Near the end of his life St. Augustine wrote one more work on marriage, his *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia*, completed about the beginning of the year 419. It was not his last word on marriage, since he was engaged for the rest of his life in countering Pelagian criticism of this work and was so occupied in the work left unfinished at his death in 430.1

However, the *De Nuptiis* is his last work concerned specifically with this subject, and it is of interest to consider what his views were at the end of his long life. They had not changed in substance since his conversion, nor were they peculiarly his own, since they were determined by the unquestioned authority of St. Paul.

Briefly, they were that the deliberate choice of celibacy conferred a higher state than marriage,2 which was however, to be tolerated as making a good use of the evil of sexual desire,3 provided that sexual relations were solely for the procreation of children.4 St. Augustine had to admit ruefully that married couples did not in fact behave in this way,5 but within marriage sexual relations merely for pleasure could be pardoned.6

1. *Contra secundam Juliani responsionem Imperfectum opus.*
2. *Contra Secundinum Manichaeum* 22: concubitus causa propagandi, non vitium, sed officium est: a quo immunitis est continentia virorum feminarumque sanctarum: non quia sicut malum illud deviaverunt, sed quia melius elegerunt; *De gestis Pelagii* 64: perpetua virginitas, quae praceeppta non est, sine dubio plus sit, quam continualis pudicitia, quae praceeppta est.
3. *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* i 27: ex malo concupiscientiae, quo bene quidem utuntur nuptiae, de quo tamen erubescent et nuptiae, reos diabolus parvulos tenet; *Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum* i 33; iii 14; *Opus imperfectum contra Julianum* IV cvii; V vii; xiii; *De bono coniugali; De sancta virginitate; De peccatorum meritis et remissione* i 57: Bonum ergo coniugii non est fervor concupiscientiae, sed quidem licitus et honestus illo fervore utendi modus, propagandae proli, non explendae libidoe accommodatus.
4. *De peccato originali* 38-44; *De bono coniugali* 3-4.
This was to lead to an absurd mediaeval view of ideal marriage expressed in a spurious sermon attributed to St Augustine but actually to be dated c. 1000 A.D., in which we have an account of St Augustine’s mission to the pagan ‘Aethiopians’ (of Morocco), *inter quos sacerdotes corum uxoratos: tantae tamen abstinentia erant, quod licet uxoros sacerdotes omnes haberent, tamen nisi semel in anno cas tangere volebant, qua die ab omni sacrificio abstinebant.* (Ad frates in cremo sermo xxxvii) See *Prudentia III*, May 1971 pp.39ff.
5. *De bono coniugali* 15: quem tandem audirimus inter familiaria colloquia, sive eorum qui coniugati sunt, sive quo fuerunt, indicantem nobis nunquam se coniugi esse commixtum, nisi sperando conceptum?
6. *De bono coniugali* 12; *De nuptiis et concupiscientia* i 16.
And yet in the fourteenth century the fury of the Church was aroused by Italian peasants who practised abstinence in marriage rather than procreate more children than they could support.  

The Biblical precedent set by the polygamy of the patriarchs would seem to be a difficulty in the way of St. Augustine’s views. But he is equal to the difficulty, for non lasciviendi, sed gignendi causa illis mulieribus utebatur (Jacob) . . . non concupiscentia percipienda voluptatis, sed providentia propagandae successionis.  

In Abraham’s case we are told nulla omnino lasciviendi, sed sola cogitata est causa generandi.  

As this high-minded sense of duty to populate the earth justified polygamy, so now our over-populated world should doubtless logically lead to a termination or at least suspension, of the institution of Christian marriage. A more plausible account of Semitic sensuality is of course to be found in classical Arabic poetry, so Ḫūrām Ibn Abī Rabī‘a writes:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Tender is she, cool in the season of heat when the vehemence of the summer has burst into flame,} \\
&\text{Warm in the wintertime, a coverlet for a lad under the night when the bitter cold wraps him around.’}
\end{align*}
\]

Trans, A.J. Arberry.  

Thus early in the history of the Church was established the ambivalent attitude to marriage and to woman that is still plaguing Western society. The very title of St. Augustine’s last work on the subject by the association of ideas in it makes this ambivalence plain.  

