

Freud and Augustine in Dialogue: Psychoanalysis, Mysticism, and the Culture of Modern Spirituality (Studies in Religion and Culture)

William B. Parsons

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"It is arguably the case," writes William Parsons, "that no two figures have had more influence on the course of Western introspective thought than Freud and Augustine." Yet it is commonly assumed that Freud and Augustine would have nothing to say to each other with regard to spirituality or mysticism, given the former's alleged antipathy to religion and the latter's not usually being considered a mystic.

Adopting an interdisciplinary, dialogical, and transformational framework for interpreting Augustine's spiritual journey in his Confessions, Parsons places a "mystical theology" at the heart of Augustine's narrative and argues that his mysticism has been misunderstood partly because of the limited nature of the psychological models applied to it. At the same time, he expands Freud's therapeutic legacy to incorporate the contemporary findings of physiology and neuroscience that have been influenced in part by modern spirituality.

Parsons develops a new psychological hermeneutic to account for Augustine's mysticism that will capture the imagination of contemporary readers who are both psychologically informed and interested in spirituality. The author intends this interpretive model not only to engage modern introspective concerns about developmental conflict and the power of the unconscious but also to reach a more nuanced level of insight into the origins and the nature of the self.



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