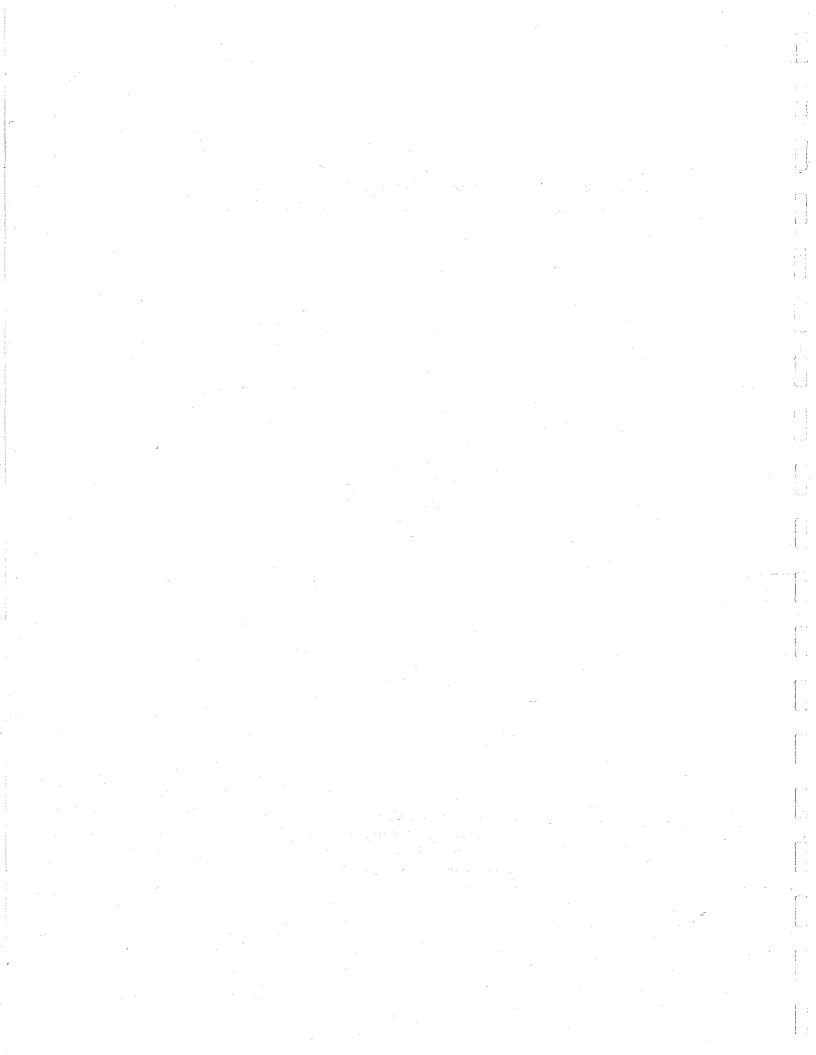# Is Sauron a Privation of Good? An Evaluation of the Augustinian Concept of Evil, as it Pertains to J. R. R. Tolkien

Written by: Nathan Bergengren
Senior Religion Major
Gustavus Adolphus College
St. Peter, MN

Mary Solberg
Professor of Religion
Rel-399
Spring Semester, Religion Thesis

Table of Contents for Thesis

Introduction

As a child, my mother always spent time reading to my sister and I, in our bunk beds, at night as we were preparing for bed. I cannot remember what exactly we read most of the time because I was still very young, but I do know that Dr. Seuss, Paddington Bear, and most other traditional children's books were not on the desired reading list. We would usually start out reading from the Picture Bible and then move on to the featured attraction—a good mystery or adventure book. Mom desired to bring us up with an understanding of the Bible and of good literature; Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, Three Investigators, anything exciting and mysterious. Fantasy was always preferred over other such genres of literature.

One of these occasions, mom pulled out this strange new book from the bookshelf and opened it up. There was a strange map inside, with strange and indecipherable words inscribed on it, as though it were written in a different language. There were many mountain ranges and little towns, and a place called Mordor, which was encircled by mountain ranges. It seemed like a wonderful place to live. My mother turned to the first page and we started reading together. This was a captivating story, with Hobbits, Dwarfs, Wizards, Dragons, Spiders, Trolls, and many other wondrous creatures. There was even a human race to read about. We read almost half the book that night. Even my mother was engrossed in this fantasy world, unable to put the book down for fear of losing her place. But alas, finally it was time for bed. Another day, another reading would ensue, and so on, until we had finally finished reading.

That book was *The Hobbit*, by J.R.R. Tolkien, the prequel to his famous trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*. In subsequent days and months, we would begin to read the books

of his trilogy—*The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers, and The Return of the King*. My mother would read for hours, unable to let go of her grasp on the book. They were your *average* children's books—filled with imagination and action—or so I thought. We probably read through the books one time, that I can remember, but as I became older and more adept to reading them for myself, I read them several more times. I was fascinated by the way that the books allowed me to enter into the realm of Middle Earth and take part in the quest to destroy the One Ring of Power. It was the classic struggle between good and evil, which I enjoyed so much, but with a twist. It seems that even the evil in the story was still somehow connected with the good because it helped to accomplish the purpose of good. And because my mother prefaced our reading with a brief lesson on how Tolkien had been a very devout Christian man in his lifetime, and that the stories could be interpreted as being pertinent to Christian living and Salvation, I was very intrigued by Tolkien. Tolkien's mythology was really about the sovereignty of God; how even the evil forces in the world assist in accomplishing good.

The books lay dormant, pages unturned, dust accumulating on their paperback covers, until one day my freshmen year of college. I had taken them to school with me more as a reminder of home, not planning on reading them. But one rainy day I decided to open up *The Fellowship of the Ring* and begin to read it again, looking for a deeper understanding than when I first read it so many years prior. I was still under the impressions that these books were absolutely about Christian living and Salvation, and an 'aesthetic' view of evil, which asserts that all things, evil included, contribute to the perfect harmony of God's created universe. This is the view of evil underlined in Tolkien's mythology.

I cannot say that it lent some profound insight on my purpose or radically changed my thought, but it did allow me to understand that, these books articulated the inevitable and immanent victory over evil that I came to believe in. I could not explain what it was, and even to this day, it is hard to put into words, but when I read through the story, I resonated with the beauty and encompassing nature of good. Good ultimately won in the end, despite oblique circumstances. I felt as though I was reading the message of the gospel or some long lost book of history, telling the story of how the world might have come to be what it is now. Evil was not going to prevail in the end, no matter how hard it attempted to stifle good, or how difficult it made it for the good characters to act 'goodly'. It occurred to me that this evil was in some way connected, inextricably, to accomplishing the goal of good. Even the bad characters, acting in their own capacities and motivations for evil, were actually helping to further the will of good. Furthermore, when the idea that this story presented its self as a possible Christian pre-history, or a story which promoted recognizable Christian themes and precedents, I began to pay more attention to the 'aesthetic' view of evil, as a way to interpret evil in a Christian sense.

This idea that the 'aesthetic' view of the universe portrayed in Tolkien's mythology was some how indicative of a Christian view of the universe was very intriguing to me. I had, and still do have, a thirst to understand how evil, communicates information about God, concerning God's goodness and power. Therefore, I began to delve deep into the writings of Christian theologians to see how they were able to understand and explain evil. Well-known theologians like Schleiermacher, Calvin, De Chardin, and Barth provided much detailed and valuable information about the nature of evil and how it fits into God's universe. But they all fell short because, while they

provided an innumerable amount of important material, they did not assist in understanding how Tolkien's view of evil could be related to a real life, physical, understanding of the nature of evil. Then, I uncovered works by Augustine and my search for guidance was over. I had found what I had been looking for.

Augustine, writing in the 4th and 5th Centuries, has impacted the Christian consciousness more than any other theologian in history, save the Apostle Paul. His life is a testimony to the captivation and validity of the Christian faith. Christianity allowed Augustine the worldview needed to be fruitful, helping to shape and support his view about evil. And so, I settled upon Augustine, sensing more than feeling, that there were real affinities between Tolkien's understanding of evil, which I was very familiar with, and Augustine's. Thus, I had settled upon a topic, in which I could explore each writer's, Tolkien's and Augustine's, understanding of evil in hopes that this idea of an 'aesthetic' view of the universe could somehow be revealed and evaluated. And possibly I might come to some new understanding through Augustine's theodicy.

The theodicy debate—the question of evil as it pertains to the power and goodness of God—has been a dominating and tantalizing avenue of inquiry since the days of Augustine, even before him. It continues, with no less potency and allure, to attract analysis from theologians and philosophers spanning the world. The diverse quantity of posited solutions have been as numerous as the number of personnel seeking to find answers to those questions.

Some theologians, who have discussed the nature of evil, say that in a world where evil is present and thus abounds, there can be no omnipotent and benevolent Creator. Others say that evil is simply a result of our evolutionary advance towards

higher and higher modes of being, moving closer to God, and has nothing to do with a loving and powerful God, similar to breaking eggs while making omelets. Others have said that evil serves as the director or road sign, pointing to humanity's need for the redemption of Christ. While these ideas do not exasperate the vast possibilities along the continuum of ideas on the subject, they do give an idea of some particulars in the theodicy debate.

It is the purpose of this thesis to explore the 'aesthetic' view of the universe, as expressed in the mythology of J. R. R. Tolkien and the theological writings of Augustine. Related to an evaluation of the 'aesthetic' view, there will be an examination of its adequacy in explaining the empirical nature of evil as well as how it serves in comforting those who suffer evil, specifically 'moral evil.' The 'empirical' nature of evil, similar to empirical data of a science experiment, refers to the observable nature of evil; how it manifests itself in the physical world. This might be different from evil's metaphysical reality. This thesis is about how Tolkien and Augustine relate to one another in their 'aesthetic' views of the universe, and an inspection into the validity of the implications or inferences of the 'aesthetic' view of evil means for those who suffer.

Understanding this view of evil, using Tolkien's own concepts can construct for us an acceptable framework as we struggle with the question of evil's existence in the world. It is important to consider this question because at a point in history, where all persons in the world are facing or have faced recognizable expressions of evil, we must evaluate what we ourselves think about evil because this will determine what steps we implement to fight against evil. It seems inappropriate for theologians and philosophers, to explain evil as an irreconcilable force, co-ordinate with God, a duality. But at the

same time, to propose that God is the source of evil is in direct contradiction to the

affirmation of the Christian God of faith. The former creates an ultimate duality, which

in my estimation is unacceptable, while the latter 'cheapens' sin and taints God's

character. The use of Tolkien and Augustine are valuable because they will help to

clarify the actual nature of evil.

