

Augustine (AD 354-430)

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Biography

Augustine was the first of the great Christian philosophers. For well over eight centuries following his death, in fact until the ascendancy of Thomas Aquinas at the end of the thirteenth century, he was also the single most influential Christian philosopher. As a theologian and Church Father, Augustine was the person who did the most to define Christian heresy and so, by implication, to formulate Christian orthodoxy. Of the three most prominent heresies defined by Augustine - Donatism, Pelagianism and Manicheism - the latter two also have especially important philosophical implications. In rejecting Pelagianism and its thesis of human perfectibility, Augustine rejected one form of the principle, often associated with Kant, that 'ought' implies 'can', and in rejecting Manicheism, with its doctrine that good and evil are equally basic metaphysical realities, Augustine rejected one solution to the philosophical problem of evil.

The *Categories* may have been the only work of Aristotle that Augustine actually read. Plato he knew somewhat better. He seems to have been familiar with several Platonic dialogues and he clearly felt a special affinity for Plato and the Platonists, which is particularly evident in *De civitate Dei* (The City of God) and *De vera religione* (On True Religion). Although he could be said to have responded to classical Greek philosophy in consequential ways, it must be added that what he responded to had been filtered through Neoplatonism, Hellenistic scepticism and Stoicism. It was principally through the writings of Cicero that Augustine became schooled in the opinions of his philosophical predecessors, and it was through the works of the Neoplatonists that he developed his deep appreciation for Plato.

Augustine's philosophy thus draws significantly on the philosophy of late antiquity as well as on Christian revelation. Its originality lies partly in its synthesis of Greek and Christian thought, and partly in its development of a novel ego-centred approach to philosophy that anticipates modern thought, especially as exemplified in the philosophy of Descartes. In his *De trinitate* (The Trinity) and *De civitate Dei*, Augustine presents a line of thinking that foreshadows Descartes' famous *cogito, ergo sum*. Through his *Confessionum libri tredecim* (Confessions, more usually known as *Confessiones*), the first significant autobiography in Western literature, and also through his *Soliloquia* (Soliloquies), which is a dialogue between himself and Reason, Augustine introduced a first-person perspective to Western philosophy.

Early in his career, Augustine found himself attracted to philosophical scepticism. In his earliest extant work he offers his most extensive response to the main sceptical arguments of his day, including those that raise the possibility one might only be dreaming. His later responses to scepticism, though less extensive, are better focused; they concentrate on the self-knowledge he considers directly available to each knowing subject, including the knowledge that one exists. Taking the first-person perspective one can also develop, he tries to show, in his *De trinitate*, a

convincing argument for mind-body dualism. But supposing, as he does, that each of us knows from our own case what a mind is raises, as Augustine is perhaps the first philosopher to realize, a problem about how one can ever know that there are minds in addition to one's own.

Augustine's account of language and meaning influenced the development of 'terminist' logic in the high middle ages. His thoughts on language acquisition in *Confessiones* provide a foil for Wittgenstein in the latter's *Philosophical Investigations*. Yet, some of Augustine's own reflections on ostensive definition in his dialogue *De magistro* (The Teacher) anticipate Wittgenstein's own views on language learning.

Augustine develops what is described as an 'active' theory of sense perception, according to which rays of vision touch objects whose consequent action on the body is 'noticed' by the mind or soul. Although his ideas on sense perception are interesting, his most influential epistemological conception is certainly his 'theory of illumination'. Instead of supposing that what we know can be abstracted from sensible particulars that instantiate such knowledge, he insists that our mind is so constituted as to see 'intelligible realities' directly by an inner illumination.

The modern concept of the will is often said to originate with Augustine. Certainly the idea of will is central to his philosophy of mind, as well as to his account of sin and the origin of evil. Strikingly, he uses psychological 'trinities', including the trinity of memory, understanding and will, to illuminate the doctrine of the Divine Trinity, where there is also a baffling unity in plurality. The theological warrant for this analogy Augustine finds in the biblical idea that God created human beings, and specifically the human mind, in his own image.

Augustine's attempts to achieve a philosophical understanding of theology and religious belief set the framework for much later medieval and early modern philosophy. On the issue of how reason should bear on religious faith, Augustine develops the idea that reason should work out an understanding of what we must first accept on faith. Yet he also displays a keen sensitivity to those issues most likely to challenge one's religious faith. Prominent among his concerns is the philosophical problem of evil, to which he offers what has proved to be perhaps the most influential type of solution.

Particularly striking is Augustine's virtually lifelong preoccupation with human freedom and how the fact that human beings are free to make their own choices can be reconciled with the Christian doctrines of God's foreknowledge, predestination and grace. Almost every important medieval philosopher in the Christian West would later contribute to the continuing effort to achieve a satisfactory reconciliation of these issues. It is significant that Leibniz, who gave the problem of freedom, foreknowledge, predestination and grace one of its most sophisticated treatments, also gave much of his philosophical attention to the equally Augustinian problem of evil.

Although Augustine did present an argument for the existence of God, it is his understanding of the divine attributes, and especially his insistence on divine 'simplicity', that is, on the idea that God is not distinct from his attributes, that has been especially influential on later thinkers. Also influential are his various attempts to understand the created world. Augustine made several

important efforts, perhaps most notably in the last books of his *Confessiones* and in his *De genesi ad litteram* (The Literal Meaning of Genesis) to give a philosophically sophisticated account of the creation story in the biblical book of Genesis. His contrast between God's eternity and human temporality set the stage for later medieval and modern discussions of these issues, and his discussion of the nature of time in Book XI of his *Confessiones* is sometimes taken to epitomize philosophy.

Augustine's descriptions of mystical experience are among the most eloquent in Western literature; they belong among the classic texts of mysticism. However, Augustine's attempts to understand ritual are perhaps more remarkable for the directness with which he identifies and confronts difficult issues than for the success of his efforts to solve them. Those efforts seem to be hobbled by his version of mind-body dualism.

Augustine is a thoroughgoing intentionalist in ethics. This feature of his thought, as well as his unflinching insistence that one can do what one knows one ought not to be doing, mark him off from ethicists of the classical Greek period. Yet Augustine also preserves in his own thinking important strands of ancient Greek thought. Thus, for example, his development of the doctrine of the Christian virtues includes an echo of Plato's idea of the unity of the virtues. His insistence that 'ought' does not, in any straightforward way, imply 'can', distinguishes him, not only from his contemporary Pelagius, whom he helped brand as a Christian heretic, but also from most modern ethicists as well.

The philosophy of history Augustine develops in *De civitate Dei* initiates a branch of philosophy that came into full flower in the nineteenth century. Also in that same work Augustine makes an influential contribution to what has come to be called 'just war theory', an applied ethical theory that has continued to develop even into the latter half of the twentieth century.

1. Life

Augustine was born Aurelius Augustinus, in the North African town of Tagaste (modern Souk Ahras in eastern Algeria), in the Roman Province of Numidia in the waning years of the Roman Empire. Except for a five-year stay in Italy, he spent his entire life in North Africa. Ordained a priest in ad 391 and made a bishop four years later, he lived out the remaining thirty-five years of his life, first as a coadjutor and then as the diocesan Bishop of Hippo (later Bône, now Annaba, Algeria), which was at the time the second most important port city in Africa.

Augustine's mother, Monica, was a devout Christian; his father, Patricius, a man of modest means, was not given a Christian baptism until he was on his death bed. Augustine received a classical education, first in the local grammar school, then in a higher school in nearby Madaura and finally, under the patronage of a local nobleman named Romanianus, at the university in Carthage. It was in Carthage as a student of rhetoric that he read Cicero's now lost dialogue, *Hortensius*, which, as he later wrote in *Confessionum libri tredecim* (*Confessions*, more usually known as *Confessiones*) altered his sensibility and brought him under the spell of philosophy.

After a brief period as a teacher of rhetoric in his home town, Augustine returned to Carthage and then, in ad 383, sailed for Rome. The five years he spent in Italy included a period as

professor of rhetoric at Milan. Also in Milan, Augustine joined a circle of Neoplatonists and turned away from the Manicheism he had embraced in Carthage. In Book VII of *Confessiones* he explains how profoundly the Neoplatonic works he read in that Milanese circle helped him think about the nature of God and the problem of evil.

It was also in Milan, after he had immersed himself in Neoplatonism, that Augustine finally became a Christian convert, under the tutelage of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, and through the continuing influence of his mother, who had followed him to Milan. The year before his baptism in ad 387 Augustine withdrew with several philosophically-minded relatives and associates to a villa at Cassiciacum, perhaps near Lake Como, where he wrote four of his earliest works, including an extremely interesting dialogue critical of the scepticism of the New Academy, *Contra academicos* (Against the Academicians), as well as the *Soliloquia* (Soliloquies).

