

# Augustine's immanent critique of Stoicism

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## Abstract

The broad contours of Augustine's critique of Stoic virtue theory in *De civitate dei* 19.4 finds a fascinating analogue in Theodor Adorno's theory of immanent critique: Augustine 'enters' into Stoic virtue theory and criticises it from its own postulates, illustrating the striking implausibility of Stoic orthodoxy when lived out *in concreto* and the absurd, but logical, conclusions to which one is necessarily carried by Stoic ethics. Through this deconstruction, Augustine clears a space to propose his own virtue ethic. Augustine maintains that a Stoic virtue ethic fails to deliver on its promised eudaimonistic ends because it lacks a robust eschatological vision. For Augustine, the Christian faith offers a more viable virtue ethic.

**Keywords:** Augustine, *City of God*, hope, immanent critique, Stoicism, virtue ethics

While the influence, continuity and development of Stoicism in Augustine's thought have received substantial scholarly attention,<sup>1</sup> less consideration has been given to Augustine's sharp demurral from what he considers a significant limitation of Stoic virtue theory. I want to draw attention to this demurral in Augustine's thought through a reading of *De civitate dei* 19.4 in which Augustine presents an 'immanent critique' of Stoic ethics. Augustine critiques Stoic virtue ethics by entering inside the paradigm of Stoic philosophy in order to uncover 'from within' the inconsistencies and contradictions of Stoic thought, particularly by exposing the gap between Stoic theory and lived reality.

<sup>1</sup> Augustine scholarship is increasingly attuned to diverse ancient philosophical influences on Augustine's understanding of the movements of the will. In this regard, the place of Stoicism in Augustine's thought has received substantial recent attention. Sarah Byers' compelling analysis of Augustine's theology of moral motivation is one recent example of a study of Augustine's appropriation of Stoic conceptions of the will and the virtues. Her work is attentive to the influences of Cicero, Perseus, Seneca and other Stoic authors on Augustine's understanding of motivation: Sarah Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013). Byers's monograph is evidence of the rich harvest that can now be gathered in the wake of the careful labours of Brad Inwood, Marcia Colish, John Rist, and others to account for the significance of Stoicism for Augustine's theology of the will, the emotions and the place of the virtues.

## Immanent critique

Immanent critique is a hermeneutical approach associated with the Frankfurt school of critical theory, particularly with Theodor Adorno.<sup>2</sup> Despite the obvious philosophical and theoretical aspects of immanent critique, it is best understood as a *method*.<sup>3</sup> That is to say, immanent critique does not propose or defend a philosophical truth claim, but establishes itself as a dissenting voice over and against a prevailing orthodoxy. Adorno terms this a 'negative dialectic'.<sup>4</sup> Immanent critique deconstructs an ideology by demonstrating the internal contradictions and incoherency of the ideological paradigm under critique. It seeks to illustrate that, 'from within' the logic of the critiqued system, its ideology cannot live out its social, political or moral postulates. The ideology is thereby exposed as logically untenable and morally dubious. Immanent critique holds the suspect ideology up against the light of historically lived reality, forcing it to confront its insincerity. The 'metaphysics of the concrete' is the vantage point of immanent critique from whence it highlights 'the contradiction between ideology and reality'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Immanent critique is presented as the ground of all critical theory, finding its roots in Karl Marx's criticism of G. W. F. Hegel. Marx critiques Hegelian idealism for failing to deliver on its emancipatory promises. Marx's criticism is posited as an immanent critique: he adopts Hegel's idealist premises, structures, language and the emancipatory hope of a finite, temporal eschatology. Marx is, then, well positioned to deliver his decisive *coup de main*: he excoriates Hegel for failing to attend to the 'real corporeal man'. According to Marx, it is the historical human person in his 'actual, sensuous, real, finite, particular' existence that is overlooked in Hegelian idealism. Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: International, 1964), pp. 180–1. Cf. Robert J. Antonio, 'Immanent Critique as the Core of Critical Theory: Its Origins and Developments in Hegel, Marx and Contemporary Thought', *British Journal of Sociology* (1981), pp. 330–45; Andrew Buchwalter, 'Hegel, Marx, and the Concept of Immanent Critique', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29 (1991), pp. 253–79; Karin de Boer, 'Hegel's Conception of Immanent Critique: Its Sources, Extent, and Limit', in Karin de Boer and Ruth Sonderegger (eds), *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 83–100; Philip Turetzky, 'Immanent Critique', *Philosophy Today* 33 (1989), pp. 144–58.

<sup>3</sup> '[C]ritical theory is not a general theory, but is instead a method of analysis deriving from a nonpositivist epistemology.' Antonio, 'Immanent Critique', p. 332.

<sup>4</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973 [1966]). For Adorno, critique lies at the heart of philosophy already in its pre-Socratic inception. The initial posture of philosophy, explains Adorno, is 'as critique, as resistance to the expanding heteronomy . . . to convict untruth, by their own criteria' (my emphasis). Theodor Adorno, 'Why Still Philosophy?', in *Critical Method*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Antonio, 'Immanent Critique', p. 338. Cf. Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: OUP, 1947), pp. 70–91.

