Augustine: Advocate of Free Will, Defender of Predestination

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The relationship between God and mankind has been one of distress and apparent contradiction. The story of the Fall in the third chapter of Genesis gives an account of our present existence, which is marked by the fundamental separation of man and his Creator, each of whom reside on a different side of a barrier of sin. The barrier, which Genesis tells us was built by Adam's fault, poses two major issues for the Judeo-Christian tradition. The first is that the side on which man resides, removed from the source of goodness and fulfillment, is permeated by evil, suffering, and sin. An archetypal question arising from this situation is how God, who is both omnipotent and maximally good, can permit the existence of such evil, and furthermore, how evil can even exist since the beneficent Creator is the source of all. The second profound issue concerns the reunification of God and humans: how is the barrier of sin broken and the gap bridged; who is active in traversing it?

One of the formative teachers in the Christian tradition made it his life's ambition to answer these questions, along with innumerable others. Saint Augustine, the great philosopher, theologian, and bishop of Hippo, is remembered as an authority concerning these two issues. Relatively early in his life, he approached the problem of evil from a Neo-Platonist perspective, famously asserting that evil is truly a lack of goodness and is a reality not on account of God, but on account of human free will. Later in his life, Augustine addressed the issue of reunification of God and mankind in the midst of the heated Pelagian controversy. While his opponents claimed that the very free will which Augustine earlier championed was the efficient lynchpin of our salvation, Augustine firmly declared that God's grace was salvation's source and eventually began to use the term "predestination" to describe the deliverance of man from his plight.

While Augustine is acknowledged as a Church Doctor and one of the most respectable and influential thinkers to have ever written, it is difficult to comprehend how any intellectual could argue so fervently for concepts as dissimilar as free will and predestination. The two, it seems, are mutually exclusive. If a person is predestined, his free choice appears to be rendered rather illusory, or at best, trivial. This has led some of his readers to conclude that there existed two Augustines, "the earlier teacher, who proclaimed the freedom of the will; and the later Doctor of Grace and defender of Predestination."[1] Augustine, however, was not as inconsistent as one might think. By considering passages from his *De Libero Arbitrio*, *De Civitate Dei*, and the *Enchiridion*, it becomes apparent that Augustine's carefully formulated answers to the problem of evil and the source of reunification are not contradictory. Furthermore, while Augustine

adjusts his formulation of the will's attributes as time progresses, his principles and overall schema do not change so much as do his audience and the social context in which he is writing. In his last years, Augustine is comfortable maintaining the verity of both predestinarian grace and free will, and even ventures to say that they work together.

Free Will and the Problem of Evil: 388-395

The problem of evil presented a challenge to Augustine from early in his life. Indeed, as he recalls in his *Confessiones*, it was the dualist explanation of the presence of evil that led Augustine to involve himself with the Manichees.[2] This group spoke of a dualistic universe in which supreme good battled supreme evil, and denied the existence of a single, all-powerful, and beneficent God. For them, the problem of evil was not a problem at all, since evil was a fundamental part of their schema. However, Saint Ambrose's teaching led Augustine to study Neo-Platonist philosophy, in which he learned "that the problem of evil could be solved without supposing evil to be a positive, independent principle."[3] Armed with this philosophy and a formulation of human free will, Augustine set out to argue that the benevolent Christian God is in no way responsible for the evil evident in the world.

It is important to recognize that, following the Neo-Platonist Plotinus, Augustine recognizes evil not as a positive reality, but rather as a privation of good. Since God, the ultimate Good, is the source of being from which all else receives its being, evil is simply the lack of being, just as coldness is truly a lack of heat. Evil things are removed farther from God on the cosmic scale of being, and thus, evil itself does not exist. However, Augustine is still compelled to account for God's allowance of the "lack of good" to occur.

