Chapter 1

Augustine's Early Works

Before *Free Will*

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We will divide Augustine's writings into three categories: the early works, the middle works, and the later works. These divisions represent significant shifts in his theology. The early writings reflect his optimistic view of human nature and his belief in conditional election—the belief that God chose who to save based on his foreknowledge of human faith. His initial understanding of the interaction between free choice and grace is based on the principle that humans can either assent to God's gracious offer of salvation or refuse his gift.[1] The middle writings send theological rumblings through Western Christianity, when Augustine rejects foreknown faith as the basis for election and proposes a doctrine of divine predestination.[2] Yet, he also says the will is called congruently, so that it remains free to either assent to or dissent from grace's call. The later writings set off more shockwaves, as Augustine adopts a darker understanding of man's bondage to sin to deal with the rising tide of Pelagianism. He comes to believe, "No one can delight in the law of God except when God directly arouse the affections."[3] This leads him to posit grace as the cause of the will's assent and to deny the theory of free will he had proposed in his early works. We will look carefully at important works from each of these three periods to discern how Augustine modified his views both within each period and between the periods.

1. TeSelle, "Engaging Scripture," 26.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

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The early works reflect his theological battles against the Manichees, a deterministic Gnostic group. These works have fewer scriptural references than his later works, though they are deeply theological. His desire to know God had inspired his involvement with the Manichees, the skeptics, and the Neo-Platonists. He was already asking important questions about God, evil, and the nature of the soul in these works. Neo-Platonism, which helped him to break with the Manichees, led him to envision Christianity as the fulfillment of Platonism. He was convinced that if the great Platonists had been alive in his day, they would certainly have become Christians. His optimistic opinion of the harmony between Christianity and Platonism eventually faded, but the influence of Neo-Platonic writers like Porphyry and Plotinus remained to the end of his life.

Augustine expresses a strong commitment to free will in his early writings. In *Catholic and Manichean Ways of Life*, he says, rational souls that have fallen away from God still, "possess that immense power of free choice."[4] Throughout his early works he clearly sees free choice as an "immense power," which even fallen humanity possesses. Free choice allows humans to decide whether they will love God or worldly things. It allows them to choose their own character and eternal destiny. Much of his early writing is dedicated to proving free choice of the will to the deterministic Manichees.

In *True Religion*, Augustine insists the rational soul has the capability to contemplate eternal things and obtain eternal life, though it must be helped in this pursuit by grace and "personal illumination" from God.[5] All have the "power to participate in the grace of God," and by choosing to either accept or reject grace, "everyone voluntarily makes himself corn or chaff."[6] The wicked are those who fall away from God by "voluntary defect,"[7] that is, they do so freely of their own choice. For Augustine, sin must be voluntary, since, "one either has to deny that a sin has been committed or to confess that it has been committed willingly."[8] If "sin overtook a man against his will, like a fever, the penalty which follows the

4. Augustine, *Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life*, 7.9.
5. Augustine, *True Religion*, 2.3.
6. Ibid., 6.10.
7. Ibid., 11.21.
8. Ibid., 14.27.

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sinner and is called condemnation would rightly seem to be unjust. But in fact sin is so much a voluntary evil that it is not sin at all unless it is voluntary."[9] He concludes, "Therefore, it is by the will that sin is committed. And since there is no doubt that sins are committed, I cannot see that it can be doubted that souls have free choice in willing. God judged that men would serve him better if they served him freely. That could not be so if they served him by necessity and not by free will."[10]

Thus, according to Augustine, "free will" or "free choice in willing" demands freedom from necessity. When Satan persuaded Adam to sin, Adam's will had to freely consent to Satan's persuasion. "If he had consented by necessity," says Augustine, "he would have been held guilty of no sin."[11] Freedom from necessity remains in Adam's offspring, as well, since "he [God] has given to all the possibility to be good, and has given to all the power to abide in the good as far as they would or could."[12] For Augustine, the will's freedom to choose what it will love, without any necessity being imposed upon it, is essential both for moral responsibility for sin and for the capability to be in a relationship with God, which is characterized by love rather than obligation.