There was of course Biblical authority for the doctrine that woman was not only the weaker vessel, but also inferior, for while man was made in the image

11. 1 Pet. iii 7.
of God, woman was not. It did not occur to the Fathers of the Church to wonder whether perhaps woman was a revised version or improved model, for these were ideas that were to come with the Industrial Revolution which also brought woman’s reaction in the fury of the suffragettes, the licence of modern morals, and the grotesque exhibitionism of modern fashion — all intended somehow to prove the equality of the sexes. St. Augustine, who was proud of his grasp of Aristotelian logic, would no doubt have been amused at the attempt to prove equal, things that are different, but having rejected the meaningless doctrine of equality, I leave it to bolder spirits to determine whether woman is superior, inferior or just incomparable. For my purpose is to seek an explanation for St. Augustine’s views on marriage.

At any rate for St. Augustine there was no question at all of treating a wife as an equal, she was an inferior being subject to discipline by her husband: Dat unusquisque et in domo sua plerumque disciplinam coniugi suae; et eam subiugat renitentem, non persequitur inimicantem. No doubt he found congenial Aristotle’s teaching that marriage is a form of aristocracy in which the better element rules.

Nor does he question woman’s subjection to man as part of the divine order right from the Creation: neque enim et ante peccatum, aliter factam fuisse decet credere mulierem, nisi ut vir ei dominaretur et ad eum ipsa serviendo converteretur. But this subordination is of course in woman’s own best

12. Gen. i 26, although v. 27 causes some difficulty for those who take this view.
13. Gen. ii 21-2. However, St Augustine himself rejects this interpretation: secundum id quod et femina homo erat, habebat utique mentem suam eamdemque rationalem, secundum quam ipsa quoque factura est ad imaginem Dei, (De Genesi ad litteram iii 34).
14. Conf. iv 28. This was later to draw on him at the end of his life the sneers of his critic, Julian, who refers to him as Aristoteles Poenorum (Opus imperfectum contra Julianum III cxxix) and philosophaster Poenorum (ibid. V xi).

Mrs Børresen concludes (p.240): ’Chez Augustin, la subordination de la femme correspond au fait, qu’elle est femina, tandis que son équivalence avec l’homme correspond à sa qualité d’ homo.’

Fr. Hugo goes so far as to say (p.153): ‘Augustine, sometimes reputed a misogynist, may be said to be the first Christian feminist.’ His book is a sympathetic treatment of Augustine’s views on the subject, which he maintains are still valid. For those able to accept the principles of Catholic theology, he would seem to prove his thesis.

For the Catholic view of marriage with special reference to Humanae vitae, see also N. Blásquez, Psicoética de la intimidad conyugal, según san Agustín. Augustinus xv 1970 113-49; and a brief notice of this article by E. Bleuwen in Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes xvii 1971, 413.
17. EN viii 13, 1161a, 22-5.
18. De Genesi ad litteram xi 50.
interests:

Hinc itaque etiam pax domestica oritur, id est, ordinata imperandi obediendique concordia cohabitantium. imperant enim qui consulunt: sicut vir uxori, parentes filiis, domini servis. obediunt autem quibus consultur: sicut mulieres maritis, filii parentibus, servi dominis. sed in domo iusti viventis ex fide, et adhuc ab illa caelesti civitate peregrinantis, etiam qui imperant, serviunt eis, quibus videntur imperare. neque enim dominandi cupiditate imperant, sed officio consulendi; nec principandi superbia, sed providendi misericordia.\(^{19}\)

Although St. Basil held similar views also based on the authority of St. Paul,\(^ {20}\) St. Augustine’s position is the more interesting in that he was not drawing on merely theoretical or theological considerations, for he had had in his youth experience, if not of legal marriage, at least of life with a concubine.\(^ {21}\) Indeed, she bore him a son and perhaps considered herself as much a wife by repute as Xanthippe apparently did in her relations with Socrates.\(^ {22}\) However, Augustine’s mother convinced him that he should contract a legal marriage: he acquiesced in the suggestion and dismissed the mother of his son, who returned sorrowfully to Africa vowing to have no relations with any other man. Since his intended bride was two years too young for marriage, for this short interval Augustine took a second concubine, since in his own words he was *non amator coniugii sed libidinis servus*.\(^ {23}\)

