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AUGUSTINE'S DEBT TO STOICISM IN THE *CONFESSIONS*

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Seneca asserts in *Letter 121* (14–16) that we mature by exercising self-care as we pass through successive psychosomatic “constitutions.” These are babyhood (*infantia*), childhood (*pueritia*), adolescence (*adulescentia*), and young adulthood (*iuventus*).¹ Augustine, of course, divides the narrative of his own development into these stages in the *Confessions*,² a text wherein he claims familiarity with more than a few works of Seneca (*Conf.* 5.6.11). This raises the question: Does Augustine use the renowned Stoic theory of “affiliation” (*oikeiōsis*, *conciliatio*), upon which Seneca’s account of maturation depends, as a motif in his own philosophical autobiography? If he does, that will update our understanding of the *Confessions* as a work in the history of philosophy. Traditionally, interpretations of this work have tended to see it as containing exclusively Neoplatonic or uniquely Christian thought.³

Self-affiliation is the linchpin of the Stoic ethical system, which defines living well as living in harmony with nature, posits that altruism develops from self-interest, and allows that pleasure and pain are indicators of well-being while denying that happiness consists in pleasure and that pain is misery (Diog. Laert. 7.85–9). Humans are rational social animals, according to Stoic psychology, and like all animals, they have an affinity to their own natural constitution, spontaneously seeking out what serves their well-being and avoiding what harms them. Pleasure and pain are by-products of these healthy and unhealthy conditions. As humans mature, their self-regard naturally extends to others who are like themselves. Initially, immediate family comes under the scope of the individual’s care, but with the development of human conceptual ability one can recognize the appropriateness of concern for all human beings. Rationality also allows for a transition from unreflectively acting on natural impulses, to the enlightened performance of natural actions as “proper functions” and as “right actions.”

Augustine had access to Stoic accounts of self-affiliation not only in Seneca’s *Letter 121*, but also in Cicero’s *On Goals*,⁴ and in non-extant sources of Stoic ethical theory.⁵ Moreover, he endorsed the notion of self-affiliation outside of the *Confessions*. In the *Against Faustus*, a work contemporaneous with his autobiography, we find him asserting that all animals – including humans, which are rational mortal animals – nourish and cherish their own flesh, since an animal is affiliated to itself in order that it might take care of its well-being (*ad incolumitatem tuendam conciliatum*).⁶ Humans and other animals naturally seek their own health, and fear death and whatever can tear apart their constitution (*membrorum conpago, iunctura*).⁷ More than twenty years later, Augustine was still affirming that every animal has been

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affiliated to itself by nature (*sibi natura conciliatum*) so that it might take care of itself (*ut se custodiat*).⁸ The question, then, is whether he also makes the notion of self-affiliation thematic in his philosophical autobiography.

I shall argue that Augustine does indeed present himself and some of his primary relationships – with his mother and his long-term girlfriend – in terms of personal and social *oikeiōsis*. In addition, his self-critiques in the early books of the *Confessions* can be more fully understood if compared to Stoic developmental theory. He depicts himself as failing to progress intellectually, socially, and morally: although he passed through the successive constitutions, becoming physically larger and cognitively capable, he did not mature correctly by the standards of his Stoic sources.

Self-affiliation

In the final paragraph of Book 1 of the *Confessions* (1.20.31), Augustine summarizes the basic orientations that guided his behavior during his prepubescent years:

At that time, I ... took care for [1] my health ... I took care of [2] the wholeness of my senses by means of an interior sense, and even in my little thoughts about little matters I took delight in [3] the truth. I did not want to be in error, I developed a good memory, acquired the armory of being skilled with words, friendship softened me, I fled from [4] pain, despondency, ignorance.⁹

Given that Augustine presents this as a recapitulation of his babyhood and childhood together, he presumably wants us to understand that some of these behaviors and desires were manifested from infancy, while others emerged later. Basic self-preservative activities such as sucking were undertaken from birth (*Conf.* 1.6.7), while “not wanting to be in error” would only be possible at a subsequent stage of childhood development.

Philosophically, the first thing to note about this passage is that it is not a description of what Augustine thinks was wrong with him. He is not, for instance, accusing himself of selfishness when he says that he took care for his own well-being. For he says that all these orientations were good, and implanted by God (*Conf.* 1.20.31, cf. 1.7.12). He is telling us that he was a typical human child. And the standard of what counts as “typical” is evidently the account of humans as rational social animals that had been given by the Stoics. For this self-description echoes texts of Seneca and Cicero on self-affiliation theory (including even the claim that the impulses are God-given¹⁰). If we consider the objects that Augustine says he pursued or avoided, which I have numbered in the passage for ease of reference, we will see that this is the case.

Augustine foregrounds his self-description with the claim that he took care for (1) his health (*meam incolumitatem*). His use of the term *incolumitas* signals that he aligns himself with the Stoic “cradle argument.”¹¹ This word is distinctive of *On Goals* 5.7.18, where Cicero reports Carneades’ summary of the Stoic position, contrasting it with that of Aristippus and Hieronymus of Rhodes:

Some [e.g. Aristippus] suppose that the primary impulse is for pleasure and the primary repulsion is from pain; others [e.g. Hieronymus] consider that freedom from pain is the first thing appropriated and pain the first thing avoided; others [i.e. the Stoics] set out from what they call the primary things in accordance with nature,

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among which they count the sound condition [*incolumitas*] and preservation of all one's parts ...

(*Trans. LS 64G*)

That Augustine sides with the Stoics here is significant in the context of the *Confessions*. By his own admission, as a young man in Milan he was inclined to accept Epicurus' claim that the natural goal is pleasure, but he rejected Epicurus' position on life after death (*Conf.* 6.16.26). Here he shows that by the time he wrote the *Confessions* he had come to believe that Stoic philosophical psychology was more convincing than hedonistic anthropology. Another sign that Augustine is relying on Stoic sources here is his assertion that he "took care" (*curae habebam*) for his well-being, a literal echo of Seneca's *Letter* 121.17:

First of all, the animal itself is affiliated to itself [*sibi conciliatur*], for there must be something to which all other things [that it seeks and avoids] are referred. I seek pleasure;¹² for whom? For myself. I am therefore taking care of myself [*mei curam ago*]. I flee from pain;¹³ on behalf of whom? Myself. Therefore, I am taking care of myself. Since I gauge all my actions with reference to my own welfare [*curam mei*], the care of myself is before all else. This [self-care] is present in all animals, and it is not brought in from the outside [by conditioning] but is inborn.