At the end of his life, Augustine wrote a summary of all his works called, *Retractations*, which is Latin for "reconsiderations." In this work he commented on each of his previous works and sometimes revised or reinterpreted them. These revisions reflect his mature theology, not his early theology, but they are important to consider alongside the early works because they show us how Augustine reinterpreted his early works in his later years. In the *Retractations* chapter on *True Religion*, Augustine attempts to reinterpret his statement, "Sin is so voluntary an evil that it is by no means sin if it is not voluntary."[13] By the time he wrote *Retractations*, Augustine believed Adam's descendants sinned necessarily, which in *True Religion*, was the opposite of voluntary. He proposes a revised definition of "voluntary," suggesting that even necessary sins might still be called "voluntary," since they "cannot be committed entirely without the will."[14]

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., 14.28.
12. Ibid., 55.113.
13. Ibid., 14.27.
14. Augustine, *Retractations*, 1.12.5.

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The man who is overtaken by sin, "like a fever," can now be justly condemned for that sin because "he yields to concupiscence voluntarily, and, therefore, does only what he wills."[15] Even "original sin in infants, for they do not as yet use free choice of the will, is not improperly called voluntary," he claims, because it was inherited from the first evil will, which did sin voluntarily.[16]

While we may admire Augustine's rhetorical skill with words, many find fault with this drastic redefinition of "voluntary." In *True Religion* "voluntary" means something that one is free to do or not do; to will or not will. It means being free from necessity and having legitimate choice between possibilities. In *Retractations* it simply means any act committed with the will, whether the will was free from necessity or not. Voluntary acts of the will no longer require a free will.

Modern philosophers distinguish between "first-order" and "second-order" volitions of the will to describe the distinction Augustine is making in *Retractations*. In first-order volitions, the will directs some faculty of the body to act. In second-order volitions, the will defines itself. It judges between conflicting first-order volitions and decides whether to say "Yes" or "No" to them. In *True Religion*, both first-order and second-order volitions must be free from obligation or necessity of any kind. In *Retractations*, second-order volitions are overcome and enslaved by lust and have lost the power to choose between good and evil and can only choose evil. Though this means second-order volitions are no longer free, Augustine insists the will remains free and moral responsibility is upheld as long as first-order volitions are free. Sinners compelled by a gun to their head are not considered "free" because their first-order volitions are compelled. However, sinners whose second-order volitions are compelled or necessary are still considered "free." This dramatic shift from an emphasis on the will's freedom to choose what it will love to the acceptance of a predetermined will, which lacks the power to choose what it will love, but is free to act according to the will it has been given, gives us a glimpse of the changes we will see in Augustine's later works. It also helps us to define what we are looking for in his early works. We need to carefully observe what second-order freedoms he ascribes to the will, that is, how free the will is to define itself by choosing what it will love and

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.

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desire. We will also want to understand how he justifies removing these second-order freedoms and accepts the substantially inferior freedom of action as his definition of voluntary willing.

Free Will

Augustine's work entitled *Free Will* offers the clearest presentation of his early doctrines of election, grace, and the will, prior to the seismic shift that occurs when he writes *To Simplician*. Book 1 begins with Augustine's student, Evodius, asking whether God is the cause of evil. Many students of philosophy have wondered, with Evodius, why a good God would allow evil in the world. Some have concluded that God is the author of evil because he is the creator. Augustine seeks to absolve God of responsibility for moral evil by distinguishing between two types of evil: "the evil a man has done, and the evil he has suffered."[17] "God is not the author of the evil a man does," though he may, at times, cause the evil a man suffers, such as natural catastrophes.[18] When Evodius asks who the author of evil not attributed to God is, Augustine insists there is no single author. "Every man is the author of his evil deeds."[19] This is the primary thesis of *Free Will*, as Augustine seeks to prove that God is not the author of the evil men do. Through the voluntary use of his free will, every man is the author of his own evil deeds.

Evodius asks if there is a "cause" of evil doing. Is there something we can blame for our evil deeds? Augustine recommends they first discuss "what doing evil is."[20] Evil is not just an action, he says, but it is also the lust or desire that motivates the action. The wise man uses his mind, reason, or spirit to rule over these desires, which sets him above the beasts who simply act on their strongest desires.[21] "Nothing makes the mind a companion of cupidity [lust], except its own will and free choice."[22] Nothing forces the will "to abandon virtue or to collapse its life into lust."[23]

17. Augustine, *Free Will*, 1.1.1.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., 1.3.6.
21. Ibid., 1.9.19.
22. Ibid., 1.11.21.
23. Babcock, "Sin, Penalty, and the Responsibility of the Soul," 226.

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Otherwise, sin would be necessary and not culpable. The free will possesses the power to choose whether it will assent to evil impulses or resist them, which means there is no "cause" for man's doing evil but his own choices.

