Being and Evil: Philosophy in the Shadow of Augustine

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts (Research)

Deakin University
August, 2018
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Portions of the second and third chapters were shortlisted for the Australasian Association of Philosophy’s 2017 Postgraduate Essay Prize. Sections of the fifth chapter were published as “Schelling and the Sixth Extinction,” in *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 13, no. 3 (2017), 107-129. I would like to thank my supervisor Matthew Sharpe for his invaluable feedback. I would also like to thank Patrick Stokes for his suggestions and comments. Professional editor, Floriana Badalotti, provided basic proofreading services, according to the guidelines laid out in the university-endorsed national “guidelines for editing research theses.”
ABSTRACT

This thesis demonstrates how Augustine’s concepts of good and evil opened up certain conceptual possibilities that Descartes, Kant and Schelling later developed through their own metaphysical systems: more precisely, its contention is that Descartes, Kant and Schelling adhere, directly or indirectly, to Augustine’s model for ontology by rendering being absolutely Good, so as to repress evil as a mere privation, fault, or absence. After the introduction, the first chapter examines how Augustine’s rationalist demonstration for the benevolent God’s existence as being’s highest totalization permits him to develop a theodicy according to which evil is the epiphenomenal privation of the Good rooted in the misuse of our free will. At the same time, we shall see that Augustine’s late doctrine of predestination inadvertently threatens his ontologization of the Good, insofar as it re-visions God as bringing evil into being as a co-eternal principle alongside the Good by gratuitously condemning some to eternal damnation. The second chapter corrects the typical portrayal of Descartes as having broken with medieval, Christian philosophy by showing how Descartes only really breaks with scholastic Thomism so as to return to Augustine’s even more ancient rationalism. Descartes thus translates Augustine’s ontological argument against the sceptics into his innate ideas of the cogito and the perfect God, as well as Augustine’s theodicy into his epistemological account of error’s privation of what truly is. Ultimately, we shall see that Descartes is even, as it were, “too Augustinian for his own good” when he reconstructs the problematic predestinarian doctrine through his late occasionalism. In the third chapter, I show that, while Kant’s first Kritik is deeply sceptical about ontological arguments, his second Kritik recapitulates Augustine’s
ontologization of the Good by demonstrating through other, critical means that our moral behaviour operates in such a way as if we have a free and immortal soul created by a benevolent Creator. As per Augustine, Kant thus holds that evil can only result from our freedom to deviate from the law of the highest, divine Good, even as he also recognizes an even more radical evil as the will’s anterior condition. The final chapter shows how the young Schelling attempts to resolve Augustinian theodicy’s shortcomings by ontologizing being as always already free, and hence evil. In the final analysis, however, even Schelling eventually reaffirms an absolute spirit of pure Positivity beyond evil’s negative dialectic to account for the inverse problem of how the Good can emerge out of the dark ground of being.

By tracing how three canonical philosophers extrapolate Augustine’s chief thought-structure, which conflates being with the Good to the detriment of evil as privation, this thesis hopes to show that Augustine’s legacy on the history of Western metaphysics has perhaps been insufficiently registered in much scholarship. This is a hypothesis that could be tested further by putting Augustine in dialogue with other thinkers, although this task is evidently beyond this thesis’ scope.
CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION .............................................................................. 1

1.1. THE ONTOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF AUGUSTINE’S CONCEPTS OF GOOD AND EVIL.............................................................................................................. 1

1.2. GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW APROPOS THE HISTORY OF CONCEPTS OF GOOD AND EVIL...................................................................................... 4

1.3. METHODOLOGY OF TEXTUAL ANALYSIS ..................................................... 9

1.4. CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER OUTLINE .................................................................. 12

CHAPTER 2. FACING AUGUSTINE’S DEMONS .............................................. 16

2.1. AUGUSTINE’S PROBLEM OF EVIL................................................................. 20
    2.1.1. The biographical backdrop of Augustine’s problematic ............................. 20
    2.1.2. Augustine’s first Manichean solution......................................................... 21
    2.1.3. Augustine’s “road to Damascus” ................................................................. 22
    2.1.4. Augustine’s rational approach to the problem of evil ................................. 22

2.2. AUGUSTINE’S RATIONALIST ONTOLOGIZATION OF THE GOOD ........ 24
    2.2.1. The sceptical context and Platonic inspiration for Augustine’s proto-
          ontological argument............................................................................................... 24
    2.2.2. The proto-ontological argument itself......................................................... 27
    2.2.3. From God’s existence to his benevolence................................................... 29

2.3. AUGUSTINE’S THEODICY .................................................................................. 30
    2.3.1. Augustine’s privation theory of evil ............................................................ 30
    2.3.2. Natural evil .................................................................................................. 31
    2.3.3. Moral evil .................................................................................................... 32

2.4. AUGUSTINE’S ETHICS ......................................................................................... 33
    2.4.1. The three eras of human history ................................................................. 33
    2.4.2. The theoretical and practical virtues ......................................................... 34
    2.4.3. The Pelagians and the Donatists’ temptations ............................................. 36
    2.4.4. The role of the Church and the State ........................................................... 40
    2.4.5. The fourth stage of history ................................................................. 41

2.5. AUGUSTINE’S DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION ....................................... 41
    2.5.1. Whereof Augustine cannot speak ................................................................ 41
    2.5.2. Augustine’s late predestinarian turn ........................................................... 42
2.6. CONCLUDING REMARKS ................................................................................... 46

CHAPTER 3. AFTER AQUINAS, DESCARTES’ EPISTEMIC AUGUSTINIANISM ................................................................................................................................. 49

3.1. AQUINAS’ WORDLY REFORTIFICATION OF AUGUSTINIANISM .............. 50
   3.1.1. Aquinas against the mystics ................................................................. 50
   3.1.2. Aquinas’ Aristotelian revival ............................................................... 52

3.2. DESCARTES’ MODERN BREAK AS A RETURN TO AUGUSTINE .......... 58
   3.2.1. The sceptical backdrop to Descartes’ critique of Aquinas ............... 58
   3.2.2. Was Descartes really a Christian? ..................................................... 59

3.3. DESCARTES’ MÉDITATIONS MÉTAPHYSIQUES ......................................... 65
   3.3.1. The first three meditations’ recapitulation of Augustine’s ontological argument ................................................................. 65
   3.3.2. The fifth meditation’s proof of God’s perfection ................................ 69
   3.3.3. The fourth meditation’s epistemic translation of Augustine’s theodicy . 70

3.4. DESCARTES’ LATE OCCASIONALISM ..................................................... 74
   3.4.1. The fifth and sixth meditations’ mind-body dualism ......................... 74
   3.4.2. Descartes’ late occasionalist turn ..................................................... 75

3.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS .............................................................................. 77

CHAPTER 4. THE AUGUSTINIAN “ANTINOMY” OF KANT’S CRITICAL TURN .......................................................................................................................... 79

4.1. KRITIK DER REINEN VERNUNFT .............................................................. 80
   4.1.1. The question of metaphysics ............................................................ 80
   4.1.2. The transcendental aesthetic ............................................................ 82
   4.1.3. The transcendental logic ................................................................. 83
   4.1.4. The analytic of principles ............................................................... 84
   4.1.5. The transcendental dialectic ......................................................... 85
   4.1.6. Kant’s critique of the proofs of God’s existence ......................... 89
   4.1.7. Making room for faith ................................................................. 91

4.2. KRITIK DER PRAKTISCHEN VERNUNFT ................................................. 92
   4.2.1. Against the Neo-Kantians’ understanding of Kant’s critical project .... 92
   4.2.2. Kant’s ontologization of the Good by other means ........................ 94
   4.2.3. Kant’s third way of reviving Augustinianism on practico-transcendental grounds ................................................................. 95
   4.2.4. The good will and the categorical imperative ............................... 101
   4.2.5. The conditions of freedom and the benevolent God for practical reason 103
   4.2.6. Kant’s transcendental theodicy of the will’s privation ................. 108
   4.2.7. Kant’s Augustinian ethics ............................................................. 112
   4.2.8. Radical evil in Eden .................................................................. 113
4.3. CONCLUDING REMARKS ................................................................. 115

CHAPTER 5. SCHELLING’S FOOTNOTES TO AUGUSTINE .............. 117

5.1. SCHELLING’S OVERCOMING OF AUGUSTINE ...................... 120
  5.1.1. Schelling’s critique of Spinoza as a crypto-Augustinian .......... 120
  5.1.2. Schelling’s rupture with Fichte by naturalizing evil ............. 124
  5.1.3. Thinking evil not only as subject but as substance ............. 127
  5.1.4. Ontologizing the privatio boni ............................................ 128
  5.1.5. The (dark) ages of the world ............................................ 133

5.2. SCHELLING’S LATER PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENT ........ 137
  5.2.1. Schelling’s middle “Manichaeism” ...................................... 137
  5.2.2. Schelling’s return to Augustine ........................................ 140
  5.2.3. Schelling’s Augustinian circle .......................................... 147

5.3. CONCLUDING REMARKS .......................................................... 149

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION ............................................................... 151

6.1. TOWARDS A HERETICAL HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY .......... 153

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................. 156
CHAPTER 1.  INTRODUCTION

This thesis demonstrates how Augustine’s concepts of good and evil opened up certain conceptual possibilities that Descartes, Kant and Schelling later developed through their own metaphysical systems. More precisely, my contention is that Descartes, Kant and Schelling adhere, directly or indirectly, to Augustine’s model of ontology by rendering being absolutely Good, so as to repress evil as a mere privation, fault, or absence. By tracing how three canonical philosophers extrapolate Augustine’s chief thought-structure which conflates being with the Good to the detriment of evil as privation, I will show that Augustine’s immense legacy on the history of Western metaphysics has perhaps been insufficiently registered in much scholarship. This is a hypothesis that could be tested by putting Augustine in dialogue with other thinkers, although this task is evidently beyond this thesis’ scope.

1.1.  THE ONTOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF AUGUSTINE’S CONCEPTS OF GOOD AND EVIL

I follow Aristotle in defining metaphysics, what is later known as first philosophy or ontology, as the study of being qua being.1 Metaphysics’ unique task is to uncover the concept that is capable of accounting for everything that is by way of a single, general structure, entity, force, principle, cause, or being, which is mutually shared by the multiplicity of individuated things. Using Descartes, Kant and Schelling as examples, this thesis will argue that a large strand of the history of Western metaphysics is

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indebted to Augustine in the precise sense that it conceives of being as wholly Good, and hence of evil as a privation without any ontological status of its own, apart from the Good which it corrupts.

Certainly, there are Platonic precedents upon which Augustine draws to demonstrate that being is absolutely Good. But, although Plato and Plotinus develop an Idea of the Good, they give much less regard to extrapolating the inverse notion of evil except as a secondary implication of their notion of the Good. So, while Augustine is indebted to the Platonists’ concept of the Good, he goes into greater detail about the consequences for evil as a privation. More precisely, Augustine invented the concept of the will (voluntas) as the source of evil’s privation of the Good when we freely choose to negate it. In The Theory of Will in Classic Antiquity, Albrecht Dihle argues that ancient philosophy, from Plato to the Stoics, only saw humans as needing to rationally understand the universe’s harmonious order to act in accord with the Good without any intervention from what Augustine would call the “will”: “free will does not exist in its own right as it does according to St. Augustine’s anthropology. It depends on man’s alleged potential ability to reach an adequate understanding of reality by his own intellectual effort.” On Dihle’s account, the concept of the will only arises

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3 There are certainly scattered references in Plato and lengthy discussions in Plotinus of evil as both a punishment, a failure to participate in the Good, and even a moral choice. See C.M. Chilcott, “The Platonic Theory of Evil,” The Classical Quarterly 17, no. 1 (1923), 27-31; and Denis O’Brien, “Plotinus on Matter and Evil,” in The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus, ed. Llyod P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 171-195. Ultimately, Platonism’s approaches to evil are incidental to this thesis except insofar as they influenced Augustine’s rigorous account of evil, at which point it will be addressed in Chapter 2, § 2.2. and § 2.3.

4 Albrecht Dihle, The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity (London: University of California Press, 1982), 45-6. For other accounts of Augustine as the inventor of the will against the Greeks’ reduction of willing to knowing, see James Wetzel, Augustine and the Limits of Virtue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2; and Simon Harrison, Augustine’s Way into the Will: The Theological and Philosophical Significance of De Libero Arbitrio (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), vi.
at the advent of Christian philosophy to respond to the problem of how we are to account for evil in a world created by a benevolent creator: “how is one to reconcile the belief in the goodness of the Creator who governs everything according to his omniscience and omnipotence […] with the existence of both moral and physical evil?”

To address this problem of evil, Dihle contends that Augustine invented the idea of our freedom to negate the Good of being. Here, Dihle recapitulates a common reading of Augustine as introducing the concept of *voluntas*: “it is generally accepted in the study of the history of philosophy that the notion of the history of will […] was invented by St. Augustine.”

According to this widespread consensus, it is Augustine who first develops a theodicy by drawing upon the notion of free will to account for evil in a world created by a benevolent God.

If I therefore seek to characterize Descartes, Kant and Schelling as inheriting an Augustinian conceptual paradigm rather than as footnotes to Plato, it is because they recapitulate both Augustine’s Platonic concept of the Good and his innovative theodicy of privative evil.

So, this thesis’ original contribution will be to show how Augustine’s understanding of the Good as supreme existence, and hence evil as a pure negativity, are appropriated—be it explicitly, implicitly, unconsciously, or through mediators—by modern philosophers as distinct as Descartes, Kant and Schelling, and in a way that...

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6 Dihle, *Will*, 123.

7 This is not to say that there is nothing in ancient philosophy that anticipates the notion of *voluntas*. Brad Inwood has argued that Seneca’s notion of *prohairesis* anticipates Augustine’s notion of will. See “The Will in Seneca,” in *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). A similar anticipation of *voluntas* in Aristotle can be found in Anthony Kenny, *Aristotle’s Theory of the Will* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). Nevertheless, both Kenny and Inwood note that these anticipations are not identical to Augustine’s later conception of will.
which indicates Augustine’s enduring impact from his own time to the post-Kantian period.

1.2. GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW APROPOS THE HISTORY OF CONCEPTS OF GOOD AND EVIL

Although this thesis looks at Augustine’s ontological concepts of good and evil, the major studies of the moral notions of good and evil in the history of philosophy should still be surveyed. In this respect, the works of Susan Neiman, Richard Bernstein and Hans Blumenberg (who also addresses evil in an ontological register) stand out in post-war scholarly literature.⁸

In *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*, Neiman’s survey of philosophers like Kant and Schelling justifiably leads her to conclude that evil is the key concept in the history of modern philosophy: “as an organizing principle for understanding the history of philosophy, the problem of evil is better than alternatives.”⁹ Thereafter, however, her work diverges from this thesis as she proceeds to speak of the moral sense of evil as it is exemplified by historical events, such as the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, the Holocaust, September 11, and the bombing of Hiroshima; as, for instance, in her claim that “September 11 was indeed a historical turning point that would change our discussion of evil.”¹⁰ It is therefore unsurprising that Neiman’s concentration on the multiplicity of particular instances of evil leads her to conclude

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⁸ There are no works specifically examining the widespread legacy of Augustine’s concepts of good and evil over the history of modern and post-Kantian philosophy. Works looking at Descartes’ relation to Augustine, and Augustine, Descartes, Kant and Schelling’s concepts of good and evil in isolation will be treated in their respective chapters.


¹⁰ Neiman, *Evil*, x.
that evil is always a relative, particular evil without any overarching, ontological essence: “attempts to capture the forms of evil within a single form risk becoming one-sided or trivial.” Here as before, this thesis differs from Neiman insofar as it holds that it is the same concept of the evil of privation rooted in our free will that can be found in philosophers as diverse as Augustine, Descartes, Kant and Schelling.

More precisely, Neiman argues that modern philosophy’s concept of evil underwent a transition from Leibniz’s account of the physical world as the source of evil to Rousseau’s account of our free will as making us responsible for evil: “Rousseau began to demarcate a sphere of natural accident that is neutral; disaster has no moral worth whatsoever and need have no negative effects. The latter were the result solely of human failure.” Neiman also observes a second transition away from attempts to make evil intelligible by furnishing a theodicy, due to Nietzsche, Freud, Arendt and other Jewish philosophers’ realization that we can never satisfyingly account for moral evil.

My thesis differs from both transitions that Neiman identifies. It rejects Neiman’s transition from denying natural evil towards addressing only moral evil. The moderns did not introduce the latter idea, since Augustine already held that natural and moral evil are two subcategories of the general concept of evil as privation. It is no wonder that the debates surrounding the 1755 Lisbon earthquake were set against the backdrop of debates between Jesuits and Calvinist Jansenists, both of whom were deeply trained

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14 See Chapter 2, § 2.3 of this thesis for a detailed discussion of moral and natural evil in Augustine’s thought.
in the Augustinian tradition. As for the second transition Neiman identifies, I also argue through the example of Schelling that post-Kantian philosophy (partially) abandons theodicy’s project of defending the benevolent God. However, whereas for Neiman this begins with Kant, for me it begins with Schelling. As we shall see in the fourth chapter, as modern as he might seem, Kant is still committed to the thought-structure that Augustine inaugurated. Moreover, the way I conceive of Schelling’s break from the philosophical traditions is different to how Neiman envisions it. While for Neiman Schelling is part of the post-Kantian trend of abandoning the question of theodicy altogether as hopeless, for me he is rather the first to ontologize privative evil to account for the Augustinian theodicy’s shortcomings. Far from seeing evil as inscrutable, Schelling identifies it with the dark ground of being itself.

Similarly, in *Radical Evil: A Philosophical Interrogation*, Bernstein correctly argues that the concept of evil constitutes the kernel of much of Western philosophy. Here as with Neiman, however, Bernstein focuses on Arendt and other political theorists’ moral notions of evil (meaning “genocide, massacre, torture, terrorist attacks,” etc.). Consequently, Bernstein focuses on particular instances of moral evil in a way which arguably sidelines the fact that many of the philosophers he discusses are primarily talking about evil in terms of an abstract, ontological concept: “I have always believed that the deepest philosophic perplexities have their roots in our everyday experiences, and ought to help illuminate these experiences. Looking back over the horrendous

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15 To give just one example, Lima’s archbishop Antonio de Barroeta already explained the earthquake in terms of divine punishment for humanity’s moral sins: “the true subterranean fire […] is the lasciviousness burning in men’s hearts; the true volcano is concupiscence”. See Jonathan Israel, “Nature and Providence: Earthquakes and the Human Condition,” in *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 42.
twentieth century, few of us would hesitate to speak of evil.\footnote{Bernstein, \textit{Evil}, ix.} Bernstein’s focus on moral issues is ultimately the consequence of his selection of mostly post-Kantian political thinkers as the object of his study. This means that he seldom considers the pre-Kantian metaphysicians like Augustine, who best articulate the ontological signification of their concepts of good and evil. Like Neiman, then, Bernstein repudiates the idea that there is any overarching concept of evil throughout philosophy’s history: “throughout I have indicated my skepticism about the very idea of a \textit{theory} of evil, if this is understood as a complete account of what evil \textit{is}.”\footnote{Bernstein, \textit{Evil}, 225.} What both Bernstein and Neiman have in common is a tendency to treat good and evil as solely moral concepts. This is because they overlook the influence of Augustine’s ontological concepts of good and evil upon the modern period they study. So, although my thesis is close to theirs in arguing that good and evil mark a major thread of philosophy’s fundamental, conceptual opposition, my starting point with Augustine will lead to a rather different conclusion. This is that good and evil are primarily ontological concepts of being and non-being. This is not so much a \textit{critique} of Bernstein and Neiman’s works, but rather a \textit{differentiation} of their ethical focus from my metaphysical concerns, even though the terms and philosophers treated partially overlap.

In \textit{The Legitimacy of the Modern Age}, Blumenberg comes closest to my own thesis when he argues that modern philosophy marks a second attempt to answer medieval philosophy’s problem of evil, even if he diverges from me in arguing that this second
attempt develops into an absolute break upon which modernity grounds its legitimacy.\textsuperscript{19} In the first part of his monumental text, Blumenberg criticizes Karl Löwith for arguing that modern, secular philosophy remains Christian by translating the messianic ideal of redemption as the Enlightenment idea of humanity’s historical progress.\textsuperscript{20} While Blumenberg proffers several objections to Löwith’s secularization thesis, the key reason is that secularization cannot be the defining feature of modernity since Christianity already secularized itself. When it became clear to the early Church that the final judgment was not imminent, Christianity had to survive by making itself beneficial to humanity in the here and now: “to demonstrate its usefulness to the surrounding world […] the ancient Church ‘secularizes’ itself into a stabilizing factor.”\textsuperscript{21}

In the second part of \textit{The Legitimacy of the Modern Age}, Blumenberg further defends modernity’s legitimacy by critiquing another thesis that modernity marked a regression to Gnosticism’s idea of splitting reality into two, co-eternal principles of good and evil. On the contrary, for Blumenberg, modern philosophy was rather a second attempt to “ward off” the Gnostic view that the physical world was created by a distinct demiurge from God.\textsuperscript{22} The first attempt was the Augustinian theodicy according to which evil is the result of the misuse of our will, which burdens human sin with the cosmic responsibility of introducing evil into the world. At the same time, the late Augustine suggested that God predestines some to sin with the result that his own attempt to ward

\textsuperscript{21} Blumenberg, \textit{Legitimacy}, 45.
\textsuperscript{22} Blumenberg, \textit{Legitimacy}, 125-6.
off Gnosticism inadvertently made God responsible for evil. By the time of late medieval nominalism, God is deemed so powerful that he can punish anyone without any humanly comprehensible justification for doing so. Consequently, the modern age emerges by honing in on the concept of “self-assertion” in an effort to reinstate a comprehensible order to the world. As Blumenberg concludes, “the Middle Ages came to an end when their spiritual system’s notion of ‘providence’ ceased to be credible to man and the burden of self-assertion was therefore laid upon him.”23 For Blumenberg, modernity’s legitimacy rests on humanity’s self-assertion from which God’s explanatory power recedes.

My thesis agrees with Blumenberg that, while Augustine always intends to conceive of God as absolutely good, he contradicts himself when he unwittingly makes God evil by admitting that he preordains sinners to commit their sins.24 It also agrees that much of modern Western philosophy marks so many attempts to answer the same problem of evil through various means. In my reading, however, the modern philosophers I treat never completely break from this same project of ontologizing the Good, as they do for Blumenberg when they develop a distinct interest in obtaining objective knowledge of the temporal world on the basis of a self-assertion against later medieval nominalism.

1.3. METHODOLOGY OF TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

This thesis will occasionally go beyond the letter of the texts in the sense that Descartes, Kant and Schelling do not always explicitly trace the thought-structures they develop

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24 For a detailed discussion of Augustine’s predestinarian turn, see Chapter 2, § 2.5.
back to Augustine. Yet, this will not result in a hermeneutic “free for all.” Rather, I am simply arguing that Augustine inaugurates the concept of being as absolutely Good and evil as the will’s privation, which Descartes, Kant and Schelling also articulate, whether they trace it directly back to Augustine or not. Such a reading has several well-established methodological precedents, such as psychoanalysis and particularly deconstruction. According to Derrida’s deconstructive method, the thinker’s intention must be taken into account without being the exclusive arbiter of their writings’ meaning, insofar as their own philosophy can also escape what they intended it to be. More precisely, Derrida argues that philosophical texts are grounded on oppositions between two terms, of which one is denigrated in favor of the other. Deconstruction thus involves identifying this opposition and demonstrating how the privileged term actually presupposes the denigrated term. As Jonathan Culler explains this deconstructive approach: “to deconstruct a discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying in the text the rhetorical operations that produced the supposed ground of argument.”

While my approach is not strictly deconstructionist, there is some methodological overlap, in that I make a close reading of the source texts of Augustine, Descartes, Kant and Schelling to show how they are grounded on a certain ontologization of the Good to the detriment of evil as non-being. At the same time, since I am treating these four philosophers’ concepts of good and evil in their ontological sense, I have to take a global approach to their works and analyze their larger metaphysical systems rather

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than any one of their works in isolation from the whole. Therefore, it has not been a
matter of analyzing one particular text, but of synthesizing much of their corpuses to
discern their general, underlying structure, albeit without losing the sense of a rigorous
exegesis. Moreover, each chapter will also conclude by moving from an exegetical
exposition to a critical reflection, which shows how each philosopher’s conflation of
being with the Good is ultimately undermined by an inadvertent re-ontologization of
evil. This last aspect of my readings is perhaps what is closest to Derrida’s comparable
claims that philosophical systems “deconstruct themselves” at certain points, despite
their authors’ intentions.

To be clear, I am not saying that these philosophers are uninterested in anything other
than ontologizing the Good. Clearly, Descartes also wishes to legitimate and undertake
his physics, and Kant aims at establishing transcendental idealism as a new basis for
metaphysics. What I am saying is that their works also contain an essentially
Augustinian opposition between good and evil that has often been overlooked. As I
proceed, then, I will also consider the key secondary literature around both
philosophers’ metaphysics in general and their concepts of good and evil. In short, my
methodology consists of a careful textual analysis of Augustine, Descartes, Kant and
Schelling’s key metaphysical works for their ideas of good and evil, as well as a critical
analysis of whether they achieve what they set out to do. At different points along the
way, I also discuss the relevant secondary literature to draw upon similar arguments in
support of my thesis, or dispute common misconceptions apropos the part of each
system as I address it.
1.4. CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER OUTLINE

In Chapter 2, I proffer a close textual analysis of Augustine’s corpus as in effect “excommunicating” evil from the Church of being, so as to render the latter absolutely perfect. As we shall see, this incites him to marry the Christian doctrine of God’s absolute benevolence with the Neo-Platonists’ proofs for the Idea of the Good. This then permits him to develop a theodicy to further acquit the benevolent God from all responsibility for evil by indicting our own freedom to renounce him. By systematizing Augustine’s thought around the problem of evil, I will condense and convey the essence of his philosophy as the rendering of being as absolutely Good, so as to repress evil as its secondary, epiphenomenal effect.

Despite all his rational argumentation for being’s absolute goodness, however, we will see that Augustine’s late doctrine of predestination ultimately argues that God condemns some to an eternal realm of pure privation alongside that of the Good. The chapter will thus conclude by arguing that Augustine’s predestinarian doctrine reintroduces a second, Manichean principle of evil into being. In the final analysis, Augustine’s endeavor to ontologize the Good is undermined by its failure to incorporate evil into a truly comprehensive theory of everything.

If Augustine cannot ultimately, as it were, seal up the gates of hell that menace being’s perfection, the fulfilment of his promise is left to those who inherit his conceptual legacy. The rest of this thesis thus considers whether Descartes, Kant and Schelling fare any better at realizing Augustine’s same ends to suppress evil. Although the choice of these three philosophers is somewhat arbitrary given that I am using them to test the
hypothesis that Augustine’s influence is widespread over much of modern and post-Kantian Western metaphysics, there are two reasons why I begin with them. Firstly, I have chosen Descartes and Kant because they are two figures who are said to have marked a decisive break from the traditions before them. Consequently, I cannot be charged with having focused on peripheral or clearly Augustinian thinkers, who are not really representative of modern Western philosophy. Moreover, I chose Schelling because I hold that he does inaugurate a certain break that philosophers like Hegel and Nietzsche shall further develop, even if he is still haunted by the specter of Augustine insofar as this break precisely involves submitting the Church father to a negative reassessment.

