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'Evil' is an elusive concept that plagues St Augustine throughout the *Confessions*. Despite determining its existence to be the 'privation of...good', there are flashes of an inability to fully comprehend this absence and it is the shaping of these thoughts which will be unpicked in this paper. Born in 354 AD in Thagaste,¹ to parents conflicted by ambition – one clouded by temporal and the other divine - it is not surprising that Augustine depicts much of his life as being marked by confusion and indecision in this somewhat autobiographical tale of conversion. A tone of deific reverence saturates the text, as it was written after this Christian conversion. However, almost every metaphysical query posed by Augustine is explored through a dualistic, binary lens: harking back to his Manichee foundations.² Yet, it would be short-sighted to suggest that this is reflective of an inherent inability to comprehend the epic workings of God's creation, as through such a dualistic presentation a natural balance emerges: allowing Augustine to draw balanced conclusions. For example, when examining who created evil, its purpose, and its nature - the ideas of Stoics, Christians, and Platonists are used as a backdrop to frame his argument.³ Though, in the same way that he continues to see the world through opposed polarities, he seems to be almost unable to escape the trappings of his occupation as a rhetorician. Whilst contemplating the workings of the world through his penned theories, it is as if he attempts to escape the limits of the human condition. At times, whilst closely scrutinising the 'created' – the reader can sense Augustine rising to the heights of the 'Creator' and yet he is trapped by his creature comforts, demonstrated by his verbose language.⁴ Plotinus similarly explores the notion of the corporeal body trapping the soul.⁵ Augustine interacts with these ideas to establish an intrinsic link between evil and people – namely original sin due to Adam and Eve's fall, a concept which underpins the *Confessions*. In addition, key autobiographical events, which decontextualised seem somewhat insignificant – such as the pear tree episode,⁶ are used as foundations to judge and assess humanity's battle with its inner and unshakeable demon – evil.

¹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. xxix.

² Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, p. xiii.

³ J. Patout Burns, 'Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil', *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 16.1, 18-19, Available at < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40015076> > [Accessed 14 February 2021].

⁴ There are examples of this throughout the work, a particularly verbose episode occurs in Book Five, from Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 5.x.18.

⁵ Ernesto Bonaiuti, 'The Genesis of St. Augustine's Idea of Original Sin', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 10.2 (1917), 161-162, Available at < https://www.jstor.org/stable/1507550?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents > [Accessed 15 January 2021].

⁶ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 2.iii.8 - 2.iv.9.

Preoccupied with evil from birth, or at least the birth of others, the first book of the *Confessions* follows the avenues: greed, original sin and innocence, that Augustine first took to find a solution to this problem of 'evil'. Employing a reverential semantic field in the opening lines, almost to the point of becoming obsequious, Augustine establishes himself as a servant, in a subjugated position, to God: 'You are great, Lord' '.... great... highly.... praised... power'.⁷ As this language continues throughout the text, it becomes clear that Augustine, at the age of forty-three,⁸ is writing this confession not as a private plea for forgiveness but a public acknowledgement of God's greatness. However, this works falls short of the servile narrative one anticipates, by the early introduction to the question of evil's existence in God's 'utterly good' world.⁹ Yet, quoting Corinthians when describing man under God as 'bearing his mortality',¹⁰ – Augustine tends to a deferential tone. By employing the transitive verb 'bearing' to describe an 'action that terminates in...an object'¹¹ it becomes apparent that Augustine does not attribute the stresses of life to external strains, but 'morality' itself. Moreover, it is implied that this task of endurance is so great due to the fallen nature of man, as he is riddled with a compulsion to 'sin'.¹² This evil is unconventionally explored through children. Establishing children as innocent, not just to the evils of the world but themselves, Augustine highlights their transparency in having difficulty when controlling urges. A baby jealous of his brother taking milk from their mother is described as being 'pale with jealousy and bitterness'. Emphasising the greed of this child, Augustine juxtaposes it with the 'profound need' of the other.¹³ The short, heavy sounds created by the repetition of 'p' and 'd' mimic the harsh light with which Augustine looks upon greed and lays the foundation for him to later use similar consonance when exploring the relationship between need and greed.

