



# Comprehending the Metaphysical Framework in St. Augustine's Moral Philosophy: An Analytical Inquiry

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Received: 25<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Accepted: 27<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Published: 5<sup>th</sup> June 2024

## ABSTRACT

Saint Augustine stands as a towering figure within the history of Western philosophical thought, having crafted a unique and influential religious-philosophical paradigm that integrates diverse intellectual currents including Manichaeism, Neo-Platonism, ancient moral philosophies, and Christian theology. Through this syncretic approach, Augustine offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the human condition and the pursuit of spiritual fulfillment. Central to Augustine's philosophical edifice are a series of interwoven metaphysical concepts that form the backbone of his thought. These include the nature of divinity, the origins of the cosmos, the essence of the human soul, the problem of evil, and the nature of free will, etc. Augustine synthesizes these notions into a coherent vision of human existence, wherein individuals are guided towards a life of moral integrity and spiritual ascent. One of Augustine's distinctive insights is his conception of governance and rulership as divine mandates imbued with metaphysical significance. According to Augustine, earthly authorities are entrusted by God with the responsibility of protecting the faithful and upholding moral order within society. Consequently, he argues for the legitimacy of defensive warfare as a means of safeguarding the righteous against external threats. Furthermore, Augustine develops a nuanced epistemological stance to underpin his theological assertions, thus fortifying them against potential philosophical challenges. Through a qualitative inquiry grounded in secondary sources, this study seeks to elucidate the intricate interplay between metaphysical ideals and various aspects of human well-being, governmental legitimacy, and the moral justifications for defensive warfare. By exploring Augustine's intellectual legacy in depth, this research aims to shed light on the enduring relevance of his thought in contemporary philosophical discourse.

**Keywords:** Saint Augustine, Metaphysics, Ethics, Just War, Original Sin

## INTRODUCTION

In the history of Western philosophy, St. Augustine emerges as a seminal figure, wielding considerable influence in the delineation of theological precepts within a philosophical framework during the Patristic Period / Age of the Fathers. Augustine's philosophical oeuvre not only delineates a pathway towards theological comprehension but also furnishes a roadmap for the harmonious coalescence of individual, communal, and societal facets within the Christian paradigm. Specifically, his doctrines proffer a blueprint for the attainment of enduring felicity in the hereafter through the cultivation of a tranquil and cohesive existence in the present realm. These moral imperatives, meticulously articulated, are undergirded by metaphysical postulations, thereby necessitating a nuanced comprehension for their assimilation. Augustine's theological treatises traverse a vast terrain, spanning from the proper conduct of individual lives, informed by transcendental constructs such as the nature of God, the genesis of the universe, the divine cosmic order, the essence of the soul, the exercise of free will, the notion of sin, and the prospect of an afterlife, to the validation of societal structures and even the authorization of defensive warfare against external aggressors. This multifaceted philosophical exposition evinces a remarkable sophistication, seamlessly intertwining metaphysical speculation with insights gleaned from human psychology. Concurrently, Augustine adopts a stratagem of relegating rationality to a subordinate role, thereby advancing the notion, valorized within the annals of Western philosophy, that certain truths transcend the purview of human reason and lie beyond the realm of epistemological scrutiny (Suleman et al., 2023; Meconi & Stump. 2014, pp. 127-132).

The impetus driving this research inquiry pertains to the interrogation of the manner in which metaphysical constructs can be harnessed as interpretative tools for shaping individual conduct, legitimizing the structure and governance of the state, and delineating the parameters within which warfare may be deemed morally acceptable. Thus, the present research endeavor, titled "Comprehending the Metaphysical Framework in St. Augustine's Moral Philosophy: An Analytical Inquiry," endeavors to elucidate the strategic deployment of metaphysical principles in systematically expounding, justifying, and endorsing moral precepts governing individual comportment, the ethical obligations incumbent upon state actors and rulers, as well as the moral calculus guiding decisions concerning warfare (Suleman et al., 2024).

This qualitative inquiry, rooted in secondary sources, endeavors to elucidate the organizational underpinnings of Augustine's philosophical edifice by subjecting his seminal ruminations to

analytical scrutiny. Drawing from a corpus of his principal works, including but not limited to "City of God" and "Confessions,". At its core, this investigation is propelled by a series of overarching inquiries: What are the metaphysical tenets undergirding Augustine's philosophical schema? How do these individual tenets conjoin to furnish a moral compass for human conduct? In what manner do these interrelated concepts mutually reinforce and substantiate one another? Furthermore, what methodological stratagem has been deployed to imbue these doctrinal postulations with epistemological credence? These inquiries serve as the navigational compass guiding the trajectory of this scholarly endeavor.