Theodor Adorno's *Negative Dialectic* is a *tour de force* critique of the idealist philosophical tradition (particularly in Kant, Hegel and Heidegger). It is naïve to assume (in the wake of the Reformation, Enlightenment and pervasive secularisation) that philosophy can continue its enterprise of making glib metaphysical assertions, maintains Adorno. The future of philosophy must become a fundamental posture of critique – its role is to deconstruct, to unmask the hubristic, totalising claims of onto-philosophy.<sup>6</sup> The critique of ontology is carried out by 'entering' into philosophies of Being, and 'from within' revealing both ontology's tyrannical attempts to conceptualise its object and the impoverished results of this ontology: 'Our critique of the ontological needs bring us to an immanent critique of ontology itself. We have no power over the philosophy of Being if we reject it generally, from outside, instead of taking it on its own structure – turning its force against it.'<sup>7</sup> Philosophy from now on is tasked with unmasking ontology as a futile exercise, which fails to deliver the truth of being. Adorno claims his method of 'negative dialectic', in contrast to onto-philosophy, does not attempt to construct an 'identity' between thought and being, but only to demonstrate the 'nonidentity' between thought and being – of its contradiction – and, as such, the impossibility of onto-philosophy: 'Aware that the conceptual totality is mere appearance, I have no way but to break immanently, in its own measure, through the appearance of total identity. . . . Dialectics is the consistent sense of nonidentity. It does not begin by taking a standpoint.'<sup>8</sup>

The method through which immanent critique is deployed is the adoption of an initial posture of acceptance towards the ideology under critique. By adopting 'the methodological presuppositions, substantive premises, and truth-claims of orthodoxy', the critique can proceed to dismantle the ideology under investigation by testing 'the postulates of orthodoxy by the latter's own standards of proof and accuracy'.<sup>9</sup> The critique is intended to clear the ground for subsequent positive theory. David Harvey explains that the method 'enters its object' so as to begin 'boring from within':

Upon 'entering' the theory, orthodoxy's premises and assertions are registered and certain strategic contradictions located. These contradictions are then developed according to their own logic, and

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 148–74; Brian O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> David Harvey, 'Critical Theory', *Sociological Perspectives* 33 (1990), p. 5.

at some point in this process of internal expansion, the one-sided proclamations of orthodoxy collapse as material instances and their contradictions are allowed to develop 'naturally.'<sup>10</sup>

I am using the *method* of immanent critique as a heuristic device to better understand Augustine's criticism 'from within' of Stoic virtue ethics.<sup>11</sup> The broad contours of Augustine's critique find a fascinating analogue with Adorno's theory of immanent critique: Augustine 'enters' into Stoic virtue theory and criticises it from its own postulates, illustrating the striking implausibility of Stoic orthodoxy when lived out in *concreto* and the absurd, but logical, conclusions to which one is necessarily carried by Stoic ethics. Through this deconstruction, Augustine clears a space to propose his own virtue ethic.

Augustine maintains that a Stoic virtue ethic fails to deliver on its promised eudaimonistic ends because it lacks a robust eschatological vision. For Augustine, the Christian faith offers a more viable virtue ethic. Augustine makes clear that for him, the overriding motivating principle of the moral life is the theological virtue of hope. As such, Augustine's 'immanent critique' deconstructs the limited, finite horizons of Stoic virtue theory through the application of its own logic. The space that his critique opens up allows Augustine to propose the primacy of the virtue of hope for a tenable virtue ethic.<sup>12</sup>

### Stoic eudaimonism

Contemporary virtue theory is conceived, principally, in Aristotelian terms (often with a Thomistic gloss). The touchstone for this retrieval is the publication of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* – a contemporary reappropriation of Aristotelian virtue ethics. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle held that the man of 'practical wisdom' would devote himself to the pursuit of *eudaimonia*:

Now it is thought to be a mark of a man of practical wisdom (*φρονήσεως*) to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself,

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Of course, many of the concerns of the Frankfurt school of critical theory do not apply to Augustine's engagement with Stoic thought. Indeed, at a foundational level, Augustine's Christian (and Platonic) commitments would limit his ability to endorse much of the materialist assumptions of the Frankfurt school and Marxist critique more broadly.

