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### St. Augustine and the Nature of Evil

Dr. Richard T. Allen<sup>1</sup>

English philosopher and editor of *Appraisal*

Co-Editor of Polish journal *Personalism* and Advisor for *Polanyiana*

Central European University, Budapest, Hungary<sup>2</sup>

Introduction

1. All Existence Is Good
2. Evil Is Not a Substance but a Privation of Good
3. Evil as Parasitic upon Good
4. Same Entity Can be Simultaneously Good and Evil
5. Evil as a Turning of the Will Away from the Supreme Good, God, to Lesser Goods

Notes

#### Introduction

Here and now I shall review Augustine's treatment of the nature of evil in the light of general philosophical and theological principles.

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<sup>1</sup> See [rt.allen@ntlworld.com](mailto:rt.allen@ntlworld.com), 20 Ulverscroft Rd, Loughborough, Leics. LE11 3PU, England. His books *The Necessity of God: Ontological Claims Revisited* (NY: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers, 2008); with Struan Jacobs, *Emotion, Reason and Tradition: Essays on the Social, Political and Economic Thought of Michael Polanyi*, (Guildford, Ashgate, 2005; 174p.); *Beyond Liberalism: A study of the political thought of F.A. Hayek and Michael Polanyi*, with appendix Aurel Kolnai (NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers, 1998); ed., *Michael Polanyi: Selected Articles on Society, Economics and Philosophy* (NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers, 1997; 395p.); *The Structure of Value* (Avebury Series in Philosophy, Ashgate Publishing, 1993; 162p.); *Transcendence and Immanence in the Philosophy of Michael Polanyi and Christian Theism*, Lewiston (NY, Edwin Mellen for Rutherford House, Edinburgh, Contemporary Theology Vol. 5, 1992; 196p.); *The Education of Autonomous Man* (Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Froebel, Marx, Nietzsche, contemporary philosophers and schemes of education, Sartre, Helvetius and B.F.Skinner; Avebury Series in Philosophy, Ashgate Publishing, 1992; ), 88p.).

See full publishing at <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/rt.allen/3-pubs.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.CEU.hu](http://www.CEU.hu) and his page <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/rt.allen/3-index.html>.

I shall follow the accounts in the *Confessions*, Bk VII xii-xvi, and the *Enchiridion*, Bks III-VIII, on the fundamental theses that evil is a privation of good, that all created beings are good and thus that evil can exist only as and when there is good for it to diminish. There they are the most clearly presented, while appearing in other works along with further treatments of evil.<sup>1</sup> Although I shall conclude with a summary of St Augustine's account of the origins of moral evil in misdirected love, I lack the space as well as the competence to consider the further consequences of evil, especially in the form of sin, and thus such themes as the freedom and enslavement of the intellect and will, of grace as the only cure, and thence of the question of predestination.<sup>2</sup>

Augustine's account of the nature of evil (*malum*) can be summarised in the following propositions

1. All that exists is good because it has been created by God who is supremely powerful and good.
2. Evil is not a substance, an entity or set of entities, but a privation, a lack or loss of good (*bonum*).
3. Evil depends upon good as that of which it is the lack or loss.
4. The same thing can be simultaneously good as existing and evil as deficient of a good.
5. Moral evil is, or results from, a turning of the will away from the supreme and unchangeable good, God, to lesser and changeable goods.

I shall now examine each of these in turn. We shall see that Augustine follows Greek ethics too much in its focus upon the good for man rather than upon the good man (see DCD, VIII 8), and hence upon evil as not aiming at our true and highest good rather than as being unjust, malicious, cruel, merciless, unforgiving, spiteful, and the like. Nevertheless, he recognises and faithfully records events and actions of his own which some of his formulations may be unable to assimilate, so that the necessary amendments and additions can be made from materials which he supplies.