In the third chapter, I will demonstrate that Descartes, the supposed pioneer of the modern break from the medieval, Christian tradition, is still deeply indebted to Augustine. Descartes thus adopts Augustine’s own cogito and ontological arguments to ward off the thought of the evil demon by re-elevating God to being’s highest perfection. This then permits Descartes to develop an epistemic theodicy that translates Augustine’s concept of evil as the error of misrecognizing a fragment of reality for its totality, when we freely choose to think beyond the limits of our finite understanding. Seen in this light, Descartes does not so much break from medieval Christian philosophy altogether as he does from Aquinas’ specific empirico-scholastic method, by way of a return to Augustine’s rationalist approach.

In the fourth chapter, I turn to Kant. It is true that Kant shows how the ideas that Augustine and Descartes use to verify God’s existence are actually those of the mind’s superimposition over reality such that we can coherently experience and think it.
Nonetheless, I will argue that Kant adopts a practico-transcendental approach in an effort to show that the condition for the possibility of our moral practice’s legitimacy is the actual existence of the benevolent God. Kant thus proceeds to argue that our moral practice functions in such a way that evil can only be the privation of the benevolent being by way of our freedom to renounce it. From Descartes to Kant, the same ambition to strip evil of any ontological stature persists as philosophy’s “Platonic Form,” even if they deploy two different methods to lay the same demon to rest.

If so many methodological innovations are needed to defend Augustine’s theodicy in the first place, however, it is because it continuously comes up short against the brute reality of evil. As we shall see, Descartes’ late occasionalist doctrine recapitulates Augustine’s own predestinarian doctrine in a way that makes God responsible for all our sins. Similarly, Kant affirms the ontological existence of a radical evil when he acknowledges it as the condition for the possibility of our freedom to choose the Good in the first place. If my line of questioning proves justified by a close exegesis, much of modern Western philosophy can be characterized as a modern Augustinianism in its many inadequate attempts to secure the being of the Good against the brute fact of evil.

In the final chapter, we shall see that it is because of these modern philosophers’ struggle to account for evil that Schelling turned Augustine on his head by ontologizing evil. Schelling thus elucidates the conditions for the possibility of human beings’ freedom to renounce the ground from whence we emerge by re-envisioning the God who created us as always already free, and hence evil. While Schelling certainly has for his stated aim the positivization of evil, we shall nonetheless see that his desire for a system capable of explaining everything through a single structure eventually leads
him to reaffirm an absolute spirit of pure Positivity beyond evil’s negative dialectic. Ultimately, then, even an avowed anti-Augustinian like Schelling buckles under the weight of the tradition before him, until he winds up repenting.

From one end to the other, our central question, our “demon” as it were, returns to haunt us: on the one hand, is there enough evidence to develop the hypothesis that Augustine furnishes the “divine Idea” in which Descartes, Kant and Schelling participate? On the other hand, to what extent do these philosophers thereby falter in their thinking of being *qua* being by falling silent when confronted with the brute reality of evil?
CHAPTER 2.  FACING AUGUSTINE’S DEMONS

This chapter examines how Augustine’s demonstration of the benevolent God’s existence as being’s highest totalization permits him to develop a theodicy according to which evil is the epiphenomenal privation of the Good rooted in the misuse of our free will. I therefore agree with Étienne Gilson’s ground-breaking argument that, although each of Augustine’s works marks a particular intervention in a specific historical debate, we can discern throughout them “one long” rational proof for God’s existence.26 I will slightly modify Gilson’s argument by specifying that Augustine’s writings do not simply comprise one rational demonstration of God’s existence, but more precisely a rational demonstration of God or being as absolutely good, so as to strip evil of any independent reality. By identifying this chief underlying motive of Augustine’s writings, I avoid Gilson’s characterization of Augustine’s theodicy as a somewhat extraneous project to his proof of God’s existence. Instead, the theodicy becomes an essential step in the same deduction to demonstrate the benevolent God’s existence. Similarly, I can reconceive Augustine’s ethics of how fallen creatures return to the Good as another necessary stage in the derivation of God’s absolute benevolence through his opening of a path to redemption. Simply put, my wager (which, as we shall see, echoes those of Blumenberg and Albert Camus among others) is that, by bringing the problem of evil to the fore as the catalyst for Augustine’s philosophical pursuits, I can formalize much of his enormous intellectual edifice.27


27 Besides Gilson, the most perspicuous general introduction to Augustine is Eugene Teselle, Augustine the Theologian (London: Burns and Oates, 1970). The only writings of Augustine that I will seldom cite are his sermons,
One relatively rare study of the metaphysical stakes of Augustine’s thought is James Anderson’s *St. Augustine and Being*. I agree with Anderson’s observation that “the properly metaphysical dimensions of Augustine’s thought have received little attention among scholars.” 28 Although Anderson spends considerable space showing that Augustine envisions God and being as one and the same, he shows minimal regard for exploring the ontological implications that this has for the idea of the *Good*, since the *Good* is co-identical with God. Moreover, Anderson spends even less time addressing the ontological consequences for evil as a privation rooted in the will. Nor does he detail the biographical backdrop that incited Augustine’s metaphysics, or the ethics that he subsequently derives from it, as this chapter will do.

What most clearly distinguishes Anderson’s essay from this thesis is that he rejects the idea that Augustine influenced Descartes on the grounds that the latter was more interested in seeking truth than God: “Augustine’s *if I err, I am* is not, like Descartes’ *cogito*, the starting-point of a *system* of pure reason but of a supernatural Wisdom uniting him […] to the living God.” 29 Here, Anderson underestimates the Augustinian dimensions in Descartes, let alone Kant, Schelling and others. Instead, Anderson’s goal is to polemicize against the scholastics’ reservations about reading Augustine as a metaphysician. So, although my goal is comparable to that of Anderson on paper (to demonstrate the ontological stakes of Augustine’s understanding of God), it differs in terms of its philosophical rather than theological emphasis, its comparative approach

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to Augustine with other philosophers, and even its account of Augustine’s metaphysics as not simply centred on being, but more specifically on the being of the Good, so as to wipe evil from the face of that which is.

In Le Dilemme de l’être et du néant chez saint Augustin, Émilie Zum Brunn goes one step further than Anderson to show how there is a dialectic of being and non-being at work in at least the early Augustine. Focusing on Augustine’s Latin semantics, Brunn argues that Augustine explicitly describes God as being (magis esse, summum esse, ipsum esse, uere esse, etc.), and all things as minus esse or “existents” by way of their finite participation in the divine being: “Augustine retrospectively translates his experience of the rapport of man to God in the ontological language of magis esse and minus esse.”

Now, if God is being, the Fall from his grace can only be a descent into non-being or non-esse: “it is about showing the ontological diminishment, the ‘nihilation’ to which the man who chooses terrestrial values condemns himself.” While Brunn’s work parallels my own thesis, she never discusses God’s attribute as the Good. Consequently, she misses what I consider to be Augustine’s key gesture: the conflation of being and the Good to the detriment of evil as non-being. Nor does Brunn put Augustine in dialogue with other philosophers as I will in the subsequent chapters on Descartes, Kant and Schelling. Like Anderson, Brunn can be seen as anticipating my own metaphysical reading of Augustine, even if she does not systematize both.

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31 Brunn, Dilemme, 59.
Augustine’s philosophy, theodicy and ethics around the problematic of conferring being not just to God, but to the *benevolent* God, and hence non-being to evil.

Finally, Robert Cooper’s short article called “Saint Augustine’s Doctrine of Evil” marks the only attempt to cohere Augustine’s thought around his concept of evil: “the attempt to systematize Augustine’s thought is perhaps a presumptuous, and surely a difficult undertaking. […] It is my belief that it is to be found in the problem of evil.”32 The trouble is that Cooper concludes that Augustine *adequately* resolves the problem of evil by tracing it back to the misuse of *voluntas*: “Augustine sought the clue to the solution of the problem in the human *will*”; and: “we have, then, on the basis of that inquiry, sought to find a resolution to the problem, on what we believe to be Augustinian principles.”33 In this chapter’s final section, we shall see that Cooper overlooks how Augustine’s solution *fails* to achieve what it sets out to do: unify all of being around the sovereign Good.

Before we reach this critical analysis, this chapter’s first two sections show how Augustine develops a rationalist demonstration for the benevolent God’s existence as being’s highest totalization. The third section traces how Augustine develops a theodicy according to which evil is but the privation of the Good as a consequence of the misuse of our *libero arbitrio*. The fourth section then demonstrates how Augustine develops an ethics of how the exercise of various virtues permits us to return to our true echelon of perfection in the hierarchy of being. If the narrative does not end there as it does for Augustine himself, it is because the final section ultimately changes tack.

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33 Cooper, “Augustine’s Doctrine,” 262, 276.
from an exegesis to a critical analysis of Augustine’s late doctrine of predestination as inadvertently threatening his ontologization of the Good, insofar as it re-visions God as bringing evil into being—as an eternal, ontological principle alongside the Good—by gratuitously condemning some to eternal damnation.

2.1. AUGUSTINE’S PROBLEM OF EVIL

2.1.1. The biographical backdrop of Augustine’s problematic

Reflecting upon his teenage years in the *Confessiones*, Augustine explains how the problem of life’s privations was presented to him with the passing of his closest friend. It was the haunting presence of his friend’s absence combined with the fear of his own inexorable death which enflamed what would become Augustine’s lifelong obsession with overcoming the evils of material finitude and loss by chasing the ideal of an immutable *eudemonia*: “mine eyes sought him everywhere, but he was not granted them; and I hated all places because he was not in them.” Even in his adolescent thought, we can already see the germ of Augustine’s mature concept of evil as the absence of existence itself. By contrast, we can see that Augustine is conflating the Good with *esse* insofar as its antithesis of evil marks the loss of life and being. As Augustine later formulates it, “the chief good is that which is properly described as having supreme and original existence. For that exists in the highest of the world which continues always the same, which is throughout like itself, which cannot in any part be

By early adulthood, Augustine already set in stone his life’s goal of determining whether there is an eternal Good totalizing all existence, so as to stave off the painful flux of the finite.

2.1.2. Augustine’s first Manichean solution

To this end, Augustine dedicated the next decade to studying the pagan philosophies and eclectic theologies on offer throughout the Roman Empire in the fourth century CE. In 371 CE, aged seventeen, Augustine’s initial attempt to explain the privation of his youthful friendship made recourse to Manichaeism, because of its central tenet that evil is an equally omnipotent and co-eternal ontological force as the Good. After all, if we experience just as much privation of our happiness as we do happiness itself, the Good cannot alone exhaust being. It is necessary to admit a certain beingness to evil, too. Nonetheless, for Augustine, the problem remained that, while the Manicheans repudiated the body at a moral level as the source of evil and suffering in favour of the spiritual as the ground of the Good, they never repudiated the body at the ontological level inasmuch as they maintained that evil had an ontological independence from the Good. Augustine encapsulates the Manicheans’ dualist ontology as follows: “they say that there are two kinds of souls, the one good, which is in such a way from God; [...] the other evil, which they believe and strive to get others to believe pertains to God in no way whatever.” If Augustine would eventually abandon Manichaeism, it is

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because he found its bestowal of half of being to the shadows as unsatisfactory to meet
his demands for a sovereign Good which reigns supreme over all of being.

2.1.3. **Augustine’s “road to Damascus”**

At age thirty, Augustine’s despair at the temporal world’s sufferings led him to
Christianity. In particular, Augustine became enamoured with its central belief that
there is but one absolutely benevolent God, who is utterly incapable of committing evil
deeds. In 386 CE, aged thirty-one, Augustine officially converted to the religion which
preached God’s all-embracing perfection. The consolations of Christianity soon
became clear when his mother Monica died. Instead of despairing at his mother’s loss
as he had when his friend had died, Augustine now contented himself with the belief
that what he loved about her particular being would continue to live on forever through
the Supreme Being as the all-encompassing “Good of all”: “as soon as she breathed her
last, […] my own childish feeling, which was, through the youthful voice of my heart,
finding escape in tears, was restrained and silenced. For […] she neither died unhappy,
nor did she altogether die.”38 With Christianity, Augustine finally found the one belief
system that immunized him from life’s evils through the ideal of another life in union
with the one, true being of the Good.

2.1.4. **Augustine’s rational approach to the problem of evil**

Being a young, curious intellectual, however, Augustine continued even after his
baptism to be haunted by the logical problem of how evil can exist in a world created
by the Christian God. After all, such a God is neither capable of creating evil because

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38 Augustine, *Confessions*, 311.
of his absolute benevolence, nor limited in his power by another ontological entity of Evil, as the Manicheans claimed. Consequently, Augustine devoted the rest of his life to developing a rational demonstration of the Christian God’s perfection in an effort to exorcise evil from being’s paradisiacal garden. Augustine himself explains how the being of the Good in which he already believed could not be rationally proven until he had furnished a theodicy accounting for the brute fact of evil: “I believed Thee both to exist, and Thy substance to be unchangeable, and that Thou hadst a care of and wouldest judge men. […] These things being safe and immovably settled in my mind, I eagerly inquired, ‘Whence is evil?’” We can see Augustine’s bourgeoning philosophical interests in the Confessions’ very structure: whereas purely religious books of his time would have concluded with book ten and Augustine’s successful conversion, Augustine adds three more philosophical books addressing metaphysical gaps in Genesis.

Certainly, Augustine extracted his two central tenets of the being of the Good and the evil of privation from the scriptures, and particularly Paul’s epistles. At the same time, Paul and even Christ himself emphasize the ethico-practical issue of how to return to the Good from evil, rather than their ontological status. Even when Paul is pressed for proof that he speaks the Word of God, he advocates a more mystical than rational approach of following our soul’s will, such as it is directed towards the highest Good: “since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me, […] examine ourselves, to see

39 Augustine, Confessions, 227. In Book Seven, Augustine repeatedly poses this question: “whence is evil?” (220, 222).
40 Augustine himself makes a distinction between the first ten books about “myself,” and the last three about the “sacred scriptures” (Confessions, 60).
whether you are holding to your faith.”41 If it is our soul’s élan vital that drives us to affirm God, Paul dismisses the philosophical bickering amongst early Christian intellectuals as a distraction from the righteous path in each of our souls: “avoid such godless chatter.”42

So, while Augustine certainly learnt the Christian doctrines from earlier Christian apologetics, and particularly Saint Paul’s epistles and Saint Ambrose’s sermons, none of them were as interested in philosophically fortifying the faith as he.43 I therefore agree with Gilson’s intellectualist tradition of reading Augustine as a rationalist, even if both Gilson and I qualify that Augustine occasionally acknowledges that mysticism, fideism and even sense perception can be secondary, albeit inferior modes of apprehending God.44

2.2. AUGUSTINE’S RATIONALIST ONTOLOGIZATION OF THE GOOD

2.2.1. The sceptical context and Platonic inspiration for Augustine’s proto-ontological argument

To rationally prove the benevolent God’s existence, Augustine made particular recourse to Neo-Platonism.45 Certainly, some Platonists’ belief that we could attain

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42 1 Tim. 2:16.
44 For a brief discussion of Augustine’s relation to mysticism and empiricism, see Chapter 3, § 3.1.
45 Augustine, *Confessions*, 251; and “Letter VI,” in *NPNF1-01*, 525. All letters cited are from *NPNF1-01*. The most important studies of Platonism’s influence on Augustine’s thought are Phillip Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and John M. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). One might object that Augustine’s doctrines sound rather stoic. They would not be alone in this line of reasoning: Marcia L. Colish’s history of stoicism argues that Augustine is influenced by the Stoics’ own conception of Nature as the *summum bonum*. However, Colish mitigates this claim by acknowledging that Augustine was even more influenced by the Neo-Platonists: “he qualifies stoic theodicy so extensively under the influence of Neo-Platonism or Christianity as to compromise many of its basic ingredients.” *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages 2:*
knowledge of the Good through our own reason alone, without the grace of God, drew Augustine’s ire. Nonetheless, Augustine held the Platonists’ rational argumentation in such high regard that he even defended them as closer to Christianity than the pagan religions: “were it not more accordant with every virtuous sentiment to read Plato’s writings in a ‘Temple of Plato,’ than to be present in the temples of devils to witness the priest of Cybele mutilating themselves?”

Now, if the question of what is true, and hence truly good was of crucial importance for Augustine as it had been for Plato, it is because he was writing against the academic sceptics about whom he had read in Cicero’s writings. The academic sceptics had first emerged at the beginning of the third century by challenging the different bases of our knowledge. Augustine is particularly interested in the way that the academic sceptics revived Plato’s argument that, since all knowledge emanates from our sense perception of particular, passing sensations about which we are often deceived, we cannot know anything for certain. For if we cannot even know whether something is truly cold or hot in itself or only for me, we certainly cannot hope to obtain the knowledge of far more complex and fundamental truths, such as the nature of good and evil.

Augustine can barely conceal his disdain when he comes to summarize the heretical academic scepticism: “the city of God thoroughly detests such doubt as ma dness regarding matters which it apprehends by the mind and reason with most absolute

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Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought Through the Sixth Century (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 154. While Augustine himself frequently acknowledges Platonism’s influence on his thought, he is only ever critical of the Stoics for being materialists, and hence conflating spiritual being with what he calls physical evil (see, for instance, “Letter CXXI,” 974).

46 Augustine, Confessions, 253-4.

For Augustine, however, it is not enough to dogmatically disavow the sceptics’ reasoning through the recourse to fideism. On the contrary, they must be immanently critiqued on their own philosophical turf.

In *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine constructs an objection that Descartes would famously resuscitate. Augustine’s critique is immanent in the sense that it uses the sceptic’s own logic to show that we can know certain truths. He thus begins by conceding to the sceptics that our sense perception does not proffer certain exterior knowledge. Yet, whereas the sceptics are content to rest their case at our incapacity to hold anything as certain, Augustine argues that there is another, *interior* faculty of knowing, which is immune from the dissimulation of *exterior* sensations. According to Augustine, the sceptics’ very doubt of our own existence permits him to argue that even they admit that we know the truth of our own existence through the very act of our doubting it, since when we doubt we at least affirm ourselves as existing as a substance capable of doubt: “I ask first whether you yourself exist. Are you perhaps afraid that you might be deceived in this line of questioning? Surely if you did not exist, you could not be deceived at all.” In other words, Augustine accepts the sceptics’ claim that we must doubt all knowledge emanating from our sense perception, only to show that the sceptics’ very doubt grants us the knowledge of our rational soul’s existence as a

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48 Augustine, *City*, 662.
49 For a comprehensive comparison with Descartes’ method, see Chapter 3.
doubting thing. As Augustine succinctly puts it in *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, “if I err, I am” (*si enim fallor, sum*).\(^{52}\)

### 2.2.2. The proto-ontological argument itself

However, Augustine’s ambition is not to prove that we can know this or that particular truth, but to show that the divine being is absolutely good. To this end, Augustine draws on Plato’s *Phaedo* to argue that, although our judgments of particular things as, say, more or less good, true and beautiful, change as the qualities of those things also come and go, they nonetheless suppose an ideal standard of the Good, the True and the Beautiful, which eternally and universally persists as the criteria to which our judgments and the qualities of things refer.\(^{53}\) Augustine further observes that these Ideas of the Good, the True and the Beautiful cannot emanate from the sensible things themselves, because we judge those things according to the extent to which they partially embody the Ideas, which must therefore have more reality as the most generic totalization of all particular, finite qualities:

> Inquiring whence it was that I admired the beauty of bodies whether celestial or terrestrial, and what supported me in judging correctly on things mutable, and pronouncing, “this should be thus, this not”—inquiring, then, whence I so judged, seeing I did so judge, I had found the unchangeable and true eternity of Truth.\(^{54}\)

As we shall see in the next chapter, to conclude the proof here by moving directly from the judgment of sensible things to the existence of a superior Good resembles Aquinas’

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52 Augustine, *City*, 561.


54 Augustine, *Confessions*, 244.
more empirically inclined cosmological proofs. For Augustine, however, this only permits us to turn inward to the Idea of the Good in our minds. Without proving that the Idea of the Good emanates from a being superior to the mind, we risk repeating the heresy of certain mystical Platonists who imagined that our own mind was in fact one and the same with the divine Good.

To avoid this, Augustine argues that we cannot be the authors of the Ideas because we even judge ourselves according to the extent to which we embody these Ideas, after which our judgments strive:

We make judgements about physical objects in this fashion when we say that something is less bright than it ought to be, or less square, and so on, and about the mind when we say that one is less well-disposed than it ought to be. [...] We make these judgements in accordance with the inner rules of truth that we discern in common.56

If these Ideas stand as our superiors, Augustine proceeds to argue, they cannot emanate from ourselves, let alone the external world. Rather, they can only come from that which contains as much perfection and truth as the Ideas themselves. The only thing that could have as much perfection as the Ideas, however, are precisely those Ideas. Given, Augustine concludes, that nothing could have created these Ideas except themselves, they must have an independent, ontological existence: “when the mind perceives itself to be mutable, and apprehends that wisdom is unchangeable, it must at the same time apprehend that wisdom is superior to its own nature, and that it finds

55 See Chapter 3, § 3.1.
56 Augustine, Will, 57, my emphasis.
more abundant and abiding joy in the communications and light of wisdom than in itself.”57 All Augustine needs to add to “Christianize” this essentially Platonic concept of being is to identify what is an impersonal Idea of the Good for Plato with the divine Idea in the mind of the Christian God: “suppose we were able to find something that you had no doubt not only exists but also is more excellent than our reason. Would you hesitate to say that this, whatever it is, is God?”58 Such is the rational, Neo-Platonic and (as we shall see) proto-Cartesian way by which Augustine establishes the benevolent God’s existence from the interior certainty of our soul’s existence.

2.2.3. From God’s existence to his benevolence

Augustine’s proof is not only intended to rationally verify God’s existence, but above all his benevolence. After having demonstrated God’s existence, Augustine thus argues that, since God is the standard of our judgments of the qualities of all things in the double sense of the word “quality” as signifying both what is and what is good, the divine being must be one and the same with the highest Good, which totalizes all particular goods. That is to say, since the proof works by recognizing God as the standard for all our judgments of things as more or less good, it not only verifies his existence. It also proves that he exists as the highest Good itself. So, Augustine’s proof is not only designed to prove God’s existence, but also verify him as the sumnum bonum incarnate. Augustine concludes by rejoicing thus: “there is something more

57 Augustine, “Letter CXXI,” 967.
58 Augustine, Will, 42.
exalted than our mind and reason. Here you have it: [...] ‘take delight in the Lord and He will give you your heart’s longings.’”

2.3. AUGUSTINE’S THEODICY

2.3.1. Augustine’s privation theory of evil

Even after demonstrating the Christian God’s existence, Augustine still needs to rationally account for the brute fact of evil that we indubitably encounter if he is not to simply deny it by appeal to Church dogma. Augustine thus turns to developing his theodicy of the *privatio boni* by arguing with Plotinus that, if being is the absolute Good beyond which there is nothing as he has already demonstrated, evil cannot be anything ontologically positive in itself. Rather, evil can only be the secondary privation of the being of the Good. As Augustine encapsulates, “what is that which we call evil but the absence of good?” While Augustine’s privation theory of evil is certainly influenced by Plotinus’ idea of evil as non-being, there is a crucial difference. At times, Plotinus still arguably remains a dualist in that he tends to reify non-being as a realm distinct from being. In Plotinus’ own words, “evil cannot have place among Beings or in the Beyond-Being; these are good. There remains, only, if Evil exists at all, that it be situated in the realm of Non-Being.” Conversely, Augustine unambiguously characterizes this non-being as nothing but the negation of the

sovereign being of the Good, which cannot exist independently of the Good that it negates. For Augustine, evil has no reality at all apart from the being of the Good, of which it is the “less good.” It is merely a turning away or fall from the Good (\textit{perversitas, aversus, defectio, lapsus, deformitas, deviare, infirmare}, etc.).

2.3.2. \textit{Natural evil}

More precisely, Augustine divides the general evil of privation into two subcategories of natural and moral evil. Natural evil denotes the emergence of the material world of particular, sensible things ensnared in the temporal flux of becoming as the privation of the purely intelligible, and hence universal and immutable divine Ideas in the godhead: “the wound or disease is not a substance, but a defect in the fleshly substance, that is, privations of the good which we call health.”\textsuperscript{63} This for Augustine is what the Nazarene was referring to in the “Sermon on the Mount,” when he implores us to reject pursuing earthly goods that are liable to rot in favour of the highest Good, which remains eternally the same: “do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, […] but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes.”\textsuperscript{64}

At the same time, famously, Augustine qualifies that natural evil is not really an evil created by God; on the contrary, it is even a good insofar as it is the \textit{just punishment} that God confers on us for committing moral evil. Even though we feel sickness, hunger and death as painful, it remains good to the extent that it is humanity’s just comeuppance after Adam’s original sin of renouncing, and hence depriving himself of a higher Good in favour of more immediate, yet inferior corporeal pleasures. Augustine

\textsuperscript{63} Augustine, \textit{Enchiridion}, 491. See also “Letter III,” 521; and “Letter IV,” 523.
\textsuperscript{64} Matt 6:19-21.
continues: “the punishment of evildoers which is from God, is, therefore, an evil for evildoers, but it is among the good works of God, since it is just to punish evildoers and, certainly, everything that is just is good.” Further, natural evil is also good in the sense that it incites us to escape from our sickly privation, thereby opening our minds to the melody of the heavens as the path to redemption. In Augustine’s own terms, “in the universe, even that which is called evil […] only enhances our admiration of the good; for we enjoy and value the good more when we compare it with evil.”

2.3.3. Moral evil

Even if natural evil were not a just punishment, it is not so much generated by God as it is by the agents of the second category of moral evil. According to Augustine, moral evil marks our free choice to renounce the divine being in favour of more immediate but inferior and passing pleasures, thereby depriving us of the totality of being’s perfection: “the will is turned to its private good, […] to something lower when it takes delight in bodily pleasures, and thus someone who is made proud or curious or lascivious is captured by another life that, in comparison to the higher life, is death.”

As we have already seen Blumenberg argue in the introduction apropos Augustine’s solution to the problem of Gnosticism, the crux of Augustine’s account of moral evil is that God has no “damned spots” on his hands even though he created human beings like ourselves with the freedom to renounce him, because God’s conferral of freedom to us is a good in itself inasmuch as it is made in the image of his own free will.

66 Augustine, Enchiridion, 491.
67 Augustine, Will, 70.
Therefore, while God wills that we have free will as a good in itself, he does not will for us to use it in such a way as to negate him in favour of a lowlier good. Indeed, God even partially rigs the game in his favour by bestowing upon us the grace of reason, the articles of faith, the prophets, Jesus Christ and the Church to direct us towards the choice of God over sin. If we still decide to renounce him, then, the blame is only to be laid at our door. This is what transpired when the archangel Lucifer contested God’s superiority, only to be banished to an eternal privation in hell. As Augustine explains with reference to Ecclesiastes: “‘pride is the commencement of all sin,’ because it was this which overthrew the devil, from whom arose the origin of sin.”