<sup>12</sup> I have used the English translation of the *City of God* by Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 2003). For the Latin I have used Augustine, *De civitate dei, Libri XI–XXII*, ed. B. Dombart, A. Kalb, in *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955).

not in some particular respect, e.g. about what sorts of thing conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life in general (εὖ ζῆν ὁλωσ).<sup>13</sup>

The ‘good life in general’ is the *eudaimon* life – variously understood as ‘living well’, ‘doing well’, ‘achieving one’s end’, ‘living a flourishing life’.<sup>14</sup> The *eudaimon* life cannot be (subjectively) reduced to extrinsic goods: pleasure, wealth, fame, etc. Rather, *eudaimonia* (as an objective state) is proper to the human person qua person, that is to say, *eudaimonia* ‘fulfils’ human nature – it makes a person ‘happy’ (in the most robust, full-orbed sense of the term). For Aristotle, the fulfilment proper to human nature is virtue. And so, there are intellectual and moral virtues proper to a human person, which, if realised, lead to *eudaimonia*.<sup>15</sup>

If the *eudaimon* life is the life of virtue, what of those other ‘good’ things – ordinary, extrinsic ‘good’ things of life such as health, riches and beauty? Are they to be conceived as goods as well? Such ‘life-goods’, for Aristotle, are not only unambiguously ‘good’, but they are, at times, a necessary foundation for virtue. It might be said that while ordinary bodily goods are not intrinsic to *eudaimonia*, they can be instrumental thereto. Nicholas Wolterstorff gives a helpful example: ‘If getting bifocal glasses would be good for me, it would obviously not be an intrinsic but an instrumental good; its worth for me lies entirely in the fact that bifocals will bring about the intrinsic good for me of being able to see better.’<sup>16</sup> It is fair to say that for Aristotle (and the Peripatetic tradition) the ordinary, bodily, external ‘life goods’ (what Augustine will term the ‘primary gifts of nature’) are included – ‘taken up’ – in the *eudaimon* life. The Stoics, by way of contrast, held the *eudaimon* life to be the exclusive preserve of virtue, which in no way included those extrinsic (and putatively termed) ‘goods’.

Augustine’s entry into the discussion of eudaimonism in *De civitate dei* is not, as most contemporary discussions, through the door of Aristotle’s ethics; rather, Augustine is critiquing Stoic eudaimonism. It is appropriate to read *De civitate dei* 19.4 as the articulation of two competing eudaimonistic accounts of virtue. That is to say, both Augustine and the Stoics understand the aim or goal

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.5; 1140a 25–8, trans. Jonathan Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 89.

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff remarks, ‘I judge that our term “the estimable life,” comes closer to what [Aristotle] had in mind. The *eudaimon* life is the estimable life.’ Wolterstorff, ‘Augustine’s Rejection of Eudemonism’, in *Augustine’s City of God: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), p. 151.

<sup>15</sup> The locus classicus is Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: OUP, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Wolterstorff, ‘Augustine’s Rejection of Eudemonism’, p. 151.

(*telos*) of the virtuous life to be happiness. To live a good life is to be happy; it is to achieve *eudaimonia* or 'human flourishing'.<sup>17</sup> Stoics very much identified the moral life with a *eudaimonian* life.<sup>18</sup> The only true good – the *summum bonum* – that brings happiness is the virtuous life, which consists of perfecting the cardinal virtues: justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude. Vice, then, is an impediment to *eudaimonia*. Going further than other ancient philosophers – such as the Peripatetics – the Stoics maintained that all other external desires (health, wealth and physical beauty) are neutral or, to use their preferred term, 'indifferent' (*adiaphora*). Externals do not bring happiness. Inner moral virtue alone is necessary and sufficient to achieve *eudaimonia*.<sup>19</sup>

In many ways, one might assume Augustine would find a natural ally in Stoic virtue theory. It would be easy to enumerate multiple examples where Augustine subordinates external good to internal good. However, Augustine criticises Stoic virtue theory in *De civitate dei* 19.4. The chief intellectual failing of the Stoics, maintains Augustine, is the claim to achieve happiness in this life by means of the cardinal virtues. Augustine rejects this possibility outright. He articulates at the beginning of book 19 that the task set before him is 'to make clear the great difference between their hollow realities and our hope, the hope given us by God'.<sup>20</sup> Even the torrential flow of Cicero's eloquence in the *Consolatio*, exclaims Augustine, could not mask the pain of the loss of his daughter.<sup>21</sup> This example establishes Augustine's main contention: within its own inherent logic, Stoic virtue ethics fails to offer a compelling ethic.

The argument of *De civitate dei* 19.4 is presented in three steps: first, there is evil in the body; second, there is evil in the soul; and, third, for both these reasons, the *summum bonum* cannot be found in this life. Augustine's distinction between the goods of the body and those of the soul is significant. He is entering into a vexed Stoic discussion. There was vigorous deliberation in the reception of Plato's teaching as to whether the happy life is found only in the good of the soul (*à la* the Stoics) or in both the goods of the body and the

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the classical definition of *eudaimonia*, see Gregory Vlastos, 'Happiness and Virtue in Socrates' Moral Theory', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 210 (1984), pp. 181–213; and Richard Kraut, 'Two Conceptions of Happiness', *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979), pp. 167–97.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. A. A. Long, 'Stoic Eudemonism', in *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), pp. 179–201.

