

AUGUSTINE ON SUFFERING AND ORDER:
PUNISHMENT IN CONTEXT

BY

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Abstract

Augustine of Hippo argues that all suffering is the result of the punishment of sin. Misinterpretations of his meaning are common since isolated statements taken from his works do give misleading and contradictory impressions. This dissertation assembles a comprehensive account of Augustine's understanding of the causes of suffering to show that these views are substantive and internally consistent. The argument of the dissertation proceeds by confronting and resolving the apparent problems with Augustine's views on sin and punishment from within the broader framework of his anthropology and metaphysics. The chief difficulty is that Augustine gives two apparently irreconcilable accounts of suffering as punishment. In the first, suffering is viewed as self-inflicted because sin is inherently self-damaging. In the second, God inflicts suffering in response to sin. This dissertation argues that these views are united by Augustine's concern with the theme of 'order.' The first account, it argues, is actually an expression of Augustine's doctrine that evil is the privation of good; since good is for Augustine synonymous with order, we can then see why he views all affliction as the concrete experience of disorder brought about by sin. This context in turn allows us to see that, by invoking the

notion of divinely inflicted punishment in both its retributive and remedial forms, Augustine wants to show that disorder itself is embraced by order, either because disorder itself must obey laws, or because what is disordered can be reordered. In either case, Augustine's ideas of punishment may be seen as an expression of his conviction that order in the universe is unassailable. It is hoped that these observations contribute to a greater appreciation not only of Augustine's theory of punishment, but also of the extent to which the theme of order is fundamental to his thought.

In memory of George Snell.

requiescat in pace

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Abbreviations

(as in Fitzgerald 1999)

<i>b. vita</i>	<i>De beata vita</i>
<i>cat. rud.</i>	<i>De catechizandis rudibus</i>
<i>civ. Dei</i>	<i>De civitate Dei</i>
<i>conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i>
<i>corrept.</i>	<i>De correptione et gratia</i>
<i>dial.</i>	<i>De dialectica</i>
<i>div. qu.</i>	<i>De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus</i>
<i>doc. Chr.</i>	<i>De doctrina Christiana</i>
<i>duab. an.</i>	<i>De duabus animabus</i>
<i>en. Ps.</i>	<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i>
<i>ench.</i>	<i>Enchiridion (ad Laurentium) de fide spe at caritate</i>
<i>ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
<i>ep. Jo.</i>	<i>In epistulam Joannis (ad Parthos) tractatus</i>
<i>c. ep. Man.</i>	<i>Contra epistulam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti</i>
<i>ex. Gal.</i>	<i>Expositio Epistulae ad Galatas</i>
<i>f. et symb.</i>	<i>De fide et symbolo</i>
<i>c. Faust.</i>	<i>Contra Faustum Manicheum</i>
<i>c. Fort.</i>	<i>Acta contra Fortunatum Manicheum</i>
<i>gest. Pel.</i>	<i>De gestis Pelagii</i>

<i>Gn. litt.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram</i>
<i>Gn. litt. imp.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber</i>
<i>Gn. adv. Man.</i>	<i>De Genesi adversos Manicheos</i>
<i>Jo. ev. tr.</i>	<i>In Johannis evangelium tractatus</i>
<i>c. Jul.</i>	<i>Contra Julianum</i>
<i>c. Jul. imp.</i>	<i>Contra Julianum opus imperfectum</i>
<i>lib. arb.</i>	<i>De libero arbitrio</i>
<i>mag.</i>	<i>De magistro</i>
<i>mor.</i>	<i>De moribus ecclesiae catholicae at de moribus Manichaeorum</i>
<i>mus.</i>	<i>De musica</i>
<i>nat. b.</i>	<i>De natura boni</i>
<i>nat. et gr.</i>	<i>De natura et gratia</i>
<i>ord.</i>	<i>De ordine</i>
<i>pecc. mer.</i>	<i>De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum</i>
<i>perf. just.</i>	<i>De perfectione justitiae hominis</i>
<i>pers.</i>	<i>De dono perseverantiae</i>
<i>quant.</i>	<i>De animae quantitate</i>
<i>retr.</i>	<i>Retractationes</i>
<i>s.</i>	<i>Sermones</i>
<i>s. Dom. mon.</i>	<i>De sermone Domini in monte</i>
<i>Simpl.</i>	<i>Ad Simplicianum</i>

sol.

Soliloquia

spir. et litt.

De spiritu et littera

Trin.

De Trinitate

util. jejun.

De utilitate jejunii

vera rel.

De vera religione

Preface

In *The Augustinian Revolution in Theology*, Thomas Allin writes that Saint Augustine of Hippo “is *par excellence* a penologist” (1911, 129).¹ This statement is not meant as a compliment. The target of Allin’s criticism is Augustine’s conviction that all suffering has its origin in the sin of the sufferer; all suffering is essentially *punishment*.² Allin contends that this view is itself evil (24-25) and in this he is not original. Versions of his objection were known to Augustine in his own time and are echoed today. Critics have argued against Augustine’s view on the grounds that it is repugnant (it is a cruel attempt to “blame the victim”); that it is unchristian (a punitive God is not the God of Christianity); or that it is patently untrue (suffering all too obviously bears no correlation to the merits or misdeeds of individuals).³ What they hardly ever ask, however, is what exactly Augustine means by it.

This is on one level not surprising. The idea that those who suffer must have brought that suffering on themselves has an ancient and universal lineage.⁴ For this reason it is perhaps too easy to assume we know what Augustine means when he says that all suffering is a punishment: as the story from Genesis goes, human beings sin and God punishes them (Gn 3). And yet Augustine has much more to say than just this (as indeed, in his view, does scripture): so much more, in fact, that one would expect scholars to engage in some systematic discussion of it. To

¹Allin penned his condemnation of Augustine’s influence on Western theology almost 100 years ago; but since he expresses himself with a useful forthrightness and as his views are by no means passé, I have used his comments to represent a fairly common view that Augustine is obsessed with sin and punishment in a myopic and simplistic way (see note 3).

²Allin and many critics who share similar views (see note 3) tend to target a composite of views for which Augustine, largely through such criticism, has become notorious. This composite includes original sin, the damnation of children who die unbaptised, and predestination. However, it becomes clear that the underlying claim rejected by critics is his view that those who suffer (which suffering includes damnation) have brought their suffering on themselves through sin. In other words, unlike Augustine they believe there is *innocent suffering*. Allin himself identifies this root criticism when he characterizes Augustine as a “penologist.” For a similar view see Kirwan 1989, 76-77.

³A critic of Augustine’s own time was Julian of Eclanum who believed Augustine depicted God as a monster (*c. Jul. imp.* 1.48). For modern versions particularly of the first view see, for example, Solomon (1999, 125-6); of the second view, Kirwan (1989, 77), Burnaby (1938, 204-206), and Pagels (1988, chaps. 5-6); and of the third view, Schilling (1977, 94) and Burnaby (1938, 206). The tenor of both Allin’s (1911) and N.P. Williams’ (1929) books is that many of Augustine’s most distinctive views are unchristian. More recently Gerald Bonner has commented on Augustine’s “brutality,” although it is not clear whether he does so as a devil’s advocate (2007, 13-19).

⁴For an overview of this idea as found in the Judeo-Christian tradition see Schilling 1977, 119-145.

see the complexity of his view (or views), we need only sample a few of his claims on the topic: sin is directly harmful to the physical body; the punishment of sin includes a tendency to sin more; suffering follows sin because sin is inherently self-damaging; suffering is the result of divine punishment; God is not – and cannot be – responsible for the damage caused by sin; the purpose of the punishment of sin is wholly accomplished by our suffering, even though we gain no personal benefit from it; by our suffering God means ultimately to heal us of our suffering.

Some of these claims seem clearly contradictory (those, for example, concerning the role and purpose of God in suffering); others are merely outrageous (those that suggest that sin has a physically detrimental effect, or that punishment results in increased behaviour of the sort that is being punished). Perhaps because of these problems, the critical response is almost never to try to reconcile these claims; that is, to try to discover how, why, or even if they are related *for Augustine*. Nonetheless, a very few commentators – we will look at the remarks of two of them in the next chapter – do advert to the contradictions and difficulties among Augustine’s claims on suffering as punishment. But they seem to assume that these claims are either underdeveloped or unintelligible. As many of these views also strike them as distasteful, they accuse Augustine of failing to be consistent with himself, especially with his better self.

In this dissertation I am concerned with questions prior to those of palatability, or even to the theodicy so important both to Augustine and to his critics.⁵ Instead I try to answer the following questions: What *is* Augustine’s account – his entire account – of the connection between sin and suffering? Is this account self-consistent? My answer to the latter is yes. I will therefore answer the first question by way of arguing that Augustine does have a unified, substantive and well-developed view of the way suffering is related to sin by means of punishment.

The difficulty in doing so is that Augustine does not present his view to its greatest advantage. As is so often the case with many other Augustinian themes, he never devotes a treatise to it (called, say, “The punishment of sin through suffering”). Rather, his various claims

⁵I use the term theodicy loosely here to refer to Augustine’s argument that God is not and cannot be the origin of evil. A number of scholars have asserted that, properly speaking, Augustine is not primarily occupied with theodicy in the eighteenth century sense of an attempt to prove the goodness of God in the face of earthly evils or to justify God’s ways towards his creatures (R. Williams 2000, 105; Mathewes, 2001, 214; Tilley 1991, 113-140). I tend to agree, as Chapter 2 will show.

emerge in the course of his arguments on other related points. When constructing (or reconstructing) his whole view, therefore, context is everything. To assemble that context begins with recognizing that for Augustine punishment functions as an *explanation*. It is meant to account for the way human life is lived now, in contrast to the universal sense that it ought to be much different. Ironically, Allin himself correctly discerns this motivation, and even echos the medical language for it which is so characteristic of Augustine. But Allin's distaste is only increased thereby: "The best our greatest doctor [Augustine] has to offer is hardly more than a lesson in morbid anatomy" (175); "his theology is really a pathology...The diseases of sin interest him more than the remedy" (129). N.P. Williams makes much the same point when he accuses Augustine of a merely "forensic" interest in the human condition (1929, 330). The implication here is that Augustine is *merely* a pathologist; but in fact there is no "mere" practice of pathology. Granted, pathology deals with an analysis of something grim. However, the analysis only makes sense in the context of the health that has been destroyed by the morbid condition. Ultimately the pathologist wants to explain what happened precisely in the interests of health.

Augustine's explanation for the "disease" of suffering can, likewise, only be adequately appreciated in the context of a much larger and more fundamental set of relationships which sin disarranges. In fact, his views on punishment reveal the supreme interest he has in relationships in general – in the orientation and interaction of things to, and with, other things. Augustine thinks that most things cannot be understood properly without seeing how they are related to other things; he refers to this relatedness as *order*, and it will be a major piece of the context which sheds light on his views on suffering and punishment. "The most distinctive feature of Augustine's thought," says one commentator, is his "capacity for making connections" (Evans 1982, viii). We must be prepared to look for those connections.

This dissertation is therefore not primarily concerned with giving an exhaustive account of a single Augustinian theme, but rather with exploring relationships between Augustine's ideas, many of which are all too often discussed in isolation. These will include not only his views dealing explicitly with sin and its punishment, but also with more basic claims about metaphysics and psychology. To conduct this kind of investigation necessarily involves

gathering together claims from a broad selection of Augustine's works, and to argue in favour of a hidden unity among those claims is always risky, especially in the case of a thinker known for his evolving ideas.⁶ As Peter Brown warns, Augustine in particular is a thinker "of mysterious discontinuities. It is one thing to see a man's thought as a whole; and quite another to make it seem consistent" (Brown 1972, 263). All the same, to see that thought as a whole sometimes has the effect of revealing the consistency that is in fact there. And while it is an injustice to force a set of ideas into an artificial "system," it is equally an injustice to ignore what unity is evident.

Brown also rightly observes that Augustine's thought is "marked by an...attempt to embrace and resolve tensions" (1972, 260), and that he generally refuses to solve problems "simply by removing one of the poles of tension" (1967, 176). Two such poles will feature prominently in this dissertation. Augustine appears to trace suffering back to two very different types of punishment, one self-inflicted, and the other divinely inflicted. So basic is this dichotomy – or what appears to us as one – that I have structured my argument around it. Just as Brown's observation predicts, Augustine refuses to relinquish either of these explanations; the way they come together, I argue, reveals an Augustine who is seldom appreciated, whose ideas about punishment are not simplistic and unreflective, but are on the contrary multifaceted and interesting.

A note on "original sin"

"Original sin" (*peccatum originale*) is for Augustine a complex of ideas with several distinct strands, some of which are best set aside in this study. In particular, I will not be addressing one of Augustine's most notorious views, that the condition of original sin is passed

⁶ In general, I take myself to be addressing the "mature" Augustine, by which I mean the Augustine of the *Confessiones* and *Ad Simplicianum* and subsequent works; that is, the Augustine who has elucidated his new apprehension of the way grace works. All the same, I also believe that certain aspects of Augustine's thought (including the fundamentals of his metaphysics) remain remarkably stable across the body of his work and I will therefore draw on his early works as well in so far as the views therein are retained. Thus, the perennial problem in the study of Augustine – that Augustine's thought is changing and developing as he writes – is not the key to the problems I am dealing with, and I will only refer to problems of development as they arise. Note that C. Harrison (2006) argues that many fundamentals of Augustine's philosophy – including the pillars of his metaphysics, the distinction between Creator and creation, the dependence of the latter on the former, and creation *ex nihilo* – remain relatively stable across the body of his work and are found in his early works in "mature" form (cf. Brown 2000, 490). For one of the best summaries of the difficulties involved in writing and thinking about Augustine, see Rist's chapter "Approaching Augustine" in his *Augustine* (1994, 1 ff.). See also Lawless 1993.

from parent to offspring (and that Adam's sin is somehow everybody's sin). The question of how sinfulness is inherited is not in itself one of the things that punishment is invoked to explain; it is a question not of how sin is related to its consequences, but of how human beings are related to one another. This dissertation deals with the former and not with the latter. It is possible, due to the tenor of Augustine's own discussions, to consider the mechanics of the consequences of sin in isolation from the question of how these consequences are passed on to offspring. Even if Adam and Eve had never produced corrupted offspring, that is, we would still be left with the question of *how* a single human being – an Adam – went from an ideal condition of perfect sinlessness and happiness to a condition of wretchedness through the punishment of his own sin. Following Augustine himself, therefore, I will occasionally couch the discussion in terms of the situation of the concrete historical Adam, but more often in terms of the more abstract situation of human nature. To avoid tainting the problems I will address with the separate problem of inheritability, I will use the word “fallenness” rather than “original sin” to denote Adam's (or the human being's) condition after the fall.

There is, however, one aspect of Augustine's doctrine of original sin which is so essential to the following discussion that it must be cemented in place first. As counterintuitive as it may seem, it is original sin that allows Augustine to acknowledge, even insist, that in the present human condition, suffering indeed makes no distinction among people based on their relative virtue: there is (now) no one-on-one correlation between evil deeds and torments.⁷ “The everyday gifts of God, as also the disasters of humanity, happen to those with good lives and those with evil lives, without distinction (*civ. Dei* 2.2); “temporal goods and temporal evils...befall good and bad alike” (1.8; cf. *Gn. litt.* 5.22.43). Indeed, as we will see, in Augustine's view the randomness of suffering is itself a consequence of sin and a cause of more suffering.

How can Augustine assert *both* that the vulnerability to suffering originates in the wrongdoing of the sufferer, and that specific instances of suffering are indiscriminate? The answer is

⁷Cavadini (2000, 231-232) makes the point I outline here when he refers to Augustine in order to correct what he takes to be Batnitsky's misrepresentation of the Christian view of suffering as exactly a one-on-one correspondence between *a* sin and *a* particular instance of suffering (cf. Hick 1966, 173). See also Mann 2001, 47: “original sin...is not an event but rather a condition.”

that for him fallenness is a general *condition* into which the first sin casts the sinner (historically identified as Adam). This sin is such a catastrophic event that it permanently changes the way the sinner normally functions. Sins committed from within the clutches of this condition are somehow themselves only the results or echos of that sin, just as the universal suffering of unhappiness in all its variety (including physical suffering) is also its legacy. Augustine is not, in other words, suggesting that every instance of suffering a person now experiences is grounded in its own discrete sin, or that a person falls anew each time he sins; rather, the fallen condition is rooted in the very first instance of human sin.

At least that is his claim. To put it to the test we begin where he does: with the problem – or multitude of problems – that face humanity. In the introduction which follows, I first outline Augustine's *explananda*; next the problems with his *explanans*; and, finally, the structure of my argument that will seek both to resolve and unify them.

Introduction

Augustine's Problem: Suffering as Punishment

There is something wrong with the world, or at least with human beings. For Augustine, this is the starting point of philosophy. One of his earliest treatises, the philosophical dialogue *De ordine*, begins with the observation that the world often looks more like something run by “an administration of slaves” than by God himself (1.1.1). Much later in *De civitate Dei* he introduces a commendation of philosophy by asking if anyone “is competent, however the torrential flow of his eloquence, to unfold all the miseries of this life.” He then undertakes to do so, famously offering several catalogues of the evils human beings both suffer and do, from the afflictions “that assault...the physical frame” (14.4), “so many that all the books of the physicians cannot contain them” (22.22), to the trials of “crazy people [who] say and do many incongruous things...contrary to their good intentions and characters” (14.4); from the way “men are plundered by their fellow men and taken captive...are chained and imprisoned, exiled and tortured,” to equally terrifying impersonal assaults of a capricious nature. And then there are the numerous sins of human beings: “treacheries, hatred,...deceits, fraud, theft,...cruelty ...lust...adultery, incest”; and finally the sheer anxiety these evils – or even the thought of them – produce daily in those who confront them. All these horrors combine to make “this present life of ours, if a state of such misery can be called a life...a kind of hell on earth” (22.22).

In the face of these dark descriptions of the human condition, Augustine holds up philosophy, or at least the “the true philosophy,” Christianity,” as “the sole defence against the miseries of human life” (*civ. Dei* 22.23; cf. *vera rel.* 1.1-6.10). In calling Christianity the only true philosophy, Augustine is not rejecting the basis of all other competing philosophies of his time, whether Platonic, Stoic, Epicurean, Sceptic, or even Manichean.¹ All agree – correctly in his view – that the promise of philosophy is the attainment of happiness (*civ. Dei* 19.1; *Trin.* 8.2.6); and all agree that human beings are universally unhappy – especially when the proper philosophical notions of what constitutes true happiness are taken into account. Indeed the

¹Augustine's idea of what counts as a philosophy is broad since for him it is any system of thought which aspires to wisdom and thereby to happiness (*civ. Dei* 19.1; see Teske 2008, 3-25). This is why as a young man he felt he could obey Cicero's exhortation to the pursuit of wisdom in the *Hortensius* by becoming a Manichean (*conf.* 3.4.7-3.6.10).

philosophers all argue that mistaken notions about what will really make people happy contributes to their unhappiness (*civ. Dei* 19.4; *Trin.* 8.3.10). Philosophers even agree broadly on the root cause of this pervasive misery: human beings bring their lamentable condition upon themselves through vice.²

Here is Augustine's own version of the thesis that vice is the explanation for the world's ills:

In the beginning man's nature was created without any fault and without any sin; however this human nature in which we are all born from Adam now requires a physician [*medico*] because it is not healthy [*sana non est*]. Indeed, all the good qualities which it has in its organization, life, senses, and understanding, it possesses from the most high God, its creator and shaper. On the other hand, the defect [*vitium*] which darkens and weakens all those natural goods so that there is need for illumination and healing, is not derived from its blameless maker but from that original sin that was committed through free will. Consequently, that criminal nature draws upon itself the most righteous punishment. (*nat. et gr.* 3.3)

In this passage Augustine encapsulates the fundamentals of his (and what he takes to be orthodox Christianity's) explanation for the evils of the human condition. Influenced by scriptural accounts of the expulsion from Eden and Adam's curse³, it asserts that there was a time when life was not filled with affliction and trouble as it is now. But the first sin caused a "fall" from this ideal condition into one of permanent damage: "The effect of that sin was to subject human nature to all the process of decay which we see and feel, and consequently to death too" (*civ. Dei* 14.13 cf. *civ. Dei* 22.22). And the connection between the sin and its dire effects is *punishment (poena)*. "Such great misery would never be imposed upon human nature, if in two human beings our whole nature were not driven from paradise into this unhappy state

²An exception from Augustine's own experience is the Manichean sect who believed that when they sin, human beings are being assaulted through no fault of their own by evil forces – the Devil quite literally makes them do it. We will examine the profound influence of this view on Augustine's alternative to it in the next chapter. He regards the Manicheans as greatly self-deluded in this respect. Even the pagan Cicero, Augustine points out to the Pelagian, Julian, quotes Aristotle in order to maintain that the present human condition is such that we have no alternative but to suppose that it is a punishment (*c. Jul.* 4.78, 83). Also see Brown (1967, 388): "The idea that some great sin lay behind the misery of the human condition was shared by pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity."

³e.g. Genesis 3, Romans 7: 9. Given the size of Augustine's body of work, Augustinian accounts of the historical event of the fall are surprisingly few, although see *Gn. litt.* 9.30.38; *Gn. adv. Man.* 2.16.24-2.23.35; *civ. Dei.* 8.13. Augustine seems to prefer to speak in terms of the fall of humanity (of human nature or the human race) rather than of an individual named Adam. This bias will be reflected in this dissertation. See Rigby 1999, 607 for an overview of biblical texts important to Augustine's conception of the story of the Fall.

by the merit of sin” (*c. Jul. imp.* 1.25); “The reason for these evils must be ...the punishment for the first and ancient sin” (*c. Jul.* 4.83; cf. *lib. arb.* 3.18; *civ. Dei* 21.15).

As expressed here, Augustine’s explanation for suffering seems relatively straightforward. Human beings sin and they are punished for it, presumably by God. But as all but a cursory reading of even one of Augustine’s major works reveals, his full explanation is very much more complicated than this. He appears to have not one but two conceptions of how suffering is a punishment for sin; and these explanations are rendered even more problematic by what Augustine asserts they are supposed to explain. So before we outline the problems with Augustine’s explanations of how human nature has become “unhealthy” through punishment, we need to explore in greater detail what Augustine is trying to account for. In a sense, of course, we have already identified the *explananda*: human life is rife with evils of various sorts. But Augustine rarely presents these ills in the purely phenomenological fashion in which they appear in *De civitate Dei*, as a list of what human beings generally consider lamentable about their lot. Rather, most often when he describes this condition he has already done a fair amount of analysis if not diagnosis, delving beneath the surface distresses of human life to expose their common characteristics and significant features.

It is Augustine’s digested account of the human condition – what I will hereafter occasionally refer to as the “symptoms” of fallenness (in deference to the medical model which will be so important to Augustine) – that will complicate Augustine’s explanation for it even more.

The symptoms: Varieties of suffering

One of the most striking features of Augustine’s reflections on the trials endemic to the human condition is his emphasis not only on sin, but perhaps even more fundamentally, on suffering. In ordinary English, “suffering” connotes more than an unpleasant experience; it also connotes a measure of helplessness. Suffering happens to the sufferer against his will – though this connotation is generally so well assumed that it hardly needs saying. For Augustine, however, the fact that human beings are the *patients* (to use an English word more closely related to the Latin *patior*) of unpleasantness is one of the most distressing aspects of suffering.

The themes of fear, anxiety and dread occur frequently throughout his works,⁴ coupled inevitably with the idea that human beings cannot “escape being tossed about at the mercy of chance and accident” (*civ. Dei* 19.4). His earliest extant work, *De beata vita*, opens with a comparison of humanity’s course through mortal life to a perilous journey on storm tossed seas, buffeted by capricious winds, threatened by unseen rocks (1.1-3; cf. *Trin.* 4.4.20). Much later, in his lists of the evils of human life in *De civitate Dei* (19. 4, 22.22), what stands out is the sense in which these evils occur at random; and, even if they are not random (as in the case of old age, for example), certainly they are nevertheless things that happen *to* a person, which come upon him unbidden and unwanted. From physical disease to madness, from broken limbs to failed crops, from robbery and deceit to murder and theft, “fears of disaster and actual disaster” (22.22) press in on every human being so that in “this life there is nothing solid and stable which may remain in our possession” (20.3). Peter Brown captures this quality well when he describes the connotations of Augustine’s “*saeculum*,” the world as human beings experience it:

For Augustine, this *saeculum* is a profoundly sinister thing...marked by the extremes of misery and suffering...It is also marked by a disquieting inanity. Like a top set off balance, it wobbles up and down without rhyme or reason. Huge states can just happen, ‘like a passing mist’; a gang of slaves almost overturns the Roman Republic at its height; elderly bishops, vowed to poverty, are tortured by their conquerors for buried treasures they have no part in. (Brown 1972, 37)

What we suffer derives at least part of its unpleasantness from the fact that it is out of our control. Despite the randomness of suffering, however, Augustine paradoxically finds its locus in the very human beings afflicted by it – not, that is, in the world in which they live, or even within society or political organizations, but in the very individuals who make up societies.⁵

⁴ See for example, *sol.* 2.9.16, *b. vita* 1.2, *lib. arb.* 1.11; *civ. Dei* 22.22, *Trin.* 8.3.10, but also as a general theme throughout the works which deal with happiness, since fear is incompatible with happiness (see Chapter 3).

⁵ Although he finds them suggestive and subjects them to penetrating analysis, in Augustine’s view the cruelty, betrayal, and general strife between human beings is itself a symptom of the damage inherent in each individual person. His most incisive comment on human relationships is that they are almost invariably characterized by *libido dominandi*, (*civ. Dei* 14.15-16; 1.0; 15.4;) the desire to have “power over other souls,” (*mus.* 6.41) to make other people do (and be) what we want. But this is neither an indictment of social organization nor, especially, of hierarchically organized relationships (which, as we will see, Augustine regards as predating the fall and so not evil in themselves; see Markus (1970, 95); Rist (1994, 203-255); and Chapter 2 of this dissertation). To those who complain about politics or social problems making for bad times, he responds “Actually we are the times...as we are, such are the times” (*s.* 130.8 as cited in Lawless 1993, 20). My emphasis in this dissertation, then, will tend to be on the effect of sin on the individual. For how affected individuals interact see Deane (1963, 39-77), Rist (1994, 223ff.), and

(continued...)

Suffering happens to human beings against their will because human beings act, in some sense, against their own will. Human nature is at “war with itself [*pugnat secum*]” (*civ. Dei* 21.15), able only to be “troublesome [*molesti*]” to itself (*civ. Dei* 14.15).

The characteristic way Augustine describes the fallen human being’s relationship to himself is that it is marked by “disobedience” (*inoboedientia*). Augustine thereby subtly shifts the emphasis in suffering from humanity’s passivity to its impotence:

A person’s wretchedness is nothing but his own disobedience to himself, so that...he now wills to do what he cannot....For who can list all the multitude of things that a person wishes to do and cannot, while he is disobedient to himself, that is, while his very mind and even his lower element, his flesh, do not submit to his will? Even against his own volition his mind is often troubled; and his flesh experiences pain, grows old, and dies, and endures all manner of suffering. We should not endure all this against our will if our nature were in every way and in every part obedient to our will. (*civ. Dei* 14.15)

As this passage suggests, we can conveniently categorize Augustine’s specific observations of the human being’s “war” with himself into two groups. The empirically discernable “disobedience” of the human being to himself occurs in the context of two disarranged *relationships* a person has to himself. One is with his own body. The other is with his own soul, specifically with his will, or capacity to want.⁶

Augustine thinks that the former impresses itself on us with greater force because the body feels more alien to us than does the soul or mind⁷; and this feeling of alienation itself causes distress. It is as though the body were both an intimate part of us and yet also part of the physical world we cannot control, “acting as it were by laws of [its] own without reference to the law of our will” (*civ. Dei* 1.25). We command the body to move and it obeys; “mind gives orders for the hand to move and so easy is it that command can scarcely be distinguished from execution” (*conf.* 8.9.21 cf. *Gn. litt.* 8.18.37); we direct its senses so that we can perceive the world around us (*lib. arb.* 2.7; *Trin.* 6.2.2; *ep.* 166.2.4). Yet the body’s disobedience is hard to

⁵(...continued)
Markus (1970, xiii-xx).

⁶We will be looking at Augustine’s “will” in more detail in Chapter 3. Here, I refer (as I think he is referring) to a commonsensical notion of the general capacity to want or desire.

⁷For our purposes soul and mind can be used interchangeably, as they tend to be by Augustine himself (Teske 1999, 807; O’Daly 1987, 7-8; Clark 2001, 97; Burnell 2005, 194).

ignore. Its seemingly independent “movements” are too often painful, humiliating or mysterious from the point of view of the soul that in other ways can exercise such seamless control over the body to which it is tied (*civ. Dei* 14.19).

First, there are the “evils that arise from the body as diseases....And in many of those...the treatment and the medicines are themselves instruments of torture” (*civ. Dei* 22.22); and there is the inescapable degeneration of old age. But Augustine is even more interested in a particularly intimate and insidious way in which the body escapes our control: it bombards us with its reactions – many of which are unwelcome and morally inappropriate – to stimuli which promise physical pleasure. Although Augustine freely acknowledges that physical appetites such as thirst and hunger are necessary for sustaining life, many of them are experienced to degrees far beyond this requirement. There is “pleasure needed to refresh the body” and then there is the appetitive lust connected with physical pleasures which “will not permit us to find the measure of necessity and the limit for procuring health, but conceals them and passes them by, drawing us to whatever delectable things may be present; so that we think what is enough is not enough” (*c. Jul.* 4.14.67-70; cf. 5.5.22). The sexual impulse in particular is grossly out of proportion both to its reproductive purpose and to rationality itself, always ready to intrude unbidden and often unwanted, experienced as a movement of the body (particularly the male body) utterly independent from the will (*civ. Dei* 14.15, 19, 23; cf. *c. Jul.* 4.5.35; *Gn. litt.* 11.32. 42). Augustine wryly observes that while other bodily appetites such as hunger, thirst, or the desire for sleep can, if ignored, lead to death, no one ever died from failing to satisfy his sexual desires – although one would not know this by the way some human beings conduct themselves (*c. Jul.* 5.5.22).

All these instances of the disobedience of the body, however, are merely harbingers of its ultimate treason. Over the physical body hangs the inevitable sentence of death, a “lethal disease” (*Gn. litt.* 9.10.17): “we bring with us at our birth the beginning of our death...our body is the scene of death’s assault.” (*civ. Dei* 13.13). Nothing is more distressing than the fear of death (*sol.* 2.9.16; *mor.* 1.22.40; *pecc. mer.* 2.33.53-2.34-54; *lib. arb.* 3.10) which represents the frustration of our most basic desire, to live. This fact of death is alone enough to make true happiness impossible in this mortal life. “No man lives as he wishes unless he is happy...In our

present state, what human being can live the life he wishes, when the actual living is not in his control? He wishes to live; he is compelled to die” (*civ. Dei* 14.25).

That the body is so recalcitrant with respect to the will – even to the point of its own demise – leads the Apostle Paul, as Augustine notes, to trace a dichotomy between “flesh and spirit” (*Gal* 5:17 in *civ. Dei* 14.2-3). But Augustine insists that it is far too simplistic to equate Paul’s idea of “flesh” simply with the physical body. Despite all the trouble and pain the body seems to cause, Augustine insists that the body itself cannot be the source of all human trouble.⁸ Augustine’s full reasoning on this point includes his idea of the inherent goodness of the body, and thus his metaphysics, which we will discuss in Chapter 2. But on a more intuitive level, he thinks it relatively clear that the body itself cannot ultimately be blamed for its own seeming disobedience. For one thing, on its own the body is simply passive matter. But more importantly, the bodily appetites in particular reveal that much of the difficulty the body gives us is mysteriously tied up with the soul, or more specifically with its desires – so much so that Paul’s “flesh” ought to be identified with the trouble the soul, or at least its desires, gives itself. Sins of lust, of overindulgence in bodily appetites – “works of the flesh” (*Gal.* 5:19-21) – are, in reality, “faults of the mind” (14.2), even when some “corruption of the flesh [here, meaning the body] results in some incitement to wrongdoing” (14.3).⁹

There is, then, something profoundly disturbed about human *desire*; it so often is *libido*, lust¹⁰ (*civ. Dei* 14.15, *lib. arb.* 1.3), an “*inordinate* desire,”¹¹ “a desire that [has] somehow got out of control” (Brown 1972, 36). But it is not as though we do not know that there is something wrong. And here lies the point of stress which interests Augustine the most: the tug of war between what we know on some level we should do – what is good – and what we would on another level rather do instead. This is the anguish Paul writes about in Romans when he says “I do not understand my actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate....I can

⁸As the Manicheans, and to some extent the Platonists, argue it is (*civ. Dei* 14.2-3).

⁹Fredriksen says that “for Augustine ‘spirit’ and ‘flesh’ are primarily moral categories” (1988, 111); she also claims that he distinguishes between the physical *caro*, and the quality of soul, *qualitas carnalis*. Only the latter is associated with sin (91).

¹⁰Augustine occasionally uses the word *cupiditas* in place of *libido*. Unlike *libido*, which always has a negative connotation, however, he also at times uses *cupiditas* to refer to desire in a neutral sense (T. Williams 1993: 5n6).

¹¹As translated by T. Williams (1993, 5).

want what is right, but the evil I do not want, is what I do” (Rom 7:15-19; see *Simpl.* 1.1.11; *Gn. litt.* 9.10.16; *c. Jul.* 3.13.27; *conf.* 8.10.22).

In all of Augustine’s variations on this Pauline theme, the most important of which we will shortly examine, it is important to recognize that for Augustine *sin itself* – or rather the desire to sin – has become for fallen human beings a kind of suffering too. In his view we require no specialized understanding of sin (of the kind he provides and which we will look at in Chapter 4) for us to know that we are mysteriously compelled to do it, even against our better inclinations. The temptation to sin is experienced as something that happens *to* a person, apart from his desire to do the good. When Paul tries to obey the law, the revealed prescription for good actions, he confronts “another law at war with my mind, making me captive to the law of sin” (Rom 7: 21).¹² This was a favourite text of the Manicheans, and as Augustine tells us in the *Confessiones*, his early adherence to the Manichean doctrine that human sin is caused by a alien evil nature attacking the essentially innocent divine nature in the human being, was due in part to his feeling that “what I did against my will was something done *to* me, rather than something I actually did” (*conf.* 33.3).

Augustine’s commentators have attempted to capture this idea – the experience that we sin while not wanting to – with a phrase Augustine himself does not use: such wrong-doing is “involuntary sin.”¹³ The phrase is misleading. As Augustine insists, despite our feeling that we are doing what on one level we do *not* want to do, on another level we would not do it *unless* we wanted to, for the wanting leads to the doing (*civ. Dei* 5.9-10; *spir. et litt.* 53.31).¹⁴ This type of sin, then, is not precisely involuntary, but at the same time it is certainly contrary to another set of our desires which deplore it. In the *Confessiones*, Augustine paints a compelling (and personal) picture of his earlier self as the sinner torn between his sinful desires, his better desires, and his disgust with the warfare itself: “As for me, when I deliberated on serving the Lord my God as I had long planned to do, it was I myself who wanted to and I myself who did

¹²This Pauline passage is examined in particular detail in the first Question of *Ad Simplicianum*. See also *nat. et gr.* 25.28.

¹³See Alflatt (1974, 1975). Simon Harrison’s critique and bibliography of the use of this phrase to characterize Augustine’s view of fallen psychology (2006: 24) is valuable, though variations on the phrase itself do seem to occur earlier in the literature than he suggests (e.g. see Burnaby 1938, 187).

¹⁴Also see Chapter 2 on the will.

not want to – the same I. I neither wanted it completely, nor did I refrain completely from wanting it....This devastation was against my will indeed” (*conf.* 8.10.22). The soul, observes Augustine, “finds it easier to rule the body than itself....when the soul is in opposition to itself it feels less shame only because it is conquered by itself and is thus also the victor” (*civ. Dei* 14.23).

Augustine captures the experience of compulsive sin with a variety of ideas which function for him as technical terms. He argues, for example, that our relationship to what we dimly know is required of us is characterized by a pair of disabilities: “ignorance” (*ignorantia*) and difficulty (*difficultas*) (*lib. arb.* 3.18; *pers.* 11.20). Human beings are not good “either because they do not see how they ought to be, or because they lack the power to be what they see they ought to be” – they have “lost the power even when [they] have the will.” Although these conditions are kinds of moral defects, they also induce suffering. “Because of ignorance, error warps our actions; because of difficulty, our lives are a torment and an affliction...to accept falsehoods as truths, thus erring unwillingly; to struggle against the pain of carnal bondage and not be able to refrain from acts of inordinate desire...[these] are the penalty of a condemned prisoner” (*lib. arb.* 3.18). In later works, Augustine occasionally replaces “difficulty” with “weakness,” *infirmitas*, signalling his deepening conviction that the experience of being torn between conflicting desires is symptomatic of an overall condition which manifests itself in such internal strife in specific situations. In particular circumstances, even the wisest of men find that they have to invoke virtue in order to battle vice, that in fact what we call virtue *is* precisely a battle against sinful tendencies which must be fought until death (*civ. Dei* 19.4, 27).

Underlying specific vices, then, is the condition of “concupiscence” (*concupiscentia*), which is not a sin itself, but the always present tendency to sin (*c. Jul.* 6.15.47), an undercurrent of a general “desire for sin [*desiderium peccati*]” which may be stirred up when circumstances are conducive (*perf. just.* 11.28).¹⁵ “There is not always a [bad] desire present for us to fight against,” such as when no tempting object happens to occur to our minds or be presented to ours

¹⁵For more on the scholarly discussion surrounding the relationship between *difficultas*, *infirmitas* and *concupiscentia*, as well on the development of Augustine’s thinking from *difficultas* (without its being abandoned) to *concupiscentia*, see Rist 1994 (135-138). For a good overview of the subtle variations on *concupiscentia* in Augustine’s works, see Burnell (1999, 224-227). Note that Burnaby identifies *concupiscentia* with Paul’s war between flesh and spirit (1938, 191).

senses; still, “an evil quality, even when not aroused by any temptation, may still exist in us, as timidity exists in a timid man even when he is not frightened” (*c. Jul.* 6.19.60). It is this “weakness, this disease, this lethargy” (*civ. Dei* 19.4) which accounts for the fact that human beings, who claim to value virtue so highly, mysteriously find it harder to be good than to be bad; “it is easier to do evil” (*Simpl.*1.1.11). Augustine points out the odd fact that those human qualities we extol – such as wisdom, virtue and industry – are not maintained except by constant struggle, effort and vigilance, while their opposites – folly, vice and laziness – seem to be indulged in almost by default. The path of least resistance is the least desirable; the soul somehow “sinks by its own weight” so that “if we were left to ourselves” simply to behave as we wished the world would be mired in a chaos of wickedness (*civ. Dei* 22.22).

What about people who are so depraved that they do not wrestle with the moral law, but always acquiesce without struggle to their worst impulses? Do they escape suffering? Augustine thinks not – in fact they are even more wretched than those who feel divided (*conf.* 1.13.21). “You see a man exulting in wrongdoing: his exultation itself is his own pit. Better is the unhappiness of him who suffers, than the rejoicing of him who inflicts the wrong” (*en. Ps.* 56.14). The “suffering” of those who believe themselves happy in their wickedness derives from the way they are yanked about haphazardly by their lusts and by the fact that the objects of their desire can never be made secure:

Cupidity carries out a reign of terror, buffeting the whole human soul and life with storms coming from every direction. Fear attacks from one side and desire from the other; from one side, anxiety; from the other, an empty and deceptive happiness; from one side, the agony of losing what one loved; from the other, the passion to acquire what one does not have; from one side the pain of an injury received; from the other, the burning desire to avenge it. Wherever you turn, avarice can pinch, pride swell, envy torture, apathy crush, obstinacy incite, oppression chafe, and countless other evils crowd the realm of inordinate desire [*libido*] and run riot. (*lib. arb.* 1.11)

When people in such a state claim that they are happy, it can only be a “false happiness” (*en. Ps.* 85.24).¹⁶ The miserable condition they are reduced to, scratching their various urges, is

¹⁶The idea of a false happiness is interesting. Normally, one would assume that it is impossible to be mistaken about being happy. Augustine means, I think, to point out that temporary conditions of satiety cannot be confused with the real settled condition of unassailable well-being that is true happiness (for more on the philosophical ideal of

subhuman. “That human beings become like brute beasts by the kind of lives they lead is something both screamed at us by human affairs and attested by scripture” (*Gn. litt.* 7.10.14). Not only these people, however, but all humanity is condemned by *concupiscentia* to a kind of inherent instability. No one can really know himself; no one knows what he might do tomorrow (*ep.* 130.2.4).

In summarizing all of these “symptoms”, it is necessary to mention one other feature of the fallen condition, which, while it is not precisely another symptom in itself, is an important feature of all the others: they are all irreversible and this is precisely because, again, they are out of human control. Humanity can, of course, make small ameliorations in its condition, but these do nothing to alter the painful trajectory of human life. For example, as we have already seen, we can cure some physical illnesses (though often not without causing more pain in the process); but we cannot do anything about the perpetual vulnerability of the body to degradation or to the inevitable old age and death. More contentious than the entropy afflicting the body is Augustine’s insistence that the tendency to sin is also not amenable to real self-healing. “Wherever a man falls there he must lie until he is raised up” (*vera rel.* 24.45); “we cannot pick ourselves up voluntarily as we fell voluntarily” (*lib. arb.* 2.20). Although he knows other philosophers espouse “do-it-yourself purification” (*Trin.* 4.4.20 in Hill’s lively translation), he thinks it a matter of simple observation (and especially of self-observation) that their methods ultimately do not work (*civ. Dei* 19.4; 24.25). While by exerting their willpower human beings can make minor adjustments to their besetting vices, all too often what passes as virtue is in reality an attempt to quash one vice by invoking another – the ancient Romans, for example, achieved remarkable discipline, power and influence by quelling their destructive appetites though the greatest vices, pride and the desire for glory (*civ. Dei* 5.12; 21.18). Besides this, scripture itself testifies that human beings are stuck irredeemably in the mire of their suffering and sin unless God himself interferes to pull them out of it: “by the grace of God we are saved, and not of ourselves [Eph 2:8]” (*Simpl.* 1.2.3); salvation is “not from he who wills, or he who runs, but from God who has mercy [Rom 9:16]” (*Simpl.* 1.2.21).

¹⁶(...continued)
happiness see Chapter 3).

Augustine himself has several all-encompassing ways of summing up the intractably blighted condition of humanity. One is that human beings labour under a “second nature” (*secunda natura*, *Simpl.* 1.1.11). By this he means that the fallen condition is how human beings are normally and inevitably found, and in which they will continue but for external divine intervention: “We...use ‘human nature’ in two senses. In the strict sense, we mean the nature with which human beings were created, a nature blameless in its kind. But we also mean the ‘nature’ of those of us who are born under the penalty of that sin” (*lib. arb.* 3.19; cf. *Simpl.* 1.1.11); “I say that the fault without which human nature is not born at present is called natural, yet it was not constituted so at the beginning” (*c. Jul.* 4.9.54).¹⁷ By calling the human condition a kind of pseudo nature Augustine indicates that human beings are not only not good, but “it is not in their power to be good” (*lib. arb.* 3.18; cf. *Simpl.* 1.1.11).

Another important way Augustine captures the overall inescapability of the condition of suffering humanity is by reference to medical terminology. Some of this we have already encountered: in *De natura et gratia* we read that “this human nature in which we are all born from Adam now requires a physician because it is not healthy”; and we have seen that in *De civitate Dei* Augustine likens concupiscence to a “disease” afflicting human nature. In other works, he is equally emphatic and consistent. Human nature is “wounded, hurt, damaged, lost” (*nat. et gr.* 53.62); “in our nature there is something like a wound which must be healed” (*c. Jul.* 5.16.65); “the whole human race limps because of the wound made through the free choice of two human beings” (4.16.83). The *Confessiones* in particular is full of the imagery of disease, injury and woundedness in Augustine’s descriptions of his life apart from God – and of God as his relentlessly persistent healer (*conf.* 2.7; 3.2, 4.3, 5.9). It is important that Augustine consistently links his assertions of humanity’s woundedness with its inability to heal its own

¹⁷ Augustine is not always careful with his use of the word “nature” as it applies specifically to *human* nature. When here using the idea of a “second” nature induced by sin, he is almost certainly trying to distinguish between true nature (how a thing ought to be) and nature in the sense of how a thing always happens to be found. If something is *always* found in a damaged state, this becomes a nature “in a manner of speaking.” But he blurs this distinction when he claims, for instance, that “our whole nature...was changed for the worse by that great sin” (*c. Jul.* 3.26.60); or that “our nature sinned” (*div. qu.* 68.3). Probably his point in the last two claims has to do with inheritability of fallenness: not only Adam sinned, but all of humanity who was “in him” at the time – thus, human nature, rather than an individual sinner, sinned (see Rist 1972, 231). If this were not his point, we would want to ask in what sense a *nature* can be damaged if it is a pattern according to which a thing *should* adhere? For more on nature in this sense see Chapter 2.

wound. Humanity “needs a healer,” because its wound is not responsive to its own ministrations. It needs the divine physician, God or Christ. “Unless [God’s] medicine were sent from heaven to men...there would be no hope of salvation [*salutis*]” (*mor.* 1.28.55).¹⁸

It is therefore not inappropriate, I think, to call the dire experiences we have listed above the “symptoms” of fallenness – the set of experiences that need explaining, and which Augustine explains by the means of the punishment of sin.

Augustine on the causes of suffering: Two versions

As we have seen, in Augustine’s view the cause of all the above ills is sin, but not only sin: the cause that links sin to its effects is “punishment.” What does he mean by this? Although it is commonly glossed over by commentators (one exception, as we will see, is Burnaby)¹⁹, an attentive reading of Augustine reveals two ways in which he conceives of this punishment. The briefest possible way of distinguishing them is to say that in one case the effects are self-inflicted, and in the other they are divinely inflicted. But this distinction is too superficial, especially in the case of the former.

For ease of reference, I will hereafter call these two different accounts the *natural* and *legal* accounts of the punishment of sin.²⁰ The important distinction to be made by this

¹⁸For an extensive list of citations wherein Augustine compares God to a physician see C. Harrison 2006, 251.

¹⁹Examples abound, but here are a few of the more noticeable. Two studies of Augustine on evil, Mathewes 2001 and Evans 1982, very occasionally mention divinely inflicted punishment in passing, but never analyse it or contrast it to self-infliction in which they are more interested (e.g. see Evans 114, 121; Mathewes 207). A few commentators blithely juxtapose the two mechanisms of punishment without apparently feeling any obligation to comment on the dissonance that results (Burns 1991, 82; Babcock 1991, 235-6, 243). Interestingly, those who concentrate on divine punishment tend (subtly or otherwise) to demonize Augustine (e.g. Kirwan who virtually never mentions that for Augustine sin is intrinsically self-harming) while those who are sympathetic to Augustine concentrate on self-infliction of suffering (or on God’s role as the healer of sin and suffering) while giving the distinct impression they are trying to downplay suffering as divinely inflicted (Evans 1982; C. Harrison 2006; Miles 1990).

²⁰This terminology is far from ideal, but there is at this stage in my argument nothing better (especially as I am dealing with a *prima facie* reading of Augustine’s two accounts of punishment and so am presuming little at this point). This is true especially in the case of natural punishment. In place of “natural” I considered the terms “logically necessary,” “eudaimonistic,” and “medical.” I considered the first because if sin is the rejection of well-being, then it must logically lead to, or contain, suffering. But this does not precisely work as a distinction to “legal” punishment, especially when the latter is applied by God (divinely imposed punishments may – conceivably – also be logically necessary). As well, the vocabulary of formal logic invites unaugustinian questions of whether the laws of nature are logically necessary and so forth. “Eudaimonistic” is too technical and so may mean different things depending on whose eudaimonism is under discussion. I considered “medical” because Augustine’s analogies for natural punishment

(continued...)

terminology is not precisely between the identities of the agents who are doing the punishing (the self or God), but rather between the ways the act of sin is related to what follows from it (its punishment). In the case of natural punishment, it is not only that the effects are self-inflicted that is important but that these effects are inflicted simply by virtue of what sin is. There is no agent we need to invoke to explain them beyond the sinner himself. There is nothing beyond his act of sin that needs to happen for the sinner to be afflicted with them. Sin is its own punishment: “Every rational soul is made unhappy by its sins” (*vera rel.* 23.44); “to every man his sin is made the penalty, and his iniquity is turned into punishment” (*en. Ps.* 5.10); “whoever loves iniquity hates his own soul” (Ps 11:5 in *Trin.* 14.4.18); “when [human beings] sin...they do evil to their own souls” (*conf.* 3.8.16).

Augustine’s full reasons for asserting that sin essentially constitutes its own punishment are complex, especially as they relate to the specific symptoms we have identified. They are grounded in his metaphysics, and we will be thoroughly exploring them in following chapters. But his basic reasoning is fairly straightforward. In this view, sin essentially involves the sinner’s violation of his own nature; sin involves the rejection of that which the sinner needs for his own well-being. Therefore, simply *by* sinning he naturally falls into a painful state of degradation (though, again, the specific forms this degradation take require some accounting for). In *De natura et gratia* Augustine captures this relationship of sin to its effects with an analogy that is so characteristic and useful that it will inform the structure of my discussion of the natural account in Part I. Note that the context of this analogy is Augustine’s response to Pelagius, who has protested that since sin is not anything – not a “substance” – it lacks the power to bring down such disastrous effects upon those who perpetrate it. Augustine replies,

believing with the divine scriptures that [human nature]...is corrupted by sin, we inquire how this could have come about. Since we have already learned that sin is not a substance, let us consider...whether abstinence from food is also not a

²⁰(...continued)

are so often based on analogies of physical ill health. But I decided against it because a punishment consisting of ill health could also be the result of legal sanction, such as torture or deprivation. I strongly considered Burnaby’s pairing (see below), of “internal” versus “external” punishment. Here, the implication seems close to my own, provided that by “internal” he means that the cause of the chain of events is solely sin itself (and is therefore internal to the sinner), and that by “external” he means that a further cause must be sought for outside of the sinner and his sin. But I rejected this pairing largely because it may be taken as implying that internal punishment, say, is merely “psychological” (see my comments below on Burnaby’s distinction).

substance. One indeed abstains *from* a substance, since food is a substance. But to *abstain* from food is not a substance – yet nevertheless if we abstain entirely from food, the substance of our body languishes and is so impaired by frailty of health, so exhausted of strength, and so weakened and broken with weariness, that even if it were able in some way to continue to live, it would barely be capable of being restored to the use of that food, by abstaining from which it became corrupted. Likewise, sin is not a substance, but God is a substance, the supreme substance, the only true nourishment of the rational creature. Listen to how the Psalmist expresses what it is to withdraw from him by disobedience and to be unable through weakness even to receive that in which one truly ought to rejoice: “My heart is withered and beaten like grass, because I forgot to eat my bread.” (*nat. et gr.* 20; cf. *conf.* 4.1.1; *Gn. adv. Man.* 9.12)

Here, although God is part of the equation of punishment (he is what the sinner rejects), God does nothing actively to inflict the ill effects of that rejection on the sinner. The only agent needed to induce a condition of suffering is the sinner himself, who refuses to “eat,” and this refusal is inherently self-damaging. As we will see, throughout his works Augustine uses other metaphors of dependency and deficiency (as we might call them) to underscore the same point; the most notable of these compare God to the light that “illuminates” human beings (*mor.* 1.11.18; *civ. Dei* 11.9), or the stream or fountain by which they are “watered” (*conf.* 1.6.10; *s. Dom. mon.* 1.1.3). The idea underlying each of these metaphors is that the human being needs to *receive* something from God, something that is necessary for his well-being. “If he refuses to do this,” which refusal is the essence of sin, “he deprives himself of a good, and this is bad for him” (*Gn. litt.* 8. 14.31).

In contrast, the legal model of the punishment of sin requires another agent besides the sinner to account fully for the infliction of the punishment. This agent is God. One of Augustine’s baldest and best known statements of this kind opens *De libero arbitrio*: “We use the word ‘evil’ [*malo*] in two senses: first when we say that someone has done evil [*male...fecisse*]; and second, when we say that someone has suffered evil [*mali... esse perpessum*]...God is the cause of the second kind of evil, but in no way causes the first kind” (1.1). Later in the same work, Augustine likens suffering to a debt that sinners must pay to God if they refuse to pay the debt of proper conduct: “No one overcomes the laws of the almighty Creator. Every soul must pay back what it owes...If it does not pay its debt by doing justice, it will pay its debt by suffering misery [*patiendo miseriam*]” (3.15 cf. *Simpl.* 2.16). Scattered

throughout his other works are many other pronouncements that the human condition is the result of divine punishment for sin. “For by the most just laws of God were all condemned to the glory of God through the justice of his vengeance” (*cat. rud.* 2.18.30); “Without the judgement of God no one is slow in mind or crippled in body” (*en. Ps.* 118.6.2). Sin has “moved God’s indignation so that he has filled the world with dire calamities”; it has “caused God to give effect to his threats and warnings by bringing destruction on the earth” (*civ. Dei* 1.9). What such claims seem to have in common is that, as Burnaby notes, God is “assimilated to a human judge...the executor of a code which is protected from too frequent violation only by the application of external ‘sanctions’”. This punishment, as Burnaby says, is such that “if ‘left to himself’ [the sinner] would not have suffered [it]” (212).

To clarify the somewhat crude distinction between natural and legal punishment I am making at this stage, we might think of the following everyday analogies. A legal punishment for drinking too much would involve being caught by the police for drunk driving, followed by an appearance in court and a sentence involving some loss to the drunkard – say his driver’s licence, or his money in the form of a fine. None of these things can be brought about simply in virtue of the drunkard’s actions alone. They require other agents to inflict them, and these agents are the causes of the punishment. On the other hand, a natural punishment for overindulging would be a hangover, ultimately caused by dehydration – depletion of the body’s water supply brought about by the effect of ethanol on the human liver and kidneys. In this case the action is in some way identifiable with its consequences – given, that is, the structure or nature of the physical body and its needs, which have been denied.

Of course, it could be reasonably objected that the latter is, strictly speaking, not a “punishment” at all, but merely an unpleasant, even painful, self-inflicted consequence. Calling it a punishment is only a manner of speaking, and only tempting in this case because of the moral connotations of drunk driving. The problems with the appropriateness of the terminology of punishment are even more evident, we might think, in Augustine’s own analogy of anorexia (self-inflicted nutritional depletion) as a way to characterize the self-harming nature of sin. In this case, we might object, the harm is obviously an unfortunate consequence. To suggest that such a condition is a *punishment* seems to imply (misleadingly and perhaps erroneously) that

someone intends it to be so.²¹ I have denoted the type of causal relationship in question natural ‘punishment’ rather than natural ‘consequence’ because Augustine himself does – that is, he says not only that the sinner brings consequences on himself but that he brings *punishment* on himself: “To every man his sin is made the penalty, and his iniquity is turned into punishment” (*en. Ps.* 5.10). In fact, Augustine’s insistence on this is highly significant, and it will arise again (to be explained) in later chapters.

Problems with the natural account

Setting aside for the moment the primary difficulty of there being two accounts of how suffering follows from sin, there are problems even with each account on its own – specifically with its explanatory power, that is, with its correlation with the symptoms Augustine wants it to explain. (Even, therefore, if Augustine had confined himself to a single account, his views would still be in need of clarification and context.)

Take for example, the symptoms of bodily degradation, continued moral degradation (compulsion to sin), and the irreversibility of both of these. From within the natural account – which suggests that sin is its own punishment – there is on the face of it no immediately clear reason any of these particular results should follow from the first sin. After all, neither pagan philosophers nor certain Christians (notably the Pelagians) thought it obvious that vice should throw the sinner into an *inescapable* and therefore permanent condition characterized by one or more of these features. But it is bodily affliction that seems on the face of it particularly difficult (if not impossible) to trace back to sin alone, as Augustine insists on doing. How could psychological or moral conditions affect the well-being of the body to the extent that it would cause not only illness but death? For note that Augustine is not merely claiming that in our moral lassitude we fail to take care of the body, which might make it more subject to weakness and decay. He is claiming that, somehow, wrong-doing in itself has an effect on the integrity of the

²¹Indeed Flew (1969, 86) and Kleinig (1973, 18) propose that any formal definition of punishment must stipulate that the unpleasant consequence of wrong-doing is imposed by a “personal agency”; to call the unpleasant *natural* result (or “penalty” as Flew calls such results) of any action a “punishment” can be done in a metaphorical sense only. Flew suggests that the idea that true punishment is inflicted *by* someone *on* someone else is assumed in the distinction we make in ordinary conversation between “penalties *for*” (which tend to refer to true punishments) and “penalties *of*” (which tend to refer to natural consequences).

body; indeed that if humanity had not sinned, it would not have been subjected either to illness and old age or even to death itself (*civ. Dei* 14.12). Burnaby objects that this idea crumbles “before the facts of our experience, in which health and disease make no distinction of persons” (213) – in other words, there is clearly no correlation at all between illness and sinfulness, or virtue and health. While Burnaby here fails to acknowledge that Augustine is well aware that bodily suffering is indiscriminate, he has a point. Augustine’s attempt to trace even the condition of physical suffering and disintegration back to sin calls for elaboration in order to render it intelligible.

Problems with the legal account

We might think that, in contrast to the above difficulties, the legal account has at least this advantage, that it can be made to account for anything. The explanatory power of God has, one could argue, a kind of brute simplicity. One can ask of Augustine such questions as *why* God would punish in specific ways, what God seeks to accomplish by doing so, or whether such a course of action is compatible with other things Augustine wants to say about God; but as to *how* God does it – presumably he simply does. Unfortunately it is the “why” of punishment, that is, the *purpose* of punishment which seems a fatal flaw in Augustine’s legal account – if he insists on maintaining the set of symptoms of the fall he does.

