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Our heart is restless until it rests in you.  
St. Augustine, *Confessions*\*

## Evil in the Personal Experience of St. Augustine

The most disturbing issue that permeates all of St. Augustine's work is the question of the existence of evil, experiencing it and inflicting it. Giovanni Papini claims that Augustine, "before he found himself in finding God, [...] had to exhaust the experience of evil to the very depths".<sup>1</sup> This remark redirects our thinking about Augustine's understanding of evil from the field of theoretical considerations to the realm of his personal experience of evil, where his philosophical and theological thought seems to be rooted. For many years, Augustine experienced evil and inflicted it himself. In the *Confessions* we read: "our life was one of being seduced and seducing, being deceived and deceiving, in a variety of desires. Publicly I was a teacher of the arts which they call liberal; privately I professed a false religion – in the former role arrogant, in the latter superstitious, in everything vain".<sup>2</sup> A sense of persistence in falsehood and iniquity, noticed by Augustine quite late, a few years before his death in 430 (if one can consider his *Confessions* as a testimony to this important moment) and his desire to know the truth about himself,

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\* Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, transl. with an introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick (USA: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1, i (1).

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Papini, *Święty Augustyn* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1958), 32 (own translation).

<sup>2</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 4, i (1).

motivated him to reflect on evil in depth. In the article we offer a look at the well-known problem of evil in the thought of Aurelius Augustine of Hippo in this very personal, experiential perspective.

## I. Substantial Evil

Young Augustine was consumed by an inner split, which he himself described as the struggle of two souls. He held his parents, who were poles apart, responsible for the splitting of his nature. The father was sexually intense, hotheaded, and impetuous, while the mother was acquiescent and evangelical. "At the threshold of his youth, we see Augustine as an insubordinate student, a disloyal player, an avid actor, a liar, and a thief".<sup>3</sup> In the *Confessions*, in which Augustine evaluates his life from the perspective of a Christian, the evil done by him is included in the religious (theological) perspective as a sin, acting against God's laws, wherefore he turns directly to his God: "Lord my God, I sinned by not doing as I was told by my parents and teachers".<sup>4</sup> When young Augustine succumbed to lusts – later he judged this overwhelming tendency as evil, as succumbing to the sin of unchastity – he began to feel a fear of God's justice. "Nothing kept me from an even deeper whirlpool of erotic indulgence except fear of death and of your coming judgement" – he confesses in the *Confessions*.<sup>5</sup> In Augustine's opinion, his juvenile sins, such as unchastity or affection for theatrical performances, were much heavier than the evil he committed as a child (e.g. stealing pears from his neighbour's garden). This hierarchy of sins was not intended to emphasize the burden of the evil itself, Augustine rather wanted to emphasize the effect of evil tendencies. The unrestrained tendency to evil in childhood may intensify so that man falls in love with it. In the *Confessions*, Augustine shares: "I loved my fall, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself".<sup>6</sup> He knew from experience that a bad choice that is repeated turns into a habit, into a habit of doing evil, and that "the pleasure of every past evil act is amplified",<sup>7</sup> and therefore he considered that good habits should be developed from an early age. At the time, "no image of evil seemed so apt to Augustine as that of the knot or entanglement.

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<sup>3</sup> Papini, *Święty Augustyn*, 21 (own translation).

<sup>4</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 1, x (16).

<sup>5</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 6, xvi (26).

<sup>6</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 2, iv (9).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography* (Berkeley–Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 142.

He describes how the cloud of evil tried to entangle him by rolling him over and over".<sup>8</sup>

The period of adolescence was a time of intense intellectual development for Augustine, and the issue of evil became crucial in his life. "With my friends Alypius and Nebridius I discussed the ultimate nature of good and evil. To my mind Epicurus would have been awarded the palm of victory, had I not believed that after death the life of the soul remains with the consequences of our acts [...]"<sup>9</sup> – he reminisced. A little later, fascinated with the writings of Apuleius and Cicero, Augustine asked himself the most difficult questions – about happiness, truth, good and evil, and about the essence of God.

The inner conflict consuming Augustine's soul was growing. One soul was directed towards the good, the other towards evil – pride and debauchery. Augustine found a reflection of the inner struggle between good and evil in the Manichaean concept of the war between light/good and darkness/evil.<sup>10</sup> He stayed with the Manichaeans for nine years. All the time he hoped that it is not man who sins and does evil, but some other nature that is somehow connected to man, but is not man himself.<sup>11</sup> Just like the Manichaeans he thought that there "evil is a kind of material substance with its own foul and misshapen mass, either solid which they used to call earth, or thin and subtle, as is the body of air. They imagine it to be a malignant mind creeping through the earth".<sup>12</sup> This image of evil, however, did not fully convince him, and finally Augustine assumed that there are two indeterminate masses, one of which, evil, is more compressed while the good is more widespread. Nevertheless, while persisting in dualism, Augustine found justification for his own tendency to evil. A little later, in the dialogue *The Happy Life*, he would write about the Manichaeans: "I did not agree with them, but thought they were concealing in these some important secret which they would later divulge veils".<sup>13</sup> They did not. And finally, the Manichaean findings did not bring solace to his suffering soul. In his *Confessions*, he admits: "when they asked me: Where does evil come from? [...] In my ignorance I was disturbed by these questions, and while travelling away from the truth I thought I was going towards it. I did not know that evil has no existence except as a privation of good, down to that level

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<sup>8</sup> Gillian Rosemary Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 6, xvi (26).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: Ecco, 2005), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 5, x (18).

<sup>12</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 5, x (20).

<sup>13</sup> Idem, *The Happy Life by Ludwig Schopp* (New York: Cima Publishing CO., INC, 2008), I (4).

which is altogether without being".<sup>14</sup> But Augustine had to wait many years for this final conclusion. It was only under the influence of Bishop Ambrose's sermons that he noticed the weaknesses of Mani's doctrine, abandoned the Manichaeans, and became their ardent opponent.

