



Problems of Creation

Overview

Creation

Augustine

- Augustine of Hippo

- Augustine on Creation

- Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Table of Contents

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Christian, Jewish, Muslim consensus: God created the world.

But there are a lot of questions:

- What does this mean, exactly?
- *How?*
- Is creation possible at all?
- Some other problems: why did God create at all? Why did God create *this* world? Why right now? Etc.

Philosophical import: creation and other types of change?

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Genesis 1:1

“In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.”

- In the beginning *of what?*
- heaven & earth? What are those?
- 6 days of creation?

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Sirach (Ecclesiastes) 18:1

“Who lives forever, created everything simultaneously.”

- ???
- *omnia simul / tota simul* – together, but in what sense?
- how is this consistent with Genesis?

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Table of Contents

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Some Context: Augustine's Life (354–430)

- 354–430
- Born in Thagaste (Algeria); bishop of Hippo (also Algeria)
- Studies grammar and rhetoric
- Joins the Manicheists, for 9 years!
- Then in Milan meets Ambrose, and gets baptized (387)
- Returns to Africa; ordered a priest, then a bishop



Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Some Context: Augustine's Life (354–430)

- 354 Augustine born
- 387 conversion
- 388 *On the Free Choice of the Will* (books 1&2)
- 391 ordained a priest
- 395 consecrated as a bishop
- ca. 400 *Confessions*
- 409 Visigoths invade Spain
- 410 Rome is sacked by the Visigoths
- 413–426 *The City of God*
- 426 *Reconsiderations*
- 430 May Vandals besiege Hippo
- 430 Augustine dies
- 431 Vandals take Hippo

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Against the Manichees:

- there is just one principle of the universe, which is God – altogether good.
- Did God create evil? . . .
- NO: evil is like a shadow (absence of the good), it has no creative cause.

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

De genesi ad litteram, VII.28.42

God from the start of the ages first created all things simultaneously together, some already in their established natures, some in their pre-established causes. Thus the Almighty made not only things actually present but also things that were to come in the future, and rested from them as made, so that from then on as he administered and regulated them he would also create the series of times and of time-bound things.

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Augustine on Creation

- 'heaven' and 'earth' stand for spiritual and corporeal things; at the beginning, they were created as formless (= *chaos*)
- things were created *from nothing*: i.e., not presupposing anything else (such as matter) – difference between God's work and an artisan's work
- God made everything in 6 days, but also, nevertheless, everything at an instant! (analogy of the glance)
- God made all things simultaneously: either in their actuality or *in their pre-established causes*.
- These pre-established causes need no new "addition" to act, only some guidance to unfold into things in time.

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Theological problem – Philosophical solution!

- the concept itself has some predecessors (see especially the Stoics – Cicero, Seneca)
- On the first day, God placed in the elements the seminal reasons of everything that would exist later. (Cf. scattering plant-pollen. . .)
- these seminal reasons then develop into the things they develop into (plants, animals, human beings).
- they explain not only the simultaneous creation problem, but many natural phenomena as well (how certain animals are produced; why certain things tend to produce their own likeness and nothing else).
- Some open questions: how does this fit with Aristotle's theory of change? What *are* these seminal reasons, metaphysically speaking? Forms, matter, both?

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Council of IV Lateran (1215)

“God [is] the first principle of the universe, the creator of all things, who by his omnipotent power brought about creation. . . at the same time, from nothing, at the beginning of time.”

God created:

- 1 everything
- 2 from nothing
- 3 all at the same time

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Table of Contents

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Excursus: Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207–1282?)

- noble Saxon family
- becomes a Beguine (cf. Hadewijch)
- Magdeburg; tertiary Dominican, then towards the end of her life resides with the Cistercians in Helfta.
- visions; mystical writings (some lost)
- *The Flowing Light*: originally middle German; the original is now lost. Perhaps influenced Dante!



Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

- very different genre!
- importance of love: God created everything out of love, because of love, for love.
- especially: humans were created in God's image, to be brides.
- God himself did not change because of creation.

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Table of Contents

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues

Early scholastics (12th c.):

- were the metaphysical constituents of the world created? (Yes.) If so, were they created simultaneously? (Perhaps; but no consensus. Could God have created matter on its own, without form?)
- plenty of discussions about the temporality of creation: does creation imply temporal finitude? (early consensus: yes; later: no)
- arguments for the actual finite past of the world: often empirical, but sometimes strange! (cf. Roland of Cremona, etc.)
- **Maimonides, Aquinas**: creation does *not* imply temporal beginning, only causal dependence.
- is creation and conservation the same? (no consensus)

Creation

Augustine

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine on Creation

Seminal reasons

Mechthild of Magdeburg

Some later issues