This flaw is vigorously attacked by Augustine’s own critics, Pelagius and his follower Julian of Eclanum. The Pelagians certainly do not object to the idea that God punishes sin.²² What they do object to is Augustine’s insistence that a tendency to sin is *itself* a divinely inflicted punishment of the first sin. Most famously their objections centre on the idea that this seems to give the sinner an excuse for his wrongdoing, while Augustine’s further insistence on the irreversibility of this condition apparently takes away the incentive for the sinner himself to

²² Pelagius believed the mere idea had a salutary effect on those to whom he preached it. He particularly thought that the threat of hell-fire helped to concentrate the mind (*gest. Pel.* 3.9, 11; Brown 1967, 372). In response, Augustine insists that “someone who is afraid of sinning because of hell-fire is afraid not of sinning but of burning” (*ep.* 145.4). On the other hand, Augustine does come reluctantly around to the position that fear and other threats of unpleasantness can effectively help to separate someone from bad habits and therefore lay the groundwork for better motivations (Rist 1972, 243-248; Burnaby 1938, 214-216).

do anything about it.²³ But what is less well known is that the Pelagians also object to the idea of continued sin as a punishment of sin because it seems to make nonsense of any normal standard of what punishment entails. We will be examining some of the Pelagian objections in greater detail in Chapter 4, when we have assembled a thorough account of why Augustine thinks sin follows on sin. For now, however, an overview of the objections aids us in anticipating the type of problems Augustine's account – or accounts – of punishment face.

In both *De natura et gratia* and *Contra Julianum* Augustine provides excerpts from the works of his Pelagian adversaries in order to respond to them. In the former work, Pelagius himself is cited as asking why someone should be punished by instilling him with a desire to do more of what he is being punished for. This would make “punishment the very cause of sin” (22.24); Augustine's God, protests Pelagius, is like a perverse doctor who makes his patient sick instead of better (26.29). For Pelagius' disciple Julian, it is clear that a valid punishment from a good God is something that ought *not* to be avoided or evaded; but if that punishment includes sin itself then we are forced to the preposterous conclusion that “the disobedience of the flesh must be praiseworthy if it is a punishment for sin...that is, an avenger of wrongs and therefore a minister of God” (5.3.8). Does Augustine really want to imply, he asks, that we therefore should acquiesce to our sinful inclinations on the grounds that to avoid doing so would be to rebel against God's intentions? How can Augustine argue that people do wicked things “through the power of God” (5.3.11) when the proper view is rather that “the goodness of God...ought to lead to repentance” (*c. Jul.* 5.4.14)?

Underlying all these Pelagian objections is the understandable assumption that a punishment is meted out in recompense for an *undesirable* behaviour – a behaviour, in other words, that is meant to be *stopped*. As Pelagius puts it, just as it is absurd to try to put out fire using fire itself (*nat. et gr.* 29.33), it is likewise absurd that “there needs to be sin so that sin should not be” (27.30). He implies that our normal assumption is that the person doing the punishing does not tolerate the kind of behaviour he is punishing – that is why it is punished. Since these examples of Pelagian objections all come from Augustine's own works where he

²³ See *nat. et gr.* 20.23; and *c. Jul. imp.* 3.67 where Augustine cites objections of Pelagius and Julian respectively. Also see Brown 1967, 342-3.

cites them in order to respond to them, we might reasonably expect an answer from him on the question of why God would choose to punish sin by making sin multiply. But instead of a clear answer, Augustine only seems to create more problems. Where we might expect him to deny that God wants more sin, he simply insists that scripture²⁴ is clear that “one and the same thing can be both sin and a punishment” (*c. Jul.* 5.3.8). “Observe how often God punishes and the very punishment engenders and gives rise to other sins” (*nat. et gr.* 23.24 cf. 22.24, *c. Jul.* 5.3.8-12). (This assertion is, moreover, not unique to the anti-Pelagian works; it also occurs much earlier, for example in *De vera religione* 26.48.) Even more bewildering is Augustine’s simultaneous insistence in *De natura et gratia* that sin actually *does* make sin go away. But his comments on how this is supposed to happen remain on the level of vague metaphor; he alludes to the fact that painful physical illnesses often require painful cures, and that fevers are often treated using the application of heat – examples of the sort of situation Pelagius dismisses as absurd (of fire being used to put out fire). To say that sin cannot take sin away, says Augustine, is like saying “a wound [does] not involve pain, and an operation [does] not produce pain, so that pain might be taken away by pain” (*nat. et gr.* 27.30).

But by using this medical example, Augustine seems to admit that God’s punishment of sin via the multiplication of sins *is* not only supposed to stop particular sins but that it is indeed meant to improve the person to whom it is applied (if fever is to sin as curative fever is to curative sin, then sin makes sin go away by curing the condition out of which it is committed); and indeed, immediately after his medical metaphors in *De natura et gratia*, he admits that “God does indeed act to heal all things” (37.31). In fact, we can gather explicit statements to this effect (as we will do in Chapter 5) from across his body of work (“You smite so that you may heal. You slay us so that we may not die apart from you,” *conf.* 2.2.4). But surely on his own theory this is nonsensical, for in this case the punishment makes the sinner keep sinning, that is, *makes him keep on performing the very action for which he is being punished*. Augustine complicates things even more when he points out what he considers to be a fundamental error

²⁴For example, in *De natura et gratia*, Augustine cites Ps 29:8 (“You turned your face from me, and I became troubled”) and Rom 1:28-31 (“And as they cared not to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them up to a reprobate mind.”). In *Contra Julianum* he lists a range of incidences from scripture in which God punishes sin by means of sin (*c. Jul.* 5.3.8, 12).

his Pelagian opponents make. They all mistakenly assume, he says, that, since God is good, God's punishment would also have to be good. Really, he says, it is more complicated than that. Punishment is an evil for the person being punished, while being a good thing overall, or at least a thing with good effects (*nat. et gr.* 24.27; cf. *retr.* 1.26; *lib. arb.* 1.1).²⁵ We are tempted to respond that if, as he has just insisted, the punishment is meant (in some weird way) to fight sin and therefore to improve the sinner, then surely the punishment is a good thing, and thus a good thing *for the sinner*. On the other hand, if the punishment makes the sinner sin more, how can it be called an overall good?

Dissonances between the two accounts

Such are the kinds of problems of squaring the legal account with what Augustine wants it to explain. But when we try to square the legal account with the natural account, things get even worse. As with the problematic aspects of the natural account on its own, the problems between the two accounts can only be fully appreciated once we have fully elaborated the former. But to anticipate them, we can say that a systematic examination of Augustine's claims about the self-damaging effect of sin reveals that all the changes wrought by sin are traceable to what he calls "privation" (*privatio*), or, alternatively, "lack," "defect," or "harm." The problem with this is that Augustine's very definition of "privation" or "harm" – in fact, of evil – is that it is *that which is unnatural* (*vera rel.* 23.44; *civ. Dei* 11.17) by which he further means that it is *that which runs counter to God's intention* (*lib. arb.* 3.15). Indeed Augustine insists that "man brought death on himself by abandoning God... 'God made not death'²⁶ [Wis 1:13]" (*retr.* 1.20; cf. *vera rel.* 11.22). Such pronouncements clearly conflict with the legal account, in which the symptoms of the fall are deliberately inflicted on humanity *by* God. When we further realize that (as I will argue in the following chapters), suffering is actually the human experience of privation, it becomes even more difficult to see why Augustine should insist that God is the

²⁵ Thus Kirwan's discussion of divine punishment (in the context of predestination) is over-simplified; he asserts that for Augustine punishment is simply an unqualified good (1989, 77). This complicated question will be revisited in Chapter 4.

²⁶ Throughout this dissertation italics in citations from Augustine's works are all mine, and are used to emphasize a feature of the text to which I want to draw particular attention. Biblical citations used by Augustine are indicated by single quotation marks as well as the scriptural source in square brackets.

author of the evil we suffer.

And yet, once again, Augustine seems to some extent aware of these difficulties without, it seems, feeling the need to comment on them in any extended way. For example, in certain passages, many of which we will examine in Chapter 4, he points out there are senses in which God is not responsible for evil – and yet in a way he is. In most cases Augustine does not discuss at any length the way each of these things can be true beyond citing quotations from scripture to each effect. “God is not the author of evil because he is the author of all things that are, and because to the degree that things are, to that degree are they good,” he says in the *Retractationes*, underscoring a point he wants to qualify from an earlier work. But then he continues,

Let no one think of this account that the punishment of the wicked, which is obviously evil to those who are punished, does not come from him. I have spoken thus in the same way in which it was said ‘God had not made death’ [Wis 1:13], although it was elsewhere written: ‘Death and life are from the Lord God’ [Sir 11:14]. Therefore the punishment of the wicked, which is from God is indeed evil to the wicked; but it is counted among the good works of God. (*retr.* 1.26; cf. *c. Jul.* 5.9.35)

In fact, broadly speaking Augustine wants to maintain the paradoxical position that the present condition is one of divine punishment in order to emphasize that it is *not* God’s intention, or at least God’s *original* intention, for humanity. He accuses Julian, for example, (who believes infants are born into an innocent and pristine condition unaffected by sin) of defending the horrible view that the sufferings of small children are some kind of perverse divine ideal, since if such sufferings are *not* the result of sin (that is, of punishment of sin) and therefore evidence that something has gone *wrong*, this means that God created those children directly into this condition (*c. Jul.* 5.1.4).

So here is a summary of the difficulties Augustine’s two accounts have in themselves and between one another. The natural account would seem, at least on the face of it, to have difficulty accounting for the depth and scope of fallenness, and particularly for the conditions of bodily degradation and irreversible moral degradation. The legal account, while seemingly a simple mechanism (God causes the symptoms), conflicts with commonsensical notions of punishment if it is used to explain the tendency to sin which follows the fall, and conflicts with the natural account if it used to explain any of the symptoms at all (since they are all examples

of that which is unnatural and therefore contrary to God's intention). And yet Augustine simply keeps asserting the truths of all his claims. If we mix and match concepts from both accounts we get the two following chains of reasoning, the conclusions to which Augustine would equally disavow. (1) Sin is our fault, not God's fault. Punishment for sin is God's "fault" (in the sense that he causes it). But part of punishment for sin is sin. So sin is God's fault; Or, (2) The consequences for sin are due to harm; harm is not God's will; but the consequences for sin are God's punishment (his will). So God's punishment (his will) is not his will.

Possible (non-philosophical) "solutions"?

I have remarked on the essential role of proper context in the resolution of the above problems. Only additional context above and beyond Augustine's bald statements about the punishment of sin will clarify how he can maintain the particular sets of claims that he does. I argue in this dissertation that the resolution of Augustine's two accounts does not fully emerge except in the context of a fully elaborated *natural* account. This is because explicating Augustine's views on "sin as its own punishment" forces to the forefront basic principles of his metaphysics that undergird both accounts. The natural account is the key to the legal account.

But before embarking on these arguments, it is necessary to respond to an objection to the whole exercise. Perhaps the exercise itself is one of over-interpretation. Could it be that Augustine has merely rhetorical reasons for maintaining that God punishes sin; or that he has other motives for maintaining both that remain inchoate, so that there is no real way to integrate the two because Augustine never does? In other words, perhaps there is no philosophical solution to the specific problem of there being two accounts.

For example, because Augustine's rhetorical skills and sensibilities are highly developed, there is always the possibility that apparent contradictions in his work are due to his exaggeration, say, of some point for effect. Is it possible, then, that when Augustine says that God applies punishment to human beings he is only speaking metaphorically or even poetically? For instance, we can be pretty certain that when Augustine says that God "sprinkles disappointment" (*conf.* 2.2.4, 3.1.1) over ephemeral goods so that they inevitably fail those who try to retain them, he does not literally mean that God dribbles some substance over these goods.

He is also not averse to reading the Bible metaphorically or allegorically, and in fact thinks that this is often the correct way to do so. So, for example, despite scriptural references to the wrath of God, Augustine insists that “God’s anger is not an agitation of mind; it is a judgement by which punishment is inflicted on sin.” He continues: “if scripture did not employ such words, it would not strike home so closely....it uses such language to terrify the proud, to arouse the careless, to exercise the inquirer, and to nourish the intelligent; and it would not have this effect if it did not first bend down and....descend to the level of those on the ground” (*civ. Dei* 15.26; cf. 22.2; *div. qu.* 52). When scripture uses language like this, then, it is only accommodating itself to dim and emotionally wrought human understanding. Such expressions say more about the human attitude to the action God takes than they do about God’s emotional state as he takes it. Could Augustine be using the idea that God punishes sin in much the same way? Is it therefore not meant to be taken literally?

In fact, this possibility is easily dismissed. Augustine is usually vigilant about pointing out instances when an important point is being couched in metaphorical terms, as in the case above, of God’s wrath. In fact, this very example shows that he has no difficulty attributing unpleasant human experiences exactly to divine causation. God may not be angry as he carries out such actions, but it is still God who is doing them.

More serious (and more plausible) is the possibility that Augustine has simply not considered and worked through the implications of the things he wants to maintain; that he does not comment on the problems with maintaining the two accounts of punishment, not because they are, in his mind, well integrated, but precisely because they are not. This is the charge of Burnaby, whose chapter “Sin and Punishment” in his seminal *Amor Dei* is the most harshly critical in what is a largely sympathetic overview of Augustine’s philosophy. Burnaby’s is the only major Augustinian study that explicitly tackles at any length the fact that Augustine has two theories connecting suffering with sin, which Burnaby calls “internal” punishment (206, 210) and “external” punishment (212-213, 216). (These are roughly synonymous with what we have called the natural and legal accounts.) While unlike Augustine Burnaby believes that there *is* such a thing as undeserved suffering, Burnaby generally approves of Augustine’s natural account. This theory, he points out, is the “logical counterpart” to Augustine’s “doctrine of the

Summum Bonum,” (211) which involves the idea that no reward is forthcoming for obedience to God but God himself, who is humanity’s highest good. To reject God is thus necessarily to suffer (though, as we will shortly see, Burnaby thinks that the level and types of suffering Augustine goes on to attribute to sin are egregious). This view Burnaby calls Augustine’s “deeper and more spiritual view of punishment” (216); “a theory of the true nature of punishment to which he...has made contributions of the highest value” (201).

Burnaby contrasts this view with Augustine’s “external” theory, in which God is said to inflict punishment on sinners. This alternative theory, objects Burnaby, shows a remarkable “lack of connection” (183) to Augustine’s entire thinking about humanity’s relationship to its good; so much so that the only way Burnaby can account for it is as a sort of hangover from “another complex of ideas too deeply ingrained in Augustine’s mind for any escape to be possible – the ideas of the ordinary man, and especially the ordinary Roman citizen, drawn from the ordinary assumptions of legal justice” (212). In this view a man “must be shown that wrongdoing does not pay, and the only way of ensuring this demonstration is by the infliction of an external pain which if ‘left to himself’ he would not have suffered.” (212). Burnaby protests that this view is incompatible with “Platonically” influenced “internal” punishment, where the punishment consists precisely in leaving a man to himself (210-11). Unfortunately, says Burnaby, Augustine could not free himself from his legalistic sensibilities which “had the fatal effect of dooming his philosophy of punishment to hesitations and contradictions” (213).

On the whole, Burnaby’s chapter argues that Augustine’s theory of punishment would have benefited from vigorous pruning of various extraneous or redundant ideas in order to render it self-consistent. For Burnaby these include most obviously the entire notion of divinely (externally) administered punishment; in his view this idea contributes nothing or at least nothing useful to Augustine’s total theory of the punishment of sin. Indeed, Burnaby even wonders about the usefulness of the word “punishment” at all; in so far as it is inflicted by an “external” agent, he would much prefer that it be renamed “discipline” or “correction” (212). But even the “internal” account of punishment he so admires (what we have called the natural account) needs, in his view, modification. In particular, Burnaby seems convinced that at least part of Augustine’s inconsistency stems from the very things he feels he needs to explain by

means of punishment, even “internal” punishment. Burnaby would prefer to abandon the idea that, for instance, certain kinds of suffering (like illness and death) are symptoms of the fall in the first place; as we saw earlier, he calls Augustine’s view that all physical evil originates in the self-harm of sin a “rationalization” which crumbles “before the facts of our experience, in which health and disease make no distinction of persons” (213).²⁷ And indeed, concerning the human condition in general Burnaby finds it difficult to agree with Augustine that “man’s sin could so turn upside down the work of a good creator” (203).

Burnaby not only advocates pruning, however, but also supplementation. The deficits in Augustine’s theory of punishment remain because it is, above all, unfinished; and it is unfinished because Augustine has not pushed his own insights to their logical conclusions. Burnaby (a clergyman and Christian apologist as well as an Augustine scholar) argues that

we may feel that Augustine could not have rested in a view of suffering which the revelation of God in Christ has made untenable, if he had allowed himself to think out the implications of his own spiritual and devotional experience. But he did not do so. Convinced as he was that all the material evils, as well as a great deal of the spiritual disablement, with which human beings are afflicted, are before anything else the punishment of sin, he was unable to carry out with consistency that theory of punishment which is alone appropriate to his philosophy of the *Summum Bonum*. (206)

The most significant lacuna in Augustine’s theory resulting from this underdevelopment, Burnaby believes, is any substantive sense that “the ‘explanation’ of suffering must lie not in its beginning but in its end” (205). Although Burnaby’s argument here remains vague, his point seems to be that Augustine’s emphasis on the *origin* of suffering in sin (or in the punishment of sin), means that he neglects to consider where suffering may *lead*. For Burnaby, the really important thing about suffering is not how it comes about but what may come about because of it – say, some salutary effect on the sufferer. For example, he laments that Augustine did not

²⁷This may signal that Burnaby’s choice of the word “internal” to denote self-inflicted punishment reveals an overly psychological or spiritualising bias in his analysis of Augustine’s theories of punishment. He lauds the ability of the internal (Platonically influenced) theory for its ability to explain such consequences of sin as fear, further sin, and unhappiness on the basis of its deep analysis of human nature. He is also willing to grant that the internal account can also successfully explain how sin results in certain bodily symptoms in so far as the body responds to sinful desires and appetites of the soul or mind. Yet he is not willing to grant Augustine that the internal theory of punishment can account for such bodily symptoms as illness or death (207-8; 213). He also intimates (albeit vaguely) that Augustine is too pessimistic in his insistence that the sinful condition is not amenable to any self-improvement (203).

further develop his intimations that the proper aim of punishment in particular is “remedial – the correction of the wrongdoer” (211).

With these concerns, Burnaby echoes the kind of criticisms we have already seen from Allin and Williams, who both charge Augustine with being narrowly and simplistically obsessed with the penal origins of suffering as a kind of “forensic” exercise. Even Peter Brown weighs in with this kind of concern, though he directs it at Augustine’s later works: in the original edition of his *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* he objects that “if suffering is seen only as the just reward of guilt, it is drained of its value...such suffering has become flat and sinister” (396).²⁸

Initial evidence that Augustine links the two accounts

In the last chapters of this dissertation I will be arguing that Augustine retains the idea of punishment in both its “internal” and “external” (that is, its natural and legal) senses precisely because together – and only together – these senses allow him to say something about what suffering is *for*, and not just about what causes it. Even prior to these arguments, however, there are already significant clues that the “external” or legal account ought not to be so hastily dismissed as merely redundant, and that for Augustine both accounts are intimately linked. Even Burnaby’s prize examples of Augustine’s expressions of an internal theory of punishment betray the fact that Augustine finds it difficult not to adulterate them with legal (“external”) overtones. In each of them Augustine assigns some role to God; while that role may be more or less passive, Augustine still seems to think it necessary to say that even while the sinner harms himself, it is God who is punishing him: “When *God punishes sinners*, He inflicts no evil of His own upon them, but leaves them to that which is theirs.’[*civ. Dei* 14.15]”; “to every man his own sin is made the penalty, and his iniquity is turned into punishment; that we may not suppose that the great peace and ineffable light of God brings forth from himself the means for the punishment of sins: rather he so orders the sins themselves that what had been delights to the sinner become the *instruments of the Lord’s chastisement*.” [*en. Ps.* 5.10]” (210); “the beginning of the punishment which *God inflicts upon the soul* that turns away from Him is

²⁸He has reconsidered his harsher judgements of the elderly Augustine and his “stern” theology in the new edition of his book, largely because of the content of recently discovered letters from that period of Augustine’s life (Brown 2000, 445; 466; 492).

blindness itself. For he who turns away from the true Light which is God, is thereby made blind. He does not feel his punishment, but already has it' [s. 117.5]" (207). All of these passages are not as "internalistic" as Burnaby suggests, though he apparently thinks nothing of using them to show that Augustine believes that sin is its own punishment. I think it is clear that they show that more is going on in Augustine's mind than just that. God has *some* role to play in the sinner's self-inflicted condition; the question is what? And, as we will see in Chapter 4, things become more perplexing when we look at expressions of God's role that are not so passive.

There is another important clue that we must not so easily dismiss Augustine's retention of the legal ("external") account of punishment as an unreflective borrowing from Roman law. A much more compelling source for this view of the punishment of sin is scripture itself. It is odd that Burnaby should not see the language of the Bible as the primary source for Augustine's language about divinely administered punishment, especially the book of Genesis wherein the story of the fall is recounted. Significantly, scripture itself also displays the same vacillation between what are interpreted by Augustine as natural and legal accounts of punishment. Take this example from the psalms, to which Augustine refers in a sermon:

If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword;
 he has bent and strung his bow;
 he has prepared his deadly weapons,
 making his arrows fiery shafts.
 Behold, the wicked man conceives evil,
 and is pregnant with mischief,
 and brings forth lies.
 He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole which he has made.
 His mischief returns upon his own head,
 and on his own head his violence descends. (Ps 7, RSV)²⁹

Augustine's interpretation of these verses is that they show that "when God punishes sinners, He does not inflict His evil on them, but leaves them to their own evil...he punishes as a judge those that transgress the law, not by bringing evil upon them from Himself, but driving them on to that which they have chosen, to fill up the sum of their misery" (*en. Ps.* 5.10). Notice that the psalm itself contains *both* the ideas that punishment is "self-imposed" (which Burnaby likes) and that

²⁹This would be Psalm 8 in Augustine's Latin Septuagint edition.

God imposes punishment (which Burnaby does not like). And there are other scriptural precedents, used by Augustine, for both accounts.³⁰ If scripture itself appears not to reject either account of punishment, why should we be surprised that Augustine himself does not?

To say this, however, raises another possible reason for abandoning the enterprise of finding enough context and substance to reconcile the two accounts, even though they are apparently bound together in Augustine's thought. This is the exegetic role Augustine often takes. Could it be that he is simply being pulled in incompatible directions by scriptural texts (and by Platonic tradition); that his views vary depending on whichever text he is engaged with? This might mean, for instance, that under the influence of Genesis 3, or other texts wherein God is portrayed as punishing human beings, Augustine insists on this point – contrary to the anthropology he develops to show that human sin is itself enough to explain what follows it.

Ultimately, however, I think it is far too simplistic to reduce the apparent problems with Augustine's theory of suffering as punishment to one of conflicting exegetical directions. Although the pressure, if we may call it that, of scriptural texts does give him influential raw material, I aim to make clear throughout this dissertation that Augustine is aware of, and deals with, tensions between scriptural texts. Indeed, for Augustine conflicting scriptural texts – or truths – are material on which human beings may exercise their minds. He even suggests that God filters truth to humanity through the occasionally deliberately obscure medium of scripture (whose writers, he also suggests, at times did not themselves know the layers of meaning behind the text they were producing) precisely to stimulate human engagement with these texts (*conf.* 12.31.42; *civ. Dei* 11.19).³¹ We can, for example, watch Augustine at work on these kinds of difficulties particularly as he struggles to articulate a position on how grace is (or is not) related to free will. One biblical text seems to insist that a human being must “work out his own salvation”; yet, the same text continues, this is evidence that “God [is] at work in” him (Phil

³⁰ Romans 1.26 (“God has given them over to the desires of their hearts,” (see *div. qu.* 79; *nat. et gr.* 22.24) is a favourite text which Augustine uses to capture the idea that sin is self-harming (although it also suggests the God has some sort of role in permitting this [see Chapter 4]). As we have seen, Augustine also contrasts ‘God has not made death [Wis 1:13]’ with ‘Death and life are from the Lord God [Sir 11:14].’ He tends to view the former as an implication of the natural account and the latter as an interpretation of the legal account.

³¹ He makes a similar claim for distortions of the truth like heresy; the debate such distortions arouse compels believers to hone and clarify their interpretations of truth (*conf.* 7.19.25; *vera rel.* 13.15).

2:12-13). Augustine insists that both facts must be true, and it is our job – with God’s assistance – to figure out the proper context in which this can be the case (see, for example, *Ad Simplicianum* 1.2.12 or *De natura et gratia* 32.36).

In a similar way, I argue, Augustine thinks that pairs of truths such as “human beings, and not God, punish themselves” and “God punishes human beings”; or “God does not cause evil (privation)” and “God causes the evil of suffering” are part of a single coherent picture of how sin results in suffering. The difference is that Augustine does not articulate the picture in a single passage or even work; in the this case the relevant context is spread out across his works, and includes the fundamentals of his metaphysics.

Organization and arguments of the dissertation

I will not be following Burnaby’s lead in suggesting modifications to both the natural and the legal accounts which would have rendered Augustine’s account of the fall internally consistent had he pursued them. Rather I will show that his account is consistent while keeping the very parameters he insists on – including all the sufferings, physical and otherwise, he attributes to sin. My claim is that this consistency emerges not by subtracting from his account but by adding to it, from other elements of his own thought.

This rest of this dissertation is divided into two major parts, each containing three chapters. Part I comprises a defence of the natural account of the punishment of sin; Part II is an analysis of the legal account in the light of the natural account.

By a “defence” of the natural account, I mean an attempt to show that Augustine has successfully described a set of relationships so as to correlate what he wants to explain (the afflictions of the human condition) with what he uses to explain it (sin). To see this, I argue, we need to realize that the fall caused by sin is not merely a moral lapse, but an ontological lapse. What binds the symptoms of the fall together is a metaphysical defect. The foundation of my argument in Part I, therefore, is the link I draw between suffering and Augustine’s well known definition of evil as the privation of good; that is, I argue that for Augustine all experiences of suffering are in fact experiences of privation of good. I thus interpret Augustine’s nutritive analogy (of God as the “bread” of humanity) as a human-centred expression of this seemingly

abstract doctrine in a way I believe has not been done systematically before. To do this systematically involves showing that Augustine indeed correlates the “goodness” of which evil is a privation with a more concrete concept – an aspect of the privative account which has been neglected. This pivotal idea, I argue, is order (*ordo*). I will show that to understand the effects of sin, we need to understand first, how human beings (and creation in general) depend on God for orderliness, and second, how this dependence is experienced in a healthy way. Sin violates this condition, producing disorder, and with it all of the afflictions of humanity. In this Augustine is consistent.

Having completed Part I, we shall initially find that Burnaby seems to be even more right than he himself argues. The natural account is so comprehensive and cohesive (in the sense that sin can apparently explain all suffering *without* invoking divine punishment), that the legal account appears redundant. Not only this, but, as I have already intimated, divine punishment appears to be *ruled out* by the very nature of the unnaturalness of the symptoms. The question becomes more acute: what can the legal account possibly contribute by way of explanation to what happens to the sinner as a result of his sin? Part II answers this question. The key, again, is context; this time, surprisingly, the context is the natural account itself, including those very features of it which the legal account initially appears to contradict. We shall find that what Augustine says about divine punishment is rendered intelligible by drawing on what the natural account has revealed about human nature and its relationship to God. The natural account is the proper and revealing context of the legal account.

Chapter 1, then, is an introduction to the natural account, putting it into its own context of its function in Augustine’s philosophy. I will argue that the basis of the natural account – the idea of metaphysical dependency – is Augustine’s attempt to account for commonsensical ways we think about evil (and therefore good). His analysis of evil shows that some kind of dependent relationship is at the heart of reality. I propose using a medical model of this relationship as a way to evaluate his success in explaining all affliction by the mechanism of sin. It is based on Augustine’s own nutritional metaphor for the Creator/creature relationship and suggests that the best way to test the internal consistency of Augustine’s natural account of the punishment of sin is to set it in broader context of the relationships involved.

The principles that will inform Chapters 2 and 3 are derived from the medical model outlined in Chapter 1: a deficiency is best understood in the context of how a nutrient interacts with what it nourishes; sickness is best understood in the context of the health it destroys; and the experiences of an ill person – or a healthy person – are explained by objective processes underlying and binding the experiences. Chapter 2 is primarily concerned with the metaphysics underlying the natural account (and, as it will turn out, the legal account too). It explores the precise nature of the metaphysical dependence of creation (and specifically human creation) on God (the Creator). The primary aim is to demonstrate that the good that creation receives from God is not only existence itself, but more precisely (and usefully), it is orderliness. Chapter 3 is concerned with the human implications of the metaphysics outlined in Chapter 2; that is, with experience. I show that order and disorder are experienced by human beings as happiness and suffering respectively, and that they are brought about by adherence to God in the first case, and by rejection of God (that is, by sin) in the second case. We will find Augustine concluding that God cannot be a cause of privation of good; the problematic implication of this is that God cannot be the source of the punishment of sin which is essentially (as this chapter has shown) privation of good.

In Chapter 4 (the beginning of Part II), I move on to consider what Augustine can mean, therefore, when he asserts that God himself brings about all the various types of suffering as a punishment for sin. I show that underlying this insistence is a deeper claim: by means of punishment, God maintains his control over the universe, that is to say, over its orderliness. The question then becomes how disorder can contribute in some way to order. I identify two types of punishment by which Augustine thinks exactly this kind of thing happens: retributive punishment, in which the suffering of the sinner alone is enough to maintain the proper order of the universe, and remedial punishment, in which the suffering of the sinner leads eventually to the restoration and reordering of that part of the universe which the sinner has disarranged – himself. Chapters 5 and 6 deal with each respectively, by drawing once again on the idea of order and dependence. In the end, I hope to show that Augustine’s theory of legal punishment, considered in the appropriate context of natural punishment, shows exactly that “the ‘explanation’ of suffering must lie not in its beginning but in its end.”

PART I

The Natural Account

Chapter 1

Evil and Dependence: The Foundation and Scope of the Natural Account

In the introduction, we saw that in *De natura et gratia* Augustine compares the harmful effects of sin with the harmful effects of (self) starvation. Since I will be basing the organization of subsequent chapters along lines suggested by this analogy, it is worth citing again, at least in part. Augustine is responding to Pelagius, who objects to his view that sin can have a permanently damaging effect on human nature. Sin cannot do this, Pelagius protests, because it is “neither a thing, nor an existence, nor some kind of body,” but rather only “the action of doing something evil” (*nat. et gr.* 19.21). Augustine retorts that self-starvation is “merely” the action of not eating, but it nonetheless has a profoundly weakening and sickening, even deadly, effect on the human body. Likewise,

sin is not a substance, but God is a substance, the supreme substance, the only true nourishment of the rational creature. Listen to how the Psalmist expresses what it is to withdraw from him by disobedience and to be unable through weakness even to receive that in which one truly ought to rejoice: ‘My heart is withered and beaten like grass, because I forgot to eat my bread.’ (*nat. et gr.* 20.22)

Throughout his works, Augustine reiterates this point using other analogies: the fountain will dry up if separated from its source (*Gn. adv. Man.* 2.5.6; *conf.* 1.6.10); things grow cold if moved away from a fire (*en. Ps.* 103.4.2); and (perhaps his favourite) what is illuminated dims when blocked from the source of illumination (*Gn. litt.* 8.12.25-6; *mor.* 1.11; *conf.* 12.15.20-21, *civ. Dei* 11.9; *ep. Jo.* 1.4). All these analogies have in common a depiction of a particular kind of relationship wherein one thing depends for sustenance on an originating source. If the dependent thing becomes separated from that source, it is diminished. With such word pictures, Augustine suggests that God is the ultimate good of humanity in the sense that he bestows something on human beings, whose act of sin is essentially the act of refusing to receive it. Since what God bestows is essential to the well-being of human beings, sin naturally leads to suffering, deprivation to discomfort.

Lack, *privatio*, is therefore the principle by which Augustine makes sense of the effects of sin. So also, therefore, is the dependent relationship in the context of which lack occurs; for as

we will see, in Augustine's view only a dependent thing can come to lack. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the idea of relational dependency is central to Augustine's philosophy; indeed for him it is at the heart of what it means for created things to exist. To explore the natural account of the punishment of sin, then, is to explore the implications of dependency.

But what *is* this "nourishment" that God provides to "the rational creature"? In some sense, as the nutritive analogy above discloses, it is God himself. Yet, as we will see, Augustine will not countenance the idea that human beings are "made out of" God. Such a thing is ruled out by the very fact that human beings *can* be diminished. Rather, Augustine will argue that what human beings (and the rest of creation) receive from God is goodness (*bonum*), which is to say existence itself. The corollary is that what human beings come to *lack* by sinning is also goodness and existence. Thus, my primary premise in Part I is that what we have called the 'natural account of the punishment of sin' is, in fact, the human face of Augustine's famous doctrine that evil is the privation of good. Following chapters explore what this "good" is, and how a lack of it is manifested in various affliction brought about by sin.

This chapter, however, has a more limited aim. Here, in what serves as an orientation to the function of the natural account in Augustine's philosophy, I introduce what Augustine is trying to achieve – and, as I will go on to show, ends up doing so successfully – with his conception of evil as some sort of violation of a dependent relationship. Of course, his main concern is to explain the human condition. But beyond this, Augustine, is, I suggest, remarkably thorough and successful at doing two things by means of his natural account. The first is that while trying to make sense of what he thinks are some basic human intuitions about evil, Augustine finds that he must remove God from any implication in evil – and does so. The second is that he does so in such a way as to trace back all instances of "evil," and by extension suffering, to a single mechanism: sin. Both of these aims, accomplished successfully, will seem to render the legal account either contradictory or redundant: contradictory if God is so well removed from evil that he *cannot* inflict suffering (as the following chapters would seem to suggest is the case); and redundant if the natural account is so comprehensive (as these chapters again bear out) that it seems unnecessary to assert that God inflicts suffering in the first place.

This chapter, then, makes clear the framework on which subsequent chapters will be built. First I identify the roots of Augustine’s idea that evil is a *lack* of good. Then I will propose a model of lack by which we can organize and evaluate the coherence and comprehensiveness of Augustine’s attempts to trace all instances of suffering to the privation caused by sin.

As we will shortly see in a fairly brief glance at Augustine’s formal arguments that evil is a *privatio boni*, Augustine tends in those arguments to talk in the broad strokes of all encompassing terms like “good” and “evil” and not so much in what these things mean *for us*. In subsequent chapters, I will be gathering together (in a way Augustine never quite does) the connections between the doctrine and how it plays out in human life (as Augustine suggests it does with his nutritive analogy of lack). Still, it is worth delving into Augustine’s more abstract arguments showing that evil involves some kind of a lack. They are the root of Augustine’s metaphysics of dependence and, importantly for our eventual contrast between natural and legal accounts, of his insistence that – in a certain sense – God has nothing to do with the presence of evil in the world.

Privatio boni: The structure of Augustine’s anti-Manichean arguments

Augustine’s doctrine of evil as a privation (or lack) of good is commonly discussed by commentators as an *essentially* anti-Manichean (that is, anti-dualistic) argument.¹ And indeed, his anti-Manichean polemic is the context in which he tends to expound this idea of evil. In fact, it would be true to say that every time he writes about evil, Augustine has one eye on Manicheism and its criticisms of Catholic Christianity.² The nutritive analogy he uses in response to Pelagius above is no exception. Both he and Pelagius have the Manicheans in mind when they use the word “substance” to argue whether sin (an action and not a substance) can so radically harm the sinner. Manichean criticisms of Catholic metaphysics were focused on the

¹See, for example, Kirwan 1989, 61-65; Babcock 1993, 241; Kane 1980, 53; Schilling 1977, 86, 92.

²Only when I am referring to Augustine’s Christianity in contradistinction to Manicheism will I call it ‘Catholic.’ Otherwise I will refer to it as ‘Christian’ since in modern English ‘Catholic’ now connotes Roman Catholicism as opposed to other Christian denominations. Augustine himself used both terms, but favoured ‘Catholic’ when arguing with the Manicheans as he well knew that the latter considered themselves Christians (*Gn. litt.* 7.11.17). On the other hand, when I use the term ‘orthodoxy’ I mean the more commonly accepted teachings of Augustine’s Christianity in contradistinction to Manichean beliefs, even though the Manicheans no doubt considered themselves orthodox in the sense of “right thinking.”

Catholic insistence that God is the creator of everything in existence (that is, of all substances), and that both God *and* what he creates are good.³ The Manicheans objected that the Catholics were then forced into the conclusion that a good God created evil (since it is obvious, at least to the Manicheans) that evil “exists” (*duab. an.* 10; *lib. arb.* 1.2). The only alternative to this blasphemy, they contended, was a dualist metaphysic positing the existence of two utterly opposed and alien substances, one evil, the other good.

Augustine’s response (the crux of which this chapter explores) is to deflate the Manichean charge by arguing that evil is *not* in fact a substance and that therefore the Catholics do not need to admit that God creates it. If the natural account is based on Augustine’s view of evil, does this mean that the natural account can be construed as a response to Manicheism? This important question should, in my view, precede our analysis of the roots of the natural account. In a qualified way, I believe the answer is yes, but in a more interesting sense than one might expect based on the conventional understanding of the direction of Augustine’s reasoning. That conventional view goes something like this. As a Catholic committed to the Old Testament accounts of Genesis (which the Manicheans rejected wholesale), Augustine must hold that God is omnipotent in a specific sense: God is the sole source, the creator *ex nihilo*, of everything beside himself.⁴ He must also hold that God is absolutely good and that everything he creates is *de facto* good as well (as God so pronounces in Genesis, *Gn. adv. Man* 1.2.4; 1.21.32; *c. Fort.* 22; *nat. b.* 3). Therefore, in order to get God “off the hook” for evil he must also find a way to claim that evil, properly speaking, does not exist; yet he must also allow for the description

³Because he wrote so extensively against them, and because he was once an “insider,” Augustine is the principal Latin source of generally reliable information about the Manicheans (Coyle 1999: 39; Torchia 1999, 79-81). The characterization of basic Manichean metaphysics in this section is found not only in those of Augustine’s works whose titles explicitly name their Manichean targets (such as *De moribus Manicheorum*, *De duabus animae*, *Acta contra Fortunatum Manicheum*, *Contra epistulam Manichaei qam vocant fundamenti*; *De genesi adversus Manicheos*) but also throughout the *Confessiones*, *De natura boni*, and *De vera religione*. For good summaries also see *De civitate Dei* 11.22, *ep.* 236, *De Natura Boni* 41-46.

⁴As Augustine indicates in his anti-Manichean writings, God’s “omnipotence” (*omnipotentia*) has as much to do with the simple fact that God has *made* absolutely everything, and made it out of nothing, as it has to do with the extent to which God can *control* his creation once he has made it (though the latter is an implication of the former): “when we wish to insist upon the omnipotence of God as creator, we may say even to sinners that they are of [that is, made by] God.” (*duab. an.* 8); “he is not almighty who seeks the assistance of any material whence he may make what he will...all things that God made...he made out of nothing.” (*c. Fort* 13; *cf. f. et symb.* 1.2.2) Anything which exists and is not God must be made by Him (*duab. an.* 13.19). For more on omnipotence see Chapters 4 and 5.

“evil” to be correctly attached to some things which clearly *are* evil. Hence the idea of making evil merely a “privation” of good.

In his summaries of Christian doctrine Augustine occasionally writes this way himself, as though orthodox views of God are the premises to his arguments about evil, and evil as privation the conclusion (e.g. *mor.* 2.3; *c. Fort.* 1.1; *ench.* 11-12; *vera rel.* 1.21; *nat. b.* 1-4). This is no doubt due to Augustine’s certainty that there is no harm (and indeed may be great virtue) in assenting to orthodox teaching based on a good and trusted authority.⁵ However, this is not the direction of Augustine’s own reasoning. If we examine, as we shortly will, the type of arguments Augustine deploys in his direct engagements with Manichean doctrine, we find that privation is not something dragged in artificially to bolster orthodox claims about a good creator. Augustine is not trying primarily to be anti-Manichean (or pro-Catholic); nor is he trying to get God off the hook. He is above all trying to understand what evil is. He finds – or so I argue – that the orthodox Catholic view of reality makes better sense of evil than the Manichean view. This is because only the Catholic view can encompass the idea that evil is in some way a defective lacking – which is what it clearly is, if we analyze what we mean by evil carefully. The direction of Augustine’s *argument*, then, is not from a particular view of God and creation to a particular view of evil, but rather the reverse; Manicheism functions as a foil in this sense.⁶ This fact is important for the natural account itself. One of the implications (and not the motivation, as is often erroneously suggested) of evil as privation will turn out to be that God is not (or even cannot be) responsible for it; but if – as I will be arguing in following chapters – human affliction is the human experience of privation, then God cannot be responsible for that either. And this will ultimately bring Augustine into conflict with his own assertions when he wants to claim that the evil we suffer is the result of divine punishment.

⁵e.g. *vera rel.* 24.45. On the relationship between reason, belief and authority see Rist 2001.

⁶Cress makes several astute observations in this regard. He points out that Augustine’s concern about the nature of evil preceded his conversion to Catholicism and indeed comprised one of his reasons for embracing Manicheism. His eventual dissatisfaction with the Manichean explanation for evil was probably one of his reasons for leaving the sect; and his discovery and embracing of the idea of evil as privation of good may well have preceded his conversion to orthodox Christianity. Cress concludes that Augustine is therefore “no fideist making use of an available philosophical doctrine to shield his faith from criticism...the privation theory of evil [is] the work of an earnest inquirer” (1989, 115). It is odd, therefore, that later Cress slips into characterizing Augustine’s privation theory as being motivated by anti-Manicheism (116, 119).

Criticisms of dualism as an approach to the correct understanding of evil

As if to strengthen his argument that whatever evil is, it is not a positively existing thing, Augustine often prefers to grapple with his Manichean opponents not from a base of Catholic orthodoxy, but on their own terms (*mor.* 1.2.3; *c. ep. Man.* 5.3.4). On those grounds alone he reveals inconsistencies and fallacies inherent in Manichean doctrine. In this sense, Augustine uses the Manicheans as the representatives of a specious commonsense view of evil – that evil is a thing whose *being* needs to be accounted for. We find Augustine pointing out that, hidden and unacknowledged within this very dualism, are the beginnings of a right understanding about what evil is – a kind of inchoate privation theory – in which evil somehow involves a condition of lacking.

The point to which Augustine constantly returns in his criticisms of Manichean dualism is the problem inherent in their assertion that good and evil are utterly opposing and alien types of substances, and that they nevertheless interact in some way. A brief summary of basic Manichean doctrine serves to capture both these ideas. The Manicheans wanted to explain the world as we know it as deriving from two fundamental and eternal principles or “Kingdoms”: Light and Dark; Good and Evil, God and the Devil, Body and Soul. It was fundamental to Manichean thinking that these two principles were both absolute, and opposed to one another; that is, they were both *purely* good or evil, and therefore so thoroughly unlike that they shared no attributes whatsoever and were eternally repugnant to one another. Nevertheless, they also wanted to claim that the world of our experience is a result of an intermixing of the two realms. This conglomeration occurred, they contended, because of primordial invasion of the light by the dark in an attempt to conquer and possess it.⁷ Thus, every living thing from plants to human beings was considered by the Manicheans as both a composite and a battleground of two hostile forces: each was a “prison” of evil physical matter confining and continually assaulting an innocent God-fragment, the soul. The effects of this war were crucially apparent in the inner struggle of a person trying to live a moral life: part of him (his pure soul, a fragment of light or God) wanted to live a pure and upright life; another part of him (the devilish physical body) was

⁷There were also non-composite things: some objects contained no light at all (such as dead bodies), and others contained nothing but light (such as the divine heavenly bodies, the sun and the moon).

intent on dragging him down into sin. “The mind of the flesh is hostile to God; is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be”; “the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; so that you will not do the things that you will to do”; “I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and leading me captive in the law of sin and death. Therefore I am a miserable man; who shall deliver me from the body of this death, unless our Lord Jesus Christ?”⁸ Scriptural texts like these from Paul (which Augustine saw as a description of a civil war within the human individual), the Manicheans saw as descriptions of a literal battle between two utterly opposed forces.

Augustine’s initial diagnosis of the conceptual source of Manichean error is that they too hastily deal with the question of *where* evil comes from before considering the more basic question of *what* evil is in the first place (*mor.* 2.2.2; *c. ep. Man.* 36.41). But he does not attempt to get from the Manicheans a systematic list of what they consider to be examples of evil, though he clearly agrees with some items which would make their list (such as wickedness or death, *nat. b.* 2; *c. ep. Man.* 33.36) and, disagrees with others (such as fire, poison or wild animals, *mor.* 2.8.11). Rather he lets the inconsistencies with the Manichean views emerge as he analyses their ideas. By showing that the Manicheans cannot help but consistently undermine their own most fundamental assertions, he begins to reveal what evil really is (and is not).

Again, the inconsistency underscored most often by Augustine concerns the Manichean insistence that good and evil are utterly alien and yet are related in various ways. Augustine is quick to point out the more obvious problems with this. If good and evil are so radically different (*duab. an.* 1.1) why would evil desire good for itself; in fact, is it not a good thing to desire good? Indeed if evil and good are so unlike, so opposite, how could evil conceive of good in the first place (*duab. an.* 12.16)? A more profound problem is the fact that neither good nor evil are as thoroughly unlike one another as the Manicheans want to insist; in fact, they have much in common. For one thing, both exist. And evil, like good, also possesses the goods of

⁸Rom 8:7, Gal 5:17, Rom 8:23-25, used by the Manichean, Fortunatus, in his recorded debate with Augustine (*c. Fort.* 21).

“life, potency... safety, memory, intelligence, moderation, power, plenty, sensation.”⁹ Their apparently “pure” good too is riddled with evil: since, as the Manicheans contend, good is attacked and harmed (imprisoned) by evil, it is susceptible to “these great evils: death, sickness, forgetfulness, madness, perturbation, impotence, neediness, stupidity, blindness, pain, iniquity, dishonour, war, lack of moderation, deformity, perversity” (*nat. b.* 40; cf. *c. ep. Man.* 33.36 ; *mor.* 2.9.14-15).¹⁰ Based on these observations, Augustine tells the Manicheans that “instead of one good and one evil principle, you seem to make both good or both evil, or rather make both good *and* evil at the same time” (*c. Faust.* 21.14). The evil principle itself is “a mixture of good and evil, even in the region where they suppose evil to be alone and in perfection” (*c. ep. Man.* 33.36).

Augustine uses this fact as a springboard to a correct understanding of evil. He suggests that dualists like the Manicheans are actually correct (in spite of their faulty metaphysics) when they attribute good things to what they, also rightly, call evil. Evil really *is* inextricably tied to good somehow, in a way that good is not similarly tied to evil (*c. ep. Man.* 33.36-34.37; *mor.* 2.2.2). It is the interpretation of this fact that needs examining. Augustine therefore next brings out the true import of the “mixture” of good and evil by means of another claim he points out is unintelligible on Manichean grounds. The Manicheans condemn evil. But on grounds of their own metaphysics to do so is irrational especially in light of what condemnation (*vituperatio*) implies. To condemn something, Augustine insists, is to imply that the condemned thing ought to be otherwise, that it is falling short in some way (*lib. arb.* 13-14; *civ. Dei* 12.1). But this is exactly what the Manicheans cannot claim about evil things. The Manicheans insist that “evil is a particular nature and substance” (*mor.* 2.2.3). “Substance” is a slightly newer word, says Augustine, for what is commonly called “nature,” and nature means that which allows us to

⁹At this stage, it may not be clear why it is so obvious to Augustine that things as life, memory, or intelligence are “good” things; one might object that these are merely neutral: they are just basic features of existing. As we will see, Augustine thinks that they are real goods; but part of his point here, I think, is that a claim of neutrality is exactly what is not open to the Manicheans. On their own view, things must be either bad or good, and the two types of existence cannot share any attributes at all.

¹⁰Augustine derives these lists of attributes partly from the attributes of human beings, body and soul, but also from his reading of the elaborate Manichean mythology, where villains and heroes are depicted as planning and conversing (for which intelligence and the like are required), and as capable of miscalculation, imprisonment, suffering, and of being in need of rescue (in the case of the light) (*mor.* 2.9.14).

conceive of something as being a “member of its own kind” (*mor.* 2.2.2).¹¹ If something has or conforms to a nature, it is true to say that there is a proper way for it to be what it is, an example of a thing with that nature. For the Manicheans, then, it is in evil’s nature to be evil and to do the things it does. So, Augustine presses them, on what grounds do they condemn the Evil Soul for being what it is meant to be – that is, for being (ironically) a “good” example of evil?¹² It always was, is, and will be evil: “souls do not sin in not being such as they cannot be” (*duab. an.* 13.18).¹³ In the end, the only thing that Manicheans can point to as being “evil” about evil is that it is opposed to good (and for that matter, the only thing that is good about good is that it is opposed to evil) (*c. Faust.* 21.14).

Augustine insists that although the Manicheans box themselves into such a corner, the seeds of a correct answer to these questions are found exactly in their condemnation of evil, or at least in a proper interpretation of it. Evil rightly ought to be condemned. But what we are rightly condemning about an evil thing is *not* its pure evilness but the fact that it is a thing that *ought not* to be evil. It has something wrong with it; it is an example of corruption (*corruptio*) or perversion (*perversio*) by a flaw (*vitium*) which harms (*nocere*) it (*mor.* 2.4.6; 7.6-6.8; *lib. arb.* 3.13-14; *civ. Dei* 12.3). It is in a state that is *unnatural* for it (*contra naturam*, *lib. arb.* 3.13; *civ. Dei* 12.1) in the sense that it falls away to some degree from the pattern to which it ought to conform. What we are condemning about an evil thing is not what it ought to be, but precisely

¹¹We will further explore Augustine’s definition (in so far as he has one) of ‘nature’ in the next chapter. Here he appears simply to want to indicate what he regards as the commonsensical idea that every thing has a particular structure or way of being the kind of thing it is.

¹²Augustine’s criticism of the Manichean moral psychology moves in a similar vein. The Manicheans believed that repentance for one’s sins is necessary for salvation (however differently they conceived of the latter) (*duab. an.* 14.22). But this, Augustine insists, makes no sense according to the dualistic view of the human being. *Who*, precisely, is repenting, and for what? If the evil part is repenting for its evil deeds then it is neither naturally evil (since repentance implies that it ought to have been otherwise) nor even evil any longer (since to repent is good). But if the good part is repenting, this implies that it is capable of doing something wrong; but in that case it is not absolutely good. The whole point of hypothesizing the existence of the evil part was to avoid saying such a thing about the good part (*duab. an.* 14.22, *c. Fort.* 21).

¹³Of course this kind of statement proved troublesome to Augustine later. The Pelagians used his own wording to object to his idea that human beings sin out of a condition of original sin. If they are preconditioned from birth to sin, then how can they be blamed for doing so (*retr.* 1.14)? His response is that although the fallen (sinful) will is held by a kind of necessity (*nat. et gr.* 66.79), it ought not to be, and moreover it is that way through its own choice. But it is not here necessary to get into thorny questions of what constitutes the basis for responsibility to see that Augustine’s point about natural evil is more fundamental: if there is a proper way of being evil, a “good” example of evil – if evil has nature – then what exactly about it are we condemning?

the flaw that prevents it from being so – thereby, in a way, praising the very nature that is harmed by the flaw

we condemn (*lib. arb.* 3.13-14).

But this is not all. From identifying evil as corruption, Augustine slips subtly into identifying evil as loss (*amissio*) or lack (*privatio*) (*mor.* 2.4.6; *Gn. litt.* 8.31; *civ. Dei* 11.9). But of what? The answer is found by realizing that if the evil thing can become even *more* evil, more flawed, then it must retain some good, even while being evil – for what does it lose by becoming *more* flawed except its goodness? Hence Augustine’s famous definition of evil: evil is a lack of goodness (*privatio boni*, *civ. Dei* 11.22; *conf.* 3.7.12; *ench.* 11). Augustine seems to anticipate the objection that this is semantic trickery of the sort that could just as easily argue that good is a lack of evil. He points out that the goods of a particular thing are easily identified – they include those characteristics of a thing which make it a “member of its kind,” that is, define its nature. In contrast, the evilness of an evil thing can only be identified by the corruption or absence of these goods. Despite the Manichean reviling of the physical bodies of animals like the ape, it is not necessary to list anything purely evil to account for the goodness of a good ape. On the contrary, it has “its own proper measure, correspondence of limbs on both sides, concord of all its parts, readiness in self defence, and other qualities which it would take a long time to pursue.” It is, however, necessary to refer to the *lack* of these things in a damaged ape (*nat. b.* 14). Likewise even the “evil” poison of the scorpion is a good for the scorpion since to lack its poison is evil for that creature (*mor.* 2.8.11).¹⁴ Even the Manicheans, therefore, cannot help but understand (and therefore talk about) evil in terms of a missing good (*duab. an.* 10.8). In contrast, “the good things can be thought of without evils” since “without these goods no nature can be conceived of” (*c. ep. Man.* 34.37).

That it is not possible to conceive of anything without simultaneously conceiving of its good leads Augustine to a surprising claim. If a thing were to lose *all* its goodness it would cease to exist, for only in this state would it have nothing left to lose. Hence, evil is also a lack of

¹⁴That the poison causes a evil physical state for the human being who is unfortunate to encounter it Augustine does not deny. This variety of evil comes about, he explains, when two goods collide in a way that “disagrees” with one of them. This does not make either of the conflicting goods an example of Manichean pure evil (*mor.* 2.8.11; *civ. Dei* 11.22).

existence (or, as it is often translated, being), in such a way that evil things *are* (*esse*) less than good things; and the worse they get, the less they exist. This means, in Augustine's view, that to be good is the same thing as *to be* (*conf.* 7.12.18; *c. ep. Man.* 40.46). In *De natura boni*, Augustine gives a rare (in his directly anti-Manichean engagements, anyway) concrete example summing these ideas up. Since we can imagine the body of an ape (which is a paragon of evil for the Manicheans because of its hideousness) becoming even *more* hideous and deformed, then it must yet have some good to lose.¹⁵ This must mean that it is in some sense good. After all, if it had no goodness left to corrupt it would totally cease to exist (*nat. bon.* 15-17; cf. *conf.* 7.12.18; *lib. arb.* 3.13).

The fact that evil is a state of corruption, not because it is defiled by some evil substance, but because it is a state of *deficiency* in a good thing, helps to explain the mystery of the way evil always seems to be “mixed” with good (so that, for example, evil things still exist, have structure, and so forth). A correct apprehension of what evil “is” (so to speak) reveals that it is nothing in itself. It is only good which really exists. For if evil is a corruption of a good thing, then we can see that, in a sense, evil relies on the good in which it is always found. “Corruption exists not by itself, but in some substance which it corrupts; for corruption itself is not a substance” (*mor.* 2.5.7; cf. *civ. Dei* 12.3).¹⁶ Augustine captures the relationship of good to evil by making metaphorical use of a relationship which to the Manicheans is anything but metaphor: evil is indeed to good as darkness is to light. Just as it is light that has real existence, whereas darkness is the absence of light, it is only good that really exists, while evil is the absence, the lack, of good. But it can only be absent from and in a good thing. It is not some force which exists separately and independently, attaching itself maliciously to good things (*c. ep. Man.* 30.33; *b. vita* 3.29).

¹⁵ Augustine notes that the Manichean disgust with the ape is another example of their knee-jerk anthropocentrism. Apes are indeed hideous if they are regarded as deformed human beings, which of course they are not. There is a proper way of being an ape (see below).

¹⁶This claim leads many commentators to summarize Augustine's privative theory of evil as the idea that evil is “parasitic” on good (e.g. Cress 1989, 109; Hick 1966, 47; Babcock 1993, 241). By this metaphor they try to capture the idea that Augustine thinks crucial: good is the only stand-alone reality in the world. While the parasitic metaphor does capture the idea that the descriptor “evil” can paradoxically only apply to good things (so that it is *conceptually* parasitic), it may also unfortunately imply what Augustine is trying to eschew: that evil is something alien which attaches itself to a good thing and sucks the goodness out of it. This, of course, is not the case. Indeed in this sense the *Manichean* evil is truly parasitic.

Since “nothing can be evil except something which is good,” evil things can accurately (if somewhat paradoxically), says Augustine, be described as “evil goods” (*ench.* 13). This demotion of evil from one of the twin sources of all that exists to merely a deficiency in the good things that really do exist, absolves God from the primary Manichean objection that, if, as the Catholics say, God has created *everything*, he must have created evil too. Since evil is neither created, nor even a thing, there is no need to trace its “existence” back to God. What is more, this correct understanding of evil allows us to see that everything which exists is indeed “good” in so far as it exists, underscoring the scripturally based Catholic teaching that everything that exists is good (*mor.* 2.4.3; *lib. arb.* 3.13).

But still, if God created a good universe (as the Genesis story derided by the Manicheans claims), then evil as lack (if not as something created) still needs to be explained. How then, then, does evil – lack of goodness, or flawedness – come about, if it comes neither from an eternal source of pure evil or from God? If Augustine were to conflate, as do the Manicheans, good things with God himself (they believed that the soul, for example, was a fragment of God), then the notion of “evil goods” would once again compromise God himself: since the goods surrounding us are capable of being corrupted this would mean that God himself is capable of corruption. But Augustine thinks it is not only impious but also illogical to take this route. The direction of his thought goes something like this: corruption implies lack, lack implies neediness, and neediness implies that there is something to need; “the only good, after all, that can diminish or increase is one that gets its good from another good” (*Trin.* 8.2.5). For Augustine, as we will see in the next chapter, the only way we can adequately account for evil as the lack it clearly is, is from within the framework of a metaphysics which acknowledges not two poles of good and evil, but two kinds of good (existing) things: that which is good and somehow independent (God the creator) and that which is good and somehow dependent (creation). That which God makes depends on God for its goodness, and rational creatures, creatures in possession of free will, may refuse that goodness. The act of so doing is sin. Sin, and not God, is what brings evil, or lack, into the world.¹⁷ This is the crux of what we have called the

¹⁷The Manicheans do not make a careful distinction between sin (evil-doing) and evil. For them, sin is just what evil things do. In the Manichean world-view, sin comes from evil, whereas for Augustine evil comes from sin.

natural account of the punishment of sin.

There are two ways that the privative account of evil will lead Augustine to such a strong insistence on absolute separation of God from evil that at times its stringency seems to rival even that of the Manichean view. One involves the creaturely (as opposed to the divine) *responsibility* for sin and therefore for the results of sin. Responsibility for sin is grounded in the freedom of the human will¹⁸; this is the anti-Manichean argument of *De libero arbitrio* in particular (cf. *duab. an.* 10.15-11.17; *c. Fort.* 15-17). This notion responds to an additional Manichean anti-Catholic objection that even if evil is traced back to sin, sinners are created by God and therefore God is ultimately responsible for what his creatures do. I will not be spending much time on this defence; I will assume along with Augustine that sinners alone are responsible for sin.

