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Augustine Contra Cicero: Evaluation, Affirmation, and the Freedom of the Will

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[Cicero] restricts the mind of the religious man to a choice between two alternatives: either there is something which lies within the power of our own will, or there is foreknowledge of the future. He considers that these statements cannot both be true, and that to affirm one of them is to deny the other.... Thus, because he wished to make men free, he made them ungodly. The religious mind, however, chooses both, confesses both, and confirms both by the faith of godliness.¹

Introduction

What does it mean to be free? Given the unthought but taken for granted assumptions of *our* modernity – the modernity that defines us not only as “Westerners” but also as “Protestants” – being free seems to mean being an independent, autonomous agent. *Auto-nomos*: being free means being “our own law.” As a result of this notion of freedom, we struggle with any suggestion that God is providentially acting to order our histories and our lives. In point of fact, most modern Christians seldom think in terms of God’s providence or, in their more pious but thoughtful moments, recognize it as, at once, spiritually satisfying *and* a fundamental contradiction to the “freedom” that they take for granted in their consumer-driven inhabitation of secular society. This conflict – between providence and freedom – is precisely what is at stake in Augustine’s debate with Cicero in Book 5 of *The City of God*. In the following argument, therefore, I seek to situate a very current and, indeed, experienced, perplexity within the framework of a classical theological discussion of the will. I will show that, when Augustine’s debate with Cicero is carefully considered in the context of his critique of Stoic and Platonic ethics within *The City of God*, his approach to Cicero’s rejection of an understanding of freedom that includes a

corresponding account of God's providence raises all the important theological issues that we, modern Protestants, must address. I will argue, in fact, that whatever one wants to say about Augustine's ideas concerning the free will, it is necessary first to see that his ability to affirm freedom *and* providence is based on his fundamental affirmation of God's salvific presence in creation which, in turn, evaluates all "reality" as a good created order.

Self-Mastery and the Problem of Free Will

In order to set Augustine's representation of Cicero's account of free will in the context of his other encounters with Stoic and Platonic ethics,² it is necessary first to take account of Cicero's position in Book 5 without moving on to Augustine's response. Cicero's argument proceeds as follows: the idea of God's foreknowledge of all future events and actions necessarily entails the claim that there exists, in the mind of God, an already actual order of those events and actions. Cicero's second step develops from his first claim. If there is an actual order of events and actions, there must also be an actual order of causes because "nothing can come about which is not preceded by some efficient cause" (CD, 5, 9, p. 200). Cicero then moves to the third step of his argument: if there is a "certain order of causes by which everything that happens happens . . . [then] all things that happen happen by fate" (CD, 5, 9, p. 200). The result of this argument is crucial. Because divine foreknowledge makes it impossible to account for a human being's power to act, it also makes it impossible for a human being to give meaning to human life.

For now it is enough to make a few things clear. First of all, Cicero's argument against divine foreknowledge is grounded on an understanding of the will in which power and freedom are connected in a very particular way. Secondly, the ability to give meaning to "human life" is dependent on this connection between power and freedom. In order to adequately make sense of these two claims I must follow Augustine's account and critique of Platonic and Stoic ethics.

Augustine begins Bk. 14 by articulating the Pauline distinction between "flesh" and "spirit." This provides him with the occasion to set forth his critique of the Platonic and Stoic understanding of the relation between reason and the passions. Augustine's argument, that

all who live “according to man” and not “according to God” are therefore living according to the flesh (CD, 14, 4, p. 586), allows him to bring both Epicurean ethics, despised by the Stoics and the Platonists alike for being fleshy, *and* Stoic and Platonic ethics under the category of “flesh” (CD, 14, 2, p. 582). At the heart of this strategy lies Augustine’s claim that the distinction between “flesh” and “spirit” is not a distinction between the body and the soul and, furthermore, not even a distinction between reason and the passions. In order to see more clearly how this argument works, it is worthwhile to follow Augustine’s account of the terms “flesh” and “spirit” and the critique of Stoic and Platonic ethics that the account produces.

In order to show that the distinction between “flesh” and “spirit” is not premised on a rejection of the body as inherently sinful, Augustine first turns to Paul’s own account of this distinction within his Epistle to the Galatians. Augustine points out that the sins of the flesh include “vices of the mind” (CD, 14, 2, p. 583). Again, with reference to Stoic and Platonic ethics, he notes that “[i]t may be, indeed, that a man tempers his desire for bodily pleasure out of devotion to an idol ... Even such a man as this, though he is seen to restrain and suppress the lusts of the flesh, is still convicted, on the authority of the apostle, of living according to the flesh; yet it is his very abstinence from the pleasures of the flesh that demonstrates that he is engaged in the damnable works of the flesh” (CD, 14, 2, p. 584). The problem, therefore, is not in the body but, in fact, in the orientation of the soul which causes the body to be corruptible, disorderly and disobedient.³