Fallen man exists in a world "dominated by lust," which Augustine calls a penal condition.[24] Evodius understands why Adam is justly punished with this penal condition, since he willingly chose to fall away from God, but he wonders how we, who have never "deserted the fortress of virtue and chosen servitude to lust," can be said to endure this condition deservedly.[25] It is essential to note that most of what follows in the first two books of *Free Will* is Augustine's answer to this question, not a study of Adam's primal condition before the first sin, as he alleges in book 3.

Augustine begins his response by asking Evodius if he has a will. When Evodius wavers, Augustine tells him he would be unable to learn, pursue wisdom, have real friendships, or even be happy if he did not have a will.[26] Evodius admits he has a will, so Augustine asks him if it is a "good will," which "desires to live rightly."[27] When Evodius says it is, Augustine makes some vital remarks, "You see, then, I imagine, that it is in the power of our will to enjoy or to be without so great and so true a good. For what is so completely within the power of the will as the will itself? Whoever has a good will has something which is far better than all earthly realms and all bodily pleasures. Whoever does not have it, lacks that which is more excellent than all the goods which are not in our power, and yet he can have it by willing it simply."[28]

In this critical passage, Augustine establishes that one of the essential characteristics of the will is its power to choose its own disposition. The morally responsible will is free to choose whether it wishes to be a good will or a bad will. "For what is so completely within the power of the will as the will itself?" Nothing is so completely within the power of the will as its freedom to choose its own moral disposition. T. Kermit Scott instructs, "The good will is, for Augustine, the very paradigm of that which is in our power, because it is the one thing that cannot possibly fail to be in our

24. Augustine, *Free Will*, 1.11.22.
25. Ibid., 1.12.23–24.
26. Ibid., 1.12.25.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 1.12.26.

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power."[29] The point Augustine is making is that fallen man rightly suffers under the dominion of lust, because he does not exercise his power to will to be good. The penal condition he faces after Adam's sin does not annul his ability "to love the good will and hold it in high esteem."[30] When he chooses to not do this, he becomes enslaved to lust.

Augustine's use of the expressions, "we who have never deserted the fortress of virtue" and, "even if we have never been wise formerly," indicate that he is describing the condition of fallen man, who retains power to choose his own character, even in his fallen state. If he chooses to "love and embrace this good will," says Augustine, then virtue dwells in his soul.[31] Evodius rejoices, "I find I can so quickly and so easily obtain so great a good [the good will]."[32] Obviously, he understood their discussion to be about men like himself, not the unique case of Adam. The punishment for Adam's sin makes it more difficult for us to choose good, but it does not render that choice impossible.

Against Manichean determinism, Augustine is arguing that moral responsibility requires that each individual's being good or evil be the consequence of his own free choices. Morally responsible choice must be voluntary, though it may occur in an environment influenced by lust. John Burnaby claims *Free Will* established the ethical point of view, "no action is sin for which the agent cannot be held personally responsible."[33] The will is morally responsible specifically because it is not forced toward any choice, but has "power" to choose between moral alternatives. This power of choice does not mean there are no influences upon the will as it makes its choice, but it does mean these influences do not necessitate any particular choice. Augustine rightly asks, "For what is so completely within the power of the will as the will itself?"[34]

Augustine contends there are two types of men in the world: those who love and pursue eternal things and those who love and pursue temporal things. He concludes book 1 with the important summary, "What each one chooses to pursue and embrace is within the power of his will to

29. Scott, *Augustine*, 161.
30. Augustine, *Free Will*, 1.13.28.
31. Ibid., 1.13.29.
32. Ibid.
33. Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, 186.
34. Augustine, *Free Will*, 1.12.26.

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determine. Will alone can drive the mind from the seat of authority and from the right course."[35] This completes their inquiry into "what doing evil means." It is nothing but the will's choice to neglect the eternal and good in order to pursue the temporal and evil. Evodius agrees, "all sins are included in this one class."[36] All sins are voluntary choices of the will. Evodius thinks they have also been successful in answering their second question, "What is the cause of evil doing"? His answer is, "we do it by the free choice of our will."[37] That is to say, there is no cause, external or internal, that is prior to willing and compels the free choice of the will in any direction.