The second way Augustine thinks privation distances God from evil will be highly problematic when we come to contrast the natural account with the legal account, which states that God inflicts evils on sinners as punishment: since evil is a lack of that proper “amount” of goodness and (therefore) existence into which God creates the world, evil represents a falling away from God’s will for the particular good that it so affected. When Augustine combines this idea with the idea that God is not responsible for the sin which brings about this privation, he makes a particularly strong case not only that God is not responsible for evil, but that he in some sense *cannot* be responsible for it. And indeed, we will find Augustine making strong statements exactly to this effect. “How can he who is the cause of the being of all beings be at the same time the cause of their not being?” (*mor.* 2.3.3); “corruption cannot come from him who is incorruptible” (*c. ep. Man.* 38.44). It is now easier to anticipate that, to the extent that Augustine is successful in tying particular evils to the coat-tails of sin, he is equally successful in ruling God out as a cause of these evils. And given what I shall next argue, it is questionable whether he even *needs* to invoke divine punishment to explain any example of suffering.

¹⁸This facet of his argument is often termed the ‘Free Will Defence’ by commentators, who assume the motivation underlying it is primarily one of theodicy (e.g. Kirwan 1989, 78; Hick 1966, 59; Solomon 1999, 125). While this is clearly true on one level, another motivation, at least in *De libero arbitrio*, would seem to be Augustine’s desire to account for the fact that we think it makes sense to hold people to account for the things they do (*lib. arb.* 2.1, 3.1).

From syndrome to disease: an evaluative model

If Augustine is successful in using the idea of sin-induced privation of good to explain all the symptoms of the fall, he will have more than contradicted the legal account (wherein God inflicts the symptoms); he will seemingly have rendered the entire legal account redundant. I think he is successful. But what does it mean to say that Augustine is *successful* in binding together all the symptoms of the fall through the explanatory mechanism of sin? Certainly, it means more than that he dogmatically asserts that all instances of human suffering are self-inflicted by sin. Rather, he must assemble a context of relationships which allow him to answer coherently not just the question of why human beings fell, but why they began to manifest *these* particular symptoms in all their variety as a result.

Augustine has given us the beginnings of a model by which to evaluate his own conceptual achievement on these kinds of grounds. Augustine compares humanity's condition to one of self-imposed nutritional deficiency. A proper understanding of a nutritional deficiency is a particularly useful example of the medical ideal of the resolution of *syndrome* into *disease*. In medical terms, a 'syndrome' – a cluster of symptoms seen in many patients – is not identified as a 'disease' until the root mechanism which links all the symptoms together is understood. Once we have isolated the originating pathology we begin to perceive the symptoms as related to one another precisely because they are all related to their ultimate cause. We begin to understand why this particular symptom and not that is present; why this particular *set* of symptoms and not another. The medical and scientific ideal, then, is to replace the *arbitrary, unrelated and independent* with the *coherent, related and dependent* through an understanding of the connections and relationships which lie on a deeper level.

Furthermore, an important feature of this kind of understanding of the disease mechanism will involve not only the relationship between the nutrient and the body in general, but also between various aspects and functions of the body itself. For example, for many centuries it was a mystery what caused the cluster of symptoms known as 'scurvy.' What strange pathogen could cause such diverse afflictions as loose teeth, bruising, stiff and painful joints, malformed hairs, dementia, and even massive internal bleeding resulting in death? Some theories denied that the symptoms of scurvy could be attributed to a single cause. Others (the

Manichean or germ theories of scurvy?) suggested that bad air, food or dirt was to blame. It took some time for people to figure out that there was a nutrient, vitamin C, on which the body is vitally and continuously dependent (the human body cannot make its own vitamin C), such that a deficiency of it causes a person to become ill and even die. The general bodily function of collagen synthesis depends on vitamin C; but virtually every part of the body – skin, organs, teeth, hair and bone – depends on some form of collagen synthesis. Thus all these are compromised by C deficiency. As well, organs such as the heart or brain on which the whole body depends are liable to hemorrhaging, and when they become compromised so does everything that is dependent on them. Hence, the wide variety and connectedness of symptoms manifested by scurvy: the abstinence from a substance on which the body is dependent causes a cascading effect of deprivation among other dependent relationships within the body itself (Carpenter 1986).

The following two chapters are organized around the assumption that Augustine’s natural account is profitably viewed as accomplishing just this kind of unifying understanding of affliction. Just as a lack of healthy collagen underlies all the symptoms of scurvy, lack of “good” underlies all the symptoms of evil which inflict humanity; and just as lack of collagen in scurvy is brought about not by some attacking pathogen, but by the failure to obtain a substance (vitamin C), so lack of goodness is brought about not by an external attack but by the sinful failure to receive the substance of good. And, finally, just as the human body is a network of dependent relationships so that the illness of one part or function causes the sickness of another, so the whole human being – body and soul – is likewise a network of dependency, so that what adversely affects the soul adversely effects the body.

The first step in laying out a comprehensive theory of a disease¹⁹ (according to this model) is to set out the network of relationships in which it plays a role. In the next chapter

¹⁹As opposed to a history of that disease. Of course when explaining the etiology of scurvy, a textbook will not go over the process by which this etiology was discovered. The process of discovering how diseases work is messy and complex and often begins rather than ends with the cure (for example, that citrus fruits cured scurvy led to an understanding of the role of nutrients in the body, and even to a further understanding of the body itself). I think Augustine would find this an apt analogy for the way he – and other thinkers (notably Paul) in his tradition – came to an understanding of anthropology. Their writings too evince a complex process where we know something about what is wrong, something about the cure (in this case, grace), and a little about ourselves – and juggle these things to come up with the kind of picture I will outline.

(Chapter 2), therefore, I examine the set of dependent relationships that will determine the effect that sin has on the sinner. Primary among these relationship is that between Creator and creature; secondary are those the specifically human creature has with himself (such as the relationship between his body and soul). These relationships, I will show, are defined by how the “nutrient” – good – is shared among the various members. The difficulty here involves trying to relate what seems a vague metaphysical concept (good) to the concrete created world. In Chapter 2, therefore, I show that what Augustine *means* by good is not only existence but orderliness. The notion of order, we will see, runs like a unifying thread throughout Augustine’s metaphysics; it will bind together not only the elements of the natural account itself, but also the natural account with the legal account. Chapter 3 then carries on with the theme of order, showing how the “symptoms” of both human well-being and its opposite – suffering – are actually the experience of varying levels of orderliness and disorderliness.

We begin in the next chapter, then, where Augustine often leaves off with the Manicheans: not with two opposed and independent realities of good and evil, but two goods, Creator and creature, one of which depends on the other. But how?

Chapter 2

Order and Existence: What Goodness is

Augustine knew that his Manichean critics had difficulty grasping the meaning of his claim that evil does not, strictly speaking, exist. He cites one critic who mockingly suggests that people who believe in the non-reality of evil should try picking up a scorpion; they would quickly experience an emphatically palpable evil.¹ Interestingly, some modern commentators seem to have similar difficulties. For example, one sometimes reads that Augustine's privation theory of evil is too abstract or anaemic to deal with the harsh and very real presence of evil as it is actually experienced²; other detractors simply dismiss it as a uselessly arcane, overly subtle, or even intellectually dishonest conceptual sleight of hand.³

Despite the debate it has inspired, a crucial feature of Augustine's privation theory has been left to languish – perhaps, in part, because of its air of abstraction. What has not been done or at least not systematically, is to link this doctrine to its human face. Rarely do commentators acknowledge that, let alone thoroughly explore how and why, Augustine thinks that all the ills of human life whether of body or soul are in fact the human *experience* of the privation of good which is evil.⁴ In the next two chapters, I will be presenting Augustine's case for this view in a

¹Among other counter-arguments, Augustine responds that many things have an evil effect – that is, disagree with or are inconvenient to – human well-being, but only when used as they ought not to be. Both salt and fire are extraordinarily useful and extraordinarily dangerous to human beings, depending on how they are administered and used, so that it is anthropocentric nonsense to call something evil just because it can be harmful (*mor.* 1. 8.11; cf. *civ. Dei* 11.22). But he seems to know he is often arguing in vain. “But what am I to do? I know that many of you can understand nothing of all this” (*mor.* 2.2.4).

²See McCloskey 1964, 36; Schilling 1977, 93; and Kirwan 1989, 62. The mathematical physicist turned dean of divinity, John Polkinghorne, expresses a typical version of this concern: “For all its intellectual attractiveness, this is a very difficult theory to square with experience. How could one tell a victim of cancer or the Holocaust that he was simply suffering from the privation of the good? There seems to be a much more positive quality to evil than Augustine's theory allows” (1989, 61).

³See McCloskey 1964, 65: privation theory is “an attempt to explain [evil] away as not needing a solution”; Matson 1965, 142-143: “Really the ‘evil as non-being’ ploy is a play on words, an unfunny joke”; and Kane 1980, 55: “Evil as privation looks very much like a tour de force of definition. Things are so defined that it is logically impossible for God to create evil.” I am indebted to Cress's 1989 article “Augustine's privation account of evil: A defence” which reviews some of the discussion on this topic.

⁴When Augustine's ideas about evil are discussed, the attention given to evil as privation is determined by commentators' interests and attention. As noted earlier, in metaphysically oriented discussions, privation tends to be viewed in relative isolation as a Platonically influenced feature of his anti-Manicheism. Those scholars who focus on
(continued...)

way he never does, to reveal unifying connections between ideas that can otherwise remain relatively neglected and underappreciated.

We begin, however, not with evil but with good. The real root of the misunderstanding between Augustine and some of his critics is perhaps not so much the idea of evil as privation, as it is the “good” which is lacking in an object so deprived. Augustine’s talk of degrees of goodness and, even more mysteriously, of existence (which as we have seen is for him synonymous with goodness), makes it tempting to ascribe to him views he does not hold; that, for instance, goodness/existence is either a conceptual abstraction (again, contrived mainly for the purpose of asserting that evil is *not* a substance) with no obvious correspondence to the world of our experience; or, that it is a featureless “stuff” of which things may have greater or lesser amounts and which God, the source of this stuff, injects into things.⁵ Although Augustine’s metaphorical language (including the nutritional example and others akin to it) helps to encourage especially the latter misconception, it is, as we will shortly see, nevertheless false that he conceives of “existence” (or goodness) as a kind of mouldable substance poured out by God; still less that he thinks God makes the world (and therefore human beings) out of his own goodness or substance. Augustine insists that God is one thing, and the soul (or any other thing) another (*c. Fort.* 11, 12; *mor.* 2.4.6). What, then, *is* this goodness, this “being,” that is lacking when a thing becomes evil? When Augustine claims that human beings “feed” on God, what exactly are they taking in?

⁴(...continued)

factors involved in the experience of evil (including questions, for instance, of sin, suffering, and free will) tend to downplay privation (Evans 1982; Rist 1994). Commentators who examine both the experiential and privative aspects of evil generally do not pay much attention to the connection between the two; or if they do, they may even suggest that there is no connection. Babcock (1993, 241), for example, suggests that Augustine eventually (in *lib. arb.* 1) imports the idea of suffering as punishment into his philosophy having found that evil as privation is a dead end – as least as far as incorporating evil into what he wants to view as an orderly universe. Babcock thus seems to drive a wedge between Augustine’s view of the experience of evil (suffering as “punishment”) and the ontological status of evil as privation. In contrast, R. Williams suggests that Augustine is effectively arguing that “what we experience and call evil is, indeed, not simply a void, a lack, but it is the *effect of a lack*” (2000, 113, my emphasis). But he does not develop this idea.

⁵Cress (1989, 110-111), R. Williams (2000, 106), Hick (1966, 57) and Rist (1994, 259) note the difficulty in importing Augustine’s idea of gradations of being into ordinary terms. Rist thinks that the equivalent degrees of goodness are easier to understand. In one sense, he is clearly correct. In ordinary terms we commonly think of things as being capable of being more or less good, whereas things either exist or not. On the other hand, what exactly we mean by “good” is still difficult to say without further analysis and translation.

My aim in this chapter is to answer this question while clarifying how apparently amorphous abstractions such as goodness and existence translate for Augustine into the concrete world we know. I will translate goodness/existence into terms which have enough purchase in ordinary experience that we will eventually be able to see the link between privation of goodness and the all too real sufferings of humanity. I argue that *order (ordo)* is the pivotal concept for doing so.⁶ As Augustine says (somewhat obscurely in its context in *De moribus Manichaeorum*), “what is corrupted is perverted; and what is perverted suffers the loss of order, and *order is good*” (2.5.7).⁷ Here Augustine is not saying that order happens to be one good among others, but that what good (or at least created good) *is*, is order. And while it may be difficult to conceive of a lack of “good,” it is far easier to conceive of a lack of order. In many ways, the idea of order is the keystone of Augustine’s philosophy. It unifies and renders intelligible (and certainly more accessible for us) not only his statements about the dependence of creation on God, but also, as we will see in later chapters, what he has to say about punishment.

This chapter is divided into two major sections. In the first, I will show that order is the bridge between God and his creation, two realities so different that it is at first difficult to see how the one can depend on the other at all. The second section concentrates more closely on how order is expressed in the structure of human existence (in particular in the hierarchical relationship of body and soul); this demonstrates that the dependent relationship between God and creation is mirrored within the human being. To refer back to our nutritional analogy, then, section one is roughly analogous to a physiological description of how the nutrient interacts with what it nourishes; the second section is analogous to an examination of the structure of the thing being nourished – for as we saw in the last chapter, this structure itself determines how the nutrient is managed.

⁶Many commentators have in passing noted the equivalency Augustine draws between created goodness and order (and therefore between evil and disorder); see, for example Cress 1989, 113, 118; R. Williams 2000, 113 and 1994, 14; and C. Harrison 2006, 86. However, none takes up the implications of these identifications. In his 1993 paper “The significance of *ordo* in St. Augustine’s moral theory,” Torchia, on the other hand, does offer an extended outline of the connection between the order of reality and moral order. However, his discussion is limited to three Augustinian texts, and he does not claim to attempt to trace *ordo* through its various manifestations in human experience so as to attain a systematic account of what the experience of *lack* of order (good or being) should and does look like – as I will try to do.

⁷“Item quod corrumpitur, profecto pervertitur; quod autem pervertitur, privatur ordine; ordo autem bonum est.”

1. Augustine's Dualism: Unity and Order

Although Augustine's metaphorical identification of God as the "food" of human beings usefully schematizes a *dependent* relationship, the analogy quickly breaks down in an important way. As we will now see, for Augustine God is not simply another member of the world, alongside that which he nourishes (as food is a member of the world alongside the human bodies, or even the human soul). God bears a unique relationship to the world. The heart of Augustine's thought, the principle as fundamental to it as the dualism of good and evil is to the Manichean system, is the distinction between *creature* and *creator*.⁸ For Augustine, there are fundamentally only two kinds of existing (good) things. There is God, the

one good which is good supremely and in itself, and not by the participation of any good [*non participatione alicuius boni*], but by its own nature and essence [*propria natura et essentia*]; and another good which is good by participation, and by having something [bestowed] [*habendo*]. Thus it has its being as good from the supreme good, which, however, is still self-contained, and loses nothing [*manente illo nihilque amittente*]. This second kind of good is called a creature [*creaturam*], which is liable to hurt through falling away [*noceri per defectum potest*]. (*mor.* 2.4.6)

This passage captures Augustine's basic metaphysics and also a set of foundational claims which at first appear difficult to reconcile when we try to outline how exactly creation (and therefore human beings) depend on God.⁹ Here Augustine reiterates the claim of the nutritional metaphor, that creation *receives* something from God, namely goodness/existence (his specific language here is that of Platonic participation; we will address this in more detail later on). However, he also goes beyond that metaphor and asserts that while creation is dependent, God is not. God is only a source, never a recipient. Even though he is the source of creation's good, he gives it nothing of his own unique goodness or being, but remains entirely in himself and loses nothing. As Augustine says more forcefully elsewhere, "All other good things derive their origin from him but are not part of him" (*nat. b.* 1); "he [gives] being but not the highest being, as he himself is" (*civ. Dei* 11.2); he does not "give birth to [creatures] out of himself" (*Gn. adv. Man.* 1.2.4 cf.

⁸R. Williams goes so far as to call this a kind of "hierarchical dualism" (1994, 10; cf. Bourke 1964, 5).

⁹Although human beings depend on God in certain unique ways, they also share the same basic dependence as the rest of creation. For the first part of this chapter, then, I will refer to creation in general.

2.29.43). Creation, in other words, is not made out of God. Yet even in his qualifications Augustine is hinting how creation depends on God, even while it receives nothing of his substance. What creation receives from God is not God-stuff, but a *likeness* of it¹⁰: creation, like its creator, both *exists* and is *good*, and has these features precisely because it comes from its Creator, who is characterized by them (it “has its being as good from the supreme good”). So although creation is not, like God, the highest kind of good, it “approximates” that good, as Augustine says more explicitly elsewhere (*propinqua summo bono* in *De natura boni* 1).

This principle – that all things “imitate [*imitamenta sint*]” God (*vera rel.* 49.95) – will underpin our discussion in this chapter; but by extension so will its apparent opposite: that God and his creation are also *unlike*. In fact, a vast gulf separates God from his creation, as Augustine makes clear throughout his works.¹¹ “All the good things that God has made are very good, but they are not good in the same *way* that God is good (*Gn. adv. Man.* 1.2.4).” “The manner in which [God] *exists* differs totally from that in which these things that are made exist (*Gn. litt.* 5.16).” There is, then, not only a quantitative but even a qualitative difference between God and creation. It is not simply that God is good on an order of magnitude which dwarfs the goodness of creation; rather he is good in a different kind of way. He *exists* in a different kind of way. To understand how these unlike goods are yet alike is to appreciate how creation depends on God.

It is very important that Augustine does not arbitrarily define two types of goods. Rather, he thinks he can point to two such objects as have just been described – two things that exist in very different ways, and yet are somehow alike – from within the bounds of normal human experience. As we will now see, he does this by identifying two realities with correspondingly very different susceptibilities to *change*. One of these – the world around us, including ourselves – is changeable (and always changing), and the other – which he identifies as God – is

¹⁰ Augustine reserves the special status of *image* (*imago*) of God for rational beings like humans and angels (*div. qu.* 51; *vera rel.* 44.82), and tends to locate the source of this image specifically in the divine Trinity (*Trin.* 9.2, 12.6-8, 12.12; *Gn. litt. imp.* 16.55-62). But a recurrent theme of his writings is that all creation is made in the likeness (*similitudo*) of God in that its goodness is a kind of imitation of his goodness (beauty) and existence (*div. qu.* 51; *conf.* 3.6.10, 7.11.17. See Clark 1999, 441; Ayres 1999, 551). The precise difference between image and likeness cannot be addressed here, nor can, with any specificity, humanity’s likeness to the Trinity, but see Clark 1999 and Bonner 1984. It is not necessary to address *imago* in detail to formulate the basis of the natural account.

¹¹ As R. Williams puts it, there is a “radical distance and difference between God and creation” (1994:10; cf. Rist 1994, 256). Williams identifies what he calls the simultaneous “continuity and...discontinuity between God and the universe” as essential to understanding Augustine on creation (11).

unchangeable (and unchanging). In fact, so different are God and creation in this respect, that their changeability (or lack of it) virtually defines them: “those natures which...are changeable in some respect are called creatures; the nature which is unchangeable is called God” (*ep.* 18 cf. *civ. Dei* 13.5-6; *conf.* 7.11.7). The question of how creation (and humanity) depends on God can therefore not only be rephrased as “how does God give creation its existence and good if he does not give it some of his being and goodness?” or even “what does it mean to say that creation’s goodness and being is like God’s yet vastly different?” but also: “how can a changeable thing be like an unchanging one?” This is where the idea of “order” will become the pivotal idea; Augustine thinks that the orderliness of changeable things is the way that they imitate their unchanging creator. We will begin, then, not with the dependent similarity of creation to its creator but with its *dissimilarity* with respect to change – a gap which, we will find, will be bridged by order.

Change versus the unchangeable: What it means to exist

Everything in the world is always changing, claims Augustine. To see this, we need to appreciate what he means by change (*mutatio*). Change is more than the mutation of form over time or the shifting of position through space. Rather, things change merely by *occupying* space and time. An object with spatial dimension, for example, is spread out (*lib. arb.* 2.14; *conf.* 7.10.16 cf. *vera rel.* 30.55) over space, and is therefore different at one spatial point than it is at another – that is, it *changes* from one point to another (*vera rel.* 21.41). This extension remains however much a changeable thing is broken apart. Such things are infinitely divisible (*c. ep. Man.* 18.20). No matter how finely physical things, for example, are divided up, those very divisions will have “a right and a left, a top and a bottom, a near side and farther side, ends and middle...these parts are present in any material object, however tiny” (*lib. arb.* 2.8). Likewise, anything which moves through time is similarly spread out, but moment by moment, at no time present all at once (*lib. arb.* 2.14; *conf.* 11.11.13).¹²

For Augustine, this extension through time or space means that a changeable thing is

¹²In the *Confessiones* Augustine engages in a prescient reflection on the fact that space is inextricably connected to time. What occupies space must occupy time as well; time is one of the measurements of the movement of objects (11.21.27-24.31).

always radically incomplete. Within any point within its boundaries, it lacks most of what it has and will have in its totality; it will always be smaller in the part than in the whole since it is inherently a multiplicity. A physical objects is “composed of numberless parts, some here, some there...however large or however small the substance may be, it occupies an amount of space without being wholly in any part of it” (*ep.* 137.4 cf. *Trin.* 6.6.8). The same point can be made about temporal extension; temporal things are like sentences of poetry: the whole of what they are – their “meaning” – is not found in a single syllable (that is, moment) but only in the whole of the time over which they exist (*vera rel.* 21.41).¹³ Any changeable thing, then, is never fully present all at once; it is never “truly and simply one” (*lib. arb.* 2.8).

The lack of true unity or oneness displayed by changing things leads Augustine to what may seem an unwarranted conclusion: changing things do not fully exist. They both are, and are not (*conf.* 7.11.17; *ep.* 2). Change is a kind of constant dying away into nothingness, since not only mutation over time, but mutation over space causes one state of affairs to dissolve, to be replaced by another which gives way to yet another. “For anything, of whatever excellence, if it is changeable, *is* not truly; for true being is not present where there is also non-being, and whatever can be changed, is not what it was; if it is not what it was, a certain death has taken place there; something has been slain there that was and is not now” (*Jo. ev. tr.* 28.10); “every change causes that which was, to cease to be” (*nat. b.* 14). Augustine regards this constant dying away into nothingness as evidence that changeable things must be creatures, things that are made. By changing, things demonstrate that they come from *nihil*, out of which God creates the world in Genesis (*Gn. adv. Man.* 1.2.4; *civ. Dei* 12.2; *nat. b.* 1), not in the sense that he fashions it from a formless substance called “nothing” (*nat. b.* 25-26), but in the sense that “before” this act of creation nothing (neither space nor time itself) existed except God (*conf.* 11.13.15).

Augustine’s claim here – that everything within the realm of our everyday experience, including ourselves, does not fully exist – needs to be understood in the context of what he thinks *does* fully exist: “that truly exists which endures unchangeably” (*conf.* 7.11.17). Augustine associates existence with a tendency *not to change*. He also thinks that there is a reality like this, and that he can, to a certain extent, introduce his readers to it: “When the soul understands

¹³For a good discussion of the nuances of Augustine’s views on physicality see Hölscher 1986, 13-21.

something which exists ever the same, it without doubt understands *God*, and he is Truth [*veritas*]” (*div. qu.* 54); “Wherever I found truth, there I found my God, truth itself” (*conf.* 19.24.35). To find out what “truth” is like is to find out what God is like.

Why should truth be identified with God? And in what sense does truth, or God, exist differently and uniquely from the ordinary but changeable things we are accustomed to describe as existing? In fact, in what sense does “truth” *exist* at all in the sense in which we usually use the word ‘exist’? Answering these questions will summarize for us Augustine’s conception of God in such a way that we can readily compare and contrast God’s existence to creation’s existence.

God as the Truth

Augustine’s claim that “God is truth” is neither equivalent to the claim that it is merely true *that* God exists, nor to the claim that God is *a* truth. Rather, as the Platonists showed Augustine (and as he consequently tries to show as well, most notably in *De libero arbitrio* and *De vera religione*, but also in sections of *De diversis quaestionibus*), Truth itself (as I shall now render it to distinguish it from particular truths) is not a proposition but something which *exists* just as surely as physical objects in the world of ordinary experience exist – indeed even more so, for it exists in a different and yet superior way than the world. Thus, to identify God with Truth is not to identify him with a human construct or artificial abstraction: for Augustine there is nothing more solid (so to speak) than Truth.

In the *Confessiones*, Augustine gives an outline of a sort of program or “inquiry by stages” by which the Platonists advised him he might discover truth, or God, for himself.¹⁴

Encouraged by the Platonic books, he

had been trying to understand how it was possible for me to appreciate the beauty of material things...and why the power to make sound judgements [*integre...iudicanti*] about changeable matters was readily available to me, so that

¹⁴In *De libero arbitrio* (2.6-11) and *De vera religione* (29.52-35.65) Augustine actually walks his readers through the Platonic program of ascent summarized in this passage from the *Confessiones*. Thus Augustine probably means this brief description of his Platonic discoveries in the *Confessiones* to function more as a biographical note than as itself a philosophical argument. Since he admits that the actual experience of treading the path he describes is difficult, lengthy, and far from obvious (*c. ep. Man.* 2.2-3.3), it is improbable he would expect to convince a reader with a such a summary as the *Confessiones* passage provides.

I could say, ‘This thing ought to be like this, but that other different’; and in seeking the reason why I was able to judge as I did, I realized that above my changeable mind [*supra mentem meam conmutabilem*] soared the real, unchangeable Truth, which is eternal. (*conf.* 7.17.23)

The key to this passage, and to Augustine’s identification of God with Truth, is his claim that in Truth he finds something “above” his mind.¹⁵ In other works which follow along the lines summarized here, he stipulates that if we first identify the most superior thing in the world, and then find something superior to that, then that thing is what we ought to acknowledge as ‘God’ (*lib. arb.* 2.6, *Trin.* 14.16; *div. qu.* 54; *vera rel.* 30.56-31.57). Roughly speaking, then, Augustine’s argument about the superiority of truth advances in two parts. First he establishes reason (*ratio*; in other works, the mind, *mens*) as the highest aspect of creation. Second he establishes that there is indeed something “higher” than reason: Truth. Given the previous stipulation, we must admit that Truth, therefore, is God.

To establish reason (or the reasoning mind) as the highest element in creation, Augustine places it in an overall hierarchy of superiority (we will return to the important notion of hierarchy in the second half of this chapter). On an intuitive level, we know that those creatures who can reason (like human beings) are superior to those that are merely able to use their physical senses (like animals), to those that merely live (like plants), and certainly to those that simply exist without living, sensing or reasoning (*lib. arb.* 1.7-8; 2.3; cf. *Trin.* 15.4.6; *civ. Dei*). This is why animals may be tamed and trained by human beings, and not the other way around (*lib. arb.* 1.7-8). Reason is also, therefore, the most superior aspect of the human being himself, surmounting his capacity to sense the visible world.

To demonstrate this more precisely, Augustine points out that the senses cannot evaluate themselves. They gather data, but reason sorts it out and “judges” the sensations gathered

¹⁵In *De libero arbitrio* Augustine approaches this argument by first asking how it is “manifest” that God exists. The argument is therefore not a “proof” for the existence of God in the modern sense; Augustine, along with most ancient thinkers, never doubts that there must be some “highest being” which ought properly to be called “God.” The important question is what thing deserves that name (Rist 1994, 69). Hence his question as he puts it in *De Libero Arbitrio* 2.3 is not *whether* God exists, but rather how it may be made clear – *manifestum* – that God exists, and by extension what God is *like*. In contrast to the Manicheans, who, he felt, did “make up” a god who appealed to them (see Chapter 1), the Platonists *discovered* rather than invented something to which, given its exalted status, they (and Augustine) only then applied the name God. See Teske 2008, 26-48 and Rist 1994, 67-71 for further argument against the mistaken notion that *De libero arbitrio* presents an argument for the existence of God.

through the senses (*lib. arb.* 2.6 .; cf. *conf.* 7.17.23, 10.8-10). It is reason, for instance, that realizes that an oar dipped in water is not actually broken but only appears so (*vera rel.* 28.53, 33.62). In *De vera religione* Augustine accords judgement a decisive role in defining reason's relationship to the rest of reality, including truth. He first defines judging by distinguishing it from knowing. To know (*cognoscere*) something is to recognize that something *is* a certain way; to judge (*iudicare*) something involves the recognition a thing can be *different* than it is: it is only this capacity for comparison and appraisal that leads to the ability to say "ought," "should," "was," or "will be" (31.58).¹⁶ Augustine then asserts that whatever judges stands above that which it judges, looking down on it, as it were, so that "what judges is superior to [*praestantiorem esse*] what is judged" (29.53). The implication for reason is that "if rational life judges by itself alone, then there is nothing more excellent" (30.54) – which is crucial because Augustine's arguments about reason begin with the supposition that the most excellent thing of all deserves to be called 'God.' But as Augustine next demonstrates, reason *cannot* judge "by itself alone"; in fact, it is far from self-sufficient. If nothing else, this is shown by the fact that reason functions better at some times than at others, and in some people better than in others (30.54; *lib. arb.* 2.5, 2.12). The question is, with respect to what does reason succeed or fail?

Sometimes, the answer seems simple: reason compares sensory states of affairs (the oar "bent" in water versus the reality of the straight oar). But more often, what reason does is not simply to compare one sensible state of affairs to another. Certain kinds of judgements we make about the world are not actually based on anything that can be received through the senses. When making these judgements correctly, we seem to be able to evaluate our sensory data by referring to invisible standards "seen" only by the mind, that is, by reason. Augustine calls these standards "truths." Throughout his works his favourite examples of such truths are drawn from three areas, which we might somewhat anachronistically label as mathematics, aesthetics, and morality. Whether the judgements in question concern the answers to arithmetical sums (*lib. arb.* 2.8; *vera rel.* 34.73), the relative perfection of a geometrical shapes in the world (*conf.* 10.12.19; *vera rel.* 30.56), the beauty of a physical object (*vera rel.* 32.59; *conf.* 7.17.23),

¹⁶Another way Augustine expresses the same idea is to say that reason "questions" the material world of nature: only reason (and therefore only human beings, as opposed to animals) wonders about nature and tries to correlate, explain and systematize its observations of physical phenomena (*conf.* 10.8.8-10).

the goodness of a good law (*lib. arb.* 1.6) or a good man (*Trin.* 8.3.4; *en. Ps.* 26), Augustine thinks that judgements made about number, beauty, goodness, or virtue can be “sound” (made *integre*, that is, correctly). They are not, in other words, a matter of opinion – if someone cannot see the true right answer to a sum, there is something wrong with his judgement (*lib. arb.* 2.8). Again, in making such judgements it is as though we are comparing sensible things to standards of number, beauty, and goodness which are themselves not present to the senses *but only to the mind* (*vera rel.* 30.55; *lib. arb.* 2.8; *conf.* 6.16.26; *civ. Dei* 8.6).

Here we approach the crux of the above passage from the *Confessiones*, in which Augustine refers to the decisive Platonic argument which showed him who or what God is. In apprehending these standards (or truths), reason has encountered a ceiling past which it has no right (or, for that matter, ability) to exercise its power of judgement. Reason can no longer give explanations or arguments for what it asserts; it has reached the irreducible limits of explanation which form the basic and unquestionable elements of thought. It cannot judge these elements because *they are that by which it judges*. We saw earlier that judging something assumes the possibility that the thing can fail to live up to some standard; it involves the ability to say that something “ought” to be a certain way. When reason encounters truth, it no longer makes sense for it to say that it “ought” to be a certain way, but only that it “is”; it “simply recognizes that it is so.” “No one can say why these intelligible things should be as they are; and no one in his sober senses should say that they ought to be as they are, *as if they could be otherwise*” (*vera rel.* 31.57). If the truth were *inferior* to us

we would make judgements *about* it, not *in accordance with* it [*secundum illam*], just as we make judgements about material objects because they are below us. We often say, not just that they *are* a certain way, but that they *ought* to be [*esse debere*] a certain way. The same is true of our souls: we often know, not merely that they *are* a certain way, but that they *ought to be* that way... We make these judgements *in accordance* with the inner rules of truth, which we perceive in common, but no one makes judgements *about* those rules. When someone says that eternal things are better than temporal things, or that seven plus three equals ten, no one says that it ought to be so. We simply recognize that it is; we are like explorers who rejoice in what they have discovered, not like inspectors who have to put things to right. (*lib. arb.* 2.12)

The important thing about all “truths”, then, is that “reasoning does not create truth but

discovers it” (*vera rel.* 34.73).¹⁷ Reason not only refers to the truth, but *defers* to it. Since reason cannot judge the truth, but only make judgements in the light of it, truth is therefore superior to reason; and, since we must concede that whatever we are “certain not only exists, but is more excellent than our reason” is God, we must acknowledge that truth is God (*lib. arb.* 3.13; *vera rel.* 30.56-31.57; *conf.* 7.6.8, 10.12.35).

How Truth – and God – exists

In so far as Truth exists differently from any changeable thing, so does God. As the standard against which changeable things are judged by human reason, Truth is inherently unchangeable, and it is so because it is *one thing*, a real – the only real – unity. Augustine tends to conflate his arguments for these points with those in favour of the fact that Truth may be said to “exist” at all, and it is worth teasing them apart.

To establish that Truth *exists*, Augustine focuses on what we might call its objectivity (though this is not his language). Augustine claims that the “standards” we can see in our minds – and only in our minds – are not thereby *of* our minds in the sense that they are merely a product of our minds. They are independent of our minds even while our minds have access to them. As a kind of preparation for this idea, Augustine points out that we experience this kind of

¹⁷The relationship of truths to Truth is not made clear by Augustine, a problem acknowledged by commentators on his epistemology (see Teske 2008, 42n33). The problem is perhaps somewhat ameliorated by the following considerations. First, it is clear that Augustine is not suggesting that individual truths such as $7+3=10$, or “This man is good” are God. As he points out, almost everyone is capable of seeing the truth in statements like these, and they are not thereby seeing God. There are immoral mathematicians who seem completely ignorant of other types of truth; likewise, even relatively godless people are able to rightly assign praise and blame and so are apparently able to make correct judgements about right and wrong (*Trin.* 15.20; cf. *lib. arb.* 2.11). What he is suggesting, however, is that the objectivity and quality of these truths is rooted in the existence of Truth, or God. Second, this relationship is suggested by his distinction between *veritas*, (or *the* truth, often rendered by translators and commentators with a capital “T”) and *verum* (something true, a true thing): “Truth is one thing and that which is said to be true is another” (*sol.* 1.15.27); in fact, Augustine even suggests that truths are the “art of the omnipotent artificer” (*vera rel.* 31.57), suggesting some kind of productive relationship, though this certainly does not imply that truths are created by God in the sense that they could have been any different than they are. In fact, this is the very point about truths: they, unlike the things by which they are judged, cannot conceivably be other than they are (a quality about which we will shortly say more). This quality is due to the fact that God “makes all things to be true which are true” (*vera rel.* 36.66), but they are true because they are somehow like him, because they in some sense *follow* from him: “Truth is that by which anything that is true is true” (*sol.* 2.15.29); a truth gets or “derives its quality” from Truth (2.10.18). So in general we can say with certainty that Augustine makes it clear that while truths are not God, all have truth in common because he exists and thereby makes them true (S. Harrison 1999, 853).

relationship to external realities all the time when we physically sense anything.¹⁸ His favourite example of this kind is the act of physical seeing. We know that when we see something we are experiencing a reality beyond our own minds because *other people can see it too*. If we direct someone with healthy and open eyes and an unobstructed view towards an object we ourselves can see, they see what we see (indeed we cannot prevent them from doing so). This implies a third object, transcending the visual apparatus and minds of both observers, with its own independent existence. In Augustine's terminology it is a "publicly" and not "privately" accessible state of affairs (*lib. arb.* 2.7). Augustine wants to claim that the "seeing" of the truth is like this in a number of important ways. (It is therefore no accident that even ordinary ways of speaking tend to borrow the language of visual apprehension when referring to the act of understanding, of intellectual apprehension of the truth.) When we make such judgements – such as about the correct answer to a sum – we are at once seeing the state of affairs that leads us to make such a judgement, and also the standard against which we compare and judge it. The "eye of the soul," Augustine asserts, is reason (*lib. arb.* 2.6; *div. qu.* 46). And just as the physical eye perceives objects which are independent of the observer, so reason perceives objects which are likewise independent of the reasoner. This is why pointing out such truths to someone who cannot "see" them is more like trying to get them to look in the right direction than it is like trying to get them to, say, memorize a fact. Truths too are public, rather than private (*lib. arb.* 2.12), "common to all who think" (2.8 cf. *vera rel.* 34.73). And this means, Augustine argues, that the things we "see" with reason exist just as do the things we see with our eyes.

On the other hand, there is a unique quality to existence of truths, and it is implied by the very superiority that leads us to acknowledge Truth as God. "If truth were equal to our minds, it too would be changeable. For our minds see the truth better at some times than at others, which shows that they are indeed changeable. But the truth makes no progress when we see it better and suffers no setback when we see it less" (*lib. arb.* 2.12). Truth *does not change*. The standards inherent in it must remain constant, or they do not represent a way to measure other things. But the unchangeableness of Truth is more profound than, say, those human standards

¹⁸This, in my view, is one of the chief reasons Augustine tends to dwell on the features and mechanics of the way the senses work in the midst of his Platonic ascents to God in *lib. arb.*, *conf.* and *vera rel.* as cited above.

which do not change by convention. The unchanging standard of Truth cannot “be otherwise.” Reason does not produce it, but bows to it, recognizing that it simply “is” (*vera rel.* 31.57, 34.73 above). When Augustine says that Truth simply “is” he is saying more than that Truth is the irrefutable axiomatic basis of reasoning. He is making a claim about the way Truth exists that contrasts it to the way changeable things exist. We saw that change includes the occupation of space and/or time. Augustine contends that Truth occupies neither and transcends both. We have already seen that Truth is incorporeal, for it is available only to the mind, not the senses. As for time, “in the truth which abides I do not find past and future, but only the present... Analyse changes in things; you will find it was and it will be. Think about God; you will find he *is*, and that ‘he was’ and ‘he will be’ cannot be” (*Jo. ev. tr.* 38.10).

Truth – or God – is not divisible into parts, either spatially or temporally, but is fully present all at once. Besides unchangeableness, Augustine has another way of expressing this manner in which God exists: God is “simple” (*simplex* in *civ. Dei* 11.10; *Trin.* 6.4.6, 15.5.7; *conf.* 4.16.28). By this description Augustine means to capture not only God’s timelessness and immateriality but the relationship – or rather lack of relationship – between God and his attributes, which is that strictly speaking God does not *have* any attributes. This is not a statement of God’s blandness but of just the opposite, of God’s pure being. God “is what he has” (*civ. Dei* 11.10; *conf.* 4.16.29). Although we rightly think of God as beautiful and good (remembering that he is the standard against which changeable instances of goodness and beauty are judged) these kinds of statements are, strictly speaking, inaccurate. God is not one beautiful or good thing among others, or even one existing thing among others. He does not “have” beauty or goodness.¹⁹ Because he is the very standard by which good and beautiful things are judged, he is beauty and goodness itself. “We talk about a good man, good land, a good beast, a good body, a good soul; but as often as you say ‘good,’ you add what it is that is good and say, ‘a good something.’ But there is a simple good, just good itself, pure goodness, through which all good things are good” (*en. Ps.* 27).

We might wonder how a single “simple” being could underpin such widely divergent kinds of truths as those which are mathematical, moral, or aesthetic in nature. If God is the

¹⁹On the identification of beauty and goodness, see C. Harrison 1992.

ground of all these kinds of truths, surely this makes him anything but simple. Augustine's answer is essential to the basis of his metaphysics. He points out that all truths *converge* in a single *unity*. For example, a unity ultimately underlies truths concerning judgements of mathematics and beauty. In *De libero arbitrio* Augustine argues that all mathematics is based on a single invisible standard of reference: the basic unit of one. (Each number, says Augustine, is named on the basis of how many times it contains "one.") But such a thing as "one" cannot be perceived by the senses since every material object is made up of parts. As we have seen, even apparently homogenous objects can be subdivided into smaller sections. So, he asks, "where" do we come to know this "one"? Wherever we have seen it, it cannot have been in material objects, which are never "truly and simply one." We therefore see it in Truth itself (2.8). Along similar lines, in *De vera religione*, Augustine holds an imagined conversation with a house builder whom he asks why a house with a certain arrangement of doors and windows or arches should be regarded as superior to one without such an arrangement. The craftsman replies that symmetrical arrangements²⁰ give more pleasure to the viewer. Questioned appropriately, the craftsman could be shown that such arrangements give pleasure because they are beautiful, not that they are beautiful because they give pleasure; and that symmetry is beautiful because it approximates unity. "It is because its parts correspond and are so joined together as to form one harmonious whole." Still, however, precisely because it has parts, such a thing does not "completely achieve the unity [it aims] at," but rather "fall[s] short of it, and in a measure misrepresent[s] it." So, again, *where* does he see unity itself, against which this judgement is made? Not in material things since "no material thing however beautiful can possibly achieve the unity it aims at, since it must necessarily have its parts separated by intervals of space." The answer, of course, is that again we are applying to our sensory experience a standard only accessible through the mind (32.59-60), a standard which is ultimately God himself. Indeed, the nearer we get to God, Augustine believes, the more attributes which are derived from him converge (*ord.* 2.44-49).

²⁰Before his conversion, Augustine wrote a treatise (now lost) in which he in part argued that we find things beautiful because they are symmetrical, and that beauty is therefore reducible to symmetry (*conf.* 4.13.20). After his conversion first to a Platonic view of beauty and then to Christianity he moves beyond this argument to ask why symmetry itself should be beautiful.

Beyond reasoning and argument, however, scripture itself, Augustine believes, testifies to God's unique singular kind of existence. It does this with its appellations for God: in the name of God given to Moses on Mount Sinai, "I am who am. [*Ego sum qui sum*]" (*conf.* 7.10.16; *nat. b.* 19), and in the cryptic term for the divine found in the Latin translation of the Psalms, *Idipsum* (sometimes *Ipse Idem*) – the "Selfsame" (*conf.* 9.4.11; 7.17.23; 12.7.7) – Augustine finds the Bible identifying the Creator of Genesis, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with a being who simply *is* and is thus unchangeable:

What is the selfsame? That which always exists in the same way; that which is not now one thing and again a different thing. What is that which *is*? That which is eternal. For, that which is always in one way and then in another *is not*, for it does not endure; it is not altogether nonexistent, but it does not exist in the highest sense. And what is that which is, except he who when he sent Moses forth, said to him, "I am Who am"? (*en. Ps.* 121.3.5)

To exist is *not to change*.

Order: Creation's imitation of unity

So far we have established the reasoning which leads Augustine to identify two types of things, the changeable and the unchangeable. We have, in other words, identified the vast *difference* between God and the world. Recall that our overall aim is to determine whether Augustine has a more concrete way of schematizing the "goodness" or "being" with which he claims God supplies creation, especially given that Augustine rejects the idea that creation is produced from God's own substance. Now that we have determined the equivalence of Truth and God, and so the unique way in which God therefore exists, the problem appears more pronounced. God exists in such a way that he is "always the same," and "not spread out over space and time" (*conf.* 7.10.16). How can a world which "is flowing, dissolving, melting...and perpetually perishing" (*b. vita* 2.8), which is "incapable of abiding unchanged for a single moment" (*ep.* 2.1) be said to exist and to be *good* in a way that somehow connects it to the highest goodness and existence, God? How can it "participate" – to use the Platonic language Augustine occasionally favours (*vera rel.* 11.21; *div. qu.* 45, 46; *mor.* 2.4.6)²¹ – in a God in

²¹For further reflection on Augustine's use of the idea of participation see Bourke 1964, 117-123.

whose substance it does not share? How is it that a changeable thing exists at all, if to exist is *not* to change?

The answers are found, Augustine thinks, in the very method by which we approached an apprehension of Truth as God. The ascent from the senses, through reason, to the Truth shows that God is “discovered” *through* that which is *not* God; so there must be some relation between the two. As Augustine finds St. Paul putting it in Romans 1:20: “For the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead” (e.g. *vera rel.* 52.101; *Gn. litt.* 2.8.17, 4.32.49; *Trin.* 13.6, 15.3). But what are we seeing in creation that allows us to judge it against the eternal and unchanging standard of truth?

In fact, we have already encountered the beginnings of Augustine’s answer to this question. In spite of their changeableness, created things manage to imitate (*mentiuntur*) unity “because [their] parts correspond and are so joined together as to form one harmonious whole” (*vera rel.* 33.61) – that is, because they exhibit *order*. Augustine makes this point more explicitly in the following passage from *De moribus (Manichaeorum)*. Here Augustine draws correspondences between unity and order, with existence functioning as a kind of common denominator.

Now things which tend towards existence tend towards order, and, attaining order they attain existence...For order [*ordo*] reduces to a certain uniformity that which it arranges; and *existence is nothing else than being one* [*Nihil est autem esse, quam unum esse*]. Thus, so far as anything acquires unity, so far it exists. For unity [*unitas*] is how, through accord and harmony [*convenientia et concordia*], compound things [*ea quae composita sunt*] exist as far as they do. For simple things exist by themselves, for they are one. But things not simple imitate unity by the agreement of their parts [*concordia partium*]; and so far as they attain this, so far they exist. This arrangement [*ordinatio*] brings about existence [*cogit esse*], and disorder, non-existence; and perversion or corruption are other names for disorder (*mor.* 2.6.8).

There are a number of important points packed into this somewhat labyrinthine passage. Taken together they give us a fairly concrete view of how Augustine thinks creation imitates, and therefore depends on, God. Augustine here makes three syllogistically related points. The first is that to exist is to be “one,” a unity. The second is that *order* is the way non-simple things (things

which have “parts”) imitate the oneness of a truly simple thing. The third is that things therefore exist to the extent that they exhibit order (and exist less to the extent that they become *disordered*). In this passage, Augustine also hints at *how* the order of creation constitutes a kind of imitation of unity: it has something to do with an “arrangement of parts” which imposes some kind of “uniformity” or “harmony” on things that are “not simple.” The only definition of order that Augustine offers resonates with this idea of a complex of relationships: “order is the arrangement of things like and unlike that assigns to each its proper position”²² (*civ. Dei* 19.13). To see what he means here, it is worth exploring a little further the idea of order itself, via the closely related ideas of form and, most importantly, nature. To do so is ultimately to pin down what constitutes the “goodness” of created things (and, generally speaking, of human beings) – the goodness that is received from God and that is somehow missing (to some degree) in something corrupted, or evil.

Nature as a pattern (order) of change

Throughout his works Augustine observes that, despite the fact that things in the world constantly change, this change is not random or arbitrary. Rather, the motions and fluctuations of changeable things are “*ordered motions*” (*civ. Dei* 8.6); they “repeat with a certain regularity their journeys through time” (*div. qu.* 45 cf. *Trin.* 3.5.11). Change is governed by patterns discernible in things, which Augustine generally calls ‘forms.’ If it were not for these forms, the universe would be unintelligible: “Whatever changeable thing you look at, you could not grasp it all, either by the sense of the body or by the contemplation of the mind, unless it had some form composed of numbers [*numerorum forma teneatur*], without which it would sink into nothing ...changeable things...complete and carry out the numbers of times and places in the way appropriate to their class [*pro suo genere*]” (*lib. arb.* 2.16). Here Augustine indicates that form has something to do with measured relationships: shapes or patterns that can be captured in terms of proportion or number. More importantly, the specific types of patterns or numbered relationships a thing displays are governed by what is “appropriate to [its] class”.

With this phrase Augustine is alluding to his conception of ‘*nature*’ (*natura*). The idea

²²“Ordo est parium dipariumque rerum sua cuique loca tribuens dispositio.”

of nature is central to understanding the connection between order and unity, and ultimately between order and goodness. We have already glanced at it in Chapter 1, where we saw Augustine use an intuitive understanding of nature to argue against the Manichean idea of a specifically evil nature. Now we can elaborate further on the concept in the light of what we know about the creator of all natures, who is a single unity. For Augustine, I will now argue, a changeable thing's nature essentially represents a prescription for the way it may and therefore will change. If my metaphor of a prescription (while not directly Augustine's) suggests that there is someone doing the prescribing, this is all to the point, for a thing's nature is, in Augustine's view, the way in which God intends a particular creature to reflect his simplicity or unity. A thing's nature does this because it itself *is what stays the same about a changeable thing*. Although a creature is always changing, the *kinds* of change it may undergo do not, and these kinds of orderly change are dictated by its nature.²³

In Chapter 1, we saw Augustine argue that the Manicheans cannot really mean that evil has its own nature, because they condemn it – and to condemn something is to imply that it is falling short of some pattern to which it ought to measure up. Augustine calls this pattern a thing's "nature," and tries to pin down its significance for his Manichean opponents by suggesting that a nature is what allows us to "conceive of a thing as being a member of its own kind" (*mor.* 2.2.2). A condemned thing ought to be good; and its *way* of being good is defined by the kind of thing it is. In *De vera religione*, Augustine gives a more elaborate definition of nature. If something has a nature, it "is a particular thing; it is distinguished from other things by its own proper form; and it does not transgress the order of nature"(7.13). Unfortunately, Augustine does not take up these points one by one, possibly because they are so interrelated in his mind that he thinks it unnecessary to do so. We can, however, clarify them by referring to other things he says about nature and patterns of order in the world. In each case we see that having a nature is linked precisely to existing.

²³In his Villanova lecture outlining the basic principles of Augustine's metaphysics, Bourke states that because corporeal things change both in time and space, they are "in no way immutable. There is no permanence in this lowest order of beings" (1964, 4). While on one level he is clearly correct, the point perhaps needs some qualification. I will be arguing that such things *do* have a kind of permanence, in that the *pattern* according to which they change is exactly what does not change about them.

By the first point Augustine seems to mean that having a nature – that is, to be a type of thing – is what allows something to be a *thing* at all. It is the order or pattern of parts that renders the parts related to one another, and thus makes them precisely *parts*, of a whole, of a single *thing*. This is what he means when he says that the “parts” of a beautiful object “*correspond* and are so joined together as to form one harmonious *whole*”; while having parts means that it will never “completely achieve the unity [it aims] at,” by such harmony of components it nevertheless thereby “approximates unity” (*vera rel.* 32.59-60). And, since (as we have seen) to be one thing is to exist, structure is what allows something to be identified as a single *thing*. In several places Augustine uses the word *integritas* (*lib. arb.* 3.14; *vera rel.* 12.23, 18.36) to express this interrelationship of parts to one another and the whole, a word whose meaning (even in modern English) connotes holding together and unifying. Other words Augustine uses to express the same idea include ‘harmony’ (*harmonia*) and also ‘peace’ (*pax*): God has not abandoned even “the inner parts of the smallest and lowliest creature, or the bird’s feather...he has not left them without a harmony of their constituent parts, a kind of peace” (*civ. Dei* 5.11). And, for example, in the case of a living body,²⁴ harmony includes what the Greeks call “those proportions...by which the mutual adaptation of each organ and the whole body [*totius corporis*], inside and out, are held together [*constat*]” (*civ. Dei* 22.24). The peace of the body is, likewise, a “tempering of the component parts in duly ordered proportion” (19.13) which it has due to its form, and without which it would be nothing (cf. *vera rel.* 11.21); we shall be examining various manifestations of peace, or unity, in human life in the next chapter.

To hold together according to a pattern (or nature) therefore allows a thing to be a thing: something we can point to as a “particular” being. But what determines this arrangement of parts into a whole? Here we approach the second and third features of “nature” as given above: something with a nature is “distinguished from other things by its own proper form; and it does

²⁴Despite his use of the example of a beautiful house to illustrate unity, Augustine is not much interested in artifacts. Most of his examples of unity or integrity are taken from the natural world (perhaps because of his much greater interest in natural things he is never very careful to make a distinction between artifacts – like houses – and natural things.) He chastises the Manicheans for failing to acknowledge the order according to which the bodies of the humblest creatures are arranged. Even in worms, insects, and apes, limbs or appendages are matched, like to like, within a single body, and organs work together to allow the animal to function as a whole – as a single unity – and therefore survive (*vera rel.* 41.77; *nat. b.* 14; *ord.* 1.1.2).

not transgress the order of nature.” These points suggest that a nature is a kind of limit or boundary, a set of characteristics to which things adhere so as to be what they are. Augustine does not tend to think of “laws of nature” in a modern generalizing way, as disembodied invisible tracks from which the behaviour of nature as a whole cannot deviate. Rather he sees the repetitiveness of patterns in nature, whether of parts to wholes, or of causes to effects, as evidence of the unfolding natures of discrete types of creatures, the potential for which is latent from the beginning in their “rational seeds,” (*rationes seminales*, or *rationes causales*, *Gn. litt.* 6.10.17), which Hill translates as the less misleading “primordial causes”). These are hidden principles of organization which reside in natural things from their very beginnings, in the way the tree is potentially hidden within its seed (5.23.44), and which determine the shape of the development of these things will take as they change. These “seeds” help explain, for example, why beans are not produced from grains of wheat, or human beings from cattle (9.17.32). Even behaviours such as falling downwards to the ground Augustine sees not as a thing’s obedience to an externally applied law of gravity but the result of that thing’s seeking its natural position in the universe (*conf.* 17.10.16, 3.9.10; *Gn. litt.* 2.4). (A specifically human manifestation of this force will take centre stage in the next chapter).

Augustine sums up this notion of nature as both a defining and a limiting factor of things using a set of descriptors which he gleans from Wisdom 11:21: “You have arranged all things by measure [*mensura*], number [*numero*] and weight [*pondere*].”²⁵ Augustine’s interprets this passage as a description of the defining features of any created thing. His most extended reflection on these features is found in *De Genesi ad litteram* (4.3.7), and though his explicit definitions of each term in that work are somewhat imprecise, he supplements them in other works by means of other virtually synonymous triads (for example that of measure, *form* [*forma*] and *order* [*ordo*] in *De natura boni* 3). Measure applies to the boundaries or limits to which a thing adheres and which makes it the kind of thing it is; this descriptor relates to non-physical things like the soul as well as to corporeal objects. Form (or number), which we have already

²⁵ Augustine’s translation of scripture reads “*Omnia in mensura, et numero et pondere dispouisti.*” (Ayes 1999:551). See Ayres, O’Donnell 1992, vol. 2, 46, C. Harrison 1992, 101-110 and Bourke 1964, 18-22 for a more detailed analysis of Augustine’s meaning and use of these terms and for some justification for my synthetic interpretation of them here.

encountered in a passage from *De libero arbitrio* (2.16) above, refers to that feature of a thing with which modern scientists would be most familiar in its material sense: the structuredness of things which makes them susceptible to mathematical description: their proportions, shape, and size (*Gn. litt.* 4.3.7-4.5.11). (Augustine is clear, however, that non-material things too have form or number, exhibiting, for example, measurable structure through time; see *Gn. litt.* 4.3.8). Finally, weight or order (the latter term as used here means something more specific than the broader idea of order we are now in the process of investigating) identifies the place that the particular thing occupies in the overall schema of creation; it is that place into which the thing naturally “settles” and which therefore determines its movement in the universe: “weight draws everything to rest and stability” (4.3.7). Of the three, a thing’s weight is more concerned with the relationship a thing bears to other things than to its own internal parts.²⁶

Notice, again, that these descriptors essentially both describe and prescribe change – or rather patterns of change – which natures exhibit. They, and the idea of nature under which they are subsumed, are variations on Augustine’s overarching theme of order. Recalling Augustine’s definition of order as “the arrangement of things like and unlike that assigns to each its proper position,” we can identify nature as that which does the assigning of proper positions according to measure, number, and weight. But what is crucial is that a thing’s nature, the particular unique way it is ordered (including the relationship between its parts and so forth), does not itself change. ‘Nature,’ then, captures for Augustine the truth that order is the way changeable things manage to in some sense stay the same.

But as we have seen, changelessness constitutes existence. This means that for Augustine, to have a nature – that is, to be ordered – is to exist. “Things are fixed in their own order by a certain particular nature so as to exist” (*div. qu.* 46). *To be* is inseparably linked to being an example of a *particular kind of thing*. Furthermore, since *to be*, purely and simply with no change whatever – to be a true unity – is to be God, the approximation of this oneness via orderliness is to imitate God. To have a nature, then, is in itself to imitate God (*lib. arb.* 3.15). And there is yet another correlation Augustine draws between the relative unity of created things

²⁶Augustine’s idea of weight is so clearly other-oriented that Hill goes so far as to translate *ordines* (one of its correlates) as “destinies”: “All things...as long as they continue to be, have their own proper measures, numbers, and destinies [*ordines*]” (*Gn. litt.* 3.16.25; see Hill 2002, 231n24).

and their existence and order. Created *good*, too, is equivalent to its order. We earlier saw Augustine argue that goodness is equivalent to existence: one of his anti-Manichean arguments involved pointing out that when we say that something has a “nature” (as the Manicheans do about evil) what we mean is that there is a specific way it is supposed to be. Augustine insists that this is not the case about evil; but his broader point is that a thing’s nature dictates what a “good” example of that thing is (*duab. an.* 4.5): so much so that this good correlates to the existence of that thing. Against the Manicheans, as we have seen, Augustine underscores this point by arguing that only something that exists can become less good, so that to lose all goodness is to cease to exist. But we have just seen that for Augustine something exists in so far as it is ordered. It follows, then, that good, too, correlates to order: for created things “order is good” (*mor.* 2.5.7). The ordering principles imitative of unity – measure, number (form) and weight (order) – are, says Augustine, in a way “generic goodness [*generalia bona*]” (*nat. b.* 3).

There is a final consideration that has been all along implied but is worth making explicit. So far we have determined that creation is dependent on God in the sense that God is that reality of which creation is an imitation; he is the “principle from which all unity derives, and to resemble which all things strive” (*vera rel.* 36.66). But Augustine wants to say more than this. Creation does not take it upon itself to imitate God in the specific ways its nature dictates; in fact Augustine thinks it more or less self-evident that nothing can choose its own nature, or form. Things simply find themselves with the nature they have. Form, Augustine insists, is always imposed from above by that which is beyond form – simple, self-existent, and the source of all form (*lib. arb.* 3.17; *vera rel.* 18.36; *civ. Dei* 13.5-6; *Gn. litt.* 4.3). “All order is from God [Romans 13.2]” (*vera rel.* 41.77). Measure, number and weight find their ultimate reference point in God, for God is “the measure without measure”, that “places a limit on everything”; he is the “number without number” by which “all things are formed”; the “weight without weight,” “which guides all things” (*Gn. litt.* 4.3.7-4.4.8). If nothing else, the very changeability of things proves that they have received everything they have – their form – which is all that prevents them from lapsing completely into the nothingness into which their constituents or parts are constantly disappearing (*lib. arb.* 3.17; *nat. b.* 1, 10; *civ. Dei* 12.1). Nature, then, is not only a pattern but an *intended* pattern: it is the design (*lib. arb.* 3.15), even the will (*civ. Dei* 21.8), of

God for that particular thing. The very order according to which they change is “fixed and governed by the laws of the highest God” and “he did not look to anything placed outside himself as a model for the construction of what he created” (*div. qu.* 46).

