

2011

The Problem of Evil in Augustine's Confessions

Edward Matusek

University of South Florida, edmatusek@hotmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd>

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Matusek, Edward, "The Problem of Evil in Augustine's Confessions" (2011). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.
<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/3733>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

The Problem of Evil in Augustine's *Confessions*

by

Edward A. Matussek

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Thomas Williams, Ph.D.
Roger Ariew, Ph.D.
Joanne Waugh, Ph.D.
Charles B. Guignon, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
November 14, 2011

Keywords: theodicy, privation, metaphysical evil, Manichaeism,
Neo-Platonism

Copyright © 2011, Edward A. Matussek

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Chapter One: Introduction to Augustine’s <i>Confessions</i> and the Present Study	1
Purpose and Background of the Study	2
Literary and Historical Considerations of <i>Confessions</i>	4
Relevance of the Study for Various Interpretative Approaches	15
O’Donnell’s and Crosson’s Approaches	17
Kotze’s Approach	21
Suchocki’s and McMahan’s Approaches	25
Wills’s and Riley’s Approaches	29
Outline of the Study	32
Chapter Two: Early Childhood and Adolescence	35
Early Childhood	35
Infancy and Early Education	35
Parents	39
Adolescence	43
Sexual Struggles	43
The Pear Theft	46
Platonic Interpretations of the Theft	49
Anti-Platonic Interpretations of the Theft	60
An Anti-Platonic “Confessional” Interpretation	66
Significance of Evil in Childhood and Adolescence	74
Critique of Augustine’s Contributions Regarding Evil	80
Chapter Three: Cicero’s <i>Hortensius</i> and the Manichean Period	85
Cicero’s <i>Hortensius</i>	85
The Manichean Period	88
Manichean Beliefs	88
Augustine’s Early View of God	95
Augustine and Manichaeism	97
The Concubine	108
Preliminary Considerations	108
The Manichean Effect on His Concubinage	110
Considerations from the Post-Manichean and Post- Conversion Periods	113
Friendship and Grief	115

Significance of Evil in the Manichean Period	119
Critique of Augustine’s Contributions Regarding Evil	121
Chapter Four: The Post-Manichean, Neo-Platonic, and Christian Periods	124
The Post-Manichean Period	124
New Breakthrough in Milan	125
Reflections on Moral Evil and Free Will	127
The Neo-Platonic Period	133
Background on Neo-Platonism and the “Books of the Platonists”	134
Plotinus’ Views on Matter	137
Plotinus’ View on Metaphysical Evil	140
Augustine’s Appropriation of Neo-Platonic Thought	143
The First Ascent	147
Final Conclusions on Metaphysical Evil and the Harmony of Creation	150
Final Conclusions Concerning Moral Evil and Free Will	155
The Second Ascent	161
The Christian Period	163
Other Conversion Stories	164
The Garden Scene	166
Post-Conversion Considerations	178
Significance of Evil in the Post-Manichean, Neo-Platonic, and Christian Periods	180
Critique of Augustine’s Contributions Regarding Evil	183
Chapter Five: Final Considerations	187
Works Cited	199

ABSTRACT

Augustine, the fourth-century Christian philosopher, is perhaps best-known for his spiritual autobiography *Confessions*. Two aspects of the problem of evil are arguably critical for comprehending his life in Books 1 through 9 of the work. His search for the nature and origin of evil in the various philosophies that he encounters (the intellectual aspect) and his struggles with his own weaknesses (the experiential aspect) are windows for understanding the actual dynamics of his sojourn.

I defend the idea above by providing a fuller examination of the key role that both aspects play in his spiritual journey. Examining relevant events from Augustine's life chronologically, I analyze his philosophical wanderings from his encounter with Cicero's work *Hortensius* through his eventual disillusionment with the Manichaean religion, and finally, his move in the direction of Christian teachings with the help of Neo-Platonism. Along the way his philosophical questions (the intellectual aspect) and his struggles with his own depravity (the experiential aspect) have an effect on each other until his ultimate move toward Christianity resolves both problems of evil.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO AUGUSTINE'S *CONFESSIONS* AND THE PRESENT STUDY

Augustine's *Confessions*, widely hailed as one of the most influential books in Western literature, especially in Western religious literature, continues to generate considerable interest among scholars, especially in academic circles in Europe and North America. Written from approximately 397 to 401, this unique work is well-known as Augustine's account of his personal journey to the Christian faith. With Augustine as undoubtedly one of the most influential Christian philosophers and theologians in history, the interest in his *Confessions* is even more intense because of the personal background that the work provides about him.

However, despite the predominance of religious elements in the *Confessions*, the number and variety of other scholarly studies from other disciplines on this particular work are rather astonishing. Even a partial summation of some of the key articles and investigations from 1888 through 1995 by Richard Severson displays a startling range of academic inquiries from a wide variety of fields, ranging from autobiographical studies to classical and literary scholarship and from psychological criticism to assorted theological investigations, of course, including studies in spirituality, doctrinal debates, "God talk," profiles of sin, and his use of Scripture throughout the work.¹ Various philosophical issues besides the problem of evil also pervade the work such as the nature of time, the

¹ Richard Severson, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine: An Annotated Bibliography, 1888-1995* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), v-vii.

phenomenon of memory, studies in ethics, and the nature of philosophy itself. Echoing Severson's opening assessment, G.E. Gorman, in the Foreword to Severson's work, notes how *Confessions* is "studied by literary critics as the paradigmatic Western autobiography, by psychologists as an ancient case study, by philosophers as a tract on time, and by theologians for many reasons."² Rarely has such a work in Western literature undergone so much serious attention in academia for so many diverse reasons.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The aim of this particular study is to provide a focused exposition of the role of the problem of evil in Augustine's *Confessions*. This analysis will be confined to Books 1 through 9 since those books in the work contain the narrative of his journey to the Christian faith and the results of his conversion. Delineating two aspects of the problem of evil, an intellectual aspect and an experiential aspect, is arguably critical for comprehending his journey. The intellectual aspect concerns his search for the nature and origin of evil, and the experiential aspect focuses on his struggles with his own temptations and weaknesses.

Both aspects are windows for better understanding the dynamics of his sojourn, and throughout the study I intend to defend that idea by providing a fuller examination of the key role that both play in the narrative. Examining relevant events from Augustine's life chronologically, I analyze important episodes from his childhood, his philosophical wanderings stemming from his first encounter with Cicero's work *Hortensius*, a careful

² G. E. Gorman, foreword to *The Confessions of Saint Augustine: An Annotated Bibliography, 1888-1995*, by Richard Severson (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), xi.

examination of his eventual disillusionment with Manichean beliefs, and finally, his move in the direction of Christian teachings, with the help of Neo-Platonism as an intermediary of sorts. Regarding “resolution” of the first problem of evil (the intellectual dilemma), it is helpful to understand that the resolution of that problem in *Confessions* is more one of explanation than justification. Augustine’s answer enables him to reach an understanding, to his satisfaction, of the nature and origin of evil. However, this explanation is not necessarily to be understood as a complete justification of God’s allowance of evil, especially in the more technical sense of theodicy as justifications developed by thinkers such as Gottfried Leibniz, John Hick, and others. This distinction is helpful in better understanding Augustine’s quest.

The intellectual problem of evil itself needs very little introduction. Formulated in the context of monotheism, the dilemma that is posed consists of explaining how evil can simultaneously exist with a deity that is all-powerful and all-knowing and supremely good since such a being would not want evil to exist and by definition would also possess the needed qualities to ensure that evil not become a reality in the first place. In other words, it is logically inconsistent, some have argued, to have evil present in the same world as a being with the attributes above. As a result, some thinkers have resorted to denying that one of the premises above is true, making this description of the problem of evil one of the most vexing issues in the history of Western philosophy because of its potential ramifications. Augustine’s related focus on the origin of evil also appears in his *Confessions*, but the formulation of the main dilemma above will be sufficient at this point for introducing the study.

An exposition of Augustine's understanding of evil at various times is a critical component for reaching a high level of understanding of the role of the problem of evil in his life. Moreover, understanding his interaction with the problem more fully can be useful in better understanding his philosophy on this issue in other works of his such as *On Free Choice of the Will* as well as his anti-Manichean works. In addition, such an analysis can also shed more light on Augustine's other views in philosophy such as his positions on free will, the concept of the will itself, and the moral nature of God.

The purpose of this current chapter is to deal with certain preliminary issues before commencing with the investigation in subsequent chapters. In particular, I seek to provide some background to *Confessions* such as Augustine's key reasons for writing the work and also the related issues of the structure and unity of the text and the historicity of the narrative. In view of several key verdicts on the historicity question, considerations of the effect of that issue on the study are included here as well. This section is followed by a survey of various interpretive approaches that have been proposed for understanding the work. The consideration of each interpretative approach also includes observations on how the study can be beneficial when it is applied to that particular understanding of the text. Finally, the last section in this chapter contains an overview of key periods in the narrative and issues that will be analyzed in the various chapters of the study.

Literary and Historical Considerations of Confessions

Reflections on both literary and historical factors concerning the work are crucial. In *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, arguably the most respected biography on Augustine from the twentieth century, Peter Brown outlines both the literary and historical

background from that period in an effort to understand what led up to the writing of the *Confessions*. Brown notes that “religious autobiography” with common features of “wandering, temptations, sad thoughts of mortality, and the search for truth” was a genre that pagan philosophers had originally established and one that Christians had continued in the fourth century.³ Thus, Augustine already had a ready audience for this type of work. Brown also observes how he would have felt the need to explain himself to his contemporaries.⁴ His anti-Manichean works still did not fully settle in everyone’s mind his break with his past association with that particular group. And although he had been baptized even by Ambrose himself, his works thus far had shown a strong acquaintance with pagan philosophers such as the Platonists. In addition, his conversion had been relatively “unspectacular,” especially when compared to various conversion narratives of his contemporaries since he had simply retired from his chair in rhetoric at Milan after serving to the end of that particular term on the basis of bad health.

Moreover, as Augustine entered middle age including coming to grips with his new role of priest and later bishop, this new adjustment led to intense self-examination as a man “made deeply afraid by the weight of my sins.”⁵ Thus, Brown argues that *Confessions* is not a “book of reminiscences” but rather an “anxious turning to the past,” which is “unmistakable” in the text itself: “Allow me, I beseech You [God], grant me to wind round and round in my present memory the spirals of my errors [*circuire praesenti memoria praeteritos circuitus erroris mei*].”⁶

³ Peter Lamont Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 152.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 157, Brown’s translation from *Conf.*, 10.43.70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Brown’s translation from *Conf.*, 4.1.1. Latin insertions are mine unless otherwise noted, and I use James J. O’Donnell’s Latin text for *Confessions* unless otherwise noted: James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol 1., *Introduction and Text* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

In connection with the title of the work itself, James J. O'Donnell notes the biblical roots in the use of the word *confession* in Psalm 9:2, 31:18, 34:18⁷ for example.⁸ However, the connotations of thanksgiving and praise that are innate to biblical usage cannot be found in classical usage. *Confiteri* (to confess) is a verb involving speaking, and *confessio* (confession) is speech that God makes possible, and hence it should be seen as authorized by Him.⁹ God is usually the addressee, but not always (e.g. 10.37.62). As the subject varies, the effect could be that of praise (a confession of praise), self-blame (a confession of sins), or “determined avowal” (a confession of faith) with the last type as the least common in Augustine’s *Confessions*.

In *Augustine: A New Biography*, the provocative work by O'Donnell that was published in 2005, he takes a somewhat different stance on the circumstances surrounding the writing of the *Confessions*. Since he also authored the masterful 3-volume edition of the *Confessions* (text and commentary) in 1992, O'Donnell's biography on Augustine has gained substantial attention. O'Donnell essentially maintains that Augustine wrote *Confessions* primarily in order to resolve any current questions or rumors about his past and thus, enable his influence, unimpeded, to help the church that he served to be triumphant and successful, especially against the Manichees and Donatists, a move which also favored Augustine's own ambitions in the long run as

⁷ O'Donnell's list of verses here uses the verse numbering found in the Vulgate edition of the Bible and translations based on the Vulgate. In translations such as the RSV (Revised Standard Version), the first verse that he references would be found in Psalm 9:1 and the last in 35:18. Regarding the second passage, 31:18, O'Donnell is arguably referring to 31:5b (32:5b in the RSV) because (1) Psalm 31 in the Vulgate only contains eleven verses, and (2) O'Donnell's Latin wording of the second example of the use of *confess* is essentially the Latin equivalent of 31:5b. (O'Donnell gives the Latin phrases of the usage of *confess* in each verse, but without classifying the type of confession. The first and last references are reasonable examples of confessions of praise, with the second reference serving as a confession of sin.)

⁸ James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, *Commentary on Books 1-7* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

well.¹⁰ O'Donnell notes the connection between this goal of resisting rival groups and the overall structure of the book:

We do not understand Augustine at this crucial point in his life unless we see that the central preoccupations of the *Confessions* are the Manichees, whom he seeks to dismiss before the work is one-third complete—and the Donatists, whom he never mentions. Between them he sets his own performance, an artful confession, exculpatory in the way public confession exculpates and justifies at the same time.¹¹

O'Donnell submits that it was crucial in Augustine's view to use his past, with a mighty work of God in it, in order to justify his present, which served to strengthen his influence and work for the African Caecilianist church and against the Donatist church.¹² Reaching that goal required minimizing his previous Manicheism, portraying it as a "youthful indiscretion," and coupled with exactly the kind of "sexual profligacy" that a Manichean teacher would have strongly objected to. For the same reason it was also crucial to minimize his previous associations with Christianity such as any enrollment as a catechumen while an infant, adolescent considerations of the faith, and ongoing associations with Christian institutions in his early period, etc., so that his true faithfulness as a Christian only began when he underwent baptism in Milan in 387. This is not to say that O'Donnell views Augustine's account as totally contrived. Rather, he sees the narrative portion as reflecting Augustine's distinct spin on specific events in his past in such a way so as to favor his own current ecclesiastical and political position in connection with the struggles of the church that he served.

In support of his interpretation O'Donnell also notes specific discrepancies in the text. For example, he argues that Augustine's assertion of spending nine years with the Manichees is problematic since even a basic calculation of his time with them from the

¹⁰ James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 41.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹² *Ibid.*, 53.

time he turned nineteen until his thirtieth birthday, approximately the time that he decisively broke with the Manichees in Rome to move to Milan, actually adds up to eleven years.¹³ Furthermore, instead of the unpersuasive efforts of Faustus, a key Manichee leader, serving as the factor that confirmed Augustine's skeptical outlook on that religion, O'Donnell observes that only when Augustine left Rome and moved to a city in which no Manichee community existed, did he make a final break with that group.¹⁴ However, O'Donnell acknowledges as well that Augustine's fear in composing *Confessions* stemmed not only from fear of a defeat in "local church politics" but also a significant fear of failure in regard to his service to God, his lord and master.¹⁵ Thus, as O'Donnell notes, "the act of telling his story sustained him and helped him shape the way he could lead his people and achieve his goals."

Concerning the historicity of the narrative, Garry Wills notes the conflict between the portrayal of various events in *Confessions* and Augustine's other writings such as the downplaying of the influence of Neo-Platonist teachers such as Mallius Theodore or the exaggeration of the importance of other figures such as Ambrose.¹⁶ Nevertheless, he submits that instead of Augustine striving to meet modern standards of historiography, Augustine's meditative tone in the work focuses on the "action of grace" in his life, God's lessons that he did not recognize or prove receptive to at the time, which is the "true story" in Augustine's view, especially in light of the participation of his life's pattern in the larger picture of divine work in creation and human history.¹⁷

¹³ Ibid., 44-45.

¹⁴ Ibid., 45.

¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶ Garry Wills, *St. Augustine's Childhood: Confessions, Book One* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2001), 11.

¹⁷ Ibid., 11-12.

Fully addressing the issue of the historicity of the narrative section is outside the scope of this study (although I do include alternative understandings of Book 8 further below). However, I will note that it is arguably still too early for firm conclusions to be drawn by scholars on O'Donnell's views concerning Augustine's motivations, and even given O'Donnell's thesis, Wills's input as to Augustine's view of the "true story" would suggest that even a modified version of the account, one that emphasizes certain events and deemphasizes others without a strict adherence to historiography, might reveal more about the true Augustine than might be thought otherwise. Examining the intellectual and experiential aspects of evil with Wills's interpretation illuminates at the very least the intricate dynamic of those elements at the level of divine action that Augustine believes is active in his life, in particular in the larger context of divine work throughout human history. For example, the temptations that Augustine struggles with in his own life as the experiential problem and the work of God's grace in addressing that problem could be seen as somehow representative of the larger role of grace in addressing the experiential problem of evil as a whole in the history of humanity.

Brown's points on Augustine's potential need to come to grips with elements of his past are also well taken. Overall, I will conduct this study on the premise that the narrative sections are historical and thus portrayed as autobiographical, essentially Brown's position on the historicity question. If this premise is accurate, then the benefits of the study have already been outlined above and even more advantages will be seen below in the treatment of the various interpretative approaches to *Confessions*. If O'Donnell's position on Augustine's motivations for writing his *Confessions* is correct, then the study is still beneficial for two reasons: first, as was stated above, *Confessions* as

a modified account of Augustine's struggles does not inevitably negate the lessons that can be gleaned about Augustine the man. Of course, it would mean that one must be more selective and discerning in what conclusions to draw when applying this analysis toward that particular end, but an altered version of Augustine's past does not render such an investigation useless in that regard, albeit more difficult to utilize it in understanding Augustine as a person.

Secondly, even under the scenario that O'Donnell's thesis is correct, one could still arguably have reason to trust what can be learned from Augustine's philosophical understanding of evil, especially in connection with his other works since putting one's "best foot forward" in an account of the past does not necessarily negate the philosophical aspects of the work. However, what should one make of a worst-case scenario in which Augustine's arguments and contemplation on evil in *Confessions* and his other works are totally spurious, simply an ongoing and effective method for Augustine to place himself in good standing with church authorities and Christian intellectuals in that period by using the problem of evil to argue for the superiority of Christianity over rival alternatives on this crucial issue? Although such a scenario strikes me as extremely doubtful, even here lessons could still be drawn from his use of the experiential and intellectual aspects as he makes the fullest utilization of arguments and reasoning that resonate with readers of his time, not to mention the effectiveness of such arguments in attacking rival groups' understanding of evil and refuting their own attacks in this regard. So the only interpretation of *Confessions* that might yield very little, if any, lessons from the ensuing study here would be a purely allegorical understanding of the work, an interpretation that is seriously problematic in my view.

On the issue of historicity, two other considerations that are helpful to consider involve the all-important conversion scene in Book 8. First, Leo Ferrari takes the position that at least some significant aspects of that crucial scene are fictional. For example, he discounts the factuality of Augustine's encounter with Romans 13:13-14 in effecting his conversion because of the existence of only one citation of that passage by Augustine in the fifteen-year period from conversion (386) to the completion of *Confessions* (401)—a conspicuous absence for a passage that Augustine presumably would have cherished as being central to his coming to Christianity.¹⁸ Noting similarities between the accounts of Paul's conversion and Augustine's own, Ferrari comments on the lack of numerous allusions to Paul's conversion in Augustine's writings during his early post-conversion period.¹⁹ When this observation is contrasted with the seventeen allusions to Paul's conversion during Augustine's period of work on *Confessions* (396-401 in Ferrari's view), Ferrari suggests that Augustine used Paul's story as a paradigm on how to present his own account.²⁰ In addition, in Sermon 89 Augustine includes the story of Nathanael under the fig tree, a narrative that is symbolic of Augustine's situation under the fig tree in Book 8, along with the voice that calls to Paul in his conversion: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"²¹ The similarity between the elements in the sermon and Augustine's own life-changing encounter under the fig tree with the mysterious voice that tells him to "take and read" is clear enough in Ferrari's view.

¹⁸ Leo Ferrari, "Beyond Augustine's Conversion Scene," *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. Joanne McWilliam (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), 98.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

But how would Augustine ever justify taking such liberties? In contrast to the silent reading that one often finds today, Ferrari submits that works such as *Confessions* were written to be read aloud to a gathered audience, thus with the text serving as a script for the purpose of a dramatic performance.²² In such a format “the presentation, to be dramatically effective, must subordinate factuality to the canons of dramatic presentation,” leading to a “certain romanticizing of reality...” Overall, in the presentation the audience is invited, in a sense, to be involved in grief over the indubitable truth of Augustine’s sinfulness of the past and his rebellion against God.²³ Moreover, on the issue of truth in Book 10 (10.3.3-4) Augustine remarks that his confession is not just for the curious, inert about changing their own lives, but for those whose ears are “opened to him by charity.” In his essay *On Lying*, written two years before his writing of *Confessions*, Augustine makes a similar point and also submits how allegory and figurative language are legitimate ways of expressing truth, especially spiritual truth. The parallel between Paul’s conversion and his own not only increased the dramatic impact but served to confirm the spiritual tradition that his conversion belonged to.²⁴ In a culture that heavily valued the past instead of looking to the future, his audience “savoured authenticity” in his presentation instead of suspecting plagiarism as the modern mind would.

Despite Ferrari’s rejection of the factuality of key elements of the conversion scene, the present study can still be helpful. One immediate benefit of the study for accounts like Ferrari’s involves Ferrari’s observation of the format of presenting *Confessions* to an audience. With presumably a mixture of both the curious and committed followers of

²² Ibid., 102. Ferrari cites 10.3.3 and 4 and 10.4.6 from *Confessions* in support of this understanding.

²³ Ibid., 103.

²⁴ Ibid., 104.

Christ among the listeners, Augustine's treatment and explanation of the experiential problem of evil throughout the entire work would need to be relevant and compelling for the first group and theologically faithful and encouraging for the second. Thus, one can learn from his treatment of the solution to experiential evil in Book 8 how Augustine seeks to show the first category of listeners that the Christian solution to his struggles is truly effectual. This effort includes his careful choice of the relevant Romans passage to illustrate the Christian claim of the authoritative nature of written revelation.

For the second category of listeners, one relevant question concerns how Augustine's treatment of Christian victory in Book 8 serves to strengthen believers' understanding of their own conversion against evil and to encourage them to persevere against other personal vices in their ongoing journey of faith. A consideration of the central role that Augustine chooses to give the Romans passage in the scene can shed light on his emphasis on the use of God's written revelation in the context of dealing with experiential evil as well as the key role of grace in the process. Moreover, through the use of imagery from the story of Nathanael, Augustine suggests a parallel here between Nathanael's story and Augustine's own initial reticence to consider Christ and his teachings as a serious option, thus reinforcing the importance of grace and perhaps instilling Catholic listeners with the additional hope that their non-believing friends could also be converted. The parallels with Paul's own conversion in that scene can heighten these points of emphasis even more in view of Paul's marked animosity toward Christianity before his own conversion in the Book of Acts.

A second but related point of contention for Book 8 involves the question, put forth by some commentators, of whether Augustine was really converted to Neo-Platonism

instead of to Christianity in the autumn of 386. John McGuckin concurs largely with the more moderate proposal that Augustine the bishop superimposed much of his feelings, both philosophical and religious, from 400 on “his younger self” of 386, a case first raised by A. Harnack in a lecture in 1888.²⁵ McGuckin submits that the conscious use of literary stylizations throughout the text of *Confessions* supports this thesis as well.

Although McGuckin readily acknowledges how Augustine’s understanding and practice of Christianity were to undergo a formative evolution in the years after his conversion, he submits that Augustine’s general Christian direction, albeit one with heavy Neo-Platonic influences at the beginning, had been established when Augustine strongly accepted the “biblical and incarnational Platonism” that Ambrose had preached in Milan. Thus, while the versions of his conversion in his early writings were expressed more in philosophical terms, after years of imbibing elements of Pauline theology Augustine focuses more on “biblical” themes in his conversion account in *Confessions*: “pride, grace, and the person of Christ.”²⁶ McGuckin also comments on the connection between the fig tree imagery and Nathanael as well as parallels between Augustine’s conversion and Paul’s, part of Augustine’s effort to illustrate “the action of grace on the proud will of man.”²⁷ However, the similarities between Augustine’s description of his anguished struggle of the will and the spiritual emotion of the Psalmist in Psalms 51 and 38 are especially noteworthy. McGuckin does not claim that the conversion scene is “entirely an artificial edification

²⁵ John Anthony McGuckin, “The Enigma of Augustine’s Conversion: September 386 AD,” *Clergy Review*, 71, no. 2 (1986): 320. For Harnack’s key work on this topic, see Adolf von Harnack, *Monasticism and The Confessions of S. Augustine*, trans. E. E. Kellet, F. H. Marseille (New York: G. Putnam’s Sons, 1910).

²⁶ McGuckin, “The Enigma of Augustine’s Conversion: September 386 AD,” 321.

²⁷ McGuckin, “The Enigma of Augustine’s Conversion: September 386 AD,” 322.

for the reader,” but he does hold that scriptural testimonies were used in shaping the basic narrative structure and even in supplying some details of the scene.²⁸

Some of the benefits of the study for Ferrari’s interpretation are also relevant for McGuckin’s approach in view of their common findings such as parallels between Augustine’s account and Nathanael’s and Paul’s own stories. However, McGuckin’s observations of the use of the Psalms, especially Psalm 38 with Augustine’s inner struggle of the will, can open the door to further insights on how Augustine uses the experiential conflict to encourage believers in their own struggles and how he utilizes Scripture to accomplish that aim. In addition, Augustine’s use of penitential passages (Psalms 51:7, 6:3, 79:5, 8)²⁹ for an exploration of his innermost being in Book 8³⁰ can also shed light on his instruction to Christians on the contrite heart they should seek to cultivate in their experiential struggles.

Relevance of the Study for Various Interpretative Approaches

One of the key investigations regarding *Confessions* involves the problem of the structural unity of the text itself. Since the relevance and purpose of examining the problem of evil in the work is connected, of course, to some kind of interpretative structure for understanding the book, it is helpful to survey some of the structural frameworks surrounding various studies in *Confessions* in order to understand the relevance of the study for specific interpretations that have been proposed. Doing so also serves to expose the reader to the unusual complexity of the *Confessions* as well as to the

²⁸ McGuckin, “The Enigma of Augustine’s Conversion: September 386 AD,” 323.

²⁹ McGuckin, “The Enigma of Augustine’s Conversion: September 386 AD,” 325, n. 32.

³⁰ McGuckin, “The Enigma of Augustine’s Conversion: September 386 AD,” 322.

richness and depth of various understandings of the text. Chosen in part on the basis of their differences in comparison to each other, these views present a basic sample of a number of plausible ways that scholars have proposed for understanding the work.

It is also worth observing at this point the difficulty that scholars experience in providing a single, workable understanding of the text. In his masterful commentary on the *Confessions*, O'Donnell notes in his Introduction how it is “impossible...to take the *Confessions* in a vacuum, and...impossible to give any single interpretation that will satisfy.”³¹ Robert McMahon, whose own interpretative approach is also included in this chapter, asserts that “no single view need be, or can be, right in any absolute sense.”³² He uses Dante's *Commedia* as an example of how two different understandings could, in a sense, be equally valid:

Dante's *Commedia*, for example, can be understood as representing a journey with three guides or as one recorded over three *cantiche*. These two descriptions divide the poem in very different ways and involve different visions of its literary form. Yet both are clearly correct within their own terms. The formal coherence of the *Confessions* may similarly be described in different ways, all of them “correct,” each with its limitations. The best descriptions, it seems to me, comprehend the work more completely than others. They reveal the *Confessions* as an even more beautiful, more coherent and compelling work than it has hitherto seemed.

Although it is perhaps inevitable that debates on the one “correct” interpretation will continue, McMahon is helpful in pointing out how more than one understanding can reveal additional insights about the work as a whole.

In all of the following approaches, the benefit of the ensuing study on evil may also shed more light on the roles of Books 10-13 too in connection with the work as a whole. Of course, the brief discussion of the key points of each approach below scarcely does them justice. My own view of the *Confessions* is not strictly tied to any one suggested

³¹ James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Text* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 1.

³² Robert McMahon, *Augustine's Prayerful Ascent: An Essay on the Literary Form of the Confessions* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), xxi.

interpretation. I strongly acknowledge the overall prayerful nature of the work, which is one reason that I do not view the narrative portion as autobiography in the stricter, twentieth-century understanding of that genre.

O'Donnell's and Crosson's Approaches

O'Donnell's interpretation and also Frederick J. Crosson's interpretative understanding serve as two complementary approaches of the value of my particular topic. O'Donnell essentially views Augustine's work as an "intellectual autobiography" with two ecstatic experiences in Book 7 and the Ostia vision in Book 9 serving as the culmination of Augustine's ascent from a state of ignorance to a specific new level of illumination.³³ O'Donnell then argues that this ascent of the mind leads to the latter part of the work, consisting mostly of theological content, with Augustine's attempt to explore more deeply the nature and activity of God in various ways: God the creator by juxtaposing the phenomenon of time with that of eternity in Book 11, Augustine's own relation to understanding the divine revelation of God the Son in Book 12, and God the Spirit's work in history as creation history is juxtaposed with church history in Book 13.³⁴

Regarding the narrative portions of the text, O'Donnell argues for a triad pattern corresponding to the Trinity.³⁵ More specifically, he identifies a correspondence of the key positive features of the Trinity: God the Father *is*, God the Son *knows*, and God the Spirit *loves*. This being, knowing, and loving is reflected in humanity, made in the image of God, but the distortion of the three aspects in sinful man becomes an evident pattern in

³³ O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 1, xxxiii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, xl.

³⁵ O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography*, 65.

Augustine's downward descent in his *Confessions*.³⁶ Drawn from the three categories of sin in 1 John 2:16 in the New Testament, the actual order of descent intentionally corresponds to the three temptations in these same general areas against Christ by the devil in Matthew's Gospel.³⁷ In his 1992 commentary, O'Donnell argues that Augustine's references to his three sins in Book 1 (1.10.16) are reflective of the three types of sin that he uses to examine his conscience much later in the work in Book 10:³⁸ "Assuredly You [God] command that I contain myself from *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*" (10.30.41).³⁹ The first category is exhibited in Augustine's sins of the flesh--sensual pleasures, especially sexual desire, which dominate Book 2.⁴⁰ The sin of curiosity, the desire to learn about forbidden areas, especially in magic and religion, corresponds to "the lust of the eyes"⁴¹ and takes place in Book 3 with Augustine's escapades in Carthage, resulting in his encounter with the Manichees.⁴² Book 4 reflects the sin of worldly ambition in connection with "the pride of life," the third temptation from John's epistle, as Augustine pursues a lucrative career.⁴³ Therefore, the corruption of the triad follows the particular order of knowing, loving, and being, with Augustine "betraying each divine person in turn, the father last." The spiritual ascent takes place by reversing his path, with events in Milan dealing respectively with his

³⁶ Ibid., 66.

³⁷ Ibid., 66.

³⁸ O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, 65-66.

³⁹ *Augustine Confessions*, rev. ed., trans. and ed. F.J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993). Sheed's italics shows the wording from the biblical text. In his commentary O'Donnell does not quote from Book 10 but does quote the relevant Latin wording from 1 John 2:16 in the pre-Vulgate Bible.

⁴⁰ O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography*, 67. In his biography on Augustine O'Donnell actually renders the first category as "hankering of the flesh" instead of "lust of the flesh," "hankering of the eyes" for "lust of the eyes," and "worldly ambition" for "the pride of life." In keeping with the wording in Sheed's translation of 10.30.41, which includes all three categories from 1 John 2:16, I use Sheed's wording for the three types of temptations while interacting with O'Donnell's biography on each of the three temptations in the same paragraph.

⁴¹ Ibid., 66.

⁴² Ibid., 67-68.

⁴³ Ibid., 68.

ambition and curiosity and eventually his sexual lust in the conversion of Book 8.⁴⁴ Thus, according to O'Donnell, his understanding of the *Confessions* takes into account Augustine's fascination with triad patterns in this period as well as his deliberate efforts to shape his story in a way that is reflective of the very theology he holds to.

Crosson's understanding is similar to O'Donnell's in some respects. Books 2, 3, and 4 are the marks of stages of overall spiritual descent, signifying an estrangement from God, with Books 6, 7, and 8 serving as marks of his gradual ascent back to God.⁴⁵ Crosson agrees as well with the triad pattern in the *Confessions* with the three categories of sin dominating his descent, and how his ascent back to God addresses each of the three. However, although the work serves as an "autobiography" at one level, at another level in the work as a whole Crosson emphasizes how the philosophical problem of divine transcendence in relation to the world (i.e. how can a God that is totally transcendent relate to that world in space and time?)⁴⁶ constitutes the higher purpose of the entire work. Consisting of two parts, the problem of omnipresence dominates Books 1-7, with the problem of divine speaking/acting in time including the Incarnation, serving as the focus of Books 7-13.⁴⁷

Although the issue of omnipresence initially emerged in 1.2.2, finally in Book 10 Augustine focuses directly on memory ultimately to show that God is not already present there as a result of recollection (10.26.37).⁴⁸ Instead, he can only have known about God through, in Crosson's words, a "direct noetic encounter, however obscure..." The second

⁴⁴ Ibid., 68-70.

⁴⁵ Frederick J. Crosson, "Structure and Meaning in St. Augustine's *Confessions*," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 31.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 33.

problem initially emerged in Augustine's thinking with his observation that the works of the Platonists offered key truths regarding the nature of the divine, but what they lacked in their writings was that "no man hears [God] *calling* to us."⁴⁹ Then, in Book 11 Augustine observes how "...in the Gospel, [your Word] speaks through the flesh, and this word sounded *outwardly* in the ears of men [*insonuit foris auribus hominum*],"⁵⁰ and he continues with subsequent meditations on that Word, specifically Genesis here, in seeking to understand more fully God speaking in time. Consequently, regarding the second problem, which stemmed originally from his experiences of God communicating to him through Paul's New Testament writings in Book 7 and through a child in the conversion scene of Book 8, Augustine grapples more extensively with the "relation of God to the temporal world" in the meditations of the last few books of his *Confessions*.⁵¹

In connection with these two interpretations, my focus on the role of the problem of evil is relevant to both approaches. With O'Donnell's approach an understanding of Augustine's struggles with evil can shed additional light on the intellectual aspects of the journey in the autobiography since I will examine throughout this study how both aspects of the problem fuel much of his intellectual journey, thus providing background for the culmination of the ecstatic experiences. An analysis of the problem also dovetails with other issues in O'Donnell's approach: To what extent does the experiential evil that flows from the three categories of sin aid in addressing the intellectual problem of evil? Do all three play an important role in that regard even though the issue of lust is arguably the largest factor in the experiential component of evil for him? In connection with the

⁴⁹ Ibid., Crosson's translation from *Conf.* 7.21.27. The first bracketed portion and emphasis are Crosson's.

⁵⁰ Crosson's translation from *Conf.* 11.8.10. The first bracketed portion and emphasis are Crosson's. In all English quotations, the choice of Latin insertions is mine unless otherwise noted.

⁵¹ Ibid., 36.

previous question, in a broader sense does an experience of one's flaws in one category make a significant difference in one's approach to the intellectual problem in comparison to someone with struggles in another category? And if lust is the most predominant temptation in the experiential aspect of his struggle with evil, what light does that shed on Augustine's view of the Trinity and humanity in the image of God?

With Crosson's approach the clearest benefit of the examination of evil in this study stems from the specific role that the problem plays in addressing the major theme of divine transcendence in the *Confessions*: what role does the problem play in resolving those metaphysical questions that Augustine explores throughout the work, and in particular, are there ways in which the experiential component of evil can shed light on those initial questions that the traditional formulation of the intellectual component does not directly address? Even if the intellectual component of the problem is arguably the driving force behind Augustine's evolving conception of God's nature and characteristics, what aspects of the intellectual problem were themselves "driven" by the experiential aspects of the problem? Would Augustine have reached the particular answers that he did without the presence of the experiential problem at various times in his life? And in a broader sense, to what extent are the intellectual aspects of the problems that philosophers grapple with influenced by their own personal experiences of those problems?

Kotze's Approach

Annemare Kotze's interpretation involves an understanding of the text based on features that she argues make up a protreptic/paraenetic literary approach in Late

Antiquity.⁵² She outlines how protreptic/paraenetic literature in Late Antiquity contains usually a conversion story of sorts, which served first a protreptic purpose, specifically seeking to convert the reader to the specific worldview of the author, and eventually followed by more writing with either protreptic or polemic elements and usually with a didactic purpose.⁵³ The protreptic section itself also served a paraenetic aim—seeking to encourage the commitment of those already converted to continue to hold tightly to the chosen path. In support of her position, she points to this same approach in three works of Late Antiquity that Pierre Courcelle in his work *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin dans la tradition litteraire: Antecedents et Posterite* pointed to as possible models for the structure that Augustine employed in *Confessions*: specifically *On the Trinity* by Hilary of Poitiers, *To Donatus* from Cyprian of Carthage, and *Dialogue with Trypho* by Justin Martyr. Arguing that Courcelle only made the parallels in connection with the autobiographical portions of the texts in question, she submits that the paraenetic sections indicate a strong parallel as well.

Concerning *On the Trinity* she notes how Hilary's careful refutation of Arian teachings is preceded by the personal story of Hilary's own conversion⁵⁴ with the climactic section taking place with Hilary's attainment of faith and baptism in Book 1.14. Regarding Cyprian's *To Donatus* Kotze submits that sermons of Augustine's indicate his familiarity with Cyprian's conversion story from chapters 3 and 4 of the work, and after the body of Cyprian's letter focuses on vices to be avoided, the book closes with a "didactic tone" in chapters 14 through 16 to encourage the reader to shun the evils

⁵² Annemare Kotze, "'The Puzzle of the Last Four Books of Augustine's *Confessions*': An Illegitimate Issue?," *Vigiliae Christianae*, 60, no. 1 (2006): 68.

⁵³ Kotze, "'The Puzzle of the Last Four Books of Augustine's *Confessions*,'" 70.

⁵⁴ Kotze, "'The Puzzle of the Last Four Books of Augustine's *Confessions*,'" 71-72.

previously discussed.⁵⁵ Kotze suggests as well that the garden scene in Book 8 for Augustine's conversion may point to Augustine's desire that his conversion be seen as fitting the traditional conversion scenarios of such earlier works. In Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, the earliest of the three works, Kotze argues for a similar overall pattern: after an autobiographical section, relatively brief in this case, the author includes a polemical discussion regarding the merits of the Jewish and Christian positions on various issues. Although there is no conversion story in this text, the work closes with a direct appeal for Trypho and his colleagues to convert to Christianity.⁵⁶

Even though the conversion narrative in *Confessions* (Books 1-9) is larger than the ones in these earlier works, Kotze observes that the basic parallels are still valid: in Augustine's work, despite the protreptic section with his own conversion story and baptism making up nine of the thirteen books of the work, those first nine books, in terms of length, constitute only roughly half of the entire text in comparison to the exegetical books, 10-13.⁵⁷ However, Kotze includes the idea that the exegetical books reinforce the protreptic aims as well, but they also serve as a polemic against Manichean views about the nature of God, similar to the polemical purpose of Hilary's final section in his own work against Arian views.⁵⁸ She also notes that if the protreptic/paraenetic view is correct, then modern readers of *Confessions* with their more contemporary understandings of autobiography approach the text with erroneous presuppositions precisely because they are unaware of the protreptic purpose behind the text itself,

⁵⁵ Kotze, "The Puzzle of the Last Four Books of Augustine's *Confessions*," 76.

⁵⁶ Kotze, "The Puzzle of the Last Four Books of Augustine's *Confessions*," 77.

⁵⁷ Kotze, "The Puzzle of the Last Four Books of Augustine's *Confessions*," 71.

⁵⁸ Kotze, "The Puzzle of the Last Four Books of Augustine's *Confessions*," 74.

whereas Augustine's combination of conversion narrative and exegetical books would have been largely expected by the reader of that period.⁵⁹

The study on evil can benefit Kotze's approach in several ways: How much does the experiential aspect of the problem play a role in serving the protreptic aim in comparison to the role of the intellectual component, especially in view of the strong emphasis on correct moral behavior and appropriate virtues in some of the previous works that Kotze discusses in order to build her case? Does Augustine emphasize the experiential aspect of the problem more than the intellectual component in this regard? If the conversion in Book 8 is arguably the climax of the conversion narrative in the protreptic section of the work, in what ways does the resolution of the experiential problem of evil in that section also serve a paraenetic purpose, especially when Book 9 is taken into consideration as well? Moreover, the question of whether there is a larger emphasis on the experiential, one that would encourage believers to persevere in the appropriate moral virtues (including the avoidance of the sin Augustine wrestles with), is also relevant to consider. Or on the other hand, does the intellectual element constitute a stronger paraenetic thread throughout the work, especially in view of Augustine's reflections on his improved understanding of God's good nature throughout the work and the spiritual peace and intellectual satisfaction that he seemingly gains as a result? Addressing such questions could conceivably shed new light on Augustine's use of the literary approach that Kotze subscribes to his *Confessions*.

⁵⁹ Kotze, "The Puzzle of the Last Four Books of Augustine's *Confessions*," 70.

Suchocki's and McMahon's Approaches

Marjorie Suchocki's symbolic understanding of *Confessions* concurs in a general sense with those scholars that see the work as representing more than one individual's journey, which to them is key to understanding the overall structure. She argues that the two trees from the Garden of Eden in the biblical account are central for comprehending the structure.⁶⁰ The tree of knowledge of good and evil is represented by the pear tree in Book 2 with the tree of life represented by the fig tree in Book 8. In the incident of the theft at the pear tree, Augustine comes to an "experiential knowledge of good and evil," and at the fig tree Augustine is empowered to obey God's command to "Take up and read." Each symbolic tree scene is followed by five books that deal with the aftermath of the respective symbolism of that tree. The first five, Books 3-7, focus on the three results of the Fall that the pear tree symbolized: "lust, death, and an ignorance of God through the inability to cling to God" with the last idea serving as an overarching theme throughout the first section. The second group of five, Books 9-13, respond to these evils with the ignorance of God, for example, eventually resulting in a satisfied knowledge of God. Thus, the final three books, often seen as a "postscript" to the rest of the work, are definitely integral to the actual structure.

In support of her thesis Suchocki compares Augustine's interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3, as found in Books 13 and 14 of his *City of God*, with the structure of *Confessions*. In particular, the sin with the forbidden fruit by Adam and Eve is repeated by Augustine in the pear tree incident.⁶¹ Moreover, with the inhabitants of the earthly city turning their misdirected love to things of the world, she argues that Augustine sees "sexual desire" in

⁶⁰ Marjorie Suchocki, "The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's 'Confessions,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 50, no. 3 (1982): 366.

⁶¹ Suchocki, "The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's 'Confessions,'" 367.

the earthly city as the most obvious example of such inordinate love, a clear case in which the body refuses to obey the spirit. Likewise, in the next five books of *Confessions* Augustine's own personal struggles with lust continually frustrate his efforts to attain knowledge of God. Book 3 in particular, with Augustine's escapades in Carthage, engages this theme⁶² with the loss of a dear friend in Book 4 introducing the problem of death.⁶³ Books 3 and 4 profoundly illustrate the ongoing theme of an "inability" to know God—with Book 3 detailing the encounter with the Manichees and in 4 a useless pursuit in Aristotle's *Categories*.⁶⁴ Books 5, 6, 7 use his growing reconsideration of church teachings ultimately to locate the lack of knowledge of God within the larger problem of the fallen will being unable to cling to God in the first place.