Augustine's *De Libero Arbitrio*, or *On Free Will*, is a dialogue with a historical friend named Evodius. Augustine begins by quickly establishing the issue he wishes to explore: "We believe that everything which exists is created by one God, and yet that God is not the cause of sin. The difficulty is: if sins go back to souls created by God, and souls go back to God, how can we avoid before long tracing sin back to God?"[4] It is at this point that Augustine offers his basic and essential solution by appealing to human free will as the blameworthy source of sin. Clearly, humans do evil in agreement with the decisions rendered by their minds. However, "since what is equal or superior does not make a mind the slave of passion, if it is in control and virtuous, on account of its justice, while what is inferior cannot do this on account of its weakness…nothing makes a mind give way to desire except its own will and free choice."[5] Appealing to a hierarchy of nobility (a Neo-Platonic emanatory notion), Augustine argues that nothing, whether nobler or less noble than a mind, can cause the mind to will evil; so nothing but the will itself can be the source.

The early sections of the *De Libero Arbitrio* tell us an important fact about the human will: it was intended for good. Evodius prompts this discussion by declaring, "I want to know whether that very free choice, by which we have concluded that we have power of sinning, ought to have been given us by Him who created us."[6] Ironically, here Augustine asks for God's providential help in answering Evodius's question regarding the power of free will![7] Even in this small instance in his early writing, Augustine sees no exclusivity between free will and divine assistance. Anyway, the consideration at hand is whether it was irresponsible of God to have given us a will which brings about evil. Augustine answers that simply because "sin occurs through free will, we must not suppose God gave man free will for the purpose of sinning."[8]

Rather, it "is sufficient reason why it ought to be given, that man cannot live rightly without it."[9] The proper and intended use of free will is to choose the good. To use free will in any other manner is a perversion for which, as was discovered before, only the will is liable. Again, since he had good intentions (which Adam spoiled), God is not to blame even for giving humans a will, despite the fact that it may be used for evil.

Another interesting result from this discussion does not concern God's liability, but the will itself. Augustine claimed that without the will, "man cannot live rightly." He affirms in yet another place, "We could not act rightly except by this free choice of will."[10] The logic here is simple: man cannot choose the good without having the ability to choose. However, it is significant to note that the language he uses implies (yet never definitively states) that man can, in his present state, choose some form of good. This notion will be quite different in later years, and it is, indeed, one aspect of Augustine's thought that he adjusts over time.

Evodius is not prepared to acquit God quite yet in the discussion. They have yet to consider the extent to which man's will is truly free, a consideration which is inexorably bound to the question of God's foreknowledge. It is a classic difficulty: if God's omniscience includes being privy to a man's decision before it occurs, how can it be maintained that the man makes a genuine choice, since he will inevitably choose what God knows? Boethius will later address the dilemma by arguing that God cannot be thought of as if he were within the realm of time, but Augustine argues without appealing to God's eternality. He accomplishes this by asserting that knowledge does not imply causality. "When you remember past events you do not compel them to have happened, and in the same way God does not compel future events to happen by His foreknowledge of them."[11] Elaborating, he considers the idea of foreknowledge in human-to-human interaction, as would be the case of a mother knowing her child would steal a cookie, if given the chance. However, her knowledge does not restrict the choice of her child.

> You would not necessarily compel a man to sin by foreknowing his sin. Your foreknowledge would not be the cause of his sin, though undoubtedly he would sin; otherwise you would not foreknow that this would happen. Therefore these two are not contradictory, your foreknowledge and someone else's free act. So too God compels no one to sin, though He foresees those who will sin by their own will.[12]

Since there is no direct causal relation between foreknowledge and a person's choice, Augustine concludes that it is safe to assert that one's will can truly be spoken of as free, and accordingly, blameworthy for its election to sin.

We should consider one more passage of the *De Libero Arbitrio*. "Do not be troubled by the blame accorded to sinful souls, and do not say in your heart it would have been better had they never existed. They are blamed in comparison with themselves, when it is realised what they would be, if they had chosen not to sin."[13] This passage references the important theme of God's justice, which Augustine asserts strongly in his later writings concerning predestination. He tells us not to "be troubled" by the fact that sinners are guilty (and will be punished accordingly), for it is by their own choice that they are deserving of judgment. However, the final sentence offers an interesting insight into Augustine's mind at the time: "when it is realised what they *would* be, *if they had not* chosen to sin." The passage seems to indicate that sinners had an alternate future, a notion at which a predestinarian would cringe. This observation would give credence to an argument that Augustine was closed to predestinarian notions at the time and that he later turned his opinions one hundred and eighty degrees to accommodate the theory. However, the conclusion to which Augustine refers—an alternate future for each individual who

exists *after* the Fall—cannot be maintained satisfactorily, since there is the possibility that Augustine here refers to an alternate future for humanity which *preceded the Fall*, a future which may not be a self-contained possibility for Adam's descendants.