It is therefore with personal experience that he can later speak of the pleasure, *quo maior in corporis voluptatibus nulla est*,\(^ {24}\) and he admits that he was once *tenebrosam spem gerens de pulchritudine uxoris*.\(^ {25}\) Moreover, he frankly admits that he had only a slight interest in the duties of matrimony and the raising of children, what really attracted him into marriage was strong sexual desire: *Magna autem ex parte atque atque vehementer consuetudo satiandae insatiabilis concupiscientiae me captum excruciabat*.\(^ {26}\)

However, the marriage did not take place, since his conversion intervened and left him strangely unable to cope with women, even close relatives, in any kind of private interview.\(^ {27}\)

But his dismissal of his concubine requires some consideration. It was an

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22. Cf. J.W. Fitton, *'That was no Lady, that was...'.* *CQ* xx 1970, 56-66.
25. *De utilitate credendi* 3.
extraordinarily harsh and heartless act in one who became deservedly renowned for his compassion. It is true that it occurred before his conversion, but this only makes it the more obvious that the woman was sacrificed for the sake of his plans for secular advancement. It can perhaps be seen as a symptom of one of the fundamental weaknesses in Western civilisation which has developed without Greek moderation, the Greek discovery of the importance of the individual to the point we have reached today in which individuals refuse to make any sacrifice of their own supposed interests for the good of any group whether family or state.

Comparison with a non-Christian in a similar situation may be instructive. The great epic of India, the *Mahābhārata* ends with an account of the ‘Great Journey’ (*mahāprasthāṇa*) of the Pāṇḍava brothers and their wife into the other world.\(^{28}\) This involved climbing the sacred Mount Meru, and as they do so, one by one they fall dead, for the soul must abandon its mortal body and gain a new one in the other world.\(^{29}\) At last only the eldest of the brothers, Yudhiṣṭhira, and his faithful dog are left alive. At this stage Yudhiṣṭhira (because of his rare virtue) receives the honour of an invitation from Indra to move straight to heaven without dying as his brothers and wife have had to do. He asks what is to become of his dog, and refuses the invitation when he learns that he would have to abandon his faithful companion.\(^{30}\) This renunciation is the more remarkable in a Hindu setting in that the dog has never been as highly regarded in India as it was in Ancient Greece, as we learn from the enthusiastic evidence of Xenophon\(^ {31}\) and Arrian,\(^ {32}\) nor did even the British Raj manage to improve his standing.

Throughout the long history of Hinduism renunciation of one’s own interests has been a highly esteemed ideal constantly practised and represented as a principal virtue not only of the priestly caste but also of the warriors – a very different outlook from that of the Heroic Age which finds its typical expression in the wrath of Achilles or the endless feuds of the Sagas.

Christianity also has always advocated self-sacrifice, but how has this worked out in practice? The courage and devotion of martyrs and confessors in the early Church are beyond praise, but what of the ordinary Christians when the Roman Empire became Christian? Here it is relevant to note the divergent development of asceticism in the Eastern and Western Churches: while those who renounced the world in the East normally entered communities sited near the cities where they could serve the communities of which they had renounced the pleasures and comforts,\(^ {33}\) in the West asceticism normally meant the complete repudiation

\(^{28}\) *MBh.* xvii.

\(^{29}\) *Ibid.* xvii. 2.


\(^{31}\) Xen. *Cyn.* i.


\(^{33}\) St Basil, *Epp.* xciv, cl. 3.
of any sense of duty to the community at large and a single-minded concern with the cure of one’s own soul.\textsuperscript{34}

For Confucius the priorities had pointed in quite the reverse direction:

\begin{quote}
子不語怪力亂神。
\end{quote}

(‘The subjects on which the Master did not talk were – extraordinary things, feats of strength, disorder, and spiritual beings’ – Transl. Legge) – nor is it without significance that these are topics eminently newsworthy in our society obsessed with the importance of sensation and records – and:

\begin{quote}
問死曰：未知生，焉知死。
\end{quote}

(Chi Lu asked about serving the spirits of the dead. The Master said, ‘While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve their spirits?’ Chi Lu added, ‘I venture to ask about death?’ He was answered, ‘While you do not know life, how can you know about death?’ Transl. Legge).\textsuperscript{35}