When we understand that for Augustine goodness is identified with order, a variety of his claims begin to open themselves to further and more useful interpretation. For instance, we can now see that the goodness received from God is indeed translatable into terms with concrete implications. Order is a measured way of viewing the relationships between things. We can also see in what sense Augustine conceives of the dependence of creation on God. Something is indeed transmitted from God to creation, but it is not God’s substance. Although Augustine may use mysteriously Platonic language when he says that creation participates in God, he means simply that creation receives God’s image, which is to say the imitation of unity as constituted by orderly change.

Perhaps most importantly, at least for our ultimate objective in understanding the underlying connection between all the symptoms of sin, we can now anticipate, at least in a general way, a more concrete way of describing the *loss* of good. Goodness (and therefore existence itself) is capable of gradation, and therefore, diminution because *order* is so capable. What is orderly can become disorderly. And if order is equivalent to a thing’s good, then when it becomes disorderly it falls away from this good into a state of *privatio boni*. Augustine makes this connection explicit, again in the passage above from *De moribus* we looked at earlier: “[order] brings about existence, disorder, non-existence; and perversion or corruption are other names for disorder” (*mor.* 2.6.8). Just as good is order, evil is not only a lack of good, but *disorder*. What is more, we can also therefore anticipate that if Augustine is consistent – and I aim to show that he is – all the symptoms of the fall, that is, of human evils in all their variety, will have this in common: that they will all be humanity’s experiences of its own disorderliness.

We still have groundwork to lay in our understanding of how Augustine believes such disorder enters into the world through sin (for example, we will need a prior understanding of human beings come to be *correctly* ordered). But a crucial question lies in the way of all this: does it follow that to be *less* orderly is to be *disorderly* and thus to be evil? Augustine’s answer is no. His reasons provide the last stroke in our picture of how God bestows existence on creation,

particularly on the human creature. Augustine argues that by divine design various types of creatures are *not* equally orderly, but this does not imply those of lesser status are evil simply in virtue of their relative inferiority. Moreover, the various levels of creature play a crucially important role with respect to one another: superior creatures convey to their inferiors the goodness/existence (or order) God provides. The human being is a case study of this kind of relationship, for in essence this is what a human being *is*: a composite creature who acts as a channel for the existence provided by God, passing that existence from its more orderly soul to its less orderly, but still ordered, body. It is within this matrix of relationships that we will need to understand the human experience of order and eventually of disorder.

2. The Sharing of Order: The Hierarchy of Goodness

If the distinction between the unchangeable God and the changeable creation is the first principle of Augustine's metaphysics, the second is the hierarchical structure of creation. Of course the distinction between God and creation already implies hierarchy: God is true – and superior – existence, and dependent creation is an inferior imitation of this unity. But Augustine goes on to insist that this relationship is itself mirrored in the relationships between superior and inferior *creatures*. Creation is itself a vast hierarchy of many types of creatures of varying levels of superiority. In this sense, Augustine's definition of order – “order is the arrangement of things like and unlike that assigns to each its proper position” – applies not only to individual natures, but to the universe as a whole.

When introducing the idea of hierarchy, Augustine's language tends to that of relative superiority and inferiority (e.g. *lib. arb.* 2.3; *civ. Dei* 11.16), or of that which is better and that which is by comparison worse (e.g. *lib. arb.* 1.8). By using such language, Augustine is usually trying to alert his readers to the significance of judgements they make about the relative value of different kinds of goods. He observes that while human beings routinely rate things on scales of value, they ought to recognize that some of these scales measure merely subjective value or utility, while others somehow measure true (objective) value, value that things possess intrinsically in the order of nature. “Would not anyone prefer to have food in his house, rather

than mice, or money rather than fleas? There is nothing surprising in this; for we find the same criterion operating in the value we place on human beings, for all the undoubted worth of a human creature. A higher price is often paid for a horse than for a slave, for a jewel than for a maidservant.” Subjectively, money is typically rated as having more worth more than a flea. This is because of all the things that money can buy in the world of commerce and because of all the discomfort the gastronomic habits of the flea bring. But there is another truer scale of value on which we know that the flea is really a superior creature to gold (*civ. Dei* 11.16).

Throughout his works Augustine elaborates on this objective scale of superiority in a variety of ways which, taken together, give us a picture of the universe as a great ascending ladder of superiority. One way to rate creatures is to distinguish between those things which simply exist (at the bottom of the scale); those which both exist and live; and those who not only exist and live but know that they do so (at the top of the scale). Living things can be further subdivided; there are those that live but do not sense (like plants); those which are able to sense but not reason about what they sense (like non-rational animals); and those who can not only reason about their sensations but judge them according to the truth. Rational beings themselves are further divided into human beings and the angels who surpass human beings because of their pure immateriality (*lib. arb.* 1.7-8; 2.3; cf. *Trin.* 5.4.6, *civ. Dei* 11.16). Even human beings contain within themselves hierarchies of superiority. The soul is generally acknowledged as superior to the body (*div. qu.* 54); and within the soul itself there are divisions: for instance, Augustine notes three levels on which the soul functions: sense, inner sense, and reason (*lib. arb.* 2.3-4; *conf.* 7.17.23; cf. *vera rel.* 29.53-54). The second is superior to the first, and reason is superior to both.

Degrees of order

Augustine thinks that any reasonable person can intuitively grasp that these scales of value measure the true relative superiority of creatures, apart from how such creatures may appeal to or otherwise be useful to human beings. He also thinks that the distinction between Creator and creature allows us to see what this scale of valuation is really all about. What it measures is in fact the extent to which created things are a likeness of God:

Indeed, things can be said to be like God in many ways. Some, created with power and wisdom are similar because uncreated power and wisdom are in him; others are similar in so far as they simply live, because he is supreme life and the source of life; and others are similar insofar as they exist because he is the highest existence and the source of existence. And accordingly those things which merely exist and yet do not live or know are in his likeness, not completely, but in a slight degree, because even they are good in their own order, since he is that good transcending all things, from whom everything good proceeds. (*div. qu.* 51)

As we might expect, greater and lesser likeness to God also corresponds to greater and lesser existence. “[God] gave existence to the creatures he made out of nothing; but it was not his own supreme existence. To some he gave existence in a higher degree, to some in a lower degree [*aliis dedit esse amplius, aliis minus*], and thus he arranged natures according to a scale of existences [*naturas essentialium gradibus ordinavit*]”²⁷ (*civ. Dei* 12.3). As we now know, the idea of degrees of existence becomes less counterintuitive if we remember that existence corresponds to goodness and that goodness in turn corresponds to orderliness. As Augustine puts it in *De natura boni*, “All things are good; better in proportion as they are better measured, formed and ordered, less good where there is less of measure, form and order...where these things are present in a high degree there are great goods. Where they are present in a low degree there are things small by nature” (3).

Small *by nature*: this is the point Augustine invariably wants to convey when he invokes the spectacle of the grand hierarchy of nature. Although lowly creatures may have less existence and even (therefore) less goodness than their superiors, they are not thereby “bad” or evil (*nat. b.* 8, 30). While an ape may not be the equal of a man, the ape is not a bad thing while viewed in the proper context of its own nature. Because an ape has a nature, there is a proper way to be an ape, to be a “good” ape, which for Augustine is evidenced (as we have seen) by the fact that the ape may be harmed, and therefore lose some of this goodness (*nat. b.* 14-15). In fact, Augustine insists, God has deliberately created creatures of myriad types and levels of goodness; the universe as a whole is more beautiful and good this way than if God had made only creatures of

²⁷ Augustine goes on to comment on his use of the word *essentia* here as he generally does whenever he uses it (see *civ. Dei* 12.2, *mor.* 1.2.2 and *Trin.* 5.2.3), pointing out that it is a newfangled word based on *esse* and invented to capture the Greek *ousia*. It is not his usual way of expressing the idea of “being” – far more usual for him is the verb *esse* preceding *essentia* in the above passage. (See Bourke 1964, 14-18 for a discussion of passages containing *essentia* and their ontological nuances).

one level of goodness. One of the great errors of the Manicheans, as well as others who mistake lesser goods for evils, is to insist that it would have been better for some types of creatures – some natures – not to have existed. They usually make these judgements in the face of the inconvenience such creatures cause human beings, or the generally repellent appearance of what they object to. But Augustine points out that even the most despised creature – every wild animal, every annoying insect, even ashes and dung – have their own useful contributions to make to the web of creation (*duab. an.* 4.4-5.5; *mor.*, 2.8.11-13; *civ. Dei* 11.22; *vera rel.* 41.77; *lib. arb.* 3.5). “The order of creation [*ordinem creaturarum*] proceeds from the highest to the lowest in just degrees [*gradibus justis*]²⁸,” so that it is wrong to wish that “something in creation should be different, or should not exist at all.” To complain because some creatures are inferior to others is as absurd, he insists, as to complain that the moon is not as bright as the sun (*lib. arb.* 3.9).

It is worth considering a little further what Augustine means by a greater (or lesser) degree of measure, form, and order – that is, of order in general. What does it mean for one thing to be less orderly than another, without its being *disorderly* (and therefore evil)? For at this point, a possible objection to Augustine’s whole schema arises, the imagined response to which is instructive.²⁹ We saw that for Augustine, order is an imitation of God’s simplicity, which is to say his unchangeability; we should expect, then, that superior creatures should be simpler than their inferiors. But surely the above hierarchies are rather of increasing *complexity*. An animal is more complex than a rock, and a human being more so than an animal. The exception to this pattern would seem only to begin at the level of the immaterial soul, which, lacking physical parts, really does seem to be simpler than the body. Indeed, if simplicity (lack of propensity to change and lack of parts) is more God-like, then ought we not to conclude that a puddle of some homogenous liquid is more God-like than any animal? One possible Augustinian response (he never confronts such an objection) is that this objection ignores the emphasis Augustine puts on order as the way a creature *coheres* as one single thing with an identifiable “nature.” Compared

²⁸The use of *justum* clearly here refers to what is broadly proper, and not to some more simplistic idea that things get what they deserve. On this use of *justum* see Chapter 5.

²⁹Mann (2001, 44) broaches a concern of this sort but neither elaborates on it nor suggests a resolution.

to a blob of fluid, the more complex biological organism is integrated by organized relationships within itself. It is less clear how a blob of fluid is “one thing” in the same way a biological organism is. It holds together loosely in the sense that any particular section of it is not strongly related to any other. So the greater the complexity – if by complexity is not meant a chaotic mess, but a complex of symmetrical and harmonious relationships – the greater the orderliness.

Although this is, again, only what Augustine *might* respond to such an objection, two things are clear in any case. First, a great level of orderliness, that is, of integrity, does not correspond to featurelessness; and second, and more importantly, a lower level of integrity does not necessarily correspond to evil. “Not as good” does not translate into “bad” or “evil.” Augustine’s overall point here will be essential for his understanding of evil, as we have already encountered it in the abstract (in Chapter 1) and as we will eventually encounter it in the concrete (in Chapter 3). He insists that as long as a thing is displaying the degree of order appropriate to its nature, it is good, even though not it may not be as good as its superior (*nat. b.* 3). The definition of evil as what falls short of nature, what is unnatural (*contra naturam, lib. arb.* 3.13; *civ. Dei* 12.1), in fact, what is *disordered*, will arise in Chapter 3.

For now, though, what is important is the positive role that lesser – that is less orderly – creatures play in the hierarchy of existence. Augustine claims that a universe made up of a variety of creatures of different levels of superiority is an overall good; but he goes on to say more than this. This hierarchical structure is also good for the creatures within it. One aspect of Augustine’s hierarchy of being which is relatively unexplored by commentators is the way in which Augustine uses it to try to show that God has constructed creatures so that they are intimately related to one another, indeed so that they *need* each other. He is particularly interested in the relationships between superiors and inferiors; the former, Augustine believes, are by design meant to convey good to the latter. The most primal and intimate example of this type of relationship is between the human soul and the human body. As we turn now to examine this relationship in the context of creaturely hierarchical relationships in general, we begin to see how human beings are uniquely dependent on God not only directly but, in a sense, indirectly, through their own mediation. This will have, in turn, unique implications for the consequences of the human relationship to God as expressed either in virtue or in sin.

Superiors and inferiors, souls and bodies

To argue that inferiors (like the body) depend on their superiors (like the soul) in fundamental ways, Augustine begins by first pointing out what may seem obvious: superiors are more powerful. Increasing order (or existence or goodness) in the hierarchy of creation corresponds with increasing power. “Any life is greater...in power [*vi*] than any body” (*Trin.* 9.4.4). The world is “so ordered...that the less powerful [yield] to the more powerful [*potentioribus*]” (*nat. b.* 8). Although Augustine offers no systematic analysis of his set of claims on this point, we can discern two ways in which he characterizes this power: generally, in terms of the scope of activities that a thing is able to do or effect, and relationally, in terms of what a thing is able to do *to* other things.

The first sense is captured, for example, in Augustine’s observations of the particular hierarchy of those creatures who merely live, those who can sense, and those who can reason. Clearly the hierarchy is one of increasing scope for action, not the least because if a creature possesses any one of these capacities – for existence, life, sensation or reason – it possesses all the capacities “below” it; each level of creation builds on the level below, so that each level adds extra powers to its arsenal. Augustine seems to infer from this alone that we are really dealing with a hierarchy, and not separate but coequal capacities (*div. qu.* 51). The second sense of power, that of power of superiors over inferiors, flows from the first, and is most generally characterized by Augustine as resulting in “subjection” of the latter, by which he broadly means that superiors can act on or otherwise manipulate inferiors at will, in a way that is not possible for inferiors to do to superiors.³⁰ One of his favorite examples of the power inherent in rational beings over non-rational beings is the ability of human beings to tame animals by various means; such a thing never happens the other way round (*Gn. litt.* 9.14.25; *lib. arb.* 1.7-8). In *De Genesi ad litteram* Augustine gives a list of other kinds of relationships involving subjection. They include the subjection of creatures things to their creator, of corporeal things to incorporeal things; of irrational to rational, of earthly to heavenly, of female to male and of weak to strong (8.23.44). He also insists that this pattern represents how things ought to be. “God’s providence

³⁰Unless the superior voluntarily submits. This is the crux of Augustine’s argument in favour of free will in the first book of *De libero arbitrio* (11).

everywhere subjects one being to another in keeping with a natural order” (*Gn. litt.* 11.28; cf. *lib. arb.* 1.8; *ord.* 1.4.25).

However, in most cases he does not conceive of power as inherently manipulative in an exploitative or coercive way (although, when it becomes perverted it certainly is, as we will see in Chapter 3).³¹ On the contrary, Augustine argues that it is only the power that superiors wield over their inferiors that allows those inferiors to fulfill the good of their own natures. One example of this type of relationship is that between a man and a woman. Although the male is generally superior to the female, this in fact means that she should be “made strong” by means of her relationship with him (*Gn. litt.* 9.18.34). Another example we have already encountered, in the interaction of reason with the senses. The perceptions gathered by the senses cannot be evaluated by the senses themselves; they must be evaluated by reason, which has the capacity to interpret them by comparing them to each other and to eternal standards.³² The determinations of reason then influence how the sense organs are turned towards the world, and thus what they pay attention to and gather (*lib. arb.* 2.5; cf. *conf.* 7.17.23; *vera rel.* 24.52). As Augustine’s list of such relationships from *De Genesi ad litteram* above intimates, he sees each pair of such relationships as both a mirror of, and as rooted in, the paradigmatic relationship of creation to God. Within creation itself, however, the most paradigmatic dependent relationship – preceding even marriage in its intimacy and immediacy – is that between human body and human soul. Both depend on God, as do all created things. But the body also depends on the soul, and in a unique way. In a variation on the Platonic theme that form can only be imposed from above (nothing can give *itself* the form it has by nature), Augustine claims that the body receives its very form from the soul, which in turn receives form from God.

How this happens is bound up with the great mystery of the union of body and soul which

³¹ Augustine is not consistent on this point. In particular, his views on the relationship between human beings and irrational animals do not seem to allow that human beings are the good of animals. Rather, human beings are simply able to bend animals to their uniquely free human wills using the reason animals lack (*Gn. litt.* 9.25).

³² And by something which Augustine calls “inner sense” (*sensus interior*): he introduces this function as a way to explain how animals, lacking reason, can orchestrate their senses enough, for example, to know to open their eyes in order to see (the visual apparatus itself cannot “know” to do this). Still, animals clearly (at least to Augustine) cannot judge their sense impressions against eternal truths. It is also possible that Augustine discusses inner sense at some length to make a point about hierarchy and power in general, as this is often the overall context in which he brings it up (for example in *lib. arb.* 2.3-5; cf. *conf.* 7.17.23). For further discussion see O’Daly 1987, 88-92, 178.

Augustine struggled to articulate all his life. That there are two very different types of substances somehow united in the whole human being he never doubts. Of course the body is material: it occupies space as well as time, and is less in its parts than in its whole. But seemingly tied to it is a superior immaterial reality changing only in time and not in space – this shows in itself that the soul is superior to the body (*Gn. litt.* 8.20; 7.12, 14, 6.20-21). The mind is not a place, Augustine insists, but it is nonetheless something, and he points to the visual images contained in our memories as proof: they do not have any extension (there are no little models in our heads of the things we have seen) and yet they exist, but nowhere in particular (*c. ep. Man.* 17.20; *conf.* 10.8.15; *civ. Dei* 8.5). In a similar vein, although the body seems suffused with the awareness of mind, when the attention (*intentio*) of the soul is focussed on a part of the body, it is able to be fully present “in” other places – such as other body parts, or other thoughts – at exactly the same time (*civ. Dei* 8.5.; *c. ep. Man.* 16-17). In fact, so different are the body and soul as substances that Augustine suggests it is actually inaccurate to speak so confidently of the soul’s being “in” the body as if it were a material thing being carried around inside another material thing (*quant.* 5.7, 30.61). The soul, he suggests, only *feels* as though it is located in the body simply because it is accustomed to viewing the universe from the body’s particular vantage point in space (*Gn. litt.* 8.21).

For Augustine, then, the body is a curious section of the physical universe which is experienced from the inside. The soul feels in its body (*sentire in corpore*, *c. ep. Man.* 16.20), in such a way that the body becomes what Hölscher calls “a lived body” (1986, 26). In the lived body, mind commands matter simply by the exercise of will, something unparalleled in the rest of the physical universe (*Gn. litt.* 8.21; *conf.* 8.8.21). In *De civitate Dei*, Augustine remarks on how it is only the sheer familiarity of the association of body and soul which prevents us from regarding it with the astonishment it merits (10.24, 21.4, 22.11). But how does this association, this “union [*conjunctum*]” (*civ. Dei* 13.24), or “mixture [*permixtio*]” (*Gn. litt.* 3.16.25) of the incorporeal and corporeal work? Augustine’s views on this are commonly regarded by scholars as one of those topics on which his writing shows the most development over time. It seems undeniable that his appreciation of the body as an inextricable part of human nature gradually deepens as a result of his pastoral engagement with the generally pro-matter and pro-body

doctrines of Catholic Christianity.³³ Such influences possibly explain Augustine's abandonment of a Platonizing tendency to identify the real human being with his soul alone. In his earlier writings, for example, Augustine defines a human being as a soul with a body in its service (*mor.* 1.27) and professes a philosophical interest only in "God and the soul" (*sol.* 1.2.7). Later he adopts a more subtle and intimate view of the relationship of the body and soul that emphasizes the essential place of the body in human nature. The "body is no mere adornment or external convenience: it belongs to humanity's very nature" (*civ. Dei* 11.13, cf. 10.29, 13.24). The soul's connection to its body is like a friendship (*s.* 155.14.14) or even a marriage (*util. jejun.* 4.5); the soul is so fitted for, or "inclined to" (*Gn. litt.* 6.25), a body that without its body (as is its state, he surmises, immediately after the body's death and prior to its resurrection) the soul must be regarded as less than human (*Trin.* 8.6.9; *Gn. litt.* 12.35).

Despite, however, this shift in his appreciation of the body, Augustine consistently maintains from his early works onwards an intimate view of its relationship to the soul.³⁴ In fact, it is in early texts – like *De immortalitate animae* and *De musica* – that we can glean some of Augustine's most interesting statements outlining the dependent structure of this relationship, a position which he continues to maintain thereafter. The body, he insists, is dependent on the soul just as the soul is dependent on God, two situations Burnaby describes as analogous (1938, 149), though to say this is to water down Augustine's view considerably. The soul's relationship to the body is not so much an analogy of God's relationship to the soul as it is an extension of that relationship. In *De immortalitate animae* Augustine says that "the form of the body by which it exists, in so far as it exists, is given by the highest being [God] through the soul. The body, then,

³³Beside the general Judeo-Christian assertion of the goodness of material creation, these included the doctrines of the Incarnation – where God is said to have become flesh – and of the resurrection of the body, where the full human being, body and soul, is believed to be reconstituted after death at some point in the future (*vera rel.* 16.30; *civ. Dei* 10.24). Another influence was probably Paul's text in Ephesians 5:29, that "no one hates his own flesh." (Fitzgerald 1999:106; Van Bavel 1995). For more on the development of Augustine's view on the body see Rist 1994, 95-104, 108-121. For thorough accounts of the body/soul relationship see Hölsher 1986 and Burnell 2005.

³⁴It is possible to over-emphasize the negativity of Augustine's early statements about the body. True, he does refer to the body as a chain (*mor.* 1.22.40) or prison (*sol.* 1.14.24) in his earlier works. But while these statements may be a vestige of Platonic attitudes to the body, they might just as well be his expression of the experience of the "fallen" body, which Augustine continues to regard as having become a prison by virtue of its corruption – though he insists that this is not how things ought to be. In fact there are positive as well as negative statements about the body in Augustine's early works (e.g. *sol.* 1.1.2; *quant.* 33.73; *b. vita* 2.2; see Fitzgerald 1999: 105-106 and Van Bavel 1995:55-56).

exists by reason of the very thing whereby it is animated” (15.24).³⁵ Further elaboration on this theme is found both in *De musica* and in Augustine’s commentary on it in the *Retractationes*. “What imitates constancy [*imitatur constantiam*]” in the body³⁶ “is transmitted through the soul by the supreme God [*a summo Deo per animam traicitur*], since the beauty that is changeable only in time is prior to that limited by time and place” (*mus.* 6.14.44; cf. *retr.* 1.11.4).

In such passages, Augustine is making two surprising claims. The first is that the soul actually gives the body its very existence; the second is that the soul does not do this by itself but rather by channeling existence through itself to the body. The soul, then, *mediates* existence – which, we have learned, is equivalent to goodness, and in created things, to order – to the body. To see this more clearly, we need to take each of these interrelated claims in turn.

Augustine adheres to the commonplace view that the soul both animates and commands the body (*civ. Dei* 21.3). For him it is self-evident that a body cannot give life to another body (*conf.* 10.6.10 cf. *civ. Dei* 13.2). But as the above passages from his earlier works reveal, when he says that the soul is the good of the body (*mor.* 1.1.4), he means much more than that soul causes the body to live and move around. Rather he is relating its living with its existing and with its form, the latter of which we have come to recognize is also its orderliness. We are already familiar with the underlying claim here, that to exist is to have form; but Augustine has now gone on to claim that “the body...exists by reason of the very thing whereby it is *animated*.” The link between form (existence) and life itself is the aspect of the body that “imitates constancy.” Augustine points out in his commentary on *De musica* in the *Retractationes* that what the soul bestows on the body is exactly what is so unique to a living thing: it “retains its

³⁵It is true that in the *Retractationes*, Augustine says that his earlier self spoke “rashly” in this passage (1.5.3). However his *Retractationes* commentary on the similar passage from *De musica* (see below, and the following note) make it clear that the rashness only applies if the corporeal beneficiaries are taken to include the whole world and not *only* living bodies. “Clear reason,” he still insists, nonetheless supports the idea that form is mediated to living bodies via the soul (*retr.* 1.11.4).

³⁶In the original text of *De musica*, Augustine is ambiguous about what exactly it is that receives form from the soul. There he appears only to refer to corporeal beauty as thus benefiting; but in the *Retractiones* 1.10.4 commentary on that text, he clarifies his meaning: only living things receive form though the soul (see below). Whether he meant this at the time is debatable. There is some evidence that Augustine flirted with the idea of a “World Soul” in his early works (see also *De immortalitate animae* 15.24; see O’Daly 1987, 62-70 and Teske 2008, 216-237) but, while calling such slips “rash” (*retr.* 1.5.3, 1.10.4) he stops short of explicitly admitting to holding the doctrine in any rigorous way. For our purposes, however, even if such passages to refer to the world in general it nevertheless remains true that the human body (which is after all part of the world) receives form through soul.

structure [*compagem tenet*]” which its soul keeps from being “broken up and dissolved [*dissolvatur et diffluat*]” (*retr.* 1.11.4). Clearly Augustine has in mind the self-organizing, healing, and regulating characteristic of the body since he goes on to point out that when the soul departs at death the body finally begins to lose its form as body, and *is* “broken up and dissolved”.³⁷ Here, therefore, we also find reiterated the association of form and existence with order, which death (the departure of the soul and life) disarranges. In *Contra epistulam Manichaei*, he is more explicit: the soul “gives unity to the body” (16). Again, as we have seen, unity *is* existence. The soul, then, gives a measure of existence to the body while the body lives.³⁸

Several commentators (Hölscher 1989, 218-220; Burnell 2005, 36-37) have remarked on the fact that, despite Augustine’s view of this rather extreme dependency of body on soul – or perhaps because of it – Augustine’s “dualism” tends towards a unifying view of human nature, including both body and soul. Burnell, in particular, cites this passage from *epistula* 137 to demonstrate this unity in duality, which Augustine compares to the Incarnation:

As, in the unity of a person [*in unitate personae*] the soul is united with the body, so in the unity of a Person, God is united with a human being. In the case of the former person, there is a combination [*mixtura*] of soul and body. In the case of the latter Person, there is a combination of God with a human being...The former happens every day to bring about human procreation. The latter happened once to bring about human liberation. (137.3.11)

Burnell concludes that “Augustine here indicates a unitary conception of the human person – not merely ‘the soul primarily, the body secondarily,’ but ‘the soul and, by virtue of that, the body’” (2005, 37). In any case, in these various ways Augustine produces a variation on the theme that form, that is, order, must be imposed on creatures from above; in this case a superior created

³⁷In *De civitate Dei*’s discussion of the resurrection of the body Augustine even identifies the body not only with the matter which makes it up, but also with a design (*ratio*) which is, even when it is hidden and unfulfilled (such as in still growing children or, of course, in the dead), waiting to be filled in with matter (22.14). While he does not explicitly connect this *ratio* with the soul, nevertheless in a dead body – one absent a soul – the *ratio* is clearly somehow absent or inactivated, because the body disintegrates. (This use of *ratio*, as a latent potentiality of physical things whose characteristics manifest over time, occurs also in *De Genesi ad litteram* 2.15.)

³⁸The objection can be levelled that the constituents of the body still continue to exist after death; Augustine’s response would perhaps be that the body *qua* body is “broken up and dissolved.” Thus, a dead and disintegrating body has less existence than a living one. In fact, we will see Augustine arguing something like this in Chapter 4 when we examine the effects of sin on the body.

being (the soul) imposes form on an inferior being (the body): “it is not something derived from the body itself that gives life to the body, but something above it” (*civ. Dei* 19.25).

Ultimately, however, “all form comes from God” (*div. qu.* 10), and the body’s form is no exception. This brings us to the second point Augustine wants to make about the body/soul relationship. When the soul provides ordering existence to its body, it does so only as an intermediary. The dependency of the body on the soul is not only a mirror image or imitation of the dependency of the soul on God, but also a continuation or consequence of it. As Augustine says in the early works cited above, existence is “transmitted *through* the soul by the supreme God,” or “given by the highest being [God] through the soul.” As far as the human creature is concerned, then, Augustine gives us the picture of a kind of cascading or shunting of existence or goodness from the highest existence down from God to soul and from the soul down to the body; a movement always from superior to inferior.

In fact, this is how things ought to operate, says Augustine. It is the proper role of the superior (less changeable) soul to affect things in bodies – to command and direct and animate – and not the other way around: to *agere* rather than to *pati* (*mus.* 6.13.39). This emphasis on the direction of influence or the assertion of power goes a long way to explaining language Augustine apparently cannot avoid as he tries to capture by way of analogy the relational triad of God, soul and body. As we have seen, despite his insistence that God’s bestowal of existence on creation (and human creation) is not a bestowal of his own substance, the terminology he relies on to encapsulate that bestowal is strongly that of emanation, of movement, of flow. We have seen him apply these metaphors to the overall relationship of God to creation. It is physical language, depicting relationships wherein one thing is a source of some sustaining substance for another thing. God is like source of water and creation is the tributary; God is the bread which feeds humanity; and, as if leery of the materiality of these analogies, Augustine depends most often on the more Platonic metaphor of radiance: God is the light who illuminates a creation whose light is derived, a pale reflection of its ultimate source.

Features of dependency

As we broaden out towards the place from which we began – with Augustine’s

nutritional metaphors and others like it – we find that deeper examination of the body/soul relationship and the God/soul/body relationship has brought out a salient feature of such metaphors of dependence. One is that of abiding continuity. There can never be a time when the rivulet need not be sustained by the fountain, the reflection by the light, or the body by food. That which is needy is always so, especially since what it receives is itself. If it does not receive – always receive – it does not exist:

Nor is [the way God works] exactly like the man working the land to make it neatly cultivated and fertile, and going away once he has finished his work...[since] the work that has been done remains when the worker has departed...Rather, just as we have to say that the sky is *being* made bright by the presence of light, not that it *has been* (because if it *had been* so without *still* having to be made so, it would remain bright even when the light was withdrawn); in the same way, human beings are being enlightened by the presence of God...but immediately lapse into darkness with the absence of him from whom one distances oneself not by local movement but by a turning away of the will. (*Gn. litt.* 8.12.26)

In creation, God is “working still” (*Gn. litt.* 5.20.40). The world is continually sustained in existence by the action of God. If this were not so, creation would lapse into nothingness – it would cease to exist (*civ. Dei* 22.24).

The importance of emphasizing the continual neediness of creation is one explanation for Augustine’s reliance on physical metaphors, notably those in which one thing must remain attached to its sustaining source in order to be so sustained. But there is another feature of such metaphors, this time of particular importance to human creation. This is that the needy dependent must itself sustain some kind of correct alignment or attachment or orientation to that on which it depends. To a certain degree, creation is always continually sustained by its creator whether it likes it or not; God never lets creation go to the extent of allowing it to lapse back into nothing (*mor.* 2.7.9). There is, however, a crucial difference between non-rational creation and rational creation in this respect. In the case of human beings (and the other rational creatures, the angels) the degree of this sustenance is precisely conditional on the creature’s choosing to participate in the relationship. In the passage above from *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine reiterates the idea of continual sustenance, finishing with a hint about its conditionality: a person will “immediately lapse into darkness with the absence of him from whom one distances

[himself]...by a turning away of the will.”

One of the recurring themes in Augustine’s anthropology is that the rational creature must choose – must will, or want – to bow to the condition of dependency in order to remain fully attached to God. In the same section of *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine goes on to use other metaphors to indicate the idea that God’s sustenance is not a one time affair, and to underscore the active role the human being must take in maintaining the sustaining connection to God:

Human beings, after all, are not the sort of things that, once made and left to themselves by the one who made them, could do anything well all by themselves. No, the sum total of their good activity is to turn to him [*est converti ad eum*] by whom they were made, and by him always to be made just...wise and blessed; not to be made so and then leave, like being cured of some bodily ailment by a physician and going away...So human beings do not turn to God in such a way that when they have been made just by him they may take their departure, but in which a way that they may always be made so by him. (*Gn. litt.* 8.12.25)

There are shades of Augustine’s doctrine of grace in this passage (for example, in his reference to being “made just”) and we shall address this topic in the next chapter. What this passage more importantly reveals, however, is the extent to which “saving” grace is only part of a much broader conception of grace in Augustine’s thought. The human being is *always* needy: first, in the sense that he must continually give whatever good he has; and second, in the sense that he must also always be actively receiving it.

To do so is, of course, in his own best interest. God is the source of his own goodness. Whether this good is realized hinges on the orientation of the soul, for it occupies a kind of middle ground, maintaining a twin set of powers of attention: it has both a “superior power of perceiving the truth...and an inferior power of giving unity to the body” (*c. ep. Man.* 16.19). As we will see in the next chapter, for Augustine the latter is dependent on the former: “For the immortality and imperishability of the body results from the health of the spirit [*de sanitate animi*], and the health of the spirit results consists in clinging [*inhaerere*] unshakably to the one who is more powerful, that is to the unchanging God” (*doc. Chr.* 1.23.23). Again, physical language abounds: the continuous attachment or correct orientation to God is captured by a verb of attachment, *inhaerere* “to cling,” one of Augustine’s favourite terms for denoting the correct

way humanity should orient itself to God (a closely related word is *adhaerere*, *vera rel.* 10.19, *Trin.* 8.2.5, *mor.* 1.14). Another verb of orientation Augustine uses is found in the *Gn. litt.* passage we have just looked at: humanity must turn towards (*convertere*, sometimes *conversare*) God to be enlightened or to receive the flow of being necessary to it (cf. *Trin.* 8.2.5; *Simpl.* 1.2.18). The picture we are given with this type of language underscores the kind of relationship captured by the nutritional metaphor we began with. Augustine envisions the soul as a kind of aperture or channel which must be open to take in God's life-giving power. As the next chapter will examine in more detail, the condition for maximal existence and all its attendant goods is this clinging to God which constitutes a good life; and "the soul derives life from God, when its life is good" (*civ. Dei* 13.2).

This chapter has been about metaphysics. I have not yet asked what it is *like* to be such a creature. What I have examined is akin, in a nutritional sense, to the physiological effects of a nutrient on the body: how the body and its systems depend on the nutrient, as well as on each other. Next we need to examine how that physiology is experienced by the person who either ingests the nutrient or refuses it. In this case, of course, the nutrient is that good which only God can give and of which human beings can receive their proper measure only by clinging or turning to him. On the other hand, human beings can lose this fullness of being by turning away from God in sin. In the next chapter, we examine what these conditions look like and, based on the metaphysics we have outlined so far, why.

Chapter 3

Order and Experience: What Goodness is like

As I suggested in the introduction, a truly comprehensive understanding of what causes an illness begins with the health it destroys. If we want to understand why vitamin C deficiency results in certain symptoms, we have first to understand how vitamin C *sufficiency* results in the “symptoms” of health. A similar kind of analysis may be applied to Augustine’s view of sin and suffering: as we know, Augustine’s short answer to the question of how sin causes unhappiness (suffering) is that sin is the rejection, if not precisely of happiness, then of the only source which can grant it, God. But it is not immediately obvious why the rejection of happiness should entail a condition of compulsive sin, moral ignorance, and even physical disease, old age, and death. To understand how this happens means analysing the implications of the relationships we have outlined so far.

This context will show us that for Augustine, an irreversible condition of sin, ignorance, and physical suffering is inseparable from unhappiness because *virtue, knowledge and physical health* are inseparable from *happiness*. As we will see, happiness is not merely a psychological state; happiness is the *human experience of order*, as unhappiness – suffering – *is the experience of disorder*. In this chapter, then, metaphysics meets psychology (and even physiology) to complete the natural account of the punishment of sin. The fact that we are able to piece together Augustine’s account in this way means, I argue, that the account is both comprehensive and consistent; indeed, when we realize that the fall of the soul is not merely a moral, intellectual, or psychological event but also an ontological event, then even the physical suffering Augustine insists is one of its effects may be viewed as inevitable.¹

¹Rombs, on the other hand, insists that the mature “Augustine limits his conception of the fall of soul to the interior or psychological process of the soul when it sins – a ‘psychology of sin,’ as it were” (2006, 110); he also cites with qualified approval O’Daly’s view that the fall is simply a “moral lapse” (110n1). Perhaps he has used too broad a brush to make what is a narrower point; his main argument is that in Augustine’s later work the fall is not, as O’Connell famously argues, a fall of the soul *into* the body – so, for example, after denying that the fall is ontological, Rombs elaborates by adding that this means it bears no “relation to the coming-to-be of the world or to individuated existence” (110). But he does not consider that there may be other senses in which the fall of soul *and* the body may be ontological or that for Augustine there is no *mere* psychology, but that psychology is grounded in and correlated to metaphysics (again, order is the bridging concept here). Other commentators, too, seem to argue or at least imply

(continued...)

Like the last chapter, this chapter also is divided into two major sections. Broadly speaking, the first deals with happiness, and the second with suffering. As in the last chapter, my emphasis is not on an exhaustive account of Augustine's views on either of these topics – or for that matter on any of the many other classic Augustinian themes and topics which will arise; rather, my concern is, once again, to trace a series of relationships between sets of ideas better appreciated in context. In this case, the primary relationship to be explored is that between happiness (or the lack of it) and order (or the lack of it).

There is one central theme, however, which does come to the fore as the link between experience and order in general, and it therefore deserves some preliminary discussion. This crucial idea is desire – or “love” (*amor, delectio*) as Augustine most often calls it.² Love (the other closely related term is “will”) is, as we will see, the medium of order in the human soul; it is both *what* is ordered (or disordered) and what orders. Furthermore, to love God (“to cling to” or “to turn to” him) is, as we saw at the end of the last chapter, the condition human beings must satisfy in order to achieve their highest kind of being (“the health of the spirit consists in clinging unshakably to the one who is more powerful, that is to the unchanging God” in *doc. Chr.* 1.24.2). In fact, it is possible to argue that if changeability is the metaphysical evidence of humanity's createdness, then desire is the experiential evidence of that createdness.

The particular importance of love in this chapter may be captured by one Augustinian dictum: human beings come to resemble that which they love. Augustine reasserts this idea in various ways. Sometimes he seems to exaggerate the point (perhaps for rhetorical purposes): “As you love, so you are. Do you love earth? Then you are earth. Do you love God? Then – dare I say – you are a god” (*ep. Jo.* 2.14).³ At other times he says simply that “what is loved necessarily

¹(...continued)

that the fall is primarily psychological. For example, Burns (1991, 70-1) suggests that the fall results in “operational failures, error and sin” and does not mention bodily afflictions in his account of the “progress of evil”; as well, see Babcock, 1993, 246n5 and my comments on Burnaby's overly psychological view of the fall in the introduction.

²O'Donovan (1980, 10-11) notes that while Augustine also uses *caritas* for love, this term has a narrower scope. It is only used of love directed toward a worthy object (God or another human being, see *div. qu.* 36). *Delectio* tends to be used in this way too, but not always. In contrast *amor* is the most neutral designation for love. Augustine uses it of any desire (see below), whether the desired object is appropriate or inappropriate.

³I render *deus* here as “a god” rather than “God” (as, for example Duffy 1999, 29; Teske 2008, 9) since the claim that human beings can become God runs counter to Augustine's thoroughgoing distinction between creator and creature;

(continued...)

affects with itself that which loves it” (*div. qu.* 35) or that “a person is conformed to whatever he loves” (*mor.* 1.21.39; cf. *Trin.* 10. 5.7, 10. 8.11). The general point he wants to make will emerge over the course of this chapter: if a person “loves” – in a certain specialized sense of love – God, he becomes more like God (who, recall, is a simple unity); if he loves a creature, he becomes less like God. As I have already intimated, Augustine will argue (though not systematically or even all in one place) that the former state is concomitant with happiness, virtue, health, and knowledge; the latter with misery, sinfulness, ill health and ignorance.

But why should a person’s love – and *what* he loves – have such power to determine the quality of his existence? The answer hinges on the relational and ordering quality of love, and that which is central to it, happiness.⁴

Prolegomenon: Love and Happiness as Organizing Principles

Augustine’s definitions of love tend to be somewhat amorphous, though not quite as notoriously difficult to pinpoint as the closely related “will” (*voluntas*).⁵ The simplest way to characterize what both have in common is that they denote desire, or at least the capacity to desire.⁶ The difference between love and will is subtle, and indeed at times Augustine uses the

³(...continued)

by a god here he undoubtedly means the kind of powerful being an unfallen person would be, as is his meaning in *civ. Dei* when he addresses the ironical result of following the serpent’s suggestion to Adam and Eve that they might become “gods.” Augustine says there that human beings could better have become “gods” – in the context, clearly meaning idealized human beings with great power over their inferiors – if they had adhered to the source of all power (*civ. Dei* 14.13). On Augustine’s relationship to the tradition of deification see Bonner 1984, 508-514. Oddly, despite his translation of this passage, Teske does not seem to feel the need to explain Augustine’s apparent admission that a human being can become God.

⁴So important are these ideas to Augustine’s anthropology that he often provides a kind of neutral overview of these facts of life prior to his recommendation of Christianity as the true philosophy. The prime example of this is in *De doctrina Christiana*, his treatise on teaching Christianity to neophytes. Here Augustine evidently thinks love and happiness so important to an understanding of human motivation that he provides a general introduction to these ideas before making any pronouncements about what ought to be loved or valued as the source of happiness (*doc. Chr.* 1.3.3, cf. 1.22.20).

⁵For one recent attempt at locating a precise meaning of Augustine’s concept of *voluntas* via Stoic antecedents (and for an overview of previous attempts) see Byers 2006 (though with no discussion of Augustine’s identification of will and love with the general metaphysical characteristic of weight).

⁶e.g. “Love is a kind of desire [*appetitus*]” (*div. qu.* 35). There are other types of love in evidence in his writings – the most notable being the love of God for humanity and love of neighbour (O’Donovan 1980 10-37). (Note that what

(continued...)

two ideas virtually interchangeably.⁷ In general we may observe that will is largely (though not exclusively) used to refer to the general tendency to desire, whereas love is used more often than will to refer to a specific desire or set of specific desires: while Augustine rarely speaks of human beings as having many wills (except in special circumstances, for example when talking about the unnatural condition of the fallen will in *conf.* 8.9.19), his view of the soul (or even the will itself) as comprised of many loves is, as we will see, essential to his theory of motivation and action.⁸

To capture the foundational significance of both love and will we need to place Augustine's notion of both not only in a psychological but in a metaphysical context. In the last chapter, we saw that Augustine uses Wisdom 11:21 to identify three unique descriptors which, taken together, capture the way a particular kind of nature is ordered. These include measure, number (or form), and weight (or order). Of the three, the last of these has the most relevance to a thing's relationship not only with its own components or parts, but with other things. Augustine claims that weight dictates the movement of, say, a physical body because by that movement the body seeks to find its proper place – the place in the universe which a thing of that nature should occupy. When it reaches that place, it can “rest” in a position of stability, free from movement at last, in virtue of that stability or “peace” (*Gn. litt.* 4.7.3). “A body tends toward its own place [*ad locum suum*] by its own weight [*pondere suo*],” he says in the *Confessiones*. “A weight does not tend downwards only, but moves to its own place. Fire tends upwards; a stone tends downwards. They are propelled by their own mass; they seek their own places.” He continues: “My weight is my love [*amor*]. By it I am carried [*feror*] wherever I am carried” (*conf.* 13.9.10; cf. *civ. Dei* 11.28).⁹

When Augustine says that love, or more generally the will, comprises the weight of the

⁶(...continued)

O'Donovan identifies as two types of love, “cosmic” love and “positive” love, I construed as the same thing viewed from the ontological and experiential angles. But by an overwhelming margin, the kind of love to which Augustine devotes the most analysis and discussion is love as motivating human desire (Burnaby 1938, 94; Rist 1994, 174; 1972, 220-221; C. Harrison 2000, 95-96).

⁷e.g. *civ. Dei* 14.7: “A rightly directed will is love in a good sense and a perverted will is love in a bad sense.” But particularly see the metaphysical commonality below, where both are considered the “weight” of the soul.

⁸Rist notes that the will is composed of a “set” of loves (1994, 177).

⁹Augustine makes exactly the same claim about will in *lib. arb.* 3.1 and about both will and love in *Gn. Litt.* 4.4.8.

human soul, he doing more than drawing an analogy between this aspect of the human being and physical weight. Rather, his claim is that what motivates human beings – literally, what moves them – is a species of the same phenomenon that moves stones downwards or fire upwards: the force of attraction, that is, the striving by one thing to gain proximity to another:

Now the souls of human beings, whether good or bad, love rest [*amant...requiem*]...that which bodies seek by their weight, is precisely what souls seek by their love, namely a resting place.¹⁰ For just as a body strives to move by its weight, descending or rising until it reaches a place where it can rest...so the soul of a human being struggles towards the things it loves, so that, by reaching them, it may rest” (*ep.* 55.10.18; cf. *civ. Dei* 11.28).

Of course, there is a profound difference between the weight of the human soul and the weight of physical things. Though it is difficult if not impossible to glean a straightforward definition of Augustine’s concept of will especially, by putting together a number of things he reiterates about it we can ascertain that the idea is partly meant to differentiate the soul’s weight from the weight of inanimate objects. Will is the cause of human actions (*civ. Dei* 5.9); those things that are done by the will would not have been done if they had not been willed (5.10); our wills are our own and nothing outside them determines them (5.10; *lib. arb.* 3.1-4); through the will the human soul is self-moving – nothing outside it makes it move (*div. qu.* 8); “to will” something means the same thing as “to be responsible for” it (*div. qu.* 3). Augustine makes most of these claims in the context of his arguments in favour of the free decision (*liberum arbitrium*) of the will (see *lib. arb.* 3.1,3 or *div. qu.* 8). At the very least we can infer from all this that what differentiates a moving rock and a moving human being is simply that the human being moves because he *wants* to.¹¹ Still, like weight, will is *relational*; it is oriented beyond itself.

¹⁰“Nec aliquid appetunt etiam ipsa corpora ponderibus suis, nisi quod animae amoribus suis.”

¹¹ Also that the will is essentially free; that to be free is what having will is all about; and that what is done freely is simply that which is done because the doer wanted to do it. At least this idea of freedom seems to me what Augustine means when he says things like “it is necessary that when we will, we fill by free decision” (*civ. Dei* 5.10); or when he tries in books 2 and 3 of *lib. arb.* to prove that sinners are culpable for their sin simply by proving that they have a will, which means that they sin freely (“there is no sin if it is not performed by the will,” *lib. arb.* 2.1; cf. *conf.* 7.3.5ff.). Clearly I disagree with those commentators who argue that Augustine’s conception of freedom involves the idea that whatever an agent wills freely, he could have willed otherwise. Kirwan is one of these (1989, 82-88). Many of the texts he uses to support this idea seem to me rather to support the simpler idea of freedom I suggest Augustine means, or at the very least to lend themselves to interpretation in this vein. There is not the space to argue this point here however. On the other hand, a few commentators do seem to assume that for Augustine freedom does constitute part of the very meaning of will, and that there is no such thing as an unfree will – notably Burnaby, who says that for

The related idea of love captures the crucial point here, which is that whatever human beings do, they do in relation to whatever it is they are trying to get; or, in another classic Augustinian variation on the theme of attraction, to whatever “delights” them (that is, inspires love and attraction in them; *Simpl.* 1.2.21-22; *s.* 159.3; *ex. Gal.* 49).¹² Like will, love is other-oriented: it “seeks to couple two things, the lover and the beloved” (*Trin.* 8.10.14). Thus love is not only “a desire” but “a kind of motion [*motus*]” and there is “no motion except *towards* something [*nisi ad aliquid*]” (*div. qu.* 35). Like any other type of movement in the universe, then, the movement of a human being is not mere meandering but is directed towards an end.¹³ “Every love has a force of its own. Love cannot be inactive in a lover, it cannot but lead him in some direction” (*en. Ps.* 121.1 cf. *div. qu.* 35).

But in Augustine’s view, love not only places a human being in a particular relationship with respect to the things he desires; it also thereby places his desires themselves into a particular arrangement. “Delight” is not only “a weight for the soul”; it also “orders the soul” (*mus.* 6.11.29). The chief role in this internal ordering is played by one central desire. Human beings desire many things, but the desire for *happiness (beatitudo)* subsumes them all. Happiness is that “for the sake of which everyone wants other things” (*Trin.* 13.2.6; cf. *civ. Dei* 8.8).¹⁴ The particular object, which when obtained, will allow a person to be happy is the “highest good,” the *summum bonum*, as Augustine notes the Greek philosophers call it (*civ. Dei*

¹¹(...continued)

Augustine “all will is free will” (1938, 227) and to some extent Rist (1994, 132) and Byers (2006, 184). Those holding Kirwan’s view might object that since Augustine insists that freedom of the will is lost or at least severely curtailed by the fall, it is therefore distinct from the notion of will. But the freedom Augustine alludes to in this context is *libertas*, a special term used to denote the kind of effortless virtue engendered by the love of God (see below) – not the *liberum arbitrium* essential to the will’s being a human will at all (see *perf. just.* 4.9; Rist 1994, 132; Burleigh 1953, 189-190; Byers 2006, 182-188).

¹²Brown in particular notes the importance of delight in Augustine’s view of motivation; it “stands for the orientation of the whole personality, its deepest wishes, and its basic capacity to love” (1969, 170; 1972, 42-43). See also Burnaby 1938, 224-225 and C. Harrison 2006, 148-149).

¹³Although the physical movement of human beings springs ultimately from will – or love – the movement of the soul called love is not spatial but is rather an inner striving for something, a “movement of the spirit.” The spirit, of course, is incorporeal (*vera rel.* 14.27-28).

¹⁴By means of an imaginary dialogue, Bonnie Kent gives an effective *reductio* demonstration of what Augustine means when he says that everything is ultimately desired for the sake of happiness. A person can give an explanation for each of his goals in terms of an underlying goal, but once the ultimate goal is revealed to be happiness, no further justification is necessary or even possible (Kent 2001, 206-7).

8.8 and 19.1). Augustine repeatedly associates the attainment of the *summum bonum* with the attainment of “rest” (*conf.* 4.10.15 cf. *cat. rud.* 2.16.24). To achieve it is to gain “complete satisfaction of the soul” (*b. vita* 3.35) and it is not achieved until a person can say “Enough! It is here!” (*conf.* 10.20.29).

The relationship of all other loves to what the soul believes to be its *summum bonum* is schematized by Augustine with his distinction between “use” and “enjoyment” (*doc. Chr.* 1.3.3, 1.22.20, 1.31.34-1.35.39; *Trin.* 10.10.13; *div. qu.* 30). Augustine argues that our loves are related to one another according to whether those loves aim either to “enjoy” [*frui*] or to “use” [*uti*] their objects. Things to be enjoyed are sought for their own sake, as an end in themselves; but things to be used are sought only because they help us along to what may be enjoyed. The difference is in the sense of completion the soul expects from achieving its objectives. In what may be enjoyed “the will rests satisfied” (*Trin.* 10.10.13; cf. *div. qu.* 30); “if you cling to [a thing] and remain fixed in it, placing in it the end of all your joys, then you are enjoying it”; on the other hand “if you pass through [a thing] and refer it to that end where you are to remain permanently, you are really using it” (*doc. Chr.* 1.33.37). By “use,” then, Augustine does not imply a sense of crude exploitation, but rather of priority. The lover will not seek *happiness* from those things he uses; used things have value but their value is relative, measured in terms of the object of enjoyment toward which they are a stepping stone; it and it only is desired for its own sake. The relationship between loves is captured by the verb *referre* which here is not a verb of consultation but of movement; the root *ferre*, “to carry” is often translated as “refer,” but also – less misleadingly – as “related” or “directed”; it is one of Augustine’s store of words associated with desire and movement (“My weight is my love. By it I am carried [*feror*] wherever I am carried,” *conf.* 8.9.10; see Brown 1972, 33). The person who uses an object does not “cling” to it, but keeps moving; the person who tries to enjoy an object does cling to it, and seeks to rest in it. That which a person uses, then, in some sense feeds into, or carries him along, to his ultimate goal. “We love those things by which we are carried along for the sake of that toward which we are carried” (*doc. Chr.* 1.35.39).

The *uti/frui* distinction shows that Augustine views love as a kind of field of interacting forces within the soul. Although it is obviously not Augustine’s metaphor, we can usefully liken

his schema to a vector diagram.¹⁵ In Augustine’s understanding of the soul and its loves, the soul experiences many attractions, each proportional in strength according to how much the desired thing delights it. Augustine implies that what delights us is not itself a choice; our choices are the effects of the resultant “weight” of our different loves, the more powerful attractions winning out over the lesser. “Our activity must be directed in accordance with that which delights us more” (*ex. Gal.* 49). And the most powerful love is directed towards that which the soul regards as the *summum bonum*, the object which, when possessed, will grant happiness. This thing operates as our prime directive in the sense that it determines and orders by priority our choices and the actions that flow from them. This is so much the case that, as Augustine suggests, we effectively *serve* the thing so loved: “a person is necessarily a slave to the things by which he seeks to be happy...he follows them wherever they lead” (*vera rel.* 37.68; cf. *Gn. litt.* 1.11).¹⁶

So far, the claims we have looked at do not stipulate that any particular object *should* be loved in this stronger sense. Augustine’s observations about the dynamics of love, its centring around happiness as its resting place, and the power of whatever object is perceived as the potential provider of the latter, are simply facts, in his view, about human psychology (grounded in metaphysics). He has not yet said anything about the implications any particular loved object has for the soul – if it is “loved,” that is, in the strong sense, with the expectation that it may be enjoyed. I noted earlier the importance of Augustine’s claim that human beings come to resemble that which they love (again, in the enjoyment sense). In fact, as the next two sections of this chapter make clearer, what he means by this is that *the more orderly the loved object, the*

¹⁵In physics, vector diagrams are used to depict and calculate the overall and decisive sum of forces on an object. Arrows are used to represent each individual force, and although the outcome will be influenced by all of them, the strongest overall force will ultimately determine the direction in which the object moves. Some further support for the “vector” view of love I envisage here can be found in Augustine’s descriptions of the person who is being healed by grace. In this case Augustine does not argue that a person’s previously decisively strong, but misdirected, loves are simply extinguished by grace, but rather that misdirected loves begin to grow weaker, while rightly directed loves (towards God) grow stronger, so that, overall, the soul begins to move in the right direction (e.g. “By his Holy Spirit he makes the delight of his precept greater than the attraction which obstructs the keeping of them,” *spir. et litt.* 30.52; “the old grows weaker and the new grows stronger,” *vera rel.* 27.50; cf. *civ. Dei* 11.28; *Simpl.* 1. 1.7). My suggested way of summarizing the interplay between forces on and in the soul is general only; it does not address more detailed and complex things Augustine says about the operation of the will (for instance, the role of “assent”; for more on assent see Rist, 1994 176-177, and Byers 2006).

¹⁶In *Contra Julianum*, Augustine demonstrates the power of the *summum bonum* by listing the things a person is willing both to do and to sacrifice in the pursuit of money, if money is what he most values (4.3.18).

more orderly the soul that loves it. But what would constitute an ordered soul, and exactly how does it come to reflect the orderliness of its ultimate objective?

Augustine's answer is that the soul can only be orderly if the object of enjoyment-love *can really be enjoyed*, if it *really is* a "resting place" for the soul; only then can the referring loves fall into proper alignment and an overall coherence, unity of purpose and orientation be achieved within the soul. As we will now see, Augustine thinks that there is for all of humanity only one thing that can fulfill this role. Despite their disagreement about what the *summum bonum* ought to be, the pagan philosophers are right, Augustine insists, that "happiness is in the soul as health is in the body" (*div. qu.* 82). Happiness is not many things to many people, but an objective state of well-being. The very universality of the desire for happiness shows this, he argues (*Trin.* 13.6 ff.; *lib. arb.* 2.9). But only the Christians (and to a degree the Platonists) have correctly identified the unchangeable God as the *summum bonum*, the only possible source for happiness and health for human beings (*civ. Dei* 12.1, 13.5-6, cf. *vera rel.* 3.3).

In the next two sections, I assemble various Augustinian claims to show to best advantage his defence of the following arguments. If God is loved as the object of enjoyment, the soul (which is to say, its loves) will be orderly – that is, more like God. If anything else is loved in place of him – which in fact is the very definition of sin – the soul becomes disorderly.

The first section will show that the love of God results not only in happiness, but also in virtue, knowledge and physical well-being (even physical immortality); each of these states will be discussed in such a way as to demonstrate that they are the human experiences of being properly ordered, and that all are therefore inseparably interrelated. Along similar lines, the second section will show that to turn away from God is to experience sinfulness, ignorance and bodily affliction (including death); all of these are linked together because they are the experience of human disorder.

1. Happiness and Order

God as summum bonum and resting place

Augustine's contention is that God is the only resting place for the human soul, the only

thing that can give the soul a sense of completion and joy. His primary approach in demonstrating that God is the *summum bonum* is to examine what an object would have to be like in order to satisfy the ultimate human desire for happiness; he then shows that God is the only reality which matches this description. “He wishes to find happiness by possessing something; well, then find out what you want to possess to be happy” (*en. Ps.* 32/3.15.16; cf. *mor.* 1.3). Sometimes Augustine first proceeds negatively, asking what human beings expressly do *not* want. The answer is clear to more or less everyone: loss (*mor.* 1.3.5). No one wants to let go of what he loves; he wants to rest in it forever (*civ. Dei.* 11.13). Even the possibility of loss produces fear, and fear is incompatible with happiness (*b. vita* 2.11; *div. qu.* 33, 34; *lib. arb.* 1.4, 2.13; *Gn. litt.* 11.16-19). Any object that can be lost, then, is not a candidate for the *summum bonum*. But as we discovered in Chapter 2, anything that changes is in a perpetual state of passing away, of loss. The *summum bonum* must, therefore, be something that is unchangeable (*conf.* 4.10.15; *lib. arb.* 1.13; *div. qu.* 35).

