

Pursuing Pankalia: The Theodicy of St. Augustine

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In a field filled with out of control trolley cars, brains-in-vats, and at least one color-blind neuroscientist, philosophers often find ourselves returning to the same illustrations to express our ideas; in the library of such thought experiments, somewhere between one of Theseus' ships and a room holding a Chinese writer, lies a dog-eared copy of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* with a long line of theodacists waiting for their turn to read it. Amidst the classic story of a struggling Russian family, one conversation between Alyosha and his brother Ivan has stood out as a famous study of what academics have dubbed "The Problem of Evil."

If God truly exists, Alyosha's brother demands, then why does He not prevent the tragedies that fill our world? After cataloging a series of such profane abuses, primarily of children, Ivan laughs at the suggestion that such evils could all be ultimately used for some "greater good," somehow woven together into an ultimately beautiful tapestry, and proclaims that even if some Deity exists, that method of operation should disqualify such a god from being worthy of any worship. "I don't want harmony," Ivan cries, "From love for humanity I don't want it... Besides, too high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it."¹ Instead, Ivan tells a story of a bitter humanist who has secretly rejected God for the sake of caring for God's people; by painting himself the color of his own Grand Inquisitor, Ivan seeks to embody his commitment to holding God accountable for the many who are damned.

Ivan is disgusted by evil, by God, and by the ugliness of life; a faithful reply to him, then, must respond to three separate points: something metaphysical (1), something theological (2), and finally something aesthetic (3); it is precisely at the intersection of these three fields where

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the theodicy of St. Augustine of Hippo can be found. Writing roughly fifteen centuries before Dostoevsky, Augustine shared many of the concerns of Ivan Karamazov, but his thoughtful contextualization of evil into a properly Christian worldview gave the neo-Platonic philosopher far more powerful resources for reconciling God and the reality of evil. Augustine offers (1) a metaphysical definition of evil that allows for (2) a theological conception of damning free will that is fashioned by God into (3) *pankalia*, or "universal beauty." By seeing evil as a void rather than a substance, Augustine is able to recognize evil actions as freely chosen sins of human agents – sins that, though evil, still function aesthetically to display the harmony of God's creation.

To answer Ivan, each of these three Augustinian points shall be considered in turn: the definition of evil as a privation, the damnable power of free agents, and finally, the ultimate design for the *pankalia* of God's Creation as centering on poetic justice. Though Augustine's position may not be fully satisfactory, it lays a strong foundation for further study.

(1) Something Metaphysical: Privation

The most foundational element of Augustine's answer to Ivan's Problem lies in his definition of evil as the *privatio boni* or "the removal of good" and not as a proper substance in its own right.² Even at first glance the power of such a definition is clear, for one need not defend a God for creating evil if evil is not a thing that can be created. Instead, Augustinian evil is similar to physical phenomena like coldness or darkness, except that rather than 'existing' as the absence or diminishment of either heat or light, evil is simply the absence of goodness – that is, the absence of God.

As the young Augustine came to reject the bitheistic Manicheanism of his youth, with its purely good deity existing eternally opposite a purely evil one, his philosophical answer to Ivan

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Karamazov's question began to take shape. The Manichean model had required Augustine to admit the eternality of evil, something his newfound Christianity was loathe to affirm.

Eventually, under the tutelage of St. Ambrose of Milan,³ Augustine came to recognize God as the sole supranatural ontological grounding in which all other beings find their foundation:

[I]t is the one true God who is active and operative in all those things [the entirety of Creation], but always acting as God, that is, present everywhere in his totality, free from all spatial confinement, completely untrammelled, absolutely indivisible, utterly unchangeable, and filling heaven and earth with his ubiquitous power which is independent of anything in the natural order.⁴

Consequently, with God as the metaphysical standard for existence in the universe, Augustine easily adopted into his worldview the Neoplatonic Great Chain of Being that fashioned the entire cosmos into a hierarchical structure;⁵ Augustine simply placed the Christian God at the top of the ladder of existence, recognizing that "He is before all things and in Him all things hold together."⁶

On this view, however, existence of any form constitutes at least some form of participation in the good reality of the Divine Being who defines the nature of perfect existence;⁷ because of this, Augustine needed Plotinus' definition of evil in the *Enneads*⁸ to truly make headway with his theology. By defining evil simply as "non-being," Augustine was able to make sense of how the Chain of Being that emanates from a perfect God could be comprised of less-than-perfect creatures while simultaneously denying a spot on that chain for ramified "Evil" itself; as he says "[t]here is no such entity in nature as 'evil'; 'evil' is merely the name for the privation of good. There is a scale of value stretching from earthly to heavenly realities, from the visible to the invisible; and the inequality between these goods makes possible the existence of

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them all."⁹ If everything that exists was perfectly good, then "everything" would be identical to the perfect God; the gradation of existence is actually made possible by privation.