(*Trans. Gummere 1925*)

Augustine next reports that (2) "I took care of the wholeness of my senses [*integritatem sensuum meorum*]" (cf. *De doct. Christ.* 1.24.25). "Wholeness" of sense organs is mentioned as a natural desideratum in Cicero's Stoic doxography, where it is listed among the preferred indifferents (*Fin.* 3.51, 56; cf. Diog. Laert. 7.109).

Here Augustine adds a stipulation about the perceptual basis of the care he exercised over his senses: "I took care of the wholeness of my senses by means of an interior sense [*interiore sensu*]." This "interior sense" is a power of self-perception that serves self-preservation, and so it, too, has a Stoic patrimony. As we learn from *On Free Choice* (completed around the time he began the *Confessions*), by the "interior sense" Augustine means a power found in humans and non-rational animals that provides awareness of oneself, and consequently enables one to seek and avoid beneficial or harmful things (*De lib. arb.* 2.3.8, 2.4.10). Augustine's language and reasoning in *On Free Choice* are quite close to Seneca's in *Letter* 121. The latter says that every animal "feels that it is a living thing," and therefore flees from threats to its life (*Ep.* 121.11–12; cf. 121.21), while Augustine argues that "every living thing flees from death. Since death is the opposite of life, it must be the case that life perceives itself, because it flees from its opposite" (*De lib. arb.* 2.4.10, trans. Williams 1993). Here in the *Confessions* we again find Augustine attributing the ability to keep himself safe and sound to the interior sense. The reason why Augustine says that the interior sense allowed him to preserve his senses in particular, is that according to Stoic authors reflexive awareness includes not only a sense of oneself as a whole (*sensus sui*) or of one's constitution,¹⁴ but also of one's parts (limbs and senses), and of how these are to be used for survival (Seneca, *Ep.* 121.5–9; Hierocles, *Elementa Ethica* [*El. Eth.*] 1.51–2.5). In addition to the overall self-awareness comparable to what we today call proprioception and interoception, humans and other animals experience limb ownership and sense reflexivity. All these internal perceptions allow for spontaneous voluntary actions aimed at self-care, with the limbs and senses being employed efficiently. Augustine similarly says that from earliest infancy he knew how to use his mouth for eating (*sugere noram*, *Conf.* 1.6.7), and argues that animals would not be able to pursue or avoid anything

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unless they had reflexive awareness of their senses provided by the interior sense (*De lib. arb.* 2.4.10). He describes the emergence of a kind of proprioception – a sense of “where he was,”¹⁵ – associating this with his attempts to secure food from adults (*Conf.* 1.6.8). In *Confessions* 1.20.31, then, Augustine’s reference to an “interior sense” by which he sought to preserve his sense organs signals that he is inheriting and endorsing a Stoic account of non-rational/pre-rational self-perception as the ground of self-affiliation.¹⁶

Coming to (3) “truth,” we note that Augustine describes his youthful self as “delighting in the truth [*veritate delectabar*],” avoiding ignorance, and “not wanting to be in error.” Here he closely follows Cicero’s version of Stoicism in the speech of Cato, where knowledge is said to be one of the primary objects of natural impulse, sought by humans for its own sake (with delight as a by-product). Cicero’s contention might seem implausible given the paucity of true intellectuals in the world, but as proof, Cicero says, the Stoics cited the behavior of children: “This can be seen in the case of children, whom we may observe to delight in [*delectari*] finding something out for themselves by the use of reason, even though they gain nothing by it [...] The mental assent to what is false, the Stoics believe, is more repugnant to us than all the other things that are contrary to nature” (*Fin.* 3.17–18).

Notice, finally, that Augustine’s [4] “I fled from pain” recalls Cicero’s report (*Fin.* 3.51) that in the Stoic model freedom from pain is naturally sought (because it is a preferred indifferent). The idea here is that pain, like pleasure, is a subjective byproduct (*epigennêma*; Seneca: *accessio, hoc supervenit*¹⁷) of an objective condition in the animal; it is given by nature as a warning (*admonitio*) that one is wounded or ill (Seneca, *Ep.* 78.7–8). Elsewhere in the *Confessions* Augustine endorses the “by-product” account, asserting that pleasure is a “companion” of healthy states.¹⁸ And in *Against Faustus*, he claims that humans and other animals flee pain because they value their self-preservation: “even wild animals flee pain, fear death, and avoid, with as much speed as they can, whatever can sunder the arrangement of their limbs and divide the coupling of flesh and spirit from their harmonious composition, for they [i.e. wild animals], too, feed and cherish their flesh. For [*enim*] no one hates his own flesh.”¹⁹ It is the desire for self-preservation, and not the pursuit of pleasure, that he calls a “law of nature” (*naturae lex*).²⁰ So Augustine’s claim in *Confessions* 1.20.31 that he fled pain should be taken to mean that he avoided pain because pain betokens unhealthy states.

Maturation of self-affiliation: social bonds

When Augustine recounts his adolescence in Books 2–6 of the *Confessions*, we find evidence that he has adopted not only the Stoic account of self-preservation for the individual, but also the idea that sociability is an outgrowth of self-affiliation. According to the Stoic accounts in Cicero and Hierocles, we love others because we love ourselves. Self-affiliation, also known as self-love²¹ (hence “love” means the disposition to take care of someone), is instinctively extended first of all to one’s own children, who literally are part of oneself via reproductive inheritance. Augustine signals his acceptance of this kind of account when alluding to the unplanned pregnancy that arose while he was living with his girlfriend. His observation (at *Conf.* 4.2.2) that when a child is born, it compels its parents to love it (... *quamvis iam nata [proles] cogat se diligere*) presents his particular affection for his son Adeodatus as an instance of a general, law-like feature of human reproduction, echoing Cicero’s report of the Stoic assertion that we are driven by nature to love those whom we have generated (*apparet a natura ipsa ut eos quos genuerimus amemus impelli*). Cicero’s statement forms part of a larger argument that human beings are social animals:

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They [the Stoics] think it is important to understand that nature engenders parents' love for their children ... Even among animals Nature's power can be observed; when we see the effort they spend on giving birth and on rearing, we seem to be listening to the actual voice of nature. As it is evident therefore that we naturally shrink from pain, so it is clear that it is by Nature itself that we are driven to love those whom we have engendered. Hence it follows that mutual attraction [*commendatio*] between human beings is also something natural. Consequently, the mere fact that someone is a man makes it incumbent on another man not to regard him as alien ... some large animals are born to serve themselves alone, whereas ... ants, bees, and storks do certain things for the sake of others as well. Human behavior in this respect is much more closely bonded.