## II. Evil as an Aspect of Reality

Looking for an answer to the question about the true sources of evil, Augustine studied more and more of evil theories – from the Manicheans, through the academics, to the one proclaimed by astrologers. Throughout this time, the axis of his research was formed by two issues – evil and the essence of God, and they were linked by a constantly open question about the origin of evil. In particular, Augustine could not understand how it was possible for evil to exist in the face of the impeccable, absolute perfection, and goodness of the Creator of all things. For if God is good, and Augustine knew this truth from a brief reading of the Holy Bible, God could not create evil, because being perfect he could not create imperfection. The breakthrough in Augustine's inquiries came with two events: the meeting with Bishop Ambrose and the discovery of the writings of the Neoplatonists – Plotinus and Porphyry, which revealed a completely new horizon to him. Thanks to them, Augustine discovered the spiritual substance.<sup>15</sup>

Augustine listened to Bishop Ambrose's sermons, which illuminated many problems of the Catholic faith from a side unknown to him, but this meeting did not result in a radical change in his life. It was difficult for a young man to resist lust, to give up his desire for possession, to renounce vanity, pride, and arrogance. However, the visible fruit of the meeting with Ambrose was a change in his thinking about God. "I have noticed frequently in the sermons of our priest [...] that, when speaking of God, no one should think of Him as something corporeal; not yet of the soul, for of all things the soul is nearest to God"<sup>16</sup> – we read in the dialogue *The Happy Life*. However, it was only the neo-Platonic thought that brought about a change in Augustine's perception of the nature and origin of evil, allowing him to retain faith in the perfection and absolute goodness of God.

First of all, in the views of Plotinus, there appears a category of the One, close to the idea of Christian God, from which hypostases of varying degrees of perfection emanate. In following the path indicated by this thought, Augustine came to the truth about God as the creator of beings

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<sup>14</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 3, vii (12).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Happy Life*, I (4).

of different perfection and as one who was and is from the beginning. He also understood that in the created reality man occupies an intermediate place, between God and the rest of creation, thus recognizing his inferiority to the Creator and his superiority to creation. This perception of reality is owing to Porphyrius, who “turned Plotinus’ discovery of Plato into textbooks, and made from it a coherent system, intensely religious and other-worldly”.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, as a condition for achieving happiness and truth, both Plotinus and Porphyrius indicated the detachment of the soul from what is sensual, a turn towards its interior, asceticism, and contemplation. These theories were a great discovery for Augustine, so that he took it upon himself to accept that the mind can be enlightened by the truth if it is detached from the sensual.

Neoplatonism also allowed Augustine to rephrase the question of evil, making him aware that “in the question of evil, the first thing to be solved is not *unde malum* (what is the origin of evil), but *quid malum* (what is evil)”.<sup>18</sup> One can suppose that Augustine, familiar with the thought of Plotinus, already sensed that evil is a privation and cannot exist without good. In the *Enneads*, Plotinus claimed that the One/Good is spilled over into all beings without harming itself, “evil, therefore, was only a turning away into separateness: its very existence assumed the existence of an order, which was flouted while remaining no less real and meaningful”.<sup>19</sup> This thought was well in tune with what Augustine knew about the Christian God – the unchangeable and eternal, who “by definition and by virtue of the evidence that establishes his existence is the supreme good”.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, God’s attributes indicate that there is no other good beyond him, and thus there is no good beyond God to be gained. “Therefore, all good things throughout all the ranks of being, whether great or small, can derive their being only from God. Every natural being, so far as it is such, is good. There can be no being which does not derive its existence from the most high and true God”.<sup>21</sup> Augustine would devote many more years of his life to developing the concept of evil as a lack of good.

<sup>17</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography*, 83.

<sup>18</sup> Agostino Trapé, *Święty Augustyn: człowiek, duszpasterz, mistyk* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1987), 94 (own translation).

<sup>19</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography*, 91.

<sup>20</sup> Étienne Gilson, *Wprowadzenie do nauki świętego Augustyna* (Warszawa: PAX, 1955), 189 (own translation). “The Supreme Good beyond all others is God”, Augustine, *The Nature of the Good*, in: Augustine, *Earlier Writings*, ed. and transl. by J. H. S. Burleigh (USA: Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2006), i. The highest good derived from the observation of good in the world; see Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, introduction, translation and notes Edmund Hill, O.P. (New York: New City Press Hyde Park, 2010), VIII, 2, 3.4.

<sup>21</sup> Augustine, *The Nature of the Good*, i.

This encounter with the neoplatonists appears to be a turning point in Augustine's life, which is sometimes called pre-conversion – the first conversion.<sup>22</sup> “By introspection in solitude and by practising the way of dialectical regress from external to internal, from inferior and physical to superior and mental, he briefly attained a vision of eternal truth and unchanging beauty [...]. Nevertheless, he knew that in that ‘flash of a trembling glance’ he had attained a dazzling glimpse of the immutable and eternal Being, an immaterial reality wholly transcending his own all too changeable mind”.<sup>23</sup> However, this very deep intellectual experience of Augustine was short-lived and did not bring with it a final solution to the problem of evil. In the *Confessions* we read: “I was seeking the origin of evil and here was no solution. But you did not allow fluctuations in my thinking to carry me away from the faith which I held, that you exist and are immutable substance and care for humanity and judge us [...] you have provided a way of salvation whereby humanity can come to the future life after death. These matters, therefore, were secure and firmly fortified in my mind while I was seeking feverishly for the origin of evil. What torments my heart suffered in mental pregnancy, what groans, my God!”<sup>24</sup> It seems that the difficulty that Augustine encountered in trying to finally solve the problem of evil was that he was constantly experiencing its power in his life and did not see the way that would allow him to identify with the good. As a consequence of the intellectual experience he encountered in contact with neoplatonic thought, Augustine finally rejected the Manichaean thesis about the material existence of evil and about God as the creator of evil in the world, and evil itself became one of the aspects of reality for him.

