



The Philosophy of St. Augustine Albert Stöckl

St. Augustine...is the great luminary of the [late Patristic period]. His great mind gathered together all the elements of Christian philosophy hitherto called into existence, reduced them to systematic unity, and left them to succeeding ages as a systematic whole, for further study and investigation. The world does not often bring forth a genius like that of Augustine. Such depth of thought such delicacy of discrimination, a spirit of inquiry so fruitful in results, such a genuine appreciation of the ideal, such conclusive reasoning, are not often found in one man to the same degree. God and the soul — these were the objects to which his investigations were mainly directed; the whole effort of his mind found expression in the pregnant words: *Noverim Te (Deus), noverim me!* (Let me know you, O God; let me know myself!).

Life and Writings of Saint Augustine.

Aurelius Augustinus was born at Tagaste in Numidia, A.D. 353. His father Patricius was a pagan, his mother Monica a Christian of exemplary piety. The extraordinary intellectual gifts of the boy manifested themselves at an early age, but passion awoke in him at the same time in all its energy, a circumstance which caused much sorrow to his mother. He received his education successively at Tagaste, Madaura, and Carthage. The vice and the excesses with which he was brought in contact in Madaura and Carthage affected his moral character most perniciously. All the while his great mind was not idle, it was restlessly seeking a solution for the great problems of life. He believed such a solution was offered by the Manicheans, and he accordingly joined their sect. When his education was finished, he adopted the profession of teacher of rhetoric, and in this capacity taught at Carthage, at Rome, and at Milan. During his stay at Milan the turning point of his life was reached.

The contradictions involved in the Manichean doctrines had bewildered him, and he had in consequence adopted the scepticism of the Academy, when his study of the writings of Plato at last roused him from his sensual degradation and awoke in him the love of the ideal. The preaching of St. Ambrose exercised a still more powerful influence on the mind of the young man. Augustine had gone to hear the discourses of the bishop for the sake of the graces of his oratory, but he soon went for the sake of the exalted teaching which was clothed in these charms of eloquence. A further influence was that of his mother, who had followed him from Rome, and whose prayers and counsels were added to the other gracious impulses brought to bear on him. The decisive moment came, and after struggle the grace of God triumphed.

After his conversion, Augustine, with several of his friends, retired to the country seat of Cassiciacum, near Milan, and in the year 337 he received Baptism. At this date began his great literary activity in the service of the Church. In the year 391 circumstances arose which obliged him to make a journey to Hippo. There he was forced by the people to receive priest's orders, and to act as assistant to the aged bishop of that See. On the death of the bishop, Augustine was unanimously elected to succeed him (395). In his new office he laboured indefatigably for the

establishment of the Catholic Faith and Christian morality, and defended the doctrines of the Church with signal energy against the Manicheans, Donatists and Pelagians. He died A.D. 430.

Of the writings of St. Augustine, those are of special interest for the history of philosophy which were written in the first years after his conversion. In the later years of his life he was occupied mainly with questions affecting religious dogmas, as during that period he was engrossed by his struggle with the Donatists, Manicheans, and Pelagians. To the earlier writings belong: — (a) The treatise *Contra Academicos*; (b), *De Vita Beata*; (c), *De Ordine*; and (d), the *Soliloquia*. These works were composed previous to his baptism at Cassiciacum. Before his baptism also, but after his return to Milan, were composed (e), the treatise *De Immortalitate Animae*; (f), the work, *De Grammatica*; (g), the treatises *De Magistro*; and (h), the *Principia Dialectices*. During his journey from Milan to Africa, he composed at Rome, (i), the treatise *De Quantitate Animae*; (k), the three books *De Libero Arbitrio*; (l), the books *De Moribus Ecclesiae*; and (m), *De Moribus Manichaeorum*. At Tagaste he composed the treatises (n), *De Musica*; (o), *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*; and (p), *De Vera Religione*.

The works which he wrote as a priest and a bishop, and which are of chief interest to the philosopher are: — (a), *De Doctrina Christiana*, Libri iv.; (b), *De Fide et Symbolo*; (c), *Enchiridion de Fide, Spe et Caritate*; (d), *De Utilitate Credendi*; (e), *De Agone Christiano*; (f), *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Libri xii.; (g) *De Fide contra Manichaeos*; (h), *De Duobus Animis contra Manichaeos*; (i), *Contra Fortunatum Manich.*; (k) *Contra Adimantum Manichaei Discipulum*; (l), *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*; (m) *De Spiritu et Littera*; (n) *De Anima et ejus Origine*; (o), *De Actis cum Felice Manichaeo*; (p), *De Natura Boni contra Manichaeos*; (q.) *Contra Epistolam Manichaei quam vocant Fundamenti*; (r), *Contra Secundinum Manichaeum*; (s), *Contra Adversarium Legis et Prophetarum*, etc.

But the works of St. Augustine which are the most important of all, both to the theologian and to the philosopher, are his great works *De Civitate Dei* in 22 books, and his work *De Trinitate* in 15 books. The latter of these was composed between A.D. 400 and 410; the former was begun A.D. 413 and completed A.D. 426. Of importance also to the philosopher are his *Confessions* which he wrote about A.D. 400. His letters, sermons, and commentaries on the Scripture also contain much that throws light upon his philosophical opinions. Of his writings against the Pelagians we may mention: — (a), *Contra Julianum Pelagianum*; (b), *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia*; (c), *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione*; (d) *Opus imperfectum contra Julianum Pelag.*; (e) *Contra duas Epistolas Pelagianorum*; (f) *De Correptione et Gratia*; (g), *De Natura et Gratia*; (h), *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*; (i), *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*; (k), *De Dono Perseverantiae*; (l), *De Peccato Originali*; etc. The *Retractationes* were composed by Augustine a few years before his death; in this work he reviews his entire system and corrects many points of his earlier teaching.