(Fin. 3.62–3; trans. LS 57F, amended)

Cicero claims here that the natural love of one's own biological product, one's child, entails that solidarity with all human beings is natural. It is not obvious in the passage how this follows,²² but Hierocles' complementary account of concentric familial-social circles of affectionate goodwill²³ lays out intermediate steps, and shares features with Augustine's account of human love in *Sermon* 349, which we are about to consider. Hierocles indicates that the attachment to others is derivative of the individual's self-affiliation. In his metaphorical description, the center point is one's own mind (*hégemonikon*), the first surrounding "circle" is one's body, and the following enclosures contain other people by degrees of reproductive separation. Hence children, spouse, parents, and siblings are first after oneself; these are followed by grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, and nephews and nieces. Subsequent are local neighbors, succeeded by members of one's deme, polis, and native country; the outermost circle contains all other human beings. As this account makes clear, human bonds arise from kinship, but also from proximity, or collaboration in projects of shared interest (as in the case of neighbors, or members of one's polis). The latter is the basis of friendship, defined as "sharing in the affairs of life" (Diog. Laert. 7.124). Doubtless we are meant to understand that these sources of affiliation overlap: proximity and collaboration typically supervene on family ties, and the possibility of shared interests requires some biological commonality (minimally, being of the same species).

In *Sermon* 349, we find Augustine not only concurring with Cicero's claim that human beings are like other animals in naturally loving their children, but also naming objects of human love that correspond to those enumerated by Hierocles:²⁴ children, wife, parents, siblings, relatives, and neighbors:

It's absolutely right for you to love [*diligere*] your wives, to love your children, to love your friends, to love your fellow citizens with human charity [*charitas*²⁵]. All these names, you see, imply a bond of relationship [*necessitudinis vinculum*], and the glue, so to say, of charity. But you will observe that this sort of charity can be found also among the godless, that is, among pagans [...]. Which of them, after all, does not naturally love wife, children, brothers, neighbors, relations, friends, etc.? So this kind of charity is human. So if anyone is affected by such harshness [*crudelitate*] that he loses even the human feeling of love [*humanum dilectionis affectum*], and doesn't love [*non amet*] his children, doesn't love his wife, he isn't fit even to be counted among human beings. A man who loves his children is not thereby particularly praiseworthy; but one who does not love his children is certainly blameworthy, I mean, he should observe with whom he ought to have this kind of love [*dilectio*] in

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common; even wild beasts love [*amant*] their children; adders love their children; tigers love their children; lions love their children. There is no wild creature, surely, that doesn't gently coo or purr over its young. I mean, while it may terrify human beings, it cherishes [*fovet*] its young [...]. So a man who doesn't love [*amat*] his children is worse than a lion. These are human sentiments [*humana sunt ista*], and they are lawful.

(Serm. 349.2; cf. 349.7; trans. Hill 1990–97, amended)

The term “lawful” here recalls Musonius Rufus’ use of the same term to refer to the Stoic ethical category “proper function” in his *Discourse* 12 on family relations, a point to which we shall return below. At the moment we should attend to Augustine’s assertion that “one who does not love his children is certainly blameworthy.” This recalls the Stoic contention that our capacity to know that we are social animals (thanks to human conceptual ability) is the source of a duty to extend affiliation to others: we ought to take care of one another, even when this entails hardship.²⁶

Now Augustine’s endorsement of “human love” in *Sermon* 349, with its similarities to Stoic accounts of social affiliation, helps us to solve a riddle about the *Confessions*. Despite the fact that he consistently presents his relationship with his “concubine” as merely a convenient arrangement for sex,²⁷ he describes his definitive separation from her in wrenching terms. “The woman with whom I habitually slept was torn away from my side because she was a hindrance to my [arranged] marriage. My heart which was deeply attached was cut [*concisum*] and wounded, and left a trail of blood” (*Conf.* 6.15.25). At first this seems odd in the context of the *Confessions*. This woman’s educational level was undoubtedly vastly inferior to his own, so he was unable to converse with her about the things that mattered to him: philosophical questions about the nature of God and God’s role in the cosmos, ethical theory, and high culture. Given this disparity, we could not describe the relationship as a romance, and Augustine makes clear that it was nothing like his intense intellectual friendships with Alypius, Nebridius, and Simplicianus, which complemented his spiritual quest. Yet it is these friendships that he considered most determinative of his identity at the time he wrote the *Confessions* – they were part of his spiritual quest, which culminated in the discovery of Platonic metaphysics. Why, then, should he present this sexual partnership as an integration of this woman into himself, conceiving of his loss of her as a cutting-off of part of his heart or self?

Apparently it is because of Augustine’s debt to the Stoic theory of social *oikeiōsis*. His presentation makes sense if we consider that although she was not an intellectual peer, she was a “friend” according to the specifically Stoic definition of friendship as preserved in Greek sources and in Seneca. As we have seen, friendship is said to be a sharing in the affairs of life; the sources indicate that these “affairs” include such mundane things as eating together, sitting next to each other in the theater, or generally just being in the same situation,²⁸ although only the virtuous can be “true” friends. Cicero argues that this “ordinary and commonplace” (*vulgaris et mediocris*) kind of friendship is a form of natural self-affiliation (*conciliatio*), an affinity for what is akin to oneself.²⁹ So Augustine is telling us that by having a child with this woman and sharing in the activities of a household for eleven or more years³⁰ he had caused her to become like part of himself, because appropriation occurs naturally when we share the activities that make up our life as social animals. Moreover, given what he says in *Sermon* 349 about human love, he likely thinks that he would have been guilty of “harshness” (*crudelitas*) had he not felt the affection for her that accompanies familial relationships.