Similarly, Adam morally sinned when he appraised his own choice to eat from the tree of knowledge above and beyond God’s prohibition. So, the crux of Augustine’s theodicy is that both moral and natural evil are not really evil, but the secondary effects of an anterior ontological good. Seen in this way, evil is either a just punishment for sin, or the misuse of the will made in God’s image.

2.4. AUGUSTINE’S ETHICS

2.4.1. The three eras of human history

According to Augustine’s reading of the Old Testament, the immediate descendants of Adam were exiled from God’s kingdom and condemned to walk the earth full of Job’s ignorance as to why there is suffering. Augustine periodizes this as the first of three eras of human history after the Fall and before his final judgment, each of which marks

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increasingly clearer revelations of God. In the second era of history, God wiped the
slate clean by the flood, which eliminated the most ignorant of human generations.
After Noah, God began to send other intermediaries between the finite and the infinite
to spread his Word, such as Abraham’s founding of the Jewish religious community,
and Moses’ institutionalization of the Ten Commandments. In the third and final stage
hitherto came the Incarnation. Just as Adam’s original sin condemned all of humanity,
so did the Nazarene redeem us of original sin through his death and our baptism, as
well as conferring on us the gift of the holy spirit and our reason which gravitates
around the divine Ideas. In Augustine’s own words, “the miracles performed by our
Lord Jesus Christ are indeed divine works, and incite the human mind to rise to the
apprehension of God from the things that are seen.”  
What Augustine thinks that these
concrete, historical vessels of the divinity all teach us is that we must spurn the “earthly
Gomorrah” and its “love of self, even to the contempt of God” in favour of the
“heavenly” city and its “love of God, even to the contempt of self.”
It is this third
epoch of history, armed as we now are with the divine Ideas, in which Augustine sees
himself as intervening.

2.4.2. Theoretical and practical virtues

Augustine’s ethics involves exercising the virtues of “faith,” “hope,” “wisdom” or
“prudence,” “temperance,” “love” or “charity,” “courage” and “justice.” Here, it is
necessary to see how Augustine is not only referring to faith in the sense of belief; faith
also means the doctrines contained in the articles of faith, which Augustine has

James Innes (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), 257.
71 Augustine, City, 455.
theologically vindicated. As Nash points out, “Augustine uses the word ‘faith’ in a number of different senses.”72 After rationally extrapolating God’s existence and theodicy, and turning to an account of charity or love, Augustine thus describes all this as his “confession of faith.”73 By faith, then, Augustine is referring to the knowledge of our history from whence we have come both in being created by God, and then having fallen through sin: “the teaching of faith [is] about past and future things.”74 This is why Augustine elsewhere refers to faith as the wisdom or prudence that teaches us precisely about the obedience to God that is good for us, as well as the rebellion against him which marks our misery: “consider whether prudence seems to you to be knowledge of things to be pursued and avoided.”75 Augustine similarly describes hope as the same rational knowledge orientated around the future confidence that we can reascend to our proper level of perfection through a life of fidelity to God.

Love or charity then refers to the desire for God after establishing his existence by faith and wisdom. For Augustine, this love must assume an objective expression through the love of our neighbours. Augustine consistently insists that the true believer does not only subjectively believe, but also practically believes by committing good deeds to others, enacting the Church’s commandments, and performing the missionary work of the conversion of others:

As for love, which the apostle declares to be greater than the other two graces, that is, than faith and hope, the greater the means are in which it dwells in a man, the better is

75 Augustine, *Will*, 22.
the man in whom it dwells. For when there is question as to whether a man is good, one does not ask what he believes or what he hopes, but what he practices.76

Finally, Augustine encapsulates all of these virtues through the overarching virtue of justice. Simply put, justice designates the synthetic constellation of all the other virtues around the rational and practical affirmation of God as the Good incarnate. As Augustine recapitulates, “justice is but the virtue by which each receives his due.”77

2.4.3. The Pelagians and the Donatists’ temptations

Augustine also negatively formulates his ethics in terms of what we ought not to do when he argues that these virtues permit us to avoid the three temptations of “the lust of the flesh,” “the lust of the eyes,” and “the pride of life.” The voluptuous temptation of the flesh transpires when we are content to overlook the greater Good by satisfying our particular, temporal wants in the here and now. In this way, the voluptuous temptation lures us in until we have abandoned pursuing the only really immutable beatitude in the next life, which we can only attain precisely by sacrificing such temporal pleasures. Similarly, the temptation of the eyes resembles the fixation on particular, ephemeral pleasures, colours and odours among the spontaneous flow of bodies in becoming. Spontaneously drawn to wherever our eyes lead us, we forget all about rationally organizing the multiplicity of sensible things around the Church hierarchy, such as it is the terrestrial incarnation of the loftier, Supreme Being: “the

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76 Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 608.
eyes delight in fair and varied forms, and bright and pleasing colours. Suffer not these to take possession of my soul; let God rather possess it.”

Finally, the temptation of pride involves putting our own individual interest at present before the general Good of all in the next life to come: “no one therefore has a single, i.e. pure heart, except the man who rises above the praises of men; and when he lives well, looks at Him only, and strives to please Him.” The paradox is that it is precisely this temptation to affirm oneself out of a vain concern for the judgment of others that deprives us of our true self in the angelic rank of perfection, a rank to which we can only ascend by passing the final judgment. If these temptations are to be avoided even though they bring us a temporal, immediate joy, it is because our eternal beatitude without the evil of privation can only be found in the plenitude of God’s being after a life of fidelity and charitable action.

Augustine also critiqued the temptations of the Donatists and the Pelagians in the polemics he wrote as the bishop of Hippo, a small African port town, where he was tasked with uniting the Christian community amid fights, riots and strikes agitated by these factions-turned-heretics. As Brown explains in his biography of Augustine, after he became a priest in 391 CE and then bishop in 396, “this same man now took the first step on that long road that led from introspection and the neo-Platonic doctrine of contemplation to those tangible realities.”

78 Augustine, *Confessions*, 361.
On the one hand, Augustine chastises the Donatists for their fanatical enforcement of the letter of Church doxa, to the point where they actually end up condemning the faithful.\textsuperscript{81} The Donatists first emerged in 311 CE in reaction to those Christians who had collaborated during the persecution of Diocletian in 303-305, even if they took their name and philosophy from Donatus and Saint Cyprian’s writings during the Dicean persecution in 250. Augustine would face off with them in 396 CE, and again as they experienced a resurgence after the sack of Rome in 410, during which times many Christians renounced their faith to avoid persecution. According to Cyprian, to be a good Christian means codifying the Scriptures’ teachings into a series of iron-clad tenets which we have only to follow.\textsuperscript{82} The problem is that Cyprian identifies these tenets with specific dogma, such as “we must not swear,” and we must preserve “virginity and continence.”\textsuperscript{83} In this way, Cyprian and the Donatists who followed him focused upon objective discipline and obedience to a set of specific practices without regard for the subjective intent behind those who enact them. Consequently, even Christians who truly believe, but are never baptized or are forced to transgress the tenets without consent, are condemned as having lapsed.

According to Augustine, the Donatists emphasize \textit{objective} practice so much so that they forget that we must always have \textit{subjective} fidelity to God. Seen in this way, Christians who renounced their faith from fear of persecution while remaining subjectively loyal to it are still good Christians. For example, in defence of the Christian

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{81} The best study of Augustine’s writings against the Donatists is Adam Ployd, \textit{Augustine, the Trinity, and the Church: A Reading of the Anti-Donatist Sermons} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
\textsuperscript{83} Cyprian, \textit{Testimonies}, 82, 92.
\end{flushright}
virgins who were raped during the fall of Rome, Augustine argues that they remained subjectively faithful to the Christian virtue of temperance from such earthly acts: “while the will remains firm and unshaken, nothing that another person does with the body, or upon the body, is any fault of the person who suffers it.”84 This is what Paul was getting at when he rebuked Peter for claiming that the Gentiles must follow Jewish customs like circumcision.85 For Paul as for Augustine, being a Christian is not only about outward obedience to traditional customs, but more importantly about the subjective intention behind such deeds: “he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal.”86 To cast out those who are faithful in their inner intention would only amount to weakening the unity of the Church.

Whereas the Donatists follow the letter of the law so much so that they condemn even good Christians, the Pelagians make the inverse error of affirming that we can attain the Good from our own will without God’s grace. In Pelagius’ own words, “God wished to bestow on the rational creature the gift of doing good of his own free will, […] so that with his capacity for good and evil he could do either.”87 For Augustine, the Pelagians fall into sin by imagining that they can merit beatitude without divine assistance and its representatives of the Church: “there are some persons who presume so much upon the free determination of the human will, as to suppose that it need not sin and that we require no divine assistance […] An inevitable consequence of this is,

84 Augustine, City, 32. See also “Letter CXI,” 952.
85 Acts 14: 7-11, 127.
86 Rom. 2: 28-9, 144.
that we ought not to pray ‘not to enter into temptation.’”\textsuperscript{88} Contrary to both Pelagian and Donatist temptations, we have seen that Augustine’s own ethics is neither a pure voluntarism nor a blind obedience to dogma, but rather an alchemy of subjective fidelity and practical action in the hope of our redemption through the love of God.

2.4.4. \textit{The role of the Church and the State}

Augustine does not advocate performing such virtues in isolation from the community of believers. Along with our inner reason, he also prescribes that we obey the directives of the Church that also embodies God’s Word.\textsuperscript{89} Augustine even goes so far as to argue in doublespeak style that the Church paradoxically loves sinners punishing them if only so as to draw them closer to his grace: “nor are we thus precluded from inflicting such punishment as avails for correction, and as compassion itself dictates. […] Sin can be punished in love rather than be left unpunished.”\textsuperscript{90} Always a man of his word, Augustine supported the emperor’s decrees of 399, 407, 408 and 415 CE, which purged the Donatists. Clearly, Augustine’s idea that the Church must reorganize the temporal law around the eternal Law as best as it can, certainly had the potential, and indeed did fuel the ideological flames of the medieval Catholic Church’s directive that the oppressed look towards the future, messianic life of beatitude, rather than their misery’s immediate amelioration.


\textsuperscript{90} Augustine, \textit{Lord’s Sermon}, 71. Augustine does qualify that the punisher must not punish out of vengeance for oneself, which would make the punisher a sinner, but only for the good of the sinner being punished.
2.4.5. The fourth stage of history

Augustine’s ethics ultimately comes down to envisioning our temporal lives as a concatenation of divinely ordained trials and tribulations, whereby we must avoid the temptation to choose the immediate, particular pleasures in favour of subjectively and objectively following the Church’s commandments as the divine’s earthly embryo. It is only in this way that we will be resurrected to our true level of perfection at the moment of the last judgment. It is this that Augustine anticipates as the fourth and final stage of human history: “how great shall be that felicity which shall be tainted with no evil, which shall lack no good!”91 Having finally laid his demons to rest, Augustine thinks that he can now rest another kind of rest, that of the eternal Sabbath, without labour or lack to corrupt its ontological completeness.

2.5. Augustine’s doctrine of predestination

2.5.1. Whereof Augustine cannot speak

In the beginning, Augustine developed a rationalist demonstration of the benevolent God’s existence. This permitted him to furnish a theodicy according to which evil is the privation of being as a result of our free will to affirm particular, passing pleasures over and above God’s perfection. Finally, Augustine’s ethics traced how we can redeem ourselves from the misuse of our will by living a life of contemplation and love of the divine Ideas incarnated by the Church. In the following chapters, we shall see

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91 Augustine, City, 815-6.
that Augustine’s absolutization of the Good is crucial insofar as it constitutes the model followed by philosophers as diverse as Descartes, Kant and Schelling.

There, we shall also see that philosophy’s problem is that it not only inherits Augustine’s solutions, but also his problems. I will therefore conclude this chapter by problematizing Augustine’s philosophy for failing to truly explain both the Good and evil through a singular concept of being. Although by doing so I shall have to explain the last of Augustine’s central doctrines, I am nonetheless moving from a strict exegesis to a critical analysis. At the same time, this critical analysis lays the groundwork for an exegesis of Schelling’s own critique of the Augustinian tradition in the fifth chapter.

2.5.2. Augustine’s late predestinarian turn

My contention is that Augustine corners himself into admitting a certain beingness to evil in a way which threatens his initial ontologization of the Good. It is well-known that, in his 396 letter to Simplician, Augustine inaugurated a turn in his thinking by developing his doctrine of predestination, which would become ever more pronounced in his final years.92 Whereas Augustine initially argued that our free choice to perform good actions can lead to our redemption, he later argues that God predestines who shall go to heaven and hell, regardless of our good deeds: “it is therefore settled that God’s grace is not given according to the deserts of the recipients, but according to the good

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pleasure of His will. […] He has certainly willed that His grace should be gratuitous.”93 Augustine does not go so far as some later Protestant and occasionalist thinkers, who radicalised his predestinarian doctrine by arguing that God even predestines our particular choices.94 Conversely, for Augustine, the misuse of our will can lead us if elected to heaven to reverse God’s predestination such that we are sent to hell: “do we then by grace make void free will? God forbid! […] Free will is not made void through grace, but is established, since grace cures the will whereby righteousness is freely loved.”95 At the same time, those who are elected to hell cannot be saved no matter what good use they make of their will. Since we do not know whether we are elected to heaven or to evil, however, we cannot simply give in to vice, since this would ruin our chances of entering heaven if we are among the chosen elect. Furthermore, freedom is also maintained as the explanation for the origin of evil insofar as Adam was indeed free. It was only after Adam freely sinned that we were condemned to the temporal world where we can only be redeemed by God’s election. Augustine thus distinguishes between free will as the source of evil and redemption through predestination: “it is one thing to inquire into the source of evil and another to inquire how one can return to his original good.”96 In this way, Augustine maintains that he can still explain evil as Adam’s will to privation while stripping his descendants of their freedom.

As we have already seen Blumenberg argue in the introduction, the objection can nonetheless be raised as to whether Augustine’s predestinarian doctrine puts in doubt his notion of being as absolutely good. Does predestination not mean that God is unjust,

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94 See, for instance, the brief discussion of Malebranche in Chapter 3, § 3.4.2.
insofar as he saves only some while condemning others to eternal damnation? To this
class of objection, Augustine responds that God cannot be charged with this injustice
because any condemnation is still the just punishment for original sin. Instead, we
should be happy that God is merciful enough to save anyone at all: “let us not then be
ungrateful, that according to the good pleasure of His will, a merciful God delivers so
many to the praise of the glory of His grace from such deserved perdition.”
As Leszek
Kolakowski succinctly puts it, even a gratuitous God is just, because “God owes us
nothing.”

One can nonetheless legitimately argue that the sins of Adam are vastly
disproportionate to the punishment of the eternal damnation of his progeny, who never
even had the freedom to avoid their forbearer’s original sin. What Augustine thus
misses is that the predestination of some to heaven is also the simultaneous
predestination of others to a realm of eternal death. In this way, predestination
effectively amounts to God’s bringing into being an eternal realm of pure non-being or
privation alongside that of the Good. Consequently, God cannot be seen as wholly
good, but rather as split by a second will-to-privation. The problem is that a God who
wills the privation of his creations would be virtually indistinguishable from the devil
who tempts us away from the Good. So, Augustine’s very attempt to affirm the
benevolent God’s absolute omnipotence over all things through his predestinarian
doctrine inadvertently threatens to introduce a principle of evil into the divine being
itself: As Gillian Evans also suggests, “Augustine had really been moving back towards

97 Augustine, Predestination, 1428.
98 Leszek Kolakowski, God Owes Us Nothing: A Brief Remark on Pascal’s Religion and on the Spirit of Jansenism
a position on a certain issue close to that which he had occupied as a Manichee.” 99 Despite his attempt to prove being’s absolute goodness, Augustine’s late predestinarian turn threatens to topple his whole ontology.

It is no wonder that it is precisely in Augustine’s defence of predestination that his original rational commitments are cast aside as he proceeds to assert by sheer faith alone that God’s reason for condemning some are mysterious, and yet just: “is there injustice with God? Of course not!”; and: “if it is disturbing, O man, who are you to talk back to God?” 100 This elucidates why, in Christian Metaphysics and Neo-Platonism, Albert Camus argues that Augustine’s pessimistic view of human depravity marked the decisive turn from Greek and Hellenic optimism in human reason’s ability to attain the Good towards a faith in divine redemption: “by understanding Saint Augustine, we can understand the entire course of Christianity’s evolution: to soften progressively Greek reason and to incorporate it into its own edifice, but in a sphere in which it is inoffensive. Beyond this sphere, it is obliged to yield its authority.” 101 Here, Camus tends to overlook Augustine’s earlier affirmation of freedom and human reason as this chapter has traced. Nonetheless, Camus is right that Augustine’s later predestinarian doctrine makes a recourse to dogmatic faith to ensure that God remains just despite the withdrawal of his mercy from the damned.

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99 Evans, Augustine on Evil, 147. In this thesis’ introduction, we already saw that Blumenberg also viewed Augustine’s predestinarian doctrine as contradicting his initial attempt to overcome Gnosticism by tracing evil back to human sin (see Chapter 1, § 1.3). A similar objection to Evans’ critique of Augustine for naturalizing evil as “involuntary sin” can be found in Malcolm E. Alffatt, “The Responsibility for Involuntary Sin in Saint Augustine,” Recherches augustiniennes et patristiques, 10 (1975), 171-86.
100 Augustine, “Response to Simplician,” 58, 60.
Augustine’s late predestinarian doctrine does not refute my thesis that, from his Christian conversion onwards, he always held that being was absolutely Good. Instead, it raises the question as to whether Augustine can rationally ontologize the Good without ultimately resorting to faith as a final court of appeal. By Augustine’s own rational standards, the recourse to faith in God’s enigmatic justice is the very inadequate response that his philosophy set out to resolve in the first place. The final step in Augustine’s solution to the problem thus comes full circle back to the problem of the solution.

2.6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Figure 1 below visualizes the problem of evil that Augustine cannot ultimately resolve. The largest circle at the centre represents Augustine’s concept of being as the absolute Good totalizing the qualities of all particular things. The four smaller circles that partially overlap with and partially fall outside the circle of the Good formalize God’s creation of a multiplicity of things by virtue of their participation to varying degrees in the godhead’s divine Ideas. Moving clockwise from the twelve o’clock position, we can see that most of the first circle falls within the being of the Good. It therefore symbolizes humanity’s true entelechy in the hierarchy of being. The second circle that still lies for the most part within the circle of being symbolizes the human being insofar as it is fallen from its proper, angelic rank of perfection, while retaining a significant access to the divine Ideas organizing its reason. The third circle symbolizes the animal, the plant and all other living organisms, who are caught halfway between the evil of privation and the being of the Good. The fourth and final circle represents inanimate
matter, which falls entirely outside of the circle of the Good. It is but one and the same with natural evil.

That which lies within the large circle is what Augustine can explain: the being of the Good and the multiplicity of individuated creatures to the extent that they strive after that Good. Although Augustine dogmatically disavows that anything outside the circle has being, we can see that, apart from our reason, our entire lives transpire outside “being.” If metaphysics is about accounting for everything, including the brute fact of our own privative existence in the material world, the circle must be expanded to incorporate evil into the realm of being.

**Figure 1. Augustine’s hierarchy of being**
In the fifth chapter we will see Schelling’s attempt, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, to reconcile the Good and evil by way of a single ontological force, entity, or principle. We must first step back from the world’s edge to see how philosophers in Augustine’s wake sought to defend his absolutization of the Good in ways that he could not.
CHAPTER 3. AFTER AQUINAS, DESCARTES’ EPISTEMIC AUGUSTINIANISM

The rest of this thesis puts Descartes, Kant and Schelling in dialogue with Augustine to develop the hypothesis that one dominant thread of the Western philosophical tradition comprises a concatenation of methodological fortifications of Augustine’s metaphysics of the *summum bonum* and the *privatio boni*. This chapter focuses on correcting the textbook histories of philosophy’s typical portrayal of Descartes as having broken with medieval, Christian philosophy. In his influential biography of Descartes, Stephen Gaukroger best articulates the view that Descartes’ chief works lie in the fields of mathematics and natural philosophy rather than metaphysics and theology.\(^\text{102}\) By contrast, there is another view most recently championed by Stephen Menn in *Descartes and Augustine*, which emphasizes Augustine’s enduring influence or at least formal affinity with Descartes.\(^\text{103}\) What ultimately emerges from the immense literature on Descartes is two seemingly contradictory readings of Descartes as either breaking with or adhering to Augustinianism.

This chapter does not so much set out to favour one view over the other, but shows how these two views are actually compatible. That is to say, it is possible to reconcile how Descartes can justly claim to revolt against late medieval Thomism, all the while remaining faithful to Christian philosophy’s earlier Augustinian tradition. To do this, it is necessary to trace how Aquinas broke with the apophatic theology in Augustine’s

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wake by appropriating Aristotle’s more “quasi-empirical” or worldly method of inferring God’s existence from his footprints in the world. Having clarified how Augustine differs from Aquinas in terms of their methods of affirming the same Christian God’s absolute benevolence, I will then demonstrate that Descartes does break with the Thomist scholastics’ Aristotelian “empiricism”—albeit only by returning to Augustine’s even more ancient rationalism. Descartes thus translates Augustine’s ontological argument against the sceptics into his innate ideas of the *cogito* and the perfect God. He then translates Augustine’s theodicy into his epistemological account of error *qua* the privation of what truly *is*. Finally, he even reconstructs Augustine’s problematic predestinarian doctrine through his late “occasionalist turn.”

3.1. AQUINAS’ WORDLY REFORTIFICATION OF AUGUSTINIANISM

3.1.1. Aquinas against the mystics

By the thirteenth century, the Augustinian tradition’s rational arguments were challenged and modified by theologians like Pseudo-Dionysius and Johannes Eckhart’s more mystically and apophatically inclined defences of God’s benevolence. According to these negative theologians and mystics, God’s goodness totally withdraws from this life. Consequently, we can only know him negatively, through a leap of faith, or by ineffable mystical experiences. Although he only emerged towards the end of Aquinas’ life, Eckhart best exemplifies this mystical Augustinianism. Eckhart grew up in a religious climate where many men had died during the Crusades and increasingly more women had assumed religious functions, in particular the female mystics known as the
“beguines.” With constant reference to Augustine, Eckhart argues that, since God’s goodness totally transcends the present, finite life, we cannot comprehend him through logical reasoning or empirical inferences. Instead, we can only grasp him by following our soul’s inner feeling or “will” for the Good:

The soul has by nature two capacities. The one is intelligence. […] The second capacity is Will. That is a nobler one, and its essential characteristic is to […] lay hold of God in a mysterious manner, and the Unknown God imparts His impression to the Will. […] Therefore St. Augustine saith that the soul is greater by its love-giving power than by its life-giving power.


105 Johannes Eckhart, “The Self-Communication of God,” in Meister Eckhart’s Sermons, ed. and trans. Claud Field (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2003), 15. Modern readings of Augustine as a mystic can be found in John Burnaby, Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938); P. Filbert Cayré, La Contemplation augustiniennne: principes de spiritualité et de théologie (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1954); Dom Cuthbert Butler, Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 1968); Denys Turner, The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Andrew Louth, “Augustine,” in Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2007). All of these commentators essentially make the same argument that Augustine rejects appeals to reason in favor of following our innate yearning or “love” for a Good beyond which any temporal goods can gratify. To make this case, they all focus on the Confessiones’ early chapters, and particularly the “vision of Ostia.” They therefore downplay the fact that Augustine’s initial yearning is only a preliminary step in a longer rational deduction of the benevolent God. So, while it is possible to develop a mystical Augustinianism by focusing on this part in isolation from the whole, it does not really capture Augustine’s own proof. It is therefore as textually inaccurate as would be the argument that Augustine is a sceptic because of his stage of hyperbolic doubt before arriving at the certainty of his own and God’s existence. As Bernard McGinn explains, although “Eckhart was familiar with a wide range of Augustine’s writings,” “he has a ‘canon within the canon’ of Augustine.” The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God is Nothing (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 175. The best account of Augustine’s relation to mysticism is thus that of Henri Marrou, who argues that Augustine’s is a “thinker’s mysticism” in the sense that he affirms that we can cognize God through our desire for an immutable Good, even as he privileges reason as the most certain means of divine apprehension. See Saint Augustin et l’augustinisme (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 70.
Eckhart’s statement here is typical of how Christian mystics reconfigured Augustine’s prescription to find God within ourselves into a focus on our sentiment, feeling or will instead of our rational thought.

While the mystics’ method was different, they wielded it to the same end of seeking the divine being of the Good. Eckhart persists: “our salvation depends upon knowing and recognizing the Chief Good which is God Himself.”106 If Aquinas was also obliged to develop another method in the age of the Christian mystics, it was because the apophatic approach left the mystics open to the charge that their ethereal penchant for otherworldly transcendence could say nothing of the sensible, privative world in which we presently reside. Worse still, insofar as the mystics insisted that God completely transcends this life, they even inadvertently committed the heresy of granting the temporal order its own independent ontological existence.

3.1.2. Aquinas’ Aristotelian revival

At the same time that the beguines were becoming prominent, Latin translations of Aristotle were being so widely distributed in French, German, and English universities that the Church forbade certain Aristotelian doctrines in 1277 for posing the threat of a complete system, which was independent of Christian doctrine. Given, however, that Islamic philosophers were appropriating Aristotle’s philosophy with great success to fortify their own faith, certain Dominican philosophers like Aquinas sought to recuperate Aristotle for the Christian cause. On Aquinas’ reading, Aristotle had responded to Plato’s difficulty in accounting for the brute fact of sensible particulars.

106 Eckhart, “The Nearness of the Kingdom,” in Eckhart’s Sermons, 8.
through his theory of transcendent Ideas by turning from metaphysics to physics and granting a certain beingness to the sensible world.107

Putting two and two together, when confronted with the sensible remnant of the problem of evil for the mystics on the one hand, and the rediscovery of Aristotle’s corpus on the other, what Aquinas essentially did was to appropriate Aristotle’s worldlier or “quasi-empirical” method to show how even the sensible world finds its being in that of the benevolent God. As Chesterton explains, Aquinas’ “empirical turn” to Aristotle was motivated by the need to correct the Augustinian mystics’ otherworldliness that took little notice of the temporal world:

There was in a sense a more subtle danger in Augustine the Platonist than even in Augustine the Manichaean. […] It thought of God too exclusively as a Spirit who purifies or a Saviour who redeems; and too little as a Creator who creates. That is why men like Aquinas thought it right to correct Plato by an appeal to Aristotle.108

As Paul VI positions Aquinas contra mystics and naturalists alike by showing how Aristotelian worldliness still leads to Augustinianism:

Thomas thus overcame the kind of exaggerated supernaturalism that flourished in the medieval schools and at the same time stood firm against the secularism that was being broadcast in the European universities through a naturalistic interpretation of Aristotle.

He showed clearly in his teaching and in the example of his scientific approach to


108 Chesterton, Aquinas, 66.
reality, how a full and unconditional fidelity to the word of God was to be united in
teaching and in life to a mind unreservedly open to the world.109

Whereas the mystics argued that the Good completely transcends the present world
except through the will’s ineffable communion, Aquinas sought to explain how the
Good still organizes the sensible realm without being reducible to it, by appropriating
Aristotle’s more worldly approach.

