

AUGUSTINE ON THE SIN OF ANGELS AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR SIN

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Abstract

The existence of the blessed angels and evil angels immediately prompts certain questions in our minds like: whether some were created blessed angels and others created evil angels? Whether evil is a thing created by God? How and why some angels sinned? What was the nature of the sin they committed? When did they sin? What was their status before they sinned? Is there a possibility of redemption for the fallen angels? Are the evil angels remorseful for their crimes? Did anything change in them after they sinned? Where are the evil angels now, if they are not in God's presence? These and many other questions come to our minds when we consider the issue of the rebellious angels. This work attempts to answer the above questions and other related matters concerning the sin of angels as treated by Augustine, using Augustine's thoughts on evil as a privation of good, the degree of good, the will and the abuse of the will and his actual treatment of the angelic sin.

Keywords: Angels, Creation, God, Augustine, Fallen Angels, Sin, Consequence of Sin, Pride.

Introduction

If God is almighty, omniscient, supreme Good, and He created all things angelic and mortal good, why then are there evil angels causing afflictions? Why are there wars, debilitating diseases, tragic losses, killing of innocent people, hunger, corruption, pandemics, injustice, oppression, murderers, rapists, racists, tyrants like: Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin, terrorists like: Osama Bin Laden and Boko-Haram and herdsmen killing innocent people in Nigeria? Why all these evils if God created all things good and why does He allow all these evils? These troubling questions were demonstrated in a survey conducted by Lee Strobel with the question: "If you could ask God only one question and you knew He

would give you an answer, what would you ask?" Approximately 17% of who participated in this survey asked the question: "Why are there [evil], pains and suffering in the world?" (Strobel 2000).

Augustine is no different from all those who question the origin and reason for the so much evil in the world. This question of evil preoccupied Augustine for a good part of his life. In the *Confessions*, Augustine related how he diligently pursued answers to his questions regarding evil:

"I anxiously sought the answer to the question, 'Where does evil come from?' How great were the pangs of my overflowing heart, what inward groans I had, my God! Yet even then Your ears were open to me, though I did not know it. When in silence I vehemently sought an answer, those silent sorrows of my soul were strong cries to Your mercy" (*Confessions* VII.5).

Despite his upbringing by a devoted Christian mother, Augustine in the early stage of his quest, viewed the Bible as providing unintelligible solutions to the problem of evil, particularly the Old Testament which seemed to only becloud the issues he was trying to solve. Augustine did not fancy Christianity as best fit to assist him in finding the answers he so desperately wanted so he turned to Manichaeism – a gnostic dualistic sect. Manichaeism was his top choice so he joined them because it was for him at this time the most "admirably plausible solution to a difficulty which appeared to [him] insoluble on the premises of orthodox Christianity: the problem of evil" (*On Free Choice of the Will*, XV).

For the Manicheans, evil is related to matter or body, and good is identified with spirit or soul. The angels have some kind of body, they are compound beings, and there is a kind of battle between the body and the spirit of the angels. Psalm 248 of the Manichaean Psalm-Book, "they [bodies and souls] have been enemies since the creation of the worlds" (Evans 1964). Being a Manichean, Augustine believed Good Principle and Evil Principle, both existing independent of each other. The Evil Principle is weaker: "I conceived two masses contrary to one another, both limited, but the evil narrower and the good more expansive. And from this harmful beginning, other sacrilegious conceits followed me" (*Confessions* VII.14). Augustine wanted more so he met with Faustus the Manichean leader but he did not satisfy Augustine's doubts.

Augustine left the Manicheans and turned to Neo-Platonism (Plotinus and Porphyry) which influenced Augustine's teaching on the sin of angels in

particular and evil in general. Neo-Platonism substituted the place of Manichaeism and became an intellectual flyover for Augustine from Manichaeism to Christianity, “they [Neo-Platonists] made clear to him [Augustine] that the problem of evil could be solved without having to recognize the existence of a positive, diabolical principle co-eternal with God” (*On Free Choice of the Will*, XXIV-V).

Neo-Platonism offered Augustine an alternative to the Manichaean dualism by claiming that evil exists not as an authentic being but as a privation of good. This Neo-Platonist’s axiom became fundamental in Augustine’s writings on evil generally and in particular, the sin and fall of the evil angels. Augustine borrowed Plotinus’ hierarchical order to explain his teaching on the degree of goodness (Ibid. XXVII). Augustine disagreed with the Platonic, the neo-Platonic, and the Gnostic/Manichaean doctrine that matter (body) is evil. All that God created is good, including matter (Hick 1977). This is the background that led to Augustine’s writings on evil in general and the evil angels in particular. This article will focus on the sin and fall of the evil angels.