### **Augustine's Life and Philosophical Background**

Saint Augustine, born in 354 AD to a pagan father, Patricius, and a devoutly Christian mother, Monica, in the city of Thagaste, located in North Africa within the confines of the Roman Empire, emerges from historical annals as a figure of profound intellectual acumen. Displaying precocious aptitude from his formative years, Augustine evinced a keen mastery of Latin grammar and vernacular discourse. It is documented that during his tertiary education, he maintained an intimate liaison with a woman, resulting in the birth of a son—a practice generally tolerated within the societal mores of the time. Concurrently, he immersed himself in the doctrines of Manichaeism, a dualistic belief system of Persian provenance, which he espoused for approximately a decade. Subsequently, his intellectual odyssey led him to encounter the tenets of Neoplatonism, facilitated by his association with the learned sage, Ambrose. Augustine's scholarly pursuits were further enriched by an engagement with the writings of the Roman luminary, Cicero, whose treatise "*Hortensius*" on ancient moral philosophy afforded him profound insights. It is noteworthy that amidst these intellectual explorations, Augustine also embarked upon a diligent study of the Scriptures, a facet of his intellectual journey that would profoundly shape his theological and philosophical perspectives (Rist, 2005, p. 27; Bray, 2015, p. 18).

At the age of thirty-two, Augustine underwent a profound religious conversion, embracing Christianity and subsequently severing ties with the woman with whom he had cohabited since the age of eighteen, yet continued to provide for their son. Following his baptism, he relocated to the city of Hippo, where he immersed himself in spiritual endeavors. It was during this period that both his beloved mother and son passed away. Augustine's ascetic devotion and scholarly acumen garnered him recognition, leading to his appointment as the spiritual leader of Hippo, a position he held until his demise in 430 AD (Mathewes, 2016, pp. 30-52; Chadwick, 2009).

Augustine's multifaceted contributions spanned the domains of theology, literature, oratory, pastoral ministry, social advocacy, and philosophy. Among his seminal works are "The City of God," "On Christian Doctrine," "On the Trinity," "On Free Choice of the Will," "On Grace and Free Will," "On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins," "On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis," "On the Work of Monks," and "On the Catechizing of the Uninstructed." Additionally, his autobiographical narrative is aptly titled "The Confessions" (Torchia, 2013).

Augustine's philosophical journey is intricately interwoven with diverse intellectual influences, including Manichaeism, Neoplatonic doctrines, and ancient moral philosophies, which collectively shaped the contours of his moral framework. His transition from skepticism to adherence to Christian theological precepts is discernible throughout his autobiographical narrative, most notably encapsulated in his seminal works "City of God" and "Confessions." The title "Confessions" itself underscores Augustine's candid acknowledgment of his transgressions, subsequent repentance, and ultimate embracement of Christianity. Within this autobiographical account, Augustine candidly recounts his erstwhile adherence to Manichaean beliefs and his involvement in carnal pursuits as acts of moral deviation. While "Confessions" serves as a chronicle of personal spiritual evolution, it concurrently delves into profound theological and philosophical inquiries, elucidating themes such as the nature of evil, the autonomy of human freewill, and the existence of the divine. Through meticulous introspection and rigorous intellectual engagement, Augustine navigates the labyrinthine complexities of ethical dilemmas and metaphysical quandaries, ultimately emerging as a formidable exponent of Christian thought (Chadwick, 2001, pp. 68-75).

In his engagement with Manichaeism, Augustine encountered a cosmological dualism positing the eternal coexistence of opposing forces, namely goodness and evil, engaged in perpetual conflict. Within this framework, the earthly realm serves as the battleground for the incessant struggle between these primal energies. Central to Manichaean doctrine is the pursuit of asceticism and the discernment of goodness as a means to transcend the entanglements of the material world (Williams, 2019, p. 18). Augustine, however, grappled with the theological quandary of reconciling the concept of eternal evil with the benevolent and omnipotent nature ascribed to God. Subsequently, Augustine's intellectual trajectory led him to encounter the philosophical tenets of Neoplatonism, particularly as expounded by Plotinus. Through the lens of Neoplatonic thought, Augustine gained insights into conceptions of divine existence and the soul's quest for union with the divine. These philosophical musings on the nature of reality and metaphysical ascent towards the divine dovetailed with his evolving theological inquiries.

Augustine's theological journey reached a pivotal juncture with his introduction to Christianity under the tutelage of St. Ambrose. This transformative encounter engendered profound shifts in Augustine's moral outlook and spiritual orientation. Synthesizing his philosophical erudition with the doctrinal precepts of Christianity, Augustine forged a unique intellectual synthesis that became emblematic of his theological contributions.

