

According to Augustine, evil results from turning the will toward transitory, temporal goods and away from the eternal goods. Augustine believes that our actions are either good or bad. The criteria to determine whether or not an action is good or bad can be determined by laws that are either unchangeable or can change. The unchangeable laws are Eternal Laws and the changeable are Temporal. These two types differ in that, while the following of the former leads to eternal goods, the following of the latter leads to temporary goods. Since, Augustine believes that an “unjust law is no law at all.” (FCW 1.5, p. 8), eternal and temporal laws exhaust the two types of laws (unchangeable and changeable) and both types lead to good, then there can be no other laws. Following eternal laws leads to eternal goods. Eternal goods are those which do not change, such as a good will and the virtues. Seeking these goods will lead people to a happy life through the driving force of love. This shows why seeking eternal goods causes good. Temporal goods are those things which have the ability to change. Augustine defines evildoing as inordinate desire. Augustine also believes that the will is in our power. He states this inordinate desire is “the love of those things that one can lose against one’s will” (FCW 1.4, p. 8). Those things that we can lose must be temporal goods, and, since the will is in our power, therefore, we can lose temporal goods against our will. Those things cannot be eternal goods because eternal goods cannot be changed, and we cannot lose them. Therefore, those things that we chase out of the love from inordinate desire are temporal goods. Therefore, evildoing comes the chasing of those temporal goods, and, since we are the cause of our own will to either temporal or eternal goods, evil stems from turning the will to those temporal goods. Evil comes from our desire things that we can lose, and good comes from those things we can't lose. In addition, turning towards temporal goods implies turning away from eternal goods since those are the only two types of goods. In addition, the eternal laws dictate that people should be guided by reason. Humans have reason and understanding, and, therefore, can be guided by reason in order to live well. When humans are guided by this reason, they achieve eternal goods. In order to live well, we seek eternal good.

Augustine is justified in thinking that evil comes from turning our will towards temporal goods. His analysis does not account for the possibility of good coming from temporal goods that one may lose. It might be possible to extend good to include good that is achieved from temporal goods. The schism between eternal and temporal goods might be ambiguous if there were a good that had the possibility to change, but never actually did change. If a good had a possibility to change, then it would be a temporal good, but if it doesn't actually change, one cannot achieve evil from it. Therefore, it might not actually be a temporal good after all.