How is it Possible for Angels that are Spiritual Beings to Sin?

Augustine holds that evil is not a being but the corruption of good in a being. God is the Supreme Being and the Supreme Good. If evil is the defection of good in a being, can there be evil in God? Augustine’s response to this question helps our understanding of evil in relation to God, and evil in relation to the angels. Augustine affirms that God is the highest good and this means that God’s Goodness is immutable, incorruptible, incapable of privation and eternal. All angelic creatures are good and their goodness is solely *from* God, but not *of* God, for the Goodness that is *of* God, is God Himself. Consequently, all angelic creatures are susceptible to mutability, corruption and privation of good because they are made not *of* Him but *from* nothing (*ex nihilo*), meaning every angelic creature can become evil but only God cannot become evil. Every celestial nature is good, their existence, the sustenance of their being and goodness is absolutely dependent, subordinate and participatory in the Supreme source of all goodness – God (*On the Nature of Good*, I). If the good in the angels is mutable then they can sin.

God created all good things whether great and small, all measures great and small, all forms great and small, all orders great and small. God is above every measure, every form, every order of created things; He, being above them is not by local spaces and heights, but by ineffable and singular actuality, from Him

every angelic measure, form, and order finds their meaning. These three things (measure, order and form), where they are great, there is a great good, where they are small, there is a small good and where they are diminished or corrupted, there is evil. And again, where these things are great, there is great nature, where they are small, there is small nature, where they are absent, and there is no nature. Therefore, all nature is good (Ibid. III). All angels whether good or evil have measure, form and order and this is what makes nature good. Evil is therefore the corruption of measure, form and order in the nature of the rebellious angels. The fall of the evil angels corrupted their measure, form and order – sin corrupted their nature (Ibid. IV).

The fallen angels who are rational spiritual beings, though they are corrupted in nature by measure, form and order are not inferior to irrational creatures like brutes (Ibid. V). All corruptible natures are so because they are *from* God and not *of* God, for what is of God is God himself. Therefore, every angelic measure, form, order, is susceptible because they were made *ex nihilo* (Ibid. X). No nature (created things), therefore, as far as it is nature, is evil. Evil is an injury on a nature, injury in the sense of the diminishing of good in a nature. The corruption of a nature does not mean there is no good in that nature, it is only diminished, and if the injury in the nature diminishes good to the extent that there is no good in the nature, then that nature does not exist because there is always some good in every nature. So, there is some degree of measure, form and order in the sinful angels – there is some good in the fallen angels (Ibid. XVII).

God said to Moses Magnificently and divinely "I am that I am," and "You shall say to the children of Israel, He who is sent me to you" (Exodus 3:14). God truly is because He is immutable. For the celestial change caused by God made the angels that were not to be. He truly is, who is unchangeable; but all angelic beings are made by Him, they received being from Him each in its own measure. To Him who is highest, nothing can be contrary in His nature and consequently, from Him every angelic being, good or evil have their being, so from Him is every angelic being exists by their nature; since every angel that exists by nature is good. Thus, every angelic nature by default is good, and everything good is from God. Therefore, angelic nature is from God (Ibid. XIX).

Augustine defined measure in nature as the size or degree of good in the nature of a being (Ibid. XXI). But God cannot be said to have a measure in His nature, that will mean He has limitations. Yet He bestows on all angels measure, so that they may in some measure exist. We cannot say God has measure, that will mean

He received it from another higher being. But if we must speak of God in relation to measure, we must say God is the highest measure, meaning that God is the highest Good. For every measure in so far as it is a measure it is good. We use measurement for limit, and we cannot speak of measurement where there is no limit – God, "And of His kingdom there shall be no limit" (Luke 1:33) (Ibid. XXII). The phrase *from Him* does not mean the same as *of Him*. For *from Him* are the angels, because He made them but not *of Him* because they are not of His substance. From God the angels are, through Him they are and in Him they are.

What was the Nature of the Angelic Sin?

The evil angels have fallen from grace and have sinned against God by turning their backs on God. What is the sin they committed? What is the nature of their sin? What happened? First, let us understand what sin is to Augustine. Sin is not the striving after evil nature (something evil) but the abandoning of something better (good), for the Scriptures: "Every creature of God is good." (1 Timothy 4:4) Every tree which God planted in the garden of Eden is assuredly good. Adam and Eve did not commit evil by eating fruit from the forbidden tree, but by deserting what was better, the commandment of God which they neglected made them commit an evil deed. God is better than any creature which He has made, His commands should not have been deserted. The tree is good and eating from the tree is good – if God wills it but eating from the tree against the command of God is what makes it evil. God did not plant an evil tree in the garden but He Himself was better who prohibited it from being eaten. Just like the instance of Adam and Eve's sin, it was the desertion of divine Will that made what the fallen angels did evil (Ibid. XXXIV).

