Examine why Augustine and Plantinga both considered the problem of evil as a primary challenge to the rationality of Christian belief. Does Plantinga's Free Will Defence constitute an effective development of the arguments presented by Augustine?

Augustine is said to have returned "*again and again, over a period of nearly half a century*"[1] to the problem of evil" and is credited with clearly defining the problem regardless of whether he is finally considered to have successfully answered it[2]. Plantinga described the problem of evil as "*the most impressive argument of natural atheology*"[3] and is credited by Sennett as offering "*easily the most sophisticated version*"[4] of the defensive strategy that is said to have originated with Augustine. This essay describes first in general terms the aspects of the problem of evil that both men had perceived were so problematic for philosophical theology. It then proceeds to describe Augustine's and Plantinga's approaches to the problem of evil and evaluates whether his claim to be presenting an Augustinian argument is justified. In final conclusion, it evaluates whether his argument is an effective support to the rationality of Christian belief.

Firstly, what needs immediate clarification is precisely what is understood by the term "evil". Theologians and philosophers have historically been forced to give evil "*a very wide signification*"[5] where evil is not construed just in terms of metaphysical, moral or spiritual evil[6] which may initially appear to be the instinctive

[1] G.R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1984(1982)), pviii
[2] G.R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1984(1982)), pviii
[3] Alvin Plantinga, *God and other minds – A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*, 1990 paperback edition with new preface (New York, Cornell University Press: 1990(1967), p115
[4] James F Sennett, *Modality, Probability, and Rationality – A Critical Examination of Alvin Plantinga's Philosophy* (New York, Peter Lang: 1992), p53
[5] Marilyn McCord Adams, Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford, OUP: 1990), p1
[6] John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 2nd edition(London, Macmillan:1977), p38

conception of evil to the theologian. Some of the most aggressive and the most rigorous challenges to theistic belief, have come in terms of considering the intrinsic "evil" character of creation in the sense of natural catastrophes and the cruelty visible within nature which is then seen to reflect on the physical weakness of God in relation to the creation. This is then interpolated to inform us of the moral weakness of God in relation to the creation. It is thus not possible to separate the spiritual, moral and physical aspects of evil in any non-trivial fashion for the philosophical theologian. It plunges straight to the heart of the rationality problem of the belief system as this artificial segmentation of the problem produces inadequate solutions.

In this respect, Plantinga's primary emphasis is on rigorously establishing the "*intellectual or rational acceptability of Christian belief…what is common to the great creeds…classical Christian belief, as we might call it*."[7] Plantinga explicitly stands rationally in opposition to at once the atheologists and also rationally confronts radical reinterpretations of Christianity that "*transcend the historical order*" [8], favouring a demythologised, non-supernatural Christianity[9]. Augustine is explicitly singled out by Plantinga as practising Christian philosophy "*with distinction*" and identifies himself as "*broadly Augustinian*"[10]. This means both men intensely and directly dealt with the problem of evil as a rational problem for the coherence of the Christian kerygma. For this reason, this essay concentrates on the *logical* argument

[7] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York, Oxford University Press: 2000), pvii
[8] Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York: 1958), p12
[9] Bultmann (1958), p21
[10] https://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/plantinga_alvin/augustinian_christian_philosophy.pdf, accessed 02/06/2015, p1

for evil (LAE) rather than the probabilistic argument where the FWD can only be applied in an abstract and perhaps unconvincing manner[11].

In brief, the *logical* argument asserts that there is a logical inconsistency between the propositions *God exists* and *There is evil*. . Although the AE generally is associated first with Epicurus (341-271 BCE) who is credited with "*arguing against the notion that the world is under the providential care of a loving deity by pointing out the manifold suffering in the world*"[12] it was with Hume that the classic statement of both forms of the argument is found on the lips of Philo in Parts X and XI of his *Dialogues*[13]. Hume's analysis of part X was the basis of a plethora of philosophers who considered it a terminus to the argument asserting there was a fundamental irrationality to theistic belief as ably enumerated by Pike in his seminal critique[14]. The significance of the argument of part XI is considered separately in a later section for it is the arguments of part X that deal with the logic of evil. Hume's arguments as tidied by these scholars may be stated thus:

> *Proposition* 1: God exists, is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good.
>
> Can this be consistent with the ontological statement (A) "evil exists" given the following propositions that would also seem to be self-evident:

[11] The *probabilistic* argument concludes that the evidence of evil in the world makes the proposition *God exists* improbable enough to render belief of it *irrational*. In contrast to the intense complexity of the logical argument, Plantinga can dispense with the probabilistic argument relatively quickly by deconstructing the notion of *a priori* and *prior* probability so that Bayes theorem collapses, "the former notion is incoherent…the latter involves relativisation to a given cognizer." Whilst the argument is seen to cause a clear methodological victory against the AE, there are doubts to its value in dealing with the intuitive plausibility of the probabilistic argument. Sennett (1992) provides a full description of this argument and the refutation.

[12] Tim O'Keefe, 'Epicurus' in http://www.iep.utm.edu/epicur/, accessed 25/05/2015, anchor (e).

[13] David Hume, *Dialogues concerning natural religion*, Henry D. Aiken (ed) (New York, Hafner: 1948), pp61-81

[14] Nelson Pike, 'Hume on Evil' in Adams and Adams (eds.), *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford, OUP: 1990), p39

Proposition 2: A perfectly good being would always eliminate evil so far as it could;

Proposition 3: An omniscient being would know all about evils;

Proposition 4: There are *no limits* to what an omnipotent being can do.

Adams and Adams in laying out this problem identify the logical problems:

1. Proposition 4 would seem to be denied by the preceding propositions and A;
2. Statement A and any of proposition 2, 3 and 4 would deny proposition 1;
3. Proposition 1 combined with 2, 3 and 4 would imply denial of the ontological reality of evil;
4. This is in turn would imply God does not exist or evil does not exist[15].

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It was to these metaphysical and logical problems such as this that, Augustine, as a young man had become "tormented" after his "conversion" to philosophy regarding the problem of evil[16]. Gnosticism, particularly in the form of Manicheism, provided the first answer for Augustine. The Manichees had the reputation as an extreme, Bolshevik like group which wanted to infiltrate the Christian church and reshape its fundamental beliefs[17]. Augustine had been drawn to them because he felt that they gave the first answer to his question, "*from what cause do we do evil?*"[18] They provided a neat explanation of evil by separating the creator God from the redeemer God and assigning a defective character to matter that precipitated all forms of evil[19]. The Redeemer God is exonerated from

[15] Marilyn McCord Adams, Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford, OUP: 1990), p2
[16] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 45th anniversary edition (Berkeley, University of California Press: 2000(1967)), p35
[17] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 45th anniversary edition (Berkeley, University of California Press: 2000(1967)), p35
[18] Augustine, *de lib. arb* in Brown (2000), p35
[19] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 3rd edition (Oxford, Blackwell: 2004), p293

responsibility for evil by locating it in the lesser deity of the creator God, "*God was good, totally innocent. He must be protected from the faintest suspicion of direct or indirect responsibility for evil*"[20]. However, the radical dualism of the Manichees soon caused "*intellectual difficulties*"[21] for Augustine and he was to write after his conversion he came to forcibly reject the dual good and evil nature explanation of his sinfulness, "*I very much preferred to excuse myself and accuse some other thing that was in me…But in truth I was a complete whole, it was my impiety that divided me against myself*."[22]

He was to reject the Manichaean conception of evil as philosophically inadequate and in his renewal of learning initially minimised the demonic realm as an explanation of evil as too close to the dualism of Manicheism[23]. In this middle period[24] of Christian belief, Augustine "*turned the Christian struggle inwards*"[25] and the "Lord of this world" is not so much identified with Satan but with the battle in the mind, "*The Devil is not to be blamed for everything; there are times where a man is his own devil*"[26]. The explanation of evil is concerned with man and his choices as captured in his tract *De Agone Christiano* (the Christian struggle)[27] and argued forcefully in *De Libero Arbitrio* ('On the Choice of the Will', 395CE). Evans describes Augustine at this point close to the Pelagian position who were even to use his *De Libero Arbitrio* as supportive of their position in their later controversy with him, "*in order to clear God of blame [for evil], he insisted the free will of men and of angels is*

