

A Feminist Appraisal of Augustine

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Abstract

Employing several major lines of argument, I claim that Augustine exhibits styles of thought, literary methods and modes of inquiry that are not only accessible to feminist scholarship, but that are genuinely feminist-friendly. I first examine the *Confessions*, and then proceed with analyses of Augustine's style, a comparison of his work to that of another major thinker in the Christian tradition, an analysis of his use of the notion of unity, and a final look at *City of God*. The work of commentators such as Chadwick, Clark, McMahon and Mallard is used in order to support the argument. Augustine's standing as one of the founding Church Fathers may make it difficult for us to mention him in the same breath as the concept of "feminism."¹ Yet in our attempts to try to come to grips with thinkers as diverse as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Quine, we have frequently noticed that concepts useful to feminists are where one finds them.

Keywords

Augustine, feminism, divine love, *Confessions*, gender.

Augustine's standing as one of the founding Church Fathers may make it difficult for us to mention him in the same breath as the concept of "feminism."¹ Yet in our attempts to try to come to grips with thinkers as diverse as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Quine, we have frequently noticed that concepts useful to feminists are where one finds them.

The same may be true of Augustine, and it is here that we have to do a great deal of work, for the time period in which he wrote and lived is so far removed from ours that that alone constitutes an enormous obstacle. Add his standing within the Church canon, his troubled personal relationships to women (mentioned in the *Confessions*), and the masculinist nature of the Platonic and Plotinistic thought

¹ Augustine is commonly described in this way. See, for example, the Introduction to the Pilkington edition of *Confessions*, p. xxxv. (Augustine, *Confessions*, New York: Liveright Publishing, 1943.)

that preceded him, and one is left with a heady intellectual brew. Nonetheless, Augustine shares with a thinker such as Kierkegaard a concern for inwardness and for the personal that may, after analysis and reflection, prove useful to feminist concerns. I plan to argue that there are at least two central concepts developed by Augustine that remind us of work in other thinkers that has proved amenable to feminist concerns, or that has shown itself to be capable of amelioration for overt feminist theorizing. The two concepts have to do with the interiority of Augustine's intellectual search, and his notion of a union with the divine. In both of these I believe we can see strands of theory that move somewhat away from the more blatantly androcentric theorizing of the ancients whose work appeared before his in time and influenced him. Let us begin by an examination of these concepts in turn.

I

Augustine's *Confessions* are filled with a kind of tortured longing for knowledge of the metaphysical that marks all of his work. We sense immediately a thinker whose quest is not merely intellectual: rather, Augustine's quest is like the quest of a dying person for water. It is a search after something that will fill an immediate, essential and profoundly felt need. As Pilkington says of his thought in the Preface to a standard edition of his work, "There is in the book a wonderful combination of childlike piety and intellectual power."² Copleston, in his chapters on Augustine in his well-known history, ascribes to the thinker a similar set of traits: he notes that "Augustine did not compose purely philosophical works in our sense."³ Throughout his work we sense a thinker on a personal quest that must be fulfilled, not only for eternal salvation but for a sort of salvation within this lifetime.

If we think of Augustine's voyage in personal terms, we can note that this journey is made simultaneously on two levels: one is a level that is purely intellectual, and that in some sense mirrors or foreshadows Descartes' later voyage, for example. A second level is emotional—as indicated, Augustine needs to find the answers to his questions, and needs them in the way that we would usually more properly ascribe to bodily longings or to a certain sort of hunger. These longings, of course, stem from needs that Augustine felt with respect to his own moral growth. A passage that gives us some conception of the operation of these two paths at once occurs in Book

² *Ibid.*, p. vii.

³ Copleston, Frederick S.J., *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. II, Part I, Garden City, New York: Doubleday Image, 1962, p. 63.