We have mentioned that Augustine, after his conversion, devoted his scientific inquiries chiefly to two subjects — God and the soul. For the conduct of his inquiries it was necessary that he should lay down a definite theory of knowledge which should serve as a basis on which to establish his system of investigation. In order to set forth clearly the philosophy of St. Augustine, it will be necessary to explain first the principles of his theory of knowledge; we shall then proceed to his teaching regarding God and the creation of the world; and lastly we shall deal with his doctrine regarding man, and the ethical theories which are connected with this portion of his system.

Theory of Knowledge.

At this point of our exposition, it is of chief importance to set forth the relation which Augustine conceives to exist between reason and authority. All that we learn, he says, we learn either from

authority or from reason. Faith is the result of the former process, knowledge is the result of the latter. In the order of time authority comes first, in the order of the nature of things, reason is the first and most excellent. The usual course when we learn a thing is that authority comes before reason. Authority offers the truth which faith thereupon accepts, but this process leads on to scientific knowledge. For reason is thus enabled to direct its attention to the truth given by authority, to acquire scientific knowledge of it, and to establish it on a scientific basis. The latter kind of knowledge is of its nature higher than a mere knowledge of faith. In this wise does faith become the basis, the condition, and the first beginning of scientific knowledge (*De Ord., Lib. 2, c. 9.*)

These general principles Augustine applies to determine the relation between Divine Revelation and human reason. In any scientific investigation of revealed truth, faith must precede knowledge, it must be the basis and antecedent condition of knowledge. In other words, the truths of divine revelation must be received by faith before we can attain a scientific or a speculative knowledge of them. Faith is therefore indispensable for man. This the more that sin has entangled man in the love of things of earth, and diverted him from the eternal; and in consequence, faith has become necessary to man as a means of salvation, as the means by which he must reach truth, and thus attain salvation (*De Vera Relig., c. 24.*)

This being premised, we may now take up the theory of knowledge, strictly so called, which Augustine offers us. To every act of knowledge, he teaches, two factors concur — an object known, and a subject knowing. Of its nature, the object is antecedent to the subject — without an object no knowledge is possible. This principle is of universal application. Now, the objects of knowledge are of two kinds, the sensible and the supersensuous; we may, therefore, distinguish in man two kinds of knowledge — experience and reason. Sense, or experience, is concerned with the sensible; reason deals with the supersensuous or intelligible. These two kinds of knowledge are essentially distinct from one another.

But the question arises: Is certainty possible in knowledge? The Academics deny this, inasmuch as they teach that mere probability is all that we can attain. But, in the first place, such probability could not be had unless we suppose the knowledge of truth possible, for the probable is probable only because it is like truth; and it is measured by comparison with truth. In the next place, probability would not, by any means, suffice to make us happy, whatever the Academics may say to the contrary. For, no one can be happy who does not possess that which he desires to possess, and no one searches who does not wish to find. He, therefore, who seeks truth without finding it, does not possess that which he wishes to possess, and cannot, consequently, be happy. Nor can such an one be said to be really wise; for the sage, as such, must be happy; certainty in knowledge must, therefore, be attainable.

The same principle can further be established by positive argument. We cannot doubt that we are thinking, willing, and living. Consciousness gives such indisputable evidence on this point that doubt or denial is impossible. If a person were to doubt whether he thinks or exists, he would, by his very doubt itself, admit that he thinks and exists; if he did not exist, he could not doubt. Furthermore, the man who knows that he doubts, has, by the fact, knowledge of a truth; is certain of this truth, that he is doubting. The man who doubts whether there is any truth, acknowledges one proposition to be true; and, as all things are true only because truth exists, he, by the fact, acknowledges the existence of truth and his own certainty with regard to it (*De Lib. Arb., Lib. 2, c. 3. Soliloq., Lib. 2, c. 1, etc.*)

Again, the truth of our sensuous knowledge is also beyond doubt. We may, indeed, be deceived in the use of our senses; but the fault is not to be attributed to the senses, for these always represent the object, according to the impressions which they actually receive. It is not by our senses we are deceived, but by the judgment we form with regard to their perceptions.

We form our judgment hastily on our present impressions, without closer inquiry into the relations which may possibly exist between these and external objects. As for the existence of an objective material world, sense renders us so certain that doubt is wholly impossible.

The truth of sensuous knowledge cannot be doubted; the truth of knowledge gained by intellect is no less above suspicion. Nothing can be more absurd than to assert that what we see with our eyes exists, but what we perceive with our intellect does not exist; for it would be irrational to suppose that reason or intelligence is not incomparably higher than bodily sense (*De Immort. Anim.*, c. 10). Dialectical truths are, therefore, indisputable. No one, for instance, can doubt that the truth of the antecedent of an hypothetical proposition involves the truth of the consequent, or that, in a disjunctive proposition, the denial of all the members, except one, involves the truth of the member remaining. And so of other truths.

As to the possibility of attaining certain knowledge, there can, then, be no doubt. A further question now arises as to the conditions of intellectual knowledge; and, first, as to the way in which intellectual knowledge is acquired. Augustine distinguishes two methods by which the knowledge of intelligible objects is attained. The first method begins with the faculties of sense. The intellect directs its attention to the objects perceived by the senses, inquires into their causes, and thus endeavours to reach the knowledge of the Ultimate, or First Cause, a process described in the words of the Apostle “Invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciuntur” (*De Gen. ad litt.*, iv, c. 32).

The second method begins with what is within man himself. Man must withdraw from sense, and retire within himself, if he would contemplate truth in all its purity. Augustine reminds us of this principle at every turn. “Noli foras ire,” he repeats, “in te redi; in interiori homine habitat veritas” (*De Vera Relig.*, c. 39). The consideration of himself and of the processes of his intellectual life is, for man, the second means to the knowledge of higher truth. And this way is the more excellent, for it is more within man’s reach, and therefore leads more perfectly to the end pursued than the other, which begins with sense and leads to the supersensuous.

To enable man by these means successfully to reach intelligible truth another condition is necessary. This condition is virtue and purity of heart. Truth can find place only in a pure heart. The man who would successfully prosecute the search after truth must, therefore, purify his soul from all defilement, and the purer his heart is from sin, and the more it is adorned with virtue and holiness, the more clearly and more perfectly will truth be communicated to him.