In order to understand the full context of how Tolkien and Augustine understand

the nature of evil, Chapters One and Two will consist of an explanation of Tolkien and

Augustine comprehensions of evil, in its form and nature. Chapter One, "Evil in

Tolkien's Trilogy," will be devoted to detailing the depictions of evil in Tolkien's

mythology; how we see evil in *The Lord of the Rings*, while Chapter Two, "Augustine's

View of Evil," will discuss how Augustine understood evil as *privatio boni*, a corruption

of good, as well as other arguments. Chapter Three will compare the Augustinian and

Tolkien understanding of evil; how Augustine is reflected in Tolkien, based mainly on

the 'aesthetic' view of the universe. And Chapter Four will critique those similarities

(*privatio boni*, free will, original sin and created perfection, and the 'aesthetic' view of

the universe), as expressive of both Augustinian and Tolkien understandings of evil. It

may very well be the case that the 'aesthetic' view of the universe is completely

insufficient in accounting for the empirical nature of evil. I do believe that there is some

truth to what Augustine and Tolkien are saying; however outdated or fantastical, Truth is

truth. In my own life, I seek to understand the nature of evil as it correlates to the validity

of the 'aesthetic' view of the universe. I need to know, in the face of evil, that there is

some purpose behind my suffering, that my suffering and the suffering of others is not

'useless', but is for some greater good. This is a statement of faith, based on my

understanding of the Christian God. But is this notion of Augustine's aesthetic view of

the universe believable? We will see.

EVIL IN TOLKIEN'S TRILOGY

J.R.R. Tolkien has arguably given the world one of the most imaginative and

engaging stories of our time. To call it simply a "story" detracts from the awe- inspiring

impact and spellbinding hold it has on those who have been captivated by its story line.

It should more accurately be called a "mythology," for it is of epic proportions. Its

mythological character, however, should not detract from its ability to influence and

effect the reader, conveying Truths about humanity and allowing the reader to peer into

their deepest recesses to illuminate what they hold to be True. Readers resonate with the

ideals and themes in myth; they are applicable their daily lives, insofar as those themes

are allowed to engage the consciousness and take the reader deeper into veracity. The

context is different, however, when the focus moves from the mythical to the physical—

there are no goblins, trolls, elves, monsters, or anything of that sort, in the real world—

but there is still value in recognizing those themes and seeing how they interact with what

the interpreter holds to be true. Myth assists in illuminating aspects of reality, which

would not have been visible without the revealing power inherent within this kind of

imaginative mechanism.[1]

Tolkien's writings have entertained diverse audiences from around the globe for

nearly eight decades, and his esteem has risen from the dismally low to becoming a

household name. But many Tolkien fans do not realize that his mythology grew out of

his tremendous Christian faith. One cannot deny there exists a window into a writer's

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[1] Clyde S. Kilby, *Mythic and Christian Elements in Tolkien,.* in "Myth, Allegory, and Gospel: An Interpretation of J. R. R. Tolkien/C. S. Lewis/G.K. Chesterton/Charles Williams" (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship Inc., 1974), 121-122. Further more, this source will be cited as, "Kilby, *Christian Elements,* page number."

soul, though their writings. Presumably, it would not be any different in this case, and it

should not be treated in any other way. Tolkien, even though expressing a desire for his

mythology to be read in regard only to itself, understood that the themes in his mythology

would interact with his readers to produce something altogether unique.   And even for

Tolkien, his mythological and linguistic projects developed into something more than

pure amusement.[2] He entered into his own myth and became a part of his mythology.

His readers, by virtue of the nature of myth, are presented with the opportunity to do the

same as well.[3]

The *Lord of the Rings* trilogy has sold more than 50 million copies and inspired

the recent Newline Cinema films, and has reached right down into the Christian soul and

awoken its interest. "From the epic battle between good and evil to the redemptive power

of self-sacrifice, the transcendent truths of Tolkien's faith are revealed through the

adventures of his Hobbits and other fictional characters."[4]   But what is this reality, or

what are these themes, which can enlighten us? Many would say that, Tolkien's

mythology, his story, is simply about a battle between good and evil. Right away,

Tolkien takes offense to this kind of simple-minded interpretation. Tolkien's mythology

is more than just a battle between good and evil. The portrayal of evil in his writing is

undeniably present and pervasive. And as it pertains to the topic of this thesis, attention

should be given to the many visions and manifestations of the concept of evil in *The Lord*

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[2] *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, Humphrey Carpenter, ed.,. Assistance of Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 211. Furthermore, this source will be cited as '*Letters*, Carpenter, ed., page number.'

[3] *Letters*, Carpenter, ed., 233.

[4] Kurt Brunner and Jim Ware, *Finding God in the Lord of the Rings* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2001.) This was taken from the prologue of the book. This source will be cited as 'Brunner and Ware, *Finding God*, page number.'

of the Rings.[5] The popularity of Tolkien has been far-reaching and many-faceted. His mythology does in fact depict a very strong and familiar view of evil, which, explained in the introduction, provides a particular world for the 'aesthetic' concept of evil.

This chapter analyzes how Tolkien portrays evil in *LOTR* trilogy—its nature, its forms (Sauron, Gollum, etc.) and how evil works. The ambiguity or presumptive nature of deeming anything 'evil' or 'good' based solely on an entity's particular practical function is apparent in Tolkien's mythology. Once this has been accomplished, there will be enough available material to relate Tolkien's representation of evil with an Augustinian understanding of evil, which will be the topic of the third chapter.

In the Beginning...

Described in the opening pages of the *Silmarillion*, Tolkien tells us that evil entered the Heavenly realms, even before the dawn of time, and would set the stage for decisions later made by other inhabitants of Middle-Earth. It begins with Ilúvatar (God), maker of all that would be. His first creations were the Ainur, "angelic beings brought about by his thought."[6] To each of them Ilúvatar assigned themes of music that would be sung for his honor and pleasure:

> Then Ilúvatar said to them: 'of the theme that I have declared to you, I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music...ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will. But I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty has been wakened into song'.[7]

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[5] From this point forward, the entire three-volume trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, will be referred to as *LOTR*. The First Volume, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, will be cited as *'Fellowship'*; the Second, as *'Two Towers'*; the Third as *'Return'*. This will make it easier to cite the sources and to do textual references.

[6] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), 10. This source will be cited to in the form, 'Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, page number'.

[7] *Ibid*, 15.

And as Ilúvatar sat and listened to the Great Music, so pleasing to him, having no flaws, the theme progressed. And "It came to the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself."[8] Sadly, the sound of Melkor's evil theme increased as some began to attune their music to his, rather than to the thought, which they had at first, and spread throughout the heavenly realms.

Ilúvatar, in an attempt to keep order and demonstrate his sovereignty, before all of the heavenly hosts, decrees:

> And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined.[9]

The scope and mechanism of such a decree is hard to imagine. It is difficult to imagine a world, however fictitious it may be, where evil can assist in accomplishing "things more wonderful." According to this story, Tolkien's mythology seems to pose a view of evil, which has been ordained to be an integral part of creation, but which its ordination or creation, as such, is left unclear and speculative. In this particular story, the origin of evil can be attributed to the act of employing free will.

This story of evil does not explain the far-reaching, tragic effect, which evil has on creation. It only explains the Heavenly origins of evil, and does not go so far as to explain how evil had access to Middle-Earth. For the rest of the story, we must turn to the character of Sauron, and understand the role he plays in the transference and propagation of evil from the heavenly realms to Middle-Earth. This is a story that will

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[8] *Ibid*, 16.
[9] *Ibid*, 17-18.

require much attention, as it is Sauron's own evil will, bent on the domination of Middle-Earth that the entire trilogy of Tolkien's mythology centers upon. This evil will, however, eventually becomes Sauron's own demise.

Sauron

Sauron possesses two very distinct expressions, besides his bodily form: he assumes the lidless, sleepless eye, seeing all, bending man's perception of reality to his own evil schemes, and the One Ring, in all of its malice and ability to control the hearts of those who desire it. Sauron, himself, is referred to as the Black Hand, Black Master, Black One, Black Shadow, Dark Lord, Darkness, Dark Power, the Enemy, and the Lord of the Black Lands.[10] Through his will and actions, he is the chief cause of evil in Middle Earth. He represents an altogether evil character in *LOTR*.

In Tolkien's mythology, Sauron developed out of the benevolence of a servant Good, being one of the Valinor, who was "perverted to the service of the Enemy", Melkor, and eventually became his chief captain and servant.[11] Tolkien describes Sauron as:

> In my story Sauron represents as near an approach to the wholly evil will as is possible. He had gone the way of all tyrants: beginning well, at least on the level that while desiring to order all things according to his own wisdom he still at first considered the (economic) well-being of other inhabitants of Earth. But he went further than human tyrants in pride and lust for domination, being in origin an immortal (angelic) spirit.[12]

Even Sauron and Morgoth, the chieftains of evil, were not evil in the beginning.[13] Both Sauron and Morgoth slowly and surely degenerated to a point of near absolute evil, as

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[10] Kilby. *Christian Elements*, 129.

[11] Tolkien to Milton Waldman, Oxford, late 1956, Humphrey Carpenter, ed., *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien,* Assistance of Christopher Tolkien. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), p. 151.

[12] Notes on W. H. Auden's review of *The Lord of the Rings*, 1956, *Letters,* Carpenter, ed., 243.

[13] Kilby, *Elements in Tolkien,* 137.

their desire for domination increased and began to dominate them, with an insatiable lust

for power. Evil, it seems, then, has its derivation from an apparently good root; one that

initially is concerned with the preservation of creation, but is ultimately deceitful, and

will not be satisfied with mere partial control.[14]

A clear and reoccurring theme in *LOTR* is the way in which evil, often through

the advantage of retrospect, actively assumes the role of an instrument of good. For an

accurate example of how this is a reality in *LOTR*, the role of the creature, Gollum, must

be understood. Although there are many ways to see the instrumental nature of Tolkien's

evil; creatures such as Shelob, the Nazgûl, and the Balrog, just to name a few, could be

used to exemplify this classification of Tolkien's evil. But, the fact remains, none are as

obvious and memorable as how Gollum's character fits this description.

