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Edited by David Vincent Meconi and Eleonore Stump

Excerpt

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ELEONORE STUMP AND DAVID VINCENT MECONI, S.J.

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## Introduction

It is hard to overestimate the importance of Augustine's work and influence, both in his own period and in the subsequent history of Western philosophy. Until the thirteenth century, when he may have had a competitor in Thomas Aquinas, he was the most important philosopher of the medieval period. Many of his views, including his theory of the state, his account of time and eternity, his understanding of the will, his attempted resolution of the problem of evil, his exposition of God's knowledge, his theory of language, and his approach to the relation of faith and reason, have continued to be influential up till the present time.

Augustine's work is a well-tilled field, but since his literary output is estimated at 5.4 million words, the field of Augustine scholarship continues to yield a bounteous harvest. It has been over a decade since the first edition of the *Cambridge Companion to Augustine* appeared. In that time, reflection on Augustine's life and labors has continued to bear much fruit. While the first edition of the *Cambridge Companion to Augustine* represented excellent historical and philosophical scholarship, significant new studies into major aspects of Augustine's thinking have since appeared, and new work on the themes Augustine addresses has also been done. Additionally, there are many new annotated English translations of his work, as well as new studies of his life and times.

This past decade of research thus occasions a major rethinking of the *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. On reflection, we thought that this revised volume might be structured better by having its sections mirror themes more natural to Augustine's own thought than the original volume did. This restructuring regrettably required omitting from this volume some very good essays found in the original.

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On the other hand, the restructuring did allow us to commission some superb new essays on topics that either were not in the original volume or were handled differently there. The result is this volume, which replaces the now outdated earlier *Companion*. Although some contributions from the earlier volume are reprinted here, some with significant revisions, eleven of the seventeen chapters are new; and nine new contributors have been added.

Aurelius Augustinus was born on November 13, 354 to a Catholic mother, Monica, and a staunch Roman pagan, Patricius. Monica would have had each of her children (Navigius, Perpetua, and Augustine) sealed with the sign of the Christian cross and their tongues purified with blessed salt, as each made their way into the world. Augustine was raised in a small corner of northeast Numidia, in the small town of Thagaste (Souk Ahras in today's Algeria).

The more formative aspects of his early life are well chronicled in his *Confessions*. He attended school first in the prosperous city of Madaura (the birthplace of the influential Roman writer Apuleius). Then, after having spent an idle year back home due to financial restraints, Augustine went to study in the ancient metropolis of Carthage in 370. Here he excelled in rhetoric.

Through his study of Cicero's (now lost) *Hortensius*, which was an exhortation to the love of wisdom, Augustine fell in love with philosophy. Eighteen years old and full of both success and searching, the ambitious Augustine sought not only true wisdom, but human affection as well. He formed a relationship with a woman, whom he took as a concubine, rather than as a wife; and together they had a son, Adeodatus.

Augustine eventually grew discontented with his life in Carthage, where he had been teaching oratory since 376; and, in 383, he sailed off to make a name for himself in Rome.

Once in Rome, he became dismayed by the students there and annoyed at their failure to pay their teacher his duly contracted fees. In 384, he gladly traveled to Milan, where through the influence of the famed Roman senator Symmachus, Augustine had secured a spot as the imperial rhetor.

In all this time, Augustine was on a spiritual odyssey.

He had grown in his interest in philosophy, but he was unable to find a satisfying answer to the problem of evil. Because the Manichaean sect did provide an answer, Augustine was drawn to them

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while he was still in Carthage. Mani (c. 205–74) was a Persian mystic whose eponymous religion maintained that the visible world is the result of an eternal conflict between two equally powerful opposite principles. The *summum malum* and the *summum bonum* have comingled, giving way to a cosmos that is composed of warring opposites – good and evil, light and dark, very heavy material bodies and lighter, ethereal ‘bodies,’ and so on. In such a world, a Manichaean’s chief desire is to be released from such divisions through gnosis and ritual.