<sup>19</sup> Long explains, 'The Stoics share with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus the doctrine that happiness is essentially a condition that depends upon a person's values, beliefs, desires and moral character. Where the Stoics stand alone is their claim that happiness consists solely and entirely in ethical virtue.' *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>20</sup> *Civ.* 19.1.5–6; CCSL 48: 657: *ut ab eorum rebus uanis spes nostra quid differat, quam deus nobis dedit.*

<sup>21</sup> *Civ.* 19.4.23–5; CCSL 48: 664.

good of the soul (à la Aristotle and the Peripatetics). In the preceding chapter (*De civitate dei* 19.3), Augustine related Varro's contribution to the debate: the *summum bonum* that brings happiness must be appropriate to the human person. We are not asking about the good of a tree or the good of a beast, explains Varro, but of a man. We must ask in the first place, 'What is man?' (*quid sit ipse homo*).<sup>22</sup> Clearly, the human person is both body and soul, answers Varro. Thus, a combination of goods appropriate to both body and soul is necessary to achieve happiness. The 'primary gifts of nature' (*prima naturae*) are first, and to them virtue is added, 'the art of living, the most excellent among the goods of the soul'.<sup>23</sup> Varro admits that no one can be happy who has only the primary gifts of nature; nevertheless, the ability to run, the beauty of body, great physical strength, and all such primary gifts of nature are undoubtedly to be considered goods: 'This is then the life of man which is rightly called happy – a life which enjoys virtue and the other goods of soul and body without which virtue cannot exist.'<sup>24</sup> Varro evidently follows the Peripatetics in the debate.

In contrast, the Stoics famously rejected the *prima naturae* as goods. True good can be only in the soul, and so the Stoic sage would be happy even roasting in the Bull of Phalaris.<sup>25</sup> External desires (health, wealth and natural beauty) were relegated by the Stoics to the category of 'indifferents' (*adiaphora*). Nevertheless, there were among those 'indifferents' those 'things preferred' (*ta proëgmena*) and those 'things rejected' (*ta apoproëgmena*).<sup>26</sup> For the

<sup>22</sup> Civ. 19.3.4; CCSL 48: 662.

<sup>23</sup> Civ. 19.3.24–7; CCSL 48: 662: *ac per hoc prima illa naturae propter se ipsa existimat expetenda ipsam que uirtutem, quam doctrina inserit uelut artem uiuendi, quae in animae bonis est excellentissimum bonum.*

<sup>24</sup> Civ. 19.3.41–2; CCSL 48: 663. In Civ. 19.3 Augustine quotes Varro as positively relating Antiochus of Ascalon's criticism of Stoic anthropology. Antiochus integrates the primary gifts of nature and virtue, with the latter fulfilling and completing the former. John Dillon describes Antiochus' anthropology: 'Nature provides the "primary natural objects of desire" (*ta prôta kata physin*) and the "seeds" or "sparks" of the virtues; Reason (*logos*) enables man to develop this beginning into a coherent philosophical life.' John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 72.

<sup>25</sup> The philosophically rigorous Stoic position is manifest in Cicero's description of the Stoic sage who, being burned alive inside Phalaris' bull, responds unaffected: 'How sweet; how indifferent I am to this!' (*Tusculan Disputations* 2.7.17).

<sup>26</sup> Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, p. 72; Joseph M. Bryant, *Moral Codes and Social Structure in Ancient Greece: A Sociology of Greek Ethics from Homer to the Epicureans and Stoics*, SUNY Series in the Sociology of Culture (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 434. Augustine does not think that the Stoics really even believe that the *prima naturae* are not goods, because they categorise some 'indifferents' as 'things preferred' (*ta proëgmena*), thereby demonstrating they have value. Therefore, the Stoics are being disingenuous, and, in reality, share the same position as the Peripatetics and Platonists,

Stoics, the indifferents 'to be preferred' (*ta proêgmena*), included especially the primary gifts of nature. These *proêgmena* could be considered relative goods, although they were certainly not to be included in the *telos* of the *summum bonum*.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, *apoproêgmena*, such as physical pain, are not really evil (because nothing external to the soul can be evil), but are, nevertheless, to be avoided whenever possible without injury to virtue.<sup>28</sup>

Augustine's 'immanent critique' enters into the heart of the debate between the Stoics and the Peripatetics. Six times in *De civitate dei* 19.4, Augustine refers to the 'primary gifts of nature' (*prima naturae*) around which the debate turned.<sup>29</sup> Like the Stoics, he undermines the claim that happiness is found in the flourishing of the *prima naturae*: '[W]hen, where, how can the 'primary gifts of nature', so called, be in so flourishing a state in this life that they escape being tossed about at the mercy of chance and accident?'<sup>30</sup> Here Augustine seems initially to side with the Stoics in the debate. In a fashion not unlike Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, Augustine notes

insists Augustine, because they share the common demarcation between temporal good and eternal good: 'Now Cicero, in his work *On the Ends of Good and Evil*, proves that the opposition between Stoics and Platonists (or Peripatetics) is really a quarrel about words rather than things. For example, the Stoics refuse to give the name "goods" to what they call material and external "advantages". According to them there is no "good" for man except virtue, meaning the art of the good life, which exists only in the soul. The other side called them "goods", in conformity with the normal usage, but they regarded them as goods of small or infinitesimal value in comparison with virtue, the practice of the good life. The result is that both sides attach the same value to "goods" or "advantages", in spite of the different terminology; the Stoics are only indulging in the pleasure of linguistic innovation on this point' (*Civ.* 9.4). Cf. Rachel Barney, 'A Puzzle in Stoic Ethics', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 24 (2003), pp. 303–40; Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation*, pp. 83–8.