Gollum

It is worth the time and space, at this point, to venture an understanding of the

creature Gollum—that pathetic and vile creature, totally depraved of any good

whatsoever. Gollum, even though supreme in his pathos and evilness, is one of the

central characters of Tolkien's trilogy, and is of the utmost instrumentality in the

destruction of the Ring. In order to understand Gollum, the name given him by his own

kin because of the gurgling sound he made in his throat, something must be explained

about his past.[15]

Sméagol, as one would learn from the first few pages of *The Fellowship of the

Ring*, was once of "hobbit-kind," who lived by the banks of the Great River. They (his

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[14] Tolkien to Milton Waldman, Oxford, late 1951, *Letters*, Carpenter, 146.
[15] Tolkien, *Fellowship*, 52.

kind) loved the River. And there, they would swim in it, spending most of their time admiring it and utilizing it for their every day necessities. Sméagol was the most curious-minded and inquisitive of a very reputable and wealthy family, who was ruled by a very stern and wise grandmother.[16] He was interested in roots and beginnings; he dived into deep pools and burrowed under trees and growing plants; he tunneled into green mounds; and he ceased to look up at the hilltops. His head and his eyes were always oriented downwards.[17]

One day, he and a very dear friend, Déagol, went out in their boat to do some fishing. Sméagol decided to run up on shore, while Déagol stayed inside the boat and continued fishing. As Sméagol was digging and playing in the muck and mud, Déagol hooked a very large fish, and before he knew it, Déagol was pulled into the river. He had to let go of the line, both because he could not catch the fish in his predicament and because something shiny caught his eye, on the bottom of the river:

> Then up he came spluttering, with weeds in his hair and a handful of mud; and he swam
> to the bank. And behold! when he washed the mud away, there in his hand lay a
> beautiful golden ring; and it shone and glittered in the sun, so that his heart was glad. But
> Sméagol had been watching him from behind a tree, and as Déagol gloated over the ring,
> Sméagol came softly up behind.[18]

There, they exchanged words. Sméagol wanted the ring because it pleased him, too, and he wanted another birthday present from his friend. But Déagol had found it, and had already given Sméagol a birthday present, more than he could afford. Déagol, it was clear, wanted to keep the ring, but with a quick move, Sméagol grabbed Déagol by the throat and strangled him because the "gold looked so bright and beautiful."[19] Then, he took the ring and placed it on his finger, discovering powers of invisibility and

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[16] *Ibid*, 53.
[17] *Ibid*, 51.

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heightened senses it provided him with. Due to the way he put the ring to malicious and crooked uses, always "sharp-eyed and keen-eared for all that was hurtful,"[20] he was banished from his clan and from his town. In weeping and muttering about the harshness of the world, he retreated deep into the Misty Mountains, where he thought, "it would be cool and shady under those mountains. The Sun could not watch me there."[21]

And there he stayed for over 500 years, while the Ring poisoned his mind and bestowed upon him, unusually long life. He never left his cave during day or night. At last, Bilbo Baggins, the hero of *The Hobbit*, came along and found the Ring, which Gollum had lost. Thus the stage was set for *The Hobbit* and *LOTR*. Neither Gollum, nor Bilbo had any idea of the significance of the Ring. Gollum pursued the path of the Ring from the time it was taken from him, until the Ring was going to be destroyed by Frodo, Bilbo's nephew. This is where Gollum's instrumentality can be seen with the most clarity.

To fully understand how Gollum serves as an instrument in accomplishing the Quest, the third volume of the trilogy, *The Return of the King*, must be consulted. This is where Gollum's instrumentality can be seen most vividly.

Through the door of the *Sammath Naur*, over the cracks of Mount Doom, Frodo had finally come to end the long journey, which they had started out from the Shire, many months ago. Frodo was there so that he might throw the Ring into the fires of Mount Doom, which were used to forge the Ring of Power, and, thus, the only thing that could destroy it. Sam was prepared to die there by Frodo's side, as he never expected to

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[18] *Ibid*, 52.
[19] *Ibid*.
[20] *Ibid*, 53.
[21] *Ibid*.

survive the Quest. Gollum had been following behind them since the Fellowship had gone through the Mines of Moria, and had been employed to lead Frodo and Sam a great deal of the way, for he was familiar with routes into Mordor, unguarded by the Enemy. All the while, though, Gollum was secretly planning how he was going to take the Ring back from Frodo, and kill Frodo and Sam, if necessary. All of his kindness and compliance was a façade, so that he might deceive them into trusting his advice as their guide, traversing dangerous ground with the intent of somehow getting the Ring back. His plans were not accomplished in the way that he had hoped, however, so he still pursued them, intent on repossessing the Ring.[22]

Gollum tried to take the Ring from Frodo on the side of Mount Doom (Orodruin), as they were traveling the road that led to *Sammath Naur*, but Sam protected Frodo once again and threw Gollum to the ground in a rage. Sam was just about to raise his sword and strike a lethal blow to Gollum, but Frodo stopped Sam. They allowed Gollum to live and they permitted him to leave back down the mountainside. However, they did not perceive Gollum turning back and advancing towards them to accomplish the mission he set out on. As Sam and Frodo entered *Sammath Naur* and proceeded towards the Crack of Doom, they did not see Gollum creep in after them.

Frodo stood at the verge of the chasm and with a clear and powerful voice said, "I have come. But I do not choose now to do what I came to do. I will not do this deed. The Ring is mine!" And with that, he put the Ring on his finger and vanished.[23]

At that moment, many things happened. Not only did Sauron and all the power of the Barad-dûr tremble and become fully aware of the folly, which Sauron allowed, but in

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[22] Tolkien, *Two Towers*, 705- 710.
[23] Tolkien, *Return*, 925.

a flash, Gollum leaped over Sam, knocking his legs out from underneath him. Sam bashed his head on the cold stone floor, as he fell to the ground. And for a moment, all went black.

When Sam revived, he saw a terrible thing. Gollum, on the edge of the abyss, was struggling like a mad thing with an unseen foe. To and fro, he swayed, coming so near the edge that he almost slipped and fell in. Suddenly, Sam saw Gollum's long hands draw upward to his mouth. His white fangs gleamed and then snapped as they bit. Frodo gave an excruciating cry, and there he was, fallen upon his knees on the brink of Doom. "Gollum, dancing around like a mad thing, held aloft the Ring, a finger still thrust within its circle." As Gollum repeated "precious, precious, oh my precious," simultaneously, stepping too far and toppling over the edge of the cliff. As he fell further and further into the chasm, his last words rang out in the cavern *precious*.[24]

As Sam and Frodo stood watching the destruction the Land of Mordor and all its armies, Sam looked down at Frodo's bleeding hand, and fell to his knees, wishing he could offer his entire hand for Frodo's severed finger. "But he's gone now beyond recall, gone forever," Sam said of Gollum. "Yes," replied Frodo:

> But do you remember Gandalf's words: *Even Gollum may have something yet to do*? But for him, Sam, I could not have destroyed the Ring. The Quest would have been in vain, even at the bitter end. So let us forgive him! For the Quest is achieved, and not all is over.[25]

Those words of Gandalf, said as they sat in the Mines of Moria, rang clearly in Frodo's mind at that moment. What if Frodo would have permitted Sam to kill Gollum? Frodo could not have destroyed the Ring and Middle-Earth would have been lost to evil.

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[24] *Ibid*, 926.
[25] Tolkien, *Return*, 926.

As the ancient lore foretold, the counter melody of Melkor's rebellion was used as an unwitting instrument in the hands of a great composer. "For he that attempteth this," the words of Ilúvatar echo, "shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath imagined." Gollum had no intention of destroying the Ring, but arguably, as fate would have it, Gollum alone was able to assure its demise. Frodo, though willing, was unable to overcome its power. And so, what evil intended, good used.

There might have been others—other characters, another possible way to destroy the Ring, which would have changed the situation—but it is most likely that Tolkien wrote this story in the manner in which he desired it to be read. Trying to change the course of actions, straying from Tolkien's illustrations, is dangerous for the plot and insulting to such a wonderful writer because no one else truly knows what is more beneficial for the story, than the inventor himself. Tolkien's own publishing editors did not dare to edit his work.

With that said, evil in *LOTR* has another unique quality. Besides its ultimate self-destruction by its own measures, a prominent theme in the trilogy is the notion that evil is somehow non-essential or without substance. To clear up any confusion with this term, this description of evil is about the quantity of evil's physical being, rather than a statement about its importance or place in the universe. One will recognize that Augustine, in Chapter Two, also uses this term to describe the nature of evil. There are definable characters in *LOTR*, who exemplify this aspect of evil very clearly. The next section is an explication of this aspect of evil.

Non-Substantial Evil

Ever since the Ring had been taken from Sauron, at the end of the Second Age, he has been unable to assume bodily form. He was reduced to spirit form, unable to act out his will physically, but able to enslave humans under his shadow of fear and misperception, not to mention his enormous army.[26] Sauron's Ringwraiths, once great kings of men, who were given nine Rings of Power, with the strength to govern the human race, were enticed by the promise of knowledge and enslaved by their lust for power, bound to their rings.[27] The horses they ride, black and ominous, are real, but their black robes "give shape to their nothingness."[28] Even Gollum, who once was of Hobbit kind, but fell under the captivation of theRing, is simply the "shadow of a living thing."[29]

Because evil has no essential being or true creative power, it can also be mentioned that evil is unable to create anything genuine and sincere. The forces of evil are only able to mock, and not properly 'create.' This privilege is reserved for only those, who have been divinely endowed with the ability to create—the eternal spirits (in the heavens) and Elves (on earth).[30] In the first age, it was believed that Morgoth (an eternal spirit) captured some of the elves newly come in to the world and slowly bred them into orcs in envy of the Eldar. This was regarded as one of his vilest deeds. He also made trolls in mockery of the Ents. Treebeard, the Ent, tells Pippin and Merry that Trolls are only counterfeits, made by the Enemy, in mockery of Ents.[31] Of the orcs, Tolkien

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[26] Tolkien, *Return*, 822.
[27] Tolkien, *Fellowship*, 255.
[28] Tolkien, *Return*, 903.
[29] *Ibid*, 920.
[30] *Letters*, Carpenter, ed., 190.
[31] Tolkien, *Two Towers*, 526.

says, "The Shadow that bred them can only mock, it cannot make; not real new things of its own."[32] It did not give life to the orcs, it only ruined them and twisted them.

When Sauron (a created spirit) does 'make', he can only counterfeit. He lacks the basic imaginative act: creation. "Even the One Ring, which was made by Sauron, could be made only after he lured the elvensmiths of Eregion into his service and learned their secrets."[33] And, paradoxically, the smithies and furnaces of Isengard, "with their iron wheels revolving and their hammers thudding, like the poorly built houses and the mills that belch smoke and pungency in the Shire, are better represented as symbols of destruction than of creation."[34] Thus, not only is there sufficient evidence to interpret evil in *LOTR* as lacking substance, being non-substantial, but because of this aspect of evil, another can be implied and indeed recognized—evil's ability to twist or corrupt, into something new, but never to create. Evil does not have this creative power, which leads to another implication of evil.

It seems, then, that as long as good and evil co-exist, evil will somehow find a way to corrupt or twist good creatures into evil ones. This makes it very easy for evil to assume a new shape and continue its work.