It is foolish to blame any creature of God as being evil in itself, just like the one planted in the garden, it is not blameworthy but praiseworthy so also the angelic nature, the nature of the fallen angels which is not different from those of the blessed angels is not to be blamed. The angelic nature is good in their measure, form and order, and therefore praiseworthy. The evil angels sinned by refusing to worship God and attributed to themselves the worship and praise due to God. As stated earlier, sin is not the striving after an evil nature, but the desertion of a better nature (God), so the act of the sinner-angels apportioning to themselves what is due to God, is what is evil, and not the angelic nature of theirs which they used amiss. It is evil to use amiss that which is good (the angelic nature). Augustine referred to St Paul in driving home his argument "...they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than

the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen” (Romans 1:25). Their sin was to use their angelic nature which is good amiss by giving what is due to God to themselves, that was an abuse of their nature which should not be worshipped or chosen over the Supreme Good which is God (Ibid. XXXVI).

Augustine identified the first sin of the angels as pride (*The City of God against the Pagans*, xi.15). Though some church fathers had argued that their first sin was envy because the fallen angels were envious that humans were created in the image of God. Augustine holds that envy cannot precede pride but pride presupposes envy; pride is the mother of envy (*The Holy Virgin*, XXXI.31). This is the foundational reason for all the sins of the rebellious angels. Every transgression of the evil angels stems from their pride of putting their will's preferences in contrast to God's will for them. Sirach clearly expresses this:

“The beginning of man's [or angel's] pride is to depart from the Lord; his heart has forsaken his Maker. For the beginning of pride is sin, and the man [or angel] who clings to it pours out abominations. Therefore, the Lord brought upon them extraordinary afflictions, and destroyed them utterly” (Sirach 10-12-13).

God is supreme and He is subject to no other being. When the evil angels decided to subject their minds and wills not to God but themselves, they were making themselves subject to no one but themselves. These angelic creatures positioned themselves to be godlike, supreme, and divine. Their sin is the perverted imitation of God (*The City of God against the Pagans*, xi.12). They sinned by attempting to found their own angelic order, depart from the God's preferred angelic measure for them; they turned against their angelic form (Ibid. XII.8).

The angels were creatures whose first task was to love and be in God's presence, they are the intellectual light created on the first day, they are not the uncreated Wisdom but the created wisdom. Their pride led them to renounce the true source of love, they were selfishly in love with themselves, exalted their own might, and rebelled against their creator (*True Religion*, XIII.26). Augustine also made it clear that the sins of the angels in no way defiled God. For he says:

“[...] though all things that He established are in Him, those who sin do not defile Him, of whose wisdom it is said: 'She touches all things by reason of her purity, and nothing defiled assails her.' (Wisdom 7:24-25) For it behoves us to believe that as God is incorruptible and unchangeable, so also is He consequently undefilable” (*On the Nature of Good*, XXVIII).

The true cause of the blessedness of the good angels is in their cleaving to God who is supreme. The true cause of the misery of the evil angels is their forsaking of Him who is supreme, and they have turned to themselves who have no supreme essence. Pride is the name of their sin and action. They were unwilling to preserve their strength for God; adherence to God was the condition for their enjoying an ampler being, they diminished and corrupted the good in them by preferring themselves to Him. Abandoning God was their first defect, their first impoverishment, and the first flaw of their nature, which was created, not indeed supremely existent, but finding its blessedness in the enjoyment of God who is the Supreme Being. By abandoning God, they did not lose their nature entirely, but their nature was with a less ample existence, they became wretched (*The City of God*, XII.6).

