

St augustine and the understanding of evil

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



St Augustine took a very interesting position on the debate surrounding the problem of evil and the existence of God. From the viewpoint that he developed - the position maintained is that evil is caused by humans and not God (Wawrytko 50). The position and the viewpoint challenge the views that an all-knowing and all-powerful God cannot coexist with evil; God would know how and when to avert it, for the good of his people.

This remained a major area of inquiry for Augustine. The roots to the questions leading to his exploration of the issue included that the then stronghold (Roman Empire) was falling apart and he was plunged in loss and disarray. Some of the extreme events that compelled him to probe the existence of God, further, included the loss of his mistress, and later the death of the mother and also a son. However, instead of dwelling on the unfair events that had taken place in his life, he ended up concluding that evil emanates from the free will of humans.

From the extreme end of the debate, the atheists and also the scientists maintain the view that, if an all-loving and powerful god existed, then he would avert all the evil seen in the world. The view is plausible, despite the fact that it is contradictory to the values developed around religion and the existence of God. However, throughout this report, I will maintain the position that St. Augustine was correct and justified, by arguing that the free will of man is the main cause of the evil seen in the world (Engel, Soldan and Durand 209). Based on this position, the paper will maintain the position that the Judeo Christians are not reverend to a selfish and narcissistic deity, who will abandon them because they do not revere him.

Fallen Paradise The first evidence that God exists, and that the free will of humans is the cause of the evil in the world includes the responsibility that comes with being creatures that can make choices based of free will. The concepts explored by Augustine, which demonstrated the truth in this claim is that of the fallen paradise, which was all at the mercy of the human being and not God. From the biblical account of the events that transpired in the Garden of Eden, it is clear that, if humans (Adam and Eve) did not sin, humans would still be enjoying the tropical paradise that they had been offered by God. Prior to the fall of man, God had instructed Adam and Eve on what they could do and what they could not, and the decrees included that they could not eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. Unfortunately, at the first attempt of being tempted by the evil one, humans questioned the directives and the goodness of God, and they ate the fruit. The disobedience of man could be viewed as the choice that predisposed him to a life of suffering from adverse events and evil (Engel, Soldan and Durand 209). According to the views of St. Augustine, becoming a fallen creature ended the pure love for God. This initial nature of the love was one not shaken by human discomforts - bodily or mental. It is conceivable that, in the case that Adam and Eve did not make the damning choice, humans would lead a life free of evil, suffering and one filled with joy and immortality.

Nevertheless, the believers of Christian doctrines still maintain that they devote their reverence to a god who knows all; can do all and is unquestionably merciful. From the viewpoint highlighted above, it is possible to question whether it is possible for a loving god and father to watch as his children suffer and also die. From a personal point of view, as a mother, I

have noticed that the responsibilities of bringing up children resemble the duty that god takes in the lives of humans (Wawrytko 50). One example is that I am often forced to subject my daughters to punishments that I consider unfair, whenever it becomes evident that it is the only way they can learn. However, it would be impossible for me to punish or reprimand my grandchildren due to the mistakes of their parents, and this is one mystery that deserves to be explored further. For the sake of this argument, taking the case of an individual that leads a virtuous life that is in accordance to the principles of godliness, it is still possible that they will die from an earthquake, which is a natural disaster beyond their control.

Based on the principle that God will deliver humanity from the evil of the world, it is hopeful that the individual will enjoy the privileges of living in heaven. From the person's case, it is possible to blame the unfair death on the unfair sins committed by the first parents. Based on the point of view, it is possible to consider god as an egotistical being. Further it is possible to question whether it is possible to please him through the collective prayers of Christians, so that he can remove evil from the world. However, it is also possible to look at the issue from another perspective, as one calling for the cleansing of the evil nature of the lives of humans as individuals. Based on this view, it is possible to maintain that God could be allowing humans to experience the pain of evil, so that they can prove the steadfast nature of their faith, so that they can prove warranting a return to heavenly glory (Engel, Soldan and Durand 210).