Augustine became a ‘hearer’ of the Manichaeans in 373. Their dualistic cosmogony supplied him with a simple theodicy, and he was an adherent to the Manichaean sect for close to a decade. Nonetheless, his eventful meeting with the much-celebrated Manichean bishop Faustus, as well as Augustine’s reading of Neoplatonic books, began to dissipate his belief that the Manichaeans were right.

Through Neoplatonism, Augustine finally came to a belief in the existence of an immaterial order. Whatever Neoplatonic authors he read while serving as the imperial rhetor in Milan, they brought him to a belief that God is not an extended composite being. Not one to make a clean, academic distinction between ‘philosophy’ and ‘theology,’ Augustine combined both these aspects of Neoplatonism into his own thought during the same time he heard the sermons of Ambrose (c. 340–97), who was the Bishop of Milan at that time. Augustine was in the basilica while Ambrose preached on the opening chapters of Genesis in the early winter months of 385. These sermons provided the searching Augustine an excellent example of how to read Scripture on a much more sophisticated level than he had ever before encountered. Through Ambrose’s expositions of biblical texts, Augustine came to realize that the Christianity he had been introduced to as a child was really a mere simulacrum of a faith much deeper and more erudite. He recognized that Ambrose perceived many layers of meaning in the Bible and was able to explain the meaning of the biblical texts with a hermeneutical finesse that Monica and other Christian teachers of his youth were not able to give him. Augustine’s appreciation of the power of allegory allowed him to read the Bible with a new depth, and his Platonism gave him the philosophical moorings by which to gauge the philosophical conclusions of his newly embraced orthodox Christian faith.

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Although he was on his way to the Christian wisdom he sought, Augustine was still not without his worldly aspirations. He freely allowed the mother of his son to be put aside (“she was ripped from my side, being regarded as an obstacle to my marriage”: *conf.* 6.15.25; Boulding 2004, 156) as a mere inconvenience and hindrance to his rising status within the imperial ranks. And then he formed a relationship with another woman until the wife he was promised reached marrying age.

During this pivotal time in Augustine’s life, he was filled with inner turmoil. He felt miserable, despite his achievements; in his own view, he was unable to see a way to true happiness. In this condition, he heard the story of Marius Victorinus, another Roman orator, who had left the comforts of imperial office to become a Christian philosopher (cf. *conf.* 8.2.3–8.5.10). He also heard the story of Antony of Egypt, who had left all things behind to serve God in constant prayer and hermetic simplicity (cf. *conf.* 8.5.15). Filled with the power of these narratives, Augustine drew his friend Alypius into his confidence: “What does this mean? What did you make of it? The untaught are rising up and taking heaven by storm (cf. Mt 11:12), while we with all our dreary teachings are still groveling in this world of flesh and blood” (*conf.* 8.8.19; Boulding 2004, 199). Seeking some resolution in contemplation and conversation, Alypius and Augustine went into the privacy of the garden where they were staying in Milan, and suddenly Augustine “heard a voice from a house nearby – perhaps a voice of some boy or girl, I do not know – singing over and over again, ‘Pick it up and read, pick it up and read.’” Remembering the story of Antony’s being moved by randomly selecting a scriptural verse, Augustine picked up a copy of Paul’s letters and chanced upon Romans 13:13–14: “Not in dissipation and drunkenness, nor in debauchery and lewdness, nor in arguing and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh or the gratification of your desires” (*conf.* 8.12.29; Boulding 2004, 206–07). This single moment convinced Augustine of God’s providential care throughout his entire life. Converted in that moment, he went indoors to find his mother Monica to tell her of his newly found joy and his desire to become a Catholic Christian.