35. \textit{Confucian Analects} VII xx; XI xi. A thousand years later Procopius (V 3. 6-8) was to make the same point:

\begin{quote}
απονοιας γὰρ μανιώδους των ἡγούμαι εὑνα διερευνᾶσθαι τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ φύσιν, ὃποια ποτὲ ἐστιν. ἀνθρώπων γὰρ οἴδε τὰ ἀνθρώπια ἐς τὸ ἀκριβές οἴμαι
\end{quote}
Indeed, this selfish other-worldliness on the part of the classes trained to
government and administration was a major factor in the collapse of the Western
Empire while the Eastern Empire survived for another thousand years. It was
also a reckless neglect of the teaching of Christ: ‘For whosoever will save his life
shall lose it.’36 But the attitude is not unknown in Western societies today as
expressed concisely in the phrase ohne mich.37

The obsession with personal salvation, contrasting so strikingly with the
compassion of the Bodhisattva, was one factor in the early Christian attitude to
marriage:38 another was the quaint doctrine of original sin, which inevitably
instilled feelings of guilt and distaste concerning an act which even if the rightful
use of the evil of sexual desire nevertheless produced a helpless infant afflicted
with original sin.39 Western civilisation still suffers from this sense of guilt, and
permissiveness is merely a violent and defiant reaction against it.

It is refreshing to look again to Hinduism for a much saner and happier
understanding and management of this basic relationship in human society.

As early as the Rgveda we find a hymn40 glorifying the status and role in the
universe of the married couple (dampati), which is the most important of the
four stages in the ideal Hindu life. And the Kāmasūtra, perhaps too often read in
καταληπτά, μη τι γε δη τα εις θεου φωνη ηκοντα. . . . . έγε γαρ οικ αν οιδεν
αλλο περι θεου οπων ειπομη ή ϑοι ιαγαθος τε πανταπαι ειη και ξυμπαντα εν τη
ξουοια τη αυτου έχει.

36. Matth. xvi 25, δε γαρ άν θελη την ψυχην αυτου σωσει, άπολεσει αυτην.
The AV translates ‘life’, but the RV recognises also the translation ‘soul’.

37. Islam was to adopt a different course, at any rate in Sufism, cf. S.H. Nasr. Sufism and
the Perennity of the Mystical Quest. Milla waMilla. The Australian Bulletin of Comparative
Religion, x 1970, 13. ‘Since it is based on the social and juridical teachings of Islam, Sufism
is meant to be practised within society and not in a monastic environment outside the social
order. The Sufi bears spiritual poverty (faqr) within himself even if he lives outwardly
amidst the riches of the world. The world has died in him and he lives in the world without
being seduced by it.’

So too Hinduism: ‘He (the Acharyadeva) urged his Sannyasi disciples to think and work
for national welfare primarily; personal salvation was to be treated as a secondary
consideration because, who lives if the nation dies?’ (Swami Vīkāsananda, Worldly Pleasure
and Liberation. Hinduism 64, 1974, 15-8, at p.16),

38. One of St Augustine’s favourite texts is I Cor. vii 32-4, ‘He that is unmarried careth for
things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord . . . .’, which he quotes at c.g.
Conf. ii 3.

39. De nuptiis et concupiscentia i 13: omnem quae de concubitu nascitur, carnem esse
peccati; and cf. ibid. 20, 37; Contra duas epistolae Pelagianorum i 4.

40. RV viii 31.

41. It is an interesting reflection on the different attitudes of East and West that while in the
West we have ‘despot’ (δεσποτης) in the singular, from the same IE origins *dems-pot-
(‘master of the house’). India has in the dual dampati (‘the married couple’); so too while
Greek sculpture can offer smug Greek athletes in splendid isolation or копу with enigmatic
smiles, the Indian has dampati (‘the married couple’).
the West for the wrong reasons, in the context of Hindu religious and ethical experience which pervades Hindu life, 'gives a detailed example of the courtship of a newly married bride by her husband, which would win the approval of most modern psychologists'.

For it was written for a society in which the arranged marriage is normal, but modern research has shown that such marriages based on the wisdom and experience of the older generation and strengthened by the determination of both parties and both families to make a permanent union a success, have a better chance than self-choice marriages based on romantic illusions or infatuation, followed by quick disillusionment and resort to divorce or the impersonal intervention of marriage guidance counsellors. Moreover, the *Kāmasūtra* professes to be written within a spiritual system, while there is as much spiritual content in the too numerous manuals of sex circulating in the West as in The Manual of Elementary Drill.

There is no attempt made in Hinduism to urge with sophistry or eristic the equality of the sexes: both parties are essential in the household, both have inalienable duties in the rites and duties of the household, and both participate in the divine purpose of a continuing creation.

