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AUGUSTINE

On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY
PETER KING
University of Toronto

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Introduction

Life and times

Augustine was born on November 13, 354, to a family of hereditary curial rank, in Thagaste (modern Suq Ahras in Algeria) during the latter days of the western Roman Empire. Christianity was the official state religion, but other religions were still tolerated and practiced; Augustine seems to have received at least a nominal Christian upbringing. He was formally educated at Thagaste, Madaura, and Carthage to be a rhetorician, one of the few professions that allowed upward social mobility. Once his education was complete, Augustine taught rhetoric in Carthage and Rome, eventually securing the post of official rhetorician to the imperial city of Milan in 384 – the very year in which the Emperor Theodosius prohibited pagan worship and made Christianity the only religion of the Empire. While resident in Milan, Augustine attended the sermons of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, and became a catechumen in the Catholic Church. In the latter part of 386, Augustine chose to embrace Catholicism wholeheartedly (which he describes as a kind of "conversion"), and he subsequently resigned his post as rhetorician. To make ends meet he took on private students and began to write and publish dialogues and treatises. Augustine was formally baptized in a public ceremony by Ambrose himself on Holy Saturday, April 24, 387. Returning to Africa, he founded a religious community in Thagaste. On a trip to Hippo (modern Annaba in Algeria) in 391, he was acclaimed priest, and in 395 he became Bishop of Hippo. Shortly thereafter Augustine wrote his *Confessions*, which, among other things, describes his spiritual odyssey to the Catholic faith.

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Augustine remained a bishop for the rest of his life, dividing his time between pastoral duties, theological controversies, research, and writing. The influence of his pastoral and episcopal duties is clearly evident in his writings, above all in his attempt to create a unified Catholic Church: politically, in his polemical campaigns against the Manichaeans, the Donatists, and the Pelagians; doctrinally, in his efforts to understand and clarify the Trinity, Original Sin, predestination, salvation, and grace. Augustine's thoughts on these matters shaped the future of the Church.

Yet while Augustine was pursuing political and doctrinal unity within the Church, the world into which he had been born was coming to an end. In 410, Rome was sacked by Alaric and the Visigoths, a shocking event that caused many to question the adoption of Christianity by the Roman state; Augustine's response was his massive *The City of God*, in which he argued that the community of the faithful should not be concerned with the events of this world. Yet, in 429, the Vandals invaded Africa, and by May of 430 had reached Hippo and put the city, with Augustine inside, under siege. Augustine died on August 28 (celebrated as his feast day) while the city was still besieged. The siege of Hippo ended shortly after his death, in 431; by 437 the Vandals had annexed Carthage, and by 442 an independent Vandal kingdom covered all of North Africa, Corsica, and southern Sicily.

Augustine's intellectual development

Augustine had no formal philosophical training. From Cicero's *Hortensius* he absorbed not only a passion for wisdom and the drive to live his life according to fundamental principles, but also a distrust of the narrow sectarianism that characterized the philosophical schools of late Antiquity. He therefore chose not to align himself with any school, but to pursue philosophy as a syncretistic amateur, taking truth wherever he might find it. In practice, this meant that Augustine's initial knowledge of philosophy was derived from the authors he studied in the course of his rhetorical education, Cicero and Seneca above all, in an eclectic mix heavily influenced by Stoic doctrines. Most of these doctrines Augustine knew in their non-technical popular forms: the unity of the virtues, the rule of reason over the emotions, the identification of virtue and happiness, strength of character as a defense against the vicissitudes of fortune. Yet he occasionally shows some knowledge of the more technical

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aspects of Stoic philosophy. For instance, in *On the Free Choice of the Will* 3.25.74.255–3.25.76.264 Augustine speaks of the mind accepting or rejecting the impressions with which it is presented in the course of sensory experience – fundamental points of Stoic doctrine, which he handles correctly.

A question that "hounded" Augustine when he was young, as he tells us in *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.2.4.10, was how a benevolent Deity could permit there to be evil in the world – the philosophical Problem of Evil (discussed in more detail below). Augustine was not satisfied with the traditional philosophical answers, nor with what he took to be the Christian response. Instead, he found the most intellectually satisfactory answer to be given by an illegal gnostic sect, the Manichaeans, who claimed to have uncovered the rational core of religion, to be successively revealed to its disciples as they progressed through various stages of purification and enlightenment. (A further attraction of Manichaeanism for Augustine was that it presented itself as an "improved" version of Christianity, allowing Augustine to maintain some continuity with his nominal religious upbringing.) According to the Manichaeans, there are two fundamental and equal opposed principles in the world: the good principle, manifest in Light; the evil principle, manifest in Darkness. Each is material, as is the world itself, and their struggle gives the world its structure. Human beings are themselves products of the Light, but have been partly corrupted by Darkness. As a result, they properly belong to the Light, and should strive to "return" to it through moral purification. Human beings are the paradigmatic battleground for the conflict of Light and Darkness, a fact reflected in the presence of both good and evil impulses within the human soul. The cosmic struggle between Light and Darkness is played out in miniature within each human being. This is possible because everything, including the human soul, is material, and hence able to be affected by the fundamental principles, Light being very fine particles and Darkness being coarse particles. In short, the Manichaeans were metaphysical and moral dualists who explained evil in the world by the presence of both a benevolent Deity and a malevolent Deity. Augustine found the depth and the comprehensiveness of the Manichaean system persuasive, and he was an active adherent for a decade or so. The Manichaeans helped Augustine promote his career, providing him with contacts in Italy and using their influence to have him win the post of imperial rhetorician in Milan.