### **1. All Existence Is Good**

The starting point of Augustine's thinking about evil is the clear statement in *Genesis* 1:31 that God saw all that he had created and it was good. Because God is both supremely good and almighty, everything that he has created is good and there is nothing that he has

not created (C, VII xii; E, III 11, IV 12). This marks a clean break with Augustine's former espousal of Manicheism, which held that the material universe, being evil because it is material, was not created by God (C, VII xiv). It also entails a rejection of the dualism of Zoroastrianism, in which as well as the good and uncreated creator Lord of Wisdom, Ahura Mazda, there is also the uncreated but evil anti-creator, Angra Mainyu, who constantly attacks creation but who will ultimately be defeated, and likewise with other dualist systems. For nothing exists outside creation that could invade it (C, VII xiii).

Nevertheless, although Augustine explicitly affirms that 'matter' is good precisely because it is capable of receiving forms which are good because they render it determinate as particular things of a specific sort (DNB, xviii; DVR, xi 21), he may have acquired something of an ambiguity in Neo-Platonism and not wholly rid himself of it. For immediately after one of the passages just cited, he rehearses the Neo-Platonic 'cascade' of being (logical and not temporal) from the fulness of being of the One or God, eternal and incorruptible, down through created and therefore corruptible beings via spirits (angels), embodied spirits (mankind), animals, plants, inanimate substances, to mere 'matter', in the philosophical sense as that in which 'forms' are embodied and which cannot exist unless 'informed' by them, and which in and by itself would be nothing. Because matter is the nearest mode of existence to nothingness, Augustine infers that delight in material joys is iniquity, *nequitia* (DVR xi 22 - xii 23) which he derives from *ne quidquam*, 'not anything' (DVR xi 21). Perhaps something of this devaluation of physical existence lies behind the merely instrumental attitude adopted towards it, as to be seen in the final section.<sup>3</sup> For the present it should be noted that lacking or not being good is not the same as being bad or evil: junk food is nutritionally worthless but that does not mean that it is toxic, and not giving to those in need is not the same as stealing.

Yet the question still remains as to how comes it, since God is supremely good and powerful, that evil exists and persists? Augustine has two answers: (a) that God permits evil to exist because his supreme power and goodness enables him to bring good out of it (E, iii 11, viii 24); and (b) things such as vipers and vermin, which may appear evil because inimical to some other things, are yet good as

existing and are fitted to their places in the lower regions of creation, namely, the earth (C, VII xii).<sup>4</sup>

The latter answer can be understood as a particular case of the former. It could also be interpreted as an example of the ‘chiaroscuro’ analogy in pantheistic theodicy: that just as both light and shade are needed in art, and as shadow sets off light, so too evil sets off good and thus contributes to the perfection of the world. But as we shall see, Augustine rightly argues that evil is dependent upon good. Nevertheless, in one place Augustine comes close to using it in respect of God’s tolerance of moral evil. His principal line of argument is that moral evil is the misuse of mankind’s capacity of free will and their ability not to sin, and that God tolerates it so that he can offer to sinners his mercy, grace, forgiveness and elevation to the state of being not able to sin so firm will then be their devotion to what is good, and thus he can bring good out of evil (E, viii 23, 27; xxviii 105). But, using the analogy of the beauty of antitheses in literature, Augustine also argues that the toleration of sin adds to the beauty of the universe as a contrast with good lives (DCD, XI xviii). Yet to mention evil and good in literary antitheses, as Augustine quotes II Cor. 6:7-10, is not the same as tolerating them in fact, nor does the addition of sins and their effects add to the beauty of the world. As for natural evils, the crucial question is usually taken to be that of injury and pain, all injury and pain in the case of animals and unmerited and non-disciplinary injuries and pain in the case of mankind. Augustine raised the question in the *Soliloquies* (I xii 21), and answered it later. Animal pain shows to us the striving of animals to maintain themselves against division and corruption, and thus also to show us that everything has been created by the supreme unity of God (DLA, xxiii 70), while our own pain causes us to strive against its cause, and a painful wound is therefore not as bad as a painless festering which will end by total destroying what it corrupts and therefore itself (DNB xx). The last remark sounds like cold comfort, and in the same place Augustine states that when pain does not cause one to strive against its cause it is useless, yet says no more about it. We can add that, because conscious beings embodied in a physical world require sensory and motor contact with things in that world in order to perceive and act within it, they therefore must be liable to unpleasant and painful sensations as well as pleasant ones and also to