### **Metaphysical Foundations of Augustine's Moral Thought: An Analytical Exploration Individualistic Moral Framework**

Augustine's ethical framework is underpinned by a constellation of metaphysical concepts, including the existence and nature of God, the exercise of free will, the genesis of the universe, the doctrine of original sin, the problem of evil, the essence of the soul, the conception of eternal life, the dialectic of time and eternity, and the eschatological notion of the afterlife. Augmenting these metaphysical underpinnings, his moral reflections exhibit a discernible integration with the foundational principles of human psychology, thereby enriching his ethical discourse.

The notion of 'God' occupies a central position in Augustine's philosophical discourse, epitomizing the Supreme Being endowed with attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Augustine portrays God as the epitome of Supreme Good, permeating all existence and serving as the ultimate source of divine benevolence. This conception finds poignant expression in Augustine's seminal work, "Confessions," wherein he articulates the human quest for existential fulfillment in the divine realm, encapsulated in the memorable invocation, "My God! You have created us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until we find rest in you." This poignant assertion underscores the intrinsic yearning of humanity for communion with the divine, reflective of Augustine's profound theological insights. Moreover, Augustine elucidates God's role as the sustainer and ordainer of the universe, wherein all facets of existence are contingent upon divine providence for their sustenance and order. God's creative act is depicted as an *ex-nihilo* endeavor, wherein the universe, comprising both the spiritual realm inhabited by angels and the physical realm inhabited by embodied souls, emerges into being through God's unfettered omnipotence, devoid of labor, effort, or material causation. The divine creative act encompasses the orchestration of time, motion, and divine law, thereby constituting a harmonious cosmic order that reflects God's benevolent design. This theological exposition underscores Augustine's profound theological synthesis, wherein God

emerges as the quintessential architect of existence, imbued with attributes of divine justice, benevolence, and creative omnipotence (Knuuttila, 2005, p. 103; O'Daly, 2020, pp. 117-123).

The treatise "On Free Choice of the Will," expounds upon the theological notion of independent human volition. Central to this exposition is the assertion that God, in His benevolence, grants humanity the faculty of free will, thereby affording individuals the autonomy to deliberate and act according to their moral agency. Augustine contends that free will constitutes an indispensable aspect of human moral development, fostering the cultivation of virtues such as faith and love through the exercise of individual choice. Within Augustine's theological framework, God's grace is portrayed as an active force, facilitating human decision-making processes by imbuing individuals with discernment and moral insight. While God is depicted as omniscient, possessing foreknowledge of human actions and their consequences, Augustine maintains that He nevertheless accords humans the liberty to act according to their own volition. This theological stance reflects Augustine's conviction that genuine moral agency and the pursuit of goodness necessitate the existence of a realm wherein individuals are afforded the freedom to choose between virtuous and sinful courses of action. From Augustine's perspective, free will emerges as a divine gift bestowed upon humanity, indicative of God's benevolence and solicitude towards His creation. The exercise of free will, predicated on individual choice, is considered inherently valuable, as it engenders moral accountability and serves as a locus for the manifestation of human virtue. Accordingly, individuals who exercise their free will to commit virtuous acts are deemed worthy of divine favor and blessings, whereas those who succumb to sinful impulses face the prospect of divine retribution. In sum, Augustine's theological elucidation underscores the intrinsic goodness and moral significance attributed to the gift of free will, as it enables humans to navigate the moral complexities of existence and align their actions with the divine will (McDonough, 2022, p. 23; Keys, 2022, p. 27).

The theological concept of 'original sin' emerges as a salient point of inquiry within Augustine's philosophical oeuvre. Augustine grapples with the conundrum: if God is benevolent and the creator of the universe and its inhabitants, does this imply that evil also emanates from such a benevolent God? Wrestling with this theological quandary, Augustine endeavors to reconcile Christian doctrinal tenets with philosophical inquiry, presenting his elucidations through the dialogue format of "On Free Choice of the Will" wherein he engages in discourse with his interlocutor, Evodius. Evodius posits the probing question: "Is not God the cause of evil?" In response, Augustine articulates the theological position that God is not the originating source

of evil but rather permits human suffering as a consequence of sinful actions. Augustine elucidates that God, in bestowing humans with the gift of free will, endows them with the autonomy to make choices and bear the responsibility for their actions. Consequently, the existence of evil in the world is attributed not to divine causation but to the misuse of human agency. Furthermore, Augustine expounds upon the intricacies of human free will, positing that it operates autonomously through the faculties of memory and reason, devoid of predetermined divine intervention (Keys, 2022, p. 108). However, Augustine acknowledges that the inherent freedom of the human will carries within it the potential for moral transgression. This intrinsic susceptibility to sin, Augustine contends, renders humans prone to errant choices that deviate from the divine standard of absolute goodness. In essence, Augustine's exposition of original sin underscores the theological interpretation that human moral lapses stem from the deviation of free will from the divine precepts of goodness. This theological framework, rooted in Augustine's synthesis of Christian doctrine and philosophical inquiry, seeks to elucidate the existential paradox of evil within the purview of divine benevolence (Mann, 2005, pp. 40-41; Wetzel, 2012, p. 44).