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In the end, however, Augustine became disillusioned with Manichaeanism, as he tells us in his *Confessions*. It was not because of its answer to the Problem of Evil – that seems to have been what Augustine held on to the longest – but because its claims to comprehensiveness led the Manichaeans to make false claims in astronomy and elsewhere, a fact Augustine found particularly galling since, in his opinion, there was no need to make such claims in the first place. His dissatisfaction with the Manichaean system left Augustine with no systematic answers to his philosophical difficulties. For a period of time he entertained the possibility that there might be no answers, or at least no answers that we can know. This was more than mere despair; Augustine found an intellectual stance ready for him to adopt in (Academic) skepticism, known to him primarily through Cicero's dialogue *The Academicians*. In addition to a wide array of arguments against dogmatic pretensions to knowledge, Augustine also found in skepticism a discussion and defense of the view that the search for knowledge is itself intellectually rewarding and valuable, and that "knowledge" itself might be understood as a dynamic process rather than a static (and perhaps secret) doctrine available only to initiates, as the Manichaeans held. Although Augustine adopted skepticism for only a few years at most, it shaped his later thinking more than he was ready to admit.

The most important philosophical influence on Augustine was not skepticism, though, but rather late neoplatonism. In his *Confessions*, he tells us how an unnamed source gave him some "books of the Platonists" to read – exactly which texts are a matter of ongoing scholarly dispute – and how the experience was an intellectual revelation to him, an experience that so profoundly moved him it changed the way he understood the world like nothing since the *Hortensius*. For one thing, Augustine tells us that it was from neoplatonism that he learned the distinction between the material and the immaterial, and how to conceive properly of the latter. (Augustine was not unusual in this regard; a similar experience is recorded by Justin Martyr.) The arguments and the doubts so effectively raised by the skeptics, as well as the errors of the Manichaeans, were confined to the realm of the material and physical, and simply did not address the kind of knowledge accessible by the mind directly. With the gates opened thereby to a form of knowledge impervious to skeptical doubt, Augustine readily adopted neoplatonic metaphysics, according to which reality is fundamentally hierarchical, structured by three primary

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cosmological principles: One/Being, Mind/Intelligence, and Soul/Life, which operate as a threefold unity with respect to the rest of the world, the product of its creative "overflow." The relations among these three principles are necessary and eternal, and, at bottom, indescribable, since the One/Being exceeds Mind/Intelligence, and is therefore ineffable. But certain things can be known about their internal relations; Plotinus, for instance, describes the first principle, One/Being, as the "Father" of the second principle, Mind/Intelligence, which it generates (and is therefore its "Son"); the third principle, Soul/Life, follows thereafter. That reality is structured by these three principles in this manner was a claim supported by extensive detailed argument, in a long tradition of Platonist metaphysics. This intelligible world is accessible to human minds, who try to ascend to the One as their goal – unreachable by the logical mind alone, which must transcend mere Being/Intelligence to attain its ineffable union with the One. At the other end of reality we find things that share least in the ultimate principles. They have less being, and are "scattered," taking less part in unity; matter is the least real kind of being, on this account. Since everything that exists, no matter how tenuously, is derived from the One, evil is not itself a positive force in neoplatonism. It is not, strictly speaking, a being at all, but instead a kind of lack of being, an absence or deprivation of what ought to be present, as blindness is the lack of vision in the eyes.

Augustine accepted the sophisticated and powerful metaphysics at the center of late neoplatonism, but he found philosophical shortcomings in its ethical views, broadly speaking. The key ethical point in neoplatonism is the return to the One, in which humans can hope to lose themselves in a mystical ecstasy. The way in which the return to the One is accomplished, though, was generally thought to depend on passing through a series of intermediate stages, in each case engaging in theurgical ritual practices meant to propitiate the daemon resident at each stage. Augustine thought that this view could not succeed, because there cannot be anything that is genuinely "intermediate" between finite being and the radically transcendent One. Instead, what is needed is something that bridges the gap not by being halfway between the human and the divine, but by being simultaneously human and divine – a Mediator, as Augustine calls it. Furthermore, while neoplatonism is clear that the human soul suffers a "fall" away from the One, necessitating its struggle to return, there is no clear account of why this fall takes place. Augustine saw that the

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explanation of the fall should be logically tied to the possibility of ascent, and combined this with his long-standing worries about evil, to arrive at his first theoretical understanding of Christianity.

For Augustine, Christianity was the *true* philosophy, a clear philosophical improvement on pagan neoplatonism. The neoplatonic triad of principles was straightforwardly assimilated to the Trinity, whose internal relations are necessary and eternal and whose relation to the rest of Creation is contingent. God the Trinity is ineffable, as was the neoplatonic triad of principles, and it is the goal of human striving. The fall of human souls away from the divine is the result of Original Sin (a term coined by Augustine), and the upward ascent to the divine is a matter of "overcoming" sin through Jesus Christ the Mediator, at once human and divine, Whose incarnation makes possible human redemption through grace. These are not mere dogmas of faith, but philosophically defensible views that offer solutions to problems that pagan neoplatonism was not able to solve. Hence Christianity is Platonist philosophy perfected.

Christianity provided Augustine with the philosophical system he had been looking for. The central mysteries of the faith made it possible to advance in the understanding of Christian doctrine without ever exhausting it, and this is how Augustine spent the rest of his life after his dramatic "conversion" to Christianity in 386. In the first flush of his enthusiasm he wrote a series of treatises, for the most part dialogues, which explore the intellectual content of Christian faith as responding to standard philosophical questions: skepticism (*Against the Academicians*), the nature of happiness (*The Happy Life*), the nature of reality (*On Order*), the immortality of the soul (*Soliloquies*, *The Greatness of the Soul*, *The Immortality of the Soul*), the possibility of knowledge (*The Teacher*), and the problem of evil (*On the Free Choice of the Will*). After Augustine became a priest, and thereafter a bishop, pastoral and doctrinal concerns dominated his thinking, so that, instead of taking his cue from standard philosophical questions, he would begin with questions posed by faith and then address them with philosophical methods and arguments. From the mysteries of the Trinity (*The Trinity*) to the community of the faithful in this life (*The City of God*), Augustine devoted his efforts to philosophical explorations of Christianity. Along the way he produced a rich stream of textual commentaries and exegesis, sermons, and occasional treatises provoked by inquiries or by controversy. In the end, Augustine wrote some 5 million

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words that survive from the period after his "conversion": approximately 120 treatises, 300 letters, and 500 sermons.