What Augustine has definitively stated thus far is that God is not culpable for the presence of evil. For the will is the source of evil, God gave the will for the use of good, God's foreknowledge coexists harmoniously with man's free will, and God is just in judging sinners, since their sin is the result of free will. As one may notice, Augustine's notion of the will in *De Libero Arbitrio* is rather unrestrained. "It lies in the will what each man chooses to seek and attach himself to."[14] The will is not described here as damaged, weak, or lacking power (as it will clearly be described in the approaching decades). On the other hand, Augustine does give a preview of coming attractions, so to speak, by mentioning that the soul is "corrupted by sin"[15] and "stained with sin."[16] Apart from these instances, Augustine's depiction of the will is very permissive and optimistic. It must be remembered, however, that in this work, Augustine is attempting to, *without implicating God*, "answer the Manichaean objection to Christianity"[17] which is based on evil, and a strong will is necessary to assert that "the mind is not cast down from its position of control, and from its right order, except by the will."[18] Augustine never goes so far as to preclude the possibility of limitations of the will; he simply refrains from mentioning any, which, considering his purpose, is a wise decision.

Freedom and God's Election: De Civitate Dei, c. 415

One of Augustine's most well-known and monumental works is *De Civitate Dei*, or *City of God*. Written in the thirteen-year period between 413 and 426, this work addresses issues so diverse that it "can almost serve as a handbook for Christian thought,"[19] though it would indeed be a very large handbook. Included in this collection is discussion of the human will. Over the twenty-five years or so between this work and *De Libero Arbitrio*, Augustine's thinking evolved in many areas, as noted by Augustine scholar Gerald Bonner: "In 396 or 397 there occurred a major development in his thought….he suddenly came to understand the message of St Paul expressed in the words: *What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?*"[20]

Satisfied with his refutation of the Manichean concept of evil, Augustine turned to God's grace, the topic addressed in the passage from the ninth chapter of Romans cited by Bonner. While many believe that Augustine's formulations of grace and predestination were developed in the midst of his arguments with Pelagian theologians, his reading of Romans 9 had a formulaic influence that far preceded the first whisperings of Pelagius. The implications are evident in a passage from his *De diversis quaestionibus VII ad Simplicianum* (written shortly after *De Libero Arbitrio*), in which he maintains his stance regarding God's culpability from *De Libero* but adds a new twist. God does not compel any person to sin, "He simply does not bestow his justifying mercy on some sinners…He decides who are not to be offered mercy by a standard of equity which is most secret and far removed from human powers of understanding."[21] This statement seems strikingly "anti-Pelagian" for the time it was written and, even more interestingly, sounds shocking given the defense he gave of free will just years before. However, this radical juxtaposition of thought in no way stopped Augustine from making the assertion. Passages from *De Civitate Dei* will shed some light on the details in Augustine's ante-predestinarian attitude, which, it turns out, is not at odds with free will.

In the fifth book of *De Civitate Dei*, written between 414 and 418, Augustine once again visits the idea of God's foreknowledge, this time inspired by Cicero's denial of its existence.[22] Setting the tone for the discussion to follow, he writes of God as the "most high, who is most rightly and most truly believed to know all things before they come to pass, and to leave nothing unordained; from whom are all powers, although the wills of all are not from Him."[23] The terminology "ordained" has found its way into Augustine's language, but not at the expense of the freedom of wills, all of which "are not from" God. He continues, "We assert both that God knows all things before they come to pass, and that we do by our free will whatsoever we know and feel to be done by us only because we will it."[24] Although it sounds identical thus far, Augustine's argument about foreknowledge and free will is not a replica of that in *De Libero Arbitrio*. He delves deeper into it, establishing, paradoxically, a closer relationship between such knowledge and human freedom.