Evil is an Enduring Force

Even though evil is defeated in *The Return of the King* (because the Ring was destroyed and all of evil's power with it), an overwhelming sense remains that evil is an enduring fact, not something easily annihilated. Evil is consistently perpetuated through

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[32] Tolkien, *Return*, 856.
[33] Katharyn F. Crabbe, *J. R. R. Tolkien* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1981), 92. From here forward, this source will be cite as "Crabbe, *Tolkien*, page number."
[34] Kilby, *Christian Elements*, 136.

some act or deed, and has devastated all three ages. It is interesting that, at the end of all three ages, there is a 'last' war with evil, and the next age is marked rebuilding of Middle-Earth. While the rebuilding process is going on, evil seems to hide, gathering strength for the next clash with the forces of Good. At the end of the Second Age, for example, Sauron loses his physical form and retreats into hiding until he is strong enough to begin rebuilding his army. In this way, evil seems to assume the appropriate form through which it may continue working, and cannot be destroyed!

The first age, Tolkien says, "ended with the Great Battle, in which the Host of Valinor broke Thangorodrum and overthrew Morgoth."[35] The second age "ended with the first overthrow of Sauron, servant of Morgoth, and the taking of the One Ring."[36] And the third age, which is more familiar because it is the setting of *LOTR*, came to its end in the War of the Ring. Thus, evil, in *LOTR*, is "cosmic and seemingly endless and will make forage of all good unless overcome by forces like those of the Fellowship and particularly by individuals committed as was Frodo."[37] In other words, the eschatological view of *The Lord of the Rings* does not foresee the conversion of evil to good, but one in which evil must conquer or be conquered. There is a strong duality implicated here. But at the same time, this external force, which evil represents, seems subject to the all-encompassing power of God. This means that good is, at least in the end and as foreordained by God, more powerful than Evil, and will not be overcome.

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[35] Tolkien, *Return*, 1057. This passage is found in the Appendices to *LOTR*. *Thangorodrum* was the fortress of Morgoth, which he had built to wage war against the Valinor.

[36] Crabbe, *J. R. R. Tolkien*, 92.

[37] Kilby, *Christian Elements*, 137.

Evil is an enduring force because it always finds its way into the hearts of corruptible creatures. It takes many shapes and forms, but with one goal—to dominate all creation.

The Ring ensnares and corrupts those who lust after it. The insidious nature of evil is made evident in by the compulsion of Gollum, the fall of Boromir, and the inability of Frodo to complete the Quest. Every free creature or being contains the seeds of evil, which may be brought to germination by exposure to evil. Gandalf, Aragorn, Frarmir, and Galadriel reject the Ring because they each know that even with the best intentions they cannot control the will of the Ring. The Ring is not evil simply because it is powerful, and humans lust after what they might use it for, but because it was born of evil, and it cannot, therefore, be made good, even by the sturdiest will. "The Ring was made for one purpose—to control the hearts of all beings—it cannot be used in any other way."[38] The whole history of evil is marked by one deception after another.

Conclusion

Tolkien's mythology in *LOTR* is predicated on an original state of perfection, followed by a break in the creature-Divine relationship. After the break occurs, Ilúvatar decrees that evil will serve as an instrument in the devising of greater, more beautiful Good, in which evil cannot imagine, but with which it is intimately intertwined. Evil is perpetuated by free-willed beings, having lustful and wicked desires. Evil also originates from apparent good intentions, it is non-substantial, and is an enduring force.

Tolkien does not support a depiction of the universe with obvious divisions between good and evil characters. There are characters more inclined to do evil things,

but in the end only prove to have been servants in accomplishing good. Likewise, the actions of good characters may not produce good ends. These ideas of evil only serve to illustrate the sovereignty of Ilúvatar and an aesthetic view of the universe. Even the fruits of evil are not beyond the redeeming power of God, in turning evil actions toward accomplishing good.

The fact that some evil characters may have no substantial being in Tolkien's mythology, however, does not in any way diminish the potency of evil or its ability to carry out its evil will. Evil is a very real and terrible force. Evil kills and it destroys. If Sauron were to have succeeded in recapturing the Ring, there would have been nothing to stop him from domination of all Middle-Earth. It was imperative that Frodo accomplish the Quest. As evil characters fall deeper and deeper into their evil wills, they become more and more a threat to the well being of good people, and even themselves. They become highly calculated maniacs, and a danger to all people.

In the next chapter, these themes will appear again in reference to the Augustinian view of evil as a privation of good. It is important that these Tolkienist depictions of evil be remembered because they will emerge yet again in Chapter Three, when they are compared with an Augustinian view of evil. As of now, it is not yet clear how these Tolkienist themes of evil relate or compare to an Augustinian view of evil. The Augustinian view of evil will clarify how Tolkien relates to a Christian context of evil and ultimately serves to illuminate some of the problems contained in an Augustinian interpretation of evil, specifically in its implication of the character of God and involving the 'aesthetic' view of the universe.

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[38] *Letters,* Carpenter, ed., 152 and Tolkien, *Fellowship,* 55.

AUGUSTINE'S VIEW OF EVIL

Saint Augustine (C. E. 354—430) has shaped the Christian consciousness more than any other theologian, except the Apostle Paul. Writing at a time when Christianity was plastic, he laid the foundations, for future Christian discourse about such concepts as evil, sin, suffering, and the Trinity. Few of his ideas were original, but he was able to bring diverse elements of Christian and Pagan belief together in a very comprehensive and brilliant synthesis.[39] Much of his discussion is concerned the nature and particular manifestations of evil.

The progressive argument for Augustine begins with an exploration of the nature of evil. Augustine discovers, in order to refute the claim that God was the cause of sin, he must place the blame solely upon the human capacity for freewill. This is called Augustine's Free-Will Defense. Augustine identified 'being' with 'goodness,' just as he had been taught my Plotinus. For Augustine, all evil things were deficient in some quality, which, still intact or present, made them good. Thus the more evil an entity is, the less substance or existence it possesses. Augustine sees evil as a privation of good. This idea is very closely related to his idea of Original Sin and the mutable nature of humans. In order to understand these concepts, however, it is important to understand Augustine's past history with Manichaeism, Platonism, and then Christianity.

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[39] John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love,* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), 43. From this point forward, this source will be referred to in the form, "Hick, *Evil and God*, page number."

Manichaeism

Throughout his long career, Augustine was occupied with the problem of evil. He lived in difficult times. Accounting for evil during that time was a very pertinent task, since it was a primarily religious culture, in which Augustine lived, and answers to this problem were much needed.

During his youth, he was a member of a Manichaean sect, founded by a man named Mani (C. E. 215—76).[40] Manichaeans, believed that there was an ultimate dualism between good and evil, light and darkness. The occurrence of good or evil could be attributed to the victory of one force over the other. The Manichaean God was not viewed as an absolute God, but as one of two co-ordinate beings, governing the universe, only having half of the available power. Good could be expressed insofar as it defeated evil in that particular battle, and visa versa. But Augustine came to believe that evil could not come from and benevolent and omnipotent God, nor in any way detract from His sovereignty.

Augustine later made the decision to leave this sect and transfer his efforts into a neo-Platonist sphere, the other side of the debate, promoting the idea that the entire universe was in essence good. He saw, now, the Manichaean vision of the world as fatally flawed, especially its concept of God. The idea of a partially sovereign and loving God, not knowing what to do about evil, did not rest well with his soul.[41] How, then, could the problem of evil be dealt with? How could he make sense of the world in a way

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[40] Hick, *Evil and God*, 44.

[41] *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine.* Vol. One, edited and translated by Whitney J. Oates (New York: Random House, 1948), 34. From this point forward, this source will be cited as "Augustine, *Basic Writings*, page number."

that would account for the reality of sin, but also promote the ultimate and unquestionable sovereignty of God?

Free Will Defense

The answer, as he found out, was in his self the entire time, right under his nose, and he did not even see it until almost at his wit's end. "And I directed my attention to discern what I now heard, that free will was the cause of our doing evil, and Thy righteous judgment of our suffering it."[42] But the more that he dwelt upon the particular sin in his life and the freedom of self, which he was addressing, the nearer he came to the conclusion "that it was none but myself that was willing and unwilling; and immediately I perceived that there was the cause of my sin."[43] And thus, for Augustine, the cause of sin and suffering was discovered inside human free will.

Augustine was adamant that the human will, and specifically, misappropriation of that will, was the origin of evil in the form of sin[44]. He understood that a wicked will was common among all forms of moral evil, which led him to devise that, "This avarice is desire, and desire is wicked will. Therefore, a wicked will is the cause of all evil."[45] The evidence that led him to this conclusion about the origin of evil was evil's expression in the malice of human sinfulness. Augustine was able to justify this observation by I

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[42] Augustine, *Basic Writings*, 93

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] A possible definition of "moral evil" was stated in the introduction. Moral evil is just the premeditated action of an evil act upon one's self or another person, or group of people.

[45] Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, translated by Anna S. Benjamin and L.H. Hackstaff. (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 126. Furthermore, this source will be cited as "Augustine, *Free Choice*, page number."

Timothy, "the root of all evil is avarice."[46] This word 'avarice' does not have to mean

"love of money", which is what is familiar, but actually can mean any sort of love in

which one has unhealthy desire and wants more than is enough.[47] Humans, in their

wicked state of desire, have chosen to turn away from God and have attuned to less godly

things.

If this avarice, this wicked will, is the root cause of evil, then how did it get there

in the first place? According to Augustine, God cannot be the one causing humans to sin

because in God there is no evil to tempt us with, and because sin would cease to be sin if

this were the case.[48] Augustine offers no clear answer to this question other than that it is

a "result of disorientation at the center of man's being, where he stands in relationship

with God, the determiner of his destiny."[49]

Just as the act of acquiring knowledge is not evil, but what we do with that

knowledge, so it is with freedom.[50] In further argument of this point, Augustine says:

> It is either the will itself, and it is not possible to go back to the root of the will, or else it
> is not the will, and there is no sin. Either the will is the first cause of sin, or there is no
> first cause. Sin cannot rightly be imputed to any one but the sinner, nor can it rightly be
> imputed to him unless he wills it.[51]

There is no inherent evil in the objects to which our sinful will turns. Rather, evil

consists in the very act of forsaking our human predisposition to do God's will.[52] God

created humans with a predisposition or knowledge of doing God's will. God also gave

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[46] I Timothy 6: 10 gives a good idea of what the cause of all evil is. It is not just the "love of money",
which the Greeks used—the word they used was *philargyria* [love of money] most likely because they used
coins made of alloys of silver—does not convey the truest meaning.

[47] Augustine, *Free Choice*, 126. This definition of "avarice" was taken from Augustine's own words
on the subject. It was useful to incorporate his definition because it pertains to the subject more succinctly.
Check a dictionary for an actual definition of "avarice".

[48] James 1: 12-14. Augustine uses this verse multiple times.

[49] Hick, *Evil and God*, 300.

[50] Augustine, *Free Choice*, 34.

