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AUGUSTINE:
CONFESSIONS AND
ENCHIRIDION

Newly translated and edited

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what is not seen, whether this unseen is believed in or hoped for. Thus in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which is used by the enlightened defenders of the catholic rule of faith, faith is said to be "the conviction of things not seen."¹⁶ However, when a man maintains that neither words nor witnesses nor even arguments, but only the evidence of present experience, determine his faith, he still ought not to be called absurd or told, "You have seen; therefore you have not believed." For it does not follow that unless a thing is not seen it cannot be believed. Still it is better for us to use the term "faith," as we are taught in "the sacred eloquence,"¹⁷ to refer to things not seen. And as for hope, the apostle says: "Hope that is seen is not hope. For if a man sees a thing, why does he hope for it? If, however, we hope for what we do not see, we then wait for it in patience."¹⁸ When, therefore, our good is believed to be future, this is the same thing as hoping for it.

What, then, shall I say of love, without which faith can do nothing? There can be no true hope without love. Indeed, as the apostle James says, "Even the demons believe and tremble."¹⁹ Yet they neither hope nor love. Instead, believing as we do that what we hope for and love is coming to pass, they tremble. Therefore, the apostle Paul approves and commends the faith that works by love and that cannot exist without hope. Thus it is that love is not without hope, hope is not without love, and neither hope nor love are without faith.

*independence of faith.
hope, and love.*

CHAPTER III

GOD THE CREATOR OF ALL; AND THE GOODNESS OF ALL CREATION

9. Wherefore, when it is asked what we ought to believe in matters of religion, the answer is not to be sought in the exploration of the nature of things [*rerum natura*], after the manner of those whom the Greeks called "physicists."²⁰ Nor should we be dismayed if Christians are ignorant about the

¹⁶ Heb. 11:1.

¹⁷ *Sacra eloquia*—a favorite phrase of Augustine's for the Bible.

¹⁸ Rom. 8:24, 25 (Old Latin).

¹⁹ James 2:19.

²⁰ One of the standard titles of early Greek philosophical treatises was *περί φύσεως*, which would translate into Latin as *De rerum natura*. This is, in fact, the title of Lucretius' famous poem, the greatest philosophical work written in classical Latin.

properties and the number of the basic elements of nature, or about the motion, order, and deviations of the stars, the map of the heavens, the kinds and nature of animals, plants, stones, springs, rivers, and mountains; about the divisions of space and time, about the signs of impending storms, and the myriad other things which these "physicists" have come to understand, or think they have. For even these men, gifted with such superior insight, with their ardor in study and their abundant leisure, exploring some of these matters by human conjecture and others through historical inquiry, have not yet learned everything there is to know. For that matter, many of the things they are so proud to have discovered are more often matters of opinion than of verified knowledge.

For the Christian, it is enough to believe that the cause of all created things, whether in heaven or on earth, whether visible or invisible, is nothing other than the goodness of the Creator, who is the one and the true God.²¹ Further, the Christian believes that nothing exists save God himself and what comes from him; and he believes that God is triune, i.e., the Father, and the Son begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the same Father, but one and the same Spirit of the Father and the Son.

10. By this Trinity, supremely and equally and immutably good, were all things created. But they were not created supremely, equally, nor immutably good. Still, each single created thing is good, and taken as a whole they are very good, because together they constitute a universe of admirable beauty.

11. In this universe, even what is called evil, when it is rightly ordered and kept in its place, commends the good more eminently, since good things yield greater pleasure and praise when compared to the bad things. For the Omnipotent God, whom even the heathen acknowledge as the Supreme Power over all, would not allow any evil in his works, unless in his omnipotence and goodness, as the Supreme Good, he is able to bring forth good out of evil. What, after all, is anything we call evil except the privation of good? In animal bodies, for instance, sickness and wounds are nothing but the privation of health. When a cure is effected, the evils which were present (i.e., the sickness and the wounds) do not retreat and go elsewhere. Rather, they simply do not exist any more. For such

²¹ This basic motif appears everywhere in Augustine's thought as the very foundation of his whole system.