Cicero objected that if God had foreknowledge of future events, he must also have foreknowledge of the efficient causes leading up to those future events. If this is so, he reasoned, a series of efficient causes, beginning now, must necessarily exist in this world as well as in God's knowledge. This series of causes would guarantee the occurrence of any future event and inevitably render the will a slave to the efficient causes. Augustine does not agree: "But it does not follow that, though there is for God a certain order of all causes, there must therefore be nothing depending on the free exercise of our own wills, for our wills themselves are included in the order of causes which is certain to God, and is embraced by His foreknowledge, for human wills are also causes of human actions."[25] Where before Augustine simply denied that foreknowledge causes an action, he here suggests that God's knowledge includes the future free choice of the will. Foreknowledge and free will are then fundamentally and harmoniously connected, since the will is a validly efficient cause known by God. Augustine has begun to move God's power and man's choice into closer relationship with one another while maintaining the validity of each.

Augustine continues in his reiteration of arguments in *De Libero Arbitrio* in the twelfth book (written before 418) by affirming, once again, that evil originates in the will and not in God. God did not create a naturally sinful human race, he writes. "It is not nature, therefore, but vice, which is contrary to God."[26] Augustine is wary of speaking of any "sinful nature" belonging to humans, since "nature" is created and talk of "sinful nature" would once again bring up the problem of evil. He even avoids talk of habitually sinful actions as "nature", preferring the term, "second nature": "Even the vice which by the force of habit and long continuance has become a second nature, had its origin in the will."[27] Vice finds its source in the will, not in created nature; the only relationship that vice has with nature is that, through sin, it distorts nature. The culpability for evil, in agreement with his earlier writings, still rests squarely on the will and not on God.

A crucial issue in the development of his schema of grace and predestination is the cause of an evil will. Augustine proposes an example to illustrate his query. Consider "two men, alike in physical and moral constitution," who are tempted to an evil (Augustine uses illicit bodily pleasure in his hypothetical situation). One submits to temptation and sins, "while the other steadfastly maintains a modest restraint of his will." In this situation, what brings about the evil will in the one and not the other? Could it be the flesh of the one, he asks? No, he reasons; both men had flesh. Could it be their dispositions? It could not be, since they were assumed to have like moral constitutions.

> If both are tempted equally, and one yields and consents to the temptation, while the other remains unmoved by it, what other account can we give the matter than this, that the one is willing, the other unwilling…? And what causes this but their own wills…?...However minutely we examine the case, therefore, we can discern nothing which caused the will of one to be evil.[28]

Augustine draws his conclusion regarding the *efficient cause* of an evil will: "There is none. For what is it which makes the will bad, when it is the will itself which makes the action bad? And consequently the bad will is the cause of the bad action, but nothing is the efficient cause of the bad will."[29] This may seem like a "cheap" solution, or even a capitulation on the part of Augustine in his search for an answer. In fact, though, it is a pivotal conclusion in the context of his Neo-Platonic background. "*Nothing* is the efficient cause of the bad will" is a specific reference to evil, which is both the privation of good and the lack of being. It is nonsensical, therefore, to inquire about a cause of an evil will:

> Let no one, therefore, look for an efficient cause of the evil will; for it is not efficient, but deficient, as the will itself is not an effecting of something, but a defect…Now, to seek to discover the causes of these defections—causes, as I have said, not efficient, but deficient—is as if some one sought to see darkness, or hear silence. Yet both of these are known by us…not by their positive actuality, but by their want of it.[30]

It becomes even more apparent that God cannot be considered to cause an evil will, since he is Being and evil is merely a privation. We cannot seek the cause of an evil will; the very *starting point* must be the will, which *freely* chooses evil, and in doing so, turns away from God. As interesting and perplexing as the issue of choosing evil is, the truly illuminating aspect of Augustine's thought here is the counterpart of the will and what it means to choose good.

While "nothing" is the cause of an evil choice, a truly "good" choice is participating in Being, and since this Being is the source of all good, he must also be the source of a good choice.Augustine begins, "the nature of God can never, nowhere, nowise be defective."[31] God is the perfect wellspring of goodness. Earlier Augustine argued that God did not create a sinful human nature, but good nature that was damaged by admitting "nothingness" as one of its sources. Concerning non-perfect natures Augustine explains, "the more being they have, and the more good they do (for then they do something positive), the more they have efficient causes."[32] The cause of good things in humans is God, and, as Augustine argues in the next section, this includes the free human will.

