

# The Problem of Evil and Pain

2. The Explanation of St.  
Augustine: The Fall and  
Original Sin

# Opening Prayer

**Lord God, the light of the minds that know you, the life of the souls that love you, and the strength of the hearts that serve you: Help us, following the example of your servant Augustine of Hippo, so to know you that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen**

# Introduction

# St. Augustine of Hippo

- Born November 13, 354 in Tagaste, North Africa (modern day Algeria)
  - North Africa was the “Bible Belt” of the Roman Empire
  - Just to the west, the veneer of Roman civilization thinned out into Numidia
- Father Patricius was a pagan; mother Monica, a Christian
  - Were of a respectable class of Roman society, but had modest means
  - Used borrowed money to give Augustine a first class education

# St. Augustine of Hippo

- In his teens became a Manichaeian
- Manichaeism
  - Religion founded by Persian Mani (216-276 AD)
  - Mani claimed to be final prophet called by God to complete the incomplete religions founded by earlier prophets: Zoroaster, Buddha, and Jesus
  - A type of **Gnosticism**: salvation achieved through special knowledge (gnosis) of spiritual truth

# St. Augustine of Hippo

## ■ Manichaeism

- Absolute Dualism: Good and Evil were locked in battle
  - God: Spirit of Light and the Heavens, source of our souls
  - Satan: Spirit of Darkness and source of the material world
- Our souls are sparks of light trapped in a filthy material body

# St. Augustine of Hippo

- Augustine was a Manichaean for 9 years
- Studied law and rhetoric (art of public speaking) at Carthage, the great city of Roman North Africa, living with a long-term concubine (name unknown) with whom he had a son Adeodatus, who later died in adolescence

# St. Augustine of Hippo

- At age 28 (383 AD) left Roman North Africa to study in Rome
- Got a plum appointment as Imperial Professor of Rhetoric at Milan
  - Milan was the *de facto* capital of the Western Empire. The Emperor usually resided there. It was also the center of Christian Platonism
  - Met Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, and was profoundly influenced by his preaching

# St. Augustine of Hippo

- 386: underwent a life-transforming conversion. Left his teaching post.
  - 387: baptized by Ambrose
- Returned to Roman North Africa
- 395: made Bishop of Hippo (modern day Annaba, Algeria, a city north of his home town of Tagaste), where he spent remainder of life

# St. Augustine of Hippo

- Chief works:
  - Confessions
  - City of God
  - Reconsiderations
  - Christian Doctrine
  - The Trinity
  - Literal Commentary on Genesis

# St. Augustine of Hippo

- Died August 28, 430, during the Vandal siege of Hippo, which fell shortly after his death

# **Augustine's Theodicy**

**Being and Goodness**

# Augustine's Theodicy

## Being and Goodness

- God is supreme in being and goodness
  - God's being is infinite and absolute
  - God's goodness is infinite and unsurpassable. God is, as Plato said, the Supreme Good
- The whole of God's creation is good. God creates only good things

# Augustine's Theodicy

## Being and Goodness

- Linked “being” and “goodness”
  - “being” has degrees or intensities
  - Everything God creates has some degree of “measure, form, and order” which defines its proportion of “being”
  - The proportion of “being” of a thing or creature determines its degree of goodness
  - **Being  $\leftrightarrow$  Goodness**

# Augustine's Theodicy

## Being and Goodness

- Linked “being” and “goodness”
  - The goodness of a thing or creature is proportional to its degree of being
    - A rose has more being and goodness and value than a rock
    - A gorilla has more being and goodness and value than a rose
    - A human being has more being and goodness and value than a gorilla
    - God's being and goodness is infinite and unsurpassable

# Augustine's Theodicy

## Being and Goodness

- “Principle of Plenitude”
  - God found it pleasing and good to fill creation with every level of being, from the lowliness of the rocks to the loftiness of humanity, so that creation is rich and variegated and full
  - Each kind of being has its own unique qualities and limitations
    - Some of what we incorrectly call “evil” in our lives is simply a manifestation of our creaturely finitude, the limitations of our being

# Augustine's Theodicy

**Being and Evil**

# Augustine's Theodicy

## Being and Evil

- All that exists, that has being, has goodness in proportion to its degree of being
- Evil is not a thing, does not have being. Evil is a *lack* of being, and hence a *lack* of goodness
  - Evil is the absence, deprivation, privation, or degradation of **being and goodness** (*privatio boni* = privation of good)

# Augustine's Theodicy

## Being and Evil

- Evils appear in creation when created things and creatures stop functioning in the way they were created to function, when they cease to have the “being” God intended them to have
  - Example: the evil of blindness: the eye ceases to function in the way it was intended
  - Evil is always the malfunctioning of something that is in itself good

# Augustine's Theodicy

## Being and Evil

- Human beings were made for God: **“You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”** (Opening line in *Confessions*)
- When we alienate ourselves from God, we become *less real*, have *less being* and *goodness*, become *less human*, and our alienation is *evil*, because we then *lack* the degree of *being* and *reality*, of *goodness*, of *humanity* for which God made us

# **Augustine's Theodicy**

## **The Fall and Original Sin**

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Fall and Original Sin

- Augustine assumed **Genesis 1-3** and the story of Adam and Eve was literally true
- The universe as created by God was in perfect harmony, a  
**“graded hierarchy of higher and lower forms of being, each good in its own place”** (John Hick)

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Fall and Original Sin

- Adam and Eve were made in the *image of God*: like God they were rational beings and had a moral nature
- In their state of original blessedness, Adam and Eve, like the angels, had **free will**, and could choose to do what is good, and had the ability *not to sin*.
- They were also blessed with gifts of immortality and an immediate knowledge of God.