Once we are clear that the distinction between “flesh” and “spirit” is not intended to be between the body and the soul, we can understand that these categories point to different postures of the whole human being. Augustine articulates this by talking in terms of a life lived “according to man” or “according to God.” Humans live according to the “flesh” insofar as they are turned away from God in a desire to make themselves the standard for truth and goodness. While the details of this claim will occupy me later within my account of Augustine’s theology of creation, what is important now is Augustine’s argument that “[t]here is no need, then, in the matter of our sins and vices, to do injustice to our Creator by accusing the nature of flesh, which, of its own kind and in its due place, is good”

(CD, 14, 5, p. 588). It is this very conclusion that leads Augustine back to an explicit critique of Stoic and Platonic ethics:

For anyone who praises the nature of the soul as the highest good, and accuses the nature of flesh as something evil, is himself fleshy both in his devotion to the soul and his rejection of the flesh; for his belief is a matter of human vanity, not of divine truth. The Platonists are not, indeed, so foolish as the Manichaeans; for they do not detest earthly bodies as the natural substance of evil.... Nonetheless, they hold that souls are so influenced by earthly limbs and dying members that they derive from them their unwholesome desires and fears and joys and sorrows. And these ‘disturbances’ (as Cicero calls them) or ‘passions’ . . . embrace all the vices of human conduct (CD, 14, 5, p. 589).

According to Augustine, the common ground covered by Platonic and Stoic ethics is governed by a dualism between body and soul. Basing their ethics on such a metaphysical dualism between the body (i.e., mutable and material reality) and the soul (i.e., immutable and immaterial reality) forces them to develop it within a subsequent anthropological dualism between reason and the passions (or, as Cicero calls them, “disturbances”) or else risk rendering the connection between a human being and its reality incoherent.⁴ In other words, once the Stoics and Platonists assume a dualism between the material and the immaterial, the dualism between something like reason and passion becomes necessary if human beings are to be understood according to that governing metaphysical dualism.

Once this metaphysical and anthropological dualism is in place and one term is chosen in opposition to the other, an ethics of self-mastery is inevitable.⁵ In order to see Augustine’s diagnosis and critique of this ethics of self-mastery we must first back up to Bk. 9 in order to get in on the beginning of Augustine’s direct critique of Stoic and Platonic ethics. In the fourth chapter of Bk. 9, Augustine begins his discussion of the Stoic and Platonic account of the relation between virtue and the passions. He explains that while some philosophers call the disturbances or passions by different names, they are in agreement that the source of these disturbances is in the body and the external world: “For the Stoics refuse to call bodily and external things ‘goods’. Rather, they call them ‘advantages,’ because they consider that there is no good for man except virtue, and that this is the art of living well, which exists only in the mind. The other

philosophers . . . call these things ‘goods’; but they hold that, in comparison with virtue . . . they are little things and of small value” (CD, 9, 4, p. 362). Whatever one calls them, the goods of the body and things relating to the body (i.e., external things), are, in themselves, fundamentally devalued within an ethics that is governed by the dualisms described above. Such an ethics must, therefore, posit both a relation to these non-goods (otherwise there would be no point in including them within the dualism) and the need to master them.

Augustine develops this central feature of Platonic and Stoic ethics further in the eighth chapter of Bk. 14. In response to the passions of desire, joy, fear and grief, the wise man pursues the good by “willing” it such that “gladness” arises from the good’s attainment and “caution” guards against seeking to attain a good that cannot be possessed, that is to say, cannot be possessed solely by the mind. As a result of never desiring a good which cannot be attained by the mind’s virtue, the Stoic sage will never suffer grief, that is, “an evil which has already happened” (CD, 14, 8, p. 593). Here again we see the same ethics of self-mastery at work. Grief must be rejected by Stoic ethics because it most profoundly points to the passivity inherent in the body’s affections and passions. In other words, because grief points to the evil that “has already happened” it points to the human being’s way of responding to the given and undergone nature of life. Grief can only be rejected by refusing this passivity and the worldliness that it reveals. To do that, however, is to place that very worldliness outside the realm of what has value while, at the same time, to admit its possibility within human existence and, therefore, to seek to master human existence by suppressing that devalued element.

Augustine’s criticism of such an ethics of self-mastery takes two forms. First, he criticizes it from within by showing how the dualism between reason and passion is impossible to sustain and is, in fact, shown to be so with reference to Stoic ethics itself. Second, he places Stoic ethics in contrast to Christian ethics and discloses the reactive, fearful posture which lies at the basis of Stoic ethics. Augustine’s two criticisms of Stoic and Platonic ethics converge insofar as his account of the role of valuation within the first criticism lies at the heart of his second criticism.

In Bk. 9 Augustine recounts a story from Aulus Gellius concerning a Stoic philosopher who once shared a journey with him.