Yet, a greedy baby is perhaps incumbered by the folly of youth and so unable to contemplate the wider moralistic connotations of his actions. Although, as Augustine reflects on the *Book of Job*'s notion of no one being 'pure from sin before you'¹⁴ and then remarking on

⁷ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.i.1.

⁸ G.R. Evans, *Augustine on evil* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1994), p.1.

⁹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.iv.4-5.

¹⁰ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.i.1

¹¹ Mary Sue Ply, and Donna Haisty Winchell, 'VERBS: TYPES AND TENSES (English Syntax)', *Bridging the Communication Gap* (Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1989), Available at <<https://gato-docs.its.txstate.edu/jcr:f65012ef-9608-4ee0-a0be-9559038bc97c/Verbs-Types%20and%20Tenses.pdf>> [Accessed 16 June 2021].

¹² Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.i.1.

¹³ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.vii.11.

¹⁴ Book of Job, 14:4-5, from Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.vii.11.

the noninnocence of the ‘infant’s mind’¹⁵ there is the suggestion that this evil lies within man from birth. Moreover, despite describing the child’s ‘limbs’ as innocent,¹⁶ the anger that consumes him in his greed as he attempts to strike his mother is not the action of an innocent. This is an event which the Stoic Seneca also explores in *De Constantia Sapientis*, but he determines that a child may ‘strike’ and yet they ‘shrink away from foul language’.¹⁷ As adults, experienced in the world, we interpret the first action as being far more violent than the ‘language’ of the second and so it is clear that Seneca is implying that the infant’s inexperience with the world affords them an innocence - from which they accurately feel the weight of people’s intentions and react more honestly to their actions as a consequence. From this Peter Abelard, a twelfth century philosopher, in *Scito Teipsum* determined that ‘the moral quality of an act depends on its intention’.¹⁸ One may parallel this to the innocence and confidence of Adam and Eve prior to the Fall, as they did not fear even their own nakedness: because nudity is not something to be feared, it is merely a wider awareness which causes one to.¹⁹ Ergo, perhaps it is not evil to which Augustine refers when he asks what he sees ‘in that child what I do not remember in myself’,²⁰ but an innocence long forgotten in adults. However, when noting that he would ‘weep when I was physically uncomfortable’²¹, Augustine is intentionally echoing Seneca to similarly conclude that the greedy baby is symbolic of man’s first and perhaps most natural position of taking.²² Although fifth century thinker Proclus, in *Proposition 28*, argued that ‘what is nearer to God is more like God’.²³ The goodness of God, goodness being the antithesis of evil,²⁴ with a baby having just left His side perhaps then provides it an innocence which age steals. It may be that the child is greedy but innocent and therefore, mistaken and yet not consumed by evil. Nonetheless, Augustine quotes Psalms, ‘in sins my mother nourished me in her womb’,²⁵ using scripture to reinforce his conclusion that babies are never innocent, having been cursed from

¹⁵ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.vii.11.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ L.A. Seneca, ‘On Firmness’, *Moral Essays, Volume I: De Providentia. De Constantia. De Ira. De Clementia*, trans. by J.W. Basore (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), xi.1-2.

¹⁸ Peter Abelard, *Scito Teipsum*, from G.R. Evans, *Augustine on evil*, p.163.

¹⁹ ‘Book of Genesis’, *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*, 2:25 - 3:7-12, Available at <<http://triggs.djvu.org/djvu-editions.com/BIBLES/DRV/Download.pdf>> [Accessed 14 February 2021].

²⁰ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.vii.11.

²¹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.vi.7.

²² L.A. Seneca, ‘On Firmness’, xi.1-2.

²³ Evans notes that Augustine shares this idea in Proclus, *De Civitate Dei*, xi.7, from G.R. Evans, *Augustine on evil*, p.30.

²⁴ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.vii.12.