VII of the *Confessions*, where he is well on the path to understanding the nature of God:

For, inquiring whence it was that I admired the beauty of bodies whether celestial or terrestrial, and what supported me in judging correctly on things mutable, and pronouncing, "This should be, this not," inquiring, then, whence I so judged, seeing I did so judge, I had found the unchangeable and true eternity of Truth, above my changeable mind. And thus, by degrees, I passed from bodies to the soul, which makes use of the senses of the body to perceive, and thence to its inward faculty . . . and from habit drew away my thoughts, withdrawing itself from the crowds of contradictory phantasms; that so it might find out that light by which it was besprinkled, when, without all doubting, it cried out, "that the unchangeable was to be preferred before the changeable" . . .⁴

This passage, with its overtly Platonic flavor, actually reminds us of some of the work of both the ancients and later thinkers. The notion of ascendancy from the body to the mind, and the notion of ascendancy from the realm of multiple embodied beauties to the concept of eternal and celestial Beauty is at once evocative of portions of the *Symposium* and the *Meditations*. The continual use of personal pronouns reinforces the notion, discussed earlier, that this is for Augustine a highly personal search: this is "my" search for "my" Truth. Thus although Augustine is drawing on a male tradition of thinkers who quest after knowledge of ultimate reality, he is doing so in a highly particularized way. We will see, at a later point, that this particularity has its tie-ins with lines of thought that might be deemed to be gynocentric.

Mallard, in his aptly-titled work *Language and Love*, also notes the way in which Augustine grapples with each religious or metaphysical question as if he were contemplating the possibility of a lover, or as if he were seeking to better relations with a lover he already had. There is the sense of a comprehension of the notion of personal betrayal in Augustine's *Confessions*, particularly in Books VII and VIII as he approaches the most difficult questions with respect to the existence of evil and its incompatibility with a God-filled metaphysics. Augustine says that he wants to "catch[] sight of home and happiness;"⁵ Mallard notes:

Likewise the nature of evil had focused for him. What he had understood so fleetingly as a boy, the burden of excessive goals and the self-destructive flight from them, now made a glimmer of sense. At least he saw that evil is not something, a part of substance, but that it is a flaw,

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, pp. 154-155.

⁵ Mallard, William, *Language and Love*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, quoted on p. 103. (quotation from *Confessions*, VII, 20, 26, trans. not noted)

a breakdown of order in the will, plus the damaging impact of that flawed will on other things. This fresh insight had vigorously renewed the love of wisdom learned from Cicero, a zeal that had flagged during nine uncertain years of Manichaeism. That is, the substantial nature of God, the guarantor of evil's nonsubstance, impressed his mind with such clarity that his ardor rose once again to pursue and contemplate the truth.⁶

Mallard employs a very careful choice of words here to get across the concept that love is what motivates Augustine, and a highly individual love at that. "Zeal" and "ardor" are not unmarked terms, and the use of such terms reminds us of the power that motivates one who seeks in that manner. Mallard also notes Augustine's initial attempts to answer the questions that troubled him with membership in a formal religious community. Although living in a community, Augustine's quest has a flavor of the personal about it. In this sense, even if in no other, it may remind us of Kierkegaard's voyage at another point in time.⁷

Another study on the *Confessions*, Robert McMahon's *Augustine's Prayerful Ascent*, uses literary theory in order to make the point that, as was the case with Descartes' work, Augustine's efforts show a great deal of sophistication with respect to the notion of literary form. McMahon notes that we may think of the *Confessions* as an extended prayer, and he calls it a "dialogue with God."⁸ A dialogue is, of course, a dyadic conversation. Augustine sees himself as a seeker who communes with another Being, a Being who is responsive in various ways and whose responses are carefully noted.