However, because all existence is ultimately of and from a good God, existence *qua* existence must be good – a fact compounded by recognizing God as an intentional, good Creator. But if Augustine is correct that God designs creatures to be what He intends them to be, then it is only by corruption that something becomes anything less.¹⁰ In the words of Phillip Tallon, the practice of evil is "to become *less* than what one was created to be; to become, not the good thing that God made, but something else, a perverted thing of our own doing."¹¹ Entities are called evil, then, when they either come to lack a property that they should possess or, conversely, they gain a property God did not intend them to have.

This analysis of privation applies not only to intrinsic properties that reside solely within the beings themselves, but to the relational properties of those beings to their surroundings as well. When those relational properties are properly ordered per God's design, then it is good; when the relationship is inappropriate, even if it is internally consistent, that disruption of propriety is what Rowan Williams has dubbed a "grammar" of evil, as Tallon summarizes how:

....there may be a disjunctive quality between subject, verb, and object. The phrases "Philip worshipped God" and "Philip played tennis" both consist of only positive terms. Yet these phrases, consisting of exactly the same terms, "Philip played God" and "Philip worshipped tennis," indicate a state of affairs that, because they are disordered, are evil and therefore degrade the subject, verb, and object through their disjuncture.¹²

Again, even without intrinsic change, Philip's shift in relational properties is equally dubbed "evil".

By way of example, consider a compassionless brute attacking a helpless victim: because the attacker exists, he must lie somewhere on the Great Chain of Being, but his lack of compassion (a property that, as a human being, he should possess) means that he is lacking an intrinsic property that would make him more good or more God-like – this lack of goodness is evil. However, this brute is also choosing to attack an innocent person, an event that should not take place, so he is also disrupting the proper ordering of the universe; this lack of order is also evil.¹³

However, because some level of variation in goodness is necessary for the variety in Creation to exist and because God is “the best Maker of all natures, the One Who oversees them with the greatest justice,”¹⁴ then Augustine is confident that a good God will successfully weave both intrinsic and relation evils together into something ultimately worthwhile. This shall be addressed further in Section (3).

In the meantime, Augustine’s definition of evil as the *privatio boni* effectively eliminates much of the apparent evil in the world under the guise of a preeminent God’s just and loving care of the Creation He fashions as good, the inner workings of which are not always clear to its inhabitants:

Divine providence thus warns us not to indulge in silly complaints about the state of affairs, but to take pains to inquire what useful purposes are served by things.

And when we fail to find the answer...we should believe that the purpose is hidden from us... There is a useful purpose in the obscurity of the purpose; it may serve to exercise our humility or to undermine our pride.¹⁵

For those examples of evil that are identifiable as such, however, Augustine is still loathe to attribute them to a perfect God – it is to finite creatures that the blame for evil must fall.

(2) Something Theological: The Power of Freedom

In what has been called "the most famous and central aspect" of his theodicy,¹⁶ Augustine deploys legal language of guilt and blame to recognize the depravity of evil while attempting to absolve the Creator God of responsibility for the chosen evil actions of free agents. Although Augustine's overall conception of freedom takes some unpacking, it never completely diverges, not even in his developed thoughts later in life, from the sentiment expressed early on in his Christian writings that "evils have their being by the voluntary sin of the soul, to which God gave free will."¹⁷

To equate evil with sin, a chosen action contrary to the perfect will of God, allows Augustine to shift much of the Problem of Evil squarely onto the backs of free moral agents and away from the shoulders of the perfect Divine. Following from the understanding of evil as the *privatio boni*, evil as sin is any chosen action that fails to meet God's expected standards of behavior and therefore lacks the goodness that it should possess. If agents truly are free to choose either right or wrong actions (in the way that we naturally assume them to be blameworthy), then it is not only the case that evil becomes a logically necessary possibility under genuine free will, but it is also true that God is not to blame when a genuinely free agent abuses their free will and sinfully actualizes something evil. By definition, a free evil act becomes a sin, an act that God would not will and does not, Himself, choose – to blame God for an action He neither wills nor controls is hardly appropriate.