Of course, there has to be more to what we most want. We want what is good. Here in a passage from *De Trinitate*, for example, Augustine leads up to a revelation of the true *summum bonum* by way of various created goods valued by human beings. His method here is to get his readers to think about the implications of the fact that everything they are attracted to is good (beautiful) in some way, and that therefore what they *really* love about good things is the source from which such things take their goodness:

Nothing draws your love but what is good. Good is earth with its lofty mountains, its gentle hills, its level plains. Good is the beautiful and fertile land, good the well-built house with its symmetry, its spaciousness and light. Good are the bodies of living things, good is the temperate and wholesome air, good is the pleasant and healthful food, good is health itself free from pain and weariness. Good is the human face with its regular features, its cheerful expression, its lively colouring; good is the heart of a friend whose comradeship is sweet and whose love is loyal; good is a righteous man, good is wealth for the things it can enable us to do, good is the sky with its sun, moon, and stars, good are the angels of holy obedience; good is the speech that instructs the hearer willingly and counsels him appropriately, good is the poem of musical rhythm and profound thought. But enough! This is good and that is good: take away “this” and “that,” and look if you can upon Good itself: then you will see God, good not by possession of any other good thing, but the goodness of every good...So our love must rise to God, not as we love this or that good thing, but as the Good itself [*ipsum bonum*].

(*Trin.* 8.3.4)

God is the *summum bonum* for the rational creature; he is the pure instance of what human beings desire in other created things. This is so much the case that occasionally Augustine lets his guard down and admits that the soul is in some way after pleasure, a desire which only Good itself can satisfy.¹⁷ Citing both Virgil and scripture, he says “You are drawn, not merely by the will, but what is more, by pleasure. What is it to be drawn by pleasure? ‘Delight in the Lord and he shall give you the requests of your heart [Ps 37.4]’” (*ep. Jo.* 26.4).

Of course, Augustine qualifies such admissions. As we saw in the last chapter, he points out that beautiful things give pleasure because they are beautiful; they are not thought beautiful because they give pleasure (*vera rel.* 32.60). More importantly, he constantly insists that God is his own reward; he is not to be desired for the sake of any other good thing, especially material goods (*vera rel.* 47.90; *civ. Dei* 4.33; *conf.* 10.22.23; *spir. et litt.* 37.22; *Gn. litt.* 8.10). And yet, Augustine also insists that somehow *all* human desires are somehow to be fulfilled in God.

What did [God] mean when he said, in the words of the prophet, ‘I shall be their God, and they will be my people [Lev. 26:12]’? Did he not mean, “I shall be the source of their satisfaction; I shall be everything that they can honourably desire; life, health, food, wealth, glory, honour, peace and every blessing”? For that is also the correct interpretation of the Apostle’s words, ‘so that God may be all in all [1 Cor 15.28]’: He will be the goal of all our longings.” (*civ. Dei* 22.30; cf. *en. Ps.* 39.7-8)

If God ought to be the goal of *all* our desires, a number of questions occur to us. Does Augustine mean that the attainment of happiness requires the abandonment of all other goods in favour of God? And what does it mean to “have” God at all? The answers to these questions are essential not only to Augustine’s account of happiness but also his account of virtue and its relation to order.

Virtue: Ordered love

For Augustine, virtue (*virtus*) is not primarily a matter of adhering to certain codes of

¹⁷Like other philosophers of late antiquity Augustine is as a rule deeply cautious about, even suspicious of *voluptas*. The word tends to be associated by them and by him with an effervescent feeling, invariably fleeting, often merely physical, and a dangerous distraction from philosophy (Rist 1994, 156). See his not entirely fair comments about Epicureanism (*civ. Dei* 14.2.; *conf.* 6.16.26).

behaviour.¹⁸ He thinks we can see this is the case by the fact that it is possible to do the ostensibly “right” thing for the wrong reasons (*civ. Dei* 19.25, 21.16; *conf.* 1.12.19; *lib. arb.* 1.15).¹⁹ Augustine’s definitions of what does constitute virtue are simple, yet mysterious, especially when listed out of context: virtue is “right and perfect vision” (*sol.* 1.6.13); it is “nothing other than the supreme love of God” (*mor.* 1.13.22); “virtue includes all that ought to be done, happiness all that ought to be desired” (*civ. Dei* 4.21); he who would be virtuous need only “love and do what [he] wants” (*ep. Jo.* 7.4.8); virtue is “ordered love” (*civ. Dei* 15.22; *s.* 21.3; *doc. Chr.* 1.27.28). It is this last, I will now argue, which ties all these understandings of virtue together. But the place to begin is with happiness, for Augustine asserts that happiness and virtue are inseparable: a person “can be made happy only by that which makes him good” (*ep.* 130.3); and as we will find, by “good” here is meant not only moral goodness, but ontological goodness, which is to say proper order, and thus existence.

If happiness involves “having” the object of enjoyment, we are bound to wonder in what sense God may be “had,” and how the having and enjoyment of this one single thing can result in a virtuous state – a state with which are normally associated multifarious attitudes and behaviours. Augustine himself points out that, precisely because God is not limited in the way created goods are limited, he cannot be possessed in the same way as these goods (*lib. arb.* 3.7-8)²⁰; he cannot be consumed nor even physically approached (*conf.* 8.8.19).

For Augustine, the attainment of happiness – and therefore the “possession” of the *summum bonum* – is most accessible in ordinary terms by thinking of how we experience earthly beauty; and this has profound implications for human behaviour in response to it, and for virtue. We obtain pleasure from earthly beauty simply by beholding it. Likewise, we can “have” God only by – and simply by – seeing him. “‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God [Matt. 5:6].’ Friends, what we are to have is a vision...a vision surpassing all earthly beauties, of

¹⁸This is not to say that Augustine thinks there is no place for rules. Indeed in his view, codified laws, whether the Ten Commandments (for more on “the law,” see Chapter 6), or the laws of the state (*lib. arb.* 1.5, 15), are entirely necessary for fallen human beings: rules are still good and necessary guidelines for human beings for whom virtue is now difficult. Merely following rules does not in itself constitute virtue, however (*div. qu.* 66; *conf.* 3.9.17; see Rist 1994, 191-199; C. Harrison 2000, 91).

¹⁹See Rist on “virtue vs. ‘virtue’” (1994, 168-173).

²⁰This is partly Augustine’s point when he says that Truth is a “public” as opposed to a private “good.”

gold or silver, of woods or fields, the beauty of sea and sky, of sun, moon and stars, the beauty of angels: excelling all these things, for all have their beauty from him” (*ep. Jo.* 4.5; cf. *ord.* 2.51). To see God (with the mind, not the eyes) is to enjoy God; and to see him all we have to do is look in the right direction, at Truth (*lib. arb.* 2.13-14). Further, since love is what orients human beings in any direction, all we have to do to enjoy God is to love God. “Love sets you in [his] presence” (*ep. Jo.* 10.4).

But how does this fit with Augustine’s pronouncement that God will be “everything that [human beings] can honourably desire”? When he lists what we might consider mundane goods among these desires, is he saying that the vision of God can effectively replace or supersede these types of goods by virtue of his superiority as the highest Good? Or is he simply attempting to emphasize God’s attractive goodness by insisting that things we usually value pale in comparison? In fact, neither of these interpretations is the case. Rather, Augustine insists that we are right to love all created goods; but we must love only God as the *summum bonum*. In fact, he insists that we can only *properly* do the former if we properly do the latter. To have one’s priorities organized in this way is to have one’s loves ordered; and the behaviour that results from “ordered love” in fact corresponds with what is regarded as virtuous behaviour. Here we must remember that Augustine rejects the Manichean idea that moral behaviour involves spurning things which are intrinsically evil. There are no bad natures (*nat. b.* 34). Although created natures are not good in the way God is good, they nevertheless have value according to their natures as created by God in his image. Virtue, then, involves *loving them in the correct proportion*. “What God has made for you is good; but some goods are great, others small: there are goods terrestrial, goods spiritual, good temporal, and all are good because the good God made them good. Therefore it is said in scripture ‘Order love in me [*ordinate in me caritatem*]’ [Song 2:4 LXX]” (*s.* 21.3; cf. *doc. Chr.* 1.27.28); “Though [everything created] is good, it can be loved in the right way, that is, when the proper order is kept, in the wrong way when that order is upset” (*civ. Dei* 15.22).

“Order love in me” – this, for Augustine, is a request, a prayer. A person does not order his own love. How this order does come about is integral not only to Augustine’s idea of virtue but to the quality of the experience of the happy life. It is tempting to harken back to

Augustine's view of God as the Truth, and thus the source of moral knowledge, in order to describe how the vision of God inspires virtue in its recipient. To do so is not inaccurate but needs some careful qualification to capture Augustine's sense. Some commentators, for example, are prone to language which misleadingly suggests that the vision of God can be consulted when we want to work out correct moral views.²¹ They are perhaps encouraged in this by Augustine's own language when he describes the virtuous attitude to created goods: such goods are to be "referred" to God (*doc. Chr.* 1.33.37). But by "referral," again, he does not imply a process of consultation of an authority for information. (After all, if this were the case, the obvious question would then be why we should go on to act rightly once we have ascertained what the right thing to do is.) As we saw earlier, the language of referral is for Augustine the language of love, of desire, of inspiration: if something is referred to another thing, the former carries (*ferre*) us to the latter. Referral is not a prescription as much as it is a description, of how the lover of God will behave – of how a *happy* person will behave – towards other goods.

To understand what sort of love it is that "refers," says Augustine, we need to think of a romantic lover:

Someone might say: 'The things that are in the world are what God has made...why should I not love what God has made?' Let God's spirit be in you to show you that all these things are good; but beware of loving things created and forsaking their Creator. You find them fair; but how much fairer is he that formed them! God forbids you not to love them, but He will not have you seek your bliss in them: the end of your esteem for them should be the love of their maker...Suppose, my friends, a man should make for his betrothed a ring, and she should prefer the ring given her to the betrothed who made it for her... if she should say 'The ring is enough, I do not want to see his face again,' what should we say of her?... 'Gold is more to you than a husband, a ring more than your betrothed?'...surely the pledge is given by the betrothed, just that in his pledge he himself may be loved. Even so, God has given you all these things; therefore, love him who made them. There is more that he would give you, even himself, their maker. (*ep. Jo.* 2.11)

In the above passage Augustine is showing the *uti/fruti* distinction in action. Implied in what he says here are two crucial points he makes about virtue as ordered love. One is that when God is loved in the enjoyment sense, other loves are automatically (so to speak) arranged so that the

²¹For example, C. Harrison says that according to Augustine, "man is to *access* the intrinsic value of things." (2000, 99, my emphasis).

lover's behaviour falls into a pattern commonly viewed as virtuous. Another is that this kind of virtue, true virtue, is effortless.

As to the first point, Augustine famously advises those who would be virtuous to “love and then do what you want [*dilige et quod vis fac*]” (*ep. Jo* 7.8). The reasoning behind this admonition shows that he is not being as naive (or sinister, depending on your point of view) as it may appear. He does not mean that whatever one justifies by means of “love” is thereby a good action, but something more specific: that if one values (desires) the true *summum bonum* above all other things, what one will want will simply fall into line with what is “moral.” We have seen Augustine propose the general theory that whatever we pursue with the aim of attaining happiness determines our behaviour towards all other objectives. Now he argues that the human love of God necessarily allows all other priorities to fall properly into place in its wake because God is the very source of the value everything else has. By invoking the idea of someone in love, Augustine also points to the moderating effect the all-consuming love of a lover for the beloved has on all his other loves; these become subject to “the moderation of an employer *instead* of the ardour of a lover [*utentis modestia, non amantis affectu*].” Here Augustine makes the point that loving lesser goods appropriately – in an ordered way – does not amount to rejecting them:

So someone who uses them well does not become attached to them [*agglutinetur*]. They do not become the limbs of his soul [*membra sui animi*], as it were (which is what happens when one loves them [in the enjoyment sense]. When these things begin to be amputated, therefore, he is not disfigured by any pain or decay. He is completely above such things, ready to possess and make use of them when there is need, and even readier to lose them and do without them. Since this is so you must realize that we should not find fault with silver and gold because of the greedy, or food because of gluttons, or wine because of drunkards, or womanly beauty because of fornicators and adulterers, and so on, especially since you know that fire can be used to heal and bread to poison. (*lib. arb.* 1.15)

This “temperance [*temperantia*]” (*mor.* 1.21.39) comes about not because the virtuous person consults the Truth, but because he is preoccupied with, even distracted by, the Truth: “Nothing that God can promise is of any worth apart from himself...what is all the earth, the sea, the sky, the stars...For the creator of them I thirst” (*s.*178.11). He is not so distracted, however, that he cannot value other goods; in fact, as the example of the lover reveals, he values them

precisely *because* of their relationship to the greatest good, because they remind him of that good as the lover's ring reminds his beloved of himself. The beauty of the lesser goods we love is a reflection of their maker, whom "we love in other things" (*conf.* 9.25; cf. *en. Ps.* 103.1) As Burnaby notes, "however many be the things possessing value, their values are never to be regarded as independent" (1938, 107); "in the Supreme Good all lesser values are included" (109).

The enjoyment-love of God, then, reflexively adjusts the love of changeable things (things created by God and therefore reflective of him) to the level of use-love; and because changeable goods will fade, use-love happens to be the only kind of love these things are able to satisfy.²² It follows that to love them in the sense that we refer our love of them to God is not simply the way that lesser goods may be *virtuously* had, but the only way they may be had at all.

This brings us to the second point Augustine illustrates with his example of the lover. True virtue is easy. Because virtue is a matter of desire and attraction, in his view the truly "virtuous" person is one who precisely does not have to *try* to be virtuous, that is, to "obey God," because he is always doing what he wants. Properly directed love ensures that "righteousness is not hard" but even "pleasant" (*Simpl.* 1.2.7); real virtue is a "compulsion to do good [*recte vivere...cogatur*]" (*vera rel.* 26.49). Likewise, when Augustine concurs with the commonplace view that to be virtuous is to "obey" God, he means much more than that we deliberately arrange our behaviour so that it conforms to what God wants. Rather, the lover of God obeys God in the same way a stone obeys gravity: he simply follows that path that draws him. "What is it to be drawn by pleasure? 'Delight in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart' [Ps 37.4]...not by necessity, but pleasure; not by obligation, but delight...a man is drawn to Christ when he delights in truth, delights in happiness, delights in righteousness" (*Jo. ev. tr.* 26.4).

²²Other human beings represent a special case of those things which must not be enjoyed but used. Augustine understandably came to be dissatisfied with saying that human beings must be "used," but wanted to avoid making them worthy of the type of worshipful love due only to God. He came to a compromise by suggesting that other people are to be enjoyed, but "in God," that is, with an appreciation of the source of their goodness and of what is due to them as beings made in his image (see O'Donovan 1980, 112-136; Rist, 159-168). Still he emphasizes that to idolize other human beings – to vainly set one's hopes for ultimate happiness on them – is just as fruitless as it is with much less valuable goods. They cannot bear the pressure of this burden. (In the *Confessiones* Augustine describes his own excessive grief at the death of a friend as the result of a love that was, in effect, attempting to substitute a mortal for God, *conf.* 4.4.9 ff.)

Since action – movement – originates in desire, right desire is therefore followed by right action (*civ. Dei* 4.21).

Virtue, then, is ordered love not in the sense that the vision of God gives human beings a reference point according to which they may deliberately go about organizing themselves; rather the vision of God itself does the ordering. Order is received by the lover of God, and this is not merely analogous to the way existence (good) is received from God by the creature, it is identical. We can more easily see this is Augustine’s point if we remember that for him, order is what ties a thing into a unity, and unity constitutes existence. We have a unified soul when use-love feeds into enjoyment-love, so that no loves contradict one another but all are integrated by one governing weight, one ultimate goal. “Love God with your whole heart...whatever else occurs to you will be whisked along toward that point to which the whole impetus of your love is hastening” (*doc. Chr.* 1.22.21). To love God is not only to be happy but to *be* – at least this, in my view, is the significance of Augustine’s statement that “what is eternal, loved in this way [with enjoyment] affects the soul with eternity” (*div. qu.* 35). To love God is to approach God, “not by intervals of place, but by likeness [*similitudine*]” (*Trin.* 7.6.12; cf. *civ. Dei* 9.17). The stability we have come to associate with form – with ontological goodness – turns out to be *experienced* not only as happiness but as “moral” goodness. “God is the unchangeable good, whereas human beings are changeable in body and soul. Therefore, unless a person turns towards God, and *stands firm in him* [*conversus substiterit*], he cannot be *formed* [*formari*] so as to be just and happy” (*Gn. litt.* 8.10.23; cf. *ep.* 140.23.56); “in that realm of truth from which all things temporal were made, we behold with our mind’s eye the pattern on which our being is ordered, and which rules all to which we give effect...the person whose knowledge and love of righteousness are perfect, *is* thereby righteous” (*Trin.* 9.7.12-9.9.14; cf. *div. qu.* 54).

As this last passage from *De Trinitate* indicates, it is not only the love of God which induces virtue and orderliness in the soul, but also the knowledge of God. Knowledge, then, is another facet of the link between the attachment to God and order, or being.

In-forming knowledge

We have seen that for Augustine virtue, “right and perfect” vision, is not something a

person achieves as much as it is something that happens to him – if, that is, he turns to God and is captured by that vision. In the previous chapter, we saw another way Augustine characterizes the vision of God: as knowledge. To know is “to perceive by means of reason,” the latter of which is the “eye of the soul” (*lib. arb.* 1.7); and God is the Truth itself, by which all truths are known. Indeed, Augustine’s preferred way of identifying that which is worthy of the name ‘God,’ is by pointing to that Truth on which reason depends.²³ We should expect, then, that as a vision of God himself, knowledge, too, is conferred on the knower by God, and that to know God does something *to* the knower, not only in an intellectual or epistemological sense but in an ontological sense. This, in fact, is exactly what Augustine claims. While the idea that knowledge is bestowed is well appreciated by scholars, the idea that existence itself is bestowed along with it is remarked upon far less.

Augustine’s theory of knowledge is one of the most opaque and controverted areas of his thought.²⁴ Fortunately, we only require the broad details of the theory in order to show that knowledge too is correlated with goodness and being, and therefore with order. We have already encountered Augustine’s arguments that we are dependent on God for what we know in one sense. When he argues that God is Truth (and therefore what God is like), he does so by showing that, behind the standards of truths against which the world is judged, is a single unchanging Truth without which reason cannot make judgements. In this sense, the very process of discovering God turns out to depend on God himself. But Augustine argues that there is another more intimate sense in which human beings are dependent on God for knowledge, commonly referred to by scholars as his ‘doctrine of illumination’ (though this is not his terminology). It

²³The transporting vision of unchanging beauty itself explains much that might otherwise mystify us about the way Augustine refers to “Truth,” the object of knowledge. When Augustine concludes, for example, one of his Platonically inspired assents to the Truth via reason with the statement “Here it is: the truth itself. Embrace it, if you can; enjoy it...what more can you desire than happiness? And what greater happiness can there be than to enjoy the unshakable, unchangeable, and most excellent truth,” and then goes on to claim that the conjugal embrace of a man and woman pales in comparison with such enjoyment (*lib. arb.* 2.13), it can be difficult to take him at his word – especially as he has led us to our glimpse of truth along the route, via reason, of mathematics, geometry and the moral law. What, we might think, could be less passionate than reason, and what could be less inspiring than the One behind all number? But of course we need to remember this One, this Unity, this Truth of all truths, is by definition also that which gives goodness, beauty and existence to everything it – he – has created.

²⁴See the comments of Matthews (2001, 180-181), and Gioia (2008, 193-198). Matthews notes that while many assume that the doctrine of illumination applies only to the apprehension of the intelligible world, Augustine actually applies it to all learning.

involves an inference based on the analogy which compares the act of knowing with the act of seeing. When we see something with our physical eyes, we require more than an object to see, and eyes to see it with; we also need something to see it *by*: without the medium of light, nothing at all can be seen. Augustine contends that we similarly cannot apprehend with the mind any of the standards of truth without God's illumination of those truths (*lib. arb.* 2.5; 2.8-11).

Although the mechanism by which this happens has been regarded as rather esoteric (Nash 1999, 438), as a philosopher in the classical tradition Augustine means it to account, like all theories, for some feature of ordinary experience. In this case the phenomenon is that of the apparent transferal of knowledge from one person to another. Augustine argues that although we tend to think of the teaching (and learning) of truths this way, there really is no such thing. Although it seems as though we learn about eternal truths (such as truths of mathematics or morals) from other human beings who try to explain them to us, this cannot actually be the whole explanation. The words and gestures (what Augustine calls "signs," *signa*, in *doc. Chr.* 2.1.1, *dial.* 5, and *mag.* 24) provided by a teacher can "only afford us an occasion" to know something. They "do not demonstrate it to our understanding" (*mag.* 36). "To afford an occasion" here translates the verb *admonere* whose meaning goes well beyond the sense of the English cognate, admonish.²⁵ It indicates that words and other signs are necessary but not sufficient triggers for learning; to "see" the rightness of the correct answer to a sum, for instance, requires more than hearing and even assenting to the words of a teacher who demonstrates its rightness. The teacher can neither see the correctness of the answer for his student nor make the student see it, which is why sometimes teaching fails because the student does not understand (*lib. arb.* 2.12). Augustine's explanation for this is that while God uses external teachers, he himself is the illuminator of the internal landscape of truths toward which teachers can only point. As the Truth, God "admonishes outwardly [via signs], and teaches inwardly" (*lib. arb.* 2.14). God's illumination links the mind with truth, just as light connects the eye with the object it sees (*mag.* 40; *conf.* 11.8.10; *lib. arb.* 2.13).

The important point here is that the more a person looks on God directly rather than on

²⁵This is Wills' translation in *mag.* 26 of *admonere* (2001, 178), which he in turn borrows from Buryeat's discussion of the function of signs in *De magistro* (1999, 295). For more on this important term in Augustinian psychology see Chapter 6.

what God illuminates²⁶, the more he is not only enlightened but the more he *is*. Just as virtue (“true and perfect” vision) corresponds both with order and with the fullest human existence, so does knowledge. The close association of being and knowledge is underscored by the otherwise odd way Augustine uses language about truth to indicate the ontological status of creation: for example, “all things are true in so far as they are” (*conf.* 7.15.21); “every soul is a soul by virtue of that by which it is a true soul; accordingly, every soul is dependent on truth for its very existence” (*div. qu.* 1). Nowhere is there more overlap between Augustine’s ontological and epistemological language, however, than when he uses metaphors of light and enlightenment. In the last chapter we saw him use this metaphor as a way to explain the way all creation, not just human creation, is dependent on God for its existence (or goodness). “God *is* light itself; we receive enlightenment [*luminari licet*] from him” (*mor.* 1.11.18). In the case of human beings in particular, it is often difficult to determine in which sense – ontological or epistemological – Augustine is using the light metaphor; and this in itself is suggestive. God is “that changeless light by whose participation the reasoning soul is set burning so as to be itself a light *made and created*” (*spir. et litt.* 11.7). “The mind *becomes like God* [*fit enim Deo similis*] to the extent it is subject to him for information and enlightenment [*dum illustrandum illi atque illuminandum se subicit*]” (*mor.* 1.12.20); “as great as is the difference between the light which brings light and the light which is brought, just so great is the difference between wisdom which *creates* and that which is created” (*conf.* 12.15.20). As the source of knowledge, God not only confers information in the modern sense of that which is known, but as *in-formation*: being, form, is conferred along with the vision of the Truth.

In Augustine’s declaration that we can only be “perfected by the full vision of God” (*Trin.* 14.24), and in his assertions that “no one can love the good unless he in some sense knows it” (*Trin.* 11), and that “to live happily...[is] to possess an eternal object through knowing it” (*div. qu.* 35), we can see the convergence of happiness, virtue, and knowledge. These states converge,

²⁶ Augustine is not claiming that every time we “see” the rightness of an arithmetical formula, the justness of a temporal law, or the beauty of a well built house, that we are seeing God himself. The fact that we can see these things is due to the activity of God himself in whom they exist; but this kind of “knowledge” is like a faint indirect light that shines on everyone; it is not equivalent to seeing the source of the light itself (*Trin.* 14.20).

moreover, because God is both the goal and means of completion of each.²⁷

In *De civitate Dei*, Augustine offers several versions of what amounts to a tripartite “definition” of God. Significantly, it describes God not only in terms of what he is in himself but what he is in relation to human beings: a *source* of existence, knowledge, and happiness (which Augustine assumes to include virtue). The tripartite form itself derives from the classical division of philosophy into three branches, physics, logic, and ethics (8.4). Each branch is grounded in its fulfillment: there must be a “cause of all phenomena” in physics, an “illumination of all reasoning processes” in logic, and “end of all action” in ethics. Augustine declares that the true God (the God of the Christians as well as, to a degree, the Platonists) is that fulfillment. Thus, in various synonymous triplets he describes God as “the cause of the organized universe, the light by which truth is perceived, and the spring which offers the drink of felicity” (8.10); “the cause of existence, the principle of reason, and the rule of life,” without whom “no being exists, no teaching instructs and no experience profits” (8.4). In other places, Augustine puts this triad even more anthropocentrically: he admonishes that we “should seek him in whom for us all things are held together, we should find him in whom for us all things are certain, we should love him in whom is found for us all goodness” (8.4; cf. 8.10).

We can interpret this definition as a concise summary of how proper order – the proper level of existence – is experienced by human beings. God is the source of *well-being* (experienced as the fulfillment of happiness, virtue and knowledge) because he is the source of *being*; and God is the goal of human desire because he is the origin of the human being himself. As the famous passage from the *Confessiones* says of God, “he has made us for (literally towards, *ad*) himself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in him” (1.1.1). The movement towards happiness (and the virtue and knowledge which comes along with it) is how we both experience and fulfill our ontological weightedness towards our proper resting place.

²⁷Notice, for instance how the object of knowledge in this passage is also the object of an act of will: “The impulse present in our seeking goes out beyond the seeker, and hovers as it were, unable to rest in any other object until what is sought has been found and the seeker is united with it. This impulse or search...can be called an act of will, for the seeker wills to find, and if something knowable is being sought, then the seeker has a will to know.” (*Trin.* 9.18).

Physical health as order through the soul

The fact that healthy experience is grounded in a healthy level of existence (goodness or order) allows us finally to see how Augustine fits actual physical health into the experience of the human being who clings to God. For Augustine, the soul is not the whole human being; the body is an inextricable component of human nature and hence tied to and influenced by the soul.

As we have seen, one of Augustine's oddest claims is that bodily health depends on "soul health." Happiness and virtue even have the effect of bestowing physical immortality: "For the immortality and imperishability of the body results from the health of the spirit and the health of the spirit consists in clinging unshakably to...the unchanging God"²⁸ (*doc. Chr.* 1.23.23). This claim is rendered less audacious than it might otherwise appear if we place it in the context of all we have learned about the way human beings are ordered.

The first step in putting this picture together involves a relatively uncontroversial claim: physical health is essentially the well ordering of a living (ensouled) body. "The peace [order] of the body...is a tempering of the component parts in duly ordered proportion...the peace of the body and soul is the duly ordered life and health of a living creature" (*civ. Dei* 19.13). To have a healthy body involves having the right parts of the body in the right places doing the right things.

What seems more difficult to understand is how this physical state could be an effect of happiness (and of its concomitants, virtue and knowledge). The proper background to this claim is Augustine's view (which we explored in the last chapter) that the body does not possess whatever order (that is, existence) it has through itself, but through what is superior to it. Like any creature, the body receives order from God; uniquely in creation, however, the body receives its goodness (or existence or order) through an intermediary, the soul, on which it is dependent for organization (unity and structure), life, and movement. The soul, we have seen Augustine claim, therefore has two main powers: one of "perceiving the truth"; and the other "of giving unity to the body" (*c. ep. Man.* 16.19). The crucial point we see him now making is that soul does the latter *in so far as* it does the former. The body can only be as ordered as the soul is; and if the soul is only ordered in so far as it adheres to God (which is virtue and happiness), the body

²⁸"Immortalitas enim et incorruptio corporis de sanitate animi existit, sanitas autem animi est firmissime inhaerere potiori, hoc est incommutabili Deo."

too can only be fully ordered – and therefore fully healthy – by means of its attachment to a virtuous happy soul. In passages like the following, we can even see the correlation Augustine traces between the formative vision of God and bodily order. The healthy body “will owe its *stability* not to itself but to the soul whose stability is in God. For the soul too owes its stability not to itself but to God *whom it enjoys [quo fruitur]*. Thus it has an ampler life than the body. For the body lives by [*per*] the soul and the soul *by the immutable truth [per incommutabilem veritatem]*” (*vera rel.* 12.25). “There exists that disposition of body which is called health [*affectio corporis quae sanitas dicitur]*” when “intent upon its Lord, the soul *understands eternal things*, and then more fully *is [magis est]*. The more also its slave [the body] *is*, in its kind, *through the soul [in suo genere per illam]*” (*mus.* 6.5.13). That “the soul is the whole life of the body, as God is the happy life of the soul” (*lib. arb.* 2.16; cf. *civ. Dei* 19.25) is therefore no mere analogy but a statement about how the members of these relationships interact.

The idea that the soul’s love of God bestows unity on its body lies behind Augustine’s insistence that the body belonging to a properly oriented soul will be immortal. Closely related is his claim that the soul’s control over this body will be absolute. The ordered soul’s grasp of its body will be so thorough that the body will never slip away from it: that body will thus be so healthy, so immune to degradation – so stable – that it will be immortal. We can see this association between the soul’s power and health in the following passage.

[The body] will submit to the spirit with a ready obedience, and obedience so wonderfully complete that [it] will fulfill the will of the spirit in such a way as to bring perfect assurance of indissoluble immortality, free from any feeling of distress, and relieved of any possibility of corruption, any trace of reluctance. (*civ. Dei* 13.20)

Here Augustine addresses the overall *experience* of health; it is not simply the absence of distress, but one of ease, of smooth transition between will and the response of the body. “The body will yield to [the soul’s] will in all things and will give no trouble” and no “burden of difficulty” (*vera rel.* 44.82). “Turned to its Lord, the soul...gives to [the body] a most easy life...a life very little toilsome and troublesome.” The soul does not have to wrestle with its body “not because...the soul does nothing in the body [as when it is separated from it], but because it does nothing more easily [*facilius*]” (*mus.* 6.5.13).

Occasionally Augustine even hints (without any development) that the power of the ordered soul will be such that it will extend into the rest of the physical world beyond the body (or through the body?) itself. Speaking of the resurrected human being, he says that “restored to its integrity” (that is, to its proper order) “and made subject to him alone by whom it was created, its body too will be restored to its original strength, and it will receive *power to possess the world*, not to be possessed by it” (*vera rel.* 23.44). “To a soul obeying God’s laws, [God] subjected *all things* without adversity so that *the rest of the things that God made* should serve it if it also...willed to serve God” (*c. Faust.* 15. cf. 22). The perfectly ordered soul, he seems to suggest, would have *everything* inferior to it under its power. In Augustine’s view this is the way the universe is properly ordered; superiors ought to rule inferiors (*lib. arb.* 1.8, 3.11). But whether he means that every physical thing (and not just its body) would bend to this soul’s will, or whether he only means that this soul, being virtuous, would only experience desires consonant with the way the world is, is not clear.²⁹ What Augustine does clearly indicate is that the proper relationship of soul and body makes the body immune even from external assaults and accidents; the only thing that can affect it deleteriously is “sin or its punishment” (*vera rel.* 16.32).

We began this section with Augustine’s assertion that human beings come to resemble what they love. In this section we have seen how an “eternal thing, loved, affects the soul with eternity” (*vera rel.* 10.19; cf. *div. qu.* 35) – that is, with relative unchangeability in its own kind. Unity of loves, and unity of soul and body are both a reflection of God’s simple unity so that “all things, joined and connected harmoniously to one another, maintain unity by a steadfast peace” (*div. qu.* 66). In some sense we can see a tendency in Augustine’s writing to use the fully realized body/soul relationship as the visible sign of the human being fully submitted to his creator. The body does not intrude as a pseudo-alien presence because it has become a responsive instrument of the will. The same kind of effortless obedience to God occurs in true virtue, where there is no striving and no resistance from other loves, but all are woven into a harmonious whole. Peace, or order, is *experienced as facilitas* (*civ. Dei* 19.27; *Gn. litt.* 12.35): a seamless movement from desire and its fulfilment. For the soul, the key to *facilitas*, to genuine

²⁹ Augustine surmises in *Gn. litt.* 3.18.27 that the “thorns and thistles” (Gn. 3:11) which came to plague fallen human beings were not newly created after the fall for that very purpose, but that they only became troublesome after the fall.

power over inferiors, is paradoxically submission; for when a thing is inherently dependent it can only flourish when it accepts what it needs.

In the following passage Augustine gives us a flavour of how all these relationships work together to make a happy human life. At one time the human being

lived in the enjoyment of God...He lived without any want, and had it in his power to live like this forever...There was no trace of decay in the body, arising from the body, to bring any distress to any of his senses. There was no risk of disease from within or of injury from without. Man enjoyed perfect health in the body, entire tranquillity in the soul...Just as in paradise there was no extreme of heat or of cold, so in its inhabitant no desire or fear intervened to hamper his good will. There was no sadness at all...but true joy flowed perpetually from God, and towards God there was a blaze of love from a pure heart...Between man and wife there was a faithful partnership based on love and mutual respect; there was a harmony and a liveliness of mind and body, and an effortless observance of the commandment. Man was at leisure, and tiredness never wearied him, and sleep never weighed him down against his will. (*civ. Dei* 14.26)

This passage is noticeably in the past tense; other portrayals of the ideal human being we have seen are in the future tense. In Augustine's view, there are only two times in history in which human beings enjoyed, and will one day enjoy again, such a relationship with their physical selves. These times are necessarily those in which human beings once were, and will be again, turned to God: before the fall, and after the resurrection.³⁰ There has never been a living example of a human being healthy in body and soul – the sort we have been describing in this chapter – since the fall. Such a person has become a matter of conjecture, an ideal pieced together from what we know of our deepest desires (which, as we have seen, Augustine views as a kind of homing instinct and clue to our own nature), reasoned reflection, glimpses revealed in scripture of a dim idyllic past and a glorious though ineffable future.

How did sin, and sin alone, disrupt all these relationships to bring about all the miseries of life as we now know it? We began this chapter noting that the fullest human existence does

³⁰ According to the mature Augustine there are distinctions between Adam's body and the resurrected body (earlier he had argued only that the body would once again achieve that "pristine stability" it had once enjoyed, *retr.* 10.) The resurrected body is the sort of body that *eventually* would have been bestowed on Adam had he not sinned. This superior kind of body will be "spiritual," by which Augustine does not mean that it will be incorporeal, but rather that it will be so wholly subservient to and dependent on the soul that it will need nothing but the soul in order to flourish (rendering it independent even of the food in now relies on). Augustine admits that exactly what this state will be like is beyond our imagination and so certainly beyond his powers of description (*civ. Dei.* 22.11-21, 24; *Gn. litt.* 6.22-28).

not come about except on one condition, that a person clings to God. But in a sense there is an assumption underlying this condition itself. The person must *know* who and what he is and (therefore) where he fits into the scheme of things: “You ought to know about the likeness of the material world to the higher realm or you will not be able to know the direction to put your efforts” (*Gn. litt.* 4.4); “the participator in the Self-same is he who confesses that he is *other than God*, that he has from God all the good he can have” (*en. Ps.* 121.6.8). This is why the mind is “commanded to know itself,”³¹ and why “it should think about itself and live according to its nature, that is...should want to be placed...under [God], and over all that it ought to rule” (*Trin.* 10.2.7). The human being, in other words “*must know that he is a creature*” (*mor.* 1.2.12). To know – and then to accept – that he is, and must be, dependent on a Good greater than himself, says Augustine, is humility: “humility exalts us [*exaltat humilitas*], by making us subject to God [*facit subditum Deo*]” (*civ. Dei* 14.13).³² Ultimately, Augustine therefore concludes, “it is better if the soul simply forgets itself in the love of the unchangeable God” (*lib. arb.* 3.25).

What, then, will happen if the human being rejects his dependence? To ask this is to ask about effects of sin.

2. Suffering and Disorder

We now reach a point where the real strength of Augustine’s natural account of the punishment of sin can emerge. The test of that account is whether sin – given all we now know about the relationship between the human being and God – will manifest not only in *some* affliction, but in *every* kind of affliction the sinner suffers. I think Augustine passes the test with flying colours, as this section will show. Whether his very success will cause him trouble when he wants to assert another major cause of suffering – God himself – will remain to be seen. We will examine the problematic implications of the idea that sin is self-inflicted at the end of this chapter.

³¹Hill, the translator here, thinks this is a reference to the famous saying inscribed over the shrine at Delphi but that Augustine was probably exposed to it through Cicero (Hill 1991, 301n9).

³²On this understanding of humility in Augustine see Rist 1994, 133n109, 188-190.

In a general way, we can already see the outlines of Augustine's achievement emerging simply from the examination of human well-being we have already conducted: if clinging to God results in happiness, then rejecting God will result in unhappiness. And now that we understand why happiness includes virtue, knowledge, and physical health, we ought to be able to infer that refusing to cling to God will result not only in unhappiness, but also in sinfulness (lack of virtue), ignorance, and physical affliction. And in fact, these inferences match up very well with Augustine's observations of the human condition as we listed them in the introduction. The consistency of Augustine's position is made even more convincing, however, if he can demonstrate two more correlations. The first is that all affliction has some kind of underlying commonality (as, for instance, all the symptoms of scurvy are the experience of a breakdown of connective tissue); the second is that this commonality can be accounted for simply by sin (as scurvy can be accounted for simply by vitamin C deficiency).

Again, in a general way we can see Augustine asserting, in the following passage for example, that all evils do have an underlying commonality. They are in fact examples of corruption:

So the corruption of an educated mind is ignorance; the corruption of a prudent mind is imprudence; the corruption of a just mind, injustice; the corruption of a brave mind, cowardice; the corruption of a calm, peaceful mind, cupidity, fear, sorrow, pride. Again, in a living body, the corruption of health is pain and disease; the corruption of strength is exhaustion; the corruption of rest is toil. Again, in any corporeal thing, the corruption of beauty is ugliness; the corruption of straightness is crookedness; the corruption of order is confusion; the corruption of entireness is dismemberance, or fracture, or diminution. It would be long and labourious to mention by name all the corruptions of the things here mentioned, and of countless other things; for in many cases the words may apply to the mind as well as to the body, and in innumerable cases the corruption has a distinct name of its own. (*c. ep. Man.* 35.39)

But as we have seen, "what is corrupted is perverted; and what is perverted suffers the loss of order" (*mor.* 2.5.7). Therefore all these evils are in fact examples of disorder.

In the above passage, we can in fact identify many if not all of the effects of the fall. But how are all these examples of disorder the effect of *sin*? The most substantive way to show that all suffering is rooted in disorder caused by sin is to analyse what Augustine means by sin itself in the *context* of the metaphysical framework we have built up thus far. That is, given what sin

is, should it – must it – have the effects Augustine claims for it? What we will find, I argue, is that an analysis of sin predicts its own effects, or, perhaps better, that sin itself in some sense contains its own effects. These turn out to be exactly those Augustine claims must ensue from it – including the most problematic effects we flagged in the introduction. They include not only the opposites of happiness, virtue, knowledge and even physical health – that is, sinfulness, ignorance, illness, suffering and death – but an *inescapable and irreversible* condition characterized by these states and experiences. The fact that, as Augustine defines it, sin *must* play out in this way constitutes a strong defence of the internal consistency of Augustine’s natural account – that is, of the idea that sin is self-harming.

Sin: The dark side of love

Like virtue, the essence of sin [*peccatum*] cannot be captured by a set of prescriptions (or in this case prohibitions); though again, as in the case of virtue, human beings have to use prohibitions to try to regulate behaviour that no longer comes naturally or easily.³³ Rules are made to guide behaviour, and for Augustine sinful *behaviour* is not the whole story. Sin cannot merely be a violation of law: actions are not immoral because the law forbids them, but the law forbids them because they are immoral. And, while it may be an adequate rule of thumb for guiding one’s actions, even the “Golden Rule” cannot adequately define evil-doing. Sin cannot simply be the act of doing to someone else what you would not like done to you, since people can have depraved ideas about what they would and would not like done to them (Augustine’s example is wife swapping). All these observations lead Augustine to locate evil-doing or sin not in the “external act” but in *libido* (sometimes *cupiditas*), desire that has something wrong with it. To see this is the case, he claims, we only need to realize that someone who *intends* to commit an evil, but is thwarted in doing so by circumstances, is just as sinful as the person who is lucky enough to succeed with his evil plans (*lib. arb.* 1.3), and that ostensibly “bad” actions can be performed accidentally by someone intending good, and vice versa (*conf.* 1.12.19; *ep. Jo.* 7.8).

³³ The decalogue (‘the law’) is the prime example of this kind of attempt to regulate behaviour (*spir. et litt.* 13.23-14.24; *Simpl.* 1.1.6-7); the temporal law is another (*lib. arb.* 1.15).

Because for Augustine sinful behaviour is grounded, as is all action, in desire, it has, like all desire, an orientational character. And like all desire, it is directed ultimately towards the same great goal sought by all human beings – happiness (*lib. arb.* 1.3, *civ. Dei* 14.4; *s.* 3.15.16). In seeking that good which will grant happiness, there are only really two choices: creator or creature. Sin chooses the option virtue rejects. It is a “disordered movement, in which goods of a lower rank are preferred to higher goods” (*Gn. litt.* 11.15; cf. *Simpl.* 1.2.18). The sinner turns *towards* inferior goods, and so *away from God* (*lib. arb.* 1.16; *vera rel.* 20.38; 38.76). We have seen that to expect happiness from something is to serve that thing, to follow it wherever it leads. Augustine’s language, therefore, is strong: to expect happiness from a creature is to commit idolatry, to treat what is not God as though it is God.³⁴ Everyone worships *something*, he insists, even those who profess not to (*vera rel.* 10.18-19; 35.65-38.69). This is the first layer of Augustine’s analysis of sin, what all sins have in common: the disorderly attempt to “use what ought to be enjoyed and to enjoy what ought to be used” (*div. qu.* 30).³⁵

However this is only one layer of the mystery of the disorderly sinful desire. A deeper level of disorder lurks beneath the surface confusion between objects of use and enjoyment. Why, if everyone wants to be happy, does a creature try to enjoy what can only be used? Is it a mistake, a miscalculation? Augustine thinks sin ultimately has a more sinister motive; to speculate about what it might be he considers what changeable good could possibly present itself as a plausible alternative to God himself – a created good so beguiling, in other words, that a creature would choose it over God himself. Augustine’s answer is that God’s only real competition in this respect is the creature himself. This becomes particularly clear, he suggests, if we imagine a creature such as the first human being, or the angels, who in their original condition *were* enjoying God and referring all other goods to him. Augustine’s reasoning here seems to be that to consider such an unfallen creature is to observe sin in an isolated and pristine laboratory condition. (Recall that sins as they are committed after the fall are in fact effects or

³⁴ Augustine’s favourite biblical text here is Romans 1:25: “They worshipped and served created things instead of the creator, who is blessed forever” (see *vera rel.* 10.18-19; *nat. et gr.* 22.24; *Trin.* 1.13; *mor.* 1.24.44; *conf.* 5.3.4, 6.9.15; *civ. Dei* 14.28).

³⁵ Strictly speaking, God cannot be used just as, again strictly speaking, creatures cannot be enjoyed. But Augustine points out that people *try* to use God, that is, to manipulate him – for instance by magical rituals – into serving their will (*civ. Dei* 15.7).

echoes of the first sin ever committed.) Somehow, Augustine suggests, the adoring gaze of this creature turned from God to notice that it was “not the same as God, and yet something that, next to God, can be pleasing” (*lib. arb.* 3.25; cf. *mor.* 1.12.20).³⁶ Augustine speculates that this awe of the self was especially inspired by the creature’s very real godlikeness: its “excellence” (*civ. Dei* 11.14) and array of powers (*Trin.* 12.14-15; *civ. Dei* 12.1; *lib. arb.* 13.25). From this followed a kind of resentment against God simply for being God, the source of existence and of power. It decided it wanted “to be under its own control (*lib. arb.* 2.19), to be “based on itself...instead of on God” (*civ. Dei* 14.13), to be “its own good – that is, its own God” (*lib. arb.* 3.24). The idolizing of objects of pleasure, then, is not the fullest understanding of sin; what is behind the pursuit of any other object but God as the *summum bonum* is the idolatry of the self.

Following scripture³⁷, Augustine calls this “perverse imitation of God” pride (*superbia*, *civ. Dei* 19.2, 14. 13; cf. *Gn. litt.* 8.14; *lib. arb.* 3.25). In his view, the general analysis of sin as the human attempt to be a little god both follows from, and provides insight into, specific instances of what are commonly held to be sinful actions. Although it is, again, important to remember that Augustine does not hold that every sin now committed is a willful rebellion against God and the result of a conscious desire to replace God as the centre of one’s universe, nevertheless all sins are at least a kind of unconscious echoing of this pattern. The pattern of pride allows Augustine usefully to reinterpret all sins in terms of the attribute or gift of God that particular sin attempts to imitate or procure independently from him. So, for example, curiosity (the lust for knowledge and new experiences) imitates the omniscience of God³⁸; sloth seeks a

³⁶Augustine confesses that this “movement” is so irrational that it is ultimately impenetrably mysterious – which is not surprising, he says, since sin is a “deficient” cause (*civ. Dei* 12.7). He is not entirely clear what this means but is clear that whatever it is, it is unknowable. There is no meaningful way to talk about a “cause” of the first sinful willing, since it is “defective,” that is, implicated in nothingness, and therefore unintelligible (*lib. arb.* 2.20). As well, sometimes he suggests that the capacity, if not the tendency, to “fall away” is a feature of createdness itself. Since creation is by its very nature incomplete and corruptible, it exists in a state of tension between nothingness and pure being (God) which can all too easily resolve in the wrong direction (*vera rel.* 11.21 cf. *civ. Dei* 14.13). He is cautious about this however: he does not want to wind up placing the blame for evil back on God as the Creator. See C. Harrison 2006, 91-95 and Rist 1994: 104-108.

³⁷Particularly Sir 10:13: “The beginning of every sin is pride [*Initium enim omnis peccati superbia est*]” (see *civ. Dei* 14.3, 12.6).

³⁸*Curiositas* for Augustine never refers to the benign and commonplace desire to know about something of which one happens to be ignorant, but rather to an unhealthy desire to know things which ought not to be known, or to the desire to know simply for the sake of knowing – a “greed” for collecting experiences as an end in itself in imitation of

kind of rest, when true rest only comes from and in God; “luxury of life” (the desire for plenty and abundance) seeks to replace the incorruptible pleasure that is God; avarice desires possessions, but only God really possesses all things (*conf.* 2.6.13-15; *vera rel.* 84). Most telling of all, however, is cruelty (the desire to be feared) which seeks to “rejoice over subjects instead of to be subject” (*civ. Dei* 14.4): pride “hates a fellowship of equality and seeks to impose its dominion over fellow human beings in place of God’s rule” (*civ. Dei* 14.12; cf. *Gn. litt.* 8.14). The human creature’s tendency to try to “have other souls under it...[so as] to operate [*operari*] on them” (*mus.* 6.13.41) and to “eat them up like food” (*conf.* 9.2.2), particularly lays bare the pride at the heart of sin.

Augustine’s identification of pride as the root of sin starkly reveals the impossible and ironic aims of sin. These aims are impossible because the creature “is so constituted that it *cannot* be its own good, the source of its own happiness” (*ep.* 140.23.56). The “standard of truth” is “not its own...but God’s” (*civ. Dei* 14.4). The aims of sin are ironic because it is neither wrong nor unnatural for human beings to “want to be unconquered [*invicti*]” – but “only as we are subject to God in whose image we are made” (*vera rel.* 45.85). Human beings

would have been better able to be like gods if they had in obedience adhered to the supreme and real ground of their being [*summo veroque principio cohaerendo*], if they had not in pride made themselves their own ground. For created gods [*dii... creati*] are gods not in their own nature but by participation [*participatione*] in the true God. By aiming at more, a person is diminished, when he elects to be self-sufficient [*sibi sufficere deligit*] and defects from the one who is really sufficient for him. This, then, is the original evil: a human being regards himself as his own light, and turns away from that light which would make him a light if he would set his heart on it. (*civ. Dei* 14.13)

In the middle of this passage, Augustine gets to the heart of the irony of sin: rather than promoting self-interest, it promotes self-harm; it “diminishes.” “We sin to increase our welfare and the result is rather to increase our misfortune” (*civ. Dei* 14.4). The misfortune, as we will now see, is grounded in the diminishment. Just as with happiness, human experience is rooted in the metaphysics underlying it.

The effects of sin – the “chain of disasters” (*civ. Dei.* 13.14) which follows on that

³⁸(...continued)

God’s omniscience (*Trin.* 12.15). See Rist 1994, 140-145.

turning away from God – can be viewed both ontologically or experientially: as a privation of good, or as suffering. Passages like the following, as well as the nutritional metaphor with which we began the chapter, reveal this connection. “A changeable good becomes a better good when it adheres to the unchangeable good by loving and serving it...if it refuses to do this, it *deprives itself of a good*, and this is bad for it, the consequence of which...is *torment*” (*Gn. litt.* 8.14.31); “the cause of evil is a falling away from the unchangeable good by a being made good but changeable...this is the first evil experience of the rational creature...that is, its first *privation of good*” (*ench.* 23-24). In such passages, Augustine makes it clear that the sinner in effect saws off the branch he is sitting on, and that the result is unpleasant. But as we have noted all along, the ontological language Augustine uses to signify lack of good tends to be vague, borrowing as it does from a physical language. The soul that sins is darkened (*civ. Dei* 14.13,18; *conf.* 13.8.9, 4.16.31; *Trin.* 10.7.5), enfeebled and weakened (*Trin.* 14.18); cold and chill (*en. Ps.* 103; *civ. Dei* 14.13). To translate such descriptions – which are notably not only of lack, but of sapped strength – into concrete terms we turn once again to the two concepts which straddle the metaphysical and the experiential: will and order. The disorder of the will – that is, of the set of loves which make up the will – is the locus of all human privation and therefore of all suffering.

The beginning of the “chain of disasters”: The fragmented will

We saw in the last chapter that the overall well-being of a free and rational creature is the consequence of its centring all its hopes for happiness on its creator through the linking bond of the will. What, then, will be the result of its breaking this “connection” by its turning away from its source? Just as clinging to a simple unity (God) organizes the loves – which is to say the soul itself – into an integrated and coherent likeness of unity, so turning away from God towards changeable creatures causes the soul to fall apart. The principle that human beings come to resemble what they love takes on a dark cast when what is loved (in the strong enjoyment-sense of love) is a multiplicity: for all changeable things are multiplicities in that they are now here, now there, and never abiding. Thus, “when a human being falls away from the unity of God...his needs...became abundant, for he pursues one thing after another, and nothing remains permanently with him (*vera rel.* 21.41). Because sin multiplies the needs of the sinner, to

“pursue a multitude” (*conf.* 2.1.1) is to “fall into pieces,” and “to be flung here and there” (2.2.2). By pursuing changeable things, a person becomes as changeable as his goals. As those things change, he changes with them, chasing after them to attain them, to keep them (unsuccessfully) from being lost. He has “as many masters as he has vices” (*civ. Dei* 4.4).

Augustine never fails to emphasize the misery of this kind of disorderly love. In these vivid passages from *De vera religione* and *De libero arbitrio* sin is shown to cause the sinner such suffering that, Augustine argues, his state may be called one of “punishment”:

[The idolizing of a creature] brings a penalty [*fit poenalis*] to him who so loves it. It involves him in miseries and feeds him with false pleasures which neither abide nor satisfy, but beget torturing sorrows...the thing desired escapes him who loved it. It torments him by passing beyond his power to sense it, and disturbs his mind with errors. (*vera rel.* 20.40)

The very fact that inordinate desire [*libido*] rules the mind is itself no small punishment [*poena*]. Stripped by opposing forces [*per diversa*] of the splendid wealth of virtue, the mind is dragged by inordinate desire into ruin and poverty; now taking false things for true...now trying to enter the light of understanding but reeling back in exhaustion...cupidity carries out a reign of terror, buffeting the whole human soul and life with storms coming from every direction. Fear attacks from one side and desire from another; from one side, anxiety; from the other, an empty and deceptive happiness; from one side, the agony of losing what one loved; from the other the passion to acquire what one did not have. (*lib. arb.* 1.11)

In such passages, we can see the close correlation between sin and psychological misery. Sin is antithetical to the rest and peace the soul desires to find in an object of abiding changelessness. We can also see hints that the sinner loses what are the correlates of happiness – virtue and knowledge (opposing desires nullify the unified love which is virtue; false things are mistaken for true). But in themselves these passages do not explain three of the most problematic features of the fall: why sinfulness, together with the infirmity and ignorance spawning it, should become a compulsive condition; why the sinner should be unable to escape his condition on his own; and why that state should be allied to bodily suffering. We have seen critics counter that while it is conceivable that sin (being a matter, after all, of desire) might well have deleterious psychological effects, there is no clear way that Augustine can convincingly argue that the harm of sin goes as far as he says it does. For one thing, it is difficult to understand how a single instance of sin should pitch a soul into an irreversible condition – as Augustine

claims happens in the event of the fall. For another, is it is obvious enough that physical affliction does not at all correlate to a person's comparative virtue.

Surprisingly, a careful inspection of his arguments shows that Augustine handles all these concerns by the same basic mechanism: the symptoms of the fall in question are each attributable to the disorder of the soul, because the disorder Augustine is describing is *not* merely psychological, but ontological. The objections to his view fail to take this fact adequately into account³⁹; and they are met when we realize that the whole human, body and soul, is irreparably damaged by sin. This in turn is because human beings *are* less when they sin, as we will now see.

The unidirectional fall

We have seen Augustine claim that “wherever someone falls he must lie until he is raised up” (*vera rel.* 24.45); that “we cannot pick ourselves up voluntarily as we fell voluntarily” (*lib. arb.* 2.20). Why a sinner should fall and remain fallen is one of the many Augustinian claims that requires some reconstruction, as Augustine himself never addresses the point head on – though he comes close to doing so. His view emerges when we put together what he says about the root of the fallen condition and what he says about its remedy. The remedy, of course, is the grace of God.

Although the topic of how grace works is obviously vast, what is important here is that Augustine insists it works on the will itself, so as to remedy its tendency to “love too little” (*vera rel.* 20.38; cf. *conf.* 3.1.1).⁴⁰ Why does the will need help to love what it should love (God)? Why

³⁹To be fair, Burnaby does note Augustine's explanation for physical affliction, but he does not examine it in any detail, dismissing it somewhat offhandedly as a rationalization (1938, 213).

⁴⁰The extent to which fallenness is amenable to self-therapy is one of those points on which Augustine's thought shows development, and so, therefore, does his teaching on grace. His earlier view seems to have been that a person's independent role in its own self-healing is to ask for God's help, since on his own he lacks the strength to do any more than this. Later, however, he decides that scripture is clear that grace is only grace if granted apart from any question of merit – and asking for help shows some merit. Asking for help, he therefore comes to argue, is itself a sign that grace has already been at work. Unlike the Pelagians, however, he always seems to have maintained that the point of grace is not merely to give the law or the free will to obey that law, but also to assist the human will freely to obey the law. For texts contrasting early and later views, as well as for speculation on the cause of his shift in view, see Fredriksen 1988 and Wetzel 2001. C. Harrison (2006) has recently argued for the unorthodox view that there is far less discontinuity and radical change in Augustine's theory of grace (and the need for it) that is traditionally

(continued...)

can human beings not simply turn back to God once they have turned away? Augustine's answer at first seems circular, but this very circularity is in fact his point. It explains why he thinks human beings get stuck in the worship of creatures and continue to reject their true good – and why they cannot fix this condition on their own. The crux of the problem is that fallen human beings are not without sin “because they do not *want* to be [*quia...nolunt*].”⁴¹ He continues,

Human beings do not want what is right, either because it is hidden from them, or because they find no delight [*non delectat*] in it. For the strength of our will to anything is proportionate to the assurance of our knowledge of its goodness, and to the warmth of our delight in it. Thus ignorance and infirmity are failings [*ignorantia...et infirmitas vitia sunt*] which hinder the will [*impediunt voluntatem*] from being moved to perform a good action...that what was hidden may become clear, that what did not delight may become sweet: this belongs to the grace of God which aids the will”(*pecc. mer.* 2.26.17; cf. *lib. arb.* 3.18; *Simpl.* 2.21).

To get Augustine's full perspective here, we must put this statement into the context of what we have learned about virtue and knowledge. We know that, turned towards God, the soul experiences a vision so fulfilling that its other loves are moderated automatically; we know that it is the delight inspired by this vision that moves the will to cling to it – as Augustine says in *De libero arbitro*, “only something seen can incite the will to act” (*lib. arb.* 3.25; cf. *Simpl.* 1.2.21); and we have seen that Augustine characterizes the fallen soul as weakened, darkened, and enfeebled. It follows, then, that the will turned away from God is by definition at least partially blinded and therefore ignorant; such knowledge of eternal truths that the fallen soul has are a pale ambient light rather than a direct vision of God, the source of all truth. It cannot therefore see what to turn *to*; and to turn (in order to see) requires that which moves the human being in any direction – the will. But the will is precisely what is weakened and turned away since it “can

⁴⁰(...continued)
thought.

⁴¹ Allin portrays Augustine's statement that “we do not do good because we do not want to” as the expression of an earlier more Pelagian view of sin. This wiser younger Augustine, he argues, realizes that we sin under no compulsion or necessity (which necessity, in Allin's view, became a feature of Augustine's later unintelligible theory of original sin) but that we sin precisely because we do wrong freely – because we want to (1911, 114). But Allin is mistaken about this being some kind of more reasonable early position; in fact, Augustine's assertion that we are not good because we do not want to be is precisely the foundation for his mature (and strong) position on the needfulness of grace: the fact that we do not *want* to do good is *exactly* our problem. Augustine thinks that once fallen we do sin under “a kind of necessity,” but this necessity is exactly our own loves, our own self-damaged will (*nat. et gr.* 66.79).

have no motive [*moveri nullo modo potest*] unless something presents itself to delight and stir the mind. That this should happen is not in anyone's power [*potestate*]" (*Simpl.* 1.2.22).