In a sense, it might seem repetitious and unnecessary to expand upon how the notions of particularity and individuality that we see in Augustine's work are related to feminist commitments, but the lack of other tie-ins in both Augustine's work and that of the early Church fathers positively demands that we do so. The hallmarks of connectedness, focus on relationships, and lack of advertence to norms or universals that is mentioned in much contemporary feminist theory—the work of Gilligan, Chodorow and Dinnerstein, to name just a few—indicates to us that particularization is a path that is not only feminist-friendly but actually a marker of thought that is not androcentric.⁹ Following along the lines of those who have engaged in

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁷ Among Kierkegaard's works, *Philosophical Fragments* stands out for its articulation of this theme.

⁸ McMahon, Robert, *Augustine's Prayerful Ascent*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989, p. 1.

⁹ The usually-cited sources are: Gilligan, Carol, *In a Different Voice*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982; Chodorow, Nancy, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985; Dinnerstein, Dorothy, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

extensive commentary in feminist epistemology and philosophy of science, we can say with some assurance that one of the hallmarks of the “stylistic aggression” about which Evelyn Fox Keller writes is the desire to give a unified and complete account of some phenomenon that admits of no counterexamples, cannot be disconfirmed, and so forth.¹⁰ The voice that engages in this activity is frequently distant and depersonalized; this, however, is not the voice of Augustine. In that sense, Augustine breaks away from traditions of his time, and indeed his work is striking because of a quality that seems to speak more to our time.

In the tradition of many poets and literary authors, Augustine writes of a relationship to the divine that is a relationship in the here and now, and one that is deeply felt. Although Augustine would like to know more about God’s creation, his metaphors for learning inform us that finding out about creation and its relationship to the divinity is a matter of revelation and insight rather than fact-gathering. Augustine’s dialogue with God is one of dyadic continuity. It is a measure of the strength of the relationship that it is presented in almost every passage in the *Confessions*.

II

McMahon’s analysis of what it is that Augustine does do in the *Confessions* provides us with further food for thought with respect to the notion that there are feminist-useful themes in the *Confessions*. McMahon is concerned not only to further the notion, examined here in the preceding, that the work is a dialogue, but he also wants to make the point that, in true dialogic fashion, Augustine does not know how he is proceeding as he goes along.

Thus we can construe the rather drifting nature of portions of the *Confessions* as part and parcel of the conversational nature of the work. Just as in a conversation with a cherished other, new truths are revealed as we speak, and we may not understand the end place of the conversation, so McMahon argues, there is a quality of journeying to the *Confessions* that makes it exciting to read yet challenges our notion that Augustine began with a complete product in mind.

Commentators on the work generally divide the first nine books from both the latter sections, and the thirteenth book itself from all the rest. But if it is clear that a turning point for Augustine occurs in the seventh and eighth books, with their meditation upon the nature of evil and the relationship of evil to the nature of God and God’s unity, it is also here that we are able to see some of the intellectual traveling that McMahon has written about.

¹⁰ Keller, Evelyn Fox, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985.

In the space of only a few pages, constituting Chapters XIV through XXI of Book Seven of the *Confessions*, Augustine moves from the view that is usually titled Manichean—that is, a view promoting the existence of two distinct substances, representing good and evil—to a view that is more consistent with the later Christian position on evil in a manner that is indicative of the struggle that he himself endured. These passages, like much of the work, are somewhat difficult to follow, because it is not clear in what precisely the revelation consists. But it is precisely this form of written comment that is the source of much of what McMahon and the other critics have to say; Augustine is not so much making a philosophical argument here (he is not, for example, engaged in a project like Descartes’) as he is giving a recounting of how he came to “see”, and some of what constitutes the core of this seeing cannot genuinely be articulated.