This libertarian understanding of free will does assume that an action must be voluntary and intentional in order to be blameworthy: a woman who sneezes and drops a kitchen knife out her window might be faulted for carelessness, but even if that knife happens to fall on and kill a passerby on the street below, the woman could not be properly blamed as a murderer – she

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neither chose to kill nor intended it to happen.¹⁸ But if blameworthiness for moral evil is based in intention, so too is praiseworthiness for moral goodness, therefore the necessity of a genuine choice between right and wrong – what Plantinga has come to call a *morally significant* choice – becomes central to a free-will theodicy. As Plantinga, a foremost contemporary free will defender, puts it:

...God can create free creatures, but He can't *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right *freely*. To create creatures capable of *moral good*, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil... The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.¹⁹

Much like how if God desires to create a two-dimensional, three-sided geometric figure, then He is bound by logic to make a triangle, God is in a similar bind if He desires to create potentially good free agents: to get the possibility of good, He must simultaneously create the possibility of evil.

This is precisely Augustine's position. He begins Book Three of *On the Free Choice of the Will* by having Evodius agree that "no blame can be attached where nature and necessity predominate"²⁰ before contrasting human actions with a falling stone to point out that "the movement of the stone is natural, but the movement of the mind is voluntary" and while we would not charge the stone with a sin, "we charge the mind with sin when we find it guilty of abandoning higher goods to put lower goods first for its enjoyment."²¹ To put this description of evil into terms already used in this chapter: we charge the mind with sin when it willfully tries to

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replace God at the pinnacle of the Great Chain of Being and pursues something of lesser importance. This reordering of one's desires is a disruption of one's intrinsic properties (and is therefore evil); by acting on those corrupted desires, the agent chooses a course of action that differs from God's perfect will, thereby disrupting the relation properties of the agent (which is also evil), as well as damaging both intrinsic and relational properties of other objects in the universe. As Augustine reiterates elsewhere, because evil is only the *privatio boni*, "There is no evil in the universe, but in individuals there is evil due to their own fault."²²

One might fairly ask, though, why God would care to create free agents at all, if freedom truly is such a dangerous tool to be wielded – would it not be better for God to create morally neutral automata if it meant that no evil would result? To this, Augustine replies that freedom allows for greater goods to exist than if freedom were absent. However, he firstly chastises anyone who would imagine their own creative ability to surpass God's perfect skill and argues that it is petulant to complain that lesser things exist (sinful agents) when greater things can be imagined (nonsinful agents).²³ Simply because greater things can exist on the Chain of Being does not mean that God is to be blamed for allowing gradation along that chain; as Augustine says, "it is like someone who, grasping perfect roundness in his mind, become upset that he does not find it in a nut, never having seen any round object except fruits of this sort."²⁴ God allows freedom because a being who freely displays love and devotion to God is greater than one who does so mindlessly or unfreely;²⁵ criticizing freedom itself on the basis of its abuse at the hands of free agents is, again, quite missing Augustine's point.

To be fair, not all philosophers affirm libertarian free will and compatibilists would have no problem with a free agent being unable to act otherwise than she does in a given scenario. Particularly in the case of Augustine, it would be a significant oversight to ignore compatibilist

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notions of freedom for the sake of focusing entirely on the above libertarian presentation. Later in life, Augustine's apologetics for the doctrine of *original* sin colored his definition of freedom sufficiently such that many readers now identify a shift in his thinking from his earlier writings to his later ones.²⁶ If Augustine did come to embrace a different definition of freedom that would allow for God to fully determine an agent's free choices, then everything in his theodicy as it has been presented thus far would crumble – a consequence that Augustine himself never seemed to admit. Although space does not permit a full response to the charge of Augustinian inconsistency on a definition of freedom, two points should be briefly considered by way of rebuttal.

Firstly, the shift in Augustine's writings in relation to the Pelagian controversy later in his life likely had more to do with his rhetoric than his logic. Whereas his earlier comments on freedom that sound particularly libertarian were responding to an unorthodox group concerned with God's goodness (Manicheans), Augustine emphasized at that point the elements of his theology that were ignored by his then-opponents: God's singular blamelessness and humanity's graceful ability to choose rightly or wrongly. Later in his life, recognizing the extent to which his comments had been twisted by new, previously unforeseen enemies (Pelagians), Augustine attempted to adjust the swing of the heterodox pendulum by emphasizing different elements of his thought: the sinfulness of humanity and our need of God's assistance for ultimate success.²⁷ This would not necessarily require that he reject libertarianism for compatibilism, but given the disparate contexts of his comments, it should not be surprising that different themes rise to the surface at different times, particularly when it can be shown that all of these themes are present throughout the Augustinian corpus.