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This reading is corroborated by the presence of the affiliation motif in his analysis of his bond with his mother, the severance of which Augustine also describes as a painful cutting or tearing (*dilaniari*).³¹ Here the etiology he gives of his woundedness is that the habit of living with her in the same household (*consuetudo simul vivendi*) – a consequence of their being biologically related – had made her life part of his (*Conf.* 9.12.30). Indeed, it looks as though in the *Confessions*, Augustine uses the terminology of “cutting” or “tearing” of the self to refer to the destruction of a bond that was formed by the appropriation of others through kinship, proximity, and/or collaboration in projects of shared interest.

Augustine’s self-critiques: distorted impulses, social immaturity, failures in “proper functions”

We have seen evidence that Augustine adopted Stoic theories of personal and social *oikeiōsis*. But two puzzles arise when we consider how his basic acceptance of these models coheres with his moral self-evaluations in the *Confessions*.

The first question concerns his assessment of babyhood and childhood. On the one hand, Augustine presents himself as a typical baby and young child, with the natural impulses proper to his species, as we saw above. But he claims elsewhere in *Confessions* 1 that he was innately perverse, driven to do many actions that were self-destructive and injurious to social relationships. Exactly how can *natural* impulses give rise to actions that do not conform to the *natural* laws of self-affiliation and sociability?

A second riddle concerns his adolescent years. Augustine shows in the case of his girlfriend that he thinks it is possible to have natural or “human” loves that arise out of relationships that are ethically unsound. His moral evaluation of the core acts that comprised his concubinage is entirely negative. This raises the question: Precisely how, in his account, can *natural* love arise out of relationships or as a result of actions that are morally *wrong*, within a normative theory that defines *ethical behavior* as following *natural* laws?³²

These are the questions we must now address, beginning with a consideration of Augustine’s critique of his babyhood and childhood.

The argument of *Confessions* 1 as a whole is that baby Augustine’s pre-rational natural impulses, though oriented toward the right objects for a human being (1.20.31), lacked the self-modulation found in healthy animals. They were “excessive,” seeking more than his nature required for self-maintenance and development, and thus with the emergence of moral accountability later in childhood, he became immoderate and unjust. Augustine the adult author presents his evidence as empirical, and not limited to his own case. Toddlers generally are “greedy” (*plorans*) for unnecessary food and adulation, even at the expense of other babies who do in fact need food and attention (1.7.11). Moreover, these traits in babies are not passing or unimportant, but indicative of raw human nature, since adults do the same kinds of things in adult contexts.³³ The observations about babies are intended to serve his *modus tollens* argument: if there were not congenital psychological distortions in humans, then we would not need to discipline toddlers; but we do, so there are (1.7.11). Augustine is doing three things in *Confessions* 1.20.31 and 1.7.11, then. First, he is agreeing with the Stoics rather than the Epicureans, presenting a model in which babies are fundamentally oriented toward what supports life (nutrients and human society) rather than toward pleasure. Second, he is arguing that this natural orientation is now excessive, and that the overindulgence is counter-productive for one’s nature, which shows that the natural orientation must have been damaged,³⁴ something the Stoics failed to notice. Third, he is showing that the emergence of natural sociability is marred by competitiveness and jealousy resulting from individuals’ excessive desire for the natural objects.

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This distortion of natural impulse apparently has as its basis a malfunction in pre-rational cognition. Recall that Augustine indicated in *Confessions* 1.20.31 that the good and natural desire for self-preservation depends upon the self-perception afforded by the interior sense. Here he suggests that the emergence of proprioception coincides with the beginning of domineering self-assertion.³⁵ Evidently he thinks that the sense of self allows for the erroneous perception that self is more important than it actually is.

So we have the answer to our question, how can natural impulses give rise to actions that do not conform to natural laws? Psychosomatic damage to the human organism skewed its non-rational perception, and consequently its natural impulses become overly acquisitive; this vitiation has been passed down through generations via human reproduction, and so is innate. Hence the impulses humans have “by nature” (that is, from birth) are not normatively natural.

Answering our other query, about natural bonds that are somehow unethical, demands prior understanding of how human intellectual development is supposed to guide maturation in the Stoic schema. Specifically, it depends upon the distinction between unreflectively acting upon natural impulses, and intentionally living in harmony with nature (one's own nature and universal Nature, the latter being equivalent to the providential will of God).³⁶ The possibility of transitioning to the second mode of life arises once reason has become “completed” at about age fourteen.³⁷ (If Augustine's sources did not report exact age demarcations, they did speak of concept formation beginning some time after the *infans* stage, and described the subsequent development of analogical and inferential skills.³⁸) So adolescents can, in principle, become adept at discerning the regular patterns in the natural world – the general providential laws by which God administers the cosmos – and in the rational conduct of virtuous people (Cicero, *Fin.* 3.21). Because adolescents can thus recognize that certain kinds of acts in general tend to contribute to human well-being considered both individually and collectively, they become able to perform “proper functions” (*kathêkonta, officia*). A proper function is an action that has a reasonable justification (*eulogos apologia, probabilis ratio*) because it is an activity in itself (*auto*) adapted to natural constitutions (Diog. Laert. 7.107; Stob. 2.7.8; *Fin.* 3.58). Wisdom, a subsequent achievement, can in principle be attained at an advanced age, though it rarely is (Seneca, *Ep.* 124.12). Sages have stable dispositions to perform “right actions” (*katorthômata, facta recta*); these are known as “perfect” proper functions because they are suited to the particular circumstances, done from the right intention, and performed with knowledge of why they are right.³⁹ (By contrast, fools can perform merely proper functions that are not right actions, doing them in circumstances wherein they ought to be omitted, or from a wrong motive.⁴⁰)

That Augustine is measuring his adolescence against this kind of developmental schema is suggested when he implies that for a long time he could not advance to acting in harmony with nature because he was not paying sufficient attention to what happens by nature. He endorses the Chrysippean model of morality as respect for one's own nature and conformity to God's “ordering” of Nature in general, in the early books of the *Confessions* (1.10.16, 3.8.15–16), asserting that the social bond which naturally ties us to God is broken when we do not conform to the divinely established and continuously administered natural order, that is, God's governance of the cosmic city.⁴¹ It therefore appears as a deficiency that “the rational, mathematical ordering of things, the order of seasons,” and the predictability of solstices, equinoxes, and eclipses, which he had read about in books by philosophers, did not become significant in his life choices until his mid- to late-twenties (*Conf.* 5.3.3–6). These cosmological items are found in Seneca's proofs for the providence of God in *On Providence* (1.2–4) and *Natural Questions* (16.1–3), and it is here that Augustine mentions Seneca by