[20] Brown (2000), p36
[21] Brown (2000), p40
[22] Augustine, *Confessions Bk V, x, 18* in Brown (2000), p41
[23] G.R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1984(1982)), p106
[24] Brown (2000) brackets this as 395-410CE
[25] Brown (2000), pp240-241
[26] Augustine, *Frang 5,5* in Brown (2000), p241
[27] Augustine composed this in 396. Subsequently republished as part of *Seventeen Short Treatises,* (Oxford: 1847) and *The Christian Combat* (New York: 1947)

the cause of sin and the origin of evil"[28]. A man with a wise, rational and virtuous mind cannot be compelled to evil for the wise, rational and virtuous mind cannot be overcome by an inferior mind, only a superior one and a superior mind would not compel it to act wrongly[29]. The origin of evil is thus within the misdirected will of man, "*energy, desire, zeal are good in themselves, but given up to an end God does not intend*"[30].

Augustine finishes BkI of *De Libero Arbitrio* by asserting that the freedom of the will is what God has given and that is undoubtedly good. However, the "good" of the will is a *medium bonum*, an "intermediate good" that is only established as a primary good when it is attached to the unchanging Good of God. The evil lies in the *aversio*, the turning away[31]. For Augustine, the free choice of the good is the highest virtue, yet it implies the potential for sin for a will to look inward. Augustine is careful to describe there is no *positive cause* within the will that would necessitate it to sin for that would imply culpability of God and his responsibility for our sins. He distinguishes between foreknowledge with and without the intervention of the will of man. In the former case, God's foreknowledge does not limit the freedom of man to act. God does not "*compel a man to sin by knowing in advance he will do so*"[32]. Augustine's view of evil at this point is that it is produced by sin in the heart of man that results from the *misdirection* of his God-given will. Evil is now "contained" within the creatures that sin but it will be finally purged from amongst men by the "*purging of the faculties of knowledge*"[33]. This would be the Augustinian "free-will" theodicy.

[28] Evans (1982), p113
[29] Evans (1982), p115
[30] Evans (1982), p116
[31] Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio* II,xix.53.199 in Evans(2000), p116
[32] Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio* III,iii.8.35 in Evans(2000), p117
[33] Evans (1984), p110

However, he heavily modified this view in his later life to the place where his final position has been described as "*radically incoherent*"[34]. The development of his theological views of the sovereignty of God, the depravity of the human condition, of "original sin" and of predestination effectively neutralised the philosophical problem for him. In the doctrine of predestination in particular, it was necessary that the grace of God act on a mind damaged by the sin of Adam *before* it can make the right choices overturning his previous thesis of the centrality of a free will. Evil was still a man-centred problem because of his sin but it was nothing more than an irritation to God's purposes and had already been dealt with. It was not a threat to God or a reflection on God's character for evil itself was a product of the corrupted will.

These doctrines are seen as becoming increasingly important to him in his responses to the Pelagian controversy, his fight with Julian of Eclanum for the soul of the Latin church[35] and the collapse of Roman Africa[36]. There was a new theological fortress of an "*ineffable God…The justice of God as inscrutable as any other aspect of His nature and human ideas of equity as frail as dew in the desert*."[37] In the *City of God*, perhaps his most mature work finished towards the end of his life, the demons and the Devil re-emerge but their activity is now subject to the will and purposes of God:

> *"If [the Devil] had never been released, his malign power would never have been evident, the most faithful patience of the Holy City would never have been tested, and it would not have been clear how great was his evil".*[38]

[34] Evans (2000), pviii
[35] Brown (2000), pp383-393
[36] Brown (2000), pp423-430
[37] Augustine *Sermons* 341, 9; *Ad Simplicanum de dev. quest*, qu ii,16 in Brown (2000), p396
[38] Augustine, *City of God xx.8* in Evans(2000), p109

The emphasis of predestination was that "*a precise judgement of God was responsible for every check in the activity…of the church….every tribulation of the elect was a calculated mercy*".[39] Now he asserted human nature was damaged by the evil of the original sin and his original thesis of the will free to choose was set aside[40] to be replaced by grace that cooperating with the will to restore it that it might choose good[41]. The final terminus of Augustine's thought was God is:

> *"immutable and omnipotent, and so His will cannot be thwarted [He takes] an act of the will…against [Him] and turn it to His own purposes for good…God must [therefore] choose some men to be saved…man is given two things by grace: first the power to will; and then the power to do what is willed".*[42]

It would seem that evil would be permitted in the purposes of God if good was to come or that evil might be perceived as "nothing" or even to be made good for it is within the purposes of God[43]. Thus, for the late Augustine the problem of evil was made irrelevant by his theology.