²⁵ Psalm, 50:7, from Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.vii.12.

conception by the Fall. Augustine advances this principle in the *Enchiridion* when positing that upon corrupting the original nature of something, evil consumes it entirely.²⁶

However, Augustine questions the acceptability of such sinful thoughts which become desires that are manifested in this stage of life. Describing how ‘people smilingly tolerate’ such greedy actions in a child, in the belief that they will dissipate with age.²⁷ Augustine employs the adverb ‘smilingly’ to create an almost sycophantic tone: reflecting the herd mindset of the masses. As, like sheep, they unquestioningly accept societal norms in the hope of fitting in or pursuing something equally trivial - a practice which he rebukes them for. This is evidenced through the use of free indirect discourse in the reflective quip: ‘so tiny a child, so great a sinner’.²⁸ This authorial intrusion informs the reader that Augustine is no longer judging the actions of a stranger, but his earlier self, and such harsh critique of a time that he does not ‘remember having lived’,²⁹ indicates the standard to which he expects others to also live to. Yet, the tone that ‘smilingly’ sets - betrays their acceptance with mediocrity, tarnishing the beauty of God’s creation by not encouraging children to meet the potential which Augustine clearly believes He ‘gave me’.³⁰ Moreover, the objective pronoun ‘me’ is clearly not being used to just assess himself but is in keeping with the autobiographical narrative, as by exploring his own sins he is unpicking man’s inherent desire to take. Augustine is also rebuking wider society. Plotinus, a Hellenistic philosopher and probable founder of Neoplatonism from the third century, regarded evil as arising when man focused on attempting to find stability in materiality, rather than direct their attentions to God. An almost gleeful neglect of divine essences and Consciousness reduced the soul to morally evil.³¹ Augustine builds on this idea, making him such a unique figure in the Christian tradition, by focusing on the pervasive sense of evil feeding off their being no end to the to the depths of sin in the human heart. It is clear that the ingenuity of man to evade this calling is infinite and that is what compels Augustine to explore evil: as he attempts to answer God’s call, he must pursue its end. Although, such awareness - as the shackles of pretence fall away - might only be gained close to death, or even in full union with Christ after death. The earlier tone of insincerity amongst the masses is sharply juxtaposed by

²⁶ Augustine, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, ed. by Albert Cook Outler (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 343.

²⁷ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.vii.11.

²⁸ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.xii.19.

²⁹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.vii.12.

³⁰ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.viii.13.

³¹ ‘Neoplatonism’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Available at < <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/neoplatonism/> > [Accessed on 30 June 2021].

an exploration of interiority, as Augustine describes the death of his dear friend Nebridius: who before passing was baptised and went on to critique Augustine's blasphemous witticisms in the hope of saving his soul too.³²

Nevertheless, in life God grants us grace to combat this evil, but Augustine proposes that this is conditional. Paradoxically, to have absolute freedom: one must fully submit to the will of God. Through the repetition of 'command' when proposing that 'You [God] command continence... command me without question...to abstain',³³ it becomes clear that goodness is so difficult to pursue because it requires such great internal change. Yet, the verb 'command' connotes a forcefulness with which grace is teaching Augustine; therefore, it may be inferred Augustine is reassuring his readership that the task is difficult but that they are not alone, being given instruction by a Divine Authority. Augustine presents the change which grace brings about to be secret (*occultus*), as it sits internally, altering more deeply than any outward change could. Pelagius, a fifth century theologian who advocated free will more strongly than Augustine, alternatively presents a less certain view on the effects of grace. He suggests that nothing learnt from God could 'directly' affect man's will or actions, accepting that God 'helps' us but does not compel us.³⁴ To an extent, Augustine interacts with this question of compulsion by proposing that what we do with our free will is 'voluntary', and where one uses it to slump away from this high calling that they have received to communion with God one shows evil to lie 'in the will'. This '*aversio*, the turning away' from God's goodness, however, does not always appear to indicate an inherent evil - merely a misguided mind. Although, as the second notion derives from the *Confessions*, it may be an evolution of Augustine's earlier thoughts about evil lying in the '*aversio*' from *De Libero Arbitrio*.³⁵ Demonstrated by Augustine's pursuit of happiness in Book Six, perhaps believing it a key to the divine when in reality it is an earthly distraction, as he asks his likeminded and equally impious friends Nebridius and Alypius what else they should seek, if not happiness. To highlight his earlier folly Augustine remarks upon a clear 'wretchedness' present within.³⁶ As Augustine contrasts vice and virtue on the backdrop of being unwise, the readership are presented with God-like freedom - an opportunity which

³² Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.iii.5-6 - 9.iv.7.