[51] *Ibid*, 126.

humans free will, so that they might will to do right, but humans used their free will to do wrongly. "For when the will abandons what is above itself, and turns to what is lower, it becomes evil—not because that is evil to which it turns, but because the turning itself is wicked."[53] This happened in the fall of the angels prior to the creation of the world, and has been the perpetual state of human kind since Adam and Eve first committed that act of original sin.[54] Because much of what Augustine says about the nature of evil can be traced back to his idea of the created order, it would be beneficial at this point to explore how Augustine viewed the created order.

The Created Order and Original Sin

For Augustine, as in Neo-Platonism, God is the ultimate of Being and Goodness, devoid of evil. God has created all that exists 'out of nothing.' And as the work of omnipotent Goodness, unhindered by any rebellious force, the material world is wholly good. There are varied levels of goodness, one aspect of whose value is "precisely its ordered variety."[55] As such, the universe contains various creatures; some who are higher and some who are lower in the scale of being, the scale of goodness. To some, God supplied a greater, to others a more limited existence, and thus arranged the creatures and other beings in ranks, according to their "allotted nature of goodness."[56] Thus, the created universe is an immensely abundant and diverse realm of goodness, each

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[52] In Augustine's theology, which was heavily influenced by Platonism, the whole of God's creation is good, and developing our evil will only corrupts what was originally created to be good.

[53] Augustine, *Free Choice*, 38.

[54] For more information and an explanation of original sin, see *On Free Choice of the Will*, pp. 129-30 and 138. The debate about original sin is not crucial to this discussion. It represents only a small fraction of the available material on evil. To Augustine, it is obvious that Adam and Eve turned from their divine purpose to fulfill their own desires to have knowledge and be like God.

[55] Hick, *Evil and God*, 57.

[56] Augustine, *Free Choice*, 107.

having its appropriate place in the hierarchy of being. This idea has been termed, the Augustinian 'Plentitude' argument; the idea that the most perfect universe is one in which there are all kinds of beings, ranging in goodness. The fuller and richer a creature's nature, the higher it stands in the scale. The whole of creation is good because it is created by God. But because it lacks the immutability of its Creator, it could be corrupted and fall from its original created goodness. This concept will be developed further in a latter section. It is developed from Augustine's distinction between 'of God' and 'from God.'

Original sin, then, becomes the loss of one's place in that original state of created order and pursuit of things less good. The blame solely rests upon human responsibility. For Augustine, the story of Adam and Eve is a literal story, explaining the process by which humans fell from God's original created goodness and became depraved. What about the devil, then? Was not he also present in the Garden to tempt Adam and Eve to their destruction? Augustine does not allow any such extenuating suggestion. He insists that the evil act would have never been done, had not a wicked will preceded it. The wicked deed, then, was committed by persons who were already wicked, and the devil would not have ensnared humans into doing what God had forbidden had humans not already begun to live for themselves. Thus, "this wicked desire, to be self-sufficient," as Augustine says, "already secretly existed in him, and the open sin was but its consequence."[57] This poses a problem of why God would allow a humanity to be created, having full knowledge that they would sin freely. It seems that God placed humans in a position to fall. This obvious problem will be discussed in the evaluation part of this thesis, Chapter Four.

The sin of Adam and Eve was at the same time the sin of all his descendants, who were "seminally present" in Adam's loins. Augustine held that the depraved state of humans was transferred from father to child through the semen, through sexual intercourse. Thus, for Augustine, all humankind is, from birth, in a state of guilt and condemnation, and there would be perfect justice in the "consignment of the entire human race to the eternal torments of hell."[58] But through some mysterious act of God's sovereign grace, God has chosen some to be saved out of this perdition, leaving the rest to undergo their just punishment.[59] This explains how humans, in an Augustinian way, might be responsible for their sin, now, but nevertheless does not adequately clarify how humans were able to sin at first. For this interpretation, Augustine's understanding of God's immutability and humans mutability, as a result of being created 'out of nothing' must be examined. This is the foundation of how Augustine argues against those who said that God was the cause of sin.

Mutable versus Immutable Good

Like all monotheists, Augustine understood God to be the highest and most secure reality, the definition of existence. He set up a distinction between the terms "of Him" and "from Him", in relation to *creation* because, for Augustine, "All other good things are only from Him, not of Him," he says, for it is "sacrilegious audacity to make nothing and God equal, as when we wish to make what has been born of God such as what has been made by Him out of nothing."[60] And because nature had been created out of

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[57] Augustine, *Basic Writings*, 438.
[58] *Ibid*, 38.
[59] Augustine, *Free Choice*, 121.
[60] Augustine, *Basic Writings*, 434.

nothing, it could not withstand the corruptive power of vice, and therefore, fell away from God.

When Augustine uses the word "nothing" to describe what God created out of, this does not mean that God brought forth creation out of material lacking some good quality, but from that, which was not anything at all, devoid of matter, of existence, until God created it and gave it existence. There were no prior building blocks, from which God used to create the universe. God is so omnipotent, that "even out of nothing, that is out of what is absolutely non-existent, He is able to make good things both great and small, celestial and terrestrial, both spiritual and corporeal."[61]

Thus, because God created the substance of the universe, and God creates only what is good, every nature, so far as it is nature, is good. It follows, that "no nature can exist save from the most high and true God."[62] Every thing that is good comes from that which is the highest good—God. Following this logic, did God create evil, too? If not, then how could evil emanate from a good creation?

God could not have created evil because in God there is no evil. That would be as if a fig tree produced oranges—unnatural. Evil is not from God. It would be against God's nature. Human sin is attributed to the misappropriation of free will, in turning from that, which is immutable (God), to mutable goodness. But why, then, would God give humans free will? So that they might do evil? Augustine says, "For the movement itself is certainly evil, although the free will must be numbered among the goods, because without it no one can live rightly".[63] This movement will not be from God, since free will was given as a gift to institute righteously. But, Augustine eventually says, "that which is

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[61] Augustine, *Basic Writings*, 431.
[62] *Ibid.*

nothing can not be known". The initial cause, or the first cause can never be known because, as will be discussed in the next section, evil is 'nothing.'

Privatio Boni

Augustine came to the conclusion: because that which is good has its ultimate origin and existence in God, as it is from God, and because nothing God creates is evil, evil, hence, must have no nature or substance at all, but that which is a corruption of good. Augustine says, "If the completion of form is a good, there is some good even in the rudimentary beginning of form. Thus, if all good is completely removed, no vestige of reality persists; indeed nothing remains."[64] When such malfunctioning occurs, it cannot be said to exist as a separate entity. It is on, the contrary, an absence of proper being in a creature. Thus, evil has no positive nature; but the loss of good has earned the name, 'evil'. 'Evil' is evil when a good thing, as all God's creation is, abandons the Good, which created it, and retreats from the scaffold of original goodness, upon which it was fixed, and turns to lesser good.

Augustine relates this idea to bodily health and the presence of an infection, which destroys the overall health of the body. In animal bodies, for instance, sickness and wounds are nothing but the lack of health. In reference to water, cold water is simply a privation of hot water. The only difference, in the case, is that neither category of water is inherently evil, whereas sickness and wounds are evil, according to how it effects the general health of the body. And when a cure is administered, those evils, which were once present in the body, do not retreat to a place in the body, where they reside until the

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[63] Augustine, *Free Choice*, 83.
[64] *Ibid..*

next opportunity to do ill, but they cease to exist altogether. Such evil, he says, is not a substance. The wound or the disease is a defect of the bodily condition, which, as a condition, is good. Augustine says:

> Evil is nothing, but the corruption of natural measure, form, or order. What is called evil nature is a corrupt nature. If it were not corrupt it would be good. But when it is corrupted, so far as it remains a natural thing, it is good. It is bad only so far as it is corrupted.[65]

Everything that exists, then, is good. But many things are now less good than when first created by God. They have fallen away from their initial state and have given up a portion of the value, with which, they were endowed by God. This decrease in the goodness of the nature of some entity means that the thing in question has to that extent become evil. For evil is *privatio boni.* It is the absence of goodness that ultimately becomes evident when a thing has defected from the proper nature installed by God.

There is a very strong Neo-Plantonic urge in Augustin's own writing, and one can recognize Augustine's obvious Neo-Platonic inspiration when he discusses the identity of 'being' with 'goodness'. Augustine has been criticized, in this respect, for adhering too closely to a Neo-Platonic worldview. In order to appreciate Augustine's more Christian use of the idea, and the way, in which, he might have explicated it in response to the understanding of a 20th century reader, it must be formulated why, today, this is a clear and valid distinction. Then, opportunity will arise for the discussion of why Augustine would have no use for this distinction.

Identity of 'Being' and 'Goodness'

Augustine showed that he was capable of developing this identity independent of Neo-Platonism, even though it was this philosophy, which greatly influenced his thought about the properties of the universe and of God. Traditionally, most of Western thought, in the 20th and 21st Centuries, has distinguished two types of 'being'. There is, first, 'being' as bare existence, having substance, one of the occupants of space and time. In this sense, anything is properly said to exist, if it can be listed in an inventory of the contents of the universe. This type of 'being', then, is not subject to varying degrees of metaphysical goodness; something either exists or does not exist, and it makes no sense to say that something exists in a higher degree than another. This is the same, no matter how much moral integrity or aesthetic value contained within each existing object; each counts only for one. There is, on the other hand, an approach to the concept of 'being' or 'existence', which is capable of degrees when, for example, "we speak of the poet or the genius existing, or living, more intensely than other people".[66] Here, there is an evaluative and qualitative use of 'existing'; the more intense the existence, the greater its worth. Thus, 'being' and 'good' are synonyms, in this framework.

When reading Augustine with this distinction in mind, it may well appear that he illicitly ignores it by treating the two concepts as one, for he repeatedly comments that if a substance should lose all its goodness, it would thereby cease to exist. However, this would be an injustice against Augustine. For Augustine, 'bare existence' did not exist, for he held that existence always and necessarily displays certain definite attributes, which are fundamentally valuable, the most basic of these being "measure, form, and

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[65] Augustine, *Basic Writings*, 432.
[66] Hick, *Evil and God*, 56.

order".[67] In order for a creature's place in the scale of good, it must possess some degree

of measure, form, and order. However, or in what sense, the possession of measure,

form, and order implies goodness, it should be sufficient at this time to say, with

Augustine, that the goodness of each existing thing consists in the fact that God has

willed it to be.

Conclusion

Evil, therefore, implies Good, by the definition of evil posed above. Because evil

can only seek to corrupt that, which has been created by God (and is therefore good), the

existence or reality of evil must, therefore, imply a Good from which it evolved.

Augustine understands that there would be no evil unless there were good. Good could

stand alone on its own—God would not cease to be God, if there were no evil—but evil

fully depends on good for survival, and would not exist, but for the Good. Thus, evil

exists for the sake of the Good, in some harmonious blend of good and evil.

Augustine also affirms the secondary and dependent, as well as the privative

nature of evil. Nothing evil exists *in itself*, but only as an evil aspect of some good entity.