Augustine now knew he had “to withdraw the service of [his] tongue from the market of speechifying” (*conf.* 9.2.2; Boulding 2004, 210). He decided to renounce his secular career and worldly

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lifestyle. After the autumn holiday of 385 (August 23–October 15), he officially resigned; and, along with Monica, his son Adeodatus, and some select friends, he left the city for a small village outside Milan, Cassiciacum. There, at the villa of his benefactor Verecundus, Augustine spent the months between September 385, and April 386 preparing for baptism. During this quasi-monastic period of his life, he enjoyed the time and leisure needed to contemplate and to write. In the early dialogues that emerge from this time, we see a young philosopher steeped in the tradition of Plato and seeking to make sense of God, the soul, and the human desire for felicity. The titles of the works from this time are revelatory: *Contra Academicos*, *De beata vita*, *De ordine*, *De immortalitate animae*, and the *Soliloquia* (a term Augustine here coined). Baptized by Ambrose on the evening of Holy Saturday, April 24, 387, Augustine (along with Monica and Adeodatus) made the requisite preparations for the journey back to Africa. Due to a maritime blockade brought about by a short-lived civil war, the group was forced to delay their journey; and, at the Roman port town of Ostia, Monica died. Along with Adeodatus, Augustine spent the rest of 387 until August 388 in Rome, where he took up some of his more concentrated attacks against Manichaeism.

Augustine returned to Thagaste with a hope of continuing the life experienced at Cassiciacum, a life of “deified leisure” (*ep.* 10.2). For close to three years (388–91), Augustine, Adeodatus (who would die during this time, around the age of sixteen), and about a dozen other men lived a life of intellectual conversation, prayer and liturgy, and philosophical study. One day, however, Augustine left the community to travel to Hippo Regius in order to interview a possible new recruit (admitting that he thought it was safe because there was already a bishop and supposedly enough presbyters there; cf. *s.* 355.2). Hippo Regius was a coastal town of about 30,000 people, with Catholic Christians competing against Donatist Christians and a strong non-Christian cult. The Catholic bishop, Valerius, was growing old, and his weak command of the Punic dialect had never allowed him to interact with his flock on any real, daily basis. Thus hearing of Augustine’s arrival, Bishop Valerius was prepared to ask him to consider presenting himself for priestly ordination. After some inner turmoil and discernment, Augustine did in fact ask to be ordained, and in 391 he was made a Catholic priest.

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With special permission to preach (a task normally then reserved for the bishop only), Augustine was quickly recognized as a gifted thinker and skilled orator. The aged Valerius wanted to seize the promising Augustine and ensure that he would remain in Hippo. Valerius thus asked for, and received, permission to have Augustine made a co-adjutor bishop in 395. Since two bishops in one diocese was usually forbidden (as outlined in the sixth canon of the Council of Nicaea), Augustine had to win the support of the wider clergy, especially the Metropolitan of Numidia, Archbishop Megalius. So, in order to show that his Christian conversion was real and he was not the pagan sympathizer he had been when he left Africa years before, he set to work on his *Confessions*.

Although no major church council occurred during Augustine's episcopacy, these thirty-five years of leadership stamped Western philosophy more than the tenure of any local bishop since. Church leaders and Roman magistrates alike looked to the Bishop of Hippo for both practical counsel and the approbation or condemnation of various theological positions. His writings during this time were occasional, never systematic, responding to exigencies and questions of supreme importance to many different constituencies around the Mediterranean. He contributed to every area of philosophy, weaving disparate topics in such a way that trying to disentangle them would do violence to his thought. So, for instance, Augustine wrote a great deal on the nature of the will, but his views on the will are also integral to his position on the relation of faith to reason, his account of virtues and vices, his attempted refutation of Manichaeism, Donatism, and Pelagianism, and a host of other issues.

Toward the end of his life, Augustine knew he could not lead his people much longer, and he sought to secure the unity and the good of the Church he had worked so hard and so long to foster. On September 26, 426, the aging bishop assembled his presbytery in Hippo's Basilica Pacis; and, in the way that Valerius had called Augustine thirty years prior, Augustine named the young priest Eraclius his episcopal successor. Then he turned his attention to consolidating his philosophical and theological work. In 428, Augustine sat down with his longtime secretary, Possidius, and laid out the structure of his literary output. In the *Indiculum* and in the more popular *Retractions*, Augustine provided a chronology and summary of all his major doctrinal works and homilies. These days of retrospection