This affirmation of the fallen will's free choice in willing includes the power to choose between good and evil. This is important to note, because in book 3 Augustine will assert that Adam alone had this freedom. He will contend that Adam's descendants lost this freedom after Adam's sin. Babcock rejects this reversal, claiming Augustine's chief aim in writing *Free Will* was to prove to the Manichees, "we are ourselves the fully responsible authors of evil that we do, that our exercise of moral agency in this regard is undiminished and unimpaired . . . The vindication of God, therefore requires a vindication of unimpaired human moral agency in willing and doing of evil."[38] In book 1 of *Free Will*, Augustine insists that the power of free choice exists in Adam and all his descendants, that it must reflect voluntary and uncaused willing, and that it must include choice between good and evil alternatives.

Book 1 ends and book 2 begins with Evodius asking why God gave man free will, since "our sinning is due to it." Since man would not have been able to sin without free will, he wants to know why God gave us "free choice in willing."[39] Augustine agrees man could not have sinned without free will, but says he could not have lived rightly without it either.[40] Man is good "because he can live aright if he chooses to do so."[41] "The will was free not only to live aright but also to sin," writes Augustine.[42] Free will

35. Ibid., 1.16.34
36. Ibid., 1.16.35.
37. Ibid., 1.16.34.
38. Babcock, "Responsibility," 225–6.
39. Augustine, *Free Will*, 2.1.1.
40. Ibid., 2.1.3.
41. Ibid., 2.1.2.
42. Ibid., 2.1.3.

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means freedom to choose either moral alternative. Because either choice is possible, we are rightly held morally responsible for our choice. When God judges a sinner, he will ask him, "Why did you not use your free will for the purpose for which I gave it to you, that is, in order to do right"?[43] Free will was given to man so he could choose right, but this freedom also makes it possible for him to choose evil. Augustine concludes, "God, therefore, must have given and ought to have given man free will."[44] It is this power of choice and self-determination which makes it possible for us to live either praiseworthy or blameworthy lives.

Evodius accepts that free will should have been given to man, but wonders why God did not give it in such a way that it could have only been used rightly.[45] This is a fascinating proposal because it is essentially the notion of "free will" that Augustine adopts in his later works. The question leads to a long discussion comparing God's "greater" goods with "intermediate" and "lesser" goods. The will is labeled an "intermediate" good because it can be used for good or evil.[46] Its "aversion" or "conversion," that is, its choice to love unchangeable good or temporal things, must be voluntary and not coerced.[47] Book 2 concludes with Augustine's declaration, "Because that defective movement is voluntary, it is placed within our power. If you fear it, all you have to do is simply not to will it. If you do not will it, it will not exist."[48]

His rejection of the premise that the will should have been given so that it could only be used rightly reaffirms Augustine's conviction that morally responsible choice may not be caused in any way. The good or evil movement of the will must come from the will's own choice and not any causal influence. Free choice of the will provides a sense of security related to our own character and destiny. Augustine asks, "What can be more secure than to live a life where nothing can happen to you which you did not will?" In a world filled with fatalistic fear, he recognizes that moral responsibility is only logical in a world that is neither causally

43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 2.2.4.
46. Ibid., 2.18.47.
47. Ibid., 2.18.51—19.53.
48. Ibid., 2.20.54.

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determined or arbitrary. We have the assurance that our eternal destinies will be just in light of our free choices.

At the start of book 3, Evodius repeats the question he posed at the conclusion of book 2, "What is the cause of the movement of the will when it turns from the immutable to the mutable good"?[49] In other words, what causes the will to turn away from God to love lesser things? In book 2, Augustine declared that this defective movement must be voluntary, but Evodius wants to be sure he understands exactly what Augustine means by "voluntary" movement which is "within our power." "Because if free will is so given that it has that movement by nature," Evodius argues, "it turns of necessity to mutable goods; and no blame attaches where nature and necessity prevail."[50] Augustine does not disagree with Evodius's statement that "natural" or "necessary" movement is not culpable. In fact, he chides, "you ought to have no doubt that it was not given in that fashion."[51]

Augustine then uses the illustration of a stone which has been thrown and is falling downward to demonstrate the distinction he makes between "natural" movement and "voluntary" movement. He asks if the stone's falling movement is "the motion of the stone"? Evodius admits that it is, but urges that it is the stone's "natural" movement, for which the stone cannot be blamed because it "is compelled by the necessity of its own nature."[52] He further argues that the soul's movement cannot be "natural," like the stone, or it would not be culpable. Augustine wonders why Evodius still doubts this truth and reminds him of their previous discovery, "that the mind can become the slave of lust only by its own will." It cannot be compelled by anything. "If that movement is accounted blameworthy," he states emphatically, "it is not natural but voluntary." What distinguishes these two is "that it is not in the power of the stone to arrest its downward motion."[53] Therefore its movement is natural and not voluntary. The will, on the other hand, is able to stop its downward movement toward sin and evil, so its movement is voluntary.