injury by the impact of other things. And Augustine suggests that we can only presume that it is better, on the whole, that a material world should exist with embodied consciousnesses, and thus liability to injury and pain, than one without them (C, VII xiii). As for the fact that both good and evil persons experience good and evil things alike, Augustine argues that God allows this to happen in order to show to the former that he can be bountiful yet is not to be taken for granted and to chastise them for the sins that they do commit, and to show forbearance to the latter as well as to chastise them (DCD, X viii-ix).

Yet are Augustine and *Genesis* right to affirm that all *things* are good? In what respect is a pebble good? It may be good as ammunition for David's sling, as gravel on a drive, or as polished and on display as an ornament, but apart from such human uses as these, how can it be good? And how can it have a good of which to be deprived, as Augustine defines evil? How could a pebble be *harmed*, as plants and even more so animals can be harmed by disease and injury? If the pebble is good as a very small part of the total inanimate background and support to life, consciousness and personal responsibility in the universe, then why should God create such a vast background in space and with such a long preparation before they arrived? The only answer seems to be that the creation of a physical world, even without reference to plants, animals and persons, is good as an expression of God's power and goodness, just as human artefacts, such as children's paintings, can be good as expressions of their makers apart from anyone's appreciation of them and any use to which they may be put. Thus wantonly to damage or destroy mere things, insofar as they can be damaged, is an evil in being an affront to their makers, human and divine.

## **2. Evil Is Not a Substance but a Privation of Good**

What then is evil? Augustine answers that evil is not a substance (an entity, a bearer of qualities) but a corruption or privation, the loss or lack of good. It cannot be a substance for all entities are good as created by God. Unlike God, the supreme and incorruptible good, created beings can be corrupted and harmed, and thus lose some part of their being and goodness. For example, diseases and wounds are evils (organic and physiological ones) because they are loss of health (the specific good of living bodies). Nor are they *things* which could

be removed and placed in some other body, for, when cured, they disappear altogether. Likewise with minds and their defects and deficiencies. Consequently, evil is privation or lack of good, and so it is nothing (C, III vii, VII xii; E, iii 11, iv 12; and elsewhere).

This conclusion needs some qualification because a lack of something good is not necessarily in and by itself an evil. For example, to lack the ability to cope with any mathematics beyond basic arithmetic may not be any disadvantage for many people even today, but to lose such an ability may be a serious problem for one whose employment requires it and who may not be able to find any equally remunerative alternative. Often it is *deprivation*, loss rather than mere lack, that is typically an evil, except when the lack is something essential to the normal functioning of the organism or person, for example, being born blind or deaf, or in dire poverty.

In contrast, some would criticise Augustine for treating ‘natural’ evils, such as pain, disease and the lack and loss of abilities, as *evils* in the first place. If, as Kant maintained, only the good will is truly and unconditionally good, then ‘natural’ evils are evil only when produced by an evil will, an intention to inflict them purely to make the victim suffer.<sup>5</sup> But it is precisely because they are evils apart from their origins that it is a *moral* evil to inflict them without good cause, and also not to try to remove or alleviate them when possible. If it were not bad to be wounded, irrespective of how it happens, then it would not be wrong to wound someone. Although it is important to distinguish between moral and natural evil, or ‘wickedness’ and ‘ills’, nevertheless they are both evils, though we would not use ‘evil’ for lesser instances of either, such as a minor act of negligence or a cold.