The concept of the 'doctrine of the privation of evil' assumes significance within this discourse. According to this doctrine, evil is not construed as an independent ontological entity but rather as a state of deprivation or absence of goodness. Analogously, darkness is perceived not as an entity in itself but rather as the absence of light. In elucidating this theological framework, Augustine contends that evil derives its existence from the absence or privation of goodness, thereby underscoring its relational and derivative nature. This conceptualization of evil as a privation of good serves to elucidate the existential paradox of evil within the theological framework. Augustine posits that this inherent aspect of privation furnishes humans with the agency to exercise their volition and engage in virtuous actions. Thus, the problem of evil is explicated by Augustine as stemming from the deviation from goodness, wherein evil manifests as a defect resulting from the failure to uphold moral rectitude (Mann, 2005, p. 46). Augustine further attributes the prevalence of sinful choices among humans to the original sin committed by primordial ancestors, thereby implicating the inheritance of a fallen human condition characterized by moral frailty.

Augustine's doctrine of 'original sin' warrants examination within the broader framework of the interplay between free will and the problem of evil. Drawing insights from biblical narratives recounting the transgression of Adam and Eve, Augustine expounds upon the theological ramifications of their disobedience to God's command, as elucidated in his seminal works

"Confessions" and "City of God." According to scriptural accounts, God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and instructed them not to partake of the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. However, succumbing to the temptations instigated by Satan, who harbored ambitions of exalting himself above the angelic hierarchy, Adam and Eve disobeyed God's decree. Their disobedience precipitated the fall of humanity, thereby engendering manifold repercussions. The act of disobedience perpetrated by Adam and Eve incurred divine retribution, resulting in the estrangement of humanity from its erstwhile state of natural perfection and immortality. Consequently, humanity became subject to physical afflictions such as illness, hunger, and disease, along with the inexorable process of aging. Furthermore, their disobedience precipitated a rupture in the harmonious relationship between humanity and God, leading to the introduction of sin and mortality into the human condition. These punitive measures, collectively understood as the consequences of original sin, include the inheritance of sin across successive generations and the alienation from the divine presence. In sum, Augustine's doctrine of original sin delineates the theological framework through which he interprets the genesis of human moral frailty and the pervasiveness of evil in the world (Bray, 2015, pp. 147-153). By anchoring his theological exposition in biblical narratives, Augustine elucidates the theological significance of Adam and Eve's transgression, attributing to it the manifold consequences that afflict humanity as a result of their disobedience to divine authority (On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis 11.32.42, The City of God 14.16–19).

The enduring legacy of the primal disobedience committed by humanity's progenitors has persisted across successive generations, manifesting as the pervasive phenomenon known as 'original sin.' This foundational transgression, transmitted hereditarily through the union of male and female, imbues each individual with an inherent proclivity towards moral frailty, thereby shaping the trajectory of human conduct. Augustine contends that original sin constitutes the root cause of evil, engendering disruptions within the divine order ordained by God. The deleterious effects of original sin permeate every facet of human existence, exerting influence over cognitive faculties, volitional capacities, and affective states, thereby impeding the prospects for moral advancement. Central to Augustine's theological framework is the notion that redemption from the shackles of original sin necessitates a transformative encounter with divine grace, precipitated through the sacrament of baptism and the embrace of Christianity. However, Augustine emphasizes that such a conversion is not to be coerced upon individuals but rather represents a conscientious choice made in accordance with the volition of each individual. In affirming the sovereignty of human free will, Augustine underscores the



pivotal role of personal agency in the journey towards spiritual renewal and moral rectitude. Augmenting his theological exegesis with a profound appreciation for divine mercy, Augustine extols the compassionate benevolence of God, who extends healing and restoration to those who earnestly seek reconciliation with divine goodness. The efficacy of divine mercy, Augustine posits, is indispensable for nurturing the moral sanctity of individuals and fostering their spiritual ascent towards holiness. In essence, Augustine's theological elucidation underscores the dialectical interplay between human volition and divine grace, wherein the redemptive potential of humanity is actualized through the transformative agency of divine mercy (Wetzel, 2012, pp. 167-186).