Augustine is establishing the vital principle that any movement of the soul, which the will is powerless to stop from happening, cannot be

49. Ibid., 3.1.1.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., 3.1.2.
53. Ibid.

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called voluntary. Moral responsibility exists only if the will is capable of dissent. Natural inclinations that necessitate the will's movement in a certain direction are not voluntary and do not deserve blame or reward. Augustine then applies this key principle to their own lives, saying, "all useful learning in this matter has its object and value in teaching us to condemn and restrain that movement, and to convert our wills from falling."[54] His use of the personal pronouns "us" and "our," shows that the wills he is discussing are the wills of fallen men, like he and Evodius. Fallen man is only morally responsible for voluntary sin, that is, sin which is not natural, necessary, or that he cannot stop.

This principle is again applied to fallen man in the next paragraph, when Evodius sums up their findings with the immensely important statement, "I know nothing I could call my own if the will by which I will 'yea' or 'nay' is not my own."[55] Evodius has captured the essence of free will in Augustine's early works in this testimonial. The will is the fundamental aspect of the soul where we define our personhood. We choose what we will love and pursue. We set values and priorities and chart the course of our lives. If my "Yes" or "No" at this level of choice is causally determined by nature, punishment, or any other cause, then it is difficult to understand how these choices represent me or my will. I also bear no moral responsibility for choices that are not my own. *Free Will* states unequivocally that the will is not my own if I do not have the power to say "Yes" or "No" to these most fundamental choices.

Some philosophers consider a person to have free will, so long as they are able to act according to the will they have, even if they are not free to choose what that will is. Augustine takes this position in his later works. However, in *Free Will*, the will itself must be free to choose its own loves and desires or it cannot be called "my own." Evodius goes on to say, "unless the movement of the will towards this or that object is voluntary and within our power, a man would not be praiseworthy when he turns to the higher objects nor blameworthy when he turns to the lower objects, using his will like a hinge."[56] There is no moral responsibility for choices of the will which are not voluntary and within our power.

54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., 3.1.3.
56. Ibid.

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Evodius has identified two key aspects of the will's role in shaping our personhood. First, I must have the power to say "Yes" or "No" to what my will loves or it will not represent my personhood. Second, the will functions "like a hinge," which swings between alternate choices before deciding whether to say "Yes" or "No." Some scholars deny that Augustine ever taught the principle of alternate choice, but it appears evident in the passage above. It is hard to understand how a hinge would be an appropriate image of choice that could only swing in one direction. On the other hand, the hinge is an ideal way to illustrate the principle of choice between alternate possibilities. These two factors are especially important because the question under consideration in *Free Will* is, "What is the cause of the movement of the will"? Augustine is insisting there is no prior cause of the will's movement toward either evil or good. Free from any determining causes, the will considers alternative loves and chooses whether to say "Yes" or "No" to them.

Book 3 of *Free Will* argues against the possibility that corrupted human nature is the cause of evil willing. The will opens the door for the corruption of the nature and not vice versa. "If a nature is corrupted by another's fault and not by its own, it is unjust to blame it,"[57] says Augustine. A virtuous man's nature cannot be corrupted, "unless it is willing to be corrupted. If it is willing, the corruption starts with its own vice and not with the vice of the other."[58] These statements disavow the notion that fallen man's nature has been corrupted by Adam's sin. The corruption of our nature must start with our own voluntary choice and not the vice of another.

Then, even after a nature allows itself to be corrupted by sin, it still retains significant freedom of choice. Augustine asks, "what debt sinful nature owes"? His answer is, "Right action," because "From God it [sinful nature] received the power to act rightly when it would. From him also it received the alternatives, misery if it acts unrighteously, happiness if it acts righteously."[59] Augustine is describing the "sinful nature" of fallen man, not the condition of Adam and Eve before the fall. He says this sinful nature maintains the power to choose good and act righteously. "There is no guilt if they are what they are because they did not receive