His famous analysis of the will in part of Book 8 culminates in the conversion moment at the fig tree, and subsequent books correct the results of the original fall.⁶⁵ Book 9 tests his new perspective on death as four deaths occur including the death of his mother Monnica, whereas Book 10 deals with the issue of lust: Augustine's commentary in that book on experiences of the senses and inordinate love are marked by the recurring idea "Give what You command and command what You will" (10.29.40, 30.41, 31.45, 37.60).⁶⁶ Although a satisfied knowledge of God is an overarching issue in the last five books, the last three in particular explore knowledge of God's nature and character in even more profound ways: Book 11 is not simply a treatise on the nature of time but ultimately on God's nature in relation to eternity,⁶⁷ whereas Book 12 addresses his

⁶² Suchocki, "The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's 'Confessions,'" 368.

⁶³ Suchocki, "The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's 'Confessions,'" 368-69.

⁶⁴ Suchocki, "The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's 'Confessions,'" 370.

⁶⁵ Suchocki, "The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's 'Confessions,'" 372.

⁶⁶ Suchocki, "The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's 'Confessions,'" 374.

⁶⁷ Suchocki, "The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's 'Confessions,'" 375.

original questions raised in Book 5 concerning God's nature and creation including issues of metaphysical evil⁶⁸ with Book 13 then focusing on the "salvation history" of that creation.⁶⁹

The study on the intellectual and experiential aspects of the problem of evil can be beneficial for several features of Suchocki's interpretation. What bearing do the experiential aspects of the pear episode have on the inability of the will to cling to God? Is the experiential component more of a driving force overall in helping Augustine with the intellectual problem or does it serve more forcefully as a hindrance, consistent with Suchocki's claim that his personal struggles with sin are an obstacle to his ability to know God? At the level of humanity is the larger theme here the idea that experiential evil is always the key obstacle in the earthly city's inability to know God instead of other factors? The question of whether the pattern for Augustine, a gradual resolution of certain experiential evil even before the conversion of Book 8, is indicative of a larger pattern for all that ultimately become believers is also worth considering under Suchocki's interpretative framework.

On the unity of the book Robert McMahon takes a markedly different approach. McMahon notes how Book 13, examining creation allegorically, divides the creative acts into nine acts, and he submits that each divine act corresponds to each respective book in the first part of *Confessions*.⁷⁰ Thus, McMahon surmises that "God's creating the young Augustine as a Christian in books 1-9 recapitulates God's creation of the Church in the allegory on universal Creation, in book 13." However, McMahon goes further and asserts that Books 10-12 contain recurring patterns that are also analogous to the allegory in

⁶⁸ Suchocki, "The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's 'Confessions,'" 376.

⁶⁹ Suchocki, "The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's 'Confessions,'" 377.

⁷⁰ McMahon, xvi.

Book 13, and he submits that the governing principle is the “return to origins” eventually resulting in a “return to the Origin,” the principle that governs the Neo-Platonist Upward Way.⁷¹ In uniting these parallels together, McMahon argues that the overall structure of the book follows this “return to the Origin,” a pattern very similar to the structure in *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius and Dante’s *Commedia*.⁷² Noting various scholars that interpret these kinds of works in this way, McMahon also points to scholarship that even suggests such an early pattern in Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Republic* as well. In the case of *Confessions* the narrative structure contains a three-part recurring pattern of “return to the Origin”: Augustine at a personal level in Books 1-9, the flow of ideas in Books 10-12 (Time is anterior to Memory in the same way that God’s sempiternal heaven is anterior to Time), and the allegory of redemption itself on a universal scale in Book 13.

In McMahon’s approach the study here can be beneficial for two crucial questions. Does the resolution of the intellectual problem of evil play a larger role (in the “return to Origin” pattern that McMahon describes) as one might expect with the Neo-Platonic emphasis on the role of the mind in meeting the goal of merging with the “One”? Does the experiential problem play a significant role at all in the “return to Origin” in *Confessions*, and if so, is there a corresponding pattern in the general role of experiential evil in Plotinian thought when viewed through the experiential category?

⁷¹ Ibid., xvii.

⁷² Ibid., xviii.

Wills's and Riley's Approaches

According to Garry Wills, various criticisms of the structure, unity, and historicity of *Confessions* are blunted by the observation that the genre of Augustine's work does not fit the mold of a standard autobiography⁷³ and that the prayerful nature of the book is a compelling factor in correctly understanding it.⁷⁴ On the issue of historicity Wills's more specific thoughts on that debate were already noted earlier in this chapter. Regarding the immediate structure of the book, he notes the patristic Christian framework that is employed throughout the work: six stages of human life, which in the original scheme match six events of creation, all of which also correspond to six ages in the history of humanity. Concerning the stages of human life, which Augustine explicitly refers to in his own growth and development throughout certain narrative sections (2.1 and 7.1), his *Confessions* only goes through Stage 4 (Juventus, age 30-45) since Augustine is still in that period himself when writing the work.⁷⁵ However, by anticipating the "seventh day," the "Sabbath," when God rested after the original creation, the corresponding age in human history envisions the human soul in the final state contemplating the Trinity, and thus, Augustine uses the final three books of *Confessions* to reflect on the specific days of Creation and what they express regarding the nature of the Trinity. Wills notes favorably as well O'Donnell's tracing of the triads throughout the work and their connection to the Trinity.⁷⁶

Regarding the study on evil in connection with Wills's emphasis, the respective roles of both intellectual and experiential evil in each stage of human life are certainly worth

⁷³ Wills, 7-8.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 10-11.

further exploration. Does Augustine suggest that the role of each might be typical, at least in a general way, in everyone's stages of life or only in his own life? Are there any lessons to be gleaned when comparing the roles of both aspects in Augustine's life to the potential roles of each in the corresponding six stages of human history that Wills discussed, a parallel that might prove to be similar to overt elements in Suchocki's interpretation of the work? Examining these issues from such an angle may unlock further layers of development in Augustine's work that have not yet been fully probed.

Patrick Riley's understanding of Augustine's work in his study, *Character and Conversion in Autobiography*, focuses heavily on the issue of self-knowledge and self-identity of the author. Despite the title *Confessions*, Riley rules out the idea that it is an autobiography in the strictest sense because of the unusual structure of the book.⁷⁷

However, he agrees that the autobiographical features in the work with the abrupt change in the format and type of discussion after Book 9 are part of the very keys to understanding the work and the theme of self-knowledge that Augustine struggles with. Books 1-8 focus on an epistemological quest by the preconversional self that strives to address the retrospective question of "who *was* I?", a question that could never be answered since the self was separated from God in that period to begin with.

In Book 10 the realization sinks in that the newly converted self also lacks the ability to be fully comprehended even by its own consciousness.⁷⁸ In that book itself Augustine makes clear that his focus is now "not what I was, but what I am."⁷⁹ The original quest for "epistemological certitude" becomes now a desire for "ontological certainty" about

⁷⁷ Patrick Riley, *Character and Conversion in Autobiography: Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau, and Sartre* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 24-25.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷⁹ Riley's translation from *Conf.* 10.3.4.

the intricacies of the self along with the realization that only God can provide that knowledge.⁸⁰ The limitations of memory that Augustine discovers in Book 10 showcase how he is unable to fully grasp or reach any satisfying level of self-knowledge. Books 11-13 then affirm the idea that God's radical difference from humans means that He can hardly be grasped by the human mind, but nevertheless, the value of the self must be based on this divine source. The "metaphysical difficulties" presented through those books reiterate why self-representation is no longer a possibility apart from God. Issues of language and also of temporality are the vehicles for reinforcing this idea in Book 11⁸¹ with the analysis of God's creative acts in Books 12 and 13 serving to recapitulate the radical difference between God and humans and consequently, the utter impossibility of human self representation.⁸² Riley's summary of this section inextricably ties the genre and structure of the book to the overarching struggle for self-knowledge:

Confessions must be read as an autobiography that elides its own autobiographical content in order to demonstrate the absolute futility of any autobiographical venture. The conversional moment is the fulcrum on which this elision turns: not precisely its motor, but the sign revealing that the preconversional self was never really quite a self, and that the postconversional self is nothing more than the absolute desire to undergo yet another transformation, this time to become an indivisible part of the eternity of the divine plenitude.⁸³

If Riley's interpretative position holds sufficient merit, then the profundity for Augustine's understanding of self-identity cannot be overstated.

The present study's relation to Riley's thesis could involve two questions in particular. First, what role do both aspects of the problem of evil play in hindering or helping Augustine's preconversional self from reaching the apex of conversion? The question of what relation there is between both components in causing Augustine's new

⁸⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁸¹ Ibid., 53.

⁸² Ibid., 55.

⁸³ Ibid., 58.

desire for “ontological certainty” as well as how his retrospective look at both affects his understanding of “self,” both preconversional and postconversional, would also merit further inquiry. More general questions such as the role of both problems in one’s grappling with the issues of self-identity and self-knowledge to begin with also come to mind.

OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

In the second chapter I examine the experiential aspect of the problem of evil as the starting point, with the idea that this component arguably launches or at the very least heightens Augustine’s eventual preoccupation with the intellectual problem of evil. I submit as well that for him the experiential aspect is an accurate barometer of the overall state of his spiritual health. As a result, I commence with an examination of relevant episodes in the first part of Augustine’s life, ranging from initial observations about his childhood in Book 1, to his growing problem of lust as an adolescent (2.2.2) to the incident of the stolen pears (2.4.9). I also explore here various understandings of the pear tree incident, and my analysis of these events also includes the connection between the experiential problem of evil and his move away from the God of his mother’s Catholic faith along with a critique of his perspective on evil in this chapter.

In the third chapter I take into account Augustine’s excited reading of Cicero’s *Hortensius*, which launches him on a quest to find true wisdom (3.4.7), and how it ultimately sets the stage for the intellectual aspect of the problem of evil. I also explore the shaping of the intellectual aspect of the problem of evil for Augustine in his Manichean period, examining the specific Manichean view of evil as well as this sect’s

overall system of thought. In addition, I analyze how the experiential aspect widens with the death of Augustine's friend (4.4.7). In connection with Augustine's relationship with his concubine during this period, I will include the effect that the intellectual aspect had on the experiential aspect such as the problem of Augustine's avoidance of self-responsibility (5.10) and related issues. My critique of Augustine's understanding of these events closes this chapter.

In Chapter 4 I argue how Augustine's brief excursus into Neo-Platonism two years later (7.9.13) was still crucial for him to reach some kind of resolution on the intellectual problem of evil. In order to do justice to the complexity of Neo-Platonic thought and its influence on Augustine's view of ontological evil, I include a survey of the various interpretations even from contemporary interpreters of the Neo-Platonic view of this aspect of evil: after briefly examining relevant sections in 1.8 of Plotinus's *Enneads* concerning evil, I incorporate relevant exposition for a fuller understanding of the Plotinian view. After applying the results of the analysis to Augustine's view and taking into account other scholars' input, I use passages from *Confessions* and other works of Augustine's to examine his position on metaphysical evil and moral evil. I also take into account the importance of the two "ascent" experiences of Book 7.

In connection with Augustine's growing understanding of free will as a cause of evil with regard to the intellectual resolution, Augustine's fresh reading of the Apostle Paul (7.21.27) on experiential evil in Romans 7 in the New Testament sheds new light on the second aspect of his struggles and helps to pave the way for the climactic conversion in Book 8. I take into account as well the connection between Augustine's tremendous struggle of the will and his experiential problem of evil (8.7.17) and then analyze several

aspects of the famous conversion scene in Milan in order to explore how the *moral* conversion in this scene, in contrast to his earlier intellectual conversion, then more fully resolves his experiential problem. I close this chapter with several observations on the results of his conversion along with a consideration of his contributions from this section of the dissertation.

The focus of the fifth chapter involves a final discussion of these overall patterns of evil in Augustine's life and additional lessons that his famous quest holds for all of us. In addition, I discuss specific lessons that Augustine's two problems offer to philosophically-minded readers today, both in the academic study of philosophy of religion and also for the layperson that struggles with these issues in the varied seasons of life. In particular, I interact with comparisons of theistic and christological theodicies as well as other categorizations of the problem of evil and what bearing these have on Augustine's struggle with the problem in his *Confessions*. I also include in the fifth chapter a consideration of the strategic nature and relevance of Augustine's view of evil for today's culture.

CHAPTER TWO: EARLY CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

There is no textual evidence that Augustine fully understood the events of experiential evil in Books 1 and 2 at the time that he experienced them. His exploration of what happened in that period is entirely retrospective. Nevertheless, this period of events holds value as important background to the later events in *Confessions* and also helps us to understand the experiential aspect of evil in his life more deeply.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Concerning the evil that Augustine experienced in his early years, much of it stems from the specific acts of others, especially in the area of education. However, Augustine also includes instances of his own sinfulness during this early period. The discussion commences here with observations about his infancy and the early part of his education followed by a separate section dealing with the more complex experiences with his parents.

Infancy and Early Education

Although examples of evil abound in Augustine's description of his early education, he even draws observations from the period of his infancy. He is quick to point out examples from this period by observing as an adult the general similarities among infants.

From this he concludes that after trying to communicate his wishes as best he could, whenever he did not receive what he wanted, he reacted with rage, taking his “revenge in screams” (1.6.8). M. Miles explains that Augustine terms this anxious grasping in human life as *concupiscentia* (concupiscence), a grasping for “sex, power, and possessions,” which becomes more evident later in his life.⁸⁴ His additional observations in the next chapter prompt his statement that children’s innocence lies only in how helpless their bodies are, not in “any quality in their minds.” He concludes chapter 7 by remarking how he was even “conceived in iniquity”⁸⁵ and by pondering the question of when therefore, was he ever innocent.⁸⁶ Yet Augustine observes further instances of evil in his childhood as well in a key passage about that period:

O God, my God, what emptiness and mockeries [*miserias...et ludificationes*] did I now experience: for it was impressed upon me as right and proper in a boy to obey those who taught me, that I might get on in the world and excel in the handling of words to gain honor among men and deceitful riches. I, poor wretch, could not see the use of the things I was sent to school to learn; but if I proved idle in learning, I was soundly beaten. For this procedure seemed wise to our ancestors: and many, passing the same way in days past, had built a sorrowful road by which we too must go, with multiplication of grief and toil upon the sons of Adam...As a boy I fell into the way of calling upon You, my Help and my Refuge; and in those prayers I broke the strings of my tongue [*rumpebam nodos linguae meae*]—praying to You, small as I was but with no small energy, that I might not be beaten at school. And when You did not hear me (not as giving me over to folly), my elders and even my parents, who certainly wished me no harm, treated my stripes as a huge joke [*ridebantur*], which they were very far from being to me. (1.9.14)

⁸⁴ Margaret Miles, “Infancy, Parenting, and Nourishment in Augustine’s ‘Confessions,’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 50, no. 3 (1982): 352.

⁸⁵ A quotation from Psalm 50:7. The scriptural passage is Psalm 51:5 in many Protestant editions of the Bible (which use the Hebrew numbering for the Psalms), whereas Sheed here references the verse using the Greek numbering system found in many Catholic editions of the Bible.

⁸⁶ Paul Rigby submits that the infancy passages in Book 1 confirm Augustine’s belief in and promotion of the concept of original sin. In addition, Rigby believes that Augustine’s infancy passages help Augustine to “confess” this doctrine, especially in its connection with his own guilt, and thus fits easily into the larger purpose of *Confessions*. However, in contrast, Miles submits that Augustine’s overall language in *Confessions* in connecting human weakness and ignorance to habit is more Pelagian at this point, not the strong concept of original sin in Augustine’s later writings. I concur with Miles that the concept of original sin in Book 1 is difficult to sustain although Augustine is rather clear in that section that he was sinful in his infancy. Concerning Rigby’s and Miles’s positions, see Paul Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine’s Confessions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987), 33-35, and Margaret Miles, “Infancy, Parenting, and Nourishment in Augustine’s ‘Confessions,’” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 50, no. 3 (1982): 362-63, n. 5.

It is not difficult to see how the idea of gaining “honor” and “deceitful riches” might already plant seeds in Augustine for his later ambitions, but his observation of this general evil among the “sons of Adam” also points to Augustine’s lament of this aspect of the human condition. However, more specifically, his habit of praying to avoid beatings, the absence of any answer to those prayers, and his elders’ and parents’ laughter at his beatings all suggest a rather miserable set of circumstances for him in this period.

Despite the evil that Augustine experienced through the harsh discipline at the hands of adults, he is also not hesitant to outline his own weaknesses as a young boy, weaknesses that provide an early glimpse of some of his later struggles as an adult. For example, in refusing to apply himself to his studies as fully as he should have, he stated that he disobeyed because of a “sheer love of play.” He loved, for instance, the “vanity of victory [*superbas victorias*],” and he submitted that he harbored “in my eyes [*per oculos*]” a strong “curiosity [*curiositate*]” for the plays at the theater and for the shows and games that he encountered with his elders (1.10.16).⁸⁷ In addition, in his efforts to excel even at boyhood games, if at a disadvantage, he would try to win by cheating, stemming “from the vain desire for first place” (1.19.30).

Concerning his early studies Augustine comments not only on his own sins as a boy but also on the folly involved in the classical aspects of his education. Referring to those classical studies as a “torrent from hell [*flumen tartareum*],” he castigates the educational system that made him as a boy learn of the god Jove and his case of adultery in Homer’s writings (1.16.26). Nevertheless, while noting that he and his classmates were “flogged”

⁸⁷ J. O’Donnell understands this passage as reflecting the triad of temptations from 1 John 2:16. The *amore ludendi* (“sheer love of play”) stems from the lust of the flesh, the *superbas victorias* (“vanity of victory”) represents the fruit of his worldly ambition, and *curiositate* (“curiosity”) corresponds to the lust of the eyes. I included Sheed’s English translation here. See James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, *Commentary on Books 1-7* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 65-66.

if they did not also drink from this “wine of error,” the vile content in the literature, he admits that he was a willing learner in such studies and “sinfully delighted in them...” In his remarks on the performances that he and his classmates gave in presenting a speech by the goddess Juno, Augustine retrospectively labels the entire business as “smoke and wind” (1.17.27).

In such reminiscences from childhood, Augustine posits how the seeds of vanity, one of the key vices that he struggled with in the future, were especially sown through the contests that took place for the learning of prose and literature:

Yet it was no wonder that I fell away into vanity [*Quid autem mirum, quod in vanitates ita ferebar*] and went so far from Thee, My God, seeing that men were held up as models for my imitation who were covered with shame if, in relating some acts of theirs in no way evil, they fell into some barbarism or grammatical solecism [*si cum barbarismo aut soloecismo enuntiarent*]: yet were praised, and delighted to be praised, when they told of their lusts [*libidines suas*], provided they did so in correct words correctly arranged. (1.18.28)

Augustine’s slide into “vanity,” the harmful examples of the particular men that he was exposed to, and the focus on gratifying one’s lusts instead of the shame that one should feel in that regard are rather evident in the passage. Augustine is rather direct in his clear statement about the negative effects of this exposure on him at that time.

In short, Augustine experiences evil in the world, not only through his school and the authority figures that maintained it, but also through his own lack of innocence. Such examples range from his basic behavior as an infant to his love of games and shows, including a love to be number one in competition with other boys instead of applying himself to his studies. Even when he did focus on his lessons, the questionable content of the classical stories and their tendency to encourage his vain wishes strengthened the generally negative view that he held of his early childhood.

Without failing to notice the good things, Augustine’s summary near the end of Book 1 expresses his thoughts on his experiential evil in that early period: “...in Him [God] I

shall exult for all the good qualities that even as a boy I had. But in this lay my sin: that I sought pleasure, nobility, and truth [*voluptates, sublimitates, veritates*] not in God but in the beings He had created, myself and others. Thus I fell into sorrow and confusion and error [...*in dolores, confusiones, errores*]" (1.20.31). One sees a small glimpse here of the triad of temptations from 1 John 2:16 that J. O'Donnell included in his interpretation of the entire work. As a boy Augustine initially sought happiness in three areas: in pleasure, in nobility ("lofty things"), and in truth. However, by seeking them in God's creatures instead of in God Himself, Augustine encounters essentially the opposite of what he was seeking. By succumbing to the lust of the flesh, he experiences sorrow instead of pleasure.⁸⁸ By yielding to the pride of life—overweening aspirations to be "on top," he has confusion instead of the lofty heights that he had hoped to reach.⁸⁹ Finally, by following the lust of the eyes he finds himself in error instead of finding truth.

Parents

Although Augustine's parents wanted the best for him, their belief concerning what was best complicated Augustine's growing struggle with sin in his view. For instance, grounded early in his mother Monnica's⁹⁰ Catholic faith, he requested baptism upon wrestling with a serious illness. Yet his unexpected recovery encouraged his mother to

⁸⁸ *Dolores* (from the word *dolor* meaning "pain") could perhaps be rendered "instances of pain" or "painful things." However, since Augustine's experience here is not limited to pain in terms of strict physical (or mental) experiences but includes experiences of disappointment, Sheed's wise choice of "sorrow" is a more encompassing word in the translation here.

⁸⁹ The noun "confusion" as an opposite result of sorts to the "lofty things" that Augustine was seeking might not be immediately apparent. However, the participial terms "troubled" or "disturbed," reasonable translations for the Latin participial form *confusus*, can be helpful here. Failing to meet one's high goals (because of an inflated view of oneself or of one's abilities) or actually reaching the high goal and then not experiencing the satisfaction that one expected can result in a "troubled" or "disturbed" state of mind.

⁹⁰ In contrast to some commentaries that use the familiar English spelling of *Monica* for Augustine's mother's name, I use the spelling *Monnica*, which Augustine uses in the Latin text.

postpone the baptism on the belief that the guilt from sinful acts after baptism could be a greater danger than such guilt before the cleansing of baptism. Augustine is candid as he remarks that “it was obvious that many mighty waves of temptation threatened to break upon me as I grew out of boyhood” (1.11.18), a point that his mother was well aware of in her decision on the deferral of baptism. He criticizes her decision (retrospectively) as well as the common attitude in his culture toward the behavior of unbaptized youth. However, despite Augustine’s criticisms of the attitude toward that behavior, since it is clear in that section that the deferral of baptism was a common practice at that time, it is more difficult for Augustine to view Monnica’s choice on the deferral here as blameworthy.

Augustine is even more critical of both parents for their failure to address effectively his growing sexual problems. He states how lust, in his sixteenth year, “took complete control of me” (2.2.4), but instead of rescuing him from this dilemma through supporting a marriage for him, both parents were strongly focused on his training in rhetoric. In the subsequent chapter he ascribes his father’s indifference concerning his struggles to his sole focus on Augustine’s future career, and he elaborates on his mother’s decision that an early marriage for him would affect his studies negatively (2.3.8). However, Augustine notes as well his mother’s hope that his training would in some way be a help in placing him on the right path to God.

Book 2 still provides additional clues on Augustine’s perception of his parents. For instance, although J. O’Meara generally agrees that Augustine praised his mother more than he did his father, he reminds us of Augustine’s pride at Patricius’ sacrificial efforts

to have him educated at Carthage.⁹¹ O'Meara is correct about Augustine's praise, but this understanding of Augustine's view of that commitment is not complete. While concurring that Augustine held some admiration for Patricius' sacrifices for him, Peter Brown rightly couples this with Augustine's later observation that Patricius saw in him only "hollow things [*inania*]" (2.3.8).⁹² Moreover, I find it noteworthy that immediately after the statement about his father's sacrifices, Augustine is critical of how "this same father" had a total lack of concern for the issue of Augustine's chastity. Indeed, there was no one, apparently not even his father, to root out the "briars of unclean lusts" that "towered over" Augustine's head (2.3.6). On the contrary, one day in the public baths his father noticed his advancement toward manhood, was thus pleased about the possibility of grandchildren, and even went to tell his mother Monnica of this development. Even after hearing this, she did not act upon the information by considering marriage for Augustine (for the reasons discussed above), and her admonition to Augustine to avoid sexual relations with a woman (2.3.7) was not effective for reasons considered in the next section.

In providing a fuller understanding of his parents, it should be also pointed out that Augustine, in Book 9, comments on his father's volatile temper and marital infidelity (9.9.19), his mother's forbearance of her husband's behavior, and her eventual success in bringing Patricius to the Christian faith (9.13.27). Augustine's touching words about her

⁹¹ John J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York, Alba House: 2001), 36.

⁹² Peter Lamont Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 18, Brown's translation.

near the end of Book 9 show his affirmation of her spirituality and high regard for her despite his criticisms of her in Book 2.⁹³

Nonetheless, a larger observation here is the lack of criticism of Patricius on Augustine's part: although Augustine does mention his father's unfaithfulness to the reader in Book 9, if his father were as responsible for Augustine's sexual activity as much as some commentators have suggested or if Augustine had felt as much disdain for his father as others have proposed, it is more difficult to explain why the recounting of Patricius' behavior was not included in Book 2 (in which Augustine describes the early development of his sexual wanderings). Augustine's postponement until Book 9 of mentioning his father's hot temper, which without Monnica's forbearance could have easily led to her being beaten on certain occasions, is noteworthy as well. Perhaps Augustine's goal in Book 2 was to underscore the role of both parents in unwittingly setting the stage in his life for two of his struggles: his vain ambitions (aided by his parents' support of his future career in rhetoric) and his sexual struggles. If such a goal of emphasizing their role were met more easily by deferring a broader discussion of his

⁹³ Some commentators give a rather Freudian interpretation to the mother-son relationship. In a summary of such studies, L.J. Daly submits the following: "The deleterious impact of Monica on Augustine's personality from nursery through episcopacy is the *idée fixe* of psychoanalytic interpretations of his conversion process." A. Hawkins affirms that it is not surprising that such interpretations of Augustine's text have emerged, but she strongly rejects them on two principal grounds: such contributors are limited (1) by their tendency to view Augustine's life under the governance of an "unresolved Oedipal situation," and (2) by a simple reductionism that unjustifiably tries to reduce religious phenomena to "the category of the sexual." Such interpretations fail to see that Augustine's eventual choice to abandon sexuality is grounded in the religious framework that he believed in. She differs as well with the common vocabulary of such studies: it is wrong to say that Augustine "repressed" or "suppressed" his own sexuality; he "renounced" it in the belief that he would gain something with deeper pleasure and satisfaction. For Daly's summary and Hawkins's comments, see Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, *Archetypes of Conversion: The Autobiographies of Augustine, Bunyan, and Merton* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1985), 168-69, n. 13. In particular, Hawkins reacts against two psychoanalytic studies in her discussion: Charles Kligerman, "A Psychoanalytic Study of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytical Association*, 5, no. 3 (1957): 469-84; James Dittes, "Continuities between the Life and Thought of Augustine," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 5, no. 1 (1965): 130-40.

parents to a later book, then this could help to explain his decision to place that such topics in Book 9, aside from the fact of Monnica's death in that same book.

ADOLESCENCE

Much of the evil discussed in this section takes place in Book 2. The observations on his sexual struggles in the first few chapters followed by Augustine's lengthy analysis of the pear theft episode dominate most of the book, and therefore, the following two sections in the discussion are divided in that way. Although the period of adolescence includes all of the teenage years, the discussion in this section extends through Augustine's sixteenth year with the subsequent events in Book 3 discussed together in the chapter on the Manichean period in Augustine's life.

Sexual Struggles

Augustine's sexual struggles have been the subject of much scrutiny. The most immediate issue concerns the nature of the language that Augustine uses in his descriptions. For example, although Maria Boulding summarizes Augustine's depictions as "lurid," she submits that the language he uses is largely metaphorical, even noting Augustine's own admission of his earlier tendency to exaggerate the truth to his companions (2.3.7) as a reinforcement of her point.⁹⁴ On the one hand, it is true that Augustine's depictions of out-of-control lust certainly contain their share of rhetorical flourishes. In particular, the vivid language in 2.1 and 2.2 comes to mind as notable

⁹⁴ Maria Boulding, "Introduction," in Augustine *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part 1—Books, vol. 1* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 20.

examples of this. However, in spite of that, one should not interpret them entirely metaphorically, especially in view of their plausible connection to what are literal events in future chapters such as Augustine's eventual taking of a concubine in Book 4. The more balanced suggestion that the struggles were literal to a certain degree but "mere peccadilloes" by today's standards, coupled with Augustine's emphasis of them to illustrate our disordered, post-Fall fragmentation supplies a more helpful understanding on the use of his sexual struggles in various parts of *Confessions*.⁹⁵

Regarding a different relation, is there any substantial link between Augustine's struggles and the disapproving parental character of Monnica? A key text in this regard is when Augustine himself states: "I still remember her anxiety and how earnestly she urged upon me not to sin with women, above all not with any man's wife [*...ut monuerit cum sollicitudine ingenti, ne fornicarer maximeque ne adulterarem cuiusquam uxorem*]. All this sounded to me womanish and I should have blushed to obey [*qui mihi monitus muliebres videbantur, quibus obtemperare erubescerem*]" (2.3.7). The admonition itself consists of two parts. Monnica first advises him "not to sin with women." The Latin here, *ne fornicarer*, conveys the meaning of avoiding fornication, sexual relations with an unmarried woman. Augustine continues to express each verb in first person as Monnica then expands her admonition so that *ne adulterarem*--he would also avoid committing adultery with any woman.

⁹⁵ The preoccupation with his sexual activities is connected to his spiritual and psychological fragmentation according to Thomas D. Kennedy. Kennedy suggests that for Augustine, sexual passion is one of the clearest indications of how distorted and disordered our human nature is due to the Fall, hence his strong focus on sex in his account in *Confessions*. At the beginning of Book 2 he begins explaining the development of his personal sexual habits, and his own testimony that God eventually restored his fragmentary self opens that entire section. See Thomas D. Kennedy, "Habit's Harsh Bondage," <http://www.baylor.edu/christianethics/PornographicCulturearticleKennedy.pdf> (HTML version). Accessed 2 January, 2009, 3-4.

R. O’Connell posits that Monnica’s instructions tended to encourage his sexual activity: her admonition to avoid fornication and “most important of all [*maximeque*],” to avoid adultery (2.3.7) has enough of the suggestion of the “cynical nostrum ‘if you can’t be good, be careful.’”⁹⁶ O’Connell believes that at the very least her wording did not put the “needed spine” into the resolve of a 16-year-old to maintain a chaste lifestyle. O’Connell’s point here is well-taken. The 2-part admonition arguably sent the message that succumbing to the first kind of temptation was not as serious as a failure in the second category, which should especially be avoided. Thus, Monnica’s admonitions to Augustine in Book 2 were definitely not ideal to say the least, in dissuading Augustine from sexual activity and probably even encouraged his subsequent negative behavior.

At the beginning of Book 2 Augustine is rather direct concerning how his sexual struggles served as an accurate barometer of his spiritual journey. In 2.1.1 he directly outlines the connection between the experiential problem of evil as exemplified by his sexual wanderings and his movement away from the only concept of God that he understands, the God of the Catholic faith of his mother. One point of this connection appears in his description of his heightened thoughts of lust in his adolescence (probably his sixteenth year):

I propose now to set down my past wickedness and the carnal corruptions of my soul...I collect my self [*sic*] out of that broken state in which my very being was torn asunder because I was turned away from Thee, the One, and wasted myself upon the many. Arrived now at adolescence I burned for all the satisfactions of hell, and I sank to the animal in a succession of dark lusts [*silvescere ausus sum variis et umbrosis amoribus*]: my beauty consumed away, and I stank in thine eyes, yet was pleasing in my own and anxious to please the eyes of men. (2.1.1)

Although Augustine’s full interpretation of this period here is done retrospectively, of course, the abiding faith of his mother from his early age on makes it reasonable to

⁹⁶ Robert J. O’Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine’s Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 20, O’Connell’s translation.

conclude that Augustine's exposure to the Christian God, albeit with African nuances, was a strong one, and his efforts to pray against the floggings at school constitute one example of this. However, he reinforces the connection between his personal evil and spiritual distance from God more explicitly in 2.2.2 by adding, "...I departed further from You, and You left me to myself: and I was tossed about and wasted and poured out and boiling over in my fornications [*ebulliebam per fornicationes meas*]."

The Pear Theft

Augustine's self-analysis of the episode of the pear theft dominates the rest of Book 2. The basic facts surrounding the theft are relatively simple. Augustine was home in Thagaste for a year until his father could have enough money to send him to Carthage to continue his studies. One night after playing games rather late with some companions, Augustine and his group went to a pear tree in the property of another owner and carried off a large load of pears (2.4.9). He admitted the pears were not especially attractive to the eye; in fact, he and his friends barely had a taste of the pears before casting the fruit to the hogs. Therefore, the theft was not committed out of hunger but for darker reasons, reasons that Augustine probes and analyzes in the subsequent chapters of Book 2.

Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle views the pear theft as entirely metaphorical for actual sexual activities that he and his group were involved in toward women. Noting that Monnica had warned him against fornication earlier in Book 2 as well as Augustine's specific comments in 2.9.17, Boyle proposes that "the theft of pears allegorized the theft of persons" with the fruit and the animal to which he had pushed it serving as "potent

symbols.”⁹⁷ Drawing from various historical sources that point to the meaning of pear imagery from that period,⁹⁸ Boyle argues that Augustine’s throwing of pears to pigs was metaphorical for sexual intercourse and that “pig” was a colloquial term for female genitals.⁹⁹

Boyle’s metaphorical understanding of the theft as sexual activity breaks down after a closer look at the details and context. One notes, for example, the difficulty of explaining the contrast between the metaphorical, yet very clear language of Augustine’s sexual activities early in Book 2 (2.1.1 and 2.2.2) and the rather straightforward, literal-sounding narrative of the events in the orchard in 2.4.9. Moreover, it is difficult to reconcile, for instance, certain elements of the supposed metaphor such as the pear as a symbol of sexual maturity or even of male genitals with the text such as Augustine’s glee at the successful playing of a trick on the “owners” of the pear tree in 2.9.17. Furthermore, as O’Donnell points out, Augustine did not need what was stolen; the case is much simpler than any case of fornication might have been.¹⁰⁰ In an actual incident of sexual transgression he could not have said clearly or convincingly that the appeal was “not the thing itself but the wrongness itself.”

Regarding a literal understanding of the theft, by using the Platonic dictum “Virtue is knowledge” as the point of comparison, we can place most of the major interpretations

⁹⁷ Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle, *Divine Domesticity: Augustine of Thagaste to Teresa of Avila* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1997), 11.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰⁰ O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, 126.

into one of two categories.¹⁰¹ The dictum itself involves the view that a correct knowledge of right and wrong will result in virtuous choices by that individual. Stated another way, one could summarize it as the belief that no one does something wrong willingly--bad choices are made simply out of ignorance. However, a narrower form of the dictum involves the position that every choice is for the sake of something that the agent believes to be good. Thus, an evil choice, voluntarily made, is done when people mistakenly believe that they perceive some type of good in it. Of course, one could hold to the latter understanding of the dictum without necessarily endorsing the former.

Therefore, one category of interpretation in this chapter views Augustine's analysis of his motive for the theft as being consistent with the Platonic dictum, but always with the more limited understanding of that belief. According to this view Augustine did choose to commit the theft because of some perceived good in the situation: either he mistakenly believed that he perceived some type of good in an aspect of the theft itself or in the companionship that accompanied the theft, or in some combination of both. The second category, the anti-Platonic classification, involves the idea that Augustine's motive serves as a counter-example to the Platonic model, even to the broader understanding of it. Therefore, accounts in this second category utterly reject both forms of the Platonic dictum or at the very least move beyond them to explain this particular act.

¹⁰¹ My use of "Platonic" here is not to suggest that Plato himself held to this dictum, especially since I am aware of contemporary discussions among scholars of Plato as to whether the character of Socrates should be understood as representing Plato's actual viewpoint in any of Plato's writings (and thus whether Plato was even a "Platonist") and the ramifications of these issues on how to interpret Plato's works. Instead of taking a side in the debate, my use of the term "Platonic" throughout this work is simply for the sake of convention in order to facilitate the discussion.

Platonic Interpretations of the Theft

Scott MacDonald's account is the most interesting of the "Platonic" interpretations and also serves as a helpful starting point for becoming acquainted with Augustine's overall analysis of the theft in more detail. MacDonald agrees with a number of commentators that Augustine undoubtedly uses the theft account to illustrate his moral depravity even further and that he describes the "divine prohibition" of not stealing as one that is written on every heart (2.4.9).¹⁰² He then notes Augustine's observation of how strange the motive is in this case, the motive of intentionally doing something that one knows is wrong.¹⁰³ Unlike the other acts of wrongdoing in Book 2, the act of theft is committed with complete knowledge that it constitutes sin, and the act is committed "precisely *because* it is a sin." MacDonald also notes two statements of motive in 2.4.9: Augustine's statement "Nor had I any desire to enjoy the things that I stole, but only the stealing of them and the sin" is reinforced by his later statement that "Our only pleasure in doing it was that it was forbidden."¹⁰⁴ In the same section MacDonald also views a similar pattern of statements as assertions on motive, and this passage is worth noting in its entirety as Augustine launches his full self-analysis here in one part of 2.4.9:

Such was my heart, O God, such was my heart: yet in the depth of the abyss You had pity on it. Let that heart now tell You what it sought when I was thus evil for no object, having no cause for wrongdoing save my wrongness. The malice of the act was base and I loved it—that is to say I loved my own undoing, I loved the evil in me—not the thing for which I did the evil, simply the evil [*amavi defectum meum, non illud ad quod deficiebam, sed defectum meum ipsum amavi*]: my soul was depraved, and hurled itself down from security in You into utter destruction, seeing no profit from wickedness but only to be wicked.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Scott MacDonald, "Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin: Augustine's Theft of the Pears," *Faith and Philosophy*, 20, no. 4 (2003): 395.

¹⁰³ MacDonald, "Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin," 396.

¹⁰⁴ MacDonald, "Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin," 398. My use of Sheed's translation for the quotations.

¹⁰⁵ I use Sheed's translation in block quotations (unless otherwise noted) throughout the discussion of MacDonald's interpretation.

According to MacDonald Augustine's worry that he committed something forbidden, a theft, only to be wicked drives his search in subsequent sections for examining the motive more carefully. MacDonald also points out how Augustine's strong focus on the foulness of the heart as exemplified in this deliberate act helps to show that Augustine's prodigality in his adolescence is now complete, drawing from the story of the Prodigal Son in the New Testament.¹⁰⁶

In addition, MacDonald concurs with the notion that Augustine's account here is deliberately intended to reflect the primal sins of Adam and Eve, a "gang of two" in connection with Augustine's companions, and also Lucifer's own fall and salvation history.¹⁰⁷ The pear tree symbolizes the Fall with the fig tree in Milan as a symbol of redemption in Book 8. In his subsequent analysis MacDonald draws from Augustine's *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount* (1.34) to identify Augustine's category of "subjective constraint" concerning motivation.¹⁰⁸ This category specifies that if an agent freely performs an action, then something in or about that activity is delightful to the agent and moves her to that activity. Using part of Augustine's discussion in 2.5.10, he also identifies an "objective constraint" on motivation, a natural connection between how humans are constituted and what objects they delight in.¹⁰⁹ Augustine observes subjective constraints when analyzing a sample case of murder, but the concept of the objective constraint precludes an offense of murder for no reason at all.¹¹⁰ As a result, even

¹⁰⁶ MacDonald, "Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin," 412, n. 10.

¹⁰⁷ MacDonald, "Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin," 397.

¹⁰⁸ MacDonald, "Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin," 399.

¹⁰⁹ MacDonald, "Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin," 400.

¹¹⁰ MacDonald, "Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin," 401.

Catiline, who reportedly committed his crimes in Rome for no reason, had reasons for his heinous acts, reasons that were based on an objectively “recognizable delight.”¹¹¹

With these categories Augustine explores his motivations and rejects that the theft itself, like murder, would hold anything objectively delightful. Although pears themselves are “appropriate objects of delight,”¹¹² he also clearly rejects those as the source of his motivation. MacDonald then moves temporarily to section 16 (2.8.16) with Augustine’s general conclusion about the wrongdoings in his adolescence.¹¹³ In particular, he focuses on a relevant passage in that section involving Augustine’s consideration of the role of his companions in his motivation for the theft:

Now—as I think back on the state of my mind then—I am altogether certain that I would not have done it alone. Perhaps then what I really loved was the companionship of those with whom I did it... If I had liked the pears that I stole and wanted to enjoy eating them, I might have committed the offence alone, if that had been sufficient, to get me the pleasure I wanted; I should not have needed to inflame the itch of my desires by rubbing against accomplices [*nec confricatione consciorum animorum accenderem prurimum cupiditatis meae*]. But since the pleasure I got was not in the pears, it must have been in the crime itself [*in ipso facinore*], and put there by the companionship of others sinning with me [*quam faciebat consortium simul peccantium*].

MacDonald submits that we already know how it seemed to Augustine that he loved the stealing itself and nothing more, but his realization that he loved the friendship itself and would not have committed the theft apart from that factor accomplishes two items: first, this final observation connects the theft narrative to the overall pattern of Book 2.¹¹⁴ In 2.1.1 Augustine indicated his desire to be satisfied with the lowest forms of goods, and his observation that he only took delight in “loving and being loved [*amare et amari*]”

¹¹¹ MacDonald does not elaborate further on Augustine’s example of Catiline here. However, in 2.5.11 Augustine explains that although Catiline was reputedly cruel for no reason at all, in reality his stated purpose for his crimes was so that his skill and willpower would not grow weaker and that through the training of co-conspirators he ultimately would be able through more crimes to take over Rome. Successful control of the city would end his fear of retribution from the law and his money problems, and apparently this final goal is the objectively “recognizable delight” that MacDonald speaks of.

¹¹² MacDonald, “Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin,” 402.

¹¹³ MacDonald, “Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin,” 403.

¹¹⁴ MacDonald, “Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin,” 404.

occurs in 2.2.2. Therefore, the pear episode too emerges as another “disordered attempt at love and being loved.” Secondly, MacDonald believes Augustine’s earlier understanding of motivation also emerges intact here. The “objectively undelightful theft” did not move him or could not alone be the source since the delight in another objectively delightful, intelligible good, the fellowship with his companions (loving and being loved), was the crucial impetus here in the theft. In contrast to the theft, this good of the camaraderie is one that humans naturally delight in.

MacDonald then moves back to section 14 (2.6.14) in order to resolve how Augustine’s proposed solution in that section fits with the later sections of Augustine’s analysis. Augustine initially rejects a number of objectively delightful human goods as sources of his motivation: corporeal goods such as the pears’ beauty, their taste, were not the source and nor were the beauty of spiritual or intelligible things such as the beauty of the virtues or the capacities of the soul or the intelligible order in Nature’s patterns.¹¹⁵ However, the deceptive vices that Augustine examines not only exemplify how a person pursues lower goods inordinately, but also show that person’s desire to be like God with respect to that good. For example, an avaricious person has an inordinate desire for possessions, but this pursuit also shows in a “defective and shadowy” way the person’s attempt to be like God with respect to possessions, that is, possess all things. In a key passage in 2.6.14, Augustine connects the section on vices (2.6.12-13) to his own act against God:

Thus the soul is guilty of fornication when she turns from You and seeks from any other source what she will nowhere find pure and without taint unless she returns to You. Thus even those who go from you and stand up against You are still perversely imitating You. But by the mere fact of their imitation, they declare that You are the creator of all that is, and that there is nowhere for them to go where You are not.

