
Augustine's Secular Education

Whence and Why Evil

The Source and Character of Evil

- ❖ Augustine: 'Having accomplished all these things, let us return, if it is alright with you, to the question proposed at the beginning of our discussion, and let us see whether it has been answered. We set ourselves the question "What is it to act in an evil way?", and everything we have talked about was raised with this end in view. **Therefore please focus your attention now and consider whether acting in an evil way is anything other than this: having neglected eternal things** — things which the mind enjoys just by virtue of itself, perceives just by virtue of itself, and which it cannot lose just so long as it loves them — and pursuing, as if they were important and wonderful, temporal things, that is, anything that is perceived through the body (the least valuable part of a human being) and can never be certain. For all evil deeds, that is, sins, seem to me to be included in this one genus.' (*De Lib. Arb.* 1.34, tr. MacDonald)

Transient Beauties: Augustine's Platonism

- ❖ Evodius: 'It is as you say. I agree that all sins are contained in this one genus: when someone turns away from divine things and the things that are truly permanent, and turns toward what is changeable and unstable. Insofar as these changeable things are placed rightly in their own order, they, too, attain their own kind of beauty. But it is characteristic of a perverse and disordered mind that it prefers to be subjected to things that ought to be subordinated to it, things that by the divine order and law ought to be under its command.' (*De Lib. Arb.* 1.34, tr. MacDonald)

Augustine's Fixation on the Transient

- ❖ Love of the theatre (*Confessions* III 2.2)
- ❖ Pride in earthly success (*Confessions* III 6)
- ❖ More lust (*Confessions* III 6.11)
- ❖ An agreeable account of the source of evil (*Confessions* III 7.12)

Monnica's Dream

- ❖ *Confessions* III 11.19: Having rejected the Christian scriptures, read literally, as absurd, immoral, and severally inadequate, Augustine turned to the richer explanations of the Manichees
- ❖ Monnica is informed that in due course Augustine will join her on the wooden rule (*regula lignea*)

The Episode with Aristotle's *Categories*

- ❖ *Confessions* IV 16.28: Pride in love of wisdom—
 - ❖ —misplaced pride, in loving the transient

Augustine's Question to Aristotle

- ❖ Where is God in this scheme?