

THE CHRISTIAN  
PHILOSOPHY OF  
SAINT  
AUGUSTINE



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in the Middle Ages and The Christian  
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The Christian Philosophy  
of  
SAINT  
AUGUSTINE

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stripped of these virtues; but it is, so to say, a soul that is dead, a soul deprived of life. It is capable of giving life to the body, but it also needs to be given life. God vivifies it by granting it wisdom, piety, justice, charity and thereby, all the other virtues.<sup>16</sup> In this sense He really plays the same role in the soul that the soul itself plays in relation to the body: He bestows order upon it, and this is the very law of the universe. Under what conditions, then, will man be perfectly ordered?<sup>17</sup>

## 2. *The Will and Love*

If, from the point of view of their origin, there is no difference between moral truth and any other truth, the same cannot be said of man who is charged with putting truth into practice. The sum-total of all the eternal essences and of the temporal things participating in these essences forms a hierarchy of higher and lower realities, and the relationships born of this hierarchy constitute what is called order. Nature is ruled by this order perforce because God Himself has imposed it. As a part of nature, man also is subject to the divine order, nor can he escape it. But there is an important difference in the case of actions which depend on the human will. These are not performed under the compulsion of the divine order; they have a purpose of their own, and this purpose is to realize the divine order. With them it is not a matter of being subject to the law but of willing it and collaborating in its fulfillment. Man knows the law. Is he going to will it? Henceforth, that is the question.<sup>18</sup> Everything depends on the decision man will or will not make to allow the order he sees imposed by God on nature to reign within himself.<sup>19</sup> Without doubt, we are now at the crossroads.

The power on which this important decision rests is none other than the will. The role this faculty plays is a leading one. Not only do all the resolutions and decisions we make in the practical order depend upon it, but every operation of our cognitive powers in the theoretical order is under its immediate control as well. It is no exaggeration, therefore, to say that as the will is, so is the man, so much so, in fact, that a will divided against itself is a man divided against himself.<sup>20</sup> It is important to explain clearly this dominant role of the will because the entire Augustinian psychology bears its stamp. We shall describe it first in the order of feeling and then in the realm of knowledge itself.

All of the soul's sensible movements can be reduced to four fundamental passions, namely desire (*cupiditas*), joy (*laetitia*), fear (*metus*),

and sorrow (*tristitia*). To desire is to consent to the movement whereby the will moves towards a thing; to rejoice is to take delight in the possession of a thing obtained; to fear is to yield to the will's movement in shrinking from a thing and turning away from it; to experience sorrow is to refuse consent to an evil actually being endured. Thus, every movement of the soul is directed either towards a good to be acquired or retained, or away from an evil to be avoided or removed;<sup>21</sup> but the soul's free movement to acquire or to retain a thing is the will itself.<sup>22</sup> Every movement of the soul, therefore, depends on the will.

Proof of this does not appear so easy where the order of knowledge is concerned. However, any of the soul's cognitive operations we choose to consider appears also to be subject to the will. In sensation, which is the lowest of these operations, attention, i.e. the will itself, intervenes to keep the sense organ fixed on its object as long as the act continues.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, the will plays the part of an active force in every sensation, and without it sensation would not take place because the sense organ would not be applied to the sense object.<sup>24</sup> Once this force ceases to function, the organ may remain fixed on the object and the object may continue to inform it with its image, but the sensation will be perceived no longer and everything will be as though the object were not there. How many things impress their image upon our eyes in this way of which we take no notice! But if the will to feel should grow in intensity, the result will be no mere sensation, but a love, a desire, a veritable passion for feeling, and the whole body may be affected by it.<sup>25</sup>