¹¹⁵ MacDonald, “Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin,” 405.

So once again, what did I enjoy in that theft of mine? Of what excellence of my Lord was I making perverse and vicious imitation [*et in quo dominum meum vel vitiose atque perverse imitatus sum*]? Perhaps it was the thrill of acting against Your law—at least in appearance, since I had no power to do so in fact, the delight a prisoner might have in making some small gesture of liberty—getting a deceptive sense of omnipotence [*tenebrosa omnipotentiae similitudine*] from doing something forbidden without immediate punishment. I was that slave, who fled from his Lord and pursued his Lord’s shadow. O rottenness, O monstrousness of life and abyss of death! Could you find pleasure only in what was forbidden, and only because it was forbidden [*potuitne libere quod non licebat, non ob aliud nisi quia non licebat*]?

According to MacDonald Augustine links the deceptive vices to the theft by painting the theft also as a perverse imitation of God, in this case through a faint imitation of God’s omnipotence, flouting the standards of God by trying to assert a kind of liberty or type of power that he (Augustine) really does not possess.¹¹⁶ This kind of possession—found only in God’s omnipotence—constitutes the objectively recognizable good that Augustine subjectively took a delight in, and so it fits well with Augustine’s theory of motivation.

MacDonald is aware that his account might seem to clash with Augustine’s text because even after section 14 Augustine explores his motivations further instead of calling his search for a motive complete.¹¹⁷ In reply, he submits that Augustine’s insistence that he committed the theft simply because it is forbidden does not deny his previous assertions in section 14 since the two descriptions work together in describing one motive. More specifically, the forbidden nature of the act enables one to understand how the act then satisfies the other description of an “expression of radical freedom and power.” Secondly, McDonald notes as well how it is correct to say that “nothing” else was motivating Augustine toward the theft since what “moved” Augustine, the possibility of omnipotence, was illusory, a total delusion.¹¹⁸ Augustine’s desire to showcase the full

¹¹⁶ MacDonald, “Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin,” 406.

¹¹⁷ MacDonald, “Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin,” 409.

¹¹⁸ MacDonald, “Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin,” 410.

depth of his depravity at this point in his student life provides a reasonable explanation for his emphasis on the motive of simply doing what is forbidden, but the role of camaraderie in drawing him to act is still needed to make the account complete, thus leading to the further discussion even past section 14. Consequently, Augustine focuses on an act in which there appears to be no rational motive, but he ultimately finds two: one motivation of the theft was pursuing a type of unbounded power and freedom through the theft, but since this motivation was not sufficient to move him to the act, the role of companionship, “to love and be loved,” was a second motivation that helped to bring about Augustine’s decision of thievery.¹¹⁹ These two goods that he focused on, whether based on error or illusion, still fall under the Platonic understanding of motivation.

I agree with some of the background in MacDonald’s account, specifically that the relating of the episode serves to display Augustine’s deep level of depravity at that time, that the episode is a general parallel with the basic account of Adam and Eve’s sin, and that MacDonald’s delineation of the subjective/objective constraints are helpful up to a point for understanding Augustine’s “weeding out” of possible motives for his actions in MacDonald’s account. However, I concur with Robert McMahon’s understanding of Augustine’s self-analysis as a prayerful searching process, not a more finalized, systematic treatise.¹²⁰ The style and tone of the self-analysis from chapter 4 through chapter 9 strongly come across as a probing, exploring confessional process, not a tidy account of which possible motives to accept or reject. This crucial distinction is, of

¹¹⁹ MacDonald, “Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin,” 411.

¹²⁰ McMahon’s “confessional” approach and its relation to my view will be explored more fully below. For his full account, see Robert McMahon, *Augustine’s Prayerful Ascent: An Essay on the Literary Form of the Confessions* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 16-18.

course, totally at odds with MacDonald's approach as well as a number of other interpretations under the Platonic category, and as a result, it seriously affects their conclusions.

In addition, accepting for a moment the approach that the theft analysis is meant to be a finished, coherent product, other problems arise. For instance, focusing on power itself as the perceived good in 2.6.14 is somewhat problematic. Montague Brown submits that Augustine is simply considering here the possibility that the theft contained at least some kind of element of good (in comparison to choosing a lesser good over a greater one) if his aim was to imitate God in the area of power instead of imitating created things.¹²¹ However, Brown adds that it would be "absurd" to say that one imitates God and thus does something good by rebelling against God in such a clear fashion. Therefore, he believes that Augustine apparently rejected that option and then moved to consider a very different possibility at the end of that section (that he simply did the theft because it was unlawful).¹²² Thus, in the very same section Augustine himself rules out the idea that he was seeking good by imitating God as he exclaims, "Could a thing give pleasure which could not be done lawfully, and which was done for no other reason but because it was unlawful [*potuitne libere quod non licebat, non ob aliud nisi quia non licebat*]?"¹²³ As a result, I find it rather challenging to accept the interpretation that one narrowly and yet reasonably perceives a "good" in this aspect of the theft without an unjustifiable exclusion of the larger aspects of the act—the rather restricted "good" here (a new level of power that Augustine doesn't already possess) does not go far in supporting the motive

¹²¹ Montague Brown, "Augustine and Anselm on the Essence of Moral Responsibility," *The Saint Anselm Journal*, 4, no. 2 (2007): 3.

¹²² Brown, "Augustine and Anselm on the Essence of Moral Responsibility," 3-4.

¹²³ Brown, "Augustine and Anselm on the Essence of Moral Responsibility," 3-4, Brown's translation. Latin insertion mine.

as a rational one in the larger context of a theft, even after considering the added motivation of the companionship. Regardless of how cognizant Augustine the youth was of the larger religious implications of his act, specifically rebellion against God, Augustine arguably knew that the basic act of stealing itself was wrong and in a clear enough way that makes a Platonic understanding here (the narrower form of the dictum) rather difficult to sustain. Moreover, concerning the friendship motive in these accounts, efforts by some such as MacDonald, to strongly link Augustine's phrase "love and be loved" in 2.2.2 to companionship in 2.8.16 as a perceived good in the theft require yet further argumentation to be effective. For instance, as K. Paffenroth observes, the immediate context in 2.7.15 and 2.8.16 including the "itch" metaphor points to the camaraderie as a facilitator of the action at most, not the actual goal of the action.¹²⁴ Explaining this metaphor is more difficult under Platonic accounts that argue for the fellowship of the companions as a full-fledged motive.

A brief consideration of several other Platonic accounts shows some similarities with MacDonald's account but in some cases key differences too. Lyell Asher's interpretation also includes Augustine's grasping for omnipotence.¹²⁵ Asher observes as well that the companions serve as the needed "itch" to "trigger his impulses" and commit the theft, especially in view of Augustine's comment earlier in Book 2 of his companions' tendency to commit bad exploits and boast about them with Augustine even boasting of things that he never committed, so eager was he for their approval (2.3.7).¹²⁶ So a key

¹²⁴ Kim Paffenroth, "Bad Habits and Bad Company: Education and Evil in the *Confessions*," in *Augustine and Liberal Education*, eds. Kim Paffenroth and Kevin L. Hughes (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 6-7. Paffenroth's translation.

¹²⁵ Lyell Asher, "The Dangerous Fruit of Augustine's *Confessions*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 66, no. 2 (1998): 239.

¹²⁶ Asher, "The Dangerous Fruit of Augustine's *Confessions*," 241.

motive in the theft was also precisely the pleasure Augustine obtained from exhibiting his act to an “admiring audience,” an audience provided to each thief by all the others.

R.R. Reno’s account is similar to MacDonald’s as well. Holding tightly to the view that all people’s actions must have some kind of good, real or imagined, as their object,¹²⁷ Augustine, according to Reno, understood himself to be seeking to possess a divine attribute, omnipotence, and therefore, his pleasure in “doing what is not allowed rested in the psychological freedom one feels when one has successfully flaunted [*sic*] authority or rebelled against conventions.”¹²⁸ Reno includes the companionship as a motive as well, a strong moving force itself, in a case “in which finite good (in this case friendship) is misprized [*sic*].”¹²⁹

Although Brooke Hopkins agrees that the pursuit of omnipotence is one motive that Augustine suggests in his search,¹³⁰ she believes that Augustine ultimately settles on the comradeship with his group as the only motive.¹³¹ After proposing the general need for camaraderie as a motivating force, Hopkins also adds the need for approval as well but then modifies that element to mean simply a motive of “fear of losing their esteem.” In connection with the passage on shame at the end of Augustine’s analysis (2.9.17), Hopkins elaborates on this as a fear of being exposed, a need to “keep up appearances to the end,” totally regardless of any damage that results. O’Donnell’s position holds that Augustine found the lower good in the companionship as the sole motive, and so he maintains his consistency with his (Augustine’s) own view that evil as “no-thing” has no

¹²⁷ R.R. Reno, “Pride and Idolatry,” *Interpretation*, 60, no. 2 (2006): 174.

¹²⁸ Reno, “Pride and Idolatry,” 175.

¹²⁹ Reno, “Pride and Idolatry,” 177.

¹³⁰ Brooke Hopkins, “Pear-Stealing and Other Faults: An Essay on Confessional Autobiography,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 80, no. 3 (1981): 310.

¹³¹ Hopkins, “Pear-Stealing and Other Faults,” 311.

power of attraction.¹³² Consequently, O'Donnell's final conclusion on the motive is similar to Hopkins's. O'Donnell's account is not strongly dependent on any parallel with the Genesis story, but he does note Augustine's related wording to that narrative (2.6.14) as part of his larger analysis:¹³³ "I was that slave [Adam], who fled from his Lord and pursued his Lord's shadow." In his discussion of evil in *Augustine the Theologian*, Eugene TeSelle firmly holds that no matter how "malicious it [the act] may appear to be," the narrative reinforces the idea that willing, for Augustine, is "always for the sake of *some* value, though that value may be insignificant or inappropriate."¹³⁴ Nevertheless, TeSelle stops short in that discussion from identifying the exact good or value that attracts Augustine in the theft episode.

The accounts above suffer from the same key problems that were found in MacDonald's interpretation. Furthermore, despite Asher's observation of Augustine's tendency to boast in 2.3.7, the more immediate contextual evidence of Augustine's calling the theft a "nothing" (2.8.16) and the secondary role of the friendship in 2.9.17 should carry more weight in the investigation here. Hopkins's modification of the companionship motive and therefore, her own overall interpretation, encounters the same difficulties. Finally, if companionship really played such a key role in the theft as O'Donnell and others submit, the invisible role of the friendship before the theft and also in much of Augustine's initial analysis, observations that Paffenroth has brought to the forefront,¹³⁵ would be unaccountably strange under such accounts. That Augustine raises

¹³² O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, 141.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 139. The ensuing quotation is my use of Sheed's translation.

¹³⁴ Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 144.

¹³⁵ Paffenroth, 4-5.

the possibility of companionship as a rational motive for the first time so late in his analysis is more difficult to explain under those interpretations.

Robert McMahon's "confessional" approach takes a somewhat different approach in tackling the difficulties of the theft episode. McMahon notes the tendency of many commentators to observe a contradiction in the entire analysis with one motive put forward by Augustine at the end of chapter 6, an irrational motive, purely a "perverse act of his prideful will," and with a positive, rational motive stemming from friendship, love of others, later in chapter 9.¹³⁶ Scholars then often side with one motive or the other for resolving this inconsistency based on the assumption that Augustine intends to present a "coherent doctrine" as part of a final product. However, McMahon submits that the process of confession of Augustine the *speaker* in contrast to Augustine the *author* indicates how the differing views in each chapter are two separate moments in his continuing self-analysis, and as a result, the second motive should be taken more seriously as Augustine's conclusion on the matter.¹³⁷ In support of his approach McMahon notes the pattern of questioning in 2.8.16, that is, questioning the irrational motive from chapter 6 and the new pattern of discovery in section 17 (2.9.17), in which he examines the new motive--to be loved by his companions--four times in five sentences, allowing the new idea to register with him with surprise and gratefulness in the pattern's center at what has been revealed to him by God: "Behold, the living record of my soul lies before You, my God [*Ecce est coram te, deus meus, viva recordatio animae meae*]." ¹³⁸ As a result, McMahon notes the failure of many commentators to distinguish

¹³⁶ Robert McMahon, *Augustine's Prayerful Ascent: An Essay on the Literary Form of the Confessions* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 16.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18, McMahon's translation.

between Augustine the *speaker* and Augustine the *author* and the false difficulties that this lack of distinction creates.

McMahon avoids many of the problems of the previous accounts, and I agree strongly with his “confessional” understanding of the flow of Augustine’s analysis. However, concerning the motivation itself McMahon’s interpretation fails to consider other options such as an irrational motive (stealing for the sake of stealing) with the camaraderie as a mere catalyst to commit the deed, not a full-fledged motive itself. As a result, he mistakenly sees the comradeship as a full motive and thus rules out any irrational motive as a possibility despite evidence to the contrary in 2.9.17.

Anti-Platonic Interpretations of the Theft

The anti-Platonic understandings of the theft have some key features in common but also some important differences. Gareth Matthews’s interpretation reaches a far different conclusion in comparison to the Platonic accounts above. On the one hand, Matthews agrees with MacDonald that the examination of Catiline’s deeds does not help Augustine resolve his inquiry, and that in addressing his own theft, Augustine plainly states that “there was nothing beautiful about you [my act of theft]” (2.6.12).¹³⁹ Yet, although Matthews also concurs that the list of vices illustrates humanity’s perverse imitations of God, he concludes that Augustine’s motivation in the theft is a case of “Rebel Without a Cause,” simply an irrational, futile act of rebellion against God’s moral standards, not a deed motivated by anything delightful in either the act itself nor the result of it, and thus,

¹³⁹ Gareth B. Matthews, *Augustine*, Blackwell Great Minds, vol. 2 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publ., 2005), 119, Matthews’s use of Henry’s Chadwick’s translation: Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

not a case of motivation in the Platonic category.¹⁴⁰ Regarding section 16 (2.8.16) Matthews agrees that because of the presence of the gang, Augustine committed an act that he would not have done alone.¹⁴¹ Yet Matthews asserts that the theft was not done for “the approval or admiration of the gang.” The initial “Rebel” motive stands; his love was still for “the act itself, but performed in concert with the gang.” In spite of this, Matthews views the passage about the “knot” that Augustine seeks to “untangle” at the end of the analysis of the theft (2.10.18) as signifying Augustine’s unresolved perplexity as to whether his account of motives is really fully satisfactory, especially in view of the difficulties associated with understanding a motivation with a desire to do wrong without cause.¹⁴²

Matthews mistakenly views the theft analysis as a coherent whole and in the end settles on an irrational motive as Augustine’s overall conclusion, with the rebellious act done without any clear goal in mind. However, while disagreeing with Matthews’s interpretative approach and final answer, I do concur with his very helpful input on the role of the companions in the theft. Section 17 does support his view of the gang as merely a catalyst for the deed, not an act done for the gang’s approval. In this way Matthews avoids a common tendency to view the companionship as a full motive despite the problems with that understanding that we noted earlier.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 120.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 122.

¹⁴² Ibid., 123.

In his own full account Paffenroth firmly holds that Augustine’s aim in the theft story is to show that the Platonic understanding of human nature is wrong.¹⁴³ He notes the negative influence of Augustine’s companions early in the narrative—they “inculcate ‘pestilential custom[s] [*de pestilentiae more... produxeramus*]’” (2.4.9) in each other, but he maintains that this is hardly even important since Augustine never says who was behind the idea of the theft.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, they do not seem to be the initial impetus behind the encouragement that he feels to steal. In Augustine’s opening analysis in the next paragraph in section 9 (2.4.9), the companions totally disappear. Paffenroth then focuses on the key passage in that section in which Augustine describes his heart including his remark that “I loved the evil in me--not the thing for which I did the evil, simply the evil ...” Paffenroth submits that this definitely points to evil being chosen by Augustine for its own sake, part of Augustine’s efforts to find an exception to the Platonic understanding of “evil” choices.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, Augustine cannot be satisfied with a Platonic view of the theft since such a view would allow that we only need guidance and education to avoid mistaking evil for good or mistaking lesser goods for greater goods—a conclusion that is antithetical to Augustine’s belief in the necessity of Christ’s sacrifice or God’s grace for the individual.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Paffenroth, 3. Paffenroth’s translation. Despite Paffenroth’s contention that Augustine means to present a counterexample to the Platonic dictum, Paffenroth works only with the narrower understanding of the dictum in his essay (except in one area below that I point out), and he never differentiates between the two different forms that the dictum can take.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 5. In stating Augustine’s dissatisfaction with the Platonic view, Paffenroth draws from both understandings of the dictum here but without noting any distinction between them: “mistaking evil for good” could encompass the broader understanding of the dictum (bad choices result from ignorance), and confusing lesser goods for greater ones brings to mind the narrower version.

Paffenroth also observes Augustine’s use of the “itch” imagery as well (2.8.16) to support his point that the camaraderie was not the focus of Augustine’s pleasure or love.¹⁴⁷ Instead of being a cause of a disease, an itch is merely a symptom, and in a similar fashion the friends are not the cause of any sin but simply another symptom.¹⁴⁸ As a result, in the same way that scratching makes something itch even worse, sinful companionship, the “rubbing together of guilty minds [*confricatione consciorum animorum*],” can only lead to additional sinful acts.¹⁴⁹ Paffenroth is aware of the paradox in his account—if evil is an ontological “nothing” in Augustine’s view, how can it have such power to attract?¹⁵⁰ The solution of friendship as the lower good is unacceptable to Augustine since it leads to a Platonic understanding of the theft, and also he is insistent that regarding the theft, he did love “nothing” (2.8.16). Since the companionship plays only a secondary role in the theft at most, Paffenroth finally concludes that the evil camaraderie is basically another element of this paradox of evil, not the resolution to it as Augustine’s oxymoronic exclamation “O friendship too unfriendly!” (2.9.17) seems to indicate.¹⁵¹ In other words, Augustine’s final observation on friendship here is best seen as a parallel element to the theft story instead of being part of it. Loving the emptiness of a useless theft is analogous to loving the emptiness of a useless relationship with no reduction or explanation beyond saying that they are both strong manifestations of evil. Therefore, Paffenroth holds that while the Platonic understanding might explain almost

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 6-7.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 7, Paffenroth’s translation.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 6, Paffenroth’s translation.

all sin in Augustine's view, Augustine offers an exception here, one that goes beyond the Platonic model for understanding it.¹⁵²

Paffenroth also mistakenly views the analysis as a systematic whole. In his account he stipulates that the motive is one of evil for evil's sake, an interesting answer that differs conceptually from Matthews's final answer. However, he reaches this conclusion by placing too much weight on the passage on evil near the beginning (2.4.9) to the exclusion of considering other relevant statements on motive throughout the analysis. In spite of that, Paffenroth's examination of the role of the companions supports their position as a catalyst reasonably well if one sees the theft analysis as a coherent whole. Nevertheless, McMahon's confessional approach to the text, and therefore the more disjointed nature of Augustine's analysis, actually supports even more fully Paffenroth's interpretation of Augustine's final comment on friendship as a parallel to the theft comment, not a regular part of the analysis.

Geoffrey Scarre's interpretation differs considerably from Matthews's and Paffenroth's. Although he understands the original passage on evil (2.4.9) as Augustine's statement that he is doing evil for evil's sake, Scarre holds that Augustine's own self-analysis here does not match his writings in *City of God* on the effects of the Fall.¹⁵³ The aftermath that Augustine describes in 14.15 of that work focuses on a number of lusts and appetites including ones for affluence, power, glory, revenge against enemies, sexual pleasure, etc. However, he notes that Augustine never says anything about wrongdoing for its own sake as the object of love, probably because he did not perceive it as one of the natural lusts resulting from the Fall.

¹⁵² Ibid., 4. In this part of his essay Paffenroth uses again only the narrower version of the dictum.

¹⁵³ Geoffrey Scarre, "Can Evil Attract?" *Heythrop Journal*, 43, no. 3 (2000): 309.

As a result, Scarre submits that instead of loving wrongdoing for its own sake, Augustine committed the theft because he was loving *sin* for its own sake.¹⁵⁴ In other words, Augustine believed that humans after the Fall are naturally inclined to resist God's commands simply because they are His commands. Wrongdoing can be attractive to us as a way to show our independence, and Scarre submits here that the essence of sin is rejecting the authority of God for our own. Thus, Scarre perceives a definite difference between doing something wrong simply for the sake of wrongdoing and doing something wrong for a different, attractive reason while still fully knowing that the action is wrong, and his explanation of Augustine's motive falls under the latter category. Consequently, although Scarre does not hold to a Platonic explanation for the theft, at the same time he does not believe that Augustine committed the vice simply for the sake of vice in contrast to Paffenroth's account. Nevertheless, Scarre concludes with his view that Augustine's account is too "theologically-charged" to be fully convincing. In reality, he suspects that Augustine's desire to be thought of as "one of the gang" and the natural competitive spirit among the boys truly explain the theft, especially since a teenager at that age is more likely to be trying to grab attention, not attempting to spite God.

Scarre's initial conclusion from the text is similar to Paffenroth's, and I will comment more on their answer in relation to my own account shortly. However, Scarre's stipulation of "sin for sin's sake" as the actual motive, based on a passage from *City of God*, is questionable. First, the gap in time between the writing of *Confessions* and the writing of *City of God* 14.15, which Scarre references, was approximately twenty

¹⁵⁴ Scarre, "Can Evil Attract?" 310.

years.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, it is not unreasonable to allow for the definite possibility that Augustine's thought in this area (what the specific results of the Fall were) matured over time, with *City of God* reflecting his final conclusions on that issue. In addition, in the context of 14.15 Augustine's outline of different results is not necessarily meant to be exhaustive, hence the wisdom in avoiding arguments from silence on that topic.

An Anti-Platonic "Confessional" Interpretation

Having reviewed key problems with the various accounts above, I outline here my own account of the motive. Despite my general agreement with McMahon's "confessional process" reading of Augustine's analysis, instead of concurring with McMahon on companionship as the motive I take a very different direction in my review: first, in 2.4.9 I observe Augustine's statement that he had no desire to enjoy what he stole but to enjoy "only the stealing of them and the sin [*sed ipso furto et peccato*]," wording with *peccato* ("sin"). Such a focus initially brings to mind Scarre's suggestion of "sin for sin's sake" as a motive. The proposal of this motivation is possibly reinforced a few lines later by Augustine's statement that they did not steal the pears to eat but instead their "only pleasure in doing it was that it was forbidden [*dum tamen fieret a nobis quod eo liberet quo non liceret*]." In spite of this, pleasure from doing something that "was not permitted [*non liceret*]" does not automatically indicate the "sin" motive here since such

¹⁵⁵ My calculation of this gap is based on the timetable of Augustine's writings that Peter Brown includes throughout his biography. See Brown, 178, 282.

wording could simply refer to a moral boundary instituted by a human authority, not necessarily by a divine one.¹⁵⁶

Later in the same section Augustine makes another statement concerning motive as he directly states that “I loved the evil in me—not the thing for which I did the evil, simply the evil...[*amavi defectum meum, non illud ad quod deficiebam, sed defectum meum ipsum amavi*].” A more literal rendering of the wording about his “failing” [*defectum*] could make the English phrasing somewhat awkward, but Sheed’s choice of wording captures the basic essence of the statement—the evil itself in him was the focus of Augustine’s love in contrast to the “thing” for which he did the evil. Such a motive is conceptually more consistent with an “evil for evil’s sake” motivation than with a focus on sinful rebellion against God. Augustine closes this section, reinforcing once again the idea of the “evil” motive by stating that he was “seeking no profit from wickedness but only to be wicked [*non dedecore aliquid, sed dedecus appetens*].”

The distinction above is important since it is analytically difficult to reconcile those two kinds of motive. Upon closer analysis, “evil for evil’s sake” involves being attracted to a wrong action precisely because of its wrongness, not for any other reason. Drawing an idea from David Hume’s essay “Of the Standards of Taste,” Scarre stresses the point that regarding virtue, we praise it, of course, and give it our approval, whereas we disapprove of vice.¹⁵⁷ He adds that an individual can certainly be attracted to things that

¹⁵⁶ Such a case of motivation need only involve human authority here, perhaps the civil authorities throughout the region or at Augustine’s age, more likely Augustine’s parents. Even with civil authority as the typical authority for declaring and enforcing property laws, Augustine at 16 would conceivably be more focused on parental authority since it is at that level that the teaching of such moral boundaries is initially made known and reinforced. This possibility brings to mind Augustine’s earlier reaction in 2.3 to parental admonition in a different area (that he avoid sexual activity), an admonition which, coming from Monnica, struck him as “womanish...” He explicitly states his failure at that time to recognize God as the ultimate source of the advice.

¹⁵⁷ Scarre, “Can Evil Attract?” 305.

he disapproves of, noting that there is no linguistical or logical problem with the following: “X is wrong, and I don’t approve of X, nevertheless, I like/want X.” Yet it does not make sense to say, “X is wrong, so I don’t approve of X, yet its wrongness is precisely what attracts me to it.” My own example of the first statement would be the case of a smoker that believes that smoking is wrong, but he likes or wants to smoke anyway because of some perceived good associated with the act: smoking makes him feel relaxed, impresses his friends, serves as a form of escapism, etc. The second statement would involve a case in which a person smokes precisely because it is wrong, not because of a perceived good associated with it. That such a statement is ultimately incoherent will be further examined later in the chapter. Yet Augustine’s statements that use the “evil” motive are best classified as reflecting this second statement.

However, “sin for sin’s sake” is an example of the first statement above.¹⁵⁸ In such a case the agent is attracted by a perceived “good” in the act such as the thrill of showing one’s imagined independence, or thumbing one’s nose at authority, variations here of consciously flouting God’s standards. This situation stems from how the term “sin” itself, particularly in the context of Augustine’s writings, presupposes a higher religious authority, God, that has laid down boundaries in the moral realm that should not be crossed. In contrast to that scenario, the “evil” category of motive, need not involve a higher authority at all.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ In the earlier outline of Scarre’s account of the theft, it was clear that Scarre essentially considers “sin for sin’s sake” as reflecting the first statement. However, whereas Scarre includes the effects of the Fall in his account, my basic breakdown of the phrase here is more generic.

¹⁵⁹ Of course, many theists if not all, arguably hold that the concept of objective evil itself makes no sense without the existence of God as a source, specifically both metaphysical basis and Moral Lawgiver, for objective good to begin with, but the point above is that one would, all other objections aside, perform evil for the sake of evil without consciously doing it for the purpose of resisting a higher authority in some way. The lack of a “higher authority” component itself in the scenario does not render the motive incoherent.

At this point some might argue that Augustine does not necessarily mean to raise two very different motives here that are incompatible with each other. Instead, he plausibly uses them simply as variations of each other. On the one hand, without any more specific qualifications made by Augustine to distinguish between them as sharply separate motives, it is not totally clear-cut that he intended these two to be very distinct motivations. Yet in the end it is best to take each statement at face value as constituting a certain category of motive instead of serving as variations of the same motive. This view is particularly the case since McMahon's "confessional" interpretative approach itself, if correct, would suggest that this understanding of those statements is the most natural reading of the text. After all, such an approach supports the view that Augustine really is probing various possibilities in an effort to understand his true motivation in the theft episode better. If McMahon's confessional approach is correct, then Augustine's switch between the two conceptually different motives poses less of a problem for McMahon's final interpretation in comparison to most Platonic accounts, which usually view the theft analysis as one coherent essay.

Although some will note that the "sin" motive above only appears in his brief summary of the theft (2.4.9) before his self-analysis actually begins, the "omnipotence" passage at the end of section 14 uses the same kind of language. More specifically, in 2.6.14 Augustine describes his illusory feeling of omnipotence "from doing something forbidden without immediate punishment [*faciendo impune quod non liceret*]," thus crossing a line again involving an authority figure, a more developed situation beyond simply committing evil for the sake of evil. Interestingly, Augustine then reverts back to wording in section 15 (2.7.15) that supports the "evil" motive as he thanks God for

forgiveness for his evil in that period of his life, thanking Him also for the evil that he never did but might have done: “And the evil I have not done, that also I know is by Thy grace [*Gratiae tuae deputo et quaecumque non feci mala*]: for what might I not have done, seeing that I loved evil solely because it was evil [*quid enim non facere potui, qui etiam gratuitum facinus amavi*]?” With “evil,” *mala*, in the immediate context here, it is certainly reasonable to understand *gratuitum facinus* to refer to a “criminal act,” performed for no reason at all. Therefore, when the passage is considered as a whole, it is best to classify this brief reference to motive as another example of the “evil” motive. This conclusion is also reinforced by Augustine’s continued use of *mala* (evil) in the subsequent sentence.

In his contemplation at the beginning of section 16 (2.8.16), even though the word “evil” [*mala*] is nowhere in the passage, Augustine continues with a motive that is conceptually consistent with the idea of “evil for evil’s sake.”

*“What fruit therefore had I (in my vileness) in those things of which I am now ashamed? Especially in that piece of thieving, in which I loved nothing except the thievery [in quo ipsum furtum amavi, nihil aliud]—though that in itself was no thing [cum et ipsum esset nihil] and I only the more wretched for it.”*¹⁶⁰

Regarding the whole episode, Augustine states his love for “nothing except the thievery,” and one sees a brief reference here as well to his eventual view of evil as literally nothing—just a privation. However, he next considers the possibility of the companionship as part of the motive. While calling that “friendship” also a “nothing,” apparently a corrupted form of friendship at best, he contemplates the prospect of his being attracted by it:

¹⁶⁰ Sheed’s emphasis in both English sentences. The first two italicized portions are Sheed’s to denote Augustine’s use of Scripture, in this case Romans 6:21 from the New Testament.

Now—as I think back on the state of my mind then—I am altogether certain that I would not have done it alone. Perhaps then what I really loved was the companionship of those with whom I did it. If so, can I still say that I loved nothing over and above the thievery [*non ergo nihil aliud quam furtum amavi*]? Surely I can; that companionship was nothing over and above, because it was nothing [*immo vero nihil aliud, quia et illud nihil est*].

Nonetheless, he eventually moves back to pursuing how the deed itself and also the companionship fit together in the correct understanding of his motivation at that time:

If I had liked the pears that I stole and wanted to enjoy eating them, I might have committed the offence alone, if that had been sufficient, to get me the pleasure I wanted; I should not have needed to inflame the itch of my desires by rubbing against accomplices [*nec confricatione consciorum animorum accenderem prurimum cupiditatis meae*]. But since the pleasure I got was not in the pears, it must have been in the crime itself [*in ipso facinore*], and put there by the companionship of others sinning with me [*quam faciebat consortium simul peccantium*].

The question might arise as to whether Augustine moves back to “sin” language near the beginning of the passage above, at least indirectly by stating, “If I had liked the pears that I stole and wanted to enjoy eating them, I might have committed the offence alone [*solus...committere illam iniquitatem*].” Despite Sheed’s choice of the phrase “committed the offence,” which might initially suggest an offended party, the Latin here is not conclusive: *iniquitatem* (from *iniquitas*, “injustice” or “unevenness”) would point to committing an “injustice” against another party, but it does not necessarily serve as a synonym or indicator of “sin” in this context.

As Augustine rules out the option that his pleasure was from the pears themselves, he concludes that it must have been in the “crime itself” [*in ipso facinore*]. With a focus here similar to his earlier statement about the *facinus* (“criminal deed”), it is best to see this as a return to the “evil” motive discussed earlier. Yet he couples that observation with an acknowledgement that the companionship was the needed catalyst to set in motion his actions leading to the theft. Augustine also includes “sin” language near the end of the passage, his use of *peccantium* in describing the actions of the group. All the same, the reference is rather brief—not a more direct statement of motive like the earlier statements

already considered. As a result, there is no serious reason to view that brief reference as negating the “evil” motive that is supported by other lines in the same passage.

The wording of his final statement on the motive in section 17 (2.9.17) is an effort to sum up the entire matter: “Here, then, O God, is the memory still vivid in my mind. I would not have committed that theft alone: my pleasure in it [the theft] was not what I stole, but that I stole [*me non libebat id quod furabar sed quia furabar*]: yet I would not have enjoyed doing it, I would not have done it, alone.” Although the statement on motive here is more general in nature than some of the previous, more direct statements, it is reasonable to classify it in the “evil for evil’s sake” category. Of course, in the passage above Augustine also strongly confirms the role of the camaraderie in sparking the decision to commit the theft but without negating the key role of the act itself as the main attraction.

Consequently, I find myself in agreement with Scarre that based on the text, Augustine’s motive centers around evil for evil’s sake. However, I differ, for reasons already discussed, with Scarre’s contention that Augustine’s view here should be understood as a case of sin for sin’s sake because of *City of God*. Scarre’s ultimate position that the real-life motive outside the text was Augustine’s vying for attention in his group is plausible, but I remain committed to taking the text at face value on Augustine’s belief about the motive despite any temptation to draw a different conclusion.

Yet Scarre is correct in his assertion that a motive such as evil for evil’s sake is ultimately incoherent. We saw earlier his belief that an individual can certainly be attracted to things that he disapproves of with the following form: “X is wrong, and I

don't approve of X. Nevertheless, I like/want X." It does not make sense to say, "X is wrong, so I don't approve of X. Yet its wrongness is precisely what attracts me to it." Scarre is skeptical of the possibility of such persons because although the virtue-loving person experiences pleasure in acting well, explaining the vice-loving agent whose feelings and moral evaluations are going separate ways here is seriously problematic: the sincerely wrong-loving agent is expected to experience pleasure "in acting *against* his sense of right," a scenario that Scarre finds "incomprehensible."¹⁶¹ As a result, he rightly submits that it is incoherent to say, "X is wrong, but I personally approve of X," labeling it a "mystery" as to how an agent could genuinely experience pleasure in something precisely *because* he could not approve of it.

Was Augustine aware of the incoherence of the motive? If our analysis above on the coherence issue is correct, he apparently did not know about or agree with such a conclusion; otherwise, he presumably would have ruled out that option during his search in Book 2 for the true motive. Yet if he evidently believed that his description of the experience that he was having as a boy is accurate and true, perhaps coming to grips with the inconsistency of the motive is part of the "knottedness" that Augustine seeks to "unravel" near the end of Book 2. As for what the true motive might have been instead of the experience of "evil for evil's sake," one can never be sure.

My own account of the motive above brings to light a few remaining observations concerning the other accounts. Regarding the Platonic accounts, the conceptual differences between the motives described earlier in my account raise more questions about the "coherent" understanding of the theft analysis, questions in addition to McMahon's own challenges to that interpretation. Although MacDonald does discuss

¹⁶¹ Scarre, "Can Evil Attract?" 306.

certain passages containing both types of motives in his list of Augustine's relevant statements on motivation, he never addresses the conceptual distinctions between them in making his case but assumes they are essentially variations of each other.¹⁶² The other Platonic accounts, including McMahon's, fail to give the "evil for evil's sake" motive adequate consideration despite the various direct statements in Augustine's search that point to this option.

Concerning the anti-Platonic accounts, Matthews dismisses the "evil for evil's sake" motive as a possibility early in his account since wickedness, no lesser good with beauty of its own, could not have been what attracted Augustine.¹⁶³ Viewing Augustine's theft analysis as a systematic exploration is a key factor in Matthews's error here since he believes that everything Augustine says throughout the analysis must somehow be logically consistent. Although Paffenroth also interprets the analysis as a methodical account, he is correct in his final conclusion of evil for evil's sake with the companionship in a catalyst role. Reaching their conclusions through the belief that the theft analysis is a coherent whole poses an additional challenge to their fellow "coherentists" that interpret the motive as fitting the (narrower) Platonic understanding of motivation.

SIGNIFICANCE OF EVIL IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

Noting the meaning and the connections between Augustine's experiences of evil in Books 1 and 2 and the implication of these connections for Augustine personally is an important step to take at this stage. Book 1 showcases Augustine's early experience with

¹⁶² MacDonald, "Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin," 398.

¹⁶³ Matthews, 119.

evil, ranging from his infancy to his early boyhood, with those early experiences laying the groundwork for his later encounters with the experiential problem of evil. In particular, his temptation in the area of the “pride of life,” to pursue vain ambition, receives impetus in two areas: the games and shows that he attended as a boy and the high expectations from the schoolmasters that he strive to excel in lessons and competitions involving classical studies and public speaking.

In Book 2 his parents unwittingly reinforce his move toward vanity as they also expect his success in those studies. At the same time, they fail (in his view) to address adequately a different, growing temptation in his life, that of his sexual struggles, thus leading to his spiritual rebellion as illustrated through the pear theft episode that dominates the rest of Book 2. Augustine’s final observation at the very end of Book 2 that “I went away from Thee, my God,...I became to myself a barren land [*regio egestatis*]” (2.10.18), summarizes the full depths of his revolt during this period. Boulding translates the phrase as “land of famine” and makes a connection with it to the story of the Prodigal Son--Augustine’s own prodigality is now complete.¹⁶⁴ Likewise, O’Donnell also had observed “echoes” of the Prodigal story in the theft analysis in Augustine’s language of throwing the pears to the pigs,¹⁶⁵ arguably a link that reinforces the serious degree of spiritual prodigality of Augustine in his sixteenth year. As MacDonald terms it, Augustine’s purpose in relating the theft story is to show by the end of Book 2 that the “prodigal has reached his nadir.”¹⁶⁶ O’Donnell and MacDonald, both

¹⁶⁴ Augustine *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part 1—Books*, vol. 1 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 74. See footnote 54 on the same page for the connection to the “Prodigal” story.

¹⁶⁵ O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, 130. O’Donnell compares the language about the pigs to Luke 15:15 in the New Testament.

¹⁶⁶ MacDonald, “Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin,” 410.

holding to a Platonic understanding of the theft, are correct that under the Platonic interpretation it is clear that Augustine's spiritual rebellion had reached a new level.

Yet under the motive that has been proposed here, "evil for evil's sake," a motive that goes beyond the Platonic explanation, how much more an understanding of this as the motive illustrates the depth of his rebellion as he deliberately committed a wrongful act without any perceived good connected to it. Although using the simple example of the theft of a pear tree may seem rather perplexing, the motive and how it showcases the depravity of his heart is clearly one of the reasons for Augustine's focus here. It is notable how the act under Augustine's analysis is even less rational in a sense than the irrational, futile act of rebellion that Matthews terms the theft as. In Matthews's account such a rebellious act, a case of a "Rebel Without a Cause," conceivably takes place when one's level of frustration or anger has reached a new high, conditions have reached a breaking point of sorts, and the agent is compelled to "lash out," revolt in some way, but without any clear goal in mind. In contrast, Augustine's "evil" motive is even less rational—so irrational that a breakdown of the logical form of it is incoherent. Although we suggested earlier that he was not aware of the immediate logical problem with such a motive, perhaps in a sense he held an awareness of the sheer irrationality of it, an act so irrational that it is even less explicable than the spontaneous, nihilistic act of rebellion in Matthews's interpretation.

In Augustine's reflections on sinful rebellion in general, which is prompted by the incident of the pear theft, he muses on how "the soul is guilty of fornication when she turns from You and seeks from any other source what she will nowhere find pure and without taint unless she returns to you" (2.6.14). The fornication passage here suggests

how the theft as well as probably the sexual relations with various women that he described earlier in Book 2 conceivably symbolize the spiritual rebellion against God that was ultimately taking place in his heart.¹⁶⁷ Viewed through this lens, concerning the earlier fornication passage in which he was “boiling over in my fornications” (2.2.2), he is plausibly using “fornications” in both ways in that particular statement, both spiritual and physical fornication. In addition, it is noteworthy how Augustine uses the metaphor of a seductress in describing his eventual spiritual/intellectual “seduction” by the Manichees (3.6.11), a metaphor drawn from Solomon’s parable of a temptress that represents Folly, the antithesis of Wisdom, in the Old Testament Book of Proverbs (9:13-17).

But more specifically, how did family relations serve as a factor in Augustine’s downward spiral into spiritual rebellion in Book 2? We noted earlier that one motive that Augustine considered in his analysis was the possibility of stealing the pears simply because such an act was “forbidden.” In that consideration we suggested that the issue of parental authority was in the forefront, especially in view of Augustine’s reaction to Monnica’s advice on sexual relations as “womanish” so that he “should have blushed to obey,” not as an admonition from God.

Although Augustine eventually rejected that motive in our account, why would he be that disturbed later about that authority to begin with, aside from the natural rebellious tendencies that can often surface in the teen years? Augustine’s frustrations with his

¹⁶⁷ Boulding suggests an allusion to Ps. 73:27 in connection with Augustine’s use of the fornication metaphor here in Boulding, 71, n. 43. I would add that the biblical use of prostitution as a metaphor for spiritual unfaithfulness throughout the Old Testament (Ex. 34:15-16; Jdg. 8:27-33; Ezek. 16:26, 28; 23:5-8) is presumably in Augustine’s mind here even though most of those references are more specifically a metaphor using prostitution in connection with adultery, i.e. Israel’s, in some cases, Judah’s unfaithfulness in the context of God’s faithfulness in his covenant “marriage” to them.

parents in the first part of Book 2 are especially key. For example, even though William Mallard agrees with some commentators that the pear tree also recalls the original tree of knowledge of both good and evil in the Genesis story, he adds that the theft episode equally centers on the “hollow rage” of this adolescent, caught between “the family’s expectations and casual disregard [from the events in 2.3] (neither of which accords with how he really is)...”¹⁶⁸ As a result, it is no coincidence that the incident with the pear tree as well as his new wayward direction in Carthage (3.1.1) both take place shortly after his frustrations with his parents (2.2.2-2.3.8). Mallard asserts that Augustine’s aggravation with his mother’s passivity in not having him baptized or married culminated in actions on his part that showed an outright rejection of her faith and a turn toward the other direction.¹⁶⁹ He notes how Augustine’s language in the “Babylon” passage in 2.3.8 points toward great frustration on his part at her inaction.¹⁷⁰

Although certain aspects of this summary of Monnica’s situation such as the Babylon symbolism¹⁷¹ are pieced together retrospectively by Augustine the adult, Mallard is focusing on Augustine the youth’s presumable disappointment and perhaps anger as well at his mother’s failure to act upon his father’s report of his physical development. In spite of Mallard’s submissions here, where exactly to draw the line between what Augustine

¹⁶⁸ William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine’s Religious Thought Through the Confessions Story* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1994), 30. The account of the postponement of his baptism is in 1.11.17-18.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁷⁰ As we saw earlier, in 2.3.6 Augustine relates how at the public baths his father rejoiced upon seeing him and realizing how he had reached puberty, and thus, Patricius could look forward to expecting grandchildren one day (2.3.6). However, despite Patricius relating this to his mother, Augustine notes in 2.3.8 that she did not act upon the news of Augustine’s development by pursuing a marriage arrangement for him as she should have according to Augustine, in order for Augustine to avoid the sexual temptations that could result from remaining unmarried in this situation.