Because of this fact, there can be no completely evil entity because then, it would cease

to be a substance all together. Therefore, all matter is, in some form, good. According to

this model, then, even the devil and all the evil spirits, whose existence is not denied by

Augustine, have not reached the nadir of privation, but are still eligible or available as

tools in whatever ways God ordains to promote Good.

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[67] Augustine, *Basic Writings*, 433.

Augustine sought to discredit the Manichaean dualism, which he had subscribed to for much of his life. He relied on his heart's conviction that God was sovereign, and from God no evil could proceed. The overall theme in Augustine's writing is, without a doubt, God's sovereignty.

The progress he makes towards satisfactory answers about evil can be traced from question to answer, and so on, in this way: (1) Augustine wanted to know what this 'evil' was, in its metaphysical nature, not what objects in nature are to be accounted evil. In much of his writing, he is responding to Manichaean dualism, and his answer—that evil is a privation of good—derives directly from his Platonic influences. (2) Augustine then asks, whence comes evil? His response to this question is the, so called, 'free-will defense', which explains, for him, not only the moral evil of sin, but also the multitudinous forms of human suffering. (3) Augustine's concept of evil answers what was later called, the problem of 'metaphysical evil,' the fact of 'finitude' (limited forms of existence). Augustine solved this problem with his 'principle of plentitude', the idea that the most rich and valuable universe is one that "exemplifies every possible kind of existence, lower as well as higher beings."[68] (4) Embracing these two aspects of the subject is the 'aesthetic' theme in Augustine's theodicy, his faith that in the sight of God all things, even sin and it punishment, form a wonderful harmony, that is not only good, perfect.

Chapter Three, compares and contrasts the definitions of evil, which Tolkien and Augustine propose. Tolkien and Augustine have nearly identical views of evil, using completely different methods.

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[68] Hick, *Evil and God*, 78.

Privation and Sauron: A Comparison of Augustinian and Tolkienist Evil

J. R. R. Tolkien was an early-20th-century fantasy writer who wrote one of the world's best-loved and most popular romantic fantasies. Augustine of Hippo was a fourth-century theologian, who influenced the Western Christian mind more than any other theologian.

These two extremely influential men, although many centuries removed from each other, seem to be getting at the same representation of evil. Even though Tolkien wrote nearly 1500 years after Augustine's major works were circulated, Tolkien's writing, surprisingly, poses a very similar view of evil. Sauron, Saruman, the Ringwraiths, Gollum, and the Ring, represent the extent of how Tolkien viewed evil, as great and terrible, but ultimately contributing to the Good and demonstrating the perfection of God's universe. Augustine also posed this 'aesthetic' view of evil, a view of evil that contributes to the ultimate harmony of the universe.

This chapter explores points of interaction or union between each understanding of evil posed by Tolkien and Augustine and lays the foundation for an evaluation of Augustine's aesthetic view of evil, to be done in the fourth chapter. Specifically, the areas where Augustine and Tolkien resemble each other the most are: their illustration of the pre-mundane fall of the divine spirits, that evil is perpetuated due to the wicked and lustful will (free-will) of sentient beings, the ambiguity in naming certain actions 'good' or 'bad'; and finally, the instrumental nature of evil as representing an 'aesthetic' view. Taking these four categories into consideration, it will become very clear that both

Tolkien and Augustine arrive at very similar interpretations of evil, even though their circumstances and settings are quite different.

Before this task is completed, however, it is appropriate at this time to explore the seemingly dualistic nature of Good and Evil, of God and Satan, one might encounter when reading the Bible. This is logical at this time because the Bible had a profound impact on both of these writers.

There can be no denying that the Bible, and especially the New Testament, alludes to the existence of an opposing force to the Good (God), named Satan, or 'Adversary'. The existence of this opposing force, Satan, might suggest the reality of an ultimate duality between good and evil, right and wrong. If this is the case, as Augustine pointed out, the sovereignty of God is in jeopardy. If this is not the case, as Augustine also pointed out, then the existence of Satan and other fallen angels must serve some other purpose, God's purpose, somehow. There is no doubt that the reality and affect of Satan is accepted through the writing of the New Testament. But there is a history behind this concept of New Testament dualism between God and Satan, which must be understood first.

New Testament Dualism

It is clear that some notion of an ultimate dualism exists in the NT, mainly, and thus, God is pitted against Satan in a cosmic battle, the winner controlling everything, the loser, losing everything. The notion of a complete duality, however, is not supported in the NT. The main reasons being: because Satan was created by God, and was not already preexistent, God would still have creative power over Satan (this does not solve any

problems, however). The resurrection of Jesus Christ symbolizes God's victory over Death and Hedes.

One can see how this idea of a Biblical dualism influenced both Augustine and Tolkien during the process of conceptualization. Augustine did not want to discredit the potency of evil because evil, for Augustine, was real, in that it could affect people. For Tolkien, he saw and understood evil. He had been in the trenches in WWI and fought side by side with his friends as they were killed. Both Augustine and Tolkien were affected heavily by their Christian faith, in respect to their interpretation of evil.

Privatio Boni

Augustine, holding fairly closely to his Platonic roots, understands evil as a privation, or absence, of good. There are two aspects of this, complementing each other, with which Tolkien resonates. One idea is that, everything evil is non-essential or non-substantial, meaning that evil depends on good for survival; and the second is the impossibility of a wholly evil entity because of the identity of being and goodness. Goodness cannot be fully removed from any being lest it be reduced to utter nothingness. These two concepts are exemplified in the writing of both Tolkien and Augustine.

Because of the identity of 'being' and 'goodness', Augustine proposes that all matter or substance is inherently good because it exists 'from God', and therefore, cannot be 'naturally' evil. Evil, according to Augustine, is simply a refusal of some member of the universal kingdom to remain in its proper role in the divine scheme. So, when such malfunctioning occurs, it cannot be said to exist as a separate entity. It is, on the contrary, the absence of proper being in a creature. Thus, evil has no positive nature, but

is the absence of good qualities in an entity. Because of this decrease in the ordered goodness of a creature, beings that have turned away from their proper role in the good, have begun to approach non-existence, as much as they have lost the original goodness in them.

Tolkien has a similar view of evil in his mythology, which supports the idea that all evil things originated from an apparently good root, having their utmost being in the Good, which they came out from. But none of the evil entities in Tolkien's mythology is completely depraved. Each one of them still has a capacity for repentance, or at least a legitimate opportunity, which they may accept. This is most visible, in some form or another, through the evil creatures, Sauron, the Ringswraiths, and Gollum.

When Sauron tricked the Numenoreans smiths into making him the Rings of Power, they thought they were doing some sort of good, doing him a favor, fashioning beautiful rings. The Elves were doing him a tremendous favor, but not in the way they had previously thought. In secret, Sauron made the One Ring of Power, which would control those who wore the other Rings. He gave Rings of Power to the kings and leaders of every race—Elves, Dwarves, and Men—and they took them gladly because in these Rings was the strength and wisdom to govern their race. But one by one, they all fell under his control and obeyed his command. He waged war upon Middle-Earth and his will was bent on dominating all life. But a last alliance was formed of Elves and Men, and they went to war against Sauron because the fate of the world rested upon whether or not Sauron could maintain possession of the One Ring. It was taken from him by Isildur and Sauron was defeated, but his spirit was allowed in endure because the One Ring was kept by Isildur. He was never to assume bodily form without retrieval of the Ring. He

retreated into hiding and waited until he was strong enough to make war again for the Ring, with which he would be unstoppable.[69]

Sauron is obviously non-essential because he has no physical existence, but his spiritual form is very potent, still able to control those who use the *palantir*, the seeing stones of old, "and allow the gloom of darkness cover their hearts."[70] The power and influence is restricted to working through his servants or through bending others' perception of reality, but not through direct physical contact. Gollum, as Tolkien describes him, 'is but a shadow of his former self', and has become a sniveling, angry, pathetic creature, with no real value to anyone, except that the Quest could not have been accomplished without his treachery and hatred. Gollum was at one time a very vibrant and happy creature, but through the influence of the ring, he became pathetic and deprived of all visible good.

Gollum, in this case, is an example of how being evil reduces physical being. Gullum became less than he was before finding the ring and murdering his best friend for it. His mind and soul were poisoned by the Ring's influence; and he lost his being, his essence, and turned into an awful creature.

Another connection between Augustine's non-substantial view and Tolkien's 'shadow' is found in the description of the Balrog, a demon of the ancient world, "Durin's Bane."[71] As the fellowship was routed through the Mines of Moria, they stumbled upon a Balrog, who had been released from the Shadows by the Dwarves as they were digging for Míthril, an impenetrable and precious silver-like metal. Tolkien depicts this great and terrible creature as "a great shadow, in the middle of which was a

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[69] Tolkien, *Return*, 1048-1055.
[70] *Ibid*, 914.

dark form, of man-shape maybe, yet greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it."[72] Even though this creature has no real being, no physical existence, it does wield "in its right hand, a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire; in its left hand a whip of many thongs", wreathed in flame, and is capable of harming the fellowship. In fact, on the bridge of Kasad-Dûm, as the fellowship exit the mines, Gandalf turns and faces this monster and falls into Shadow along with the Balrog.[73] Its lack of physical being does not imply that it is harmless, however; it means that it can do harm using other methods.

The Ringwraiths were at one time kings of men, who were promised wisdom and power by Sauron through the Rings of Power, but later fell into Sauron's hands, and became his most loyal servants. They do the bidding of Sauron during the periods when Sauron is in hiding or has lost his bodily form. They are the bearers of the Nine Rings of Power, given to men; and they desire the One Ring with their whole being. They long after it with an unquenchable thirst. They are described as being 'shadows of the Shadow', robed voids, sitting on their winged steeds. The horses they ride on are real, but their robes give shape to their nothingness. They, too, have been corrupted and infected by the lust for the ring, and all evil deeds. Once great and powerful kings of men, they have been reduced to nothingness through their desire for the One Ring.

It is clear, by these examples that evil creatures have been corrupted and mutilated into the evil creatures they are now. Those who have been lastingly and continuously corrupted by evil desires have lost more of their physical substance, but somehow increased in terrible and deadly qualities. Those who have not been as corrupted or

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[71] Tolkien, *Fellowship*, 103.
[72] *Ibid*, 321.

affected by evil desires or forces (i.e. trolls, orcs, etc.) have much physical being, but are lacking in the terrible and deadly strengths of those more corrupted. But no matter how evil or how decreased in being a creature becomes, there is, by definition, no completely evil entity. Every creature has the capacity for doing good, even the most evil ones, and that aspect of evil must not be forgotten.