While at sea the ship on which they traveled “was tossed about and in great peril this philosopher grew pale with fear” (CD, 9, 4, p. 363). When, after the storm had passed, the philosopher was asked about his response to the storm, he gave Aulus Gellius a book of Stoic philosophy in which Gellius read

that the soul experiences certain mental images ... and that it is not in our power to determine whether and when these shall strike the soul. When these images come about as a result of terrifying and awesome things, they of necessity move the soul even of the wise man ... This does not, however, cause the mind to fear any evil, nor to approve of these images nor consent to them. For such consent, they hold, is within our power ... [T]he wise man, though he experiences them of necessity, nonetheless retains with mind unshaken a true and steadfast perception of those things which he ought rationally to seek or avoid (CD, 9, 4, pp. 363-364).

Augustine explains that, according to the Stoics and Platonists, “the mind and reason of the wise man are not under the dominion of the passions” (CD, 9, 4, p. 364). By their own account, then, the relation described above, between reason, the mind and the soul as related to the passions, the body and the external world but nevertheless master over them, is preserved and perfectly exhibited by this traveling philosopher. However, Augustine challenges this view precisely with reference to the experience of the storm-tossed philosopher. He argues: “For if the philosopher attached no *value* to the things which he thought himself about to lose in a shipwreck – that is, his life or his bodily wellbeing – then surely he would not have been so terrified by the peril as to betray his fear by the testimony of his pallor” (CD, 9, 4, p. 364, italics added). Augustine’s argument, offered on the basis of the Stoic philosopher’s own experience, is that by valuing certain things (i.e., life and well-being) over certain other things (i.e., death or bodily suffering), one has already incorporated one’s reason and one’s passion. Valuation, then, is nothing other than a judgment of reason made on the basis of what one ultimately desires and this passionate relation is no more clearly shown than when one is faced with the loss of the desirable object. The dualism between reason and the passions needed by an ethics of self-mastery is, therefore, a fiction. In his discussion of Augustine’s Stoic sage, James Wetzel, in his *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, nicely makes this point: “The image of reason as deflecting passion

or emotion in the manner of a fortress wall deflecting an outside enemy no longer captures the quality of the assault. For if Augustine is right to suggest that disruptive passion reveals what the sage values, at least insofar as passion is itself an expression of some judgment of value, then reason is implicated in the experience and the enemy is within the gates.”⁶ According to Augustine’s account, Stoic ethics is based on a phenomenological misrepresentation of what they actually hold to be the case. Like the “fools” with whom they contrast themselves, the Stoics and Platonists live a passion-driven life in which judgments of value are constantly employed yet never recognized. At this level, then, Augustine has shown that the basis of the Stoic and Platonic ethics of self-mastery is phenomenologically impossible to sustain and, therefore, another phenomenology of the self is necessary.

In keeping with the dispositional approach articulated in terms of the Pauline categories of “flesh” and “spirit,” Augustine offers an alternative account of the passions and their relation to virtue. On this basis he begins his most profound critique of Stoic ethics. He refuses to endorse an anthropological dualism by understanding human action in terms of its orientation towards or away from the good rather than dividing that agency along the lines of a body-soul split. In Bk. 14 he explains that what is important is the “quality” of the will (CD, 14, 6, p. 590). This quality of the will is determined by that toward which the soul is oriented and, therefore, the passions or emotions that arise as the result of this orientation will be judged on the basis of the orientation (CD, 14, 6, p. 590). Thus, contrary to the Stoics and the Platonists, the passions are not the problem. Rather, the passions and emotions are disclosive of a will that is turned toward or away from the good. More will be said about Augustine’s account of the will when I turn to an examination of his theology of creation. For now, what is most important about his alternative discussion of the passions is that our passions or, perhaps better, our passion-inspired existence, is disclosive of what we affirm and, indeed, whether we are actually able to live in terms of affirmation. This concern with affirmation can be detected in his account of fear and love in the ninth chapter of Bk. 14.

Before turning to Augustine’s treatment of fear and love I want to present the groundwork for my reading of that treatment. I want to suggest that it is in the midst of that treatment that Augustine most

significantly indicts Stoic ethics as an ethics of fear and reactivity. Central to this reactivity and fear is the issue of valuation. As we have seen, Augustine's first criticism of Stoic and Platonic ethics revealed the place of valuation within their thought. Now, in this second critique, Augustine will call into question the basis of these valuations. Following Gilles Deleuze's account of Nietzsche, we might say that Augustine is carrying out a critique of Stoicism and Platonism that is at once his own "evaluation": "The problem of critique is that of the value of values, of the evaluation from which their value arises, thus the problem of their *creation* ... Evaluations, in essence, are not values but ways of being, modes of existence of those who judge and evaluate, serving as principles for the values on the basis of which they judge."⁷ In other words, one's evaluation of reality is the claim to truth implied in one's whole way of being in the world. Because all existence is passionately inspired, each particular "form" of existence (i.e., each evaluation) will emerge on the basis of what is ultimately valued. What gives each particular form of passionate existence its particularity (i.e., its claim to truth) is the fact it always implies interpretation and, therefore, always brings with it a certain way of "constructing" the world. Remaining within a Nietzschean terminology, one can say that evaluation happens either from the within the space of an 'affirmation' or a failure to affirm.⁸ To fail to affirm is to be reactive. In his treatment of the relation between fear and love, Augustine suggests that Stoic ethics is based on an evaluation in which a fundamental fear of its other, i.e., the body and the external world, is primary. Therefore it is already a reactive response to its other and not, as it claims to be, an independent affirmation of the life of the soul.