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name. Augustine's self-diagnosis, then, is that his philosophical-theological-ethical development was retarded,⁴² slowed by his distraction in the unsophisticated religious mythologies through which he sought to justify his sexual immoderation.⁴³

The self-criticism here and in his judgment upon his concubinage, which we are about to examine, is that his insensitivity to the divinely established natural order rendered him incapable of identifying proper functions. In tandem, his social affiliations were simply spontaneous, not structured by reason. Throughout his adolescence he was not advancing toward wisdom. In relation to Seneca's three stages of progress, for instance, his teenage and twenty-something self failed to make the initial grade, because he had lust and fear of death.⁴⁴

That this is the self-diagnosis regarding his girlfriend can be seen when we compare his *Sermon* 349 about human loves, quoted above, with his treatise *On the Good of Marriage*, which he commenced immediately after finishing the *Confessions*. The distinctions Augustine makes in these works, as well as his examples and terminology, are strikingly similar to Musonius Rufus' application of the Stoic theory of proper functions to the case of sexual mores.⁴⁵ Musonius and Augustine divide the contrary to nature (*para phusin, contra naturam*)⁴⁶ from the natural or the "human," and then divide the natural or human into the "legitimate" and the "illegitimate." By "legitimate" acts (*nomima, kata nomon, legitima, licita*), they refer to the "justifiable," that which is defensible by reason.⁴⁷ Thus "legitimate" is another name for "proper function,"⁴⁸ and the "liceity" in question is conformity to the natural or common law. Sexual intercourse within marriage is given as an example of a legitimate natural action or proper function.⁴⁹ The rationale here, apparently, is that the act that can result in children should be done within a context that provides for long-term support and education of children.⁵⁰ "Illegitimate" but nonetheless minimally natural acts include a man's intercourse with a courtesan, and adultery.⁵¹ Acts such as these tend to be done "only in hiding and in secret," according to both Musonius and Augustine, because they are commonly recognizable as illegitimate.⁵²

This analysis helps us to understand why Augustine makes so much of the fact that he was not married to his long-term partner (*Conf.* 4.2.2). He thinks that his relationship with her fell short of being a proper function. His state of mind as he entered the liaison was devoid of practical wisdom (*inops prudentiae, Conf.* 4.2.2), meaning that he did not recognize which actions were defensible by reason, and which were not. Furthermore, Augustine indicates that what was right for someone of his intellectual bent was to forego marriage altogether to live the ascetic life of a philosopher (*Conf.* 6.14.24; cf. 8.11.27, 8.12.30).⁵³ So, marrying his girlfriend would not have been a right action, given his role in the providential ordering of the universe, despite the fact that marriage is in general a proper function.⁵⁴

Thus Augustine presents his adolescent self as thoughtlessly following natural impulses, rather than living intentionally in agreement with the natural order established by God. And now we know his answer to the question, how can *natural* love arise out of relationships and as a result of actions that are morally flawed, that is, not in conformity with *nature*? In the early stages of development, what natural law requires of humans is that they follow their basic God-given natural impulses, like other animals. With the emergence of mental acuity, however, what is natural for them is to use their reason to shape impulse into an art of living.⁵⁵ This means selecting natural objects with attention to context. Merely natural collaborations, pursued without regard to the relevant circumstances or without a well-reasoned motive, will not be proper or morally correct; but they will nonetheless create social-affective bonds analogous to the group affiliations experienced by non-rational social animals.

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Conclusions

Augustine's debt to Stoic psychological and ethical theory was considerable, even when he sought to improve upon the Stoics' account of the human condition. This is clear from the *Confessions*, where he employs concepts of self-affiliation, self-perception, sociability, maturation and ethical reasoning that he found in his Stoic sources. While thus believing that the Stoics' basic account of humans as rational social animals was sound, Augustine thought that their failure to see that we are born dysfunctional was naive (*De civ. D.* 19.4), and consequently he developed his own account of natural human goodness marred by inherited woundedness. But he articulated this in terms of the psychological framework he found in his Stoic sources. Accordingly he exploited Stoic psychology to move beyond the mythical Manichean explanation for the disorders that he noticed within himself and in society (*Conf.* 5.10.18), replacing that with an account of self-awareness and impulse skewed by psychosomatic damage. It is in his philosophical autobiography that Augustine most thoroughly articulated this revised Stoic anthropology, using it to understand his youthful self-perceptions, desires, successes and failures.

Notes

- 1 Abbreviations of works cited of Augustine are as follows:

Conf., *Confessiones*; *C. Faust.*, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*; *C. Iul.*, *Contra Iulianum*; *De bono coniug.*, *De bono coniugali*; *De civ. D.*, *De civitate Dei*; *De dial.*, *De dialectica*; *De doct. Christ.*, *De doctrina Christiana*; *De Gen. ad litt.*, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*; *De lib. arb.*, *De libero arbitrio*;

De mag., *De magistro*; *De quant. anim.*, *De quantitate animae*; *De serm. Dom. in monte*, *De sermone Domini in monte*; *De Trin.*, *De Trinitate*; *De vera relig.*, *De vera religione*; *Div. quaest.*, *De diversis quaestionibus*; *Enarr. in Ps.*, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*; *Ep.*, *Epistulae*; *Retract.*, *Retractationes*; *Serm.*, *Sermones*.