It is to Plantinga's analysis of the problem that it is expedient to turn. Plantinga proposes a version of the *free will defense (FWD)* that claims "*the presence of agents free to make their moral choices would make it possible that God be omnicompetent and that there be evil in the world*"[44]. Plantinga uniquely formulated his FWD to deal with both moral and natural evil but it is the former that is considered in this essay as noted above (see note 11). Plantinga starts first with a logical dissection of the problem to try and identify precisely what is required to verify

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[39] Brown (2000), p406)
[40] In his *Retractiones* (426-8CE) he implausibly argues the Pelagians had misappropriated his earlier work of *De Libero Arbitrio* because he had not mentioned grace simply because he was not dealing with it.
[41] Evans (1984), p120ff
[42] Augustine, *Enchridion* and *De div quaest simplic* ('answer to questions from Simplicianus') in Evans pp168-169
[43] Evans(2000), px
[44] Sennett (1992), p52

rationality. Plantinga effectively argues, the set of propositions 1-4 stated in the introduction above is *"both implicitly consistent and implicitly inconsistent"*[45] because either possibility expressed by proposition 4, if true, would have to be "*necessarily* true or *necessarily* false; so if such a claim is [just] *possible* [either is equally consistent]"[46]. This, effectively, according to Plantinga, is a logical conjunction that is not formally solvable. That is, the argument becomes one in which the opposing parties are arguing the plausibility of a possible additional proposition that renders the propositions compatible or incompatible[47]. He finds a peculiar ally in Dawkins[48] on this logical point:

> *"[such a proposition] transport[s] us dramatically away from 50 per cent agnosticism, far towards the extreme of theism in the view of many theists, far towards the extreme of atheism in my view."*[49]

Plantinga's approach is a *possible* rationale for why God *could* permit evil and is known as the "Free Will Defense" which is the less ambitious what God's reason *might possibly be*"[50] for permitting evil. He does not pit the free will theodicist against the free will defender, he simply asserts that philosophical arguments have clear boundaries.

In analysing Plantinga, it is helpful to consider Sennett's synthesis and summary of some of his complex argumentation where it is appropriate for clarity. Plantinga acknowledged Sennett's singular command of his work with the

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[45] Alvin Plantinga, 'The Free Will Defense' *in* James F. Sennett, *The Analytic Theist – an Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1998), p23
[46] Alvin Plantinga, 'The Free Will Defense' *in* James F. Sennett, *The Analytic Theist – an Alvin Plantinga Reader* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1998), pp22-23. Emphasis added in first and second instance.
[47] Alvin Plantinga (1998), p24
[48] Plantinga in his most recent book *Where the conflict really lies – Science, Religion and Naturalism* (New York, OUP: 2011) deals with Dawkins and the "new atheists" in detail.
[49] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Bantam Press, London: 2006), p109
[50] Plantinga (1998), p25

remarkable comment "***I** have learned much about **my** work from reading his book…he understands…the motivation and direction of my work.*"[51] According to Sennett, Plantinga's FWD is the consistency of the following set[52]:

> *(P1) There are some worlds that God, that omnicompetent, could not have actualised.*
> *(P2) It is possible that among the possible worlds could not have actualised are all worlds in which there is moral good, but no moral evil.*
> *(C) Therefore, it is possible that God, though omnicompetent, could not actualise a world with moral good but no moral evil.*[53]

Plantinga uses the term "actualise" with a precise meaning. In doing so he exegetes and exposes the logical fallacy in Leibniz's theodicy. Leibniz is significant because of his strong emphasis on rational deduction which provided a philosophical theodicy. The problem for theists was that his reasoning was inverted by atheists. Leibniz's argument proceeds thus with Sennett helpfully adding the Plantinga notation (α = the world that is) that identifies what Plantinga calls "Leibniz's Lapse"[54]:

> *(3) Necessarily, if God is omnicompetent, then α is the best of all possible worlds.*
> *(4) God is omnicompetent.*
> *(5) α is the best of all possible worlds*[55]*.*

The LAE asserts that (5) is incorrect (we can imagine better worlds with less evil) and (4) is therefore false. Plantinga argues that this is invalid because (3) is false:

> *"The atheologian is right in holding that there are many possible worlds containing good but no moral evil; his mistake is in endorsing*

[51] Alvin Plantinga, back cover of Sennett (1992), emphasis added. This is a modified form of Sennett's PhD thesis in which he records numerous accounts of discussions with Plantinga, private access to early drafts of Plantinga's *Warrant* three volume opus and being congratulated by Plantinga on finally understanding his TD considered later in this essay, a feat achieved by few men.
[52] This argument is found first in *God and Other Minds* (1967), refined in *God, Freedom and Evil* (1974) where it is probably stated in its most accessible form and presented with the most intense complexity and rigour in the *Nature of Necessity* (1978).
[53] Sennett (1992), p53
[54] Alvin Plantinga, 'God, Evil, and the metaphysics of freedom' in *The Problem of Evil*, Adams and Adams (eds)(Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1990), pp97-101
[55] Sennett (1992), p54

Leibniz's lapse…his central contention – that God, if omnipotent, could have actualised just any world he pleased – is false."[56]

He argues that "God creates the world" does not express the same proposition as "God actualises α". For example, if there are free agents, then there are some states of affairs included in α that are not actualised by God but by those free agents. In other words, the fact that α is actual, does not prove that God can actualise α. Thus, omnicompetence does not imply that God actualises α which refutes (3).

This analysis of Plantinga is dealing with the logic of the argument which he used to refute Mackie's seminal objection[57] which provided modern atheists with the standard refutation of the FWD. In early work, he refutes Mackie's 'quasi-logical rules' first generally, *"not even an omnipotent being can bring about logical impossible states of affairs"*[58]. It is a strikingly simple rebuttal of Mackie, there are "*some worlds he could not have actualised…those in which He does not exist*"[59] and so establishes there are worlds in which God cannot actualise. If there are *some* worlds God cannot actualise, Mackie's objection ceases to be a necessary truth as is his logical premise. This is an important gain for the FWD but Plantinga in later work[60] fully deconstructed Mackie's arguments by rigorous formal logical argument. Again, Sennett provides a concise compression of Plantinga's lengthy refutation and juxtapositions it besides the Plantinga thesis as presented in the later work. Mackie's argument is presented thus:

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[56] Alvin Plantinga, 'God, Evil, and the metaphysics of freedom' in *The Problem of Evil*, Adams and Adams (eds)(Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1990), p101
[57] John Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" in *The Philosophy of Religion*, Basil Mitchell (ed.)(London, Oxford University Press: 1971), p92
[58] Plantinga (1974), p17
[59] Plantinga (1974), p39
[60] Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press:1978), pp164-193

(P1) For any free moral agent J and at any time t, it is possible that J choose to do right at t.
(C1) Therefore, for any free moral agent J, it is possible that J choose to do right at all times.
(C2) Therefore, it is possible that all free agents choose to do right at all times.[61]

Plantinga defines Mackie's argument as using the concept of *weak* actualisation which is used to describe a world W for which God strongly actualises a state of affairs T(W) but which is actualised with the state *free agents existing*. There are thus many such possible weakly actualised worlds but for Mackie it should be possible that even with the limitation of free will, God would be able to *weakly* actualise a particular world but then ensure with his omnicompetence that only those agents that would do right would be in that world would be in that world:

(6) God can weakly actualise a morally perfect world.
Given God's omnicompetence, (6) entails
(7) If God weakly actualises a World W and W includes free moral agents existing, then W also includes all free agents being morally perfect.[62]

However, Plantinga permits the atheological modification that you could limit actualisation to worlds He did exist in and develops his most vigorous and technical statement of the FWD[63] where he modifies P2 to give:

(P2) It is possible that among the worlds God could not have <u>weakly</u> actualised are all the worlds in which there is moral good but no moral evil.*

The effect of this small change is to ensure that (7) is not a necessary truth though it is not necessarily false. Plantinga then defends the rationality of P1/P2* as a consistent set by developing the doctrine of *Transworld Depravity* (TD). TD is an

[61] Sennett (1992), pp72-73 Sennett here demonstrates that Mackie's objection fails tests of modal logic (in a lottery of one hundred tickets there can still only ever be one winner, not one hundred winners though each ticket *could* win) but those deficiencies are not fatal to his particular argument and he permits it to proceed with modification.
[62] Sennett (1992), p56.
[63] Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press:1978), pp164-193

intensely technical concept but its basic idea is an "*intuitive one*"[64] that no matter what God does, there will be evil because there is "*significant freedom*"[65] for the moral agent to insert evil into their actions. Within any world in a particular set of possible worlds, there is still the possibility of "*at least one wrong action*"[66] when a potential person suffers from TD. TD is a logical construct that is proposed as an accurate reflection of the *essence* of known[67] persons. It is built upon an application of the principles of modality that Plantinga develops in the *Nature of Necessity* and is difficult to comprehend without the background of this work. It is used to establish that any instantiation of their essence in any strongly actualised world where they had significant freedom would admit the possibility of a wrong moral choice. Plantinga uses the concept of a "counterfactual of freedom" (CFF) which is a contingent proposition of the form:

(8) In circumstances C, agent J would (freely) perform Action A.[68]

However, "*causal laws and antecedent conditions determine neither that I take A nor that I refrain*"[69] so there is still a world in a series of worlds in which God does all *He* can to prevent evil and still there is a possibility of evil. A series that is contingent implies "*the antecedent of [opposite conditionals contained in a set S'] does not entail the consequent of either*"[70]. That is, the actual outcome is unknown from foreknowledge of the conditions, "*the relationship between causal laws and*

[64] Sennett (1992), p60
[65] Alvin Plantinga, 'God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom' in *The Problem of Evil*, Adams and Adams (eds)(Oxford, OUP: 1990), p102
[66] Alvin Plantinga, 'God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom' in *The Problem of Evil*, Adams and Adams (eds)(Oxford, OUP: 1990), p102
[67] One rebuttal of TD that Plantinga considers is that God could have created different persons that did not suffer from TD. However, he is simply concerned with asserting the *possibility* of TD to refute the premise that (7) is a necessary truth.
[68] Sennett (1992), p57
[69] Alvin Plantinga, 'God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom' in *The Problem of Evil*, Adams and Adams (eds)(Oxford, OUP: 1990), p89
[70] Plantinga (1974), p41

counterfactuals…is intimate and notorious"[71]. There are possible worlds in which either will be true but the action of God's actualising that world does not set the outcome and can never preclude either outcome.

So, turning to the conclusion, does Plantinga represent a development of Augustine? In the words of McGrath, "Augustine appears to have been reduced to silence"[72] by the problem of evil but this appears to be the case because he moves the premises from the philosophical sphere to the theological sphere:

> *"[that] God is good and the author of all things; that all things are good; that man is the cause of his own troubles…evil [is] of no more importance in a man's life than he consents (with the aid of divine grace) to allow it to be"[73].*

This would seem to be a perfectly acceptable strategy for Augustine. Plantinga's reformed epistemology project permits Augustine such epistemic freedom. Pike's main insight in rebutting Hume and his modern followers was that he recognised a further argument in Part XI of the Hume's Discourses that effectively set aside Philo's convictions (thought to be Hume's own) and represented the epistemic issues at the heart of the issue:

> *"It ought not to go unnoticed that Philo's closing attack on Cleanthes' position has extremely limited application. Evil in the world has negative importance only when theology is approached as a quasi-scientific subject…Under these circumstances, where there is nothing to qualify as a 'hypothesis' capable of having either negative or positive 'evidence', the fact of evil in the world presents no special problem for theology."[74]*

[71] Alvin Plantinga, 'God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom' in *The Problem of Evil*, Adams and Adams (eds)(Oxford, OUP: 1990), p95
[72] McGrath (2004), p294
[73] Evans (1984), pxi
[74] Nelson Pike, 'Hume on Evil' in Adams and Adams (eds.), *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford, OUP: 1990), p52

