

Confessing with St Augustine

Augustine on Grace and Freedom

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What is Freedom of the Will?

- Contemporary debate on the nature of freedom tends to focus on the question of the spontaneity of the will and its relation to external causes.
- Is my act of choosing X rather than Z determined by some cause outside my will, or is it entirely un-determined by causes outside my will?
- In theology, this is often posed as a question about the compatibility of divine providence and human freedom.
- It is an important question, because it helps us conceive of what it means to be responsible for our actions.



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What is Freedom of the Will?

- A assumes the spontaneity of the will is a necessary condition of “free choice” (*liberum arbitrium*). A choice that is not spontaneous is coerced, and hence not free.
- A’s account of human freedom is what might be called “compatibilist” in that it does not compete with God’s sovereignty & foreordination.
- The reason for this is that the faculties and powers of human beings are *gifts*, which are dependent upon divine power for their being.
- In that sense, human existence can never be independent of God. As God is the Creator, A assumes that God’s government is not an inhibition to, but a necessary condition for the free movement of the human will.



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What is Freedom of the Will?

- But while the *spontaneous* movement of the will is necessary for a free choice, it is not sufficient for one.
- A thinks we have to think of “freedom” not only in terms of the spontaneous movement of the will, but also in terms of its sufficiency to obtain its proper object: happiness.
- God directs creatures toward their end — happiness in the “beatific vision”. And yet happiness is elusive. Why?



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Original Sin and the Problem of Free Choice

- A works out questions of human freedom against the narrative structure of the Bible, and specifically Romans 5 which contrasts the effects of Christ and Adam.
- Accordingly, he attributes this to a defect of human character, which he takes to be the consequence of Adam's sin. A takes Adam & Eve as historical figures from whom the whole human race has descended.
- Though their existence was ordered by justice, through their sin they corrupted their wills. A describes this as their "conversion" to the creature.
- Our natural unity with Adam & Eve forms the basis of a shared spiritual history and condition — one marked by tragedy.



Original Sin and the Problem of Free Choice

- Three inter-related effects:
 - Knowledge: We no longer know how to attain happiness.
 - Will: Our affections are disordered and misdirected.
 - Power: Our desires exceed our ability.
- A takes our frustration and inability to attain happiness as a sign of alienation from God.
- This alienation reaches its greatest intensity in death, which has the character of divine judgment because it imposes limitations on our enjoyment of finite things.



Truth, Knowledge, & Pride

- Everyone desires to know the truth. Even liars hate to be deceived because error is an evil (*Ench.*, 5.17). Yet we fall into error — either by mistake, through deception or misunderstanding, or by fault.
- *Pride/Greed* — The first/basic form of sin
 - “The heart is exalted before ruin and humbled before glory” (Prov. 18:12); “The love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim 6:10).
 - “It was through this also that the Devil, not of course that he loved money, but his own personal power” (*Gen.*, 15.19)



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Truth, Knowledge, & Pride

- Pride is opposed by love (*caritas*), “which does not seek her own” and “is not puffed up” (1 Cor. 13:4-5).
- “One is holy, the other unclean, one social, the other private, one taking thought for the common good . . . the other putting even what is common at its personal disposal because of its lordly arrogance; one of them God’s subject, the other his rival” (*Gen.*, 15.20).
- Pride is the *libido dominandi* — the desire to dominate, which turns everything into a means of personal fulfilment and control.



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Desire & Created Goods

- A thinks of human moral vocation as a calling to “enjoy” God and “use” everything else for the enjoyment of God.
- But because we are embodied creatures who exist in an environment adapted to our desires, A says that we are prone to love lesser goods above greater goods — to “enjoy” what we ought to “use”.
- Created things “deceive” us precisely in virtue of their desirability & likeness to God. We perceive in them a “unity” or fitness to facilitate happiness which they do not have (*True Religion*, 34.63).
- Pride disposes us to the use of all these things for our self-fulfilment.



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Concupiscence: the Tinder of the Soul

- This tendency to be pulled downward into the enjoyment of created goods is called *concupiscentia* — “concupiscence”.
- Concupiscence is the “tinder” of the soul — its readiness for the inordinate love of lesser goods. A often finds this in places we think of as innocent:
 - The hunger of a baby
 - The episode of the pear tree.
- Is concupiscence a sin?



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Curiosity & The Bondage of the Will

- Curiosity (*curiositas*) — a fascination or preoccupation of the mind, which is motivated by concupiscent desire, to acquire knowledge of some illicit thing.
 - “One is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:13-16).
- This curiosity ultimately delivers only “freedom from justice”, and “slavery under sin” (*True Religion*, 40.76).