Augustine viewed the sin of pride by the angels as an evaluation – specifically, a comparative evaluation of themselves as superior in relation to others including God. This prideful evaluative act is a cognitive and an affective stance towards their good – more exactly, that their good deserves them turning to themselves and not to any other being or good, this is a voluntary act. “There are many different goods from which a person selects what he wants: through seeing and grasping something for his enjoyment, he sets up the highest good for himself rightly and truly” (*On the Free Choice of the Will*, II.IX.27.108). Pride is having a *voluntas* directed towards oneself as the rebel angels did by turning away from God. This prideful self-love is morally objectionable and an expression of contempt for God” (*The City of God against the Pagans*, XIV.28). Whereas the good angels turned their wills to God, and so remained with a *voluntas* towards justice (*On the Free Choice of the Will*, II.V.15.55; III.V.16.59), the bad angels are made miserable by “this turning away from Him Who is the Highest and turning to themselves who are not the highest; what other name does this vice have but pride?” (*The City of God against the Pagans*, XII.6). The morally objectionable character of pride stems from apostasy, which is why pride is the first and the worst of all sins – a view Augustine holds by citing Sirach: “The beginning of pride is when one departs from (*apostatate*) God, and his heart is drawn away from Him Who made him; for pride is the beginning of all sin” (Sirach. 10:14-15).

Augustine identified the primary nature of the angelic sin as pride and envy, with pride giving birth to envy, he also identifies the secondary nature of the angelic sin as ignorance and lust. They were ignorant of the significance of their angelic duty, and they lusted after what is hurtful (self-love), and these brought in their train error and suffering, which, when they are felt to be imminent,

produce that shrinking of the mind known as fear. The attaining of their minds' desires, however hurtful or empty that may be – turning away from God, prevented them from ever perceiving their true angelic nature, for if they did perceived their nature, it is overborne by a diseased appetite, and so it was puffed up with a foolish joy. From these fountains of evil, which spring out of defect rather than superfluity, flows every form of misery that besets a rational angelic nature (*The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Charity*, XXIV).

What is the Origin of Evil in the Rebel Angels?

Augustine inquired, what causes the will of the fallen angels to do evil? If it is another will that forced them to sin against God, then they are not to be blamed for their sins but the will that compelled the fallen angels' will. But this is not the case, therefore, they sinned by their own freewill and their will is the origin of the evils they committed (Ibid. III.XVII.47–49). For Augustine, the angelic will determines the angels' actions, choices, and even their evil character traits and they are conscious of the consequences of the will's loves and desires. The will is thus better characterized as one's moral personality (Rist, 1972).

Augustine tried to differentiate the angelic sin from Adam and Eve's sin based on the circumstances of the angelic and human sins. Lucifer and the other fallen angels sinned without being tempted by another, they sinned spontaneously and the result of their deeds is eternal separation from God, with no chance of redemption (*The City of God against the Pagans*, XIII.26). Lucifer is the number one and foremost sinner among the evil angels, *primus omnium peccatorum* (*Letter*, CV.IV.13), the first of the angels to fall (*Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, III.VII). The sin of the other fallen angels is graded less severe in comparison to that of Lucifer, because they were somewhat lured by Lucifer but willingly rebelled against God. Unlike the evil angels' fate which was immediate and irrevocable after sin, humans' fate was redeemable. For Augustine, the reason for humans' redeemable fate is simply for the fact that Adam and Eve were lured into sin by the devil, even though they consented (*Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, XXI.23). Sinning without being tempted, mandated the angelic eternal damnation but the circumstances of human temptation created an opportunity for redemption in Christ (*On the Free Choice of the Will*, III.XXV.76). The element of temptation in the instance of the human sin explains the different divine reaction to the angelic and human fall. The angelic sin and the human sin resulted from pride, both angels and humans were conscious of their evaluative acts of

judgement before they sinned. Though of different natures, angels and humans committed the sin of pride.

The will is the cynosure of evil, Augustine says: “where the will becomes evil, this evil would not arise in it if the will itself were unwilling, and its defects are therefore justly punished, because they are not necessary, but voluntary” (*The City of God against the Pagans*, XII.8). The fallen angels never experienced the glory of God, it was in their natural state where they have to decide to turn to God and experience the beatific vision or turn to themselves and be eternally separated from God, which they decided to turn to themselves and fell from light to darkness (TeSelle, Eugene 1970). From the above statement, Augustine maybe making some controversial claims which sounds Pelagian in nature; that is the good act of the angelic will is somewhat not based on God’s help which is grace. But this is a notion of will which he condemned that no creature angelic or human can make itself better without God’s aid. Still further, Augustine attributes the angelic act of good will to God making His grace available to the angels so that they will choose to turn to him from the first moment of their being. If all the angels received God’s grace at their creation why did some turn to God and others sinned? Augustine answered that “the fallen angels, therefore, . . . received less of the grace of the divine love than those who remained steadfast in the same love . . . [who] were more amply aided by God” (*The City of God against the Pagans*, XII.9). If this is the case, Augustine is suggesting, if not accusing God of deciding which angel will turn to Him and which angel will turn against Him. It may be better to suggest that, they all received God’s grace in equal measure and while some decided to make proper use of the will and grace received from God, others simply abused the will and grace they received. Augustine is simply implying the evil angels were predestined to fall from the beginning (Wiebe, 2015).