Yet privation and deprivation are not the only forms of evil, especially of evils inflicted by persons upon each other. If *A* is the source, cause or agent of *B*’s suffering a privation or deprivation, then is not *A* itself evil in that respect? Poisons, poisonous plants, mosquitos that spread malaria and venomous snakes are dangers to other plants, animals and humans as sources or agents of deprivation and even death. Are they not therefore evils? As we have seen, Augustine, anxious to avoid any hint of Manicheism, denies that their being at variance with some other things makes them evil for they are also in accord with some others. But why are they not good in some respects and evil in others? We probably would not say that

they are evil, because what they do is not a matter of choice and responsibility. Yet they can certainly be bad for some other things by causing them harm and even death, the ultimate privation.

Again, pain, anguish, and the like are not in essence privations or deprivations, though they may also incur them, such as lack of peace of mind and inability to concentrate on anything else. What is the specific item which disparagement, disdain, contempt, malicious gossip, insults and verbal bullying deprive us of? The evil suffered is the very fact of having them inflicted upon us, and the evil intended is that of the malicious attitudes expressed in them.

Other interpersonal evils need not in themselves be deprivations. For example, the unjustifiable breaking of a promise can be a deprivation as in cases of not returning what one has borrowed and not paying for goods or services received, for then it constitutes theft. Similarly but less directly, promises to do something when not fulfilled usually deprive the other party of the opportunity to make, to have made, or of more time to make, other arrangements or incur him unexpected costs and thus deprive him of the money needed to pay them. And in cases such as the breaking of a promise to keep a secret when nothing further arises from it because the third party does not pass it on or take advantage of what he has been told, one could say that the person to whom the promise has been made is deprived of a trustworthy friend, confidant or neighbour, even if he does not find out that the promise has been broken, and that this is the essential evil in the breaking of promises. But that would not apply in the case of an unkept promise to do something after the other party's death.

Finally, it has been inferred from Augustine's account of evil as not a substance (an entity) but a privation, that he therefore held it to be nothing.<sup>6</sup> Evans refers to Augustine's boyhood escapade of joining his companions in the theft of some pears, the real enjoyment of which was in doing something forbidden and in the wrong itself, for they threw the pears, or most of them, to some pigs (C, II iv). There was nothing attractive in it save that of doing it because it was wrong (C, II vi). A little later Augustine tries to analyse in more detail his state of mind at the time. He loved nothing in it but the thieving itself, or perhaps also the companionship in doing it, but both were 'nothing' (*nihil*) (C, II viii). This puzzles him: he was sure he would not have done it by himself. For the sake of a

prank, and delight in that the owner did not know that they had done it, and from fear of shame if had refused to join in, he did wrong to another and not for any profit for himself (C, II ix).

It is always a temptation of philosophers and theologians to try to explain irrational and perverse actions and states of mind and to make them intelligible and thus to render them normal and rational after all. Augustine, however, in working out what was in his mind at the time does not remove its perversity. It is a crooked tangle of knots that no one can unravel (C, II x). Yet it is clear from his account, and from similar things that we ourselves have done, that doing something wrong can be all the more alluring simply because it is wrong or forbidden by those in authority over us, that children especially are liable to succumb to peer-group pressure and the fear of being called ‘chicken’, and that many of us do like some engagement in adventure, pranks and taking risks and in success in doing so even when foolish and perverse. But what does he mean by saying that all these are ‘nothing’? One meaning could be that he means that they are ‘vain’, ‘worthless’, and hence nothing to be considered, pursued and acted upon. But a more ontological meaning seems to be what he has in mind. And here, I suggest, is a confusion in his account of his state of mind. The reasons for his joining in the theft were not nothing: they were clearly what he thought and what he wanted to do or not do, at the time. As thoughts and desires, they were real, but they were not substances, just as qualities, relations, movements and actions are not substances. Is Augustine therefore thinking that only what is a substance is real? This is wholly contrary to the ontology with which he is operating, in which substances are what qualities are qualities of, what relations relate, etc., and in which substances likewise cannot exist without qualities. That what he then sought and enjoyed were not ‘things’ (substances, entities), even less that they were not bodily things like the pears, does not mean that that they could not be real: that persons cannot be companions, enjoy companionship, be tempted to do what they know is wrong and then to do it. If so, then saying that they were ‘nothing’ is close to what he himself found to be the fundamental fault of the Manichees, that they could think only in terms of bodily things (CF, xxxv 2).<sup>5</sup> Evil is not a *thing* but that does mean it is nothing.