Both Tolkien and Augustine affirm the identity of being and goodness. All that has been created or corrupted plays a part for good, however large or small that responsibility may be. Tolkien affirms the idea that evil is a privation of some good beginning, being more deeply deprived of good as they allow the desire to have power and wealth to take hold. Augustine agrees; as this happens, more and more physical being is lost, as that which is good is being corrupted into evil. Both Augustine and Tolkien propose the impossibility of there being a totally evil being, depraved of all good. If this would happen, then it would cease to exist altogether. But evil in Tolkien's mythology seems to grow in strength and domination as it falls deeper and deeper into evil, while Augustine's interpretation of evil seems to hold that evil things will become less powerful as they go that direction. Evil, for both Augustine and Tolkien, implies some good, from which it originated, and which it is still a part, no matter how dismal that existence may be.

Free Will

One of the strongest comparisons between Augustinian and Tolkienist evil, and perhaps the foundation of most all other accepted views of Christian evil, is in regards to their representation of evil, as originating from a free choice of will. This theme is

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[73] *Ibid.*

abundant in Augustine's own writings, and is expressed countless times in Tolkien's mythology.

Augustine, in rebuttal to those who were proposing that God was the cause of sin and suffering, and towards the Manichaeans, who understood evil to be one of the original constituents of the universe, attributes all evil, both moral and natural, directly or indirectly, to the wrong choices of free rational beings. "An evil will, therefore, is the cause of all evils."[74] Again, Augustine says, "the cause of evil is the defection of the will of a being who is mutable good from the good which is immutable. This happened first in the case of the angels and, afterwards, that of man."[75] This is the heart of Augustine's theodicy. All evil can be explained to be a result of free rational beings turning away from that, which is highest good—God—to that, which is a lower good.

In Tolkien's representation of evil, evil in Middle-Earth is perpetuated through the employment of free will. Tolkien chooses to use another word for this ability for rationality in his mythology, however. Free will is to the real humanity of the world, as 'sub-creator' is to his mythical world. In this sense, sub-creative powers were given to each of God's higher created beings, the eternal spirits and to a certain extent, the elves, so that they might continue the good work of God in Middle-Earth. This gift of sub-creative ability, however, does not negate the fact or eliminate the possibility that the subject might use this creative power from a desire to do ill. This is exemplified in how Morgoth, the original evil figure, broke the ban on making other rational beings and began making things for himself, to be their Lord. Tolkien is very careful in distinguish between 'creation' and 'making' and 'corruption' and 'remodeling,' as respective

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[74] Augustine, *Free Choice*, 126.
[75] *Ibid*, 660.

capacities, which are possessed by either force. Both make full use of the free choice of will, but only those, who have been endowed with the sub-creative capacity are able to 'create' or 'make'. Those who have not been given this special ability, according to Tolkien, can only hope to 'remodel' or 'corrupt' what has already been rightly established, and never truly 'make' or 'create', thus reducing their ultimate potency.[76]

In any case, evil, for both Augustine and Tolkien, occurs as a result of free rational people, who either use their sub-creative (free-will) powers to do good or promote evil, according to their inclination. This capacity for free will is given as a gift to be used to enact good things, but too often, for both worlds, it is implemented to do evil. This moral evil, or sin, is completely contingent upon the free will of beings, and is surely not generated or advocated by God. Augustine is adamant in this point: that God cannot be the cause of sin, if God is to be benevolent and omnipotent.[77] There are vast amounts of different permutations of moral evil in Middle-Earth, and on our planet, but the common link, which denominates them all, is how free will, in each case, is used to do evil.

The Aesthetic View of Evil

Augustine does not use the word 'aesthetic' in his writings about evil. This is a term, which has been coming into use in regard to his idea that the universe, all of it, from the vantage of God, is wholly good. The aesthetic theme is Augustine's affirmation of the faith that, seen in its totality from the ultimate stand point the Creator, the universe is wholly good; for even the evil within it is made to contribute to the complex perfection

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[76] Tolkien to Peter Hastings, Oxford, September 1954, *Letters*, Carpenter, ed., 195.
[77] Augustine, *Free Choice*, 3.

of the whole. Augustine never tires of seeing the universe, in its gradations and contrasts, as a beautiful work of the Artist. This can be traced back to Augustine's idea of 'plentitude', the notion that the universe comprises many different kinds of beings, more or less ordered in goodness. The most beautiful world, according to Augustine, is a world in which every kind of being exists, no matter the goodness of that being. The overall beauty of the universe becomes apparent when the viewer considers the universe as a whole, and recognizes that God is gathering all of creation unto God's self.

This theme is readily recognizable in Tolkien's mythology. As the story progresses, one can understand that all evil, though very terrible and wicked, aid in the production of good things in indiscernible ways. Tolkien says:

> No man can estimate what is really happening at the present *sub specie aeternitatis* (Latin: 'through the scope of eternity'). All we do know, and that to a large extent by direct experience, is that evil labours with vast power and perpetual success—in vain: preparing always only the soil for unexpected good to sprout in.[78]

Tolkien was also trying to account for the sum total of all human misery throughout the history of the world, at his present moment, just as Augustine undoubtedly was. Tolkien understood that all things, good and evil, have a value in themselves, apart from their "causes" and "effects." But, as the problem arises for humans, they do not always live under the most satisfying circumstances, and they "hope that things maybe better for us, even on the temporal plane, in the mercy of God."[79] One can see that Tolkien's thought process about the contribution of evil to the aesthetics of the universe resembles very closely to that of Augustine's, but even in Tolkien's mythology, this theme is present more than a few times.

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[78] Tolkien to Christopher Tolkien, Oxford, 30 April 1944, Carpenter, ed., *Letters*, 76.
[79] *Ibid.*

In order to understand how evil lays the soil for "good to sprout in," the decree of Ilúvatar must be revisited and restated because this is the foundation of evil, both in its 'evilness' and in its 'goodness'. From the first few pages of *The Silmarillion*, the role of evil in the accomplishment of good is ordained. After perceiving that a new melody has been created, Ilúvatar decrees, he will see that "No theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this hall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined."[80] How does this actually play out? The whole story must be taken into consideration in order to illustrate how evil works in this manner.

There are a few characters that seem to embody this quality of evil. There is Shelob, the terrible man-eating spider, which appears to sting Frodo to death at the end of Volume Two, *the Two Towers*, but actually enables Frodo to get inside the Black Gates. Shelob only paralyzed Frodo, so he seemed dead. This was how Shelob was able to eat those, whom she captured. As they were attempting to enter the Gates of Mordor through the Pass of the Spider, *Cirith Ungol*, they encountered Shelob and Sam wounded her, but not without Frodo being stung by her. The commotion had awakened the guards of the tower and they came to investigate what was happening. They found Frodo lying there, obviously hurt or dead, as they thought, and decided to carry him back into the tower. They were arguing over who would be the one to have his clothing, but Sam, overtaken with rage against his adversaries and love for his master, Frodo, rose against the tower orcs and defeated them.

All the work of figuring out a way into Mordor, past the numerous orcs and other creatures, guarding the gates and passageways, had been removed. Both Sam and Frodo

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[80] Tolkien, *Silmarillion*, 17.

were inside, now, and they could begin their journey to Mount Doom to destroy the Ring. In this case, the orcs and Shelob were ineffective in killing both Frodo and Sam, and all the arduous work Same and Frodo were intending was ultimately accomplished for them, by the evil forces they were trying to destroy. Evil, in this instance, served to defeat itself by permitting Frodo and Sam to continue their quest to destroy the Ring.

At the end of the first book, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the fellowship comes under attack by fighting Urukai from Saruman and Boromir was killed by the leader of the Uruks, and Merry and Pippen, two Hobbits who were also part of the Fellowship, are taken away by the orcs. The Uruks were under the impression that one of them carried something of value—the Ring.

During this time, however, Sam and Frodo set off across the River Anduin and reached the other side, making a path for the Land of Shadow, Mordor. Frodo knew that it was time for the Fellowship to break and go their separate ways, for there was other work to be done in other parts of Middle-Earth. Gímli, Lágolas, and Aragorn follow the orcs to recue Merry and Pippin.

These actions, the splitting of the Fellowship, is very significant in the battle against Sauron and the hosts of Mordor because as a Fellowship, they were contained within proximity to each other, the nine of the Fellowship. But, as they split off from each other and began to pursue other objectives, they were free to lead good forces against the forces of evil. Gímli, Legolas, and Aragorn were able to help defend Helm's Deep from an invasion of Saruman's Urukai, while Merry and Pippin were successful in convincing the Treebeard and the Ents to storm the Tower of Orthanc, where Saruman

was barricaded.[81] Aragorn was able to lead a small company through the Paths of the Dead, gathering reinforcements for the battle of *Minas Tirith*.[82] Aragorn, through these trials and battles, was also able to finally accept his Kingly right, as the King of Gondor, and exercise his gift of healing, while leading troops against the host of Mordor.[83]

Each of the different participants of the Fellowship was able, in some way, to contribute to the overall battle against the forces of evil, brought about by the schism of the Fellowship. As a cohesive Fellowship, they could not have fought evil, but as separate entities, they were able to destroy the Ring in the fires of Mount Doom, while Gímli, Legolas, and Aragorn controlled the outcome of the war against the host of Mordor on the battlefield. Merry, in the heat of battle, manages to assist in killing one of the Nazgûl. Evil, in the end, only served in the devising of things more beautiful, just as Ilúvatar had decreed. By the destruction of the Ring, evil was abolished from Middle-Earth, and the Age of Men could commence.

It is interesting that Augustine uses the word, 'harmony' or 'harmonize', to explain how even the evil things in the universe only prove its perfection. Ilúvatar, in Tolkien's mythology, uses the same word to describe the product of all of evil's attempts at disruption. For Tolkien and Augustine there is a supreme Divine harmony, which every creature participates in, good or evil. For Augustine, each being realizes its creative possibility; each is in its own way contributes to the perfection of the whole. A human being, regarding the creation from a limited perspective, may only focus on aspects, which are useful or practical to their self, and are not able to understand creatures

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[81] Tolkien, *Two Towers*, 515 ff.
[82] Tolkien, *Return*, 768 ff.
[83] *Ibid.*

according to their value in the sight of God.[84] Thus, for both Tolkien and Augustine, that which appears evil in the temporal scope of the universe, serves to illustrate and punctuate the perfection of God's creation.

Conclusion

Thus, as it has been shown, the relation between Augustine and Tolkien, in their respective view of evil, resembles each other very closely. Both Augustine and Tolkien identify 'being' and 'goodness', and suggest that as an entity becomes more and more depraved of the good, which it once had, it begins to lose its essence, and ceases to be substantial. This is the nature of evil, as they both understand it. In regard to the origin of evil, both Augustine and Tolkien understand that evil originates from a free will gone wicked, but in itself is a moderate good, or intermediate good. Free will was given as a gift, so that one could will to be aligned with the Divine Will, but too often it is clouded and used to accomplish moral, temporal, evil. And both Augustine and Tolkien seriously resonate with each other in their depictions of the beauty and perfection of the universe, as evil contributes to it. For both of these writers, evil exists for the sake of good, and donates itself to the perfect harmony of the universe.