For Aquinas, the origin of our knowledge lies in sense perception.110 Although we
cannot grasp the purely intelligible idea of God, we can discern his effects in the
sensible world: “the intellect depends on the sense for the origin of knowledge”; and:
“because we are not able to see His essence, we arrive at the knowledge of His being,
not through God Himself, but through His effects.”111 Aquinas even rejects the
ontological argument that we can prove God’s existence by thinking the idea of God
even if we have yet to encounter any of his sensible effects: “it does not follow
immediately that, as soon as we know the meaning of the name God, the existence of
God is known.”112 Certainly, Aquinas holds that the intellect is distinct from the body
insofar as it survives the body’s death. Yet, our minds are hylomorphically bound to
the corporeal in our present, fallen state. So, the search for redemption through the
knowledge of God must begin with the sensible tools with which we are equipped.

109 Paul VI, Lumen Ecclesiae.
110 The most comprehensive introductions to Aquinas are Leo J. Elders, The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas
111 Aquinas, Gentiles I, 64, 82.
112 Aquinas, Gentiles I, 81.
The best example of Aquinas’ worldly approach is his five proofs for God’s existence, which infer from effects back to their divine Cause. Here, we can clearly discern Aristotle’s influence inasmuch as all five demonstrations are grounded upon the principles of the impossibility of real contradiction and infinite regress, which we never really observe in nature. As McInerny notes, “we can imagine the excitement with which Thomas poured over those passages in Aristotle where the pagan philosopher argues that the world of change and motion requires in order to be at all […] a first mover.” Aquinas’ “proof by movement” argues that we perceive things as constantly changing or moving from potentiality to actuality. Now, something cannot move from potentiality to actuality except if it is moved by another thing already in actuality. However, since an infinite regress of finite things moving other finite things from potentiality to act is also impossible, there must be a first Unmoved Mover, which moves all things without being moved itself, as the pure act without further potentiality, which Aquinas calls God. “The proof by efficient causality” states that nothing in the world of becoming can have its existence contained in its essence, since it would have to paradoxically exist before itself. But since an infinite series of efficient causes is also impossible, there must be a first Cause without cause, which we may call God. “The proof by contingency” explains that all things emerge, become and perish, and can therefore be and not be. If all things are thus contingent, and yet an infinite regress of contingent things as the cause of other contingent things is impossible, there must be a necessary Being or God, whose essence contains his existence. It is by means of this

necessary divine Being, rather than an infinite regress of contingent causes, that all other contingent things gain their temporary existence by participating in its Essence. The “proof by final causality” states that we regularly observe inanimate things gravitating around a certain goal or purpose too often to be mere chance. However, inorganic objects cannot have the knowledge of their own goal. It thus follows that another thing or a God must confer their goal on them.

Most importantly for our purposes, the “proof by the degrees of being” marks a quasi-empirical twist on Augustine’s own ontological argument by arguing that we make judgments about things as more or less good than others. While our judgments of things tend to change in accordance with the becoming of those things, they nonetheless imply a certain standard of Perfection or a God, who exists eternally and universally as the means by which all things participate to varying degrees to gain the qualities which we are judging:

> Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble, and the like […] as they resemble in their different ways something […] which is truest, something best, something noblest, and, consequently, something which is uttermost being. […] Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.\(^{115}\)

Therein lies the empirical caveat to what is essentially Augustine’s own ontological argument: whereas Augustine argues that we judge ourselves in accordance with these ideas, which must therefore be more perfect than our minds, Aquinas argues that we

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\(^{115}\) Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, 14.
judge external things according to these ideas, which must be superior to the world. Be it by Augustine’s rationalism or Aquinas’ more worldly approach, the result is the same: the Idea of the Good must emanate from an even more perfect being than either ourselves or the world.

Having inferred God’s existence, Aquinas proffers his “analogy of proportionality” to render him omnibenevolent. According to Aquinas’ analogical method, given that the five proofs demonstrated that God is the all-encompassing pure act towards which all sensible and contingent things gravitate as the centre of their true perfection, we can infer God’s properties by attributing to him the infinitely perfect qualities of our finite qualities: “it must be said that to see the essence of God there is required some similitude in the visual faculty, namely, the light of glory enlightening the intellect to see God, which is spoken of in the Psalm In Thy light we shall see light.”\(^\text{116}\) Putting the analogy of proportionality into action, Aquinas infers that, since God is the pure act after which all things strive, he is the absolute Perfection or Good of all, without any lack or deficiency: “all related perfections are in God. Hence He is universally perfect.”\(^\text{117}\) By observing that all things desire God’s pure act as the highest Good, insofar as it totalizes being’s full potentiality without privation, Aquinas is able to conflate being with God’s benevolence: “good and being are really the same”; and: “every being, as being, is good.”\(^\text{118}\) Such is how Aquinas refortifies Augustine’s ontologization of the Good by virtue of our experience in the ephemeral world of the fallen.

\(^{116}\text{Aquinas, Theologica I, 50.}\)
\(^{117}\text{Aquinas, Theologica I, 21.}\)
It only remains for Aquinas to infer that evil is merely a privation of God’s benevolence: “as Augustine says: since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in his works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil.”119 Despite the semi-empirical facelift, Aquinas establishes the same thing as Augustine: being’s absolute goodness that reduces evil to the realm of non-being.

3.2. DESCARTES’ MODERN BREAK AS A RETURN TO AUGUSTINE

3.2.1. The sceptical backdrop to Descartes’ critique of Aquinas

If I digressed to discuss Aquinas’ defence of Augustinian theodicy, it is because it created the conditions for Descartes’ modern break from Thomist scholasticism, if only by a return to Augustine’s rationalism. By the late sixteenth century in which Descartes was born, the Thomist scholastics’ inductions of God’s benevolence had been thrown into doubt by Montaigne and other modern sceptics. In “Apologie de Raymond Sabond,” Montaigne argues that our senses can give each of us different and even contradictory knowledge: “as for the error and uncertainty of the operation of sense, each can furnish as many examples as one pleases along with falsehoods and deceptions.”120 For instance, a phenomenon that is hot or good for one person can appear cold or bad for another. For Montaigne, then, the only sure road to God is through a leap of faith: “it is faith alone that certainly and wholeheartedly embraces the highest mysteries of our religion.”121 By now, this situation facing Descartes in the

119 Aquinas, Theologica I, 14.
early seventeenth century should sound familiar: much as Augustine appropriated the Neo-Platonists’ rationalism contra the academic sceptics, so does Descartes appropriate Augustine’s rationalism to combat the modern sceptics.

3.2.2. **Was Descartes really a Christian?**

It is true that Descartes often translates Augustine’s rationalism in terms of the Euclidean method of instilling us with the absolute certainty that our knowledge is valid, insofar as it is derived from axiomatic principles. It can thus seem as if Descartes is only using Augustine’s method to pursue a very different, and decidedly modern, end of determining the true for truth’s sake. According to Gaukroger, for instance, it is only after Galileo’s condemnation in 1633 that Descartes tries to reconcile his physics with theology by developing the ontological argument in the *Méditations*:

> What he was subsequently concerned to do was to legitimate his physical theory. [...] The only way to do this effectively, Descartes came to believe, was in terms of a vocabulary and a mode of presentation derived from scholastic natural philosophy and metaphysics, despite the fact that these were completely antithetical to his own naturalist philosophy.\(^{123}\)

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\(^{123}\) Gaukroger, *Descartes*, 12. A variant on Gaukroger’s reading is Michael Hanby’s radical orthodox account. For his argument to work, Hanby has to see Descartes as breaking with Augustinianism such that he can attribute modernity’s discontents to the former, and its remedy to a renewed “critical Augustinianism.” Hanby thus argues that Descartes abandons Augustine’s Christology and trinitarianism, which symbolize how humanity’s redemption is mediated through a collective community or Church body. Instead, Descartes returns to the “Pelagian” affirmation of our individual will. See Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 178. As we shall see, however, if Hanby had focused on Augustine and Descartes’ metaphysics rather than an ethics that Descartes barely develops, he would have discovered a fundamental continuity rather than an epiphenomenal rupture.
Having published the *Méditations* in 1640, Descartes thus returns to systematizing his thoughts in the *Principes de la philosophie* and developing his physics in *Passions de l’âme* before his death at the decade’s end.

On the contrary, my contention is that Descartes sought to prove being’s absolute goodness when confronted with the brute fact of physical evil. As Descartes makes it even more clear in his correspondence with Princess Elisabeth during the last decade of his life, philosophy’s ultimate goal must be to affirm the highest Good: “the sovereign good is without doubt the thing which we ought to put forward to ourselves as the goal of all our actions, and the contentment of mind that comes from it is also rightly called our end.”124 While Gaukroger is right that Descartes concentrated on mathematics and physics in the 1610s, Descartes already had a deeply religious education in the Jesuit collège system throughout the 1600s.125 On 10 November 1619, Descartes also had his three famous dreams where he was lost and confounded in the woods with phantoms surrounding him and lightning striking everywhere, before opening a book which told him to reflect inward on his own mind, and thereby become calmer through the certain conviction of his own existence. Upon waking, Descartes even attributed the dream to the grace of God. Baillet transcribes Descartes’ dream, recorded in his lost *Olympia*, in the first biography of Descartes: “continuing to interpret his dream in waking, Descartes supposed that the way out of incertitude […] was] the good council of a wise person, or even Moral Theology.”126 Gaukroger

himself describes Descartes’ night of dreams as a tarrying with the problem of evil in the guise of sensible deceptions: “feeling that while he had not erred in the eyes of men, he may have erred in the eyes of God, he reflected on good and evil.”

On Gaukroger’s own account, Descartes’ dreams expressed a tension between his religious convictions and his physical experimentations: “guilt played a crucial role in the ‘Christianization’ of pupils. […] It would have been nothing short of remarkable if Descartes […] had not felt the rigours of the Christianizing process.”

Given that Descartes’ 1619 dream already contained the schematic germ of the *Méditations*’ musings on scepticism, the evil demon, the *cogito* and the ontological argument, Gaukroger undermines his own thesis that Descartes only became concerned with the problem of evil after 1633. This alone elucidates why, precisely after his dreams, Descartes spent the next year working on his first account of the rationalist method in *Règles pour la direction de l’esprit*. Later on, Descartes himself identifies 1619 as the year that he abandoned the study of books to join the army so as to start from scratch in his experience of the world without learned prejudices: “this is why […] I entirely left behind the study of letters, […] resolving to no longer search for any other science than that which I could find within myself.”

It is true that, after 1620, Descartes returned to working on his physics and mathematics after struggling to furnish the desired method. His continued religious motives are clear, however, insofar as he recommenced writing *Les Règles* in 1626-7. Descartes describes the difficulty of reconciling his natural philosophy with the Christian faith in

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128 Gaukroger, *Descartes*, 110.
a letter to Mersenne: “as for what you asked me, how Christian virtues agree with the
natural, I do not know what to say”; and: “I fear that you would judge that my
philosophy is too emancipated from theology.” In light of these facts, Descartes’
hesitation to publish the exposition of his physics in *Le Monde* before the *Méditations*
did not simply stem from a fear of persecution; it was also because of his own desire to
reconcile his natural philosophy with his Christian faith. As Descartes himself tells us
in a letter to Mersenne: “I only wanted to entirely suppress the Treaty that I had made,
and lose almost all my work of four years, so as to render an entirely obedient life to
the Church.” Gaukroger himself wonders why Descartes did not publish *Le Monde*,
given that he would not have actually faced persecution in the Netherlands or France,
where a similar physics was already widely accepted. Seen in this light, to imagine
that Descartes only really cared about his physics and mathematical inquiries simply
because they form his earliest writings (which is not even true, given his even earlier
religious school years) would be like imagining that Augustine must have always been
anti-Christian because he was first a Manichean.

If there is any controversy at all as to whether Descartes’ theology specifically harks
back to Augustine, it is because, although we know that Descartes regularly discussed
Augustine with Mersenne from 1637 onwards, the extant correspondence commences
almost a decade after Descartes began to compose an early version of the
*Méditations*. It is also true that Descartes initially responds to Mersenne’s

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130 René Descartes, “À Mersenne 18 décembre 1629” and “À Mersenne 6 mai 1630,” in *Oeuvres de Descartes I: Correspondance*, eds. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Léopold Cerf, 1897), 110, 150.
131 René Descartes, “À Mersenne février 1634,” in *Correspondance I*, 281.
observation of the similarities between Descartes and Augustine that the latter “does not seem to make the use of it [the cogito] that I do.”\textsuperscript{134} Three years later, however, Descartes endorses Augustine’s cogito argument to certify our own existence at Mersenne’s repeated behests: “I truly find that it serves to prove the certitude of our being.”\textsuperscript{135} Descartes’ final viewpoint on Augustine is that he is happy to trace his own philosophy back to Augustine, since he is no longer interested in originality: “I have great satisfaction that my thought agrees with those of a so wise and excellent person. Because I am hardly of the mindset of those who desire that their opinions appear new.”\textsuperscript{136} Whether Augustine directly influenced Descartes is an irresolvable question that is ultimately incidental to this thesis.\textsuperscript{137} What is important for my present purposes is whether Descartes shared a thought structure that can be seen as originating with Augustine; and from Descartes’ own account, it can.

Certainly, Descartes argues at times that he wants to determine whether we can really possess absolutely indubitable knowledge. On second impressions, however, Descartes’ motives for certain knowledge turn out to be one and the same with Augustine’s theological objectives, insofar as he can only anchor our knowledge upon secure foundations by demonstrating the benevolent God’s existence. Descartes’ metaphysics and physics cannot therefore be completely separated, since he needs the

\textsuperscript{134} René Descartes, “À Mersenne 25 mai 1637,” \textit{Correspondance I}, 376.
\textsuperscript{135} René Descartes, “À *** novembre 1640” and “À Mersenne décembre 1640,” in \textit{Correspondance III}, 247, 248.
mathematical approach to prove God, and needs God’s benevolence to guarantee his physics. As Michael Latzer argues, “the distinction breaks down in other ways, too, when we recognize that divine grace is just as surely needed for cognitive clarity and the attainment of truth as it is for moral integrity and salvation.”138 Consequently, Descartes’ fixation upon finding a sure footing against deceptive sense perception—what he also tellingly calls the “evil demon”—reflects Augustine’s own obsession with the problem of evil. Descartes himself identifies the desire to repress evil or error as the driving motive of his rationalist renovation of the Christian faith: “I must examine if there is a God, and […] if he can deceive: because without the knowledge of these two truths, I do not see how I can ever be certain of anything.”139 Little wonder that Descartes himself even concedes to Arnauld’s claim that “the basis for Descartes’ entire philosophy [is] exactly the same principle as that laid down by St. Augustine”: “it would be a kind of impiety to apprehend that discovered truths in philosophy were contrary to those of faith.”140

If Descartes was nonetheless held to be heretical by many of his contemporaries, it is because his “new” method of fortifying the Christian faith is at least formally opposed to the Thomist tradition’s inductive arguments, if not to its end result of demonstrating the divine existence. We now know better, however, that Descartes’ rationalist method should not be seen as sacrilegious, since it only opposes Aquinas so as to return to the earlier Church father Augustine’s own rationalist method when confronted with the

140 Descartes, Méditations, 633, 1088.
Thomists’ inadequacies to indubitably prove the articles of faith. As Gilson explains, “the [Augustinian] tradition by which he founded himself was universally respected in the Church, and it is for this that Descartes could not have lacked being sensitive to it. […] In Saint Thomas’ place, he substituted Saint Augustine.”141 The remainder of this chapter will thus trace how Descartes follows Augustine even more so than Aquinas: from his initial scepticism and the epiphany of his own existence, to the purely intelligible proof of the benevolent God’s existence, to the theodicy of error as the privation of reality emanating from our free will, and even to his own theodicy’s undoing through his late occasionalism, according to which God predestines sinners to their sins.

3.3. DESCARTES’ MÉDIATIONS MÉTAPHYSIQUES

3.3.1. The first three meditations’ recapitulation of Augustine’s ontological argument

In the preface to the Méditations, Descartes puts his Augustinian cards on the table by arguing that he aims to use his new rational method to rectify on surer grounds the two classical Augustinian doctrines of our soul’s free, immortal existence, and of the benevolent God’s capacity to consequently reward or punish us, depending upon how we utilize our freedom. By appropriating their own philosophical approach, Descartes believes that he will be able to convert even the modern sceptics back to the Church’s ranks:

141 Étienne Gilson, Études sur le rôle de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du système cartésien (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1930), 35.
I have always held that these two questions, about God and the soul, were the principle one which ought to be demonstrated by the reasoning of philosophy rather than by theology. […] It does not seem possible to ever be able to persuade infidels to any religion, nor even to any moral virtue, if one does not firstly prove to them these two things by natural reason.142

In the first meditation, Descartes adheres to Augustine’s own initial method of radical scepticism by observing that our sense perception sometimes deceives us, such that we ought to doubt all our empirical knowledge, including even the scholastics’ inductive proofs for God’s existence.143 John Carriero highlights throughout his reading of the Méditations its anti-Thomist bent in terms of its rationalist method, if not its ultimate aim of verifying the benevolent God’s existence: “the fundamental issue separating Descartes and Aquinas concerning our knowledge of God is their different conceptions of how we cognize God. […] Descartes holds that our cognition of God is not constructed from sensory materials: we cognize God immediately.”144 The problem with Carriero, however, is that he can only see Descartes as a modern break, since he overlooks that Descartes not only critiques medieval philosophy qua Thomism, but appropriates it qua Augustinianism.

In any case, Descartes adds, we must not simply doubt knowledge emanating from our exterior sense; we must even doubt our purely conceptual, interior knowledge, as if an evil demon were deceiving us into mistaking non-being for being:

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142 Descartes, Méditations, 383.
143 The best general introduction to Descartes’ philosophy is Bernard Williams, Descartes’ Project of Pure Inquiry (London: Routledge, 2005).
I will therefore suppose, not that God who is supremely good and the fountain of truth, but a certain evil demon, no less cunning and deceitful as he is powerful, has employed all his industry to deceive me. […] This is why I will carefully take guard to not believe any falsity.\(^{145}\)

In the second meditation, Descartes’ hyperbolic doubt paradoxically permits him the same insight that permitted Augustine to counter the ancient academic sceptics: he cannot doubt his own existence without affirming his existence, at least as a doubting, and hence thinking, thing: “there is thus no doubt that I am, if he deceives me; and that he deceives me all that he will want, he will never be able to make me think that I am nothing, so long as I would think to be something.”\(^{146}\) By securing this one truth of his own existence as a thinking substance, a truth which is absolutely certain even when he doubts it, Descartes recapitulates Augustine’s own immanent critique of the sceptics.

Like Augustine, however, Descartes wants to know more truths about reality outside the self-certifying existence of the *res cogitans*. In the third meditation, Descartes thus essentially recapitulates Augustine’s ontological argument.\(^{147}\) He does this by surmising first that all our ideas must have causes, and secondly that these causes must have as much reality as their ideal effects if they are to produce them.\(^{148}\) For instance, the ideas of particular, physical objects could have been created by us as a thinking substance insofar as we can think of such objects’ purely intelligible and mathematico-

\(^{145}\) Descartes, *Méditations*, 412.

\(^{146}\) Descartes, *Méditations*, 415-6.

\(^{147}\) For my previous discussion of Augustine’s proto-*cogito* and ontological arguments, see Chapter 2, § 2.2.

\(^{148}\) Descartes, *Méditations*, 438.
geometric forms, which possess more reality than their particular, physical instantiations. However, the idea of an absolutely benevolent and all-powerful God cannot emanate from our own finite beings, since it contains more reality than ourselves. We have no experience of anything infinite, yet we have an idea of infinity; so this idea cannot have come from our experience. In fact, the only thing from whence such an idea of a being without limit could emanate is from such a perfect being itself. Descartes affirms: “God exists, because [...] I will not have the idea of an infinite substance, I who am a finite being, if it has not been put in me by some substance which was truly infinite.”149 Here, Descartes may seem Thomist since his proof is based on explaining finite effects by way of an infinite cause. For Descartes, however, the thought of the finite and the infinite transpire wholly within the mind, rather than through judgments about the external world. As Secada puts it, whereas Aquinas is “existentialist” in that he holds that we know a thing’s existence before its essence, Descartes is “essentialist” in holding that we know a thing’s nature before its existence.150 All epistemic cosmetics aside, the third meditation is a close recapitulation of Augustine’s ontological argument of examining our own ideas to prove God’s existence.

For this linkage of Descartes’ ontological argument to that of Augustine to work, it is important to briefly address the role of Saint Anselm. Many commentators argue that Descartes’ ontological argument originated with Anselm’s argument in the eleventh century that, since we can conceive of something of which nothing is greater, it must

149 Descartes, Méditations, 445.
exist in reality, since to exist is greater than to not exist.\textsuperscript{151} In Anselm’s reply to Guanilon’s “lost island” objection, he expresses his ontological argument in terms even more closely aligned to that of Descartes. Namely, he specifies that he is not saying that everything that can be thought, such as Guanilon’s imaginary island, necessarily exists in reality. He is merely saying that what can be thought that could not have been generated from thought, such as the idea of a being more perfect than thought, must necessarily exist.\textsuperscript{152} Here, I do not deny that Anselm’s ontological argument anticipates that of Descartes. I merely want to point out that, as Anselm himself acknowledges, he is merely recapitulating Augustine’s original ontological argument:

> I have not been able to find that I have made in it any statement which is inconsistent with the writings of the Catholic Fathers, or especially with those of St. Augustine. Wherefore […] let me first read diligently Augustine’s books on the Trinity, and then judge my treatise in the light of those.\textsuperscript{153}

While we cannot be certain that Descartes directly drew upon Augustine, he himself acknowledges the influence of Anselm, who was indeed influenced by Augustine.

\textbf{3.3.2. The fifth meditation’s proof of God’s perfection}

In the fifth meditation, Descartes proffers an even more strictly Augustinian proof for God’s existence in a way which also more explicitly confers him the attribute of perfection.\textsuperscript{154} If we were able to create the idea of God, Descartes argues, we would

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For a book-length study of Descartes’ account of God’s key attributes of infinity and perfection as one and the same in that perfection denotes being without lack or limit, as well as a genealogy of these attributes back to Augustine’s notion of God, see Devillairs, \textit{Descartes}.
\end{footnotesize}
totalize all of reality, since the Idea of God denotes the absolute perfection of all reality itself without lack or remainder. However, we judge ourselves to be finite and deficient with reference to the idea of God’s infinite perfection (*ens summe perfectum*). It is thus impossible that we or anything else could have produced the idea of an infinitely good being of which we are deprived. It therefore follows that such an idea can only emanate from that infallible being itself: “it is necessary that I attribute to Him all sorts of perfections. […] And this necessity is sufficient for me to make myself conclude that this first and sovereign being truly exists.” 155 Here as elsewhere, Descartes closely follows Augustine’s proof for God’s existence from the fact of our inferior self-evaluation when juxtaposed with his absolute perfection.

### 3.3.3. The fourth meditation’s epistemic translation of Augustine’s theodicy

After having anchored being’s perfection upon surer, Augustinian soil than Thomist scholasticism, in the fourth meditation, Descartes addresses Augustine’s subsequent problem of how evil can exist in a world created by the benevolent God. Here, Descartes seeks to pass off Augustine’s theodicy as a kind of *epistemological* account of *error qua* reality’s *privation*. It is clear that Descartes is referring to the same signified as Augustine, in the latter’s idea of “evil,” by the epistemic term of “error,” when Descartes negatively defines this error as nothing “real and positive” in the twofold sense of the latter adjective as neither good, nor ontologically existent. On the contrary, error is the mere “privation” of the truth of what really *is*. 156 As Descartes recapitulates the Augustinian theodicy in epistemic terms: “as for privation, which only

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155 Descartes, *Méditations*, 476.
consists of the formal reason of error and sin, it has no need of any relation to God since it is not a thing or a being.” 157 It follows from this that God cannot deceive us by depriving us of the real, since he is one and the same with reality’s perfection: “it is impossible that He ever deceive myself, since in all fraud and deception we encounter some sort of imperfection.” 158 Descartes’ (and Augustine’s) second proof has already shown that God bestows us the capacity to judge things as true or false, insofar as our reason orbits around the Ideas in his mind qua reality’s totalization. In a letter to Mersenne, Descartes cites Augustine as an authority on this very critical point: “to those who say that God continually deceives, […] they contradict the fundamentals of the Faith, which is that God cannot deceive, and which is repeated in many places in S. Augustine.” 159 By redefining evil as the error of privation of what reality is actually like, Descartes is able to acquit God of all charges inasmuch as he is being’s totality.

Through his notion of “noetic sin,” Peter Harrison has also argued that the early modern epistemic pre-occupation with error was influenced by the theological idea that the Fall cognitively impaired our faculties, an idea which had been revived through the Protestant Reformation’s appropriation of the Augustinian corpus. 160 While Harrison shows how this led natural philosophers to develop microscopes, telescopes and other empirical aids to supplement our fallen senses, others like Descartes focused on pure reason as our sole faculty that rests intact after the Fall. 161 At the same time, Harrison tends to trace Descartes’ rationalism back to Aquinas’ optimism that we can think the

157 Descartes, Méditations, 465-6.
158 Descartes, Méditations, 456.
161 Harrison, Fall, 6.
glory of God, contra Augustine’s (late) pessimistic view of human depravity: “Descartes held fast to a relatively optimistic Thomist account of human nature and aspired to attain, in his own words, a ‘perfect knowledge of all things.’”¹⁶² This is because Harrison largely downplays Augustine’s own rationalism by accepting the Calvinist focus on his late predestinarian doctrine, in isolation from his larger framework as the exhaustive account of Augustine. Elsewhere, Harrison does acknowledge Augustine’s confidence in reason’s capacity to access the divine mysteries against the Protestant account: “the retention of these ‘gifts’ provided Augustine with the confidence to refute skepticism.”¹⁶³ Here, Harrison admits that the Protestant reading of Augustine’s predestinarian doctrine takes on a life of its own beyond its original source: “they surpassed Augustine in their stress on the depravity of human nature.”¹⁶⁴ Hence, while Harrison is right that early modern philosophy translates sin as error, at times he overlooks how this is philosophically rooted in Descartes’ return to Augustine rather than to Aquinas.

Thus far, Descartes has only demonstrated that evil does not emanate from God’s will. He still has to address from whence it does arise. To this end, Descartes qualifies that, since we are not ourselves God, our knowledge by virtue of our reason’s participation in the divine Ideas is inferior and finite. But, although our knowledge is limited, our will surpasses those limits in its curiosity to think the entirety of being in all its perfection. Putting the two and two of our infinite will and finite knowledge together, we have the freedom to at least attempt to understand all of reality because of our will,

¹⁶² Harrison, Fall, 21.
¹⁶³ Harrison, Fall, 37.
¹⁶⁴ Harrison, Fall, 49.
even if we will not ultimately be able to because of our finite understanding. Descartes’ initial method of hyperbolic doubt already presupposed that we have the free will to turn against our prejudices to believe in the existence of God, the world, and even ourselves before we have actually proven them: “we have a free will that makes it such that we can abstain from believing doubtful things, and thus prevent ourselves from being deceived.”\textsuperscript{165} It is only a simple, next step for Descartes to deduce that error transpires as the consequence of our free choice to try to (mis)recognize a part of reality for the whole, which is ultimately beyond the boundaries of what we can know:

The will being a lot ampler and more extended than the understanding, […] I also extend it to things I do not understand; to which […] it easily distances itself, and chooses good for bad, or the false for the true. This is what makes it such that I deceive myself and sin.\textsuperscript{166}

Descartes thus concludes his epistemic translation of Augustine’s theodicy with the ethical caveat that we ought to refrain from making such judgments beyond the scope of our finite knowledge if we are to avoid erroneously depriving God of his full and glorious being: “if I abstain from giving my judgement on a thing, when I do not really conceive it with clarity and distinction, it is evident that I make good use of it, and that I am not deceived.”\textsuperscript{167} Here as elsewhere, Descartes’ account of our free will as the source of error recalls Augustine’s concept of moral evil rooted in \textit{voluntas}.