Concerning the efficient cause of the evil will of the fallen angels, Augustine answered that there is no efficient cause, but deficient, as the evil will itself is not an effecting of something, but a defect. The defection results from turning away from God who is supreme, to lesser beings (themselves) who are not supreme – this is the origin of an evil will. To investigate the causes of these defections is like looking to see darkness, or hear silence. Though we know what darkness and silence are not by their actuality but by the privation of light and sound. Therefore, it is senseless to inquire of those things which cannot be known by their actuality. We only know darkness and silence as a result of the absence of light and sound, so also, we can talk of the deficient cause of the evil will of the

fallen angels because of the privation of an efficient cause. Our mind perceives intelligible forms by understanding them, but when they are deficient, our minds know them by not knowing them; for “*who can understand defects?*” (*The City of God*, XII.7).

What are the Effects of the Angelic Sin?

The sin of the angels brought about certain changes in those fallen angels. Their sins corrupted the measure, the form, and the order that belong to their nature. The corrupted nature is called evil, and the uncorrupted nature is called good insofar as the nature is not corrupted; but when it is corrupted, it is evil (*On the Nature of Good*, IV). Sin corrupted the rationality of the angels and this is as a result of not obeying the Lord their God in order to keep enjoying the beauty of their rationality. The angelic sin does not only effect corruption, but also serve as punishment for their sins. God is the supreme Good and it does not go well for anyone who deserts Him, and among the things made by God the rational nature is so great a good, that there is no good by which it may be blessed except God. The sinner-angels are punished because their disobedience to God is not conformable to their rational nature, but the punishment and suffering they face is justice and conformable to their fault (Ibid. VII).

Augustine suggested that pain can be both bodily and mental, and that pain is a special kind of evil, which cannot exist except in good natures. The angels’ sin which is the resistance of the supreme Being necessarily leads to pain in the sinner-angels, this pain is as a result of their refusal to being what they are or what they are meant to be which is good beings. This pain which is eternal, serves them no useful purposes. Augustine pushes the effects of sin in the angels further when he alluded to the fact that facing the pain of a corrupted nature without feeling the pain is worst. For instance, a wound with pain is better than a painless putrescent wound. So, corrupting their intellect and will without knowing the value of what they have lost is worse than knowing the value and the extent of their loss. It is just like someone who does not have a knowledge about a thing but knows he or she does not know anything about that thing, this person is better than someone who does not know and the person does not know that he or she does not know. A body putrefies only because there is something good still left in the body that can decay, for if there is nothing good left then there can be no putrefaction, so also in the evil angels they are putrefying because there is some good left in their nature; if there is no good left in their nature as a result of sin which leads to corruption then they will cease to be but

that is not the case. They still exist because sin does not putrefy all the good in the sinner-angels but a larger part of the good in their nature (Ibid. XX).

Another damage of the sins of the angels on themselves is what Augustine called a bad measure, a bad form, and a bad order. This is so called because they have become less than they should be, or because they are not adapted to those things to which they should be adapted; so that they may be called bad as being alien and incongruous. By bad measure, Augustine means the fallen angels have done things less than they ought to, or have done things the way they ought not have done, or more than they should have, or in a way not convenient. By the damage of sin which resulted in the bad form of the sinner angels, Augustine means that their form is bad when compared with the form of the blessed angels which is more handsome or more beautiful. This corrupted form that is lesser to that of the blessed angels is not in size but in comeliness. A bad form is out of harmony when applied to the appropriate form fitting for angelic nature, a bad form is alien and unsuitable for angelic nature. A bad order is called so because it is inferior or has failed to maintain its natural angelic degree or it is not what it is meant to be. Yet where there is any measure, any form, any order, there is some good and some nature; but where there is no measure, no form, and no order, there is no good, no nature. There is some measure, some form and some order in the sinner-angels therefore there is some nature though not as it should be in them (Ibid. XXIII).

The sin of the angels cost them their divine given mission of helping and leading mortals to God. Augustine says that contrary to some who believe that there are good and bad demons and that one who follows a good demon can be with God after lifetime on earth is not true. No fallen angel is good and any following of the sinner-angels lead human not close to God but far away from God. These fallen angels already lost their mission of leading humans back to God as a result of their sin (*The City of God*, IX.2).

