



Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ: Agency, Necessity, and Culpability in Augustinian Theology

By Jesse Couenhoven

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According to Augustine's doctrine of original sin, Adam's progeny share a collective guilt which, like an infection, spreads through wayward sexual desires, passing from parent to child. But is it fair to blame sinners if they inherit evil like a disease? In *Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ* Jesse Couenhoven clarifies the logic and illogic of Augustine's controversial views about human agency. The first half of the book examines why Augustine believed we are trapped by evil, and why only Christ can save us. Couenhoven examines overlooked texts Augustine wrote at the culmination of his career and offers a novel reading of his views about whether we control our personal identities, what we should be held culpable for, and whether freedom is compatible with necessity. The second half of the book develops a philosophically and scientifically astute theory of responsibility that makes it possible to retrieve some of Augustine's most divisive claims.

Couenhoven makes a case for the surprising thesis that a carefully formulated doctrine of original sin is profoundly humane. The claim that sin is original takes seriously our dependence on one another for essential aspects of character and personality, our ownership of cognitive and volitional states that are not simply products of voluntary choices, and our status as personal agents of evil. Attending to these aspects of our lives challenges the idea that each individual's moral and spiritual standing is up to her or him, and drives us to ponder not only the nature of our responsibility and the shape of the freedom we seek, but also the need for grace we all share.

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Editorial Review

Review

"...it is much to his credit that Jesse Couenhoven has undertaken to clarify, explain, and defend aspects of Augustine's conception of original sin in this compelling and well-argued volume. He insists that the doctrine of original sin is not the product of some cruel religious logic, but in fact a deeply humane understanding of our natures, one that permits us to respond more adequately to moral evil and the plight of its perpetrators." - Augustinian Studies

"It's a good feeling when studying a book for a review proves to be rewarding and edifying. Couenhoven's carefully composed monograph definitely provided intellectual stimulation and impetus for rethinking commonplaces, as well as an enjoyable diatribe. At the same time, it is a complicated book on complicated matters which defies superficial reading." -- Reviews in Religion & Theology

"...creative, convincing, and important... This impressive book is recommended for theologians, Augustine scholars, and philosophers of religion looking for a revision and rigorous defense of Augustine's doctrine of original sin." --Religious Studies Review

"[B]oth Couenhoven's careful interpretative work and bold constructive work distinguish this book as a model for further engagements with Augustine's thought." --*Anglican Theological Review*

"Couenhoven offers a significant and provocative contribution to moral philosophy and a needed corrective in Augustinian studies to discussions of original sin. In this, his book traverses the domains of historical scholarship and contemporary moral debates, and should be read both by experts interested in the latter as well as by theologians attempting to balance accounts of human agency with the depth and pervasiveness of sin." --*Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*

"Students of Augustine's thought will find this a helpful introduction to the complexity of his doctrine as it relates to original sin. Constructive theologians will marvel at its informed, careful, and constructive use of historical sources. Recommended." --*CHOICE*

"Couenhoven's careful analysis of Augustine's final response to the ablest of the Pelagian writers, Julian of Eclanum, makes those ancient writers participants in the modern analysis and understanding of human freedom and responsibility. The presentation adapts Augustine's vocabulary and arguments so that his perspective becomes intelligible to readers in a radically different cultural context." --J. Patout Burns, Jr. Malloy Professor of Catholic Studies, emeritus, Vanderbilt Divinity School

"Couenhoven's argument is calm and careful, unapologetic but not blustery, acknowledging the several

worthwhile concerns about Augustine's doctrine of original sin, while yet insisting that those concerns do not outweigh that doctrine's singular virtue of being true, and that it does not legitimate moralistic blame, but funds gracious compassion. A truly impressive achievement, combining philosophical acuity, historical learning, and theological profundity in equal parts, occasionally leavened with a wry sense of humor. We have been waiting for this book for some time, and it proves to have been worth the wait." --Charles Mathews, Carolyn M. Barbour Professor of Religious Studies, University of Virginia

"The project of this book is to defend a version of Augustinian compatibilism, based on Augustine's later work. The book does not defend this view as a whole, but selects the more plausible parts and mounts a surprisingly effective reply to the usual objections, connecting this reply to contemporary philosophical treatments of related questions. It is well-written, and a sensitive and nuanced treatment of the texts." --John Hare, Noah Porter Professor of Philosophical Theology, Yale Divinity School

"Students of Augustine's thought will find this a helpful introduction to the complexity of his doctrine as it relates to original sin. Constructive theologians will marvel at its informed, careful, and constructive use of historical sources." -A.W. Klink, Duke University, *CHOICE*

"Augustine's doctrine of original sin has been widely accepted by traditionally minded Christians, but is undeniably problematic. Why should subsequent generations suffer the consequences of sin for what the first people did? Jesse Couenhoven tackles this thorny issue and the book is a must read for anyone working on these questions." --*Journal of Reformed Theology*

About the Author

Jesse Couenhoven is Associate Professor of Moral Theology in the Humanities Department at Villanova University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Shannon Harvey:

Nowadays reading books become more and more than want or need but also turn into a life style. This reading routine give you lot of advantages. The huge benefits you got of course the knowledge the actual information inside the book that will improve your knowledge and information. The knowledge you get based on what kind of publication you read, if you want get more knowledge just go with training books but if you want really feel happy read one along with theme for entertaining for instance comic or novel. The particular Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ: Agency, Necessity, and Culpability in Augustinian Theology is kind of book which is giving the reader unpredictable experience.

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Lee Henry:

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