<sup>27</sup> The chief difference between the Stoic and the Peripatetic valuation of the *prima naturae* lies in whether or not these primary gifts of nature are to be rejected after one has achieved inner virtue or whether they are taken up in the virtuous life. Dillon explains, 'The Stoics . . . held that these "first things" were only the basis laid down by Nature for the human being by which he should ascend to a comprehension of Virtue, which for the adult then becomes the *telos*. Antiochus agreed, but with the proviso that Nature does not intend the lowest "first things" to be then rejected.' Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> Cicero relates, 'Those very philosophers who deny that pain is an evil do not generally go so far as to say that it is sweet to be tortured; they say that it is unpleasing, difficult, hateful, contrary to nature, and yet that it is not an evil' (*Tusculan Disputations* 2.7.17).

<sup>29</sup> *Civ.* 19.4.25, 34–5, 40, 58–9, 62, 153.

<sup>30</sup> *Civ.* 19.4.25–7; CCSL 48: 664: *ea quippe, quae dicuntur prima naturae, quando, ubi, quo modo tam bene se habere in hac uita possunt, ut non sub incertis casibus fluctuent?*



the many evils of this life that can unexpectedly befall anyone.<sup>31</sup> In the first place, there are evils in the primary gifts of nature, the body: amputation, paralysis, ugliness, sickness and weakness. Augustine asks, 'What if a man's spine is so curved as to bring his hands to the ground, turning the man into a virtual quadruped?' Such privations of 'all beauty and grace of body' are an evil and, for this reason, the Stoics are right not to include the *prima naturae* of the body in the *summum bonum*.

Not only are there evils in the *prima naturae* of the body, but even in the mind: 'Then what about the primary goods, so called, of the mind itself?'<sup>32</sup> Here too evils are ubiquitous, Augustine continues. Consider blindness, deafness and insanity: 'Crazy people do many incongruous things, for the most part alien to their intentions and characters . . . and when we think about their words and actions, or see them with our eyes, we can scarcely – or possibly we cannot at all – restrain our tears.'<sup>33</sup> Such debilitating evils of mind strike at our very ability to apprehend truth. Sometimes the evils that befall our body and mind are the attacks of malevolent demons, who make our mind and body playthings of their malignant designs. Our corporeal limitations and challenges at times directly affect our internal disposition. The Book of Wisdom, reminds Augustine, describes the soul as weighed down by the perishable body: '[I]s anyone so confident that such a disaster cannot happen to a wise man in this life?'<sup>34</sup> One cannot say, even of the sage, that this life brings happiness.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Byers notes, 'Augustine never questions the legitimacy of Seneca's assessment of what may happen to us. His graphic list of the continual threats and disappointments that characterise human life in *City of God* 19.4–8 evokes Seneca's catalogue of potential disasters and disappointments: the death of oneself and one's friends; physical pain; betrayal by professional associates; disappointment in one's spouse; being trapped by the fiscal responsibilities that follow from parenthood; the corruption of friendship through malice or lies; hunger; poverty; and disease.' Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation*, p. 155.

<sup>32</sup> Civ. 19.4.39–41; CCSL 48: 665: *Quid ipsius animi primigenia quae appellatur bona, ubi duo prima ponunt propter comprehensionem perceptionem que ueritatis sensum et intellectum?*

<sup>33</sup> Civ. 19.4.44–8; CCSL 48: 665.

<sup>34</sup> Civ. 19.4.52–3; CCSL 48: 665: *Et quis confidit hoc malum in hac vita euenire non posse sapienti?*

<sup>35</sup> Augustine's animated description of life's evils is intended, I am arguing, to establish the common ground of an 'immanent critique' by agreeing with the Stoics against the Peripatetics that happiness cannot be found in the primary gifts of nature. However, this catalogue of bodily and mental evils is also meant to unsettle glib assertions of the Stoic sage's *apatheia* (or equanimity of soul) no matter the external circumstances.