The case of an unperceived impression may seem simple, but it is really much more complicated than it seems. When our will fixes one of our sense organs on a sense object, it simultaneously intervenes in two different ways: it keeps the sense organ in contact with the object, but it also impresses the recollection of the sensation upon the memory while the sensation is in progress, and it is chiefly because of this second operation of the will that sensation is something conscious. If a person says something in our hearing while we are thinking of something else, we claim that we have not heard a thing. But this is not exactly the case. We have heard, but we do not remember anything because our will was distracted and did not fix the sounds in memory as they struck our ear.<sup>26</sup> By showing, therefore, that sensation falls under the control of the will, we have established the will's dominion over the memory. Now what is true of memory is equally true of all the internal senses, and particularly of the imagination. The will retains sensations and impresses recollections, but it also joins

together and separates the images thus received and stored away so as to use them again as it likes in the most diversified combinations. Thus, it combines as it likes elements borrowed from the knowledge of the sensible world to create an imaginary world according to its own fancy. We must add that this is the source of any number of errors into which we are led by the will, the *conjunctrix ac separatrix*,<sup>27</sup> when it would have us accept its own fabrications as a faithful representation of reality.

Is it possible to go beyond the sensible order and still find the will's dominant influence even in the operations of pure understanding? There can be no doubt of it. If the will is the active force which calls forth sensation, it is also the force which causes rational knowledge. In our study of man's intellectual activity, we have seen that it ends in the conception of truth engendered therein. But before we produce knowledge in ourselves, we have to desire it: we know because we want to know, and we only seek knowledge because we want to find it. If the desire for knowledge becomes strong, we call it research, the word itself denoting precisely that passion for knowledge which leads to science.<sup>28</sup> But whatever the degree of knowledge we attain, it is always determined by an impulse to investigate which has its origin in the will. Since, therefore, all of the soul's operations depend on our voluntary decisions, it is true to say that the will is the man himself. Now what is the principle of the will?

According to Greek physics, and particularly the physics of Aristotle, every body is drawn to a given place in the universe by a kind of natural weight. If we imagined the physical elements of which the world is composed mixed and mingled together in a kind of chaos, they would sort themselves out spontaneously and each try to find the place where it belongs, and once there, would come to rest: fire above air, air beneath fire, earth below, water above earth. It is the natural tendency possessed by physical bodies which causes fire, when left to itself, to rise, and a stone, when left to itself, to fall, provided that the fire has not reached the upper region of the world nor the stone the center of the earth. If, in thought, we did away with weight in bodies, the universe would immediately become inert, utterly immobile, dead. Now St. Augustine thinks of man and his will in somewhat the same way. In every soul, as in every body, there is a weight drawing it constantly, moving it always to find its natural place of rest; and this weight we call love. "My weight," says Augustine, "is my love" (*pondus meum amor meus*); *eo feror quocumque feror* (by it am I borne whithersoever I am borne).<sup>29</sup> From this follow consequences of great importance touching the nature of our voluntary action.

Comp. XIII 9 10

First of all, it is obvious that, if love is the inner force which moves the will and the will denotes the man, we can say that man is essentially moved by his love.<sup>30</sup> To man, then, love is not something accidental and superadded, but a force within his essence, like the weight in a falling stone. Moreover, since love is by definition a natural tendency towards some good, it will strive to reach its goal until it has attained it. Can we imagine a love that is lazy and idle? *Da mihi vacantem amorem et nihil operantem!* It is a myth. Man's love never rests. What it does may be good or bad, but it is always doing something. Crime, adultery, homicide, lust; love causes all of these as well as acts of pure charity or heroism. For good or ill, its capacity is un-failing; for the man it drives, it is an inexhaustible source of action.<sup>31</sup>

Now if this is so, it is the height of folly to expect to cut man off from his love or to forbid him to make use of it. This would mean separating him from himself and forbidding him to be what he is: take from a man the love which leads him from one thing to another towards some goal vaguely conceived and he will be worth less than a material body, which at least yields to the pull of its own weight. The moral problem is not *whether* one should love but *what* one should love. "Are you told not to love anything? Not at all! If you are to love nothing, you will be lifeless, dead, detestable, miserable. Love, but be careful what you love."<sup>32</sup> Virtue, then, means to will what we should will, i.e. to love what we should love.

