

Augustine, Wannabe Philosopher: the search for *otium honestum*

By: Allen Wilson, Faculty Advisor: Dr. Maura Lafferty

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN

Introduction

My project attempts to reimagine the early career of Augustine through three formative milestones in Augustine's early career before he was ordained bishop of Hippo. The tracing of Augustine's publications at each of these points reveals the choice of a career much different than the one that chose him.

Rather than the episcopacy, Augustine presents himself in his early career as pursuing a Christianized form of *otium honestum*, or the honorable leisure of a philosopher.



Origen, from "Les Vrais Portraits Et Vies Des Hommes Illustres" by Andre Thevet, Via Wikipedia

Method

This project evaluates the philosophical ideals put forward in the Latin texts Augustine composed at three important milestones in his early career:

- Cassiacum: *Against the Academics*, *On the Happy Life*, *On Order*, *Soliloquies*
- Thagaste: *On Music*, *On Grammar*, *On Rhetoric*, *On Geometry*, *On Dialectic*, *On Arithmetic*, *On Philosophy*, *On the Magnitude of the Soul*, *On Eighty-Three Varied Questions*, *De Magistro*,
- Hippo: *Confessions*, *Against Faustus*, *On Christian Doctrine*

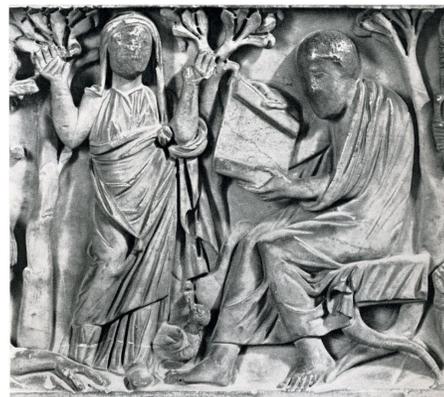
The sources from which Augustine draws his philosophical insights are taken here as indicators of Augustine's own philosophical disposition, as one philosopher is distinguished from another by his library (Hadot, Grafton & Williams).

Cassiacum: Philosophical Retreat

Halfway between retiring from his teaching position and being baptized, Augustine retires to the Cassiacum estate to read, write, and explore the *otium honestum* (or honorable leisure) of a philosophical, communal lifestyle.

Text	Latin	English
<i>Confessiones</i> 8.12.29	"tolle lege, tolle lege."	Take read, take read."
Paulinus, Epistle 16.6	"arguit enim ipsa facundia tuae doctrinaeque fecunditas voluntatem tibi potius in sacris litteris parem quam aut vacationem aut facultatem abesse. ... vacat tibi ut et philosophus sis, non vacat ut Christianus sis."	"Indeed your eloquence itself and the fruitfulness of your learning proves your desire more in sacred letters than that either freedom or ability are absent... there is free time for you so that you may even be a philosopher; there is not leisure so that you may be a Christian."
<i>Contra Academicos</i> 3.20.19	"apud platonicos me interim, quod sacris nostris non repugnet, reperturum esse confido."	"Meanwhile, I trust that I will find in the platonists that which does not disagree with our sacred writings."

The *Cassiacum Dialogues* demonstrate an explicit synthesis of Christianity and philosophy at work in a way that persists in the early development of Augustine's theology.



Santa Maria Antiqua Sarcophagus, via Smart History

Thagaste: Business as Usual

Augustine moves back to his home estate, and is frustrated by his inability to enjoy the *otium honestum* (honorable leisure) of his Cassiacum experience.

Text	Latin	English
Epistle 18.1	"nam de securitate nescio utrum quicquam in hoc mundo sperandum sit."	"...for I do not know whether anything concerning freedom from care can be hoped for in this world."
Epistle 14.1	"non tamen tantum habemus otii, quantum existimas et quantum nos semper optasse nosti et optamus."	"... we do not, nevertheless, have so much leisure as you think nor as much as you know we've always wanted and indeed do want."
Epistle 21.3	"quod ante non feci, quia et tempus non habui; tunc enim ordinatus sum, cum de ipso uacationis tempore ad cognoscendas diuinas scripturas cogitarem et sic nos disponere uellemus, ut nobis otium ad hoc negotium posset esse."	"which I did not do before, because, indeed, I did not have time; then indeed I was ordained [at that very moment], when we were thinking about the time itself for a break for the purpose of understanding the divine scriptures and thus we desired to put off things so that it might be possible for us to have leisure for this business."

Hippo: Critical Point

Text	Latin	English
Epistle 118.2	"nolo prius aliquid doceas, quod dediscendum est, ut uera doceas."	"I do not wish that you learn before hand, what must be unlearned, so that you may learn true things."
<i>Contra Faustum</i> 22.57	"qui cum sint agendi uirtute habiles et digni, quibus regimen ecclesiae committatur, ad dispensandum fidei sacramentum illi accensi studio doctrinae atque indagandae et contemplandae sapientiae se ab omnibus actionum molestiis remouere atque in otio discendi ac docendi condere volunt."	"...those who although they may be capable and worthy in the power of doing the things in which the steering of the church is entrusted ... wish to remove themselves from all the annoyances of action and to settle themselves in the leisure of learning and teaching."

The *negotium* (or business, opposite of *otium*) incurred by Augustine's ordination and promotion to bishop would put an end to Augustine's ideal of *otium honestum* (honorable leisure).



Saint Ambrose barring Theodosius from Milan Cathedral by Anthony van Dyck, via Wikipedia

Conclusion

What is most crucial is the very thing that we cannot measure, Augustine's "inner orientation". From his changed orientation, philosophers like Augustine change what it means to do philosophy from the inside and out. We see this most clearly in his appropriation of *otium honestum*, where what is *honestum* slowly comes to be defined on Christian terms. The traditional language of aristocratic *otium* provides a vocabulary with which Augustine can begin to redefine his new lifestyle, both to his would-be patrons, his philosophical friends, and even to himself. The stark change from Cassiacum & Thagaste to Hippo, however, reveals Augustine's abandonment of *otium honestum* as a viable lifestyle for Christian like himself.

Bibliography

All English translations are my own. Sources listed provide Latin sources:

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