

AUGUSTINIAN THEODICY AND POLITICAL EVIL: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF NIGERIA'S SOCIO-POLITICAL CRISIS

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Abstract

The Nigeria's socio-political crisis has become over time a concern among African socio-political thinkers worried over the prevalent evil called politicking in her democracy, especially from their understanding of the problem of evil in Augustine. Part of the worry is the question; whether God is permissive of the evil, moral abuses, injustices and others despotic tendencies in the Nigeria's socio-political crisis being a good and all-knowing God. These concerns, reflects the cry of the average poor Nigerian who is left to continually wonder about the fate of a country said to the most populous race in Africa. According to Saint Augustine's free-will theodicy, moral evil is as a result of the abuse of free- will and the problem of evil remains a hindrance to justifying the belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God. This paper, adopting a philosophical analysis method, will concern itself with the possibilities of curbing moral evil in the exercise of free will among Nigerian politicians. Harnessing the Augustinian theodicy in the context of the tragedies of the Nigerian state, this work attempts to argue for a morally and politically conscious state in the use of freewill. It will also query the nation's suffering as a consequence of the abuse of human free will and moral evil, and not as a direct creation of God. In its conclusions, this framework places responsibility and moral sincerity as the sine-qua-non to correct the prevalent issues of corruption, violence, wickedness, mistrust and social injustice ravaging our human actions and their collective fallen nature, while also offering a path to redemption through moral political correctness in godliness.

Keywords: Moral evil, Politics, theodicy and free will, Nigeria.

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Introduction

The problem of evil is one of the most important to be faced in any system of thought. Evil is a fact an ever-present fact. It demands some kind of an explanation. What is it? How did it begin? What is its purpose? And how can that be reconciled with the existence of an all-powerful, all-loving and an all-knowing God? Such questions as these are inevitable. The existence of evil makes an emotional appeal, as well as raises an intellectual problem. A medieval Philosopher, Augustine, however tries to give justifiable reasons to prove the existence of God amidst all these evils perpetuating our world.

Harnessing the Augustinian theodicy in the context of the tragedies in Nigeria involves interpreting the nation's suffering as a consequence of human free will and moral evil, not as a direct creation of God. This framework places responsibility for the prevalent issues such as corruption, violence, and social injustice squarely on human actions and their collective fallen nature, while also offering a path to redemption moral correctness.

In this paper, the aim at considerably give justifications based on that of Augustine to prove why evil still permeates our world, despite the theists' concept of God and all the attributes given to him. Augustine in his books '*Confessions*' and '*City of God*' argues that, evil is as a result of the abuse of man's freewill, which God gave him after creating everything that were considered good. In this thesis, my main concern however will be to examine these arguments raised by Augustine in his theodicy to answer the questions posed by scholars who support the nonexistence of God by using the dialectical method of Hegel. The central concepts used in this paper are; evil, theodicy and freewill. However, it should be noted that, evil as used here refers specifically to moral evil, that is, evil caused by man's moral actions.

Arguing that evil is the deprivation of good, since all things were made with goodness. John Hick in, *Evil and the God of love*: saw evil as "physical pain, mental suffering and moral wickedness, which also deprives good. Moral evil is an evil inherent in the wicked actions of moral agents and the bad consequences they produce. This category of moral evil contains the wrongful and hurtful acts as well as the bad character traits of free human beings: actions such as murdering, lying, stealing, and traits such as dishonesty, greed, cowardice. It includes phenomena such as war, torture, physical violence, poverty and political oppression. Persons can be held morally accountable for all of these things.

Theodicy And The Theodicy Of Augustine

Theodicy is a term that Leibniz coined from the Greek words *theos* (God) and *dike* (righteous). A theodicy is an attempt to justify or defend God in the face of natural and moral evil. Free will is the ability to choose, think, and act voluntarily. For many philosophers, to believe in free will is to believe that human beings can be the authors of their own actions and to reject the idea that human actions are determined by external conditions or fate.