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Curiosity & The Bondage of the Will

- A thinks we are so held in the thrall of concupiscence and curiosity, that the only way we can be delivered from it is through a divine gift (*Conf.*, X.29.40).
- This gift consists in the saving missions of the Father, Son, and Spirit —
 - The Father sends the Son to become our *teacher*, granting us a share in his wisdom so that we might make our way to God.
 - The Son through his humbling and death, provides us an example by which we might order our loves.
 - The Spirit illumines our minds & reveals the “sweetness” of God, giving us the power to raise our love above created things.

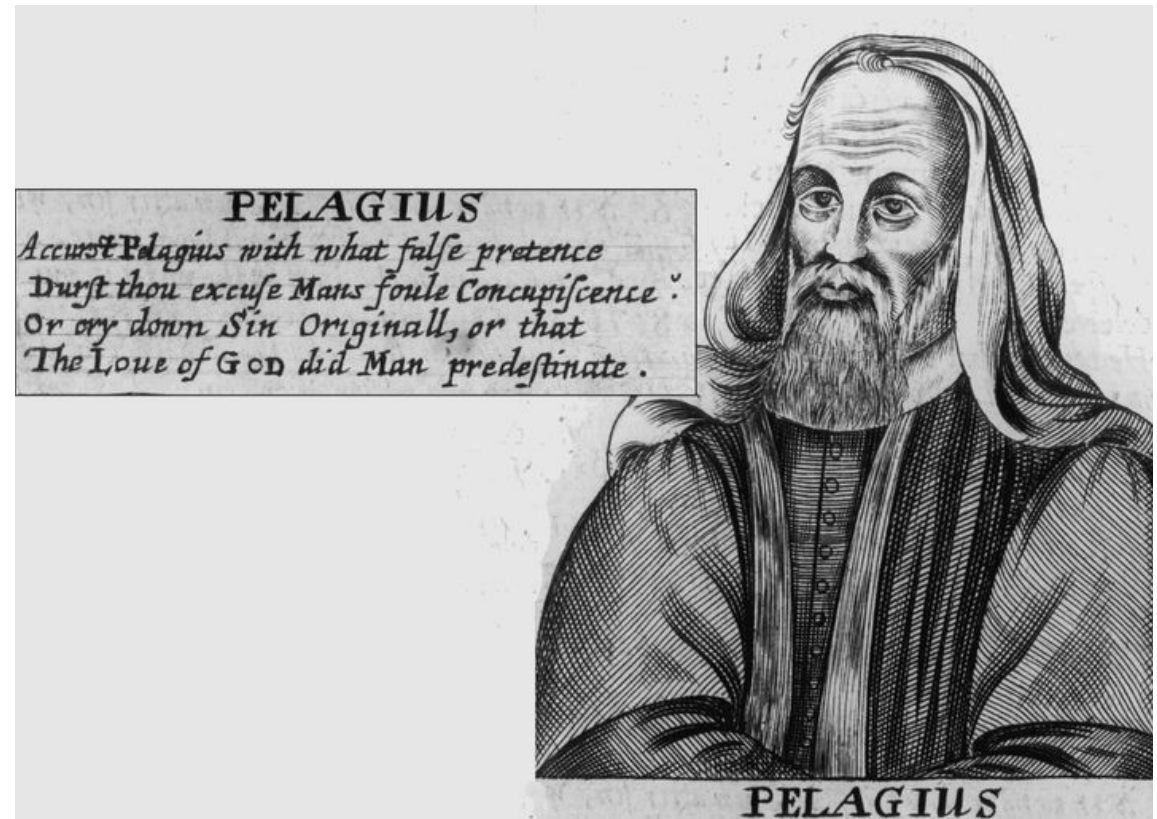


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Pelagianism and the Grace of God

- Pelagius sought to maintain moral responsibility by emphasising the possibility of sinlessness.
- He denied that sin was in-born, holding that Adam's sin was only his own, with no further consequences to his race. Sin continues to infect the human race only by imitation.
- God's grace is not requisite to move the will from sin. This power is given already in nature.
- Freedom from sin might be obtained by the cultivation of a disciplined will.



Freedom and Grace

- “In declaring this nature to be sound, he rejects the Physician’s mercy” (*Nature and Grace*, 34.39).
- A distinguishes between different degrees of moral freedom:
 - Able not to sin
 - Not able not to sin
 - Not able to sin
- As nature is held in bondage to sin, freedom from sin must be a deliverance of divine grace.



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