57. Ibid., 3.13.38.
58. Ibid., 3.14.39.
59. Ibid., 3.15.43.

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power to have an ampler existence."[60] "No man is guilty because he has not received this or that power," says Augustine, "But because he does not do as he ought he is justly held guilty. Obligation arises if he has received free will and sufficient power."[61] Guilt and moral obligation require the power to choose good. "Because they have the power to be good there is guilt if they will not,"[62] Augustine concludes. If the will is incapacitated so that it cannot will good, then it sins necessarily and is not guilty of sin. Augustine writes succinctly, "If 'oughtness' depends upon what has been given, and if man has been so made that he sins by necessity, then he ought to sin. So when he sins he does what he ought. But it is wicked to speak like that. No man's nature compels him to sin, nor does any other nature . . . He sinned in that he did something voluntarily . . . So, if no one is compelled to sin either by his own nature or by another, it remains that he sins by his own will."[63]

It would be hard to state his conclusions any more clearly than, "No man's nature compels him to sin, nor does any other nature." In case the point is missed, however, Augustine entreats, "But what cause of willing can there be that is prior to willing"?[64] He answers, "Either, then, will is itself the first cause of sin, or the first cause is without sin. Now sin is rightly imputed only to that which sins, nor is it rightly imputed unless it sins voluntarily."[65] "Whatever be the cause of willing," he continues, "if it cannot be resisted no sin results from yielding to it."[66] Then, for emphasis he reiterates, no one "commits sin in doing what there was no means avoiding."[67] In the strongest language possible, Augustine has underscored the absolute necessity for the will to be able to say "Yes" or "No" to sin. Being free to only say "Yes," removes obligation, guilt, and moral responsibility because sin cannot be resisted or avoided.

At the end of book 3, we find a dramatic shift in Augustine's understanding of man's fallen condition. Many scholars believe this portion of *Free Will* was written several years after he wrote the previous sections.

60. Ibid., 3.15.44.
61. Ibid. 3.15.45.
62. Ibid., 3.15.44.
63. Ibid., 3.16.46.
64. Ibid. 3.17.49.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid., 3.18.50.
67. Ibid.

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Chadwick claims *Free Will* was authored over a period of six or seven years.[68] Babcock asserts that during the seven years he was writing *Free Will*, "Augustine's thinking on moral agency underwent developments that put his own claims at risk."[69] Robert Evans contends, the dialogue in the three books of *Free Will*, "is a work that is at unity neither with itself nor with the later and more developed theology of its author."[70] The discontinuity becomes most evident near the end of book 3, when Augustine claims the freedom he has been describing previously in *Free Will* was only found in man as he was created. Fallen man, he says, "has not the freedom of will to choose to do what he ought to do or fulfill it when he will."[71] He is beset by ignorance and difficulty, which were "not in the nature of man as he was made, but are the penalties of man who has been condemned."[72] Pointing to Paul's struggle with sin in Rom. 7:18–19, Augustine explains, "Wrong things are done by necessity when a man wills to do right and has not the power."[73] Fallen man, he concludes, "is not good, nor is it in his power to become good."[74] Free will was lost because Adam was unwilling to use it properly when he could.[75]

Augustine's elimination of fallen man's freedom to do good is a reversal of his early teaching. His contention, "the freedom of the will to do right" he had been discussing was intended only to apply to Adam's condition before the fall, seems disingenuous considering how frequently his previous discussions ascribed this freedom to the "sinful nature," "any man," and "every man." In fact, some of his most important teachings on the will's freedom to do good in book 1 revolved around those "who certainly are foolish and were never wise." This is a reference to fallen man and the conclusions he reached ought to be applied to fallen man. He and Evodius certainly applied their conclusions to their own wills on several occasions. Babcock believes that Augustine is attempting "to

68. Chadwick, *Augustine: Short Introduction*, 40.
69. Babcock, "Responsibility," 227.
70. Evans, *Pelagius*, 86.
71. Augustine, *Free Will*, 3.18.52.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid., 3.18.51.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., 3.18.52.

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draw the consequences of his new position"[76] and reinterpret his previous statements.

What led Augustine to make such a radical change? Some scholars propose it was a consequence of his debate with Fortunatus in 392.[77] On the first day of this debate, Augustine firmly insists, "someone who is forced by necessity to do something does not sin."[78] On the second day he repeats, "I say there is no sin if we do not sin by our own will, and for this reason there is also a reward, because we act rightly by our own will."[79] However, when Fortunatus quotes Romans 7 to show man is sometimes incapable of doing what he wills, Augustine retreats to the position, "free choice of the will existed in the man who was first created . . . But after he sinned by free will, we who are descended from his stock were cast down into necessity."[80]