That is the second point: the theme of human depravity and our need for God to empower our free choices is something that appears in Augustine earliest writings, not simply those

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written after his alleged position-shift. Those who would claim that Augustine moves from a libertarian understanding of free will to affirm a compatibilistic framework tend to do so because of his later increased emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the necessity of His grace for human agency to function; this sounds quite similar to Augustine's call in his early *On the Free Choice of the Will* that "our freedom is this: to submit to this truth, which is our God Who set us free from death – that is, from the state of sin."²⁸ When "the Early" Augustine references a verse like Psalm 37:4 ("Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart"),²⁹ he is making the point that a human agent must choose to bow the knee to the God who satisfies all desires, but it is only by God's grace that those desires are at all satisfied.³⁰ On this reading, Augustine is championing a God granting grace to humans, while also recognizing that the onus is on the human to receive the gift, or, as King puts it, "what is shared from a metaphysical point of view might yet be chalked up to individual responsibility from a moral point of view."³¹ And, in the other direction, libertarian free choices and some of the philosophical grounding difficulties that such open options create, appear even in Augustine's later works, for example predominating his discussion of the efficient cause of evil in Book Twelve of *The City of God*.³²

However, regardless of whether Augustine can easily be identified as affirming either libertarian or compatibilistic free will, both recognize God's grace shown to somehow-free agents, thereby giving them the opportunity to be great by loving God, even though they have the ability to sin. This serves Augustine's model primarily by underlining the penal character of evil, whether or not moral blameworthiness is compatible with determinism. This is simply to say that although both the libertarian and the compatibilist will understand the metaphysical situation differently, their moral assessment of a sinful agent's depraved condition will ultimately agree,

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meaning that one more facet of evil on Augustine's view should be recognized: its function as a tool for righteous punishment of sin.

The possible retributive function of evil follows a line of thinking exemplified well by Augustine's recognition of a certain element of beauty in death; in Book Thirteen of *The City of God*, Augustine explains why sin leads to death for all people, even those who are forgiven of their sins and justified in God's sight: in light of Christ's victory over death, "it is not that death has turned into a good thing...[but]...that God has granted to faith so great a gift of grace that death, which all agree to be the contrary to life, has become the means by which men pass into life."³³ This is why examples of so-called "natural" evils are nothing of the sort to Augustine; actions or events such as tsunamis, earthquakes, and disease are not attributable to the sinful choice of a human agent, but stem directly from the perfect God who may use their evilness for a variety of good reasons, including as a means to administer the "just deserts" for freely chosen sins. This means that either, as mentioned in the previous section, we may not know the reasons why God would allow such devastation (but must rest in the comfort of His perfect love and goodness), or we can recognize God's victory over even life's greatest enemy to bring the beauty of justice to His Creation – that second option, to Augustine at least, "precisely because it follows from and gives expression to the divine justice, needs no theodicy."³⁴

Without question, a free will approach to theodicy, grounded in the definition of evil as a privation, has been one of the most historically influential elements of Augustine's model.³⁵ It is a powerful one: many of Ivan Karamazov's complaints can find a response in blaming the free human agents who chose to create such evils. Consequently, many readers of Augustine discover his privation + free-will theodicy to be sufficient enough for their apologetic purposes and simply stop reading, thereby failing to discover the final, and most important, piece of

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Augustine's theodicy – the element that allows Augustine to consistently maintain that "God, who is supremely good in his creation of natures that are good, is also completely just in his employment of evil choices in his design, so that whereas such evil choices make a wrong use of good natures, God turns evil choices to good use."³⁶

Something Aesthetic: The Poetic Justice of *Pankalia*

If the goal of the theodicy is simply to give God a sliver of logical possibility within which He might feasibly coexist with evil then the above elements of Augustine's framework will be sufficient: no one creates evil for it is a privation and evil actions are brought about by free, evil actors – not by God. But Augustine, like Ivan Karamazov, was not satisfied with this anemic description of God's goodness and endeavored instead to explain not merely the origin of evil, but why a good God would allow such evil to continue to exist after the fact. Whereas some thinkers have suggested that God is required to assume such a posture for the sake of respecting free will, Adams quite rightly criticizes the idolatry of such a notion, sarcastically decrying the idea that "personal agency [is] sacrosanct, holy ground on which not even God may tread uninvited without violation."³⁷ Instead, Augustine ties his famous free-will defense up in a bow of aesthetic themes that, much like holiday wrapping paper, are often ignored for the sake of the prize inside.