For Augustine, the angelic mind has a higher and a lower part. The lower part of the mind is plagued by emotional passions like – fear, anger, lust, and all other similar affections. The higher part of the mind which is rational is used by the angels to control the whole mind to avoid the higher part of the mind being plagued by emotions found in the lower part of the mind. The sin of the bad angels affected the upper part of the evil angels' mind and they cannot act rational but are overwhelmed with emotions. They are enslaved by their emotions, subjected to vices, and are not free to act in wisdom that leads to

purity and the necessity to leading mortals to God. The corruption of their minds by passion only makes them more intent on deceiving and seducing humans, in proportion to the mental force and energy of desire they possess (Ibid. IX.6).

The angels fell from the presence of God as a result of their sin into the sublunary region of the universe, they fell from the tranquillity in heaven to turbulence of the lower world surrounded by air: "For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgment" (2 Peter 2:4) (*The Christian Combat*, V.5). Augustine suggested that the demons have bodies that are aerial in nature (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, III.X.14). Before the rebel angels fell, their habitation was in the celestial realm. It was their pride that sentenced them to the misty atmosphere below. The nature of this realm's air is that it is saturated with vapour when you stirred it, it becomes windy when you agitate it, the air can lighten and thunder violently, when you gather it in mass it becomes cloudy, it rains when it is condensed, when the clouds of this air are chilled it snows, the air hails when it's thick clouds are tightly frozen, and a clear sky when rarefied. All angels have celestial bodies but at the fall of the bad angels, they lost the celestial nature of their body, and their current body is aerial in nature and fitting for the punishment of fire which they deserve. Their current region occupied by them which is misty serves as some sort of prison house for them, in keeping with their nature, until the Day of Judgment (Ibid III.X.14-15).

What is the Purpose of the Angelic Fall?

Augustine proposed that God's nature cannot suffer harm, and no creature under God can suffer harm unjustly unless he permits it. When rational creatures, angelic or human, sin and harm themselves and others as a result of their sins, it is only God who permits the harm resulting from the sin and the extent of the harm (*On the Nature of Good*, XI). If this is the case, why does God allow these creatures, angelic or human, whom He loves so much to sin and then permit the harm of sin they do to themselves? Augustine's reply to this question answers the question we most times ask "Why God who knows all things (including the fall of the angels) created them knowing they will fall?" For Augustine, the angelic privation of the sinner-angels does not in any way distort the order of the universe or God's plan rather it makes for appreciation of beauty and order, though this is not so evident, for many see it as vicissitude. Augustine explained his point by using this example:

“For by not illuminating certain places and times, God has also made the darkness as fittingly as the day. For if we by restraining the voice fittingly interpose silence in speaking, how much more does He, as the perfect framer of all things, fittingly make privations of things [angels]? Whence also in the hymn of the three children, light and darkness alike praise God, (Daniel 3:72) that is, bring forth praise in the hearts of those who well consider” (Ibid. XVI).

God makes good use of the evil deeds of sinner-angels. It is the responsibility of all angelic creatures to guard their measure, form, and order, to avoid their nature from being corrupted with sin. But God stops none of them if anyone so wish to misuse the good given to them against the will of God. God knows how to order the righteous angels and even the unrighteous ones; so that if they themselves through the iniquity of their will should misuse the good God gave them, through God’s righteous power, He uses their evil deeds, rightly so, to punish those angels who have perversely ordained themselves to sins (Ibid. XXXVII).

God permitted the evil of the fallen angels only in the justice of His judgment. And surely all that is just is good. Although, the angelic sin in so far as it is concerned is evil and it is not good; yet the fact that evil as well as good exists, is a good. For if it were not good that evil should exist, its existence would not be permitted by the omnipotent God, who without doubt can easily refuse to permit what He does not wish, so as to bring about what He does wish. And if we do not believe this, the very first sentence of our creed is endangered, where we profess to believe in God the Father Almighty. For He is not truly called Almighty if He cannot do whatsoever He pleases, or if the power of His almighty will is hindered by the will of any creature whatsoever (*The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Charity*, XLVI).

Did The Rebel Angels Enjoy Blessedness Before Falling?