### III. Sinful Passions

The immersion in neoplatonic spirituality, which had a profound impact on Saint Augustine, turned out to be only a preparatory stage for what was supposed to permanently change his life – to become a Christian. He will later write about this extremely important event himself – addressing Romanian – as follows: “a conflagration which surpassed anything you believed possible in me what more shall I say one which seemed incredible even to myself. What title of honor, what retinue of men, what empty desire of renown, finally, what enticement binding one to this mortal life then had any effect on me? Indeed, I completely and hastily

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Henry Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2001), 34–36; Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography*, 91–92.

<sup>23</sup> Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction*, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 7, vii (11).

returned to myself. But I looked back, I confess, from a long journey, so to speak, upon that religion which had been instilled into us in our childhood and which had been implanted within our very marrow; and yet, it was drawing me to itself without my being aware of it. And so, while wavering and hastening and hesitating, I seized the writings of Paul, the Apostle".<sup>25</sup> For it turned out that what Augustine could not find in the writings of Plotinus and Porphyrius, what was missing in those writings, he found in the *Letters* of St. Paul. So he eagerly began to solve the problem of the sinfulness of the body which had been consuming him since his early youth, and the reading of the *Letters* revealed to him the way St. Paul had overcome this difficulty. St. Paul's rules seemed extremely strict to Augustine, as they demanded that he give up his lifestyle completely, renounce his sexual contacts, marriage, career, and fame. Augustine knew perfectly well that becoming a Catholic would require huge sacrifices from him and for a long time he was not ready to make them. It was only the experience of the conversation with Pontitian who, having summarized the life story of Saint Anthony, introduced Augustine to the lifestyle of the Egyptian monks, that finally changed his life. After this meeting, lost, dumbfounded by a multitude of thoughts, despairing, Augustine confessed: "hatred I felt for myself [...]. But my madness with myself was part of the process of recovering health, and in the agony of death I was coming to life. [...] For as soon as I had the will, I would have had a wholehearted will. At this point the power to act is identical with the will. The willing itself was performative of the action. Nevertheless, it did not happen. What is the cause of this monstrous situation? [...] So I was in conflict with myself and was dissociated from myself. The dissociation came about against my will [...]. And so it was' not I' that brought this about' but sin which dwelt in me, sin resulting from the punishment of a more freely chosen sin, because I was a son of Adam. [...] I threw myself down somehow under a certain figtree, and let my tears flow freely. Rivers streamed from my eyes [...] I was saying this and weeping in the bitter agony of my heart [...] I had put down the book of the apostle [the *Letters* of St. Paul, the Apostol – A.B.] when I got up. I seized it, opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: 'Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its [...]. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled".<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Idem, *Against the Academicians*, translation and introduction by Sister Mary Patrician Garvey, R.S.M. (Wisconsin: Marquette University Press Milwaukee, 1957), II II, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 8, vii (17)–xii (29).

This passage describes the famous “scene in the Garden of Milan”, which is a turning point in Augustine’s life – a description of his spiritual struggle which will result in the adoption of Christianity along with what it calls the truths of the faith. Under the influence of these strong experiences, he also decided to give up his secular career and renounce marriage.

Augustine went a long way from his first reading of Holy Bible to his decision to be baptized. During this time, he constantly experienced the evil associated with the limitations of his own body. The biggest problem for him was the question of sexuality. The condemnation of sexual passions was characteristic of many ancient authors, so it is not surprising that this problem was also important for Augustine. However, after becoming a Christian, he would say to himself that “as you lay awake last night and the same question arose, you found it was very different with you than you had supposed. Imagined fondlings and bitter sweetness tickled your fancy, much less than formerly, of course, but far more than you had supposed”.<sup>27</sup> Christianity brought Augustine a definitive explanation of the origin of the “disturbing sweetness” which to him appeared to be a bodily sin. It revealed to him that evil is the result of weakness of human will and the punishment for Adam’s sin. So Augustine finally abandoned the Plotinus intuition that the source of evil is matter. It is man who is the only perpetrator of evil, the center of sin is inside him and no external causes should be sought.

#### IV. Metaphysical Evil

On the path of abandoning earthly attachments, Augustine made the fundamental assumption “no one doubts that we are incited to learn by the double weight of authority and of reason”.<sup>28</sup> He took the person of Jesus Christ as his authority and decided to train reason by reading Plato. This moment in Augustine’s life seems to be extremely important, because the problem of evil would from now on be considered in the light of these two factors of cognition. Now he would take up the challenge to intellectually explain what in the order of faith had already been recognized by him. Augustine, the Christian believed that the truth was in God and that he was revealing it to him, and the very discovery of it fascinated him, captivated him, and made him wonder at the perfection of the Creator. One of these truths that Augustine found in God was the truth about evil.

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<sup>27</sup> Idem, *The Soliloquies*, in: idem, *Earlier Writings*, ed. and transl. by J. H. S. Burleigh (USA: Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2006), I, xiv (25).

<sup>28</sup> Idem, *Against the Academicians*, III, XX,43.



After the Milan experience, Augustine, together with his mother and a group of friends, settled in Cassiciacum. In the *Soliloquies* he recalls that during this stay, he carefully examined himself in the perspective of his experience and understanding of good and evil. The fruit of this introspection was the statement that every good should be desired only when it leads us to the highest good and every evil should be feared only when it leads us away from it.<sup>29</sup> Augustine emphasized the value of the human choice of conduct, and since the sin of bodily lusts had always been the main problem for him, he placed even more emphasis than before on the need for sacrifice, on living in asceticism.

Moreover, during his stay in Cassiciacum, the problem of evil appeared to Augustine in a new, so far unnoticed by him, extra-moral light. During numerous philosophical disputes, the question was asked: "Does evil take the same place as good in God's order?". The answer required the broadening of Augustine's field of interest with the metaphysical dimension of the issue and the analysis of the nature of good itself and its relation to evil, which he did in a number of his first philosophical dialogues.

