

Lecture 5

Creation as Sign: Augustinian and Medieval Victorine Theology

God and the World: The Cosmos in Religious and Ethical Perspective HPHP5904/6904

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Augustine of Hippo

(354-430)

- Bishop of Hippo, theologian
- *Confessions*, *On the Trinity*, *City of God*
- Free will, divine grace, exegesis, epistemology, semiotics, Trinitarian theology, creation theology



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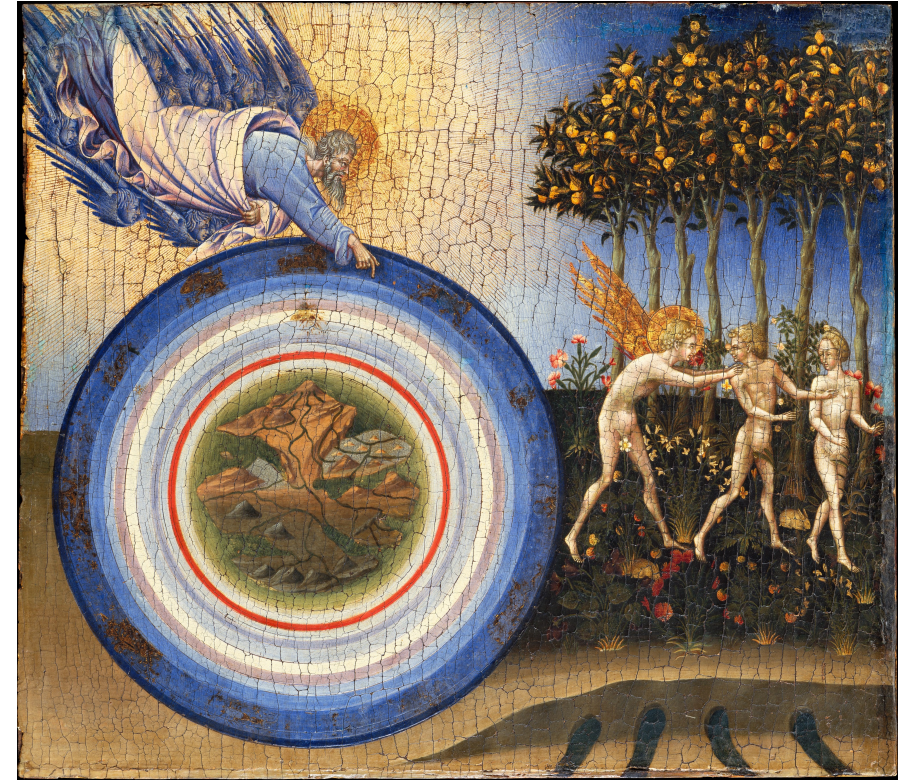
The effort to think through the mystery of creation runs like a leitmotif through Augustine's work.

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EDMUND HILL, "INTRODUCTION," *ON GENESIS*, 13.

Augustinian creation theology: works

- ▶ Three Genesis commentaries:
 - ▶ *On Genesis: A Refutation Against the Manichees* (388/389)
 - ▶ *Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis* (393-395)
 - ▶ *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (401-416)
- ▶ *Confessions*, Books 11-13 (397-401)
- ▶ *City of God*, Book 11 (c. 416)