This ignorance is unsurprising, for the aesthetic notion in Augustine's theodicy is difficult for post-Enlightenment thinkers to affirm, committed as many are to a Humean fact/value dichotomy. Augustine, however, writing as he was during the period when what has been called "the unity of transcendentals" reigned supreme, saw the true head of the Great Chain of Being as the unification of every property worth possessing. To say that God is the pinnacle of Creation, in Augustine's mind, is to affirm that God is, metaphysically speaking, the limit of

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each superlative quality that subsequently applies to all other categories of existence – God *is*, in an ontologically definitive way, all goodness, all truth, and all beauty; these are “instantiated in a primary and privileged way in God, and instantiated in a derivative way in God's creation.”³⁸

When the Neoplatonic concept of plenitude³⁹ that recognizes Creation as good in virtue of its fullness and variety is added to this framework – the variety made possible by the graded variance of existence – Augustine is then primed to make his case against Ivan Karamazov that, all things considered, the world is genuinely beautiful.

As was common in Late Antiquity, Augustine demonstrated a marked appreciation for symmetry and the contra-position of opposites⁴⁰ that led him to champion a definition of beauty as that which integratively weaves good and bad elements together into a harmonious symphony that is not beautiful in spite of its dark strokes, but because of them. In much the same way that Rembrandt's paintings, Bartok's études, or Cantonese cuisine combines dissonant elements to synergistically create something beautiful, Augustine's understanding of beauty was focused on contrast, but one that can only be appreciated from the proper, distanced perspective; as he says, “A picture may be beautiful when it has touches of black in the appropriate places; in the same way the whole 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.”⁴¹ To myopically view a chiaroscuro painting from mere inches away would trivialize a given brushstroke's contribution to the overall aesthetic effect of the interplay between light and dark; in much the same way, to focus on the experience of a given fraction of the universe – however bad it may appear – limits one from appreciating the derivative beauty that suffuses all of the Beatific God's Creation.⁴²

Finite creatures such as ourselves, however, often cannot help but focus on the given fraction of Creation that appears most readily to us – particularly when the visceral pain of

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ourselves or others demands our attention. This is certainly Ivan Karamazov's complaint: his inability to rationalize the immense suffering of an apparently innocent child leaves him hamstrung to approach any God who could allow such a thing. At this point, Augustine can be fairly criticized for failing to meet such existential questions; as Tallon points out, Augustine's hope of "perfect harmony evades our vision and fails to connect with much of how we experience the world."⁴³ However, Augustine would likely point out not only that logically consistent answers are not always personally satisfying, but that a single actor in Creation should not selfishly expect to understand all of the Grand Design.⁴⁴

However, Augustine's aesthetic theodicy does grant him more explanatory power than some contemporary theodacists who wish to starkly divide a "logical" sphere of explanation for evil from an "emotional" one.⁴⁵ Not only does Augustine's answer simultaneously touch, however briefly, on both spheres, but it does so in a manner that allows him to easily fold in one final concern: the moment-by-moment aesthetic triumph of righteous judgment for sin. Given that sin is not merely an offense against God's law, but is a degrading perversion of one's self further down the Great Chain of Being,⁴⁶ Augustine's understanding of justice becomes something more than a mere penal debt and instead offers an opportunity for Creation to poetically display a darker brushstroke, automatically redeeming, at least in part, even the worst life has to offer. With a definition of beauty as the harmony of opposites, Augustine's theodicy allows God to easily "send rain on the just and the unjust," condemning sinners to floods, famines, and plagues, and to still genuinely work all things for good; His ultimate, transcendental purpose is always meant to be something harmonious. Whether free creatures provide depraved elements of Creation for the Grand Artist at the top of the Chain to paint with (thereby absolving the Artist for the blame of those evil acts) or whether the Artist himself is structuring painful

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experiences as moment-by-moment "just deserts" for those free choices, the ultimate product is something beautiful.