Augustine begins his treatment by pointing out the way in which the Scriptures distinguish between two types of fear: "Now one kind of fear is that of which the apostle John speaks: 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.' This, however is not fear of the same kind as that felt by the apostle Paul when he feared lest the Corinthians be beguiled by the subtlety of the serpent. This latter is the fear which love has, and which, indeed, only love has" (CD, 14, 9, pp. 600-601). In reflecting on this distinction it is important to keep in mind that one sort of fear is proper to love and this is contrasted to a fear that brings torment. The latter kind of fear, that which is

entangled with torment, is a fear “that frightens a man away from an evil which may befall him” and is generated by “the anxiety of an infirmity which fears to sin” (CD, 14, 9, p. 601). Love’s fear, on the other hand, “is clean, enduring for ever” and, as such, is a fear “which keeps [one] steadfast in a good which cannot be lost” (CD, 14, 9, p. 601). Such a fear, Augustine continues, “that is ‘clean’ signifies the act of will by which we shall invariably refuse to sin ... not with the anxiety of an infirmity which fears to sin, but the with the tranquility of love” (CD, 14, 9, p. 601, italics added).

Ideas such as “tranquility,” the protection against “an evil which may befall” man, and the attainment of that which cannot be lost, are clear indicators that Augustine has Stoic and Platonic ethics in mind in the midst of this important discussion of fear and love. At the heart of the distinction lies a description of what could only be Augustine’s account of the ground of Stoic and Platonic ethics: a refusal of the passions and the external world based on a reactive posture that is grounded on a “fear which frightens man away from an evil which may befall him” and is, therefore, entangled in the torment of anxiety. Unlike the Christian, who is connected to the true source of love which cannot be lost because it is eternal, the Stoic is left in an antagonistic relationship to the world that must be rejected but, in this very rejection, forms the basis of the Stoic’s negative posture. In contrast to this, Christian love is grounded on a fundamental affirmation that the source of its tranquility and steadfastness is the eternal source of the world. Therefore, the world and the passions of the body do not, for the Christian, become the enemy but, rather, the very place in which, and the very means by which, such tranquility and steadfastness take shape. Ironically, the Stoic ethics of *apatheia* is the least able to engage in an affirmation that maintains a productive distance from the world because at every step its self-enclosure and pretended distance from the world is but a fearful reaction to the world’s impending ‘disturbance’. Augustine’s sense of affirmation, on the other hand, does provide the critical distance from the world that is necessary to embrace the world for what it is: the gift of the good God (CD, 11, 23, p. 478). Such a distance-producing affirmation involves understanding the body and the passions within the gifted order of creation which means recognizing both their goodness (again, consider the example of the apostle Paul) and their danger.

The conclusion that can now be offered is crucial: the Stoic and Platonic ethics of self-mastery is thoroughly reactive because it is grounded on a fundamentally antagonistic assessment of the “worldly” which results from the assumption of a body-soul dualism which is already an evaluation of the world. In other words, Augustine’s rejection of Stoic and Platonic ethics is not the rejection of an “argument” that could have just as easily been ignored. Rather, it is the rejection of one way of being in the world on the basis of a critical confrontation with another way of being in the world. At the heart of this contestation lies the meaning of freedom. Within the terms set by the Stoic and Platonic evaluation, freedom from disturbance emerges as the ultimate goal. The possibility of this freedom is understood to lie within the human being’s power remove himself from the ‘world’ by mastering the negative elements that inhibit his freedom.⁹ It is precisely these conclusions, I will now argue, that one must keep in mind as one considers Cicero’s defense of free will against divine foreknowledge.

When, at the beginning of this investigation, I considered Cicero’s arguments, I pointed out the connection between power and freedom and the fact that such a connection was crucial to understanding the meaning of human life. Now that I have developed Augustine’s assessment and critique of Stoic and Platonic ethics, it will be easier to show that Cicero’s own pre-understanding is deeply shaped by Stoic and Platonic assumptions. Cicero assumes that the connection between freedom and power is defined in a particular way. First, he assumes that the will’s power is the power to shape one’s life by initiating a causality that is one’s own. Freedom, therefore, is the power to initiate one’s own causality without resistance. Necessary to this understanding of freedom is the negative assumption that *if* one speaks of an order of causes in any way known in advance within the divine mind, such an order is necessarily at odds with the power of human agency because such an order denies power its freedom to initiate its own causality. If I am right in pointing to the antagonistic posture of Stoic and Platonic ethics, it is clear that this assumed antagonism grounds Cicero’s claim that an actualized order of causes, however one might understand that, *must* be understood as fundamentally opposed to free human agency. One may, at this point, object: but how could such an order of causes not oppose human freedom given that human freedom is exactly the