Babcock says, Augustine gives habit (*consuetudo*) "the force of necessity" for the first time in this debate and consequently from now on he has to restrict the exercise of the free will to the first man.[81] Yet, as Babcock notes, this absence of free will is the result of "habit" or continued practice of sin. Through habitual sinning, man becomes enslaved to sin and loses his free will. Augustine argues in this debate, that necessity comes only after man has yielded to sin by "free choice." Habitual yielding to sin leads to necessity, but we do not sin necessarily from birth. Before we become entangled in a sinful habit, Augustine asserts, "we have in our actions the free choice of doing or not doing something."[82] The free choice of doing or not doing something is the freedom to say "Yes" or "No" to good or evil alternatives. Without this freedom there is no moral choice. This freedom can be surrendered by a habitually yielding to sin, but as a result of free choice. His contention in book 3 of *Free Will*, that fallen man has lost freedom of will to choose to do good, appears to be more radical than the position he defended in the *Debate with Fortunatus*.

76. Babcock, "Responsibility," 228.
77. Ibid., 229.
78. Augustine, *Debate with Fortunatus*, 17.
79. Ibid., 21.
80. Ibid., 22.
81. Babcock, "Moral Agency," 39–40.
82. Augustine, *Fortunatus*, 22.

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Wetzel comments on Augustine's radical change, when he writes, "A more dramatic departure from book 1 of *De libero arbitrio* (*Free Will*) could hardly be imagined."[83] Just prior to introducing this twist in book 3, Augustine had demanded, "But what cause of willing can there be which is prior to willing"? His answer was, "Either, then, will is itself the first cause of sin, or the first cause is without sin."[84] He was adamant, "Whatever be the cause of willing, if it cannot be resisted no sin results from yielding."[85] If original sin has now become the "cause" of all sin which follows the primal sin, then Adam's sin alone will meet the criteria to be called "sin."

Augustine quickly responds to objections, "They say: If Adam and Eve sinned, what have we miserable creatures done to deserve to be born in the darkness of ignorance and in the toils of difficulty?"[86] His opponents appear to be asking a question similar to what Evodius asked in book 1, but Augustine's response is dramatically different this time around. His initial reply is a caustic, "Keep quiet and stop murmuring against God."[87] However, he then admits his opponents might have a valid complaint, if man had been left in this condition without any aid available. Man is not guilty because of his penal condition, he says, but rather because he refuses to avail himself of the aid that is available to him in this penal state.[88] He assures us that God is willing to heal all who will humbly accept his aid, "But if any of Adam's race should be willing to turn to God, and so overcome that punishment which had been merited by the original turning away from God, it was fitting not only that he should not be hindered, but that he should also receive divine aid. In this way also the Creator showed how easily man might have retained, if he had so willed, the nature with which he was created, because his offspring had power to transcend that in which he was born."[89]

In this passage, fallen man is not totally incapacitated by sin, but has power to overcome his penal condition by willing to turn to God

83. Wetzel, *Virtue*, 397.
84. Augustine, *Free Will*, 3.17.49.
85. Ibid., 3.18.50.
86. Ibid., 3.19.53.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid., 3.20.55.

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and accept his aid. Babcock explains, "ignorance and difficulty do not unjustly burden the soul, so that even in our impaired condition, we retain a restricted, but not negligible, capacity for moral agency."[90] He believes Augustine carved out a narrow, but crucial area of moral agency for fallen man in *Free Will*, though he concedes that Augustine eventually discards this position.[91]

The end of book 3 clarifies Augustine's evolving view of the relationship between grace and free will prior to the writing of *To Simplician*. By claiming the "freedom of the will to do right" belonged only to Adam, he clearly disavows the Pelagian view of the will, which claimed the fallen will was unaffected by Adam's sin. Yet, he does not negate all freedom of choice for the fallen will. It sometimes lacks knowledge of what is right, but it remains free to seek that knowledge. It is able to will what is good, though it may lack the power to do the good it wills. Ultimately, the fallen will retains the power to choose to be a good will or a bad will, as Augustine had taught in book 1. Even at the end of book 3, he says, sinful souls have the "natural power" to discern wisdom from error and seek good things.[92] Though born in ignorance and difficulty, they are under no necessity to remain in that state.[93]

Augustine's denial of the "freedom of the will to do right" in Adam's descendants is not yet a denial of all freedom to will the good, but only the denial of unrestrained freedom. The fallen will remains free to exercise its choice between good and evil, even under the penal influences of difficulty and ignorance. These penalties impede the freedom to choose good, but they do not eliminate it. Augustine also denies original guilt on numerous occasions, saying the blame for these penal conditions, "is ascribed neither to the souls nor to their Creator."[94] He assures us ignorance and difficulty are only the starting point for the soul's progress. The freedom to choose to progress remains in the power of the will, "for the capacity to do so is not denied to it."[95] Three times, he says, this penal condition is "natural" to man, then insists that "no one rightly blames him for

90. Babcock, "Responsibility," 230.
91. Ibid.
92. Augustine, *Free Will*, 3.20.56.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid., 3.20.57.
95. Ibid., 3.22.64.