Consequently, Augustine's aesthetic themes of contrast and harmony allow him to recognize the frequent painfulness of the human experience alongside its happier moments in a manner that some Pollyannaish fideism cannot accomplish. Augustine's is the God who says to the prophet Isaiah "I form light and create darkness / I make well-being and create calamity / I am the LORD who does all of these things,"⁴⁷ not denying that calamity exists, but instead recontextualizing such suffering to highlight God's ability to effect a glorious triumph out of even those darkest moments. Genuine *pankalia* ("universal beauty") proclaims God not simply as an Artist of Evil, but as its Conqueror, negating whatever destructive power it possesses by His subjugation of it to His will. As David Bentley Hart wrote in a response worth quoting at length to the deadly 2004 tsunami in India and Southeast Asia:

To say that God elects to fashion rational creatures in his image, and so grants them the freedom to bind themselves and the greater physical order to another master – to say that he who sealed up the doors of the sea might permit them to be opened again by another, more reckless hand – is not to say that God's ultimate design for his creatures can be thwarted. It is to acknowledge, however, that his will can be resisted by a real and (by his grace) autonomous force of defiance, or can be hidden from us by the history of cosmic corruption, and that the final realization of the good he intends in all things has the form (not simply as a dramatic fiction, for our edification or his glory, nor simply as a paedagogical device on his part, but in truth) of a divine victory.⁴⁸

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This is precisely why Augustine would argue that God "judged it better to bring good out of evil than to allow nothing evil to exist."⁴⁹ And, to adapt a phrase from Marilyn Adams, to say of this beautiful victory that it "trivializes" the worst that this world has to offer would seem, to Augustine, to reflect an insufficient appreciation of what "beautiful" really means.⁵⁰

Something Problematic

This is not to say, however, that Augustine reached some unassailable position with his theodicy that renders it immune to criticism. As already mentioned, Ivan Karamazov's angst over the phenomenology of suffering may not be existentially satisfied (even though it is logically answered) by Augustine's appeal to God's overall goal of *pankalia*. In the short space remaining, two other important criticisms to Augustine's position shall be considered: its *prima facie* inability to respond to Marilyn Adams' concern for horrendous evils and its apparent incompatibility with the Augustinian affirmation of a sinner's eternal conscious torment in Hell.

Firstly, Augustine's perspectival shift away from a given persons' life experiences to the overall beauty of the universe as a whole does grate against Adams' concern for life-ruining experiences of individual agents (what she dubs "horrendous evils"); as she argues in reference to Augustine's Great Chain of Being, "What participants in horrors are suggesting is that horrendous evil so caricatures Godlikeness at the top level as to defeat the positive value of the bottom level, indeed provides weighty reason for them to wish that their lives—*prima facie* so ruined and/or ruinous to others—had never occurred."⁵¹ Although some of her concerns about the cumulative, rather than the atomistic, effect of harms is blunted by a fuller appreciation of God's omniscience,⁵² her primary concern for the individual is, admittedly, not a question that Augustine was seeking to answer. Had Augustine been responding, like many later theodicians, to a particular event rather than a worldview like Manicheanism, he may well have tuned his

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attention in the more personal direction with which Adams is concerned. Understandably, this suggestion does more to contextualize than excuse Augustine's oversight and the apparent force of Adams' point here is sufficient for her to simply lay claim to this beachhead and move on in her argument. And while Augustine's universal perspective would certainly not require God to "return horror for horror" to individuals as Adams suggests,⁵³ her conclusion that God must achieve victory over evil "or at least evils of horrendous proportions within the context of each individual's life" makes sense.⁵⁴

Augustinian soteriology, however, is certainly far from universalistic; Augustine spends many a page in a variety of works describing how "perpetual death of the damned which is separation from the life of God will last forever and will be the same for all, whatever views people may have because of their human feelings concerning varieties of punishment or alleviation or interruption of suffering."⁵⁵ Hohyun Sohn brings Augustine's aesthetic concerns into conversation with John Hick's classic work on the subject to conclude that "whatever gain there may be in Augustine's aesthetic theodicy of harmony is outweighed by the idea of hell as a permanent feature of the universe," on the grounds that an infinite amount of suffering could never equally counterbalance even a full and unbroken lifetime of sin.⁵⁶ While this charge once again is operating on a more personal level than where Augustine was focused, it still deserves a response.