evil is not a substance; the wound or the disease is a defect of the bodily substance which, as a substance, is good. Evil, then, is an accident, i.e., a privation of that good which is called health. Thus, whatever defects there are in a soul are privations of a natural good. When a cure takes place, they are not transferred elsewhere but, since they are no longer present in the state of health, they no longer exist at all.²²

def. of
evil

CHAPTER IV

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

12. All of nature, therefore, is good, since the Creator of all nature is supremely good. But nature is not supremely and immutably good as is the Creator of it. Thus the good in created things can be diminished and augmented. For good to be diminished is evil; still, however much it is diminished, something must remain of its original nature as long as it exists at all. For no matter what kind or however insignificant a thing may be, the good which is its "nature" cannot be destroyed without the thing itself being destroyed. There is good reason, therefore, to praise an uncorrupted thing, and if it were indeed an incorruptible thing which could not be destroyed, it would doubtless be all the more worthy of praise. When, however, a thing is corrupted, its corruption is an evil because it is, by just so much, a privation of the good. Where there is no privation of the good, there is no evil. Where there is evil, there is a corresponding diminution of the good. As long, then, as a thing is being corrupted, there is good in it of which it is being deprived; and in this process, if something of its being remains that cannot be further corrupted, this will then be an incorruptible entity [*natura incorruptibilis*], and to this great good it will have come through the process of corruption. But even if the corruption is not arrested, it still does not cease having some good of which it cannot be further deprived. If, however, the corruption comes

goodness of
nature

good cannot
be eliminated

²² This section (Chs. III and IV) is the most explicit statement of a major motif which pervades the whole of Augustinian metaphysics. We see it in his earliest writings, *Soliloquies*, I, 2, and *De ordine*, II, 7. It is obviously a part of the Neoplatonic heritage which Augustine appropriated for his Christian philosophy. The good is positive, constructive, essential; evil is privative, destructive, parasitic on the good. It has its origin, not in nature, but in the will. Cf. *Confessions*, Bk. VII, Chs. III, V, XII-XVI; *On Continence*, 14-16; *On the Gospel of John*, Tractate XCVIII, 7; *City of God*, XI, 17; XII, 7-9.

to be total and entire, there is no good left either, because it is no longer an entity at all. Wherefore corruption cannot consume the good without also consuming the thing itself. Every actual entity [*natura*] is therefore good; a greater good if it cannot be corrupted, a lesser good if it can be. Yet only the foolish and unknowing can deny that it is still good even when corrupted. Whenever a thing is consumed by corruption, not even the corruption remains, for it is nothing in itself, having no subsistent being in which to exist.

13. From this it follows that there is nothing to be called evil if there is nothing good. A good that wholly lacks an evil aspect is entirely good. Where there is some evil in a thing, its good is defective or defectible. Thus there can be no evil where there is no good. This leads us to a surprising conclusion: that, since every being, in so far as it is a being, is good, if we then say that a defective thing is bad, it would seem to mean that we are saying that what is evil is good, that only what is good is ever evil and that there is no evil apart from something good. This is because every actual entity is good [*omnis natura bonum est.*] Nothing evil exists *in itself*, but only as an evil aspect of some actual entity. Therefore, there can be nothing evil except something good. Absurd as this sounds, nevertheless the logical connections of the argument compel us to it as inevitable. At the same time, we must take warning lest we incur the prophetic judgment which reads: "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil: who call darkness light and light darkness; who call the bitter sweet and the sweet bitter."²³ Moreover the Lord himself saith: "An evil man brings forth evil out of the evil treasure of his heart."²⁴ What, then, is an evil man but an evil entity [*natura mala*], since man is an entity? Now, if a man is something good because he is an entity, what, then, is a bad man except an evil good? When, however, we distinguish between these two concepts, we find that the bad man is not bad because he is a man, nor is he good because he is wicked. Rather, he is a good entity in so far as he is a man, evil in so far as he is wicked. Therefore, if anyone says that simply to be a man is evil, or that to be a wicked man is good, he rightly falls under the prophetic judgment: "Woe to him who calls evil good and good evil." For this amounts to finding fault with God's work, because man is an entity of God's creation. It also means that we are praising the defects in this particular man *because* he is a wicked person. Thus, every entity, even if it is a defective

²³ Isa. 5:20.