Augustine formulated some of his most subtle and original doctrines when confronted by views with which he disagreed. Manichaeanism he saw as an intellectual challenge to Christianity, and he wrote several works directed against it: *Against Faustus the Manichaean*, *The Analysis of "Genesis" Against the Manichaeans*, *The Nature of the Good*, *Against the Fundamental Epistle of the Manichaeans*, to name only a few. Donatism, a social movement within the African Church concerning the issue of sacerdotal purity, absorbed Augustine's energies for many years and led him to reflect on the proper role played by the Church as a social institution, an offshoot of his new pastoral vocation. But without a doubt the most sophisticated challenge Augustine had to confront was the movement inspired by the British monk Pelagius, beginning in the early 400s.

Pelagius was what now would be called a "moral perfectionist" – he thought that humans could attain virtue and the good life by their own efforts, making moral progress towards their goal, "perfecting" themselves. After all, Pelagius reasoned, God would not command us to improve ourselves were it not possible to do so – a version of the "*ought* implies *can*" principle. It follows that the opposition between the spirit and the flesh is not irreconcilable; that blaming "human nature" for shortcomings or faults is bad faith; that infants, who do not yet have a will, cannot sin and therefore are not in immediate need of baptism; that God redeems individuals in proportion to their deserts. Pelagius and his followers, notably Caelestius and Julian of Eclanum, offered systematic defenses of these views, which many found appealing and persuasive.

Augustine did not. Instead, he found "Pelagianism" to be a pernicious and dangerous doctrine, because he understood it to deny the need for God's grace in human salvation. That is, he thought that Original Sin effectively made it impossible for postlapsarian human beings to attain virtue in this life, so that direct divine assistance was the only hope we could have for the good life. Human nature was itself damaged in Original Sin, leaving all human beings with an irreconcilable opposition of spirit and flesh, its stain found even in newborn infants as children of Adam (and hence in immediate need of baptism). The deepest of the Pelagian errors, according to Augustine, was the view that God's grace is proportional to individual deserts, which fails to recognize the extent to

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which human beings are now incapable of genuine deserts on their own, as well as the pure gratuitousness of God's bestowal of grace.

Unlike Manichaeanism, Pelagianism was not generally taken to be heretical. It was a movement born within the Church, the expression of a different view about how Christian doctrine should be interpreted. It was not clearly opposed to orthodoxy. Augustine therefore had to argue against what he took to be the mistaken views about grace at the heart of the Pelagian movement, and in addition to convince people that Pelagianism was not merely a different view but a dangerous heresy. He carried out the former in a series of works, notably *Deserts and the Forgiveness of Sins*, *Perfection and Human Righteousness*, *The Spirit and the Letter*, *Nature and Grace*, *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, and his two works *Against Julian*. Augustine accomplished the latter through some complex and rather shabby political maneuvers, eventually securing papal and imperial decrees against certain aspects of Pelagianism. The result was not what he had foreseen. The defenders of Pelagianism took refuge in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, where the decrees were not considered to have binding force, and continued to argue their case from exile. Nevertheless, the impetus of Pelagianism in the western part of the Roman Empire had been effectively curbed, although not all of Augustine's positions were adopted as authoritative.

Augustine continued his polemics against the Pelagians in their exile, and also against what he considered worrisome Pelagian "tendencies" in the western part of the Roman Empire, until the Vandal siege of Hippo effectively cut him off from the rest of the world. It was his last doctrinal controversy, and he left in its wake a sophisticated and subtle theory of grace.

Works

The works translated here deal with two major themes in Augustine's thought: will and grace. Each is central to explaining and understanding human responsibility. On the one hand, free will enables human beings to make their own choices, and hence is tied to the possibility of evil as well as the possibility of good. On the other hand, God's grace is required for human choices to be efficacious, though its active assistance does not go so far as to cancel human responsibility. The difficult task of reconciling free will with God's grace occupied Augustine for much of his life.

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Augustine wrote *On the Free Choice of the Will* in two stages. Book 1 was written in 387–388, not long after his "conversion" to Christianity, while he and his friend Evodius (his interlocutor in the dialogue) were waiting in Rome for the weather to clear to return to Africa after the death of Augustine's mother, Monica, in Ostia. Books 2–3, and perhaps some revisions to Book 1, were written after Augustine was acclaimed a priest in Hippo in 391. The work as a whole was finished by 395, when Augustine sent a copy to Paulinus of Nola (*Letters* 31.7). In the annotated catalog of his written works he drew up shortly before his death, Augustine says only that the impetus for *On the Free Choice of the Will* was to "inquire through argument into the origin of evil" (*Reconsiderations* 1.9.1). Clearly one of his motives was to show that Christianity had a reply to the Problem of Evil that was philosophically better than the dualist response of the Manichaeans.