This being premised, we may now penetrate more deeply into the nature of intellectual knowledge. The question which first arises concerns the ultimate or highest ground of all knowledge. Augustine answers that the ultimate ground or reason of all intellectual knowledge is the Absolute Truth — God. This principle Augustine proves after the fashion of Plato:

(a.) That we may have knowledge of anything as true, or good, or beautiful, and distinguish it from what is not true, or good, or beautiful, it is necessary to have a rule or standard, according to which the judgment regarding the object is determined. This standard, according to which we estimate the truth, or goodness, or beauty of an object, must be absolutely immutable, otherwise it could not be a trustworthy standard of judgment. The standard of judgment must be present to our minds; but, it is not the mind itself, for the mind is changeable, and, besides, we judge ourselves and our own actions by this standard, and must so judge ourselves. That immutable, invariable standard must, therefore, be something higher than our own minds; and, since there is nothing immutable and invariable but God, this standard, must be God Himself, in so far as He is absolute truth, goodness, and beauty (*De Lib. Arb.*, II, c. 12, 16).

(b.) If a human teacher states any principle to us, we do not immediately perceive the truth of the principle. We must have within ourselves a criterion by which we test the truth of the proposition stated. And this criterion can, for the reason already given, be no other than the

absolute truth itself. It appears, then, that the immutable, eternal Word of God is the teacher of the soul; we consult this Word when we endeavour to assure ourselves of the truth of a proposition laid down by a human teacher; and this truth the Word reveals to us with as much clearness and evidence as our moral condition permits. Instruction from without only leads us to consult the instructor within ourselves, to receive from Him an insight into the truth (*De Magistro*, c. 11).

(c.) When two individuals understand and acknowledge as true an assertion advanced by one or the other, the question presents itself: How and by what means have both alike knowledge of the truth in question? The one does not read it in the other; there must be some common ground in which and by which both alike obtain knowledge of it. This ground can, again, be no other than the absolute, immutable truth, which is above both, and in accordance with which both alike form their judgment (*Conf. XII*, c. 25).

It follows from these considerations that our minds are, in some mysterious way, united to the eternal unchanging truth. Without this union they would be incapable of attaining knowledge of truth. God is the Sun which illumines human minds. In His light we perceive truth. As we can observe nothing with the eye of the body, when the sun does not shed its light over the objects of vision; so we cannot have knowledge of intellectual truth except in the light of God — the Sun of our faculty of intelligence. And, as the sun sheds its light upon all men, so that, in its light, all may be able to see, so does God give His light to all minds to make truth accessible to all. This gift is, however, bestowed upon different men in different degrees, as their aptitudes are differently determined by their moral condition.

The knowledge of the essences of created things depends upon the intellectual light thus furnished by the absolute divine truth. Without this light such knowledge would be impossible. The Divine Word includes within Himself the ultimate reasons (*rationes*) or archetypal forms, after which all things are created and of which all things are ectypes. God, as absolute truth, is thus the ultimate cause of all our knowledge of truth, and the Word of God is the ultimate cause which renders intelligible to us the essences of things, inasmuch as He includes within Himself the archetypal forms of all existence. It follows that we may assert, and must assert, that we have knowledge of the essences of things in their ultimate eternal causes (*in rationibus aeternis*) which exist in God.

In this way the origin of our intellectual knowledge must be explained. It now becomes manifest how the consideration of our own activity of intellect leads us at once to the knowledge of God. When we see that all intellectual knowledge is dependent upon the absolute truth, which is the sun of our intelligence, we need only turn our gaze from the object illumined by that sun to the sun itself, and we, at once, have knowledge of God, the ultimate and supreme cause of all our knowledge.

If we consider the theory of knowledge here set forth, we shall observe that Augustine follows unmistakably the Platonic line of thought. But we should not be warranted in concluding, at once, from this, that his views are identical with those of the Ontologists. Augustine nowhere asserts that we have immediate intuition of God and of all truth in Him — the position maintained by the Ontologists. Nay, such a thing would be in flat contradiction with his subsequent teaching regarding God and created things. The later scholastics, it may be assumed, interpret him correctly, when they understand Augustine's theory, which holds that God is the sun of the mind, and that we have knowledge of truth only in the light which He diffuses, to mean that God is the ultimate principle, not of all being only, but of all knowledge as well; that the intellect, by which we attain the truth, is a participation of the Divine intelligence; that, moreover, the principles of reason which guide our judgments have their ultimate and highest source in God (*in the Divine Word*), and that, when we judge in accordance with these

principles, we are judging according to the standard fixed by the Absolute Truth. We may also assume the Scholastics to be warranted in maintaining that Augustine's proposition as to our knowing the essences of things *in rationibus aeternis* does not imply an immediate contemplation of the Divine Ideas, but merely signifies that the essences of things could neither be nor be known, unless they were antecedently formed in the Divine Ideas, as in their highest cause. The thoroughly Platonic character of Augustine's theory of knowledge lent favour, however, to the interpretation put upon it by the Ontologist school at a later period.

Teaching Regarding God and Creation.

Augustine's chief proof for the existence of God is derived from our notion of the True and the Good. It is a fact that we know truth. Now, irrespective of the principle that an absolute truth must be supposed, to enable us to know any truth whatever, it is to be noted that whatever is true is so only because of the absolute truth, that is, because it participates in that truth. There must, therefore, exist an absolute truth: this truth is God. God, therefore, exists. Again, it is undeniable that we all strive after what is good, for we all seek to be happy. There are many kinds of changeable good after which we may strive. But, nothing changeable is good of itself; it is good only because it participates in the good which is absolute and unchangeable. It follows that there must exist a good which is, in itself, absolute and unchangeable. This good is God. God, therefore, exists (*De Lib. Arb.*, II, c. 3, 15 ; *De Trin.*, VIII, c. 3).