### Augustine's immanent critique of Stoic eudaimonism

Up to this point, Augustine has tracked with a Stoic virtue ethic. He agrees with them that the *summum bonum* cannot be found in the primary gifts of nature, because, at best, we hold such goods tenuously; at any moment evil can befall both body and mind. Augustine has hereby laid the foundation for his immanent critique; provisionally accepting the philosophical presuppositions of the Stoics over and against the Peripatetics, he will now begin 'boring from within'.<sup>36</sup> He turns to ask about 'virtue itself' (*ipsa uirtus*), the most significant of human goods that are cultivated within. He reminds his Stoic interlocutor that, according to his own anthropology, virtue is not one of the external *prima naturae* that can suffer dissolution and decay.<sup>37</sup> The Stoics maintain that *eudaimonia* or 'the happy life' is achieved when the cardinal virtues – prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude – perfectly inhere in the soul. But how can this be, asks Augustine, when the cardinal virtues are, in fact, no different from the primary gifts of nature? They also are held tenuously, existing only in 'unceasing warfare with vices' and, for that matter, are not always victorious.<sup>38</sup> Augustine systematically deconstructs Stoic virtue theory, analysing in turn each of the cardinal virtues, which supposedly offer happiness, to demonstrate that, in fact, such virtue, even from a Stoic perspective, admits the presence and challenge of evil. The necessary conclusion is that happiness cannot be found in the possession of the cardinal virtues. Rather, each cardinal virtue is intelligible only in light of the vices it seeks to contain, so that after this vale of tears, such virtues will no longer be necessary.

Temperance 'bridles the lust of the flesh', explains Augustine. The desires of the flesh war against those of the spirit. We await the day when the desires of the flesh will no longer oppose those of the spirit. Nevertheless, 'in our present life', temperance is needed lest we give way to the desires of the flesh. Augustine writes, 'God forbid, then, that, so long as we are engaged in this internal strife, we should believe ourselves to have already attained that happiness, the end we desire to reach by our victory.'<sup>39</sup> The repeated charge levied against the Stoics is that they immanentise the eschaton by claiming victory in virtue when virtue is, in fact, always held tenuously and involves struggle. Pointedly, Augustine asks the Stoic sage whether he has reached 'such a height of wisdom' so as to no longer need to struggle against lust.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Cf. David Harvey, 'Critical Theory', *Sociological Perspectives* 33 (1990), p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Civ.* 19.4.62–4; CCSL 48: 665: *porro ipsa uirtus, quae non est inter prima naturae, quoniam eis postea doctrina introducente superuenit, cum sibi bonorum culmen uindicet humanorum.*

<sup>38</sup> *Civ.* 19.4.65; CCSL 48: 664: *perpetua bella cum uitiiis.*

<sup>39</sup> *Civ.* 19.4.80–2; CCSL 48: 666: *Absit ergo ut, quamdiu in hoc bello intestino sumus, iam nos beatitudinem, ad quam uincendo uolumus peruenire, adeptos esse credamus.*

<sup>40</sup> *Civ.* 19.4.83–4; CCSL 48: 666.

Prudence likewise demonstrates that in this life ‘we are in the midst of evils, or rather that evils are in us’.<sup>41</sup> Even when prudence is successful and her counsel to avail oneself of temperance in the face of evil is heeded, this does not remove evil from life, but offers (at best) one example of self-control. Justice is the virtue that gives each his due. The Stoics claim that one ought to attend to nature to discern what each is due. Again, Augustine ‘enters’ into Stoic thought to critique it ‘from within’: the substantive premise to the Stoic principle of justice is the aphorism *sequi naturam*; nature teaches the justice that each is due. Augustine traces this Stoic logic: nature proposes a hierarchy whereby the body ought to be subordinated to the soul and both body and soul subordinated to God. However, ‘from within’, Augustine points out that such rightly ordered hierarchy (such justice) is realised infrequently and then only with great difficulty: ‘Does not justice demonstrate, in performing this function, that she is still laboring at her task rather than resting after reaching its completion?’<sup>42</sup> When we look to nature as our guide we are confronted with the fact that in this life, perfect justice does not inhere in our soul, but ‘weakness’, ‘disease’ and ‘lethargy’.<sup>43</sup>

Fortitude is the clearest example indicating that the cardinal virtues cannot be equated with the *summum bonum*. After all, fortitude calls one to bear evil with patient endurance.<sup>44</sup> *Eudaimonia* cannot exist when one is forced to endure ills. Augustine knows well how the Stoic will respond: those ills are not really ills; as a Stoic sage, I am called to display *apatheia* in the face of such ‘indifferents’ (*adiaphora*). But Augustine is not convinced: ‘I am astounded at the effrontery of the Stoics in their contention that those ills are not ills at all, when they admit that if they should be so great that a wise man cannot or ought not to endure them, he is forced to put himself to death and to depart from this life.’<sup>45</sup> Augustine allows the contradiction inherent in Stoic logic to unfold naturally. Can the virtuous life, the happy life, life in union with the *summum bonum* really be so miserable that the Stoic sage is called to kill himself? But this is precisely the model set out by the great Stoic philosopher Cato the Younger. He could no longer bear with fortitude to live under Caesar’s victory. He ended the ‘happy life’, notes Augustine,