Augustine already knew that evil does not exist as a substance entity and was not created by a perfect and good God. In *Of True Religion* he emphasizes that "no nature, or, if you prefer it, no substance or essence, is evil".<sup>30</sup> Everything that exists is good, so the evil whose cause Augustine sought cannot be a substance, because if it were, it would be good. Augustine's God- Creator is completely devoid of evil, and "God transcends all measure, form and order in his creatures, not in spatial locality but by his unique and ineffable power from which come all measure, form and order".<sup>31</sup>

However, beings created by God, because of God's act of *creatio ex nihilo*, participate in nothingness. As a consequence, every creature has a tendency to non-being. This aspect of Augustine's thought is pointed out by Hannah Arendt, stating that in the order of being, "all things by the very fact that they *are* are good', evil and sin included".<sup>32</sup> But since all creation has been "extracted from nothingness" (*creatio ex nihilo*), then "that which comes from nothingness, participates not only in being, but

<sup>29</sup> Cf. idem, *The Soliloquies*, I, XI-19.

<sup>30</sup> Idem, *Of True Religion*, in: idem, *Earlier Writings*, ed. and transl. by J. H. S. Burleigh (USA: Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2006), xxiii, 44. Cf. Jacek Salij OP, *Rozmowy ze świętym Augustynem* (Poznań: W drodze, 1997), 29.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine, *The Nature of the Good*, iii.

<sup>32</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vols. 1-2, One/Thinking, Two/Willing (San Diego-New York-London: A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc., 1978), Vol. 2, 91. Cf. Stefan Świeżawski, *Dzieje europejskiej filozofii klasycznej* (Warszawa-Wrocław: PWN, 2000), 354.

also in non-being".<sup>33</sup> It can be observed here that the creature is born with some primordial, essential lack, the *natura nulla*, which always means nothingness, and with the need to make up for this lack, with the primordial need to acquire being/goodness. This lack, as lack of being, is pure nothingness and evil at the same time. The inclination to non-being was found by Augustine in the human soul and he considered it a cause of the corruption of human nature.<sup>34</sup> "It is nothing but the corruption of natural measure, form or order. What is called an evil nature is a corrupt nature. If it were not corrupt it would be good. But even when it is corrupted, so far as it remains a natural thing, it is good. It is bad only so far as it is corrupted".<sup>35</sup> But this corruption does not come from the essence of things, but from the disharmony between things. For Augustine recognizes that where there is measure, figure, and order, there is goodness, and where there is none, there is no good, so there is no nature. He also states that "evil has no existence except as a privation of good, down to that level which is altogether without being".<sup>36</sup> Nothingness, immanent in human being, as its imperfection (evil), seems to summon man, call upon him to replace it with something existing, which is indeed something good – some measure, figure and order.

Augustine explains it as follows: "For you [God – A.B.] evil does not exist at all, and not only for you but for your created universe, because there is nothing outside it which could break in and destroy the order which you have imposed upon it. But in the parts of the universe, there are certain elements which are thought evil because of a conflict of interest. These elements are congruous with other elements and as such are good, and are also good in themselves".<sup>37</sup> And further Augustine explains: "Of course it is possible that one nature even when corrupted may still be better than another nature which has remained uncorrupted, because the one has a superior, the other an inferior measure, form and order".<sup>38</sup> In conclusion, it can be said that God has endowed everything with a measure, form and order, and depending on the extent to which they have been realized in a particular being, we can speak of great or small good. Of course, all things are good, even those that have been corrupted, because in the corrupted ones the good is only diminished. Thus

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<sup>33</sup> Gilson, *Wprowadzenie do nauki świętego Augustyna*, 189–190 (own translation).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Agnieszka Kijewska, *Święty Augustyn* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 2007), 104.

<sup>35</sup> Augustine, *The Nature of the Good*, iv.

<sup>36</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 3, vii (12).

<sup>37</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 7, xiii (19).

<sup>38</sup> Idem, *The Nature of the Good*, v.

Augustine came to the thesis that the corruption of things is the lesser good, and that the loss of good is evil.<sup>39</sup>

In his treatise *On Order*, Augustine emphasizes that the cause of evil is by no means the order of God, “if for God to be just it is necessary that he judge between good and evil if here was no evil there would be no justice of God”.<sup>40</sup> This means that evil was born out of the order, but God, not indifferent to this disruption, brought it into the order of the universe. In the *Soliloquies* he will clearly say that God is the Creator of the best and most beautiful of worlds, and while he does not create the evil itself, “who doest no evil so that existence is good because it is thy work”.<sup>41</sup> So it turns out that the world in which evil is present is perfect and nothing of this perfection is taken away by evil. For disorder does not affect works created by God. God did not create evil, did not want it, and “God does not love evil. It would not be in order for Him to do so. He loves order so much that for its sake He does not love evil”.<sup>42</sup>

## V. Culpable and Inculpable Evil

During his long journey back to Africa, Augustine continued to discover the God he had chosen, and reading the *Psalms* reassured him in his choice of asceticism as the most appropriate way of life. In the *Confessions* we read: “I read ‘Be angry and sin not’. How was I moved, my God! I had already learnt to be angry with myself for the past, that I should not sin in future [...]. And I cried out loud when I acknowledged inwardly what I read in external words”.<sup>43</sup>

During this journey, still in the year of Augustine’s baptism, he experienced evil that was not the result of anyone’s choice, which was completely independent of him – his mother Monica died. This is how he describes this painful event: “I closed her eyes and an overwhelming grief welled into my heart and was about to flow forth in floods of tears. But at the same time under a powerful act of mental control my eyes held back the flood and dried it up. The inward struggle put me into great agony [...] my soul was wounded, and my life as it were torn to pieces, since my life and hers had become a single thing [...]. And because it caused me such sharp displeasure to see how much power these human frailties

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Miles Hollingworth, *Saint Augustine of Hippo: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 283.

<sup>40</sup> St. Augustine, *On Order (De Ordine)*, translation and introduction by Silvano Borusso (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustines Press: 2007), II, VIII, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Idem, *The Soliloquies*, I, I-2.

<sup>42</sup> Idem, *On Order*, I, VII, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 9, ii (10).

had over me, though they are a necessary part of the order we have to endure and are the lot of the human condition, there was another pain to put on top of my grief, and I was tortured by a twofold sadness".<sup>44</sup> Soon afterwards, Augustine lost his son Adeodate and his great friend Nebridius. Undoubtedly, these experiences inspired him to do more research on the phenomenon of evil.