The conundrum, then, is this. What would be needed to rectify the sinner's situation is the will – but the will, once fallen, lacks the “strength” – the motive – to do so. Hence Augustine's insistence that God needs to strengthen the will itself, but also his claim that without this help the damaged condition is irreversible and inescapable. The picture of grace Augustine presents depends on his conceiving of the will as a kind of attractive force or weight, and it is perhaps helpful to push his analogy further. The set of relationships he describes is usefully likened (at least by modern readers) to ordinary physical systems in which forces of attraction come into play. Fallen human beings are like objects which would be attracted to another object by physical force, but for their being outside the range of attraction. And, just as, say, a piece of iron moved just outside the range of attraction of a magnetic field needs to be moved by an outside force to return to the attractive field, or as a satellite needs to be boosted into the range of orbit of a planet, so fallen human beings cannot want the good enough without an extra boost to their capacity to correctly will. They have been captured by the gravity of lesser things, which they continue to pursue (thereby sinning repetitively); and lacking the very force to do so, they cannot escape that new orbit. He “who turn[s] away from [God's] light and embraces a darkness of [his] own” finds that “when someone loves a shadow, the eye of the soul grows weaker and more inadequate to look on [God]. So he wanders in darkness more and more, and gladly pursues *whatever comes easiest* [*quidquid...tolerabilius*] to him in his weakened state” (*lib. arb.* 2.16); having sinned, the soul “falls back on *what [its] strength permits* [*cadunt in quod valent*]” (*conf.* 10.23.33); “the consciousness is overweighted by a kind of self-heaviness, and is therefore heaved out of happiness...nor can it go back up again, having squandered and lost its strength, except by the grace of its maker”⁴² (*Trin.* 12.11.16; cf. *civ. Dei* 22.22). Sin therefore becomes easier than virtue (*Simpl.* 1.1.11), which human beings nevertheless extol – leading to a painful conflict between their highest aspirations and their “second nature.” They struggle to govern “a half-maimed will, with one part rising upwards and the other falling down” (*conf.*

⁴²“Praegravatus animus quasi pondere suo a beatitudine expellitur...nec redire potest effusis ac perditis viribus, nisi gratia Conditoris sui.”

8.8.20).⁴³

Physical affliction as disorder – and suffering

The will, we saw, was the channel through which the soul receives its very existence and good, and that measure of order which correlates with happiness. It is only by acknowledging their utter dependence and turning to God – through the will – that human beings can receive the full being and consequent powers over lower creation that God bestows on them, just as reflected light cannot exist without being open to the original source, or a tributary must remain unblocked to partake of the river.

What does this mean for the body? Again, Augustine’s view requires some reconstruction, but its outlines are not difficult to see within the framework we have built up. We saw in the last section that health is nothing more than the well-ordering of the body through and by the well-ordered soul. The soul attuned to God passes on the form it receives from God along to its body. This “stability” of form results not only in immunity to “disease from within or to injury from without” but also in immortality (*civ. Dei* 14.26). But, as we have seen, death, “disease, and wounds” are “privations of the good we call health” (*ench.* 11); that is, they are all the manifestations of disorder in the body, harmful rearrangements of the physical matter of the body in a way that deviates from its healthy way of being organized. Augustine’s inference then, is that as the soul becomes disordered, *so does the body*: “neglecting the Lord, the soul...is less...[and so] though the fault of its mistress, the body *is* less than it was since the soul was greater before its fall” (*mus.* 6.5.13).⁴⁴ The body is deprived of some form when it is, to some degree, cut off from the ultimate source of form in God by the will which turns away from God.

⁴³ Interestingly, Burnaby notes that in one of the letters (157.9) “Augustine speaks of the process of Christian perfection as the ‘transference of weight’ from *cupiditas* to *caritas*. We naturally think of the Newtonian metaphor of ‘change in the centre of gravity’. But in Aristotle’s world a ‘transference of weight’ is of course an impossibility: there is no alchemy that can turn stone into fire...Augustine, even in adopting the physical analogy for human love, has introduced into the structure of Greek thought a dualist dynamic which is alien to it” (1938, 94).

⁴⁴ Augustine’s point does not seem to be that the sinful soul simply behaves in a way that turn out to be harmful to the body (by overeating, or drinking for example). When he says that “in paradise the greediness [*aviditas*] of the soul which badly used its body produced weakness” (*vera rel.* 45.83), the context makes it clear that he is not talking about, say, gluttony or other kinds of over-indulgence. Rather, the “greediness of the soul” was its pride, the “misuse of the body” was the body’s role in taking and eating the forbidden fruit, and “the weakness” produced is the fallen condition itself.

Death is only the culmination of the process of decay which shows that the damage sustained by the body/soul due to sin is so extensive that eventually the soul can no longer either hold the body together or hold onto the body itself. When the bodily functions “fail totally through some major defect or disorder, with the messengers of sensation and the ministers of movement giving up altogether, the soul itself takes its departure.” But even if “they do not fail totally as usually happens in death, the soul’s intentions are upset, as of one struggling to restore what is falling to bits and lacking the strength to do so” (*Gn. litt.* 7.19.25); “we bring with us at our birth the beginning of our death, and with the vitiation of our nature our body is the scene of death’s assault” (*civ. Dei* 13.15, cf. 13.2).

Not surprisingly, decay or corruption of the body is experienced as *suffering*. Privation of good hurts – although, as in the case of desire, Augustine is careful to point out that a body in itself can feel no pain. “Pain [*dolor*] is really an experience of the soul not of the body” (*civ. Dei* 21.3, cf. 14.15), and is evidence of the soul’s “strong drive toward unity [*ad unitatem*] in governing and animating” the body, “for what is pain but a sense of resistance to division and corruption?” (*lib. arb.* 3.23). “Bodily pain is really nothing but a distress of the soul arising from the body, and a kind of disagreement [*dissensio*] with what happens to the body, in the same way as mental pain, which is called grief [*tristitia*], is a disagreement with what has happened to us against our will [*nobis nolentibus acciderunt*]. And grief is usually preceded by fear [*metus*], which is also something in the soul, not in the body” (*civ. Dei* 14.15). Nothing inspires apprehension and fear more than death itself for “the separation of the soul from the body” is a “violent sundering of the two elements, which are conjoined and interwoven in a living being,” and so “is bound to be a harsh and unnatural experience as long as it lasts, until the departure of all feeling, which depended on this interconnection of soul and body” (*civ. Dei* 13.6). In this sense, it is death that is unnatural, not the fear of it.⁴⁵ In every case of bodily affliction – whether

⁴⁵Contrast this to the Stoic position: for example Epictetus in the *Encheiridion* classifies the body itself as one of those things which are not “up to us,” where those things which are up to us are “by nature free, unhindered and unimpeded,” and those which are not are “weak, enslaved, hindered.” For Epictetus, since the body is not up to us, it should not be something on which we base our happiness; misery comes from treating something weak and enslaved as though it is free, as though it is “ours” (*Encheiridion* 1). Epictetus’ *general* descriptions of our relationship to those things which are up to us and not up to us could easily be applied to Augustine’s characterization of the ideal and the vitiated body/soul relationship respectively. But this is where the similarity ends. Augustine deviates sharply

(continued...)

pain, death, or lust – “the soul suffers *against its will* because of its body” (*civ. Dei* 22.3).

Other influences on the fallen body

As we have seen, one of the ways Augustine frequently expresses the damage sustained by the body, besides the overall summation that it is all a kind of “death,” is that the body is “disobedient” to the soul. This disobedience includes not only its vulnerability to injury and illness, but also its apparently autonomous reaction to stimuli that, if indulged, would lead to inordinate consumption and therefore to sin. The body appears to take on a kind of life of its own, independent from the desires of the soul and therefore, from the perspective of the soul, arbitrary. But because of this very fact, Augustine needs to provide some account of the causes which bring this degradation about – especially given his insistence both that no event is causeless (*ord.* 1.5.14; *div. qu.* 24; *civ. Dei* 5.9) and that the body on its own is passive matter.

In fact, he does. And here we begin to make some sense of Augustine’s claim that in a fallen human being bodily affliction is arbitrary in the sense that it does not correspond to the relative virtue or vice of the individual, even while the arbitrariness itself is traceable to sin. Thanks to the metaphysics we have outlined, we can, I believe, discern in Augustine’s work two suggestions for what *does* govern the body once it comes loosened from its moorings in the ordered will. Although in both cases Augustine gives us no more than hints, they are an important part of his complete picture of bodily affliction. These influences are, first (and somewhat paradoxically) the disordered soul itself, and second, the laws that govern the physical universe (of which the body is, of course, a part).

The body does in fact remain tied to (and therefore subject to) the fallen soul to some degree until death. The sinful soul, after all, continues to animate and move the body by virtue of its continuing to vivify it (*civ. Dei* 13.2). And yet there is a sense in which the body obeys the soul in a way in which the soul itself would rather it did not. In the introduction we saw Augustine argue that it is plain enough that the body’s appearance of acting independently of the

⁴⁵(...continued)

from Epictetus because he insists that our bodies are one of the things that *ought* to be up to us, and that indeed that their not being up to us means something is has gone wrong and needs to be righted, not just with our *attitude* to the body, but with the body itself.

soul's wishes (such as during sexual arousal) must actually be a problem with the soul; the body has no impetus of its own from which to act. Now we can see his more precise understanding of the problem: the soul's lack of control over the body is merely a symptom of its lack of control over *itself*. While it is true that in the fall, "human nature...was vitiated and altered so [a person] experienced the rebellion and disobedience of desire in his body" (*civ. Dei* 13.3), it is likewise clear that "the flesh can surely feel no desire...by itself, apart from the soul. When the flesh is said to desire...it is in fact the person himself who has this experience" (*civ. Dei* 14.15). Recalcitrant desires which move the body apparently against the will are evidence of the fragmentation of the human will, whose loves escape its own control, even its own understanding. These desires well up in the soul and the body, ironically, obeys them. This, Augustine asserts, is the war with the "flesh" to which Paul refers: not primarily a war of body and soul, but of war between the better intentions of the soul and its ungovernable and corrupted desires, mirrored in the "disobedience" of his own body to those intentions (13.13).

Augustine provides slightly stronger assertions about a second influence on the fallen body. There is a way in which the body appears disobedient because it really *has* escaped the control of the soul entirely, and the evidence for this is its susceptibility to physical dissolution through disease, injury, and, ultimately, death. But if the soul is no longer completely forming the body, then what causes *are* operating to bring about this decay? In answer, Augustine occasionally makes mysterious allusions to the fact that, while the body is always susceptible to ordinary physical laws, the fallen body is even more so. "[The soul] governs a body of its own. But after it has sinned, it no longer rules the body exactly as it chooses, but only as the laws of the universe allow [*non omnimodo pro arbitrio, sed sicut leges universitatis sinunt*]" (*lib. arb.* 3.11); "Every body is obedient to its soul so far as permitted by the merits of the latter, or by the orderly arrangement of things [*pro eius meritis, et pro rerum ordine sinitur*]" (*vera rel.* 23.44).

To put these statements into context, we need to recall that in the body, whether perfect or fallen, the soul enjoys a uniquely privileged relationship to the physical world – the body is a section of that world in which the soul has "part-ownership [*partiliter possidet*]" (*Trin.* 12.3.14). The body is suffused within its boundaries with awareness and is controlled, to some degree, by that awareness. Even so, Augustine seems to be saying, jurisdiction over the body must be

shared between the soul and the laws that govern the rest of the physical universe. He corroborates this idea in *De Genesi ad litteram*, where he argues that the world is governed through operations partly natural and partly voluntary (“*partim naturalis, partim voluntaria*”). The former are the sort that “give growth to trees and herbs” and, in the human body, allow for “its coming to be, its growth, its aging.” Here Augustine seems to be referring to the ordinary laws of nature which run their course apart from human desire. On the other hand, voluntary causes are those that follow from the will of human beings (and angels); voluntary “works,” for example, allow a person to take care of his body by procurement of food and shelter. The body, therefore, is subject to “twin powers of providence” (*Gn. litt.* 8.9.17; cf. *civ. Dei* 5.9).⁴⁶ Taking all of Augustine’s statements into account – including his suggestion that the unfallen body would be immune not only to dissolution of old age, but to external insults like accidents – we can reasonably infer that what changes after the fall is the proportion of control each type of cause has over the body. Before the fall, the will seems to have had some kind of power even over natural laws themselves, or at least a power of acting in some kind of harmony with them advantageous to its body. After the fall, however, the soul must relinquish its body, at least to a degree, to the inexorable laws of cause and effect, decline and decay, over which it has no control.

This view, I suggest, is what underlies Augustine’s apparently contradictory assertions that all suffering, even physical affliction, is the result of sin, and yet that assaults on the integrity of the body, whether from within it or without it, seem arbitrary to those who must endure them. They are simply as “arbitrary” – outside the control of the will – as the rest of the physical world. We will return to facets of this question in Chapter 5.

The natural account: Summary and implications

For *both* body and soul, where the characteristic feature of dependency on God is *facilitas*, the characteristic feature of attempted independence from God is *difficultas*, the war and disunity in the soul between its own inclinations and between itself and its body. The human

⁴⁶In both these passages from *Gn. litt.* and *civ. Dei*, Augustine points out that the distinction between “natural” and “voluntary” vanishes when we are talking about God. The laws of nature are expressions of his will.

being *feels* fragmented because he *is* fragmented; he feels like a slave because he is a slave. He “serves those things that ought to serve him” (*lib. arb.* 1.15) which is both an upending of proper order, and a tangible result of his having attempted to overthrow that order. Indeed, just as Augustine has a tendency to use the healthy body/soul relationship as a symbol of a right relationship with God, so the fragmented body/soul relationship becomes emblematic of the fall. “The soul deserted its superior and master; and so it no longer retained its inferior and servant obedient to its will” (*civ. Dei* 13.13). Because human nature has been disobedient to God, it is now disobedient to itself, the very self it wanted to serve above all other things. It is its own set of chains. In fact, a person’s “wretchedness is nothing but his disobedience to himself so that because he would not do what he could, he now will to do what he cannot” (*civ. Dei* 14.15). We end, therefore, with the reverse of the paradox of virtue: where humility – the acceptance of one’s creaturely dependence on God – raises the human being, pride – the desire to take God’s place – debases:

It certainly appears somewhat paradoxical that exaltation abases and humility exalts. But devout humility makes the mind subject to what is superior. Nothing is superior to God; and that is why humility exalts the mind by making it subject to God. Exaltation, in contrast...spurns subjection...Hence it falls away from him who has no superior, and falls lower in consequence. (*civ. Dei* 14.13)

“Power is attained only by the perfect soul which is submissive to God” (*vera rel.* 52.101); and power dwindles in the soul which rejects God.

In the last two chapters I have tried to put together a picture of the way Augustine thinks sin itself causes the sinner harm, an account we called the natural punishment of sin. The aim of gathering together the important components of this picture was to show that by it Augustine can coherently and consistently account for all types of human suffering *by means of the sinner’s own action alone* – without, that is, having to fall back on the idea that the cause of these effects is some attack on the sinner from without. In fact, it is Augustine’s analysis of a specious dualism that shows him two things: first, what it means to claim that a thing is evil (it is something that ought to be good, and so is in a state of *privatio boni*); and second, that only on the supposition of a pure good – an unchangeable good which underlies those goods that can fall away from it – can evil can be accounted for. I have therefore suggested that the idea of

privation of good is actually the foundation of the natural account of the punishment of sin. The suffering caused by sin is the experience of the disorder caused by sin, and disorder is nothing more or less than privation of good. This is what will seem to get him into trouble, as we now turn to his other account of evil and suffering.

The problem now confronting us centres around Augustine's use of the natural account to show that God must be utterly divorced from the responsibility for evil. For the misery sinners suffer, Augustine blames, variously, the sinner, his sin, those things to which the sinner defects, or even the internal logic of sin: "Evil wills have in themselves their own interior punishment, that is, their own wickedness" (*Gn. litt.* 8.23); "the evil... receive the recompense... of their own evil wills" (*div. qu.* 27); "by [the sinner's] own failure he is cast down among corruptible beauties which rank as penalties [*id est poenarum ordinem*]" (*vera rel.* 41.77); the sinner will "receive his reward from the object of his concern" (*civ. Dei* 21.26); "the wretched are wretched simply because they do not enjoy God"; "unhappiness is the inseparable companion [*individua comes*] of wickedness" (*s.* 37/3.15.16). All these various ways of identifying the source of suffering emphasize that "God is not responsible for humanity's perversity" (*div. qu.* 3).

But in his zeal to show that God is not the cause of evil, Augustine goes beyond these assertions to a stronger and more basic claim. He suggests that God must be dissociated from evil on metaphysical grounds, because of the sort of being he is. To see his point in these cases we need to remember, again, that the fall – the event of the first sin and its consequences – is for Augustine not just a fall from virtue but a fall down the ladder of being. The disordered human being actually exists less fully than his virtuous (and happy) counterpart. He enters into a privative condition. Furthermore, what he comes to lack is what God is in the business of supplying, and, what is more, wants to supply in a greater measure than the sinner is willing to receive. In passages like the following, therefore, Augustine suggests not only that God is not, but that he *cannot* be, the source of evil as privation. God is unable (though in what sense is not clear) to be so because he is the giver, not the destroyer of goodness and being:

To every person his own sin is made the penalty and his iniquity is turned into punishment; that we may not suppose that the great peace and ineffable light of God brings forth from himself the means for the punishment of sins. (*en. Ps.* 5.10)

Whoever is the author of all things which are, and whose goodness is responsible for the existence of all that exists, cannot have anything at all to do with non-being [*non esse ad eum pertinere nullo pacto potest*]. Now everything which lacks in relation to being, tends toward non-being. However, to be and to lack in nothing is good, whereas evil is a lacking. But he on whom nonbeing has no claim is not the cause of [this] lacking [*causa deficiendi*], that is, of the tending toward nonbeing, because he is, if I may say so, the cause of being [*causa essendi*]. Therefore he is the cause only of good, and for that reason he is the highest good. Consequently he who is the author of all things which are, is not the author of evil, because to the degree that things are, to that degree are they good. (*div. qu.* 21)

God is not the author of evil. For how can he who is the cause of the being of all things be at the same time the cause of their not being – that is, of their falling off from existence and tending to non-existence?⁴⁷ (*mor.* 2.2.3)

God is that from which all that exists derives its existence...For all existence as such is good. For that reason death does not come from God. ‘God did not create death, nor does he take pleasure in the destruction of the living’ [Wis 1:13].⁴⁸ (*vera rel.* 11.21-22)

It seems a small step from statements like these to what seems a reasonable extrapolation: the privative state – the experience of which is suffering – represents a violation of God’s will. After all, privation is precisely an evil because it is a falling short of the measure of goodness God intends a particular being to have: “Natures are natures because God made them so; they are flawed to the extent that they fall away from the design of the maker [*in quantum ab eius qua factae sunt arte discedunt*]” (*lib. arb.* 3.15). Indeed, we have seen that Augustine thinks privation – corruption – is fundamentally unnatural (*lib. arb.* 3.14).⁴⁹ Surely, then, vitiated nature represents a loss of divine control over creation. If so, it would seem, then, that Augustine’s brand of eudaimonism has been so successful in removing God from any responsibility for evil that in the fall of humankind he has been relegated, by the very structure of the reality he has

⁴⁷ “Enim potest ille, qui omnium quae sunt causa est ut sint, causa esse rursus, ut non sint id est, ut ab essentia deficiant et ad non esse tendant?”

⁴⁸ Augustine’s allusion to Wisdom 1:13—which claims that God is not responsible for death or destruction – is particularly significant since, as we have seen, for Augustine “death” refers not only to the physical death of the body, but also in a symbolic fashion to the overall fallen condition of which it is the prime symptom.

⁴⁹ An interesting question is how a thing can possibly behave contrary to its own nature since its nature defines whatever paths its behaviour may take. Augustine never confronts this question head on, though I do believe that he has a kind of answer to it, as we will see in Chapter 5.

created, to the status of a bystander, who must look on as rational creatures rebel against him and corrupt his creative efforts.

The problem is that Augustine never goes on to conclude this; as we will see in the next chapter, although he does concede that sin is against God's will, and even that the effects of sin are also against God's will, he also insists that God is *not* helpless in the face of sin; far from it. He is, in fact, the avenger and ruler of sin (*lib. arb.* 3.4 *conf.* 1.10.16; *c. Jul.* 5.9.36), the *punisher* of sin. Augustine thereby introduces another mechanism for the connection of sin with its consequences, and it seems to subvert many of his cherished ideas. But he does not shy from the tension; indeed he embraces it. In Part II we investigate why.

PART II

The Legal Account

Chapter 4

The Problem Revisited: God and Disorder

In Chapter 1, I identified two different explanations Augustine uses to explain the suffering endemic in the human condition. Both are, loosely speaking, varieties of “punishment.” The first I called the “natural account” and the second the “legal account.” The *prima facie* difference between the two seemed to be that in the natural account the effects of sin are not separable from the act of the sin itself; sin is its own punishment. In the legal account, however, punishment must be applied by an external agent (God).

I also suggested that by the time we had demonstrated the comprehensiveness of Augustine’s “natural” theory of the punishment of sin, its apparent incompatibility with his other “legal” theory would appear even more pronounced. The problems we now face are epitomized in the following passage from the *Retractationes*. In this later work, Augustine writes a book (that is, a chapter) on each of his works, adding comments and emendations to reflect how his views have changed or (more often) to provide greater clarity and avoid possible misunderstandings of his original (and retained) meaning. Here he comments on a remark he had made in the work *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 21:

Care must be taken that one not misunderstand my claim [in *div. qu.*] that God is not the author of evil because he is the author of all things which are, and because to the degree that things are, to that degree are they good. Let no one think on this account that the punishment of the wicked, which is obviously an evil to those who are punished, does not come from him. When I said this I spoke in the same way it which it was said [in scripture] that ‘God has not made death’ [Wis 1:13], although it was elsewhere written that ‘Death and life are from the Lord God’ [Sir 11.14] Therefore the punishment of the wicked, which is from God, is indeed evil to the wicked; but it is counted among the good works of God, because it is just that the wicked be punished, and, of course everything which is just is good. (*retr.* 1.26)

The claim that Augustine here wishes to clarify (and which he paraphrases in the first few lines above) is the very same cited at the end of the previous chapter, where I grouped it with other similar expressions. In these passages Augustine insists that God is not, and even cannot be, responsible for a lack of being or goodness because he is the *source* of these things, not their

annihilator.¹ Here we find him reiterating this claim, yet following it with a qualification that seems tantamount to a denial. God is not the cause of non-being – but he is the punisher of sin. Punishment is evil to those who suffer it – but it is good because it is God’s work. The problem with these sets of claims is that, as we have now seen, the punishment of sin *is* non-being, or at least the *experience* of non-being (privation). And surely for evil to be evil *for* the wicked, requires its being simply evil, that is to say, a condition of the privation of good.

In fact, when we turn to Augustine’s legal account of the punishment of sin ambiguity confronts on every front. We will find him reiterating that God does not inflict evil – and yet he does; that fallenness is really evil – and that it is good. We might easily wonder if Augustine is backsliding: whether, despite building up an elaborate metaphysics to show that evil is a self-inflicted deficiency, he has nevertheless incoherently retained the idea that it is a result of an external attack, not by some inherently evil force, but by God himself.

This chapter examines this ambiguity in the detail which is possible now that we have a fuller understanding of the metaphysical basis of the natural account; hence it consists of more questions than answers. It asks what work the legal account does in Augustine’s overall explanation for unhappiness, especially since the comprehensiveness of the natural account would seem to render it redundant. At the end of the chapter I will suggest two directions we might take to find the roots of Augustine’s ambiguity on God’s role in the fall – and, I believe, to render it not only less ambiguous but also relatively coherent. But first, we turn to an examination of the contexts in which Augustine makes the claim that God punishes sinners. What exactly does God *do* when he punishes; and *why*?

What God does: Cause the fallen condition?

Augustine never offers a definition of punishment, perhaps because he considers it a commonsensical notion. We generally think of a punishment as an unpleasant penalty imposed on one agent by another as a consequence of an action that the first agent ought not to have

¹ Interestingly, in *De vera religione* (11.21-22) we find an earlier use of Wisdom 1:13 (‘God has not made death’) to prove the same point: God is not the cause of evil (“death”) because he is the cause of its opposite, good (and being). Yet in the chapter of the *Retractationes* dealing with *De vera religione*, Augustine does not comment on or otherwise qualify his use of it. This seems to corroborate, if tacitly, the fact that he believes the point itself remains valid.

done.² Augustine provides several clues that he adheres to this simple definition. He attests to the unpleasantness of punishment when he says that it is “evil for the sinner” (despite its being good in other ways we will later discuss), and, of course, when he specifically describes the disagreeableness of the experiences he labels as punishments. He also seems to assume that punishment is applied to someone as a consequence of something undesirable they have done. At least, this seems to be the implication of his passing statement in *De libero arbitrio* that a punishment, if it is just, is imposed on someone in consequence of some *sin* they have committed (3.18) – that is, (presumably) it is not imposed arbitrarily. There is also the apparent broad agreement we have seen him share with Pelagius (see the introduction) on the idea that God’s punishment of sin is ultimately imposed with the intention of stopping sin, since it is, after all, because sin is undesirable that it is punished. (Pelagius then understandably dismisses as unintelligible Augustine’s identification of compulsive sin as one of the ways sin is punished.) And finally, as we shall note in abundance throughout this chapter, when Augustine uses the word “punishment,” he is very often (though not always) referring to something that is done *to* someone *by* someone else.

As we saw in Augustine’s “natural” explanation of fallenness, no one needs to do anything *to* the sinner for him to suffer; everything he suffers may be ascribed to the consequences of his own actions. The obvious question that arises is why Augustine calls this kind of consequence a “punishment” at all. But setting this aside for the moment, we must first ask whether Augustine’s “legal” account of the punishment of sin is simply a parallel explanation of suffering that runs alongside his “natural” account but never meets it. Is there, for example, some highly specific context in which Augustine uses this account that would explain why he insists on maintaining it? As we saw in the introduction, Burnaby answers this question

²This very simple definition takes into account the way we ordinarily use the term punishment. I have also considered the defining points of punishment as outlined by Kleinig (1973, 17-48), Flew (1969, 85-89), and Honderich (2006, 8-12), which roughly map onto one another. These authors also take themselves to be analysing what we commonly mean when we call something a punishment. I have left out the defining feature of punishment which says that to be a true punishment, a penalty must be meted out by an “authority” (Flew, 87; Kleinig, 37-42). It seems to me that when we are talking about God, this is assumed; and anyway, some commentators deny the strict importance of this feature (Honderich 2006, 9; Zaibert 2006, 58-62). Note, too, that the definition of punishment is traditionally considered distinct from the justification for punishment; the question of what punishment is, is distinct from the question of why punishment is exacted (Kleinig 1973, 10-13). Augustine’s views on the latter will be considered in the final section of this chapter.

affirmatively. His view is that Augustine feels more or less unconsciously obliged to give the nod to two incompatible traditions on punishment: the Greek (Platonic) tradition, in which sin really is its own punishment, and the Roman legal tradition, in which punishment must be applied to a law-breaker so that he does not “get away” with his crimes. Burnaby thinks that these considerations form the only “context” which can make sense of the intrusion of the incongruous legalistic way of thinking into the richer eudaimonistic framework. While Augustine has, in Burnaby’s view, been more or less consistent in working out the latter, the former is left as a vestigial and primitive sideline. In fact, Burnaby suggests, the legal account of sin is entirely unnecessary since its premise – that punishment must be visited on the sinner so that he does not “get away” with his sin – is rendered moot by the natural account, in which suffering must and will follow on sin. Burnaby sees no way to bring these two ways of explaining suffering together and this, he thinks, is because Augustine himself did not even try. A blind spot is by definition left unexamined.

The problem is that there is ample evidence that Augustine clearly does know he is maintaining viewpoints which might seem contradictory (though apparently it does not seem to him necessary to confront the problem explicitly or at length). The passage above from the *Retractationes* is only one demonstration of this fact. So is his comment from *Contra Julianum*, in which he supports his own “contradictions” with those of scripture itself (once again alluding to both Wisdom 1:13 and Sir 11:14): “Holy scripture itself cannot be said to contradict itself when it says: ‘God made not death’ and also says: ‘Life and death are from the Lord God’ ...God inflicted death not as its first author, but as the avenger of sin...It is not contradictory that in [humanity’s] punishment they themselves are the author, God the avenger” (*c. Jul.* 5.9.36).

In fact, it is remarkable how often some of his most legalistic descriptions of the human condition (as divinely inflicted punishment) are juxtaposed with his natural account. Sometimes such descriptions merely introduce arguments which will end up proving that sin is its own punishment. For instance, one of the most well known of Augustine’s references to divine infliction of suffering occurs in the first few lines of one of his most “eudaimonistic” texts: *De libero arbitrio*. “We use ‘evil’ in two senses: first when we say that someone has done evil; and second, when we say that someone has suffered evil...God is the cause of the second kind of evil,

but in no way causes the first kind” (*lib. arb.* 1.1). After this statement Augustine goes on to demonstrate in the rest of the work that God is the only true source of human happiness, so that if human beings reject him it is impossible for them not to harm themselves (see 1.11-15 particularly).

Augustine frequently associates the natural and legal accounts much more closely even than this. In fact, “straight” statements either of the natural or legal variety are harder to come by than peculiar combinations of the two. Indeed, as we saw in the introduction, Burnaby himself provides several examples, albeit unwittingly, as he seems to think them straightforward expressions of the natural account (or as he calls it, “internal punishment”). “To every man his own sin is made the penalty, and his iniquity is turned into punishment, that we may *not* suppose that the great peace and ineffable light of God brings forth from himself the means for the punishment of sins; rather, *he so orders the sins themselves* that what had been delights to the sinner become the *instruments of the Lord’s chastisement*” (*en. Ps.* 5.10); “when *God punishes sinners*, he inflicts no evil *of his own* upon them, but leaves them to that which is theirs” (*civ. Dei* 14.15); “the beginning of the punishment which *God inflicts upon the soul* that turns away from him is blindness itself. For he who turns away from the true light which is God, is *thereby* made blind” (*s.* 117.5). In Burnaby’s “internalist” passages, Augustine clearly puts some distance between God, who is the source of all peace and goodness, and the dreadful effects of sin; yet somehow God is using these effects as his instruments of punishment. Many other such passages can be found throughout Augustine’s works. “What [God] *take[s] vengeance on* is what men inflict on themselves, for even when they sin against [God], they do *evil to their own souls*” (*conf.* 3.8.16); “let us not attribute our defects...to the action of God, but rather to the *will of man* and to his *just punishment*” (*nat. et gr.* 34.39). When Augustine wants to summarize the cause of the human condition, this combination of sources of punishment – punishment that is at once self-inflicted and divinely inflicted – is by far his usual manner of expressing it.

Such statements lead us ineluctably to the conclusion that even in those passages where Augustine simply refers to the inevitable self-harm of sin as “punishment” – without referring explicitly to someone who *does* the punishing – he really means more than that wrong-doing is in and of itself essentially harmful to the wrong-doer. Perhaps when he invokes the idea of

punishment he *always* has in mind a punisher – God – despite the fact that he is simultaneously identifying the sinner himself as the applier of the unpleasant effects. This is something to keep in mind as we consider the possibility that the natural account may be related in some substantial way to the legal account.

To make matters even more complicated – or, perhaps better, to refine the problems already evident – even in Augustine’s apparently straightforward attributions of suffering to divine punishment there is a great deal of ambiguity about what God does to induce that suffering. As in the “combination” expressions above, the context in which Augustine tends to make such attributions is as a short form way of referring to the human condition. Often such attributions are mere interjections made on the way to arguments on larger topics; often, as well, they are quotations, or at least paraphrases, of scripture: a particular favourite is the “yoke of Adam” that has been laid on humanity (Eccl 40:1; see *civ. Dei* 21.15; *c. Jul.* 3.3.9; 4.12.60). While these interjections make it clear that God contributes to the suffering of sinners, no consistent picture emerges of what it is he does. In fact, Augustine describes varying levels of divine “aggression” which we can rate on a kind of spectrum ranging from relative passivity to outright activity.

(1) God’s involvement in the fall is at its most passive when, as Augustine suggests, his contribution is simply in allowing us to reap the consequences of our sin. Ironically, some of the passages Burnaby chooses to illustrate the idea that sin its own punishment can equally as well be interpreted as expressions of something God does on this kind of level. “When God punishes sinners, he inflicts no evil of his own upon them, but leaves them to that which is theirs” (*civ. Dei* 14.15); “you have ordered...that every disordered mind should be its own punishment” (*conf.* 1.12.19); “what God takes vengeance on its what people inflict on themselves” (*conf.* 3.8.16). Augustine echos this idea in various ways, for instance by suggesting that God “permits [*permittit*]” sinners to experience the consequences of their rebellion (*Trin.* 13.16; *div. qu.* 79). Again, although Burnaby conflates this idea with natural punishment (his “internal punishment”) Augustine himself seems to be suggesting more: he is not only indicating that God allows misery in the sense that he allows the sin which causes it, but also that God’s allowance involves his omitting to do something, namely, to interfere with the natural course of events according to

which human beings will suffer the misery caused by sin.

(2) The passive aggression displayed by God in the fall gets subtly more aggressive and less passive in the next level on our spectrum. Sometimes Augustine describes the fall not just as the result of the human being's abandonment of God, but of God's abandonment of the human being. Moreover, this abandonment is not just a "letting be" (as in the version above), but a ceasing to do some action upon which the human being is dependent. God turns away from the sinner in response to the sinner's turning away from him. Augustine's most frequent ways of expressing this scenario are borrowed from various passages from Paul's letter to the Romans: "God had given them over to the desires of their hearts" (Rom 1:26 as cited by Augustine in *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 79); "And as they cared not to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them up a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not proper" (Rom 1:28-31 as cited by Augustine in *De natura et gratia* 22.24). Augustine allows that the latter passage in particular means that God "abandons [*deserere*] those who deserve to be abandoned" (23.25); "when thus abandoned, a man becomes blinded and necessarily offends all the more" (22.24). The terminology of God's abandonment of the sinner as his response to the sinner's abandonment of God is in fact fairly common in Augustine's works (see, for example, *civ. Dei* 13.2,15, 8.12; *correct.* 31). So are Augustine's similar claims that God "withdraws" from the sinner (*Trin.* 13.16) or "turns his face away" (*Gn. litt.* 11.33) from him. Augustine even depicts God as "hiding" from fallen humanity (*conf.* 10.23.34).

(3) Even when Augustine makes God more directly and actively responsible for the suffering which follows sin, he still manages to maintain some kind of distance between God and the suffering he inflicts. This distance is provided by Augustine's invocation of legal or political terminology to refer to God's response to sin, as though the cosmos were a vast court of law through which God works. Most often Augustine depicts the punishment as being meted out *through* God's "judgement" (*judicium*) or "justice" (*justitia*) – or of combinations of these – rather than simply by God. Although this may seem a subtle distinction, this language is used by Augustine so frequently that it is worth noting. "Without the judgement of God no one is slow in mind or crippled in body" (*en. Ps.* 118.6.2); "for by the most just laws of God were all condemned to the glory of God through the justice of his vengeance" (*cat. rud.* 2.18.30); "from

the hidden judgement of God comes perversity of heart, with the result that refusal to hear the truth leads to commission of sin, and this sin is also punishment for preceding sin...from a just judgement of God” (*c. Jul.* 5.3.12); “if [the soul] refuses [to cling to God], it deprives itself of a good...the consequence of which, by the justice of God, is also torment” (*Gn. litt.* 8.14.31).

Although Augustine is clearly not personifying or reifying God’s justice, it does appear that he wants to suggest that there are prescribed boundaries to the infliction of misery which even God does not exceed.

(4) At his most actively punitive, God is portrayed by Augustine as bringing about the misery of the fall through a direct attack upon sinning human beings. Oddly jostling Augustine’s medically inspired descriptions of the human condition as one of an illness, of tumors, festering sores, of weakened limbs and fevers, are references not only to God the physician and healer of these afflictions, but of God the deliverer of scourgings (*conf.* 2.2.4; 3.3.5; 8.11.25) and inflicted blindness (*conf.* 1.18.29). It is as if God actually reaches out a hand and directly inflicts these blows in response to sin. Sin has “moved God’s indignation to fill the world with calamities”; it has “caused [him] to give effect to his threats and warnings by bringing destruction on the earth” (*civ. Dei* 1.9). It should be noted that such attributions of direct harm to humanity by its creator are the rarest of all of Augustine’s ways of characterizing divine punishment.

All of these ways of attributing fallenness to God’s activity seem to conflict with the natural account to varying degrees. In the natural account, God’s role might be described as *entirely* passive. Although he remains active as the creator and sustainer of creation, it is this very role that the sinner spurns, thereby harming himself. Augustine’s emanantist metaphors in particular seem to paint a picture of a God who is continually “radiating” being, passing it down to his creation. It is only by freely turning away from God in sin that rational creatures are cut off from receiving this bounty. The implication seems to be that God goes on giving it out just the same, whether we are turned to him or not – just as the sun is still shining even while it is blocked from areas in shadow. And even though Augustine cautions that such metaphors ought not to imply that an actual substance is transferred from God to creation (as we saw, what is conferred is a likeness), the point remains: in the natural account of the fall, human choice rejects what God offers and presumably keeps offering – or the creature would stop existing

entirely (*civ. Dei* 22.24; *mor.* 1.7.9). There is apparently no need to ascribe to God any collusion in the process of degeneration following sin.

But Augustine's more legalistic characterizations of God's role in the fall now seem to suggest that God's role is not passive at all. God *is* doing something in response to sin. But what? Perhaps (1) above is the most reconcilable with the natural account: God is responsible for the fall in that he simply "lets" it happen. On the hand, as we saw at the end of the last chapter, an extrapolation of the natural account would seem to render this notion redundant. What choice does even God himself have about the connection between sin and suffering, if the very definition of sin is the rejection of what makes us happy? The problem with (2) above is more acute still. In what sense are sin's effects the result of God's abandonment of the sinner when it is the sinner who is abandoning *him*? What, precisely, does God *stop* doing that would cause fallenness, especially if the sinner's actions are enough to explain that condition? Most problematic of all, however, are (3) and (4). In what sense can God be said to visit punishment actively on the sinner? If all the symptoms of the fall are adequately explained by a self-induced deficiency of what God provides, what does it mean to say that God does something to bring this state about? Has Augustine simply made God into a substitute for the Manichean Kingdom of Darkness – not in the sense that God is evil, but in the sense that evil is visited on humanity by a harmful attack from an external agency?

A possible solution and its insufficiencies

There is a temptingly neat solution to at least some of the ambiguity surrounding Augustine's view of the causes of fallenness. This is that, according to Augustinian metaphysics, God can never really be a truly "external" agent. Having in Part I examined Augustine's fundamental distinction between creator and creature, we cannot help but anticipate that it likely affects all his other distinctions – especially when they involve God as a causative agent, as in the distinction between natural and legal punishment.

God is not related to the world as is a human being. The God whom Augustine has described is not one of the causes making up the chain of causes within nature; nor he is, even, the first link in the chain. He is rather the cause of the whole chain itself. He is the author of

nature and therefore of the way that nature unfolds. What happens “naturally” is something that is applied to nature by God: “the will of the great Creator is [*sit*] the nature of every created thing” (*civ. Dei* 21.8). God’s will “is the necessity of things [*rerum necessitas est*]” (*Gn. litt.* 6.15.26). This much we have seen Augustine indicate in our unfolding of the natural account of punishment. It would be reasonable to wonder, then, whether in Augustine’s mind the distinctions of “passive” and “active” simply do not apply to God in the same way as they do to a creature. For a human being, there are things that *will not* occur in the world unless he (the human being) *does* them, and things that *will* occur in the world unless he does something to *stop* them. In the former case, he takes an active role and in the latter case, a passive role. But for God, nothing at all will happen unless he (God) does something *all the time*; and things that happen if no one does anything to stop them *are* things that he does. And indeed Augustine says something like this himself: “Except by God’s will nothing can happen to anyone...if I am told that something would happen if God did not prevent it...I reply that what is to happen is the action of God”³ (*c. Faust.* 26.4). Perhaps, then, we should also infer that the effects of sin that come about due to the sinner’s violation of his own nature are at the same time something that God does. Such an inference would seem to explain to some degree Augustine’s semantic confusions about who “causes” the fall. Human beings “cause” sin (Augustine is never ambiguous about that); but as to who causes its *effects*, we should not be surprised that he attributes these sometimes to the sinner and sometimes to God.

Is the fact that *every* event is in some way “the will of God” enough to do away with the problem of Augustine’s two apparently distinct mechanisms for explaining suffering? Not as it stands, though it certainly is the beginning of the solution. Problems of agency still remain (for example, the question still remains as to what Augustine means when he says that fallenness is brought about in part by God’s “abandonment” of the sinner; or what role God’s “justice” or “judgement” play). But beyond this, we run into a much more serious problem. The problem is grounded in the fact that the same suffering Augustine describes as “punishment” when it is caused by God is called “evil” when it is caused by human beings. As we saw in the unfolding of

³“Quod autem Dei voluntas non habet, fieri de quoquam omnino non posse...Porro si audiam quod aliquid futurum erat, sed Deus fecit ne fieret; fidissime respondebo: Illud potius futurum erat quod Deus fecit, non illud, quod si futurum esset, hoc fecisset.”

the natural account, suffering is the experience of the privation of that good which comes from God. And privation is a falling away from that extent of being or goodness that a particular nature is, by God's design, supposed to have. Indeed, the very point of Augustine's analysis of evil (besides, of course his aim to explain suffering itself) is that it divorces it from God's activity without reifying it. If Augustine really is saying that the effects that follow sin are in some way God's will, or come about by God's design – which, if they are a deliberate punishment, would seem to be the case – then he has a lot more explaining to do. How can Augustine claim that “sin...vitiates nature” (*nat. b.* 28), a nature that is the very “will of God” (*lib. arb.* 21.8) and then go on to claim that the effects of sin are also God's will?

The latter is in fact exactly what Augustine does assert, not in response to the question of how God punishes, but of *why* he punishes. And as we turn to this question, things become even more problematic. We find that Augustine is not only going to claim that fallenness is God's will, but that it is that *through which* he asserts his will despite sin – the very sin that “vitiates nature.” Buried in this problem, however is the answer to it.

Why God does it: The reasons for fallenness

While it may be true – and we will shortly see how true – that God is in some measure responsible for whatever unfolds from the choices human beings make, Augustine will never push this idea to the following extent. Although (as we have seen above) he will admit that in some sense God “permits” sin and its consequences, he will never say that God in his wisdom has decided that the free choice of human beings is worth a *universe* which sin can damage. He will also never retreat to the position of saying that it is God's will that a situation can come about that is against his will, in the sense that the final result is less than ideal. Although it may *seem* as though Augustine's privation theory of evil is saying exactly these things, we will now see that the crux of the legal theory is to deny them.

The aim of the natural account was to account for all the ills of the human condition while showing that God must be distanced, even divorced from evil. The legal account, unlike the natural account, is not only about explaining something, but also about asserting something. Augustine rarely traces a particular symptom to the activity of God (though as we will see a

notable exception is also one of the most unintelligible – that God causes the sinner to sin even more). Rather, the most common context in which Augustine attributes human affliction to divine activity occurs when he wants to claim something about God, or, more specifically, about God’s administration of the universe. God, he insists, remains in complete control over the universe, whatever his creatures may choose to do.⁴

Augustine has two main ways of expressing this unerring administration. Each can be construed as a response to the two closely related implications of the natural account: first, that privative evil seems to ascribe to human beings the power to disrupt the order of nature; and second, that this disruption represents the violation of *God’s will*. As we will now see, Augustine counters both these implications by asserting that punishment actually *maintains* God’s will, precisely by maintaining the order of nature.

Throughout his works Augustine reiterates what may appear a paradoxical statement. Whatever is done against God’s will – and sin is against his will – nevertheless cannot achieve ends which are against his will. Not only this, but whatever is done against God’s will plays into his will: it becomes, or even *is*, in some way, his will. “Evil men do many things contrary to the will of God but so great is his wisdom, and so great his power, that all things which seem to oppose his will tend towards those results or ends which he himself has foreknown are good and just” (*civ. Dei* 22.2); “as related to their own consciousness, these [sinful] creatures did what God wished not to be done; but in view of God’s omnipotence they could in no way effect their purpose. For in the very fact that they acted in opposition to his will, his will concerning them was fulfilled” (*ench.* 100); “the will of the omnipotent [God] is never defeated; and his will can never be evil; because even when it inflicts evil it is just, and what is just is certainly not evil”

⁴The tempting shorthand for this assertion would be to say that God is *omnipotent*. However, after much thought I have chosen to adhere to more detailed ways of referring to God’s unerring control over his creation. This is primarily because this is what Augustine himself does. Perhaps surprisingly, he does not tend to rely on the word *omnipotentia* itself. There are, it should be noted, a few instances where he does use it in connection with the idea that the sinner can in no way contravene God’s will (e.g. see *ench.* 100, 102 above; though in the latter, the word is used more as a title for God – the “Almighty” – as in the phrase *omnipotentis voluntas*, for example). But such uses are not ubiquitous; and he also uses the word in other ways we have already noted (for example, in order to capture idea that, in contradistinction to Manichean ideas, God has *made* everything). In order, therefore, to avoid potentially ascribing to the term ‘omnipotence’ layers of meaning that may not be Augustine’s (concerning, say, questions of modal logic or possible worlds etc.) I have tended to avoid it. For an account of the term that does avoid anachronism see Rist 1994, 260-266.

(102). What is more, Augustine is explicit that it is *by* punishment, that is, by the unhappiness that follows sin, that God ensures that his will is never violated.

If you have sinned, do not think that a man has therefore done what he wanted and that therefore something has happened to God that God does not want. As God wills that a man should not sin, and as he wills to spare the sinner that he might turn again, so in the end he wills to punish the man who persists in sin so that his contumacy may not escape the power of justice. Whatever you choose, the Almighty will not lack the means to fulfill his will in you.” (*en. Ps.* 110.2, cf. *ench.* 104)

But in what sense does God’s will triumph by the punishment of sin? Augustine’s answer is that God is never defeated because whatever sinners choose, the order (or variously – as below – the perfection, or beauty) of the universe is not disturbed: “with God as creator and disposer of all things, the perverse disorder of transgressors did not pervert the right ordering of the universe” (*civ. Dei* 14.11). And again, it is precisely *because* of the effect their sin has on sinners that this order is not disturbed. Augustine’s reasoning here is that the effect of sin is to situate the sinner in a new condition or place, such that he fits properly into the whole, despite his having done what God does not want. “There is nothing disordered and nothing unjust in the world [*nihil inordinatum in universo nihilque iniustum est*], whether we know this or not. But the sinful soul, for its part, suffers misfortune. Still, because it is deservedly in the state befitting such a being, and because it suffers that which it is reasonable for such a being to suffer, the sinful soul does not mar by its deformity any of God’s sovereign rule [*nihil inordinatum in universo nihilque iniustum est*]” (*div. qu.* 27); “when the sinful soul is unhappy it is not where it is fitting that only the happy should be, but where it is fitting that the unhappy should be” (*vera rel.* 41.77).

In *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine qualifies this point slightly: it is not only that the universe *remains* ordered (perfect) whatever happens (“when those who do not sin are happy, the universe is perfect but when those who sin are unhappy, the universe is no less perfect”), but also that the punishment of sin is *necessary* to the maintenance of this perfection. “The unhappiness that grieves you also contributes to the perfection of the whole [*universitatis perfectioni*] by ensuring that this whole includes even those souls who deserved to be made unhappy because they willed to be sinners”; punishment “places the soul in an order where it is

not disgraceful for it to be, forcing it to conform [*congruere cogat*] to the beauty of the universe as a whole [*decori universitatis*], so that the ugliness of sin is remedied by the punishment of sin [*ut peccati dedecus emendet poena peccati*]” (3.9; cf. *vera rel.* 23.44). By this new post-sin “order” Augustine seems simply to allude to the fact that the sinner no longer occupies the relatively exalted position he did as a non-sinner (for instance, he is now miserable). Under the rubrics of the natural account we saw the reasons why this happens and how they are related to the sinner’s rejection of the good from which he needs to draw strength, being and power. Why, then, does Augustine bother to go on to claim, as he does here, that this new state *keeps* order when he in other places insists that the reduced condition of the sinner is *unnatural* to him and therefore *disorderly*? Indeed, in the passage from *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 27 above, Augustine begins by insisting that there is nothing disordered in the universe, and ends by saying that the sinner’s “deformity” – surely another word for disorder – does not mar this order! This difficulty echoes the problem we have already seen at the beginning of this chapter when Augustine claims that punishment is an evil “for the sinner” even though it is a “good work of good.” If punishment involves the bringing about of disorder – which is by definition contrary to God’s intention – how can it be a “good” work? Or to put it our problem more precisely, what exactly is good about punishment? For Augustine simply to claim that it is good because by it the good God maintains his good control over a good world is not enough: this is simply to say that punishment is good because it is good.

Is Augustine defending two different views of vitiated nature simply depending on what characteristic of God he wants to maintain; that is, when he wants to emphasize God’s absolute goodness (and therefore his distance from evil), he insists that evil is brought about by the self-infliction of suffering through sin, but when he wants to defend the omnipotence of God, the damage caused by sin transforms into a divine instrument?

There are two clues that this is not the case; that Augustine’s claims about how God maintains order (and thus his will) involve more than a crude about-face on the evilness of the evil suffered by the sinner. First, when Augustine insists that order is maintained despite sin, his final emphasis is not on the individual sinner (whom he consistently insists is disordered) but on that of the universe as a whole, which remains perfect and good and orderly – thanks to the

punishment of sin. We might think that this is not the typical viewpoint with which punishment concerns itself. By focussing above all on the universe, Augustine seems to be ignoring to some degree the very subject who is being punished. He is, however, not denying that the sinner is disordered, but rather that this very disorder somehow besmirches the whole of which the sinner is only a part. The question is, how can Augustine maintain this balancing act? As we will see in subsequent chapters, Augustine's full answer actually does refer to what is to become of the sinner himself, and it is useful to classify his views under two of the traditional justifications for punishment. Still, whatever happens to the sinner, the sinner's situation contributes to God's overarching purpose of maintaining the order of the *world*.

There is a second indication that whatever the meaning of the Augustine's claim about the goodness of punishment, it evidently involves something more subtle than the simplistic assertion that evil is good, or even that evil is really a good if one looks at it from the proper perspective. Rather, his short-hand expression for the way God fits evil into the ordered whole of the universe (and therefore preserves his own will despite what the sinner does), is that God brings good out of evil (*bene facere de malo*). God knew that "some of the angels, in their pride would wish to be self-sufficient...and hence would forsake their true good...yet he did not deprive them of this power, judging it to be an act of greater power and greater goodness to bring good even out of evil [*de malis bene facere*] than to exclude the existence of evil" (*civ. Dei* 22.1); "God who is supremely good in his creation of natures that are good, is also completely just in ordering evil choices so that whereas such evil choice wrongly use good natures, so God turns evil choices to good use [*bene utatur etiam voluntatibus malis*]" (11.17); "when the intelligent creation, both angelic and human, sinned, doing not God's will but their own, God used the very will of the creature which was working in opposition to the Creator's will as an instrument for carrying out his will, the supremely Good thus turning to good account even what is evil...God is so powerful and good that he can bring good out of evil" (*ench.* 100 cf. 11, 104).⁵

The claims we have just listed – that God remains in control of the universe not only in spite of sin and its effects, but because of these effects; that the universe thereby remains

⁵ "Cum angelica et humana creatura peccasset, id est, non quod ille sed quod voluit ipsa fecisset, etiam per eandem creaturae voluntatem qua factum est quod Creator noluit, impleteret ipse quod voluit, bene utens et malis tamquam summe bonus."

perfectly ordered (or beautiful); and that God thus manages to bring good out of evil – are captured by Augustine in a single stroke, with a metaphor he borrows in its essentials from Stoicism. In works both early and late Augustine illustrates the place of perceived evils in the orderly universe by invoking the image of a mosaic or picture. Occasionally he introduces a variation on this theme and uses the example of a poem. In either case, his point is that what is depicted in a work of art cannot be appreciated or even discerned by regarding small sections of it up close; this perspective produces a distorted viewpoint which may often be displeasing. Only by standing back and viewing its overall pattern, so that one can how the displeasing parts fit into the whole, can one see how these parts actually contribute to the picture itself (*ord.* 1.2; *vera rel.* 43, 76; *civ. Dei* 11.18, 23; 12.4; *ench.* 11).

At first – or even second – glance, Augustine’s use of this theme would seem in direct contradiction to his basic view of evil. By using the mosaic metaphor he seems to be saying that the identification of a thing as “evil” is a mistake, the result of a limited perspective which is corrected by seeing the evil as *necessary* to the good of the whole, and therefore not really an evil at all. Surely, we might object, his robust theory of evil – that it is a lack of good – would seem to call rather for a likening of the world to a defaced work of art full of holes rather than one whose pristine image relies on jarring elements. Indeed several commentators take it for granted that the Stoic metaphor does not really fit with Augustine’s “strong” view of evil; Burnaby calls what he (and others) denote the “aesthetic” considerations in Augustine’s later works a mere “echo” of the Stoic influence in his more youthful works (195).⁶ However, I think there is more to Augustine’s aesthetic metaphors than this. For one thing, not all his uses of the model are cut from the same cloth. The majority of such passages, in fact, really do try to show that many things human beings often call evil are not evil at all; they are simply meant to illustrate his view that there are no evil natures. These uses of aesthetic metaphors occur in contexts where his intended target is clearly the irrationally anthropocentric views of the Manicheans, who claim that some natures are evil because they are disagreeable:

And yet there are heretics who fail to see [the goodness of creation], because

⁶The characterization of Augustine’s insistence on abiding order as an “aesthetic” approach to evil is common enough (see for example Hick 1966, 62 and Bonner 2007, 35) that it is worth noting that it is not Augustine’s own terminology.

there are so many things which do not suit the inadequacy and frailty of our mortal flesh...many things which cause distress, like fire, cold, wild animals, and so on. They do not observe the value of those things in their own sphere and in their own order and the contribution they make by their own special beauty to the whole material scheme, as to a universal commonwealth. They even fail to see how much those same things contribute to our benefit, if we make wise and appropriate use of them. (11.22)

These kind of considerations explain such pronouncements as this: “We, for our part, can see no beauty in this pattern to give us delight; and the reason is that we are involved in a section of it, under our condition of mortality, and so we cannot observe the whole design, in which these small parts, which are to us so disagreeable, fit together to make a scheme of ordered beauty (*civ. Dei* 12.4).⁷ In other similar passages, Augustine opposes the views of those who condemn creatures simply for being inferior to other creatures; the very presence of these inferiors, he argues, actually makes the universe better than it would have been without them, because they contribute to its variety and therefore its beauty (*lib. arb.* 3.9; *civ. Dei* 12.4; *nat. b.* 8). Still other uses of the aesthetic theme address those things which are wrongly condemned as evil simply because they are changeable and therefore will be lost. For example, Augustine compares those who call such goods “evil” because those goods must be lost, to those who would absurdly want a single syllable of a poem to last forever. The very point of the syllable is that it gives way over time to successive syllables, words, phrases and verses. The good of the poem can only be realized in this way, and only discerned from this viewpoint. Similarly, changeable things are not evil; what is evil is not viewing them as part of a great whole (*vera rel.* 12.43).

Unfortunately, however, not all Augustine’s comparisons of the ordered world to a work of art can be dealt with as easily. In his later works, he really does seem to suggest that real evil – the privation which follows from sin – contributes to the perfect form of the whole. We have already seen him make this claim in *De libero arbitrio* above. In this passage, Augustine seems

⁷ See also *Confessiones* 7.13.19 where the context (Augustine has just been talking about the Manicheans) makes it clear that the “evils” in question are really good creatures that human beings find disagreeable or unpleasant for various reasons. The “mosaic” argument of *De ordine* 1.2 is arguably in the same vein, though in this early work it must be admitted that Augustine is willing to count some surprising things as necessary “evils” (evils that resolve into goods when seen from a wider perspective). These include prostitutes and executioners, both roles being unfortunately necessary for the orderly running of a city (2.4.12). His arguments that the human city in particular requires the acceptance of necessary evils acquires greater sophistication and qualification in *De civitate Dei* 19 (See Rist 1994, 209-216, 237-245; Markus 1970, 95-100).

to go even further:

If no one had sinned in the world, the world would have been furnished and fitted only with things naturally good. And the fact that sin has happened does not mean that the whole universe is full of sin...and the evil will that refused to keep the order of its nature did not for that reason escape the laws of God who orders all things well.⁸ A picture may be beautiful when it has touches of black in appropriate places [*cum colore nigro loco suo posito*]; in the same way the 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. (*civ. Dei* 11.23; cf. *vera rel.* 40.76)

It is difficult to reconcile the comparison here of evil to touches of black in a painting with Augustine's view of evil as a privation of good. Privative evil seems more akin to a hole or gash in the painting; the colour black, by contrast, is needed by the artist to complete the image he intends. Is Augustine therefore saying that evil is *needed* to make a beautiful and perfectly ordered world? This *seems* to be the point of his even more jarring claims in, for example, *De civitate Dei* and *Enchiridion*, that the touches of evil in the world are comparable to the use of antithesis, or "the opposition of contraries," in poetry, so that "there is a kind of eloquence in events, instead of in words" (*civ. Dei* 11.18): "In the universe, even that which is called evil, when it is regulated and put in its own place, only enhances our admiration of the good; we enjoy and value the good more when we compare it with the evil" (*ench.* 11). Here there seems to be an explicit espousal of the idea that evil is really a good if one gains the correct perspective on it. Yet each of these passages is partnered with a qualification that says that God allows evil because he is so "omnipotent and good" that he can bring good *out* of it (*ench.* 11), that he created human beings and angels in the knowledge "of their future evil state" because he knew "how he would put such creatures to good use" (*civ. Dei* 11.18).

The claim that evil is *necessary* for the good of the whole goes beyond the earlier claim that God brings good out of evil. And anyway, it is not yet clear in what sense God *does* bring good out of evil, or, for that matter, in what sense evil – especially the evil (or good?) of punishment contributes to order. For now, then, we set aside the aesthetic metaphor as yet another problem to be resolved. Later on I will be suggesting a possible interpretation of it that

⁸"Nec mala voluntas, quia naturae ordinem servare noluit, ideo iusti Dei leges omnia bene ordinantis effugit."

fits everything that Augustine seems to want to say. But to do this requires further elaboration of how Augustine thinks God maintains order through punishment.