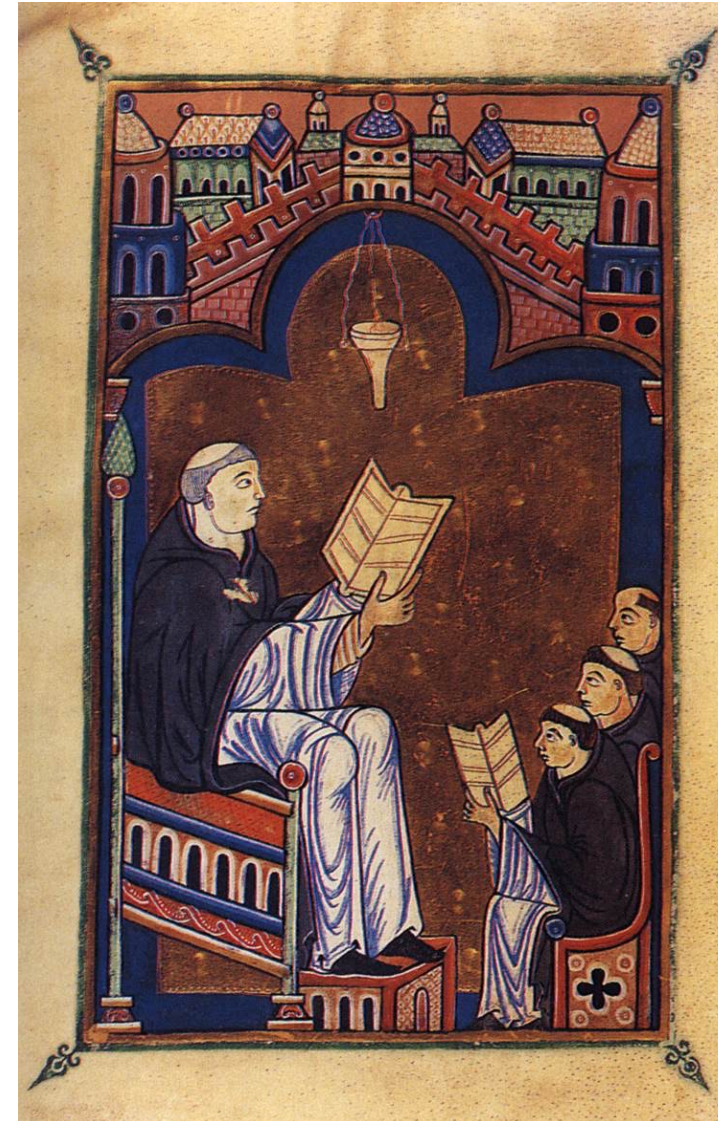


The Creation of the World and the Expulsion from Paradise.
Giovanni di Paolo. (1445)

Hugh of St Victor

(1096-1141)

- ▶ Abbey of St Victor, Paris
- ▶ Theologian, mystic, teacher
- ▶ “A second Augustine”
- ▶ Exegesis, creation theology, mysticism
- ▶ *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith; Didascalicon; On the Three Days*





The “book of nature”

- Patristic and medieval notion of “reading” or interpreting creation
- hidden “words” and meaning in creation can be interpreted
- divine words or divine speech in creation

Logos - logoi

Ancient Greek and Stoic philosophy

- *Logos* = thought, opinion, a reason, argument, cause; a general principle; a definition, formula (ancient Greek philosophical concept, 5th c. BC)
- *Logos* = (cosmological) “universal reason or law that governs the cosmic process” (Heraclitus, c. 550-480 BC)
- Stoic *logos*: 1) rationality permeating all being; 2) *logoi spermatikoi* (*rationes seminales*, Latin)= seminal reasons or causes in material beings and contained in the creative *logos*

Jewish theology

- “word of the Lord” (*dabar Yahweh*)
– an informative, communicative, and creative word
- Septuagint translation (Greek) – *logos*

Patristic theology

- Patristic *logoi* of creation= “inner essences” of things; reason, purpose, cause, principle
- influenced by *logos* concept of Greek philosophy and Jewish theological/biblical notion of the “word” (*dabar*, translated as *logos* in the Septuagint)
- Patristic *logoi*: the Incarnate Logos contains the created *logoi* (Maximus the Confessor, Christian monk and theologian, 6-7th c.)