In summary, Augustine in defining evil as privation seems to be thinking only of evil as inflicted *upon* something or someone and not as inflicted *by* something or someone as we shall see also in the next section. For in the case of the former it may well be a privation or deprivation (or thwarting), whereas in that of the latter it is a misuse of a person's abilities. The latter can itself be the result of another misuse, as when one person is persuaded by someone else to do something wrong.

Yet when Augustine comes to the problem of the origin of evil, he says in effect that it does not arise: God does not create it and it results from the will of created spirits, that is, angels and mankind (DCD, XI 17). This, of course, is an account of specifically moral evil, the evil wish, intention, will and deed to inflict harm, and also of the injuries thus inflicted. It does not apply to 'natural' evils, unless we think that the universe could have been and was created without them, and that they were introduced by corrupted angels. Otherwise their origin would be accounted for as suggested in Section 1.

### **3. Evil as Parasitic upon Good**

Not being a substance or entity, evil is a process or condition of privation or deprivation. Now in the Aristotelian terminology that Augustine uses, a process or condition must inhere in a substance, some *thing* that suffers the privation or deprivation. Furthermore, that entity must itself be good in order for its lack or loss to be a privation or deprivation: anything that is in no way good cannot have its goodness diminished. Hence evil depends upon the existence of good, without which it would have nothing to corrupt, attack, diminish or destroy (C, VII xii; E, iv 12, 13). And so evil not only depends upon actual good as that which it diminishes or destroys, but it destroys itself if and when it finally destroys that which it attacks for then it has nothing in which to exist (E, iv 12).

But Augustine's account of the asymmetric relation between good and evil requires one amendment. As we have seen, it entails that an evil would cease to exist if it were completely to destroy the good which it injures. In one sense that is true: it would be the case that, once the injured object had been destroyed, then there would be no privation in the sense that there would be nothing left to suffer that particular process or condition of privation. In that way a thorough-going evil would cease to be an evil, and only partial evils can exist.

If rocks falling from a cliff damage my car then the damage persists, and if they totally destroy it then it has gone and the damage with it. It also follows, as Augustine mentions with the example of the healing of diseases and wounds (E, iii 11), that an evil can be made to disappear by restoring what has been damaged or replacing what has been lost. Now this may be true of sub-personal existence but it is not true of personal existence. Firstly, the harm that someone has suffered can remain in the victim's memory. Even though what has been stolen during a burglary may be restored or be replaced by the insurance company, a painful sense of one's home and privacy having been violated can remain. Likewise the anguish of a severe injury or illness that has been cured. Moreover, the evil of a person intentionally inflicting evil, or of one not caring whether his actions result in evil or not, does not end when his victims have died nor when the harm he has caused them is repaired and their losses restored or replaced. He has committed evil and the guilt remains with him, and it can be cancelled only by repentance and forgiveness.

If Augustine had thought more in terms of distinctively personal categories, he might well have seen that evil depends upon good in another way and not just as that which it harms. For moral evil, in the narrow sense of performing evil acts, depends upon generally valuable attributes and capacities. Persons who are ignorant, clumsy, slow to learn, physically weak, impatient and careless will not do as much harm as those with knowledge, dexterity, mental agility, strength, patience and diligence. The illiterate cannot write poison-pen letters and only skilled programmers can produce viruses and trojans. All abilities and powers can be misused as well as used, and moral evil, in the narrow sense of wickedness, consists in their misuse and so requires them to conceive, express and execute its evil intentions. If human abilities and powers were not themselves good, it would not be an evil for us to lose them or evil of others to rob us of them. Specifically moral evil is the intentional misuse of good in the way we abuse the abilities and powers at our command and not a privation or deprivation, although its objective may well be a privation or deprivation.