Numerous conjectures have been advanced and deliberated upon concerning the origin of the souls ensnared in the travails of earthly existence resultant from original sin. Within his treatise, *On Happy Life*, Augustine propounds that individuals come into the world by virtue of divine agency, natural forces, existential compulsion, personal volition, or a confluence of these factors. While the creation of Adam's soul by divine hand is unequivocal, ambiguity shrouds the provenance of subsequent souls. Consequently, after a decade of scholarly deliberation, Augustine posits four conjectures in his work *On Free Will*. The first hypothesis posits the notion of orthodoxy (traducianism), attributing the genesis of souls to a natural process occurring at birth through the union of male and female. Conversely, the second hypothesis espouses creationism (creationism), advocating for the individual creation of each soul by divine fiat upon birth. The latter two hypotheses propose that souls preexist, with one positing divine intervention in their attachment to the corporeal form, while the other contends that souls, by their intrinsic nature, become conjoined with the body sans divine intervention. Of these conjectures, the orthodoxy hypothesis appears ostensibly tenable, positing that the transmission of Adam's original sin through successive generations (Teske, 2005, p. 122; O'Daly, 1987, pp. 15-18).

The aforementioned concepts delineate a theological framework wherein the divine entity, characterized by omnipotence and omniscience, is posited as the creator of both the cosmos and its inhabitants. Within this paradigm, the universe operates according to a discernible order, yet humans are charged not merely with passive acceptance but with the imperative to apprehend these phenomena through rational inquiry, thereby exercising their endowed faculties of reason and volition. Such endowments are construed as divine bestowals, indicative of a purposeful agency, whereby human autonomy is underscored as ethically consequential, given the prospect of accountability attendant upon error. The primordial transgression,

ascribed to Adam in tandem with Eve's complicity, engenders the narrative of original sin, epitomizing a rupture in the divine covenant precipitated by forgetfulness of the divine injunction. Thus, the genesis of evil is framed not as an autonomous entity but rather as a manifestation of human estrangement from the benevolent divine presence. Inherited as an ontological legacy from the progenitorial fall, original sin bespeaks an inherent proclivity towards moral frailty, necessitating the provision of ethical guidance in light of its enduring influence. Augustine's moral schema is predicated upon the contention that adherence to such moral precepts facilitates the realization of humanity's veritable potentiality and engenders a sustained state of felicity. Integral to this theological discourse is the recognition of divine grace as an indispensable redemptive force, requisite for the expurgation of sin's deleterious effects, which inexorably afflict humanity by virtue of their existential condition.

Henceforth, underscored within the framework of Greek and Roman philosophical traditions, Augustine's moral discourse delineates the overarching teleological objective of human felicity. However, in contradistinction to these antecedent traditions, wherein the attainment of happiness through the cultivation of cardinal virtues—namely wisdom, courage, justice, and self-discipline—is posited as feasible through individual agency, Augustine espouses an alternative thesis. Contrary to such assertions, he advances the proposition that genuine happiness is contingent solely upon divine grace, thereby repudiating the efficacy of human endeavor in securing worldly contentment. Augustine elucidates that his conversion to Christianity, catalyzed notably by personal tribulations, underscores an acknowledgment of God's salvific intervention, thereby elucidating the pivotal role of divine benevolence in the trajectory of human existence (Stump, Kretzmann, 2001: 215). In corroboration, Augustine expounds upon the dialectical interplay between human volition and divine mercy, elucidating their symbiotic influence in the course of individual life trajectories.

In Christian doctrine, Augustine emphasizes the importance of love as the fundamental moral attitude, surpassing previous philosophical views that prioritize rationality. He identifies two main forms of love: love for the divine and love for oneself. The most significant is the idea of loving God and others, seen as the highest moral virtue. According to Augustine, this concept of love leads to a transformative mindset, shifting focus away from self-centered tendencies toward seeking the greatest good. Augustine argues that love has the power to elevate morality, rejecting the idea of simply following external rules in favor of internal change. Therefore, in Augustine's moral framework, the dominance of love, seen as the epitome of mercy, is crucial for determining moral integrity.