In the ninth section of the twelfth book, Augustine considers angels, which, like humans, have wills. Supplementing his earlier claim that nothing is the cause of evil wills, he writes that one cannot deny a cause of a good will. "As to the good will, if we should say that there is no efficient cause of it, we must beware of giving currency to the opinion that the good will of the good angels is not created, but is co-eternal with God."[33] Such a conclusion is clearly unacceptable, since only God is eternal. Like humans, angels must have been created with a good will, the cause of which is God.

> We are driven to believe that the holy angels never existed without a good will or the love of God. But the angels who, though created good, are yet evil now, became so by their own will….These angels, therefore, either received less of the grace of the divine love than those who persevered in the same; or if both were created equally good, then while the one fell by their evil will, the others were more abundantly assisted.[34]

Angels who chose the good were assisted by God in doing so, by virtue of the fact that it was a good choice. But Augustine makes the startling assertion that they were "more abundantly assisted" than those angels who chose evil (through their own will, since that choice has nothing as its cause). God elected a group to which to offer more abundant assistance; this position is nothing short of predestinarian.

We must remember, though, that God is still not the cause of any evil, since that evil came from the will, which is free. The will can choose the good or the bad: in choosing the good, it is being fueled by God, who is the source of goodness, while in choosing the bad, it does so on its own accord, separate from God and relegating itself to a lesser state of being. Choosing to sin is a free action insofar as nothing but the willing being is responsible for the decision, while choosing the good (through the assistance of God) is free since it is participating in Being to a fuller extent, not bound by the restraints of nothingness.

In the fifth and twelfth books of *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine used his Neo-Platonist background to both defend the freedom of the will and flesh out his earlier assertion that God "simply does not bestow his justifying mercy on some sinners." This assertion will be even more fully explored by examining God's justice in his next writings, but as for now, Augustine has provided an explanation as to why righteous souls must be elected by God: they could not be righteous apart from his involvement, since anything apart from his involvement is wicked and of lesser being. "For, as He is the creator of all natures, so also is He the bestower of all powers, not of all wills; for wicked wills are not from Him, being contrary to nature, which is from Him."[35]

Weakness of the Will: The Enchiridion, 421-422

The final years of Augustine's life, which ended in 430, were filled with heated debates with the Pelagians. Pelagius himself was offended by Augustine's remark in the *Confessiones*, "Grant what Thou does command, and command what Thou wilt."[36] Pelagius believed the remark degraded man's free will, through which, he argued, humans could independently choose the good. This view, obviously incompatible with Augustine's opinions, sparked a fierce debate which shaped the tone of the bishop's later works. While the debate with Pelagius himself was occurring concurrently with the writing of books five and twelve of *De Civitate Dei* (and ended with Pelagius' condemnation in 418), the controversy continued to escalate with Julian of Eclanum in the last decade of Augustine's life. In these years, Augustine made some of his boldest proclamations regarding predestination. However, as we have seen, the groundwork for Augustine's predestinarian schema was present even before 400: his theory of predestination did not *originate* with the Pelagian controversy. Rather, his predestinarian ideas were heavily explored, accented, and developed as a result of it.

Shortly after 420, Augustine wrote a work called the *Enchiridion*. The work was written upon request of a Roman named Laurentius, who desired a handbook of Christian doctrine that answered various questions. In this work, which was written in the midst of the Pelagian debate concerning wills, Augustine treats the matter of wills quite thoroughly. With the controversy brewing in the back of his mind, Augustine emphasizes the power of God in relation to human beings, stresses God's justice in relation to our sinfulness, and steadfastly maintains that God is not culpable for the presence of evil in creation.

Augustine's writing in the work clearly has an anti-Pelagian tone, specifically in the following passage, in which he speaks of the will as damaged to a much greater extent than he has in the previous two works we have addressed.