#### **4. Same Entity Can be Simultaneously Good and Evil**

Augustine continues his formal discussion of evil by arguing that it defies the Law of Non-Contradiction but is none the worse for that.

On the one hand, he is to be congratulated for preferring concrete facts to abstract logic, but, on the other, in this case there is no contradiction. The alleged contradiction arises from the fact that every natural existence is good, as created by God, but may also be evil as defective, as deprived of something, and conversely everything which is evil must also be good as a created being (E, iv 13). Though good entities may be wholly so, with no taint of evil, evil beings can be evil only insofar as they exist and are therefore good. A man or angel can exist and not be unjust, but an unjust person can exist only as an angel or a man and therefore good. Evil, therefore, can arise only from the good things which it can injure (E, iv 14).

But this does not entail a real contradiction, for the same being is good in one way and evil in another, or not evil at all. Firstly, the same entity remains good in that which of which it has not yet been deprived and has suffered evil only in respect of what it has lost or is corrupted only in part. As Augustine himself said, the existence of privation and corruption presuppose that something good remains in order to suffer the privation or corruption. For total privation means that the entity is no longer there, and likewise total corruption: a wholly diseased organ or organism would be dead.

Moreover, we see here again the effect of Augustine's failure to distinguish suffering evil from thinking and inflicting it. We have already dealt with the ways in which non-personal beings can be sources, causes or agents of harm to other entities. In the case of persons, the difference between suffering and inflicting evil is even more marked. Perhaps Augustine is tacitly aware of this because he cites a specifically moral evil, injustice, when mentioning men and angels. For it is obviously the case that suffering an evil does not mean that one is a bad *person*. For to be a bad person is to wish, intend and intentionally inflict evil, and that is, as we have also seen, to misuse powers and abilities which are essential to our existence as persons and are therefore good. Even in the case of intentional self-harm, as when knowingly taking addictive and harmful drugs, there is a distinction between the same person as inflictor and sufferer, agent and victim, and possessor and abuser of his powers and abilities.

Perhaps Augustine has been misled by thinking too much in terms of substances and qualities and of physical ones at that, and of evil as suffered and not as being inflicted. For things cannot possess

physical qualities, especially visible ones, in exactly the same place and at the same time (E, iv 14). But relations and powers are different and at precisely the same time someone can be in one relation to one person and in quite a different one to another: a man may swindle his employer in order to pay off gambling debts. Yet, as we saw in Section 2, Augustine did recognise that non-personal beings can be bad for one set of things and good or neutral for another.

### **5. Evil as a Turning of the Will Away from the Supreme Good, God, to Lesser Goods**

Now we come to the question of just what in general is evil in the personal sphere. Augustine's personal motto was *mihi inhaerere deo bonum est*: 'It is good for me to cleave to God' (Ps. 73:28; e.g. C, VII xi). God's love is both the supreme exemplar of personal existence whom we should imitate and the supreme good that we can enjoy, both what we should be like and what can truly satisfy us. This, of course, is a Christian axiom. But, as a religion of world-redemption, Christianity stands between, or better over, its contraries of world-flight and secularism, and can at times slide into either. The former would have us shun all temporal goods and purposes as vain, unreal or downright evil, while latter would urge the reverse. So when Augustine states that specifically moral evil, iniquity, is a perversion of the will in turning away from God towards lower things, does he mean that we should wholly abjure the latter as worthless or evil or has he something else in mind?

Augustine, unlike some other theologians, took to heart the great Johanne statement that God is love (I Jn 4:8), from which he rightly drew the consequence that man, being made in the image of God, is also love (TEJP, II xiv). What is central to a person is his love or pattern of loves (*ordo amoris*, DDC, I xxiii 22, xxvii 28). Hence evil is fundamentally a disorder of a person's loves. What, then, is love and how should it be ordered?