Although Augustine knew already from reading St. Paul's writings that evil comes from human free will, it would be only 10 years after he was baptized that he would clearly indicate the will as the source of evil when writing: "Man [...] can sin and deny God, or he can choose not to do so. [...] The origin of sin is in the will; therefore in the will is also the origin of evil".<sup>45</sup> Yet Augustine saw two kinds of evil: evil, which man does not commit and to which he is subject against his own will as an entity created out of nothingness (death, pain, passions), and evil, which he commits himself and which is the result of an abuse of his will. In the latter case, he distinguished between the sins committed by people by giving in to passions and the evil (corruption) of the body as the punishment for the sin of the first man, which falls on every person in every generation.<sup>46</sup> But it is only in his great work *The City of God* that he will distinguish the essential lack of being in human nature as a result of *creatio ex nihilo* from its corruption, and then he will write: "For the corruption of the body, which is a burden on the soul, is not the cause but the punishment of Adam's first sin".<sup>47</sup> In *Of True Religion* he will clearly indicate sin as the cause of corruption.<sup>48</sup> According to Augustine, after a sin has been committed, both soul and body suffer, because the whole being has been damaged.

Thus evil does not come from the nature of things, but is the result of man's turning against the order established by God, his shifting from the supreme good to the lower good. As St. Augustine explains, "Defects are not mere relations to natures that are evil; they are evil in themselves because, contrary to the order of natures, there is a defection from Being

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<sup>44</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 9, xii (29–31).

<sup>45</sup> Idem, *Contra Faustum*, XXII, 22. <https://www.augustinus.it/links/inglese/opere.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> "Just as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners", Saint Paul, The Apostol, Romans, 5, 19, <https://www.catholic.org/>, access: 05.10.2020. "As it was by one man that death came", Saint Paul, The Apostol, 1 Corinthians 15, 21, ibidem. Cf. Ewa Podrez, "Problem zła z perspektywy metafizycznego optymizmu i pesymizmu (Rozważania o złu św. Augustyna i Artura Schopenhauera)", in: *Studia z dziejów filozofii zła*, ed. R. Wiśniewski (Toruń: UMK, 1999), 65.

<sup>47</sup> Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, Books VIII–XVI, transl. Gerald G. Walsh, S.J. and Grace Monahan, O.S.U. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), XIV, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. idem, *Of True Religion*, xii, 23.

that is supreme to some lesser being [...]. In a word, anyone who loves perversely the good of any nature whatsoever and even, perhaps, acquires this good makes himself bad by gaining something good and sad by losing something better".<sup>49</sup>

These reflections raised two important questions in Augustine. He formulated the first one in his *Confessions*: "Why then have I the power to will evil and to reject good?"<sup>50</sup> The second was uttered in the treatise *On Free Will*: "But I ask now whether our Maker ought to have given us free will seeing it is proved to be the source of our capacity to sin. If we had not had it, apparently we should not have sinned. It is to be feared that in this way God may be held to be the author of our ill-doing".<sup>51</sup>

St. Augustine already knew that it is man, his bad choices, who is responsible for evil, because the nothingness inherent in his nature, which calls for completion, can be supplemented by good or evil, depending on human choice. But he went on to ask: where does the will to do evil come from in man, and why does man choose evil rather than good, wishing for good after all? He solved these problems by studying in depth the *Letters* of Saint Paul, who put the conflict between "wanting" and "being able to" into a "category of two opposing laws". In the *Letter to the Romans*, Augustine read: "And really, I know of nothing good living in me – in my natural self, that is – for though the will to do what is good is in me, the power to do it is not [...]. So I find this rule: that for me, where I want to do nothing but good, evil is close at my side. In my inmost self I dearly love God's law, but I see that acting on my body there is a different law which battles against the law in my mind. So I am brought to be a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body. God – thanks be to him – through Jesus Christ our Lord. So it is that I myself with my mind obey the law of God, but in my disordered nature I obey the law of sin".<sup>52</sup>

Inspired by St. Paul's findings, Augustine confesses: "So my two wills, one old, the other new, one carnal, the other spiritual, were in conflict with one another, and their discord robbed my soul of all concentration".<sup>53</sup> This war of old/bodily and new/spiritual will, tearing Augustine's soul apart reflects the inner conflict of the soul between wanting and exercising that will.<sup>54</sup> However in his treatise *On Free Will*

<sup>49</sup> Idem, *The City of God*, Books VIII-XVI, XII, 8.

<sup>50</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 7, iii (5).

<sup>51</sup> Idem, *On Free Will*, in: idem, *Earlier Writings*, ed. and transl. by J. H. S. Burleigh (USA: Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2006), 1, xvi, 35.

<sup>52</sup> Romans 7, 18, 21–23, 25.

<sup>53</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, 8, v (10) 4.

<sup>54</sup> Attention should be drawn at this point to the 20<sup>th</sup> century concept of the conflict of desires of the first and second order of H.G. Frankfurter, which has been widely discussed and established permanently in the contemporary inquiry into the

he writes that “there is nothing so much in our power as is the will itself. For as soon as we will [*volumus*] immediately will [*voluntas*] is”,<sup>55</sup> but it turns out that the will by its own command cannot defeat itself and every “want” automatically does not involve “can”. Ultimately, Augustine would solve the problem of the conflict between “I want it” and “I can do it” a little later with the category of grace.

As for the question of why God gave man free will when he knew that it would be the cause of sin, Augustine argued in *On Free Will* that “Now if we allow that God gave it, ought we to say that he ought not to have given it?”<sup>56</sup> But he gave the gift of free will so that man could live morally, and choose and do good. An act committed without the free will “would be neither sinful nor righteous unless it were done voluntarily. For the same reason both punishment and reward would be unjust, if man did not have free will. But in punishing and in rewarding there must have been justice since justice is one of the good things which come from God”.<sup>57</sup>

## VI. Pride

After his return to Tagasta, Augustine decided to apply the principle of *deificari in otio*, but to his own great dissatisfaction he was ordained a priest and soon became a bishop. He had many pastoral responsibilities and had to start to address many issues concerning the theological formation of his faithful, as well as the issues revealed by reading the Holy Bible. He preached and wrote works on anthropology, Christology, ecclesiology, hamartiology, eschatology, mysticism, ascetics, and morality. The issue of evil had always been a matter of close interest to him.