Shortly after Augustine's baptism, his mother died. Following a brief stay in Rome, Augustine returned to Carthage in ad 388 and never left North Africa again. When he became first a priest and then a bishop, he sought to combine his pastoral duties with extensive excursions into philosophy and theology. It was in response to the spread of Donatism, Pelagianism and Manicheism in North Africa that Augustine wrote great treatises to expose those trends as heretical (see Manicheism; Pelagianism). It was in further response to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, blamed by critics of Christianity on the Christianization of Rome, that Augustine wrote *De civitate Dei*. Rome had already been sacked in ad 410; Hippo itself was under siege as Augustine died twenty years later.

Augustine's literary output, produced with the help of scribes, is enormous. Chadwick (1986) claims that what survives of his work is the largest body of writing left by any ancient author. In addition to approximately one hundred books and treatises there are some two hundred letters and over five hundred sermons. Three years before his death, Augustine went through all his works and listed and commented on them in a great compendium, the *Retractationes*, or reviews. In some cases he retracts claims made in the works he reviews, or expresses regret at having made them. However, most of what he had written he lets stand. On the basis of these reviews, we may conclude that at least 90 per cent of Augustine's writings have survived.

After Augustine became a priest in ad 391, he wrote no single work that could be said to be entirely philosophical. On the other hand, hardly anything he wrote at any time in his life was entirely devoid of philosophy. Philosophical reflections, analyses and explorations turn up, often quite unexpectedly, in his sermons and letters and, of course, in the great theological, exegetical and doctrinal treatises. By the time Augustine came to write *De civitate Dei*, his lingering admiration for the grand ambitions of speculative philosophy and natural theology had become tempered with an acute awareness of how the human mind on its own is too crippled by old vices to be able to 'enjoy and abide in the changeless light' (*De civitate Dei* XI.2). Be that as it may, the philosophical light in his own eye burned brightly until the very end of his long and singularly productive life.

2. Scepticism

In Rome at the beginning of his stay in Italy Augustine grew increasingly dissatisfied with Manicheism, to which he had provisionally given his allegiance in Carthage. He found himself attracted to the sceptical viewpoint of the Academics, the followers of Arcesilaus and the New Academy, who 'held that everything was a matter of doubt and asserted that we can know nothing for certain' (Confessiones V.10.19). Augustine seems to have learned of ancient scepticism, and of the debate between Arcesilaus and the stoic Zeno of Citium from Cicero's *Academica* (see Cicero).

Augustine's most extensive discussion of scepticism is to be found in his earliest surviving work, the dialogue *Contra academicos*, written at Cassiciacum just months before his baptism. The Academics, according to him, base their claim that nothing can be known on the application of a strict criterion for knowledge put forward by Zeno. Although Augustine formulates Zeno's criterion in several ways and it is difficult to be certain exactly how he wants it to be understood, the point seems to be that, according to this criterion, something can be known just in case it cannot even seem to be false. Indubitability would then be both necessary and sufficient for knowledge. Against accepting such a criterion, Augustine proposes a dilemma: either the criterion is known to be true, or it is not. If it is known to be true, then the sceptics are wrong, since something is known. If it is not known to be true, then the sceptics have given us no adequate reason to become sceptics.

Augustine is not satisfied, however, with merely demonstrating the self-defeating character of the Academic position; he goes on to offer sample knowledge claims that he dares the sceptic to challenge. These sample claims fall naturally into three groups: *logical truths* (for example, 'There is one world or there is not'), *mathematical truths* (for example, 'Three times three is nine'), and *reports of immediate experiences* (for example, 'That tastes pleasant to me'). Of special interest is Augustine's response to the sceptical challenge, 'How do you know that this world exists if the senses are deceptive?' (*Contra academicos* III.11.24). Augustine answers: 'I call this entire thing, whatever it is, which surrounds and nourishes us, this object, I say, which appears before my eyes and which I perceive is made up of earth and sky, or what appears to be earth and sky, the world.' His idea is that, even if he is asleep and dreaming, he can know that 'the world' exists in the stipulated sense that there is for him at least a phenomenal world.

Although Augustine never goes on, in the fashion of Descartes (§9) to offer an argument for the existence of a world that is independent of him and his sense-impressions - what came later to be called 'the external world' - he does at least entertain the thought that there might not be such a world. As we know from later philosophy, that supposition is of great philosophical moment. Furthermore, his idea of an apparent world that fills our phenomenal space, whether or not there is an independent external world that resembles it, suggests a very Cartesian concept of mind.

Augustine never again devoted a whole treatise to the refutation of scepticism, but he did respond, again and again, to the challenge of Academic scepticism. Among the most interesting of these anti-sceptical passages are two in which he presents reasoning remarkably like Descartes' *cogito, ergo sum*:

In respect of those truths I have no fear of the arguments of the Academics. They say, 'What if you are mistaken?' If I am mistaken, I am [Si fallor, sum]. Whoever does not exist cannot be mistaken; therefore I exist, if I am mistaken. Because, then, I exist if I am mistaken, how am I mistaken in thinking that I exist, when it is certain to me that I am if I am mistaken?

(De civitate Dei XI.26)

Similar reasoning is to be found in *De trinitate* (On The Trinity), except that there Augustine defends the 'inner' knowledge by which we each know, in our own case, that we are alive. (Presumably 'alive' must be understood here not in a specifically biological sense, but rather in the sense in which we may ask if there is life after death.)

Although Augustine's way of certifying his claim to know that he exists is indeed very similar to the reasoning of Descartes, the similarities should not obscure the equally important differences. Perhaps the crucial difference is that, unlike Descartes, Augustine does not use 'I exist' as a foundation stone in a rational reconstruction of knowledge. Indeed, although there are passages in Augustine in works such as *De libero arbitrio* (On Free Choice of the Will) that suggest a foundationalist approach to knowledge, he never really offers anything that could be called a systematic reconstruction of what one can be said to know. His defence of 'I know I exist', in particular, is meant simply to defeat universal scepticism, of the sort that occupied his attention in *Contra academicos*. His idea is that, if universal scepticism can be defeated by an unassailable knowledge claim, then the Academics are not after all 'wiser than the rest' and not everything is 'a matter of doubt', as he had earlier been tempted to think.

An important weapon in the attacks of the Academic sceptics on putative knowledge claims was always the question, 'What if you are dreaming?' In a passage from Book XV of *De trinitate* that parallels the *si fallor, sum* passage from *De civitate Dei* just discussed, Augustine considers the Academic's taunt: 'Perhaps you are sleeping, and you do not know, and you see in your dreams.' Augustine replies: 'He who is certain about the knowledge of his own life does not say in it: "I know that I am awake," but "I know that I live".... He cannot be deceived in his knowledge of this even by dreams, because both to sleep and to see in dreams belong to one who lives' (*De trinitate* XV.12.21). In *Contra academicos*, Augustine rejects in a similar way the idea that not knowing whether one is dreaming might be a threat to one's claim to know logical and mathematical truths, or truths about one's immediate experiences.

However, Augustine never questions the assumption that we are sometimes awake and having veridical sense experiences, as well as sometimes dreaming. (He asserts that he sometimes knows, while he is dreaming, that he is dreaming, but he does not explain how he can know this.) Thus Augustine seems never to have considered the ultimate Cartesian challenge that perhaps no thought that has ever entered one's mind is any more nearly true than the illusions of one's dream: in effect, all life might be simply one's dream.

3. Philosophy of language

In Book I of *Confessiones*, Augustine presents a classic view of language acquisition through ostension: 'When [my elders] named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I

saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out' (Confessiones I.8.13). This passage, made famous by Wittgenstein in his Philosophical Investigations, may seem to most readers of the work to be little more than an aside. Yet, reflections on language appear throughout Augustine's writings, and language acquisition is a special concern of a relatively early work, the dialogue *De magistro* (The Teacher), a dialogue between Augustine and his young son Adeodatus (who died at age 16, shortly after the dialogue was written).

In *De magistro*, Augustine clearly poses the problem of the ambiguity of ostension, and indeed does so in a most memorable way. First, the issue is raised as to how one can point to the colour of a body as distinct from the body itself. Then, there are more general worries:

Augustine: Come now, tell me; if I, knowing absolutely nothing of the meaning of the word, should ask you while you are walking what walking is, how would you teach me?

Adeodatus: I should walk somewhat more quickly...

Augustine: Don't you know that walking is one thing and hurrying is something else?

(De magistro 3.6)

This last worry is surprisingly Wittgensteinian; as is Augustine's response. Although Augustine admits there is no way to eliminate all conceivable ambiguity in ostension, an intelligent learner, he thinks, will eventually catch on.