²⁴ Matt. 12:35.

There can only be evil when there is good.

one, in so far as it is an entity, is good. In so far as it is defective, it is evil.

14. Actually, then, in these two contraries we call evil and good, the rule of the logicians fails to apply.²⁵ No weather is both dark and bright at the same time; no food or drink is both sweet and sour at the same time; no body is, at the same time and place, both white and black, nor deformed and well-formed at the same time. This principle is found to apply in almost all disjunctions: two contraries cannot coexist in a single thing. Nevertheless, while no one maintains that good and evil are not contraries, they can not only coexist, but the evil cannot exist at all without the good, or in a thing that is not a good. On the other hand, the good can exist without evil. For a man or an angel could exist and yet not be wicked, whereas there cannot be wickedness except in a man or an angel. It is good to be a man, good to be an angel; but evil to be wicked. These two contraries are thus coexistent, so that if there were no good in what is evil, then the evil simply could not be, since it can have no mode in which to exist, nor any source from which corruption springs, unless it be something corruptible. Unless this something is good, it cannot be corrupted, because corruption is nothing more than the deprivation of the good. Evils, therefore, have their source in the good, and unless they are parasitic on something good, they are not anything at all. There is no other source whence an evil thing can come to be. If this is the case, then, in so far as a thing is an entity, it is unquestionably good. If it is an incorruptible entity, it is a great good. But even if it is a corruptible entity, it still has no mode of existence except as an aspect of something that is good. Only by corrupting something good can corruption inflict injury.

15. But when we say that evil has its source in the good, do not suppose that this denies our Lord's judgment: "A good tree cannot bear evil fruit."²⁶ This cannot be, even as the Truth himself declareth: "Men do not gather grapes from thorns," since thorns cannot bear grapes. Nevertheless, from good soil we can see both vines and thorns spring up. Likewise, just as a bad tree does not grow good fruit, so also an evil will does not produce good deeds. From a human nature, which is good in itself, there can spring forth either a good or an evil will. There was no other place from whence evil could have arisen in the first place except from the nature—good in itself—of an angel or

²⁵ This refers to Aristotle's well-known principle of "the excluded middle."

²⁶ Matt. 7:18.

*Corruption
is good
evil*

How did the evil develop out of the good?

a man. This is what our Lord himself most clearly shows in the passage about the trees and the fruits, for he said: "Make the tree good and the fruits will be good, or make the tree bad and its fruits will be bad."²⁷ This is warning enough that bad fruit cannot grow on a good tree nor good fruit on a bad one. Yet from that same earth to which he was referring, both sorts of trees can grow.

CHAPTER V

THE KINDS AND DEGREES OF ERROR

16. This being the case, when that verse of Maro's gives us pleasure,

"Happy is he who can understand the causes of things,"²⁸

it still does not follow that our felicity depends upon our knowing the causes of the great physical processes in the world, which are hidden in the secret maze of nature,

"Whence earthquakes, whose force swells the sea to flood,
so that they burst their bounds and then subside again,"²⁹

and other such things as this.

But we ought to know the causes of good and evil in things, at least as far as men may do so in this life, filled as it is with errors and distress, in order to avoid these errors and distresses. We must always aim at that true felicity wherein misery does not distract, nor error mislead. If it is a good thing to understand the causes of physical motion, there is nothing of greater concern in these matters which we ought to understand than our own health. But when we are in ignorance of such things, we seek out a physician, who has seen how the secrets of heaven and earth still remain hidden from us, and what patience there must be in unknowing.

17. Although we should beware of error wherever possible, not only in great matters but in small ones as well, it is impossible not to be ignorant of many things. Yet it does not follow that one falls into error out of ignorance alone. If someone thinks he knows what he does not know, if he approves as true what is actually false, this then is error, in the proper sense of the term. Obviously, much depends on the question involved in the error,

²⁷ Cf. Matt. 12:33.

²⁸ Virgil, *Georgics*, II, 490.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 479.