\textsuperscript{166} Descartes, \textit{Méditations}, 463.

\textsuperscript{167} Descartes, \textit{Méditations}, 464.
3.4. DESCARTES’ LATE OCCASIONALISM

3.4.1. The fifth and sixth meditations’ mind-body dualism

The trouble with Descartes is that he is so faithful to Augustine that he ultimately recapitulates the latter’s own predestinarian doctrine in an occasionalist guise to the extent that both can be seen as undermining the initial ontologization of the Good. Descartes’ troubles arise when his very recapitulation of God’s absolute perfection compared to lowly, extended things corners him into inadvertently ontologizing extended substance as a separate being.168 More precisely, Descartes qualifies that we have a clear and distinct idea of the cogito and God as spiritual substances, without reference to any other substance beyond them. Since we need nothing outside of spiritual substance in order to explain it, we thus have an ontologically distinct being. What Descartes soon realizes, however, is that it equally follows from this that we can clearly and distinctly conceive of extended substance without the idea of any spiritual substance: “the soul is a substance entirely distinct from the body; because, examining that which we are, […] we have no need of extension, of figure, of being in any place, nor of any other such thing that we can attribute to the body.”169 Descartes is thus obliged to confer extension its own ontological substantiality. It is Descartes’ mind-body dualism that led to Leibniz’s critique of his physics for conceding to the atheist idea that extended substance has its own kingdom of being distinct from that of heaven. In Leibniz’s own words:

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168 Descartes, Principes, 122.
169 Descartes, Principes, 95.
As to the philosophy of Descartes, [...] I do not hesitate to say absolutely that it leads to atheism. [...] I believe that the laws of mechanics which serve as a basis for the whole system depends on final causes; that is to say, on the will of God determined to make what is most perfect, and that matter does not take all possible forms but only the most perfect; otherwise it would be necessary to say that there will be a time when all will be evil.\textsuperscript{170}

Following Leibniz, the Church even put Descartes on the index of heretical writers because his mind-body dualism seemed to contradict the idea that the Eucharist coheres the body around the mind.\textsuperscript{171}

3.4.2. Descartes’ late occasionalist turn

In his 1640s correspondence with Princess Elisabeth before his death in 1650, Descartes attempted to resolve the mind-body dualism by way of an anticipation of occasionalism.\textsuperscript{172} According to this occasionalist doctrine, God would not be the supremely perfect being if events transpired that did not emanate from him. Given that he is indeed such a being as Descartes has already shown, God must occasion all events, including all of the effects that seemingly stem from our will:

We cannot demonstrate He exists except by considering Him as a supremely perfect being. He would not be supremely perfect if something could happen in the world that


\textsuperscript{172} Interestingly, Mersenne suspected Descartes of Pelagianism and advised him to read Augustine for how to avoid this heresy just before Descartes’ occasionalist turn (“À Mersenne 25 mai 1641,” in \textit{Correspondance III}, 543-4).
did not come entirely from Him. [...] God is such a universal cause of everything that
He is in the same way the total cause, and thus nothing can happen without His will.\textsuperscript{173}

As Gaukroger explains Descartes’ later occasionalist bent (albeit against his own thesis
separating Cartesian physics from metaphysics), “at no stage did Descartes believe that
human perceptual cognition, still less human behaviour, could be explained without
reference to an immaterial intelligence.”\textsuperscript{174} It is no wonder that, in the wake of
Descartes’ death, other Cartesians like Nicolas Malebranche recapitulated Descartes’
rationalist method, \textit{cogito} and ontological arguments, and physics; albeit, with the
added supplement of a greater occasionalist emphasis in part to alleviate Leibniz’s
concern that physical evil is a distinct, ontological realm from that of divine spirit.\textsuperscript{175}

The problem is that this occasionalist solution to the Cartesian mind-body problem
simply reproduces the same problem found in Augustine’s predestinarian doctrine. As
we saw in the second chapter, if God predestines or occasions everything including
even our particular choices, he is in some sense willing immoral acts into being. As
Latzer, too, suggests: “is my putative freedom to avoid error and to choose the good
and the true a genuinely unconstrained power, given that, in the very strident language
of Descartes’ letter to the princess, the slightest thought could not enter into a person’s
mind without God’s willing?”\textsuperscript{176} In Descartes’ own words:

> When we think of the infinite power of God, we cannot but believe that all things
depend on Him and, by consequence, that our free will is not exempt from this. For it

\textsuperscript{173} René Descartes, “Descartes à Elisabeth 6 octobre 1645,” in \textit{Correspondance IV}, 314.
\textsuperscript{174} Gaukroger, \textit{Descartes}, 7.
\textsuperscript{175} See, for instance, Nicolas Malebranche, \textit{Entretiens métaphysiques}, in \textit{Oeuvres de Malebranche tome I}, ed. Jules
\textsuperscript{176} Latzer, “Descartes’ Theodicy,” 42.
implies a contradiction to say that God created men of such a nature that the actions of their will do not depend on His. For this is the same as saying that his power is […] finite since there is something that does not depend on it at all. 177

Like the late Augustine’s appeal to faith in God’s mysteries, all that Descartes’ Cartesian followers like Malebranche could say in the face of this objection is that we cannot say anything about God’s ultimately enigmatic machinations: “do not ask why God wants to unite spirits to bodies. It is a constant fact, but whose principles has hitherto been unknown to philosophy.” 178 Ultimately, Descartes’ late occasionalist turn fairs no better than Augustine’s predestinarian doctrine at rationally defending being’s absolute goodness when confronted with the brute fact of evil.

3.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Descartes’ initial goal was to rationally demonstrate Augustine’s ontologization of the Good contra the sceptics and scholastics alike. The starting point of hyperbolic doubt, the cogito argument, the ontological argument, and the epistemic theodicy: all these ideas are already present in Augustine. The problem with Descartes is that he was so faithful to Augustine even to the point of his own undoing, namely when he makes God responsible for our sins through his late occasionalist doctrine. Since Descartes and his Cartesian disciples proved inadequate at defending the Augustinian theodicy by depriving evil of any ontological reality, we shall see in the next chapter why Kant

177 René Descartes, “Descartes à Elisabeth 3 novembre 1645,” in Correspondance IV, 332-3.
178 Malebranche, Entretiens, 55.
sought to ontologize the Good by other means than rationalism (not to mention empiricism and mysticism).
CHAPTER 4. THE AUGUSTINIAN “ANTINOMY” OF KANT’S CRITICAL TURN

“How fortunate we are that neither moral nor physical evil can shake our faith in one God who governs the world in accordance with moral laws!”—Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*

Having situated Descartes’ modern break in the Augustinian lineage, in this chapter we shall see how even Kant’s critical turn adheres to the central tenets of the Church father’s metaphysics of the Good. After Cartesian rationalism and Thomist scholasticism, Augustine’s influence is so widespread under other names that it can no longer be a matter of historically tracing philosophers’ direct references to him, or through intermediary figures, who were in turn influenced by him. As Elmar J. Kremer and Michael J. Latzer note, “if it is possible to speak of a ‘consensus’ or ‘mainstream’ approach to theodicy in the Christian West, such would be the theodicy of Saint Augustine.”

Instead, I will make a comparative study of the formal resemblances between Augustine and Kant.

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180 To my knowledge, there are only two articles that put Kant and Augustine in dialogue: Edgar Valdez, “Kant, Augustine and Room for Faith,” in *Forum Philosophicum: International Journal for Philosophy* 18, no. 1, 2013, 19-35; and John E. Hare, “Augustine, Kant and the Moral Gap,” in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (London: University of California Press, 1999). Valdez links Augustine’s idea that we cannot find the divine Good in the sensible world, but only through faith in a supersensible beyond, to Kant’s idea that we cannot find the highest moral law in phenomena but only in the noumenon by taking it as the object of rational faith. Hare links Augustine’s proto-Calvinist idea that we cannot attain salvation in this life to Kant’s idea of the highest Good as a regulative, unattainable ideal. While both essays make important steps of putting Augustine and Kant in dialogue, this chapter focuses on the broader similarities between their projects as both attempting to ontologize the Good, albeit by different means (primarily rationalist for Augustine and practico-transcendental for Kant).
Now, it is true that Kant’s first *Kritik* is deeply sceptical about Descartes and Augustine’s ontological arguments for being’s perfection. Nevertheless, we shall see how, in his second *Kritik*, Kant recapitulates Augustine’s ontologization of the Good, not by mobilizing rationalism as Descartes and Augustine do, but through a *practico-transcendental* method. This new method enables Kant to argue that our moral behaviour operates in such a way *as if* we have a free and immortal soul with duties towards a benevolent Creator. Once more, evil can only result from our freedom to deviate from the law of the highest, divine Good. By inferring that the same, old benevolent God is the necessary condition for the possibility of our moral practice’s validity, Kant redeems the Redeemer once more in a recapitulation of Augustinian theodicy by other, critical means.

In the final analysis, however, I will argue that Kant’s practical ontologization of human freedom inadvertently ontologizes our moral evil to negate the benevolent being from whence we emanate as much as it ontologizes our good will. Having elucidated Kant’s aborted effort to rescue what he still can of the Augustinian doctrine by transcendental means, we shall then be in a good position to see how Schelling’s philosophy submits the Augustinian legacy, with Kant included, to a negative reassessment.

### 4.1. *KRITIK DER REINEN VERNUNFT*

#### 4.1.1. *The question of metaphysics*

Certainly, Kant opens the first *Kritik* by lamenting the fact that, whereas the sciences are constantly making progress in their knowledge of the world, metaphysics is mired
in a “battlefield” of contradictory ideas and systems.\textsuperscript{181} Given that metaphysics has already abdicated its throne as queen of the sciences by Kant’s day, it would be surprising if Kant were to dedicate his gargantuan book to further beating an already dead dog. On the contrary, Kant’s goal is to \textit{restore} metaphysics upon a new, legitimate ground by calling into question the validity of its older, dogmatic form.\textsuperscript{182}

Kant begins his inquiry into the possibility of true metaphysical knowledge by observing that all knowledge is comprised of two kinds of judgments, linking predicates to subjects. On the one hand, \textit{a priori}, analytic judgments have their predicates contained in the concept of the subject. For instance, the statement “all bodies are extended” is an analytic judgment, because bodies imply extension. On the other hand, synthetic, \textit{a priori} judgments have to infer the predicate because it is not contained in the concept of the subject. For example, the proposition “all bodies are heavy” is a synthetic, \textit{a priori} judgment because heaviness is not implied by the essential definition of bodies. Since such synthetic \textit{a priori} judgments make universal claims, they cannot be derived with certainty from the particular objects of experience. That is to say, if all our knowledge purely conforms to particular objects of experience, we cannot validly generalize any objective, universal propositions. For objective, universal knowledge to be possible, objects must instead conform to our \textit{a priori} cognition. Kant explains his “Copernican turn” of re-envisioning objects as conditioned


\textsuperscript{182} For Kant’s own objection to the claim that he depreciates metaphysics rather than refortifies it, see his letters “To Marcus Herz, 1773”; and “To Moses Mendelssohn, August 16, 1783;” in \textit{Philosophical Correspondence 1959-99}, ed. and trans. Arnulf Zweig (London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 77-8, 105.
by cognition, rather than our cognition as derived from objects: “if intuition has to conform to the constitution of the objects, then I do not see how we can know anything of them a priori; but if the object conforms to the constitution of our faculty of intuition, then I can very well represent this possibility.”183 Only if Kant can show that our metaphysical knowledge derives from an a priori, “pure” or “transcendental” ground through which all objects are given can he restore metaphysics’ validity.

4.1.2. The transcendental aesthetic

In the “Transcendental Aesthetic,” Kant turns to considering the transcendental conditions for synthetic, a priori judgments or metaphysical knowledge by examining how the mind is first affected by objects through what he calls “sensibility.” Sensibility denotes the pure forms of intuition before any concrete sensations since they are that through which all sensations appear. According to Kant, all objects of outer and inner sense are given in terms of two forms of space and time respectively. This is demonstrated by the fact that space and time are not empirical objects drawn from experience, but rather the ground that all sensations presuppose to appear at all. While we can therefore think of all objects in space and time as not existing, we cannot think of space and time as not existing. In Kant’s terms, although space and time are “empirically real,” they are also “transcendentally ideal” as the conditions for all objects of experience, which nonetheless arise from the mind rather than being things-in-themselves.184

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183 Kant, Pure Reason, 110.
184 Kant, Pure Reason, 164.
4.1.3. *The transcendental logic*

In the “Transcendental Logic,” Kant argues that, while intuition *gives* objects to us, we can only *think* them through “concepts of the understanding.” Just as there are no concepts without intuition to think, so is there no thought of intuition without concepts: “thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.”

The necessary, *a priori* rules of the understanding are formalized by logic in terms of our faculty of judgment, which attributes predicates to subjects. Kant identifies four general, underived types of judgments which each have three moments: quantity that judges in terms of universal, particular and singular moments; quality that judgments affirmatively, negatively or infinitely; relation that judges categorically, hypothetically or disjunctively; and modality that judges problematically, assertorically or apodictically. These judgments permit us to synthesize a sensible manifold of intuition under one cognition or concept through three steps: intuition gives a sensible manifold; the imagination synthesizes this manifold under a concept of the understanding; and the concept gives the manifold a unity. This threefold synthesis generates as many categories of the understanding as there are judgments by which we can think a sensible manifold of intuition: the categories of quantity that are divided into unity, plurality and totality; quality that are divided into reality, negation and limitation; relation divided into substance and accidents, cause and effect, and reciprocity or community between agent and patient; and modality divided into possibility and impossibility, existence and non-existence, and necessity and contingency.

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Kant also provides a “transcendental deduction” of this threefold synthesis to guarantee the concepts’ objective validity by showing that they arise a priori before all particular objects of experience. To this end, Kant identifies the three faculties of the mind as sense, imagination and apperception. Sense creates the “synopsis” of the a priori manifold by distinguishing it in time and space; imagination the “synthesis” of the manifold by reproducing it under an a priori rule; and “apperception” the transcendental unity of the manifold as reproduced by imagination.\footnote{186} Kant pays particular attention to the last moment according to which we can only see the manifold as a unity by distinguishing it from other past impressions, which requires a consciousness, or “transcendental unity of apperception,” that represents the manifold reproduced by imagination in terms of our past impressions: “it is this apperception that must be added to the pure imagination in order to make its function intellectual for in itself the synthesis of the imagination, although exercised a priori, is nevertheless always sensible, for it combines the manifold only as it appears in intuition.”\footnote{187} Through the transcendental deduction’s threefold synthesis, we arrive at the objective validity of the categories of the understanding, since they are not empirically inferred from contingent objects of experience (which would require us to merely assume their universality), but are rather the conditions for all possible experience as such.

4.1.4. \textit{The analytic of principles}

In the “Analytic of Principles,” Kant details the faculty of judgment’s way of subsuming things under given rules in terms of “transcendental schema,” which apply

\footnote{186} \textit{Kant, Pure Reason}, 225. \footnote{187} \textit{Kant, Pure Reason}, 240-1.
pure concepts of the understanding to sensible intuition. Put otherwise, the schema is that part of the imagination which turns a sensible image into a cognition by relating it to the rule of the concept. The schema thus mediates between the purely sensible image and the *a priori* concept. The table of judgments generates four possible schemata for synthesizing a sensible manifold under the unity of a concept. The “axioms of intuition” synthesize all appearances in terms of extensive magnitudes. The “anticipations of perception” give each object an intensive magnitude or specific degrees of reality through the affirmation of certain qualities and the negation of others. The “analogies of experience” synthesize all appearances in terms of the *a priori* rules that determine their relation to each other in time. More precisely, the analogies of experience stipulate that all appearances involve substances that persist to be able to have temporal relations between distinct substances; they presuppose a causal relation by which we see some appearances as succeeding others in time; and the various manifolds of representation appear under certain principles of simultaneity, such as the law of contradiction according to which opposites cannot appear at the same time and place, but only after each other. Finally, the “three postulates of empirical thinking” in general synthesize appearances in terms of what is actually experienced, what can possibly be experienced, and what is necessarily experienced as the general condition of experience.

4.1.5. *The transcendental dialectic*

A crucial consequence of the fact that metaphysical knowledge is derived from *a priori* concepts of the understanding is that we cannot think objects as things-in-themselves or “noumena” beyond the “phenomena” of possible experience: “with this faculty we
can never get beyond the boundaries of possible experience.”\textsuperscript{188} Although we can conceive of things-in-themselves as those things which must affect us for the categories of sensibility to then give them as objects in space and time, we cannot know what they are like outside of their appearance for us through pure intuition. The noumenon is thus not a positive cognition, but rather an abstraction from all forms of sensible intuition: “from this arises the concept of a noumenon, which, however, is not at all positive and does not signify determinate cognition of any sort of thing, but rather only the thinking of something in general, in which I abstract from all form of sensible intuition.”\textsuperscript{189} Nonetheless, the noumenon does serve the positive function of acting as a limit concept beyond which the objective validity of our sensible cognition cannot stretch: “the concept of a noumenon is therefore merely a \textit{boundary concept}, in order to limit the pretention of sensibility.”\textsuperscript{190}

In the “Transcendental Dialectic,” Kant shows how we can avoid falling into the “transcendental illusion” of thinking beyond the bounds of possible experience, an illusion which is nonetheless inevitable. Although it has no objective validity, the illusion serves a function of making reason consistent by extrapolating the syntheses of conditions to an absolute unconditioned endpoint. Kant identifies three types of illusions beyond the bounds of experience: psychology’s thinking of all experience in terms of a subject; cosmology’s thinking of all objects of appearance in terms of a world; and theology’s thinking of the ultimate condition of all things in terms of a Supreme Being.

\textsuperscript{188} Kant, \textit{Pure Reason}, 111-2.
\textsuperscript{189} Kant, \textit{Pure Reason}, 348-9.
\textsuperscript{190} Kant, \textit{Pure Reason}, 350.
In psychology, there are four “paralogisms” that all mistake the conditions of experience for things-in-themselves. In short, the transcendental unity of apperception that accompanies all appearances leads us to falsely infer that: the soul is a substance; its quality is simple; it maintains a unity over time; and it relates to outer objects in space. The first paralogism makes the mistake of attributing real existence to a substance when in fact this substance is not inferred from experience, but rather derived from the concept of substance: “we have not grounded the present proposition on any experience, but have merely inferred [it] from the concept of the relation that all thought has to the I as the common subject in which it inheres.”\(^1\) The other paralogisms proceed in the same way. The idea of the unity of thought accompanying appearances does not derive from an intuition, but from the concept of unity. The numerical identity of consciousness as persisting in time is invalid because this is not given in intuition as it is for external objects derived from experience. Finally, we cannot take appearances for things-in-themselves outside the subject, since any thinking about them derives from \textit{a priori} concepts of the understanding.

Kant then considers cosmology’s “four antinomies” that are generated by applying reason to nature as the sum total of appearances, which is not itself given in appearances. What Kant shows is that cosmology’s four standard theses can be contradicted by four antitheses, so that we cannot definitively affirm any by pure reason alone. The first thesis is that “the world has a beginning in time, and in space it is also enclosed in boundaries.”\(^2\) The proof is that, if there is no beginning in time or

\(^1\) Kant, \textit{Pure Reason}, 416-7.  
\(^2\) Kant, \textit{Pure Reason}, 470.
boundary to space, each successive series of states and space would be an elapsed infinity. Since it is impossible for infinity to elapse, however, there must be a beginning and a boundary. The antithesis states that “the world has no beginning and no bounds in space, but is infinite with regard to both time and space.”193 The proof is that, if there is a beginning and a boundary, the beginning is preceded by time and the boundary delimited by space such that there is always already time and space. The thesis of the second antinomy states that “every composite substance in the world consists of simple parts.”194 The proof is that we cannot imagine composites without simple parts, but we can imagine simple things without composites. The antithesis states that “no composite thing in the world consists of simple parts.”195 The proof is that, since every simple thing must occupy a space, it forms a composite of space. The thesis of the third antinomy states that “causality in accordance with laws of nature is not the only one from which all the appearances of the world can be derived. It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom.”196 The proof is that, since every happening requires a cause, the series of all causes requires an initial spontaneity to bring it about if we are to avoid an infinite regress. The antithesis states that “there is no freedom, but everything in the world happens solely in accordance with laws of nature.”197 The proof is that every beginning of action including a spontaneous beginning presupposes a state of the not-yet-acting cause such that even the free, spontaneous act is determined. The thesis of the fourth antinomy states that “to the world there belongs something that,

193 Kant, Pure Reason, 471.
194 Kant, Pure Reason, 476.
195 Kant, Pure Reason, 477.
196 Kant, Pure Reason, 484.
197 Kant, Pure Reason, 485.
either as a part of it or as its cause, is an absolutely necessary being.”\textsuperscript{198} The proof is that the world of sense changes, and every change requires an ultimate preceding condition including an unconditioned to avoid an infinite regress. The antithesis states that “there is no absolutely necessary being existing anywhere, either in the world or outside the world as its cause.”\textsuperscript{199} The proof is that, since all things are in time and hence subject to change, an unconditioned would contradict our experience. Even if the necessary cause were outside the world and hence not subject to time, it would have to begin to enact the series of causes and would thus still belong in time.

While Kant might seem to be critiquing some fundamental Augustinian theses, such as that of a necessary being, it is crucial to grasp that he is arguing that we can neither prove nor disprove them by appeal to pure reason. In the next section, we shall see how he believes that we can even re-establish the dogmatic theses through practical reason.

\textbf{4.1.6. \textit{Kant’s critique of the proofs of God’s existence}}

Finally, Kant addresses the ideas of pure reason. The central idea of reason is that there is a maximum reality of all possible predicates and cognition, which is to be identified with being \textit{qua} being: “the object of reason’s ideal [...] is also called the original being; because it has nothing above itself it is called the highest being, and because everything else, as conditioned, stands under it, it is called the being of all beings.”\textsuperscript{200} As the original being encompassing all, it is simple, self-sufficient, eternal, and hence one and the same with the concept of a perfect God: “we will be able to determine the original

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{198} Kant, \textit{Pure Reason}, 490.
\item\textsuperscript{199} Kant, \textit{Pure Reason}, 491.
\item\textsuperscript{200} Kant, \textit{Pure Reason}, 557.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
being through the mere concept of the highest reality as a being that is singular, simple, all-sufficient, eternal, etc. […] The concept of such a being is that of God.”

Kant identifies three inadequate proofs for the existence of God by means of speculative reason. The “cosmological argument” argues that, if something finite exists, then a necessary being must exist to guarantee the series of finite existences. Given that we ourselves exist as a finite being, then that necessary being must indeed exist. Kant dismisses this argument because it relies on causality to move from the world of sense to the suprasensible, when causality is only a category that relates to empirical appearances: “the principle of causality has no significance at all and no mark of its use except in the world of sense; here, however, it is supposed to serve precisely to get beyond the world of sense.” The “physico-theological proof” reasons from a determinate, conditioned existent in the world to a necessary, unconditioned being to guarantee it. It thus makes the same mistake as the cosmological argument except in reference to an external thing rather than the I.

Finally, the “ontological proof” argues that the idea of a necessarily existing God is enough to prove his actual existence. For Kant, the ontological proof is invalid since existence is not a predicate but a logical determination of predicates: “being is obviously not a real predicate, i.e., a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing. It is merely the positing of a thing or of certain determinations in themselves.” Like so many, Kant identifies Anselm as the originator of the ontological argument, at which he takes aim here for supposing that we can deduce

201 Kant, *Pure Reason*, 558.
from our mind’s ideas the existence of things independent of any relation to us. 204 As we saw in the previous chapter, however, Anselm acknowledged that he derived his argument from Augustine. 205 So, even though Kant never mentions Augustine by name, the fact that he often envisions his transcendental philosophy as a critique of the ontological argument means that he is also critiquing Augustine. It is therefore Kant’s critique of the ontological argument that marks his greatest distinction from Augustine.

4.1.7. Making room for faith

Kant concludes the first Kritik by advising that we must have the “discipline” to restrain our knowledge within the proper limits of possible experience. 206 At the same time, Kant anticipates the second Kritik by qualifying that, while the Ideas of reason so crucial to Augustine and Descartes cannot be validly established by pure reason, they are the necessary conditions for the possibility of our practical or moral reason:

Since there are practical laws that are absolutely necessary then if these necessarily presuppose any existence as the condition for the possibility of their binding force, this existence has to be postulated. […] In the future we will show about the moral laws that they […] presuppose the existence of a highest being. 207

Thus, Kant argues, the first Kritik was not intended to rid metaphysics of religious theses, but merely to show they cannot be proven by means of pure reason: “I therefore presuppose readers who would not want a just cause to be defended with injustice.” 208

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206 Kant, Pure Reason, 628.
207 Kant, Pure Reason, 585. Kant already anticipated as much in the preface (see 112).
208 Kant, Pure Reason, 649.
While the first *Kritik* can be viewed in isolation as a negative project of exposing Augustinian theses to be illusions of pure reason, it also sets the stage for the second *Kritik*’s positive project of restoring theses on the surer grounds of practical reason.

4.2. **KRITIK DER PRAKTISCHEN VERNUNFT**

4.2.1. *Against the Neo-Kantians’ understanding of Kant’s critical project*

It is crucial to qualify that the sceptical prohibition on rationally thinking the thing-in-itself *perturbs* Kant, because he not only wants to determine our knowledge’s true limits and conditions, but also sustain the metaphysics of the Good. It is well acknowledged, after all, that Kant was pursuing a synthesis of modern science and traditional morality. Kant himself rejects the view that he has “misused” his philosophy “to depreciate Christianity”: “my conscience is clear: I have never let the Divine Judge out of my sight.”