The other main selections translated here were written much later and concentrate on grace: *On Grace and Free Choice* (426–427), *On Reprimand and Grace* (426–427), and *On the Gift of Perseverance* (428–429). The first two were written in response to a situation that had arisen among the monks of a monastery at Hadrumetum (modern Sousse in Tunisia). Some of the brothers had been reading Augustine's *Letters* 194 against the Pelagians. From their reading they concluded that there was little scope for human free will – indeed, so little scope that when one of their number misbehaved, they insisted that the proper response was not to reprimand him but instead to pray to God to set the errant brother straight, since God's direct action is necessary to change anyone's behavior: a confession of human weakness. In response, Augustine wrote *On Grace and Free Choice*, and then *On Reprimand and Grace*, to correct the misreadings of these brothers. Addressed to Valentine, the abbot of Hadrumetum, they were meant to be circulated and read by all the members of the monastic community there and elsewhere. The third, *On the Gift of Perseverance*, from which excerpts are translated here, was written for monks in Provence (mainly in Marseilles and Lérins) who had drawn fatalist conclusions from the doctrine of predestination: If God long ago has already selected those who will be saved and those who will be damned, either at the Creation or at the beginning of the human race, they reasoned, then it cannot make any difference what we do, since God's verdict has already been passed. Again, Augustine's response was meant to be circulated and read widely.

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Augustine's writings differ in literary style and genre depending on the audiences to which they are addressed. *On the Free Choice of the Will* and the *Confessions* were written for the educated elite of the late Roman Empire. Nominally Christian since the Edict of Milan in 313, this class was steeped in the culture of its classical past, and would have been as attentive to literary style and presentation as to philosophical content, if not more so. Augustine therefore chose to write *On the Free Choice of the Will* as a dialogue – an "open" literary format which invites the reader to become a participant in the discussion – and to make little appeal to Christian doctrine until Book 3, aiming rather at the cultivated intellectuals who were used to reading Cicero's philosophical dialogues for edification. Likewise, the *Confessions* is in its own way a dialogue, namely a dialogue between Augustine and God, meant to be "overheard" by the reader. Here biblical quotation and allusion are common, with the aim of showing that the Bible could sustain as rich a depth of context and meaning as the classical pagan texts it was meant to replace; in essence, Augustine made a literary use of the Bible.

By contrast, the works *On Grace and Free Choice*, *On Reprimand and Grace*, and *On the Gift of Perseverance* were written not for general consumption but instead for devout monastic communities, deeply engaged with the nuances of Christian doctrine. They are shot through with doctrinal details and biblical exegesis, as befits their audience. Augustine appears here, as he does in *On the Free Choice of the Will* Book 3 (and in the latter parts of most of his dialogues), as the voice of orthodox doctrine. Aimed at devout monks unaccustomed to theological speculation for the most part, Augustine is sensitive to monastic practices as well as to subtleties of doctrine. Here the Bible is treated as the ultimate fount of Christian belief, in which declarations and pronouncements of doctrine appear in a literary context that is the background vehicle for their presentation.

Despite these literary differences, Augustine's focus in the works translated here is always on the complex set of issues that are involved in human responsibility.

Will

For Augustine, the key to moral action is found in the agent's possession and exercise of free will – the psychological faculty of choice and volition, the existence of which Augustine demonstrates in *On the Free Choice of*

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the Will 1.12.25.82. Although God alone is completely free, angels and human beings have free will. Just as our minds can transcend the mere sensible world and rise to the contemplation of eternal truths, so too our wills can transcend the natural order and are able to resist all external influences.

Augustine spells out his basic conception of the will in three theses. First, he holds that we are responsible only for acts done out of free choice. As early as *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.1.1.3 Augustine declares that freedom is a necessary condition for the ascription of moral responsibility. It may not be sufficient; other circumstances, such as ignorance of some relevant circumstances, might absolve a free agent of responsibility. But it is at least necessary. This view is widely shared among philosophers, even today.

Second, the will is completely self-determining, or, as Augustine puts the point in 1.12.26.86 and 3.3.7.27, "what is so much in the power of the will as the will itself?" On pain of infinite regress, there cannot be any prior cause or ground that determines the will in its free choices. The freedom involved in free choice must therefore be a radical freedom, such that nothing whatever can determine its choice, including its own nature.

Third, we are responsible for not having a good will, since it is within our power to have one. Augustine proves in two stages that anyone has the power to have a good will. First, he shows that a mind that is properly "in order" (with reason in control) can easily have a good will (*On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.10.20.71–1.11.21.76). Second, and more difficult, is to show that even a disorderly mind, one that is not entirely in control of itself – the more common situation, and the one in which Augustine finds himself in *Confessions* 8.9.21 – is able to have a good will; this is the burden of his "treatise on the good will" (1.11.23.79–1.13.29.97).

The topic of *On the Free Choice of the Will*, the context in which these theses are articulated and defended, is explicitly concerned with the nature of responsibility. Augustine raises the issue in connection with the traditional Problem of Evil, which asks how God's existence can be reconciled with the presence of evil in the world. More exactly, the Problem of Evil holds that the following three claims cannot all be true:

(1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and purely good.
(2) Someone good will eliminate any evil that can be eliminated.
(3) There is at least one case of genuine moral evil in the world.

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There is nothing problematic in [1], which states a straightforward and widely accepted version of theism. Note, however, that the elimination of evil mentioned in [2] is a weaker requirement than the prevention of evil: Firefighters should put out whatever fires exist, but firefighters who set fires for the simple pleasure of then putting them out are less good than firefighters who do not do so, and indeed who try to prevent fires as well as put out whatever fires exist. (The stronger version of [2] that insists on prevention is not taken into account by Augustine.) Finally, the restriction to *moral* evil in [3] is important: Augustine does not discuss cases of so-called "natural evil" such as the suffering and misery produced by earthquakes, tidal waves, disease, and the like, which arguably might not impugn the goodness of God. Nor does [3] require that evil be widespread, or part of human nature, or even very bad. It is enough that there be at least one instance of an eliminable moral evil in the world to challenge the existence of a benign and powerful Deity. Since [2] and [3] seem unassailable as given, it looks as though [1] has to be given up.