³³ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.xxix.40 - 10.xxx.41.

³⁴ Augustine, and Pelagius, *De Gratia Christi*, 1.viii.9 - 1.xiv.15, from G.R. Evans, *Augustine on evil*, pp.160-161.

³⁵ Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, 11.xix.53.199, from G.R. Evans, *Augustine on evil*, pp.116-117.

³⁶ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.xvi.26.

Richard Miller postulates is intentionally devised to ground the fault of evil in man's will.³⁷ As, even with hindsight, Augustine is attempting to evade the realities of evil.

Evil evades Augustine through language. Aged eighteen after reading Cicero's *Hortensius* the pull of the unstable and insubstantial material world became less influential and Augustine pursued the moral and the truthful – through the theosophy of third century thinker Mani.³⁸ The Manichee and Gnostic theosophies tied evil to the materiality of matter, bestowing it with an autonomous power.³⁹ Augustine is clearly inflicted with this way of thinking when he first starts to explore the relationship between evil and divinity. Demonstrated by his envisioning God as a 'substance', and attempt to give both polarities form through 'shape'.⁴⁰ It is clear that Augustine was trying to use the language that Aristotle had created to make sense of the material world and apply it to the unpicking of the Divine. Chadwick proposes that the words that we use are a sign of our fallen state, as they fall short of the 'expression of divine mysteries'.⁴¹ Plotinus had similar difficulty in the fifth *Ennead* when describing God's eternal presence as 'at once he is contained, and there is an end of his placelessness'. Evans satirically undercuts Augustine's efforts by remarking that if he had consulted Plotinus, the latter 'exploited his conceptual resources to the limit':⁴² meaning that words had been exhausted as a medium of attempting to comprehend evil and divinity. In response, Chadwick proposes 'gestures' to be 'the natural vocabulary of all races'.⁴³ However, this implies that man is united by a language which is communicated through our corporeal bodies, bodies which according to Plotinus trap the soul and therefore prevent us from a true union with Christ.⁴⁴ This language is emblematic of man having Fallen: its very words, or gesticulations, are therefore tainted by evil - making a true comprehension of Divinity again unattainable. Nevertheless, Augustine perseveres and comes to the unsatisfactory conclusion that evil had a mass and so, upon confrontation with such malevolent matter - God was finite.⁴⁵ The Manichee obsession with

³⁷ Richard B. Miller, 'Evil, Friendship, and Iconic Realism in Augustine's *Confessions*', *Harvard Theological Review*, 104.4 (2011), 405-407 <<https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/core/journals/harvard-theological-review/article/evil-friendship-and-iconic-realism-in-augustines-confessions/075153DDA23A6EF1D4AA32C33277AA86>> [Accessed 13 January 2021].

³⁸ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, p. xiii.

³⁹ 'Neoplatonism', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

⁴⁰ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.xvi.28.

⁴¹ Henry Chadwick, 'Introduction', from Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, p. xxii.

⁴² Plotinus, *Ennead*, v.v.9, from G.R. Evans, *Augustine on evil*, pp.33-34.

⁴³ Henry Chadwick, 'Introduction', p. xxii.

⁴⁴ Mateusz Stróżyński, 'The Fall of the Soul in Book Two of Augustine's *Confessions*', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 70.1 (2016), 84-85, Available at < https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/24754433?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents > [Accessed 14 January 2021].

⁴⁵ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 5.x.18

materiality continues to pervade Augustine's thoughts until an awareness in Book Seven, whilst imagining these celestial conflicts in bodily states, emerges.⁴⁶ Hitherto, towards the end of the text there is an approach to greater degrees of incomprehensibility when examining the nature of God's presence being like matter and yet, not. Surveying the connexion between mind and body, Augustine proposes an attempt to unpick the idea of 'a nothing something'.⁴⁷ Interacting with the mutability of the body, the divine and evil by contrasting it with the immutability of God a clear parallel is drawn with the [in]tangible.