Although Kant’s moral commitments are well known, it is still worth insisting on this point insofar as there are philosophers such as certain Neo-Kantians who argue that Kant prohibits any and all access to objective reality. While most of the Neo-Kantians do admit from time to time that Kant has another, religious side, they nonetheless emphasize that both for Kant’s purposes and their own Kant was always more committed to a critique of theology rather than its restoration. To give just one example, Ernst Cassirer’s biography best exemplifies this partial reading by

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emphasizing Kant’s initial critique of dogmatic metaphysics.\textsuperscript{211} Cassirer’s chapter on Kant’s youth and upbringing thus portrays him as turning away from religious dogma, despite the fact that Kant would continue to write much which was conducive to theology.\textsuperscript{212} To get around this fact, Cassirer argues that the first \textit{Critique} is a complete whole without any need for the second \textit{Critique}’s restoration of freedom as a thing-in-itself:

\begin{quote}
We do not need here, however, to make the effort to foresee the new form and the solution to the problem of the thing in itself, which is achieved in Kant’s doctrine of freedom, for it does not affect the theory of appearance as such, the systematic analysis of pure experiential knowledge. It composes a self-contained whole.\textsuperscript{213}
\end{quote}

Elsewhere, Cassirer does admit that practical concerns were already present in the first \textit{Kritik}: “he had conceived his philosophy from the very first as a self-contained whole, and ethical problems formed an essential, integrating constituent of it.”\textsuperscript{214} For Cassirer, however, Kant’s musings on moral reason are a secondary task in light of his initial critical project. On the contrary, I shall presently argue that the practical proof of being’s goodness becomes one of Kant’s main concerns, what he himself calls “the most important views involved in the reconstruction of metaphysics.”\textsuperscript{215}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[211] For another clear example of the Neo-Kantian partial reading, see Hans Vaihinger, \textit{The Philosophy of the “As If”: A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind}, trans. C.J. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1984), especially 47, 49, 76, 287 and 293.
\item[213] Cassirer, \textit{Kant’s Life}, 216.
\item[214] Cassirer, \textit{Kant’s Life}, 232.
\item[215] Immanuel Kant, “To J.H. Lambert, September 2, 1770,” in \textit{Correspondence}, 59.
\end{footnotes}
4.2.2. **Kant’s ontologization of the Good by other means**

In his earlier, pre-critical “The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God” (1763), Kant already attested to his theological commitments when he attempted to verify God’s existence from both the *a posteriori* inductive argument from design, and an *a priori* modified ontological argument that God is the cause of what is potential but not actual. Having eliminated proofs with recourse to understanding or sensibility in the first *Kritik*, Kant was obliged to find another demonstration. Kant himself admits the need to find a new method for demonstrating anew the Christian faith’s absolutely benevolent God when confronted by his own critique of dogmatic metaphysics:

> We should, then, think for ourselves an immaterial being, an intelligible world, and a highest of all beings (all noumena), because only in these things, as things in themselves, does reason find completion and satisfaction, which it can never hope to find in the derivation of the appearances.\(^{216}\)

It is this need to ontologize the Good upon a surer footing than Augustine and Descartes’ ontological argument that accounts for why Kant devotes so many of his later works to religion, morality and theology’s essential binary between good and evil.

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4.2.3.  *Kant’s third way of reviving Augustinianism on practico-transcendental grounds*

In his critical period proper, Kant finds a “third way out” through his practico-transcendental method of thinking the metaphysical conditions for the possibility of our moral practice.\(^\text{217}\) What Kant terms “practical” or “moral reason” shows us what being must be like *in itself*, if our moral behaviour is to have any validity. As Kant explains, the Augustinian postulates are not dogmas, but rather rational, inasmuch as they are the necessary presuppositions for the possibility of our moral practice’s validity: “these postulates are not theoretical dogmas but *presuppositions* from a necessarily practical point of view; hence, although they do not expand theoretical cognition, they do give objective reality to the ideas of speculative reason.”\(^\text{218}\) It is crucial to see that, for Kant, the idea of the Good is no mere phantom, but *ontologically real* insofar as it is *necessary* for moral thought. He describes his new method, what he calls “moral theism,” as being as certain and rigorous as a mathematical proof:

> The moral theist asserts without qualification that it is impossible for speculative reason to demonstrate the existence of such a being with apodictic certainty. But he is nevertheless firmly convinced of the existence of this being, and he has a faith beyond all doubt from practical grounds. […] Hence a faith in God built on this foundation is as certain as a mathematical demonstration.\(^\text{219}\)

Kant even goes so far as to say that the testament of practical proof far outweighs any doubt that pure reason might stir in us (even as he notes that pure reason cannot disprove the practical proof anyway, such that the two form one consistent system):

The conviction I have regarding the infallibility of divine truths is so powerful in me that I would consider everything that contradicts them to be sufficiently disproved and would reject it. It is, however, precisely the agreement between my system and religion that raises my confidence to a fearless serenity in the face of all difficulties.220

It is not that practical reason establishes for Kant that God is a necessary postulate derived from reason; on the contrary, practical reason tells us that God is the creator of reason: “God is the supreme cause of the entirety of reason and nature.”221

What Kant therefore proposes to do is develop a critical theodicy that defends God’s benevolence better than Augustine and Descartes’ ontological arguments could by thinking the purity of his being as the necessary condition for the possibility of our moral reason. Seen in this light, Kant’s goal with the first Kritik is to clear the way of pure reason’s illusory ontological argument so as to re-establish the same content that proof establishes by surer, critical means in the second Kritik. As he himself insists, “if in what follows we raise doubts about these speculative proofs and take issue with the supposed demonstrations of God’s existence, we will not thereby undermine faith in God. Rather, we will clear the road for practical proofs.”222 Such will be Kant’s aim after the first Kritik: construct a critique of practical reason that restores the

221 Kant, *Lectures*, 25.
metaphysics of the Good by transcendental means in light of the critical philosophy’s
destitution of the classical proofs of the benevolent God’s existence.

As late as his often overlooked essay, “On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy,” written in 1791 after the third *Kritik*, Kant explains how his ulterior motive for the critique of pure reason was to ontologize the Good upon the firmer soil of our practical affirmation of the very same theodicy. Certainly, Kant holds that all hitherto existing theodicies have failed to redeem the Redeemer inasmuch as they rest on essentially ontological arguments, which fallaciously apply categories of the mind to noumena: “every previous theodicy has not performed what it promised, namely the vindication of the moral wisdom of the world-government against the doubts raised against it.”\(^{223}\) Nonetheless, Kant goes on, if we continue to synthesize beyond the thing-for-us to formulate theological ideas, it is precisely because they mark the conditions for our practical reason:

> We also have in the moral idea of our own practical reason a concept of a *moral wisdom* which could have been implanted in a world in general by a most perfect creator. […]

The proof of the world-author’s moral wisdom in the sensible world can be founded only on this insight.\(^{224}\)

From before his critical turn to his very late writings, Kant is consistently concerned with re-establishing the Christian onto-theology of the Good on solider foundations than Augustine, Descartes and the other dogmatic metaphysicians could.


\(^{224}\) Kant, “Theodicy,” 31.
As heterodoxic as my reading of Kant might at first seem despite Kant’s above claims
to be pursuing precisely the kind of critical theodicy I have outlined, I am not alone in
my line of reasoning. Already in Kant’s own day, Karl Reinhold’s *Letters on the
Kantian Philosophy* argued that Kant only critiques both blind faith and dogmatic
metaphysics to show how we can have properly rational grounds for our faith, albeit
through practical rather than pure reason:

> One would very much misunderstand the *Critique of Reason* if one were earnestly to
believe that it [...] declares without reservation that our previous metaphysics is
useless. It does just the opposite. While it denies this science the capacity to
demonstrate God’s existence, it assigns to this same science the noble vocation of
purifying moral faith of the crude and subtle errors that have clouded it until now and
of protecting it forever from degenerating into superstition or nonbelief.225

As Manfred Kuehn later puts it in his authoritative biography, Kant only critiques pure
reason’s pretences to think God, or what Kuehn calls “belief,” so as to reconstruct the
same doctrines upon practical reason, or what Kuehn distinguishes as “rational belief”:
“Kant then went on to point out that this need of reason does not enable us to know that
God exists. It only justifies a belief. Still—and this seems to be Kant’s most important
concern in the essay—this is a rational belief.”226 Seen in this new light, the second
*Kritik, Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* and *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen*

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der bloßen Vernunft, as well as Kant’s lectures and essays on theology, must be reconceived as a critique of all hitherto existing theodicies grounded upon pure reason, in an effort to find a surer footing for theodicy in practical reason.

More recently, T.K. Seung has made a similar argument that Kant is actually a Platonist insofar as he only critiques Plato’s rationalist demonstration of the Idea of the Good so as to re-establish it upon the grounds of practical reason: “Kant renamed the Platonic Forms the Ideas of pure reason. Although the Ideas of pure reason inevitably leads to metaphysical illusions in theoretical philosophy, he says, they are absolutely essential for practical philosophy.” My only criticism of Seung is that he would have fared better if he had characterized Kant as a crypto-Augustinian rather than a Platonist, since Kant not only restores the Idea of the Good, but also Augustine’s theodicean account of freedom as the cause of evil, which is underdeveloped in Plato. Similarly, in Kant’s Critical Religion, Stephen Palmquist provides a detailed account of how Kant only abolishes pre-critical theology so as to uphold its key principles through a fortified critico-practical theology:

Anyone who wishes to regard moral action as irrational is constrained to postulate something that would make it possible to understand how the highest good could become a reality. [...] Kant argues that the immortality of the soul and the existence of God are the two postulates that can save morality.228

228 Stephen R. Palmquist, Kant’s Critical Religion: Volume Two of Kant’s System of Perspectives (Sydney: Ashgate, 2000), 75.
Here as with Seung, however, what Palmquist’s admirable study downplays is that the religious doctrines Kant reintroduces can be best described as Augustine’s notions of the being of the Good and the privation of evil rooted in the will. As Kant himself succinctly puts it: “the sole objects of a practical reason are, therefore, those of good and evil.”

The rest of this chapter will thus recapitulate Kant’s four key writings on religion to see Kant’s affinity not only with Augustine’s *summum bonum* and *privatio boni*, but also with the late Augustine’s inadvertent re-ontologization of evil. I begin as Kant does in his preliminary *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* with his description of what we naturally determine to be good according to our moral practice. I then turn to Kant’s transcendental deduction in the second *Kritik* of the objective conditions for the possibility of our moral practice, so as to show how he practically restores the essentially Augustinian tenet of being’s absolute perfection. I conclude with an exegesis of *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, where Kant not only deduces what is essentially Augustine’s own theodicy and ethics, but also Augustine’s problematic admission of a radical, primal evil. Throughout my exegesis, I also refer to Kant’s *Lectures on Philosophical Theology* where he summarizes these other works in a way which often best brings out their affinity with Augustine.

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229 Kant, *Prolegomena*, 106.
230 The best introduction to Kant’s writings on practical reason is Roger J. Sullivan, *An Introduction to Kant’s Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1995. Despite its many merits, however, Sullivan’s introduction tends to overlook Kant’s religious postulates other than that of freedom to make him more palatable to a modern analytic audience.
Before re-establishing Augustine’s being of the Good as the formal conditions for the possibility of our practical reason, in the *Grundlegung*, Kant begins by asking what it means for us to be good in the first place. Putting it negatively, Kant reasons that to be good cannot simply mean that we conform to what is good by chance, self-interest, natural inclination, unconscious spontaneity, or any other extraneous reason. Formulating it positively, to be good means to have a “good will,” which both intends to act, and really does act for the sake of the Good as an end in itself. In Kant’s terms: “as to what it is to be morally good, it is not enough that it conform to the moral law, but it must also happen for the sake of this law; otherwise, that conformity is only contingent.”

231 Much as Augustine concludes that the Christian ethic necessitates both practical, charitable action and faithful, contemplative intention, so does Kant assert that the will must act to produce the Good for its own end rather than as a means to some objective consequence, as well as consciously do so rather than out of a natural, spontaneous inclination.

Now, Kant continues, if the good will cannot act out of a spontaneous instinct or from our self-interest, it can only act out of a “duty” to a “law” of a higher Good beyond it. 232 Given that the good will acts for the Good as an end unto itself, the law to which it obeys cannot direct it to act out of its own self-interest, but only out of a duty to the

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highest Good of all. Such is Kant’s definition of what it means for us to be good: have a good will directed towards fulfilling our duty to the law.

Thus far, Kant has only defined what it is for us to be good by nature of our willing to obey the duty to the Good; he has not, however, defined what the Good is as such. To this end, Kant argues that, for the good to be beyond any particular self-interest, it must be a highest, universal Good of all. Moreover, this highest Good cannot be “hypothetical” or “assertoric,” which is to say, as a means in pursuit of another, higher end, since the highest Good is the ultimate end of all moral practice. Rather, Kant identifies the highest moral law with what he terms “the categorical imperative.” According to the categorical imperative, we ought to act not only in certain “hypothetical” situations as a means to another end, but categorically; viz., such that we could will our action to be universally applied to everyone, including ourselves: “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” The good will affirming the categorical imperative achieves the universal Good of all insofar it cannot harm another as a means to its own self-interest, since it would be willing that it could itself be (ab)used by others in the same way as a means to their own ends. Kant provides a helpful example of how the categorical imperative functions in concrete moral reasoning: we should not refrain from putting our talents to good use even if we are in a privileged and comfortable position, since we would actually be willing the loss of our safe position in a world

235 Kant, *Groundwork*, 37.
where no one bears the fruit of their respective talents.\footnote{Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 37-40.} In this way, the categorical imperative incites us to treat everyone not as a means to our own happiness, but as an end or good in themselves, what Kant characterizes as a heavenly “kingdom of ends” modelled on the biblical kingdom of God.

Despite the logical terms in which Kant describes the highest Good as the categorical imperative, we can see that he still attributes it the key quality of Augustine’s own \textit{sumnum bonum}: it is \textit{universal} in that it encompasses the good of everyone’s particular goods into one absolutely, all-unifying Good of all. It is no wonder that Kant claims that the Bible best expresses precisely the categorical imperative through Christ’s message that we ought to love our neighbours and enemies as ourselves, inasmuch as the categorical imperative requires that whatever we will as a good for us can be universally willed for all.\footnote{Kant, \textit{Groundwork}, 15.}

\textit{4.2.5. The conditions of freedom and the benevolent God for practical reason}

Having defined just what the Good is, in the second \textit{Kritik}, Kant turns to deducing the \textit{metaphysical} conditions for the possibility of our developing good wills in conformity with the categorical imperative. Kant concludes that those metaphysical conditions for our moral reason are nothing other than Augustine’s concepts of the benevolent God, and our immortal soul’s \textit{libero arbitrio} as the cause of evil. For Kant as for Augustine, the three key postulates of ontology are: the existence of the benevolent God; the immortality of the soul; and that soul’s freedom.
Kant first follows Augustine in arguing that the good will requires that we are free to be able to be consciously responsible for affirming the categorical imperative, rather than doing so from a spontaneous inclination: “the concept of freedom, insofar as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, forms the keystone of the whole edifice of a system of pure reason.”\(^\text{238}\) I shall return to why Kant needs freedom as a postulate not only to establish the good will as freely good, but also to account for evil without indicting God in the process.

Moreover, Kant qualifies, if we are free to choose the good, and hence do not yet embody it, there must be an ontologically objective good, which the Christian God incarnates. Much as Augustine proves God’s existence and benevolence as the highest Good after which we strive—and therefore could not have ourselves generated in being inferior to it—so does Kant practically reason that the moral law that the good will strives to obey must already be actual, and hence embodied by an absolutely benevolent being. As Kant explains:

> Because the human being cannot himself realize the idea, inseparably linked with the pure moral attitude, of the highest good, yet encounters in himself a duty to work toward this, he finds himself drawn toward the faith in the cooperation or arrangement, by a moral ruler of the world, through which alone this purpose is possible.\(^\text{239}\)

\(^\text{238}\) Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5.

Kant attributes God the three key characteristics that Augustine, too, identifies. Namely, he must be an omnipotent, benevolent and just creator by permitting us to participate in his divine essence, inasmuch as our will spontaneously strives after him:

In accordance with this need of practical reason, the universal true religious faith is faith (1) in God as the omnipotent creator of heaven and earth, i.e., morally as holy legislator; (2) in him, the preserver of humankind, as benign governor and moral provider thereof; (3) in him, the steward of his own holy laws, i.e., as just judge.240

In this way, our moral reason is not only enforced by the belief in the ontological fact that we are free, and hence morally responsible for our actions, but also that there is an omniscient Supreme Being to whom we are indebted as the actual embodiment of the highest Good. In his Lectures, Kant even more directly raises the ontological stakes of his concept of the Good when he argues that being is nothing other than the highest Good insofar as it exhausts all reality without remainder or “deficiency”: “we come to the idea of a highest being. Let us represent to ourselves: (1) a being which excludes every deficiency. [...] (2) A being which contains all realities in itself.”241 Here as in Augustine and Descartes, being as the absolute totalization of reality is conflated with the Good as the highest perfection.

Finally, Kant reasons that our free soul must be immortal. This is because, although no will can attain perfection of the moral law, the ideal is the necessary condition after which our practical action strives. We must thus assume that our progress towards the ideal is infinite, which requires assuming in turn that we are immortal: “the highest

240 Kant, Religion, 154.
241 Kant, Lectures, 23.
good is practically possible only on the presupposition of the immortality of the soul.\textsuperscript{242} Kant’s own vision for what being must be like for our moral practice to be valid bears a striking, if unwitting resemblance to that of Augustine.

Based upon these formal, Augustinian conditions for our moral reason of the benevolent God and the soul’s freedom and immortality, Kant continues to restore other classical, Christian doctrines on new, transcendental grounds. For instance, Kant argues that the idea of Christ, a human being who is able to instantiate the highest Good, provides a necessary example by which our moral practice can be fortified in the belief that it, too, can attain the ideal of a wholly good will: “there had […] come down from heaven to earth such a truly divine minded human being, who through his teaching, way of life, and suffering, had provided in himself the example of a human being pleasing to God.”\textsuperscript{243} Further, Kant reaffirms the ideas of the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment as the necessary ideals of a kingdom of ends to come, after which our practical reason can strive: “[as for] this presentation of a historical narrative of the future world, […] we can—in continual advance and approach to the highest good possible on earth—only look ahead, and make provision for it.”\textsuperscript{244} As Gottfried Höffe explains, all of the tenets that Kant restores by practical reason are those Christian doctrines he had earlier eliminated by the critique of pure reason: “the essence of Christianity lies, for Kant, in a religion of pure practical reason, whereby […] the opposition between good and evil […] can be described independently of any historical

\textsuperscript{242} Kant, \textit{Practical Reason}, 155.
\textsuperscript{243} Kant, \textit{Religion}, 70.
\textsuperscript{244} Kant, \textit{Religion}, 150.
form as the expression of the moral self-understanding of autonomous reason.”245 It is little wonder that Kant observes that the articles of faith are the best historical expressions of our practical reason’s metaphysical conditions.246

It is crucial to see here that Kant is not saying any and all historical religions empirically instantiate practical reason’s postulates. Indeed, Kant even goes further than Augustine in denying that Judaism is anything but a series of historically contingent political statutes. On the contrary, for Kant, Christianity is “the only true religion for man’s salvation” inasmuch as it alone fully grasps the essentials of the moral postulates of the *summum bonum* and human freedom: “we therefore cannot begin the universal history of the church […] except at the origin of Christianity.”247 For Kant as for Augustine, there is no contradiction between reason and faith in (Christian) dogmas: “between reason and Scripture there is to be found not merely compatibility but also unity, so that whoever follows the one will not fail to concur with the other.”248 Kant’s Augustinian conception of the amicable rapport between reason and faith is particularly evident in the preface of *Der Streit der Fakultäten* and its first essay “The Conflict of the Philosophy Faculty with the Theology Faculty.” Written in the context of the censorship of his *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, Kant defends himself against the charge that he misuses his philosophy “to distort and disparage many of the cardinal and basic teaching of the Holy Scriptures and of

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246 Immanuel Kant, “To Friedrich Wilhelm II, After October 12, 1794,” in *Correspondence*, 219.
247 Immanuel Kant, “To J.C. Lavater, April 28, 1775,” in *Correspondence*, 80; and *Religion*, 141.
Christianity.” 249 Contrary to the common (mis)reading of the essay that Kant is advocating that reason should be “free to evaluate everything,” including matters of faith, Kant repeatedly qualifies that this is so because reason not only furnishes nothing to contradict faith, but because it even finds ways to fortify it anew. 250 Much as Augustine argues that reason fully endorses the scriptures, so does Kant argue that “Christianity must as such be based on reason,” and yet the Bible “contains a means for introducing this religion” to those lacking the time to devote themselves to such rational endeavours. 251 Certainly, Kant at times holds that any religious tenets other than these general principles are invalid before reason, if not before faith. Fortunately for Augustine, however, we need no others to re-establish his metaphysics’ central tenets.

4.2.6.  
Kant’s transcendental theodicy of the will’s privation

After having ontologized the Good as the necessary condition for our practical reason, in Religion, what he also calls a “union of Christianity and the purest practical reason,” Kant addresses the “antinomy” of evil: “that the world lies in baseness is a lament as ancient as history.” 252 Given Kant’s Augustinian onto-theology, it shall come as no surprise that his theodicy describes evil as a privation or “deviation” from the moral law. That is to say, since being is the highest Good, evil can only be the deviation from being into nothingness. In Kant’s own words, “the proposition, the human being is evil, can signify nothing other than this: he is conscious of the moral law and yet has

250 Immanuel Kant, Conflict, 27.
251 Kant, Conflict, 77.
252 Immanuel Kant, “To C.F. Staudklin, May 4, 1793,” in Correspondence, 205; and Religion, 17.
admitted the deviation from it into his maxim.” To give a concrete example, if we were to put our own good alone before the good of all others, we would be deviating from the moral law which seeks the universal Good of all. Even though our own good is certainly a part of the universal Good, to pursue the former alone would be to deprive the Good of its greater totality. While Kant tends to describe evil as the moral law’s deviation, he elsewhere describes it in identical terms to those of Augustine as a “negation” or “limitation,” without any reality apart from the being of the Good from whence it derives: “evil […] is only a negation, and consists only in a limitation of what is good”; and: “negations […] are nothing but limitations of the highest reality.” Like Augustine, Kant even takes aim at the old Manichean heretics for ontologizing evil contra practical reason’s postulate that being is absolutely good: “Manichaeism conflicts with human reason, since reason leads us to one single being of all beings, and it can only think of this being as supremely holy.” Here as elsewhere, Kant is simply redressing Augustine’s claim that evil is the diabolical pride of putting our own self-interest before others, and thereby depriving us of a higher Good still.

Kant does not stop there in his transcendental deduction of the Augustinian theodicy; he even identifies precisely our free will as the source of this deviation. Here as with Augustine, Kant certainly admits that our capacity to deviate from the categorical imperative as the Good of all is a necessary possibility, which stems from God’s conferral of freedom to us. At the same time, if evil is co-eternally potential from the

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253 Kant, Religion, 35.
254 Kant, Lectures, 117, 44.
255 Kant, Lectures, 115.
moment God confers us a free will to affirm or renounce him, it is not \textit{actual} until we ourselves choose to negate the primordial Good from whence we arose. As Kant elucidates:

If man is to be a free creature, […] it must also be within his power to follow or to shun the laws of morality. Man’s use of his freedom has to depend on him, even if it should wholly conflict with the plan God designed for the moral world. […] Hence if God does not prevent evil in the world, this never sanctions evil; it only permits it.\textsuperscript{256}

Although evil’s deviation from the Good is a necessary condition for the possibility of our moral practice of freely affirming or renouncing the divine Law, it is only actualized by free subjects like us. Consequently, the blame can only then be laid at our doors rather than at the gates of heaven. For Kant as for Augustine, evil only transpires when we freely misrecognize our particular self-interest for the highest Good, thereby depriving being of its totality, such as it is only to be found in the love of God’s benevolent essence.

More precisely, Kant specifies three kinds of deviations from the divine Law. Firstly, Kant calls “frail evil” the impotency to live up to what we consciously know to be the higher Good, upon being confronted with the possibility of satisfying our own particular, more immediate self-interest: “it [evil] is, \textit{first}, human heart’s weakness as such in complying with adopted maxims, or the \textit{frailty} of human nature.”\textsuperscript{257} Imagine, for instance, that a passer-by drops their wallet, and we decide to pick it up and keep it rather than alert them of their loss. At this point, we might commit an act of frail evil

\textsuperscript{256} Kant, \textit{Lectures}, 156.
\textsuperscript{257} Kant, \textit{Religion}, 32.
inasmuch as, even though we know that keeping the wallet for ourselves is wrong, we deviate from the moral law anyway so as to derive the benefit of accruing the stranger’s money.

Moreover, Kant names “impure evil” the unintentional enactment of a moral good for immoral ends of our own self-interest: “second, the propensity to mix immoral incentives with the moral ones (even if this were done with good intention and under maxims of the good), i.e. impurity.”\(^{258}\) To return to the above example, we would be committing an act of impure evil if we gave the stranger’s wallet back, albeit only because we expected praise or reward for doing so. While we would be technically abiding by the moral law, we would only be doing so in order to benefit ourselves, thereby actually putting our own self-interest before that of the highest Good.

Finally, Kant calls “wickedness” the conscious commitment to the privation of being’s absolute goodness: “third, the propensity to adopt evil maxims, i.e. the wickedness of human nature, or of the human heart.”\(^{259}\) Although this last evil is theoretically conceivable, Kant dismisses the possibility that anyone would actually be committed to such wickedness.

Clearly, Kant’s transcendental theodicy restores the essentials of Augustine’s dogmatic theodicy upon practical rather than rationalist grounds, in an effort to achieve the same end of banishing evil from the kingdom of being. Kant himself concludes as much, even if he attributes his moral tenets to Christianity\(^{259}\) tout court rather than to Augustine:

\(^{258}\) Kant, *Religion*, 32.
\(^{259}\) Kant, *Religion*, 32.
“the doctrine of Christianity […] provides a concept of the highest good (the kingdom of God) which alone is adequate to the strictest demand of practical reason.”

By retracing Augustine’s theodicy upon practico-transcendental grounds, Kant imagines that he has rationally secured the Good in-itself once and for all.

4.2.7. **Kant’s Augustinian ethics**

After deducing the Augustinian theodicy anew, in the second half of *Religion*, Kant turns to the task of restoring the essentially Augustinian ethics of how we can return from our collective fallenness to a kingdom of ends in the city of God. In short, since we are often corrupted by putting our own good before the Good of all in the social world, Kant’s ethics prescribes that we organize the entire human race around the universal law of the categorical imperative: “this, then, is the work of the good principle, of establishing for itself, in humankind as a community, a power and a kingdom according to laws of virtue, a kingdom that maintains the victory over evil.”

For Kant, this society cannot be organized around any nation-state, which would leave out the peoples of other states, and hence not be truly universal. Rather, it can only be organized around the *Church*, insofar as the Church treats all Christians equally, be they gentiles or Jews, men or women, and masters or slaves. Surprisingly for an Enlightenment figure, Kant grants just as much authority to the Church as the arbiter of the universal law of all as Augustine does: “such a community, as a kingdom of God, can be undertaken by human beings only through religion, and […] in order for this religion to be public, this kingdom can be presented in the sensible form of a

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261 Kant, *Religion*, 137.
church.” Kant is adamant that it is only the Church that has ever historically sought to constellate the peoples of the earth around the rational postulate of the highest Good.