freedom to govern one's actions independently of all external causes. Such an objection, however, reinforces the dependence on Stoic and Platonic ethics and opens onto the second point of agreement between Cicero and Stoic ethics. If the human being necessarily exists in opposition to the external world, then freedom must mean *freedom from* the forces of that external world, the greatest of which, for both Cicero and the Stoics, is fate. However, such an understanding of freedom is fundamentally dependent on a particularly Stoic and Platonic evaluation. If, within the terms set by a different evaluation, the human being is not understood to be in fundamental opposition to the world, then human freedom can and will mean something entirely different than freedom from the world. Furthermore, having to be able to give meaning to one's own human life by exercising such freedom and power – Cicero's second concern – continues to reinforce the opposition between the human agent and the "world" and is itself fundamentally dependent upon a certain evaluation of reality. One might suggest that Augustine's Cicero was the best representative of this Stoic and Platonic evaluation in that he truly understood and embraced the dualism between body and soul and the ethics of self-mastery that it proposes. As its best proponent, he had to save it from a contradiction (i.e., the positing of both free will and divine foreknowledge within a oppositional and dualistic anthropology and metaphysics) and, therefore, he sought to disprove that which could not be the case (i.e., divine foreknowledge) in favor that which was most certain of all (i.e., self-mastery through freedom and power).

Augustine's Theology of Creation: The Will Revisited

In the following section I will not be attempting to give an exhaustive account of Augustine's theology of creation or his understanding of the will. My goal is to raise some important points from within his theology of creation in *The City of God* (mostly from Bk. 11) in order to revisit his response to Cicero. Even within Augustine's response to Cicero I will only take up those points that allow me bring to light the important connection between Augustine's affirmative evaluation of reality and his confession of free will and divine foreknowledge.

I will begin my account of Augustine's affirmative evaluation of reality where Augustine's own theology of creation intersects most clearly with his treatment of Stoicism. Central to Augustine's

understanding of true judgment is his understanding of the creature's participation in God's ordering which, as he will point out, is a participation in God. Based on a reading of the opening chapters of Genesis, Augustine argues that creaturely self-knowledge is illuminated when it is directed toward "the praise and love of the creator" (CD, 11, 7, p. 457).

The important claim here is that knowledge of the world and the self shares in truth only insofar as that knowledge is placed in the "light" of God's wisdom which is, for Augustine, "the art by which [creaturely things] were made" (CD, 11, 7, p. 458). In order to elaborate on this, it is necessary to take note of the trinitarian order that he discovers within creation itself. Augustine claims that "there is no nature, even among the least and the lowest of the beasts, which was not wrought by Him from Whom comes all the measure, all the form and all the order without which nothing can be found or conceived to exist" (CD, 11, 15, pp. 469-470). These categories of measure, form and order will become the focus for his trinitarian account of creation in the twenty-second chapter of Bk. 11, where he argues that the very logic of Scripture's account of creation contains within itself the threefold structure of the Trinity:

[I]f the intention of Scripture had been only to tell us Who made the light, it would have been enough to say, 'God made the light.' And if it had wished us to know not only Who made the light, but by what means it had been made, it would have been enough to announce, 'And God said, Let there be light, and there was light,' that we might know not only that God made the light, but that He made it by His Word. But because it was fitting that three great truths regarding creation should be intimated to us – that is, Who made it, by what means, and why – Scripture says: 'God said, Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good'" (CD, 11, 22, pp. 475-476).

Scripture's witness to creation takes this threefold structure because in its fullness it discloses to us the source, means and reason for creation's existence. Given what was claimed before about truly knowing a thing when one knows the art by which it was made, we can now see that truly to know creation, and ourselves as a part of that creation, is to know the source, means and reason of the created order. But, Augustine clearly points out, to know *that* is to know God. This last claim is always twofold: truly to know the created order is to

know that it comes from God through God's Word by the delight of God's Spirit and, secondly, to know that in knowing that one knows God. In other words, we truly know the created order only insofar as we know it as God's creation *and* we know God through that created order insofar as the threefold structure of creation's createdness gives us a "profound and mystic intimation of the Trinity: that is, of the Father [measure/source], Son [Word/means], and Holy Spirit [goodness/reason why]" (CD 11, 23, p. 480).¹⁰

As "natural" as this account may sound, Augustine is clear that such truthful knowledge of God and the created order is by no means automatically achieved. The reason for this is simply that in order to *know* the created order in this way one's *will* must be directed toward "the praise and love of the creator" (CD, 11, 7, p. 457). In other words, right knowledge is fundamentally implicated in right desire. Augustine's Pauline alternative to the Platonic and Stoic dualism of body and soul is grounded in his orientational approach and it is for this reason that everyone who is not 'directed toward' God is, by definition, directed toward the "flesh," that is to say, directed toward some other source of truth. From this claim two things follow that have a direct bearing on Augustine's discussion with Cicero and Stoic and Platonic ethics. First, Augustine's theology of creation establishes the possibility for an affirmation of the created order that maintains enough distance from it so as to see it as a created order that witnesses to its Creator. Second, any understanding of the creature's relation to the world which posits an opposition between the order of causes of the external world and the creature herself is nothing but an enactment of what Augustine will show to be the root of all sin: the prideful refusal to see oneself as a harmonious part of the whole. It is to this prideful refusal that we must now briefly turn.