God, as He is in Himself, is above all predicates. No one of the categories can be applied to Him in the sense in which it is applicable to creatures. Even the category of Substance cannot be applied to Him in its proper sense; if it were so, then it would follow that He could be the subject of accidents. In regard to God, it is better to employ the notion Essence (Essentia) than the notion Substance. From this it follows that God, as He is in Himself, is incomprehensible and ineffable; there exists no term which is worthy of Him or which rightly signifies His Being. In the right understanding of this truth consists the right knowledge of God. *Deus melius scitur nesciendo*. If, however, we speak of Him in human language, we must attribute to Him all that our thoughts can conceive of what is loftiest and most excellent.

God is absolute simplicity. He is not only free from every admixture of material element — an eternal immutable Form — but, furthermore, every attribute which belongs to Him is one and the same thing with His Essence. In God, being, life, wisdom, goodness, etc., are not different things; all these are, in Him, one and the same thing — His absolute infinite Essence. God is not good or just because of participated justice or goodness; He is His own justice and goodness. The same holds of His other attributes. God is, therefore, absolutely immutable and imperishable; no shadow of change can affect Him.

God is eternal. His existence is an unchanging present, without a past and without a future. God is immeasurable and omnipresent; limitation and extension in space have no application to Him. He is above space and above time; and yet He is in every space and at all times, whole in the whole, and whole in every part.

God is absolute intelligence and absolute will, and is, therefore, the absolute spirit. As spirit, God is Divine. Conceiving in thought His own Essence, He generates within Himself the Eternal, Personal Word, in whom the whole infinitude of His Being is expressed. The Divine Word is thus the Son of God, the Personal Image of the Father. Again, the Father loves Himself in the Son, and the Son loves Himself in the Father, and in this love there proceeds from both Love rendered personal — the Holy Ghost. In the Divine Word, moreover, the Father expresses not merely Himself, He expresses all other things likewise. The Divine Word includes within Himself the ideas or primal causes of all things; these ideas may even be said to be the Logos

Himself, for nothing can exist in Him which is not His Being itself.

God is omniscient. Nothing is hidden from His gaze. His knowledge is antecedent to the existence of things which are. We have knowledge of things because they are, and in so far forth as they are; but things are for the reason that God knows them, and after the manner that God knows them. God is absolutely free. He is sufficient for His own happiness. He has no need of any other thing. All His actions, therefore, producing effects extrinsic to Himself are absolutely free. No shadow of necessity can affect His will. Whatever He determines on, He chooses freely; but His choice once made, He cannot change His decision; such a change would imply imperfection of knowledge or imperfection of will.

God is omnipotent. Whatever He wills He can effect, and He can effect it by His mere will, without need of the concurrence of any other cause. God's will is co-extensive with God's power. Whatever is in contradiction with His essence or His attributes, that God cannot will, and, consequently, cannot effect. It would be weakness in Him to will or to effect anything of this kind. God is absolutely holy; He can will nothing except what is good; evil He can neither desire nor do. It is, therefore, impossible that He should be the author of evil in the world. God is infinitely good; what He wills, He wills for the good of His creatures. He is, however, absolutely just; He must therefore reward or punish each man according to his deserts.

There does not exist any eternal matter, apart from God, out of which He fashioned the created world; for God, being omnipotent, has no need of a material substrate on which to exercise His productive power; His omnipotence is competent to give things their total being. Nor has God produced the world from out His own being; in such a supposition the world would be like to Him in nature. The origin of the world can, therefore, be explained only by creation from nothing. God created the world from nothing. But He did not effect this creation unconsciously. He reproduced in creation the eternal ideas of the Divine Word. Every species of being has its proper idea in the Divine Word, and is created to the likeness of that idea.

The creation of the world is the revelation of the Divine goodness. God was not, however, so moved by His goodness to create, that creation was for Him a necessity. On the contrary, the ultimate and highest reason for creation was the absolute and free choice of God. He has created the world because He willed so to do. To seek a higher reason for this Divine resolve would be to set above God a higher power on which He would be dependent, and so to deny His supremacy. The perfection and happiness of God have received no increase from creation the creative activity of God has been a benefit to creatures only.

Created things are not without beginning, and they are not eternal, for they are changeable and perishable, and what is changeable and perishable cannot be eternal. Whatever is created is limited in time and space. Time is the measure of movement; it can begin only with the beginning of motion. Hence the world is not in time; contrariwise time was created in and with the world. Before the creation of the world there was no time. The same holds good of space, for without an extended world space is inconceivable.

God created all things simultaneously — the world of spirits and the world of matter. *Creavit omnia simul*. In the Scriptural expression: "God created the heavens and the earth," we are to understand by the term "heaven" the world of spirits, and by the term "earth" corporeal nature. Matter without form was the direct product of the Divine act of creation. This formless matter had no determinate — no actual character; it was "almost nothing." It could not, therefore, exist for an instant in the formless condition; it must have been clothed in some form or other from the beginning. Matter, then, does not come before form, in the order of time; it takes precedence in the order of nature — that is to say, matter must be presupposed as the substrate of form; it is only in this sense that matter can be said to have been created first. We must, further, distinguish between spiritual and corporeal matter, of which one is the substrate of the corporeal, the other

of the spiritual world.

All things having been simultaneously created, we cannot understand by the “six days” of the Mosaic narrative six successive periods of time. The six days represent no more than the order in which things follow one another in the gradations of being. The six days were consequently only one day, or, more properly, one instant, which is mentioned six times, because the Scripture, at each mention of the term, introduces a new order of being, which, of its nature, is next to that immediately preceding, its existence being dependent on the existence of the preceding order. By the six days is meant no more than that the universe of things is divided into six gradations of being; and as the number six is the most perfect number, the phrase may be understood to signify the perfection of the world which God has created.

The duration of the created world depends upon God’s conservation of its existence. If the sustaining power of God were for a moment withdrawn, the world would sink back into nothingness. The Divine wisdom has furthermore established all things in a comprehensive order, and assigned to each being its determined place in this order; and as He has made all things in order, so does He govern all things and guide them all by His providence to their appointed end. Evil itself is not excluded from this providence, for evil may be made to serve purposes of good.