More precisely, Kant qualifies that the Church institutes the categorical imperative by way of its scriptural scholars. It is left to the theologians like Augustine to interpret the scriptures and extract from it the postulates of practical reason: “rational religion and scriptural scholarship are, therefore, the proper appointed interpreters and trustees of a holy document.” Kant’s ultimate ethical arbiter of the scriptural scholar turns out to be none other than Augustine himself as the greatest example of a theologian who sought to rationally demonstrate the articles of faith. Even though Kant does not mention Augustine by name, he very likely had him in mind when he gives as an example of such ethical figures the scriptural scholars in Augustine’s ancient Rome, since Augustine was indeed the most rational among the Church fathers: “well-meaning public teachers have kept on interpreting them [holy books] until they pretty much brought them, in terms of their essential content, into agreement with the universal moral dogmas.” Simply put, Kant’s ethics ultimately prescribes that we be good Augustinians by grounding our religion in rational thought, even if for him this means practical rather than pure reason as it did for Augustine.

4.2.8. Radical evil in Eden

Despite Kant’s best efforts to ontologize the Good, Kant’s critique of practical reason ultimately harbours its own unwitting ontologization of evil. For Kant, the condition

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262 Kant, *Religion*, 166.
263 Kant, *Religion*, 125.
for the possibility of the Good is that we have the freedom to rationally choose it contra evil. That is to say, any concept of morality necessarily presupposes its opposite of the evil that we resist in order to be good. The antinomy thus arises in that Kant can only ontologize the Good by also ontologizing evil. Therein lies Kant’s concept of human nature’s “propensity” for “radical evil”: radical evil is the name for the metaphysical evil that our practical reason must paradoxically presuppose as the a priori condition for the possibility of our freedom, and hence our good will. In Kant’s own words:

There is in the human being a natural propensity to evil; and this propensity itself, because it must in the end indeed be sought in a free power of choice and hence must be capable of being imputed, is morally evil. This evil is radical, because it corrupts the basis of all maxims.265

This is precisely Kant’s problem with the Genesis narrative: it tries to separate evil as historically arising later in time than the Good with the Fall, even though it is actually a necessary precondition for Adam and Eve to be good in the first place by freely affirming God’s law.266 As Allen Wood observes, Kant’s notion of freedom naturalizes evil as an equal “propensity” along with the categorical imperative: “Kant holds that, although human nature contains predispositions to good, the human power of choice is by nature evil.”267 Gordon Michaelson, too, explains that Kant’s concept of freedom subverts his own attempt to render being wholly good inasmuch as the formal conditions for its possibility are not only the existence of the Good, but also of evil: “within the Kantian framework this amounts to reason virtually turning against its own

265 Kant, Religion, 40-1.
266 Kant, Religion, 45.
best interests, and freedom freely producing its own most severe debility."\(^{268}\) Or, as Slavoj Žižek explains, a “crack” in Kant’s account of the Good is opened up insofar as he must posit radical evil as a condition for the moral law: “in ‘practical reason,’ the ‘crack’ is introduced by the possibility of ‘radical Evil,’ of an Evil which, as to its form, coincides with the Good.”\(^{269}\) Even though the whole point of Kant’s religious writings are to practically restore the essentially Augustinian doctrines of the being of the Good and the will’s erring as the formal conditions for our moral practice, he soon discovers that the good will has its own formal condition of our natural propensity for evil.

4.3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the first *Kritik*, Kant certainly critiques Augustine and Descartes’ ontological argument as a transcendental illusion. In the second *Kritik*, however, Kant devises a practico-transcendental method to re-ontologize the Good. Only this too proved insufficient insofar as Kant could only ontologize our free choice of the Good by paradoxically ontologizing evil. While Kant himself articulates radical evil as a necessary logical consequence of his own moral system, Žižek rightly argues that he tends to shy away from its implications: “whenever Kant approaches this possibility, he quickly dismisses it as unthinkable, as an object of ultimate abhorrence.”\(^{270}\) Ultimately, Kant suffers from Augustine’s same pitfall of refusing to think the reality

\(^{270}\) Žižek, *The Negative*, 101.
of evil, except as a mere, secondary negation without any ontological positivity of its own apart from the one, true being of the Good.

What the last two chapters have shown is not only that much of modern philosophy aims to ontologize the Good, but that it also ultimately fails to effectively do so. In the next chapter, we shall thus see why Schelling submits philosophy's Augustinian lineage to a negative reassessment by daring to think the beingness of evil that the Augustinians could not.
CHAPTER 5. SCHELLING’S FOOTNOTES TO AUGUSTINE

In this final chapter, I will show how Schelling inaugurates a great paradigm shift to the extent that he attempts to resolve the shortcomings of Augustine’s explanation of evil by ontologizing it. Although there is relatively little scholarly interest in Schelling compared to Kant, Descartes or Augustine, over the last two decades, anthologies like The New Schelling and Schelling Now have launched a veritable “Schelling renaissance.” Prominent thinkers like Slavoj Žižek, Iain Hamilton Grant and Markus Gabriel have argued for the enduring relevance of Schelling’s thought to contemporary metaphysical debates in continental philosophy. Each year since the turn of the century has seen an increasing number of publications on Schelling introducing him to a new generation of scholars by making the case for his contemporary relevance. This chapter aims to contribute to the Schelling renaissance by situating him as a paradigm-shifting figure in the history of philosophy to the extent that he breaks with the Augustinian conceptualizations of good and evil.

In the first section, I will show how Schelling’s early philosophy can be characterized as an overcoming of Augustine’s ontologization of the Good by drawing out the way

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Schelling links his project of unifying Fichte’s notion of human freedom with Spinoza’s philosophy of nature to a naturalization of evil, so as to elucidate how being can negate itself through the emergence of the free human subject. As we shall see, Schelling ultimately affirms that God is also free, and hence morally evil, to account for why he negates himself by creating privative creatures like ourselves, who are capable of renouncing him in a way which paradoxically reaffirms his own privative essence.

By elevating evil to the status of being, however, Schelling then faces the inverse problem to Augustine: if evil is all that there is, how can we elucidate the brute fact of the Good? Even if the Good is nothing more than a mere error or fantasy of human thought, it would still be necessary to explain the beingness of the error which is capable of dissimulating reality’s dark ground. In the second section, we shall thus see how Schelling’s turning of Augustine on his head eventually corners him into positing a second, co-eternal, and yet ontologically distinct principle of the Good alongside the principle of Evil, in a brief transitional phase. Given that Schelling’s initial driving motive is to unify good and evil in a singular concept of being, Schelling’s late philosophy makes an even more severe about-face by affirming, through sheer mystical faith alone, the truth of Augustine’s notion of being as a pure Positivity beyond the present world’s negative dialectic. So, even though Schelling attempts to break with the Augustinian tradition by ontologizing evil, he ultimately falls short in his account of the Good, which takes him back full circle to that starting place from whence he sought to escape.
Schelling’s tendency to conduct his education in public by publishing his work almost as soon as he wrote it, to continuously change his ideas and positions often seemingly in a single work, and to write in a vague compositional style means that it is possible to interpret him in a number of different ways. In tracing Schelling’s rethinking of evil not only as subject but as substance, I primarily draw on Schelling’s four 1794-96 essays where he first distances himself from Fichte and gravitates around Spinoza, before developing his own constructive Naturphilosophie in the 1799 text of the same name. I also draw on Schelling’s more mature, and hence often clearer and more refined, presentations of his fusion of Fichte and Spinoza in the 1809 Freiheitsschrift, and the 1811 Clara. My discussion of Schelling’s stages of natural history is primarily drawn from the 1799 Naturphilosophie, but also the 1811-15 Weltalter drafts, particularly the third version. Finally, my analysis of his late philosophy is primarily based on his 1842-43 Berlin lectures, as well as the 1810 Stuttgart Seminars and the 1833-34 Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie. In short, I base my analysis of Schelling’s critiques of Fichte and Spinoza on the 1794-96 period, of his Naturphilosophie on the 1799-1800 and 1809-15 texts, and of his late philosophy on the 1810, 1833-34 and particularly 1842-43 works. While there are certainly differences over these periods, Schelling often repeats the same critiques of Fichte and Spinoza, as well as his ontologization of freedom and evil. So, it is ultimately this particular thread in Schelling’s thought that I will trace with an eye to seeing how he tries to resolve the Augustinian theodicy’s shortcomings.
5.1. SCHELLING’S OVERCOMING OF AUGUSTINE

5.1.1. Schelling’s critique of Spinoza as a crypto-Augustinian

At first glance, it might seem odd to claim that Schelling grounds his first negative philosophy upon a critique of Augustine. It is well known, after all, that Schelling was largely a Fichtean idealist during the early to mid-1790s, from whence his first writings date. This objection is soon mitigated, however, to the extent that Schelling himself characterizes Spinoza’s mechanical view of nature that he opposes as a crypto-Augustinianism. Conversely, Schelling is attracted to Fichte’s philosophy inasmuch as it amounts to an ontologization of freedom, or what he also calls at times (along with Augustine) “moral evil.” Although Schelling almost always develops his early philosophy by first presenting the same opposition between Fichte and Spinoza, I will focus upon its presentation in the Freiheitsschrift, since this text best brings out the heretical consequences of Schelling’s overcoming of Augustine.273

Apropos Spinoza, Schelling wants to follow his realism insofar as it is able to speak of nature independently of its relation to us, as any metaphysical concept of being qua being necessarily must. According to Spinoza, we can explain effects with reference to their causes, because the causes must contain at least as much reality as their effects if they are able to produce them: “the knowledge of an effect opens on, and involves, the knowledge of the cause.”274 Now, since all effects are reducible to their causes

inasmuch as they have identical properties, effects are really one and the same thing as their causes. Further, since each finite cause must be reducible to a more primordial cause from whence it gains its existence, all cause-effects are ultimately reducible to one ultimate self-caused substance. In Spinoza’s own words, “it follows quite clearly that God is one: that is, in the universe there is only one substance, and this is absolutely infinite”; and: “all that He produces is within Himself, and not outside Him, because there is nothing outside Him.”\textsuperscript{275} By tracing all effects back to an all-encompassing uncaused cause, substance, or necessary being, Spinoza reduces all particular things to what he calls modifications or “modes” of the general “attributes” of substance’s essence.\textsuperscript{276} While Spinoza refers to this monist substance as God in the above quotations, he elsewhere calls it “nature” in the sense of extension. After all, if all things are reducible to one monist substance’s modes, corporeal bodies can be no exception. As Spinoza succinctly puts it, “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”\textsuperscript{277} This is why Schelling characterizes Spinoza’s philosophy as a “realism” inasmuch as it posits extended nature as the one monist substance from whence everything else immanently derives as its modes.

For Schelling, however, the trouble with Spinoza’s realism is that its reduction of all things to a blind, mechanical nature fails to account for our human capacity to freely turn against this one, necessary substance. According to Spinoza, since everything is determined by the laws of nature, error consists in overlooking the real material causes of things in favour of attributing the effects to subjective phenomena.\textsuperscript{278} As an example,

\textsuperscript{275} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 224; \textit{Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being}, in \textit{Works}, 50.
\textsuperscript{276} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 217.
\textsuperscript{277} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 54.
\textsuperscript{278} Spinoza, \textit{Ethics}, 264.
Spinoza argues that our belief that we have free will marks the false attribution of our actions to our subjective intent rather than to nature’s laws of motion and rest, which are wholly outside our control. For Spinoza, then, human autonomy is the misrecognition of the real, natural causes of our actions by attributing them to the illusory cause of our own will. As White puts it, “in Schelling’s view, Spinoza is right to begin with the absolute. [...] Spinoza’s crucial error thus cannot be found in his doctrine of the absolute as such; it is found rather in his assumption that the absolute must be completely different from and beyond the human subject.”  

Put otherwise, Spinoza’s monist system cannot explain how the morally evil human subject can emerge out of nature as its own privation, if nature is not in some sense always already “free” or “evil.” In Schelling’s own words:

If [...] the concept of system opposes the concept to freedom generally and in itself, then it is curious that, since individual freedom is surely connected in some way with the world as a whole, some kind of system must be present, at least in the divine understanding, with which freedom coexists.

Although Spinoza had the right ambition to develop a system of nature, he ultimately failed to follow through by denying the brute fact of our moral evil. Consequently, Schelling will follow Spinoza in attempting to construct an ontology of nature in-itself, all the while redefining nature to elucidate how it can negate itself through the subject’s freedom.

279 White, Schelling, 11.
280 F.W.J. Schelling, Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: Suny Press, 2006), 9. Whether this is a completely accurate reading of Spinoza, given Deleuze, Negri and the French revival of Spinoza as a thinker of dynamic affects, will not be touched on here since my present purposes are restricted to examining how Schelling reads Spinoza.
While Schelling upholds Spinoza’s disavowal of freedom as his chief target, it is often overlooked that Schelling sees this as the most popular expression of Augustine’s theodicy in late eighteenth century Germany. In a crucial footnote at the Essay’s margins, Schelling identifies Augustine as the founder of the privation theory of evil, which he sees Spinoza as popularizing in a naturalist guise by denying the reality of free will: “it was […] already several among the earlier fathers of the church, most notably St. Augustine, who posited evil as mere privation.”281 Certainly, Spinoza was often treated as an anti-Christian pantheist; nonetheless, Schelling is able to discern that Spinoza and Augustine share the same, striking reduction of our will to a mere privation. So, although Schelling situates his philosophy against the critical backdrop of Spinoza, the Dutch philosopher is but the most popular variant during the late eighteenth century German Enlightenment on the essentially Augustinian privation theory of evil. If Augustine is the true father of the tradition to which Spinoza belongs when it comes to conceptualizing the will, it is clear that, when Schelling criticizes Spinoza’s disavowal of human freedom, he is also criticizing the Augustinian notion of privative evil. Seen in this light, Schelling’s goal to construct a system capable of explaining everything that there is as an ostensible critique of Spinoza’s mechanical aspects, is but one and the same with the injection of evil into the heart of being itself. As Schelling himself argues, the price to pay for properly elucidating the being of everything, including our freedom, is the elevation of evil to the apotheosis of that which is:

281 Schelling, Freedom, 36-7.
Either real evil is admitted and, hence, it is inevitable that evil be posited within infinite substance or the primal will itself, whereby the concept of a most perfect being is utterly destroyed, or the reality of evil must in some way be denied, whereby, however, at the same time the real concept of freedom vanishes.282

For Schelling, any properly all-encompassing concept of being will have to account for the Good’s own negation of itself through the human subject’s freedom to commit moral evil.

5.1.2. Schelling’s rupture with Fichte by naturalizing evil

Having diagnosed Spinoza and Augustine’s mutual reduction of human freedom to a mere privation, Schelling turns to Fichte’s idealism for the best account of freedom in his day: “until the discovery of idealism, a genuine concept of freedom was lacking in all the more recent systems.”283 According to Fichte, human freedom denotes our capacity to decide and re-decide our own nature or essence forever anew: “the object of the activity of the Ego is posited as product of freedom, that is, as accidental, as a thus which could be otherwise.”284 It is crucial to note here the resemblance between Fichte’s notion of human freedom and Augustine’s concept of the moral evil as the affirmation our own particular will against the general and immutable Good. Only, whereas Augustine sees moral evil as a mere privation, Fichte’s idealist take affirms the reality of free human activity as a “positive,” ontological activity. For Fichte as for Schelling, freedom is not simply the capacity to choose between good or evil; it is specifically the positive capacity to choose evil by renouncing the ground from whence

283 Schelling, Freedom, 17.
we came. If Schelling is attracted to Fichte’s notion of freedom, it is because it grants a positive, ontological status to the very account of evil which Spinoza and Augustine strip of any reality.

Already by the late-1790s, however, Schelling becomes critical of Fichte to the extent that he only articulates our capacity for moral evil as a phenomenon for us apart from nature in-itself. That is to say, Fichte is only concerned for how phenomena such as human freedom appear to us moral beings, rather than the ontological status of freedom as such. What is missing from Fichte’s idealist account of the primacy of human autonomy is any role for a nature that is external and distinct from spirit as the backdrop against which spirit emerges. On Fichte’s account, nature, the “object” or the “non-I” is not an anterior or even external substance separate from the subject. Instead, it is posited by the subject as the means by which the subject can think itself as an object or other of its own thought. Simply put, Fichte’s view of nature is that it is merely a subjectively posited tool for the I’s self-assertion. So, while Fichte describes the subject as free in a way that Schelling admires, he does so in such a way as if it alone exists, as if external nature is nothing but the subject’s own positing of an object, which the subject can then reshape or “negate” to assert its freedom. Fichte himself states their difference in a letter to Schelling, insofar as Schelling divides being between spirit and nature where Fichte only sees spirit: “I still do not agree with your opposition between transcendental philosophy and philosophy of nature. […] The thing is not added to consciousness, nor consciousness to the thing, but both are immediately united in the
I.” For Schelling, however, Fichtean idealism cannot refute Spinozism, since it does not contest its ground in the real world of things-in-themselves: “the fight against dogmatism is waged with weak weapons if criticism rests its whole system merely upon the state of our cognitive faculty, and not upon our genuine essence.” Instead, we ought to maintain Fichte’s notion of freedom as a privative potency, but also reconcile it with a concept of nature in-itself. Such is why Schelling will ultimately seek to transpose Fichte’s idealist concept of human freedom onto noumenal nature to develop a system which would be capable of incorporating the brute fact of our moral evil into its notion of being.

Therein lies the realist signification behind Schelling’s ostensibly idealist contention that nature is always already spirit. To cut off this classical objection at its head, Schelling is not advocating an idealist reduction of nature to the human subject’s objects of intuition. After all, such a dependence of the object on the subject would simply recapitulate Fichte’s idealism, which is only one of the two philosophies that Schelling seeks to synthesize along with Spinoza’s realism. What Schelling denotes by labelling his philosophy an “absolute idealism” is certainly a realism, but one which holds that nature is distinct and anterior, yet structured in the same way as the free, morally evil spirit. Far from affirming a traditional idealism, Schelling shows that we can only have knowledge of nature in-itself if it is always already structured as per our own subjectivity. For Schelling, it is not that nature is reducible to the subject’s ideas,


but rather that nature must always already be privative if such a free, morally evil subject can arise from it only to negate it:

It is by no means adequate to claim that “activity, life and freedom only are the truly real” with which Fichte’s subjective idealism can coexist; rather, it is required that the reverse also be shown, that everything real (nature, the world of things) has activity, life and freedom as its ground.287

What is merely a subjective “reality” for Fichte or a privation for Spinoza and Augustine becomes the objective reality of things-in-themselves for Schelling. Only such a malefic concept of being as evil can account for the emergence of a subject, which is capable of negating being without dogmatically disavowing the free subject’s existence.

5.1.3. **Thinking evil not only as subject but as substance**

We are now in a position to better articulate the radically anti-Augustinian kernel of Schelling’s project. On the one hand, Schelling wants to speak of being *qua* being—but in a way which can account for being’s own negation with the emergence of the free, morally evil subject, rather than reduce the latter to the former as per Spinoza’s mechanical view of nature and Augustine’s privation theory. On the other hand, Schelling wants to transpose our freedom beyond the things-for-us onto nature in-itself rather than reduce the latter to the former as per Fichte’s idealism. As Bowie explains, Schelling wants to have Spinoza’s realism without his mechanical elements, and Fichte’s dynamism without his idealism:

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The danger is that one will either fall into the materialist trap of thinking that by explaining the mechanical functioning of nature we will finally explain ourselves, thus making self-consciousness and freedom epiphenomenal, or into the Idealist trap of thinking that self-consciousness is wholly self-grounding, thus making its relationship to nature one of simple domination.\textsuperscript{288}

Termed differently, Schelling seeks to transpose Fichte’s account of human freedom onto Spinoza’s account of nature in-itself to develop an enlarged concept of being, which is able to honour privative evil with an ontological standing by explaining why being’s essence requires that it negate itself as per the subject’s moral evil. In Schelling’s own words:

The task that I had first set myself was, then: to explain the idea of an objective world which was absolutely independent of our freedom, and indeed which limited this freedom, by a process in which the I sees itself as unintentionally but necessarily engaged, precisely through the act of self-positing.\textsuperscript{289}

Such is the driving motive of Schelling’s early account of evil: transpose human evil onto nature to resolve Spinoza and Augustine’s inadequate account of moral evil through an enlarged concept of being.

\textit{5.1.4. Ontologizing the privatio boni}

If Schelling were to merely say that nature is reducible to the human being’s specific form of moral freedom, he really would be the idealist for whom he is so often

mistaken. If he is to affirm that nature an sich is grounded upon the privative being of evil, he will instead require a concept of free, moral evil which is irreducible and anterior to privative nature’s particular acceptation in the form of our human will.

The irony is that Schelling finds such a model for a trans-human being structured as per human spirit in the works of Augustine himself. In another telling footnote, Schelling argues that Augustine inadvertently gave him this insight that God’s act of creation is nothing but an act of privation through the Christian doctrine that God creates us not by emanating from him, but rather ex nihilo: “Augustine says against emanation: nothing other than God can come from God’s substance; hence, creatures are created from nothingness, from whence comes their corruptibility and inadequacy. This nothingness […] might receive for the first time a positive meaning.” 290 For Augustine, creation ex nihilo denotes the way that God freely creates us rather than out of any preconceived model or essence. After all, does not Augustine say that we are made in the image of God? In particular, is not our libero arbitrio made precisely in the image of his divine liberty, infinity and omnipotence? Turning Augustine’s own insight against him, Schelling argues that being is always already subjective in the sense that it is nothing other than the absolutely free God: “God is, according to general consensus, the most voluntaristic being.” 291

Of course, what Schelling realizes that Augustine does not is that, if God freely creates us out of nothing, it is because God’s free act of creation is exactly a privation. For freedom, such as Schelling follows Fichte in defining it, is nothing but the negation of

290 Schelling, Freedom, 40.
our own essence so as to decide it for ourselves. As Schelling would have it, the essence of our freedom consists in turning the world and even itself into an object or other of itself; viz., in negating the nature from whence we emerged: “the thought generated is an independent power, continuing to act on its own, indeed, growing within the human soul in such a way that it restrains and subjugates its own mother.”292 Seen from this perspective, what Augustine fails to grasp is that affirming that God is free means that he has to be capable of committing the moral evil of negating himself. Here, Schelling is essentially proffering another, more heretical resolution to the problem of evil by downplaying God’s benevolence so as to emphasize his omnipotence to do anything, including even commit the ultimate evil of self-renunciation. That is to say, if freedom is defined as the capacity to renounce the being from whence we came, the divine being that conferred us this power in his image must also have the capacity to commit moral evil: “He is at the same time that which can negate his own being which is dependent upon Him, can transform his necessary being into contingent being, namely into a being posited by itself.”293 Schelling’s point is that, if God loves and wishes to reveal himself as an absolutely free being, he would naturally have to do so in the form of “revealing” his freedom by negating whatever backdrop there was from whence he emerged. Only, since God is that primal ground of being, there is nothing for God to affirm his freedom by opposing—nothing, that is, except God himself. It follows from this that the way in which God first “loves” himself by revealing his divine libero arbitrio is by negating himself. Therefore, when Schelling says that Augustine’s doctrine of the creation ex nihilo must receive a positive sense for the first time, he is saying that God did not

292 Schelling, Freedom, 18.
293 Schelling, Modern Philosophy, 55.
create us out of a nothingness that does not denote any actual referent. Instead, Schelling interprets the doctrine as saying that God creates us out of the nothingness of his own privative essence by negating himself. The paradox for Schelling is that it is really Augustine who is the true heretic when he goes on to limit God’s freedom by disavowing that he has the power to corrupt himself.

We have come to the crux of Schelling’s solution to the problem of evil: it is only if God is always already privative that we can explain why he creates precisely privative, free human beings, who can renounce him in a way that simultaneously affirms him qua absolutely free being. As Snow explains, “the orthodox Christian asks how evil is possible, given God’s goodness, thus taking the divine reality as primary. Schelling takes the human experience of the reality of evil as primary, and asks what sort of God could possibly coexist with our knowledge of evil.” For Schelling, the way in which God would negate himself (and hence reveal himself qua pure free force of negation) would be through his act of creating individuated things, who are made in his image, not in spite of, but because they deprive him of his plenitude. Consequently, the creation of fallible, inferior entities like us is the act by which God mutilates himself to paradoxically “reveal” himself qua free being. Put otherwise, Schelling’s concept of the free God means that the very rupture from the divine being with the emergence of humans paradoxically affirms its being qua privative, free act. As Bernstein perspicuously observes, Schelling’s God needs us lowly beings to affirm his free essence: “Schelling departs from the philosophical and theological tradition whereby God is thought to be completely self-sufficient. On the contrary, God needs his

creatures in order to reveal himself. […] This is the evil spirit that can act only in and through human beings.”295 This is what Schelling is getting at when he repeatedly states that “the first existence is the contradiction itself”; viz., God reveals or loves himself by contradicting, negating, or depriving himself through his act of creating inferior, lowly worms capable of wriggling out of his way, and thereby affirming his free, privative Essence.296

At first, Schelling describes being in terms of Augustine’s free God. Later, however, Schelling makes it abundantly clear that affirming God’s absolute freedom is one and the same thing as positivizing the evil of privation. If freedom is precisely a turning away from the divine ground, God’s own freedom can only be expressed through his very own act of immanent self-negation. As Schelling explains, God’s freedom rests on an even more fundamental ground of “positive disharmony” or primal “finitude”: “evil is not merely a privation of the good, not a mere negation of an inner harmony but rather a positive disharmony”; and: “evil does not come from finitude in itself but from finitude raised up to Being as a self.”297 Far from being a privation of being’s full positivity, evil must be the dark ground of being itself to account for the moral evil to which we bear witness all the time in the temporal world of becoming: “all other explanations of evil leave the understanding and moral consciousness equally unsatisfied. They all rest fundamentally on the annihilation of evil as a positive opposite.”298 It is only if the divine being is always already evil that we are able to

295 Bernstein, Evil, 87.
296 Schelling, Ages, 90.
298 Schelling, Freedom, 35-6.
explain why he negates himself by creating privative, imperfect beings to paradoxically affirm himself *qua* absolute freedom or moral evil, before those beings commit the further sin of renouncing him, and hence returning to his dark ground anew through the assertion of their own freedom. Such is the way that Schelling resolves the shortcomings of Augustine’s theodicy through an admittedly heretical transvaluation: ontologize evil such that we sinful spirits attest to rather than refute being’s negative essence(lessness).

5.1.5. *The (dark) ages of the world*

We can better detail Schelling’s overcoming of Augustine by looking at the threefold history of being’s self-revelations or negations, which he traces over many of his works, and particularly the four drafts of the *Weltalter*. In the beginning, Schelling recapitulates his basic insight that the ground of being is always already a pure negativity or privative force, which can only reveal itself by paradoxically negating itself: “the beginning really only lies in the negation.” Schelling then describes how privative being first negates, externalizes, or alienates itself by creating the objective, physical world of nature. Schelling thus sees nature or “matter” as God’s dark ground manifesting itself: “this subordinate, dark, and unconscious dimension that God, as essence, continually *seeks* to expel and exclude from his proper self is *matter*.”

Augustine, extended nature is not so much the contingent Fall and subsequent

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300 Schelling, *Ages*, 16.

punishment for our morally evil act of renouncing God, as it is the necessary means by which God reveals his privative freedom.