Regarding the notion that an individual's eternal consignment to Hell could never equally offset his finite collection of sins, the traditional position has argued that "the reprobate continue to sin in hell and thus accrue guilt that warrants further punishment."⁵⁷ Unsatisfied with this self-perpetuating view of hellbound sinners, Andy Saville has argued for the eventual "reconciliation and the glorification of God by the damned" insofar as they "come to recognize the justice, and

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true awfulness, of their state.”⁵⁸ Although it does not quite reach the level of individual balance that either Sohn or Adams is seeking, Augustine would likely gravitate towards this latter view, perhaps allowing us to once again blunt the force of Sohn’s criticism while still recognizing the point being made.⁵⁹

Alyosha’s Response

For better and for worse, St. Augustine’s theodicy has been firmly cemented for centuries as a wellspring for Christian theodicy. His definition of evil as the *privatio boni* is often assumed in scholarly conversations about the topic and his free-will defense of sinful evil (as well as God’s justified punishment of said sins) has become standard fare both inside and outside of the academy. Notably, his aesthetic themes, though not given the same level of consideration, are equally important to a consistent reading of his project: God’s pursuit of *pankalia* is the only thing that rationally undergirds his allowance of freely chosen evil actions.

Ultimately, this means that Augustine’s final answer to Ivan Karamazov looks remarkably similar to the response actually given by Ivan’s brother Alyosha in the pages of *The Brothers Karamazov*: after a heated conversation with his brother culminates in a powerfully poetic metaphor (Dostoevsky’s famous parable of the “Grand Inquisitor”), Alyosha’s final argument is not a sentence, but an action: he kisses his brother in a tender display of love and affection. Whatever criticisms may be brought fairly against Augustine’s system, his goal is undoubtedly to devotedly proclaim and intellectually defend the God to whom he prayed “Too late loved I Thee, O Thou Beauty of ancient days, yet ever new! Too late I loved Thee!”⁶⁰

So, although Ivan’s rebellion sparked a famous debate, one need not assume the role of his Grand Inquisitor in the face of the world’s evil. Instead, we might paint ourselves into the position of Dostoevsky’s Prince Myshkn, whose childlike faith mirrors the young Augustine’s

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own journey into Christianity. And when *The Idiot's* prince is said to have proclaimed that "Beauty would save the world,"⁶¹ the bishop of Hippo would simply smile and nod.

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¹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, (New York, NY: Airmont Publishing, 1966), 222.

² *Ench.* 11

³ *Conf.* VI.3

⁴ *CD* VII.30. See also *Conf.* I.3.3

⁵ For more on the Great Chain of Being see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

⁶ Colossians 1:17, NASB. See also *Conf.* VII.12.18

⁷ As Marilyn McCord Adams says, "For Christian Platonists (such as Augustine, Anselm, and Bonaventure), God is Goodness Itself, once again, the perfect integration of Justice, Truth, and Beauty. For everything else, *to be* is to be somehow Godlike, to participate in, to imitate or

reflect Beauty itself.” in *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell

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⁸ Specifically, see Section 3.2.5 of Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1930), 165.

⁹ *CD XI.22*

¹⁰ *LA 3.13.36.126; CD XII.1-2*

¹¹ Philip Tallon, *The Poetics of Evil: Toward an Aesthetic Theodicy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 104.

¹² Tallon, *Poetics of Evil*, 104.

¹³ As in Patrick Lee, “Evil as Such is a Privation: A Reply to John Crosby,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2007): 488, “there will be bad things and bad acts, but to call them “bad” will mean either that they have a privation in them, or that they cause privation.”

¹⁴ *LA 3.12.35.124*

¹⁵ *CD XI.22*

¹⁶ Tallon, *Poetics of Evil*, 114.

¹⁷ *DF 20*

¹⁸ Conversely, if the woman had been hypnotized, brainwashed, or controlled in some other way such that she was forced by another to stab her victim, then the woman would still not be guilty of murder.

¹⁹ Alvin Plantinga, “The Free Will Defense,” In *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, edited by James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 27.

²⁰ *LA 3.1.1.2*

²¹ *LA* 3.1.2.10

²² *VR* xxiii, 44

²³ See *LA* 3.5.13.45-46; See also Frederick Sontag, "Augustine's Metaphysics and Free Will," *Harvard Theological Review* 60 (1967): 301.

²⁴ *LA* 3.5.14.51

²⁵ As in *LA* 3.5.15.56: "For just as a wandering horse is better than a stone that does not wander off because it has no perception or movement of its own, so too a creature that sins through free will is more excellent than one that does not sin because it does not have free will."