¹⁷¹ As a common symbol of human sinfulness and divine judgment in the New Testament, Babylon is used by Augustine to state that “she [Monnica] still lingered in its outskirts. She had urged me to chastity, but she did not follow up what my father had told her of me...” (2.3.8).

the youth felt concerning Monnica's actions and what is really retrospective on Augustine's part is difficult to fully ascertain from the text. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to conclude from the text that the early frustrating situation between Augustine and his parents was a definite factor, if not the only factor, in his behavior in the second part of Book 2. Although the "forbidden" motive is not the motivation that Augustine finally settles on as explaining his behavior with the theft, his deeper, darker descent into an irrational motivation for the pear theft is arguably connected to the unfavorable situation that he found himself in at home.

Therefore, instances of experiential evil in Augustine's early childhood and adolescence, evil caused by himself as well as others, are not difficult to find in the first two books of *Confessions*. His parents, though well-meaning, plausibly made questionable decisions that either encouraged or at least did not adequately discourage his negative behavior in this early period despite his mother Monnica's efforts to ground him in a basic foundation of knowledge about God at the same time (1.11.17). Consequently, the parents' mistakes or in some cases the young Augustine's perception of them as mistakes at that time presumably served as a key factor, if not the only factor, behind Augustine's temporary rejection of God and his journey in a wayward direction. Although the influence of these early instances of evil on his later preoccupation with the problem of evil itself remains to be seen, the correlation between the experiential evil of this period and his growing spiritual distance from God is already rather clear. Augustine describes his rebellion in stark terms in this part of the work, and his overall description

of this period of life provides important background to the reader before Augustine commences with new experiential and intellectual struggles with evil in subsequent books.

CRITIQUE OF AUGUSTINE'S CONTRIBUTIONS REGARDING EVIL

Augustine's struggles with evil in this first part of *Confessions* provide definite issues for further consideration, issues that are not limited to his time period or setting. If the earlier analysis of the theft episode in this chapter is correct, then what of Augustine's basic point that not all evil acts fall into the Platonic category? An elaboration of a famous experiment with C. Fred Alford's input will be helpful in addressing the inquiry.

Alford first reminds us of the famous Milgram experiment (1974) in which the experimental subject, "the teacher," is instructed to give increasingly higher shocks (in 15-volt increments) to a mild-mannered man, middle-aged, whenever he does not give the correct answer concerning a word pair.¹⁷² Actually a confederate of Milgram, the man grunts with discomfort when the "shocks" reach around 100 volts and then yells, complaining of a heart condition, and even eventually reaching the point of screaming before later falling silent as the voltage gradually "increases" further.

Noting how a panel of psychiatrists originally predicted that only one-tenth of one percent, the "sickest" members of the population, would eventually deliver the full range of shocks, Alford submits that Milgram struggled to explain why 65% of the experimental subjects, working- and middle-class men and women that lived in New

¹⁷² C. Fred Alford, "Evil Be Thou My Good," *The Good Society*, 15, no. 2 (2006): 14.

Haven, did deliver the full shock.¹⁷³ Of course, the “teachers” did not ignore the cries of the “learner”: some were hesitant to continue, others demurred, but most ultimately continued the shocks. Milgram carefully argued that the subjects are not sadistic, but rather they could not help themselves because they are “born and bred for obedience” as Alford summarizes the account.

Alford later briefly summarized the Milgram experiment to ordinary citizens under the title “If Hitler Asked You to Electrocute a Stranger, Would You? Probably.”¹⁷⁴ After spending two hours with them each, Alford observed that the citizens’ explanation of the results was similar to Milgram’s: people are “naturally weak, conformist, and cowardly,” but “not naturally sadistic.” Alford then spent three hours per week for more than a year with a group of prisoners incarcerated for murder and rape. The prisoners’ answers were markedly different from those of the group of free citizens. First, Mr. Acorn, whose input was strongly supported by the other prisoners as accurately voicing their thoughts throughout Alford’s interaction with them, quickly changed the summary name to the following: “If the State Asked You to Electrocute a Stranger, Would You? Hell, Yes.” A biker that is covered with tattoo designs (some rather vulgar) and that wants to open a tattoo shop after his release, Acorn might be dismissed by many as unqualified for even understanding the Milgram experiment, but Alford asks us to consider the possibility that his background does qualify him. Acorn submitted that all people have the potential for violence, adding that the prisoners with him all sense that “half of the citizens of the state would love to see us fry; hell, they’d be lining up for the job.” Acorn essentially argues that the state’s executioner adheres to public procedure to carry out his own sadism,

¹⁷³ Alford, “Evil Be Thou My Good,” 14.

¹⁷⁴ Alford, “Evil Be Thou My Good,” 14. Alford here also references the related article by Phillip Meyer, “If Hitler Asked You to Electrocute a Stranger, Would You? Probably,” *Esquire*, 73 (1970): 72-73.

whereas a man that, say, kidnaps people and electrocutes them in his basement handles his sadism “freelance.”¹⁷⁵ Alford suggests that it is the difference between the Milgram subjects and the criminal, the difference between civilization and barbarism, instead of a difference between sadism and obedience. He adds that the inmates were not more sadistic and aggressive in his experience than the free participants. Rather, the inmates’ sadism is simply more visible, “more likely to go freelance, less bound to institutional forms,” virtually the basic definition of criminal-type behavior. If this is true, then Alford concludes how evil, pleasure in hurting, is “more widespread and institutionalized than we know,” but we have a tendency to confuse “organization, rationalization, and legitimation with goodness...”

As a result, regarding Augustine’s analysis of Catiline’s acts in Book 2 of *Confessions* (2.5.11), Alford poses the question: “Is not Augustine working a little too hard to make Catiline’s savagery a rational act, perverse, but nonetheless based on reason?” He believes Augustine stops too early when he should have continued exploring other possibilities of pure evil.¹⁷⁶ Alford closes by asserting that Enlightenment optimism finds it “literally unthinkable that people, or at least more than the psychopathic few...find pleasure in hurt, harm, and destruction” but instead he suggests that we should listen more closely to those “idiot savants of evil,” the prisoners that he interviewed.

On the issue of evil for evil’s sake, in response to Alford Scarre would conceivably suggest that the willingness of free citizens to “fry” anyone could easily be understood as anger or revenge or even as expressing their own superiority over that person, all definite reasons that he raises in his own essay regarding the more general question of whether

¹⁷⁵ Alford, “Evil Be Thou My Good,” 15.

¹⁷⁶ Alford’s own interpretation of the pear theft falls into the Platonic category, which is helpful in understanding his criticism here of Augustine. See Alford, 14.

one person hurts another only for the sake of it.¹⁷⁷ Scarre adds that people that enjoy others' suffering are often not indifferent to who the others are; it is precisely their enemies, those against whom they hold some kind of grudge, that they want to be on the receiving end.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, concerning the prisoner Acorn's example Scarre could conceivably go further and mention the tendency of people to see their enemies as any enemy of society, extrapolated to include any criminal in society since criminal activity poses a threat to the peaceful, orderly society that the free citizen has come to love and value and thus, not a case of sadism simply for the sake of sadism. Whether the death penalty itself is ethical is a separate issue, but I concur with Scarre's conceivable line of reasoning here against Alford.

However, both Scarre's and Alford's accounts agree that the Platonic understanding of wrong acts is not an adequate explanation of the real human condition. Alford's submission that people's potential for violence is conceivably much greater than we may realize or want to admit or even consider is a sobering thought. This is not to suggest that people never do acts because of a perceived good or that people do not have such motivations much of the time. Yet it is conceivably difficult, especially as one surveys various events of today across the globe, to assert strongly that people do wrong acts that they do out of ignorance more often than not. In contrast, I propose that Scarre's account of deliberate acts of wrongness, performed for attractive reasons beyond the act's wrongness itself, constitutes the ultimate motivation behind many acts that we see and hear about. Alford's submissions, including Acorn's more basic account of people's enormous potential to do wrong, are points well-taken even though Alford's belief in

¹⁷⁷ Scarre, "Can Evil Attract?" 315.

¹⁷⁸ Scarre, "Can Evil Attract?" 316.

pure evil suffers from the problems that Scarre raises in his own essay. Augustine would presumably be astonished at how the simple youthful theft of a pear tree among other factors has contributed to some of the larger debates about good and evil today.

CHAPTER THREE: CICERO'S *HORTENSIUS* AND THE MANICHEAN PERIOD

This chapter focuses primarily on events in Books 3 and 4 of *Confessions* and also through much of Book 5. At the age of sixteen Augustine moves to Carthage to continue his education in rhetoric and immediately describes how “a cauldron of illicit loves leapt and boiled about me” (3.1.1).¹⁷⁹ He was “in love with love [*amare amabam*]” but since his ultimate hunger was not for the “spiritual food,” God Himself, his “soul was sick.” Therefore, his struggles with lust continued and his new interest in stage plays stemmed from his efforts to cope with his own miseries that he saw mirrored on the stage (3.2.2).

CICERO'S *HORTENSIUS*

In 3.4.8 Augustine's excited reading of *Hortensius* by Cicero at the age of nineteen launches him on a quest to find true wisdom. The part in the *Hortensius* that makes an impact on Augustine is the large focus on Wisdom, but Peter Brown reminds us how “Wisdom” for Augustine does not hold the same meaning that it held for Cicero.¹⁸⁰ The name of Christ was held with a certain regard by Augustine, not only as a result of his boyhood in a Christian household, but also from the tendency of his culture to view the

¹⁷⁹ Carl Vaught submits how this was literally true in a sense by the pornography that was displayed through mosaics on the public buildings that Augustine could see from the city center. See Carl Vaught, *The Journey Toward God in Augustine's Confessions: Books I to VI* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), 68.

¹⁸⁰ Peter Lamont Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 30.

name of Christ as a safeguard, “like a vaccination,” against the common, very active presence of demons in the physical world. Moreover, the fourth-century presentation of Christ as the wise teacher, and not the suffering Savior, affected his interpretation as well.¹⁸¹ Conversely, so-called pagan “Wisdom” would have meant nothing to Augustine.¹⁸²

Augustine’s experience is not just intellectual but life-transforming—a return to the God that he had moved away from in the past. However, first, in the section in which he describes his encounter with the *Hortensius*, he initially remarks how “in eloquence it was my ambition to shine, all from a damnable vaingloriousness and for the satisfaction of human vanity [...*fine damnabili et ventoso per gaudia vanitatis humanae*],...” (3.4.7). Next, by noting the effect that the experience had on Augustine’s desires, Robert O’Connell illuminates the religious and moral aspects of the experience:¹⁸³

It turned my prayers [*preces*] to You Yourself, Lord, and redirected my purposes and desires [*vota ac desideria*]. My every vain hope was suddenly cheapened for me [*viluit mihi repente omnis vana spes*], and with incredible ardor of heart [*aestu cordis incredibili*] I yearned for the immortality of Wisdom. I began to rise up, in order to return to You [*surgere coeperam ut ad Te redirem*]...

O’Connell interprets *vana spes* as “vain hopes,” viewing this as Augustine’s term meaning “‘empty’ aspirations after ‘secular’ or ‘this-worldly’ distinction” and corresponding to the worldly, lucrative career of the last of the triad of sins (the pride of life) from James J. O’Donnell’s interpretation of *Confessions*. Thus, in contrast to Augustine’s obsession with ambition in the earlier quotation, Cicero’s inspiring work here greatly tempered his desire for glory at this point.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 31.

¹⁸² Ibid., 30.

¹⁸³ Robert J. O’Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine’s Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 35. O’Connell’s translation is used here and with all quotations from *Confessions* in the discussion of his interpretation in this section. All Latin insertions are his in these quotations.

However, although O’Connell observes that the phrase *aestu cordis incredibili* does hint at the erotic quality of the experience, he submits that this erotic element is intensified in the next part of Augustine’s experience: “How I burned, O my God [*ardebam...*], how I burned with desire to fly back to You from earthly things [*a terrenis*]...for Wisdom is with You [*apud Te est enim Sapientia*]” (3.4.8). O’Connell notes the continuing sexual imagery in the next passage: “What delighted me in [Cicero’s] exhortation was only this: I was stirred up, and enkindled, and enflamed to love, to seek after, to attain and strongly embrace, not this or that sect, but Wisdom Itself, whatsoever Wisdom might be” (3.4.8).¹⁸⁴

Nevertheless, Cicero’s work had its limitations in Augustine’s view because of his disappointment in 3.4.8 at the lack of any mention of Christ in it:

In so great a blaze, only one thing held me back: that the name of Christ was not in it...Whatever lacked that name, no matter how well-written, polished, and truthful it might be, could not wholly bear me away [*non me totum rapiebat*].¹⁸⁵

The intellectual aspect of the experience led to his immediate next step of looking at the Christian Scriptures for this “Wisdom.” The resulting disappointment of this step stemmed from how his “conceit was repelled by their [the Scriptures’] simplicity.”¹⁸⁶ In 3.7.12 several other questions that challenged the Catholic faith, including a question on the origin of evil, strengthen Augustine’s belief that the Catholic faith of his mother does not have the “Wisdom” he is seeking after reading Cicero. Instead, he finds himself

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 36.

¹⁸⁶ My use of Sheed’s translation.

gravitating toward the Manichees with their promise of showing the truth of their teachings through the use of reason.¹⁸⁷

THE MANICHEAN PERIOD

In 3.6.10 Augustine, now nineteen, falls in with the Manichees, for whom the problem of evil is a primary issue. In various works Augustine states that this period lasted nine years.¹⁸⁸ L. Ferrari offers the observation that a prolonged period without baptism encouraged sin in Augustine's day¹⁸⁹ along with other observations of how and why Augustine would have experimented with Manichaeism but without actually leaving the Church.¹⁹⁰

It is small wonder then, that still unbaptized at the insecure age of nineteen he indulged himself yet again when confronted by the mysterious Manichees with their constant talk of the Holy Trinity (3.6.10), and of his beloved Christ. Consequently, the previously mentioned secretive character of the Manichees and their love of the "suffering Jesus" who was "crucified throughout the visible universe" . . . were irresistible to a bright and curious nineteen-year-old with his passionate love of the name of Christ on the one hand (3.4.8; 5.14.25) and with a licence to sin and his fascination for secrecy on the other.

Augustine's curiosity, stemming from one of the sins in the triad of weaknesses in O'Donnell's interpretation of *Confessions*, arguably helped to lead to his time with the Manichees, and this consideration leads us to consider their system of beliefs next.

¹⁸⁷ J. O'Meara adds that it is certainly no coincidence that the focus on reason in the *Hortensius* helped lead to the impact of Manichean reasoning on Augustine in the Manichees' questions against the Catholic faith. See John J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York, Alba House: 2001), 68.

¹⁸⁸ *Conf.* 3.11.20, 4.1.1, 5.6.10 (397-401); *On the Morals of the Manichees* 19.68 (388); *On the Morals of the Catholic Church* 18.34 (388); *The Advantage of Believing* 1.2 (391); *Against the Epistle of Manichaeus Called Fundamental* 10.11 (396).

¹⁸⁹ Leo Ferrari, "Young Augustine: Both Catholic and Manichee," *Augustinian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1995): 120-21.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 121. In the quoted portion, Ferrari focuses on one of the "Jesus" figures in Manichean thought by quoting from Brown, 52.

Manichean Beliefs

In order to better understand Augustine's attraction to this sect as well as its effect on the two problems of evil and his eventual disillusionment with the group, specific background on the group's dogma and morals will be helpful here. Seven writings from the group's founder Mani make up the Manichean canon such as *The Living Gospel* and *The Book of Mysteries*.¹⁹¹ According to Manichean cosmogony, before heaven and earth were created there existed two principles, good and evil, with the first principle called the "Father of Greatness" in his "Kingdom of Light," a kingdom composed of five elements (air, wind, light, water, fire).¹⁹² However, the divine substance itself was light, different from either matter or intellect but still apprehensible and possessing a quality of manifestation.¹⁹³ The realm of the principle of evil is the reverse image of the realm of Light, and the "Prince of Darkness" is the head of that realm.¹⁹⁴

As for the nature of the soul itself, Jason BeDuhn makes clear that in Manichean teaching the soul is that "divine substance" that is now "enmeshed" with darkness, evil,

¹⁹¹ Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 6.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 9. Augustine refers to these five and to the corresponding five areas of darkness in *Conf.* 3.6.11.

¹⁹³ Geo Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965), 45. In a similar discussion John J. O'Meara clarifies that this Kingdom was material but "without appearing to be material," in John J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Alba Books, 2001), 57. He suggests that Augustine's difficulty in conceiving of a purely spiritual God probably resulted from his tendency to think of a "spiritual" God who was composed of some kind of tenuous matter, yet with immaterial properties attributed to it. Nevertheless, O'Meara concludes that the Manichees viewed the Father as "Light Resplendent," not as a kind of person, and in the context of Manichean cosmogony a finite, limited God. William Mallard compares physical light seen with the physical eye (e.g., fire, sunlight, moonlight) with "light" emotions in the inner person (e.g., gentleness, nostalgia, longings for peace, truth, love), what Augustine calls "corporeal fantasies" in 3.6.10, with Mallard arguing that they are substantively the same in Mani's view. The inner light imprisoned in the flesh desires to be back with the Father. See William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought Through the Confessions Story* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1994), 54.

¹⁹⁴ Lieu, 10.

and this mixed condition has produced what we see in the cosmos around us.¹⁹⁵ Thus, Man is a microcosm of the cosmic battle: his body of matter is from the demon but his soul is from God.¹⁹⁶

Only a number of adherents could observe the strict rules of the church, leading to the ecclesiastical organization of Mani's church.¹⁹⁷ One class was made up of "the chosen few," and thus called "the Elect," also labeled variously as the "just, perfect, or holy,"¹⁹⁸ and forming the community of monks in the religion. The Elect play a crucial role in Manichean beliefs on salvation since their strict observance of the commandments, including those of purity, enables them to be the "earthly agents for the release of the captive Light."¹⁹⁹ This is accomplished through their digestive systems, which refine the various Light Particles in the food that they eat and release these Particles through their belches.²⁰⁰ The other major class was composed of the Hearers, that is, Catechumens.²⁰¹ Hearers or Auditors were precisely that because they were unwilling, at least at this point, to follow the required life of the Elect perfectly—hence their label, taken from Romans 2:13.²⁰² However, the Hearers' role in the salvation process was important too as they gave "Soul-Service," committed to caring for the Elect with almsgiving as well as with food preparation for these "redemptive meals."²⁰³

¹⁹⁵ Jason BeDuhn, "The Metabolism of Salvation: Manichaean Concepts of Human Physiology," in *The Light and the Darkness: Studies in Manichaeism and Its World*, eds. Paul Mirecki and Jason BeDuhn (Boston: Brill, 2001), 9.

¹⁹⁶ O'Meara, 61.

¹⁹⁷ Lieu, 20.

¹⁹⁸ Michel Tardieu, *Manichaeism*, trans. M. B. DeBeroise (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 58.

¹⁹⁹ Lieu, 21.

²⁰⁰ Augustine speaks contemptuously of this process in 3.10.18, using a fig tree as an example.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁰² O'Meara, 65.

²⁰³ Lieu, 20.

Monks were required to hold to five major commandments, and the laity were bound to observe three of them, at least in part.²⁰⁴ The third commandment, especially relevant for us to understand Augustine's early perception of the Elect, required the monk to practice strict chastity, not only sexually by pursuing a life of celibacy but also even to the point of avoiding any pleasurable contact by touching dew, snow, fine fabric, etc.²⁰⁵ Hearers did not have to observe all the same commandments as the Elect but could marry (or have mistresses), and yet were instructed to avoid procreation.²⁰⁶ A Hearer sins less with a concubine than with a wife—intending to propagate men is a larger evil than simply seeking one's own pleasure. Nevertheless, the ideal in this area would be total abstinence.²⁰⁷ As for almsgiving, the Hearer must give a tenth (or seventh) of his possessions with the result that he received purification from his worldly works as his giving allowed the Elect to fulfill their own duties.²⁰⁸

A brief, closer look at evil in Manichean thought will be helpful for understanding Manichaeism's promises of deliverance. This in turn is helpful for understanding Augustine's strong preoccupation with the problem of evil. Although the term "myth" is often used to describe the cosmic drama described earlier, Mani's claim to have received special revelation precludes the use of the term since his entire teaching on origins is meant to be understood literally and be scientifically accurate as well.²⁰⁹ As Lieu summarizes it, the "total acceptance of the Manichaean gnosis is essential for the believer's redemption as it demands his participation in a special lifestyle which has a

²⁰⁴ Tardieu, 63.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 65.

²⁰⁶ Lieu, 21.

²⁰⁷ O'Meara, 64.

²⁰⁸ Tardieu, 69.

²⁰⁹ Lieu, 22.

salvific function and which is only meaningful within a literal understanding of the cosmogonic drama.” As a result, Mani held literal views on the goodness or badness of celestial entities. He regarded the sun and the moon as good beings but saw the planets and the signs of the Zodiac as evil and pernicious.²¹⁰ In his *Kephalaia* Mani even laid out a schema in which two zodiacal animals were connected to each of the Five Worlds of Darkness.²¹¹ In another passage in the same work, Mani divided the world into four parts, with each part split into four triangles. In this way three specific zodiacal signs were distributed to each triangle.²¹² Astrological ideas enter Manichean thinking at this point, and the zodiacal signs that one is “connected” to affect both the physiology and psychology of humans.²¹³ Moreover, this science of *melothesia*, which outlined the impact that astrological signs have on different parts of the body, allowed specifically for the influence of Zodiac signs such as Aries influencing the head, Taurus affecting the neck and shoulders, the belly influenced by Virgo, the genitals by Scorpio, and so forth in one of the systems of influence.²¹⁴

However, besides astrology, food is a second crucial factor in one’s physiology and psychology. In Manichaeism “you are what you eat,” and so eating a food with many dark (negative) substances instead of light particles can disturb one’s physical health and also harm one’s psychological well-being as such food strengthens the presence of evil within the individual.²¹⁵ A third factor involves the senses. Each sense organ has a

²¹⁰ Widengren, 69.

²¹¹ Ibid., 69-70.

²¹² Ibid., 71-72.

²¹³ BeDuhn, 12.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 13. Section 70 of *Kephalaion*, another Manichean writing, is BeDuhn’s source for this breakdown of astrological influences.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 14.

“memory storehouse,” a depository of good and evil from the world.²¹⁶ Experiences gained through the five senses enter the appropriate sensory repository and have an effect on one’s behaviors and attitudes. Which “regime” controls the body at a given time determines the memories, good or evil, that will be consulted and utilized.²¹⁷ For example, whenever the body is controlled by “the regime of evil,” the senses have a tendency to take in and concentrate on experiences that cultivate unhealthy dispositions. Thus, the Manichean strategy to free elements in Nature and especially in food is frustrated whenever the individual is controlled by evil.²¹⁸

A closer look at the Manichean preoccupation with evil in the context of North Africa is useful at this point. In particular, the Manichees in that area centered on the problem of evil as did their Gnostic forerunners in Africa two hundred years before—and essentially gave the same answers as well, as W. H. C. Frend points out.²¹⁹ The evil that both groups struggled with was demoniac forces of evil, and the Berbers in Augustine’s Africa held to a belief in those forces from “remote prehistory” all the way to the present.²²⁰ This evil was manifested in two ways. First, there was the virtually universal belief in Africa that the life of an individual was under the tight governance of the stars and planets beginning at birth, and death could result from the eventual decree of those demons that controlled the planets that originally corresponded to the birth of that person. Religion aimed to provide people with the formulas needed to deal with certain demons that they would encounter on their journey to Paradise. Thus, astrology was not only a crucial part of

²¹⁶ Ibid., 15. BeDuhn draws this from *Kephalaion* 56, 138.20ff.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 16.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 22.

²¹⁹ W.H.C. Frend, “The Gnostic-Manichaean Tradition in Roman North Africa,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (April, 1953): 17.

²²⁰ Frend, “The Gnostic-Manichaean Tradition in Roman North Africa,” 18.

Gnostic and Manichean belief systems but was very attractive to African Christians as well.

The second evil was even more dreadful as it involved the “evil eye” and the “evil mouth” as immediate causes of suffering.²²¹ Various buildings, churches among them, had inscriptions against “Invidus” or “evil eye,” and decorations on personal possessions existed for the same purpose.²²² The Berbers already viewed Saturn, the supreme God in the North African region, as “savage and morose,” demanding blood sacrifice for appeasement and totally sovereign over creation. In this vein Frend suggests that perhaps an African’s acceptance of this jealous deity as God versus a rejection of him (by viewing him as an evil Archon) well determined whether that person became committed either to the Donatists²²³ or to Gnostic and Manichean beliefs.²²⁴ In other words, to be for or against the Old Testament was to be for or against Jehovah.²²⁵ Thus, Frend adds that if many North Africans desired freedom from the domination of a “savage Creator-God” as well as deliverance from “tangible powers of evil,” then the strong attraction of movements such as Gnosticism becomes clear: their promise to redeem the believer from these elements and provide a logical explanation of happenings and of phenomena through a strong use of astrology. Frend sees a parallel between developments in Gnosticism and in Manichaeism: in both the second century and the fourth, a speculative

²²¹ Frend, “The Gnostic-Manichaeic Tradition in Roman North Africa,” 18.

²²² Frend, “The Gnostic-Manichaeic Tradition in Roman North Africa,” 19.

²²³ The Donatists, heretics that claimed to have the true Christian church in view of their specific ecclesiology, were rivals of the Catholics in part of the fourth century.

²²⁴ Frend, “The Gnostic-Manichaeic Tradition in Roman North Africa,” 19-20. In formulating this suggestion, Frend draws from Augustine’s observation that some Africans, especially astrologers, considered Saturn and the Christian deity to be the same being. See Augustine’s *The Consensus of the Evangelists*, 1.21.29-36. Concerning the main choice between the Donatists and Gnostic/Manichean beliefs, the Catholics did not become a predominant force in North Africa at all until the period of the great Persecution under Diocletian and then never come to dominate the region until the Conference at Carthage in 411. See Frend, 13.

²²⁵ Frend, “The Gnostic-Manichaeic Tradition in Roman North Africa,” 20.

focus on evil along with a distaste for Old Testament writings led directly to a dualistic, heretical variety of Christianity.

Augustine's Early View of God

A relevant issue for exposition involves Augustine's view of God at this point, especially since the Manichees' challenge concerning the concept of God and evil drew Augustine's attention. J. Kermit Scott and various other commentators concur on the conclusion of Augustine's general belief in his early life in the God of his mother, including the view of God as a very dominant, sovereign deity.²²⁶ This concept was coupled with the notion of God as a powerful father whose "protection might be less than fully reliable" for his followers on earth.²²⁷ However, this earthly life was followed by a blissful, pain-free existence in a "heavenly home," and all of these key elements pointed to a heavily anthropomorphic concept of deity. Scott concludes that it "seems certain that Augustine at this point conceived his god as a corporeal being with a body very like a human." Scott adds that although this anthropomorphism is not stated by Augustine explicitly, his later difficulties in conceiving God without a body (in his Manichean period) reinforce the point above. In addition, his attraction to the Manichean concept of God as superior to the Catholic view, which he understood to be a God "bounded by the form of the human body" (5.10), also supports that conclusion in Scott's view.²²⁸

²²⁶ T. Kermit Scott, *Augustine: His Thought in Context* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995), 68.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

²²⁸ Scott's translation.

Although Scott doesn't utilize the passage in *Confessions* 7.1.1 in support of his position, Augustine's comments there concerning his beliefs on the nature of God are relevant:

Now my evil sinful youth was over, and I had come on into young manhood; but the older in years, the baser was my vanity, in that I could not conceive any other kind of substance than what these eyes are accustomed to see. I did not indeed, O God, think of You under the figure of a human body [*non te cogitabam, deus, in figura corporis humani*]. From the moment I began to know anything of philosophy, I had rejected that idea; and I rejoiced to find the same rejection in the faith of our spiritual mother, Your Catholic Church. But what else to think of You I did not know.

Carl W. Griffin and David L. Paulsen draw two conclusions from the passage: (1) there was a past time before he learned anything of philosophy in which Augustine viewed God in anthropomorphic terms, and (2) despite being raised a Christian he did not think Christians believed otherwise until a definitely later date, specifically the preaching of Ambrose in Milan.²²⁹ Griffin and Paulsen interpret the period of learning about

²²⁹ Carl W. Griffin and David L. Paulsen, "Augustine and the Corporeality of God," *Harvard Theological Review* 95, no. 1 (2002): 104. Based on this same passage, Mallard and O'Donnell also reach the conclusion that Augustine had thought of God anthropomorphically in the earlier part of his life. See Mallard, 64, and James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, *Commentary on Books 1-7* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 186. O'Donnell also refers to 5.10.19 concerning this early view of God that Augustine held. See O'Donnell, vol. 2, 393. K. Paffenroth contends that Augustine's main problem here is with any anthropomorphic features of God, especially in the Incarnation of Christ, not in a corporeal God per se, and Augustine is only a corporealist because of Manichean influence. Using a more restrictive meaning of "corporeal" (a humanlike body, not just a material one), Paulsen counters that after meeting the Manichees, Augustine had a choice between that restrictive type of "corporeal" Christian God or a non-anthropomorphic, but material Manichean God. Augustine's belief that Christians believed in the first kind of deity in Christianity was reinforced by the Manichees' biased teaching, other Christians, and certain biblical passages. I would add that Paffenroth's position (that Augustine only had a problem primarily with the Incarnation) is problematic. Paulsen is on firmer ground here in view of 7.1.1. Nevertheless, the Manichean influence was plausibly the key factor, if not the only factor, in Augustine's belief at that point concerning what Christians' concept of God was. For Paffenroth's argumentation, see Kim Paffenroth, "Paulsen on Augustine: An Incorporeal or Nonanthropomorphic God?" *Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 2 (1993): 234-35. For Paulsen's argumentation, see David L. Paulsen, "Reply to Kim Paffenroth's Comment," *Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 2 (1993): 235-39 and Carl W. Griffin and David L. Paulsen, "Augustine and the Corporeality of God," *Harvard Theological Review* 95, no. 1 (2002): 97-118.

philosophy in the passage as essentially contemporaneous with his Manichean conversion.²³⁰

Augustine and Manichaeism

There is very little doubt that the problem of evil was a key factor in moving Augustine toward the Manichees when he joined them at the age of nineteen. In his work *On Free Choice of the Will* (388) he asserts that the question of the source of our evil-doing was “a question that wore me out, drove me into the company of heretics [the Manichees]... and knocked me flat on my face [*me...atque deiecit*]” (1.2.4).²³¹

In 3.7.12 Augustine admits his initial bafflement with several issues the Manichees brought to his focus, the first question dealing with evil (“Whence comes evil?”—“*Unde*

²³⁰ Although Griffin and Paulsen do not explicitly mention Cicero’s *Hortensius* in connection with the period when Augustine first learned about philosophy, this is a reasonable interpretation of their meaning in the context of the article, especially since their English translation of the passage, derived from Henry Chadwick’s rendering, uses the term “wisdom” instead of philosophy.

²³¹ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 3. See also *Conf. 7.5.7*. In 1.2 of another work, *The Advantage of Believing* (391), Augustine stresses how “you know, Honoratus, that for no other reason did we fall in with such men [the Manichees] than that they kept saying that by pure and simple reason, apart from all formidable authority [*nisi quod se dicebant terribili auctoritate separata mera et simplici ratione...*], they would lead their willing listeners on to God and free them from all error.” See Augustine, “The Advantage of Believing,” trans. Charles T. Wilcox in *Writings of Saint Augustine: Treatises on Various Subjects*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari, Fathers of the Church (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1952), 392. This comment is arguably compatible with his statement in *On Free Choice* since the problem of evil was a major issue to be resolved for him but ideally through reason, of course, based on Cicero’s emphasis on reason in *Hortensius* and the exhortation to pursue Wisdom. The Manichean claim to resolve issues of evil and God by proving the truth of Manichean thought through the use of reason (in contrast to his background in the Catholic Church with its fundamental command to believe) greatly attracted Augustine. In the same section of his essay to Honoratus, he notes how this epistemological factor of desiring the use of reason affected the depth of his advancement with the Manichees: “But, again, what reason kept me from embracing them completely so that I remained in that rank which they call Hearers (so as not to lose the hope of this world with its affairs), except that I noticed that they themselves also were more fluent and eloquent in refuting others than they were strong and sure in proving their own beliefs [*...nisi quod ipsos quoque animadvertēbam plus in refellendis aliis disertos et copiosos esse quam in suis probandis firmos et certos manere*]?” Augustine, *The Advantage of Believing*, 392-393.

malum?”).²³² Since Catholics believe that God is all-good and omnipotent, this inquiry about evil raises a challenge to some of their key beliefs. Augustine’s utter inability to address that question and others adequately and the Manichees’ promise of rational explanations for the truth on those issues commanded his interest.

O’Connell’s input is helpful as he sees a narrative relationship between three events of Augustine’s life at this point: his sexual struggles, his common-law marriage with a concubine, and his encounter with Cicero’s *Hortensius* all help to lead to his growing interest in the Manichees’ religion.²³³ In particular, O’Connell notes the Manichean emphasis on sexual purity, which would have conceivably accorded with Augustine’s attraction to Cicero’s call to follow high ideals.²³⁴

One additional development here is how Augustine’s “curiosity” with theater in 3.2.2 now merges in Book 4 into an effort to compete in various public displays for “the applause of spectators,” ultimately coupled with his struggle with worldly ambition (4.1.1). However, his ambition is most evident in his teaching career in rhetoric: “Overcome...by the desire for money” is how Augustine describes himself as he offers lessons in rhetoric for compensation in 4.2.2. Although Cicero’s *Hortensius* had tempered his “vain hopes” somewhat in Book 3, the temptations present in Carthage apparently brought his struggles in this area back in full force. Moreover, Augustine’s statement that he pursued glory during the entire nine-year period while trying to cleanse himself through Manichean practices suggests even here that Manichean teachings were ineffectual in lessening his own struggle in this area (4.1.1):

²³² Their second question dealt with the nature of God (a challenge based on the perception that Catholics believed in an anthropomorphic God), and the third question challenged the righteousness of the Old Testament patriarchs in view of their questionable acts (e.g., bigamy, killing, animal sacrifices).

²³³ O’Connell, 45.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

Throughout that nine-year period, from my nineteenth year to my twenty-eighth, I was astray myself and led others astray, was deceived and deceived others in various forms of self-assertion, publicly by the teaching of what are called the liberal arts, privately under the false name of religion; in the one proud, in the other superstitious, in both vain. On the one side of my life I pursued the emptiness of popular glory [*popularis gloriae...inanitatem*] and the applause of spectators, with competition for prize poems and strife for garlands of straw and the vanity of stage shows and untempered lusts [*intemperantiam libidinum*]; on the other side I was striving to be made clean of all this same filth, by bearing food to those who were called elect and holy, that in the factory of their own stomachs they should turn it into angels and deities by whom I was to be set free. And I followed out this line of conduct; and so did my friends who were deceived by me and with me.

It is rather clear from the overall context here that Augustine was not “set free” by the “stomachs” of the Elect during this entire period or at the very least he certainly did not perceive him as freed. He is also candid regarding his role in leading “astray” friends of his into following the same “line of conduct” that he himself was deceived into.

In 4.13.20 Augustine explores further imaginings of the nature of Manichean substance in the context of the issue of beauty in his *The Beautiful and the Fitting*. This book was a work that he hoped would win him favor with the orator Hierius in his quest for acclaim (4.14.23). Although that work is not extant now, Augustine describes briefly his difficulties at that time in better understanding the nature of substance and evil. In particular, his inability to imagine spiritual entities proved to be a major stumbling block to his thought in this area (4.15.24).²³⁵ However, in section 26 in that chapter Augustine also eventually connects his limitations on thoughts regarding substance to his attraction to the guiltlessness that Manichean thinking provided him:

What could be worse pride than the incredible folly in which I asserted that I was by nature what You are? Since I was not myself immutable...I choose rather to think You mutable than to think I was not as You are...So that I went on imagining corporeal forms: and being flesh I accused the flesh, and being a wayfaring spirit I did not return to You [*et spiritus ambulans nondum revertabar ad te*] but in my drifting was borne on towards imaginings which have no reality either in You or in me or in the body, and were not created for me by Your truth but were invented by my own folly playing upon matter [*sed a mea vanitate fingeantur ex corpore*]. And I spoke much to the little ones of your

²³⁵ Concerning that passage, Maria Boulding notes how Augustine’s attempt to do a “philosophical ascent” from the creature to ultimate reality at this point fails since he cannot imagine an immaterial soul. See Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Part 1—Books*, vol. 1 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 108, n. 63.

flock...I put to them the question: “Why does the soul err if God created it?” But I would not have any one ask me: “Why then does God err?” And I preferred to maintain that Your immutable substance had been constrained to suffer error [*et contendebam magis incommutabilem tuam substantiam coactam errare*] rather than admit that my own mutable substance had gone astray through its own fault and fallen into error for its punishment.

Yet, even after the disappointing meeting with Faustus, after which Augustine still associates with the Elect despite his serious doubts about their cosmology, he is still attracted to the tendency of Manichean doctrine to portray himself as guiltless (5.10.18):

For I still held the view that it was not we that sinned, but some other nature sinning in us; and it pleased my pride to be beyond fault, and when I did any evil not to confess that I had done it, that You might heal my soul because it had sinned against You: I very much preferred to excuse myself and accuse some other thing that was in me but was not I. But in truth I was wholly I, it was my impiety that had divided me against myself [*verum autem totum ego eram et adversus me impietas mea me diviserat*]. My sin was all the more incurable because I thought I was not a sinner; and my iniquity was most execrable in that I would rather have You, God Almighty, vanquished in me to my destruction than myself vanquished by You for my salvation [*...te, deus omnipotens, te in me ad perniciem meam, quam me a te ad salutem malle superari*].

In view of the quotations from *Confessions* above, the influence of Manichean beliefs on his weaknesses quickly comes into focus. Roy W. Battenhouse is direct in his assessment: “They [the two warring principles within him] were fated and he need feel no guilt about them; he needed only to observe them.”²³⁶ G. R. Evans summarizes it by saying that the Manichees had taken the personal struggle between one’s soul and body and placed the issue on a cosmic scale.²³⁷ They took away Augustine’s “private responsibility” for the health of his soul and “allowed him to cast his burden into the cosmic maelstrom.”

With just as perhaps the most pervasive temptation that he struggled with, Manichean beliefs especially had an effect on his relationship with his concubine. As Warren Thomas Smith notes, Manichean teachings offered Augustine a way out of self-responsibility: “It was not the *real* Augustine that was sinning, but the evil *within*. He

²³⁶ Roy W. Battenhouse, “Introduction,” in *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, ed. Roy W. Battenhouse (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 25.

²³⁷ G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 13.

might disassociate these carnal, lustful exploits from his soul, which was his authentic being.”²³⁸ R. McMahon concurs with this idea, adding that “Manichaean doctrine allows the young Augustine to blame his fleshy desires on an alien force within him, distinct from and opposed to his ‘true nature.’”²³⁹ Moreover, “Inclined to ‘fleshliness’ by youth and education, he can continue to enjoy his mistress...without acknowledging his own responsibility for his conduct.”²⁴⁰ This is not to say that Augustine’s motivations for wrong acts stemmed from a sense of moral license, an excuse to commit the wrong action. Rather, whenever he did do something immoral, Manichean teaching encouraged him not to bear a sense of responsibility for the mistake in which the “bad regime” happened to prevail in that instance.

Augustine also dabbled in astrology itself from certain mathematicians that claimed that the planets and stars were the cause of the evil that one does, not the human agent himself (4.3.4-4.3.5). Only a strong counterexample of two infants that were born the same day but with differing destinies (7.6.10) finally dispelled his trust in such astrology, although he had already largely rejected the specific Manichean understanding of astronomy itself after his disappointment with Faustus (5.6.10). Augustine himself notes retrospectively how the astrologers’ belief in the planets as the cause of one’s misdeeds presents the problem of how one is “guiltless” in such a system (4.3.4). However, he never does directly state that this implication is the factor that attracted him to the astrologers’ teachings.

²³⁸ Warren Thomas Smith, *Augustine: His Life and Thought* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 24.

²³⁹ Robert McMahon, *Augustine’s Prayerful Ascent: An Essay on the Literary Form of the Confessions* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 62.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 62-63. The word *mistress* itself conjures up negative connotations of the relationship. The term *concubine*, which I use in a later section in this chapter, sums up more accurately the legal and ecclesiastical acceptability of such relationships at that time.

Of course, Augustine's disappointment with Faustus's inability to address his questions about the Manichean writings, specifically their failure to explain and predict accurately astronomical phenomena, was a major factor in Augustine's abandonment of the sect (5.7.12-13). As Battenhouse makes clear, since Augustine's doubts on Manichean calculations concerning the natural sciences were now substantial, this factor naturally raised questions as to whether the Manichees could be trusted in the area of deeper matters.²⁴¹ The very observation by Augustine that those celestial bodies venerated by the Manichees were subject to the calculations and evaluation of the philosophers (5.5.9) probably made him reconsider whether the beings in those bodies really had a kind of divine nature in accordance with Manichean teaching.²⁴² Furthermore, I would submit that the problems with Mani's astronomical writings might have been especially troubling for Augustine since those difficulties raise questions on whether Mani's literal understanding of the entire cosmological process of purification, including the role of the sun and moon in delivering redeemed Light, is actually correct.

However, additional problems abound in other aspects of the Manichean process, other aspects that were reviewed earlier. Eating the right foods was within Augustine's control, but which "regime" controlled him at a given moment was essentially beyond his reach, and Manichean teachings did not necessarily rule out the possibility of astrological influence on the type of regime in control. As a result, in light of Mani's *melothesia* understanding of astrological influence on an individual, even a person with an otherwise predominantly good "regime" could conceivably have his or her destiny trumped by a fate that was determined by the alleged demonic forces in the sky.

²⁴¹ Battenhouse, 25.

²⁴² Kam-Lun Edwin Lee, *Augustine, Manichaeism, and the Good* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 6.

Moreover, Augustine's statements on the lack of any sense of guilt were derived from Manichean thinking as several commentators noted earlier. However, these same Manichean beliefs did not allow the individual to take any active role, including any role in regime choice, to win the personal battle against evil. As Brown makes clear, the self-contradictory aspects of the Manichean tradition puts the Manichee in a dilemma: the promise of taking control of one's identity and being able to "secure" a release from the rest of evil that was present in him was contradicted by the myths which portrayed the helplessness of Good and the definite limit to the power of the good God.²⁴³

However, the reputation of Mani himself and the prayers of the Elect on Augustine's behalf are factors in the efficacy of the salvific process in Manichaeism that must be considered as well. First, what about the roles of Mani himself and the Elect with regard to Augustine's eventual loss of trust in Manichean teachings? The very need to resolve the experiential evil that he felt consumed with arguably affected his perception of which authority to trust in addressing both problems of evil. Despite Augustine's attraction to the Manichean sect because of its emphasis on reason, he experienced a personal dialectic of sorts between authority and reason during his nine years with the Manichees according to Frederick van Fleteren.²⁴⁴ For example, when Augustine favored the teachings of the astrologers against the advice of Vindicianus and Nebridius to abandon those teachings, authority, specifically the perceived greater authority of the astrologers, carried more weight here than reason (4.3.6). Regarding reason, the Manichees did promise "rational explanations" of solar/lunar phenomena but actually demanded an "irrational belief in fantastic accounts." When Augustine eventually reached a level of uncertainty as to

²⁴³ Brown, 42.