Insofar as the Stoic ethos is grounded on a claim which posits an opposition between the order of causes (i.e., fate) and the free human agent, it is a textbook case for Augustine's understanding of sin. In his introduction to Bk. 12, Augustine formulates his account of the sin of pride by noting that "some [of the angels] remained constant in cleaving to that which was the common good of them all: that is, to God Himself, and His eternity, truth and love. Others, however, delighting in their own power, and supposing that they could be their own good, fell from that higher and blessed good which was common to them all and embraced a private good of their own" (CD,

12, 1, p. 498). Just like the angels, human beings, though naturally good and intended to be oriented to God, turn away from God by valuing themselves as their own source of power, goodness and truth. This turn toward oneself is a refusal to accept one's place within the order and measure of creation (i.e., a refusal to look *through* the created order to its true source) and, therefore, a refusal of the created order *qua* common.¹¹ Such a refusal of both the common created order and its true source is disclosed by the subsequent antagonistic construction of that order in terms of private power and opposition.¹² That this turn is a turn from one source of power in order to seek power in oneself is crucial for Augustine's engagement with Cicero.

Earlier I pointed out that Cicero's objection to divine foreknowledge was premised on an understanding of human power as the power to initiate one's own causality and therefore to prevail against external causes in the world. This power is fundamentally connected to freedom which is the freedom from these external causes, that is to say, the freedom of self-determination. Given Augustine's critique of Stoic ethics and his alternative theology of creation, it will come as no surprise that this sort of oppositional construction of the relation between human agency and creation's causality is exactly what Augustine rejects in Cicero's position. Augustine is able to affirm what Cicero cannot because Augustine understands the relation between human agency and the created cosmos very differently. This difference can be developed along two lines, both of which point to the fundamental issue of power and freedom. First, Augustine does not establish an opposition between creature and cosmos because the cosmos is always already affirmed as the created order, that is to say, the good work of a personal creator. This is the point of Augustine's playful transformation of Cicero's notion of "fate":

Moreover, as to an order of causes in relation to which the will of God can do all things: we do not deny this, but neither do we bestow upon it the name of fate, unless perhaps, we may understand 'fate' to be derived from '*fari*,' 'to speak'. For we cannot deny that it is written in the sacred Scriptures: 'God hath spoken once; these two things have I heard, that power belongeth unto God. Also unto Thee, O God, belongeth mercy: for Thou wilt render unto every man according to his works' (CD, 5, 9, p. 201)

The order of the cosmos is not, therefore, the anonymous order to be feared but rather the spoken Word of the Creator who both gives power and exercises mercy.¹³ This leads to the next point. Because the cosmos is the work of a personal creator, creaturely freedom cannot be the freedom from that created order. Once this is understood it will be easier to appreciate what may be, at least for us modern Stoics, Augustine's most difficult claim: that our wills are contained within the order of causes which is the will of God (CD, 5, 9, pp. 201-202). His claim is that our will, which is our power to influence the order of causes, is empowered by the will of God which is the efficient cause of all things (CD, 5, 9, p. 202). In order to understand this claim, it is necessary to note that Augustine does not understand the will as a faculty, which would place the focus back on dividing up the human agent into discernible acting "parts." Rather, the will is the concrete form of one's passion-inspired existence when that existence is expressed through agency. It gains its power by being in harmony with the empowering Breath of the Creator who "quickens all things" (CD, 5, 9, p. 202). Our free will, then, is our will that has been empowered to act in common with the true source of power. It is along these lines that we can understand the "destitute power" that characterizes the "impious and proud" false gods who are "deprived of [God's] immutable light in which all may share" (CD, 11, 1, p. 449). Their destitute power is the result of their bondage to themselves which is a result of their refusal to "take delight ... in submitting themselves" to the source, means and goodness of the created order. By constructing his argument in keeping with these false gods, Cicero posited an understanding of the cosmos and human agency within that cosmos that prevented him from seeing human agency in any terms other than those developed within Stoic and Platonic ethics. Augustine's rejection of Cicero's argument is, therefore, a rejection of the evaluation upon which Cicero constructed his argument. This rejection is based solidly upon Augustine's own theology of creation in which participation in God is not only the source for true knowledge but also the source of true human freedom and power.