Thus, in the paragraph that is Chapter XIV of this work, Augustine notes that “Hence it [his soul] had gone into the opinion of two substances, and resisted not, but talked foolishly.”¹¹ But only a few lines later, in the paragraph titled Chapter XV, “And I looked back on other things, and I perceived that it was to thee they owed their being, and that they were all bounded in thee . . .”¹² The line immediately preceding this says, “This sight was not derived from the flesh.”¹³

McMahon reminds us that it is these twists and turns in Augustine’s phrasing that give his work its rhetorical force. As he writes in his preliminary chapter on the notion of self-presentation:

The distinction between Augustine as speaker and author is crucial for this study of the *Confessions*. For the premise of the volume is that God is guiding the speaker’s prayerful narration, meditation and exposition . . . The speaker never entirely knows what he is about to get into, for he is being led by God to discovery through prayer.¹⁴

Augustine also makes effective use of metaphor and symbol. As McMahon notes, metaphors of the ocean, and of voyaging on both sea and land are found throughout Book VII. This symbolism ties in not only with the points that Augustine endeavors to make, but with the structure of the Hexameron—God’s creation of the world in six days. Thus, to some extent, Augustine’s recounting of his grappling with the notion of evil and of God’s wholeness recapitulates portions of the structure of Genesis.

In Chapter V of Book VII, utilizing the water imagery of the Old Testament, Augustine writes:

But Thee, O Lord, I imagined on every part environing and penetrating it [the mass of all God’s creatures], though every way infinite; as if

¹¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, pp. 152-153.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹³ *Ibid.*, *ibid.*

¹⁴ McMahon, *Ascent*, p. 14.

there were a sea everywhere, and on every side through immensity nothing but an infinite sea; and it contained within itself some sponge, huge, though finite, so that the sponge would in all its parts be filled from the immeasurable sea.¹⁵

Commenting on the water imagery here, McMahon notes “The controlling metaphor here is water. [A similar passage] combines images of watery instability with those of firmness. Like water, the young Augustine is *informis*, lacks a stable form.”¹⁶

Imagery, metaphor and personalization—all of these elements of literary control constitute the special appeal of the *Confessions*. Because this appeal is not without its parallel among other authors concerned with the Christian tradition, it may prove instructive to contrast some of Augustine’s work with that of another thinker.

III

Kierkegaard’s work is also noted for its highly intense focus on the immediate and the personal, and Kierkegaard can provide a fruitful point of departure for an examination of some of the tensions in Augustine’s work.¹⁷ Both thinkers are concerned with a personal quest that may or may not ultimately involve others, and both thinkers are concerned with characterizing the quest in a way that makes its power transparent. There are differences, however, particularly with respect to literary form: Augustine does not make particular use of fables or concocted stories, whereas Kierkegaard, writing much later and in the sophisticated voice of the nineteenth-century, does. Kierkegaard wants us to think of his quest as something on the order of a paradox or puzzle: he finds his relationship to the Teacher puzzling, and wants us to understand his puzzlement. Augustine is not so much overtly puzzled as moved to show us the pathways by which he came to his awareness. Consider some contrasts, and similarities, between the two thinkers, particularly (in Augustine’s case) with respect to some of the material just examined in Book VII. As we have just seen, Augustine compares the relationship of the Lord to his creation to a sea and a sponge within it.¹⁸ Kierkegaard generally chooses to focus on his relationship to Christ, and usually writes of Christ as Teacher. In *Philosophical Fragments*, he writes:

The teacher, then, is the god himself, who, acting as the occasion, prompts the learner to be reminded that he is untruth and that it is

¹⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 139.

¹⁶ McMahon, *Ascent*, p. 95.

¹⁷ See, for example, Nielsen, H.A., *Where the Passion Is: a Reading of Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Fragments*, Tallahassee, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1983.

¹⁸ See fn. 15.

through his own fault. But this state—to be untruth and to be that through one's own fault—what can we call it? Let us call it sin.