- 2 *Conf.* 1 = *infantia* and *pueritia* (for Augustine, the transition to *pueritia* occurs with the acquisition of speech, which is distinct from the mere imitation of words and phrases, *Conf.* 1.8.13); *Conf.* 2–6 = *adulescentia*, which begins with puberty. Young adulthood (*iuventus*) apparently begins at age 30 (*Conf.* 7.1.1). Cf. *De vera relig.* 26.48. Of the texts listed in O'Donnell 1992: 2.56, Varro in Servius on *Aen.* 5.295 is most like Augustine and Seneca in beginning from *infantia* (though the characteristics of the ages are not described with any thoroughness); cf. also Varro, *Ling.* 6.7.52.
- 3 Hultgren (1939: 237ff., 251ff.) and Holte (1962: 239) paid some attention to *oikeiōsis* theory in Augustine, but not in the *Confessions*. Hadot (1968) and O'Donovan (1980) make mention of *oikeiōsis* theory in *Conf.* 1.20.31; see note 9 below. Obviously there is Neoplatonism in the *Confessions* (metaphysics and *eros* theory; cf. Byers 2013: 49–53), but it would be an error to suppose that the text therefore contained no, or only adulterated, Stoicism. Regarding “Christian” philosophy, Augustine tells us that what he got from Christianity was the idea that grace resulting from the incarnation is medicinal for weakness of will (*Conf.* 7.19.25, 7.21.27) (NB not his basic philosophical psychology or metaphysics). On Stoicism in the later books of the *Conf.*, see Byers 2013: 23–54, 78, 153, 172–206; Ekenberg 2014: 30–1, 35–6; O'Daly 1981.
- 4 In *Conf.* 6.16.26, Augustine reports having discussed *de finibus bonorum et malorum* with his friends. This is either a reference to Cicero's work (cf. *De civ. D.* 9.4), or to Varro's *De philosophia* (cf. *De civ. D.* 19.1).
- 5 E.g. Varro's *De philosophia*; Cicero's *Fat.*, lost portion; see Courcelle 1969: 192–4 n. 201, Solignac 1958, and Betagh 2010: 37 on Augustine's use of other doxographies.
- 6 *C. Faust.* 21.5 (cf. Cicero, *Fin.* 3.4.16; Seneca, *Ep.* 121.14–17, 121.21, 121.24). Augustine here repeats Ephesians 5:29 (“No one hates his own flesh”), but uses technical terminology from Stoicism (per Cicero and Seneca) to explain it. For “rational mortal animal,” see e.g. *De quant. anim.* 35.47; *De mag.* 8; *De dial.* 9.17; *De civ. D.* 8.4, 9.13, 16.8; *De Trin.* 7.4, 15.7; *Serm.* 358.3; *Enarr. in Ps.* 29.2.2; *De serm. Dom. in monte* 2.51; cf. Cicero, *Acad.* 2 (= *Lucullus*). 7.21; Seneca, *Ep.* 58.14, 41.8.
- 7 *C. Faust.* 21.7; cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 121.10–17 (*constitutio* for *sustasis*); Cicero, *Fin.* 3.5.16 (*status*).
- 8 *De Trin.* 14.14.18. Cf. *De civ. D.* 19.4.

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- 9 “tunc ... meamque incolunitatem ... curae habebam, custodiebam interiore sensu integritatem sensuum meorum inque ipsis parvis parvarumque rerum cogitationibus veritate delectabar. falli nolebam, memoria vigebam, locutione instruebar, amicitia mulcebar, fugiebam dolorem, abiectonem, ignorantiam.” All translations of the *Conf.* are from Chadwick 1991, often amended. Hadot (1968: I 292 n. 1) flags a phrase which I have left out of my quotation: “At that time [i.e. childhood], I existed, I lived and thought, and took care for my self-preservation, *a trace of your transcendent unity whence I derived my existence.*” Hadot sees this as a “transposition of Stoicism” first articulated by Marius Victorinus. According to Hadot, Victorinus applied the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis* to God the Father, when he claimed that God “watches over” himself (*semet ipsum custodire*). From this one instance of *custodire* I do not think we can conclude that Victorinus conceived of God in terms of *oikeiōsis*. Victorinus might instead be referring to the Neoplatonic idea that the One has simple self-awareness as a self-possession (*echein heauto*), without duality of subject and object (*Enn.* III 9.9, VI 7.39). Moreover, Augustine does not use the term *custodire*, or any term for “self-preservation,” to describe God. In this phrase from *Conf.* 1.20.31, Augustine is simply making an analogy between God, who is a metaphysical unity, and mortals, which keep themselves in being by eating, avoiding predators, etc. The animal does this by following a natural inclination given to it by God. O’Donovan (1980: 50) incorrectly supposes that by “hidden unity” Augustine refers to the original human condition before the fall. He also claims that Augustine deviates from Stoic anthropology by saying that the human being has an impulse to “live in this intimacy/union [*coniunctio*] of body and soul.” But the Stoics held that the human being is a thorough mixture of body and soul; this might be plausibly described as a union. The real difference between Augustine and the Stoics is in the metaphysics of the soul: Augustine thinks the soul is immaterial, the Stoics think it is material. But that is irrelevant to *oikeiōsis* as a psychological theory.
- 10 Seneca, *Ep.* 82.15, 121.17, 121.20–1; Cicero, *Off.* 1.4.12.
- 11 In their claims about the natural goal of human life, Stoics and Epicureans both cited the behavior of babies, who, like wild animals, were thought to be “the voice of nature” because they were pre-inculturation. See e.g. *Fin.* 1.9.30, 2.10.31–2; Brunschwig 1986: 118–29 *passim*.
- 12 As Inwood (2007: 342) notes, Seneca’s point here is that even the hedonist must admit that pleasure is sought for the sake of self, i.e. there is a more fundamental orientation to one’s constitution.
- 13 Similarly for static pleasure (see note 12).
- 14 *Fin.* 3.5.16; Seneca, *Ep.* 121.11–14. The idea here is that activities such as avoiding a threat or pursuing food require awareness that a threat is a threat to oneself and that food is food for oneself, which requires comparison of objects sensed to one’s own constitution. Brittain (2002: 263ff.) speaks of “quasi-concepts.” “Constitution” means its ruling element (*hēgemonikon*, *animus*) in relation to its body (Seneca, *Ep.* 121.14). What is the continuous subject or self in this account (cf. Inwood 2007: 341–2)? It is the *hēgemonikon* together with the body, that is, the organism as a whole; the *hēgemonikon* continuously governs the body, but the manner in which it does so (the “constitution”) differs at various stages of development.
- 15 Augustine’s claim that this emerged after birth does not necessarily commit him to the Antiochean rather than the Stoic position (see Inwood 1984: 170–1; Ramelli 2009: 40). He seems to believe that perception of the particular senses and limbs is present from birth (*De lib. arb.* 2.4.10, *nesesse est etiam sentiat se videre dum videt*; cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 121.12; Hierocles, *El. Eth.* 6.1–9; and compare *Conf.* 1.6.7 to Hierocles, *El. Eth.* 5.55), while overall proprioception is activated with further development of the body.
- 16 The texts given by O’Daly 1987: 103–4 from Plotinus (and Porphyry) are not relevant, upon close inspection. E.g. when Plotinus addresses reflexivity (*Enn.* IV 5.5, 8.8, V 3.2) he is talking about the perceptive part of the soul perceiving the body, or about a perception of one’s own desire, whereas Augustine speaks of the interior sense perceiving the animal’s life or sense experiences, and does not mention reflexivity of desire. Again, *Enn.* IV 7.6 addresses the combinative function of the common sense, which Augustine does not mention. In *De lib. arb.* Augustine ascribes both perception of common sensibles and self-perception serving self-preservation to the interior sense; the mention of the common sensibles prompts O’Daly 1987: 102 to consider the relevance of an Aristotelian “common sense” (cf. Toivanen 2013: 370). More pertinent is Aetius’ report, “the Stoics called the common sense an interior touch, in accord with which we perceive ourselves” (in Stob. 1.50.6); cf. Augustine, *De quant. anim.* 33.71: “The soul attends to itself in touch ... it accepts and desires those things which are in accordance with the nature of its body.” While internal “touch” for the Stoics implies materialism (so Hierocles, *El. Eth.* 3.55), Augustine evidently retained this language of “touching” as a metaphor.
- 17 Diog. Laert. 7.85–6; Seneca, *De vita beata* 9.1–2. In *nuce*, Stoic reasoning against the cradle argument for hedonism was that it is rash to infer from, say, babies’ crying when they feel the pain of hunger,