> Can [sinners] be restored through the merit of their own works? God forbid. For what good work can a lost man perform, except so far as he has been delivered from perdition? Can they do anything by the free determination of their own will? Again I say, God forbid. For it was by the evil use of his free-will that man destroyed both it and himself. For, as a man who kills himself must, of course, be alive when he kills himself, but after he has killed himself ceases to live, and cannot restore himself to life; so, when man by his own free-will sinned, then sin being victorious over him, the freedom of his will was lost.[37]

Augustine's manner of speaking must be considered carefully when interpreting a passage such as the one above. Although his words express the idea that man's will has been obliterated completely, this is far from the point Augustine is making, and in fact, he speaks otherwise just sentences later. It must be remembered that Augustine was a professor of rhetoric and he writes as a rhetorician speaks, using flamboyant images and words to make his point against an adversary. The will which Augustine speaks of as "destroyed" is the will which can freely choose to love God, for apart from God's grace, fallen man cannot accomplish such a feat. This does not necessarily mean, however, that man does not have any will, nor does it mean that man's will is not free. Augustine argues that one's freedom depends on who, or what, he is serving:

> He is freely in bondage who does with pleasure the will of his master. Accordingly, he who is the servant of sin is free to sin. And hence he will not be free to do right, until, being freed from sin, he shall begin to be the servant of righteousness. And this is true liberty, for he has pleasure in the righteous deed; and it is at the same time a holy bondage, for he is obedient to the will of God.[38]

Sinners are free only insofar as they can sin, since they are slaves to sin. But the righteous are redeemed and slaves of Christ, their master, and so through Christ, they are free to do good, which is "true liberty." He later expounds upon this notion: "We shall be made truly free, then, when God fashions us, that is, forms and creates us anew, not as men—for He has done that already—but as good men, which His grace is now doing, that we may be a new creation in Christ Jesus."[39]

It is the grace of Christ that transforms us, and this is given by God to the elect. Thus, only through God's election may the wills of men become good. Augustine, with Pelagian opponents in mind, mentions that some deny that God would change the will of a person. To them he responds, "Why are we taught to pray for our enemies, who are plainly unwilling to lead a holy life, unless that God may work willingness in them?"[40] He pushes the point further, stating that not only can God change one's will, but it is only through God's work that a will can become good. "Now against [sins of ignorance and weakness] it is our duty to struggle; but we shall certainly be beaten in the fight, unless we are helped by God, not only to see our duty, but also, when we clearly see it, to make the love of righteousness stronger in us."[41] As in *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine makes God's mercy the central lynchpin in a man's choosing of the good, so much so that "the mercy of God is necessary not only when a man repents, but even to lead him to repent."[42] Man, as the result of sin, is described here as incredibly feeble, so feeble

that he cannot even *begin* to repent on his own. Thus, those to whom God does indeed grant mercy must be chosen and destined to receive it from the beginning of time.

Augustine's predestinarian ideas, while fitting with his Neo-Platonic background and logical reasoning, present two very problematic concerns, both involving the very issue addressed in his *De Libero Arbitrio*, namely, God's goodness despite the presence of evil. The first is that with man's weakness so heavily brandished, Augustine seems to portray a God who is rather arbitrary and cruel in choosing only some to save and others to leave for perdition. Indeed, what kind of good God would choose to save only some of his children? Augustine addresses the problem by citing an idea he discussed even in *De Libero*: God's justice.[43]

God is not only wholly good; he is wholly just as well. Since man turned away from God in Adam, God would be completely fair in allowing the whole race to suffer damnation, and we could not complain of injustice. God is also merciful, and this explains his salvation of those he elects. "When He [changes the evil wills of men] He does it of mercy; when He does it not, it is of justice that He does it not, for 'He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth'."[44] Some people, Augustine explains, have trouble understanding why, as Scripture tells us, Yahweh "loved" Jacob but "hated" Esau.[45] "It seems unjust that, in the absence of any merit or demerit, from good or evil works, God should love the one and hate the other."[46] But this is not so, he claims, for "who but a fool would think that God was unrighteous, either in inflicting penal justice on those who had earned it, or in extending mercy to the unworthy?...He who said, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,'[47] loved Jacob of His undeserved grace, and hated Esau of His deserved judgment."[48] God cannot be said to be less good simply because he allows some to perish, for it is on their own account that they are perishing. Augustine actually uses the free-will defense from *De Libero* to defend God's justice in a predestinarian schema.