Contemplating nature

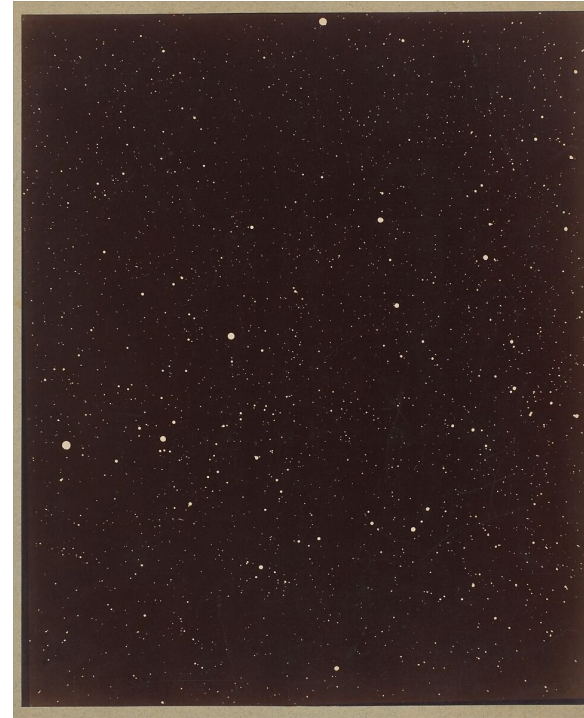
- ▶ *Theoria* (Greek) – contemplation of God
 - ▶ Plato: the mind's ascent from sense-experience to higher realities; a way of life
 - ▶ Aristotle: contemplative life (*bios theoretikos*) – the noblest kind of life
 - ▶ Patristic context: contemplation and vision (Moses not seeing the face of the Lord, but a reflection of God's glory, Exodus 33:18-23). Final vision achieved in heaven. Knowledge involves transformation of the beholder.
 - ▶ Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-c. 394), *theoria* = scientific study of the laws of the cosmos, exegetical study of Scripture, and spiritual contemplation

Patristic contemplation of nature (*physike theoria*) –
contemplating the *logoi* of creatures,
based on the *logoi-Logos* connection

Part of spiritual progress and the path of perfection
(Evagrius Ponticus, monastic theologian, c. 345-399)

Romans 1:20 – key to Augustine and Hugh of St Victor

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead [.]”



Augustine's creation theology

- ▶ Influenced by Neoplatonism (Plotinus, 3rd c.; *Enneads*; combined ideas of Plato, Stoic and Aristotelian philosophy)
- ▶ Creator – source of creation (not its highest part); creation from nothing; immutable; transcendent; present to creation (“most hidden and most present,” *Conf.* I.4.4.)
- ▶ Trinity as Creator: all three persons active in creation:
 - ▶ “[The] Father through the Son, in the gift of the Holy Spirit made all things and every particular thing.” (Augustine, *Of the True Religion*, VII:13)
 - ▶ “In the beginning” God made heaven and earth = The Word or Son (*Conf.* 11.9.11)
 - ▶ Trinitarian causality perceived throughout creation

Augustinian theology: creating the world

- ▶ Divine free will; divine omnipotence
- ▶ Creation of matter and spirit; space and time; inanimate and animate creatures
- ▶ Creation from nothing
- ▶ *Creatura* – material and spiritual creatures
- ▶ Actual creation

Augustine: the divine ideas and seminal reasons

- ▶ Divine ideas: “principle forms or stable and unchangeable reasons of things [...] contained in the divine intelligence” (Jared Ortiz)
 - ▶ God is the supreme Form; divine ideas are identified with the Word of God
 - ▶ Creatures are made through the Word/through the divine Form (containing all ideas and forms).
 - ▶ Thus creatures *imitate* the eternal ideas, and participate in the Ideas of the Word – and are like God in a limited way.
- ▶ God creates through the seminal reasons – principles regulating development of creatures
 - ▶ God creates causal reasons for things that came to exist afterwards (new genera, new types).
 - ▶ Causal ideas: qualities of the natural world determining what a thing is; God can also prescribe something other than what the seminal formula prescribes
 - ▶ Examples of causal ideas: standards for creatures – age for giving birth; capability of speech for humans, but not for animals