²⁶ See Jesse Couenhoven, "Augustine's Rejection of the Free-Will Defence: An Overview of Late Augustine's Theodicy," *Religious Studies* 43, no. 3 (2007): 278-298 for one excellent presentation of this perceived shift.

²⁷ See *Retr.* 1.9

²⁸ *LA* 2.13.37.143

²⁹ As in *LA* 2.13.35.137

³⁰ See also in the closing lines of *LA*, book two: "But since we cannot rise of our own accord as we fell of it, let us hold on with firm faith to the right hand of God stretched out to us from above, namely our Lord Jesus Christ."

³¹ Peter King, introduction to *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, ed. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xxix.

³² *CD* XII.6-8; In particular, see Augustine's consideration of two men of identical dispositions who freely respond differently to the beauty of a woman's body in section six.

³³ *CD* XIII.4

³⁴ William S. Babcock, "Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 16, no. 1 (1988): 31.

³⁵ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 32-55 gives an excellent overview of how this concept can be traced through the thinking of such powerhouses as Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, Jerry Walls, Eleonore Stump, and (by way of opposition) John Hick.

³⁶ CD XI.17

³⁷ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 33.

³⁸ Wouter Goris and Jan Aertsen, "Medieval Theories of Transcendentals," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/transcendentals-medieval/>

³⁹ The classic definition of plenitude found in Lovejoy, *Great Chain*, 52 is helpful here: "the thesis that the universe is a *plenum formarum* in which the range of conceivable diversity of *kinds* of living things is exhaustingly exemplified...that no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled, that the extent and the abundance of the creation must be as great as the possibility of existence and commensurate with the productive capacity of a 'perfect' and inexhaustible Source, and that the world is the better the more things it contains."

⁴⁰ See VR 55 and CG 11.18. For a helpful application of Augustine's conception see Joel Slotkin, "Poetic Justice: Divine Punishment and Chiaroscuro in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2004): 100-127.

⁴¹ CD XI.23

⁴² As in VR 76: "All have their offices and limits laid down so as to ensure the beauty of the universe. That which we abhor in any part of it gives us the greatest pleasure when we consider

the universe as a whole." Augustine points out that judging a building based on a single angle or the beauty of a person based solely on their hair would be fruitless – he deigns to apply the same logic to Creation in all its fullness.

⁴³ Tallon, *Poetics of Evil*, 131-132.

⁴⁴ See, once again, *CD XI.22*

⁴⁵ Of the sort that Adams rightly criticizes in *Horrendous Evils*, 14 under the abstract/concrete distinction.

⁴⁶ Concerning sin as a reorientation of one's priorities, see Babcock, "Moral Agency," 42: "It is an act of self-deprivation because, in turning from God to self, the will deprives itself of the divine light in which it could see and understand and abandon(s) the fire of the divine love with which it could love its supreme good, the true source and goal of its fulfilment."

⁴⁷ Isaiah 45:7, ESV.

⁴⁸ David Bentley Hart, *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005), 63.

⁴⁹ *Ench. 27*

⁵⁰ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 189.

⁵¹ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 42

⁵² Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 40. Which is simply to say that her concerns over imprecision in the just retribution for cumulative harms should not be problematic for an omniscient being.

⁵³ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 41. From a universal perspective, there is no necessary requirement for all individual wrongs to be proportionally repaid in kind provided that those wrongs contribute to *pankalia*.

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⁵⁴ Adams, *Horrendous Evils*, 43.

⁵⁵ *Ench*, 113; See also *CD* 21.

⁵⁶ Hohyun Sohn, "The Beauty of Hell?: Augustine's Aesthetic Theodicy and Its Critics," *Theology Today* 64 (2007): 53.

⁵⁷ Shawn Bawulski, "Annihilationism, Traditionalism, and the Problem of Hell," *Philosophia Christi* 12, no. 1 (2010): 70.

⁵⁸ Andy Saville, "Hell without Sin - a Renewed View of a Disputed Doctrine," *Churchman* 119, no. 3 (2005): 257. See also Henri Blocher, "Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Hell," in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster, 1993), 310.

⁵⁹ I say this following Blocher, "Everlasting Punishment," 291, given that Augustine clearly affirms eternal punishment for the damned.

⁶⁰ *Conf.* X.27

⁶¹ Part III, Section V of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larrisa Volokhonsky (New York, NY: Vintage, 2003), 382.