

In *Faith Order Understanding*, all of the late Louis Mackey's virtues are on display. His sensitivity to language and to the limits of language to bear stable meaning seems especially appropriate to the study of what is arguably the most elastic of the medieval traditions of thought, the so-called Augustinian tradition. Defining that tradition by the project of "faith seeking understanding," Mackey documents this precise point in exacting detail at one of those places in any body of Christian thought where heaven and earth can be said to meet – rational reflection on the existence of God. What he makes very clear is that "not everyone who proves the existence of God is proving the same thing" and "those who prove the existence of God do not all understand the nature of proof in the same way." These phrases are generally true in his judgment of any and all rational reflection on the existence of God but they are also especially true to the variety of such reflections to be found within the Augustinian tradition and among its four greatest medieval representatives: Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, and Scotus.

Mackey's way into the Augustinian tradition and its reflection on the existence of God is philosophical, though he is extraordinarily sensitive to the literary decisions structuring the texts he examines because of the proofs they contain. Moreover, he is deeply aware of the historical context in which each author finds himself and the ways in which that context speaks to the texts each author produces. In addition, he is well aware of the interpretive traditions surrounding the texts he has chosen to engage. Indeed, he deepens the understanding of the essential character of Augustinian philosophizing within the context of "faith seeking understanding" by adding to it a truly basic and constitutive notion of hierarchic order that demands a unique origin and thereby opens up the possibility of a valid if circular proof (a constructive hermeneutical circle). What one receives thereby in the most exquisitely indirect way possible is confirmation of that typically acute Nietzschean intuition that an explicit and formal atheism is not decisive for the "death of God." For, as he put it, inasmuch as someone still believes in grammar (one manifestation of hierarchic order), one still believes in God.

In this work, Mackey deepens our sense of the philosophical project of medieval Augustinianism in and through its natural theology. He does so in prose that is crystal clear, deceptively simple and straightforward. There is less of the poetry than is to be found in much of the best of Louis Mackey's work elsewhere. Nevertheless, this volume displays his characteristic sensitivity to tensions and reversals motivated by recognition that existence is more complex and mischievous than we can comprehend. Here, his sensitivity is restrained and put in the service of an act of homage to the tradition of thought and imagination that makes up the beating heart of this work. As a result, Mackey does for the medieval Augustinian tradition something like what Boehner had begun to do for Franciscan thought of the late thirteenth and fourteenth century, especially of Ockham, and what Gilson worked tirelessly to do for the Thomist tradition.

FAITH ORDER UNDERSTANDING

Natural Theology in
the Augustinian Tradition

LOUIS MACKEY

Foreword by
ROBERT SWEETMAN



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MANUFACTURED IN CANADA

To the memory of my teacher,
ROBERT E. CUSHMAN (†1993),
who introduced me to the power and the grace
of the Augustinian heritage

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– LOUIS MACKEY

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– ROBERT SWEETMAN

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– EVA MACKEY MEYRAT and JAKE MACKEY