The Problem of Evil and Pain

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

Leon Bonnat “Job” 1880
The Problem of Evil and Pain

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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

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Introduction

- Epicurus (341-270 BC):
  - Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent.
  - Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.
  - Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?
Introduction

- The presence of evil and suffering in the world is the most potent rational objection to the existence of a all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God.
  - Han Kung: “the rock of atheism.”
- The presence of evil and suffering in the world is one of the great and life-long challenges to a life of faith.
- Theodicy = an explanation of how evil and suffering can exist in a world created by an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God.
St. Augustine of Hippo

  - North Africa was the “Bible Belt” of the Roman Empire.
  - Just to the west, the veneer of Roman civilization thinned out into Numidia.

- His Father Patricius was a pagan; his 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.
In his teens became a **Manichaean**.

**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: the Spirit of Light and the Heavens, source of our souls.
    - Satan: the 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
Died August 28, 430, during the Vandal siege of Hippo, which fell shortly after his death.
Augustine’s Theodicy

Being and Goodness

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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 $\propto$ 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 level 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 level of being.
Augustine’s
Theodicy

Being and Evil

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Augustine’s Theodicy

Being and Evil

- All that exists – that has being – has goodness in proportion to its degree of being:
  - Being $\uparrow \Downarrow$ Goodness

- 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* = the privation of good).
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, wholly 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

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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.
Evil first appeared among those creatures who had free will.

The Fall:

First some angels rebelled against the God, the Supreme Good.

Then these fallen angels 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. They became less human, lacking the degree of being (the degree of goodness; Being &GT; Goodness) that God intended for humanity.

- 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

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“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:
  - That is: good in an aesthetic sense.
  - Augustine evoked a principle of “moral balance:” if sin is justly punished, it 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.”

Influence of Augustine’s Theodicy

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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.
- Our need for redemption.
- God’s incarnation in Jesus to redeem us.
Influence of Augustine’s Theodicy

- The ideas inherent in The Fall and Original Sin continue to be taught in 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 could *perfectly good* creatures like the angels and human beings, living in a *perfectly good* world created by the **God**, the **Supreme Good**, choose *not* to do good (= to do evil, 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.
    - That is, it seems like there must have been a “seed” of evil from the beginning for evil to appear and grow.
  - 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*?

- That is: must “freedom” by its very nature include a “flaw” or “seed” that gives rise to evil in an otherwise perfectly good creation?°
Criticisms
Modern Science

- Modern Science:
  - From science, we have learned that humanity actually emerged from lower forms of life, forms of life with limited moral awareness and crude religious concepts:
  - Yet 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 for untold millions of years before human beings appears.
    - Dinosaurs suffered the pains of arthritis.
    - Hurricanes and earthquakes existed before even the most primitive forms of life appeared.
Criticisms

Eternal Torment of Hell

- The “moral balance” afforded by the just punishment of sinners may give creation an “aesthetic” goodness – but what about a 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

Next Time: The Problem of Evil and Pain

The Explanation of Leibniz: The Best Possible World

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