<sup>41</sup> Civ. 19.4.4.87–8; CCSL 48: 666: *ipsa nos in malis uel mala in nobis esse testator.*

<sup>42</sup> Civ. 19.4.91–6; CCSL 48: 666: *quid iustitia . . . nonne demonstrat in eo se adhuc opere laborare potius quam in huius operis iam fine requiescere?*

<sup>43</sup> Civ. 19.4.100–1; CCSL 48: 666: *quamdiu ergo nobis inest haec infirmitas, haec pestis, hic languor.*

<sup>44</sup> Civ. 19.4.103–5; CCSL 48: 666: *iam uero illa uirtus, cuius nomen est fortitudo, in quantacumque sapientia euidentissima testis est humanorum malorum, quae compellitur patientia tolerare.*

<sup>45</sup> Civ. 19.4.105–9; CCSL 48: 666: *Quae mala stoici philosophi miror qua fronte mala non esse contendant, quibus fatentur, si tanta fuerint, ut ea sapiens uel non possit uel non debeat sustinere, cogi eum mortem sibimet inferre atque ex hac uita emigrare.*

on account of 'indifferents'. Cato's fortitude evaporated in the face of evil. Augustine asks, 'How can it be that those circumstances were not evil, if they make life a misery from which a man should escape?'<sup>46</sup> Augustine deconstructs Stoic virtue ethics 'from within' by revealing the blatant and inherent contradictions of its system. The last movement of his immanent critique points to the absurd conclusions of Stoic ethics:

[T]heir 'wise man' (that is, the wise man as described by them in their amazing idiocy), even if he goes blind, deaf, and dumb, even if enfeebled in limb and tormented with pain, and the victim of every other kind of ill that could be mentioned or imagined, and thus is driven to do himself to death – that such a man would not blush to call that life of his, in the setting of all those ills, a life of happiness! What a life of bliss, that seeks the aid of death to end it!<sup>47</sup>

The Stoics are wrong to claim that the cardinal virtues – temperance, prudence, justice and fortitude – are the *summum bonum* in which happiness is found, insists Augustine; rather, they are only the highest human goods that we have in *via*.<sup>48</sup>

### Eudaimonism and hope

Stoic virtue theory, as Augustine views it, falsely claims to offer a happiness it cannot provide. In short, Augustine maintains that the absence of an eschatological vision in Stoic virtue theory means it is insufficient to secure happiness. Augustine challenges the conclusion that the sage who has perfected the cardinal virtues will be happy despite his external circumstances. Augustine repeats that the sage will not be happy, because happiness is not found in this life. In fact, each of the cardinal virtues is, in itself, demonstrative of the fact that we are not at rest, but at war.<sup>49</sup> In

<sup>46</sup> Civ. 19.4.130–1; CCSL 48: 667: *quo modo igitur mala non erant, quae uitam miseram fugiendam que faciebant?*

<sup>47</sup> Civ. 19.4.109–17; CCSL 48: 666.

<sup>48</sup> In establishing his immanent critique, Augustine initially adopts the Stoic criticism of the Peripatetics, who included the primary gifts of nature within the *summum bonum*. But now that Augustine has dismantled – 'from within' – the Stoic claim that the cardinal virtues alone constitute the happy life, he returns to the Peripatetics and asserts that, in reality, they are closer to the truth than the Stoics: '[T]hose who acknowledge such things to be evil are talking in a more tolerable fashion; the Peripatetics, for example, and the members of the Old Academy' (Civ. 19.4.132–3; CCSL 48: 667).

<sup>49</sup> Civ. 19.4.177–80; CCSL 48: 668: 'For in this state the very virtues, which are certainly the best and most useful of man's endowments here below, bear reliable witness to man's miseries in proportion to their powerful support against man's perils, hardships and sorrows.'

his critique of Stoic eudaimonism, Augustine mitigates the significance of the cardinal virtues; or rather, he situates them in their temporal context, identifying them with what the Apostle Paul calls ‘genuine piety’ (*ueram pietatem*), but not happiness.<sup>50</sup> The cardinal virtues make no claim that those who possess them will not suffer misery. Rather, their very existence claims the opposite: that ‘human life is compelled to be wretched’.<sup>51</sup> The cardinal virtues might put the sage on the road to happiness, but they have need of the theological virtues to realise their end. Augustine even asserts that the Stoics twist the cardinal virtues into ‘falsity’ when they claim happiness can be achieved through their appropriation.<sup>52</sup> The cardinal virtues are falsified by the Stoics since they fail to situate them as subordinate and penultimate to the theological virtues. For Augustine, virtue theory can deliver on its promised eudaimonism only when fulfilled by the theological virtues, particularly the virtue of hope, in which the ‘happy life’ is found.