²⁴⁴ Frederick E. Van Fleteren, "Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding," *Augustinian Studies* 4 (1973): 36.

whether the Manichean accounts can explain such phenomena (5.3.3, 5.3.6), he remained committed to the Manichees because of Mani's reputation for "sanctity of life [... *creditam sanctitatem*]" (5.5.9).²⁴⁵

Nevertheless, regardless of how well Mani himself might have conquered experiential evil in his own life, Augustine's gradual disillusionment with the lack of moral purity of the Elect, which he gives various examples of in his work *On the Morals of the Manichees* (388),²⁴⁶ was another issue. In that work Augustine specifically states that during the entire nine years of his time with the Manichees, he had never heard of a member of the Elect that either had not violated rules of morality or wasn't suspected of having done so (19.68).²⁴⁷ For example, his observation of several of the Elect making "indecent sounds and gestures" toward various women near a square in Carthage so disturbed him that he and his friends "lodged a complaint" on the incident. He was disgusted to learn that no punishment was forthcoming from Manichean leaders since the men in question might have provided the civil authorities with information on the sect in retaliation,²⁴⁸ a line of reasoning that would allow all kinds of moral laxity to go without punishment. He outlines other disturbing events by members of the Elect although some are based on hearsay: sexual advances toward a woman at the end of a meeting after the

²⁴⁵ Boulding's translation of this term here as "alleged holiness" in the context of 5.5.9 is helpful for comparison. See Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, 119.

²⁴⁶ Stanley Romaine Hopper, "The Anti-Manichean Writings," in *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine* ed. Roy W. Battenhouse (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 157. Stanley R. Hopper's implication here is namely that the lack of purity of the Elect in that work of Augustine's is arguably a significant experiential factor in Augustine's eventual dissatisfaction with the group. Eugene Portalie also notes the effect of the hypocrisy of the Elect on Augustine. See Eugene Portalie, *Guide to the Study of Saint Augustine*, trans. Ralph J. Bastian, introd. Vernon J. Bourke (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1960), 11.

²⁴⁷ Augustine, "On the Morals of the Manichaeans," trans. Richard Stothert, in *St. Augustin: The Writings Against the Manichaeans, and Against the Donatists*, reprint edition, ed. Philip Schaff, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 4 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 87.

²⁴⁸ This scenario was a real possibility since Manichaeism was an illicit religion at this point in the Empire. Nevertheless, Augustine did not find the argument (that the men should not be punished) very compelling.

light in the lamp at the meeting had been put out, false charges of sexual assault (against a follower's wife) by one of the Elect against another, prompted by jealousy between the two men (19.71), and an elderly member of the Elect beaten up by a woman's brother and friends after the woman was in the course of time visibly pregnant. This last case was unavoidable in a sense since any timely marriage to her by this member of the Elect (to prevent any discovery of the illegitimate pregnancy) was prohibited by the Manichean rules against marriage by the Elect (19.72). In his comments on this particular incident (19.73), surely Augustine also had in mind the effect of Manichean doctrine on his own struggle with lust and his concubine during that period despite the differences between his own situation and this one:

I blame the man for the atrocity, and not you. Still there is this in you all that cannot, as far as I can see, be admitted or tolerated, that while you hold the soul to be part of God, you still maintain that the mixture of a little evil prevailed over the superior force and quantity of good [*asseritis tamen etiam exiguo admixto malo maiorem eius copiam ubertatemque superari*]. Who that believes this, when incited by passion, will not find here an excuse, instead of checking and controlling his passion [*Quis enim cum hoc crediderit et eum libido pulsaverit, non ad talem defensionem potius quam eius libidinis refrenationem compressionemque confugiat?*]²⁴⁹

Augustine clearly could draw from his own past concerning how Manichean teachings could lead to an abdication of moral responsibility. However, the thrust of his argument here is an intellectual one, not personal experience, as he seeks to use the problems in Manichean teaching on good and evil to illustrate how their beliefs can easily lead to immoral behavior.

This section on the Elect, taken as a whole, leads to troubling conclusions: If the Elect themselves were not meeting the standards they were committed to reach, then either the members were fraudulent, and thus hypocritical in their commitment to these standards, or even worse, the light separation process was not the effectual cosmic resolution that

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 88-89.

Augustine had been told to accept. Moreover, the prayers that the Elect were committed to say on his behalf would presumably be of no avail if the Elect's own dedication to personal purity lagged in any significant way. In any case, the result was ultimately the same: the group supposedly with the real solution to the intellectual problem of evil still struggled with experiential evil in their very own lives. Despite Augustine's earlier trust in Mani because of Mani's alleged "sanctity of life," the failure of any of the Elect that he encountered to emulate this standard successfully surely weakened his trust in Manichean thinking even further.

However, the largest experiential factor by far was the failure of the Manichean system to help him deal with experiential evil in his life since that failure in turn raised considerable questions about their solution to the intellectual problem. More specifically, although they were basically correct about a real, experiential struggle between a "New Man" and "Old Man" (within the individual) from Pauline theology, their view of the actual cosmology involved was seriously uncertain in Augustine's opinion. In addition, the nine years he had devoted to Manichaeism, including serving meals to the Elect, taking part in their rituals, and presumably almsgiving as well to help secure his own purification, had actually only increased the evil he experienced in life—his commitment had been to a rather questionable system of thought all this time. It should be stressed at this point that Augustine cannot prove or show that Manichaeism is definitely wrong. Rather, he has encountered enough serious questions and doubts about the Manichean religion that he is now seriously open to another alternative.

Therefore, in *The Advantage of Believing* (391), which he wrote only five to six years after his Christian conversion, Augustine notes the difference between the Manichean interpretation of his leaving the sect and his own understanding of events:

Therefore, let them [the Manichees] cease to utter that saying, which they have on their lips as if of necessity, whenever they are deserted by anyone who has been a Hearer over a rather long period of time, ‘The light hath made its way through him [*lumen per illum transitum fecit*].’ For you see—you [Honoratus], who are my greatest care...how empty this can be and how very easy for anyone to censure... And so I leave this for your prudence to investigate. For I am not afraid that you may think that I was possessed by light [*me arbitreris inhabitatum lumine*] at the time that I was entangled in the life of this world, having a darksome hope from the beauty of my wife, from the pomp of riches, from the emptiness of honors and other harmful and destructive pleasures [*de inanitate honorum ceterisque noxiis et perniciosis voluptatibus*]. And all these...I did not cease to desire and hope for, as long as I remained their attentive Hearer. Nor do I attribute this to their teaching, for I admit that they assiduously advise that such things be shunned. But to say that I have been deserted by light now that I have turned away from all these shadows of things [*cum ab his omnibus umbris rerum me averterim*] and determined to be content with only the necessary sustenance for bodily health, but that I was enlightened and resplendent when I loved these things and was held enmeshed in them [*his involutus tenerer*], is characteristic of a man who, to put it very gently, gives superficial consideration to matters on which he loves to talk much. (1.3)²⁵⁰

So although Augustine readily concedes that Manichean teachings supported an ideal of not pursuing marriage, riches, or honors as goals, he points out how he harbored these desires during his entire time as an “attentive Hearer.” Thus, the Manichean view that the “light” has left him, specifically that his remaining body of Matter is pure evil, makes little sense in light of the enormous changes with his personal struggles. According to the “truth” of the Manichean system, this pattern of evidence should be reversed.

Finally, in 5.10.19 during Augustine’s temporary foray into Academic skepticism, he continued to reject the anthropomorphic understanding of God that he believed the Catholic Church held to, but he still held a corporeal view of God as well as the view

²⁵⁰ Augustine, “The Advantage of Believing,” trans. Charles T. Wilcox in *Writings of Saint Augustine: Treatises on Various Subjects*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari, Fathers of the Church (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1952), 394.

of evil as a substance, based on Manichean influence (5.10.20). This factor also explains his continual rejection of the basic Catholic teaching on the Incarnation in the same section.

The Concubine

This section serves to provide a closer examination of the nature of the relationship between Augustine and his concubine in order to supplement the discussion in the previous section and also to bring to light other retrospective considerations of Augustine's. These components of the discussion will provide a more complete understanding of the problem of evil for him during this time.

Preliminary Considerations

In the second chapter of this work in the analysis of Augustine's adolescent sexual struggles, the idea has already been raised that his escapades were not the huge, sinful frolic that his evocative descriptions might suggest. J. Ramirez essentially makes the case that the image of Augustine as a great sinner as exemplified by the period of concubinage also falters upon close examination.²⁵¹ For example, according to Augustine he and the concubine were faithful to each other during their relationship (4.2.2). Thus, instead of "years of promiscuity and sexual license," from a practical standpoint they were the equivalent of years of marriage—Augustine could not act upon an uncontrolled sexual appetite with the "confines" of a faithful partner, not to mention his family life of caring for both mistress and son, which itself imposed "sexual moderation" on the participants.

²⁵¹ J. Roland E. Ramirez, "Demythologizing Augustine as Great Sinner," *Augustinian Studies* 12 (1981): 68.

In actuality, there was no significant difference between their relationship and a common-law marriage as practiced over the centuries in many countries.²⁵² When compared to contemporary Western vogues of cohabitation and easy divorce, Augustine's life of fidelity with her was relatively commendable. The church did not frown upon such relationships, and even if it did, Augustine was not a baptized Christian at that time. In addition, with infidelity common among Roman marriages including the case of Augustine's father,²⁵³ Augustine's long-term faithfulness to his concubine showed his superior character in this regard.²⁵⁴ Moreover, Monnica's lack of protest at Augustine's relationship is worth noting²⁵⁵—what she actually protested against, even to the point of breaking with Augustine, was his connection with the Manichean religion.

Not all scholars agree on whether Augustine actually loved her. James A. Brundage holds that he did not,²⁵⁶ but the majority of scholars, including Kim Power and Danuta Shanzer, hold that he did. The arguments of both rely heavily on key passages such as the “torn” passage in 6.15.25 in which the concubine is dismissed as preparation for an upcoming marriage that Monnica had arranged for Augustine for his social mobility.²⁵⁷

²⁵² O'Connell essentially describes it also as a common-law marriage. See O'Connell, 16.

²⁵³ *Conf.* 9.9.19.

²⁵⁴ Ramirez, “Demythologizing Augustine as Great Sinner,” 69.

²⁵⁵ Arguments from silence such as this arguably have limited force. Nevertheless, Augustine's tendency to include Monnica's reaction at pivotal points in the narrative makes her lack of protest here noteworthy. Kim Power notes how unlikely it would be for Monnica to share a home with her if she disapproved of her as well as the observation that Monnica loved Adeodatus, their son (9.12.29). Two years after the relationship began, Monnica refused to share her home with Augustine (3.11.19) but specifically because of his Manichean ties. See Kim Power, “Sed unam tamen: Augustine and His Concubine,” *Augustinian Studies* 24 (1993): 65, n. 42. As a result, objections that Monnica's disagreement with the relationship itself was one factor among others in arranging an actual, legal marriage for Augustine and causing him to end relations with the concubine are difficult to sustain.

²⁵⁶ James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 99-100. Brundage references 2.2.2 here but presumably in error since the passage in 4.2.2, a key text on this topic, is more plausibly what he has in mind here.

²⁵⁷ Kim Power, “Sed unam tamen: Augustine and His Concubine,” *Augustinian Studies* 24 (1993): 54, and Danuta Shanzer, “*Avulsa A Latere Meo*: Augustine's Spare Rib--*Confessions* 6.15.25,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 92 (2002): 159-62.

That Augustine never names the first concubine is interpreted either as a step taken out of respect for her or to spare them both embarrassment or out of Augustine's pain from her memory.²⁵⁸

However, it is clear that Augustine regarded the relationship as sinful as it exemplified his sexual struggles, a conflict that received no fuller resolution until his conversion in Book 8.²⁵⁹ He describes the lust that dominated the relationship as a situation in which he was “bound by this need of the flesh [*deligatus morbo carnis*],” and I “dragged with me the chain of its poisonous delight, fearing to be set free...” (6.12.21). When he takes a second concubine (after the first is dismissed) instead of waiting for the upcoming marriage that had been arranged by Monnica, his description is direct: “In fact it was not really marriage that I wanted. I was simply a slave to lust [*sed libidinis servus eram*]. So I took another woman...and thus my soul's disease was nourished and kept alive as vigorously as ever, indeed worse than ever...” (6.15.25).

The Manichean Effect on His Concubinage

In view of Augustine's struggle with lust, another relevant question involves how his relationship with the concubine was perceived by the Manichees that he associated himself with in this period. Brown submits that under the Manichees, Augustine's “punctilious relationship” with the concubine was not any better or worse than marriage itself—it was simply the best they could expect him to do. Thus, as the Manichees at their service sang hymns praising virginity, Brown can imagine Augustine believing that such

²⁵⁸ Power, “Sed unam tamen,” 51.

²⁵⁹ Power reminds us how twice in 9.6 Augustine categorizes Adeodatus as being the result of his (Augustine's) sin. By implication the concubine as his partner sinned as well, especially with their “bargain struck for lust” [*pactum libidinosi amoris*] in 4.2, Power's translation. See Power, “Sed unam tamen,” 65, n. 41. Passages in 6.12 and 7.3 reinforce the same conclusion.

“stirring sentiments” did not yet apply to himself as he famously prayed, “Lord, give me chastity and continence...but not now [*sed noli modo*]” (8.7.17).²⁶⁰ We have already seen his retrospective candor on how Manichean doctrine allowed him to avoid taking responsibility or even a sense of ownership for “his” weakness whenever he did fail in that area.

On the moral implications of the Manichean faith at a personal level, Brown notes that “Augustine as a Manichee could enjoy the very real consolation, that for all his intense ambition, his disquieting involvement with his concubine, the pervasive sense of guilt that came so often to cloud his relations with his mother, at least the good part of him remained throughout, unsoiled...”²⁶¹ However, O’Connell suggests that Augustine, never content with “second class,” was “determined to advance in that sect” with definite steps to do so (5.7.13), and thus, surely the practice of strict sexual purity of the Elect would have worked on Augustine’s thinking and attitude here deeply.²⁶² O’Connell acknowledges that this teaching that allowed one to evade any sense of culpability continued to attract Augustine (5.10.18) but asserts that the ambiguity of the statement in that section precludes the idea that Augustine necessarily *felt* guiltless. This observation, along with the name of Augustine’s son, Adeodatus (Gift of God) and O’Connell’s reminder that Augustine is ever aware of the meanings and implications of words, all suggest a “subconscious defiance” of Manichean teaching in this area. O’Connell’s point on Augustine’s ambitions within the sect is well taken, but the last points are problematic. The birth of Adeodatus most likely took place before Augustine’s first association with

²⁶⁰ Peter Lamont Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 392.

²⁶¹ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 40.

²⁶² O’Connell, 54.

the Manichees, and the point on the lack of a sense of guilt is perplexing. Why would Augustine continue to be attracted to the avoidance of responsibility (that resulted from Manichean thought) for so long if this “benefit” was not also experienced by him emotionally at least part of the time?

Contra O’Connell, Ramirez posits that Augustine was a better Hearer than most because although he did have a concubine, he never had offspring during his time among the Manichees—his only son was actually born before his association with the Manichees ever began.²⁶³ Furthermore, he never did marry nor even seriously consider marriage during his time with them.²⁶⁴ Ramirez does concede that Augustine, in the same section in which he admits his joyful belief that he is guiltless over the sin he seemingly committed (5.10.18), states how “that sin was the more incurable whereby I judged myself to be no sinner...” This factor gives him limited culpability here because Augustine at the time of this statement is speaking with the conscience of a Manichee, an observation that mitigates any condemnation we might normally give someone in his situation as he “acts in accordance with that conscience.”²⁶⁵

Most of Ramirez’s points are well taken, but concerning conscience it is difficult to be certain as to which one prevailed in Augustine in this period. On the one hand, the influence of a residual Catholic conscience that he was grounded in since birth and possibly had not totally cast off yet should be considered. On the other hand, a Manichean conscience could be the larger factor here even though his other writings indicate a hesitation to fully embrace Manichean teaching. Battenhouse explores the latter

²⁶³ Ramirez, “Demythologizing Augustine as Great Sinner,” 70.

²⁶⁴ Even concerning Augustine’s agreement to an arranged marriage to a girl, a marriage arranged by Monnica, his agreement took place after his nine years of close association with the Manichees.

²⁶⁵ Ramirez, “Demythologizing Augustine as Great Sinner,” 71.

option without extensive elaboration, specifically that the Manichean religion simply “drugged his conscience” in his moral struggles²⁶⁶ with conscience here presumably as a permanent, basic blueprint of right and wrong that includes the fundamental idea of self-responsibility for one’s actions. In addition, one should not discount the possibility of a “hybrid” conscience, one that draws from both Manichean and Catholic values as a slightly bewildered Augustine continues living a kind of “religious double-life.”²⁶⁷ Although I am inclined to believe that the Manichean conscience dominated his thinking during this period, the conclusion is not easily reached in this case.

Considerations from the Post-Manichean and Post-Conversion Periods

Augustine’s relationship with his concubine began in his eighteenth year in approximately 372. Although that fifteen-year relationship extended well past the nine years of Augustine’s Manichean period, a further look at that part of the narrative is helpful in better understanding the nature of the relationship. After fifteen years or so of living with Augustine, including approximately fourteen years of raising their son Adeodatus, the first concubine is dismissed to make room for Augustine’s upcoming marriage (6.15.25). The dismissal is in the passive voice: “She with whom I had lived so long was torn from my side [*et avulsa a latere meo*] as a hindrance to my forthcoming marriage. My heart which had held her very dear was broken and wounded and shed blood.” Although many scholars see Monnica as the one behind the dismissal, other explanations are considered in the following chapter. However, even if the “Monnica”

²⁶⁶ Battenhouse, 25.

²⁶⁷ Leo Ferrari has argued cogently that during his entire time with the Manichees Augustine was still a Catholic Catechumen, albeit in a vacillating way. See Leo Ferrari, “Young Augustine: Both Catholic and Manichee,” *Augustinian Studies* 25, no. 1 (1995): 109-128.

theory is true, Augustine certainly succumbed to pressure at the very least and allowed the concubine to be sent away. Nevertheless, despite the future marriage, as we saw earlier, he had stated candidly in 6.15.25 how he was “a slave to lust,” and thus, he took a second concubine.

Kim Power essentially agrees that Augustine’s relationship with the first concubine was close, but she submits that textual hints such as Augustine’s comments to Alypius about his relationship with the concubine (6.12.22) point to the possibility that Augustine actually viewed the relationship as a *de facto* marriage, thus making the “lustful bargain” phrasing (4.2.2) a rhetorical device to make a definite boundary between a *de facto* marriage and marriage *de jure*.²⁶⁸ Then, with the status of concubinage as a “second-class marriage,” dismissing his concubine would be morally, even if not legally, tantamount to dismissal of a wife, therefore making his marriage to another woman a case of adultery.

The “torn” passage in 6.15.25 reinforces this interpretation according to Power.²⁶⁹ Terms such as *integer*, *morbus*, *desperatius* are nuanced in the text with meanings of grief and injury. Therefore, his shame at taking a second woman in her place is no surprise if “in his lacerated heart” sex with someone else felt like adultery. In *The Good of Marriage* 5.5, this view is reinforced through Augustine’s denunciation of men’s dismissal of their concubines to marry women of more suitable fortune and rank.²⁷⁰ Moreover, in the passage the charge of adultery (not fornication) affirms how blurred the boundaries are between concubinage and marriage.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Power, “Sed unam tamen,” 53.

²⁶⁹ Power, “Sed unam tamen,” 54.

²⁷⁰ Power, “Sed unam tamen,” 54-55.

²⁷¹ Power, “Sed unam tamen,” 55.

Friendship and Grief

The failure of the third temptation to satisfy, especially due to its transient nature, becomes amplified by Augustine's period of misery and grief at the death of a friend in Book 4. Gerald Schlabach notes how *ambitio saecul* was the most troublesome of the triad for Augustine, and then he links this third struggle to the friendship passages in Book 4.²⁷² Ambition was a "subtle temptation" for Augustine, Schlabach informs us, because it did not require aspiration to public positions *in saeculo* as long as a few friends were to offer their praise of him. In his description of the friendship Augustine points out how it grew from a "community of shared interests," not out of a genuine concern for one another, much less a friendship based on enjoyment ultimately focused on God.²⁷³ Augustine's grief at losing the friend was immense: "Sorrow entirely clouded over my heart; death appeared wherever I looked" (4.4.9).²⁷⁴ Every action he had shared with the friend was "cruel torture" with his friend constituting "half of his soul" (4.6.11).

However, even before the death Augustine noticed how he had loved the experience of the friendship itself more than the friend:²⁷⁵ "So wretched was I that I held that life of wretchedness to be more dear to me than my friend himself. For although I wished to change it, yet I was more unwilling to lose it than I was to lose my friend" (4.6.11). Schlabach's conclusion is hard-hitting: in their friendship they had used one another in a "pact of reciprocal instrumentality" in order to create experiences that they valued above how much each valued the other. While conceding that Augustine did not state such a

²⁷² Gerald W. Schlabach, *For the Joy Set Before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2001), 34.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 35. Schlabach's summary of Augustine's description of the friendship in 4.4.7. Augustine's stress on the role of God in making a true friendship is in the same section.

²⁷⁴ Schlabach's translation from 4.4.9. All translations are Schlabach's in the discussion of his interpretation.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

pact in so many words, Schlabach notes other events in book 4 that suggest this kind of pattern: Augustine's description of the relationship with his concubine as a *pactum libidinosi amoris* (bargain struck for lust) (4.2.2),²⁷⁶ his portrayal of new friends in Carthage as an "adulterous reciprocity" as they bolstered each other's illusions (4.8.13), and Augustine's greater concern (after his now-baptized friend seemed to be recovering from sickness) for restoring the previous "joviality" of the friendship than for the ultimate good of his friend (4.4.8).²⁷⁷ Similarly, Marie McNamara submits how Augustine's attachment was "emotional and superficial" so that loving the friend as if death would never come made his despair at the death inevitable, a total despair that was manifesting a certain "idolatry of friendship."²⁷⁸ So both her observations and the last part of Schlabach's analysis expose the fuller extent of experiential evil here, not only Augustine's struggle with the temptation of ambition among his friends but also his use of those people in Book 4 for meeting primarily that need of his to feel important and influential instead of focusing on their needs.

Elements of the narrative are intertwined with Augustine's Manichean thinking as well. The unnamed friend in Book 4, whom Augustine had converted to Manichaeism in the past, expressed openness later to his Catholic baptism after learning of that sacrament being administered to him while he was not conscious (4.4.8). Augustine made light of the baptism after his comrade regained consciousness, but his friend's sharp disapproval at Augustine's jest surprised him. Then, a certain irony is evident as Augustine discovers

²⁷⁶ This is my translation in parentheses, borrowing from Power's rendering. Of course, if Power's view is correct, namely, that the "pact" phrase is really a rhetorical device, then Schlabach's use of that example does not support his point here.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 190-191, n. 37. The two quotations in English are Schlabach's own wording, not a direct translation from *Confessions*.

²⁷⁸ Marie A. McNamara, *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1964), 66.

experientially Manichaeism's inability to provide him comfort after the very friend that he had converted to Manichean teachings eventually passes away. In particular, Mallard adeptly brings to light how Augustine's miserable grieving process contains Manichean elements that actually perpetuate the misery itself. In connection with this, he quotes from *Confessions* (4.7.12) Augustine's efforts to depend on God at this time and find resolution to his grief:²⁷⁹

Towards you, Lord, my soul needed to be lifted up for cure, I knew that! but [*sic*] I did not will to do it, nor could I, all the more because I saw you as nothing substantial and sure [*non...aliquid solidum et firmum*], as I conceived you. You were only an empty phantom. My error was my God. If I tried to lay my soul there [*si conabar eam ibi ponere...*], it fell through the emptiness and came down again on me. I remained an unhappy place, where I could not stay, and I could not go.

Mallard carefully elaborates on how Augustine's efforts to depend on God were limited by his Manichean understanding of deity: "Assuredly, if he tried to lay his soul on God, 'it fell through the emptiness and came down again on me'—since God [in the Manichean system] *was* his soul, plus countless other souls and sparkles."²⁸⁰ He has us also consider Augustine's other anguished observation, "I...an unhappy place, where I could not stay, and I could not go." Mallard notes here how Augustine "hung, suspended, a paradigm of the cosmos...the world of Mani, suspended forever in irresolution with no conqueror" as he directly links to Manichaeism Augustine's record of his feelings at that time. Mallard's final summary of the lack of resolution in a Manichean universe makes Augustine's ongoing agony another example of experiential evil brought on by Manichaeism while Mallard simultaneously reinforces his previous criticism: "Mani could only reflect the world; he could not change it. To permit oneself to love was to follow Mani into the heart of his morass, where the stalemate of good and evil was itself

²⁷⁹ William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought Through the Confessions Story* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1994), 60, Mallard's translation.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 61, bracketed insertion mine.

the true evil, the darkest evil of all.”²⁸¹ In the dualistic Manichean system the principles of good and evil were essentially equal in strength, leading to no guarantee that good would ever triumph over the other side—a cosmic battle with no apparent end in sight.²⁸²

Although the pattern of using friends to meet his ambitions constitutes a type of evil, in relating some final relevant aspects of the narrative for this particular chapter a case of experiential evil surfaces again in the narrative, this time in Augustine’s treatment of his mother Monnica. He is rather candid about his gross deception of Monnica in his efforts to sail away unopposed to teach in Rome despite her strong disagreement and tears about his overall plans (5.8.15). In spite of her intense opposition here, he credits her many prayers on his behalf, not only with sustaining him through his serious illness in Rome (5.9.16-5.10.18) but also with regard to divine providence in subsequent events that will be included in the following chapter. Augustine’s brief excursion into Academic Skepticism, which serves as a transition of sorts for the next step in his journey, will be included as well.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 62.

²⁸² Matthew Condon correctly identifies Augustine’s conversion in Book 8 as the pivotal event in *Confessions* but then ultimately uses that observation to argue that Augustine’s motive for not naming his friend here in Book 4 must be understood as part of a higher goal of using key characters throughout *Confessions* to align himself with esteemed figures of the Latin Church. As part of his case, Condon also submits that not referring to a character by that person’s name, is, in a sense, obliterating that individual’s existence. However, Condon’s thesis is problematic. There is a strong likelihood that the experience in Book 4, another case of experiential evil, was so miserable for Augustine that he certainly had no desire to recall the friend’s name. Stated another way, he deliberately “chose” to forget the name. In addition, his failure to name his own parents much sooner in the narrative and his naming of Nebridius at all do not fit well with Condon’s line of reasoning. For Condon’s overall argument, see Matthew G. Condon, “The Unnamed and the Defaced: The Limits of Rhetoric in Augustine’s *Confessiones*,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 1 (March, 2001): 43-63.

SIGNIFICANCE OF EVIL IN THE MANICHEAN PERIOD

In this chapter Augustine's three temptations, stemming from the triad of sins that O'Donnell raised to the fore in his interpretation of *Confessions*, constitute much of the experiential evil that Augustine encounters in this period of life. His initial struggles with lust in Book 2 have been joined now in Book 3 by his weakness for "curiosity" in new ideas and new experiences, which ultimately took him into exploring other beliefs, including his association with the Manichees after beginning his search for Wisdom from Cicero's *Hortensius*. His struggle with worldly ambitions grows in Book 4, leading to his competition for praise and glory in stage competitions and his writing of a book at that time, *The Beautiful and the Fitting* (4.13.20-14.23), for consideration by Hierius, an orator.²⁸³ However, the Manichees' promise of release from these evils is never kept, and other books that Augustine examines during this time simply exemplify his continuing descent into a triad of experiential evils.²⁸⁴

The deceptive Manichean promise to solve both the intellectual and experiential problems of evil only leads ironically to more experiential evil in Augustine's life as he reaches a serious level of doubt that Manichean teaching could resolve either issue.

²⁸³ I note here the irony of how Augustine's sinful desire for acclaim by writing *The Beautiful and the Fitting* dovetails with his efforts to comprehend the nature of substance and evil in the work itself, stemming from the intellectual problem of evil already on his mind.

²⁸⁴ Frederick Crosson comments on Augustine's tendency near the end of each book of *Confessions* to discuss specific books that he encountered and read. See Frederick J. Crosson, "Structure and Meaning in St. Augustine's *Confessions*," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth P. Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 30-31. I note here how each book reinforces a theme of Augustine's specific weakness for that particular book of *Confessions*: Book 2 (focusing on lust) is the exception, but the Manichean writings (and his earlier exploration of *Hortensius*) help to showcase his curiosity that is prevalent in Book 3, and mastering Aristotle's *Categories* (4.16.28) and numerous books in the liberal arts (4.16.30) exemplify Book 4's focus on his worldly ambitions. Augustine's overall confusion of the truth in Book 5, especially after the encounter with Faustus, results in his focus on the writings from the Academic skeptics. Crosson refers to the importance of the Epicurean writings in Book 6, but the other connections made here are my combination of an extrapolation of Crosson's "book pattern" observations and O'Donnell's insights on the triad of sins discussed in the first chapter.

Moreover, as we have seen, Manichean beliefs arguably helped to perpetuate the evil of Augustine's three weaknesses, not in the sense of cultivating an attitude of moral license toward those areas of struggle but in absolving him of any serious sense of personal responsibility whenever failed in any of those struggles. So although the Manichean system didn't necessarily encourage his misdeeds, it certainly didn't discourage them either. Moreover, in Manichean teaching there was no permanent, active, good "he" that could even take ownership of his struggles to begin with—Augustine was doomed to be a passive observer of evil under their system without even enough individuality in the system to call it "his" good or "his" evil. However, the link between experiential evil and one's credibility as an authority is also very crucial here. Although Mani's supposed holiness was a factor in Augustine's decision-making regarding his authority, even after the discrepancies that he noticed in Mani's writings on astronomical matters, the hypocrisy that he perceived in the Elect with their own experiential evil conceivably increased his doubts that their solution to the intellectual problem of evil was really the correct one.

The grief at the loss of the unnamed friend in Book 4 stems from how friendship for Augustine is largely an extension of a method for reaching his personal goal of worldly ambition. Thus, the experiential evil that one commonly associates with the loss of a comrade takes a twisted turn in Augustine's case: the main experiential "evil" he perceives here is the loss of someone through whom he was able to have his need for self-glory met. As an additional example of experiential evil, the Manichean system actually can offer him no solace in this episode. Both the Manichean concept of God and

the self, along with the stark cosmic dualism inherent in the system, only prolong his agony in the grieving process.

Augustine's struggles with lust through his relationship with the concubine are the most visible signs of his spiritual waywardness. Nevertheless, Ramirez's qualifications of Augustine's situation help to illuminate the good aspects of Augustine's choices—his fidelity to the concubine as well as the confinement of his lustful behavior to one partner in contrast to the alleged immoralities in Book 2. The level of experiential evil during this period, when viewed as willful acts of evil, is not so easy to assess since Augustine's general conscience regarding right and wrong and the residual presence of a Catholic conscience instilled early on by his mother are factors that must be considered along with his "Manichean conscience" of that time. In short, in the narrative Augustine is no closer at this point to a resolution to the intellectual problem of evil, and as a result, the experiential problem of evil with his three weaknesses has advanced far beyond the level of difficulty it posed for him by the end of Book 2.

CRITIQUE OF AUGUSTINE'S CONTRIBUTIONS REGARDING EVIL

Several interesting observations come to mind on Augustine's insights and interpretations in this part of *Confessions*. First, Augustine's candid admission that he avoided taking responsibility for his choices is a prevalent theme in his Manichean period. Despite the fact that Manichaeism is no longer a prevalent religion as it was in Augustine's time, the mindset that it can potentially lead to is alive and well today in some quarters. It is interesting for some counselors to report the tendency of certain counselees to summarize difficult periods of life as cases in which "I simply had some

bad luck” instead of recognizing that the choice of a particular partner for marriage, a particular job, or a particular habit with damaging effects was quite directly an unwise (wrong) choice on his or her part to begin with. Such a pattern quickly suggests a parallel to the avoidance of responsibility that Augustine confesses from his time with the Manichees. To his credit Augustine eventually owns up to his flawed reasoning, albeit retrospectively, and clearly sees the implications of Manichean thinking on the issue of moral accountability.

The issue of conscience in this section of *Confessions*, which Augustine brought to the fore, perhaps unwittingly, also raises interesting questions: to what extent if any, does a basic blueprint of right and wrong exist in a human being, how detailed is that blueprint, and how do later factors such as the Manichean influence on Augustine’s perception of right and wrong play a role in informing one’s conscience? As an example, Augustine’s relatively sudden adherence to the Manichean ban on procreation, especially not long after his concubine bore a child, is rather unusual. One need not be a strong advocate of Natural Law ethics to wonder what was running through Augustine’s mind as the sect that he associated himself with taught him how evil marriage and childbirth inherently were. One criticism of Augustine here would be the need for a fuller clarification from him on what his thought process was concerning the more controversial aspects of Manichean doctrine, in particular since he states in various works that he never fully assented to Manichean teaching and was waiting for fuller truths to emerge from their initial presentations of doctrine. However, despite that lingering drawback the

considerations in this critique are recognition of some of the interesting questions that this part of *Confessions* has stimulated and can bring to the forefront to the observant reader.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE POST-MANICHEAN, NEO-PLATONIC, AND CHRISTIAN PERIODS

The coverage of events in this chapter begins with Augustine's post-Manichean period (from 5.10.19 through 7.8.12), followed by a Neo-Platonic Period (from 7.9.13 through 7.18.24), and then a Christian period (from 7.19.25 through all of Book 8, with relevant passages in Books 9 and 10 also included for consideration). In this chapter Augustine finally reaches a resolution for each aspect of the problem of evil, and his Christian conversion is the high point of the overall narrative.

THE POST-MANICHEAN PERIOD

Although Augustine still associated with the Manichees at this point in the narrative, his doubts about their teachings were substantial enough that it is reasonable to term this next period as "post-Manichean" with respect to his ongoing search for truth and a resolution to both problems of evil. This part of the chapter essentially covers the period in which Augustine eventually experiences a new breakthrough in Milan concerning his perception of Catholic teaching and raises new questions on evil and free will as he reflects on the problem of evil from that standpoint.

New Breakthrough in Milan

Augustine had eventually come to the point of largely rejecting Manichean teachings during his time in Rome, but only after his later move to Milan (5.13.23) does he begin to make substantial progress in his quest. However, first, as we noted near the end of chapter 3, during Augustine's temporary foray into Academic skepticism while in Rome (5.10.19), he continued to reject the anthropomorphic understanding of God that he believed the Catholic Church held to, but he still held a corporealist view of God as well as the view of evil as a substance, based on his previous exposure to Manichean thinking (5.10.20). This situation also explains his continual rejection of the basic Catholic teaching of the Incarnation in the same section since he reasoned that any nature born of the Virgin Mary meant that this nature was mingled with Mary's flesh and thus, that the nature would be inescapably defiled as well. In his own words, "I feared to believe the Word made flesh lest I be forced to believe the Word defiled by flesh" (5.10.20). Therefore, with strong doubts about Manichean teachings but formidable difficulties at this point in accepting key Catholic doctrine, Augustine accepts the skeptical outlook of the Academics for a brief period: holding to any belief with a considerable measure of doubt and thus, not taking a firm side on any position to the point of calling it "knowledge." Yet even though he recounts the Manichees' weak arguments against the Christian Scriptures in 5.11.21, his tendency to think only in corporeal terms continued to stifle any progress in resolving his intellectual struggles.

A breakthrough begins when Augustine applies for and receives a professorship in Milan after discovering the drawbacks of teaching rhetoric in Rome (5.12.22). In Milan he meets the famous Bishop Ambrose whose sermons begin to make an impression on

him, especially as Ambrose's more figurative approach toward understanding the Scriptures begins to address Augustine's difficulties with various biblical stories (5.14.24). Even though he did not perceive the Catholic side as "clearly victorious" at this point, due to the influence of Academic skepticism on his intellectual journey he decides that he can no longer hold to Manichean teaching or associate with the group to any degree, and so he decisively breaks with the sect. Although he considers the views of the philosophers to be "more probable," he declines to go in their direction either since they were "without the saving name of Christ." Augustine then "determined...to go on as a catechumen in the Catholic Church" (5.14.25) but not as someone that fully accepted church teaching at that time in light of his unresolved questions. Rather, his intention was "to remain in that state [as a catechumen] until some certain light should appear by which I might steer my course [*quo cursum dirigerem*]."

Next, in Milan Augustine reached the realization that the idea of God having a human figure was not standard Catholic belief as he had previously thought (6.4.5), and Ambrose's preaching and spiritual interpretation of various biblical passages continued to make an impression on him (6.4.6). As a result, although he still wrestled with how to think of God in non-corporeal terms, this period significantly influenced his thinking on two of the three dilemmas that the Manichees had originally brought to his attention (3.7.12). The apparent resolution to his questions about Scripture, in turn, brought him to the point of preferring Catholic doctrine (while still working through the question of its truth) as well as holding a newfound level of respect for those that accepted the Bible as divine revelation (6.5.7).

Even so, despite breaking new ground at the intellectual level, Augustine's struggles at the experiential level continued unabated: in his own words he was "all hot for honours, money, marriage...[*inhiabam honoribus, lucris, coniugio...*]" (6.6.9). Only an encounter with a drunken beggar helped to shed a little light on his misery and the futility of his pursuits: "Certainly his joy [the beggar's enjoyment of wine] was no true joy; but the joy I sought in my ambition was emptier still." In addition, "he [the beggar] by wishing luck to all comers had at least got wine, while I by lying was aiming only to get empty praise" (6.6.10). Moreover, as we saw earlier in the third chapter, despite the future marriage arranged by Monnica he had stated candidly in 6.15.25 how he was "a slave to lust," and thus, he took a second concubine during this period.

Reflections on Moral Evil and Free Will

Augustine's recent rejection of Manichean teaching and new breakthrough in Milan with Catholic teaching leads to his new openness to solutions concerning evil, and this development, in turn, lead to his reflections on moral evil and free will in the first part of Book 7. At the beginning of that book, Augustine restates his rejection of the idea of God in the image of a human body, and he also rejoices upon learning that the Catholic Church also rejected such a view. Even though he still perceives God generally as "some corporeal substance" extended into space in every direction, he firmly holds to God as being "incorruptible and inviolable and immutable [*incorruptibilem et inviolabilem et incommutabilem*]" (7.1.1). He was also now certain that the Manichees' beliefs were false (7.3.4), but he was still perplexed as to the cause of evil.

In 7.3.5 Augustine discusses part of the solution to the problem of evil in connection with his growing understanding of the will. Two seminal ideas in the passage are especially crucial: the first involves the concept of free choice of the will, a notion that includes the corollary of individual responsibility for what one wills, and the second centers on the thought that this free choice made by the will is where sin comes from.

The breakdown of the relevant passage by Simon Harrison into numbered clauses is helpful for part of our analysis:

(1) I directed my mind to understand [cernerem] what I was being told [quod audiebam], namely that (2) the free choice of the will is the reason why we do wrong (3) and suffer your just judgement; (4) but I could not get a clear grasp of it. (5) I made an effort to lift my mind's eye out of the abyss, but again plunged back. I tried several times, but again and again sank back. (6) I was brought up into your light by the fact that (7) I knew myself to have a will *in the same way and as much as I knew myself* to be alive [tam sciebam me habere voluntatem quam me vivere]. (8) Therefore [itaque] when I willed or did not will something, I was utterly certain that none other than myself was willing or not willing. (9) That there lay the cause of my sin I was now *gradually beginning* [iam iamque] to recognize. (10) I saw that when I acted against my wishes [invitus facerem], I was passive rather than active [pati me potius quam facere videbam]; (11) and this condition I judged to be not guilt but a punishment [non culpam sed poenam]. (12) It was an effortless step to grant that, (13) since I conceived you to be just, (14) it was not unjust that I was chastised.²⁸⁵

First of all, in clause 1 who was the source that was exposing Augustine to the idea of free will as a cause of evil? Based on the use of *audio* six times in Book 6 with Augustine's listening to Ambrose, J. O'Donnell is correct in raising the implication that Augustine's hearing of the free will idea here is also from Ambrose in this passage in Book 7.²⁸⁶ Harrison goes further and helpfully elaborates on how the two uses of *facere* in clause 10 are the key to the next part of Augustine's discovery. By mentally combining *facio* with *invitus* (against my will), Harrison redefines the first *facio* as *patior*, something

²⁸⁵ Simon Harrison, "Do We Have A Will?: Augustine's Way in to the Will" in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 195, Harrison's use of Henry Chadwick's translation with Harrison's Latin insertions and also some English alterations in italics. Harrison overtranslates the "tam...quam" in clause 7 deliberately in order to bolster his point concerning the pivotal connection between cogito-type arguments for one's existence and Augustine's current reasoning about the will in this passage.

²⁸⁶ James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, *Commentary on Books 1-7* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 406. O'Donnell states this conclusion more directly on 453 of the same work as he notes Augustine's stronger acceptance of the idea of free will in 7.16.22.

that is being done to me.²⁸⁷ So certain actions that appear on the surface to be my actions are now seen as things “done to” me. In other words, if I do not like the action that I am doing, one could say that *I* am, in a sense, not actually doing it: not wishing to be a party to the action that is happening shows that I am not the author of the action. In clause 11 then, this “condition” of experiencing things that I do not want does not lead to blame—I am not guilty for an action that I really do not do (in connection with the meaning of this in clause 10).²⁸⁸ Combining this with clause 13, that God is just, with the unwritten premise that God is providentially in control of what happens to me, then those happenings must be a just punishment for some action I already did. At this point Harrison recognizes the implication of this reasoning as leading toward some theory concerning “original sin,” but he views any further discussion of that possibility as tangential to his purpose here.

The input above enables the reader to see the interesting relationship between the key clauses. The understanding from clauses 10-14, namely that just punishment (for things already done) is taking place as he experiences “doing” actions that go against his will, reinforces the earlier conception in clauses 8 and 9 that his own free choices are the cause of sin, choices that he is ultimately responsible for.

However, the lynchpin of the passage centers on the existence of the will to begin with, and it is noteworthy in clause 7 how Augustine equates the certainty of this with the certainty of his own existence. But what allows Augustine to view the argument with such strong certainty? Harrison correctly sees the argument about will as a self-evident realization, a “cogitolike” line of reasoning similar to Augustine’s reasoning in other

²⁸⁷ Harrison, 199.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

works that he really exists.²⁸⁹ As examples of the “cogitolike” reasoning for one’s existence, Harrison examines 11.26 in *City of God* as well as 2.3.7 in *On Free Choice of the Will*, examples in which the denial of one’s own existence would constitute a self-refuting line of reasoning. Harrison bolsters the case more fully by providing an example of a “cogitolike” argument for the will from *On Free Choice of the Will* (1.12.25). In that passage Augustine seeks to convince his interlocutor Evodius of the existence of the will:

A: Do you want to know [*Visne hoc scire*]?