Exploring the tangibility of matter, against the fragility of unformed matter when looking at divinity and evil; Augustine makes explicit that God did not create evil. Whilst composing *The City of God*, at the backdrop of the collapse of a Christian Empire Augustine was obliged to demonstrate how its ruin had been no fault of God's. The fault lay with man, or at least with people who had abused their free will, in which 'power' and 'substance' made the 'nothing' of evil a 'something'.⁴⁸ Augustine further tussles with this inability to trap the existence of the intangible in language, in the *Confessions*. He asks God if 'which you have made...contain[s] you?'.⁴⁹ This lack of understanding about God's presence, which continues into Book Two and Three unsurprisingly 'transcended my [Augustine's] mind'.⁵⁰ As the mortal body from which Augustine stands in, to the temporal land which he stands on, to think about the vastness and closeness of God - only exists by His will: it is barely there at all. God, who is formless, grants form to this matter and so, at the root of our material existence is this incomprehensible nothingness that exists because God has called it into being. Moreover, the time which Augustine uses to theorise about matter, he deconstructs in those theories, as it passes from the past to the future: one is amazed that there is a present at all. God's transcendence of time is noted by Augustine, 'You are before the beginning of the ages, and prior to everything that can be said to be 'before''.⁵¹ The certainty that there is something 'before' implies a keen awareness of time, the inference being that when writing 'by creation there is both morning and evening' Augustine is purposefully reversing the sequence of the day⁵² as it is laid out in

⁴⁶ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.i.1

⁴⁷ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 12.vi.6.

⁴⁸ Augustine, *The City of God*, from G.R. Evans, *Augustine on evil*, pp.98-99.

⁴⁹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.ii.2.

⁵⁰ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 7.x.16.

⁵¹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.vi.8. This idea builds on scripture, echoing *Jeremiah* - 'before I formed you in the womb I knew you'. From 'Jeremiah', *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*, 1:1.

⁵² Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.xxxv.50.

Genesis.⁵³ This is likely an attempt to rationalise the deaths of his friend and mother because just prior to this, he is asking for ‘a peace with no evening’ -⁵⁴ clearly indicating his current distress.

Eschatological inquiry reinforces the interpretation that by prolonging the life of people, God is extending the opportunity for corruption to manifest: making Him partially responsible for evil. However, in this pronounced analogy between the chaos and fragility of the [in]tangible, Augustine discovers an abyss and - like Dante -⁵⁵ finds evil residing in the darkness of this nothingness, without God.⁵⁶ Through the extension of this analogy to Book Thirteen, the tone of familiarity which pervaded Augustine’s earlier reflections, is echoed in his episode: ‘when I forgot you, you did not forget me’.⁵⁷ The use of the verb ‘forgot’ suggests that one had a memory to forget. The introduction of this intangible element to the human corpus prepares the readership to consider how the grace that God imparts draws them into fellowship with themselves. Yet, man’s propensity to fall into evil makes one unworthy of such a gift. Augustine clearly concurs by depicting more than a dependence on God, but an acknowledgement that we owe our lives and salvation, through Jesus’ sacrifice, to Him: ‘it was your gift to me that I exist’.⁵⁸ This notion of a ‘gift’ is later contradicted by the transactionary language used in the juxtaposition ‘you are never avaricious, yet you require interest’.⁵⁹ Augustine argues that this is a debt that man can never pay back, and therefore he is confined to the payment of ‘interest’ to God through sacrifice. Is this commodification of salvation and existence itself, thereby, evil? Conversely, in the *Enchiridion* Augustine depicted God thinking it better to give goodness the opportunity to come out of the evil, rather than destroy his flawed creation: mankind.⁶⁰ Evidently, He has no part in evil. In the *Confessions*, Augustine proposes a predestination which works with Providence to satisfy God, as it guarantees the salvation of a select few. Alternatively, fifth century Christian monk and theologian, John Cassian argues that salvation begins and ends with the individual.⁶¹ However, in the *Proslogion*, renowned eleventh century Christian philosopher, Saint Anselm proposes that ‘the salvation of the just if from the Lord’⁶². By

⁵³ ‘Genesis’, *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*, 1:1-31.