The question of whether the rebel angels ever experienced the divine blessedness, and Augustine’s response gives a clue into Augustine’s theology about the state of the angels before they were either punished (evil angels) or rewarded (good angels). To begin, none of the angels were created evil, all of God’s creation is good. So, the-now evil angels were created good; Augustine refer to the angels as light (*The City of God*, XI.7). The divine intent of their

creation was not for them to do or live whatever way they wanted, they were created to be enlightened that they might live wisely and blessedly (Ibid. XI.11). Augustine seems to suggest that they experienced the divine blessedness and but had not yet secured it, by this statement “Some of them, having turned away from this light, have not won this wise and blessed life, which is certainly eternal” (Ibid.). The sinner-angels fell away from blessedness before they could secure it, for securing it means to be eternally blessed and they are not eternally blessed. The fall means they still have good in them and the light and wisdom in them is eternally beclouded with darkness and foolishness and this they are doomed to eternally experience. Another question that may arise, is to what extent did they participate in the divine light before they fell and did they participate to the extent of the angels that are now eternally blessed? To the first part of the question regarding the extent of their participation, Augustine says it is hard to tell, though their participation was mild in his work *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* he seems to hold that the evil angels fell at the moment of their creation so they barely participated in the divine blessedness.

“Yet as soon as [they were] made [they] turned away from the light of truth, swollen with pride and corrupted by delight in [their] own power. Accordingly, [they] did not taste the sweetness of the happy angelic life. Surely [they] did not receive it and turn up [their] nose at it; rather, being unwilling to receive it, [they] turned [their] back on it and lost it” (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, XI.XXIII.30).

To the second part of the question, he argued that the extent of participation of the fallen and blessed angels are not equal. For if they had equally participated in this true knowledge, then the evil angels would have remained eternally blessed equally with the good, because they were equally expectant of being eternally with God in His presence (Ibid.). That the rebel angels will live eternally is not the same as blessedness. Augustine says:

“For, though a life be never so long, it cannot be truly called eternal if it is destined to have an end; for it is called life inasmuch as it is lived, but eternal because it has no end. Wherefore, although everything eternal is not therefore blessed (for hell-fire is eternal), yet if no life can be truly and perfectly blessed except it be eternal, the life of these angels was not blessed, for it was doomed to end, and therefore not eternal, whether they knew it or not” (Ibid.).

Did the Sinner-Angels have Foreknowledge about Their Fall and the Consequences?

This is a complicated discussion that I suppose Augustine did not answer but presented conflicting views. In the *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Augustine argued that immediately after the creation of the angels, the evil angels turned away from the light of truth, due to their swollen pride and malicious delight in their own power and because of this, they did not have a taste of the sweetness of the happy angelic life (Ibid. XI.XVI.21, XI.XXIII.30). For Augustine, the blessed angelic life is that of eternal happiness and the knowledge of the “foreverness” of this life, but the fallen angels never had this blessed angelic life, therefore the rebel angels did not know of their fall beforehand and the consequences of their fall (*The City of God against the Pagans*, XI.13).

In *The City of God*, Augustine’s opinion about this current subject of discussion seems to conflict with his thoughts on this subject in the *Literal Meaning of Genesis* which we just examined in the forgone above paragraph. In *The City of God*, he said: “... they were enlightened that they might live wisely and blessedly. Some of them, having turned away from this light, have not won this wise and blessed life, which is certainly eternal, and accompanied with the sure confidence of its eternity [...]. But who can determine to what extent they were partakers of that wisdom before they fell?” (*The City of God*, XI.11). In this quotation, Augustine seems to argue that they somewhat experienced the blessed life but did not secure or win it and they were not aware of their fall or the effects of their future fall before it happened. One thing that has been consistent in his argument so far is that the fallen angels had no foreknowledge of their fall neither did they have the knowledge of the consequences of the fall.

The next conflict sparked by Augustine in this discussion is whether all the angels were not aware of the future fall or only the fallen angels were not in the know of the future rebellion. He says that, if they knew they were going to fall, the anticipation of their fall would cause them sadness knowing their current exalted status will not last but will be replaced with eternal damnation. They were not sad in their state of exalted status, therefore, they did not know (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, XI.XVII.22). If none of them knew that they will not have this blessed eternity forever, then none of them could actually be said to have been happy because of the uncertainty of their future. What if those to-be blessed angels knew they will secure eternal life beforehand and the future sinner-angels did not know that they will fall. An idea like this will show

injustice, partiality and treatment of some angels better than the other even before the fall of the evil angels (Ibid. XI.XIX.26). It is difficult to maintain that only some angels knew of the future rebellion (*The City of God against the Pagans*, XI.13).

