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AUGUSTINE AND THE ANCIENT QUARREL BETWEEN POETRY AND PHILOSOPHY

Summary: Augustine participates in an ancient argument over who leads the best life and therefore ought to rule: poets or philosophers. The poets argue that the philosophers' contemplation of the impersonal and eternal dissolves human ties, and therefore is subversive of political and moral life. The philosophers argue that the poets lack knowledge of man's true good and therefore construct harmful mythologies to guide men's moral and political lives. Augustine agrees, in part, with both critiques. Each side demands that the other give up real human goods, preferring either the moral or intellectual life to the exclusion of the other. Christian revelation is truly salvific, Augustine argues, since it reveals God as both eternal and personal, logos and love. This God who enters history unites moral and intellectual life into one, integrated way of life; by following Christ, man leaves no part of himself behind in his ascent to communion with God.

Sumario: Agustín participa en una antigua discusión sobre quién lleva una vida mejor y por lo tanto debe gobernar: los poetas o los filósofos. Los poetas sostienen que la contemplación de lo impersonal y eterno de los filósofos disuelve los vínculos humanos, y por lo tanto es subversiva de la vida política y moral. Los filósofos sostienen que los poetas carecen de conocimientos sobre el verdadero bien del hombre y, por tanto, construyen mitologías perjudiciales a la hora de guiar las vidas morales y políticas de los hombres. Agustín está de acuerdo, en parte, con las dos críticas. Cada parte exige que la otra renuncie a bienes humanos reales, prefiriendo ya sea la vida moral o la intelectual, con la exclusión del otro. La revelación cristiana es verdaderamente salvífica, argumenta Agustín, ya que revela a Dios como eterno y personal, logos y amor. Este Dios que entra en la historia une la vida moral e intelectual, en una forma de vida integrada; siguiendo a Cristo, el hombre no deja atrás una parte de sí mismo en su ascenso a la comunión con Dios.

In this paper I will highlight Augustine's critical engagement with Greek thought in light of Christian faith in the context of the ancient "quarrel between philosophy and poetry" spoken of in *Republic* X.[1] The

[1] Plato, *The Republic*, 607b. Augustine probably had access to few of Plato's writings; nevertheless, the conversation in which Augustine participated about the poet, the philosopher, the Christian and their roles in the city was decisively set by Plato. Augustine was much more immediately influenced by Cicero. For insight into Augustine's formation in and engagement with Cicero, see M.P. Foley, "Cicero,