Augustine was deeply convinced that the power of pastoral activity lies in the monastic life and, as Bishop of Hippo, he did not want to deprive himself of it. Bishop Augustine’s motto was: *praeesse est prodesse* and he treated the office as a service, not a privilege, so he looked at his own tendency to evil all the more closely. Among other things, despite numerous fasts, Augustine continued to attribute to himself the sin of gluttony, giving in to the pleasures of smell, hearing, seeing, and eating. This meticulousness in tracking his own submissiveness to pleasures reveals

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moral subject. It seems to find its source precisely in the Augustinian concept of the new and the old will. Cf. Harry G. Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, 1 (1971): 5–20; Jasper Hopkins, *Freedom of the Will: Parallels Between Frankfurt and Augustine* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 1994).

<sup>55</sup> Augustine, *On Free Will*, 3, iii, 7.

<sup>56</sup> Idem, *On Free Will*, 2, ii, 4. Cf. Salij OP, *Rozmowy ze świętym Augustynem*, 22.

<sup>57</sup> Idem, *On Free Will*, 2, ii, 3.

Augustine's growing sensitivity to the love of goods far away from the highest good. Ultimately, he wanted to restrain his senses so that the intellect could control them. We also learn from the *Confessions* that he saw a certain threat from philosophy, because the mind motivated by cognitive progress can fall into a vain pursuit of curiosity. Augustine also took up the fight against evil which he saw in his own love of fame, "I am poor and needy [...]. I am vexed with myself [...]" [writes Augustine – A.B.]. This is a temptation to me even when I reject it, because of the very fact that I am rejecting it. Often the contempt of vainglory becomes a source of even more vainglory. For it is not being scorned when the contempt is something one is proud of".<sup>58</sup> Fighting this last weakness seems to be an extremely difficult challenge for Augustine, who by virtue of his office has gained widespread recognition and popularity as Bishop of Hippo.

If one searches Bishop Augustine for some unconquered weakness, one should point out the deep need for friends. "Augustine needed the constant response and reassurance of a circle of friends: both to know that he was loved! and to know that there was someone worth loving, encouraged him greatly to love in return. [...] At this time, he found no difficulty in calling a friend 'half of my soul'".<sup>59</sup> Sometimes he let his loved ones compliment him. However, it was not just about the pleasure achieved from interacting with loved ones, but about realizing the idea of kinship in Adam. God created man to live in a community that was violated as a result of corruption and disagreement and division became commonplace among people. "The poignant sense of the need to regain some lost unity is perhaps the most distinctive strand in Augustine's mystique of the Catholic Church".<sup>60</sup>

This meticulousness in tracing all manifestations of evil led Augustine to discover that pride is its real source. He defined pride as the perversity of the will, as its tendency to transgress the order, to voluntarily turn away from God, to rely only on itself.<sup>61</sup> In his *Confessions* he writes: "I inquired what wickedness is; and I did not find a substance but a perversity of will twisted away from the highest substance, you O God, towards inferior things, rejecting its own inner life and swelling with external matter".<sup>62</sup> The sin of the first people was precisely most tragic in its consequential prideful turning away from God, who made

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<sup>58</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 10, xxxviii (63).

<sup>59</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography*, 195–196.

<sup>60</sup> Idem, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography*, 220.

<sup>61</sup> "There is a worse and more execrable kind of pride whereby one seeks the subterfuge of an excuse even when one's sin is manifest". Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, Books VIII–XVI, XIV, 14.

<sup>62</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 7, xvi (22).

a lasting change in human nature, introducing disorder into the divine harmony of creation – disturbing its perfect measure, order and form.

## VII. Rescue from Evil

In perfidy, Augustine saw an important aberration of human will, the irreversibility of the tragic act of pride that our forefathers had committed. Liberation from this fundamental evil, as Augustine assumed, is not in man's power and must come from outside, from God, the Creator of all good natures, in the form of his grace. He defined grace as "a set of all God's undeserved gifts, the purpose of which is to enable man to be saved in a state of decline", and "acting upon a tainted nature [it – A.B.] does not create God's work, but reconstructs it, reconstructing order and overcoming the disorder of which man is after all the only perpetrator".<sup>63</sup> Only God's grace overcomes sin and can repair corrupt nature and renew the soul. Grace, then, is "what gives the will the strength to want goodness or the strength to do it. Well, this double force is also defined as freedom".<sup>64</sup> Augustine strongly emphasized the thesis that free will was perfect only in the first man, while after original sin only the desire not to sin remained in man. He resolved the conflict between "I want it" and "I can do it" by resorting to the concept of God's grace and claiming that it is through grace that man regains his freedom lost in sin, and that the will subjected to grace is healed and becomes more free.<sup>65</sup>

Unfortunately, the granting of grace does not depend on human will or on seeking it, because God grants grace to whomsoever he wishes.<sup>66</sup> The question arises here, however, whether man can do anything to obtain it? According to Augustine, it is human duty is to fulfil the law (restraining the flesh) and to have faith (turning away from pride), but fulfilling these duties will not in any way influence God's decision about whom he grants grace to. "The law, i.e. the letter, has been given to us because we seek grace; grace, i.e. the spirit, because we keep the law: the first, by giving commands, is the cause of death; the second, coming to help, is the source of life".<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Gilson, *Wprowadzenie do nauki świętego Augustyna*, 198 (own translation). Cf. Agostino Trapé, *Święty Augustyn: człowiek, duszpasterz, mistyk*, 200.

<sup>64</sup> Gilson, *Wprowadzenie do nauki świętego Augustyna*, 206 (own translation).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, 209.

<sup>66</sup> "I am gracious to those to whom I am gracious and I take pity on those on whom I take pity". Holy Bible, Exodus 33, 19, <https://www.catholic.org/>, access: 05.10.2020.