Augustine rightly acknowledges the conflicting ideas he was floating and he confesses that he does not know what the right answer is. (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, XI.XXV.33) Peter King in his article *Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin*, attempted to proffer a solution to this problem on behalf of Augustine by saying that no single angel had knowledge about their future status after their creation. He argued further:

“[Immediately after their creation was] the very moment when they could exercise their freedom to turn their wills as they pleased; those who kept their wills directed to God were rewarded with both eternal happiness and knowledge of their eternal happiness, whereas those who did not were damned [...] and ever after, the good angels are assured of their happiness, and the bad angels were not – as Augustine says, they turned their back on the gift of eternal happiness and so lost it, never having received it” (King 2012).

The little issue with Peter King’s suggested solution is that Augustine suggested in *The City of God* as we have seen above that the angels actually experienced in some little measure the light before turning away from the light, though he cannot tell to what extent they enjoyed it. What can we say is the solution suggested by Augustine that maybe more plausible? In book 11 of *The City of God*, Augustine holds the idea that all the angels participated in the light but the participation was not equal:

“And how shall we say that they participated in it equally with those who through it are truly and fully blessed, resting in a true certainty of eternal felicity? For if they had equally participated in this true knowledge, then the evil angels would have remained eternally blessed equally with the good, because they were equally expectant of it [...] In the one case fear, in the other ignorance, prevented them from being blessed. And even if their ignorance was not so great as to breed in them a wholly false expectation, but left them wavering in uncertainty whether their good would be eternal or would some time terminate, this very doubt concerning so grand a destiny was incompatible with the plenitude of blessedness which we believe the holy angels enjoyed.”

Let us attempt to proffer a solution to this problem, I do not claim that this solution perfectly solves the problem. Let us hold Augustine's idea that all the angels participated in the light at some point before some fell but that they did not participate in the light equally. By equality we do not mean that some were more in the light than others in terms of blessedness but the inequality is in their will. While the future good angels turned their will to God who is the true Light while participating in the light by first turning inwardly to themselves to see their goodness (evening) and then turned to God and saw God's Goodness (morning) and in admiration of God cleaved to Him expecting to be elevated (knowledge), the others who will become the future devils while still in the light looked at the goodness in themselves (evening) and they admired the goodness in themselves and berated others' goodness (night) including God's. This is what makes the participation unequal and resulted to their fall (What they did is what made the participation unequal). Augustine also mentioned the issue of ignorance, let us suggest that all of the angels were ignorant of the future (though even the future blessed angels were not saddened by uncertainty of the future but were happy in admiration of God's Goodness) but only the fallen angels were ignorant of the fact that the goodness they so much admire in themselves could be sustained only if they do not turn away from the true Light. This ignorance was not caused by God but it is the result of their pride that blinded them to the reality of the source of their goodness which is God. Therefore, the unequal participation and the ignorance they experienced were self-inflicted by their will and decisions. After all, Augustine identified their first issue as pride giving birth to envy (*The City of God against the Pagans*, XIV.28), and their secondary issue as ignorance and lust (*The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Charity*, XXIV).

Conclusion

The question at the beginning of this article about the existence of evil in the world and why God allowed evil in the world, I suppose has been answered by Augustine in his treatment of the fall of the evil angels. Evil is not a thing but the absence of good. It is the misuse of the good will and other good things God has created. God is not responsible for the evils in the world but the sinner-angels and humans are responsible.

During the course of this piece of work certain questions in our minds have been taken care of. We now know why it was possible for the angels to sin. Though they are good, they are mutably good and owing to the fact of their

changeability, the good in them could be corrupted by evil; only God is immutable and incorruptible and incapable of being harmed by evil. The evil angels sinned of their own accord, they were proud of themselves and viewed themselves as above everyone else including God. This pride led them to envy, ignorance, short sightedness, fear, lust, doubts and errors which eventually culminated in a gigantic fall from their so admired graciousness to utter misery. From one moment of having so much and being light to having nothing and being darkness.

The consequences of their rebellious deeds tarnished the good in them, they fell from the superlunary realm to the sublunary sphere and they are incapable of true love, humility, virtue and selflessness. Augustine identified the similarity and dissimilarity between the angelic sin and the human sin. The similarity in both the angelic and human sin is pride and ill love of the self. A disregard for the Will of God and a superior regard for personal will results in the self-destructive consequences of sin. The dissimilarity is that the angels were not tempted, they sinned spontaneously while humans were tempted by the devil to sin and for Augustine, this is the reason why human get a chance for redemption and the angels do not.

Lastly, the events surrounding the fall of the sinful angels cannot be fully and adequately explained by anyone, lots of questions may still be left unanswered, some explanations may not be satisfying enough and our little contribution to some difficulties on this subject may not be the best but this is a scholarly work open to improvement and further examination.

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