Augustine's idea that human free will is crucial for moral responsibility deserves careful examination. Only when individuals take responsibility for their actions can we properly assess their moral correctness. Free will means having the ability to make decisions and act without being forced. Augustine's ethical framework suggests that humans have rational minds and the freedom to make their own choices, making them responsible for their behavior. With these abilities, people can distinguish between right and wrong actions. A key part of Augustine's moral philosophy is the belief that divine grace is necessary for humans to achieve moral goodness and ultimate happiness, despite their natural tendencies. This need for divine grace stems from the original sin passed down from our ancestors. While divine kindness is offered to humans, it doesn't override their free will. This means people must consciously choose to behave morally in order to receive divine mercy. Therefore, receiving divine mercy isn't a one-time event but an ongoing relationship that requires a steadfast commitment to moral behavior. Thus, Augustine argues that the idea of solely relying on oneself for moral improvement is flawed, emphasizing the need to follow divine guidance for moral progress (Copleston, 1993: 81-86).

Hence, love or mercy emerges as the judgement of what is right or wrong. It mainly helps to control human desires wisely, considering people's natural tendency to have many different cravings. These desires can be grouped into two main types:

1. Lower, earthly desires
2. Higher, heavenly aspirations In this division, the cultivation of higher aspirations is emphasized as the way to improve morally. Crucial to this process is the need to act not out of self-interest but out of selfless devotion to the divine. Such devotion involves qualities like putting others before oneself, being thankful, being reverent, and being humble.

This idea is based on the belief in a hierarchical order, which categorizes different things in existence. At the top of this hierarchy are transcendent, unchanging things like the divine essence, wisdom, mathematical truths, and absolute moral values, which are considered to have intrinsic worth and high status. In contrast, lower down are things like material possessions and physical well-being, which Augustine sees as having less importance. At the center of this hierarchy is the human being, particularly the soul, whose moral path depends on its inner desires. Focusing on higher pursuits, referred to as "Bhakti" or "Pnaivala" in Augustine's terms, is seen as a crucial step toward a fulfilling life. This Bhakti consists of three parts: first,

elevating God as the most important entity imaginable; second, showing gratitude to God for being kind, even if it doesn't seem deserved; and third, acknowledging personal wrongs and earnestly asking for God's help to be freed from them (Williams, 2019: 13-14).

Given these explanations, it becomes clear that Augustine's ethical framework has a purposeful direction. He believes that the ultimate goal of human life is to find happiness, which is achieved by being united with the divine in the afterlife. This leads to the central argument that pleasures experienced in earthly life are temporary and incomplete, highlighting the need for people to focus on seeking lasting and perfect satisfaction. At the core of this belief is the importance of loving God above all else, seen as the most crucial command. Therefore, the moral actions of people driven by strong devotion to God are seen as inherently noble. On the other hand, any moral behavior that lacks genuine spiritual devotion is considered to have little real value, merely pretending to care about heavenly matters.

### **Ethical Constructs in Social and Political Contexts**

Augustine's social and political philosophy derives from Christian theological precepts, informed by his engagement with antecedent philosophical traditions. Rooted in theological tenets, his discourse encompasses themes such as the inherent sinfulness of humanity, the existence of evil, the exercise of free will, and the indispensable role of both the state and the church. Central to Augustine's conception is the notion that nations and governments are divine endowments, embodiments of divine justice and mercy. Nations, transient abodes for human existence, serve as conduits for communion with the divine and avenues for spiritual progression, while governments fulfill essential functions in maintaining societal order. Governments, entrusted with the task of curbing unrighteous behavior and quelling discord through punitive measures, are instrumental in safeguarding the peace and well-being of the righteous. Augustine underscores the imperative for rulers and governmental authorities to function as instruments for the restoration of divine order, particularly in instances where human transgressions disrupt the ordained harmony established by God. Thus, rulers and their agents are vested with the authority to administer retribution against wrongdoers, thereby aligning governmental activities with divine providence. In essence, Augustine posits that governmental institutions and their operations are integral components of God's overarching divine plan, entrusted with the imperative of upholding moral rectitude and preserving societal equilibrium (Corey, & Charles, 2011: 76).

The governmental apparatus is indispensable in regulating society and fostering tranquility, yet the collaboration with religious institutions is imperative for the efficacious execution of this endeavor. Consequently, governments, guided by the counsel of religious bodies, endeavor to cultivate a societal ethos aligned with the divine will as the progenitor of the cosmos. Accordingly, governmental actions are directed towards promulgating laws and norms conducive to the cultivation of moral conduct among citizens. However, the government must abstain from encroaching upon the domain of religious institutions, restricting its interventions solely to secular affairs devoid of spiritual or doctrinal implications. It is underscored that the stability of government and nation hinges upon the incorporation of religious precepts and guidance. Particularly salient is the recognition that excessive governmental overreach in societal regulation can precipitate its own demise, thereby necessitating a collaborative partnership with religious entities to uphold moral rectitude and ensure societal harmony (Meconi, 2021: 87, & Gorry, 2011: 7).