God is not, indeed, the author of evil; but evil could not exist in the world unless by permission of God, since nothing exists contrary to His will. Evil is opposed to the will of God in so far as He abhors it, but it is not opposed to the will of God in the sense that it exists in spite of Him. Consequently, though evil, in itself, is not good, yet it may be said that it is well it should exist, since it does not exist without God’s (permissive) will. But it is well that it should only exist in so far as it is subservient to good. God can draw good out of evil. Evil then, is against established order, in so far as it disturbs that order, but it is not for this reason extrinsic to established order, for when the evil exists it is made subject to that order, and hence subservient to good. God might, indeed, have prevented evil, but He preferred to draw good from evil, rather than not permit evil at all. The magnificence of the universal order is rendered more imposing by the presence of evil and by its subordination to good.

In the order of the universe there must be little things as well as great. We must not measure things by their usefulness to us; we must not account evil whatever injures us; we must judge each thing according to its own nature; each has its own standard of perfection — its own form — its own harmony in itself. All creatures praise and glorify God, and this in such wise that they invite man to praise and glorify Him. Man stands at the summit of the visible world; he is the microcosmos, for he has within himself the being of inanimate bodies, the vegetative life of the plant, the sensuous faculties of the brute, and, over and above this, is possessed of reason, which last attribute brings him into kinship with the angels. Thus, he forms the link of union between the world of spirit and the world of matter.

Psychology.

The human soul is a substance essentially different from the body — immaterial, simple, and spiritual. The category of Quantity cannot be applied to it; it has not extension in space. The proofs adduced by Augustine for this doctrine are, briefly, the following:

(a.) If the soul were corporeal, it would be a body of determined quality. It would, in consequence, have knowledge of itself as being of this quality. This, however, is not the case. (*De Trin.*, X. c. 7.)

(b.) Even the faculty of sensuous perception is inexplicable, if supposed to belong to a principle wholly material. If the soul were corporeal it could not containat once within itself the

vast number of sensuous images with which our memory is stored. Still less can our intellectual knowledge be attributed to a corporeal principle, for this knowledge is concerned with the immaterial and supersensuous, whereas the corporeal deals only with the corporeal and sensible; to this only is its power proportioned. (*De Anima et ejus Orig.*, c. 17. *De Quant. Anim.*, c. 13.)

(c.) When we reflect upon a truth, we penetrate and understand it more perfectly the more we withdraw from sense and retire within ourselves, and so become immersed in the truth. Now, if the soul were merely the harmony of the body, and not a substance distinct from it, this divorce from the body and concentration of the soul within itself would be impossible. (*De Immort. Anim.*, c. 10.)

(d.) The soul perceives at every point of the body the impressions made at that point, and perceives, them not by a portion of its being, but by the entire ego. It must, therefore, be whole in every, part of the body. This is possible only if the soul is of simple incorporeal nature, for a body, being an extended entity, can be present simultaneously at several points only by means of the several parts of which it is composed. (*Ep. 166, ad Hieron.*, p. 4.)

From the immaterial and simple nature of the soul we may argue to its further characteristics, In the first place it is essentially individual. There is no such thing as an universal soul — each man has his own individual soul. In the second place, the soul of man, being essentially spiritual and rational, cannot be degraded to the condition of an irrational soul; the doctrine of the migration of souls is, therefore, an absurdity. In the third place, the human soul is like in nature to the pure spirits or angels. Its nature, no doubt, disposes it to union with the body, but this does not make it specifically distinct from the angels, for the angels, too, have bodies, though these are more perfect in kind than the bodies of men, and are immortal. It follows that man being distinguished from the brutes, on the one side, and from the angels, on the other, may be rightly defined an *animal rationale mortale*.

The soul is not, as the Manicheans say, an emanation from God. If it were, it ought either to share in all the divine perfections, being of like nature with God, or the Divine substance ought to be capable of all those imperfections which we perceive in ourselves. The one alternative is as absurd as the other. The soul must, therefore, like other beings, have been originally created by God.

As to the point of time at which the soul of the first man was created, Augustine is led by his principle that God created all things at once, to the view that Adam's soul was created at the same time as all other spiritual beings, and was subsequently united to the body. That union, however, was not the punishment of any offence; the nature of the soul required its union with the body, the union was not unnatural, nor was it for the soul a condition of misfortune.

Augustine rejects the notion that all human souls have been created simultaneously and are united successively to the several bodies which they animate. The individual soul comes into existence with the individual body to which it belongs. But Augustine is unable to arrive at a definite opinion as to the manner in which these souls come into being. Their origin by a generative process would seem to him to afford the best explanation of the transmission of original sin; but, on the other hand, it is inconceivable to him how one soul can be generated by another, if the soul be an immaterial and simple essence. The theory of generation degenerates easily into Traducianism — a doctrine which must be totally rejected, for it has meaning only in the hypothesis that the soul is of a corporeal nature.

But the theory of creation is, according to Augustine, surrounded with insoluble difficulties. If God daily creates new souls, these souls as they come forth from His hand must be good in themselves. Now, in their union with the body they are made subject to original sin, and as this union is not of their choice, but accomplished wholly by God, it is difficult to explain on what grounds those souls can be eternally reprobated which could not by any possibility be purified

by baptism, such souls, for instance, as those of children who die unbaptized. God would be obliged to secure baptism for such children; for if, by uniting their souls to their bodies, He makes them subject to original sin, He is bound to make provision for their deliverance from this sin. But, on the other hand, God cannot be held to owe anything to anyone.

In this way, Augustine sees difficulties on both sides, to which he can find no answer. He, therefore, holds it to be the more prudent, and the safer, course to suspend his judgment — and this all the more that Sacred Scripture does not lay down any definite teaching on the point. The passages which are cited in favour of the one theory or the other are not conclusive, because any one of them can be interpreted in the sense of either theory. This he undertakes to prove in regard to a number of such passages.

Augustine asserts emphatically the oneness of the soul in man. The essential constituent parts of man are soul and body, and nothing more. If an argument be built on the words of the Apostle, “the flesh wars against the spirit,” to show that there are in man two souls substantially different from one another, each having a will of its own, it might be argued with equal force, that there is no reason why we should stop at a duality of wills; we should admit as many wills as there are opposing tendencies in man, and these tendencies are numberless.