The teacher, then, is the god, who gives the condition and gives the truth. Now, what should we call such a teacher, for we surely do agree that we have gone far beyond the definition of a teacher.¹⁹

The element of commonality in both of these accounts is a desire to present to the reader part of the intellectual journey of the inquirer. The disparity arises in the notion of the disguise: writing so much earlier, before such literary devices achieved the commonality that they did during the post-printing period, Augustine sees no need to try to transform his relationship to God into a series of stories and parables. Yet the thinkers have more in common, perhaps, than they do in the way of difference. In each case, the quest is intensely personal, as we have seen, and in each case the desire to transmit the quest leads to the authorship of multiple and lengthy works. Furthermore, each journey is filled with twists and turns, with the fascinating quality of a voyage the end of which is sometimes in doubt. Kierkegaard partially resolves our doubts (and his) by suggesting that we embrace the absurd. Augustine tries to help us by showing us the metaphors and images that aided him: a sea has the capacity to move into a sponge in every pore, and just so the Infinite has the capacity to invade the finite. What both Augustine and Kierkegaard have in common is that the particularity of their search reminds us of patterns that have been used by feminists because they stem from the gynocentric. Each thinker is driven by a personal quest, rather than an androcentric desire to give a generalized, Complete Accounts view.

Augustine's method of showing us his journey may be slightly clearer, and somewhat less strainedly literary, partially because he wants to try to articulate some of the differences between his thought and the Neoplatonist thinking that preceded it, although he was, of course, heavily dependent upon such thinking.²⁰ Kierkegaard, although obviously influenced by preceding thinkers (especially Hegel) does not seem moved to try to make specific comparisons. Thus Augustine shows us the links and routes of his thinking, often leading us to make a comparison with, for example, portions of the *Enneads*.

As Clark notes, "First of all, if the one is Plotinus' God, then his God is not trinitarian as is the God of Christianity revealed in Scripture and believed in by Augustine . . . [And] conversion is mediated not by the internal Word or *Nous* as understood but by the Incarnate

¹⁹ Kierkegaard, S.K., *Philosophical Fragments*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 15.

²⁰ Mary Clark, in her excellent Introduction to *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984), is very concerned to show the specificity of Augustine's relationship to Plotinus. See especially pp. 21-25.

Word in whom we believe.”²¹ Clark then cites the following passage from the *Confessions*:

What shall wretched man do? Who shall deliver him from the body of this death, but only your Grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord, whom you have begotten co-eternal and formed in the beginning of Your ways, in whom the Prince of this world found nothing worthy of death, yet killed Him, and the handwriting, which was against us, was blotted out. None of this is to be found in the books of the Platonists.²²

Kierkegaard might signal a contrast by use of a parable or give us his view through pseudonymous authorship; Augustine’s method is more straightforward, and as we have seen, in some instances explicitly comparative. What both authors have in common is a highly intense and individualized style that makes manifest to the reader the mazelike nature of their journeys and the time and effort expended by each thinker in order to negotiate that distance.

IV

In the preceding sections we have made extensive use of the interiority of Augustine’s thought, not only to acquaint us with its philosophical ramifications, but also as a springboard for comparison with, for example, the work of Kierkegaard.

But the other crucial manifestation of a concept that does important duty in Augustine’s thought and that lends itself to at least some sort of feminist analysis is the notion of union with the divine. This concept is particularly strong for Augustine, since, as we have seen, his road to Christianity took him through both Manichaeism and various versions of Plotinus’ thought, as set down by Porphyry.²³

Certain sorts of philosophical questions seemed to have plagued Augustine almost from his teenage years, and as he matures and is better able to fit the questions into a Christian framework, we can see strands of the original formulations in his work. As we have seen in our analysis of Book Seven of the *Confessions*, Augustine sometimes makes these comparisons explicit, and at other times they are more or less implicit and to be inferred from a close reading of the text. One of the questions with which we are most familiar, the difficulty with accounting for evil if God is to be defined as all good, is a philosophical question about the existence of opposing attributes in a substance, and in that sense is directly related to both Plotinian and Manichaean philosophies.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 24.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 24. (The fn. on p. 24 indicates that this is from Book VII, Chapter XXI of the *Confessions*.)

²³ Chadwick, Henry, *Augustine*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 13-23.