Augustine's strategy is to reject, or at least to modify, [2]. It is the classic statement of what has come to be known as "the Free Will Defense" to the Problem of Evil. Augustine holds that:

(4) Every case of genuine moral evil in the world stems from the voluntary choices of free agents.
(5) Since God bestowed free choice of the will on human beings unconditionally, He ought not, and hence He does not, interfere with its exercise.
(6) It is better for there to be a world in which there are beings with free choice of the will, even at the cost of genuine moral evil, than a world in which there is neither.

Taken together, Augustine thinks that [4]–[6] restrict the scope of [2] as follows:

(2*) Someone good will eliminate any evil that it is morally permissible to eliminate.

Since God gave free will unconditionally, He has morally bound Himself not to interfere with its exercise, as [5] declares, and thus is not obliged in all cases to eliminate any evil that can be eliminated; if anything, God is obliged not to interfere with human free choice. Furthermore, [2*] is plausible on its own merits; no one should be obligated to do something

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morally impermissible. God of course "can" do so, in the sense that He has the power to do so, but He does not permit Himself to – a fact that Augustine takes to be sufficient as a response to the Problem of Evil.

Much of Book 1 is given over to Augustine's defense of [4], the claim that genuine moral evil stems from human free choice (dramatically recognized in the excerpt from *Confessions* 7.3.5). A key part of his argument is to show that free choices must be uncompelled, and hence are "authored" by the agent – they originate in the agent, who is responsible for them, a conclusion drawn explicitly in 1.11.21.76. Augustine's argument is the proof of the third thesis articulated above, that a good will is accessible to any moral agent.

In Book 2, Augustine defends [1] and [6]. His argument for the existence of God takes us the farthest afield from the will. Briefly, Augustine's argument exploits an analogy between perception and thought. Just as we believe that a sensible object exists because it is publicly accessible to our distinct individual senses – you and I can both see it – so too we should conclude that an "intelligible" object exists because it is publicly accessible to our distinct individual minds, in that you and I can both conceive it. This intelligible object is truth, that is, eternal and necessary truth of the sort exemplified in mathematics. What is more, we have to conform our minds to such truths when we conceive of them. We understand mathematical truths only when we recognize that their truth is independent of our minds, and likewise objective, not a matter of dispute or individual opinion. Mathematical truths are true whatever we may think about them, no matter how much we might want them to be otherwise. Augustine thus concludes that truth is "higher" than our minds. Hence something higher than our minds exists, which either is or is a part of God.

Given the nature of free will, Augustine takes [5] to be implicit in the proof of [6]. In Book 2, he derives [6] from two other claims:

(6*a*) All things *qua* good come from God.
(6*b*) Free will is one such good thing.

Briefly, his argument for [6*a*] turns on the claim that all things in the world are disposed in accordance with mathematical laws. Augustine in fact holds a stronger claim, namely that things exist only to the extent that they "are numbered" by eternal (mathematical) truths, which must come from God. To articulate his position, Augustine puts forward

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and separately argues for three subsidiary claims, in perhaps the most abstruse section of *On the Free Choice of the Will*: (*a*) things exist only to the extent that they have form; (*b*) the forms of things are governed by number; (*c*) eternal laws must derive from something eternal. The conjunction of (*a*)–(*c*), Augustine maintains, entails [6*a*].

Augustine's argument for [6*b*], in contrast, turns on the straightforward idea that free will is itself good because it allows a certain kind of good, namely moral good, to exist in the world. Without free will, there cannot be any moral goodness. Now moral goodness is not merely one feature among the many that add to the goodness of the world. Instead, it is an entirely distinct and unique class of goodness, one that is higher than, and incommensurate with, the goodness of the rest of the world. No matter how beautiful or perfect of their kind rocks, trees, and horses might be, they are not capable of moral goodness, which, as Augustine tells us, far "excels" their goodness. The world would be incomplete if it lacked any of the many kinds of goodness. With free will, created beings can reach higher heights; sinking to lower lows is entirely their own doing.

To support this last claim, Augustine turns in Book 3 to the source of the impulse to evil action. He argues that it does not stem from our nature, since if it were natural, it would be necessitated, and hence necessary and not culpable. (This point occasions Augustine's brief but influential discussion of how God's foreknowledge of our free choices does not make them necessary.) The most striking part of his discussion, perhaps, comes in his rejection of the idea that there could be anything determining or restricting the freedom of the will, in 3.17.48.164–3.17.49.169. Instead, Augustine defends the claim that the freedom involved in free will must be radical: Nothing at all can determine the will in its free choice. In particular, the will is not bound to do whatever the agent thinks it best to do. For Augustine, the freedom of moral agents is bound up with their ability to be weak-willed or even perverse, doing the wrong thing for no reason at all. Such is the radical freedom of the will.

The rest of Book 3 revolves around the main dogmatic issue treated in *On the Free Choice of the Will*, namely the extent to which Original Sin has impaired human free choice. Augustine regularly describes human nature as being "damaged and deformed" after the Fall; since human nature is by definition common to all human beings, the damage it has suffered therefore affects all human beings. This takes two forms. On the

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one hand, each human being is held to be guilty of Original Sin, precisely in virtue of being human. This is a puzzle. The normal way to be in a state of sin is to commit a sin for which one has not been forgiven; it is not clear how a person could be in a state of sin without having done anything, and particularly unclear in the case of newborn infants, who are incapable of any act of will whatsoever. Augustine considers four possibilities in his attempt to explain the transmissibility of Adam's guilt, which depend on an account of the origin of human souls (3.20.56.188–3.21.59.200), though he does not here settle on a solution.