It seems Nicholas Wolterstorff overstates the case when he argues that Augustine rejected eudaimonism *tout court*.<sup>53</sup> It is certainly true that the Stoic principle of emotional detachment (*apatheia*) was, for Augustine, inhuman and devoid of charity, particularly in its censure of compassion. Likewise, Wolterstorff is correct to point out that Augustine had no confidence in fallen human nature’s ability to achieve the equanimity of soul required of the Stoic sage. From this Wolterstorff concludes: ‘Augustine, rather than developing a distinct version of eudaimonism, broke with eudaimonism.’<sup>54</sup> However, this conclusion does not account for the underlying *ratio* of Augustine’s immanent critique of Stoicism, which is to deconstruct a particular (Stoic) account of eudaimonism in favour of his own (Christian) eudaimonism. Augustine’s constant equation of hope and happiness in *De civitate dei* 19.4 suggest that the quest for eudaimonism – the search for the happy life – is not abandoned, but transposed into a new (eschatological) key.

Augustine’s entire critique of Stoic virtue theory in *De civitate dei* 19.4 is presented within the structure of an *inclusio*, bookended with quotations from Paul’s letter to the Romans about the hope of what is to come. At

<sup>50</sup> Civ. 19.4.189; CCSL 48: 668.

<sup>51</sup> Civ. 19.4.181–5; CCSL 48: 668: *non se profitentur hoc posse, ut nullas miserias patiantur homines, in quibus sunt (neque enim mendaces sunt uerae uirtutes, ut hoc profiteantur), sed ut uita humana, quae tot et tantis huius saeculi malis esse cogitur misera.*

<sup>52</sup> Civ. 19.4.201–2; CCSL 48: 669: *hic sibi conantur falsissimam fabricare.*

<sup>53</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘Augustine’s Rejection of Eudaimonism’, in *Augustine’s City of God: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149. See also Wolterstorff’s broader argument concerning the inadequacy of eudaimonism to offer a full-orbed account of human rights in ch. 8 of *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

the outset, Augustine makes clear that he will demonstrate that only *eternal* life is appropriately named the *summum bonum*.<sup>55</sup> For this reason the Apostle Paul teaches: 'The just man lives on the basis of faith' (cf. Rom 1:17).<sup>56</sup> Augustine writes, 'For we do not yet see our good, and hence we have to see it by believing.'<sup>57</sup> After the deconstruction of Stoic virtue theory by means of his imminent critique, Augustine concludes *De civitate dei* 19.4 by returning again to Romans. Commenting on Romans 8:24 ('It is in hope that we are saved. But when hope is seen fulfilled it is hope no longer: why should a man hope for what he already sees?'), Augustine notes that Paul is speaking to people already in possession of the cardinal virtues. The Romans whom Paul addresses possess prudence, fortitude, temperance and justice; that is to say, they had 'genuine piety'.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Paul goes on to tell them that only the theological virtue of hope brings happiness: 'As, therefore, we are saved in hope, it is in hope that we have been made happy.'<sup>59</sup> Augustine's immanent critique initially adopts the Stoic position on virtue theory. He then begins 'boring from within' to reveal the inconsistencies of the Stoic system when it is fully extended according to its own logic. In so doing, Augustine clears space to present a different eudaimonistic theory of virtue that is anchored on moorings that are more eschatologically secure.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Civ. 19.4.3–4; CCSL 48: 664: *respondebit aeternam uitam esse summum bonum*.

<sup>56</sup> Civ. 19.4.6–7; CCSL 48: 664: *Iustus ex fide uiuit*. In addition to Augustine's insistence that the cardinal virtues do not bring happiness, he also criticises the corollary implication: that happiness is the result of human effort and self-mastery rather than grace. The theological virtues are an infused gift, so that the man who lives by faith receives happiness from God: '[I]t is not in our power to live rightly, unless while we believe and pray we receive help from him who has given us faith to believe that we must be helped by him' (Civ. 19.4.8–10; CCSL 48: 664). In contrast, precisely because the Stoics think happiness is found in this temporal existence, they also think that happiness is the result of 'their own effort' (*a se ipsis beatificari*; Civ. 19.4.17–18; CCSL 48: 664). Cf. Civ. 19.4.109–111; CCSL 48: 666: 'Yet so great is the stupefying arrogance of those people who imagine that they find the Ultimate Good in this life and can attain happiness by their own efforts.' (*Tantus autem superbiae stupor est in his hominibus hic se habere finem boni et a se ipsis fieri beatos putantibus*.)

<sup>57</sup> Civ. 19.4.7–8; CCSL 48: 664: *quoniam neque bonum nostrum iam uidemus, unde oportet ut credendo quaeramus*.

<sup>58</sup> Civ. 19.4.189–90; CCSL 48: 668: *qui secundum ueram pietatem uiuerent et ideo uirtutes, quas haberent, ueras haberent*.

<sup>59</sup> Civ. 19.4.193–4; CCSL 48: 668: *sicut ergo spe salui, ita spe beati facti sumus*.

<sup>60</sup> I am grateful to Daniel Ellis and Jim Fodor, colleagues and friends at St Bonaventure University, whose insight guided thinking through the contours of the argument.