In *De magistro*, Augustine seems to want to account for meaning solely by appeal to what terms refer to. However, he does point out that for some pairs of words, each signifies 'as much' (*tantundem*) as the other; that is, the terms are co-referential, even though they do not signify 'the same' (*idem*) in that they do not have the same meaning or sense. Thus 'word' (*verbum*) and 'name' (*nomen*) are said to be co-referential, though not identical in meaning. Here Augustine relies on blurring the distinction, made in later medieval philosophy, between the personal and the material supposition of a term, or, we might say today, between *using* a term and *mentioning* it by quoting it (see Language, medieval theories of).

The discussion in later writings such as Book XV of *De trinitate* of the 'inner word' that is in no natural language seems to be, in part at least, an attempt to allow that a sense or concept mediates between a general term in a natural language and its extension:

For the thought formed from that thing which we know is the word which we speak in our heart, and it is neither Greek, nor Latin, nor of any other [natural] language; but when we have to bring it to the knowledge of those to whom we are speaking, then some sign is adopted by which it may be made known. And generally this is a sound, but at times also a nod; the former is exhibited to the ears, the latter to the eyes, in order that that word which we bear in our mind may also become known by bodily signs to the senses of the body.

(De trinitate XV.10.19)

Although the idea that thinking might be inner talking is as old as Plato's Theaetetus, it is to Book XV of De trinitate that William of Ockham, for example, makes reference in the Summa logicae (I.1) when he wants backing for the idea of there being a mental language, as well as spoken and written languages.

Augustine begins De magistro with an inquiry into the purpose of using language. His son's first suggestion, that we speak either to teach or to learn, encourages us to accept the common assumption that we use language, either mainly or solely, to pass on information. Although Augustine and his son quickly come to include singing and praying among the language activities they discuss, the dialogue never gives proper consideration in the manner of, for example, Wittgenstein or J.L. Austin, to the full range of activities that make use of language or to the variety of roles individual utterances may play in our lives. On the contrary, Augustine concludes his dialogue with the suggestion, backed by an intriguing but somewhat elusive line of reasoning, that language only reminds us of what we already know.

Other important discussions of language are to be found in Augustine's De doctrina Christiana (On Christian Doctrine), especially at the beginning of Book II, as well as in the early treatise De dialectica (On Dialectic) (the authenticity of which, though contested, seems now to be quite generally accepted).

4. Epistemology

Augustine is said to have an 'active' theory of sense perception. The term 'active' in this context includes the idea that in vision the eyes emit rays that touch the object of vision. This is an idea that can be found in Plato's Timaeus, for example, as well as in other ancient sources (see Perception; Plato). More generally, it is Augustine's contention that, although bodily sense organs undergo change during perception, perception is not something undergone by the soul. 'Perception', he writes in a famous passage, 'is something undergone by the body *per se* that is not hidden from the soul [*non latens animam*]' (De quantitate animae 48). The soul takes note of what the body undergoes: 'For it is not the body that perceives, but the soul through the body, which messenger, as it were, the soul uses to form in itself the very thing which is announced from the outside' (De genesi ad litteram XII.24.51).

In Book XII of De genesi ad litteram, Augustine departs altogether from commenting on the biblical book of Genesis and offers instead a somewhat independent treatise on three kinds of vision: bodily vision, spiritual vision and intellectual vision. What Augustine calls *bodily vision* is in fact sense perception; *spiritual vision* is the entertaining of mental imagery, whether in memory or imagination; and *intellectual vision* is the non-imaginal perception of universal objects, structures and truths. This work includes Augustine's most serious attempt to account for error in sense perception. It also includes one of his most beautiful descriptions of mystical vision, and in fact this work took on great significance for the discussion of mysticism in the later Middle Ages (see Mysticism, history of).

Augustine's theory of sense perception seems not to be representational in the sense of making an image or sense-datum the direct object of perception. Thus in his discussion of vision in De trinitate, he claims that in seeing a body, we immediately form an image of it in our sense; yet

we cannot discriminate between the form of the body seen and the form of the image we produce in our sense. He offers analogies and arguments to convince his readers that sight does have an image of the body seen, as soon and as long as it is seen, an image we may retain in memory after the perception. However, he seems to consider the formation of this inner image to be part of the process of seeing the *body*, not the production of something that could properly be said to be the direct object of perception.

Augustine's account of knowing, for example, what is virtue or what is a square, is not based on the idea of abstraction, as the accounts of Aquinas and sometimes even Aristotle are said to be. Rather, he espouses what is called 'the theory of illumination'. Augustine's talk of illumination is, in part, simply the deployment of an apt and traditional metaphor, that of light. He often uses this metaphor in discussions of cognition, as in the Soliloquia:

So, whoever apprehends what is transmitted in the sciences, admits without any hesitation that this is absolutely true; and it must be believed that it could not be apprehended, if it were not illuminated by another sun, as it were, of its own.

(Soliloquia I.5)

Platonic resonances in this passage are obvious. What exactly is meant by 'illumination' in this context is, however, less immediately obvious. What is the cash value of this light metaphor? Why does Augustine insist that whatever is apprehended through the sciences could not be apprehended if it were not appropriately 'illuminated'?

Perhaps the basic idea in Augustinian illumination is a generalization of the problem of learning by ostension. No group of instances of F-ness will display F-ness unambiguously as the single feature those items have in common; thus, if we ever come to understand what F-ness is, it will be only by an inner illumination that reveals something that cannot be unambiguously pointed to or displayed. In *De magistro*, Augustine concludes that no 'outward' teacher can teach us what anything is by asking or telling us something. At most, the 'outward' teacher can admonish or remind us to look 'within', where Christ the inner teacher dwells. Christ is identified as 'the unchangeable excellence of God and the everlasting wisdom that every rational soul does indeed consult' (*De magistro* 11.38) (see *Illumination*).

More generally, Augustine, like Plato before him, insists that 'intelligible realities', presumably including what we might think of as a priori truths, cannot be learned or even confirmed in sense experience. However, Augustine explicitly rejects Plato's idea that the soul might have been introduced to the intelligible realm before birth; instead he espouses innatism. Referring to the Socratic interrogation of the slave boy in Plato's *Meno*, which is meant to demonstrate that there is latent knowledge of geometry even among the untutored, Augustine protests that not all would have been geometricians in their previous life, 'since there are so few of them in the human race that one can hardly be found.' He goes on:

We ought rather to believe that the nature of the intellectual mind is so formed as to see those things which, according to the disposition of the Creator, are subjoined to intelligible things in the natural order, in a sort of incorporeal light of its own kind.

(De trinitate XII.15.24)

5. Philosophy of mind: dualism and memory

Although arguments for soul-body, or mind-body, dualism are almost as old as Western philosophy, all such reasoning before Augustine seems to have started from an externalist or third-person perspective. Thus when Plato in the *Phaedo*, for example, has Socrates claim that we have knowledge we could not have acquired in this life and therefore our souls must have existed before they took on this bodily form, he is reasoning from a perfectly impersonal point of view.

By contrast, Augustine's approach is ego-centred, or first-personal. In Book VIII of *De trinitate*, he claims that we, from our own individual first-person perspective, 'know what a soul is, since we have a soul'. In the next book he adds, 'When the mind knows itself, it alone is the parent of its own knowledge' (*De trinitate* IX.12.18). In the following book he surveys philosophical theories about what the mind is (for example, that it is blood, that it is the brain, that it is a collection of atoms, that it is air, that it is fire, that it is some 'fifth body' or that it is a harmony). Reflection on this divergence of philosophical views suggests that the mind does not really know what it is. Yet if, as Augustine has maintained, the mind knows what a mind is from its own case, then it knows and is certain what a mind is. Therefore if the mind is uncertain whether it is blood, or the brain, or fire, or air, or indeed anything corporeal, it is really none of these things; if it is in fact uncertain as to whether it is any of these corporeal things, then it is none of them (*De trinitate* X.10.16).

Of course, the idea that the mind can know what a mind is only from its own case raises the problem of other minds. How do I know that there are minds to go with other human or animal bodies, if all I can ever observe are the motions of those bodies? Augustine's response is the earliest statement of the notorious argument from analogy. 'Just as we move our body in living', Augustine writes, 'so, we notice, those bodies are moved'. We come to think that there is something present in another body 'such as is present in us to move our mass in a similar way' (*De trinitate* VIII.6.9).

Recently, philosophers such as Norman Malcolm (1963) have argued that it is a mistake to suppose that one could come to know from one's own case what a mind is, or what thinking or feeling or having a pain is. They argue that we need a criterion to determine whether *x* is in pain or whether *y* even has a mind. Since one does not use a criterion in one's own case, they continue, either the argument from analogy could never get started (because we lack the needed criterion) or it is otiose (because we have such a criterion). Argumentation of this sort is often taken to be directed at Descartes' philosophy of mind; but in fact it is Augustine, rather than Descartes, who offers the argument from analogy and who maintains that each of us knows what a mind is from our own case, and can know what a mind is only from our own case (see Descartes, *R.* §§7–8).