On the other hand, distinct from the guilt involved in Original Sin, there is the punishment it calls forth. In *On the Free Choice of the Will* 3.18.52.177–3.20.55.186, Augustine identifies three distinct penalties inflicted on human nature: (*a*) ignorance, (*b*) mortality, and (*c*) trouble. Now (*a*), ignorance, refers to our difficulty in discerning the principles of right and wrong, which before the Fall were transparently known to us. And (*b*), mortality, is the fact that human beings now grow old and die. But the problematic penalty for human responsibility is (*c*), "trouble," which refers to the fact that postlapsarian human beings are subject to strong and unruly desires that direct us elsewhere than towards God, desires at best only partly under our control and often not even so. Augustine's generic term for such desires is "lust" (*concupiscentia*), which encompasses more than mere sexual appetite, though it certainly includes it; it is the same sense of the word as occurs in the phrase "the lust for power" – a strong, if not irresistible, craving or compulsion. Some of Augustine's statements in his discussion here gave ammunition to his later Pelagian critics, who argued that in *On the Free Choice of the Will* Augustine was at that time himself a moral perfectionist.

Augustine's discussion of Original Sin points the way to his later speculative thinking, in which doctrinal and dogmatic questions would set the agenda for his philosophical inquiries. And without a doubt, the most difficult questions were raised by the doctrine of grace, as it emerged in its final form after the Pelagians had been hounded into exile.

Grace

The doctrine of grace has surprising philosophical depth and complexity, as Augustine was the first to recognize. Despite its nominal form, "grace" picks out a feature of certain acts, namely that they are supererogatory in

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their conferral of benefits. That is, acts of grace confer benefits on their recipients; they are good to do, but not wrong not to do. Hence acts of grace are neither obligatory nor forbidden for the benefactor, and not a matter of entitlement for the recipient. Whether there are such supererogatory acts is a matter of dispute, but most philosophers think that there are. Everyday examples include leaving a "tip" or gratuity (etymologically linked to "grace"); giving money to charity; helping an infirm person to cross the street; volunteer work. The conferred benefit is a gift freely given with no strings attached; grace is thus often called a gift.

Augustine is interested in ordinary cases of grace only insofar as they illuminate divine grace. For it is only through divine grace, Augustine holds, that humanity has any hope: human beings have put themselves in a disadvantaged position through Original Sin, and so are not entitled to the benefits God can provide – benefits God is under no obligation to provide, either. Hence any supernatural benefits to which we might aspire are a matter of grace.

The following example may clarify Augustine's position. An employer has given several of his employees positions of trust; upon discovering that two of them have been embezzling funds, he dismisses them. As a result, each is reduced to penury (one is in worse straits than the other) and must beg for their living. Leaving work one evening, the employer is approached by his former employees, each begging for money. It is reasonable to think that the employer is not under any moral obligation to give either of his former employees money, on the grounds that acts of charity are supererogatory, and hence good to do but not obligatory. And it might well be thought that even if there is a general duty to be charitable, the employer is certainly under no obligation to help *these* two beggars. Not only are they in the condition they are in due to their own wrongdoing, and hence deserve their condition; the wrong that they did was done to the employer. Augustine holds the strong view that, in addition to the moral fault involved in wrongdoing, there is separate and additional harm done to the victim of the wrongdoing – here, harm to their benefactor – which is itself a wrongdoing. (Dante much later followed Augustine on this score, reserving the deepest circles of Hell for those who wronged their benefactors.) Hence the employer, more than anyone else, is certainly not obligated to help either of his former employees. Now if he were to give either of them money, though, he would be conferring

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a benefit on the recipient(s), and he is morally permitted to do so. Giving either, or both, money would be an act of grace.

In Augustine's view, the human race has disadvantaged itself with respect to God in exactly the way the employees did with respect to their employer. Adam's wrongdoing put him, and thereby the human race, in the wrong. (The whole human race is put in the wrong by the doctrine of the transmissibility of Original Sin – an independent doctrine, but one that Augustine holds, as we have seen.) Nor was Adam's sin merely a case of wrongdoing. The wrong that was done was done to God, who is therefore clearly free of any obligations to the human race, like the employer as regards his former employees. Nevertheless, should God choose to bestow benefits on human beings, He is certainly permitted to do so, and the bestowal of such benefits would be an act of grace – or, as Augustine often says in shortened form, it would be "a grace." Grace is thus supererogatory on God's part but a genuine benefit to us, who are its undeserving recipients.

Augustine identifies four fundamental forms of grace:

[G1] salvation;
[G2] good works;
[G3] perseverance;
[G4] the "beginning of faith" (*initium fidei*).

Each form of grace involves its own philosophical issues, discussed individually below.

The first form of grace, [G1], is salvation. This is the ultimate benefit God can confer. God's graciousness in conferring salvation is further magnified by the fact that Original Sin has made damnation the default and deserved postmortem human condition. (Hence damnation is not an instance of gratuitous cruelty, whereas salvation is an instance of gratuitous kindness.) Now it is intuitive and convenient to think of God's choice whether to save a given person as happening at the instant of that person's death, once and for all. Doctrinally, matters are more complex, to be sure; God's conferral of salvation is in some sense "final" only with the Last Judgment. But these refinements do not matter for the point at issue. That said, we need to distinguish God's grace operative in salvation from closely related puzzles about predestination, and then take up Augustine's claims about residual justice.

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Augustine notoriously adopts a strong doctrine of predestination, according to which God has foreordained whom He will gratuitously save (the lucky few known as the "elect"). From the point of view of grace, it makes no difference when God confers the benefit; it is an undeserved good that God is at liberty to bestow whenever He sees fit. The doctrine of predestination, though, has often been thought to conflict with human freedom, on the following grounds: If God has already foreordained, long before my birth, whether I shall belong to the elect, then nothing I do will affect God's choice, and so my free will is inefficacious – it will have no effect on whether I am saved or not, a matter that was settled before I was born, and indeed before the universe was created. This seems to have been the line of reasoning that troubled the monks of Provence, on whose behalf Augustine wrote *The Predestination of the Saints* and *On the Gift of Perseverance*. Yet other philosophers, Augustine among them, held that God would not have foreordained you to the elect if you were freely going to commit evil, and so His choice *is* sensitive to your behaviour. Each side seems to have good reasons for its view: the fatalists because causation does not run backwards in time, the optimists like Augustine because God has genuine foreknowledge.