The contrast with St Augustine's view of marriage as merely tolerated, and even then inevitably passing on the curse of original sin to the coming generation, could hardly be more striking.

Yet Western Civilisation need not have come to this impasse. The vigorous intellectual activity within early Christianity produced over eighty heresies known to St Augustine, and if that of Pelagius, reckoned the eighty-eighth, had prevailed we might have heard no more of original sin and become rather responsible masters of our fate just like a Hindu believer in the doctrine of *Karma*.

Moreover, if the Emperor Julian had succeeded in his attempt to foster all that was best in the ancient traditions of Greek Civilisation, Western society might now be firmly founded not so much on the *doctrinaire* theories of Plato on the equality of the sexes as expressed in a somewhat impractical way in the *Republic*, but on the later and eminently practical ideas of the Stoic and

42. A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India* 172.
44. *De haeresibus init.*
45. *Rep.* v. 453 b sqq. But it must be remembered that Plato did not intend the *Republic* to be taken as an outline of what a real state should be, his ideal state was merely to form an analogy with the constitution of the individual soul: his suggestions on the nature of a real state are to be found in the *Laws*.
46. Cf. Clemens Al. iv 8 p.590-2 (=SVF iii 59.32-7):
Neo-platonic thinkers, who advocated equal opportunities for education for members of both sexes in so far as they had the potential to benefit by it, just as the Buddhists see no difference between the sexes in matters of the mind.

Even a Roman jurist rejected the alleged incapacity of women in legal matters:

Feminas vero perfectae aetatis in tutela esse fere nulla pretiosa ratio suasisse videtur: nam quae vulgo creditur, quia levitate animi plerumque decipiuntur et aequum erat eas tutorum auctoritate regi, magis speciosa videtur quam vera; mulieres enim, quae perfectae aetatis sunt, ipsae sibi negotia tractant, et in quibusdam causis dicis gratia tutor interponit auctoritatem suam; saepe etiam invitus auctor fieri a praetore cogitur.

Thus the philosophers of Greece achieved, and Hindu civilisation from its earliest manifestation in the Rgveda not only achieved but also practised, a higher ideal of marriage based on chastity and a permanent union than Western civilisation has yet achieved, or is likely to achieve if emancipation is to mean merely permissiveness.

ταίς γυναιξίν, ἐμφερώς τοῖς ἀνδράσις.

And Antipater of Tarsus in SVF iii 254-7 (= Stobaeus IV xxii (a) 25), for a lengthy eulogy of marriage in terms of the highest Stoic morality, with the characteristic dictum (at 255.11-2):

Συμβέβηκβ δε και τον μη πείραν έσχηκότα γαμέτης γυνακός και τέκνων ἁγευστον ευαι της ἀληθωσωτάτης και γνησίων εννοιας.

47. E.g. Proclus in R. i 97. 24-6 Kroll: πώς δ ’ αν τό ϋήλυ καί το τής έτερότητος γένος καί την άνομοιότητα παρά φύσιν είναι τοις ούσαν φήσαιμεν;

and his enlightened discussion of Plato Rep. (in R. i 236-57K), from which may be quoted his principle, και δει μη τό γένος βλέπειν, ἀλλα την καταφρον των γενον δύναμιν η άδυναμίαν και ταύτη παιδείαν ορίζειν (i 249.13-5K).


49. Gaius i 190.

50. On which Stenzler rightly comments:

Man hat mit Recht die Stellung, welche die Ehefrau bei den verschiedenen Völkern im Hause einnimmt, zu einem wesentlichen Massstabe ihrer Cultur gemacht. Das Bild derselben, welches uns in diesem Liede [the Vedic hymn celebrating the marriage of the Sun and Moon, still used in the Hindu wedding service, RV x 85] entgentritt, weiss der indischen Nation eine viel höherestellung an, als man zu glauben pflegt, wenn man dieselbe in unklarer Vorstellungsweise unter den verwirrenden begriff der orientalischen Völker bringt. Eine Nation, in welcher ein Dichter sich dieser edlen Anschauung erheben konnte, darf unmöglich ohne Weiteres mit den anderen Völkern zusammen geworfen werden, mit welchen sie für uns nur das gemeinschaftlich hat, dass sie im Osten von Europa heimisch ist. Hier ist es die tiefste Neigung des Herzens, welche die Braut bewegt,