Although Augustine's theory of sense perception seems not to be representational in the sense of making an image or sense-datum the object, or at least the direct object, of perception, his account of memory does seem to be representational. He is inclined to think of what is

remembered, or perhaps what is remembered directly, as an image rather than as what the memory image portrays. Indeed, in *De magistro* he asserts flatly, 'When a question arises not about what we sense before us, but about what we have sensed in the past, then we do not speak of the things themselves, but of images impressed from them on the mind and committed to memory' (*De magistro* 12.39). Augustine concludes, incorrectly, from the fact that we have no direct access to absent persons and things, or past events, that there is no way one can make claims about *them*, as distinct from their images, and hence there is no way we can, either falsely or truly, remember those past or absent things themselves.

Although Augustine sometimes uses *memoria* in ways that suggest that it means simply 'memory', he also uses the term much more broadly. Thus Book X of the *Confessiones* is a treatise on *memoria* as mind. In that book, Augustine tells us that the storehouse of his *memoria* includes not only images of objects and of past events but also feelings and experiences, certain facts, himself (!), and principles and laws of various sorts.

About feelings, Augustine asks how one could know what the terms for them mean unless on hearing, for example, the term 'pain', one had in one's *memoria* what that term means. However, if one had pain itself in one's *memoria*, he reasons, it would hurt just to think about the meaning of the word. Yet surely, he goes on, one can think about what 'pain' means, or what a pain is, without being in pain. But how? Augustine is not able to say. Although this apparently original criticism of imagist accounts of meaning seems quite devastating, it did not lead Augustine himself to turn away from his effort to appeal to images in explaining how words for feelings, or moods (such as 'happy' and 'sad') have the meaning they do.

6. Philosophy of mind: will

As Albrecht Dihle (1982) and others have argued, the concept of the will, important in much medieval and modern philosophy including the idea of a volition as an act of will, can be said to originate with Augustine. Plato's division of the self in his *Republic* into reason, spirit and appetite, by contrast, seems to make no room for the will as a distinct faculty or power, and Aristotle's subtle discussion of the voluntary in Book III of his *Nicomachean Ethics* seems not to presuppose the idea of any such force or power as the will.

In *De trinitate*, Augustine presents among other putative analogies to the divine Trinity the mental trinity of memory, understanding and will. His suggestion is that just as each of the three divine persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is distinct from the other two - though each is also God and not just part of God - so memory, understanding and will are each distinct from each other, though each is also mind and not just part of mind. Yet Augustine also recognizes that the human mind, with its various trinities, is only an imperfect image of the divine Trinity. The mind-as-will may well operate in opposition to the mind-as-understanding; indeed, a will that is evil does just that. The idea of there being such a thing as what the Greeks called *akrasia* - doing what one knows one ought not to be doing - is thus not a conundrum for Augustine, in the way that it is for Socrates and Plato, or even for Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII 3 (see *Akrasia*).

Sometimes Augustine suggests that what he terms 'the first cause of sin', namely the will, is itself uncaused. 'What cause of the will could there be', he asks rhetorically in *De libero arbitrio*

(III.17), 'except the will itself?' This point is important to Augustine since, as he claims in this passage, there would be no such thing as sin if the acts of one's will were caused by something extraneous to the will. The idea of the will as a first, uncaused cause, should be coupled with Augustine's claim that the will is 'in our power'. Since it is in our power, he writes, it is free for us (*De libero arbitrio* III.3).

There is also, however, a competing suggestion also to be found in Augustine, to the effect that God, through his knowledge, is the cause of all that he foreknows, including free choices of the will (see §7). Since Augustine defines 'will' (*voluntas*) as 'a movement of the soul, under no compulsion, either toward getting or not losing something' (*De duabis animabus contra Manichaeos* (*On the Two Souls*) 10.14), it follows that the will is free from compulsion. In discussing this definition Augustine makes clear that ignorance, though it may excuse an action that would otherwise count as sinful, does not render the will unfree (*Retractationes* 14.3).

In his efforts to define and reject Pelagianism as a heresy, however, Augustine has to explain how the grace of God can work on the human will without destroying its freedom. 'Do we then by grace make free will void?' is how he puts the challenge to himself in *De spiritu et littera* (*On The Spirit and the Letter*) XXX.52. His answer is that, no, 'free will is not made void through grace, but is established, since grace cures the will whereby righteousness is freely loved.' This is the doctrine of 'prevenient' grace, which Augustine distinguishes from various other kinds of grace. The concept of the will is thus a point of intersection for several characteristic Augustinian doctrines. First, human wills are depraved as a result of Adam's original sin. Second, a human will is able to act rightly only through the grace of God. Third, if our wills were not free, we could not be justly punished for choosing wrongly. Fourth, God foreknew who among human creatures would choose rightly and become saints, and he also predestined them, or foreordained that they would do so. It seems that Augustine's emphasis on the efficacy and importance of God's grace must inevitably qualify his defense of free will. Nevertheless, the anti-Pelagian writings Augustine composed in the last two decades of his life are eloquent testimony to the ingenuity with which he sought to reconcile the doctrine of divine grace with his insistence that human beings are free to make their own choices (see Grace).

Augustine's efforts to establish the compatibility of God's foreknowledge with human free will were almost as extensive as his attempts to show that God's grace is also compatible with free will. However, Augustine paid much less attention to the worry that predestination also poses a threat to the possibility of free will. Thus in his *De praedestinatione sanctorum* (*On the Predestination of Saints*) 37, he insists that God chose the elect 'before the foundation of the world', not simply because they were in fact going to be 'holy and immaculate' but that they might become so. Clearly he thinks of predestination as something additional to mere foreknowledge. So, even if we understand how it can be that God's foreknowledge does not render our choices unfree, we will still need to deal with the additional threat to our freedom that seems to be posed by predestination (see Predestination).

Knowing, as already noted, can be thought of as a sort of seeing; and we are not usually tempted to think of seeing as determining the nature of what is seen. However, predestination is a form of predetermination, and how predetermination can be compatible with human freedom is much

more difficult to understand. Augustine, though he certainly does not ignore this problem, is less helpful in showing how it can be dealt with than he is with the problem of foreknowledge and free will.

7. Metaphysics: God and divine attributes

In *De libero arbitrio* (II.15.39), Augustine offers an argument for the existence of God. He first gets his interlocutor to admit that (1) x is God if and only if x is more excellent than our minds and nothing is more excellent than x . He then tries to establish that (2) truth exists and is more excellent than our minds. From these two premises he concludes that (3) something is God (in other words, God exists). His idea is that either nothing is more excellent than truth, so that, since truth is more excellent than our minds, truth itself is God; or else something is more excellent even than truth, in which case it (or, we could add, something even more excellent than it) is God.

In fact, Augustine has the idea that God is not only something more excellent than our minds, but is also something than which our minds can conceive nothing more excellent. Thus he writes that ‘God is the supreme good, and that than which nothing can be nor can be conceived to be better.’ This formula is remarkably close to the one Anselm uses in formulating the ontological argument: ‘For we believe that you are something than which nothing greater can be conceived’ (*Proslogion* 2) (see God, concepts of).

Augustine made important contributions toward the project of giving a philosophical analysis of the divine attributes, or divine ‘names’, as philosophers of the high Middle Ages sometimes called them. Thus he made clear that, although God is omnipotent, he is unable to do certain things, such as sin, die or make a mistake. According to Augustine, ‘ x is omnipotent’ means that ‘ x does whatever x wills’. However, Augustine does not deal with seeming difficulties posed by this account, for example, whether ‘if God wills to sin, God sins’ can be true even if its antecedent is necessarily false, or what to say about an agent with only minimal power whose wants, because they are also minimal, never outrun the agent’s power to satisfy them (see Omnipotence).

Augustine is perhaps the first in a long line of philosophers to maintain that God is perfectly simple, that is, that God is identical with his attributes (*De civitate Dei* XI.10; *De trinitate* VI.7.8). Thus God is his goodness, he is his wisdom, and so forth. Later philosophers who made this claim central to their philosophical theologies include Anselm and Aquinas (see Immutability; Simplicity, divine).

Augustine links divine simplicity to God’s immutability. Sometimes he even explains simplicity in terms of immutability. ‘The reason why a nature is called simple’, he writes, ‘is that it cannot lose any attribute it possesses, that there is no difference between what it is and what it has’ (*De civitate Dei* XI.10). He goes on to add that even the incorruptible body we shall receive in the resurrection is neither simple nor unchangeable. That body will not be simple, he maintains, because the substance ‘in virtue of which it is called a body is other than the quality from which it derives the epithet incorruptible.’ Even the human soul, he continues, is other than its wisdom. Only God *is* his wisdom.