This is an insightful assessment. For those theologians with a scientific background, evil is the "*most painful of [Christianity's] difficulties*"[75]. In contrast, the fundamentalist has a simple answer to the problem of physical evil: Satan, not God, is the origin of evil in creation. There is no problem of evil because it is subsumed in theological categories. Similarly, Augustine's theological terminus led him open to the charge of "radical incoherence"[76] because his theological bedrock of predestination and the sovereignty of God would render a man impotent in the face of evil. His increasing confidence in a theological explanation rendered the philosophical problem as "irrelevant"[77]. The only free will in the human race was Adam and his disobedience damaged the will of all his descendants. Thus, as Pike satisfactorily describes the theological solution to the problem, he like Augustine, considers it justifiable to sidestep the philosophical issues, "*[presupposing] the very thing that they are trying to explain*"[78]. There is left the uncomfortable philosophical impasse of how a moral, omnicompetent being could create such a being that *could* originate evil.

This philosophical aspect of the Augustinian project may be seen to have been picked up and advanced in Plantinga. For in contrast, Plantinga has approached the problem primarily as an analytic philosopher and is concerned with a far more modest defence of the rationality of belief in the face of evil and is not concerned with explaining its origin and explicitly states the scope of his argument as of no general value as a theodicy but that his work may have indirect significance

[75] John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality – the relationship between science and theology* (SPCK, London: 1991), p84
[76] Evans (2000), pviii
[77] Evans (2000), pxi
[78] C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Collins, London: 2012(1940)), pp9, 11

and value for one seeking a theodicy[79]. Theodicies are intended as a strong assertion of "what God's reason *is*"[80] for permitting evil and Augustine had originally generated a theodicy centred on a truly free will which is a clear philosophical position but then retreated from that as his theology became far more pessimistic about man and far more focussed on the sovereignty of God. Plantinga did not want to obscure the logical issues and explicitly stated that he was concerned about is demonstrating the *possibility* that the propositions 1-4 are not mutually exclusive and thus the theist is rational in believing them. He thus distinguished his approach as a *defence* rather than as a *theodicy* to directly defend the rationality.

It is fair to assert that his approach remains "Augustinian" in the broad sense that he himself understands the term[81] and in which Augustine himself is said to have valued the way of philosophy as that of "[breaking] the most hateful bonds that had held me away from…finding truth"[82], that is a freedom from a religious dogma which was Manicheanism for Augustine and which would perhaps been fundamentalism for Plantinga. He is not developing primarily a theological position that holds the will of man conjoined with the satanic will as the origin of evil as a terminus to the argument but rather establishing a rational possibility as part of the defence of the rationality of theistic belief in the face of evil[83]. This is perhaps distinctive of Plantinga's philosophical approach, the truth of the proposition is not

[79] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, Eerdmans reprint (Grand Rapid, Wm. B Eerdmans: 1977(1974)), p29
[80] Plantinga (1998), p25. Emphasis original.
[81] https://www.calvin.edu/academic/philosophy/virtual_library/articles/plantinga_alvin/augustinian_christian_philosophy.pdf, accessed 01/05/2015
[82] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 45th anniversary edition (Berkeley, University of California Press: 2000(1967)), p103
[83] Sennett (1992), p69

asserted absolutely but in terms of its *warrant*; that is, it can be reasonably or rationally believed[84], it is not necessarily the truth:

> *"[T]he theist's not knowing why God permits evil does not by itself show that he is irrational in thinking that God does indeed have a reason."* [85]

Plantinga, by his own admission, had a narrow interest in what he was trying to argue and recognised he did not provide a defence for a believer confronted with the "*magnitude* and *extent* of evil [precipitating] a crisis of faith [it] is not intended for that purpose"[86].

He was concerned with answering philosophers like Hume, Mill and Mackie that had presented a logical argument which they had then used as part of a more general attack on theistic belief as in the words of Mackie:

> *"the theologian can maintain his position as a whole only by..be[ing] prepared to believe, not merely what cannot be proved, but what can be disproved from other beliefs that he also holds"*[87].