Analyzing the problem of evil, where it was established that, the problem of evil refers to the question of how to reconcile the existence of evil with an omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent God. An argument from evil attempts to show that the co-existence of evil and such a God is unlikely or impossible as Augustinian theodicy posits. To briefly explain his ideas on the

concept of evil and his theodicy, Augustine submits that evil is not created by God, but exists due to the abuse of freewill.

The Concept Of Theodicy

"Theodicy" is a term from two Greek words 'theos' (God) and 'dike' (righteous), coined by Leibniz.¹ It is an attempt to justify or defend God in the face of natural and moral evil.

Theodicy is centuries old set of questions. Historical scholarship often looks at theodicy as a history of ideas and/or social ideologies. The history of the issue is important because the social and political and religious contexts that gave rise to reflection on the problem of evil differing from era to era. While various thinkers' reflections may be said to be semi-commensurable, or, at least, analogous, one cannot set aside a historical sense of where various insights come from. The question is whether enough commensurability exists across periods and thinkers to say that a tradition exists or that later theodicyists are justified in borrowing earlier ideas. Some have gone so far as to suggest that theodicy is a modern problem, that earlier formulations while concerned with evil are in no way attempting to justify God, rather to argue for a specific God (Marcion), explain the role of wisdom (Boethius), or the purposes of conversion within a history of salvation (Augustine).

Theodicy, which is the attempt to reconcile the traditional view of God with evil in the world,² is fundamentally explained by Augustine in the concept of evil in the world created by a God who is All-Good, All Powerful and Omniscient using the notion of the fall of man and freewill. In his Confessions, Augustine said, "all beings that suffer corruption are nevertheless good, if they were supremely good, they could not be corrupted. If they were not good at all, there will be nothing in them to be corrupted"³.... He added, "Corruption either damages nothing, it cannot not be, or whatsoever suffers corruption is deprived of all good whatsoever, they will not exist at all"⁴ So, for him, whatsoever that undergoes corruption falls under the lower goods.

Evil And Freewill

As mentioned earlier, God who has created all things good, did that in a hierarchy of goodness. This however raises the debate of how then, did evil come about? "It came about initially in those levels of the universe that involve freewill: the levels of angels and human beings. Thus, according to Augustine; Will (voluntas) is an essential constituent of human nature. Along with memory and understanding, it constitutes the triune faculty of the human mind, which is the greatest gift of God's goodness in the creation."⁵

Some of the angels turned from the supreme Good, which is God, to the lesser gods, thereby rebelling against their creator; they in turn tempted the first man and woman to fall. This fall of the angelic and human beings were the origin of moral evil or sin.⁶ The natural evils like earthquakes, storms, tsunamis and so on can be vividly explained by Augustine as the penalties of the abuse of human freedom, what we termed as sin. Thus, Humanity was intended to be the domineer of the earth but this early defect as a result of the abuse of her human nature sets the earth in awry. Thus, Augustine could say that "Evil has no positive nature; but loss of good has received the name 'evil'.⁷ For Augustine, since there is happiness for those who do not sin, the universe is perfect; and it is no less perfect because there is misery for sinners..... the penalty of

sin corrects the dishonor of sin. It can be understood that, here there is a principle of moral balance. Thus, sin that is punished justly is cancelled out and no longer mars the perfection of God's universe. This idea of Augustine provided several reasons or answers to the century long debate and the question of why evil in the world; created, by a God who is goodness itself.

In this light, Plantinga, the Contemporary American Philosopher, on two philosophical points defended the Western Christendom view of "why evil?". He asserted that, human beings have freewill, and the possession and the use of it to do more good than evil, of such value that it outweighs all evil in the world. It explains the assumption that a morally sufficient reason for God to permit evil is possible: the value of man's possession and use of freewill is a possible reason for God's permitting moral evil, which is evil caused by man. I must hasten to add that, in the view of Augustine; God created human beings and had given us freewill. However, we are to use our freewill to choose or do only what is good for we also possess this goodness and by our nature can do good. Plantinga, as quoted by Miller says: A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can't cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they are not significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and he cannot give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so.....the fact

that free creatures sometime go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for he could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil by removing the possibility of moral good" ⁸