In his effort to clarify the divine attributes, Augustine sometimes admits defeat. Thus, in Book I of *De doctrina Christiana*, he concedes that his efforts to clarify the doctrine of the Trinity have been unworthy of God and suggests that God is ineffable. He then notes that to say God is ineffable is to describe God and therefore to show, by saying it, that what one says is false.

8. Metaphysics: creation, time and eternity

Plato, in his *Timaeus*, pictures creation as the action of a divine craftsman who looks at eternal paradigms to form instances in an also pre-existent 'receptacle'. Augustine, interpreting Genesis 1: 1 to mean that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), insists that God created unformed matter, as well as what he formed from it. His rejection of the Platonic alternative is explicit: 'You did not hold anything in your hand, of which you made this heaven and earth; for how could you come by what you had not made, to make something? For what is there that exists, except because you exist?' (*Confessiones* XI.5.7). Augustine's assumption is that nothing exists, except because God exists. Moreover, because everything changeable has a beginning, and the heavens and the earth are certainly changeable, God created them.

Not only did God create the world, and create it out of nothing, according to Augustine, he also conserves or sustains it, lest it disappear into nothing. If God's power 'ever ceased to govern creatures', he writes:

their essences would pass away and all nature would perish. When a builder puts up a house and departs, his work remains in spite of the fact that he is no longer there. But the universe will pass away in the twinkling of an eye if God withdraws his ruling hand.

(*De genesi ad litteram* IV.12.22)

Here is the precursor of Descartes' idea that 'the same power and action are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment of its duration as would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence' (*Meditation III*) (see *Creation and conservation, religious doctrine of*).

If the idea that God created matter is philosophically troublesome, even more puzzling is the contention, which Augustine affirms, that God created time. To make sense of that claim, one must study what Augustine says about time. In a much cited passage, Augustine asks, 'What then is time?' and responds: 'If nobody asks me, I know; but if I am asked what it is and want to explain, I don't know how to' (*Confessiones* XI.14). Wittgenstein (1958a: 26) thought this question epitomized philosophy as a misguided search for definitions (see Wittgenstein, L. §§16–18). By contrast, Bertrand Russell praised Augustine's theory of time as 'a very able theory, deserving to be seriously considered', and 'a great advance on anything to be found on the subject in Greek philosophy' (Russell 1945: 354).

In his discussion, Augustine appeals to the fact that we speak of 'a long time' and 'a short time'. He then develops a perplexity that Aristotle had raised in a highly condensed form in Book IV of his *Physics* but never resolved. 'How can anything that does not exist', Augustine asks, 'be either long or short?' (*Confessiones* XI.15.18). But the past is no more and the future is not yet, he continues; only the present exists. 'Can present time be long?' he asks. For any present period of

time, he notes - the present century, the present year, the present day, or whatever - part of it is no more and part is not yet. All that is ever really present is the instantaneous divider between what is not yet and what is no more. As a simple divider between the past and the future, the present, the 'now', has no duration at all and so cannot be either long or short. Therefore, how can times be either long or short? Augustine concludes that it is in his own mind that he measures time. It is mental impressions that one measures, he says, and therefore time is the measure of something mental.

Early on in Book XI, Augustine had sought to deal with the sceptical question, 'What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?' (Confessiones XI.10.12). His answer is to say that 'there cannot possibly be time without a creature [*sine creatura*]' (Confessiones XI. 30), presumably because the mind of God is timeless, as time is a measure of created minds.

In Book XI of *De civitate Dei*, Augustine seems to revert to a more Platonic theory of time, according to which time is the motion of bodies, perhaps especially the motion of the heavenly bodies. The explicit question up for discussion is why God made the world at one time rather than another. Augustine may have derived this sceptical question, and the earlier one in *Confessiones* introducing the discussion of time, from Cicero's *De natura deorum*, although Cicero was himself passing on discussions that have their roots in Presocratic philosophy.

It would have been odd for Augustine to conclude that time is the measure of bodily motion, since he explicitly rejects such a theory in *Confessiones* with the apt objection that time may equally be the measure of a body's rest. In Book XII of *De civitate Dei*, however, Augustine makes it clear that he considers the movements of the angels to be sufficient for there to be time. Angels have always existed, he claims, in the sense that there is no time at which they failed to exist. Nevertheless, they are created beings; indeed time was created with them.

In supposing that God creates time, Augustine does not of course suppose that this creation took place in time. 'There can be no doubt', he writes, 'that the world was not created *in* time but *with* time' (*De civitate Dei* XI.6). Augustine's idea is that God timelessly creates time; indeed, God's own being is immutable and timeless. In supposing that God timelessly creates time, Augustine avoids a paradox in the idea of time having been created. One might otherwise suppose that the idea of time having been created must somehow involve a contrast between a time when there was no time and the temporal period that began with time's creation. The absurdity of that idea seems to have led Aristotle to reason that time, like the universe, is eternal. But Aristotle did not consider the Augustinian idea that God timelessly creates time, perhaps even a first time (see Time).

Though Augustine often uses temporal words to talk about God and God's actions, those words are to be understood in a special sense. Sometimes Augustine warns his readers of this need. Thus he writes in *Confessiones* (XI.13.16), addressing God: 'It is not in time that you are before times; otherwise you would not be before all times; you precede all past times in the loftiness of your ever-present eternity.' He adds, 'Your years, because they abide, all abide at once.'

One might suppose that, if God is eternal in the sense of being 'before' or 'outside' all time, God could have no causal efficacy *in* time. With similar reasoning, Aristotle complained that Plato's

Forms, being eternal and unchanging, could not be the cause of something's happening now rather than earlier or later (see Forms, Platonic §7). With Aristotle's criticism in mind, a Christian believer might complain that Augustine's depiction of God as being out of time means that God could not act in history. Augustine is, however, in a rather different position from Plato, since he supposes God to have created time. Though we may speak of God's actions *in* history, God in Augustine's view brings it about timelessly; there is time in which the entities of creation can act and be acted on by him. In the dialogue *De libero arbitrio* (II.3), the character Evodius maintains that 'God has decided once and for all how the order of the universe he created is to be carried out, and does not arrange anything by a new act of will' (see Eternity).

Following in the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition, Augustine supposes there are different senses of 'exist', or ways in which something may be said to exist. He assigns the highest way, or the strictest sense, to the existence of God: 'Being is in the highest and truest sense of the term, proper to Him from whom being derives its name' (*De trinitate* V.2.3). Here Augustine links Platonic metaphysics with God's saying to Moses in Exodus 3:14, 'I am who am.' God truly is, Augustine writes in *De natura boni* 19, because he is immutable. 'For every change', Augustine goes on, 'makes what was, not to be; therefore he truly is who is unchangeable.'

9. Philosophy of religion: problem of evil

Although the author of the biblical book of Job questioned how it can be that unjust suffering is compatible with the nature of God, he seems not to have had a problem with the mere existence of evil. It may be that Epicurus was the first thinker to ask how the existence of evil could be compatible with the nature of God (Lactantius, *De ira Dei* (The Wrath of God) 13).

In *Confessiones* (VII.5.7), Augustine raises this compatibility problem in a particularly persistent way. Put in a somewhat more modern way, the problem is how the statements (1) God is all-good and (2) God is all-powerful, can be consistent with (3) there is evil. Although the conjunction of these three statements is not logically inconsistent, it is natural to assume that (4) if there existed some being both all-good and all-powerful, evil would not exist. The conjunction of (1), (2), (3) and (4) is indeed logically inconsistent (see Evil, problem of; Leibniz, G.W. §3).

When Augustine was a Manichean, he rejected (2) and, insofar as for Manicheans the principle of evil was coequal with the principle of good, there is a way in which he could also be said to have rejected (1). However, as Augustine moved toward Christianity, those options became closed. In *Confessiones* (VII.5.7), Augustine considers rejecting (3). 'Can it be', he asks, 'that there simply is no evil?' But if there really is no evil, he reasons, our fear of evil is unfounded; however, an unfounded fear of evil would itself be evil. If there is no evil, therefore, there is evil; so, there is evil. Augustine returns a few sections later in the same work to embrace the Neoplatonic idea that evil is not a reality but a mere privation and so, in a way, does not exist. Yet the fear of something nonexistent can itself be evil.

In *De civitate Dei* (XII.8), Augustine finds the root cause of evil in human free will. 'A will could not become evil', he writes, 'if it were unwilling to become so; and therefore its shortcomings are justly punished, being not necessary but voluntary.' In insisting that the existence of free but evil choices of human agents is compatible with the all-goodness and all-

power of God, Augustine thus rejects (4) above. Since the problem of evil, conceived as a problem about the apparent inconsistency among (1), (2) and (3), is a purely *a priori* problem, all one would need to do to solve it would be to show that (4) is not a necessary or conceptual truth. Augustine, however, tries to do more; he tries to show that (4) is actually false.