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- that babies' natural goal is pain's contradictory (the absence of pain, static pleasure) or contrary (kinetic pleasure); for if one of these were the natural goal, then giving the hungry baby anesthesia or sugar would be putting the baby into its natural state; but in fact the baby who is merely given pleasure will die from lack of nutrients; this tells us that what the baby was crying *for* was not pleasure but nutrients; so it is a healthy condition that is the animal's goal, not pleasure. It is interesting to note in relation to this "by-product" account that contemporary neuroscience distinguishes between nociception (the registering of tissue damage) and the sensible pain that follows.
- 18 *Conf.* 10.31.44, *adiungit se tamquam pedisequa periculosa iucunditas*; cf. *De civ. D.* 19.1, *Conf.* 10.35.54, 10.35.57. *Pace Miles* 1991: 20, 37.
 - 19 *C. Faust.* 21.7 (trans. Teske 2007, amended). Cf. *C. Faust.* 21.5, 21.14; *Enarr. in Ps.* 99.5, 148.3 (compare Augustine, *utilia sumendi*, to Seneca, *Ep.* 121.21, *ad utilia impetus*); *De quant. anim.* 33.71; *De lib. arb.* 3.23.69–70.
 - 20 *C. Faust.* 21.5, cf. 21.7.
 - 21 E.g. Cicero, *Fin.* 3.5.16: *se diligere = sibi conciliari*; Seneca, *Ep.* 121.24: *conciliatio et charitas sui*; Gellius, *NA* 12.5.7; cf. Hierocles *El. Eth.* 9.1–10.
 - 22 For discussion of this problem, see e.g. Blundell 1990: 223ff.; Engberg-Pedersen 2006 – and the references therein.
 - 23 *El. Eth.* 9.1–10: *sterktikos*; Hierocles in Stob. 4.84.23: *eunoia*.
 - 24 Note that Augustine's *Serm.* 349 differs essentially from the Antiochean account in *Fin.* 5.65 (which might otherwise have been thought the source for it) insofar as it is not concerned with justice.
 - 25 Cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 121.24, *charitas*. Hence it would be a mistake to suppose that the term "charity" itself signaled a uniquely Christian and non-Stoic sense of love of neighbor.
 - 26 *Fin.* 3.19.64, 3.20.68; Hierocles in Stob. 4.84.23; cf. Vogt 2008: 103ff. *Pace Striker* 1991: 58, this is not conceived of as trading self-realization for the well-being of the group. The common good is sought *as* the rational individual's well-being, since (a) the individual is an integral part of the whole and relies upon the whole for her own thriving, and (b) it is reasonable to treat others as oneself, given that they have an identical nature as oneself.
 - 27 *Conf.* 4.2.2, 6.5.15. Augustine characterizes this relationship as temporary concubinage: the plan was always for him to marry and have his "official" family with someone else. Presumably this woman had a social status inferior to his.
 - 28 Diog. Laert. 7.124; Seneca, *Ep.* 48.2–3; Cicero, *Amic.* 5.19; Hierocles, *El. Eth.* 11.15–20.
 - 29 *Amic.* 5.19–20, 21.81, 8.27, 9.29. Cf. Weiss 2014: 135–7.
 - 30 From the age of eighteen or nineteen to twenty-nine or thirty. (Adeodatus was sixteen years old in *On the Teacher* [*Conf.* 9.6.14], written in 389 [*Retract.* 1.12], so the partnership dates to at least 373. The split occurred in 384 or 385 [*Conf.* 6.11.18].)
 - 31 *Conf.* 4.7.12 and 9.12.30 respectively; cf. *Conf.* 6.15.25.
 - 32 Augustine (cf. Diog. Laert. 7.88; Cicero, *Nat. D.* 1.14.36) thinks of ethics as conformity to natural or common law, e.g. *C. Faust.* 15.7, *De Gen. ad litt.* 9.17, *Div. quaest.* 53.1–2, *Ep.* 157.3.15.
 - 33 *Conf.* 1.19.30 *ad fin.* Wanting more than is needed is an "illegitimate desire," meaning that it exceeds the boundary of natural law (*Conf.* 1.18.29, 2.2.4, 2.3.8). It is clear that *Conf.* 1.19.30 is indebted to Seneca, *Constant.* 12.2. But in concluding that there is *congenital* disorder in humans, Augustine obviously departs from the Stoics. While Seneca sometimes says that babies are destined to wrongdoing, he attributes this to faulty societal conditioning.
 - 34 As a result of the original sin (Gen 3:6).
 - 35 *Conf.* 1.6.8 seq. Contrast *Conf.* 1.6.7 (before proprioception), where he says his impulses were perfectly moderated.
 - 36 Seneca, *Ep.* 107.7–12 (quoted by Augustine, *De civ. D.* 5.8); *Fin.* 3.45, 3.21; Diog. Laert. 7.86–8; Striker 1991: 4–7.
 - 37 In humans, repeated sensory experience leads to the formation basic concepts (*prolēpseis*) by about age seven (Aetius, 4.11.1–4; the texts in *SVF* 1.149; Jackson-McCabe 2004: 327–41). Reason is "completed" through increasingly sophisticated use of rational operations such as analogy, comparison, contrast, and inference by age fourteen (*SVF* 1.149; Diog. Laert. 7.52–4; cf. Inwood 1984: 72–4).
 - 38 Seneca, *Ep.* 120.4–5, 121.11–12; Cicero, *Fin.* 3.21, 3.33.
 - 39 Cicero, *Fin.* 3.21; Diog. Laert. 7.87, 7.109–10.
 - 40 Diog. Laert. 7.108–9; *Fin.* 3.59, 3.20, 3.58–9; Philo, *De cherubim* 14–15; White 1978: 111–15.
 - 41 *Conf.* 3.8.15. Cf. the repeated epithets for God: *ordinator rerum omnium naturalium* (*Conf.* 1.10.16, 4.3.4, cf. 3.8.16); *administrans* (*Conf.* 6.5.7, 7.1.2, 7.6.8; cf. *administrare* in Cicero, *Nat. D.* 2.30.75 seq. and