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Fall and Original Sin

- Evil first appeared among those creatures who had **free will**
- **The Fall:**
  - First some angels rebelled against the God, the Supreme Good
  - These fallen angels in turn tempted Adam and Eve to rebel against God

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Fall and Original Sin

- Consequences of Adam and Eve's Sin:
  - Death: loss of the gift of immortality
  - Ignorance: loss of the knowledge and intimacy with God
  - Corruption of their moral nature
    - loss of the inner harmony between reason and the passions. The passions now dominated rational thought (**concupiscence**), inclining one to sin
    - the **ability not to sin** was replaced by an **inability not to sin**
    - The *image of God* in Adam and Eve was damaged, although not destroyed

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Fall and Original Sin

- Consequences of Adam and Eve's Sin:
  - Because of their sin, Adam and Eve became *less real*, had *less being* and *less goodness*
    - Became *less human*
  - Augustine believed human nature was transmitted in the sexual act. The corruption of Adam's moral nature and the guilt of his sin (= **Original Sin**) was passed on to his children through his seed, and so on to all subsequent generations
    - Baptism removes the guilt of the **Original Sin**, but not the corruption of the human moral nature

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Fall and Original Sin

- **“The LORD looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God. They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no, not one.” (Ps. 14:2-3 NRSV)**
- **“Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.” (Ps 51:5 NRSV)**

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Fall and Original Sin

- “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.”

(Romans 7:18-20 NRSV)

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Fall and Original Sin

- Consequences of Adam and Eve's Sin:
  - Natural Evils were part of God's punishment for Adams and Eve's sin:
    - “nature red in tooth and claw”
    - Earthquakes, storms, etc.

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Fall and Original Sin

**“All evil is either sin or the punishment for sin”**

- Augustine

# Augustine's Theodicy

**The Aesthetic Goodness of  
Creation. Moral Balance**

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Aesthetic Goodness of Creation

“If it were not good that evil things exist, they would certainly not be allowed to exist by the Omnipotent Good.”

- Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 24. 96

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Aesthetic Goodness of Creation

- Even though, as a consequence of the **Fall** and **Original Sin**, there is **natural evil** and **moral evil** in creation, the universe is still good from God's perspective
  - Good in an aesthetic sense
  - Evokes a principle of "moral balance:" a sin that is justly punished no longer mars the beauty and goodness of God's creation

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Aesthetic Goodness of Creation

- Moral Balance and Hell:
  - The existence of hell for sinners does not mar the goodness of creation, for:  
**“since there is happiness for those who do not sin, the universe is perfect; and it is no less perfect because there is misery for sinners... the penalty of sin corrects the dishonor of sin.”**

# Augustine's Theodicy

## The Aesthetic Goodness of Creation

- “For as the beauty of a picture is increased by well-managed shadows, so, to the eye that has skill to discern it, the universe is beautified even by sinners, though, considered by themselves, their deformity is a sad blemish.”

- Augustine, *City of God*, 11. 23.

# **Influence of Augustine's Theodicy**

# Influence of Augustine's Theodicy

- Augustine's ideas of **The Fall** and **Original Sin** has profoundly influenced the Western Church to this day. Explains:
  - The universal human alienation from God and tendency to sin
  - The origin of evil
  - The necessity of infant baptism
  - Reason for God's incarnation in Jesus and redemption

# Influence of Augustine's Theodicy

- The ideas inherent in **The Fall** and **Original Sin** continue to be taught in many Sunday Schools:
  - human nature is somehow corrupted from what God intended because of **Original Sin**, and this accounts for the universal tendency to sin
  - Babies are born “in sin” (with the guilt of the **Original Sin**), and need the grace of baptism (to be freed of that guilt) so they can become children of God
    - Strict Roman Catholic teaching: an unbaptized baby cannot go to heaven

# **Criticisms of Augustine's Theodicy**

# Criticisms

## A Flawed Creation?

- How can perfectly good creatures like the angels and human beings, living in a perfectly good world created by the God, the Supreme Good, choose to sin and thus fall?
  - “The self-creation of evil out of nothing!”
  - The choice of some angels and Adam and Eve to do evil seems to require a flaw in the perfection of creation
  - Augustine’s answer: the “mystery of finite freedom”

# Criticisms

## A Flawed Creation?

- Underlying this criticism: Could God have created free individuals who would never choose to sin, and yet who would still be free?
  - “Compatibilism:” yes
  - “Incompatibilism:” no

# Criticisms

## Modern Science

- Modern Science:
  - Humanity emerged from lower forms of life with limited moral awareness and crude religious concepts
    - In Augustine,  
**“There would seem to have been a higher form of humanity at the wrong end of man’s evolution.”** (Piet Schoonenberg)

# Criticisms

## Modern Science

- Modern Science:
  - Nature was “red and in tooth and claw” long before human beings evolved
    - Life preyed on life
    - Dinosaurs suffered the pains of arthritis
    - Hurricanes and earthquakes existed before the most primitive forms of life appeared

# Criticisms

## Eternal Torment of Hell

- The “moral balance” afforded by the just punishment of sinners may engender an “aesthetic” goodness, but what about moral goodness?
- The eternal torment of hell  
**“would render impossible any solution to the problem of evil, for it would build both the sinfulness of the damned, and the nonmoral evil of their pains and sufferings, into the permanent structure of the universe” (John Hick)**

# References

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