In accordance with the conception that the government functions as an instrument for guiding society in accordance with divine precepts, it is incumbent upon rulers to prioritize the safeguarding of the populace under their jurisdiction. Central to this mandate is the assurance of a just and secure existence through the maintenance of law and order, thereby affording protection to the virtuous from the transgressions of the unjust. Consequently, it is imperative to ensure that the legislative framework of the state adheres to the dictates of divine law. Moreover, the state assumes the responsibility of shielding its citizenry from the incursions of foreign entities ignorant of God's purpose, thus justifying its authorization to engage in warfare under judicious circumstances (Mattox, 2006: 48-52). However, warfare is not to be pursued unjustly or for the purpose of subjugating others; rather, it must be conducted with due regard for ethical principles. Individuals aspiring to receive divine grace and live in accordance with justice must remain cognizant of the injustices and aggressions perpetrated by foreign nations and be prepared to confront such challenges. Augmenting this perspective, Augustine asserts the inevitability of warfare within human society, positing it as a necessary mechanism for sanctioning wrongdoers and reforming corrupt nations. The ultimate objective of warfare, according to Augustine, is the establishment of a tranquil and prosperous society conducive to human flourishing (Syse, & Reichberg, 2007: 35-38). Numerous texts and epistles authored by Augustine expound upon this thematic terrain, exemplifying his doctrinal stance. For example, in *Answers to the Petilian*, *The Donatist*, *Bishop of Cirta*, *Reply to Faustus the Manichean*, *To*

Marcellinus (138), To Boniface (189), Questions on the Heptateuch, To Darius (222). The City of God, On Free Choice of the Will are the prominent.

Grounded in the exposition of aforementioned principles, St. Augustine is credited with the formulation of the doctrine of just war. It is noteworthy, however, that antecedent scholars such as the Roman philosopher Cicero and St. Ambrose have also made contributions to this discourse. Nevertheless, the attribution of formalizing the concept of just war accrues to Augustine. War, construed as a necessary recourse to maintain justice and morality within a world inhabited by fallen humanity as a consequence of Adam's sin, is conceptualized as a 'necessary evil' — a means to uphold justice and safeguard the innocent.

The paradoxical nature of justifying war, ostensibly classified as an evil, arises from its inherent association with human sins such as pride, avarice, and lust. However, its justification is predicated upon its deployment for the protection and redress of injustices inflicted upon the vulnerable, as well as for the punishment and reformation of those perpetrating injustice. Thus, war, while acknowledged as intrinsically tainted by human transgressions, assumes legitimacy when undertaken in defense of the oppressed and in pursuit of rectitude. In this regard, Augustine emerges as the harbinger of a well-defined framework delineating the concept of 'war for Christian justice'.

### **Incorporation of Metaphysical Tenets into the Intellectual Sphere**

Augustine employs a strategic approach, bolstering his moral theory with a robust foundation in metaphysical principles to fortify it against the scrutiny of philosophical rationality. He delineates a taxonomy of knowledge comprising cognition / sensory perception, rationality, and wisdom, each serving distinct epistemic functions. Cognition, characterized as the most rudimentary form of knowledge shared by both humans and animals, occupies the lowest rung in this hierarchy. Reason, a faculty unique to humans, operates by analyzing and synthesizing sensory data, thereby transcending mere cognition. Nonetheless, knowledge derived from sensory perceptions is deemed inadequate for apprehending the immutable essence of reality. Beyond the realm of sensory perception, Augustine accords primacy to wisdom—a form of knowledge originating within the mind independent of sensory input. Endowed with infallibility and elevated status, wisdom represents the pinnacle of human cognition. Yet, Augustine contends that human knowledge is inherently circumscribed, fraught with limitations and prone to error. The attainment of genuine, absolute knowledge necessitates an acknowledgment of these inherent limitations and a devout quest for divine guidance.

Summarily, Augustine asserts, as evidenced in the texts *On True Religion*, *On the Trinity*, that while human reason enables a limited understanding of God, complete fulfillment and happiness remain elusive without faith (Rist, 2005:26, & Beilby, 2002: 23-25). Thus, Augustine posits the indispensability of a symbiotic relationship between knowledge and belief.

For Augustine, the dichotomy between faith and reason is not absolute; rather, they synergistically complement each other in the pursuit of ultimate truth. While reason facilitates a lucid apprehension of worldly phenomena, there exist truths that transcend the purview of reason and necessitate the apprehension afforded by faith. Particularly in matters pertaining to the divine and spiritual realm, faith emerges as the indispensable epistemic lens. Augustine encapsulates this symbiotic relationship with the maxim "I believe in order to understand", underscoring the precedence of faith in certain domains over empirical understanding. He further elucidates that faith enables one to apprehend that which is imperceptible to the senses, and the corollary gift of faith is the capacity to comprehend that which is beyond sensory perception (Copleston, 1993:52-67).