To solve the problem of evil in the universe of all good things, Augustine explains in chapter 13 of Book 7, captioned, "Universal Good". In paragraph one, he said, "nothing whatsoever is evil, and not only to you, but also to your whole creation, for outside of it, there is nothing that can break in and disrupt the order that you have imposed upon it".⁹

Augustinian Theodicy And Political Evil: A Philosophical Analysis Of Nigeria's Socio-Political Crisis

Nigeria, a country rich in resources, is plagued by socio-political and economic crisis that have left millions of its citizens in despair. In the face of such challenges, the concept of theodicy, as articulated by St. Augustine of Hippo, offers valuable insights. Theodicy, the philosophical and theological attempt to justify the existence of evil in the world despite the presence of an all-powerful and all-good God, can help us as Nigerians understand and respond to our crisis. Augustine posits in his book; *the City of God*: that any kingdom (country, nation) whatsoever where there is no justice is not distinguishable from robbery. Augustine went further by claiming that these kingdoms without justice are not just like robberies, they are robberies. He gave analogical explanations to support his initial claim (kingdom without justice are like robberies and historical evidences to support the latter claim (that such kingdoms are robberies.) In the Nigerian situation, inclusive of all sectors, we have payed deaf ears to the admonition of Thoreau against fighting evil, when he said; If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go; perchance it will wear smooth certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps

you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.¹⁰

In lieu of the above Nigeria's socio-political misfortune, that is, the mental complacency, where country men and women tolerate with silence, bad leadership and followership, aiding and abetting democratic misdemeanor like: **Corruption:** pervasive corruption has undermined trust in government and institutions.¹¹ **Insecurity:** Boko Haram's insurgency and banditry have caused displacement and loss of lives.¹² **Economic Instability:** fluctuating oil prices and poor economic management have led to poverty and unemployment.¹³

Augustine's theodicy emphasizes that sovereignty of God's power and goodness are not negated by evil. Human free will that is human choices and actions contribute to evil suffering, the importance of faith by trusting in God's goodness and wisdom despite uncertainty. Augustine's theodicy in the Nigerian context, can be applied by acknowledging human responsibility, that is recognizing the role of human actions in perpetuating crisis.

Philosophical Evaluation Of Augustinian Theodicy

Augustine held that there was a state of ignorant bliss in the Garden of Eden which was unbalanced by the fall. This I believe is at odds with Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. If God can be held responsible for the system by which the natural world works, he should be held responsible for the suffering that his system causes. Augustine's theodicy puts all the blame on the first humans, Adam and Eve, yet all suffer. Why should people suffer for the misdemeanours of past generations? Augustine makes much of the idea of hell as part of Creation. Therefore, God must be directly responsible for its creation, and therefore must have foreseen the need for punishment.

The great German Protestant Theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) says that a basic criticism is that a flawless creation will never go wrong and that if that creation in fact go wrong, the ultimate responsibility must be with its creator: Thus, a good God must be responsible for any flaw in His creation.¹⁴ Augustine tried to explain this by giving his personal view that the angles who fell may either receive less of the grace of divine love and if both were created equally good, it could be certain that while some fell out of their free will others got closer to the divine love such that they could not have fallen. According to the Augustinian use of the doctrine of the 'fall', humankind was created as perfect creatures and was placed by God in a perfect milieu. However, these perfect creatures transgressed and became the location for the creation of evil ex-nihilo. It is thus that they are now found to be wholly responsible for the existence of sin and evil in the universe.

Unfortunately, philosophical theodicy believe that these arguments is entirely unsound as a philosophical premise, as it inevitably renders God ultimately responsible for the moral failings of humanity. If it is true that humankind was created as unqualifiedly perfect, then how exactly

was it that they came to sin? It is logically impossible that such beings would have the capability to needlessly sin in the first place. It is thus necessary to assert that humanity was not created good

in this sense, rather that they were formed as morally imperfect beings. However, if this is the case then God is responsible for our ability for moral failing and thus cannot justly capability on account of what Augustine considers as our misuse of free will.