Augustine's interpretation of creation

- ▶ Exegetical: Genesis commentaries; order of creation; participation of creation in God
 - ▶ Principles of interpretation: various interpretations; literal and spiritual meanings
- ▶ Theological: mutability and immutability arguments; preservation of creation
 - ▶ Further theological concepts: order (*ordo*); matter and form; mode (*modus*); goodness of creation
 - ▶ Divine vestiges; Creatures are “modeled on the prefections of God and each reflects an aspect of that perfection in its unique way. The purpose of this world, then, is to mirror the beauty and goodness of its Creator.” (Burt, Donald X. “Courageous Optimism: Augustine on the Good of Creation,” 61)
- ▶ “Confessional” - *Confessions*, Book 10
 - ▶ Sensory language; beauty; necessity of investigation and reason; love of creation vs love of God

“ But heaven and earth and everything in them on all sides tell me to love you. [...] But when I love you, what do I love? It is not physical beauty nor temporal glory nor the brightness of light dear to earthly eyes, nor the sweet melodies of all kinds of songs, nor the gentle odour of flowers and ointments and perfumes, nor manna or honey, nor limbs welcoming the embraces of the flesh; it is not these I love when I love my God. ”

AUGUSTINE, CONFESSIONS X.:8, P. 183.

Hugh of St Victor: Victorine creational theology

- ▶ The twelfth century : interpreting the six days of creation; the school of Chartres (Bernard and Thierry of Chartres)
- ▶ Victorine theology: creation – ordered, rational, beautiful, harmonious; divine Wisdom
- ▶ Hugh of St Victor:
 - ▶ scientific, aesthetic and theological view (Boyd Taylor Coolman)
 - ▶ “the whole knowledge of truth” consists in knowledge of creation and Creator (Hugh of St Victor, *On the Sacraments*, 1.3.31)
 - ▶ works of foundation (creation) and works of restoration (salvation)
 - ▶ sacramentals in creation – “symbolic patterns” foretelling the works of salvation
 - ▶ Sensible world – a “kind of book” (*On the Three Days*, 4.1, p. 63)
 - ▶ Beauty and the goodness of creation; systematizes perceptions

Creation as sign: Hugh of St Victor, *On the Three Days*

- ▶ Written c. 1120 - “at once a sermon, a collection of wonders, a theological-philosophical treatise on creation, the existence of God and the mystery of the Trinity, [an] allegorical treatise, and an account of the mind’s journey to God [.]” (Hugh Feiss, Introduction, *On the Three Days*, 51-52.)
- ▶ Romans 1:20
- ▶ Triad: divine power, wisdom and goodness – attributes of the Trinity

Divine power-wisdom-goodness

- ▶ Context: 12th-century Paris, Trinitarian theology
- ▶ Rationally distinguished in God; common to all three persons of the Trinity
- ▶ God's power, wisdom and goodness characterise God's activities; they produce the effects of God – in turn, creatures reflect power, wisdom and goodness.
- ▶ Deeper understanding of the Trinity is gained by viewing divine activity and creatures; the triad offers a trace (*vestigium*) of divine power, wisdom and goodness.

The triad

Divine power

- Manifest by creaturely magnitude and multitude
- Divine power makes something from nothing – every smallest thing

Divine wisdom

Manifest by creaturely beauty

-- *Structure, movement, appearance, quality*

Divine goodness or kindness

Manifest through creaturely usefulness –

The *necessary, beneficial, fitting or pleasing*

Creation theology

Sense theory
(external/inner senses)

Creation as
sign

Creation as divine vestige

Knowledge of sensible
objects – knowledge of
the divine

Summary and conclusions

- ▶ Humanity is a unique part of creation – both creature and interpreter.
- ▶ Knowledge of creation -- not an end in itself
- ▶ Creation reveals and conceals aspects about God.
- ▶ The Creator is manifest through creation and distinct from it.
- ▶ Love of creation vs love of God
- ▶ The significance of materiality

Bibliography – secondary sources

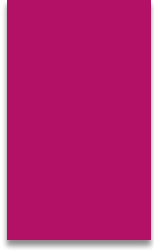
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Images

- ▶ *The Creation of the World and the Expulsion from Paradise.* Giovanni di Paolo. 1445.
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- ▶ *The Sixth Day: The Creation of Animals, Adam and Eve from The Creation of the World.* Johann Sadeler I.
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