

Can one pray to a God beyond speech?

Augustine and Providence

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Then Moses stretched his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. (Exodus 14:21, ESV)

It is clear that God cannot *interfere* with the universe, not because he has not the power but because, so to speak, he has too much.¹

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God's creative and sustaining activity does not make the world different from what it is—how could it? It makes the world what it is.²

[I]t is clear that God cannot *interfere* with the universe, not because he has not the power but because, so to speak, he has too much; to interfere you have to be an alternative to, or alongside, what you are interfering with. If God is the cause of everything, there is nothing that he is alongside.³

Every action in the world is an action of God; not because it is not an action of a creature but because it is by God's action that the creature is *itself* and has its *own* activity.⁴

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From Augustine's *Confessions*:⁵

Then you put an idea in my mind, and it seemed good in my sight: to make my way to Simplicianus ...⁶

You have torn away my bonds: let me offer to you a sacrifice of thanksgiving. How you tore them away, I shall now recount, and let everyone who worships you say, when they hear these things, "Blessed is the Lord ...".⁷

For it was you, only you—for who else calls us back from all our deadly error except the Life itself that does not know how to die, and the Wisdom that enlightens our needy minds while needing no light itself, and which arranges the affairs of the world even down to the changing of leaves on the trees—you who dealt with my stubbornness ...⁸

¹ Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London & New York: Continuum, 2005), 6.

² Herbert McCabe, *Faith Within Reason*, ed. Brian Davies (London & New York: Continuum, 2007), 75.

³ McCabe, *God Matters*, 6.

⁴ McCabe, *God Matters*, 7.

⁵ The translation I have followed is Augustine, *Confessions*, edited and translated by Carolyn J.-B. Hammond, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014/2016).

⁶ *conf.* VIII.1.1.

⁷ *conf.* VIII.1.1.

⁸ *conf.* VII.6.8.