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the natural condition from which he started."[96] As in the first two books of *Free Will*, there is no moral responsibility for "natural" or "necessary" sin, so the will must retain power to will good and say "No" to sin.

Augustine has increased his emphasis on the fallen will's need for grace. It is unable to overcome ignorance and difficulty without this aid. But he assures his readers that grace will be given, "if it [the will] makes a good use of what it has received. It has received the power to seek diligently and piously if it will."[97] He even praises God for having given the fallen soul "so good a start" and "so much dignity as to put within its power the capacity to grow towards happiness if it will."[98] He summarizes, "So man has imposed on him a penalty which was corrective rather than destructive."[99]

It is important to note what Augustine has not done at the end of book 3. He has not eliminated the fallen will's freedom to turn to God to receive grace. He has not ascribed to the will the total subservience to sin or the penal guilt that we see him professing in his later works. Carol Harrison comments, "human beings are not held guilty for Adam's sin, even though they justly suffer the punishment for it, but they are guilty if they fail to confess their weakness humbly and to acknowledge their absolute helplessness, ignorance and need for God's healing grace."[100]

If fallen man does not acknowledge his need for grace, he will be overcome by ignorance and difficulty, and will become enslaved to sin. On the other hand, if he humbly accepts God's grace, he will find God's healing power freely available to him.[101] The choice between these two alternatives remains in the power of the will, which retains the essential powers of assent and dissent. That is, it has the freedom of choice to say "Yes" or "No" to its own sinful inclinations, as well as to God's offer of grace.

In *Retractations*, Augustine explains "grace" was only mentioned in passing, but not defended by laborious reasoning in *Free Will*, because

96. Ibid.
97. Ibid., 3.22.65.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid., 3.25.76.
100. Harrison, *Rethinking*, 218.
101. Ibid., 223.

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it was not the subject under discussion.[102] He also notes that he did not explain in *Free Will*, the way God prepares the wills of his elect. While he admits to his many statements about the voluntary nature of sin and his requirement that nothing can be the cause of the will, in *Retractations*, he contends these statements are only true of the will "freed by the grace of God."[103] He acknowledges having written that intermediate goods, like the will, can be used "not only rightly, but also wrongly," but reminds us he also wrote, "The virtues by which man lives rightly are great goods," which cannot be used wrongly.[104]

In this last statement, he is claiming to have taught that the ability to use the will rightly was a virtue which came only as a gift of God. This claim appears inconsistent with the way he presented both the will and virtue in *Free Will*. The quote he presents came in his response to Evodius' suggestion that the free will should have been given in such a way that it could only be used rightly. Augustine clearly disagreed with Evodius' suggestion and insisted the "aversion" or "conversion" of the will must be voluntary and not coerced.[105] The will's movement toward good or evil has to be a voluntary movement. On virtue, he taught, "A man is made virtuous by regulating his soul according to the rules and guiding lights of the virtues."[106] He also taught, "The will . . . obtains man's first and best good things [like virtue] though it is itself only an intermediate good."[107] Finally, he claims, "If we love and embrace this good will, those virtues . . . which together constitute right and honourable living, dwell in our souls."[108] Virtue is described as a guiding light for the will's choices. It is a goal to be obtained by the will's choices. It is never described as the force that drives or motivates the will's choices. Augustine disallowed this type of causal influence on the will, so that it could only be used rightly, when he responded to Evodius' proposition that God should have made the will this way. He insisted that the will's movements toward either good or evil must be voluntary and not coerced by any cause, internal or external.[109]

102. Augustine, *Retractations*, 1.8.2.
103. Ibid., 1.8.2–3.
104. Ibid., 1.8.4.
105. Augustine, *Free Will*, 2.18.51–19.53.
106. Ibid., 2.18.52.
107. Ibid., 2.18.53.
108. Ibid., 1.13.29.
109. Ibid., 2.13.47.

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