<sup>67</sup> Agostino Trapé, *Święty Augustyn: człowiek, duszpasterz, mistyk*, 191 (own translation).



Living in faith and law is a challenge to the human will, which is why Augustine once again raised the theme of *liberum arbitrium*. Inspired by the dogma of the Trinity, in the work *The Trinity* he presented the concept of a triad of memory, intellect and will, "in fact though they are not only each contained by each, they are all contained by each as well. After all, I remember that I have memory and understanding and will, and I understand that I understand and will and remember, and I will that I will and remember and understand, and I remember my whole memory and understanding and will all together [...]. Likewise when I understand these three I understand the whole of them together".<sup>68</sup> The triad of memory-intellect-will is one being, one life, one soul. However, although its elements are inseparable, each of them has a different function. The intellect and memory are passive (contemplative), while the active will binds all the elements together.<sup>69</sup> Thus, it is the will, the active agent of the triad, that establishes subjective, spiritual unity. Moreover, since the function of the will is attention, it is the will that is responsible for which images of the sensual world will be remembered, which will be rejected and which of them will become the material for the intellect to understand. So it is the will that is the source of human action. In addition, the will is the only power of the mind that has contact with the outside world, which makes it the unifying factor between man and the world around him as an area in which human actions are carried out. The *liberum arbitrium* is thus responsible for the good and evil done by man.

The will, which by grace returns to the Creator again, is transformed into love. In this way the love of God, which was destroyed by sin, is renewed. Just as the will used to bind the intellect and memory together, so now love is a factor in the unity of human subjectivity – "[...] there are three: I myself, what I love, and love itself".<sup>70</sup> When the will ceases, the anxiety that torments the will ceases as well. Until then it was the active part of the memory-intellect-will triad, while love brings peace with itself, restores the soul's measure, form, and order and the love of God, the Source of all good that will destroy evil.

The question arises here: who should man love? Augustine provides the answer: "'Let no one say I don't know what to love'. Let him love his brother, and love that love; after all, he knows the love he loves with better than the brother he loves. There now, he can already have God better known to him than his brother, certainly better known because more present, better known because more inward to him, better known because more sure. Embrace love which is God, and embrace God with love".<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, XI 18, 327.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 99.

<sup>70</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, IX 1, 2, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Idem, *The Trinity*, VIII 5, 8, 12.

It turns out that it is love, as it has always been present in the human soul, that is the inner strength of man. It is the reason why all passions are born, which are “modulations of the only movement of love”. In *The City of God*, Augustine points out that rightly ordered love (*ordo amoris*) is a virtue, and a disordered one – a vice.<sup>72</sup> It turns out, therefore, that ultimately it is love that is the factor in the moral classification of human acts. “Only if it is true love does it deserve to be called love, otherwise it is covetousness; [...] True love then is that we should live justly by cleaving to the truth [...]”.<sup>73</sup> And in his characteristic, very personal way, Augustine continues to teach: “Come, see if you can, *O soul weighed down with the body that decays* and burdened with many and variable earthy thoughts, come see it if you can – God is truth. For it is written *that God is light* not such as these eyes see, but such as the mind sees when it hears ‘He is truth’. Do not ask what truth is; immediately a fog of bodily images and a cloud of fancies will get in your way and disturb the bright fair weather that burst on you the first instant when I said ‘truth’. Come, hold it in that first moment in which so to speak you caught a flash from the corner of your eye when the word ‘truth’ was spoken, stay there if you can. But you cannot; you slide back into these familiar and earthy things. And what weight is it, I ask, that drags you back but the bird-lime of greed for the dirty junk you have picked up on your wayward wanderings?”<sup>74</sup>

Augustine brought all human activity down to love, because only if man loves, will the Love save him from evil.

## VIII. Social Evil

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, never returned to Rome, but he never stopped loving Rome, either. When the troops of Magnus Maximus – the Emperor-Usurper from Britain – arrived at the borders of Italy, he did not allow the thought of a real threat to his beloved city, but he had to come to terms with the facts when Alaric I, the Visigothic king, conquered Rome. This fact intensified the aversion of his African citizens to Christianity, who blamed the followers of Christ for the fall of Rome. The conquest of Rome was a surprise and a shock to the Christians themselves, who believed in the eternity of the city. In view of this situation, Augustine proceeded to defend Christianity even more zealously – he encouraged others, urged them not to stand against the Gentiles, and directed everyone’s eyes to the promises of Christ. The tragic fall of Rome

<sup>72</sup> Cf. idem, *The City of God*, Books VIII-XVI, XV, 12.

<sup>73</sup> Idem, *The Trinity*, VIII, 5, 7, 10.

<sup>74</sup> Idem, *The Trinity*, VIII, 2, 2, 3.

motivated him to do even more intellectual work, which resulted in his greatest work, *The City of God*, where Augustine quoted numerous pieces of evidence to demonstrate the lack of connection between the fall of Rome and Christianity. This monumental work of Augustine describes the “intertwined and confused two states in the temporal world”, which will only be separated by the final judgment – the earthly state and the state of God, which “on earth is often received with disbelief and reluctance”, and which will provide the final peace.

In *The City of God*, Augustine addressed the Roman people directly, and he addressed them as “the people of Jerusalem *in spe*”: “Why, then, do not you Romans with your noble character, you sons of the Reguli, Scaevolae, Scipii, and Fabricii, let your hearts go out to these better things. Look at the difference between these things and the base arrogance and deceiving wickedness of the demons. However great and good your natural gifts may be, it takes true piety to make them pure and perfect; with impiety, they merely end in loss and pain. Choose now your course, not to seek glory in yourself, but to find it infallibly in the true God. At one time, you could enjoy the applause of your people, but by God’s mysterious providence the true religion was not there for you to choose. But, it is now day; awake as you awoke in the persons of those men in whose sterling virtue and sufferings for the faith we glory. They battled on all sides against hostile powers and, conquering by their fearless death, have purchased this country for us with their blood. To this Country we pleadingly invite you. Join its citizens, for it offers more than mere sanctuary, it offers the true remission of your sins. [...] Reach out now for the heavenly country. You will have very little to suffer for it, and in it you will reign in very truth, and forever. In that land there is no Vestal altar, no statue of Jupiter on the Capitol, but the one true God, who will not limit you in space or time, but will give an empire universal and eternal”.<sup>75</sup>

The fall of Rome was for Augustine an experience of the power of social evil, the disintegration of his world and the work of his whole life. He did not, however, consider the fall of Rome as his personal life drama, but rather sadly admitted that “his life falls on the sixth, last of the great ages-eras in the history of the world” and will no longer experience anything new. Deep down, however, despite the facts, he shared the faith of many in the indestructibility of Rome. He regarded this difficult time as a moment of trial in which “the Lord is building Jerusalem”.