Conclusion: Confession and Affirmation

In contrast to Cicero, Augustine's affirmation of free will and divine foreknowledge is an affirmation of the relation between human

agency and the created order. Augustine's critique of Cicero, and the Stoic assumptions upon which Cicero based his argument, is not, therefore, merely a critique of one argument in isolation. Rather, it is a critique of an entire evaluation of reality. By this I mean that both Augustine and Cicero had the same given reality with which to work: they both lived and acted in the midst of an order of causes that seemed at once malleable and incomprehensible. Augustine's evaluation of this reality, based as it was on the Scriptural witness to a Creator whose very presence is discernible within the good created order, is grounded on an affirmation that the creature's own proper existence is to be turned toward the source of that created order and, therefore, that human agency is best understood in terms of participation in God through the very affirmation of the world as creation, that is, as the Creator's gift to all. Only through such an affirmation can one avoid the reactive posture of Stoic and Platonic ethics whose own evaluation of the world in terms of an antagonism between the soul and the body disallows them from understanding human agency and, ultimately, happiness itself, in any terms other than the phenomenologically incoherent terms of self-mastery.

I will now suggest that it is this affirmation of the world as God's good created order that lies at the basis of Augustine's language of confession, faith and belief in Bk. 5. In response to Cicero's rejection of divine foreknowledge in order to save free will, Augustine states that the "religious mind ... chooses both, confesses both, and confirms both by the faith of godliness" (CD, 5, 9, p. 200). Augustine's language of confession and faith points to the centrality of affirmation as the fundamental connecting point between knowledge and ethics. This is so because, as we have seen, our affirmative way of being in the world is, itself, the emergence of our particular form of passion-inspired existence and, as such, it is the very basis of our knowledge *and* our desire. In the midst of his response to Cicero, Augustine suggests that "he lives ill who does not believe well concerning God" (CD, 5, 10, p. 205). While it would be easy to disregard or simply miss this remark, I believe that that would be to miss out on a great deal of what is happening in Augustine's interaction with Cicero and the Stoic and Platonic philosophers. Indeed, this remark seems to summarize the argument that I have been advancing within this paper. One's way of being in the world is

fundamentally determined by the evaluation of reality on which it is grounded. For Augustine, belief in God is fundamentally determinative of one's interpretation of everything else because it is an evaluation of reality that provides the conditions for all other valuations.¹⁴ If one takes Augustine's language of confession seriously, to confess something is explicitly to locate the matter of that confession within the context of one's evaluation of reality. Or, to put the same thing in another way, it was Augustine's language of confession within his account of Cicero that led me to wonder if there was not something more going on in that discussion than simply an "intellectual" debate. By confessing the simultaneous affirmation of free will and divine foreknowledge, Augustine locates that particular affirmation within an affirmation of reality itself and it is this affirmation of reality that Augustine will call faith.

I will conclude with a note about the view of freedom that emerges from Augustine's encounter with Cicero and the Stoic and Platonic philosophers and its relation to the contemporary discussion of free will within Augustine's work. As I have shown, the reactive posture of self-mastery assumes a view of freedom in which the human agent is necessarily opposed to the order of causes within which he operates. Freedom, therefore, is the human agent's freedom from that order.¹⁵ Augustine's rejection of the evaluation that made this notion of freedom possible is the basis for his rejection of that notion of freedom. If what I have argued is an accurate account of Augustine's approach to the question of free will within *The City of God*, it is safe to suggest that those who wish to understand Augustine's notion of free will must take these considerations into account. At the very least it seems necessary to ask what Augustine means by "freedom" before launching into an account of his views of free will. The critical potential of asking oneself this question comes when one realizes that many accounts of free will within Augustine's work proceed as though Augustine actually held the understanding of freedom that he attributed to the Stoic and Platonic philosophers. For example, Eleonore Stump's essay on Augustine and free will¹⁶ in the *Cambridge Companion to Augustine* not only fails to specify what freedom actually means for Augustine, but, more importantly, she also proceeds as though Augustine's understanding of freedom is freedom from external causes. I will point to two examples within the essay that are

particularly revealing. First, Stump assumes the arguments of “compatibilism” and “libertarianism” in order to set the terms for her discussion of Augustine’s treatment of freedom of the will. The problem with this, however, is that both of these philosophical positions assume a *de facto* opposition between human freedom and an order of causes. Compatibilism “supposes that the world can be causally determined *and yet* also contain free acts”¹⁷ while libertarianism assumes that “an agent acts with free will... only if the act is not casually determined by anything outside the agent.”¹⁸ According to my argument, Augustine would reject both of these positions on the same grounds upon which he rejected Cicero’s position because these positions assume that freedom is freedom from an order of causes. Secondly, Stump’s conclusion is that Augustine’s arguments do not suffice and, therefore, he runs the risk of endorsing a deterministic position.¹⁹ The critique of determinism, which was Cicero’s critique as well, is only sensible if one assumes that freedom is necessarily defined over against the order of causes. I have shown, however, that Augustine refuses this move precisely because of the metaphysics and anthropology that it assumes.