⁵⁴ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.xxxv.50.

⁵⁵ Dante, *Inferno*, ‘The Divine Comedy’, trans. by C.H. Sisson (New York: Oxford University, 1993), Canto XXXIV, lines 39–45.

⁵⁶ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.vi.12.

⁵⁷ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.i.1.

⁵⁸ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.xx.31.

⁵⁹ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.iv.4.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, p. 330.

⁶¹ G.R. Evans, *Augustine on evil*, pp.166-169.

⁶² Saint Anselm, ‘Proslogion’, *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm*, trans. by Benedicta Ward (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1973), p.263.

stipulating the 'just', Anslem betrays a tending to Augustine's suggestion of predestination: salvation reserved for a few. Although, Augustine perhaps imagines an evil in this pre-selection and so reaffirms God's goodness by imploring his readership to use their free will. They must make the choice to be saved; but it is God who saves us, 'the door is opened'.⁶³

Evil thrives because one is often in company. The narrative of Augustine stealing from a pear tree in Book Two and being encouraged by his pears to perform this very act, demonstrates man's inability to succumb to his proclivity of engaging in lesser deeds. Clearly, Augustine fears social ostracisation in his adolescence, and perhaps more significantly, despite having enough food he is unable to overcome the temptation of coveting what is not his. Admitting that he had 'no motive' other than 'wickedness itself',⁶⁴ this led Augustine questioning as to whether in that moment he loved evil itself. The brevity of the subclausal consideration 'I loved the self-destruction',⁶⁵ given that the body is a temple⁶⁶ and a gift from God,⁶⁷ betrays Augustine's disturbance with this episode. Perhaps it is why he desires what he does that most troubles him. However, having begun the work with an immediate allusion to the Fall when declaring that 'your [God's] wisdom is immeasurable',⁶⁸ with wisdom being an obvious hint to the Tree of Knowledge from Paradise, and the clear visual imagery of the pear tree being that which similarly corrupted Adam and Eve -⁶⁹ Augustine's preoccupation with the circularity of evil is more likely cause for this disturbance. In *Genesis*, God threatens 'death' if they eat from the Tree of Knowledge and yet it is not mortal death that they are punished with but the death of a state which precedes evil,⁷⁰ an innocence which Augustine is obsessed with and yet can never reach - even in death. Moreover, by eating the forbidden fruit, man did not gain divine knowledge but a human awareness - indicating that despite Augustine's efforts to truly comprehend the divinity in the evil of mankind, he will always fall short because man has forsaken its divinity, and thereby the receptacle, through which the Divine is truly understood. Leo Ferrari attributes Augustine's upset to his inability to disassociate from the Manichaean belief that trees contain soul elements, and through the plucking of their fruit one

⁶³ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.xxxvii.53.

⁶⁴ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.iv.9.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ '1 Corinthians', *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*, 6:19-20.

⁶⁷ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.xx.31.

⁶⁸ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.i.1.

⁶⁹ 'Genesis', *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*, 2:16-17 - 3:4-5.

⁷⁰ 'Genesis', *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*, 3:4-5.

is disrupting divinity itself.⁷¹ When Augustine later rests under a fig tree,⁷² Ferrari posits that the clear symbolism of the 'fig', being representative of the Biblical Tree of Life and therefore goodness, is absolutely intentional. Marjorie Suchocki furthers this inference of intentionality by using the Trees of Paradise to divide the books, from Nine to Thirteen 'answering' the 'evils' of Three to Seven, which explore the consequences of the Fall.⁷³ What emerges is the assertion that Augustine's fall had its origins in the Fall, evil's own genesis, creating a shared and cyclic aspect to sin.