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quickly came to an end. In 429, the Vandal general Geneseric and his (Arian Christian) army invaded North Africa from Spain. By the middle of 430, they had easily made their way eastward. Hippo came under siege; much of the city suffered, but Augustine's library was miraculously spared. With the Vandals threatening ever closer, the seventy-six-year-old Augustine succumbed to a fever. He died in Hippo on August 28, 430, reciting the psalms he had written out and posted on the wall adjacent to his bed. Possidius survived the Vandals and was able to use the remaining years of his own life organizing and overseeing the copying of Augustine's writings, as well as composing the first biography of his teacher and guide.

In that *Life of Augustine*, Possidius says that Augustine's writings "show us as brightly as the light of truth ever permits someone to see, that this priest, so acceptable and so dear to God, lived virtuously and sanely (*recte ac sane*) . . . and no one is able to read what he wrote about divine matters without great profit" (§31). And Possidius was surely right. Augustine's writings have been a powerful influence throughout all the centuries since then; and they are a witness to the beauty of truth and to the integrity of a life insistent on wisdom.

Many of the topics of concern to Augustine are treated in the following chapters. The seventeen essays gathered here are divided into six main parts. Each part represents a major area of Augustine's thought, although, given the nature of his writings and interests, there is some inevitable overlap among the essays. The epilogue maps out his enormous influence upon subsequent generations.

Of all the diverse topics important to him, Augustine maintained early on that he cared to know only God and the soul (*sol.* 1.2.7). The first part is accordingly entitled The Nature of God and contains three chapters examining Augustine's views on various divine attributes.

Scott MacDonald opens the volume with "The divine nature: being and goodness." MacDonald shows that the metaphysics that Augustine learned from the Platonic tradition provided a rich structure by which Augustine was better able to comprehend the Christian account of God. At the top of this structure stood the uncreated God, with created immaterial minds just below, and all material things closer to the bottom of the structure. Because of its connection between God and matter, such an ontological arrangement negated the Manichees'

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dualism and their deprecation of matter. It allowed Augustine to see all of creation as a participant in God's own being and goodness.

In "God's eternal knowledge according to Augustine," John Cavadini shows the importance of Augustine's recognizing that God's knowledge of creatures is eternal, not temporal. For Augustine, because God's knowledge is eternal, it is perfect and unchanging. Since God's knowledge of all things is never imperfect, it cannot be added to. Nonetheless, nothing in God's immutability rules out God's responsiveness to creatures, for Augustine. Cavadini rightly stresses Augustine's view that God's knowledge is concomitantly human aid as well, and he calls attention to Augustine's interest in God's foreknowledge of his own self-gift to humanity on the Cross.

According to Christian doctrine, God is not simply goodness or being, but also a Trinity of persons. In his "Augustine on the triune life of God," Lewis Ayres introduces Augustine as an inheritor of centuries of thinking on the Trinity. With his keen philosophical mind, however, Augustine does not simply inherit a tradition, but advances it by showing that God does not *have* anything, but rather *is* all that God is typically said to have. For example, God does not *have* wisdom or mercy; rather, God *is* wisdom and mercy. In the Trinity, each of the divine persons is what he is only in relation to the other persons of the Trinity; each person of the Trinity is as it were a subsistent relation. For this reason, the three distinct persons still are only one God. As Augustine understood the doctrine of the Trinity, the union among the three divine persons is love. There is in the Trinity a perfect unity of a lover, the beloved, and the love conjoining them. Finally, on Augustine's view, the Father sends the Son to give the Spirit to human beings, so that those who receive God's love are able to be united with God forever.

The second part is God's Relation to the World, and it includes three chapters on Augustine's views of God's relation to the world.