In light of Stump’s approach, and the many others like it, I suggest that Augustine’s thought is too radically theological to accept the terms that have been defined above as Stoic and Platonic. Therefore, however one wants to address the complexities of Augustine’s view of the will, it is important to keep in mind his radical claims about the place of this account within a theology of creation and a phenomenology of the self. Only by doing this will one be saved from turning Augustine into Cicero and relegating all important discussions about freedom, the will and ethics to the reactive logic of self-mastery.

Notes

- 1 Augustine, *The City of God*, edited and translated by R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Book 5, Chapter 9, p. 200. All further citations to this text will appear within the body of the essay as follows: (CD, Bk.#, Chapter #, p.#).
- 2 Following Augustine, I will be equating ‘Stoic’ and ‘Platonic’ within my analysis (CD, 9, 4, p. 362). It is important to point out that, throughout the paper, whenever I use these terms I am always referring to

Augustine's representation of a common claim made by both the Stoic and Platonic philosophies of his day.

- 3 For Augustine's account of this claim see CD, 13, 14, p. 555.
- 4 I gain support for articulating things in this manner by the fact that Augustine's comparison of the Platonists and Stoics to the Manicheans contains within itself the suggestion that the anthropological dualism between soul-as-reason and body-as-passions is *structurally* similar to the metaphysical dualism of the Manicheans.
- 5 By an "ethics of self-mastery" I mean an ethics which assumes that the human being contains within itself something which must be suppressed and controlled in order for the true nature of that human being to emerge. Thus, the "self" is seen as itself containing an alien force which must be "mastered."
- 6 Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 53. See also his essay, "Predestination, Pelagianism, and Foreknowledge" in the *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, edited by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 7 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 1.
- 8 Deleuze, pp. 175ff.
- 9 Following the insights of Charles Cochrane, James Wetzel suggests that the Stoic and Platonic understanding of the battle between reason and the passions is, indeed, part of a larger battle in which the "philosophers pitted human powers of self-determination against the powers driving the cosmos. Virtue gave them their only hope of controlling or disarming fortune, which conveyed the effects of whatever they experienced as an alien power" (Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, p. 117).
- 10 And again, "But if the divine goodness is nothing other than holiness, then certainly it is a careful use of the reason, and not a presumptuous boldness, to see a suggestion of the Trinity expressed in the works of God as if by a veiled mode of speech: a mode intended to develop our understanding when we ask, of anything whatsoever that God has created, Who made it? By what means did He make it? and, Why did He make it? For it is the Father of the Word Who said, Let it be. And that which was made when He spoke was beyond doubt made by means of the Word ... And if this goodness is rightly understood to be the Holy Spirit, then the whole Trinity is revealed to us in the works of God" (CD, 11, 24, p. 481).

- 11 On this see William S. Babcock, “The Human and the Angelic Fall: Will and Moral Agency in Augustine’s *City of God*,” in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, edited by Joanne McWilliam (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), pp. 135-136.
- 12 Augustine gives a similar account in *De Trinitate*: “What happens is that the soul, loving its own power, slides away from the whole which is common to all into the part which is its own private property. By following God’s directions and being perfectly governed by his laws it could enjoy the whole universe of creation; but by the apostasy of pride which is called the beginning of sin it strives to grab something more than the whole and govern it by its own laws; and because there is nothing more than the whole it is thrust back into anxiety over a part, and so by being greedy for more it gets less” [Augustine, *The Trinity*, translated by Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), Bk. 12, p. 330].
- 13 Notice that Cicero’s argument is itself an enactment of the ignorance of the created order that comes from the sin of pride. If Cicero would not have been turned away from the true source of the cosmos he would not have failed to see the Word as its principle of creation and, therefore, he would not have needed to construct his notion of fate. Augustine’s argument against Cicero does not proceed, therefore, through the application of an external standard (i.e., Christian theology is not simply imposed upon classical philosophy) but, rather, suggests that the very ground and form of Cicero’s argument itself finds no better (critical) explanation than in Augustine’s theology of creation.
- 14 One could make the same argument by appealing to Augustine’s detailed account of the ethical and political results of the Roman worship of false gods in Books 1-4 of *The City of God*. It is for this reason that one must not only believe in God but, according to Augustine, more importantly, “believe well concerning God.”
- 15 It is difficult to avoid noting the way in which Kant’s account of freedom is precisely “Stoic and Platonic” in the sense in which this has been described by Augustine. This similarity is important because if one were to show that Augustine interpreted the Stoics and Platonists entirely mistakenly one could, at least from an Augustinian perspective, still find Augustine’s account very useful *against* Kant and Kantian accounts of freedom.
- 16 Eleonore Stump, “Augustine on free will,” in the *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, pp. 124-147.
- 17 Stump, p. 125, italics added.

- ¹⁸ Stump, p. 125. For my purposes it is enough to list only the first claim of libertarianism. The second claim, that one is free only if one could have done otherwise, is modified by Stump herself (pp. 125-126).
- ¹⁹ Stump, p. 142.