Looking at Augustine’s life, one can see that he was given the experience of every kind of evil, and yet all human experience of the reality of the earthly world was considered by him to be a tangible goodness

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<sup>75</sup> Idem, *The City of God*, Books I-VII, transl. Demetrius B. Zema, S.J. and Gerald G. Walsh, S.J. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), II 29.

of God's gift.<sup>76</sup> Although God has now revealed himself as a strict Father, "the world reels under crushing blows, thl' old man is shaken out; the flesh is pressed, the spirit turns to clear flowing oil".<sup>77</sup> This quotation illustrates how Augustine was able to interpret even the greatest human drama in terms of Goodness.

However, he still had to experience the fall of the *pax romana* in Africa. At that time "tears flowed more often than usual and became his bread day and night; as he approached the end of his life, he immersed his own old age in bitterness and mourning more than others".<sup>78</sup> In his old age, Augustine's personal fears began to plague him. In his *Confessions*, he himself admits that the fear of death and the fear of God's judgment constantly filled his heart. For the Bishop of Hippo was convinced that on the day of Judgment he would bear responsibility not only for his own sins, but for the sins of the entire community formed by him.

## Conclusion

Under the influence of a polemic with Julian, Augustine returned to the *unde hoc malum* question for the last time. The fatigued old bishop considered his own suffering, too, in terms of the relationship between God and evil. His God is almighty, so is the cause of everything, but he is also a perfectly just God.<sup>79</sup> The misery of mankind as punishment for the sin committed by man at the beginning of his existence, and human suffering as an announcement of the horror of the Last Judgement, are the effects of an act of God's justice that most overwhelm man with horror. Yet Augustine refers to hope and, alongside the stream of evil that has manifested its power in ever newer forms throughout his life, he sees a second stream, full of light and abundant goods. "I have loved, o Lord, the beauty of thy house'. At any rate, from the kind of gifts which God gives, even amid the griefs of this present life, and to the good and wicked alike, we may conjecture, with His help, something of the greatness of that grace which, for lack of experience, we cannot properly put into words".<sup>80</sup>

The young man from Cassiciacum, convinced of the possibility of exposing the phenomenon of evil by means of the intellect, as time goes by

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Miles Hollingworth, *Saint Augustine of Hippo: An Intellectual Biography*, 21.

<sup>77</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography*, 292.

<sup>78</sup> Trapé, *Święty Augustyn: człowiek, duszpasterz, mistyk*, 309 (own translation).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *Against Julian*, transl. Matthew A. Schumacher, C.S.C. (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), V, 3, 14.

<sup>80</sup> Idem, *The City of God*, Books XVII-XXII, transl. Gerald G. Walsh, S.J. and Daniel J. Honan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), XXII 21.

understands himself less and less, becoming a wanderer who is permeated by a longing for unattainable perfection. He continues to be torn between good and evil and, aware of his helplessness in fighting evil, turns to God: "Therefore I lay bare my feelings towards you, by confessing to you my miseries and your mercies to us, so that the deliverance you have begun may be complete. So I may cease to be wretched in myself and may find happiness in you".<sup>81</sup> The struggle between good and evil will only end with the coming of the Last Judgment, but Augustine emphasized that it is a human task to remain on the path of goodness "shall not turn away until in that peace of this dearest mother, where are the firstfruits of my spirit and the source of my certainties, you gather all that I am from my dispersed and distorted state to reshape and strengthen me forever".<sup>82</sup> So it turns out that the reward for this long and hard struggle of man against evil is Jerusalem, the home of God, God himself, where he will regain his life.<sup>83</sup> Augustine calls: "My God, give me yourself, restore yourself to me. See, I love you, and if it is too little, let me love you more strongly. I can conceive no measure by which to know how far my love falls short of that which is enough to make my life run to your embraces, and not to turn away until it lies hidden 'in the secret place of your presence'. This alone I know: without you it is evil for me, not only in external things but within my being, and all my abundance which is other than my God is mere".<sup>84</sup> As for the phenomenon of evil, it has remained for Aurelius Augustine of Hippo forever hidden in mystery.

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<sup>81</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 11, i (1).

<sup>82</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 12, xvi (23).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. idem, *Confessions*, 12, xvi (23).

<sup>84</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 12, x (10).

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## Summary

The most disturbing issue that permeates all of Saint Augustine's works is the problem of existence, experiencing and inflicting evil. Giovanni Papini claims that Augustine himself, "before he found himself in finding God, [...] he had to exhaust the experience of evil to the very bottom" (Giovanni Papini, *Saint Augustine*, translated by Antonina Brzozowska, Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1958, 32). This remark redirects our thinking about Augustine's understanding of evil from the field of theoretical deliberations to the ground of examining his personal experience of evil, where his philosophical and theological thought seems to have its roots. For many years, Augustine suffered greatly from evil and inflicted it himself. A sense of persistence in falsehood and iniquity, observed by Augustine quite late, a few years before his death in 430 (if one can regard his *Confessions* as a testimony to this important moment) and his desire to know the truth about himself, motivated him to reflect on evil in depth. In the article we offer a look at the well-known problem of evil in the thought of Aurelius Augustine of Hippo in this very personal, experiential perspective.

**Keywords:** St. Augustine, evil, personal experience