One of the first effects of giving love such a leading role is that the value of the love will determine the value of the will and ultimately the value of the act which results therefrom.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, we have said that man acts according to his passions, and these in turn are simply direct manifestations of his love. Therefore, if his love is good, his passions and his will will be equally good; if it is evil, they also will be evil (*recta itaque voluntas est bonus amor et voluntas perversa malus amor*).<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, since the quality of the love determines the quality of the will and the will determines the act, we can say that as the love is, so is the act. It is a mistake to think that there are passions which are good or evil in themselves independently of the intention which prompts them. All men, good or bad, experience all of the passions, but good men have good passions and evil men evil. Hence, there is a righteous anger, a justifiable pity, a salutary fear, a holy desire: it all depends on the love which inspires them.<sup>35</sup> In the same way, it is a mistake to think that there are some things good in themselves and others evil. All things can be occasions for good or evil wills and consequently occasions for praiseworthy or blameworthy acts. If greed is evil, it is not gold that is at fault, but

unde ipsa vivificatur. Melius quippe est quam corpus, sed melius quam ipsa est Deus. Est ergo ipsa, etiamsi sit insipiens, injusta, impia, vita corporis. Quia vero vita ejus est Deus, quo modo cum ipsa est in corpore, praestat illi vigorem, decorem, mobilitatem, officia membrorum, sic cum vita ejus Deus in ipsa est, praestat illi sapientiam, pietatem, justitiam, caritatem. *In Joan. Evang.* XIX, 5, 12; *PL* 35, 1549-50.

17 Age nunc, videamus homo ipse quomodo in seipso sit ordinatissimus. *De Lib. Arbit.* I, 7, 16; *PL* 32, 1229-30.

18 *Epist.* 140, 2, 4; *PL* 33, 539.

19 Gradatim enim se (*scil.* anima) et ad mores vitamque optimam non jam sola fide, sed certa ratione perducit. Cui numerorum vim atque potentiam diligenter intuenti nimis indignum videbitur et nimis flendum, per suam scientiam versum bene currere citharamque concinere, et suam vitam seque ipsam quae anima est, devium iter sequi, et dominante sibi libidine, cum turpissimo se vitiorum strepitu dissonare. Cum autem se composuerit et ordinaverit, ac concinnam pulchramque reddiderit, audebit jam Deum videre, atque ipsum fontem unde manat omne verum, ipsumque Patrem veritatis. *De Ordine* II, 19, 50-51; *PL* 32, 1018-19.

20 *Confess.* VIII, 5, 11; *PL* 32, 753-54. Cf. VIII, 9, 21-10, 24; *PL* 32, 758-60. Cf. Ferraz's remarks in *La psychologie de s. Augustin*, p. 80-86.

21 *De Civitate Dei* XIV, 6; *PL* 41, 409.

22 Voluntas est animi motus, cogente nullo, ad aliquid vel non amittendum, vel adipiscendum. *De Duabus Animabus* X, 14; *PL* 42, 104. Concerning the significance of this definition as regards

original sin, see *Retract.* I, 15, 2; *PL* 32, 609.

23 *De Trinitate* XI, 2, 2; *PL* 42, 985-86. The development is summed up in the final formula: Haec igitur tria, corpus quod videtur, et ipsa visio, et quae utrumque conjungit intentio, manifesta sunt ad dignoscendum . . .

24 Quae cum ita sint, tria haec quamvis diversa natura, quemadmodum in quamdam unitatem contemperentur meminerimus; id est, species corporis quae videtur, et impressa ejus imago sensui quod est visio sensusve formatus, et voluntas animi quae rei sensibili sensum admovet, in eoque ipsam visionem tenet. *De Trinitate* XI, 2, 5; *PL* 42, 987. Voluntas autem tantam vim habet copulandi haec duo, ut et sensum formandum admoveat ei rei quae cernitur, et in ea formatum teneat. *Ibid.* *PL* 42, 988. The following remarks owe much to the excellent chapter of W. Kahl, *Die Lehre vom Primat des Willens bei Augustinus, Duns Scotus und Descartes*, ch. III, p. 24-42.

25 *De Trinitate* XI, 2, 4-5; *PL* 42, 987-988.

26 *De Musica* VI, 8, 21; *PL* 32, 1174 (See the analysis above of the perception of a verse or musical phrase, p. 63-64). Cf. *De Trinitate* XI, 8, 15; *PL* 42, 996. For the same reason the will searches within memory and finds the images it has fixed there. *De Trinitate* XI, 3, 6; *PL* 42, 989.