The first is Simo Knuuttila's "Time and creation in Augustine." Knuuttila focuses on Augustine's commentaries on Genesis to explain and illuminate Augustine's influential account of time and eternity. Augustine's insistence on creation "out of nothing" enabled him to see this world as the result of God's establishing all things that would ever exist through "seminal reasons," a doctrine he surely first encountered in Platonism and various forms of Stoicism. As Augustine sees it, before creation, there was no time; but, as

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a part of creation, time itself is dependent upon the reality of movement and the awareness of rational souls. For that reason, Knuuttila traces Augustine's psychological theory of time, especially as Augustine appropriates the insights of Aristotle, but also as he appends his own dynamic concepts of the past as memory and the future as anticipation.

The next chapter is William E. Mann's "Augustine on evil and original sin." Augustine struggled with the problem of evil. How could an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God allow evil and its deleterious effects in his world? Mann examines Augustine's reflections on the apparent incompatibility between God's knowledge and the problem of evil. He also takes up Augustine's far-reaching teaching on original sin (a term which Augustine himself coined and introduced into Christian philosophical theology). And he lays out Augustine's conception of evil as the privation of being and goodness. These things together give us Augustine's understanding of a world in which both God and evil exist.

Allan Fitzgerald's chapter "Jesus Christ, the knowledge and wisdom of God" rounds out this section by stressing Augustine's focus on Christ as the redeemer of the evil of the post-Fall world. Responding to the pagan images of Jesus, Augustine argues that Christ is much more than a wise and just man. Rather, Christ is fully divine as well as fully human. As God, Christ is God's wisdom and justice; as human, in his incarnate state, Christ makes available to all human beings the wisdom and justice they need in order to attain happiness. This understanding of Christ's mediation is what provided Augustine with a "spiritual method" (as Fitzgerald calls it) which sees in Christ both the Truth which is God and also the way of truth for human beings. Fitzgerald shows that Augustine's writings on Jesus stress his simultaneous role as God and human, both the giver and given, the destination as well as the way.

The third part, Human Nature, has to do more specifically with human nature.

The first essay is Bruno Niederbacher's "The human soul: Augustine's case for soul-body dualism." Niederbacher points out that Augustine never settled definitely on the origin of the soul, but remained open to various philosophical possibilities. He discusses Augustine's account of the metaphysical reality of the human soul, describing its seven levels of greatness, their respective actions, the

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soul's relation to the body, and, finally, the soul's immortality. Niederbacher ends by exploring three Augustinian arguments for the soul's immateriality.

Peter King's "Augustine on knowledge" elucidates five major areas of Augustine's theory of knowledge. First is Augustine's critique of skepticism. King lays out Augustine's reasons for thinking it more reasonable to accept that human beings can know the truth than to withhold assent from claims to know. Next, he considers the role illumination plays in Augustine's epistemology and his views of innermost knowledge (the knowledge of one's own cognitive condition). Finally, King explains the importance of empirical knowledge for Augustine and his insights into social epistemology.

In her chapter "Augustine on free will," Eleonore Stump is concerned with Augustine's struggle to understand the nature of the human will's freedom. Well-known controversies have existed over this facet of Augustine's thought, so much so that it is sometimes hard to believe that their participants can be reading the same texts of Augustine's. Stump maintains that much of the problem stems from the fact that contemporary theories about free will have formed the lenses through which scholars have read Augustine's texts, and that these theories are inadequate to capture his position. Her chapter therefore begins with a careful consideration of various theories of freedom of the will in order to outline a theory not canvassed in contemporary philosophy but more illuminative of Augustine's own position. With this theory, it is possible to produce a more or less irenic compromise among competing interpretations of Augustine's account of free will.

The fourth part, *Human Excellence*, examines Augustine's views of human well-being. It includes two chapters addressing Augustine's understanding of the nature of a human person's flourishing. There has been disagreement regarding Augustine's attitude toward the good life for human beings. His insistence on the human need for grace has led some scholars to overemphasize the gloomier passages encountered in his thought, especially in the later works. But, as these two essays argue, Augustine's ethical theory hinges on personal relationships, while his understanding of the fullness of human living is explained as an eternal communion with God.

In "Augustine's ethics," Timothy Chappell shows that in Augustine's ethics virtue is a matter of communion and of charity. In the process,