When describing the common practice of flogging a child in the pursuit of their heightened concentration in education, Augustine's pontifications over the inherent evil in such an act highlight his inability to break from the habit of a rhetorician. Despite it being that temporal enterprise which his mother coveted on his behalf and which he is critiquing.⁷⁴ Although, there is an inherent conflict in his parenting as being a Christian she did wish to raise Augustine to be pious, pursuing the Divine. In his early adulthood, Augustine's decision to mark that period with lusty conquests - settling with a common-law wife, outside of wedlock, and thereby rejecting continence,⁷⁵ a cleaving to what is good, to fall for concupiscence demonstrates his intentional choice of sin, or evil. By Book Six, the text takes the form of an internal monologue to offset the weight and heavy burdens of world, and depict how they are encroaching on Augustine's interior world. Despite wishing to have continence, evidenced by the continual questioning in the chapters - 'How will I find the right books' 'will I get time to read them?' -⁷⁶ the contents of which is of little import: it is the sheer volume of queries which betray his anxieties about his life choices, when exploring abstinence. Augustine again falls to concupiscence by taking a woman who was not his wife, but his self-awareness when admitting to being a 'a slave of lust'⁷⁷ perhaps indicates a maturity from boyhood to manhood - or the sinner to the saved. Conversely, Augustine only leaves the mother of his son, Adeotatus, 'begotten of my sin',⁷⁸ again standing to take full accountability, to hunt societal elevation in

⁷¹ Leo C. Ferrari, 'The Tree in the Works of Saint Augustine', *Augustiniana*, 38.1/4 (1988), 38, Available at <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/44992463?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents> [Accessed 15 January 2021].

⁷² Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.iv.29.

⁷³ Marjorie Suchocki, 'The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's *Confessions*', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 50.3 (1982), 366, Available at <https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/stable/1463596?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents> [Accessed 15 January 2021].

⁷⁴ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.x.16.

⁷⁵ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 9.v.13-9.vi.14.

⁷⁶ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.v.7.

⁷⁷ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 6.xv.25.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

the form of a convenient marriage. Typically focussing on the minutiae of earthly endeavours would engender a harsh rebuke by the converted Augustine; however, when reflecting upon this time it is his legal marriage which he almost parallels with adultery of his *first* wife. Such deviation from scripture,⁷⁹ determining what is evil based on his personal morality might betray a heretical flair. On the other hand, it is in keeping with Plotinus' ideas of audacity (*τόλμα*), one's freedom being completely dependent on their own independence -⁸⁰ in order to have such a lasting impact on the Catholic Church maybe some aspects of Augustine's theodicy required an original voice. Cavadini proposes the essence of sin is pride, Augustine's originality may thereby be confused for arrogance, leaving an emptiness which one fills with "friendship" found in other sinners.⁸¹ Mateusz Stróżyński builds on this by engaging with Plotinus' idea of *consortium*, sinning in company, theorising that it may not be an inherent desire to sin which causes one to fall to evil but the company of others.⁸²

Such extensive exploration of the human condition encourages one – like Petrarch – to feel as if they are 'reading the history of my own wanderings, and not of another's' as they too become a pilgrim on this journey of salvific redemption when reading this text.⁸³ Yet, unlike Dante's *Divine Comedy*, one does not meet God in life in this work.⁸⁴ The problem of evil, for Augustine, comes down to free-will and whether we allow it to influence us. However, this conclusion is not satisfying because the inescapable human condition becomes the sole cause for a true union with God being unachievable in this life, contradicting some of Augustine's earlier thoughts on striving for happiness. Therefore, the true didactic purpose of this text is not to agree with his notion of 'evil', instead Augustine demands that us, his readership, 'pick up and read'⁸⁵ to discover whether its true nature evades us too. If only to ask whether it is our inability to comprehend evil which keeps us from God or if it is evil itself?

⁷⁹ In the Ten Commandments it says 'Thou shalt not commit adultery', from 'Exodus', *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version*, 20:14.

⁸⁰ Stróżyński, 'The Fall of the Soul', p. 83.

⁸¹ Stróżyński, 'The Fall of the Soul', pp. 96-97.

⁸² Stróżyński, 'The Fall of the Soul', p. 91.

⁸³ Suchocki, 'The Symbolic Structure of Augustine's *Confessions*', p. 365.

⁸⁴ Dante, *The Divine Comedy*.

⁸⁵ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.viii.19 - 8.xi.26.

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