From a more distinctive but similar point of view, Bakunin pointed out that the liberty of individuals is founded on their freedom to take any action, as

long as it does not affect others. From Bakunin's point of view, the boundary for what is to be done and what not to do are drawn-out by law. Further, he viewed that the liberty of man is more founded on a man's disconnection from man and not his ties with man. In essence, the desire to do adverse or good actions is grounded on man's understanding of himself (Marx 162). Based on this new outlook to the fall of man, it is possible to view the fall of Adam and Eve as the result of lacking a basis for defining what was good and what would harm or cause harm, maybe to God. For example, in the case that Adam and Eve knew the exact implications of eating the forbidden fruit, it is likely that they would have refrained. Nevertheless, there is hope in those who develop the knowledge of self, and the capacity to return to God for another chance (Marx 163).

Augustine maintained the position that the free will of humans is partly to blame for the damnation of the world, because with the privilege of free will, came the heavy responsibilities of choosing and doing what is right. Right from the time of creation, God gave man the exceptional favor of choice and free will. In the case that this privilege was not accorded to man, it would remain that man would remain a captive bound by the choices made by God. The freedom of man, unlike the limited nature of other creatures is manifest from the fact that God made other animals in pairs, but allowed man to choose whether there was a befitting partner among them. However, after creation was concluded, there was no best fit for man, and then God gave him the option of meeting a companion that was best for him. Upon seeing Eve, Adam made the remark that she was a part of him, and it is possible that God would have given him another, if he declined Eve (Wawrytko 50).

From the explanations given about God's accordance of free will (freedom) to Man indicated that man's free will is tied to God, and that without him man would not have it. For example, according to religious teachings, the poverty of some people is allowed by God, so that he can test the devotion of those that can supply their needs.

Fast-forward to the time of eating the forbidden fruit, Eve and Adam had the option of seeking counsel from God, regarding the consequences of eating the forbidden truth. Unfortunately, they used their free will negatively, and went on to eat the forbidden fruit, which damned them to a life of evil and suffering. The choices of man that led to his damnation demonstrate that they chose a path that was not in line with God's will of giving man a life of eternal happiness and peace. Nevertheless, it is possible to question whether the all-powerful and benevolent god would have done something to relive man of his suffering. However, in answering this question, it is possible that the suffering and the evil experienced in life are the tests needed to prove the reverence of every individual to God. More importantly, the testing time will not go to waste, because it is a part of the prequalification needed to return them to eternal happiness in heaven. The consideration of the causes of evil, the effects of it and also the promises that lies ahead, it becomes evident that God exists, and is only allowing his children to endure the testing needed to justify their worth.

From the dissection of the nature of evil, it becomes clear that it was not one of God's creations. Further, it becomes evident that evil is not a thing, but a subject that came into existence as a culmination of the adverse choices made by humans as free beings. This view, according to St. Augustine is

expressed in the position that God is the creator of only good things, and therefore is not the one that fashioned evil for man. The dissection of a person's life in the world demonstrates the same phenomenon, because he equips all humans with all the tools they need to live a happy and comfortable life. For example, the creative mind of man has allowed him to fashion the machines that allow him to travel faster, and to avoid difficult work. Developing on the previous ideas, St. Augustine's ideas are right that evil is the creation of man (Engel, Soldan and Durand 210). The evidence is that the suffering experienced is only temporary, in the same way any good employer will test an employee before absorbing them. The implication of this statement is that, right from the start, man chose to take the path of suffering (sin).

However, due to the love and the mercies of God, he allowed man further freedom - through salvation - to choose God's path or an alternative one. Going back to the suffering seen in the world, it is apparent that it is all the consequence of the original sin, and it comprises the bad experiences that God allows his people to face, so that he can test their devotion to him. Further, by living in accordance with the principles of godliness, much of the pain experienced is found to get relieved. The idea to be conceived in this case is that, since the time of Adam and Eve, God allowed man to choose God (obedience) or evil (disobedience). Up to this time, man is still faced with the same challenged of choosing God over evil, or evil over him. In essence, without God, there would not be the good to distinguish evil from the goodness of God.

The review of the views of St. Augustine demonstrates a lot of truth to the views that evil is fashioned by humans and not God. This paper explored a variety of topics on the subject, and showed that the fall of man was one of his choices and that the responsibilities that come with free will proved difficult for humans. From the exploration of the nature of evil, it was found that it is the product of human actions, and not the creation of God, which supported the views of Augustine that, evil was not fashioned by God, but by the choices of Man.