



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

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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