

Soul is the principle that accounts for the intuitively obvious distinction between things that are living and things that are not. To be alive is to have a soul, and death involves a process leading to the absence of Soul. Augustine views different levels of soul in terms of ascending degrees of complexity in their capacities, such as, souls capable of reproduction and nutrition, while also having sensation and locomotion, and finally, of rational thinking. There is an asymmetry in these functional capacities, and reason is seen as higher than the others. In keeping with the intellectualism of the Greek philosophical tradition, Augustine's psychology focuses upon the asymmetrical and dominant relation which reason is able to exert over other capacities. Augustine teaches the superiority of the rational over the non-rational. Augustine presumes a three-fold hierarchy of (1) things which exist, (2) things that exist and live, and (3) things that exist, live, and possess understanding.

Augustine's psychology focuses upon our cognitive capacities, beginning with sense perception and working up to reason. The senses are coordinated by what Augustine refers to as the "inner sense." The inner sense for Augustine makes us aware that the disparate information converging upon us from our various senses comes from a common external source (such as, smell and taste belonging to the same object one is looking at while holding it in one's hand). The inner sense also makes us aware when one of the senses is not functioning properly. In both of these respects, the inner sense bears an organizational and criterial relation to the senses, not only combining the information of the senses, but passing judgment on the results of this synthesis. It is for this reason "inner sense" is regarded as being above the other senses, while it is only when we move above the "inner sense" and turn to reason that we reach what is distinctively human.

Augustine conceives 'reason' as the mind's ability to engage in deductive reasoning, where logical necessity is the criterion of adequacy. Reason is distinctively human, as well as our tendency to place such enormous significance upon the fact that humans are capable of reasoning. Understood in terms of the mind's ability to recognize logical necessity, reason is not merely one instrument among many; instead, it becomes the means whereby the human soul comes into contact with truths that are devoid of the mutability afflicting the objects of the senses. For Augustine, reason is the cognitive apex of the human soul, not only because it distinguishes us from other creatures, but more importantly for the way in which it distinguishes us. For it is reason which gives us access to truths that are of an absolutely reliable sort.

Augustine obliges us to reject the notion that our relation to the sensible world is sufficient to account for all our beliefs. God plays an active role in human cognition by illuminating the individual's mind so that it can perceive the intelligible realities which God simultaneously presents to it. Language is an instrument that mediates our relation to the world and to other minds. Augustine teaches us that there is a distinction between signs and what they signify. Augustine tells us, that if we follow these Basic Rules for the Correct Interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures we will never be in Error!

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Saint Augustine of Hippo **On Christian Doctrine**

Feast Day: August 28



**In writing 'On Christian Doctrine' Saint Augustine's
intent was to set down Basic Ground Rules
for the Correct Interpretation of
the Complexities of Scripture,
for All Peoples of All Times!**

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

***ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE WRITTEN BY ST. AUGUSTINE BETWEEN 396 A.D.
AND 426 A.D. THIS WORK WAS COMPLETED IN 426 A.D.***

St. Augustine of Hippo, born in Africa, was the eldest son of Saint Monica, educated and baptized in Italy, was a Christian Neoplatonist, and North African Bishop. He was one of the most important figures in the development of Western Christianity. In Roman Catholicism, he is a saint and pre-eminent Doctor of the Church, and the patron of the Augustinian religious order. Many Protestants, especially Calvinists, consider him to be one of the theological fountainheads of Reformation teaching on salvation and grace.

Augustine is one of the main figures through and by whom the merging of the western philosophical tradition with the widespread merging of the Greek philosophical tradition, with the Judeo-Christian religious and scriptural traditions, was accomplished. This was one of the decisive developments in the development of Christian Doctrine.

Augustine was one of the towering figures of medieval philosophy whose authority and thought came to exert a pervasive and enduring influence well into the modern period, even up to the present day. There is much in Augustine's thought that is worthy of serious philosophical attention. Augustine is not only one of the major sources whereby classical philosophy in general and Neoplatonism in particular enter into the mainstream of the early and the medieval philosophical thought processes. There are significant contributions of his that emerge from his modification of our Greco-Roman inheritance, such as: his subtle accounts of belief and authority, his account of knowledge and illumination, his emphasis upon the importance and centrality of the will, and his focus upon a new way of conceptualizing the phenomena of human history, just to cite a few of the more conspicuous examples.

The single most decisive event, in Augustine's philosophical development was his encounter with the books of the Platonists in Milan in 384, which provided a major turning point for Saint Augustine, reorienting his thought along basic themes that would persist until his death forty-six years later. Augustine himself makes it clear that it was this encounter that made it possible for him to view both the Church and its scriptural tradition as having as intellectually satisfying and resourceful content that desperately needed to be shared.

It would be a mistake simply to view Augustine's writings as the uncritical application of a Neoplatonic framework to a static body of Christian doctrine, for it is clear that the points of divergence have become more important to him and that he regards the Roman Catholic Church as having sufficient internal resources to address whatever difficulties confront it. Part of this gradual change of attitude is attributable to his detailed study of scriptural texts, as well as his immersion in both the daily affairs of his monastic community and the sorts of controversies which confronted the Church in the fourth and fifth centuries. There is also his involvement in the North African Donatist controversy concerning the validity of sacraments administered in the wake of the persecution of 304-305, and most especially the Pelagian controversy which engaged him from about 411 until his death in 430, in which serious issues arose regarding the role of grace and the efficacy of the unaided human will.

Platonism provided Saint Augustine with a philosophical framework, which was both pliable and enduring, which forms an important part of the philosophical legacy that Augustine bequeathed to both the medieval and modern periods. Within his writings, Augustine couples this philosophical framework with his profound belief that God is the ultimate source and point of origin for all. Equated with Being, Goodness, and Truth, God is the unchanging point which unifies all within an abiding and providentially ordained rational hierarchy. Throughout Augustine's teachings, we find repeatedly, that the intelligible realm with God as its source, promises the only lasting relief from the anxiety prompted by the transitory nature of the sensible realm. For all the changes that affected Augustine between his initial encounter with the books of the Platonists in 384 to 386 and his death in 430, he never abandoned the Neoplatonic ontology's distinction between the physical (sensible) and the spiritual (intelligible) and its hierarchy within, by which these realms are unified.

For Augustine, the individual human being is a body-soul composite, and there is an asymmetry between soul and body. As a spiritual entity, the soul is superior to the body, it is the province of the soul to rule the body. The soul is sent by God to administer the body and the soul comes to inhabit the body by its own choice. All souls are propagated from Adam's soul, thus creating a vertical link between God and each individual soul. Human life is to be conceived in terms of the categories of body and soul and that an adequate understanding of the soul is necessary for an appreciation of our place within the moral landscape around us.