In one aspect of its being the soul of man is in close relation with the body, in another it is superior to the body. We may distinguish in the soul a *pars inferior* and a *pars superior*, according to the different characters of the faculties with which it is endowed. By the lower part of the soul we mean the vegetative and sensitive faculties, in virtue of which the soul is the principle of corporeal life, as well as of sensuous perception and locomotion. The functions of these faculties are essentially dependent upon the bodily organs. The higher part of the soul, on the other hand, signifies the intellectual faculties — reason and will — faculties whose functions are not dependent on the bodily organism. Herein lies the difference between “spirit” and “soul.” The terms are altogether relative: In so far forth as the soul stands in immediate relation with the body by its sensitive and vegetative faculties, it may be called “soul” in the stricter sense of the term; in so far as it is exalted above the body in its functions of thought and will, it may be called “spirit.”

The soul in its union with the body is the element which determines the nature or specific character of the composite entity. (*De Immort. Anim.*, c. 15.) And hence, man, as man, is something different from either of the component elements of his being. The body is not man, neither is the soul; man is the unit formed by both (*De Mor. Eccl.*, I., c. 4). Body and soul in conjunction form a single nature different from both constituents — this nature is man.

The relations which subsist between the body and the soul in man render it impossible for the body to exercise independently any influence upon the soul. This becomes more evident if we observe that to admit the opposite would be to give the soul the character of matter which receives in itself the action of the body — a supposition which is incompatible with the spiritual nature of the soul, and its superiority to the body. The body, then, does not act upon the soul, but the soul acts in and through the body. If the soul suffers, it is not that it is so affected by the body; the affection comes from itself in so far as it has become capable of suffering by its union with the body, and by its activity in the organism.

The action of the soul in the body and on the body is not, however, immediate. Between the active soul and the organs of the body there is interposed a subtle element of a somewhat spiritual nature by means of which the action of the soul reaches the organs of the body. This element Augustine designates “Light” or “Air;” that is, he attributes to it a nature analogous to that of light and air. In this way he tries to bridge over the chasm that separates the spiritual soul from matter. He is, however, ready to admit that it remains a mystery impossible of adequate comprehension *how* the soul is united to a material body.

The human soul, in so far as it is a sensitive soul, shows its activity in the functions of sensuous knowledge and sensuous appetite. To the faculty of sensuous knowledge belong the external senses, the *Sensus Communis* or General Sense in which the external senses are united, the Imagination (*vis spiritalis*) and the Sensuous Memory. The Sensuous Appetite is the faculty of sensuous pleasure. To the soul, as spirit, Augustine assigns three fundamental faculties: — Intellectual Memory (*memoria*), Intelligence (*intelligentia*), and Will (*voluntas*). Furthermore, Intelligence is either intuitive or discursive, and we must, therefore distinguish between Intellect (*mens*) and Reason (*ratio*). In other parts of his work, (*De Quant. Anim.* c. 27), Augustine substitutes, for the last two terms, the expressions Ratio and Ratiocinatio. The distinction here laid down is, it must be remembered, only relative.

The soul, being spirit, is created after the image of the Triune God. All other things exhibit the imprint (*vestigia*) of the Trinity in their unity, form, and order; but in the soul we have the image (*imago*) of God. Augustine explains variously wherein the image of God consists. He finds it in the trinity of elements — Being, Knowledge, Will; in the three fundamental faculties — Memory, Intelligence, Will; and lastly in the action of these three fundamental faculties when they are concerned with God. When the soul *remembers* God, the *thought* of God proceeds from this recollection, and with this thought is conjoined the *love* of God, which serves as it were to bind together the recollection and the thought. In this threefold action is reflected, in clear outline, the triune life of God.

15. The soul is, of its nature, immortal. For this proposition Augustine adduces many proofs, akin, for the most part, to the Platonist reasoning; of this kind are the following: —

(a) That thing in which the imperishable exists is itself imperishable. Now truth exists in the soul, inasmuch as the soul possesses it by knowledge. Truth is imperishable. Therefore, the soul must be imperishable also.

(b) The soul is identified with Reason. Now Reason, as such, is immortal, for the principles of Reason are immortal. It follows that the soul is imperishable, if the soul be inseparable from Reason. That it is inseparable is proved by the fact that the union of the soul with Reason is not an union in space, and the one, by consequence, cannot be separated from the other. The soul, accordingly, is imperishable; and, since Reason can exist only in a living subject, the union of Reason with the soul implies not only the indefectibility of the latter, but also the perpetuity of its life — namely, its immortality, in the true sense of the term.

(c) The essential distinction between soul and body consists in this, that the soul is life, whilst the body is merely animated. If the soul, like the body, could be deprived of life, it would cease to be a soul, it would be like the body, merely a something animated (*animatum*). The soul, therefore, cannot lose its life; that is, it is immortal.

(d) Being has no contrary principle which can destroy it (*essentiae nihil contrarium*). The body though dissolved after death does not lose its being, for its elements remain; so the soul also must endure, that is, it is imperishable. Nor is there any principle contrary to the *life* of the soul which can destroy it. The life of the soul is truth, and the contrary of truth is error; but error, it is clear, cannot destroy the life of the soul. It follows that not only in its being, but also in its life, the soul is imperishable; that is to say, it is immortal.

Ethics.

The subjective basis of moral life is free will. Augustine uses the term liberty in a twofold sense: the one liberty of choice, the other freedom from evil, and freedom for (supernatural) good.

Free will, as a faculty of choice, is, according to Augustine, an essential attribute of man, for

(a) Will is will precisely because it is exempted from physical necessity and determines

itself to act or to forbear. Freedom is involved in this essential notion of will; a will without freedom is inconceivable. (*De Lib. Arb.*, III. c. 3.)

(b) Furthermore, consciousness testifies clearly to the freedom of the will. Of what are we more keenly conscious than of the fact that we have a will, and that we act by our will, unconstrained by any necessity? (*De Lib. Arb.*, III. c. 1.)