At the same time, Schelling emphasizes that, if being is nothing but self-negation, it will have to continue to fall from itself even after it has initially done so through the first negation of nature. After nature has negated pure non-being in order to affirm it, nature must in turn generate its own immanent contradiction, which reaffirms nature’s true ground of pure negativity. It is at this stage that Schelling develops his notorious Naturphilosophie to show how nature is not some consistent, monist whole as it is for Spinoza; rather, nature is always already generating its own immanent contradictions. The fact that Schelling’s model for the evil of privation is always the free human being’s particular acceptation of moral evil closest to us elucidates why he makes the point of nature’s heretical ground by stating that nature is always already spiritual: “nature is already, within and in itself, not a corporeal, but a spiritual-corporeal being.”302 Schelling thus describes nature as a “pure,” non-sapient subject that nonetheless performs the essential act of subjectivity by rendering its own being contingent in negating itself: “the subject which is at first a subject which is pure and not present to itself—in wishing to have itself, in becoming object to itself—is tainted with contingency.”303 Elsewhere, Schelling still regularly refers to spiritual nature as “demonic” insofar as spirit is one and the same with moral evil: “that essence which […] is neither merely corporeal nor merely spiritual but the corporeal aspect of the spirit and the spiritual aspect of the body, we shall refer to as the demonic.”304

302 Schelling, Ages, 60.
303 Schelling, Modern Philosophy, 116.
More concretely, Schelling appropriates the physics of his time to argue that the movement of inert extended bodies is guided by dual, conflicting forces of attractive and repulsive gravity, as well as electromagnetic and chemical reactions. It is dead matter’s gravitational, chemical and electromagnetic collisions and reconfigurations of itself which eventually negates itself as it gives rise to living organisms: “one and the same universal dualism diffuses itself from magnetic polarity on through the electrical phenomena, finally even into chemical heterogeneities, and ultimately crops up again in organic nature.”\(^\text{305}\) It is at this point that Schelling most clearly affirms nature’s privative potency by modelling seemingly invariant inorganic laws and processes on finite, organic life. The living organisms that Schelling depicts are radically finite in that they do not contain their existence in their essence. Rather, they feel hunger, thirst, cold and pain. They are thus forced to adapt by changing or “negating” themselves and their environment if they are to satisfy their needs in a hostile external world. As Schelling puts it, “life consists precisely in the freedom to negate its own being as immediate, posited independently of itself, and to be able to transform it into a being posited by itself.”\(^\text{306}\) Here, Schelling intends this definition of life to not only hold for sentient creatures, but also for inorganic objects and processes. As far as Schelling is concerned, there is little difference between organic life’s struggle for survival by negating and being negated by its environs, and gravitational, chemical and electromagnetic collisions and compositions of inorganic bodies. For instance, the collision of matter’s basic building blocks betrays a negation as they lose their old form


when combined with each other to assume new large-scale structure formations, such as planets and stars, as well as mountains, rivers and forests. So, it is not that inorganic processes generate a living organism that expresses being’s negative process only insofar as it can starve, age and ultimately die; rather, the inorganic processes that give rise to the living are always already negative in the sense in which they form a history of new and forever emerging corporeal bodies, forms, and interactions. Far from developing a mystical or religious conception of the natural world as is all too often alleged, Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* simply states that nature is grounded upon the conflicting, antagonistic interaction of living things and their environmental milieus in a singular network of being’s privative becoming. In other words, Schelling’s is a view of nature close to what Augustine called natural evil, albeit with an added ontological weight.

In the third age of the world, Schelling describes how organic nature’s constellations and re-constellations of sensible shapes, forms and forces of negation ultimately result in the emergence of the rational human being. We have no need to re-tread how humans mark an acceptation of negation, since it was precisely Schelling’s initial model for the being of privation that he sought to absolutize, such as it alienates or externalizes itself and nature in becoming an other or object of its own thought against which it can then freely choose to act.

As with his initial model of the “voluntaristic” Christian God, Schelling’s talk of teleology here largely adheres to an Augustinian vocabulary which speaks of being as the free God’s self-revelation: “to look at the entire history of the world as a progressive
revelation of God is now a customary thought.”307 We can see, however, that he is really appropriating the same signifier as a Trojan horse to smuggle in a malefic non-being, of which the ages of the natural and spiritual worlds are but so many self-hereticizations—or is he?

5.2. SCHELLING’S LATER PHILOSOPHICAL DEVELOPMENT

5.2.1. Schelling’s middle “Manichaeism”

In the final analysis, Schelling’s seemingly only terminological likeness to Augustine ultimately betrays a far graver conceptual complicity. Schelling’s about-face first arises when he is confronted with the opposite problem to Augustine: whereas Augustine fails to account for the brute fact of evil, Schelling’s inverse hereticization of being must now illuminate the brute fact of the Good. Snow periodizes Schelling in terms of how to mitigate the threat which evil opposes to a systematic conception of all reality: “the acknowledgement of the reality of evil presents the most radical challenge conceivable to systematic philosophy. […] It is what forces him ultimately to produce a devastating critique of what he later calls negative philosophy.”308 After all, Schelling himself admits that nature does not only have a repulsive force of negative gravity, but also a unifying force of attractive gravity. Similarly, the evolutionary cycle of living organisms is not only propelled by the eventual demise of all things, but also their struggle to survive and conserve themselves. As Schelling’s own critique of the history of philosophy attests to, the hitherto last age of the world of human reason has also been predominantly marked by a desire for the Good, until the advent of Schelling’s

307 Schelling, Ages, 79.
308 Snow, Schelling, 146.
still only recent overcoming of Augustine. Even if the Good were a mere illusion or error of human thought without any objective reality, Schelling would still have to determine how a repulsive being of allegedly pure negativity can distort itself through the Augustinian thought of it as the privation of the “true” being of pure positivity.

The following figure 2 formalizes what Schelling’s initial account of evil can and cannot explain. Given that Schelling’s basic gesture was to transvaluate Augustine’s concepts of good and evil, figure 2 is a direct inversion of my earlier formalization of Augustine’s hierarchy of being in figure 1. The large circle at the centre represents Schelling’s concept of being, which is akin to Augustine’s concept of the evil of privation. The smaller circles that partially overlap and partially fall outside the central circle represent the production of individuated things by virtue of their participation to varying degrees of intensity in the being of evil. Finally, the figure permits us to see that Schelling is unable to account for the beingness of that part of things that falls outside the circle of sinister being, and yet structures much of the history of the world.
Unable to properly conceive of the brute fact of the Good in a world of pure evil, Schelling initially resorts to re-introducing a second, unifying force of the Good, along with the dissipating force of a not-so-pure Impurity in what is often referred to as his “theory of potencies.” Already at the end of the Essay and increasingly throughout the Weltalter, Schelling ultimately acknowledges that it is only this ontology of the dual-
being of good and evil that can account for both inert nature’s attractive and repulsive forces, life’s cycle of life and death, and human reason’s desire for redemption and capacity for moral evil: “both of the opposed potencies, the eternally negating potency and the eternally affirming potency, and the unity of both make up the one, inseparable, primordial being.”

Although Schelling is never entirely satisfied with this theory of potencies or his earlier philosophy, his later works do tend to favour the former. Thus, Schelling now tells us, the transcendental condition for the possibility of human freedom is not only the moral evil that renounces the nature from whence we emerge, but also the unifying desire to attain beatitude with the Good. Struggling to elucidate how the Good could emerge out of a primal Schism, Schelling has no choice but to return half of being back to its rightful proprietor—Augustine’s benevolent divinity. In this way, Schelling retraces Augustine’s own transitional, Manichean philosophy between his youthful, sinful hedonism and his mature Christian rationalism.

5.2.2. Schelling’s return to Augustine

At first, Schelling thinks that the solution to elucidating both good and evil consists in rationing out a segment of being to each of them. It is not long, however, before Schelling realizes like the young Augustine that this Manichean solution only reproduces the problem of furnishing a system, which would be capable of seizing the essence of all things in a singular concept of being. That is to say, Schelling’s solution here is but the problem disguised as its opposite, insofar as the conferral of being to two incompossible principles cannot satisfy the ontological criterion of being as that

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309 Schelling, *Ages*, 10. Given that this theory of potencies is already evident at the *Freedom* essay’s end, it is not so much a clear turn at any one, decisive point in Schelling’s trajectory as it is that Schelling constantly wavers between the two.
which totalizes all of reality in one concept. As he puts at in the Freiheitsschrift’s final pages, “there is either no common point of contact for both, in which case we must declare ourselves in favour of absolute dualism, or there is such a point; thus, both coincide once again in the final analysis.”\(^{310}\) Given that Schelling’s initial absolutization of humanity’s moral evil was motivated precisely by the attempt to unify the counterpoised human evil and divine benevolence in one system of immanent, monist being, Schelling cannot rest content with a dualist ontology to the extent that it tautologically comes full circle with the original problem.

In chasing after the true system that still eludes him, Schelling ultimately makes an even more fatal about-face: he totally re-ontologizes the Good by asserting the existence of an even higher unity in a Neo-Platonic realm beyond the privative play of the forces of a partial good and a privative evil: “if evil exists in the discord of the two principles, then good can exist only in the complete accord of the two, and the bond that unifies both must be divine since they are one, not in a conditional, but in a complete and unconditional manner.”\(^{311}\) In place of evil, or even of two dualist forces of good and evil, Schelling now affirms that there is an even higher, purely self-identical being, which rests completely “indifferent” to the dualist forces: “if Nature is to be thought as absolute totality, then nothing can be opposed to it, for everything falls within its sphere and nothing outside of it. […] Antithesis must be assumed to have sprung from a universal identity.”\(^{312}\) Here, Schelling essentially reintroduces the Augustinian idea of a completely unified being that dwarfs all dualisms, so as to

\(^{310}\) Schelling, Freedom, 68.
\(^{311}\) Schelling, Freedom, 56.
\(^{312}\) Schelling, Nature, 179.
maintain the system when confronted with the temporal world’s irreconcilably antagonistic forces.

Although Schelling holds that this resolves the problem of systematicity, he now encounters another problem: he himself admits that there is no evidence of a transcendent realm of pure becoming in the temporal, privative world in which we reside. Nor does the human subject provide such evidence insofar as Schelling himself has demonstrated that spirit’s essence is its free, morally evil negation of any such final unity. Without either the empirical Naturphilosophie or rational thought to back up his re-ontologization of the Good, Schelling makes one final resort of appealing to pure mystical faith alone. Here, it is crucial to see why Schelling calls his epistemic method a “metaphysical empiricism,” in order to avoid confusion on whether Schelling is using an empirical rather than a mystical approach. In his Berlin lecture series, Schelling distinguishes between three empiricisms. “Base empiricism” only affirms that we can know pure sensations without any knowledge of the suprasensible. The second empiricism affirms that we only know things through sense data, and yet we do have knowledge of the suprasensible by having faith in the divine revelation. Schelling’s own third way states that we can “empirically” know the suprasensible through our own inner sentiment, which is directed towards a Good beyond all empirical goods in the here and now. In his own words, “a higher level of philosophical empiricism, however, is one that […] goes beyond all external facts but nevertheless relies on the inner fact of an irresistible feeling to convince us of the existence of God.”

Although Schelling terms his approach an empiricism, it is actually more akin to the negative theologians’ mystical approach.\(^{314}\) This elucidates why Schelling now opposes the truth of his mystical epistemology’s “divine magic” to his own previously twofold methods of empirical *Naturphilosophie* and dialectical rationalism:

Through false imagining and cognition that orients itself according to what does not have Being, the human spirit opens itself to the spirit of lies and falsehood. […] By contrast, the true good could be effectuated only through a divine magic, namely through the immediate presence of what has Being in consciousness and cognition.\(^{315}\)

For the late Schelling, only “mystical empiricism” can guarantee the uniformity of his system through the assertion of a transcendent realm of pure Positivity or “potency” beyond the sensible and rational “actuality” of all things in the this-life. Tillich describes Schelling’s mystical subsuming of all things under God’s becoming self-identical as aimed at repressing sin, or what Tillich calls “guilt-consciousness”: “the eternal meaning of the world process is that indifference becomes love. But love is the bond of the principles, that is, it is identity. Identity is the absolute divine goal. Thus, in eternity, mysticism triumphs over guilt.”\(^{316}\) By appealing to the mystical approach of feeling our way to a higher Good than all external goods, Schelling backtracks from his earlier, heretical philosophy to Augustine’s ontology of the Good as the sole source of all things.

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\(^{315}\) Schelling, *Freedom*, 56.

It is Schelling’s re-ontologization of the Good here by mere assertion alone for the sake of the system, which has given the grounds for the critique of his thought first initiated by Hegel’s disciples. According to them, Hegel rightly develops the properly rationalist concept of being’s pure dialectical negativity that we actually encounter. Conversely, Schelling retreats in the face of the terrifying, yet all too real negativity behind a “philosophy of faith” in a possible final day of judgment, where we will once more be united with the plenitude of God. As a young Friedrich Engels puts it, “Hegel maintains that anything which is reasonable is also real; Schelling says, however, that what is reasonable is possible, and thus safeguards himself, for in view of the known extensive range of possibility, this proposition is irrefutable.”

Or, as Frederick Beiser more recently observes of the late Schelling’s undemonstrated reconversion to the idea of an absolute, self-identical spirit at the hidden ground of the world, despite all the empirico-rational evidence before him in the world itself: “he stresses that we cannot prove the existence of the absolute, since all demonstration is valid only in the sphere of the conditioned.”

By identifying a higher being of pure Indifference beyond the dualist shadow play during the ages of the world, Schelling thinks that he finally furnishes the true metaphysical system which seizes the beingness of everything in what turns out to be nothing other than Augustine’s own ontology of the Good.

Here, it must be objected that, if Schelling’s solution to guaranteeing the systematicity of the concept is none other than Augustine’s absolutely self-sufficient and indifferent


Good without any absence or deficiency, does he not then run up against Augustine’s same problem of explaining the brute fact of evil, which motivated his own critique of the Augustinian theodicy in the first place? It would seem, however, that Schelling is perfectly aware his system risks regurgitating the very philosophy of the Good that he earlier critiqued. Consequently, Schelling qualifies that there is a minimal, yet crucial difference between his own ontologization of the Good and that of Augustine: whereas Augustine dogmatically repudiates tout court the existence of evil, Schelling opts to account for evil as the necessary means of the Good’s becoming. At this point, Schelling once more returns to modelling the benevolent Supreme Being on the human spirit, albeit now not so much on our moral freedom as on our self-consciousness. That is to say, for self-consciousness to be as the thinking of oneself, it has need of externalizing or alienating itself as an other or object of its own thought through which consciousness then returns to itself: “the self cannot intuit the real activity as identical with itself, without at once finding the negative element therein, which makes it nonideal, as something alien to itself”; and: “it is with it in order to have an Other through which it would be able to contemplate itself, present itself, and be intelligible to itself.” 319 The paradox of self-consciousness is that it has to negate itself by becoming an other of itself to paradoxically affirm itself as the thinking of itself.

Therein lies the key to accounting for the brute fact of evil given that being is an absolutely benevolent God, or what Schelling terms “absolute spirit”: he is not so much a benevolent state as he is a benevolent process, which unifies all things around himself as their purposive totality. God is not so much a noun as he is a verb, not a fixed state

319 Schelling, Idealism, 53; and Ages, xxxvi.
or stasis, but a doing or activity. The insight that God’s unifying process must be like our own self-consciousness’ return to itself enables Schelling to argue that God can only think or “love” himself as the highest Good by externalizing or alienating his absolute benevolence through his act of creating inferior, privative beings, which harbour the desire to be reunified with him: “the beginning of consciousness in Him involves his separating Himself from Himself, His opposing Himself to Himself.”

Termed differently, evil is the becoming of the Good’s self-revelation by alienating itself from itself, to paradoxically express itself through those alienated creatures’ constant aspirations and strivings to re-actualize the Good in its all-encompassing wholeness. While Schelling had earlier argued that the act of creating privative beings capable of moral evil was the direct expression of being qua evil, he now transvaluates that creation as the synthetic movement of being in all its unifying benevolence.

In this way, Schelling retroactively re-evaluates his earlier philosophy’s ontologization of evil as the preliminary stage on the way to his late philosophy, which restores the Good as the former’s reconciliatory quilting point all along. By acknowledging the ontological reality of the temporal world that Augustine simply denies—while still subordinating it as the privative, albeit necessary unificatory becoming of the Good, a Good which is nothing other than this unificatory process as such—Schelling concludes that he has at last uncovered the system of being.

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321 Schelling, Positive Philosophy, 155.
5.2.3.  

Schelling’s Augustinian circle

In the wake of this final defence or *theodicy*, Schelling claims that he is able to explain evil as the acceptation of the Good’s unificatory process, rather than just a pure privation: “the positive is always the whole or unity; that which opposes unity is severing of the whole, disharmony, ataxia of forces. The same elements are in the severed whole that were in the cohesive whole.”\(^{322}\) It is therefore unsurprising that more theologically orthodox thinkers, like Adam Karl August von Eschenmayer and Martin Deutinger, received Schelling’s later philosophy with open arms, even if they were still dissatisfied about him granting the negative a role as the necessary process of the positive’s development. As Thomas O’Meara summarizes their views in *Schelling and the Theologians*, “Schelling had improved upon his earlier metaphysics and had laboured over a positive, Christian philosophy, but […] the consciousness of time is at fault; the tension in the relationship of God to the world is imperfectly resolved.”\(^{323}\) No wonder Schelling himself claims that his later philosophy is the rational crystallization of its historical expression throughout the ages in the guise of Christianity, if not Augustine’s Christianity specifically: “he must grasp Christianity as that which is truly universal, that which, therefore, even serves as the very foundation of the world.”\(^{324}\)

It is nonetheless difficult to see how this is in line with Schelling’s earlier view that a self-identical being would be unable to account for the multiplicity of particular,

\(^{322}\) Schelling, *Freedom*, 38.


\(^{324}\) Schelling, *Positive Philosophy*, 185.
individuated things in nature such as we ourselves embody: “I hate nothing more than
the mindless striving to eliminate the multiplicity of natural causes through fictitious
identities. I observe that nature is satisfied only by the greatest dominion of forms, and
that it delights in arbitrariness in the deathly management of decomposition.”325
Despite Schelling’s insistence that his concept of being captures both the Good and
evil as the former’s necessary becoming, I want to insist that Schelling’s late
philosophy still remains subject to my (and his) critique of the Augustinian lineage. To
claim that evil is the becoming of the Good’s unificatory process does not explain the
beingness of the precise point in time, however brief, when evil first negates the Good
to only thereafter enable the Good to attract the privative beings back towards it.
Further, how does evil’s transvaluation as the Good’s method of self-revelation explain
the fact that many things in nature, and especially we humans, can go against any desire
others and ourselves might have to re-join the Good? Indeed, does not Schelling’s own
initial negative philosophy exhibit precisely this (anti-)ethic of attempting to affirm the
Good’s negation? Even if this were his theoretical error or illusion, rather than the true
nature of sensible reality, any concept of being would still have to account for why the
privation, which is supposed to create the conditions for the Good’s self-revelation,
more often than not seems to inhibit it.

In the final analysis, Schelling’s failure to capture the evil of privation _qua_ privation,
rather than reducing it to the preliminary stage in the Good’s self-revelation, remains
captured in the horizon of my (and indeed his own) critique of Augustinianism. It is little

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wonder that Schelling’s final take on evil is an almost word-for-word reformulation of Augustine’s doctrine of the *privatio boni*, which he earlier audaciously chastised for its failure to adequately grapple with the brute reality of evil: “evil is, however, not a being, but rather a non-being that has reality only in opposition and not in itself. Precisely for that reason absolute identity is prior to evil as well, because the latter can appear only in opposition to it.”  

326 Whether Schelling postulates a co-eternal, unifying force alongside the equally ontological force of evil, or simply sublates both by an even higher Idea of pure indifference to all dualisms, he cannot escape the charge that he never really thinks evil *qua* privation, negation and repulsion, but instead as the merely secondary becoming of plenitude, affirmation and synthesis.

### 5.3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter started out by showing how Schelling seeks to account for Fichte’s idealist notion of our free, moral evil by situating it at the tell-tale heart of nature *an sich*. That is to say, Schelling accounts for the brute fact of evil that Spinoza and Augustine disavow by conceiving of the being that human sin is supposed to negate as always already evil. As heretical as all this may sound, we ultimately saw how Schelling’s turning of Spinoza and Augustine on its head confronted him with the inverse problem to that of Augustine of being unable to account for the beingness of the Good, except by conferring half of being back to the Good in what amounts to a rather heterogeneous philosophy of two incompossible potencies. As discussed, however, Schelling’s initial driving motive was to furnish a system capable of explaining moral evil in a single

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concept of nature. Consequently, Schelling was ultimately led to reinstate, by mystical faith alone, an even higher being akin to Augustine’s Good without lack, in a kind of transcendent Neo-Platonic realm of pure ideality beyond the interplay of light and shadow, which constitutes our own world.

Although Schelling was among the first to try to break from the Augustinians’ grip, his solution ultimately proved unsuccessful. Whether other philosophers in his wake could better heed his call for a concept of being, which can account for both good and evil through a single principle, is another story for another dissertation.
CHAPTER 6.  CONCLUSION

I began by examining Augustine’s attempt to rationally demonstrate that reality is absolutely Good, such that evil is only a privation resulting from the misuse of our will. What my exegesis showed, however, was that Augustine’s doctrine of predestination ultimately contradicted his conflation of being and the Good by holding that God condemns some to eternal damnation no matter what good use of their will they make, in what amounts to a coming into being of an eternal realm of pure privation alongside that of the Good.

The third chapter then considered how, like Augustine, Descartes’ goal was to make us certain of God’s absolute goodness in a world in which an evil demon could be deceiving us as to the truth of our own existence. Like Augustine, Descartes demonstrated that we, thinking substances, judge ourselves according to an Idea of perfection, which cannot come from ourselves or anything other than the divine, perfect being itself. Like Augustine, Descartes’ ontological argument enabled him to conclude that evil is but the error of mistaking a part of reality for its totality when we freely choose to think beyond the limits of our finite understanding. The trouble for Descartes, however, was that he followed Augustine’s predestinarian doctrine in the guise of his late occasionalism (according to which God is the cause of all our actions, including even the misuse of our “free” will) in a way that re-ontologized evil.
In the fourth chapter, we saw how Kant repudiated dogmatic metaphysics on the grounds that its concept of being was a transcendental illusion generated by pure reason. At the same time, Kant proceeded to substitute our pure reason for practical reason, so as to once more demonstrate that dogmatic philosophers and theologians’ concept of the benevolent God is the condition for the possibility of our moral practice’s validity. Having practically restored the benevolent God, Kant then denigrated evil as a mere privation of the being of the Good derived from our free will’s denial of his perfection. Despite Kant’s novel defence of the essentially Augustinian theodicy, Kant not only conferred a certain beingness to our choices of the Good but also to radical evil when he ultimately ontologized human freedom.

In the fifth chapter, I examined how Schelling forced philosophy to come to terms with how the human being capable of evil can emerge out of a ground, which it can negate. To this end, Schelling inferred that the ground must always already be capable of such evil. Here, Schelling’s model was Augustine’s own God insofar as he is absolutely free, and hence capable of negating even himself. For Schelling, then, it was the supremely privative Being that creates morally evil human beings, not so as to negate its essence, but to affirm it paradoxically by negating it. At this juncture, however, Schelling shied away from his own heretical insight when he ran into the inverse problem of Augustine: how are we to account for the brute fact of certain unifying forces if the ground of being is absolutely evil? Ultimately, Schelling backtracked by dogmatically affirming that being is absolutely good, such that the evil of privation is but the secondary, albeit necessary, becoming of the Good to be itself by communing with itself as an object of its own divine thought.
6.1. TOWARDS A HERETICAL HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

This analysis of Augustine’s influence, be it direct or formal, on Descartes, Kant and Schelling has afforded us sufficient evidence to establish the hypothesis that Augustine’s influence on a certain thread of modern and post-Kantian philosophy may be deeply underestimated. The goal for future research is thus to see to what extent other philosophers recapitulate Augustine’s template for philosophy, be it explicitly or inadvertently. As with Descartes, Kant and a certain Schelling, my suspicion is that even some of the most ostensibly secular or heretical philosophers might turn out to be the most paradoxically faithful.

Of course, this is not the time or place to go into details. I can only offer several possible lines of interrogation. It could be argued, for instance, that Leibniz appropriates Augustine’s own rationalist method to demonstrate that the physical evil of extended bodies ultimately finds their entelechy or sufficient reason in spiritual, indivisible monads, which are in turn grounded in God’s pre-established harmony of all things around the choice of the best.327 As per Augustine, Leibniz’s doctrine of pre-established harmony ultimately permits him to furnish a theodicy which accounts for evil as so many physical and moral falls from God’s grace.328

Similarly, although Rousseau chastises blind obedience to Church dogma, he also follows Augustine by rationally deducing the highest ideal of a secular Good in the

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guise of the State of Nature.\textsuperscript{329} He then develops a “social constructivist” theodicy, whereby humankind’s fall from Nature stems from our “perfectibility” or free will to come together in societies and develop new kinds of alienating desires, which are dependent upon others outside our own immediate and self-identical being. Despite the naturalistic tone, then, Rousseau maintains that evil is nothing other than a \textit{construction} without any reality of its own apart from the State of Nature that it corrupts.\textsuperscript{330}

We can also find certain Augustinian residuals when Berkeley appropriates Locke’s empirical method to argue that all our sensations are ideas, before arguing further that our passive ideas organized around the law of pleasure can only be occasioned by the benevolent, Christian divinity.\textsuperscript{331} Whether inadvertently or intentionally, Berkeley would thus be a “crypto-Thomist” who appropriates the modern age’s empirico-scientific method as a Trojan horse, so as to smuggle back in the medieval theology of the omnibenevolent God. From this of course all-too-brief survey, we can nonetheless glimpse that there is much fruit to bear from putting Augustine in dialogue with other modern thinkers beyond this thesis’ scope.

As my reading of another, anti-Augustinian Schelling has already suggested, it would also be worthwhile to see to what extent still other philosophers submit Augustine to a negative reassessment by ontologizing the evils of privation, matter and human freedom. Like this other Schelling, Hegel also seeks to tarry with the negative by


thinking the morally evil, free subject not only as a privation but also as the ontological substance *par excellence*.\(^{332}\) Even more explicitly still, Nietzsche attempts nothing less than the transvaluation of the Christian categories of physical and moral evils as the true, sensible being, which the fairy-tale of a benevolent God only distorts.\(^{333}\) In a similar vein, Heidegger also contends that being is nothing but its own withdrawal, refusal or “privation” from its presence-at-hand for us. It is not mere chance that Heidegger develops such ideas in his early 1920-1921 lecture series on Augustine, Neo-Platonism and Saint Paul.\(^{334}\)

To recapitulate these omens: a future research project arising out of this study would be twofold. In a first movement, it would continue to examine to what extent modern philosophers like Leibniz, Rousseau and Berkeley follow Descartes and Kant by adhering to Augustine’s metaphysics of the Good and the *privatio boni*. In a second movement, it would then see to what extent post-Kantian philosophers like Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger take up Schelling’s attempt to submit Augustine to a negative reassessment, even if many of them may, like Schelling, wind up buckling under the weight of the Church father’s tradition. By expanding the inquiry into the legacy of the thought-structure that Augustine inaugurated in this way, we could further see how it is fruitful to put him in dialogue with other philosophers, as this thesis has already gone some way towards doing through the examples of Descartes, Kant and Schelling.

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