The purpose of temporal punishment

In the following two chapters I will argue that Augustine thinks universal order is maintained by divine punishment in two ways: through punishment with a *retributive* intent and through punishment with a *remedial* intent. Before I go on to outline what I mean by this (since Augustine does not himself use these terms, at least systematically) it would seem reasonable to spend some time addressing Augustine's views on *temporal* punishment. One would assume that his justifications for the punishment human beings apply to one another, in, say, the earthly city would shed some light on divine punishment. Unfortunately this is far from the case. For one thing, as on so many other topics, Augustine offers no sustained analysis or even definition of the purpose of punishment in human communities.⁹ For another, his most explicit discussion of the justification of punishment is highly ambiguous. And lastly, he makes it clear enough that temporal punishment, though necessary, is at best a blunt instrument and only an imitation of God's unerring and perfect punishment. Still, a brief glance at these points and therefore at some of his more (and less) well known statements on temporal punishment is useful – if only to show that we may justifiably ascribe to Augustine the usual ways of describing the motives behind punishment (as retribution and reformation).

Augustine's most well-known reflection on the use of punishment is contained in a passage from *De civitate Dei*, where he criticizes the views of the Platonists on the topic:

The Platonists, though they choose to believe that no sins are unpunished, nevertheless think that all punishments are intended for correction [*emendationi*], whether imposed by divine or human laws, whether imposed in this life or after death (in case anyone either gets no punishment in this life, or receives punishment that does not effect correction here)...We indeed admit even in this mortal life that there are cleansing penalties [*poenas purgatorias*] – not such afflictions as fail to improve a person's life, or even make it worse, but penalties cleansing for those who are restrained and corrected by them. All other penalties, whether temporal or eternal, according as divine providence must deal with each

⁹This may be one explanation for why amazingly little has been written on Augustine's views on punishment *per se* – which would otherwise be strange for someone who has been excoriated for being a “penologist par excellence.”

person, are sometimes inflicted for sins...and sometimes are inflicted to exercise and exhibit a person's virtues. (*civ. Dei* 21.13)

The implication here, that some perfectly justifiable punishments are *not* cleansing (the Latin of the passage is somewhat ambiguous), could be taken as evidence that Augustine is simply a good deal harsher than his favourite Greek philosophers. Indeed, his claim that such punishments are “inflicted for sins [*inferuntur pro peccatis*]” has been interpreted as a statement of some kind of retributive theory.¹⁰ On close examination, however, it is not clear whether Augustine is here asserting something about what punishment *ought* to do, or what punishment in fact *ends up doing* in the real world; or even whether he is referring to divine or temporal punishment (or whether there is a real distinction, in his view, for the Platonists). He could simply be pointing out a certain naiveté on the part of the philosophers (it would be very nice if all criminals were reformed by punishment, but in fact they are not). And if he is indeed referring to criminals, disruptors of orderly society, what he says does not necessarily apply to punishment meted out by God.

Only one thing becomes relatively clear in this passage, and that is that Augustine does not think a punitive action needs to achieve or even (necessarily) aim at the reformation of the penalized person in order to be properly called “punishment”; it may still be justifiable whatever its effect on the penalized person. That he indeed thinks retribution is *one* of the fitting aims of punishment is supported by the simple definition of it which he uses to criticize the unseemly “lust for revenge” elsewhere in *De civitate Dei*: this type of *libido* is a “shadow of retribution [*umbra retributionis*],” the principle according to which “those who do evil must suffer evil [*ut qui male faciunt mala patiantur*]” (*civ. Dei* 14.15). Of course, whenever Augustine calls on the language of shadows and imitation, he is usually attempting to contrast something merely earthly with its divine or eternal prototype. We can reasonably assume, then, that Augustine is here condemning revenge as a sinful attempt to parody the retribution God inflicts on sinners; in this case the definition *would* apply to divinely administered punishment, but not necessarily to the temporal variety. Although Augustine rarely applies the word “retribution” to divine punishment of sin, there are a few isolated examples (for instance in *De civitate Dei* 14.20). And indeed the

¹⁰ See Breyfogle 1999. Bettenson in fact translates the sentence in question so as to read that all non-purificatory punishments “are imposed...*in retribution* for sins” (Bettenson 1972, 990).

idea that sinners ought to suffer for their infractions is far more prevalent, as we will later see, in his discussions of divine as opposed to temporal punishment.

In fact, in those comments which unambiguously concern specifically temporal punishment, Augustine is far less interested in questions of retribution than he is in two other aims: deterring the potential wrong-doer, and reforming the actual wrong-doer. And he tends to emphasize each of these in different contexts. The usefulness of deterrence arises largely in his more theoretical discussions of the role of punishment in the governance of the temporal city state, while he agonizes much more concretely about the ideal of reformation in the contexts of more intimate communities governed by Christian ideals.

Augustine's most direct discussions of temporal punishment in the city state occur in *De libero arbitrio* and *De civitate Dei*. In these works he depicts organized human society as a community of individuals with intensively competitive, often conflicting, interests and no clearly shared values ("loves" in *civ. Dei* 14.28) except the desire to be able to go about their business unmolested by one another (Markus 1970, 84-95). Deterrence keeps the lid on the always precariously simmering pot of tensions which is human interaction. "The law of the people merely institutes penalties sufficient for keeping the peace among ignorant human beings, and only to the extent that their actions can be regulated by human government" (*lib. arb.* 1.5). Temporal laws rely on the value human beings set on such goods as food, property, family, freedom, and other general advantages supplied by living in a society; the law uses human attachment to these goods to regulate human behaviour: it "can punish evildoing only by taking one or another of these goods from the one being punished. So it is by fear that the temporal law coerces human beings and bends the souls of its subjects in whatever direction it pleases" (1.15). This works, according to Augustine, in two ways: by the threat of the loss of some good to anyone who disturbs the peace of society, and by the cautionary "example" of those who have been caught and actually punished by this loss. Both the threat and the examples are meant to give potential criminals pause; to discourage them from acting on those desires which would make orderly human coexistence impossible. In such passages, Augustine express his doubts about the range of powers the state has to affect a person's soul for good. All it can do is maintain a kind of external order, in the negative sense of an absence of overt conflict. Temporal

law, then, necessarily leaves many real sins unpunished; but “rightly so...just because that law does not do everything, it does not follow that we should disapprove of what it does do” (1.5).

This minimalist stance is in stark contrast to some of his more personal reflections (such as those in his letters) on temporal punishment. As a man in authority, Augustine wrestles with the heavy burden that having to administer punishment places on him.¹¹ In his ruminations, he admits that ideally punishment should contribute to the reformation of the criminal, and should certainly not make him worse:

How deep and dark a question it is to adjust the amount of punishment so as to prevent the person who receives it not only from getting no good, but also from suffering loss thereby. Besides I know not whether a greater number have been improved or made worse when alarmed under threats of such punishment...What then is the path of duty, seeing that it often happens that if you inflict punishment on one he goes to destruction; whereas if you leave him unpunished, another is destroyed? (*ep.* 95.3)

We agree that criminals should lose the freedom to commit more crimes. But we hope it does not go beyond this – that, while retaining life and sound limbs they should be compelled by law away from their mad instability toward a sober steadiness and be assigned some useful labour to repair the wrongs they have done. Even this much is called a punishment, but who can doubt that it should be deemed more a service than a severity when the rage to harm is precluded but not the prospect of a healing repentance? (*ep.* 133)

His greater engagement here with the effect of punishment on the punished person perhaps stems from the fact that Augustine feels able to apply a different standard when dealing with fellow Christians (Grossi 1999, 242). Christians are members of a community with one shared value – indeed the highest of shared values: the love of God. In such a community, there is more scope for the acts of authorities to be acts of love, just as the punishment meted out by parents within the family are meant for the good of their offspring. Indeed familial relationships are a metaphor which Augustine often uses, not only for explaining the motives of benign human authorities but for those of God as well, as scripture attests: “For whom the Lord loves, he

¹¹ As a bishop of the church he was responsible for aspects of both civil and criminal law, including sentencing (Markus 1999, 499).

corrects; he scourges every son whom he receives” (Prov 3:12 in *s. Dom. mon.* 1.63).¹² At its highest, Augustine conflates punishment with correction (*correptio*) which, while often painful, is always applied with the intent of reforming its object (1.63). Correction is the way explicitly Christian communities are to seek to deal with sins and infractions (*en. Ps.* 78.14).¹³

Still, Augustine accepts that not all attempts at correction will be successful, and that in such cases punishment is still desirable. In a sense, Augustine’s views on temporal punishment in the Christian community and in society converge when he discusses punishment in the context of the City of God, a society which is founded on the mutual love of the *Summum Bonum*. His model for it is the family:

If anyone in the household is, though his disobedience, an enemy to the domestic peace, he is reprovved by word, or by a blow, or any other kind of punishment that is just and legitimate, to the extent allowed by human society; but this is to the benefit of the offender, intended to readjust him to the domestic peace from which he had broken away. For just as it is not an act of kindness to help a man, when the effect of the help is to make him lose a greater good, so it is not a blameless act to spare a man, when by doing so you let him fall into a greater sin. Hence the duty of anyone who would be blameless includes not only doing harm to no one but also restraining a man from sin or punishing his sin, so that either the man who is chastised may be corrected by his experience, or others may be deterred by his example. (*civ. Dei* 19.16)

Although this has been a somewhat cursory introduction to what Augustine has to say

¹²Augustine notoriously takes this idea to its extreme in his eventual decision to use force to bring Donatist heretics (whose fanatical elements had a tendency to terrorist activity) back into the Catholic church. One of his biblical proof texts justifying the practice occurs in Luke’s parable of the wedding feast, wherein the master of the feast commands his servants to approach invitees and “compel them to come in” (Luke 14:23). Although Augustine’s justification of persecution cannot be explored here, a number of mitigating factors should be noted. First, Augustine’s underlying idea was that such persecution was for the good of the heretics themselves, as well as the communities experiencing turmoil on their account. Second, the “force” in question was not torture or the threat of death, but usually the imposition of a fine or other civil penalty. His general idea was to separate the heretics from bad influences in their trouble-making communities in order to gain their attention and thus a fair hearing for Catholicism. Gary Wills offers a fresh recounting of Augustine’s views on dealing with heretics which takes into account the modern discomfort with them while viewing Augustine’s decisions against the exigencies of his time and situation (Wills 1999, 102-120). For classic and fair treatments of Augustine on persecution see also Brown (1972, 260-278) and Rist (1994, 239-245; 1972, 246-252).

¹³At times Augustine distinguishes between correction and punishment, seeming to reserve the latter for penal retribution which does not produce reformation (*en. Ps.* 78.14; 104.8). At other times he indicates that correction is a *type* of punishment whose aim is remedial (*s. Dom. mon.* 63). These differences may indicate the connotation he feels his listeners lend to *poena*. For more on the specialized punishment of correction, see Brown 1972, 274-6; C. Harrison 2000, 183; Grossi 1999; Van Bavel 1999.

about temporal punishment, it does reveal several important things that may be applicable to divine punishment. Clearly, Augustine’s thinking on punishment in general is capable of nuance, and he ascribes a range of proper motives to the act. Clearly, too, the remedial function of punishment is of prime importance to Augustine, at least when one human being punishes another. Beyond this, however, we have simply amassed more problems. For one thing, we have not gained much to help us in our understanding of how exactly punishment works, since Augustine seems to assume some kind of commonsensical understanding of this matter on the part of his reader. We are also left wondering if Augustine does not hold human beings to a higher standard than he does God. We have seen him admit that God punishes sin in such a way that *more* sin follows, and in such a way that the person being punished is harmed – for that is what the privative state entails (it is “evil for the sinner”). Yet in the above passages he both denounces punishment that causes a person “to fall into greater sin,” and approves of punishment that does “harm to no one.”

The way forward: Order and punishment

Augustine’s discussions of God’s purposes in punishing sin are, as we will see in the next two chapters, equally as complex. The complexity is exacerbated in that it sprawls across many, if not most, of his major works, from the relatively early to the relatively late. Nevertheless, when we assemble these views, a certain consistency can be found.

Two definite themes emerge. When God punishes sin he does so either as a retributivist or as a remedialist.¹⁴ In order to maintain the order of the whole universe, God seeks either the

¹⁴There are three ways punishment is routinely justified: its aims are thought to be retributive, remedial (or reformative), or deterrent (Armstrong 1969, 146; Honderich 2006, 6-7). Sometimes this formulation is simplified into a distinction between retributive and utilitarian aims, on the grounds that both remedial and deterrent aims look to some good end (the reform of the offender, or the prevention of subsequent offences by him or others) to which punishment is a means, whereas retributive theory insists that punishment is self-justifying (Kleinig, 1973, vii; Quinton 1969, 55). Any perusal of the literature on the philosophy of punishment reveals exactly how difficult it is to articulate what lies behind the retributive impulse (see Zaibert 2006, 4; 96-97). Some argue that retribution is not a justification of punishment as much as a logical deconstruction of what must underlie any moral justification of punishment (e.g. Quinton, 55-56). My very rough way of characterizing the retributive aim has been tailored to the Augustinian situation; Augustine thinks that it is good that the sinner suffer because the suffering contributes to the order of the universe. In a way, to say this breaks down the hard and fast distinction between pure retributive theory (if there is such a thing) and a more utilitarian theory, since here there is some end at which punishment aims (order). This can be seen if we imagine the offender “getting away with it.” This situation is wrong – somehow unbalanced – and needs to

(continued...)

suffering of the sinner, which is in and of itself enough to accomplish this aim (this is retributive punishment), or the mending of the sinner by means of his suffering (this is remedial punishment). In the first case suffering is good for the universe only; in the second, it is good for the sinner as well. There are two important points to note here. One is that my terminology is not Augustine's. The other is that it is also important to recognize that these two branches of Augustine's legal account are not exclusive of one another. Indeed as we will later note, Augustine needs them both since he thinks that the weight of evidence (for instance, from scripture) is that not all sinners will be saved; and even those who are saved require a passage of time over which they are transformed. Retributive punishment, therefore, ensures that order is maintained even while the universe contains sinners still stuck in their sin and suffering.

Of the next two chapters, Chapter 5 will deal with divine punishment as retribution and Chapter 6 with divine punishment as remedial. In both cases the mystery to be solved is how Augustine thinks order can be maintained by the *disorder* that he sometimes calls evil and sometimes calls punishment. To resolve this problem is to resolve the central conflict between what we have called the natural account and the legal account. What is more, I will show that the answers to smaller mysteries we have identified will fall into place when we have resolved this larger one. These include Augustine's seeming vacillation between active and passive expressions of God's role in the fall and the particularly vexing question of why God should punish sin with the inclination to sin more.

To argue all these things I will need to draw on a wide range of diffuse material from across his body of work; Augustine does not devote sustained argument to what he thinks God is up to when he punishes. His expressions of what I have identified as God's variously retributivist or remedialist roles are sometimes cryptic and often misleading in the limited context of the works in which they appear. Only when we view these themes in a broader context does his meaning become clearer. This context will include instructive glances at such varied topics as the laws of nature, the moral "law," grace, and even his theory of learning. But the bulk of the

¹⁴(...continued)

be put right. It is a situation, moreover, which is in the future as far as the actual offense goes, so that Honderich's characterization of retributive theory as merely "backward-looking" (it looks only back to the offense and not to some future good) seems oversimplified (2006, 17 ff.). If we had to label Augustine's kind of retributivism it would perhaps best be characterized on the "intrinsic good" model (Honderich, 24 ff.; cf. Zaibert 2006, 136-137; 208-212).

illumination we will need will come from our unfolding of the natural account in Part I, especially Augustine's fundamental insistence on the absolute distinction between creator and creation and the dependence of the latter on the former. That the one account provides the basis for the other is the real proof of the basic unity of Augustine's thought on the effects of sin.

Chapter 5

Retributive Punishment: Good for the Universe

Augustine's remarks on God's retributive purposes for the suffering of sinners are a study in the dangers of reading him out of context – or even in the limited context in which such remarks occur. He particularly invites misunderstanding with one of the most common devices he uses to capture the idea of retribution. In several of his works, Augustine addresses what he sees as the mistaken inference that, by means of their sin – which, after all, is rebellion against and rejection of God – sinners are able to contravene the very will of their creator. To show that this inference is erroneous, Augustine uses the metaphor of creditor to debtor.¹ God, he insists, is an infallible creditor, one who never fails to get what he is owed:

No one overcomes the laws [*leges*] of the Almighty Creator. Every soul must pay back what it owes, either by using well what it received, or by losing what it was unwilling to use well. If it does not pay its debt by doing justice, it will pay its debt by suffering misery...If it does not pay its debt by doing what it ought [*faciendo quod debet*], it will pay its debt by suffering what it ought [*patiendo quod debet*]. (*lib. arb.* 3.15; cf. *Simpl.* 1.2.16)

This passage from *De spiritu et littera* is even more colourful:

what [sinners] do is not to defeat [God's] will but to cheat themselves of a supreme good and fall into the distress of punishment in which they must learn the power of him whose merciful gifts they have despised...the will of God is ever undefeated, which would not be, had he no way of dealing with his despisers, or were there any escape for them from his sentence. Suppose a master says: 'I will that all these my servants work in the vineyard, and after their labour rest and feast; provided that any who will not so work shall grind forever in the mill.' It might appear that one who would despise the order is acting against his master's will; but he will only defeat it if in spite of his master he escapes also from the mill. And that, under the power of God, is impossible [*nullo modo fieri potest sub Dei potestate*]. (*spir. et litt.* 58)

¹With his creditor/debtor language Augustine is here also preparing the ground for objections to the idea that God "elects" to save some sinners while leaving others where they are. (This idea will harden in later works into his full blown doctrine of predestination.) His point is that if a creditor chooses to remit a debt he does so at his own discretion. A debtor whose debt is not forgiven can never claim that he is "owed" forgiveness; he has got himself into his own predicament and the creditor is justly owed (*Simpl.* 1.2.16-17). The question of predestination is only tangential to my arguments in this and subsequent chapters, but see my concluding remarks for some limited reflection.

Remarks like these give the impression that Augustine's God is a kind of Nietzschean fiend, who upon being deprived of something he is owed (good behaviour) can be repaid in a currency he apparently values just as much (suffering). At the very least, Augustine seems to be saying nothing more profound than that God remains in control because the sinner does not, that God wins because the sinner loses. The suffering that follows sin simply ensures that the sinner can never achieve what he wants – which is to get away with his sin – and so God always triumphs in the end.

Such claims make it easier to sympathize with Burnaby's impression that Augustine was too overly influenced by the Roman Law he was obliged to administer every day: it is the mark of that kind of law, Burnaby points out, that it cannot allow wrongdoers to get away with their crimes. It must do something *to* the wrong-doer. It is also easier to understand Allin's characterization of Augustine as a "penologist par excellence." In these passages, Augustine indeed seems to have reduced the relationship between humanity and God to one governed by contract; or rather, by violated contract, for which redress will successfully be sought by a relentless and all-powerful creditor. Here, it would seem, the "order" maintained is mere "law and order," the inexorable administration of an iron-fisted ruler. This is not the order we saw earlier in our unfolding of the natural account: the order that is right relationship, the order that unites parts into wholes by the correspondence and patterns among those parts.

Or is it? In this chapter, I will argue that in fact it is. But to see this we need to go beneath the surface of claims like this (and variations on them) and find deeper layers of meaning. These layers are now far more accessible because of what we have already discovered about Augustine's notion of "order" in creation, an idea which seems *prima facie* so different than the "cruder" version of order expressed above. I will argue that what Augustine is actually claiming in his retributive statements like those above is something about the orderliness of disorder: that *disorder itself*, the very disorder that sin introduces into the universe, *is bounded and contained by order*.² This is why, I believe, he feels able to claim that suffering – the same

²This question exercises Augustine from the very beginning, as the dialogue *De ordine* demonstrates; however, the question about the relationship between order and evil was abandoned early in the conversation and so left unresolved, Augustine tells us, in favor of a topic better suited to the limitations of some of its interlocutors (*retr.* 1.3). In a sense, then, I am claiming that if we take a panoramic view of Augustine's work we can see that he has

suffering we have previously viewed as the experience of disorder – contributes to the order of the whole universe. And if this is true, then in his view the natural and legal accounts are not only compatible, but complementary. Again, what binds them is a notion of order that, despite initial appearances, remains consistent across both accounts.

A way beneath the surface of Augustine’s creditor/debtor language is found through passages which at first glance seem to making similar claims (that the sinner always loses and so God always prevails), but in a slightly different way. One of the most suggestive is found in *De libero arbitrio* and is part of the same argument from which the first passage above is extracted. The context of the argument is Augustine’s response to an imagined objector who suggests that sinners and their unhappiness are so appalling that perhaps it would have been better if they had never existed. Augustine at first launches into an argument that is now familiar to us: the universe is full of different types of creatures not all of which are equals; nevertheless, this hierarchy and variety does not detract from, and even enhances, its beauty. Since “the order of creation proceeds from the highest to the lowest by just degrees” it is wrong to “say that something in creation ought to be different, or should not exist at all.” To claim that a thing should not exist because it is inferior to more glorious creatures is, he continues, like saying “the moon should not exist, but there should be two suns” (3.9).

Augustine’s next move is potentially problematic. The perfection of the universe, he argues, would actually be compromised *without* unhappiness:

Our analogy about the sun and the moon shows us one thing... 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, 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. (3.9)

Seemingly realizing that he may have appeared to overstate his case, Augustine immediately concedes that someone might object thus:

If our unhappiness completes the perfection of the whole, then this perfection would be missing something if we were always happy. Therefore, if no soul becomes unhappy except by sinning, it follows that even our sins are necessary to

²(...continued)

answered the question posed (but abandoned in favour of a less taxing reflection on the liberal arts) in that early work.

the perfection of the universe that God created. How then can God justly punish our sins when they are necessary to ensure that his creation is complete and perfect? (3.9)

Augustine's response to this objection is worth citing at length as there is much in it for us to digest in the course of this chapter:

What is necessary to the perfection of the universe is not our sins or our unhappiness, but the existence of souls, that simply because they are souls [*in quantum animae sunt*], sin if they so will and become unhappy if they sin. If unhappiness preceded [*praecedit*] sins or continued [*perseverat*] after those sins were taken away, you would be right to say that the order and administration of the universe was defective. But it would be no less a blot on this order if sins existed but not unhappiness. When those who do not sin are happy, the universe is perfect; but when those who sin are unhappy, the universe is no less perfect. The fact that there are souls that will be unhappy if they sin and happy if they do not sin means that the universe is complete and perfect with respect to every nature that it contains. Sin and the punishment for sin are not natures, but characteristics of natures [*affectiones naturarum*], the former voluntary [*voluntaria*] and the latter punitive [*poenalis*]. The voluntary characteristic that comes about when one sins is disgraceful, so the punitive characteristic is used to place the soul in an order [*ordinet eam*] where it is not disgraceful for such a soul to be, forcing it to conform to the beauty of the universe as a whole, so that the ugliness of sin is remedied by the punishment of sin [*peccati dedecus emendet poena peccati*]. (3.9)

At first glance, claims found within this passage seem merely to be reiterating the idea that the sinner can never get his way, since he always ends up unhappy. And, as in the passage about suffering as the sinner's debt to God, the crucial points in this passage seem to sit uneasily with what we have learned from the natural account – that is, with what we have learned about the causal connection between sin and suffering (or “unhappiness” as it is termed here). But the way they do so is interesting: the problem is that this passage seems to be pointing out the obvious while ascribing to it some kind of special ordering power simply because it is now viewed under the heading of “punishment.” For instance, Augustine here belabours the idea that unhappiness only and always follows upon sin, and never upon any other occasion. His point seems to be that it is neither unhappiness nor sin *on its own* that contributes to the perfection of the universe, but the pairing of the two: *given* sin, unhappiness follows. Unhappiness never wells up randomly without prior sin; and without sin, only happiness abounds. But having examined

his own more complex arguments for why this *must* be so – that human beings depend on God for happiness, so that to reject God through sin is to reject happiness – we want to say: *of course* unhappiness only follows on sin. It is impossible that it should not, according to the fundamentals of Augustine’s own metaphysics and anthropology. As Augustine even says at the beginning of this very passage, “souls...simply because they are souls, sin if they so will and become unhappy if they sin.”

This, I argue, is precisely Augustine’s point. In this sense, perhaps, the stumbling block for us in this passage (and others like it) is not so much its legalism as the fact that it is saying something so obvious that it almost eludes notice. Augustine is claiming that the impossible can never be; and this is precisely what order requires. The barring of impossibilities *is* the maintenance of order. It might be argued that impossibilities by their very nature need not be prevented, even by God. But this too, I believe, is part of Augustine’s point. Order will always prevail (we will be addressing God’s role in maintaining this kind of order shortly). In inviting us to try to imagine a universe where sin is committed with no ill consequences, or in which unhappiness arises apart from sin, he is inviting us to contemplate not only the gross distortion that such a situation would represent, but also its sheer impossibility. The implication is that even sin and its effects must follow some rules. We will never experience uncaused unhappiness. Unhappiness is an effect always preceded by its cause, sin.

This interpretation throws a variety of Augustine’s more “legalistic” pronouncements into new light (several of which are found in the passage above from *De libero arbitrio*). One of these is the theme that arises whenever Augustine discusses the overall effects of sin on the universe: upon sinning the sinner is thrown into a new “place” (variously, by his sin alone, or by God in response to his sin). We encountered this idea earlier in the previous chapter, where we merely noted that Augustine uses it to insist on the unsullied order of the universe and the therefore invincible will of God; it is reiterated at the end of the passage above (“the voluntary characteristic that comes about when one sins is disgraceful, so the punitive characteristic is used to place the soul in an order where it is not disgraceful for such a soul to be”). We might wonder why Augustine should describe what appears to be the sinner’s ontological fall in this curious way: surely it *is* disgraceful for a human being to occupy a more lowly place than he

ought to be by nature, in a way that is *not* comparable to the lesser brightness of the moon compared to the sun. But now we have another way of interpreting this “fall.” Precisely because it is inevitable, demanded by what sin is (a rejection which then entails a loss), it is in this sense orderly. It would indeed be disorderly (disgraceful) for someone to sin and remain unaffected.

Such a scenario is, of course, impossible. But I am contending that this is one of Augustine’s points. Again, by asking us to try to conceive a sinner who is *not* assigned to this new place, Augustine emphasizes that the universe is at least consistent – orderly – in this sense, that a sinner who “gets away” with his sin remains impossible. As we have seen, elsewhere Augustine puts the point more eudaimonistically: “unhappiness is the inseparable companion of wickedness” and therefore “men are perverse [*perversi*] in wanting to be wicked without being unhappy...which is an impossibility [*quod fieri non potest*]” (*en. Ps. 32/3.15.16*). Likewise, I argue, when he says things like this – “it is better order that a nature should suffer punishment justly than that it should rejoice with impunity in its sin,”³ (*nat. b. 9*) – it is beside the point for us to object that the sinner *cannot* rejoice with impunity because his very sin is the rejection of joy (and that therefore there is no possibility of impunity). This, again, is precisely what Augustine means when he says that the sinner’s condition is demanded by order and that it is just.

What of Augustine’s mysterious allusion in the passage from *De libero arbitro* above to a “punitive characteristic” of the soul which ensures the suffering of the sinner? This is not, I believe, a reference to some kind of fail-safe or self-destructive mode implanted in the soul which is triggered by sin and casts the soul downwards into misery, thereby preventing it from achieving the happiness it seeks apart from God. Although Augustine does not use the terminology of a punitive dimension to the soul anywhere else in his works, I believe it is here simply yet another way of expressing what *must* follow sin because of what sin itself entails. Notice that Augustine is careful to say that this punitive characteristic is just that: a characteristic, not a separable thing. It is better, then, for us to interpret it as a tendency of the soul to fall when it sins (as it must) than as a special feature supplied to the soul by its maker as a means of damage control. If we assume (not unreasonably I think) that this characteristic is

³“Melius ordinatur natura ut iuste doleat in supplicio quam ut impune gaudeat in peccato.”

exactly the “interior [self-inflicted] punishment” cited at the end of Part I, then we are looking at yet another way of saying that sin is its own punishment. This may well be why Augustine contrasts it with the “voluntary characteristic” by which the soul sins – because while sin is willed, the unhappiness that attends it is not.

Interestingly, in the same section of *De libero arbitrio* (and immediately after the passage in which he compares God to a creditor who exacts what is owing him) Augustine says this:

These two things [sin and punishment] are not separated by any interval of time [*temporis intervallo*], as if someone at one time did not do as he ought and then at some other time suffered what he ought, lest the beauty of the universe be marred, even for an instant [*puncto temporis*], by having the deformity of sin without the beauty of punishment [*decore vindictae*]...Just as someone who is not awake is asleep, someone who does not do as he ought immediately suffers what he ought, for so great is the happiness that comes from justice that no one can fall away from it without falling into misery. (*lib. arb.* 3.15)

Except that it is couched in terms of an order which is never disrupted, this seems to me to be another way of saying that sin is its own punishment. Again, to object that it is unnecessary to say any of this because it is *impossible* for someone to sin at one time and then incur the punishment at another time is to miss the point – because this *is* the point. Unhappiness is as inseparable from sin as being “not awake” is from being “asleep.” There will never be sin without punishment.

The never wavering *patterns* of (1) first sin *then* punishment (though sin’s priority is not temporal but causal or logical) and (2) no sin *without* punishment (and vice versa), are examples of order. It thus becomes slightly easier to see why Augustine associates what he, in other contexts, calls deformed or ugly (the effects of sin, here called “punishment”) with (of all things) beauty. Here we need to recall that order and beauty (goodness) are the same thing. Both are the imitation of God’s unity. Augustine is not saying that what constitutes the punishment (unhappiness) is beautiful in itself, but he is claiming that sin without ensuing unhappiness would be a truly deformed (disordered) situation.

Justice and order

Augustine's conception of divine justice is another idea that is illuminated by seeing it not just as an imposition on sinning humanity, but as an expression of what *must* happen in an orderly universe from which impossibilities are excluded. As we noted in the last chapter, one of Augustine's favourite ways of expressing the idea that the fall is in some way imposed by God as a punishment for sin is to say that is imposed by or through God's justice (or, alternatively, by his just judgement, or his just laws). This leads us to envision a cosmic legal system over which God presides, meting out the appropriate sentence for each sin. While this is true on one level, I think his idea of justice goes deeper; it, also, speaks to the idea that even sin and its effects must adhere to order. For us, "justice" is a moral term and thus cannot be used of the mere workings of the universe, but for Augustine for whom the workings of the universe are inherently orderly and thus an imitation of the divine, this is not true.⁴ For example, he will describe as "just" the truth that no effect may be greater than its cause (*div. qu.* 2; *nat. b.* 1). The violations of this rule would be "unjust", he says – by which he clearly means that it is impossible that it should be violated. So justice is not only a moral order in which "each receives his due (*nat. b.* 2)"; more broadly, it also "consists in the perfect ordering of all things" (*lib. arb.* 1.15).

Justice, then, refers not only to what *ought* to be but to what *must* be. "What could be so inequitable as that it should go well with a deserter of the good? Nor indeed is there any way in which this could really happen [*Neque ullo modo fieri potest ut ita sit*]" (*Gn. litt.* 8.14.31). As I have said, this expands our understanding of the meaning of his claims that the effects of sin are mediated by God's justice. Statements such as "For by the most just laws of God were all condemned to the glory of God through the justice of his vengeance" (*cat. rud.* 2.18.30); or, "This aversion [from God] and conversion [to the creature], being both voluntary and not compelled, is followed by the fit and just punishment of misery" (*lib. arb.* 2.53), become not

⁴We have already seen that Augustine applies what we regard as terms of moral valuation to what we regard as the morally neutral laws of the universe. For example, order itself is synonymous with beauty and goodness. And Augustine routinely describes this order as "fit" (*dignus*) ("the whole rhythmic succession and gradation in space and time is judged to be beautiful not by its size and length but by its ordered fitness" (*vera rel.* 43.80); even the lowly worm is characterized by its body's orderly fitness (*vera rel.* 41.77). "Fit" is an adjective that he often pairs with "just"; when, for instance, describing the "new place" into which the sinner is thrown, he says that sin, "being voluntary and not compelled, is followed by the fit and just punishment of misery" (*lib. arb.* 2.53).

only statements of what sinners deserve, but what they must of necessity get, because order in the very sense of necessity demands it.

Significantly, we also begin to see how a claim like this may begin to make some sense: “from the hidden judgement of God comes perversity of heart, with the result that refusal to hear the truth leads to commission of sin, and this sin is also punishment for preceding sin...from the just judgement of God” (*c. Jul.* 5.3.12). If justice includes what cannot but follow from sin by the rules of order – and we have shown that more sin *must* be an effect of the first sin – then it does not appear quite so counterintuitive to say that sin is justly “punished” with the tendency to sin again. Again, what is desirable – that is, orderly or “just” – about such as state is not that it is how things ideally should be for the human creature, but how things must (and therefore in another sense “should”) be, *given* the fact that he has sinned. “Sinners are ordered so as to be punished [*in suppliciis ordinantur*]...this order is contrary to [*non competit*] their nature, and is therefore penalty. But it suits their fault and is therefore just” (*nat. bon.* 7).

One of the keys to reconciling God’s roles in the natural and legal theories here emerges. It involves recognizing that Augustine’s arguments that (1) it is impossible that unhappiness not follow upon sin (the crux of the natural account) and that (2) the same unhappiness is imposed by God in an effort to maintain order (the crux of the retributive version of the legal account), are different views of the same scenario. It is a mistake to oppose these ideas based on the supposition that if (1) is true, then (2) is either redundant or a cruder more primitive attempt at explaining what (1) does better. In my view, Augustine sees no opposition because he believes God to be the very foundation for (1)’s being the case; the very foundation, in other words, of what is possible or impossible, what is just or unjust. To protest that God *need not* impose unhappiness on the sinner because the sin by itself is the rejection of happiness is to miss the fact that in Augustine’s view God is the very foundation of claims about causal necessity (including the claim that the rejection of happiness results in unhappiness). For Augustine, God is the very standard not only by which we make such judgements, but which makes such judgements true. To suppose otherwise is to suggest that God is subject to some standard of logic just as we are.

Similarly, to suggest that Augustine need not bother arguing that justice demands that the

sinner suffer for his sin because he is bound to suffer anyway is to miss his point. I suggest that in Augustine's view, the fact that the sinner is bound to suffer *is* due to the operation of justice. For the same reason it is a misconstrual of Augustine's point to interpret his emphasis on the justice of the sinner's suffering as an inference that things could have been otherwise. For instance, he is not implying that God *could* have chosen, say, to "punish" *good* deeds with suffering, but that he does not because that would be unjust. To say this would be to imply that there is some standard of justice to which God himself must adhere in order that the punishment he applies to the sinner be just. But God himself *is* the very standard by which anything is judged just or unjust. It is true that Augustine does not explicitly make these points about God's special relationship to necessity and justice in this context – and we should not expect him to since he does not see the problem (the disconnect between natural and legal accounts) to which they are (for us) a solution. But he does make similar types of claims in other contexts; for example, he will claim that even God cannot make what is true, untrue – not because he lacks the power to do so or because truth has some claim over him, but because he is "the supreme and unchangeable Truth" and therefore the "the source of all truth" (*c. Faust.* 26.4); and that even God would not do what he has deemed impossible to do in his creatures, "because he is not more powerful than himself" (*Gn. litt.* 9.17.32).

Augustine's conception of God's justice or even God's will as the standard of what events must follow from other events is, therefore, one key to the reconciliation of legal and natural accounts, and is certainly the key to passages which seem to juxtapose them and which we looked at in the introduction. The italicized segments in the following passage (which I have cited a few times already) illustrate, I think, the unity in Augustine's mind between what must be and what ought to be:

If someone is unwilling to [cling to unchangeable good] *he deprives himself of the good* and experiences evil...torment follows *by God's justice*...for the well-being of him who deserts the good would be *contrary to justice*...according to God's justice, one who has voluntarily lost what he ought to have love should suffer the pain of *losing the inferior object* he did love. (*Gn. litt.* 8.14)

To refuse the good is necessarily to experience torment – but through God's justice. To love the inferior creature is necessarily to experience loss (it is not a stable thing and will pass

away) – but to lose it is also according to God’s justice. The will of God *is* the necessity of things (*Gn. litt.* 6.15.26). It is no wonder, then, that Augustine should at times attribute suffering to divine activity, at other times solely to human fault; at times speak as though God were passive, at other times active.

Suffering and the laws of nature

Besides the fact that suffering in general must follow from sin, there is, I believe, another way Augustine points out that order is maintained by suffering: this time in the way suffering manifests and unfolds. Augustine claims, I will show, that even the dissipation that follows sin proceeds according to orderly laws. In this sense, too, God’s will is done despite sin.

The idea is encapsulated in a rather gruesome passage from *De civitate Dei* where Augustine gives an example of how order is observed even as a thing becomes *disordered*. (In this passage he uses the terminology of “peace” which, as we saw in Chapter 2, he uses more or less synonymously with order.) Here Augustine details the disintegration of the human body as it is hung upside down in what is, obviously, an unnatural position for it. In each stage, from the struggle for breath, to death, and to eventual decomposition, he points out how the elements that make up the body are “at peace” with the other elements with which they are in contact:

Even what is perverted must of necessity be in, or derived from, or associated with, that is, in a sense at peace with some part of the order of things among which it has being or of which it consists⁵....nothing is in anyway removed in this process from the control of the laws of the supreme creator and ruler who directs the pace of the whole scheme of things.” (*civ. Dei* 19.12)

Augustine then goes on to draw a comparison with the wretchedness of sinners. In spite of the fact that

the wretched...*in so far as they are wretched [in quantum miseri sunt]*...are obviously not in a state of peace...[nevertheless] because their wretchedness is deserved and just, they cannot be outside the scope of order [*praeter ordinem esse non possunt*]. They are not, indeed, united with the blessed: yet it is by the law of order [*ordinis lege*] that they are sundered from them. (*civ. Dei* 19.13)

The conclusion here echoes what we have already deduced about Augustine’s claims concerning

⁵“Quod autem perversum est, etiam hoc necesse est ut in aliqua et ex aliqua et cum aliqua rerum parte pacatum sit, in quibus est vel ex quibus constat.”

justice and order: that such claims are also an expression of what must necessarily happen to those who harm themselves through sin. Here, Augustine is saying that although their misery is itself evidence that they are in themselves not in state of peace (that is, of order), order nevertheless demands that this state has followed on sin. But, coming as it does after a description of the *process* by which a thing's disorder manifests itself, I think Augustine is going beyond the claim that sin must cause suffering, to say something about the way this suffering manifests itself. These steps too follow orderly patterns. On close inspection of certain other kinds of passages, which we will now examine, we can see that Augustine elsewhere ponders this theme. The question on his mind seems to be this: What governs the very disorder that the sinner experiences? His answer is, paradoxically, order and therefore God.

Although in Part I we saw that Augustine identifies randomness as one of the most disturbing characteristics of suffering, we also saw that what we experience as random is in fact simply that which happens to us against our own weakened will. It is not causeless (every event has a cause *div. qu.* 24; *ord.* 1.5.14), but its causes no longer lie within the scope of human control because of the scattered and weakened fallen will. Indeed fallenness might be described as a condition in which even the human will is not completely susceptible to its own self, leaving it powerless over itself and over the world it is meant to command. Because human beings are not meant to exist in this way, this condition is disordered. But does this mean that everything that induces the experience of suffering is subject to no order and no laws? Augustine's answer is no, and we will find that he connects this point directly not only to the role of punishment in maintaining order, but also to its role in maintaining God's will, that is, his control over creation.

When we looked at Augustine's explanation (in Part I) for the body's degradation as it becomes loosened from its intimate attachment to the now weakened will, we found that Augustine's explanation for it referred not only to disorder but also, paradoxically, to law. We saw that in *De libero arbitrio* he suggests that before it sins, the will commands the body completely and infallibly, but afterwards "only as the laws of the universe allow" (3.11). I suggested that these "laws of the universe" were the ordinary laws or patterns of cause and effect according to which natures develop and change – what we (and very occasionally Augustine) commonly call "the laws of nature" to which the physical universe is subject. We also saw that

in *De civitate Dei* (5.9) and *De Genesi ad litteram* (8.9.17) Augustine outlines a distinction between natural and voluntary causes (or providence), the former to which human beings are subject, and the latter by which human beings make things happen within the limits of the natural laws. My contention was that Augustine's point in *De libero arbitrio* is that the soul's capacity to exercise its will within the natural world is at its greatest when it is properly oriented to God, and it is diminished as it retreats from God. This diminished scope for power over the world is especially evident in the relationship between the soul and the body. Although even the body is always subject to natural laws (of movement, nutrition, growth and so forth), the body attached to the fallen will is even more so. The soul is aware of having to share jurisdiction with another power in a way unnatural to it. But this power itself is not disordered – it is made up of “laws,” the laws of natures. When it suffers the body is simply experiencing itself as the patient of these laws which act upon it, impinge on it, and otherwise degrade it.

Interestingly, in *De diversis quaestionibus* we find another expansion of this theme, but this time oriented toward explaining not only the fallen body but fallenness in general, and this time as punishment. Here Augustine borrows terminology from Roman law with its distinction between public law and private law:

Every soul, to some degree, exercises an authority [*potestatem*] belonging to it in virtue of a certain private [*privati*] law, and, to some degree, is contained and ruled by laws of the universe [*universitatis legibus*] analogous to public [*publicis*] laws...the universal law is the divine wisdom...the more each soul finds enjoyment in its own private domain, and by a disregard for the God who presides over all souls for their benefit and health, desires its own power over itself or others rather than God's power over all, the more...it is forced in punishment to be subject to the divine [*divina*] laws, as if to public laws...where the divine law commands in the manner of public law, it obviously prevails over private freedom [*vincit privatam licentiam*], although even private freedom itself would be nothing apart from the permission of the universal divine power....the whole is more powerful than the part...what [the soul] does privately it is permitted to do only to the degree that the universal law permits. (*div. qu.* 79)

Clearly Augustine is attempting to draw a distinction between the scope of two kinds of laws: those that are limited to a personal sphere and those that apply to everyone universally (see

Mosher 1977, 200n2).⁶ It is tempting to draw an illuminating parallel between these public and private laws and the previously examined natural and voluntary causes. In this passage, public laws, too, are “universal” and the soul is to some degree “contained and governed” by them. It is reasonable to assume that the realm of the private law, then, corresponds to what is voluntary; that is, to the localized influence of the will which can make things happen within the limits of the framework of the public or natural laws. What Augustine makes explicit in this passage, however, is that the public (or universal or natural) laws are also divine laws. This is not surprising, as God is the “the author and creator of nature” (*civ. Dei* 5.9) who “has the causes of all that exist in his hands” (7.30), so that “all things are governed and fixed by the laws of the most high God” (*div. qu.* 45). For Augustine, this means that the universe is a kind of cooperative effort; some things happen because God wills them (through the natural laws); other things happen because his creatures will them: “God orders all causes...he directs the whole of his creation, while allowing to his creatures the freedom to initiate and accomplish activities which are their own for, although their being completely depends on him, they are not what he is” (*civ. Dei.* 7.30); “whatever is done in the world is done partly by divine agency and partly by our will” (*div. qu.* 24); God does some things “by his will alone” and others by “what he has ordained to be accomplished by himself with the cooperation of the wills of his creatures [*cooperantibus creaturae suae voluntatibus*]” (*spir. et litt.* 7.5). The crucial question then becomes this. Does this mean that the creature – more to the point, that the sinning human being – can “break” God’s laws?

Augustine’s answer is no. As he says above, if the human creature tries to “enjoy” created goods and rejects God, he does not thereby cease to become subject to the divine laws, the more general laws that govern the universe. We have already noted that the effects of sin are the work of God in the sense that every event is the work of God. But the question that remained was how Augustine can claim that order is not only preserved despite sin, but *because* of the very effects of sin, when those effects *are* instances of disorder. If we revisit this troublesome

⁶According to Berger 1953, under Roman law, private law “governs the relations between individuals and primarily concerns the benefit of private persons” (532) whereas “public laws are passed by the vote of the people in a popular assembly” (546). Perhaps metaphorical uses of legal terminology like these are what encourages Burnaby to posit Roman law as the entire source and motivating influence behind Augustine’s legal account – to the detriment of the more superior natural account (see introduction).

passage from *De diversis quaestionibus*, we can find answers to this concern:

There is nothing disordered or unjust in the world, whether we know this or not...the sinful soul suffers misfortune...but because it is deservedly in the state befitting such a being, and because it suffers that which it is reasonable for such a being to suffer, the sinful soul does not mar by its deformity any of God's sovereign rule...in so far as we act with a good will we act in conformity with the law...otherwise we are *acted upon* in conformity with the law [*secundum legem agimur*], since *the law remains unchangeable* and directs all changeable things by a supremely beautiful government. (*div. qu. 27*)

We either act in conformity with the law, or we are acted upon by it. What is it to act in conformity with the law? It is to have a “good will”; that is, a will which clings to the good of its nature. If such a will chooses not to observe that law, it must nevertheless observe another; and given what Augustine has said above, that law includes the natural laws. We make our choices, but when those choices are enacted they fall into the unchangeable framework of laws that governs the universe: the “public” laws take over, for better or for ill, depending on the nature of our choice (“the whole is more powerful than the part”).

Augustine's point may be captured with an analogy he himself does not use. A person may choose to act in conformity with the law of gravity and stand back from the edge of a precipice; or he may choose to flout it and step off a cliff; but he will still be acted upon by that law when he falls. Or to use an analogy Augustine does favour, a person may obey the dictates of his body's need for nutrition, and eat properly; or he can choose to ignore the fact that he needs to eat to live; but then his body will be acted upon by the physical laws which cause it to wither and die from its lack. Everything that happens to the sinner, including his own “deformity,” proceeds according to these laws. What remains orderly, then, is not the sinner in himself, but the process according to which he is acted upon. We regard the laws of nature(s) as laws precisely because they are orderly; because we see things unfold in invariably the same way.⁷

⁷Augustine cites two instances of the apparent breaking of these laws when events occur which appear to flout the usual laws of nature. One includes miracles. But, he insists, these are not really instances of things occurring contrary to nature; first, because what God wills *is* the nature of things, so his will can never be contrary to nature (*civ. Dei* 21.8); second, because God will never do something to or with a natural thing that he has already determined is impossible for that thing (*Gn. litt.* 9.17.32). Rather, in a miracle God simply skips some of the steps that nature usually takes to get from one point to another (*Gn. litt.* 6.13.23-24). The other occasion when an event appears to deviate from the normal course of things is when we simply do not understand the underlying laws that are operating. In this case there is some factor we have missed. A mundane example of this reasoning is found in his early *De ordine*,

(continued...)

Natural events are like “a continuous...river of ever-flowing succession, passing from the visible to the hidden, by a regular and beaten track” (*Trin.* 3.5.11); they are governed “by the laws of the most high God [*summi Dei legibus*] so that “those things which change do repeat with a certain regularity [*certo moderamine*] their journeys through time” (*div. qu.* 46). But as we saw in Chapter 2, changeable things are *unchangeable* in so far as they display order, that is, in so far their patterns of change stay the same. This, then, is the answer to our question about how Augustine thinks order remains undisturbed by the effects of sin. These very effects proceed in predictable patterned ways; or as Augustine puts it in *De diversis quaestionibus* above, “the law remains unchangeable and directs all changeable things by a supremely beautiful government” – even when the change in question is for evil. *This* is the sense in which “there is nothing disordered or unjust in the world.”

Augustine’s overall argument is that if the human creature will not obey God in one way, he will nevertheless obey him in another. This is the point of the following passage from *Contra Faustum*, which could be mistakenly dismissed as a statement about God’s punitive actions, but for the analysis we have just undertaken. Now we can see just how closely related justice and the order of nature, of cause and effect, are for Augustine:

God, the author and creator of all natures, does nothing contrary to nature; for whatever is done by him who appoints all natural order and measure and proportion must be natural in every case. And human beings act contrary to nature only when they sin; and then by punishment they are brought back to nature again. The natural order of justice requires either that sin should not be committed or that it should not go unpunished. In either case, the natural order is preserved, if not by the soul, at least by God. (*c. Faust.* 26.3)

This passage helps us to see more clearly, I think, what lies behind Augustine’s “retributive” assertions not only that God’s will always wins out, but that human beings can be said to owe a debt to God that they will have to pay in one way or another. The “natural order” which governs the self-harming effect of sin means that if the sinner will not have God in one way, he will have him in another. “God wills all to be saved...but not in such a way as to deprive them of freedom

⁷(...continued)

when in discussion with his fellow philosophers, he debates the reason for a drain which has ceased to run properly. This is not some contravening of the laws governing the flow of water. The drain must be blocked, by leaves or some other object (1.3.6-11).

of choice, for the good or evil use of which they are subject to the judgement of absolute justice...what [sinners] do is *not to defeat his will* but to cheat themselves of a supreme good and fall into the distress of punishment” (*spir. et litt.* 58).

In this chapter I have tried to present Augustine’s own material in such a way as to make clearer why he should hold a variety of seemingly incompatible views. These include the sense in which an evil (the disorder suffered by the sinner) can be regarded as a good when it is regarded as a punishment; and the sense in which God’s retributive punishment – punishment which seeks to make the wrong-doer suffer – maintains God’s control over his creation, even though sin is an act of rebellion against him, and even though the damage it inflicts causes a privation of goodness in the world. I have argued that in Augustine’s mind this very damage follows a law of order; first, in the sense that sin must be followed by disorder (if it did not, *that* would be an instance of disorder); and second, in the sense that the disintegration itself is subject to orderly natural laws which govern such a process of change. These views constitute one branch of a reconciliation of what we have called the natural and legal accounts.

Whether the reconciliation is completely seamless is another matter. We might note a number of unsatisfactory elements within it. For one thing, Augustine’s use of the hierarchy of being as a way to describe the position of the fallen sinner in a perfect universe rings false. His customary target for this device is the Manicheans whom he perceives as mistakenly shunning as evil creatures whose only fault is their relative inferiority. In this case, Augustine will convincingly argue that as long as a creature is meant to be a certain way – as long as it has a “nature” – it is not evil. Its place on the scale of relative goodness and order contributes to the beautiful variety of natures that makes up creation. But when he then wants to fit the sinner into this very hierarchy in such a way as to make much the same argument (about the contribution to the beauty of the whole) he undermines his very point about the goodness of inferior “natures.” They are good *as natures*. But there is no proper way to be a sinner. It is as though Augustine has admitted the existence of a new kind of creature called “sinner” with its own nature and mode of being, its proper place in the hierarchy of nature. Granted, perhaps his point is only that the sinner is not able to “rejoice in his sin with impunity” but that he must fall down and be reduced in both being and goodness. But Augustine has not been careful to make this distinction.

Another way in which he is imprecise is in his assertion that by means of suffering *per se*, God brings good *out of* evil; suffering guarantees that God has his way *even though* human beings act against his will by sinning. By means of retributive punishment, Augustine seems to me rather to be saying simply that order is always maintained, rather than that disorder happens, but that God somehow works some good *out of* it.

Also questionable is his strict insistence that simply because there are disordered creatures in the universe, the universe as a whole is not disordered. We might reasonably object that just as an injured hand makes for an injured body, some disorder in the universe makes for a disordered universe. Such an admission would not require him to abandon all order in the universe; his point about disorder being somehow contained by orderly laws could still be held in some form. Surely it would be possible to admit that the universe after the fall is not quite as good as the universe before; that Plan B, while still a plan, is not as ideal as Plan A.

Indeed, perhaps the most frustrating thing about the particularly retributive branch of Augustine's legal account of the fall are the things he approaches saying but never quite does. He grants that it is God's will that we become what we will (*Gn. litt.* 11.8.12); but he does not go on to allow that God might will a less than perfect universe. He suggests that even disorder follows rules, and thereby comes near to asking the difficult but interesting question of how a thing can *ever* be in an "unnatural" state – especially if its very dissolution follows laws of (its?) nature. But he never enters that debate.

It would be easy to credit – or blame – Augustine's uncompromising stance on divine omnipotence for his refusal to allow that the perfection of the universe may be sullied, no matter what its inhabitants do. But one might equally as well blame his overwhelmingly strong sense of order itself. Or perhaps the two views are one and the same. In any case, he clearly believes that sinners themselves need not be mended in order for the universe to be mended; and this is the case since it is not really possible to disturb the universe in the first place. Since, as he believes, the testimony of scripture is that all sinners are *not* restored (*civ. Dei* 15.1, 21.2; *ench.* 93; *corrept.* 42.44)⁸, such an assertion is necessary if the all-important order of the universe is to

⁸On the reason why Augustine thinks that all are not saved, as well as on his attempt to reconcile this with scriptural references to the contrary, see Rist 1994, 266-289.

shown to abide.

And yet there are hints that he himself is not entirely satisfied with this. Although he is by no means a universalist, almost despite himself he occasionally hints that even the condemned sinner is better off suffering for his sin than not, whatever the value of that suffering to the universe might be. “Pain is evidence of a good that is left: the sinner is in a worse state if he rejoices in the loss of righteousness. But a sinner who feels anguish, though he may gain no good from his anguish, is at least grieving the loss of health...grief at the loss of a good, when a man is punished, is evidence of a good nature...his grief arises from some remnants of peace” (*civ. Dei* 19.13; cf. *Gn. litt.* 8:14; *nat. b.* 20). Granted, such passages are ambiguous and verge on mere reiterations of the theme that the disorder of the sinner is part of the overall order of the universe; still, Augustine seemingly finds it difficult to take his eye off the good of the sinner, even as the sinner experiences retribution.

This tendency comes to fruition in what I call the remedial branch of Augustine’s legal theory of the punishment of sin. There is another way that God brings good out of evil: he makes evil go away, but not by destroying it. As we saw in Part I, evil “is not a separate substance which attaches itself to what is good; rather it is healed by restoring what is evil to its previous condition” (*civ. Dei* 14.11). In remedial punishment, God restores sinners – or at least those who are “chosen” (*Simpl.* 1.2.13) – to the reflection of order they are meant to display, the order proper to their nature. “In all [these] cases divine providence...recalls to its true and essential nature whatever manifests defect, that is, tends to nothingness, and straightens it” (*vera rel.* 17.34). Again, Augustine needs *both* types of punishment to be able to assert that the order of the universe is always maintained at all times: while the retributive branch applies to all sinners while they suffer, the remedialist branch applies only to those who will eventually be restored. Nevertheless, the latter reveals an Augustine who has seldom been acknowledged, a man who very much wants sinners to be saved not only *from* their corruption, but *by means of it*.

Chapter 6

Remedial Punishment: Good for the Sinner

To say that Augustine is interested in understanding how human beings are saved by God from their corrupt condition is hardly controversial. He has, after all, earned over the centuries the title of Doctor of Grace. What is slightly more controversial (or at least less well studied) is one facet of how human beings are improved by God: by punishment, this time of the remedial variety. Perhaps this aspect of Augustine's view on divine punishment has been neglected because of its *prima facie* counter-intuitiveness, even its absurdity – a problem Pelagius was quick to denounce for the nonsense he felt it to be. Augustine is claiming that the condition from which we need to be rescued is one of the things that will rescue us. An analysis of why he thinks this involves some conjecture; nevertheless I think there is enough evidence to support the interpretation I offer; and if it is Augustine's view, I think it is his most interesting and creative contribution to the idea that suffering has the character of punishment. His argument, as I present it, is a puzzle whose pieces are made up of equally creative observations on psychology, learning, time and evil, illuminated by reflections on the law, and grace itself. Obviously we cannot address all of these vast topics in great depth; but it is not necessary to do so in order to see how they fit together to clarify Augustine's idea that the human condition not only needs to be mended but that it will be mended – at least for the “elect” – and partially by means of itself. This is divine punishment as reformative; and because God is doing something in and with the damage humanity inflicts on itself, it is the last piece in the puzzle that unifies the natural and legal theories of suffering as punishment.

Healing punishment

Given the complexity of the material we need to gather, it is best to proceed in layers. I want first to establish that Augustine indeed thinks that the fallen condition is meant in some way to reform human beings (or at least those who will be saved). That is, before we look at *how* this is supposed to happen, I simply want to confirm *that* it is supposed to happen – especially given the apparent difficulty that human beings would not need reforming if they were not in the

fallen condition in the first place. But Augustine is quite clear that the condition that needs fixing is what will somehow contribute to the fixing. For example, in *De civitate Dei*'s lengthy excursus on Hannah's song (1 Sam 2:1-10), Augustine interprets one passage – "[God] leads men down to the grave and leads them back again" – in precisely this way. This passage means, he says, that

God brings life to the same persons to whom he has brought death...and [they] are certainly brought to death by God for their own well-being...For Paul says, 'You are dead!' But see how healthfully God brings men to death! He goes on to say, 'and your life is hidden with Christ in God.' [Col. 3.3]. See how God brings life to these same men! But is it true that those whom he had brought to the realm of the dead and those he has brought back again are the same people? Indeed it is. (*civ. Dei* 17.4)

Likewise, in *Contra Epistulam Manichaei*, he says that "God's will concerning erring men is that they should be amended rather than destroyed...In every case where, previous to the final judgement, God inflicts punishment [*vindicatur*]...we must believe that the designed effect is the healing of men, and not their ruin [*non ad interitum hominum, sed ad medicinam valere*]"(*c. ep. Man.* 1.1).

But perhaps Augustine's most explicit and so most problematic avowal of this idea comes in *De natura et gratia* in his complicated response to Pelagius who has strenuously objected to it. We looked briefly at this exchange in the introduction and have glanced at it since, but it is worth reexamining in more detail now, especially given all that we have learned about the connection between sin and its effects.

The background to Pelagius' objections is important. He has no quarrel with the idea that God punishes sinners for their sin. What he does object to is the idea that human beings are damaged by sin in such a way, and to such an extent, that they sin all the more – and that this tendency in itself is a punishment meted out by God. Notice that his implicit assumption is that a punishment rightly ought to *stop*, even heal, the sin and the pride associated with it. In this sense he is a remedialist and clearly thinks that Augustine is claiming, in a twisted way, to be one too. Thus, Pelagius objects that Augustine's views amount to an assertion that "punishment is the very cause of sin, if the sinner is weakened [by it] to the point that he commits more sins" (22.24), and that "it was necessary for man, in order to take away all occasion for pride and

boasting, that he should not be able to exist without sin.” Against such views Pelagius protests that “it is completely absurd and foolish that there should have to be sin so that sin should not be” (27.30). “What more shall I say than that we may believe that fires are quenched by fires, if we may believe that sins are cured by sins” (28.32); “it is the duty of a physician to be ready to heal a man who is now wounded; however, he ought not to wish” – as Augustine claims God the physician does – “that a man who is sound should be wounded” (26.29).