Yet puzzling as the problems of predestination may be, they are not problems with the fact that God bestows salvation as an act of grace. Instead, they ultimately have to do with the compatibility of free will and foreknowledge (which is closely related to foreordainment), discussed in *On the Free Choice of the Will* Book 3.

Philosophical problems that are specific to [G1], salvation, come to the fore in problems of residual justice. We can best introduce them by returning to the analogy with the employer and his former employees. Since the employer has no moral obligations towards his former employees, helping either would be supererogatory. Suppose he helps one but not the other. Given that he is not obligated to help either, is there any unfairness in helping one but not the other? Suppose further that the one he does not help is the one who has the greater need. Given that he is not obligated to help either, if he does help, is he obligated to help the one with greater need?

These are questions of residual justice, the former focusing on the justice of an act of grace to one (undeserving) recipient and not to the other, the latter on whether such acts of grace, if performed at all, must be at least conditionally proportional to the status of their recipients. The

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answers to these questions are logically independent of one another, and not entailed by the mere fact that conferring the benefit is supererogatory. One might hold, for instance, that the benefactor is not required to help either of the potential recipients, but that *if* he helps either, he has to help each equally (or if this is not possible then he must select the recipient in an equitable manner).

Augustine takes an uncompromising position on residual justice. He argues that there is no injustice in conferring benefits on one rather than another, and further that no issue of proportionality arises. More exactly, Augustine holds that distinct cases are strongly independent (the moral permissibility of conferring the benefit on one recipient is independent of how anyone else is treated) and that the benefactor need not have a reason to pick one recipient over another. In support of his position he cites in *On the Gift of Perseverance* 8.17 the Parable of the Vineyard (Mt. 20:1–16), in which workers who have labored for different times in the vineyard are nevertheless paid the same amount by the owner. Augustine declares that the owner's "generosity towards some was such that there was no inequity towards the others." Each person receives his due, and further benefits, such as those bestowed by generosity, are not subject to considerations of fairness.

Augustine's position is at least partly motivated by his concern to safeguard divine freedom. He might be thought to go too far. It is enough to avoid Pelagianism to say that God is not obligated to help anyone, that no one deserves divine assistance. Yet that seems compatible with the weaker claim that, if God assists any of the (admittedly undeserving) recipients, He should do so in proportion to their (admittedly inadequate) deserts, or at the very least He should have a reason to bestow grace upon one recipient rather than another. The reason need not be known to us; it is enough to conclude that there must be such a reason. Nor does this obviously impinge on divine freedom. God can bind Himself in all sorts of ways, and bestowing grace in proportion to deserts is not obviously more freedom-canceling than His refusal to interfere with acts of free choice.

The second form of grace, [G2], is the grace involved in human good works. Augustine holds that there is an asymmetry in human action: We do evil all on our own (as established by *On the Free Choice of the Will*), but we can do good only with God's help as a grace. If we grant Augustine the asymmetry – he takes it to be a consequence of the Fall – we need to clarify how God helps humans to do good works, and whether God's help

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vitiates human freedom, or responsibility, since we cannot perform those works on our own.

An agent brings about a good action, then, only because God graciously comes to his assistance. This can happen in two ways. First, God can make an outcome attainable that would not otherwise be attainable, much the way the pilot makes it possible for me to fly from Amsterdam to Toronto, which I cannot otherwise do. In such a case God's assistance is direct. Second, God can act on the agent's powers, not directly on the outcomes. This is what happens when God "strengthens" the human will, for instance, so that it has the necessary force to reach its object. Augustine holds that in neither of these cases does God's assistance render the outcome a joint product. Rather, God's assistance enables the human agent to accomplish an end, while the accomplishment and the responsibility for the accomplishment remains with the agent, despite the need for God's assistance. Contrast these cases with, say, the differential contributions of the members of a string quartet. Their performance is truly a joint product, since each adds something different; in such a case each contributor adds something distinct but necessary to the performance as a whole, which is genuinely a joint production. But even when God enables a human being to attain an end, He is not merely cheering from the sidelines, so to speak. According to Augustine, God's contribution is necessary, but it does not detract from the agent's responsibility. After all, *I* am the one who flies from one city to another, for all that the pilot controls the plane, the maintenance crew stocks it with fuel, and so on. Likewise, *I* am the one responsible for the (result of the) exercise of my abilities, whether they be increased, diminished, or otherwise affected by another agent. Augustine's substantive thesis, then, is that good works always involve God's gracious assistance in a way that fully preserves human responsibility.

Augustine's thesis might be challenged on the grounds that even in the case in which God merely acts in concert with human abilities, thereby augmenting them, it is not clear why we should assign the responsibility for the action to the human partner – which is all the less tempting when God's contribution is anything more than minor. At the least, it seems as though God should be counted as a joint partner in the action. And so much the more so in the first case, where the outcome is simply unattainable without God's assistance. Why not count God as joint partner?

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One reply open to Augustine is that in each kind of case, God's assistance is strongly independent of the human agent. Not only can the human agent not bring it about that God assist him; he cannot influence the kind or nature or degree of assistance God may bestow. From the point of view of the agent, God's "standing offer" of assistance is merely a fact of the situation, a fact of which he may choose to take advantage, much as he might take advantage of a snowfall to ski, or of the high tide to put to sea. What is shared from a metaphysical point of view might yet be chalked up to individual responsibility from a moral point of view.