The second problematic issue related to God's goodness and predestination comes from Saint Paul, who Augustine has been citing so often in his own defense. Paul famously writes of God: "Who will have all men to be saved."[49] However, if this will for universal salvation were true (along with man's weakness and God's power), God would not allow any to be damned and would bestow his grace upon all. Augustine notes that theologians usually solve the dilemma with the response that God's universal salvific will does not prevail since in many cases, man himself does not will it (and chooses evil instead). However, this response gives Augustine's "weak" man too much influence over omnipotent God, an imbalance of power that Augustine is not willing to surrender in the midst of the Pelagian controversy.

Rather than restricting God's omnipotence, Augustine proposes that we "are rather to understand the Scripture [1Tim 2:4] as meaning that no man is saved unless God wills his salvation: not that there is no man whose salvation He does not will, but that no man is saved apart from His will."[50] Augustine then suggests that we should pray for God to will our salvation, and "it was of prayer to God that the apostle was speaking when he used this expression."[51]

The interpretation is quite a stretch, and even Augustine seems to implicitly recognize that this is so; he offers another possible interpretation of the verse: "We may understand by 'all men,' every sort of men. And we may interpret it in any other way we please, so long as we are not compelled to believe that the omnipotent God has willed anything to be done which was not done."[52] As long as God's omnipotence is protected, Augustine seems to be fine with any interpretation we want to give Paul's problematic verse!

Clearly, Augustine's arguments are carefully formulated so as to avoid Pelagian readers citing his own words against him. In previous works, such as *De Civitate Dei*, he had maintained

consistently that God's grace was the critical factor in salvation, but his relentless insistence on God's absolute omnipotence seems to be the trait of a battle-hardened Augustine. It is fascinating to note that he ensures that his position does not conflict with his early claim that God is never the source of evil, since his insistence on God's power might resurrect the Manichean objection. "The will of the Omnipotent is never defeated; and His will never can be evil; because even when it inflicts evil it is just, and what is just is certainly not evil."[53] He still guards God from culpability, but his defense now is centered less on the human will and more on God's justice. Despite the shift of focus, he has never come close to denying his original claims that man can freely choose evil in his fallen state and that he is responsible for doing so.

There are parts of the *Enchiridion* that sound quite frightening to the modern Catholic ear, the scariest of which have not yet been addressed. Near the end of the "handbook," Augustine begins to use language that sounds surprisingly Calvinist, prefiguring the later notion of "double-predestination," the idea that God not only elects some for salvation but actively elects the rest for damnation. This notion is due undeniably to Augustine's escalation of God's absolute omnipotence. At one point, Augustine writes of "those whom in His justice He has predestined to punishment," and "those whom in His mercy He has predestined to grace."[54] In the same section, he seems to say that punishing of the "non-elect" was God's will from the very beginning, so by acting badly, the damned are actually accomplishing God's will. "In the very fact that they acted in opposition to His will, His will concerning them was fulfilled."[55] Bonner notes that "Augustine's conviction of the absolute power of God would not admit that it could ever be defeated by the human will; even those who seem to reject God are in fact fulfilling His purposes."[56]

A Single Augustine

It is here that one really begins to question whether this is the same Augustine who wrote so movingly of God's love in the *Confessiones*, the Augustine who considered God the epitome of goodness. The fact is, however, that there was only one Augustine, and his vastly different approaches came from the same brilliant mind. The incongruity in his thought is not evidence of schizophrenia; rather, it is a window into the different environments in which Augustine wrote. Augustine the rhetorician is keenly aware of his audience, and he is formulating his words with his listeners in mind. It would be as inconsistent to claim that in the last few passages Augustine is writing to inspire converts as it would be to argue that he wrote the soul-moving sections of the *Confessiones* to counter the Pelagians. Augustine writes with a goal, and his goal in the end of the *Enchiridion* is to ensure that his handbook can in no way be read by heretics to say that God is lacking power. Bonner addresses the dilemma with much insight: "It may be that some will…be tempted to think of two Augustines, with two different theologies." Bonner continues to say that to do so would be to make a terrible mistake. If Augustine seems different, he explains, it is because one is simply seeing "the other side of the medal. Augustine is concerned both with the heights to which man can be raised by God's grace, and the depths into which he has fallen through his own sin. There is, indeed, an underlying unity in Augustine's thinking."[57]

The underlying unity is that Augustine is acutely aware of the fact that without God, man is lost. Man was created by God for God, and although man has fashioned an abyss of sin that separates himself from his Maker, it has been bridged, *but from the side of God*. From this foundation springs the free-will defense of the *De Libero* that man is responsible for evil, and the

necessity of grace so heavily emphasized in his later writings, which alludes to the truth that the disparity has been recompensed by God. Which aspect of Augustine's thought, which "side of the medal," we discover depends on Augustine's audience and the current controversy in which he is engaged.