All love (*amor*) arises from, or is a form of, *appetitus*, that is, desire or craving which is directed to something good or believed to be good, and thus which will make us happy. Desire is ultimately desire to have the desired good, or proximately for other things as means to what is desired for its own sake. It is also desire for a good we do not have, and so it is fulfilled as *inhaerere*, to cleave to, to possess the desired good, but if that good is then threatened it

becomes the fear of losing it. This fear itself is an evil because it destroys the calm of present enjoyment. Hence whatever can be lost cannot be a proper object of enjoyment, and so any desire for mutable things cannot bring happiness. Our goal therefore is to achieve freedom from fear, from the fear of not obtaining or losing the good we have. And so only a immutable and eternal good, that is, God, can be our genuine good and bring us happiness. Hence love takes two forms: *cupiditas*, which is the wrong form because it is the craving for permanence in mutable things which are beyond one's own control; and *caritas*, which is the right form because it is the craving for what is really eternal and cannot be lost. *Cupiditas* is the root of all evils: it makes man worldly and perishable; and so he commits evils in the attempt to enjoy perishable goods with security. It turns to external and inferior things and to the love of bodily pleasure, and thus a person becomes proud, inquisitive and licentious. But *caritas* is the root of all good, for it is the love of what cannot be lost, and so relieves man of fear and makes him immutable and eternal. The proper order of love is therefore to love only what cannot be lost and so come to have nothing to fear; not to cleave to nor to enjoy temporal and perishable things — such as political and social liberty, family, friends, citizenship, honour, praise, popular glory and money — but to be prepared to lose them and be without them, and to use them in attaining what is eternal. Hence doing evil is to neglect eternal things and to pursue perceptible and temporal things which cannot be possessed with certainty (Compiled from: C, VII v, vii, xvi, XII xi, X xxx-ii; DBV, II. x; DCD, VIII 8, XIV, xxv; DLA, I xiii 27, xv 32-4, xvi 34, II xvi 413, xix 53; DT, VIII 5; DVR, xlv 88; E, 28, 104-5; S, 72 6, 306 3-4, 307; 83DQ, xxxiii. xxxiv, xxxv 1-2).

There are several items in this account that could be questioned, but our concern is with its bearing upon evil. Augustine's focus, like that of much of Greek ethics, seems to be upon the self-inflicted evil of seeking happiness in the wrong objects rather than with the wickedness of inflicting evil upon others. The latter appears only as a by-product of the former when, out of fear of failing to obtain or of losing a perishable good, people resort to evil treatment of others to secure it. Of course, unscrupulous and callous persons do act like that. But such acts do not necessarily follow from the desire for mutable goods. There are people with earthly aims who pursue

them within proper limits and do not cheat, steal, attack and hurt their fellows in order to achieve and secure them. Also, such acts, as Augustine knew from his own boyhood escapade of stealing pears which he did not even bother to eat, can be motivated by the sheer delight in doing something wrong, and, when listing sins of violence, he also recognised violent acts committed from motives of revenge, envy and the sheer joy of seeing others suffer (C, III viii). (Incidentally, these acknowledgements also contradict the rationalist thesis that all actions are aimed at the realisation of something thought to be good, to which Augustine also subscribed, as we have just seen.) In the same place he also listed sins against nature, that is, perversions of our nature such as sodomy. Although they could be described as vain attempts to find happiness in mutable things, that would not account for Augustine's condemnation of them as abominable. It is the misuse itself of our powers and abilities that he really regards as evil.