When Augustine uses what has recently come to be called the 'free-will defence' to solve the problem of evil, he does not reject the logical possibility that human beings might have been created to have free will, yet never sin. For example, he supposes that the saints in heaven will have free will, yet they will sin no more. 'Now the fact that they will be unable to take pleasure in sin', he writes in *De civitate Dei* (XXII.30), 'does not entail that they will have no free choice. In fact, the will will be the freer in that it is freed from taking pleasure in sin and immovably fixed in the pleasure of not sinning.' Adam's freedom, Augustine goes on in the same passage, was an ability not to sin, combined with the possibility of sinning. The freedom the saints will enjoy in heaven will bring with it, he says, the impossibility of sinning. Lest we protest, in the manner of philosophers who have discussed this issue in our own time, that the impossibility of sinning would destroy free will, Augustine adds that God cannot sin, yet surely God has free will.

Thus Augustine's rejection of (4) does not rest on a rejection of the logical possibility that God might have created a sinless world in which agents exercise their free will. Rather, it rests on Augustine's belief that the impossibility of sinning, when it finally comes to the saints in heaven, is a free gift of God's grace, not anything God is constrained to bestow on creatures, not even by his all-goodness. Another way that Augustine tries to show (4) is false is to suggest that evil, or sin, is like a dark colour in a beautiful painting: in itself, ugly, but in context something that contributes to the beauty and goodness of the whole (*De civitate Dei* XI.23).

10. Philosophy of religion: divine foreknowledge and free will

The problem of how God's foreknowledge of what an agent will do is compatible with that agent's acting freely seems to be a specific version of the problem Aristotle discusses in *De interpretatione* about how the prior truth of a statement about a future event is compatible with that event's being contingent. Aristotle's discussion and the commentaries on it by Boethius, as well as the latter's own discussion of the problem of foreknowledge in Book V of his *De consolazione philosophiae* (The Consolation of Philosophy), were influential on later medieval discussions. Also influential, however, was Augustine's discussion in Book III of his *De libero arbitrio*, and perhaps even more so in Book V of the *De civitate Dei*.

In *De civitate Dei*, Augustine takes Cicero as his target. As represented by Augustine, Cicero argues that (1) if God foreknows all events, then all events happen according to a fixed, causal order, and (2) if all events happen according to a fixed, causal order, then nothing depends on us and there is no such thing as free will. If we can then add (3) God foreknows all events, as Augustine insists we can, we can conclude that (4) nothing depends on us and there is no such thing as free will. Augustine attempts to defeat this argument by insisting that 'our wills themselves are in the order of causes' (*De civitate Dei* V.9), and adds it is necessary that, 'when we will, we will by free choice' (V.10). Moreover, among the things that God foreknows are the

things that we will do of our own free choice. Thus premise (2) is false and God's foreknowledge, rather than being a threat to free will, is in a way its guarantor.

Talk of God's foreknowledge, as Augustine himself realizes and points out, is somewhat misleading. God, as an eternal being, is outside time. However, for any event that to us temporal creatures is still in the future, it is true to say of God that God knows, as we should say from our own point of view, 'already' what will happen. Augustine's explicit discussion of the problem of foreknowledge and free will proceeds as though God's knowledge perfectly reflects the causal order in which human wills operate freely, without itself causing that order. Thus he insists in *De civitate Dei* (V.10), for example, that 'it is not that one sins because God foreknew that one would sin'. But in fact, Augustine, like Aquinas after him, seems to hold the view that God's knowledge actually causes to happen what God knows will happen.

The context for Augustine's assertion that God causes what he knows is a discussion of how God can know the material world without himself having a body or any sense organs. Rejecting the suggestion that God might need messengers of any sort, whether sense organs or angelic witnesses, Augustine boldly denies that God's knowledge is in any way dependent on what he knows. God does not know creatures because they are, he writes in *De trinitate* (XV.13.22); rather, they are because God knows them. Indeed, Augustine adds in the same passage, God learns nothing about creatures from the creatures themselves. If then we are unable to surprise God with any of our free choices, and God's perfect and immutable knowledge not merely reflects but actually causes us to be the (to God) unsurprising creatures we are, how is there any metaphysical room for human free will? And how can it not be the case that we sin because God foreknows we will?

It seems to be Augustine's view that God's foreknowledge that, for example, Peter would deny Christ three times somehow causes Peter's denial without making it unfree and, therefore, without detracting from Peter's responsibility for it. Indeed, the view seems to be that God's foreknowledge of a free choice can cause there to be the very free choice that there is. Moreover, even though the choice is caused by God, it is the agent, not God, who makes the choice. Since the free choice is voluntary, the agent is responsible for it.

Of course, the problem mentioned earlier as to how predestination is consistent with free will is directly relevant here. If Augustine's account of God's grace can make clear how it is possible for God to foreordain and predestinate human choices without rendering those choices unfree, then perhaps it will also make clear how God can cause them without making them unfree. On the face of it, however, the claim that (1) God causes everything he foreknows, including the free choices human beings make, seems simply to contradict the assurance that (2) 'it is not that one sins because God foreknew that one would sin' (*De civitate Dei* V.10). If there should be no satisfactory way of reconciling (1) and (2), (1) should be qualified or rejected as a true reflection of Augustine's view, since it is far less prominent in Augustine's writings than the repeated insistence on (2) (see Free will; Omniscience; Predestination).

11. Philosophy of religion: faith, reason and mysticism

When discussing the relationship of faith and reason, Augustine characteristically insists that faith must precede understanding. 'For understanding is the reward of faith', he writes in his *In Ioannis evangelium tractatum* (Homilies on the Gospel of John), adding: 'Therefore do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe that you may understand' (29.6).

The comment of Augustine's interlocutor, Evodius, in the dialogue *De libero arbitrio* (II.2), 'But we want to know and understand what we believe', is apt, not only for much of Augustine's own writing but for much of medieval philosophy as well. The *Proslogion*, the treatise in which Anselm develops his famous ontological argument, carries the Augustinian subtitle, 'Faith in Search of Understanding'.

In Question 48 of *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII* (Eighty-Three Different Questions), Augustine divides the classes of things to be believed into three. In the first class, ranging over the temporal dealings of human beings, are things that are 'always believed and never understood'. In the second group, which are 'understood as soon as they are believed', are 'human reasonings'. It is the third group, which concern divine dealings, that are first believed and afterward understood. However, even if 'I believe in order that I may understand' applies only to theological questions, there is still a problem. How can one believe something before one even understands it? As Augustine himself points out in his sermons, his hearers need to understand what he is saying before they are in position to believe what he says. How can one believe, for example, the biblical claim that the earth was once invisible and without form before one even understands what that claim means? In *Confessiones* (XII.23), Augustine makes a distinction between questions about truth and those about meaning. He seems to suppose one can accept that, for example, the biblical account of creation in Genesis 1 is true without knowing what each of the statements that make it up means. Of course one would need to have some general idea of what those statements might mean in order for one's faith in the truth of the account to have any real content, but even a minimal understanding might be enough to give one's faith some purchase.

How, though, did Augustine think one is to choose among rival authorities in coming to accept, for example, some biblical or creedal statement, or some commentary on the Bible or the creed, as true? He seems to have allowed for both prior and subsequent constraints on what should be believed. As for prior constraints, he writes in *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae* (Morals of the Catholic Church) 7.11: 'We must have recourse to the teachings of those who were in all probability wise'. As for subsequent constraints, he looked for predictions that are not borne out as discrediting a putative authority. Thus he discredited astrologers in *Confessiones* (VII.6) by pointing out that it sometimes happens that a slave in misery has a twin brother who prospers as a freeman, though the twins were born under precisely the same astrological sign.

Later in *Confessiones* (VII.17), Augustine describes an early attempt at mystical ascent. Though 'in an instant of awe', his mind, he says, caught sight of God, he had not the strength to continue the vision; the memory remained with him as something he longed for. In the same work, he describes a more prolonged ascent that grew out of conversation with his mother:

As the flame of love burned stronger in us and raised us higher towards the Selfsame, we passed through all corporeal things, and the heavens themselves, from which the sun and the moon and the stars shine down upon the earth.... At length we came to our own minds and passed beyond them to that place of everlasting plenty, where you feed Israel forever with the food of truth. There life is the Wisdom by which all things are made.

(Confessiones IX.10)

Shortly thereafter Augustine's mother died.