In *De Libero Arbitrio*, *De Civitate Dei*, and the *Enchiridion*, Augustine exhibits many different aspects of his thought. He convincingly argues, to the disparagement of the Manichees, that the Christian God can indeed be the source of all and yet remain inculpable for the presence of evil, since human will freely chooses the evil by abusing its freedom. In the other two works, he vigorously argues, following his Neo-Platonic philosophical training, that salvation, the reunification of man and the ultimate Good, can only be born of the ultimate Good; so man must be actively chosen and given the grace to accomplish this. The two assertions, man's freedom to choose evil and his pure reliance on God's grace for salvation, are never at odds with each other, although their resulting notions of free will and predestination seem, at least superficially, inharmonious. However, Augustine was clearly comfortable with both, though he usually championed one more that the other in any given argument. Three years before his death, in his *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio* (which also defends both free will and predestination), Augustine makes a fascinating assertion which attests to the unity of the two notions:

> Nevertheless, lest the will itself should be deemed capable of doing any good thing without the grace of God, after saying, 'His grace within me was not in vain, but I have laboured more abundantly than they all,' [Paul] immediately added the qualifying clause, 'Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.' In other words, Not I alone, but the grace of God with me. And thus, neither was it the grace of God alone, nor was it he himself alone, but it was the grace of God with him.[58]

It is no wonder that this philosopher, theologian, and mystic, who wrote so voluminously on such a diversity of issues, possessed the brilliance to formulate a generally cohesive schema which acknowledges unity in the most disparate of ideas. It was Augustine, after all, who spent much of his life speaking so eloquently of the unity between two fundamentally disparate entities in our world: gracious God and his fallen man.

Notes

[1] Bonner, Gerald. *God's Decree and Man's Destiny* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1987), xii.
[2] Augustine. *Confessiones*, trans. F.J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 3.7.
[3] Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, trans. Dom Mark Pontifex (Westminster: Newman Press, 1955), Introduction, 4.
[4] Ibid., 1.2.4.
[5] Ibid., 1.11.22.
[6] Ibid., 1.16.35.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid. 2.1.3.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 2.18.47.
[11] Ibid., 3.4.11.
[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 3.5.12.
[14] Ibid., 1.16.34.
[15] Ibid., 3.5.12.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., Introduction, 8.
[18] Ibid., 1.16.34.
[19] Wilken, Robert Louis, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 189.
[20] Bonner, *God's Decree and Man's Destiny*, "Augustine and Pelagianism in Light of Modern Research", 17.
[21] Qtd. in Bonner, *God's Decree and Man's Destiny*, 17.
[22] Augustine references Cicero's *De Divinatione*, ii.
[23] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 1993), 5.8.
[24] Ibid., 5.9.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 12.3
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 12.6.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 12.7.
[31] Ibid., 12.8.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 12.9.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 5.9.
[36] Augustine, *Confessiones*, 10.29.
[37] Augustine. *Enchiridion* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, trans. J.F. Shaw, ed. Philip Schaff, (1887), 30.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 31.
[40] Ibid., 32.
[41] Ibid., 81.
[42] Ibid., 82.
[43]Augustine, *De Libero*, 3.5.12
[44] Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 98.
[45] Mal 1:3, c.f. Rom 9.13.
[46] Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 98.
[47] Ex 33.19, c.f. Rom 9.15.
[48] Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 98.
[49] 1Tim 2.4.
[50] Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 103.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., 102.
[54] Ibid., 100.
[55] Ibid.

[56] Bonner, *God's Decree and Man's Destiny*, xii.
[57] Ibid., "Christ, God, and Man in the Thought of St. Augustine," 293.
[58] *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff, (1887), 12.