Once Augustine has made the move to Christianity, however, a new and subtle twist on the problem of union or of opposing tendencies within a given substance emerges. If the Neoplatonists developed a view of lower realms as emanating from those higher,²⁴ the relationship that is given by the mediation of Christ has to be described in different terms. But it puts Augustine to the test to articulate this relationship, for it is crucially different from, and yet significantly related to, all of the preceding thought that he himself has studied and made use of.

Chadwick, in his *Augustine*, a volume of the Oxford University Press' "Past Masters" series, ably summarizes this position as follows:

[T]he supreme God has acted within the time and history within which we live This act has its culminating focus in Jesus, model to humanity by his life and wise teaching and by his unique filial relation to the supreme 'Father' Access to this movement of God to rescue fallen man is found through the assent of faith and to adhesion to the community of Jesus' followers Thereby the spirit of Holiness unites man to God, to give hope for the life to come, of which Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate pledge . . .

In these themes Christian preaching spoke to Augustine in strongly other-worldly terms which linked arms with Platonic morality and metaphysics.²⁵

Clark also finds this element of Augustine's thought intriguing, and, like Chadwick, she sees the union as a mediated union with Christ in the role of the middle term. More importantly, perhaps, the union that is possible during this lifetime is not, metaphysically speaking, a complete union. That union of the immortal soul with the eternal is possible only after death. Nevertheless, through the grace of Christ it is possible to achieve, during the course of the earthly lifetime, a type of unity with God that approaches in some sense this other, more transcendental unity. Clark articulates this type of unity as follows:

In the final analysis, love is the key to the freedom and the unity and the peace of the world. The person who loves according to truth and is really free, achieves that unity within God, unity within self, and unity with others which is the prelude to the Eternal Peace of the risen life where there is perfect freedom or spiritual liberty.²⁶

Clark also notes that whether or not one continues to see strands of the Neoplatonic here is not as important as coming to grips with what she views as Augustine's overall mysticism. Because of the strict standards for the usage of the term "mystic" within the religious tradition, there is some debate, Clark reports, over whether Augustine

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

²⁶ Clark, in Introduction to *op. cit.*, p. 33.

actually merits this term.²⁷ Because Augustine continually describes acts of movement toward God, whether intellectualized or not, and whether inspired by some previous contact with other philosophical traditions, Clark sees Augustine as functioning within the limits of mysticism and “loving God when the capacity for loving is realized through God’s gift of himself.”²⁸

V

Augustine’s *City of God* is revelatory of both of the tendencies that we have examined throughout this paper. In Book XIX of this work, Augustine examines how various sects have approached the problem of virtue in this life, thus emphasizing the personal nature of the quest and, more importantly, the reality of bodily intrusions into this quest that keep it from its fulfillment. The notion of unity comes into play again when it is made clear that what allows for virtue in this life is the kind of union with the eternal that makes the temptations and trials of the body bearable and even surmountable.

When writing about the four “things sought by men” of Marcus Varro, enumerated at the beginning of Book XIX, Augustine characterizes them, crudely, as pleasure, bodily repose, bodily health, and spiritual health.²⁹ But he is quick to point out that there is much in life that interferes with the man who seeks virtue, and interferes with the work of those who already obtain at least some of these four components of the quest for wisdom. The personal nature of the quest, and the very specific nature of that in this life which opposes it, is articulated by Augustine in this passage:

For what torrent of eloquence suffices to explain the miseries of this life? Cicero lamented them as best he could in the *Consolation* on the death of his daughter, but how inadequate was his best! For when, where, how in this life can the so-called primary natural goods be so possessed as not to be threatened by unforeseen accidents? Why, what pain is there, the contrary of pleasure, what disquiet is there, the contrary of repose, that cannot befall the body of the wise man?³⁰

At each turn in the argument, throughout Book XIX, Augustine juxtaposes a personal vision of what life can mean with notions of contrast, of failure of unity, and of the interference of the body with the soul’s quest for union.