Augustine’s responses to these charges are difficult to unite into a coherent view. Indeed he seems both to affirm and to deny what Pelagius suggests is the correct view. For instance, in the following passage, he affirms the idea that God indeed punishes sin in such a way that more sin is committed:

Pelagius does not consider how worthily the light of truth abandons [*deserat*] the transgressor of the law. When thus abandoned, a man becomes blinded and necessarily offends all the more. By falling he is injured and thus injured does not arise sufficiently to hear the voice of the law, which admonishes him to ask for the grace of the savior...by that penalty [*poenam*], that is, by that blinding of the heart because of the abandonment by the light of wisdom, they fell into more and serious sins...and this is punishment of iniquity as well as being iniquity [*poena est ista iniquitatis, cum sit et iniquitas*]...Behold how often God inflicts punishment, and how from such punishment more numerous and severe sins arise. (22.24)

Augustine’s references to “the law” and to “grace” here are important and we shall address them later on. But what is important for now is that he seems clearly to be implicating God’s punishment in the human tendency to sin – for which God has punished humanity in the first place. So far, Augustine appears to be doing nothing more than reiterating one version of the legal account of the punishment of sin. Here we have it in its relatively passive “abandonment by God” version. Notice too that, as is so often the case, Augustine stops short of saying that God “makes” human beings sin. Rather, God punishes them and “through the punishment” more sins result.

But, having said that God’s abandonment is in some way partially responsible for the compulsive sin of the fallen human being, Augustine then uses this very idea (of God’s damaging abandonment) to *agree* with Pelagius’ assumption that God’s punishment should *heal* sin. He points out that, Pelagius’ protestations aside, physicians regularly use like to heal like.

“One can investigate and observe that poisons can be eliminated by poisons. And...the heat of a fever can be broken by the heat of certain remedies” (28.32). So to say that it is “absurd and foolish that there should have to be sin so that sin should not be” is like saying that

a wound did not involve pain, and an operation did not produce pain, so that pain might be taken away by pain. If we did not know this from experience, but heard about it in some part of the world, where such things had never occurred, then no doubt we might deride this, perhaps using the very words of Pelagius: ‘It is completely absurd that pain should have been necessary in order that the pain of a wound should not be’...God does indeed act in order to heal all things, but he acts on his own judgements and does not take his method of curing from the one who is sick...that swollen pride can only be cured by sorrows [*doloribus*]. (27.30-31)

Augustine clearly thinks that when God punishes his intent may indeed be to heal, and that the sinful fallen condition is just such a punishment. As we move on to ask *how* God does this we see even more clearly the kinds of problems that arise among Augustine’s claims.

How punishment heals

For one thing, nowhere in the passage above does Augustine acknowledge the problems with his analogies of like curing like. When a physician applies an antidote to a poisoned person, heat to a fevered person, or a scalpel to a wound he is administering these treatments to someone who is *already sick*. But as Pelagius notes, Augustine’s claim is that the sickness and the cure are one and the same; and we might well question the physician who makes his patient sick in order to cure him, somehow using the sickness itself.

Even granted what we learned in the last chapter – that God’s unique role as the creator of the sinner (and the laws he must obey) means that it is true both that the sinner harms himself *and* that God punishes him – it is not clear how Augustine thinks that this healing through sickness is supposed to happen. In the above passage from *De natura et gratia*, Augustine makes several cryptic comments about what God does to heal the sinner, by means of that condition with which the sinner is being punished. In one of them he objects to the way Pelagius has characterized his [Augustine’s] own view: “It is *not* said to a man,” he protests, “that ‘It is necessary to sin, so that you may sin no more,’ but rather that ‘God abandons you for a short time, that you may know that what you take pride in is not your own but his, and learn not to be

proud” (28.32). In another place Augustine explains that punishment is really an evil, since it results from God having “turned his face away” from the sinner. Yet

this very trouble was in some way a remedy for him against pride. For in the time of his prosperity he had said, ‘I shall never be moved’ [Ps 29:7] and attributed to himself what he had received from the Lord. For what did he have that he had not received? [cf. 1 Cor 4:7] For this reason it became necessary to reveal to him the source [*unde*] of what he had received, so that what he had lost in his pride he might receive in humility. (24.27)

In the above passages, Augustine indicates that there are two main ways God is implicated in curing fallen human beings by the “sickness” of fallenness. Both are problematic and will need further elaboration if they are to be fitted into a coherent view. The first is that the cure is accomplished partially through God’s abandonment of the sinner. We have already encountered one problem with what Augustine wants to attribute to God’s abandonment, which is the fallen condition itself. What, we wondered, does God’s abandonment of the sinner add to the explanation of the fall, when Augustine has shown that the sinner’s abandonment of *God* is sufficient to explain what follows sin? Now, however, is added the new difficulty of how and why this abandonment can supposedly *heal* the fallen condition if it also, in some way, brings it about. How, exactly, does a physician heal his patient by staying away from him? And what does Augustine mean when he says that God abandons the sinner “for a short time [*aliquantum*],” an idea which he repeats several times throughout his response to Pelagius in this work (e.g. God “turns his face away for a short time [*paululum*],” *nat. et gr.* 27.31”).

Setting aside the abandonment difficulty for the moment, we come to an even more unaccountable (and tortuous) claim. Augustine asserts that God cures fallenness by means of itself because the fallen condition *teaches* us something about the root of our problem, pride. Through such vehicles as “sorrows” or through continued sinning (as pain is used to stop pain, sin is used to stop sinning), we learn something that quells the pride that has caused all our problems. It seems to be something about God, or at least about our relationship to him: the sinner comes to “know” that “what he takes pride in is not [his] own but [God’s]”; “the source of what he had received,” is revealed to him “so that what he had lost in his pride he might receive in humility.” (Presumably what he has “lost” by his sin here means not only his own well-being, but that which grants it, God.)

The instructive mechanism of suffering (of “sorrows”) looks initially relatively promising – if, that is, by it Augustine means that sorrows can be redemptive because they force to us to a recognition of what is of true value. Indeed this very theme does occur in Augustine’s work, usually associated with the loss of changeable things. Changeable things must be lost, but the sorrow and fear that attend the loss serves both to demonstrate to us their inherent limitations and to impel us to search for a more stable and worthy object for our love. “A soul does not turn towards God except when it turns away from the world, and there is nothing better calculated to turn it away than to find its frivolous, harmful, soul-destroying pleasure mingled with toil and suffering” (*en. Ps.* 9.10).

The problem with suggesting that the sorrow of loss *in itself* heals the overall condition of fallenness itself is that it presumes that the suffering sinner *knows* where else to place his hopes – and that he can then detach them from changeable things to do so. And indeed, on closer examination we can see that Augustine most often uses this type of argument (the healing attributes of sorrows) when he is addressing *Christians* who presumably have already accepted that God is the only thing that can make them happy.¹ In fact, Augustine draws a distinction between the effects of suffering on Christians and on non-Christians: “Fire which makes gold shine makes chaff smoke...the violence which assails good men to test them, to cleanse and purify them, effects in the wicked their condemnation, ruin and annihilation” (*civ. Dei* 1.8, 19.10; cf. *Trin.* 13.20). Here Augustine indicates that the true Christian² will only be made better by suffering, while the wicked will likely be made worse. And indeed we have seen that improvement is impossible for those who have not yet been set on the path of salvation by grace. The breaking of the cycle of compulsive sin and loss is precisely what he who remains in his sin cannot do. It is one of the features of fallenness *not* to learn from the experience of loss and to be hopelessly attracted to unsatisfying things. And all this is a reflection of pride.

¹The most poignant examples are in his addresses to frightened congregants awaiting the invasion of the barbarian hordes (Brown 1967, 292-3, 431).

²Augustine does not assume that simply because a person professes Christianity, he has received grace. And even if he has, this does not mean that he has suddenly been made perfect thereby; it does mean, however, that he has been set on the right path and that God is assisting him both to know and to desire the good more than he desires what is wrong and harmful (*Trin.* 14. 17.23; Brown 1967, 177ff.). So it is not inconsistent for him to think that the Christian still needs help with sin, for which sorrow provides some antidote.

This brings us to the underlying problem with the idea that fallenness itself should be an instance of revelation. The fallen condition, as we learned in Chapter 3, is precisely *opposed* to learning, or at least to profound learning of a kind that would lead to some kind of transforming humility (where humility, as we have learned, is the acceptance of one's creatureliness). As we have seen the fallen condition is characterized not only by sorrows but by compulsive sin grounded in the pride that brings it about. It is helpful here to be reminded what pride is, and why it causes irreversible damage to the sinner who commits it. Pride is humanity's desire to be the god of its own life; it "arises from trust in self and in making the self the spring of its own life...to go this way is to draw back from the fountain of life, whose water alone gives the righteousness good life and from that changeless light by whose participation the reasoning soul is set burning so as to be itself a light made and created" (*spir. et litt.* 11.7). Pride is a *drawing back* from God; it certainly does not move the proud person *towards* God. Moreover, the resulting loss of knowledge – of the motivating vision or "light" of God – is precisely why the commission of pride causes the sinner to become *stuck* in his sinful condition. Once the vision is lost, the motivation or strength to turn towards it is gone. Hence the resulting condition of moral difficulty and, significantly, *ignorance* – or as Augustine calls it in the above passage, "blinding of the heart," so that "a man...necessarily offends all the more" (22.24). So to say that the fallen condition cures the fallen condition does not seem analogous to saying that a painful procedure is necessary to a painful condition; it is more like saying that blindness can cure blindness – or more to the point, ignorance cure ignorance. In any case, there is a final and related objection: if the condition were sufficient to be its own cure by granting some kind of salvific revelation, then presumably humanity would not continue to suffer from it.

Yet the theme of divine punishment as *instructive* recurs frequently throughout Augustine's writing. Unfortunately whenever Augustine makes claims of this sort he does so in passing, never taking up their meaning in detail. However, a revealing interpretive exercise is to gather together some samples of such claims. As I do so, I will italicize words and phrases referring to the language of *learning* Augustine employs, to *what is learned*, and to the *means* by which it is learned. I will then propose an interpretation of the crux of such passages. This interpretation, I will try to show, is supported by the very foundations of Augustine's philosophy

as we found underpinned the natural account. The combined weight of passages, then, will allow us to see more clearly what instructive qualities Augustine is claiming for divine punishment. But to solve *all* the problems with this interpretation we will need to go further afield to other Augustinian themes which use the same kinds of ideas and language.

Here, then, is a characteristic selection of Augustine's claims that God's punishment for sin allows us to learn something which helps us out of it. They are evidently, I think, roughly analogous to those from *De natura et gratia* above.

For it is certain that if man ignores God's will he can only employ his own powers to his own destruction; and thus he *learns what a difference* it makes [*discit quid intersit*] whether he *gives his adherence* to the *good that is shared* by all, or finds pleasure only in *his selfish good*. In fact, if he loves himself a man is given over to himself [*donatur sibi*] so that when *as a result* [*inde*] he has had his fill of *fears and griefs* he may use the words of the psalm...and sing 'My soul is troubled within me,' and then when he is set right [*correctusque*], he may then say, 'I shall keep watch for you, *my strength*.' (*civ. Dei* 13.21)

Thus [Adam and Eve] *gained a knowledge* [*cognoverunt*] where ignorance would have been a greater bliss if they had *trusted in God* and obeyed him and thus had refrained from an action which would force them to *learn by experience* [*experiri*] the *harm* that disloyalty and disobedience would do. (*civ. Dei* 14.17)

By the consequent *experience* [*consequenti experientia*] [of having sinned]...[God] *showed* [*demonstraret*] to angels and men (the rational part of creation) what a *difference* there was [*quid interesset*] between the *individual's self-confidence* and *God's divine protection*...and thus *showed* [*ostendere*] them the *magnitude* of their *pride's power for evil* and of *God's grace for good*. (*civ. Dei* 14.27)

When the soul has become involved in its sin it *learns by paying the penalty* the *difference* [*luendo poenas, discit quid intersit*] between the precept it refused to obey and the sin it committed. In this way it *learns by suffering* [*sentiendo*] to know the *evil it did not learn to know by avoiding it*. By making comparison [*comparando*] between its former and present state, it loves more earnestly the good which it loved too little. (*vera rel.* 20.38)

[The sinner] is overweighted with a sort of self-heaviness, and is therefore heaved out of happiness, and by that experience...learns to his punishment [*experimentum poena sua discit*] what a difference there is [*quid intersit*] between the *good* he has forsaken and the *evil* he has committed. (*Trin.* 12.11.16)

Nor can it be that his own will does not come crashing down, if he exalts himself by preferring it to the will of the one above him. This is what the man

experienced by ignoring God's command, and this is what he *learned by the experience* – *what the difference* [*experimento didicit quid interesset*] is between *good and evil*, the good of *obedience*, that is to say, and the evil of *disobedience*, that is, of pride and insubordination, of a perverse imitation of God, and of claiming a harmful freedom. Now the tree by which it was possible for this to happen [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] took its name...from this very event. We would have no awareness of evil, after all, except by experience [*nisi experimento non sentiremus*], because there would not be any unless we had committed it...That person...should have his praises sung above all other human beings, who takes pleasure in the good without any experience of evil, so that before ever being conscious of the loss of the good, he chooses to hold on to it in order not to lose it³...[but for the sinner this] *good is known through the experience of evil* [*item per experientiam mali scitur bonum*], since those with whom things go badly on the loss of the good *feel* [*sentit*] *what it is they have lost*. (*Gn. litt.* 8.14.31-32)

Obviously these passages are not so tightly related that it becomes immediately obvious what their import is in Augustine's mind; and not every element that occurs in one occurs in all of them. Nevertheless several significant themes emerge. Primary among them is the idea that the effects of having sinned allow the sinner to learn something. Through them he "discovers" or is "shown" something. The first thing to consider, then, is what the sinner learns. On the surface, the more obvious answer is that he learns that sin is bad for him. But Augustine clearly has more in mind, though precisely what is not entirely clear. He refers repeatedly to a *contrast* which forces itself upon the sinner: the difference between two states, once of which he gains if he clings to God, the other into which he falls if he turns away from God. The problem here is first, that only Adam (the first sinner) has ever actually experienced such a contrast; other fallen human beings are born into a fallen state and know nothing radically different with which to compare it. And second, we have seen Augustine insist that when a human being falls, he cannot get up again on his own power, contrasting experiences or not. What kind of knowledge is it that this experience is able to grant when, as we have seen, the fall *damages* the ability to know God?

What sin teaches?

In our discussion of the natural account, which viewed sin as inherently self-harming, we

³In the same passage, Augustine goes on to note that there is one person who matches this description – Jesus.

saw that human beings are fundamentally needy. They depend on God for knowledge – for the vision of Truth which allow them to make rational judgements, for the satisfaction and joy that is happiness, and for the virtuous ordering of love which accompanies it. But these experiences of dependency are themselves the indications of a more basic dependency: human beings receive their very existence from God. They are creatures, a different kind of good than God. We saw that human beings must *know* who and what they are in order to find their place in the universe. “The participator in the self-same is he who confesses that he is other than God, that he has from God all the good he can have” (*en. Ps.* 121.6.8). The human being “must know that he is a creature” (*mor.* 2.12).

As we saw in Chapter 3, the ideal way of knowing one’s place, as it were, happens as a side-effect of the vision of God. But in the above passages, Augustine seems to be suggesting another way of coming to know one’s place. Here I suggest that what is significant is Augustine’s emphasis on the importance of “experience” and the “difference” it makes. His point, I think, is that there are situations in which facts are better grasped when their implications are lived. For human beings, especially the sinful variety, seeing is believing.⁴ What Augustine is getting at in these passages is that the sinner’s sufferings and impotence show the sinner much more than that sin is bad for him. Yes, “if man regards what is of God as his own, he loses what is of God and is reduced to what is his own” (*nat. et gr.* 49). But the experience of having done so demonstrates just how insignificant and pitiable is “what is his own.” He is stripped to expose the *meaning*, so to speak, of his creatureliness: that he is literally nothing without God.⁵ This nothingness is no abstract idea; he *becomes* it, or at least closer to it. He “feels” the great divide between the unchangeable Good and his changeable self (see particularly

⁴Augustine evidently does not think that the need to experience the implications of a truth is primarily a fallen attribute, but that it is a psychological feature of the human mind. For example, he suggests that the command to Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree in paradise was meant to give them a concrete experience of the nature of their relationship with God; namely that he is the Lord that they need to obey (*Gn. litt.* 8.6.12; cf. *civ. Dei* 14.17). The reliance on experience, however, seems to have been enhanced or at least made more needful by fallenness – and painful experience is especially effective valuable as it breaks through the complacency and obtuseness of pride (Rist 1994, 241).

⁵Elsewhere Augustine does point out that the sinner cannot put himself out of existence by his sin (thereby really becoming nothing); God prevents this and “so leaves something to be punished” (*civ. Dei* 19.13, 22.24; cf. *c. ep. Man.* 41.47, *mor.* 2.7.9). Still, the sinner as a creature comes out of nothing (he receives all he has from God) and is therefore nothing without God.

the passage from *De Genesi ad Litteram* at the end of the selection of passages above). To some degree, he “knows” God in a negative sense, as that which he lacks.

This is the crux of the above passages. Basic problems remain, however. What kind of real knowledge could result from this type of experience *while a person is experiencing it*? After all, if the experience alone is enlightening, the sinner would be made better by means of the very effects of his sin. But instead he is made worse. Is Augustine suggesting that we become better by becoming worse?

In fact, I think he is. How he thinks this happens involves some conjecture, though conjecture founded on a solid fact. The solid fact is that Augustine never draws an explicit equivalence between divine punishment resulting in fallenness, and grace. His uncompromising view is that grace and only grace – the divine influence on the human will so that it might turn to and love God – may cure fallen human beings.⁶ Indeed, grace is what rescues them *from* punishment. What, then, of the beneficial knowledge that the *punishment* is supposed to grant; or of the humility that is supposed to come in the wake of having experienced the effects of pride? Is Augustine contradicting himself by asserting that there may be real improvement by means of punishment alone – that is, without grace? And if punishment may be so effective, why is grace necessary?

It could be that Augustine is simply being inconsistent. On the other hand – and this is the conjecture – perhaps Augustine’s language here indicates that punishment itself *contributes* to grace because, though it is not effective on its own, grace itself incorporates what is revealed by punishment. But the revelation itself only comes because of what grace shows in and by the experience of deprivation preceding its coming. What divine punishment can teach will only be “learned” when it is over, but what it teaches it could not have taught without the period of ignorance it imposes. So we *do* need to become worse in order to become better – in the end.

⁶Although Augustine did change his mind about who makes the first move in the process of healing, God or the sinner, he never seems to have held that a person can save himself without any divine help. Even in his earliest work, *De beata vita*, the sinner is depicted as being blown into the safe port of the Christian community by a benevolent wind sent from heaven (*b. vita* 1.1).

Learning and the law

The above interpretation – linking the actual improvement not so much to punishment but to what grace does *with* the punishment – gains some credence since Augustine espouses something similar to it in his views on the Pauline concept of the law. For Augustine, Paul’s “law” refers both broadly to a prescriptive moral law which is perceived by those “under” it as being imposed from without, and, more specifically, to the written moral code in decalogue form given to Moses on stone tablets (*spir. et litt.* 29.17; *cat. rud.* 2.23.41). Augustine is particularly interested in two of Paul’s observations concerning the human relationship to the law. One is that, prior to the perception that there is a moral law which one ought to aspire to live up to, there is no perception of sin either. It is only after the law is made known to a person that he may violate it. The same action performed “before” the law thus takes on a different character “after” the law: in a sense, the law makes a person who has received it and violated it “worse” than if he had performed the same action before receiving the law. The reason is that he is now aware that he is doing something wrong, and does it anyway (*spir. et litt.* 26.14; *Simpl.* 1.1.3). The second is a psychological observation. The law also seems to make people worse in the sense that the very perception of being held to account seems to increase the desire to sin all the more; people “find greater pleasure in doing what is forbidden...sin deceives them with its false sweetness” (*Simpl.* 1.1.5 cf. *div. qu.* 66; *spir. et litt.* 16.10).

So while the law is good – and the general consensus that it ought to be observed attests to its goodness (*Simpl.* 1.1.6, 17) – it cannot make or even help people be good, that is, be the sort of people who as a matter of course avoid the things it proscribes. “If there had been a law given which could have given life, righteousness would be altogether by the law [Gal 3:21]” (*spir. et litt.* 34.19). The ineffectiveness of the law in this sense is clearly what Augustine means when he says that it “contributes nothing to God’s saving act,” for he immediately goes on to argue that in another sense, the law actually contributes a great deal: it prepares the soul to receive grace. “Through [the law] [God] does but show man his weakness [*per legem ostendit homini infirmitatem suam*] that by faith he may take refuge in the divine mercy and be healed.” (*spir. et litt.* 15.9). Faith is the gift of God, the power to believe in and to want what will save the sinner from himself (31.54). But evidently, in Augustine’s view (which he regards as Paul’s

view), it can only come to someone who has been shown that he needs it – even if he does not fully recognize the import of what he has been shown until grace itself does the showing. The law, then, is like a “tutor conducting [the sinner] to grace [*paedagogo perducatur ad gratiam*][Gal 3:24]” (*spir. et litt.* 16.10).

In the following passages, notice the similarity between the kind of language Augustine applies to the instructive function of the law and the descriptions we have already seen of the remedial function of punishment. This is true particularly of his emphasis on the *experience* that the law forces those “under” it to undergo, and on what they will eventually *learn* from that experience:

Forbidding of sins increases the desire for sinning. However this serves the purpose of making the soul *aware* [*sentiat anima*] that it is *not sufficient in itself* to extricate itself from enslavement to sin, so that in this way with the subsiding *and extinction* of all *pride*, it might become *subject to its deliverer* and so that a man might say with sincerity, “My soul has clung to you.” In this state one is *no longer* under the law of sin but in the law of righteousness. (*div. qu.* 66)

Man needed to be *shown* [*demonstranda*] the foulness of his malady. Against his wickedness not even a holy and good commandment could avail: by it the wickedness was rather increased than diminished. For ‘the law entered in, that the offense might abound’ [Rom 5:20] so that thus convicted and confounded he might *see his need for God* [*videret...sibi esse necessarium*], not only as teacher but as helper. (*spir. et litt.* 9.6)

The righteousness of the law...is set forth so that every man may *recognize his infirmity* [*infirmiorem suam cognoverit*] and so, *not in his own strength* or through the letter of the law...may *attain* and do, and live it. (*spir. et litt.* 51.29)

The law was not given to introduce sin nor to extirpate it, but simply *to make it known* [*demonstraretur*]; by the *demonstration* of sin to give the human soul a *sense* of its guilt in place of a secure sense of its innocence...sin cannot be overcome without the grace of God, so the law was given to convert the *soul by anxiety* about its guilt, so that it might be *ready to receive grace* [*ad percipiendam gratiam*]. (*Simpl.* 1.1.2)

On its own the law is not only ineffective but exacerbates the condition it condemns. But in a way this *is* its function: it brings forth and manifests before our eyes the nature of our condition. We do not, however, fully understand what we have been shown until we have passed through and beyond that condition. While the law concretely demonstrates humanity’s “need for God,” someone under the law does not know this is what he is experiencing until he has been released

from the experience, when it is integrated into grace.

In a sense, then, the learning that happens along with grace is retrospective and depends for its lessons on experiences which the preceding law forces on those living under it. I suggest that Augustine views the function of divine punishment in its remedial form in a parallel manner. That is, the learning that punishment provides for cannot come about simply due to the punishment. Nevertheless neither can the learning happen without it. In fact, this could be the significance of an extract from one of the passages above on the “healing” brought about by pride: “if he loves himself a man is given over to himself so that when *as a result* he has had his fill of *fears and griefs* he may use the words of the psalm...and sing ‘My soul is troubled within me,’ and then when he is set right, he may then say, ‘I shall keep watch for you, *my strength*.’ (*civ. Dei* 13.22). In other words, *prior to being set right* the man only knows he is troubled. Afterwards – when, presumably, he is no longer in the fallen *condition* – *then* he clings to God having learned what lacking God is all about.

There is a strong possibility too that this is the explanation for Augustine’s reiterated yet mysterious claims that fallenness is associated with having been abandoned by God, and that this abandonment is for “a little while.” Perhaps Augustine is not, after all, saying that the fall is in some way caused by God’s desertion, but that in response to the man’s self-inflicted fall, God does nothing about it – for a little while. God lets him stew in it, so to speak, for an ultimately good purpose – the building up of a store of experience which will ultimately contribute to self-knowledge, when he is finally illuminated by the light of grace. Grace, then, cements this experience into the whole person, transforming who he is.

There is some evidence that we can go even further than this: that Augustine at least tentatively considers the idea that the experience of fallenness, that is, of punishment, allows us to achieve a state of perfection (with God’s help, of course) which would not otherwise be available to us if we had not had the negative prior experience. If this is so, it suggests one possibility for making sense of Augustine’s repeated assertions that the learning gained through punishment relies on some kind of perceived “difference” between good and evil. It is well known that Augustine assumes the final state of the resurrected “blessed” in heaven will be

superior to that of the first human beings in Eden.⁷ While the latter had physical bodies, the former will have spiritual bodies; the latter were dependent on food for sustenance while the former will not need it; and there are other differences. But the most profound difference is the kind of freedom that the human will had and will have with respect to sin. Adam and Eve were able not to sin (*posse non peccare*) if they so chose; but the blessed will not be able to sin (*non posse peccare*). Augustine is clear that this in no way detracts from their freedom in the sense that when they act they do so because they want to. Rather they are not able to sin in the same way that God is not able to sin. At all times they, and he, are doing what they want to do; what they want is always the good (*civ. Dei* 22.30).⁸ There is a special unshakable stability to the wills of the blessed.

In at least one place, Augustine seems to entertain the notion that this stability is partly due to the experience of having done evil and suffered for it. In *De civitate Dei* he contemplates what the blessed saints will remember about the trials of their previous penal condition. It cannot be such that the memory of their sufferings and sins will disturb their happiness, or heaven would not be heaven. He suggests that an answer to this question lies in recognizing that “the knowledge of evil is of two kinds: one in which it is accessible to apprehension by the mind, the other in which it is a matter of direct experience. Similarly, vices are known in one way through the teaching of the wise, and in another way in the evil life of fools.” Likewise, he continues, there are two ways of “forgetting evils.” One happens when a scholar pursuing the life of wisdom forgets what he has learned about them; the other happens when someone who “has experienced and suffered [*expertus et passus*] them...[escapes] from his misery.” The saints will

⁷It seems to me that on this point in general Augustine is more ambiguous than Rist’s comments (1994, 278-279) allow. Rist’s observation that Augustine believes the final condition of the blessed will be superior to Adam’s condition is indisputable. But he further speculates that the reason for this is that the blessed have passed through the intervening fallen condition which “gives [God] the opportunity to create something even better” than Adam’s condition which was “the best possible world *at that time*” (Rist’s emphasis). As I argue below, this thought definitely seems to have occurred to Augustine. On the other hand, Augustine also speculates that had Adam not sinned, he would eventually have been transferred to a state like those of the resurrected saints (*Gn. litt.* 6.24.35).

⁸We might better understand Augustine’s meaning if we think for a moment about evils that we are simply unable to perform, not because some external agent is preventing us but because we are not capable of wanting to do heinous things. Does this “incapability” mean we are less free? Am I, for instance, “free” to harm my child? In one sense, yes: no one is stopping me. In another sense, no: I “cannot” do it because I cannot *want* to do it. It is difficult to see this “inability” as a instance of compromised freedom, however. This is Augustine’s point. A person who could harm his child but “chooses” not to is in a way *less* free than someone who is unburdened by this type of “choice.”

forget past evils in this second way: “they will be so free from all of them that they will totally be erased from their feelings [*sensibus*].” All the same, Augustine concludes, there is a way in which the saints *will* remember their past sufferings:

Yet such is the power of knowledge [*potentia scientiae*] – and it will be very great in the saints – that it will prevent not only their own past misery but also the misery of the damned from disappearing from memory. Otherwise, if they were to lose the knowledge of their past misery [*si se fuisse miseros nescituri sunt*] how will they, as the psalm says, ‘sing the mercies of the Lord for all eternity’ [Ps 89:2].

The joy of the saints here is due not only to the ideal condition they find themselves in, but because they have not forgotten their “own liberation” (*civ. Dei* 22.30). Augustine seems to be implying that the *contrast* between the saints’ past misery and their present beatitude contributes to this beatitude. Underlying his thoughts could be that the condition they were once in adds to the *stability* of the sinless condition they are now in, perhaps because, having experienced it, they are incapable of wishing themselves into such a state again.

Interestingly, in an aside in the *Confessiones*, Augustine points out a psychological proclivity of human beings that he finds unaccountable, but important. “What is it that goes on within the soul so that it takes greater delight if things that it loves are found or restored to it than if it had always possessed them?...Everywhere a greater joy is preceded by a greater suffering” (*conf.* 8.3.7-8; cf. *civ. Dei* 14.17).⁹ Again, Augustine’s observation here could explain what the mysterious and transforming “difference” is which is perceived by means of divine punishment. As we observed earlier, except for Adam and Eve, human beings do not experience the contrast between an ideal condition and a deformed one. They know only the latter. This made it difficult to understand exactly what experiential contrast between good and evil

⁹The context of this observation is Augustine’s reference to the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32), and in conjunction with it, the parable of the lost sheep (Lk 15:3-7; Matt 18:12-14). The former especially is a scriptural device which stands as the defining metaphor for the *Confessiones* itself. Augustine sees the parable as a metaphor for the return of creation to God at the end of time as he recounts it in the last three books of the *Confessiones*; more intimately it is also the metaphor of his own life, and especially of his conversion to Christianity (see also *conf.* 1.18.28, 2.10.18; Boulding 1997, 13). In this parable, of course, the younger son only comes to appreciate his father’s love when he has wandered far from it; and he only turns around and returns when he has “had his fill” of trouble. (Probably this is the source for the phrase “when he has had his fill of fears and griefs” from the passage from *civ. Dei* above.) The point of the parable of the lost sheep is that the return of wandering sinner is an even greater occasion of joy than if he had never strayed in the first place.

Augustine was referring to. But perhaps the “difference” Augustine is alluding to is rather between the deformed condition and the ideal condition which follows it, not which precedes it. If this is the case, new light is shed on a particular expression of the aesthetic metaphor which at first seemed so contradictory to Augustine’s general take on evil: “In the universe, even that which is called evil, when it is regulated and put in its own place, only enhances our admiration of the good; we enjoy and value the good more when we compare it with the evil” (*ench.* 11). It could well be that here Augustine is not saying that evil is in itself necessary for the perfection of the whole; rather, he may be indicating that, *given* that evil has happened (due to sin), it can be used (when “regulated” by God) to draw attention to good – to, in fact, serve the good. In the next section, we consider another way in which the aesthetic metaphor may be linked to Augustine’s idea of healing punishment.

Good out of evil: The aesthetic metaphor reconsidered

I have suggested that by putting Augustine’s claims about remedial punishment into the context of some of the broader themes of his work, we can find out what Augustine really means by his more problematic claims. So far we have addressed some of these: what he could mean by God’s abandonment of sinning humanity, what the instructive contrast or “difference” is that punishment renders plain; even how pride can be said to teach something about pride – once, that is, extra help is given to transcend it. The overarching problem, however, remains. Surely the physician, as Pelagius points out, should want his patient to remain well. Why impose a condition – and if the condition is “punishment” then it would seem to be imposed – that then needs to be cured? And if the condition is *not* imposed but self-inflicted then why use the term “punishment” to describe it, and insist that it one of the “good works of God”? Pelagius’ criticism of the methods of Augustine’s divine physician is really an expression of the basic problem of this dissertation. Can Augustine’s legal account of the punishment of sin can be squared with his natural account? In what sense can fallenness be *both* self-inflicted and inflicted by God?

I suggest that, just as in the case of retributive punishment, Augustine’s account of remedial punishment as a whole allows for his maintaining both these things. It is useful to

recall what underlies his claim that fallenness is the result of divine punishment in general. Punishment, as we saw in Chapter 6, is the way that God maintains the order (or perfection or beauty) of the universe despite the evil of sin; or, to put this another way, punishment allows God's will to prevail whatever human beings may choose – even if they should choose to rebel against him. “[When they sinned] doing not his will but their own, he used the very will of the creature which was working in opposition to the Creator's will as an instrument for carrying out his will, the supreme Good thus turning to good account even what is evil either for punishment or for salvation” (*ench.* 50). This is the theme of God's bringing “good out of evil” which is so important to Augustine. Somehow, God takes *whatever* we do and fits into an orderly whole. As we have seen, there are two ways Augustine thinks God does this, each corresponding to a standard way of defining the purpose of punishment. One of these, fallenness as retributive punishment, we examined in the last chapter. Augustine's claim here was that the suffering of the sinner is itself enough to maintain the order and goodness of the world. We found that this is so because suffering proceeds from sin in an orderly fashion; it does not enter the world in any other way but succeeding sin; and the degradation that results unfolds according to unvarying laws. Thus, at any particular point in time, the universe is in an orderly state. Augustine's argument, then, was that God brings good out of evil in the sense that evil has limits which are circumscribed by order (good).

The other variety of punishment, which we have examined in this chapter, is remedial: punishment ensures that the sinner is healed and restored to the (non-suffering) condition he is supposed by nature to be in. In contrast to retribution, remedial punishment really does bring good *out* of evil in the sense that an evil situation is transformed into a good one (somehow by means of itself). It is thus bound up in time: there is a before and an after. God's goal is to bring a disorderly thing back into order. But as we have seen, if the evil situation (fallenness) is divine punishment, it is also God's intention; so in what sense is it evil? And indeed we noted the ambiguity of Augustine's language on this front. When the human condition is discussed as the privative effect of sin, it is evil; even when it is punishment it is evil “for the sinner”; but when it is one of the “works of God” it is good. Which is it?

As in the case of retribution, the answer again is both, but in a more subtle way.

Augustine, I believe, is arguing that one of the ways God brings good out of evil is this. God takes the evil human beings do and *uses* it as material for punishment so as to restore human beings. So the evil condition of human beings *is* self-inflicted; but God takes it up into his plan so that it looks as though it were his intention all along – and in a way it is. Augustine’s point is not so much that punishment is something that God does but that it is something that God does with what *we* do.

The point here is subtle. We first need to reexamine certain ways he expresses the idea that God brings good out of evil. In significant instances he claims not that God inflicts evil so as to immediately erase it, but rather that God uses the evil human beings do as some of the building blocks in his design of creation. His plan takes these choices into account in such a way that evil choices ultimately result, over time, in good ends. For instance, Augustine claims that “so great is [God’s] wisdom, and so great is his power, that all things which seem to oppose his will *tend [tendant]* towards those *results or ends [exitus sive fines]* which he himself has foreknown are good and just” (*civ. Dei* 22.2); and that “God who is supremely good in his creation of natures that are good, is also completely just in his *ordering* of evil choices so that where such evil choices make a wrong use of good natures, God puts evil choices to good use [*bene utatur etiam voluntatibus malis*]” (*civ. Dei* 11.17). “[God] foresaw that man would make a bad use of his free-will, that is, would sin, [so] God *arranged his designs [praeparavit voluntatem suam]* rather with a view to *do good* to man even in his sinfulness, that thus the good will of the Omnipotent might not be made void by the evil will of man, but might be fulfilled in spite of it” (*ench.* 114).

In all these passages we see reiterated the idea that God to a certain extent builds his plans around what human beings, even sinners, give him as raw material, so to speak. The fact that there is a “plan” at stake, and a plan that unfolds over time, is captured by Augustine’s use of the idea of foreknowledge, by which he does not so much mean that God makes calculations based on the future, as that God makes calculations taking into account what his creatures will do.¹⁰ Indeed we have already encountered the idea that God has made his creation a cooperative

¹⁰Elsewhere he famously argues that God, being timeless, does not actually *foreknow* anything, but knows everything about his creation all at once. But he is careful to reject the apparent implication that, since what is the future to us is

effort. “Now if there is for God a fixed order of all causes, it does not follow that nothing depends on our free choice. Our wills themselves are in the order of causes, which is for God, fixed, and is contained in his foreknowledge, since human acts of will are the causes of human activity” (*civ. Dei* 5.9).

Of course most of these claims about God’s “use” of humanity’s evil *could* be taken in the sense in which we interpreted them in the last chapter: God’s activity involves placing the sinner in a degraded position appropriate to his choice. But I think the passages listed above go beyond this claim; for one thing, Augustine suggests that God’s ultimate “plan” is to “do good to the sinner.” But even more important, Augustine is suggesting that when he punishes remedially, God plays the same game that the sinner does, but in the other direction. Whereas the sinner abuses good things (the changeable things that he idolizes including his own power, or even the law itself) by twisting them to evil purposes, God takes evil things (sinners damaged by their own choices) and bends them to good purposes – ultimately to the advantage of the sinner himself. The important thing is that just as the good things the sinner abuses remain good, the evil things out of which God produces good remain evil; not, that is, in the sense that the sinner is eternally locked into his sinful state, but that while he is in that state, it really *is* an evil state – despite the fact that it will be used to improve him. Hence Augustine’s ambiguity about whether the condition to be healed is a good or an evil.

Augustine makes these distinctions a little clearer when he discusses another instance in which God brings good out of evil, that is, when God “uses” an evil to effect something good. In Augustine’s view the star instance of good coming out of evil is death. As we have seen, the physical death of the body is the most primal and symbolic of the effects of sin. As the sinner cuts himself off from God, he also cuts himself off from himself, in the sense that the essential components of his nature, body and soul, are in death forced apart. This is an evil. And yet, Augustine argues, God has turned this evil to good; in the “good” death of the martyrs who know that there are some things worse than physical death; and, more fundamentally, in the doorway

¹⁰(...continued)

eternally present to God, our actions are already fixed and preordained. God no more determines what he sees us doing in the future than we determine someone else’s actions as we watch them act in the present (*civ. Dei* 5.10, 11.21; *lib. arb.* 1.3; see Wetzel 2001, 49-50; Rist 1994, 268-7; Kirwan 1989, 95-103).

to eternal life into which death has been transformed, by the death and resurrection of the incarnation of God in Christ. Still, he is careful to emphasize that

it is not that death has turned into a good thing, when it was formerly an evil. What has happened is that God has granted to faith so great a gift of grace that death, which all agree to be the contrary of life, has become the means by which men pass into life...death is not itself a good thing when it enhances the glory of the sufferer, just as the law is not an evil thing when people use it to sin more...but as unrighteousness puts all things, good and evil alike to a bad use, so righteousness puts all things, evil as well as good to good use [*utitur*]. (*civ. Dei* 13. 4-5)

This passage makes it easier to see how Augustine could feel justified in attributing good things to an evil, such as the self-inflicted condition of humanity. It also recasts Augustine's remarks on the way the things the sinner pursues "rank as" or are "ordered by God" as punishments. For example, in *Contra Epistolam Manichaei*, Augustine says that the universe contains some things "which serve for bodily punishments, such as fire, poison and disease...and other things in which the mind is punished...by the entanglements of its own passions, such as loss, exile, bereavement, reproach" (1.1). It could well be that here Augustine is not suggesting that the lower created goods transform from what they are in their own natures to mere instruments of divine punishment. Rather, because they must be lost, they *function* – are *used as* – punishments. In this sense even God himself is using good things as evils for a good end. One can see how Augustine's language about what is a good or an evil, and who is doing what might become somewhat complicated.

Such considerations cast a fresh perspective on the aesthetic metaphor Augustine continues to use even in his later works. As we have seen, this is often regarded by commentators as nothing more than a Stoic "echo" (as Burnaby puts it) expressing the idea that apparent evil is really not evil when one puts it into the perspective of the whole. But perhaps there is another reason Augustine continues to maintain this analogy. He could be using it to suggest the idea that while it is sinful creatures who provide the dark spots in the canvas of the world, God incorporates those "touches of black" into the picture, painting around them so that they *become* part of a pattern – so that they look (and in fact are) necessary for what comes out of them. "God *arranged his designs* [*praeparavit voluntatem suam*] rather with a view to do

good to man even in his sinfulness, that thus the good will of the Omnipotent might not be made void by the evil will of man, but might be fulfilled in spite of it” (*ench.* 114).

Order, time and change

Perhaps Augustine’s most revealing example of the divine working of good from evil is personal. Augustine’s life as recounted in the conversion story of the *Confessiones* is a case study of the process. In this work we can how Augustine sees his own life as an illustration of the way God makes good use of genuinely bad things, not only to produce a universal orderliness, but to heal the disorderliness of a individual human being. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Thompson 2006), God appears nowhere in the *Confessiones* as an on-stage character. He remains always behind the scenes. As Augustine narrates his story, however, God’s influence is evident in the way Augustine himself is nudged onto paths which happen to take him in the “right” direction; when he looks back on his life he can see how all paths led him to the garden, to the encounter with scripture, and to the decisive wrestling match with himself, and ultimately with God. These nudges are seldom, if ever, conventionally “supernatural” (there are no voices or visions; even the voice in the garden crying “*Tolle lege!*” is presented as entirely natural in origin). Even more significantly, the nudges are very often the genuinely sinful intentions either of himself, or of other people. (To underscore this principle, he also points out examples of this phenomenon in the lives of other Christians, like his mother.) But Augustine’s claim is not that God was using as a puppet either him or other people whose sins were agents of change, “making” them do what he, God, wants. Rather, in some mysterious way God *uses* what they all freely do to bring various individuals to the places where they might find him; “You secretly made use [*utebaris*] of both their perversities and my own” (*conf.* 5.8. 14); “you carried me away on my own [evil] desires so as to put an end to those desires” (5.8.15). Nevertheless, all the bad things these agents did were all their own, and so genuinely bad. To emphasize this Augustine continually characterizes the agents as *nesciens*, unwitting, of the good contribution they would make to plans not their own. The work of God was not in their evil desires or actions themselves, but in how these were woven into a good pattern – a pattern that is good *for someone*. In the case studies contained in the *Confessiones*, it is good for Augustine, and other

characters such as his mother and his friend Alypius (Thompson 2006, 47-8).

Of course, the *Confessiones* is about grace. Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that when Augustine claims that divine punishment allows us to learn something, he cannot mean (if he is consistent) that it does so all by itself, since fallenness is opposed to that kind of learning. I have presented evidence that the learning to which he refers, though it must *use* fallenness, comes when fallenness is healed. But even if I am wrong, and Augustine is indeed being inconsistent by ascribing real transformation to punishment alone, the very least we can say is that the remedial type of divine punishment is part of what we might call the “grace process.”

Augustine clearly thinks of grace in two dimensions. One is grace proper, which is received from God in a single transforming experience. For instance, in *Ad Simplicianum*, “the intellectual charter for the Confessions” (Brown 1967, 170), Augustine says that “a person begins to receive grace the moment when he begins to believe in God, being moved to faith by some internal or external admonition” (*Simpl.* 1.2.2). But the very argument of *Ad Simplicianum*, as well as the contemporaneous *Confessiones*, is that this moment is preceded by a long period of “calling” (*Simpl.* 2.2, 13) in which, as Augustine will later put it, God “prepares the will” (Augustine borrows the phrase from Proverbs 8:35) to receive it.¹¹ One vehicle of this preparation is the law. Another, in some way, is clearly the very condition from which God rescues humanity. The fact that the repair of the sinner involves a *process* means that the resolution of evil takes time.

The *Confessiones*, Augustine’s case study of the gradual restoration of the sinner, shows us that the orderly “picture” of the universe is a moving one: it is a story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The recounting of the story of Augustine’s life in that work is followed by three books recounting salvation history, from creation, to fall, to redemption and restoration. In Augustine’s view God is the author of these stories – even though human beings contribute many of the events that make up the story. As I show elsewhere, Augustine writes his own autobiography in such a way that not only two but three perspectives of his life are ingeniously interwoven. Only one of them is a *story* in the sense that all the events are organized – ordered – in such a way as to lead to the conclusion the author (God) has in mind. One perspective

¹¹See *corrept.* 2.18.30; *nat. et gr.* 63.75. Sage (1964) collects a large number of Augustine’s references to this text.

includes the reasons why Augustine thought he was doing things at the time he was doing them; another includes the “real” reasons he did these things – motivations he kept hidden from himself (or at least refused to pay attention to) even as he followed them. The third perspective is what God was doing in, through and around him as he acted so as to lead him inexorably to the decision in the garden. The conversion to which his own actions (and the actions of others) unwittingly lead him was not his own goal. God, he emphasizes in the *Confessiones*, was always in control even, in some sense, of Augustine’s sins (Thompson 2006: 41-51).

For Augustine, then, there are no isolated events. The proper perspective on all events is not that each one of them is “really” good when it is put in the illuminating frame of the whole, but that each event – even if evil in itself – is compelled by God to contribute to a good end. All events, including those brought about by human beings, are designed – or better, are fitted *into* a design by God – so as to *lead* somewhere, which is to say, to God himself. In a sense, then, the kind of order Augustine is defining here is not so very different from any other kind which allows changeable things to exist in the first place. In Chapter 2 we saw that anything changeable changes across space and time. But it is the way the points in space or the moments in time correspond with one another – the relationships between them – that makes a thing cohere as a whole. A temporal thing, Augustine tells us, is like a poem or even one line of a poem. The meaning of a poem is evident on the level of its individual syllables but only in the syllables as a group and only after they have been said. In a somewhat similar way, the life of the redeemed sinner is made into a single whole – or made whole – by God.

Augustine offers another illuminating comment on this process in the *Confessiones*. In letters accompanying gifts of copies of the work he asks the recipients, “join me in praising him whom I wanted to be praised on my account...for we have brought ourselves to ruin, and he who made us has made us new all over again” (*ep.* 231.6; cf. *ep.* 27.4). What has happened to him (and is still happening) is that the God who created him is still at work on him. But a consideration of what Augustine means by divine “punishment” has shown us that this “remaking” involves what the sinner himself does. Augustine writes much later in *De correptione et gratia* what could be a summary of his life as depicted in the *Confessiones*:

God makes all things work together for good – absolutely all things, even to this

extent, that if some [people] swerve and stray from the path, he makes their very wanderings contribute to their good, because they come back wiser and more humble...they learn that their rejoicing on this path ought to be with fear and trembling, and that they should not arrogantly rely on their own strength to remain on the right path. (*corrept.* 24)

Here we see clearly how, by means of the very condition Augustine so often identifies as punishment, a destructive act committed by a human being is turned into a creative act of God. Legal punishment – at least in its remedial form – is meant ultimately to show human beings precisely the truth underlying “natural” punishment: that human beings can only harm themselves by rejecting the source of their own existence.

But when it is a precursor to grace, punishment is a means to a much greater realization than that merely of the sinner’s weakness. This is only a stepping stone to the vision of God himself. God’s ultimate aim in using suffering as a punishment is to reveal who he is. In this sense, I argue, Augustine considers redeeming punishment an *admonitio*.¹² As I have argued elsewhere, *admonitio* for Augustine is virtually a technical term; it provides a link between Augustine’s theory of grace and his theory of learning (2006, 51-53). The term is one of the few clues in *Ad Simplicianum* about how grace works (we are moved to faith through *admonitio*, 1.2.2). In the *Confessiones*, Augustine is *admonished* through the books of the Platonists to seek Truth (*conf.* 7.10.16), and Anthony (one of Augustine’s role models) is *admonished* by a Gospel reading to turn to God (8.12.29). The English transliteration, to admonish, connotes chastisement, and in the *Confessiones*, this is indeed part of what admonishment effectively does. But the term has for Augustine a much broader connotation: it signifies divine activity in the mind which makes *use* of earthly experience, inert in itself, to carry the mind beyond the experience to the ground of all experience. In Augustine’s early texts like *De magistro* and Book 1 of *De libero arbitrio*, “admonishment” abbreviates Augustine’s conviction that *all* learning requires divine involvement in the mind. Human teaching can only “*admonish*” us; it cannot present truths to our minds (*mag.* 36). The attention of the mind must be carried to truth by God’s illumination. God “*admonishes* outwardly and teaches inwardly” (*lib. arb.* 2.14).

Admonitio in Augustine’s thought, therefore, may be considered as a general principle

¹²For more on the importance of *admonitio*, as well as references to Stoic antecedents for the term, see C. Harrison (2006, 242-244), Van Fleteren (1990, 67), and O’Donnell (1992: vol. II, 438).

descriptive of how God works in creation. In this sense, remedial punishment is its star instance. God takes what human beings do and works it into an orderly whole, by which human beings – some of them are least – are “carried” to him. By itself punishment only shows us *that* we lack. Grace shows us why we lack, and then what we lack. “For they fled away, so that they might not see you who see them always, and that, being blinded they might stumble on you, for you forsake nothing you have made” (*conf.* 5.2.2).

Concluding Remarks

I began this dissertation by acknowledging several denunciations of Augustine's conviction that all suffering is the result of punishment. Commentators like Thomas Allin and N.P. Williams think that Augustine's view is narrow and backward looking, obsessed with punishment for its own sake. Even Burnaby, who generally thinks Augustine's eudaimonism has great merit, rejects the idea of divinely inflicted suffering as a redundant accretion culled from the all-pervasive Roman law. I hope I have demonstrated that, whether one agrees with Augustine or not, his theory of suffering as punishment is neither simplistic nor shallow. This is shown, if by nothing else, by the many and varied Augustinian themes we have had to mine in our attempt to analyse what Augustine means by punishment.

This holds for both the natural and the legal accounts which have been found to contain depths that might not be evident on a superficial examination of their basic mechanisms. For instance, we found that the natural account could only be coherently presented by seeing the effects of sin as the opposites of the effects of the love of God; and this led us to see the effects of sin as an implication of the way reality itself is built. This kind of presentation also revealed that Augustine has *reasons* for asserting that these experiences are the effects of sin, beyond their mere unpleasantness. If human beings depend on God for everything – and to depend on God for order or form *is* to depend on him for everything – then everything, body *and* soul, will be deleteriously affected by their turning away from God, including their ability to turn back. This lent the wide variety of afflictions a kind of coherence. Is Augustine a “penologist par excellence”? Perhaps so, if we mean by this only that from the vantage point of the punishment of sin all the fundamentals of his anthropology and metaphysics can be unfolded.

Perhaps more surprising, however, is the substance that lies behind the legal account, which has proven to carry far more weight than one might expect, certainly beyond what most commentators allow. On the surface it is merely the claim that God sees behaviour he does not approve of and in response inflicts suffering on the offender to make his disapproval felt. In fact, we have found that Augustine goes well beyond this simplistic conception. Rather, the legal account is the expression of Augustine's conviction that universal order is unassailable; even the

degradation that the natural account describes must follow rules, and since the author of all rules is God, God is at work even when he is rejected. But this is not simply because God is creator and so whatever happens in his world is his will. Rather the way things unfold reflects what he *is*: a simple unity, of which orderliness – including even the laws governing suffering – is a changeable imitation.

This, we found, was the basis for the ambiguity of Augustine’s language about who causes fallenness. Is it the sinner? Is it God? Is it *not* God? The answer to all three questions is yes, depending on the angle from which we view the event. The sinner causes sin, and so he causes the privation of that goodness with which God wants to provide him. But the fact that this privation follows from sin – and the way in which it follows – is subject to order and to the source of all order. More profoundly, God can use this order to teach the sinner something both about himself and about God, and thus reorder the sinner himself.

Still, the very word “punishment” surely helps to obscure these layers in the legal account. Perhaps the best way to conclude this study is by asking what work the very notion of punishment does in Augustine’s account of suffering. It is interesting to consider what might have been lost (in Augustine’s view, anyway) if he had abandoned the word “punishment.” Why, for instance, does he not replace the word with “consequence” or (in the case of those who will be saved) “correction”? The facile answer is that Augustine cannot apply an anachronistic concern to himself; he is simply not squeamish about the word punishment, as we are. But beyond this, punishment expresses something essential to Augustine’s understanding of the cosmos as a *creation*, as an expression of God’s will. “Punishment” presumes intentionality; and for Augustine, as we noted in the last chapter, there are no mere consequences, things that happen mechanically simply because mindless causes produce them. God “has the causes of all that exists in his hands” (*civ. Dei* 7.30); all are ordered so as to make up integrated wholes. In a way, then, to call suffering a punishment is to give meaning to that suffering.

We must be careful here. For whom is it meaningful and in what sense? Augustine’s detractors have devalued his view of suffering as punishment precisely by suggesting that it is a perverse attempt to find meaning in the meaningless. For example, Elaine Pagels ascribes the historical longevity of Augustine’s theory to the fact that “people would rather feel guilty than

helpless” (Pagels 1988, 146):

Augustine assures the sufferer that pain is unnatural, death an enemy, alien intruders upon normal human existence, and thus he addresses the deep human longing to be free of pain. But he also assures us that suffering is neither without meaning nor without specific cause. Both the cause and the meaning of suffering, as he sees it, lie in the sphere of *moral choice*, not *nature*. If guilt is the price to be paid for the illusion of control over nature...many people have seemed willing to pay it.¹ (147, Pagels’ emphases)

Pagels’ point here is closely allied to her view that “Augustine...denies the existence of nature *per se* – of nature as the natural scientists have taught us to perceive it – for he cannot think of the natural world except as a reflection of human desire and will. Where there is suffering, there must have been evil and guilt” (1988, 134; cf.148-149). There are some clear distortions as well as unreasonable expectations of Augustine’s views in these comments; but there is also a kernel of truth. First, the distortions: *Of course* Augustine does not view nature as a mindlessly unfolding and morally neutral field of causes. No thinker of antiquity does. Pagels also neglects the fact that he is nevertheless interested in the law-abiding patterns according to which nature unfolds; these patterns remain unchanging whether human beings like it or not (as we have seen, the effects of sin are grounded in the sinner’s violation of his own nature). This means that for Augustine part of the agony of the fallen condition is precisely that those afflicted by it are helpless; far from providing the illusion of control, Augustine’s depiction of the human condition emphasizes that suffering *is* haphazard. And while he would certainly not dispute that people desire to be free from pain, he also thinks they wish to be free from sin and find themselves unable.

¹Babcock engages in a more nuanced version of the same kind of psychologizing in his paper on Augustine’s early interpretation, in *De libero arbitro*, of suffering as punishment for sin. Babcock tries to illuminate Augustine’s motives by referring to a poem by Paulinus of Nola, in which one of the poet’s friends, Theridius, accidentally blinds himself. Theridius prays for assistance to his patron saint, first apologizing for whatever great sin he has committed so as to deserve this misfortune. Says Babcock, this is not an expression of “an over-active sense of guilt,” but rather “an attempt to bring the accidental within a pattern of meaning. The accidental is quintessentially senseless. It just happens, without rhyme or reason, and for just this reason, when the accidental is evil, represents evil unordered and uncontrolled, evil as a purely random factor, untamed and striking where it will without design or cause or purpose. And it leaves those whom it strikes utterly helpless; for what help can there be against the random, the senseless, the purposeless, the uninterpretable? Against this backdrop of this question, we can see the point of Theridius’ prayer. It serves the purpose of drawing the accidental into the realm of meaning and thus of cancelling its random character. It locates evil in the realm of the action and interaction of moral agents, and in this realm Theridius is not helpless: he knows what to do, and what he does makes sense” (1993, 243-244).

But the kernel of truth in Pagels' remarks is that in the universe as Augustine conceives it there are indeed no "meaningless" events. The "meaning" conferred to suffering by its status as a punishment is best considered in the light of its most extreme case. We have noted a number of times that Augustine believes on the basis of scripture and experience that not everyone is saved, so that punishment is not corrective in every or even most cases. The reasons why God should choose to save only some sinners are inscrutable, Augustine ultimately decides, but we must not doubt that God is just (*Simpl.* 1.2.16). We have seen that the existence of disordered human beings does not besmirch God's universe because their disorder proceeds in an orderly way; but what about the fact that for some sinners punishment becomes eternal? Those who are not saved by grace suffer forever in a state called hell. What meaning can this kind of suffering have – suffering with no possible reprieve and no redemptive quality?

The eternity of punishment does not in itself appear to bother Augustine or strike him as disproportionate to the sin it follows. Responding to the objection that eternal punishment seems too harsh a punishment for Adam's sin he says that this sin "merits eternal evil because a man destroyed in himself a good that might have been eternal" (*civ. Dei* 21.12). His point seems to be that if eternal bliss is rejected the result is eternal misery. "The supreme death of the soul is alienation from the life of God in an eternity of punishment" (*civ. Dei* 6.12). Hell is where the full significance of having turned away from God is finally revealed. It is the culmination of a process, the end point of the path on which the sinner set himself during his life. For both the damned and the saved "what they most love in this life is completed for them after this life"; thus the sufferings of hell happen not because "[sinners] love these woes, but because the things they loved were the beginnings of these woes and necessarily bring them to this plight" (*vera rel.* 53.103-105).

There is in this suffering a kind of meaning, though not in a particularly consoling or even personal sense. Putting together what Augustine says about hell with what he says about punishment as order, we can infer that the damned "have" God, too – though certainly not in the sense that the blessed have him. I have suggested that for Augustine suffering is the experience of disorder. But in another sense, Augustine's legal account implies that suffering is also the experience of *order*. "The wretched as wretched are not in a state of peace [that is, order]. Still

because their wretchedness is deserved and just, they cannot be outside the scope of order. They are not indeed with the blessed, yet it is by the law of order that they are sundered from them” (*civ. Dei* 19.13). Here Augustine reiterates the idea that *order* demands that the rejection of God necessarily entails misery, or disorder. Pain is the experience of the human will coming up against that which is wholly other, which will not yield to it but before which it must yield. Affliction is the necessity of things impinging on the human soul and body. But “*God* is the necessity of things”: order is the reflection of his unchangeableness. To encounter order in this sense is therefore to encounter, if not God, then an implication of who God is. Hell may be separation from God, but in another sense God is inescapable. “Where does [the sinner] find your law but in his own punishment? Your law is the truth, and you are the Truth” (*conf.* 4.9). Augustine’s tag from *De ordine* – “order is that which will lead us to God” (*ord.* 1.4.27) – can be interpreted in more than one way.

On the other hand, remedial punishment has meaning in the more conventional sense. For the saved sinner it leads somewhere away from itself. Augustine’s theory of punishment, especially in its remedial variety, turns out to be never very far from his teaching on grace, and his views on grace are an extension of the idea that all creation is derivative, given by God. Although this is not the place for a discussion of Augustine’s Christology, there is one aspect of it that shows in a single stroke that Augustine’s view of punishment is not merely “forensic,” but that he is, above all, concerned with where suffering may lead the sufferer. This is that God gives himself over to suffering in order to further that end.

Man can be cured of the universal sickness of sin, which stems from Adam’s fall, only by drinking the bitter cup, the cup of temptations, wherein this life abounds, the cup of tribulation, anguish, and sufferings...And that the sick man may not answer, ‘I cannot, I cannot bear it, I will not drink;’ the physician all whole though he may be, drinks first, that the sick man may not hesitate to drink. (*s.* 88.7)

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