A fundamental tenet within Augustine's philosophical corpus is the doctrine of divine illumination, which underscores the notion that human understanding is contingent upon divine intervention. Augustine posits that true knowledge emanates from God, who serves as the ultimate source of enlightenment. While humans possess cognitive faculties for acquiring knowledge, their efficacy is inherently circumscribed. Divine agency, therefore, plays a pivotal role in facilitating human understanding, rendering it functional through the mechanism of divine illumination. This process enables individuals to apprehend transcendent truths, augmenting rather than supplanting human wisdom and knowledge. The symbiotic relationship between divine illumination and human intelligence underscores the interdependence of these two faculties. Human knowledge, Augustine contends, is not solely the product of individual or collective human endeavor but is made feasible through divine assistance. The act of illumination is attributed to God's boundless love for humanity, facilitating communication with individuals and guiding them towards truth. Analogously, just as objects obscured in darkness become perceptible to the senses in the light of the sun, divine illumination enables the human mind to apprehend truths beyond the purview of sensory perception (Matthews, 2005: 181).

Augustine's discourse concerning the inherent limitations of human reason unveils a profound epistemological framework, wherein reason unaided by divine illumination proves inadequate to apprehend the intricacies of his theological constructs. Implicit in this assertion is the recognition that Augustine's theological edifice eludes rational scrutiny in isolation, necessitating recourse to divine guidance for comprehension. The corollary proposition posits that Augustine's doctrinal postulates, shrouded in the ineffable realm of divine revelation, transcend the purview of unaided reason, rendering them impervious to rational interrogation. Consequently, human cognition is relegated to a stance of acceptance rather than comprehension, wherein individuals are enjoined to embrace Augustine's theological tenets with steadfast conviction. Augustine contends that such faith suffices to engender a virtuous life in the temporal realm and to secure transcendence in the realm of the divine posthumously (Cary, Doody, & Pafeenroth, 2010: 23-25). In this vein, Augustine's philosophical enterprise assumes the character of theological philosophy, wherein theological precepts intertwine with philosophical inquiry, precluding neat categorization as distinct and pure philosophy.

## CONCLUSION

In a meticulous exploration of St. Augustine's metaphysical framework within his moral philosophy, the article illuminates a rich tapestry of theological insights and philosophical reflections. Augustine's profound intellectual contributions, rooted in his theological synthesis and philosophical inquiry, offer invaluable insights into the intricate interplay between metaphysical constructs and ethical imperatives. Central to Augustine's moral thought is the theological concept of free will, underscoring the moral agency of individuals in navigating existence. His elucidation of original sin as a hereditary legacy highlights the existential paradox of evil, conceptualized as a privation of goodness. Augustine emphasizes divine grace as indispensable for moral development, reflecting the interplay between human volition and divine mercy. Love assumes paramount importance within Augustine's ethical framework, guiding moral conduct towards divine devotion. His hierarchical conception of desires underscores human teleology towards union with the divine. Augustine's ethics predicate on divine love and moral agency, offering a vision of human flourishing through spiritual devotion and ethical rectitude.

Augustine's ethical constructs extend to social and political contexts, emphasizing the inherent sinfulness of humanity and the collaboration between governmental and religious institutions



in fostering moral rectitude and societal equilibrium. His doctrine of just war exemplifies a nuanced approach to ethical dilemmas, aligning political endeavors with divine mandates.

Augustine employs metaphysical principles to fortify his moral theory, delineating a taxonomy of knowledge comprising cognition, reason, and wisdom. He asserts the symbiotic relationship between faith and reason, positing divine illumination as necessary for true knowledge. Augustine's discourse unveils an epistemological framework wherein human reason, unaided by divine illumination, proves inadequate for comprehending theological constructs. Implicit in Augustine's discourse is the recognition that his theological edifice transcends rational scrutiny, necessitating divine guidance for comprehension. Consequently, human cognition is relegated to acceptance rather than comprehension, engendering faith as the means to virtuous living and transcendence.

In this way, Augustine's metaphysical framework within his moral philosophy offers enduring insights into human existence, moral agency, and the quest for ultimate felicity. His synthesis of theological precepts and philosophical inquiry serves as a beacon of enlightenment, guiding humanity towards a deeper understanding of the moral fabric of existence. Through his profound inquiries, Augustine continues to offer invaluable guidance for navigating moral decision-making in governance, societal organization, and international relations.

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