²⁷ In trying to defend Augustine against the charge that he was not a mystic, Clark notes that one critic claims that, according to Augustine, “every ascent to God [by the] Augustinian method ends with an act of infused contemplation.”

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, in Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 433-434.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 441.

It is the lack of clear understanding of this interference by the ancients that, according to Augustine, makes their accounts of life ring false, and, in some cases, seem completely erroneous. Augustine cites the Stoics, for example, on what they have to say about the “happiness” of the human condition—a “happiness” such that, according to Augustine, one of the chief joys available in this life is the knowledge that one can leave it at any time by one’s own hand.³¹

The City of God, however, is a union of both civil tranquility and the personal response of the soul to the divine. Again Augustine’s response is implicitly personal, as the preceding sections with their citations of the Stoics, of Cicero and of Terence reveal how his quest for learning led him along various pathways of commentary on the nature of human life. According to Augustine, the peace and the Celestial City can be analyzed along the following lines:

The peace of the body, therefore, is an orderly, proportioned arrangement of its parts; the peace of the irrational soul is the harmonious arrangement of the appetites, the peace of the rational soul is the ordered agreement of knowledge and action; the peace of body and soul is the ordered life and health of a living creature. Peace between moral man and God is an ordered obedience in faith to eternal law; peace among men is an ordered concord; domestic peace is ordered concord among those ruling and those obeying. Civil peace is a similar concord among citizens. The peace of the Celestial City is a perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God and of one another in God. The peace of all things is the tranquility of order. Order is the distribution of things equal and unequal, each to its own place.³²

All things, according to Augustine, desire peace, but the peace of the body cannot compare to the peace of unity with the Celestial City.³³ The soul seeks peace instinctively, but may have the misfortune to be lured by falsity and by those, in the earthly realm, who promise an unholy or untoward peace.³⁴ The peace of the *City of God* is a peace of unity with the eternal—the soul’s true homecoming—and Augustine’s description of it is, as always, intensely personal.

V

In this paper I have created an argument to the effect that the feminist themes of personalization, particularity and unity that are reflected in the work of some feminist epistemologists and developmental

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 443. (Augustine says, in part, “Oh, happy life which seeks the help of death to end it! If it is happy, let the wise man remain alive.”)

³² *Ibid.*, p. 456.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

theorists are to be found in Augustine for the discerning reader. Part of my argument has been that the feminist reader must work harder with Augustine than with, for example, a thinker closer in chronological time, such as Kierkegaard, because the style of thought of Augustine's time period itself represents a challenge.

One might wonder how feminist arguments could be applied to the work of Augustine, given the conceptual difficulties just mentioned, but some of the problems are alleviated by the use of object relations theory and the general notions of male personality development. Evelyn Fox Keller and other contemporary feminist theorists have written of "stylistic aggression," and the notion that the kinds of drives that males exhibit from a psychoanalytic standpoint may be manifested in the realms of intellectual work and theory development, as well as in the areas of physical aggressiveness.³⁵ These sorts of drives, Keller and other feminists have argued, frequently contribute to the development of rigid and ramified theory in the sciences, for example. Such theorizing, in its quest for intellectual aggrandizement, often forsakes the personal and detaches itself from its area of inquiry. But with Augustine we find another mode of endeavor.

Drawing on an analysis of the personal nature of the quest in the *Confessions*, of Augustine's literary style, of contrast to other thinkers, and of the notion of unity and portions of the *City of God*, I have tried to show that this early Father of the Church, although masculinist in his beliefs about the status of women, does not necessarily exhibit a masculinist or androcentric mode of thought. Augustine's work is there for the appraisal; the feminist scholar must take the care to unearth that¹ which is worthwhile in his work in the spirit of a true woman-centered archaeology.

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³⁵ Keller, Evelyn Fox, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.