E: I do not know this either.

A: Then ask me nothing more.

E: Why not?

A: Because I oughtn’t to give you an answer to your question unless you want to know the answer [*nisi volenti scire quod rogas*]. And secondly because, if you don’t want to attain to wisdom [*Deinde nisi velis ad sapientiam pervenire...*], I ought not to discuss such things with you. And finally because we cannot be friends unless you want things to go well for me [*nisi velis ut bene sit mihi*]. But look to yourself and see whether you, as regards yourself, do not want to be happy [*utrum tibi voluntas nulla sit beatae vitae tuae*].

E: I admit that it cannot be denied that we have a will. Go on, let us now see what follows from this.²⁹⁰

Augustine’s examples of key “wants” in the context of his dialogue with Evodius effectively outline the importance (and unavoidability) of Evodius’s “wanting” definite things as part of everyday life. In particular, the last example on the desire for one’s own happiness and well-being is helpful as it should resonate with any reader.

After becoming convinced in 7.3.5 that his free will is the locus of evil acts,

Augustine presses the question of evil further, seeking the “root” of it all:

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 201.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 201-202, Harrison’s translation. Harrison points out the difficulty in ensuring the coherence of the vocabulary as he renders the Latin noun “voluntas” and verb “volo” as “will” and to “want” and to “wish” respectively in the context of the exchange here. He also refers to 1.7.17 and 2.3.7 in *On Free Choice* as containing “cogitolike” arguments that focus on existence but with a pattern of elements similar to this exchange in the overall line of reasoning.

But I asked further: “Who made me? Was it not my God, who is not only Good but Goodness itself? What root reason is there for my willing evil and failing to will good, which would make it just for me to be punished? Who was it that set and ingrafted in me this root of bitterness [*quis in me hoc posuit et insevit mihi plantarium amaritudinis*], since I was wholly made by my most loving God? If the devil is the author, where does the devil come from? And if by his own perverse will he was turned from a good angel into a devil, what was the origin in him of the perverse will by which he became a devil, since by the all-good Creator he was made wholly angel?”

Instead of stopping at the level of the will, Augustine raises the same question that conceivably arises in many typical discussions on the problem of evil: How could his will do evil acts if the will itself was made by a good God? Or if the devil is ultimately responsible for this evil, how did *he* become evil if he was made by the same loving God? After modifying his view of God to a refined conception of a measureless sea with creation as a huge but still finite sponge enveloped by this sea, Augustine questions how evil could have ever entered such a system:

“Where then is evil, and what is its source, and how has it crept into the Creation? What is its root, what is its seed? Can it be that it is wholly without being [*An omnino non est*]? But why should we fear and be on guard against what is not? Or if our fear of it is groundless, then our very fear is itself an evil thing. For by it the heart is driven and tormented for no cause; and that evil is all the worse, if there is nothing to fear yet we do fear. Thus either there is evil which we fear, or the fact that we fear is evil.

“Whence then is evil, since God who is good made all things good? It was the greater and supreme Good who made these lesser goods, but Creator and Creation are alike good. Whence then comes evil? Was there perhaps some evil matter of which He made this creation, matter which He formed and ordered, while yet leaving in it some element which he did not convert into good? But why? Could He who was omnipotent be unable to change matter wholly so that no evil might remain in it [*an impotens erat totam vertere et commutare, ut nihil mali remaneret, cum sit omnipotens*]?...Could it possibly have existed against his will?...could He not have taken away and reduced to nothing that matter which was evil, and provided good matter of which to create all things? For He would not be omnipotent if He could not create something good without the aid of matter which He had not created.” (7.5.7)

Augustine raises the possibility early in the passage that evil itself has no being, but he quickly raises further questions that cast doubt on that position. Of course, he will return to that very option later in Book 7 (7.12.18). Concerning another position that he examines later in the passage, perhaps evil does not come from an all-powerful Maker

but instead from the matter He used in creating the world.²⁹¹ However, in the process of his questioning Augustine concludes that this possibility is not compatible with the notion that God is omnipotent. G. Matthews correctly elaborates that this solution was never attractive to Augustine since his belief that God created everything from nothing renders this solution implausible: if God used formless matter to create the heavens and the earth, the initial step of God creating formless matter from nothing, matter to be used next in making creatures, raises questions on how God would have been unable to avoid making creatures not tainted by evil because of any evil of matter itself.²⁹² He agrees that Augustine does find the first solution, the privation solution, appealing later in 7.12.18.²⁹³ Nevertheless, this is not his primary response to the problem of evil; rather, Augustine's Free Will Defense, as Matthews terms it,²⁹⁴ rises to the fore later as Augustine's fuller response.

Despite the large number of questions about evil, in this same section Augustine states how in this period "the faith of Your Christ...taught by the Catholic Church, stood firm" in his heart, even though he was still uncertain on a number of points of Catholic doctrine. In addition, besides his recent rejection of Manichean teachings, he repudiates

²⁹¹ Augustine does submit later in Book 7 that the "stuff" of creation is ontologically inferior to God, the supreme substance, and therefore, understandably subject to corruption, but this state of affairs is not the same as working with matter already tainted with evil, which is the scenario that he raises at this point in *Confessions*.

²⁹² Gareth B. Matthews, *Augustine* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 107-108.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁹⁴ Matthews follows Alvin Plantinga's famous use of the term "Free Will Defense" in discussing this line of reasoning. In this regard Matthews refers to chapter 6 of Plantinga's work, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

any further belief in astrology as well (7.6.8-10),²⁹⁵ followed by a strong statement of basic belief in Christ as the way of salvation and in the authority of the Christian Scriptures (7.7.11). All the same, he states, “I was still on fire with the question whence comes evil [*quaerebam aestuans unde sit malum*],” and limitations to still thinking of God in corporeal terms continue to complicate for him any hope of a resolution.

THE NEO-PLATONIC PERIOD

In the Neo-Platonic period of the narrative, Augustine is greatly influenced by the writings of Neo-Platonism, a pivotal event that provides a breakthrough for his questions concerning the nature of God and related matters. This period commences with his encounter with some “books of the Platonists” (7.9.13-15). After a brief overview of Neo-Platonism itself and some consideration of which “books of the Platonists” Augustine read, we take a closer look at Plotinus’ views on matter and metaphysical evil, followed by Augustine’s appropriation of Neo-Platonic thought, his first attempted ascent

²⁹⁵ Although the chapter on astrology may seem out of place with the rest of the sequence of Book 7, O’Donnell reminds us how *curiosity*, one of Augustine’s three weaknesses, especially on certain intellectual questions, is resolved throughout Book 7. At the beginning of the fourth book, the astrology discussion serves to mark how far Augustine’s fall into Manichaeism was (on account of his youthful curiosity at that time) and now the resolution (and rejection) of that knowledge “source” in Book 7 help to highlight his liberation from curiosity in this book. Although he is now “detached” from the Manichees, his “pre-Manichean *curiositas* hounds him” as he still seeks answers to two of the three questions that originally compelled him into the Manichean group. In that regard, see James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, *Commentary on Books 1-7* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 405-406. In the previous chapter we briefly mentioned Frederick Crosson’s outline of Augustine’s succumbing to 3 weaknesses: the lust of the flesh in Book 2, the lust of the eyes (curiosity) in Book 3 with the Manichees, and the pride of life (secular ambition) in Book 4. After his overall confusion in Book 5, now his current ascent to God has involved addressing each weakness in subsequent books but in reverse order from how he first yielded to them: confronting his ambition (in particular through the encounter with the beggar) in Book 6, dealing with the intellectual problem of evil in Book 7, and overcoming the struggle with lust in Book 8. See Frederick J. Crosson, “Structure and Meaning in St. Augustine’s *Confessions*,” in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 31.

of the mind, and his final conclusions on metaphysical evil, the harmony of creation, moral evil, and free will. A brief consideration of his second attempt at an ascent of the mind closes this section.

Background on Neo-Platonism and the “Books of the Platonists”

A short overview of Neo-Platonism is helpful at this point. Plotinus, the original source and pioneer of Neo-Platonic thought, viewed reality as a series of emanations all flowing from *the One*, the ultimate source of reality, similar to the way that a light bulb, the source of light, has a field of light radiating out from it, with that field becoming fainter and fainter as the distance from the bulb increases. *The One* in Neo-Platonism is beyond being and essentially unknowable. Three levels of reality flow or emanate from *the One*, with each new level becoming more complex. After the first two emanations, *Intellect (Nous)* and *Soul*, the final level, *Matter*, is the most complex, but since it is the farthest removed from *the One*, beings at this level are capable of the greatest evil.

The negative view toward *Matter* explains the ultimate goal in Neo-Platonism. People are viewed as consisting of a soul housed in a physical body. As a result, the desire of every person should be for the soul to ascend each level of reality (through contemplation and meditation) ultimately to attain union with *the One*. Only then could perfection be achieved. Nevertheless, the brief outline above of Neo-Platonism does not do justice to the complexity of Neo-Platonic thought nor to the differing interpretations of the main writings, therefore making a deeper look at the relevant works necessary. Yet in order to accomplish that task one must consider first which writings of Neo-Platonism Augustine encountered.

There is no universal agreement on which “books of the Platonists” Augustine read, including whether the writings of Plotinus or Porphyry were a larger influence on him at this point. In spite of this, some of Augustine’s works and the research of certain scholars point at least to Plotinus’ likely influence as a reasonable conclusion. In *City of God* 8.12 Augustine lists Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Porphyry in that order as the most eminent Platonists, and he then calls Plotinus “that great Platonist” later in 10.2. Only months after he converted to Christianity, in his *Against the Academics* (3.18.41) Augustine clearly praised Plotinus as the most prominent philosopher in the spirit of Plato’s thinking.

Based on Paul Henry’s focused methodology (demonstrating Augustine’s literary dependence on certain passages in the *Enneads*), Eugene TeSelle concurs with Henry that 1.6 and 5.1 of Plotinus’ *Enneads* and probably 3.2 and 4.3 as well, influenced Augustine early.²⁹⁶ Using a similar methodology, Olivier du Roy’s insights (that 5.5 surely influenced Augustine early) and Robert O’Connell’s conclusions (the influence of 6.4 and 6.5 on Augustine) have expanded the list.²⁹⁷ With the same line of reasoning TeSelle has included 1.8 (“On the Origin of Evil”) and other tractates to the list of probabilities. Furthermore, Stephen Menn pinpoints phrasing in 7.10.16 of *Confessions* that is arguably taken from *Enneads* 1.8.13.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 43-44. For Henry’s work itself, see Paul Henry, *Plotin et l’Occident*, XV, I (Louvain: Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense, 1934).

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁹⁸ Stephen Menn focuses on the phrase *in regione dissimilitudinis* (“in the region of unlikeness”—my inclusion of Sheed’s translation) as stemming from Plotinus’s phrase *en to(i) anomoiotetos topo(i)*. See Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 199, n. 49. While recognizing that thesis, Boulding also posits that Augustine could have had Luke 15:13 in mind, and she also references Augustine’s *Commentary on the Psalms* 99.5 regarding a similar theme. See Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, Part 1—Books, vol. 1 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 173, n. 72.

Arguments for a strong Porphyrian influence in the time period of *Confessions* are less conclusive at best: Porphyry's *On the Return of the Soul* does not appear to have been read by Augustine until very near 400 at the earliest,²⁹⁹ and James J. O'Donnell maintains that Porphyry was only named by Augustine in any of his writings when Augustine becomes aware of Porphyry's polemic against Christianity.³⁰⁰ Porphyry's *Mixed Questions* (on the union of body and soul) does not explain Augustine's eventual familiarity with key Porphyrian themes not present in that work,³⁰¹ and arguments that the influences of 6.4 and 6.5 on him are from Plotinian, not Porphyrian versions of the *Enneads*, lessen the possibility that Porphyry's *Sentences* made a substantial impact on Augustine. In summary, the *libri platoniorum* were conceivably either a group of key treatises by Plotinus or perhaps a "package" of works by both Plotinus and Porphyry so that in 7.9 of *Confessions* Augustine was exposed to the key Neo-Platonic teachings that enabled him now to perceive God as a non-corporeal, eternal being. Likewise, he also gained new understandings of the soul, matter, and evil that would soon be helpful to him in addressing the intellectual problem of evil. Even though those writings did not contain the teaching of the Incarnation as Augustine himself states in that same section (7.9.14), the books are a key instrument in his eventual willingness to reconsider the possibility of the veracity of the Christian Scriptures in his search for truth.

²⁹⁹ TeSelle, 51. See also TeSelle, 123-31 and 237-57.

³⁰⁰ O'Donnell here points to *The Consensus of the Evangelists* 1.15.23 (traditionally 399/400 but 400-15 by his dating), *Letter* 82.2.22 (circa 405), and *Letter* 102.2.8 (406-12) among other examples in James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, 422. Contra O'Donnell's dating (and interpretation here) of the first work, see TeSelle, 237-58.

³⁰¹ TeSelle, 53.

Plotinus' Views on Matter

Plotinus' views on matter are the best starting point for understanding his views on evil more fully since matter is often understood to be the locus of evil for Plotinus. His key comments on the nature of matter in 3.6.7 of his *Enneads* are relevant for this part of the discussion: "Matter has no reality and is not capable of being affected...Matter is no Soul; it is not Intellect, is not Life, is no Ideal-Principle; no Reason-Principle; it is no limit or bound, for it is mere indetermination; it is not a power, for what does it produce?"³⁰² Moreover, in the same section Plotinus even excludes it from the regular categories of Being: "[Matter]...has no title to the name of Being. It will be more plausibly called a non-being, and this in the sense not of movement [away from Being] or station (in Not-being) but of veritable Not-Being, so that it is no more than the image and phantasm of Mass; a bare aspiration towards substantial existence..." Therefore, Matter seems to be quite different from contemporary definitions of Matter. It appears to be something with a radically different type of existence in comparison to the One or the other emanations from the One.

However, despite the summary above a deeper look at the origins of matter reveals a lack of widespread agreement among scholars on the best understanding of this element in Plotinian thought. For example, W. J. Carroll notes three positions that seem prevalent regarding the origins of matter and the One: (1) matter exists independently of the One and in opposition to the One (P. Pistorius), either passively or actively; (2) matter is the last product resulting from the procession of the One (E. R. Dodds, Paul Henry, A. H. Armstrong, Dean Inge); and (3) the issue is meaningless because matter is really nothing

³⁰² Plotinus, *The Six Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna and B.S. Page (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 3.6.7.

in Plotinus' system (John Murray, Joseph Katz, Cletus Carbonara).³⁰³ Interestingly enough, J. M. Rist conceivably holds to a combination of the first two views, that "matter is good when it is viewed as a product of a higher reality and evil only when considered in itself apart from the emanative process."³⁰⁴

After examining key passages pertaining to matter, Carroll proposes the following six results about matter that he gleaned from those sections, results that show the gradual development and changes in Plotinus' thought concerning matter.³⁰⁵

- (1) In 2.4 there are two kinds of matter: Intelligible matter (matter with form) had origins in the One, but this claim is not made about corporeal matter--it is simply void of any qualities, seen as a container for bodies, and identical to privation, but it does have existence.
- (2) In 2.4.1 a link is made between corporeal matter, seen in the guise of total indetermination, and the chain of various types of reality, which ultimately have the One as their source.
- (3) In 3.6.14 matter is no longer seen as produced but rather is viewed as that which halts production from the One.
- (4) In 5.8.7 Intellect (Nous) shapes matter in the same way that a potter has an effect on clay, but Intellect has no causal (creator) effect on matter.
- (5) In 3.2.2 the One is seen as the First, prior to all things, and matter is viewed as the Last, but Plotinus avoids discussing the origins of matter.

³⁰³ William J. Carroll, "Plotinus on the Origin of Matter," in *Neoplatonism and Nature: Studies in Plotinus' Enneads*, ed. Michael F. Wagner (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2002), 180.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 179. For a fuller look at Rist's view, see John M. Rist, "Plotinus on Matter and Evil," *Phronesis* 6 (1961), 154-66.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

(6) In 1.8 the major section on matter and evil, great ambiguities are present regarding the status and origin of corporeal matter. Instead of linking matter to the higher realities, it is the “ancient nature,” the cause of all evil.³⁰⁶

Carroll concludes by positing a potential way to understand the flow of development of Plotinus’ thought over time:³⁰⁷ position (2) represents his fully developed monistic position (corporeal matter originates from the One), and (6), the final position, is representative of Plotinus’ move toward a more dualistic position (matter seemingly without any origin in the One). Thus, (1) then is a transitional view (Plotinus’ uncertainty about matter’s origin) culminating eventually in the monism of (2); whereas (3), (4), and (5) would be transitional periods of uncertainty leading eventually to a more dualistic position in (6). Even so, Carroll is quick to note that although Plotinus’ monism seems to change into a dualism of sorts, it is one “of implication rather than intent.”³⁰⁸

Kevin Corrigan’s analysis agrees with key elements of Carroll’s theory of two types of matter. Moreover, he clarifies how lower (corporeal) matter is simply the image of intelligible matter.³⁰⁹ Regarding the difference between both kinds of matter, in intelligible matter “activity expresses what the matter is, whereas in...[lower matter], matter does not become a ‘whole illuminated substance’ (2.4.5) together with form, but remains something ‘covered’ or masked by form.”³¹⁰

In addition, commenting on a passage from 1.8.4, Corrigan elaborates on the three ways that “secondary evil” as he terms it, has an effect on compound beings: in the first

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 201.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 201-2.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 202.

³⁰⁹ Kevin Corrigan, *Plotinus’ Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance: Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander of Aphrodisias* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1996), 290.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 290.

option, such evils have privation, which is part of their composite nature (that is, “they ‘belong to matter’, are ‘of matter’, in a privative way”),³¹¹ in the second option, they make a privative kind of unity with it by perceiving it” (seen here as a ‘single activity’ according to Aristotle); or in the third option, they “produce” evil in such a way that evil needs “positive form” to have any power. Corrigan notes that these three types of participation are further developed in other chapters by Plotinus.

According to R.T. Wallis the Middle Platonists had wrestled with whether Matter was simply inert, without form, and therefore, a morally neutral entity or evil in the sense of an active principle.³¹² Plotinus combines both ideas and sees the lack of Form in Matter as precisely what makes Matter part of Absolute Evil. Along those lines, Plotinus does not see Matter as a principle that exists independently but simply as the limit at which the flow of reality out of the One fades into darkness.³¹³ Therefore, instead of a positive force he views it more as a “poverty” that taints with its deficiencies every single body that is based on it.

Plotinus’ View on Metaphysical Evil

Although some key aspects of Plotinian views on evil were included in the previous section, a fuller look at this subject is needed. Plotinus discusses the nature of evil in various places in his *Enneads*, but the most developed discussion can be found in the First *Ennead* in the Eighth Tractate. Plotinus opens by elaborating on the Good so that its

³¹¹ Ibid., 197.

³¹² R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972), 49.

³¹³ Ibid., 50.

contrary, evil, will be more easily understood. Then, in 1.8.2 he submits the idea of evil as being present in Non-Being because of the radical difference between it and Being and Beyond-Being (the Good).

Yet even though Plotinus situates evil in the realm of Non-Being, he is careful to explain that Non-Being is not non-existence; rather, it is a type of existence that is a marked contrast to “Authentic Being,” and it is at most “an image of Being” (1.8.3). Likewise, “some conception of it would be reached by thinking of measurelessness as opposed to measure, of the unbounded against bound, the unshaped against a principle of shape, the ever-needy against the self-sufficing... whatsoever fragment of it be taken, that part is all lawless void...” We must also not think of evil as simply an accidental quality but recognize the existence of Absolute Evil:

For if Evil can enter into other things, it must have in a certain sense a prior existence, even though it may not be an essence. As there is Good, the Absolute, as well as Good, the quality, so, together with the derived evil entering into something not itself, there must be the Absolute Evil... That Kind whose place is below all the patterns, forms, shapes, measurements and limits, that which has no trace of good by any title of its own, but [at best] takes order and grace from some Principle outside itself, a mere image as regards Absolute Being but the Authentic Essence of Evil... The bodily Kind, in that it partakes of Matter[,] is an evil thing... in their [bodies'] ceaseless flux they are always slipping away from Being... Soul, on the contrary, since not every Soul is evil, is not an evil Kind. (1.8.3)

Therefore, for Plotinus absolute evil exists in connection with a specific Principle, a “mere image.” The “bodily kind” participates in evil because of its connection with Matter, where evil is found; therefore, souls are not naturally evil. The nature of evil as “found” in Matter is also described as “absolute Lack” and “where there is utter dearth, there we have Essential Evil, void of all share in Good; this is the case with Matter” (1.8.5). Thus, “we are not to think of Evil as some particular bad thing--injustice, for example, or any other ugly trait--but as a principle,” apparently a privation of sorts, found with Matter in connection with the Principle of Evil.

Yet although evil is not a “thing” *per se*, Plotinus does reinforce its connection with Matter (or at least a certain type of Matter) as well as how it “infects” types of Being: “For, wholly, without part in Good, the negation of Good, unmingled Lack, this Matter-Kind makes over to its own likeness whatsoever comes in touch with it” (1.8.4). Consequently, the “Soul’s seeing” can be “balked by the passions and by the darkening that Matter brings to it,” but the ideal Soul is one that is “wrought to perfection, addressed towards the Intellectual-Principle, is steadfastly pure: it has turned away from Matter...”

In 1.7 Plotinus argues for the existence of metaphysical aspects of evil by seeing it as one of necessity. First, the universe must by its very nature be composed of opposed principles: “...for necessarily this All is made up of contraries: it could not exist if Matter did not...[Thus] what comes into it [the Nature of this cosmos] from God is good; evil is from the Ancient Kind which, we read, is the underlying Matter not yet brought to order by the Ideal-Form” (1.8.7). In the second argument from necessity, Plotinus maintains that in the emanative process of the Good, it is natural, of course, in the sequence of productions from the One to have eventually a “Last” in the sequence and this “Last” is evil: “As necessarily as there is Something after the First, so necessarily there is a Last: this Last of Matter, the thing which has no residue of good in it: here is the necessity of Evil.” After reinforcing the notion that Matter is the cause of Evil, he explains how vices and virtues fit into his teaching on evil as well as how vices are caused by Primal Evil.

The importance of metaphysical evil in the context of Plotinus’ overall views on evil cannot be overestimated. Dominic O’Meara argues that 1.8 of Plotinus’ *Enneads* can be understood as presenting two theses: (1) moral evil cannot be understood without

presupposing metaphysical evil, and (2) the constitution of this material world includes the presupposition of metaphysical evil.³¹⁴ The first thesis can be more easily understood if one considers the earlier quote above from Plotinus regarding the effect of matter on the soul. As P. Pistorius explains, "...both [moral and metaphysical evil] are caused by the same factor, namely matter, the absolute lack. Moral and general [metaphysical] evil are in their nature identical; the moral aspect appears when the human soul yields to matter and ceases to exercise its self-determination."³¹⁵ Stated another way, vices are exhibited after Primal Evil has first had an effect on the soul. As Plotinus himself explains: "The evil of matter precedes the weakness, the vice; it is Primal Evil. Even though the Soul itself submits to Matter and engenders it; if it becomes evil within itself by its commerce with Matter, the cause is still the presence of Matter" (1.8.1). As a result, not only does the soul seem to bear no moral responsibility for its wrong choices, but also Plotinus adds that "the Soul would never have approached Matter but that the presence of Matter is the occasion of its earth-life."

Augustine's Appropriation of Neo-Platonic Thought

It is difficult to be conclusive on Augustine's precise interpretation of Plotinus' thought in some respects or whether he was aware of the shift on the nature of matter that Plotinus' writings appear to make over time. However, some general observations in this area can be advanced as we seek to understand what he appropriated from Plotinian

³¹⁴ Dominic O'Meara, "Evil in Plotinus (Enn. 1,8)," in *The Structure of Being and the Search for the Good: Essays on Ancient and Early Medieval Platonism*, ed. Dominic O'Meara (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), 4. Reprinted from *Platon in der Abendlandischen Geistesgeschichte*, eds. T. Kobusch and B. Mojsisch (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 1-15.

³¹⁵ Philippus Villiers Pistorius, *Plotinus and Neoplatonism: An Introductory Study* (Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1952), 126-7.

thought. First, on the nature of matter elements of positions 4 and 5 (from Carroll's analysis) coincide or at least are compatible with Augustine's metaphysical breakdown in Book 7 of *Confessions*: just as position 4 presents the Intellect (Nous) as shaping matter into an intelligible entity, Augustine views all matter as being under God's creative direction and purpose (7.12.18). Similarly, with position 5 the One is "prior to all things," and like the One, God is also the ultimate reference point for describing what manner of existence all other things have (7.11.17). In general, the more dualistic positions in Plotinus' thought above tend to dovetail to a fair extent with Augustine's Christian metaphysics.

With regard to evil, whether Augustine also discerned the three types of participation that Corrigan noted is unclear, but he apparently drew heavily from the privation understanding (the first of Corrigan's three categories on how "secondary evil" affects beings) in view of his words in 7.12.18. However, although Plotinus appears to categorize evil as a "mere image" in the realm of Non-Being but not in the category of non-existence, Augustine does not include an "image" category in his account. Furthermore, instead of discussing Non-Being and non-existence as two distinct categories, he simply states directly that evil is not a substance (7.12.18). He also avoids ever taking Plotinus' position that matter itself is inherently evil. Concerning Plotinus' two arguments of necessity (that evil must exist), Augustine clearly does not accept or use the first, in particular that certain metaphysical opposites must exist. The second argument, that there must inevitably be a final element, which should be called evil, in the procession of emanations after identifying the first element, is too pantheistic for Augustine to appropriate directly. Nevertheless, did that flow of argumentation influence

his thinking at all that the inferior nature of material “stuff” (material ontologically inferior to God Himself) would make privations “natural” in a sense and thus unavoidable?³¹⁶ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore that question more fully, but the consideration is an interesting one.

All the same, what is the overall effect of this Neo-Platonic system of thought on Augustine’s basic views on the nature of God and evil? Instead of the passive and relatively powerless good God in Manichaeism which had troubled Augustine, Peter Brown points out the improvement in Plotinus’ system:

...the power of the Good always maintained the initiative: the One flowed out, touching everything, moulding and giving meaning to passive matter, without itself being in any way violated or diminished...Evil, therefore, was only a turning away into separateness: its very existence assumed the existence of an order, which was flouted while remaining no less real and meaningful. It was the self-willed part that was diminished, by losing contact with something bigger and more vital than itself.

Brown’s understanding here takes the position that Augustine understood Matter as flowing out of the One. The “self-willed” element reminds one of Augustine’s own ruminations on free will, but it is difficult to know how much that factor influenced his thought. Presumably Ambrose’s direct coverage of free will in a Scriptural context was still the greater factor. However, the larger ramifications of Neo-Platonism are not lost on Augustine as Brown eloquently outlines his changing position regarding the nature of God Himself:

It is this revolution which is, perhaps, the most lasting and profound result of Augustine’s absorption of Neo-Platonism. It did nothing less than shift the center of gravity of Augustine’s spiritual life. He was no longer identified with his God [as in Manichaeism, with its view of good and bad substance in an individual from those respective kingdoms]: this God was utterly transcendent—His separateness had to be accepted. And, in realizing this, Augustine had to accept, that he, also, was separate and different from God.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ Augustine’s discussion on the corruptibility of material things in 7.12.18 will be covered later in this chapter.

³¹⁷ Peter Lamont Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 91.

W. Mallard adds that since Augustine's original conception of God was physical, he thought directly of divinity as electricity or light,³¹⁸ but the Neo-Platonists, in contrast to that, immediately taught him how to understand the idea that God is more like a principle.³¹⁹ Consequently, O'Meara argues that Neo-Platonism served as a bridge for Augustine in his search for the truth, in particular regarding evil: "...it was Neo-Platonism that finally delivered him from the two persisting difficulties which had been so deeply ingrained in him by the Manichean teaching of a material God and a principle of Evil... The Neo-Platonist teaching bridged a gap between a material [physical] Manicheism and a spiritual Christianity."³²⁰

Stated another way, Plotinus' focus on the spirituality of the Word, in some ways similar thematically to the Gospel of John (but without saying the Word was made flesh), pervaded Augustine's mind (7.9.13-15). This led him to realize that extension is not needed for one's being (7.10.16), and at that point he began to understand how physical things are part of creation and how everything that God has made is good even if corruptible. Moreover, as stated earlier, Neo-Platonism influenced Augustine's final conclusion that metaphysical evil is literally *nothing*, simply a lack or absence of goodness (in the same way that darkness is simply the lack or absence of light), which addressed his perplexity on the nature and origin of evil.

The influence of Neo-Platonism on Augustine's concept of God can also be seen by considering a broader canvas of his writings. John Rist acknowledges the Neo-Platonic

³¹⁸ William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought Through the Confessions Story*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1994), 74.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

³²⁰ John J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine: The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind Up to His Conversion* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1954), 158.

roots of Augustine's concept of God, even of seeing something of the Trinity in Neo-Platonic thinking.³²¹ Yet, he also notes the distinctions that Augustine makes in various writings. For example, in Question 46 of *83 Questions*, with the old tradition of the unchanging Platonic Forms in God's mind in view here, Augustine speaks of the Forms being in the Son as the Word (=Logos) just as the Neo-Platonic Forms are in the *Nous*.³²² Nonetheless, Rist points out how careful Augustine must be in avoiding an exact parallel: although the Forms are contained in the Word, the Word is not subordinate (unlike the *Nous* in Plotinian thought). In addition, Rist observes in Augustine's writings how he avoids the Plotinian expression of God as "above being"³²³ or "beyond being"³²⁴ or as "the One" but instead describes Him as either "being itself [*ipsum esse*],"³²⁵ which is closer to Porphyry's phrase "being alone [*to einai monon*],"³²⁶ or as "true being [*idipsum*]."³²⁷ Augustine's thinking of God as the Good by identifying being as the Good parallels Neo-Platonic thinking more closely here.³²⁸

The First Ascent

It is not uncommon for commentators to view the experience in 7.10.16 as an effort by Augustine to take what he learned in Plotinus' writings and attempt an ecstatic "ascent

³²¹ John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 256.

³²² *Ibid.*, 256, n. 1.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 257.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 258.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 257.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 257, n. 3. In particular, Rist references Augustine's *Commentary on the Psalms* 135 (134) and *On the Gospel of John* 38.8-9. In a different section Rist submits that despite the closeness of Augustine's phrasing to that of Porphyry, Augustine probably followed the lead of Victorinus here from his work *Against Arius*. See Rist, 258.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 257. In footnote 3 Rist's reference for Augustine's use of *idipsum* is from *Commentary on the Psalms* 122 (121).3.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 259.

of the mind” on Plotinian terms in order to “see” this new understanding of God at the level of certainty. Vernon J. Bourke observes a three-stage ascension in Augustine’s move toward God in that passage: “thus admonished [by the writings of the Platonists] to turn back to my very self [*redire ad memet ipsum*], I entered into my innermost parts [*intravi in intima mea*] under your guidance... and I saw...above my mind the immutable Light [*lucem incommutabilem*].”³²⁹ Noteworthy here in Bourke’s view is the clear pattern of moving from outside one’s mind to the inside of the mind and eventually to above one’s mind.³³⁰

Contra various interpreters including Bourke, Robert O’Connell is correct in rejecting the notion that the experience in 7.10.16 constitutes a Plotinian-type ascent of the mind. Terms in the passage such as *vidi* (I saw), *cognovi* (“I came to know”), *manifestatum est mihi* (“it was made manifest to me”) are actually Augustine’s way of stressing that he now held to the truths in that section at the level of knowledge (thus with certainty) instead of the level of belief on the authority of, say, Ambrose.³³¹ The thrust of the passage in 7.10.16 centers on *what* he saw, the world-view he came to know with certainty, not secondary considerations such as *when* he came to see it,³³² but even here Augustine seems more concerned with giving the reader assurance that he reached a breakthrough to a spiritual type of understanding, not in describing that spiritual reality in

³²⁹ Vernon J. Bourke, *Wisdom from St. Augustine* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1984), 68, bracketed portion mine.

³³⁰ O’Donnell views the experience in 7.10.16 as Augustine’s effort to achieve an ascent (through the mind) to a kind of union with highest being based on what Plotinus had taught, an effort that fails. Subsequent paragraphs (7.11.17-16.22) recount further developments in his thinking, thus paving the way for a successful ascent (successful on Plotinian terms as Augustine had understood them) in 7.17.23. However, that success leaves Augustine dissatisfied, setting the stage for the fuller resolution in Book 8. See James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, 435.

³³¹ Robert J. O’Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine’s Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 107. The translation “I came to know” (instead of “I knew”) for *cognovi* is O’Connell’s choice.

³³² *Ibid.*, 115.

any great detail.³³³ In contrast, according to many commentators such phrases are used to narrate the temporal sequence of the experience (or experiences),³³⁴ and those interpreting the text this way hold to the “narrative-mystical” interpretation in O’Connell’s thinking since they commonly see a mystical element in the experience(s) as well.³³⁵ However, Augustine’s use of Romans 1:20 four times in such passages, a verse in which God is “viewed” only mediately, indirectly through His creation instead of a direct vision of Him, is crucial here.³³⁶ Furthermore, Augustine’s own summary statement in 8.1.1 that he reached those certainties only “enigmatically, as though in a mirror,” drawing from the Apostle Paul’s contrast with direct, immediate vision (1 Cor. 13:12), reinforces this conclusion.³³⁷ Therefore, the term *lux*, for example, is better translated in 7.10.16 as “light-field” or “luminous atmosphere” (with the intelligible truths bathed in that Light) instead of as “light” or even “light-source,” which would imply that Augustine directly glimpsed that Light, God Himself, as part of a direct, immediate mystical-type vision.³³⁸ Yet perhaps most compelling is how it is astounding to think that anyone, even with Augustine’s talent, would have put together such a “sophisticated tapestry of supporting insights” after only such a slender acquaintance with Platonic thinking in philosophy (a month or a year at most), a definite problem for those in the “narrative” camp to explain.³³⁹

³³³ Ibid., 194.

³³⁴ Ibid., 116.

³³⁵ Ibid., 117.

³³⁶ Ibid., 192. O’Connell points out the use of Romans 1:20 in 7.10.16, twice in 7.17.23 and once again in 7.20.26 For a fuller discussion of Augustine’s view of “understanding” and its connection to his interpretation of Romans 1:20, see Robert O’Connell, *Soundings in St. Augustine’s Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 55-56.

³³⁷ Ibid., 192.

³³⁸ Ibid., 142.

³³⁹ Ibid., 143. Bourke’s and O’Connell’s input on 7.17.23 will be considered shortly.

Final Conclusions on Metaphysical Evil and the Harmony of Creation

Regardless of how one might characterize the nature of it, the experience in 7.10.16 leads to new developments in Augustine's thinking, starting first with the concept that true being is that which "abides unchangeably" (7.11.17).³⁴⁰ In addition, "corruptible things are good: if they were supremely good [*si summa bona essent*] [like God] they could not be corrupted, but also if they were not good at all they could not be corrupted" (7.12.18), and these latter insights are based on a tight connection between being and goodness: starting with God as true being, everything else is good to the point that it exists, a key insight that serves to bolster his new understanding of evil: "Thus whatsoever things are, are good; and that evil whose origin I sought is not a substance [*malumque illud, quod quaerebam unde esset, non est substantia*], because if it were a substance it would be good." Not surprisingly, Augustine elaborates on this account of evil as corruption of a good nature in anti-Manichean writings such as *The Nature of the Good* (399):

When accordingly it is inquired, whence is evil, it must first be inquired, what is evil, which is nothing else than corruption, either of the measure, or the form, or the order, that belong to nature [*corruptio vel modi, vel speciei, vel ordinis naturalis*]. Nature therefore which has been corrupted, is called evil, for assuredly when incorrupt it is good; but even when corrupt, so far as it is nature it is good, so far as it is corrupted it is evil. (4.1)

Therefore, corruption of any of the three perfections (measure, form, order) that God originally formulated in the good nature of the subject is called evil, and so the extent of the evil depends, of course, on the extent of the corruption of that nature. Augustine's

³⁴⁰ O'Donnell submits that just as the books of the Platonists in 7.9 provided Augustine with a correct understanding of Scripture and a corrected conception of God, therefore making the ascent in 7.10 possible, now a corrected understanding of the goodness of creation in this entire section of the book will address the remaining Manichean objection of "Whence evil?" from 3.7.12. See James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, 446.

correction of the question “Whence is evil?” by stating that one must first address the question “What is evil?”, brings to mind his quest in Book 7 of *Confessions* on the first question as his initial starting point.

In his concluding remarks in that section (7.12.18) Augustine affirms not only the goodness of all individual substances that God has made, an observation that helps to address his earlier question of whether God was the origin of evil in some way, but he also maintains the goodness of creation as a whole:

Thus I saw and clearly realized that You have made all things good, and that there are no substances not made by You. And because all the things You have made are not equal, they have a goodness [over and above] as a totality [*ideo sunt omnia*]: because they are good individually, and they are very good all together, for our God has made all things very good.³⁴¹

In the next section Augustine reaffirms key ideas on evil from the previous section and also includes wording as to how this new understanding resolves at least part of his inquiry on the presence of evil in creation. He also uses those insights to elaborate more on the harmony of creation as a whole despite the evil that exists in the “lower part of creation” (7.13.19):

To You [God], then, evil utterly is not—and not only to You, but to Your whole creation likewise, evil is not: because there is nothing over and above Your Creation that could break in or derange the order that You imposed upon it. But in certain of its parts there are some things which we call evil because they do not harmonize with other things [*quia non conveniunt*]; yet these same things do harmonize with still others and thus are good; and in themselves they are good. All these things which do not harmonize with one another, do suit well with that lower part of creation which we call the earth [*et omnia haec, quae sibimet invicem non conveniunt, conveniunt inferiori parti rerum, quam terram dicimus*]...God forbid that I should say: “I wish that these things were not”; because even if I saw only them,...yet even for them alone I should praise You:...*fire, hail, snow, ice, and stormy winds, which fulfill Thy word...beasts and all cattle,...kings of the earth and all people*...And since from the heavens,...*all Thy angels praise Thee*...I no longer desired better, because I had thought upon them all and with clearer judgment I realized that while certain higher things are better than lower things, yet all things together are better than the higher alone.³⁴²

³⁴¹ The bracketed portion in English is Sheed’s. Concerning the second sentence of Sheed’s translation above, for the sake of comparison Boulding’s rendering runs as follows: “I saw too that you have not made all things equal. They all exist [*ideo sunt omnia*] because they are severally good but collectively very good...” See Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, 174.

³⁴² Italics are Sheed’s to denote biblical references that are directly part of the text.

Other works by Augustine that also treat the theme of evil and the harmony of creation are helpful for understanding this section of *Confessions* more fully. The following passage is from *On Free Choice of the Will* (388-95) and in this example Augustine moves from examining the variety of physical objects to the variety of souls that one finds in creation:

When you observe the differences among material objects and see that some are brighter than others, it would be wrong to want to get rid of the darker ones, or to make them just like the brighter ones. Instead, if you refer all of them to the perfection of the whole [*sed ad perfectionem universitatis referens omnia*], you will see that these differences in brightness contribute to the more perfect being of the universe. The universe would not be perfect unless the greater things were present in such a way that lesser things are not excluded. In the same way, when you consider the differences among souls, you will find that the unhappiness that grieves you also contributes to the perfection of the whole by ensuring that it includes even those souls who deserved to be made unhappy because they willed to be sinners. God was perfectly justified in making such souls [*Tantumque abest ut Deus tales facere non debuerit...*], just as he deserves praise for making other creatures that are far inferior even to unhappy souls. (3.9)³⁴³

Earlier in this section of *On Free Choice*, Augustine had discussed the brightness of the sun and the moon, but “material objects” in the quotation above takes the broader meaning of physical objects in general. After examining the comparative brightness and darkness of those objects and how they contribute to the universe, he makes a transition to the comparative “brightness” and “darkness” of souls—their happiness or unhappiness based on just deserts.

A similar theme is explored in Augustine’s *The Nature of the Good*, and in this passage he focuses on how privations fit into the orderliness of the universe:

Yet even these privations of things [silence, the absence of voice, and darkness, the absence of light] are so ordered in the universe of nature, that to those wisely considering[,] they not unfittingly have their vicissitudes. For by not illuminating certain places and times, God has also made the darkness as fittingly as the day. For if we by restraining the voice fittingly interpose silence in speaking, how much more does He, as the perfect framer of all things, fittingly make privations of

³⁴³ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 88. Concerning this key quotation, Sharon Kaye and Paul Thomson remind us of the idea that Augustine’s approach toward understanding evil in this passage was the inspiration for the “Best of all Possible Worlds” theodicy developed by Gottfried Leibniz. See Sharon Kaye and Paul Thomson, *On Augustine* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001), 19.

things [*rerum privationes decenter facit*]? Whence also in the hymn of the three children, light and darkness alike praise God, that is, bring forth praise in the hearts of those who well consider (16.1).³⁴⁴

Augustine's examples of silence and darkness are interesting, but the statement that God "fittingly" made privations may strike many as unusual, almost as if God created privations as the result of a direct intention to design and introduce them as a part of creation. However, the statement can be best understood by taking into account Augustine's thoughts in 7.12.18 of *Confessions* on the corruptibility of created natures, which provides a more nuanced understanding of the passage above: God, fully aware of the corruptible nature of the creative material, wisely made all things so that the resulting privations, an inevitable part of the newly created order by its very nature, would be a harmonious, useful component in the finished universe.

In his *City of God* Augustine reinforces certain elements of the theme of evil and the design and beauty of creation in Books 11 and 12. In the first book he uses a picture analogy to reinforce the idea of the overall beauty of the world despite the evil it contains: "A picture may be beautiful when it has touches of black in appropriate places; in the same way the whole universe is beautiful, if one could see it as a whole, even with its sinners, though their ugliness is disgusting when they are viewed in themselves" (11.23).³⁴⁵ In Book 12 he includes the notion that although it is difficult to appreciate the complete harmony and beauty of the natural world from our limited human standpoint, it is still wrong to question the divine Designer of it all:

But it is ridiculous to condemn the faults of beasts and trees, and other such mortal and mutable things as are void of intelligence, sensation, or life, even though these faults should destroy their corruptible nature; for these creatures received, at their Creator's will, an existence fitting them, by passing away and giving place to others, to secure that lowest form of beauty [*peragant infimam pulchritudinem*], the beauty of seasons, which in its own place is a requisite part of this world. For

³⁴⁴ A footnote in the translation here references Daniel 3:72 from the Old Testament as the hymn that Augustine refers to in the last sentence. The first two bracketed portions in the quotation are also mine.