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- dioikein* in Chrysippus, Diog. Laert. 7.87); *moderator universitatis* (Conf. 7.6.10). See also the emphasis on providence in Conf. 5.6.11, 5.7.12, 5.8.14, 5.8.15, 5.9.16, 5.9.17, 5.13.23; and compare Conf. 1.10.16, 3.8.16, 6.7.12 with Cleanthes in Seneca, *Ep.* 107.11 (quoted by Augustine, *De civ. D.* 5.8).
- 42 Hence his self-accusations of impiety in failing to recognize the providential natural order, e.g. Conf. 7.6.8. Cf. his (compensatory?) insistence on God as administrator throughout the early books of the *Confessions: ordinatio rerum omnium naturalium* (Conf. 1.10.16, 4.3.4, cf. 3.8.16); *administrans* (Conf. 6.5.7, 7.1.2, 7.6.8; cf. *administrare* in Cicero, *Nat. D.* 2.30.75 seq. and *dioikein* in Chrysippus, Diog. Laert. 7.87); *moderator universitatis* (Conf. 7.6.10); Conf. 5.6.11, 5.7.12, 5.8.14, 5.8.15, 5.9.16, 5.9.17, 5.13.23; and compare Conf. 1.10.16, 3.8.16, 6.7.12 with Cleanthes in Seneca, *Ep.* 107.11 (quoted by Augustine, *De civ. D.* 5.8).
- 43 Conf. 5.10.18 on Manichaeism; cf. Conf. 4.3.4–6 on astrology. As Augustine presents it, up until this point he was not strongly motivated by a scientific/philosophical interest in cosmology or astronomy as such, but was drawn to these cosmological mythologies because he was seeking an answer to the problem of evil in the sense of an exculpatory explanation for his own doing of evil.
- 44 Seneca, *Ep.* 75.8–15; Augustine, Conf. 4.6.11 seq.
- 45 The detailed parallels suggest that Augustine knew this treatise in a Latin translation or paraphrase. On *oikeiōsis* and Musonius' account of marriage, see Gill 2000: 601–3.
- 46 Augustine, *C. Iul.* 5.17; Conf. 3.8.15; Musonius, fr. 12; cf. Cicero, *Fin.* 3.18, *Nat. D.* 2.134 seq.
- 47 Musonius: *nomizein dikaia*; cf. Augustine, *Serm.* 349.3: that which is not condemnable by reason, *ratione damnabile*.
- 48 Augustine, *De bono coniug.* 16.18: *licitum, officium*; cf. *De Gen. ad litt.* 12.15.31: *licitos mores*.
- 49 Musonius, fr. 12; Augustine, *C. Iul.* 5.17, *Serm.* 349.3, *De bono coniug.* 3.3–6.6, 16.18, Conf. 4.2.2 (*coniugium legitimum*).
- 50 Musonius, fr. 12; Conf. 4.2.2, 6.12.22.
- 51 Musonius, fr. 12; Augustine, *Serm.* 349.2–4, cf. 51.21.
- 52 Musonius, fr. 12; Augustine, *Serm.* 349.4.
- 53 For an account of how he eventually became motivated to adopt this lifestyle, see Byers 2013: 37–9, 172–85.
- 54 More generally, he thinks that marriage as a “right action” would require “divine love” in addition to “human love,” i.e. loving God more than one’s spouse, loving God in one’s spouse, and wanting one’s spouse to love God (*Serm.* 349.7).
- 55 Cf. Diog. Laert. 7.86; Varro in Augustine *De civ. D.* 19.3; Seneca, *Ep.* 121.16; Cicero, *Fin.* 3.20–1.

Further reading

C. Brittain, “Non-rational Perception in the Stoics and Augustine,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 22 (2002): 253–308, contains analysis of Augustine’s reference to “interior sense” in *City of God*. S. Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) is a study of Augustine’s engagement with Stoic epistemology, action theory and virtue ethics, with responses to Sorabji (2000). Concerning Augustine’s knowledge of Stoic theory of “sayables” (*lekta*), see A. A. Long, “Stoic Linguistics, Plato’s *Cratylus*, and Augustine’s *De Dialectica*,” in D. Frede and B. Inwood (eds), *Language and Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 36–55. G. O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), is a study focused mainly on Augustine’s engagement with Platonism, but with some reference to Stoicism. See also G. O’Daly, “Augustine on the Measurement of Time: Some Comparisons with Aristotelian and Stoic Texts,” in his *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought* (London: Variorum Publishing, 1981), pp. 171–9. J. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) is a comprehensive study of Augustine, with sections on Augustine’s knowledge of Stoic logic. R. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) contains a section on Augustine.

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