27 *De Trinitate* XI, 10, 17; *PL* 42, 997. In the *De Musica*, Augustine calls *phantasia* an image which purely and simply produces a memory, and *phantasma* an image of an object which has not been perceived and which we form

with the aid of memories. *Op. cit.* VI, 11, 32; *PL* 32, 1180-81.

28 Nam voluntas jam dici potest, quia omnis qui quaerit invenire vult; et si id quaeritur quod ad notitiam pertineat, omnis qui quaerit nosse vult. Quod si ardentem atque instantem vult, studere dicitur. . . . Partum ergo mentis antecedit appetitus quidam, quo id quod nosse volumus quaerendo et inveniando, nascitur proles ipsa notitia. . . . *De Trinitate* IX, 12, 18; *PL* 32, 972.

29 *Confess.* XIII, 9, 10; *PL* 32, 849. Cf. Nec aliquid appetunt etiam ipsa corpora ponderibus suis, nisi quod animae amoribus suis. *Epist.* 55, 10, 18; *PL* 33, 213. Animus quippe, velut pondere, amore fertur quocumque fertur. *Epist.* 157, 2, 9; *PL* 33, 677. Neque enim vir bonus merito dicitur qui scit quod bonum est, sed qui diligit. . . . Si essemus lapides, aut fluctus, aut ventus, aut flamma, vel quid ejusmodi, sine ullo quidem sensu atque vita, non tamen nobis deesset quasi quidam nostrorum locorum atque ordinis appetitus. Nam velut amores corporum momenta sunt ponderum, sive deorsum gravitate, sive sursum levitate nitantur. Ita enim corpus pondere, sicut animus amore, fertur quocumque fertur. *De Civitate Dei* XI, 28; *PL* 41, 341-342. The intimate relationship between love and will is explained by the fact that, according to St. Augustine, love is but an intense will: . . . voluntatem nostram, vel amorem seu dilectionem quae valentior est voluntas. . . . *De Trinitate* XV, 21, 41; *PL* 42, 1089.

The notion of "delight," whose importance continued to increase throughout the history of Augustinism, is closely associated in his mind with

the notion of love, as we have defined it: Non ergo invidemus inferioribus quam nos sumus, nosque ipsos . . . ita Deo . . . ordinemus, ut . . . solis . . . superioribus delectemur. Delectatio quippe quasi pondus est animae. Delectatio ergo ordinat animam. *Ubi enim erit thesaurus tuus ibi erit et cor tuum* (*Matth.* 6, 21); ubi delectatio, ibi thesaurus: ubi autem cor, ibi beatitudo aut miseria. *De musica* VI, 11, 29; *PL* 32, 1179. The reason for this is that "delight" is the very thing love pursues in its object: Non enim amatur, nisi quod delectat. *Sermo* 159, 3, 3; *PL* 38, 869. See the whole sermon.

30 The will's action on the whole man is exercised through the mediation of the images and ideas over which it has control. In Augustinian psychology, the will is not a "generator" of representations, but it does bind them together. In other words, it applies our powers of sense, imagination and thought to their acts or turns them away from them. Whence the dominant influence it exercises by setting all of man's activities to work in the direction of his dominating love. See *De Trinitate* XI, 7, 12; *PL* 42, 993-994, and 8, 15; *PL* 42, 995-996.

31 *Enarr. in Ps.* 31, 2, 5; *PL* 36, 260.

32 *Ibid.* Cf. Cum . . . nihilque aliud curae esse debeat quomodo vivatur, nisi ut quod amandum est eligatur: . . . *Sermo* 96, 1, 1; *PL* 38, 585, and *De Bono Viduitatis* 21, 26; *PL* 40, 448.

33 Rectae autem sunt voluntates et omnes sibimet religatae, si bona est illa quo cunctae referuntur: si autem prava est, pravae sunt omnes. Et ideo rectarum voluntatum connexio iter est quoddam ascendentium ad beatitudinem, quod certis velut passibus agitur, prava-

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