³⁴⁵ Gareth B. Matthews's translation from Matthews, 111.

things earthly were neither to be made equal to things heavenly, nor were they, though inferior, to be quite omitted from the universe...Of this order the beauty does not strike us, because by our mortal frailty we are so involved in a part of it, that we cannot perceive the whole, in which these fragments that offend us are harmonized with the most accurate fitness and beauty [*cui particulae, quae nos offendunt, satis apte decenterque conveniunt*]. And therefore, where we are not so well able to perceive the wisdom of the Creator, we are very properly enjoined to believe it, lest in the vanity of human rashness we presume to find any fault with the work of so great an Artificer [*ne tanti artificis opus in aliquo reprehendere vanitate humanae temeritatis audeamus*]. (12.4)

After discussing further the goodness of such natural things themselves, he concludes in the very next chapter that “All natures, then, inasmuch as they are, and have therefore a rank and species of their own, and a kind of internal harmony, are certainly good.”

Continuing with the theme of creation in *Confessions*, Augustine brings the concept of justice into the equation, enabling him to make a transition to the nature of moral evil and punishment:

Your justice displeases the wicked: but so do the viper and the smaller worms: yet these You have created good, and suited to the lower parts of Your creation—to which lower parts indeed the wicked themselves are well suited [*quibus et ipsi iniqui apti sunt*], insofar as they are unlike You, though they become suited to the higher parts as they grow more like You. So that when I now asked what is iniquity, I realized that it was not a substance but a swerving of the will [*voluntatis perversitatem*] which is turned towards lower things and away from You, O God, who are the supreme substance: so that it casts away what is most inward to it and swells greedily for outward things. (7.16.22)

In this unusual but pivotal passage Augustine remarks first on how the wicked are unhappy with a variety of creatures that are part of the lower world, with examples of creatures that afflict and bother those that are confined to that lower part of the world.

Again, in his *On Free Choice of the Will*, a slight elaboration on a similar theme is helpful for contrasting the just from the passage below with the reaction of the unjust to the creatures that they are confined with in the previous passage:

For the best souls lend dignity to the humblest creatures among whom they dwell, not by their unhappiness (for they are not unhappy), but by making good use of those creatures [*sed usu earum bono*]. But it would be unjust if sinful souls were permitted to dwell in the highest places, where they do not belong, since they cannot use superior creatures well or adorn them in any way. (3.9)

Although Augustine opens here with discussing the “best souls,” he then moves to the topic of “sinful souls” and how their proper place in the universe is *not* with the superior creatures, therefore making the lower places the proper abode for such sinners.

Final Conclusions on Moral Evil and Free Will

Augustine then unexpectedly uses that same account (7.16.22) to pronounce deeper insights on the nature of moral evil. He focuses on what exactly iniquity is: not a substance but a “swerving of the will...towards lower things...and away from...God...the supreme substance...” Even though he briefly brought up the concept of free will earlier in Book 7, the statement on “swerving” constitutes his most important statement on the nature of moral evil. His discussion of it in *On Free Choice of the Will* sheds additional light on the nature of this “swerving.” First of all, his understanding of the will and of one’s punishment for the misuse of that will are clear in 2.19-20:

Hence, the goods that are pursued by sinners are in no way evil things, and neither is free will itself... What is evil is the turning of the will away from the unchangeable good and toward changeable goods. And since this turning is not coerced, but voluntary [*quae tamen aversio atque conversio, quoniam non cogitur, sed est voluntaria...*], it is justly and deservedly punished with misery.

But perhaps you are going to ask what is the source of this movement by which the will turns away [*quoniam movetur voluntas cum se avertit...unde iste motus existat*] from the unchangeable good toward a changeable good. This movement is certainly evil...that movement is not from God. But then where does it come from? If I told you that I don’t know, you might be disappointed; but that would be the truth. For one cannot know that which is nothing [*Sciri enim non potest quod nihil est*].

The will’s turn away from the “unchangeable good,” God, toward a changeable good, the wrong focus of one’s love, is “justly...punished” according to Augustine. With regard to the source or cause of this movement, Augustine reiterates the idea of evil as literally “nothing,” no substance that can be pinpointed as the cause. Later in the same section Augustine adds that “...every defect comes from nothing [*omnis autem defectus ex nihilo*]

est], and that movement of turning away, which we admit is sin, is a defective movement. So you see where that movement comes from; you may be sure that it does not come from God.”

In 3.17 of the same work, after stating that “...a perverse will is the cause of all evils [*Ergo improba voluntas, malorum omnium causa est*],” Augustine elaborates more on this issue:

But if you are asking for the cause of this root [a perverse will], how can it be the root of all evils? Its cause would then turn out to be the root of all evils. And as I said, once you have found that, you will have to search for *its* cause, and there will be no limit to your searching.

And besides, what could be the cause of the will before the will itself? Either it is the will itself, in which case the root of all evils is still the will, or else it is not the will, in which case there is no sin. So either the will is the first cause of sin, or no sin is the first cause of sin [*nullum peccatum est prima causa peccandi*]. And you cannot rightly assign responsibility for a sin to anyone but the sinner; therefore, you cannot rightly assign responsibility except to someone who wills it [*Non est ergo cui recte imputetur nisi volenti*]³⁴⁶—but I don’t know why you would want to look any further.

Although his conclusion may not satisfy modern readers, Augustine is adamant that the will itself is the best stopping point in one’s search for the cause of moral evil despite the questions that might still emerge. Even after considering the effects of original sin in the next part of Book 3, Augustine retains his basic conclusion that “souls pay the penalty for their sins, for which their own wills are alone responsible. We should look no further for the cause of sin” (3.22).

It is true that later in life, while writing Book of 12 of *City of God*, Augustine does elaborate slightly on the nature of the will and how to understand it, but he does so without deviating at all from his basic premise that an evil will has no underlying cause (12.7):

Let no one, therefore, look for an efficient cause of the evil will; for it is not efficient, but deficient [*non enim est efficiens, sed deficiens*], as the will itself is not an effecting of something, but a defect [*quia nec illa effectio sed defectio*]. For defection from that which supremely is, to that which has less of being,--this is to begin to have an evil will. Now, to seek to discover the causes of these defections,--causes, as I have said, not efficient, but deficient,--is as if some one sought to see darkness, or hear

³⁴⁶ Bracketed portion mine.

silence. Yet both of these are known by us, and the former by means only of the eye, the latter only by the ear; but not by their positive actuality..., but by their want of it [*non sane in specie, sed in speciei privatione*]...For those things which are known not by their actuality, but by their want of it, are known, if our expression may be allowed and understood, by *not* knowing them, that by knowing them they may be not known. For when the eyesight surveys objects that strike the sense, it nowhere sees darkness but where it begins not to see. And so no other sense but the ear can perceive silence, and yet it is only perceived by not hearing. Thus, too, our mind perceives intelligible forms by understanding them; but when they are deficient, it knows them by not knowing them; for “who can understand defects?”³⁴⁷

In his careful wording here Augustine strives to use the examples of darkness and silence again, both privations of a sort, to explain how the deficient cause of the will can only be known by *not* being known as a “positive actuality.” In 12.9 of the same work Augustine emphasizes the defection away from God: “There is, then, no natural efficient cause, or, if I may be allowed the expression, no essential cause of the evil will [*malae voluntatis...essentialis nulla sit causa*]...the will is made evil by nothing else than defection from God,—a defection of which the cause, too, is certainly deficient [*cuius defectionis etiam causa utique deficit*].”

Will any of this make sense to the modern reader or at least can Augustine’s view here be more understandable in some way to modern ears? However, the inability to explain such causes is precisely the point according to C. T. Mathewes as he expounds further on the nature of metaphysical evil for Augustine and how it connects to the notion of literally no cause for moral evil:

First, the introduction of evil into a wholly good creation is fundamentally a *negative* act—ontologically privational and hence intellectually incomprehensible. That such an act is, strictly speaking, inexplicable need not, however, render it incredible; rather, it tells us something about the nature of wicked acts themselves. They are, at heart, purely negative, a nay-saying to the world, and they are, thereby, ultimately unthinkable. Such acts are done not simply out of *bad* reasons, but rather out of *no* reasons at all...Sin is the perverse manifestation of our godlike faculty of freedom, the *ex nihilo* that stays *nihilum*.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁷ Emphasis mine in the block quotation. Augustine quotes from Psalm 19:12 in the last line.

³⁴⁸ Charles T. Mathewes, “Augustinian Anthropology: Interior Intimo Meo,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 27, no. 2 (1994): 205.

Mathewes here seeks to use Augustine's privation understanding of ontological evil as the starting point for comprehending why evil acts are ultimately incomprehensible.

Then, in the next section he focuses more on the sinful act itself:

To seek a "cause" for sin is to try to render it intelligible, and to render it intelligible is to render it explicable; that would tie it back into the explanatory fabric of the cosmos, the violation of which is what sin quite literally is...But its [the sinful act's] consequences are disastrous; the act alienates us from ourselves and destroys the integrity of desire and will with which we were created.³⁴⁹

So the development of Augustine's free will understanding of moral evil takes place particularly in *On Free Choice of the Will*, not as much in *Confessions* itself. In *Confessions* one sees Augustine's brief acknowledgment in 7.3.5 of his consideration of the role of free will with the problem of evil, followed by his argument that he has a will and the famous "swerving" statement in 7.16.22, but not much further development of those ideas in the remainder of Book 7. Book 8 contains more considerations but about the nature of the will in the context of Augustine's struggle to exercise the power of it to turn his back on his temptations. However, there is not further development in that book of a free will explanation in relation to the original intellectual problem of evil.

It is easy to lose sight of the overall flow of thought and experience that Augustine goes through from the beginning of Book 7 up to now or even to miss the full implications of his conclusions along the way. Rowan Williams links the key ideas on evil from Book 7 together in a helpful manner to clarify Augustine's system of developing thought here. He notes how at the beginning of Book 7, Augustine is still "in thrall to a kind of sophisticated materialism," with only one being, God, as invulnerable to any invasion or erosion that hurts others.³⁵⁰ In such a universe in which one's "territory" is invaded or some kind of force takes up the "space" that was lost by the

³⁴⁹ Mathewes, "Augustinian Anthropology," 206.

³⁵⁰ Rowan Williams, "Insubstantial Evil" in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, eds. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (New York: Routledge, 2000) 108-9.

original entity, the question *Unde malum?* (Whence is evil?) is a reasonable question.³⁵¹ Yet Augustine's breakthrough, which includes a new frame of reference, involves his focus on thinking itself. The mind certainly does not use or take up space, and asking the question of how the mind orders and evaluates its own environment then raises the question of the source from which the mind is deriving its standards, "its sense of real and mutually relative (ordered) structures." The answer in the Platonist literature that he was studying points to a freer, more active presence that activates the mind, a truth not passive or static.

Thus, by 7.12.18 he finds that the original difficulty has "dissolved" or at least been redefined so that the first question must be discarded.³⁵² In addition, this source of all is from the divine, but in all that is not divine a plurality exists regarding agencies, with variety in their self-determination, all part of "an interlocking system of action and passion." Consequently, what may appear to the casual observer as disagreeable, aesthetically speaking, or "contingently annoying" is simply a specific arrangement of both constraint and action. Perhaps it is a case concerning action more vulnerable or even more liable to variation due to circumstances than human actions and especially more than distinctive actions such as mental functioning.³⁵³ More precisely, at the level of one's actual experience in the world evil can be understood as a failure of the balance that is appropriate between action and constraint that should be operative in a particular interaction in the world. In general, even though Williams is definitely familiar with

³⁵¹ Ibid., 109.

³⁵² Here Williams points particularly to Augustine's return to the question of evil after gaining his new outlook on the nature of creation, and in this connection Augustine understands next that corruptibility is "not *ipso facto* incompatible with good in some measure." See Williams, 122, n. 16.

³⁵³ Concerning the arguments on the harmony of creation in 7.13 and 7.16, Williams understands Augustine's point to be that there need not be local, obvious harmonies at each level of existence in order to believe in the overall coherence of creation. See Williams, 122, n. 17.

Augustine's understanding of metaphysical evil as a privation, in light of Augustine's use of interactions in the history of the world in his writings for understanding the origins of evil, the charge against him of teaching a solution to the problem of evil in terms of "essences" instead of "personal relationships" is in Williams's view a "caricature."³⁵⁴

Despite his belief that the privation response is not Augustine's primary emphasis in addressing the problem of evil, Williams is definitely willing to defend that understanding of evil from critics, and in doing so the reader gains a better grasp of the response itself. A key disagreement from John Hick that Williams counters involves Hick's belief that there should be a crucial distinction between a "metaphysical" account of evil and an "empirical" account: regardless of one's understanding of evil as a privation, one cannot accurately speak of evil as being *experienced* in such terms.³⁵⁵ Evil activity seems to have a power of its own as one considers agents of evil such as Milton's Satan, Shakespeare's Iago, and the Nazi Joseph Goebbels, for example.³⁵⁶ Furthermore, if evil is described as an absence of good, describing pain as an absence of pleasure, for instance, is surely an inadequate description of something that clearly *impresses* itself on the subject. Williams responds that the "power" of evil is derived from those elements that are most active and alive in the context of the reality one is speaking of. For example, the will that is corrupted in Augustinian terms is definitely not a will that is powerless or weak as long as it shows the identifiable excellences of the will: energy, liberty, persistence, etc. What is specifically *evil* in the evil will simply cannot be understood or spoken of in terms of energy, liberty, and so forth. Although the fervent

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 110.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 110. Williams draws the objections in this section from John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Collins, 1966), 61-62.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 111.

desire for something false eventually takes the “subject to destruction,” it would be wrong to conclude that the search for falsehood is necessarily vague or half-hearted. Moreover, since evil itself is not a substance, the only way it can be sought after or even desired is “by the exercise of the *goods* of mental and affective life swung around by error to a vast misapprehension, a mistaking of the unreal and groundless for the real.”³⁵⁷ Therefore, what we call evil and what we experience is not simply a type of void, a lack, but rather the effect of that lack, “the displacement of true by untrue perception...”³⁵⁸ To use a physical analogy, although a vacuum is an absence, a “lack,” its effects in a larger system of forces can be powerful.

A Second Ascent

Augustine describes a second ascent of the mind in 7.17.23. In this section Augustine marvels “to find that at last I loved You and not some phantom instead of You...yet [I] soon was torn away from You again by my own weight [*diripiebar abs te pondere meo*], and fell again with torment to lower things” and “carnal habit” [*consuetudo carnalis*] was that weight. His wording is not explicit here concerning the “lower things” that pulled him down, but with “carnal habit” as the weight, his struggles with his weaknesses immediately come to mind as the factors that were holding him back from being able to “cleave” [*cohaerere*] to God. Later in the same chapter, Augustine’s mental “glance” takes place toward “That Which Is [*id quod est*],” God Himself, and he remarks how “my weakness was beaten back again so that I returned to my old habits [*et repercussa*

³⁵⁷ Emphasis mine in the quotation.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

infirmirate redditus solitis...].” Again, despite the general wording one thinks of his carnal struggles here as inhibiting the ability to “cleave,” and Augustine admits in 7.18.24 that he could not find the strength to enjoy God until he “embraced” the Mediator, Christ Himself.

Even though this second ascent appears to use the same pattern as the first (7.10.16), Bourke also outlines seven different stages this time in his basic analysis of the text, and he includes parenthetical numbering in his quotation to make the stages more evident:

And so, step by step (*gradatim*) from (1) bodies, to (2) the soul which senses through the body, and thence to its (3) interior power to which the sense organs report about external things...further to (4) the reasoning power...which lifted itself to (5) its understanding ...whence it discovered (6) the Immutable itself [*ipsum incommutabile*] ...and in the flash of a trembling glance [*in ictu trepidantis aspectus*] (7) reached up to That Which Is [*pervenit ad id quod est*].³⁵⁹

O’Connell agrees that an ascent is happening but as he notes that the account of the experience begins and ends with Romans 1:20, he rightly views the ascent like the one in 7.10.16, as one only of understanding, not a mystical type of “vision.”³⁶⁰ He acknowledges how the last line’s language would suggest an “ecstatic ‘vision’” if taken out of context.³⁶¹ However, the very next lines of the passage are reminiscent of the wording in 7.10.16: Augustine had only been allowed a “glimpse” of divine radiance by way of the “eye of ‘understanding’” which once again had to “peer ‘through’ created realities.” Therefore, even though Bourke’s seven-stage breakdown is correct, again O’Connell’s rejection of the “mystical” interpretation of the ascent is the more satisfying understanding of this passage. One remaining concern involves O’Connell’s failure to discuss the ascent at Ostia (9.10.23), experienced by Augustine and Monnica after his conversion and seen by various commentators as a successful mystical ascent in Christian

³⁵⁹ Bourke, 68. First Latin insertion is Bourke’s.

³⁶⁰ Robert J. O’Connell, *Images of Conversion*, 187.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

terms. Nevertheless, presumably O'Connell would point to the differences in language between that account and the other two ascents as well as the conspicuous absence of Romans 1:20 in the Ostia passage, clues that would suggest or at least allow the possibility of a mystical ascent in this case and therefore, without negating his interpretation of the other two experiences in Book 7.

THE CHRISTIAN PERIOD

Neo-Platonism, or at least Augustine's understanding of it, had exercised a powerful influence on his thinking through Plotinus' writings and the Neo-Platonic elements in Ambrose's sermons. These sermons were helpful in addressing key objections that Augustine had previously held concerning the Christian Scriptures, and in short, Augustine finds himself moving ever more toward Christianity. Although he comes to accept the teaching of the Incarnation in 7.21.27, it is also crucial here to discuss how other conversion stories prove necessary to bring Augustine closer to the point of submission followed by his own conversion in the garden. Some post-conversion considerations on the aftermath of his struggles with the experiential problem will be included in this section as well.

Despite his high esteem for Christ at this point, Augustine admits his lingering confusion and ongoing disbelief in the Incarnation (7.19.25). He reaffirms how his belief in the incorporeality of God resulted from the books of the Platonists (7.20.26), books that also opened the way for him to reconsider the Christian Scriptures now, especially Paul's writings, which resolved his objections concerning the nature of Christ (7.21.27). However, perhaps Paul's discussion of the personal struggle with evil in Romans 7, a

passage that Augustine also draws from in 7.21.27, was a catalyst in his realization that something more was needed. In 8.1.1 he reflects on how an intellectual conversion itself is not sufficient: “But in my temporal life all was uncertain; my heart had to be purged of the old leaven. The way, our Saviour himself, delighted me, but I still shrank from actually walking a way so strait.” Augustine also admits that even though his old desires of secular ambition were lessening, that was not the case with his struggle with lust—the very struggle that now held him back from embarking firmly on the new path (8.1.2):

But I was unhappy at the life I led in the world, and it was indeed a heavy burden, for the hope of honour and profit no longer inflamed my desire, as formerly, to help me bear so exacting a servitude. These things delighted me no longer in comparison with Your sweetness and the beauty of Your house which I loved. But what still held me tight bound was my need of woman [*sed adhuc tenaciter conligabar ex femina*]: nor indeed did the apostle [Paul] forbid me to marry, though he exhorted to a better state, wishing all men to be as he was himself. But I in my weakness was for choosing the softer place, and this one thing kept me from taking a sure line upon others [*sed ego infirmior eligebam molliorem locum et propter hoc unum volvebar, ...*].

The “weakness” that Augustine speaks of called for a conversion of the will; his intellect had already embraced the truth. It is at this point that Augustine seeks help in dealing with this final barrier.

Other Conversion Stories

Other accounts of conversion prove to be important now in moving Augustine closer to his own conversion. Since his weakness with lust was affecting his decision-making for Christ, Augustine decided to see Simplicianus, a trusted friend of Ambrose, whose recounting of the conversion of Victorinus (8.2) then inspired Augustine, who was “on fire to imitate him [*exarsi ad imitandum*]” (8.5.10). In addition, another factor that influenced his desires was Victorinus’ decision to abandon teaching Rhetoric when Julian’s law against Christians’ teaching that subject forced Victorinus to choose between

that career and his faith. He tells of his agony in desiring to follow the example of Victorinus but not being able to yield his will to the new direction:

I longed for the same chance [to follow the example of Victorinus], but I was bound not with the iron of another's chains, but by my own iron will. The enemy held my will; and of it he made a chain and bound me. Because my will was perverse it changed to lust, and lust yielded to become habit, and habit not resisted became necessity [*et dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas*]. These were like links hanging one on another—which is why I have called it a chain—and their hard bondage held me bound hand and foot. The new will which I now began to have, by which I willed to worship You freely and to enjoy You, O God, the only certain Joy, was not yet strong enough to overcome that earlier will rooted deep through the years [*nondum erat idonea ad superandam priorem vetustate roboratam*]. My two wills, one old, one new, one carnal, one spiritual, were in conflict and in their conflict wasted my soul. (8.5.10)³⁶²

His sexual struggles are the focal point for the “battle of wills” that Augustine describes here, just as we saw in the earlier quotation from 8.1.2. Of course, the implication of two wills in the passage should be understood rhetorically as Augustine describes the immense struggle that he undergoes during this time.

Yet another conversion story—really consisting of four conversions—had a strong effect on Augustine. During a brief visit Ponticianus, a colleague of Augustine's, told him of the inspiring life of Antony, an Egyptian monk, and how a book on his life had motivated a state official, right at the moment of having read part of that work, to commit to such a life of devotion (8.6.15). This official's colleague, another official in a similar position, also spontaneously devoted himself to the same kind of life after witnessing the commitment of his friend, and even the two women they were betrothed to “dedicated their virginity to You,” thus making a similar pledge after eventually learning what the two men had done. However, this latest conversion narrative had a different effect on him (8.7.17):

But this time, the more ardently I approved those two as I heard of their determination to win health for their souls [...*audiebam salubres affectus*] by giving themselves up wholly to Your healing, the more detestable did I find myself in comparison with them.

³⁶² First bracketed portion in the quotation also mine.

Augustine in this comparison laments his double-minded state, which was even evident earlier in the past in his famous request to God, “Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet” (8.7.17). Acting as a stimulus, these accounts of conversion pave the way for the beginning of Augustine’s own turn to Christ in the following chapter.

The Garden Scene

The events and inner struggle surrounding Augustine’s own conversion dominate the rest of Book 8. After outlining the basic narrative that takes place and reflecting on the struggle of his will, we will examine a more in-depth interpretation of key events and imagery in order to reach a fuller understanding of the impact of the conversion on his experiential problem of evil.

After Ponticianus had left, Augustine’s reflections in 8.8.19 on the story told by him triggered an intensification of the struggle of Augustine’s will, sparking his famous cry to his friend Alypius, “What is wrong with us?” This exclamation is followed by the departure of both men to the garden by the house as Augustine’s frantic conversion experience commences, prompting him (retrospectively) to reflect on the relation between a disobedient mind and the will, a product perhaps of “the mysterious punishment that has come upon men and some deeply hidden damage in the sons of Adam” (8.9.21). The resulting considerations on the experiential aspect of the problem of evil lead Augustine to conclude that “there are two wills in us, because neither of them is entire...” Augustine is learning that despite his newfound understanding of the nature of evil at an intellectual level, the experiential struggle with evil is still a stark conflict not

easily resolved. All the same, despite intense struggles at the level of the will and his earlier suggestion of the existence of two wills, he rejects the Manichean position that two natures exist in people (8.10.22-24).

Returning to the conversion scene, Augustine describes the “twisting and turning in my chain in the hope that it might be utterly broken...But it still held me” (8.11.25). The personal battle intensifies in the next section (8.11.26) as his “one-time mistresses”³⁶³ were now figuratively “plucking at my garment of flesh and murmuring softly: ‘Are you sending us away?’” and “...the strong force of habit said to me: ‘Do you think you can live without them’ [*cum diceret mihi consuetudo violenta, `putasne sine istis poteris`?]*” This experience is countered by his imaginings of a multitude of people that had joyfully lived out a life of continence, and Continenca, appearing as a lady, beckons to Augustine: “Can you not do what these men have done, what these women have done?...Cast yourself upon Him [*proice te in eum*] and be not afraid... Cast yourself...He will receive you and heal you.” After weeping heavily, Augustine famously hears a child’s voice from a nearby home, chanting, “Take and read [*tolle lege*], take and read.” Viewing this as a divine command, Augustine takes to heart the first passage that his eyes now notice as he picks up Paul’s writings again: Romans 13:13-14. According to Augustine the admonishment in the passage to leave his life of lust finally brings the submission of his will to the new life that he feels called to and results in his complete conversion to the Christian faith.

Carol Harrison’s tracing of the flow of Augustine’s exposition of his struggling will is helpful to include here. After noting his marked dependence on the Romans 7 passage by

³⁶³ Sheed uses this translation for the original Latin wording *antiquae amicae meae*. However, we will consider momentarily reasons why this rendering may not be the best translation of the experience that Augustine describes.

Paul with its focus on the inner struggle not to sin, Harrison observes the “fallen will” as “imprisoned, weighed down by the iron chain of sin which had assumed all the strength and necessity or habit” and definitely “at war with the new will,” one that was “emerging towards God” in 8.5.10.³⁶⁴ He was “twisted and turning with his half-wounded will” (8.8.19), rather divided in himself, “passive and unwilling” to yield to God in the face of strong habit (8.5.11), similar to one’s unwillingness to leave a warm, comfortable bed, and thus continually delaying the time when he must ultimately leave the bed despite knowing such a moment is inevitable (8.5.12).³⁶⁵ Even though his body readily followed his will’s orders to move his limbs, his will was “at war with itself,”³⁶⁶ incapable of obeying its very own orders because of its disassociation from itself through sin (8.8.20-10.23).³⁶⁷

However, what exactly was Augustine struggling against and why? The need for a complete break with his sexual struggles and with his worldly ambitions is in view here, stemming from a combination of factors. Yet in order to understand this interpretation

³⁶⁴ Carol Harrison, *Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford Press, 2000), 89.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

³⁶⁶ Simo Knuuttila adds an interesting afterthought about types of will, in this case reluctant and effective, but only after qualifying Augustine’s theory of will to begin with. Although choosing a particular means to an end can be reluctantly chosen, concerning Book 8 of *Confessions* Knuuttila showcases it as a prime example of Augustine’s view that even the fundamental orientation of the will can itself be reluctant. More precisely, he views Augustine’s description of his own conversion as an example of the kind of gap that can exist between “evaluation and effective motivation.” Despite seeing how better it would be to change his way of living quite radically, Augustine continued following his “settled habits” by willing it, with “will” as the “decisive power” that allows it to happen. Although he willed that he would somehow will to change his way of living, his will to will this was “ineffective” or “partial and imperfect” in Augustine’s account. In particular, Knuuttila perceives Augustine’s view on effective will as follows: “...if S wills that *p*, S also wills that S wills that *p*.” Yet, in contrast to that, “If S wills that *p* and says that S wills that S does not will that *p*,” the second-order will here may relate to S’s evaluation but constitutes at most a wish, an imperfect will for however long that will continues to be ineffective. See Simo Knuuttila, “The Emergence of the Logic of Will in Medieval Thought” in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 207, 214-15.

³⁶⁷ Carol Harrison, 90.

more fully, it is necessary to tie together certain threads of data in Book 8. We noted earlier from 8.1.2 Augustine's statement that "the hope of honour and profit no longer inflamed my desire, as formerly..." and "what still held me tight bound was my need of woman..." Although such reflection suggests that worldly desires were essentially gone and that lust was the only vice left to address, other passages in Book 8 call for a more nuanced position. In 8.5.11 after reflecting on his desire to imitate Victorinus, Augustine makes the following comments about the state of his struggle:

I no longer had the excuse which I used to think I had for not yet forsaking the world and serving You, the excuse namely that I had no certain knowledge of the truth. By now I was quite certain; but I was still bound to earth [*terra obligatus*] and refused to take service in your army [*militare tibi*]; I feared to be freed of all the things that impeded me [*impedimentis omnibus*], as strongly as I ought to have feared the being impeded by them. I was held down as agreeably by this world's baggage [*sarcina saeculi*] as one often is by sleep...

Phrases such as "forsaking the world" and being "held down by this world's baggage" raise the notion that the enticement of secular honors has not totally disappeared. In addition, his need to be free of "all the things" impeding him reinforces the suggestion that his battle with lust is not necessarily his only current struggle. The imagery of military service, suggesting an austere, single-minded life of commitment to God, might also be taken as revealing his need to abandon worldly aspirations since the immediate context with the phrases above fortifies this understanding. It is true that shortly after that Augustine remarks how "it would be better to give myself to Your love rather than go on yielding to my own lust..." but the thoughtful wordplay here, juxtaposing a surrender to divine love with succumbing to his own desire, does not rule out the presence of struggle in areas beyond the sexual. Nonetheless, the prominence of sexual temptation in his life in that quotation illuminates again his earlier observation of how "tight bound" he was for the need of a woman.

Likewise, that struggle is listed first in his opening sentence about the visit of Ponticianus and the subsequent conversion scene in the garden, but the statement also includes his personal battle with achievement in the secular arena: “Now, O Lord,...I shall tell...how You delivered me from the chain of that desire of the flesh [*de vinculo...desiderii concubitus*] which held me so bound, and the servitude of worldly things [*saecularium negotiorum servitute*]” (8.6.13). The reference to the “chain” clearly hearkens back to the chain of lust that he discusses in 8.5.10, but the “servitude of worldly things” is his clearest statement yet in Book 8 that the weakness for secular achievement was addressed by his conversion and apparently needed to be. This imagery of servitude is bolstered a few lines later by Augustine’s brief remark about his “...business, under the weight of which I groaned [*...negotiis sub quorum pondere gemebam*].” Even though our primary interest at this point would still be relevant passages in Book 8, in observing Augustine’s motif of the burdensome, dreary toil that his original desire for secular advancement had become, his other remark in 9.2.4 (after his conversion) is noteworthy: “Desire for money, which formerly had helped me to bear the heavy labor of teaching, was quite gone; so that I should have [had nothing to help me bear it and so] found it altogether crushing if patience had not taken the place of covetousness [*recesserat cupiditas, quae mecum solebat ferre grave negotium, et ego premendus remanseram nisi patientia succederet*].”³⁶⁸

Back in Book 8, the story that Ponticianus told strengthens the theme of leaving a worldly life of achievement and embracing a single-minded military-type life of duty for God: the first Imperial agent was moved by what he read about Antony the monk, held the desire to take up a similar kind of life, and “the world dropped away from his mind

³⁶⁸ Bracketed portion Sheed’s.

[*exuebatur mundo mens eius*]” (8.6.15). The second agent added that he would also join his companion “in so great a service [*tantaeque militiae*]” and likewise, their two fiancées “dedicated their virginity to You” after hearing about the commitment of the two men. In the next chapter Augustine’s remark about his previous prayer “Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet” (8.7.17) and his subsequent comments in this same section serve to highlight the prominence of his lust problem. However, Augustine’s use of continence in *Confessions* including his apparent distinction here between chastity and continence in his famous prayer is significant in pointing to his other struggles besides lust.³⁶⁹ For example, concerning the focus on continence that begins in 10.29.40, God’s command in the very next chapter that a person “contain” (*continere*) himself regarding *all three* of the triadic sins, pride, carnal lust, and curiosity (10.30.41) and also Augustine’s reiteration of the Apostle John’s warning to “contain ourselves” (*continere se*) against those same three in 13.21.29 are notable, thus indicating that Continence in 8.11.27, the conversion scene in the garden, does not necessarily refer to chastity only.³⁷⁰

Moreover, in the next section after his famous prayer for continence (8.7.18), Augustine’s further comments keep his battle with his secular aspirations in the forefront: “I had thought that my reason for putting off from day to day the following of You alone to the contempt of earthly hopes [*contempta spe saeculi*] was that I did not see any certain goal towards which to direct my course.” In keeping with the imagery of the burden that his worldly goals had become, he chastises himself for telling himself previously that “you could not cast off vanity’s baggage [*sarcinam vanitatis*]” earlier

³⁶⁹ Robert J. O’Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine’s Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 247.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 248-249. O’Connell must apparently be referring to the triad of sins (from 1 John 2:16) in section 30 of 13.21, not in section 29.

because of the need for certainty on what is true. Even though certainty has been reached, “yet you are still carrying the load [*et illa te adhuc premit*]. Here are men who have been given wings to free their shoulders from the load [*umerisque liberioribus pinnas recipiunt*], though they did not wear themselves out in searching nor spend ten years or more thinking about it.” So the image of the “load” and the example of the two men freeing themselves from it by leaving their public careers—despite an apparently much simpler search for truth—weigh heavily on Augustine’s mind as he compares their story to his own situation.

The observations above concerning Augustine’s secular goals for achievement cause us to reexamine the images in 8.11.26, supposedly images of Augustine’s “past mistresses” that are still pulling at him: “Those trifles of all trifles, and vanities of vanities, my one-time mistresses [*...nugae nugarum et vanitates vanitantium, antiquae amicae meae*]” were now figuratively “plucking at my garment of flesh and murmuring softly: ‘Are you sending us away?’” and “...the strong force of habit said to me: ‘Do you think you can live without them’ [*cum diceret mihi consuetudo violenta, `putasne sine istis poteris`]*” Despite the mention of *sordes* and *dedecora* (“filth and shamefulnes”) later in the passage, it seems improbable that the short interval between the arrival of Augustine in Carthage and the commencement of his common-law marriage would have allowed Augustine to have many *amicae* with a sexual meaning.³⁷¹ Moreover, the efforts of these tempters to have him “look back [*respicere*]” can be compared to how Victorinus

³⁷¹ Ibid., 240-41. J. O’Donnell submits that “Past lovers” is not meant here, suggesting that if Augustine had really meant this, he would have used *veteres* instead of *antiquae* (‘of long standing’). See James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 3, *Commentary on Books 8-13, Indexes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 52-53.

“did not look back on vanities [*non respiciebat in vanitates*]” in his unflinching movement away from his secular career and toward baptism.³⁷²

A consideration of verses 13 and 14 from Romans 13, the verses that Augustine quotes from in Book 8 as pivotal to his conversion, also provides clues concerning the experiential evil that is addressed by his conversion.³⁷³ However, since Augustine does not quote both in their entirety, the verses are fully given below with the use of O’Connell’s amplified translation for the sake of analysis:

13: Let us walk honorably, as though in daylight; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and [acts of] shamelessness, not in contention and emulation--[or...perhaps more exact, “not in a spirit of contentiousness and mutual rivalry”: *non in contentione et aemulatione*], 14: but garb yourselves...in the Lord Jesus Christ,...exercise no carnal (or human) providence amid [or: in view of, on behalf of] your concupiscences [*et carnis providentiam ne feceritis in concupiscentiis*].³⁷⁴

Regarding the relevance of the last line, O’Connell observes that Augustine’s realization of his desire for “womanly embraces,” even in the context of Christian matrimony, necessitated that he “provide” (through working for a living) so that he could support such a wife and any child their union might produce.³⁷⁵ His concupiscences imposed the need for him to exercise this carnal kind of “providence” by engaging in a life of

³⁷² Ibid., 241.

³⁷³ Based on his understanding of the Latin term *capitulum* in the text, O’Connell posits that verses 11 and 12 were also read by Augustine in the garden. He connects the military language on “armor” (verse 12) with the contemplative life that Augustine has desired ever since reading *Hortensius*, with an emphasis in those verses on taking that step *now*, without further delay. In this way the conversion story of Victorinus, also a rhetor that delayed becoming a Christian and then when he did so, declined to “look back on vanities,” was a narrative that had a large effect on Augustine in O’Connell’s thesis. In the conversion story with the two Imperial agents, the first one’s decision “on the spot” [*hoc loco*] to commit to Christ’s service, with that official being “stripped of this world” (*exuebatur mundo*), is coupled with his friend’s immediate decision to also join such a service [*militia*] as well as their fiancées’ commitment of their virginity to Christ. O’Connell’s ideas are intriguing here, but lingering questions on the soundness of his application of *capitulum* to its use in 8.12.29 and on the peculiarity of Augustine’s very incomplete quotation (if O’Connell is right) should be addressed before his thesis gains wider acceptance. See O’Connell, *Images of Conversion*, 227, 230-31, 237.

³⁷⁴ O’Connell’s translation, Latin insertions, and bracketed portion from O’Connell, *Images of Conversion*, 221. For the purpose of analysis, in his book O’Connell actually provides the English translation of the last part of verse 14 (from “exercise...” to the end) below the block quotation instead of within it while leaving the Latin insertions for that section, curiously enough, in the block quotation. (His quotation also includes verses 11 and 12 at the beginning in connection with his “capitulum” thesis.) I use the more traditional format here as the clearest way to examine our verses of interest, 13 and 14.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 225.

business, *negotium*. In addition, O’Connell correctly notes how the line on “contentiousness and rivalry,” often ignored in commentaries on Book 8, definitely raises reminders about the competition in Augustine’s profession as rhetor and the burden that he felt his career had become. Therefore, although the words in Romans speak to Augustine’s struggles with lust, words addressing his life of secular ambitions were also present. Furthermore, after the garden scene Augustine speaks of losing worldly hopes [*spem saeculi*] in 8.12.30 as a result of the conversion, and Monnica indicates the same about him in 9.10.26.

Yet O’Connell’s submission that the Romans passage did cut to the heart of Augustine’s dilemma—engaging in business (*negotium*) in effect to “support” his other concupiscences--should also be compared to a larger direction of dependence: Augustine’s initial acquiescence to the arrangement of a legal marriage because of his lust problem, but also a marriage that enables him to advance with his secular aspirations, a career which, consequently, would make the continuing marriage financially sustainable to begin with. In short, disregarding for a moment Augustine’s possible perception of adultery if he married,³⁷⁶ the symbiotic relationship that would exist between a legal marriage if it took place, and his various weaknesses called for a final, decisive break with those temptations at conversion in order to “contain” all of them in the future instead of a focus only on his battle with sexual temptation at that crucial time.

However, if one focuses exclusively for a moment on Augustine’s break with his sexual struggles and subsequent commitment to celibacy, what were all the key factors that motivated him in this direction? First, it is true that the motif of military service in

³⁷⁶ In the third chapter we briefly considered Kim Power’s view that textual hints in *Confessions* point to the conclusion that Augustine essentially viewed the concubinage as a *de facto* marriage, thus making a legal marriage to someone else a case of adultery.

Augustine's mind, noted in Book 8 and exemplified by the two agents, does support to some extent such a celibate life of commitment. A second factor, sometimes overlooked, involves the earlier influence of Cicero's *Hortensius* to embrace the celibate life as part of a life devoted to pursuing wisdom.³⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the importance of the first concubine's vow of celibacy constitutes a third factor. After his dismissal of the first concubine with his subsequent inability to commit to sexual renunciation in imitation of her own vow, Augustine has taken another concubine until his impending marriage.³⁷⁸ All the same, he seems to be wearying of the idea of marriage. Although he recognizes that he is not obliged to reject the option of marriage, he appears to take the view that for him marriage would at best be an "honorable self-indulgence." In short, Asiedu submits that although it is not clear when exactly Augustine began to rethink what possible path he might take to become a full-fledged member of the church,³⁷⁹ by the time he decides to visit Simplicianus (8.1.1), he has come to the point of equating conversion with continence.³⁸⁰ Nonetheless, Asiedu points to Augustine's desire for a dream (6.13.23)

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 251. James J. O'Donnell refers to research that helps to confirm that *Hortensius* fragments, in particular 74M, 80M, and 81M, "essentially" include an invitation to continence, and he suggests that Manichaeism, with its "presumed chastity of the elect," was therefore attractive to Augustine. All the same, he allows for the possibility that the idea of continence attracted Augustine even before the Manichean period, thus even before his encounter with Cicero's *Hortensius*. See James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 3, 44.

³⁷⁸ F. B. A. Asiedu, "Following the Example of A Woman: Augustine's Conversion to Christianity in 386," *Vigiliae Christianae* 57, no. 3 (2003): 286.

³⁷⁹ Asiedu, "Following the Example of A Woman," 287.

³⁸⁰ Asiedu, "Following the Example of A Woman," 288. Asiedu also incorporates *The Good of Marriage* 5.5 into his analysis. He acknowledges how two slightly dissimilar situations are described there, how both pertain to Augustine's situation, and notes how Augustine has exonerated his first concubine, not daring to accuse her of adultery. Based on these observations, along with Augustine's good words in 6.15.25 of the example that she set, Asiedu concludes that even if an inkling of this kind of thinking from both passages formed some part of Augustine's perspective between the dismissal of the first concubine and his conversion in 386, then this interpretation would constitute the most certain explanation of Augustine's situation. Marrying another woman, even one of "his rank and fortune," implied adultery to Augustine, a factor that would be sufficient eventually to make continence in his thinking a "necessary corollary" to his Christian conversion. See Asiedu, 300. Power's argument in the third chapter that

about his future situation with marriage (just after the Milanese girl had accepted Augustine's proposal) as the initial sign of trouble regarding Augustine's struggle with the marriage option versus a life of continence.³⁸¹ By 8.6.13 Augustine is in the "throes of his anxieties, distraught over the prospect of having to consider a life of continence as an essential aspect to his possible conversion to Christianity." In 8.11.27 the large number of people that Lady Continence shows him as she beckons for him to embrace the same kind of life is perplexing: Augustine's encounter with figures with such a life was rather limited.³⁸² Prior to the visit from Ponticianus, he knew quite little about Christian asceticism and even Ambrose's own little community was only recent news to him. So Augustine's only exposure was from the brief examples from Ponticianus and perhaps Augustine's memory of individuals that he might have encountered around Milan. In view of this limited exposure and the presentation of Continence as a woman, Asiedu posits that the obvious, close example of Augustine's own concubine and her own sexual renunciation after living with him for years would be uppermost in his mind, in particular with her example as the very one Augustine claimed previously that he could not follow (6.15.25).

Finally, Asiedu argues that the brief reference to the concubine's vow to God (to give herself to no other man in the future) is one of the conversion stories in *Confessions*.

Augustine probably perceived the first concubinage as a *de facto* marriage strengthens Asiedu's point here, but one cannot be totally sure of his perception of the concubinage before his conversion.

³⁸¹ Asiedu, "Following the Example of A Woman," 294. Asiedu actually places the events above in a sequence right after the dismissal of Augustine's first concubine, a dismissal that Asiedu views as largely Monnica's doing even though the dismissal does not take place until 6.15.25. Nevertheless, the natural understanding that the dismissal must take place at some point in view of the upcoming marriage means that Asiedu's point here should still be well taken.

³⁸² Asiedu, "Following the Example of A Woman," 295.

Besides noting the use of conversion narratives in *Confessions* in the broad sense,³⁸³ he posits that a parallel emerges with the two courtiers at Trier that renounce the world because of their Christian conversion (8.6.15).³⁸⁴ Their respective fiancées were left in a state of “marital limbo,” and both women also followed the example of both men, committing to chastity before God [*dicaverunt etiam ipsae virginitatem tibi*], a textual section covering the same semantic range as the *vovens tibi* of the concubine passage. Since basic vows of renunciation were leading people into becoming ascetics, many of which Augustine and others took to be genuine conversions in the fourth and fifth centuries, this observation strengthens the case that the concubine was doing the same.³⁸⁵

Even though Asiedu’s line of reasoning cogently makes the concubine’s vow a crucial third reason, such an account is enhanced by the additional observations of Augustine’s desire to be a “winner,” including in the spiritual arena, part of a brief point raised by Power earlier in this chapter. This desire to be “on top” is compatible with the text concerning Augustine’s strong sense of shame at being so slow to commit to service for God (8.7.17) and with his powerful desire to imitate Victorinus and the two Imperial officials (8.5.10, 8.8.19). Even though the text does not necessarily showcase in explicit terms Augustine’s competitive streak as a source of his humiliation here, one can imagine that thought process in his mind, an attitude of “Can’t I do better than this?,” especially as part of the motivation behind the question of frustration that he poses to Alypius in the garden (8.8.19). In connection with all this, Augustine’s apparent disgust at being unable to imitate his concubine in her new commitment of celibacy conceivably increased his

³⁸³ Asiedu, “Following the Example of A Woman,” 302.