At the root of this focus upon the misdirected search for happiness is the assumption that love is, or is a form of, *appetitus*. Thus things are to be loved either as to be used (*uti*) for something else, namely, to help oneself in achieving happiness, or 'for their own sakes', that is, loving them because one enjoys them (*fruti*) and so finds one's happiness in them. Our aim in life is not to allow ourselves to be distracted by things that should only be used, but instead to reach for what really can be enjoyed (DDC, iv 7-8). As for what is to be used and enjoyed, Augustine's answer is that we should not give our hearts to what is below us, the temporal and physical things we need in this life, but should use them in the light of the life and world to come, so that we may cleave to what is above us, that is, to God in whom alone lies our true happiness (DT, IX 13, XII 21; DDC, v 10, viii 8, xxii 39). What, then, of what is equal to us, ourselves and our fellow men? Are we to enjoy or use us and them, or perhaps both? We have been commanded to love one another, but is this on the other's own account or for some other reason? That is, respectively, should we enjoy or use each other? And at this point Augustine proposes a third possibility, namely, loving oneself and thus other 'in God' or 'on account of God', so as to bring ourselves and them whole-heartedly to love God (DDC, I xxii 20 - xiii 22). Hence to love another person is either to enjoy him, to make him one's goal and to rest one's happiness upon him, or to use him to

attain our true goal of enjoying God, the supreme and unchangeable good by encouraging him so to use himself (DDC, I xxxiii 37 - xxxiv 38). Is this an adequate account of *caritas*? It is hardly a love of the other for the unique value that he is and can more fully become, but rather for him as just another person, one neighbour among others and not the love that Augustine obviously had for his mother, son and friends. *Caritas*, self-devotion, self-giving and cherishing of the other cannot be accommodated within Augustine's scheme of *appetitus*, use and enjoyment, except by subordinating them to one's own and the other person's attainments of happiness, just as the real wickedness of mankind in malice towards each other cannot be assimilated to merely seeking happiness in the wrong things. In fact one great form of wickedness, as the modern age especially has shown, consists in the perversion of self-devotion when evil causes are its object. The Nazis, Communists and others would not have murdered millions had they all been self-serving opportunists, timer-servers, or cowards. *Pessimum optimi corruptio*: the worst is the corruption of the best. By omitting the best, Augustine has not been able to name the worst.

In summary, Augustine, although holding that creation is good and that man is love, yet could not wholly free himself from the egocentric eudaimonism of much of Greek ethics and the element of world-flight instead of world-redemption in Neo-Platonism, and so, despite his own experience, neglected the evil that is causing or enacting evil and other evils that are not directly the lack of good, especially in the personal sphere.

### Notes

1. References will be given in the text using the following abbreviations:

C = *Confessions*

CF = *Contra Faustus*

DBV = *De Beata Vitae (On the Happy Life)*

DCD = *De Civitate Dei (The City of God)*

DCD = *De Doctrina Christiana (Of Christian Teaching)*

DLA = *De Libero Arbitrio (On Free Will)*

DNB = *De Natura Boni (Of the Nature of the Good)*

DT = *De Trinitate*

DVR = *De Vera Religione (Of True Religion)*

E = *Enchiridion*

S = Sermons

TEJP = *Tractatus in Epistolam Joannis ad Parthos*

followed, as appropriate, by the number of the book in Roman upper case, of the chapter in Roman lower case, and of the paragraph in Arabic numerals.

2. For more on these themes see: G.R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982; Hannah Arendt, *Love and St Augustine*, eds J.V. Scot and J.C. Stark, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996; C. Matthews, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

3. This lingering suspicion of physical existence as such may also have reinforced Augustine's belief that evil distorts our mental capacities in the specific form of making us able to think only in terms of bodily images, and thus unable properly to conceive of any non-physical objects, especially God. See Evans, *op. cit.*, Ch. III, §§ 2-3.

4. This is based on the Aristotelian cosmology of a system of crystalline spheres encasing the earth, in which those beyond that of the air are not subject to change.

5. *op. cit.* p. 3. C. Matthews (*op. cit.*) interprets Augustine's characterisation of evil as a privation as meaning that it is nothing, a 'no thing'. But that would mean that moral evil would be the willing of either nothing and thus not willing at all or of nothingness, i.e. nihilism, total destruction. That moral evil is the willing of deprivation and destruction, *inter alia*, does not mean that what is willed is not something determinate, such as the theft of this person's money or the destruction of that person's business, and that the desire for it, the intention to bring it about and the doing of it are not real acts and actions.

6 See further, Evans, *op.cit.* pp. 36ff.



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