(c) Without free will, the distinction between good and evil becomes unintelligible. If we were not free we could not be bound by any moral law: merit and demerit, reward and punishment, praise and blame, would be wholly meaningless. The very remorse which we experience in reference to certain actions is evident proof of free will, for we could not feel remorse for an act the performance or omission of which was not in our power. (*De Act. cont. Felic. Man.*, II. c. 8.)

Freedom from evil and freedom for (supernatural) good is not, according to Augustine, an essential attribute of the human will, it depends on the grace of God. This grace alone can free us from evil and bestow the capability for (supernatural) good, as well as the desire of attaining it. Free will, as a faculty of choice, the *liberum arbitrium*, cannot be lost, but the freedom from evil and the freedom for (supernatural) good may be forfeited, though not otherwise than by our own fault.

Free will, as a faculty of choice, is not destroyed or impaired by God's providence. God foresees the actions of men as they are, namely, as free acts, which we are at liberty to perform or to omit. The foreknowledge of God does not deprive free acts of their character of freedom. Man's act is not what it is, because God foresees it thus, but rather God foresees it thus, because it is what it is. If man's act were other than it is, God would have foreseen it to be otherwise.

With this teaching regarding free will we may associate Augustine's doctrine regarding the Sovereign Good. He distinguishes two kinds of good, the enjoyable and the useful. The enjoyable is that which, when possessed, makes us happy, and which, therefore, we desire for its own sake; the useful is that which is merely a means to the attainment of another good, and which, therefore, we desire and strive after for sake of something else.

This being premised, it becomes clear that the Sovereign Good must have the following characteristics: — It must be an enjoyable good, which being possessed makes us completely happy. It must be inalienable; a happiness which could be lost would not be true or perfect happiness at all. Lastly, it must be the source not only of our highest happiness, but also of our supreme perfection, for good, of its own nature, is calculated not only to make us happy but also to make us perfect.

If this be so, it follows that the Sovereign Good cannot consist either in sensual pleasure, or in virtue, for neither of these exhibits the characteristics which belong to the Sovereign Good. The Sovereign Good must be something higher than man; it can be no other than God — the Infinite Good. The supreme happiness of man must, therefore, consist in the eternal contemplation and love of God, the Sovereign Good. It follows that for man God is the only enjoyable good, and that every other good is merely a useful good, that is to say, it should be used only for the attainment of eternal happiness in God.

It follows, further, that supreme happiness is not attainable in this life, and that it is reserved for us in the life to come. The ultimate end of man is to attain eternal happiness in God; his ultimate end is, therefore, not attainable in this life, it must be secured hereafter. This leads at once to the rule of life for man. Man's duty here below is to strive after the Sovereign Good, that is, to live so as to attain to the Sovereign Good in the life to come.

The path of duty, in this respect, is marked for us by the Divine Law. We must act according to this law in order to fulfil the duty set us in life, and it is precisely in living and acting according to this law that moral goodness consists. But to fulfil this law in every respect, it

is necessary to strive after virtue; in virtue consists our moral perfection. Moral goodness is essentially connected with the final destiny of man; so too, is virtue. Virtue is essentially the means to the attainment of the Sovereign Good; this relation apart, virtue ceases to be virtue; it becomes a mere form of self-deification which is vice, not virtue.

Virtue is defined by Augustine “Animi habitus, naturae modo et consentaneus” (*Cont. Jul. Pelag.*, IV., c. 3); or, as “Ars bene recteque vivendi” (*De Civit. Dei*, XIV., c. 9). It is, therefore, a capability or tendency of the will for good, acquired by the practice of what is good, and which implies strength and firmness of will in well-doing. Virtue does not require that man should be wholly inaccessible to the movements of passion; the so-called *apatheia* is unnatural and contrary to virtue; virtue requires only that the *pathê* should be kept under control, that they should be restrained within the limits prescribed by the moral law, and thus made subservient to rightness of life.

The Divine Law being the rule and standard of moral action, the point or precept of this law which is the basis of the whole and which includes within it all other precepts, is the Law of Love. First in this order is the love of God; the love of God is our first and highest duty. This love leads us to refer to God all that we are, all that we have, and all that we do, and thus to make of ourselves an offering to Him. From the love of God is derived the true love of self, in virtue of which we seek what is best for us, our Supreme Good, God Himself. With this is united the love of our neighbour, which consists in this, that we desire for our neighbour as for ourselves his highest good, and, as far as in us lies, assist him to attain it.

As the law of love is the fundamental law of our moral life, so love is the fundamental virtue. It is the basis of all other virtues; all other virtues are only special aspects of the virtue of love. In the first place, this holds good with regard to the Cardinal Virtues — Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, and Justice. Prudence is love, in so far as it discriminates clearly between what is a help to it and what is a hinderance. Fortitude is love, in so far as it boldly and readily undergoes all things for sake of the object it loves. Temperance is love, in so far as it maintains itself inviolate and undefiled for sake of what it loves. Finally, Justice is love, in so far as its service is wholly for the object loved, and it thus acquires dominion over all things else. (*De Mor. Eccl.*, I., c. 15.) Love is, thus, the source of all that is morally good, and no work has worth or merit before God if it be not done for love.

Evil is not a real substantial entity; everything that is, in so far as it is, is both true and good. Evil is merely negation — negation of the good which ought to exist — that is to say, it is a *privation* of good. Evil is, therefore, possible only through good; if there were no good, a privation of good or loss of good would not be possible. A being absolutely evil, in which no good whatever exists, is an impossibility; be it ever so evil, inasmuch as it is or has being, it is to that extent good. Absolute evil is absolute negation — mere nothing.

These considerations exhibit to us the relation which subsists between evil and the natural order. Evil is contrary to nature, since it deprives nature of its befitting good. In this sense it may be described as a deterioration or corruption of nature. But evil cannot destroy nature, for the corruption induced by evil supposes a nature or substance corrupted, and the destruction of this would involve the disappearance of the evil.