³⁸⁴ Asiedu, “Following the Example of A Woman,” 304. Asiedu also observes interesting parallels between the conversion of the unnamed friend in Book 4 and that of the concubine, 303-304.

³⁸⁵ Asiedu, “Following the Example of A Woman,” 305.

dissatisfaction even more: a woman whose limitations and weaknesses he was quite familiar with (and presumably from a lower social class) was exhibiting much greater spiritual maturity at this point than he himself, an observation that plausibly inspired him later to do the same, even beyond what Asiedu envisioned in his thesis. Therefore, regardless of his struggle with secular ambition, Augustine's broader desire for achievement, whether in the secular arena or elsewhere, if viewed as a weakness in this context, was arguably a factor in addressing another weakness, the lust problem, in the narrative leading up to his conversion.

But was the pull of ambition truly broken in Augustine's life in Book 8? Love of praise (another aspect of this enticement discussed later in Book 10) is a serious concern of Augustine's after his conversion, especially because of the difficulty of testing oneself in that area. Such considerations are included in the following section.

Post-Conversion Considerations

A brief look at relevant passages in Books 9 and 10 sheds further light on the experiential aspect of evil. In 9.1.1 Augustine is quick to outline the new release from his experiential struggles as a result of the conversion experience from Book 8, including another use of the "vanities" phrase as part of his statement. Yet in the context of this passage such "vanities" refer to all three of his major struggles, not simply secular aspirations:

How lovely I suddenly found it to be free from the loveliness of those vanities [...*carere suavitatibus nugarum*], so that now it was a joy to renounce what I had been so afraid to lose. For You cast them out of me, O true and Supreme Loveliness...Now my mind was free from the cares that had gnawed it, from aspiring and getting and weltering in filth [*ambiendi et acquirendi et volutandi*] and rubbing the scab of lust [*scalpendi scabiem libidinum*].

The term “lust” refers plainly enough to his sexual struggles, and the “aspiring” and “getting” (*ambiendi et acquirendi*) plausibly refer to his desires concerning ambition and money. The term “filth” could conceivably represent any or all of the three temptations even though the temptation involving curiosity is not explicitly in view anywhere else in the passage.

With the decision to abandon his professorship (9.2) and his baptism under Ambrose (9.6.14), Augustine continues to move in his new Christian direction. But why wait as long as he did to be baptized? O’Donnell suggests that the time lapse was providential since his philosophical retreat with Monnica and friends at Cassiciacum provided a way to test his new resolve to avoid the same besetting sins as well as avoid the specific temptations that could be easily encountered in urban life.³⁸⁶

However, in Book 10 Augustine is candid on the lingering nature of those experiential struggles while he affirms the great release from them that his conversion made possible. In 10.30.41 he is rather frank about the problem of lust after he opens with the entire triad of sins in his first statement in the passage:

Assuredly You command that I contain myself from *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*... You commanded me also to abstain from fornication, and in the matter of marriage You advised me a better course though You allowed me a less good. And since You gave me the power, it was so done, even before I became a dispenser of Your Sacrament. Yet there still live in my memory the images of those things, of which I have already spoken much, which my long habit had fixed there [*quas ibi consuetudo mea fixit*]. When I am awake they beset me though with no great power, but in sleep not only seeming pleasant, but even to the point of consent and the likeness of the act itself [*sed etiam usque ad consensionem factumque simillimum*].³⁸⁷

But Augustine is apparently most troubled by the inherent difficulty in testing his progress with the third temptation, that of the “pride of life” or in Augustine’s case, his

³⁸⁶ James J. O’Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 3, 70.

³⁸⁷ Sheed’s use of italics to mark Augustine’s use of biblical passages shows, in this case, I John 2:16 with the triad of sins that Augustine includes in his prayer here.

ambitions. Here he discusses it as the love of praise from others, a problematic area to test oneself in, in contrast to the other two temptations (10.37.60):

...I am in great fear of my secret sins—sins that Your eyes see, though mine do not. For in those other kinds of temptation I have some power of examining myself, but in this [the love of praise] almost none. For I can see how far I have advanced in power to control my mind in the matter of the pleasures of the flesh and curiosity for vain knowledge: I can see it when I am without these things...But how are we to be without praise in order to discover our true attitude to praise?

Noteworthy here is how “love of praise” is not necessarily confined to the secular arena—one can encounter that problem in other areas of life, an observation that we noted earlier in discussing his overall desire for achievement. Augustine explores the last question in the passage more fully throughout the rest of that section before moving to other subjects, but it is plain that the answers that he proposes are not as clear-cut as he would like.

SIGNIFICANCE OF EVIL IN THE POST-MANICHEAN, NEO-PLATONIC, AND CHRISTIAN PERIODS

The thread of the problem of evil that runs through Augustine’s life from the end of Book 5 through his Christian conversion in Book 8 and the aftermath of that event shows a close connection that exists between the intellectual and experiential aspects of the problem. Stated another way, Augustine’s two conversions, the *intellectual* and the *moral*, can be affirmed from the vantage point of his struggles with the problem of evil. This first conversion was a submission of the mind to God, whereas the moral conversion, in contrast, dealt with the submission of the will.

The intellectual conversion included, of course, reading about and believing in a corrected view of God, which in turn paved the way for dealing with the intellectual aspect of the problem of evil including the nature of metaphysical evil and of moral evil.

Therefore, the intellectual aspect of the problem involved first a much needed corrective to Augustine's understanding of God's nature: his gradual move from a corporealist notion of God to the concept of a spiritual, sovereign entity, one that is totally separate from Augustine himself in contrast to the Manichean conception of deity that he had imbibed earlier. Concerning the experiential, even though Ambrose's preaching begins to make Augustine more receptive again to the Christian Scriptures, which will eventually prove key to his conversion scene, in the meantime his struggles at the experiential level intensify. The encounter with the beggar illuminates Augustine's misery in his occupation with his ambitions, and as we saw in the third chapter, his taking of a second concubine during this period after dismissing the first showcases how he is "a slave to lust."

It is no accident that the multitude of questions about evil that Augustine raises in the first few chapters of Book 7, along with his new openness to the idea of free will and a sense of responsibility for his own evil, emerge just after his experiential struggles outlined above. The experiential aspect of the problem and his resulting misery from it arguably create a fresh receptiveness in him to unconsidered solutions for the intellectual problem. Regarding the question of whether evil is ultimately traceable back to the Creator (a variation of the question of "whence evil?"), his encounter with writings of Neo-Platonism breaks the impasse by allowing him to think of God in non-corporeal terms and view metaphysical evil as a privation. The concept of privation, in turn, supports his understanding that creation as a whole is in harmony and the notion that a perverse will is the (deficient) cause of evil—no further cause should be sought after. From this last new insight with the intellectual problem, Augustine must now surely

realize how he is personally responsible for his own moral evil. Moreover, the ascents of the mind that Augustine achieves before and after his reflections on evil, harmony, and free will bring him to the level of certainty on his new understanding of God's nature—the conceptual lynchpin that makes all the other insights above possible.

However, the resolution to the intellectual problem of evil is not enough to resolve his experiential struggles—the will must still be subdued. The depth of experiential evil is illuminated in Augustine's quotation on how the “chain” of his own making, a chain from lust, held him back from following the soldiery example of Victorinus, whose final rejection of “vanities” Augustine needed likewise to imitate. Nevertheless, Augustine's disgust with his own evil only reaches a tipping point after hearing about four other conversions, leading to the famous garden scene in which divine intervention through Scripture helps to subdue his will and address his experiential problem of evil through Christ the Mediator. This conversion event involves a focus on “continence” of all of Augustine's evil, not simply lust. Ironically, the first concubine, who endured the most from his experiential struggles with lust was notably the key example that influenced his thinking to embrace chastity and address his experiential problem of lust by her very own act of commitment. Nonetheless, the initial exhortation from *Hortensius* to embrace celibacy, the Christian motif of military service in God's army, and Augustine's own ambitious desire to be successful in any endeavor were also significant factors. However, despite the seeming progress against the temptation of secular ambition before Book 8, the potential symbiosis with his experiential struggles that could have resulted from a legal marriage made a fuller break with them at conversion all the more crucial.

Augustine's own post-conversion considerations highlight the lingering residue of experiential evil that stays with him as well as his realization that he is totally dependent on God's grace concerning his "secret sins." All the same, he stands by the decisive step taken, with God's help, against experiential evil by his act of the will in the Milanese garden. At long last, the second of the two aspects of the problem of evil came to a final resolution in a small garden in Milan after years of struggle.

CRITIQUE OF AUGUSTINE'S CONTRIBUTIONS REGARDING EVIL

Augustine's approach of using free will to explain moral evil and also his privation model for explaining the metaphysical nature of evil are among the most well-known accounts of evil in the history of philosophy. Concerning the free will explanation itself, in contemporary analytic philosophy of religion Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defense, which includes elements of Augustine's free will account along with some tools of argumentation from modal logic, has brought new life to seminal ideas initially found in Augustine's approach. This example is of notable interest since Plantinga's version has justifiably been successful in largely warding off the traditional challenge that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with an all-good, all-powerful God. As a result of Plantinga's effective counterargument, current debates over the problem of evil have largely shifted into new directions such as evidential considerations (e.g. Is the amount of evil that we see in the world really justifiable for the purposes that such evil is allowed for?)

Contemporary philosophers are much more divided over the issue of Augustine's privation understanding of metaphysical evil. Future interaction over the implications of

Augustine's approach itself is necessary and has value as Rowan Williams's engagement with Hick's objections has made clear. Augustine's privation model still certainly has its defenders,³⁸⁸ but some theologians that decry the influence of Greek philosophy on Christian theology throughout history do desire theological accounts to be framed in demonstrably biblical categories. Aside from the issue of categories, other questions arise: are privations in creation really unavoidable because of the ontological inferiority of matter in comparison to God? It is not immediately clear why the answer would need to be yes. Moreover, some Christian philosophers such as John Frame question whether such a model is compatible with the Christian Scriptures: would the statement of the goodness of creation in Genesis 1:31 also allow for privations to be present?³⁸⁹ Frame is doubtful and based on the robust view of God's sovereignty that he believes the Bible teaches, such an understanding of God's nature would make God just as responsible for the bad aspects of creation as for the good under Augustine's privation solution.³⁹⁰

A similar problem emerges in connection with God's omnipotence and the idea that evil wills have no cause. Kermit Scott draws from *On Free Choice of the Will* to point to Augustine's argument in Book 3 that creation is under God's perfect control.³⁹¹ Even the sin of fallen humans and those sinners themselves add in some way to God's perfectly ordered universe, and yet, in no way does this perfect order depend on the existence of

³⁸⁸ For one of the more notable articles in that regard, see D.A. Cress, "Augustine's Privation Account of Evil: A Defense," *Augustinian Studies* 20, (1989): 109-28.

³⁸⁹ John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 156.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.

³⁹¹ T. Kermit Scott, *Augustine: His Thought in Context* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995), 174. Scott references *On Free Choice of the Will* 3.5.47 here. Scott actually seems to mean God's sovereignty instead of omnipotence (although both concepts are related), thus making his objection similar to Frame's.

those sins or sinners whatsoever.³⁹² Scott holds that Augustine's claim (in *On Free Choice*) that there is no cause of an evil will since it is "nothing" seems clearly false in view of Augustine's earlier insistence in the same work that God is in total control of everything, a position that includes all beings and events.³⁹³ Therefore, Augustine cannot successfully claim that God possesses both omnipotence and perfect goodness, and when "push comes to shove," omnipotence is the doctrine that Augustine will maintain at all costs.³⁹⁴ In short, Augustine's determination not to bend the belief of God's absolute control over the universe left him in a "radically uncomfortable" position of subsequent difficulties with the idea of God's perfect goodness.³⁹⁵ This was the case despite the predominant idea of God's goodness in the "imperial myth" of a sovereign God in Augustine's culture that he was influenced by at that time.³⁹⁶ However, in Scott's closing remarks in that section he recognizes how the power of that myth went far beyond Augustine:

Augustine could preserve his conception of an imperial deity in absolute control of the universe only by sacrificing the justice of that deity, and the most marked incoherence in his thought comes from his inability to face that conclusion. That the incoherence went unchallenged by the Pelagians and others is due to the fact that no one was willing to assert that one must sacrifice either God's perfect goodness or the absolute efficacy of his will. So powerful was the imperial myth.³⁹⁷

Concerning experiential evil, Augustine's account of the power of God to break through his weaknesses and cause significant life change with Christ as the Mediator brings to mind the perennial debate on the impact of religion in one's life. Furthermore, it also raises the issue of absolute truth claims made by certain religions in relation to the

³⁹² Ibid., 174-175. Concerning the text of Augustine's arguments that Scott summarizes here, Scott references *On Free Choice of the Will* 3.9.91-97.

³⁹³ Ibid., 223. Scott holds that events include all human choices.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 227.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 228.

³⁹⁶ The insights of W. H.C. Frend and Scott himself concerning the concept of the sovereign "Creator-God" in Augustine's culture were briefly discussed in chapter 3.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 229.

plurality of existing religions since religious diversity is on display perhaps even more today than in Augustine's time. It is assuredly beyond the scope of this chapter to wade into the waters of debate on those topics, but it should at least be noted how Augustine was consistent throughout his life in his defense of Catholic Christianity as the true way to God: his resistance to splinter groups, heresies, other sects, and other religions was easily evident throughout his life as he responded to threats by the Donatists, Pelagians, and Manichees, for example, in his numerous writings. His defense of the Christian faith against the old Roman system of gods and against other groups in *City of God* quickly comes to mind as a notable example.

Such are some of the key observations concerning Augustine's account of the nature and origin of evil. Regardless of whether one agrees with Augustine's account or not, the staying power of his efforts on these issues in the history of thought is impressive and difficult to deny. So although it may not be problematic to find those that disagree with elements of Augustine's account, it is arguably more difficult to locate detractors that have no respect for his contributions to the enormously complex topic of evil in this early period of his life.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Some final reflections are in order as we consider the two problems of evil in *Confessions* one last time and the lessons that Augustine's journey can hold for us today. After first taking a final look at the role of the two problems throughout the narrative, we will then take into account several informative links between some contemporary explorations of evil and Augustine's approach in *Confessions*. A final consideration of Augustine's views on evil for the current culture closes this chapter.

Concerning the overall patterns of evil in *Confessions*, the experiential aspect of the problem arguably dominates much of the narrative and serves as the "driving force" of Augustine's journey throughout it. The experiential evil that Augustine engages in throughout the first two books of the work culminates in the pear theft in the last part of Book 2, a simple, yet revealing act that showcases the depths of his flight from God in the story. Augustine's life-changing reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* and his subsequent encounter with the Manichees and their questions serve to launch the intellectual aspect of his quest.

However, his experiential weaknesses, a consuming desire for worldly success, an unrestrained curiosity about forbidden things, and a lustful love of his concubine, are in the forefront during his time with the Manichees. In spite of his hopes of finding an answer for the intellectual problem, a resolution that holds implications for his weaknesses, the Manichees' experiential failure to live up to their own standards

convinces him of their inability to address satisfactorily the intellectual aspect of his problem, much less the experiential one. An additional experiential struggle, the heart-wrenching experience of grief at his friend's death, also displays the Manichees' failure to help Augustine at any level. The experiential aspect is predominant in the next part of the narrative as well, as the intellectual questions that Augustine raises in Book 7 emerge after experiential encounters with his own evil in Book 6 (e.g. reflections on the beggar, his emotional turmoil after the first concubinage). The new answers that he finds through Neo-Platonism and Christianity not only deal with the intellectual problem effectively but also lead to a reinterpretation of the experiential in which he takes personal responsibility for his evil. In the end the final resolution of the experiential problem ultimately takes place through his Christian conversion.

In short, despite Augustine's strong intellectual bent the experiential aspect of the problem is in some ways the larger element that ties together the narrative. Yet perhaps the reader should not be surprised at this. Out of all of the sources that influence our pursuit of knowledge and happiness (reason, authority, tradition, etc.), experience conceivably plays the largest role in shaping the content of our beliefs and the direction of our decisions. The same is true, in a sense, in our motivation to address the experiential aspect of life and make necessary changes. Augustine has deep satisfaction with the answers that he has found for the intellectual problem. However, his comparison of himself to others (including his first concubine) that have seen changes in their own lives is the factor that finally provides him with the needed momentum to take action in the area of the experiential himself.

Augustine's journey with both aspects of the problem of evil also offers some insightful similarities with contemporary explorations of the problem of evil. One example revolves around the obvious christological elements in Augustine's resolution of the experiential problem. T. Work's discussion of two kinds of theodicy is helpful at this juncture. Work outlines how the theistic cluster of theodicies, based on the doctrine of creation, tends to stress divine transcendence.³⁹⁸ In contrast, the christological cluster, based on the doctrine of redemption, has a tendency to place the stress on divine immanence.³⁹⁹ Stated another way, the theistic cluster, which places an emphasis on divine attributes such as immutability, impassibility, aseity, etc., is more metaphysical in nature and is expressed in philosophical language.⁴⁰⁰ The christological cluster, by contrast, is more of a practical nature, and is "embodied in the semiotics of the worshipping church." Thus, although philosophically-minded theologians and even Church Fathers have formulated carefully developed theistic theodicies, such claims have no "practical embodiment" in church life⁴⁰¹ and even have reached a level of infamy in congregational settings.⁴⁰²

In rejecting a merely theistic approach, Work points to the advantages of the christological approach as exemplified in the Christian church's celebration of Advent.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁸ Telford Work, "Advent's Answer to the Problem of Evil," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2, no. 1 (March 2000): 102.

³⁹⁹ In contrasting these two kinds of theodicy, Work draws from Albert C. Outler, "God's Providence and the World's Anguish," in Michael J. Taylor, *The Mystery of Suffering and Death* (Staten Island,; Alba House, 1973), 5.

⁴⁰⁰ Work, "Advent's Answer to the Problem of Evil," 103.

⁴⁰¹ For instance, Work notes here that there is no "Feast of Impassibility" in the church.

⁴⁰² Work points out that such arguments have, in the context of church life, even taken the form of biblical prooftexts that often tend to wound rather than heal the congregant in his opinion. He references Is. 55:8, Eccl. 5:2, Rom. 9:20, and Rom. 8:28 as examples.

⁴⁰³ Work acknowledges the power of theodicies from the other two major theistic religions, Jewish and Muslim treatments of the problem of evil, but submits that the advantage of an explicitly christological theodicy makes such other accounts "inadequate," regardless of whether they are "wrong *per se*." See Work, 104, n. 12.

In contrast to the focus on divine sovereignty and human freedom in theistic-oriented solutions, he submits that the christological emphasis lies in God's justice as made manifest in the *past* at the first Advent of Christ, in the *present* as Christ is active through his spiritual kingdom on earth, and in the *future* through the coming eschaton, beginning with the second Advent of Christ, in which all sin and pain will be wiped away forever.⁴⁰⁴

In addition, such a liturgical celebration emphasizes an eschatological ethics of both mercy and justice that the church is responsible to carry out in the present day until the final realization of both in the eschaton.⁴⁰⁵ Why both? The exercise of mercy alone, God revoking his sentence of death against wayward humanity, would be compromising His justice.⁴⁰⁶ On the other hand, if God were to allow the sin of humanity or His own just wrath to annihilate those made in His image, either option would constitute an “embarrassing concession to evil.” The history of humanity would be one giant tragedy. Therefore, a “merciful justice” contains both elements, punctuated by God's own redemptive comings in human history to reassert His sovereignty and bring humanity ultimately to its final destination.

God's mercy is currently extended through the church, especially through its missionary witness.⁴⁰⁷ However, God's justice, not only the exercise of it earlier in history⁴⁰⁸ but also the initial victory of Christ over natural corruption in the first Advent, energizes the church even now in living out the effects of that victory in anticipation of

⁴⁰⁴ This summary is a compilation of key points from Work, “Advent's Answer to the Problem of Evil,” 104-106.

⁴⁰⁵ Work, “Advent's Answer to the Problem of Evil,” 106.

⁴⁰⁶ Work, “Advent's Answer to the Problem of Evil,” 108. Work draws from Athanasius and Anselm here in discussing the dilemma of God's either exercising mercy without justice or justice without mercy.

⁴⁰⁷ Work, “Advent's Answer to the Problem of Evil,” 106.

⁴⁰⁸ Work gives examples of justice from the Old Testament such as punishment of Egypt's firstborn, Israel's and Judah's enemies, Israel and Judah themselves, and also from secular history including the punishment of Rome itself.

the establishment of final justice at the second Advent.⁴⁰⁹ The present-day exercise of civil justice by the state also helps to point to the eventual arrival of final justice under the divine.⁴¹⁰ Thus, Advent views the problem of evil not as an objection brought against Christian theology and ethics but rather as forming a constructive part of them. Theodicy in this perspective is not primarily an intellectual task or even an existential one, but rather a praxis for the community of believers.⁴¹¹

How does the classification of theodicy above relate to Augustine? Of course, as we noted before, Augustine's treatment of the question of evil in *Confessions* is meant to be more one of explanation, not necessarily a robust justification such as the systems developed by Leibniz or John Hick. However, both types of theodicy are helpful categories in understanding Augustine's dealings with evil. Concerning his answer to the intellectual aspect of the problem, he emphasizes the metaphysics of the transcendent God in addressing the nature and origin of evil, God's immutability, incorruptibility, and inviolability, to show God's separateness from evil and its origins and to acknowledge God's ability ultimately to defeat it. His understanding of free will plays a crucial role as well, and so the key elements of his intellectual answer fit plausibly in the theistic-oriented category of theodicy.

As for the experiential aspect, Augustine's focus in that area can naturally be linked more readily with some components of the christological approach to evil. Nonetheless, this link in *Confessions* primarily occurs because of Augustine's position on the

⁴⁰⁹ Work, "Advent's Answer to the Problem of Evil," 109-110.

⁴¹⁰ Work, "Advent's Answer to the Problem of Evil," 110.

⁴¹¹ In his essay Work does address briefly how the christological approach would incorporate God's use of both mercy and justice in a response to David Hume's well-known challenge concerning God and evil. However, he readily acknowledges that such answers will not satisfy everyone, and despite this potential intellectual engagement of the christological approach, he still views the orientation as primarily a praxis-centered one. See Work, "Advent's Answer to the Problem of Evil," 110-111.

“receiving end” of God’s present-day dealing with evil through the extension of mercy, an extension that is done through the church on the basis of Christ’s work on the cross in the first Advent. In Augustine’s own case, his evil is addressed through an encounter with Christ, but in a sense it is also through the church’s work of mercy that this encounter takes place.

Of course, *Confessions* focuses on evil at a personal level, not at a societal level in the way that *City of God* focuses on the issue.⁴¹² Nevertheless, one sees glimpses of the role of the church in Augustine’s personal battle with evil even in *Confessions*. Bishop Ambrose, perhaps unknowingly at first, plays a significant part in dealing with Augustine’s objections to Christian revelation in the first place. Augustine’s crucial discussion with the Christian Simplicianus is formative as the latter uses the conversion story of Victorinus to inspire Augustine. Ponticianus’ account of the impact that the book about St. Antony had on the two officials, itself an example of the church’s work in their conversion, and the subsequent effect on Augustine’s own turning point especially come to mind. However, even earlier factors such as Monnica’s prayers and example on his behalf as well as the presumable influence of the Christian believers in his hometown should also be noted. Indeed, through this very “defeat of present-day evil” process, which is also part of the larger work of mercy, the current spiritual kingdom, which is represented by the church, is expanded—one conversion at a time. From the christological perspective one could say that God is “retaking” His territory from evil.

Stated another way, Augustine’s treatment of the intellectual problem reflects the orientation of the theistic cluster to a certain extent. The application of his answers to the

⁴¹² Work’s contention of final justice in the coming eschaton brings to mind Books 20-22 in *City of God*, in which Augustine describes the elements of that justice on a large scale.

question of “Why evil?” may not satisfy the modern mind, but his stress on the experiential aspect arguably centers more on “how” questions. For instance, based on the examples of conversion above, the experiential element is helpful in relating how God, even now through His church, is eradicating evil, and Augustine himself is the key example in Book 8 of *Confessions*. If Kotze’s analysis of the protreptic features of the work is correct,⁴¹³ then one purpose of Augustine’s masterpiece is to encourage the reader to deal with his own experiential evil through Christ as well.

Other contemporary approaches to the problem of evil share some similarities with some aspects of Augustine’s treatment of evil. M. Adams views the question of “why?” as ultimately unanswerable, at least in the daunting cases of horrendous evil.⁴¹⁴ As a result, she recommends a shift in focus to the “how,” even to the point of utilizing religion-specific values of what is “good” in contrast to the general values that have characterized answers proposed in the past.⁴¹⁵ In Adams’s case, the “how” centers on how God could be sufficiently good enough to created individuals in a way that would defeat the horrendous case of evil that an individual went through and thus provide that person with a life as a great good to that individual on the whole.⁴¹⁶ Thus, Adams’s approach concentrates on addressing the intellectual problem of evil, albeit by taking the discussion in a new direction.

⁴¹³ We initially considered Kotze’s protreptic/paraenetic interpretation of *Confessions* in the first chapter.

⁴¹⁴ Marilyn McCord Adams, “Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God,” in *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 3rd ed., eds. Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, David Basinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 367. Regarding her understanding of horrendous evil, Adams points to cases such as participation in Nazi concentration camps, the slow experience of death through starvation, parental incest, and the detonation of atomic bombs over populated regions.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 370-71. As a general example that the “how” can be satisfying without knowing the “why” of the situation, Adams uses the scenario of a two-year-old’s satisfaction from the comfort given by the mother as the two-year-old undergoes painful, but life-saving surgery. Even if the “why” of the surgery were explained to the two-year-old, the child would not understand it, a situation analogous to an adult’s incomprehension of God’s ways, as Adams suggests.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 371.

Nonetheless, her emphasis on the “how” brings to mind the experiential problem of evil that Augustine grapples with in *Confessions*. In addition, her stress on defeating specific evil in the context of an individual’s life, in contrast to other methods that concentrate on generic or global theodicies,⁴¹⁷ also provides a noteworthy similarity to Augustine’s personal need for evil in the context of his life to be defeated, a defeat of experiential evil that would provide him with a much better life on the whole. Of course, some clear differences also remain. Naturally, Adams’s center of attention is on cases of horrendous evil, unlike Augustine’s, since she believes that generic and global theodicies are not sufficient justification to an individual that goes through a particularly horrible occurrence of evil.⁴¹⁸ Furthermore, much of the evil that Augustine endures results from his own weaknesses, not from the actions of others that Adams’s examples imply.⁴¹⁹

Coming from a different angle, philosopher John Frame views the narrative in the Bible as dealing with two problems of evil. The first involves the Old Testament problem of evil in which episodes of Israel’s suffering, often brought about by the nation’s disobedience, are addressed by God each time, but often after long periods as the people wait for deliverance.⁴²⁰ Moreover, the pattern of disobedience in Israel’s history brings the justice/mercy dilemma to the fore in God’s dealings with the Jewish people.⁴²¹ Their rebellion calls for divine justice, not mercy, and yet the Old Testament prophets include both elements in their messages to the people.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 368.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 369.

⁴¹⁹ This is not to suggest, of course, that horrendous evils cannot be self-inflicted in some way. However, the case studies that come to mind are plausibly acts of evil caused by one agent against another person.

⁴²⁰ John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 181-82.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 182.

Frame then views the sacrificial death of Christ as a theodicy that resolves the justice/mercy impasse—the need for both is met through the Atonement to an astonishing degree.⁴²² As a result, sufficient confidence has been given for trusting God for a future vindication with regard to the second problem of evil—the issue of suffering and evil in the broader context of history.⁴²³ Even now, a proper theocentric perspective points to divine uses of evil for God’s ultimate glory, a “greater-good defense,” in a number of contemporary examples of evil,⁴²⁴ but God is also totally trustworthy for the evil not yet understood.⁴²⁵ Since Frame’s christological account concentrates more on the “how” instead of the “why,” Augustine’s approach is similar to some aspects of his account in a way that is comparable with Adams’s exploration above. Yet other observations also emerge. The experiential problem of evil that revolves around Israel’s travails in the biblical account, a problem resolved at the cross according to Frame, is reminiscent of Augustine’s own experiential problem that was resolved, in a sense, through the cross in Book 8. However, in Augustine’s case Christ’s death is the ultimate basis for the solution to Augustine’s experiential problem, whereas Frame’s treatment of the cross and the justice/mercy issue is more comparable with the direction of Work’s discussion. Yet both Frame’s and Augustine’s handling of the experiential is distinctly christological in nature, similar to Work’s approach.

One might also suggest the presence of a large dissimilarity between Israel’s key role in Frame’s approach and Augustine’s own experiential struggles with evil. On the one hand, it is certainly true that *Confessions* deals with the experiential problem at a personal

⁴²² Ibid., 183. In particular, Frame references Romans 3:26 and 5:20-21 in the New Testament for this theodicy.

⁴²³ Ibid., 184.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 184-85.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 187.

level, not with the larger context of a nation such as Israel in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the predominance of the experiential over the intellectual in driving both narratives, Augustine's and the biblical account, is noteworthy. The second problem of evil that Frame outlines concentrates heavily on the experiential as well, but again at a macro-level in contrast to Augustine's personal account. Yet if *Confessions* is also meant to convert the reader as we suggested earlier, then Augustine's personal conversion is intended to serve as a model of sorts for others to respond to, a model that has implications at the macro-level long before Augustine's fuller treatment of evil at that level in *City of God*.

A final consideration of Augustine's privation view and evil at the level of popular culture is useful for understanding some additional challenges regarding the problem of evil. J. Elshtain, drawing from A. Delbanco's account, notes that the concept of sin as "privation" is "almost inaccessible to the modern mind" because modern thought's tendency toward materialism is such that we "confuse a privative conception of evil, which should imply no reduction of its hideousness and virulence, with our own attenuated versions of evil as a concept that has disappeared into relativism."⁴²⁶ She correctly suggests that returning to the Augustinian understanding of the nature of evil is the way to "give...[evil] its due without giving it its day."

Elshtain goes further by pointing out the tendency at the level of popular culture to move toward a dualistic way of thinking, thus viewing evil as an active, generative power.⁴²⁷ Concerning pop culture, much entertainment at that level is "awash in Gothic

⁴²⁶ Andrew Delbanco, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 48. Quoted in Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Why Augustine? Why Now?" *Theology Today* (April 1998): 10.

⁴²⁷ Elshtain, "Why Augustine? Why Now?" 10.

horror, with hauntings, slashings, and supernatural appearances of all kinds,” a trend in which the culture grants “more power to evil than to good.”⁴²⁸ As a result, regaining the Augustinian view of evil is critical because in that view “evil cannot generate. It can only reproduce itself through acts of debased mimesis.”⁴²⁹

On the one hand, Elshtain is correct that one’s position on metaphysical evil is the starting point for instilling in society a more balanced perspective of evil, and the Augustinian model does hold much promise as a corrective to the current tendencies of the culture. However, as we saw in the fourth chapter, for Augustine the metaphysical view is a starting point that also leads to other important elements in one’s understanding of evil, including the unbalanced action/constraint relation between agents that Rowan Williams highlights and the responsibility that a free agent should take for wrong actions. All of these elements can be used together, not only for keeping evil in its place in the culture but also for reinforcing the idea of personal responsibility in the relational dynamic that all of us are a part of.

The final reflections in this chapter help to confirm that Augustine’s journey and views in *Confessions* are not part of some archaic writings that have no bearing for today. All of us are on some kind of journey to come to grips with the basic elements of our daily experience, including the evil that we see around us, and Augustine’s famous work reminds us of the importance of the issues themselves and of interaction with others’

⁴²⁸ Although Elshtain originally made her observation on popular culture in 1998, as I write this, recent movies such as *Fright Night*, *Paranormal Activity*, and even older films like *The Blair Witch Project* illustrate her point here. Thus, it seems that the fascination with the horror genre continues unabated and in a way that arguably goes beyond the thrill that some people gain simply because they enjoy being scared.

⁴²⁹ Regarding examples of totalitarian evil (Hitler and Stalin), their orders had to work in such a way so as to destroy the “living tissue” of civilized society, largely by fostering immoral acts of “thoughtless habituation.” In contrast, the courageous villagers of Le Chambon that risked their lives to save refugees from Nazi horror acted out of habit and character, and their acts were “generative...opening up new possibilities for decency.” See Elshtain, 11.

experience and beliefs in grappling with those concerns. In addition, both the intellectual problem and the experiential problem throughout his work also serve to keep us balanced in our pursuit of truth in these areas: an active inner life of the mind, and yet one that is never divorced from the daily struggles of our life experience. Regardless of what readers of *Confessions* may think of his final conclusions, they are all the more enriched by his active use of both the intellectual and experiential aspects in the pursuit of questions that greatly affect us all.

WORKS CITED

- Adams, Marilyn McCord. "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God." In *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 3rd ed., edited by Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, David Basinger, 365-76. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Alford, C. Fred. "Evil Be Thou My Good." *The Good Society* 15, no. 2 (2006): 13-16.
- Asher, Lyell. "The Dangerous Fruit of Augustine's *Confessions*." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66, no. 2 (1998): 227-255.
- Asiedu, F.B.A. "Following the Example of A Woman: Augustine's Conversion to Christianity in 386." *Vigiliae Christianae* 57, no. 3 (2003): 276-306.
- Augustine. *Confessions*, rev. ed. Translated and edited by F.J. Sheed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993.
- Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*. Translated by Thomas Williams. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993.
- Augustine. "On the Morals of the Manichaeans." Translated by Richard Stothert in *St. Augustin: The Writings Against the Manichaeans, and Against the Donatists*, reprint edition, edited by Philip Schaff, 69-89. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 4. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994.
- Augustine. "The Advantage of Believing." Translated by Charles T. Wilcox in *Writings of Saint Augustine: Treatises on Various Subjects*, edited by Roy J. Deferrari. Fathers of the Church Series. New York: Fathers of the Church, 1952.
- Augustine. *The Confessions*. Translated and edited by Maria Boulding. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century Series, Part 1—Books, vol. 1. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997.
- Battenhouse, Roy W. "Introduction." In *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, edited by Roy W. Battenhouse. New York: Oxford University Press, 1955.
- BeDuhn, Jason. "The Metabolism of Salvation: Manichaean Concepts of Human Physiology." In *The Light and the Darkness: Studies in Manichaeism and Its World*, edited by Paul Mirecki and Jason BeDuhn, 5-37. Boston: Brill, 2001.

- Boulding, Maria. "Introduction." In Augustine, *The Confessions*, translated and edited by Maria Boulding, 9-33. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century Series, Part 1—Books, vol. 1. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997.
- Bourke, Vernon J. *Wisdom from St. Augustine*. Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1984.
- Boyle, Marjorie O'Rourke. *Divine Domesticity: Augustine of Thagaste to Teresa of Avila*. New York: E.J. Brill, 1997.
- Brown, Montague. "Augustine and Anselm on the Essence of Moral Responsibility." *The Saint Anselm Journal* 4, no. 2 (2007): 1-10.
- Brown, Peter Lamont. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Brown, Peter Lamont. *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Brundage, James A. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Carroll, William J. "Plotinus on the Origin of Matter." In *Neoplatonism and Nature: Studies in Plotinus' Enneads*, edited by Michael F. Wagner. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2002.
- Condon, Matthew G. "The Unnamed and the Defaced: The Limits of Rhetoric in Augustine's *Confessiones*." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, no. 1 (March, 2001): 43-63.
- Corrigan, Kevin. *Plotinus' Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance: Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander of Aphrodisias*. Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1996.
- Crosson, Frederick J. "Structure and Meaning in St. Augustine's *Confessions*." In *The Augustinian Tradition*, edited by Gareth B. Matthews, 27-38. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Delbanco, Andrew. *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995.
- Elshtain, Jean Bethke. "Why Augustine? Why Now?" *Theology Today* (April 1998): 5-14.
- Evans, G. R. *Augustine on Evil*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

- Ferrari, Leo. "Beyond Augustine's Conversion Scene." In *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, edited by Joanne McWilliam, 97-107. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992.
- Ferrari, Leo. "Young Augustine: Both Catholic and Manichee." *Augustinian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1995): 109-128.
- Frame, John. *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994.
- Frend, W. H. C. "The Gnostic-Manichaeian Tradition in Roman North Africa." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (April, 1953): 13-21.
- Gorman, G. E. "Series Foreword." In *The Confessions of Saint Augustine: An Annotated Bibliography, 1888-1995*, edited by Richard Severson, ix-xii. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996.
- Griffin, Carl W. and David L. Paulsen. "Augustine and the Corporeality of God." *Harvard Theological Review* 95, no. 1 (2002): 97-118.
- Harrison, Carol. *Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford Press, 2000.
- Harrison, Simon. "Do We Have A Will?: Augustine's Way in to the Will." In *The Augustinian Tradition*, edited by Gareth B. Matthews, 195-205. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Hawkins, Anne Hunsaker. *Archetypes of Conversion: The Autobiographies of Augustine, Bunyan, and Merton*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1985.
- Hopkins, Brooke. "Pear-Stealing and Other Faults: An Essay on Confessional Autobiography." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (1981): 305-313.
- Hopper, Stanley Romaine. "The Anti-Manichean Writings." In *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, edited by Roy W. Battenhouse, 148-63. New York: Oxford University Press, 1955.
- Kaye, Sharon and Paul Thomson. *On Augustine*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001.
- Kennedy, Thomas D. "Habit's Harsh Bondage."
[http://www.baylor.edu/christianethics/Pornographic CulturearticleKennedy.pdf](http://www.baylor.edu/christianethics/PornographicCulturearticleKennedy.pdf)
 (HTML version). Accessed 2 January, 2009, 31-36.
- Knuutila, Simo. "The Emergence of the Logic of Will in Medieval Thought." In *The Augustinian Tradition*, edited by Gareth B. Matthews, 206-221. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

- Lee, Kam-Lun Edwin. *Augustine, Manichaeism, and the Good*. New York: Peter Lang, 1999.
- Lieu, Samuel N. C. *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985.
- MacDonald, Scott. "Petit Larceny, The Beginning of All Sin: Augustine's Theft of the Pears." *Faith and Philosophy* 20, no. 4 (2003): 393-414.
- Mallard, William. *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought Through the Confessions Story*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1994.
- Matthewes, Charles T. "Augustinian Anthropology: Interior Intimo Meo." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 27, no. 2 (1994): 195-221.
- Matthews, Gareth B. *Augustine*. Blackwell Great Minds, vol. 2. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publ., 2005.
- McGuckin, John Anthony. "The Enigma of Augustine's Conversion: September 386 AD." *Clergy Review* 71 (September 1986): 315-25.
- McMahon, Robert. *Augustine's Prayerful Ascent: An Essay on the Literary Form of the Confessions*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989.
- McNamara, Marie A. *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine*. Staten Island: Alba House, 1964.
- Menn, Stephen. *Descartes and Augustine*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Miles, Margaret. "Infancy, Parenting, and Nourishment in Augustine's 'Confessions.'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50, no. 3 (1982): 349-64.
- O'Connell, Robert J. *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's Confessions*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1996.
- O'Donnell, James J. *Augustine: A New Biography*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005.
- O'Donnell, James J. *Augustine: Confessions*, vol 1., *Introduction and Text*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- O'Donnell, James J. *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 2, *Commentary on Books 1-7*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

- O'Donnell, James J. *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 3, *Commentary on Books 8-13, Indexes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- O'Meara, Dominic. "Evil in Plotinus (Enn. 1,8)." In *The Structure of Being and the Search for the Good: Essays on Ancient and Early Medieval Platonism*, edited by Dominic O'Meara. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998.
- O'Meara, John J. *The Young Augustine*, 2nd rev. ed. New York, Alba House: 2001.
- O'Meara, John J. *The Young Augustine: The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind Up to His Conversion*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1954.
- Kim Paffenroth, "Bad Habits and Bad Company: Education and Evil in the *Confessions*." In *Augustine and Liberal Education*, edited by Kim Paffenroth and Kevin L. Hughes, 3-14. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000.
- Paffenroth, Kim. "Paulsen on Augustine: An Incorporeal or Nonanthropomorphic God?" *Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 2 (1993): 233-35.
- Pistorius, Philippus Villiers. *Plotinus and Neoplatonism: An Introductory Study*. Cambridge: Bowes and Bowes, 1952.
- Plotinus. *The Six Enneads*. Translated by Stephen MacKenna and B.S. Page. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952.
- Portalie, Eugene. *Guide to the Study of Saint Augustine*. Translated by Ralph J. Bastian, Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1960.
- Power, Kim. "Sed unam tamen: Augustine and His Concubine." *Augustinian Studies* 24 (1993): 49-76.
- Ramirez, J. Roland E. "Demythologizing Augustine as Great Sinner." *Augustinian Studies* 12 (1981): 61-87.
- Reno, R.R. "Pride and Idolatry." *Interpretation* 60, no. 2 (2006) 166-180.
- Rigby, Paul. *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987.
- Riley, Patrick. *Character and Conversion in Autobiography: Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau, and Sartre*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2004.
- Rist, John M. *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

- Scarre, Geoffrey. "Can Evil Attract?" *Heythrop Journal* 43, no. 3 (2000): 303-317.
- Schlabach, Gerald W. *For the Joy Set Before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2001.
- Scott, T. Kermit. *Augustine: His Thought in Context*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995.
- Severson, Richard. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine: An Annotated Bibliography, 1888-1995*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996.
- Shanzer, Danuta. "Avulsa A Latere Meo: Augustine's Spare Rib--*Confessions* 6.15.25." *Journal of Roman Studies* 92 (2002): 157-76.
- Smith, Warren Thomas. *Augustine: His Life and Thought*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980.
- Suchocki, Marjorie. "The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's 'Confessions.'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 50, no. 3 (1982).
- Tardieu, Michel. *Manichaeism*. Translated by M. B. DeBeroise. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- TeSelle, Eugene. *Augustine the Theologian*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.
- Van Fleteren, Frederick E. "Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding." *Augustinian Studies* 4 (1973).
- Vaught, Carl. *The Journey Toward God in Augustine's Confessions: Books I to VI*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003.
- Wallis, R. T. *Neoplatonism*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972.
- Widengren, Geo. *Mani and Manichaeism*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965.
- Williams, Rowan. "Insubstantial Evil." In *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, edited by Robert Dodaro and George Lawless, 105-123. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Wills, Gary. *St. Augustine's Childhood: Confessiones, Book One*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2001.
- Work, Telford. "Advent's Answer to the Problem of Evil." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2, no. 1 (March 2000): 100-111.