The objections raised by atheist philosophers J.L Mackie and Antony Flew are more substantial.¹⁵ Is it not possible that God could have created man immutable in his goodness, yet still have the opportunity to freely choose in other areas? Will men not have immutable goodness in heaven? and will he not have also have freedom to choose among certain options? Why not here on earth? Could God not construct man's nature such that evil simply was not an option? Or was God also involved in these leadership despotisms perpetuated in our political histories as observed below? We must become intellectually responsible to understand the theodicy of Augustine as simply the abuse of human freewill from a good God, who allows us to be responsible for the effects of our actions.

In his article, '*Democracy, Leadership and Nation Building in Nigeria*', Charles C. Nweke in his assessment of Leadership within Nigerian Democracy opined that Certain existential circumstances turn out concomitant to leadership features as leadership tends to strongly equate rulership, hence various systems of government embody appropriate ruler. The Socio-Political and Economic crisis in

Nigeria still reflect subtle Military regime in her Democracy, this is evident from the of 'Leadership Challenges of Nigeria Democracy Military-in-Civilian Garb' when he stated that; Obasanjo's military approach to democratic rule popularized presidential arbitrary imposition of elective candidates with sheer impunity, a situation from which the citizenry developed the slogan 'selection' in place of election. The Odi military massacre of November 20, 1999 remains one of the most undemocratic and ignoble actions of that administration. The military-styled democratic rule of the government which was nothing much short of despotism and dictatorship institutionalized the cankerworm of Nigerian democratic leadership- corruption. This I consent to giving the historic and incessant despotic tendencies in our democracy till date not denying also the high level of corruption in our public service especially with the age long recovery of the loots of General Sani Abacha even as we speak, corruption in Nigerian democratic leadership is the inability to ensconce a free and fair election as the judiciary considered the last hope of the common man is equally ensnared in collaborative corruption with the political bigwigs. Nigeria's Ethnic and Religious problem is blamed to the 1914 Lugardian amalgamation given that stable sovereignties are anchored on homogeneity and natural sense of indigenship without prejudice to certain multi-cultural polities that support the one Nigeria Spirit even though it remains a mirage of history.

The question here is, is it God that has caused all this? Augustine's theodicy has told us that it is the abuse of our free will that is to be blamed, hence, it is man failure to choose good over evil, mindfulness over politicking and humanity over callousness in governance.

Accruing to these problems, philosophy becomes the universal remedy to good Leadership as a Parameter for Nigeria Nation Building as it basically beams its rational searchlight and providing socio-political theories and consequently foundational about the thesis of leadership as in the case of the forms of government in the works of Plato and Aristotle and especially those of Lockean

social contract thesis. This is the only feasible truth needed in Nigeria today, philosophy would prescribe adequate capacity building for prospective leaders.

Plato placing high intellectual capacity as the greatest parameter for quality leadership which of course is found within the class of philosophers said, unless philosophers become kings, the society cannot progress developmentally. Plato philosopher king postulation signifies the import of critical thinking as a requisite for quality leadership especially in a socio-political crisis in Nigeria battered by bad and evil choices. Blaming our tragedy on God's omnipotence will only amount to a blackmail, as good and truth are one and same, eternally known as beauty. In a democratic setting as Nigeria, this paper recommends that for our political leaders as well the establishment of some institutions like Nigerian Institute of Peace and Strategic Studies (NIPS) together with other activities designed for leadership capacity building, that critical thinking studies, with emphasis on leadership for conscious service are highly recommended as pre-requisite for any leadership position and political stability

Conclusion

Augustine's theodicy argues for Gods existence as omnipotent and good and solve the problem of evil and suffering in the world. He believed that God didn't create evil, he maintains that evil does not exist, rather it is a privation of good.

As observed, if Augustine's concept of theodicy offers a framework for understanding and responding to socio- political and economic crisis in Nigeria, it means that we are responsible for the moral failures that have bedeviled our political history.

Blaming our tragedy on God's omnipotence will only amount to a blackmail, we must become responsible enough to choose good over evil, mindfulness over politicking and humanity over callousness in governance, if and only if we want to heal the crisis of political evil in Nigeria.

Endnotes

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