The third form of grace, [G3], is perseverance. Augustine thinks of this as the personal quality of tenacity more than anything else. An agent cannot be said to persevere in the will-to-φ, according to Augustine, unless he never fails in his will-to-φ. So much holds for the sobriety of reformed alcoholics, too. But Augustine endorses a stronger thesis: he holds that if an agent ever fails to will-to-φ (in the appropriate circumstances), then the agent never really had the will-to-φ in the first place. Steadfastness of will is the model here: unless it is maintained "up to the end," as Augustine likes to say, then the agent never had the will-to-φ.

It is tempting to construe Augustine's notion of perseverance of the will as a kind of policy, a "meta-will" or second-order will about future acts of will. The will-to-φ is an occurrent act, whereas the policy to will-to-φ is distinct from any individual instance of the policy – with Augustine's additional proviso that one does not have the policy if there is ever a lapse from it. Because of the distinction between occurrent action and policy, Augustine can maintain that the bestowal of perseverance is separate from and additional to having the will in question. Yet, tempting as it is, this construal is problematic as an interpretation of Augustine's view. For Augustine holds that perseverance is a feature of the very act of willing that is directed at its object. The person on a diet wills not to eat certain foods, which, at least on the surface, appears to be a volitional act directed at those foods, not at future acts of will and choice, as the second-order interpretation would have it.

A better approach is to think of an act of will as a *resolve*. The agent resolves – wills – to do or not to do such-and-so, and the "strength" of the resolve is measured by its efficacy. The vegetarian resolves not to eat meat; the sybarite resolves to enjoy the pleasures of life. In each case the

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agent's future behavior is plausibly seen as the operation of the selfsame resolve, rather than as a new act of will that may or may not be in conformity with a prior policy decision. Furthermore, a resolve must endure for some period of time. If not, we suspect that there was no resolve in the first place, a fact that at least approximates Augustine's stronger thesis mentioned above. And finally, it is clear that a resolve is just a particular act of will. Augustine can be understood as holding that every act of will really is a resolve – that acts of will that do not endure over time are not really acts of *will* at all, but better understood as whims, or wishes, or something else that falls short of resolve. There is little discussion of such matters in contemporary philosophy; Augustine's remarks are a useful point at which to start thinking about them afresh.

The fourth and final form of grace, [G4], is the "beginning of faith": the initial impulse to believe in Christian doctrine. It is perhaps the most challenging to reconcile with freedom. Augustine holds that the "beginning of faith" is itself due to the grace of God. Under this heading he includes two very different kinds of cases. On the one hand, God may strengthen a person's faith to make it, or to help make it, wholehearted. On the other hand, God may simply make one a believer, as Saul of Tarsus, on the road to Damascus, seems to have been infused with faith, independent of his will.

The first case is similar to [G2] and [G3]: God "strengthens" the faith that the agent already has or wills to have. It is relatively unproblematic.

The second case is more difficult to reconcile with human freedom and responsibility. It seems wrong to say that Saul is "responsible" for his conversion. It also seems wrong to think that coming to have proper Christian faith, as Augustine would say, is entirely out of our control. If so, accepting Christ as savior seems not to be in our power. Yet radical conversion of the sort Augustine envisions seems in God's power rather than ours. How can this form of grace be compatible with free choice?

A possible reconciliation is as follows. The cases of radical conversion Augustine discusses are cases in which there is, arguably, voluntary or culpable lack of faith – that is, a lack of faith on the part of those who, like Saul, should have known better. (According to Augustine, Saul should have known better because his Jewish heritage gave him the relevant information to recognize Christ as the messiah.) God's conversion of Saul, then, merely brings Saul to a point at which he *should* have arrived

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on his own. It is clearly a gift from God and, while it does not depend on a prior free act of will on Saul's part, it might reasonably be said to accord with how Saul should comport his will. That is, God's action removes Saul's perverse and blameworthy refusal to believe, and allows his will to believe freely. This is in keeping with Augustine's remarks about the Jews and the Gentiles, as well as those to whom the gospel has been preached, whom he declares are culpable for their lack of faith. In short, God removes an *obstacle* from the individual, and the belief that follows upon its removal is as free as any other. Removal of an obstacle or an impediment does not cancel freedom. Instead, it makes it possible: untying someone frees him from constraint and allows him to act freely thereafter. So too in the case of radical conversion. God's action removes an (internal) obstacle to faith, which the agent may then embrace freely. It would be different if God directly infused faith. But even in the case of Saul, the best-known and most dramatic radical conversion, He did not; He merely appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus and asked Saul why he persecuted Him – a question, leaving Saul's subsequent conversion to Paul a matter of his free choice.

Augustine regarded his reconciliation of human free will and divine grace as one of his crowning achievements. The subsequent history of theories of free will and moral responsibility, and the extremely acrimonious history of theological discussions of grace, have confirmed the accuracy of that assessment. Although the metaphysical assumptions within which he articulated his account of free choice have changed over time, Augustine's intuition about the will as a self-determining power or faculty has been developed and defended for fifteen centuries as one of the classical statements of what is involved in human choice. Augustine's influence on the theology of grace has been equally dominant. It would not be an exaggeration to say that all discussions of grace and salvation within the Christian tradition, including those that occurred in reformed churches following the Reformation, were influenced by Augustine's legacy and in many cases reduced to alternative readings of his work. This applies to the work of Calvin and to those within the Calvinist tradition who disagreed about the necessity of grace for salvation, predestination, and the efficacy or otherwise of free will when not supported by grace. It applies equally to Jansenist theologians in the seventeenth century and their vociferous opponents among the Jesuits; the most famous and

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influential theological exposition of the Jansenist position was called, simply, *Augustinus* (1640), in recognition of its debt to Augustine. The texts translated in this volume are among those that helped define the terms within which all subsequent philosophical and theological discussion of human responsibility took place.

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