

ST. AUGUSTINE AND BEING

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A Metaphysical Essay

by

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PREFACE

The properly metaphysical dimension of Augustine's thought has received little special attention among scholars – even “Scholastics.” The Thomist metaphysicians – especially the “Anglo-Saxon” ones – receive first honors for being the most neglectful of all. Why? It is a puzzling phenomenon particularly in the light of the fact (recognized by almost every Thomist) that the very existence of Thomas the theologian is inconceivable apart from his pre-eminent Christian mentor in the intellectual life, the Bishop of Hippo. It is a puzzling phenomenon because, although the Christian metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas is not the Christian metaphysics of Augustine, these metaphysics could not be simply opposed to one another, else the theologies wherein they exercise the indispensable function of vital rational organs would themselves be discordant. But what respectable “Scholastic” would deny that, in their essential teaching about God and the things of God, the thought of these two masters is remarkably congruent?

May I suggest that one of the major reasons for this paradoxical neglect of Augustinian metaphysics on the part of Thomists (above all, in the English-speaking world) is their simplistic assumption that whereas Aquinas was an Aristotelian in philosophy, Augustine was a Platonist, despite the fact that in theology they were substantially at one – as if there could be theological agreement, formally speaking, even where there is metaphysical disagreement, formally speaking. In this study we propose to test that assumption by examining a most eminent case in the history of Christian metaphysics. Our object is demonstration. We seek proof in concise terms upon some

fundamental issues in Christian ontology – proof of a view (which we consider basic) concerning St. Augustine's metaphysical doctrine.

Such an undertaking, if successful, should in some measure contribute to a better understanding not only of Christian philosophy in general but of Augustinism and Thomism in particular.

All of us owe so much to so many, both living and dead, that we could never hope to thank more than a tiny fraction of their number. Yet there are certain benefactors, contemporaneous with ourselves, whose names we can gratefully cite. In connection with the present project, then, it is a pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness to Father Roger Hanouille, O.S.A., whose scholarly researches (not yet published) have been of particular value; to Father Robert P. Russell, O.S.A., of this University, who has critically read the manuscript and whose profound and comprehensive knowledge of St. Augustine have in themselves provided indispensable support – though, of course, I cheerfully assume total responsibility for the interpretations proposed.

Allow me also to thank Messrs. Allan Janik and George Parvenski,* graduate students in philosophy at Villanova University, for their competent technical assistance, as well as Mrs. Helen Stoughton, Secretary of the Department of Philosophy, for her generous typing services.

* Since this was written, Mr. Parvenski has unfortunately died.

ST. AUGUSTINE'S WRITINGS REFERRED
TO IN THIS ESSAY

- A LITERAL COMMENTARY ON "GENESIS" (*De Genesi ad litteram*
– 12 Books)
- AGAINST FELIX, THE MANICHEAN (*De Actis cum Felice Manichaeo*
– 2 Books)
- AGAINST JULIAN, THE PELAGIAN (*Contra Julianum haeresis*
Pelagianae defensore – 2 Books)
- AGAINST THE ADVERSARY OF THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS
(*Contra Adversarium Legis et Prophetarum* – 2 Books)
- ANSWER TO THE SKEPTICS (*Contra Academicos* – a Dialogue in 3
Books)
- COMMENTARY ON PSALM (S) (*Enarratio in Psalmum . . .* – c. 150
in no.)
- CONCERNING THE NATURE OF THE GOOD (*De natura boni contra*
Manichaeos – a Dialogue in 1 Book)
- CONCERNING THE TEACHER (*De magistro* – a Dialogue in 1 Book)
- INCOMPLETE WORK AGAINST JULIAN (*Opus imperfectum contra*
secundam Juliani responsionem)
- ON FAITH AND CREED (*De fide et symbolo* – 1 Book)
- ON "GENESIS," AGAINST THE MANICHEANS (*De Genesi contra*
Manichaeos – 2 Books)
- ON FREEDOM OF CHOICE (*De libero arbitrio* – a Dialogue in 3
Books)
- ON MUSIC (*De musica* – a Dialogue in 6 Books)
- ON ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL (*In Johannis Evangelium* – 124 "tracts")
- ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE (*De doctrina Christiana* – 4 Books)
- ON THE BLESSED LIFE (*De beata vita* – a Dialogue in 1 Book)
- ON THE GREATNESS OF THE SOUL (*De quantitate animae* – a
Dialogue in 1 Book)

- ON THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE* (*De moribus ecclesiae Catholicae* – 1 Book)
- ON THE MANICHEAN WAY OF LIFE* (*De moribus Manichaeorum* – 1 Book)
- ON THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL (*De immortalitate animae* – a Dialogue in 1 Book)
- ON THE SOUL AND ITS ORIGIN (*De anima et ejus origine* – 4 Books)
- ON THE TRUE RELIGION (*De vera religione* – 1 Book)
- RETRACTATIONS (*Retractationes* – 2 Books)
- SERMON (s) (*Sermo* . . . – c. 400 in no.)
- THE CITY OF GOD (*De Civitate Dei* – 22 Books)
- THE TRINITY (*De Trinitate* – 15 Books)
- THE BOOK OF EIGHT-THREE QUESTIONS (*De diversis quaestionibus* 83 – 1 Book)**
- THE CONFESSIONS (*Confessiones* – 13 Books)
- UNFINISHED LITERAL COMMENTARY ON "GENESIS" (*De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* – 1 Book)

References include book, chapter, and paragraph number, where applicable, followed by the volume and column numbers of Migne's Latin Patrology ("PL"), which includes (in volumes 32–47) the works of St. Augustine, edited by the Benedictines of Saint-Maur. Simply in the interest of accuracy of meaning, other more recent editions of certain individual works, e.g., *The Confessions* and *The City of God*, have been consulted, as well as the useful *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* (CSEL), published in Vienna from 1887 on.

* These two "books" constitute one treatise.

** Question 46 is on the important topic of the exemplar ideas (*De ideis*).

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