Thus, Plantinga, though he was intensely thorough in his treatment and demonstrates there is no formal contradiction between the propositions, was more concerned with the philosophical reasoning rather than dealing with evil in and of itself. There seems a dissatisfaction with terminating the argument at this point, for as Plantinga himself states, propositions may be not formally contradictory but may be "clearly contradictory"[88] in their sense. What Plantinga is implicitly admitting is that there are limits on God's omnipotence and he is not as free as he might wish to be of the theological premises required to ensure his argument succeeds. God's

[84] Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York, Oxford University Press: 2000), pxi
[85] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, Eerdmans reprint (Grand Rapid, Wm. B Eerdmans: 1977(1974)), p11
[86] Plantinga (1977), pp28-29
[87] J.L. Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence' in *The Problem of Evil*, Adams and Adams (eds)(Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1990), p25
[88] Plantinga (1977), p13

omnipotence is limited by Plantinga in the sense that he is bound by the laws of logic, "*not even an omnipotent being can bring about logically impossible states of affairs*"[89]. He accepts there are other possible interpretations of the term "omnipotent" as really unbounded as understood by Luther or Descartes but considers them irrelevant for these atheological and theological arguments[90].

Plantinga thus offers some progress beyond middle Augustine in a theological sense during his argument with a purely theological *'if God has a reason it would be a good one'*[91] which is specifically a simple Augustinian position of confidence in God's goodness. It is also undeniable that his emphasis on free will and significant freedom would have been at home with the middle Augustine and is the basis of his arguments[92]. However, Plantinga was also quick to recognise the multi-faceted nature of the problem and it was seen he uniquely set out to deal with both the probabilistic and logical arguments in what has been acknowledged as a robust exposition. His work demonstrated a philosophical treatment of every aspect of the AE such that Sennett describes Plantinga's *"almost exclusive concentration on this atheological argument"*[93] was for a broadly theological purpose – to establish the rationality of theistic belief. He was similarly circumspect as to what his own arguments were actually intended to achieve though he was confident that they did achieve some limited success when viewed within the context he was setting[94].

[89] Plantinga (1977), p17
[90] Plantinga (1974), p17
[91] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, Eerdmans reprint (Grand Rapid, Wm. B Eerdmans: 1977(1974)), p10
[92] The Calvinismm underpinning Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology would seem to commit him to a theological position not dissimilar to that the later Augustine concerning predestination.

[93] Sennett (1992), p70
[94] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, Eerdmans reprint (Grand Rapid, Wm. B Eerdmans: 1977(1974)), p29

Thus, although Plantinga succeeds in answering the philosophical challenges by demonstrating no formal contradiction and perhaps no other *logical* contradiction[95], there is still perhaps a theological uneasiness that would seem to leave the explanation of the origin of evil untouched. Augustine was not prepared to terminate at this point but was to push on to his final position. It has been criticised as "*radically incoherent*"[96] but to Augustine it followed from his final theological premises of predestination and the sovereignty of God. Augustine's preoccupation with the demonic in the *City of God* was to address the crisis of his time and the fall of the "Christian" Roman Empire, it demanded his philosophy could ultimately explain evil within the providence of God. The philosophical complexities were set aside by axiomatic theological principles. Augustine had moved "*away from the metaphysical aspects of the problem of evil…towards a preoccupation with practical and pastoral aspects*"[97]. Theologians from Eusebius down had venerated the Empire as the kingdom of God on Earth and Augustine was interested in reinterpreting theology and making room for a theodicy that could explain its collapse. His theodicy became theological rather than philosophical, grounded in predestination and choices of God but rational nevertheless.

The technical aspect of Plantinga's work has no direct parallel in Augustine but he does indeed share Augustine's passion that philosophy is indeed "the nourishing food of the soul"[98]. Both men would be satisfied that the rational status of their belief would be maintained for their own times by their treatment of the problem

[95] Plantinga (1977) uses formal, implicit and explicit in describing logical contradiction
[96] Evans (2000), pviii
[97] Evans (1984), p119
[98] Augustine Ep 1,3 quoted in Brown (2000), p103

of evil even if, like this author, one feels the problem is ultimately theological rather than philosophical.

Word count: 5006

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