Augustine wonders whether the moment when he and his mother 'reached out in thought and touched the eternal Wisdom' prefigured life in heaven. In perhaps his most eloquent description of the beatific vision, Augustine suggests that such an experience may help one live a more moral life on earth:

There the virtues of the soul are not laborious and wearisome. For there desire is not bridled by the work of temperance, or adversities borne by the work of fortitude, or iniquities punished by the work of justice, or evils shunned by the work of prudence. There the one virtue and the whole of virtue is to love what you see and the greatest happiness is to have what you love. For there the heavenly life is drunk at its source, from which a little is splashed over onto this human life so that it is lived among the temptations of this world with temperance, with fortitude, with justice, and with prudence.

(De genesi ad litteram XII.26.54)

In Chapter 7 of the treatise *De cura pro mortuis* (On the Care of the Dead), Augustine raises a problem for the understanding of religious ritual. He wonders what can be the point of bending one's knees, holding out one's hands or prostrating oneself in supplication to God when the prayer we have in our hearts is already known to God. Augustine's problem is really two problems. First, why should we go through a prayer, whether inwardly or outwardly, when God already knows what we want to say? Second, why should we give outward expression to a prayer, since God, the intended recipient, knows already what we say inwardly in our hearts? He then gives an answer which is intended to apply to both problems: 'Although these motions of the body cannot come to be without a motion of the mind preceding them, when they have been made, visibly and externally, that invisible inner motion which caused them is itself strengthened' (*De cura pro mortuis* 5.7). The idea is that going through a prayer intensifies the thoughts and feelings that the prayer expresses, which answers the first problem. Moreover, doing this outwardly, with appropriate bodily motions, strengthens the inner feelings that such bodily motions express, thus answering the second problem. Augustine must have known as well as we do today that ritual sometimes actually gets in the way of our thinking the thoughts and having the feelings that the ritual is supposed to express. However, it would be enough for him if religious ritual regularly, or even just often, had the effect of nurturing and strengthening religious feelings and attitudes.

An odd thing about Augustine's response to his problem is that, according to his own metaphysical principles, the response is inappropriate, or even false. The reason is that, in

Augustine's view, the soul or mind is superior to the body and what is superior cannot be affected by what is inferior to it (De genesi ad litteram XII.16.33). So, neither the physical productions of sound in saying a prayer nor the physical movements of kneeling or stretching out one's hands can possibly have the effect of intensifying thoughts or feelings.

No doubt what Augustine should have concentrated on is not the bodily motions of tongue, hand or knee in prayer, but rather the importance to a relationship, whether it is a relationship with God or with another human being, of giving expression to one's feelings of gratitude, remorse or whatever else might be appropriate. Thus God's omniscience is really inessential to the issues Augustine is raising. Because some person, A, knows another person, B, very well, it might be the case that A knows that B is sorry for having wronged A, even though B has not yet apologized or asked for forgiveness. In that case, for A to apologize or ask for forgiveness would not have the purpose of passing on information to A; nevertheless, it might be important to their relationship. This might also be true of a relationship between a human being and God. This alternative response to the problems Augustine raises about ritual should remind us of Augustine's tendency, noted in the discussion of De magistro above, to try to reduce the role of language as well as that of gesture to one of passing on information, or even to merely reminding us of what we already know.

12. Ethics: sin, vice and virtue

For Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, there existed the problem of how we can ever do what we know we ought not to be doing. This is the problem of *akrasia* (see Akrasia). From this ancient perspective, perhaps the most striking thing about Augustinian ethics is its easy acceptance of *akrasia*. In Confessiones II, Augustine tells of stealing pears as a boy of sixteen. He spends two chapters ruminating on what might have motivated his theft. It was not the pears themselves, he says, for he had better ones at home. He concludes that it was the flavour of sinning that motivated him.

In De libero arbitrio (I. 2), Augustine admits that the question of why we do evil disturbed him greatly when he was young and moved him toward Manicheism. Once he accepted the idea of original sin, however, he found nothing paradoxical in saying of someone: 'He hates the thing itself because he knows that it is evil; and yet he does it because he is bent on doing it' (De nuptiis et concupiscentia (On Marriage and Concupiscence) I.28.31).

Augustine was an extreme intentionalist in ethics. In De sermone Domini in monte (Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount) I.12.34, he identifies three necessary and sufficient conditions for committing a sin: receiving an evil suggestion, taking pleasure in the thought of performing the act suggested and consenting to perform the act. Thus in Augustine's view, whether one commits a sin is in no way dependent on whether the contemplated action is actually carried out. Even when the action is carried out, it is the intention (understood as suggestion, pleasure and consent), rather than the action itself, or its consequences, that is sinful.

Augustine also devoted two treatises to the topic of lying. In the first of these, De mendacio (On Lying), he first suggests that a person *S* lies in saying *p* if, and only if (1) *p* is false, (2) *S* believes that *p* is false and (3) *S* says *p* with the intention of deceiving someone. He then considers three

cases: first, that of someone with a false belief who wants to deceive another by saying something that is, unknown to them, quite true; second, the case of someone who expects to be disbelieved and so knowingly says what is false in order to instill a true belief; and third, the case of someone who, also expecting to be disbelieved, knowingly speaks the truth in order to instill a falsehood. Augustine seems not to know what to do about these problem cases. He contents himself with insisting that the conditions (1)–(3) are jointly sufficient, without taking a stand on whether each is singly necessary (De mendacio 4.5).

Discussing virtue and vice, Augustine contrasts those things that are desirable in themselves with those that are desirable for the sake of something else. He says that things of the first sort are to be enjoyed (*frui*) whereas those of the second sort are to be used (*uti*). Vice, he adds, is wanting to use what is meant to be enjoyed or wanting to enjoy what is meant to be used (De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII 30).

Ambrose had already added the Pauline virtues of faith, hope and love to the classical virtues of temperance, courage, wisdom and justice. Augustine follows Ambrose in this, and he follows St Paul in assigning first importance to love; in fact, he offers an interpretation of each of the seven virtues that makes it an expression of the love of God. Thus temperance is love ‘keeping itself whole and incorrupt for God’; fortitude, or courage, is love ‘bearing everything readily for the sake of God’, and so on (De moribus ecclesiae catholicae (On the Morals of the Catholic Church) 15.25). Virtue, he says, is nothing but the perfect love of God. In this way Augustine provides a Christian analogue to Plato’s idea of the unity of the virtues (see Virtues and vices).

13. Ethics: ‘ought’ and ‘can’

Augustine also attacked the Pelagians for their views on the avoidance of sin, focusing on the question of ‘ought’ and ‘can’. Two of his contemporaries, the British monk Pelagius and his disciple Coelestius, had made the principle that ‘ought’ implies ‘can’ a central tenet of their religious and ethical teaching. As already noted, Augustine was the person primarily responsible for defining their teaching, Pelagianism, as a Christian heresy (see Pelagianism). In his treatise De perfectione iusticia hominis (On Man’s Perfection in Righteousness), subtitled ‘In opposition to those who assert that it is possible for one to become righteous by one’s own strength alone’, Augustine describes the chief thesis of Coelestius as the contention that if something is unavoidable, then it is not a sin; there is simply no such thing as an unavoidable sin. Augustine responds to Pelagius and his disciple by rejecting the simple disjunction that either something is not a sin or it can be avoided. ‘Sin can be avoided’, he writes, ‘if our corrupted nature be healed by God’s grace.’ Thus in a way, Augustine agrees that ‘ought’ does imply ‘can’, but only with a crucial qualification. ‘Ought’ implies ‘can with the gratuitous assistance of God’, but it does not imply ‘can without any outside help’ (see Kant, I.).

Augustine’s response to dreaming as a possible threat to knowledge claims fits together with his intentionalism in ethics and his anti-Pelagianism to produce an interesting problem as to whether one is morally responsible for the acts of one’s dream self. He agonizes over this problem in Confessiones (X.30). Three ways of justifying a claim of no responsibility suggest themselves. I could say I am not responsible (1) because I am not my dream self, or (2) because what

happens in a dream does not really happen, or (3) because I am powerless to avoid doing what my dream self does, and 'ought' implies 'can'.

Augustine's philosophical and theological commitments seem to undercut each of these three responses. Thus (1) is undercut, it seems, by his somewhat concessive response to scepticism. I can know that something tastes sweet to me, Augustine insists in *Contra academicos* (III.11.26), whether or not I am dreaming. It seems to be a consequence of this insistence that, if I am dreaming, I am my dream self. As for (2), it seems to be undercut by Augustine's strong intentionalism in ethics. Thus when I commit adultery in my dreams, even if no 'outward' adultery takes place, still I entertain the evil suggestion, take pleasure in the evil suggested and give consent; so there is wrongdoing. As for (3), as noted above, Augustine rejects the Pelagian insistence that 'ought' implies 'can'. or rather, he accepts it only with an important qualification. Although 'I ought to refrain from consenting to fornicate' does, in Augustine's view, entail that I can so refrain with the help of God's grace, it does not entail that I can refrain strictly on my own, that is, without any divine grace. Yet if I receive no grace and consent to fornicate, I sin, according to Augustine, and it is just for God to punish me.