With regard to the cause of evil, we must distinguish between the remote and the proximate cause. The remote cause is the finiteness and mutability of created things. It is only a being which is finite and changeable which can be subject to evil. God, the absolutely immutable, is beyond the reach of evil; for the immutable, as such, cannot undergo a privation of good. The proximate source of evil is the free will of man. Free will alone can effect evil, as it alone can effect good. But beyond its freedom no further reason can be assigned why the free will does evil rather than good. The Manicheans are absurd, when they assign man’s bodily nature as a

reason to explain why he does evil.

We must distinguish two kinds of evil (*malum*): the *malum culpae*, and the *malum paenae*. The former is moral evil — evil in the strict sense of the term; the latter is a consequence of the former, and is occasioned by it. To begin with moral evil: it must consist in the privation of moral good, in man's turning away from his Sovereign Good, and giving himself to good that is changeable. Good that is changeable is not, indeed, evil in itself; but when man prefers it to the Sovereign Good, and sets it above the Sovereign Good, he perverts and disturbs right order, and precisely in this perversion of order lies the evil of his action. This turning away from the Sovereign Good, and turning to evil, takes place when man violates the Divine law, which marks for him the path to the Sovereign Good. Hence moral evil — sin — may be defined "Dictum, factum vel concupitum contra legem Dei." (*Contra Faust. Manich.*, XXII., c. 27.)

The *malum paenae* is the actual loss of the Sovereign Good, incurred as the punishment of moral evil. This last constitutes unhappiness, for happiness can consist only in the possession of the Supreme Good. In the present life, this unhappiness is not felt in its full force, for the good of the mutable and created order goes some way to compensate for the loss; but in the life to come such compensation is not admissible, and the fulness of misery must then be experienced. Such is the punishment of moral evil. That it should be inflicted is a requirement of God's justice, and from this point of view it may be called good, since it is an effect of God's justice. It is, therefore, an evil only for the man on whom it falls; and in so far as it is thus an evil it is caused by man himself, for he has provoked it by his sin. As a requirement of justice it is good, for it is a restoration of the order that had been disturbed; viewed in this light, it has God for its author.

We see, then, that a good action implies an approach to God, the Supreme Being; whereas an evil action implies a separation from the Supreme Being — a movement towards nothingness. Hence, it is only the good action which is a positive entity in every respect; the evil act is positive only as an act; the direction in which it tends is to non-being, it is in this regard something merely negative. This analysis warranted Augustine in asserting that evil may be said to have, not a *causa efficiens* but a *causa deficiens*, for it is essentially a defection from the highest perfection — a retrogression towards imperfection and nothingness. (*De Civ. Dei*, XII., c. 7.)

So much with regard to the general lines of Augustine's Ethics. His teaching on the subject of Grace and Redemption falls, no doubt, under this section; but we cannot follow him into these questions; they belong to the history of dogma, not to the history of philosophy. We content ourselves with noticing a few points:

(a.) The first man, says Augustine, enjoyed freedom from evil and freedom for good. He consequently had power not to sin — "posse non peccare." He needed, it is true, for this the assistance of God, but this assistance was merely an *adjutorium sine quo non*, that is, an aid without which he could not succeed in avoiding evil and doing good; but not a grace *by means of which* he did good.

(b.) But when the first man sinned, the guilt and the punishment of his sin descended upon all his posterity, for the reason that they were all contained *seminaliter* in him. In consequence of this inherited sin, man can no longer do that which is connected with his supernatural destiny, and he is thus made subject to evil. To the "posse non peccare" has succeeded the "non posse non peccare." Not that man is forced to evil by any intrinsic necessity, but that man is so hampered by sensual desires, that he can no longer shake himself free from evil, for sensuality is ever dragging him down to it again.

(c.) The human race was delivered from sin and its punishments by Christ. By His Passion and Death, Christ has merited for us the race which destroys evil within us, and makes us again

capable of good. This grace, by which we do good, is not a mere *adjutorium sine quo non*, it is an *adjutorium quo*, that is, it not only makes the good possible for us, it also effects the good within us, although not without our will, or further than our will co-operates. This grace restores the “*posse non peccare*,” it leads us to the condition of eternal perfection, where the “*posse non peccare* is replaced by the “*non posse peccare*.”

(d.) Redemption is, on the part of God, a free act. He would not have acted unjustly had He left all men in original sin and under the condemnation which follows it. But He was pleased to show, on the one hand, what the offence of man deserved, and on the other what His own mercy could effect. He, therefore, elected from the *massa damnationis* a portion of the human race to be saved by His gratuitous grace, while He left the rest in the *massa damnationis*.

(e.) This election is called in Scripture *Predestination*. The non-predestined are not altogether excluded from God’s grace; but it is only in the elect that grace produces its full effect, leading them effectually to their destined end. To the non-predestined it is not an injustice that they are not elected; they have deserved condemnation; God does not predestine them to evil; it is only because of His knowledge of the evil which they do that they are condemned. This is what the Scripture signifies by the term *Reprobation*.

(f.) From the outset, God’s grace delivered a certain number of human beings from perdition, and this number constituted the kingdom of God, as opposed to the kingdom of the world. The entire time covered by the existence of the human race is no more than the period of development for these two kingdoms. In the end will come the complete separation of the elect from the reprobate. After the general resurrection, the former will receive eternal reward, the latter eternal punishment. There is no restoration of the reprobate, as imagined by Origen.

The vastness of the doctrinal system of Augustine is apparent from even this brief sketch. His inquiries covered the whole range of speculative knowledge, and his clear and penetrating mind diffused light in every region of its investigations. It is not a matter of surprise that Augustine’s teaching should have exercised a larger influence on the development of Christian philosophy than that of any other thinker.

Albert Stöckl. *Handbook of the History of Philosophy. (Part 1: Pre-Scholastic Philosophy)*. Trans. T.A. Finlay. Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1887.

© SophiaOmni, 2011. The specific electronic form of this text is copyright. Permission is granted to print out copies for educational purposes and for personal use only. No permission is granted for commercial use.