14. Ethics: on killing

Although Augustine's thoughts on suicide are not particularly original, they have been extremely influential. His position became Christian orthodoxy, which in turn influenced decisively the legal thinking in predominantly Christian countries. Augustine's position is that, with certain specifiable exceptions (primarily, lawful executions and killings in battle by soldiers fighting just wars (see below), anyone who kills a human being, whether himself or anyone else, is guilty of murder (*De civitate Dei* I.21), and murder is prohibited by divine commandment (see *Death; Suicide, ethics of*).

Augustine did not invent the idea that certain requirements must be satisfied if a war is to count as just. The theory of just warfare - both the conditions that must be satisfied if a war is to be entered into justly (*jus ad bellum*) as well as the requirements of justice in the waging of war (*jus in bello*) - are already well developed by Cicero in his *On the Republic*. Nor was Augustine the first Christian thinker to develop a theory of just warfare; Ambrose had already done so (Christopher 1994). Nevertheless, Augustine is usually considered the father of the modern theory of the just war. Such deference is appropriate in that it is in Augustine, more than in Cicero or Ambrose or anyone else in the ancient world, that later theorists have found their earliest inspiration.

Although Augustine accepts the commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill', he interprets it in such a way that not everyone who brings about the death of another can be properly said to kill. Thus, he writes in *De civitate Dei* (I.21), 'One who owes a duty of obedience to the giver of the command does not himself kill; he is an instrument, a sword in its user's hand.' Thus an executioner may bring about the death of a convict without killing, and so may a soldier end another's life without killing, especially when war is being waged 'on the authority of God'.

In general, Augustine takes over the Roman principles of just war as set forth by Cicero and adds his own emphasis on the intention with which the acts of war are performed. This following passage is characteristic:

What is the evil in war? Is it the death of some who will soon die in any case, that others may live in peaceful subjection? This is merely cowardly dislike, not any religious feeling. The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, the lust of power, and such like; and it is generally to punish these things, when force is required to inflict the punishment, that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars.

(Contra Faustum manichaeum 22.74)

Beyond such insistence that war should not be fought from love of violence, revengeful cruelty or lust for power, Augustine did not work out specific principles for the just conduct of war. Still, in making it plausible to many Christians that killing in war need not fall under the divine commandment not to kill, Augustine freed others to develop principles for what might be considered the just declaration of war, as well as the just conduct of war, once it has been justly entered into (see War and peace, philosophy of).

15. Philosophy of history

In the Poetics, Aristotle remarks that poetry is more philosophical than history. He seems to have thought of the historian as the mere chronicler of events, whereas the tragedian tells us what sort of person would, probably or necessarily, do or say what sorts of things. Augustine was the first important philosopher to treat the writing of history in a more philosophical way. In *De civitate Dei*, he rejects the idea of eternal recurrence, later associated with Nietzsche, according to which:

just as Plato, for example, taught his disciples at Athens in the fourth century, in the school called the Academy, so in innumerable centuries of the past, separated by immensely wide and yet finite intervals, the same Plato, the same city, the same school, the same disciples have appeared time after time, and are to reappear time after time in innumerable centuries in the future.

(De civitate Dei XII.14)

Although Augustine does not offer philosophical arguments for his own 'linear' view of history, he does offer a variety of criticisms of what he takes to be the main philosophical argumentation in support of the cyclical theories (*De civitate Dei* XII.18).

The account of history Augustine offers is meant to be a universal history, that is, a history of the world. It divides the history of the world into seven ages, analogous to the seven days of creation. The discussion proceeds, however, more as a gloss on scripture than by appeal to rational considerations or nontheological evidence. Although he does not try to establish the nature of 'God's universal providence' by general considerations or evidence that is independent of Christian revelation, he does seek to establish that divine providence, like divine foreknowledge and divine predestination, is compatible with human free will. On a more general

level he tries to establish that history can have a meaning, in fact the meaning God foreordains it to have, even though human agents are perfectly free; and indeed, are foreordained to be free (see History, philosophy of).

List of works

Augustine (386–429) Collected Works.

(The seventeenth-century Maurist edition of Augustine's works is to be found in J.P. Migne (ed.) *Patrologia Latina*, Paris, 1844–6, vols 32–47. Critical editions of many of his works are to be found scattered through the *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum*, Vienna: Tempsky, 1866–, as well as in the *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, Turnholt: Brepols, and The Hague: Nijhoff, 1953–. English translations of Augustine's major works are to be found in P. Schaff (ed.) *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886–8, repr: Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971–74. A smaller selection is found in W. Oates (ed.) *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, New York: Random House, 1948, 2 vols. Individual works are also to be found scattered through the series *Fathers of the Church*, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1947–, and in the series *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, New York: Newman, 1946–. The first English translation of Augustine's complete works is currently being published in 46 vols, edited by J.E. Rotelle, Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, in conjunction with the Augustinian Heritage Institute.)

Augustine (386) *Soliloquia* (*Soliloquies*), trans. C.C. Starbuck, in W. Oates (ed.) *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, New York: Random House, 1948, vol. 1, 257–297.

(A dialogue between Augustine and Reason, this work assumes the first-person perspective that marks one of Augustine's special contributions to philosophy.)

Augustine (386) *Contra academicos* (*Against the Academicians*), trans. P. King (along with *The Teacher*), Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1995.

(Augustine's most sustained effort to refute the scepticism of the New Academy.)

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(Includes a Christian definition of the classical virtues.)

Augustine (388–95) *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII* (Eighty-three Different Questions), trans. D.L. Mosher, *Fathers of the Church* vol. 70, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1977.

(Short discussions of a variety of metaphysical, epistemological and theological topics.)

Augustine (388–95) *De libero arbitrio* (On Free Choice of the Will), trans. T. Williams, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993.

(The first philosophically important treatment of how to reconcile human free will with divine foreknowledge.)

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Augustine (389/91) *De vera religione* (On True Religion), trans. J.H.S. Burleigh, *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, London: SCM Press, 1953, 218–283.

(Augustine here finds truth even in doubting.)

Augustine (392/3) *De duabus animabus contra Manichaeos* (On the Two Souls), trans. A.H. Newman in P. Schaff (ed.) *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, 1886–8, vol. 4, 91–124.

(A spirited rejection of the Manichean idea that each person has both a good and an evil soul.)

Augustine (394) *De mendacio* (On Lying), trans. M.S. Muldowney, *Fathers of the Church* vol. 14, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1952, 45–120.

(The earlier of two treatises devoted to an analysis of the sin of lying.)

Augustine (394) *De sermone Domini in monte* (Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount), trans. J.J. Jepsen, New York: Newman Press, 1948.

(Perhaps the most important statement of Augustine's intentionalist ethics.)

Augustine (396–426) *De doctrina christiana* (On Christian Instruction), trans. J.J. Gavigan, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1947.

(Augustine's handbook of biblical exegesis.)

Augustine (397–401) *Confessionum libri tredecim* (Confessions), trans. F.J. Sheed, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993; trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961; trans. H. Chadwick, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

(This is no doubt the most widely and frequently translated of Augustine's works. The above are the English translations deserving of special mention.)

Augustine (399) *De natura boni contra manichaeos* (The Nature of the Good), trans. A.H. Newman in W. Oates (ed.) *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, New York: Random House, 1948, vol. 1, 429–457.

(An attempt to make plausible the idea that evil is a privation.)

Augustine (400) *Contra Faustum manichaeum* (Reply to Faustus), trans. R. Stothert in P. Schaff (ed.) *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series, 1886–8, vol. 4, 151–345.

(A major polemic against the leading Manichee of Augustine's time.)

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(Several good English translations exist, of which the above is the most notable.)

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(A treatise on the accusations against Pelagius.)

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(Augustine's efforts to review, in order of composition, all of his earlier works and, where he thinks it necessary, correct his earlier views.)

Augustine (429) *De praedestinatione sanctorum* (On the Predestination of Saints), trans. R.E. Wallis in W. Oates (ed.) *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, New York: Random House, 1948, vol. 1, 775–817.

(A final effort to insist that even the beginning of a believer's faith is God's predestined gift, though God does not act in human sin.)

References and further reading

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(A discussion of the cogito, various dream problems, the problem of other minds and other issues that arise from the attempt to pursue philosophy from a first-person point of view.)

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(Still valuable as a guide to the interrelations between Augustine's various views in philosophical theology and theological ethics.)

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