There is also a notion of divine justice, which both Augustine and Tolkien seem to propose. For Tolkien, in the end, the creature Gollum falls into the Cracks of Doom and gets what he deserves—the Ring and death. Saruman and Wormtongue, his apprentice and servant, are killed in the Shire for their trespasses. Wormtongue slit Saruman's throat in anger and revenge for Saruman's betrayal, but before he got away he was shot down by a Hobbit archer. All the loose ends are tied up and all the good

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[84] Augustine, *Basic Writings*, 98.

participants are rewarded with wealth, property, or eternity, as are the Elves, Frodo, Gandalf, and eventually, Merry, Pippin, and Sam. Aragorn becomes King of all of Middle-Earth, as was foretold by the ancient prophets, and is wed to Arwen, the daughter of Elrod, the King of the Rivendel Elves. The Shire is replanted and restored greater than it was before the War of the Ring, greater than in the history of its history. All of Middle-Earth is made peaceful for the "Age of Men," and it seems that evil will never again rear its ugly head. The evil receives nothing, but death and defeat, while the good people maintain prosperity and promise for the rest of their days.

But can humanity rely on this myth for information about evil? Does Augustine provide an understanding of evil that is satisfactory? Is Augustine's aesthetic view of evil, as maintaining perfection in spite of evil, adequate in this light? Does it offer comfort to those who are suffering or experiencing the forces of evil first hand? The next chapter, Chapter Four, deals primarily with these questions, concerning the character of God and the feasibility of this view.

A CRITIQUE OF AUGUSTINE'S VIEW: Is it Adequate for the Suffering?

By now, one should have a fairly firm understanding of both Augustine's and

Tolkien's view of evil. In dialog, they resemble the other very closely, as Tolkien had

learned from Augustine himself. For someone who has been engaged by this paper thus

far, the question, then, can be asked, What relevancy does a Tolkienist view of evil offer

to what human beings, in the real world, are experiencing? And, of Augustine, then, a

different question can be asked, Does an aesthetic view of the role of evil offer hope in

regards to the horrific reality of human suffering around the world? These are all very

fruitful questions; ones that will be clarified later on, but first, it is important to return to

Tolkien for a moment, and discuss further his understanding of the nature of evil. Then,

once this has been accomplished, a consideration of the validity or adequacy of

Augustine's evil will be ventured.

Tolkien was a very strictly devout Catholic young man, in his youth, but as he

grew up, the pressures accompanying life in the career world, allowed him to lose touch

with his religious roots. His family and career had become more important to him, than

his religious life. They went to church, as was expected of their family, but it was a civil

Christianity, and meant nothing to him at the time. He later returned to those religious

roots, after realizing how important they were to him, and how instrumental religion had

been in creating the man he was.[85]

The writings of Augustine have not only influenced much of Western Christian

thought, but have also influenced the theology of the Catholic Church as a whole.

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[85] Tolkien to Michael Tolkien, Oxford, November 1963, Humphrey Carpenter, ed, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien,*. Assistance of Christopher Tolkien, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 338.

Tolkien was a Catholic, and had been taught Catholic theology, while at King Edward's Grammar School. He was familiar with Augustine's argument, that evil was a privation of good. This familiarity with Augustine's evil never truly left Tolkien because it can be seen in Tolkien's writing, in mythical terms. Whether this was a conscious or unconscious decision on Tolkien's behalf, the fact remains that both Tolkien and Augustine are operating under very similar understandings of evil.

But, to return to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, 'What relevancy does a Tolkienist view of evil offer to what human beings, in the real world, are experiencing', the answer is 'nothing'. Insofar as it serves to illustrate the wide influence Augustine has had on the majority of Western Christian thought, understanding how evil is portrayed in Tolkien's mythology is relatively inconsequential. If this were not the case, and Tolkien has provided the world with some plausible and trustworthy mythology, then the occurrence of "Tolkienists" or "Lord of the Ring-ists" would be quantifiable. But the very fact that there is no occurrence of this phenomenon serves to indicate that something else is occurring, which relates to a structure already in place— Christianity. However, the very fact that Augustine's view of evil is traceable in Tolkien's writing is reason enough to explore how this idea of the aesthetic universe hold true. That being said, then, the second question posed at the beginning of this chapter was, Does an aesthetic view of the role of evil offer hope in regards to the horrific reality of human suffering around the world, today? Seeing as how most Christians, whether they know it or not, have adopted some form of the Augustinian view of evil, it makes perfect sense, now, to turn towards Augustine, neglecting Tolkien, and evaluate the logical nature of Augustine's argument about the aesthetic view of the universe.

There are two main focal points of human reality, of which Augustine's notion of evil as a privation of good affects more drastically than other forms. John Hick states them, in his book *Evil and the God of Love*, as (1) a problem with the metaphysical reality such an understanding of evil implies and (2) the difference between the empirical and metaphysical reality of evil—"as a fact of observation rather than an inference from theological premises."[86] Each of these qualms with Augustine will be explained. Another qualm with Augustine's view involves the character of a God, which would create a perfect humanity, lacking nothing, experiencing the wonderful eternal presence of the Divine, but also in full knowledge of the tragic flaw humans possessed that would nullify the whole situation. The Augustinian approach to evil as *privatio boni* accounts for 'natural evil' fairly well, as in bodily sickness or disintegration of food, but it does not adequately explain 'moral evil'. Each of the former arguments against Augustine will be discussed in length in the upcoming sections.

Metaphysical Evil

In a discussion of the logical nature of Augustine's proposal that evil is a privation of good, Hick immediately says, "Augustine would not be offering an analysis of the actual nature of evil, but would rather be recommending an optimistic vocabulary, and with it an optimistic way of thinking about the world."[87] Augustine's idea that evil is a privation of good resembles more a "semantic preference," similar to someone who, when asked if the glass is half empty, says the glass is half full, "there is no such state as

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[86] Hick, *Evil and God*, 61.
[87] *Ibid*, 60.

a glass being half empty."[88] Such a reply, although having the form of a truthful statement, only expresses a linguistic suggestion. In the case of many opposite terms, such as large-small, hot-cold, fast-slow, good-evil, it is possible to terminate the use of one by defining it in terms of the other. To eliminate the use of the word 'small', one might simply explain someone as being 'less large'. Similarly, one could terminate the world 'evil' by speaking of greater and lesser degrees of goodness. In this sense, the problem of evil can be eliminated by not using the word 'evil'. But obviously the reality of the problem of evil does not go away by simply taking it out of one's vocabulary. The solution lies in more difficult and deep waters than to be solved by an elementary linguistic motion to abolish the world 'evil' from our vocabulary.

Outdated Premises

Many of the premises of Augustine's argument for evil as the privation of good have since been disproved. For the *privatio boni* concept receives its meaning and validity primarily from the context of Christian and Jewish presuppositions. This concept relates most directly to the idea of a creation *ex nihilo*. In this *ex nihilo* model, God created the universe, humans included, in a state of original perfection. Augustine's idea of original perfection is now seen as unlikely because of scientific innovations in the field of genetic evolution. But humans, through their sinful acts, broke the bond between God and creation. Augustine also says that, even before the temptation in the Garden, Adam and Eve were already wicked; the serpent would not have been able to tempt them if there were not already fallen. Augustine does not claim to know when the first wicked

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[88] *Ibid.*

thought began to sprout roots, but he does say that it was before eating the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil.

The problem with a belief in an original state of perfection and original sin, then, is thus drastically reduces the amount of possible interpretations about the human condition. God must have chosen to set humans up for the fall. If God created humans in a state of perfection, then they should not be capable of rebelling against it. What could be more satisfying than God's full presence, being in communion with the Divine eternally? Augustine sought to uphold God's benevolence and omnipotence by saying that evil was a privation of good human free will, but this does not solve this problem. In fact, it created a greater hurdle to leap.

Given the universe has been created by an omnipotent God, what is the nature of evil, then? Hick says that, "It cannot be anything substantial, a positive constituent of the universe, but can only be a loss of natural 'measure, form, and order', a malfunctioning of something that is in itself good."[89] This privative definition makes it clear, within the Christian context, how there can be evil in a good creation: evil was not created by God, but consists in human beings' free will to turn from good. Augustine formed his argument, so that evil could not be explained in any other way, but to say that evil is a privation of some pre-existing good.

Natural Evil

The idea of evil as *privatio boni* inflicts less offense on the impact of 'natural evil' then 'moral evil'. But even applied to the former, the privative account of evil could only function very inadequately as an empirical description of the nature of evil. It is

true, that which is commonly called 'evil' in nature could be regarded as consisting in the corruption or dissolution of some substance, which, apart from that disruption, is good. This is illustrated by the rotting of an apple or any other living organism, that when it becomes corrupted, tends more towards dissolution and disintegration. In this form, this idea can be brought in conversation with Augustine, as some loss in 'measure, form, and order'. When a disease infects the body, it can be said to corrupt or disrupt the natural state of bodily goodness. Likewise, natural phenomenon such as volcanoes, tornadoes, and the host of other meteorological events could be regarded as some kind of break from some imagined ideal of natural goodness. It is clear that, from a definition of evil as a privation of good, the previous examples of natural evil could be seen as some collapse in the ordered goodness, tending towards non-existence, insofar as there is a breakdown in the previously established arrangement of goodness in life or matter.[90]

Moral Evil

To simply call evil a privation of good does not adequately deal with the reality of moral evil in the history of human existence. Humans have had a relatively short history in comparison with other animals,' but that history has been marred by the reality of the power and terror of evil actions. For example, the history of Hitler, Stalin, Hussein, and Bin Laden prove that a personality may in fact become more integrated and potent as a result of an evil will. The will or personality does not decrease in existence, but can actually increase in strength and substance. To think of the occurrence of the Holocaust as a mere absence of some good is utterly insufficient. The evil will as an experienced

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[89] Hick, *Evil and God*, 60.

reality is not negative, as far as the definition of evil as *privatio boni* would suggest, but can be an absolutely positive force in the world. Hick says, "Cruelty is not merely an extreme absence of kindness, but is something with a demonic power of its own. Hatred is not merely lack of love, or malevolence merely a minimum degree of good will."[91] These actions are empirically evil because they cause pain and suffering for so many people.

The free will defense of the Augustinian theodicy, in an attempt to transfer the blame for moral evil from God to humans, has introduced a new kind of problem into the equation, centered on the character of God. God created humans in a perfect state of created order, to be in relationship with God. To give the greatest endowment imaginable, God gave humans free will, so that they might freely will to do God's will. But humans chose freely to turn from the Good, which they were supposed to choose to do, thus contaminating humans with a condition of depravity that can only be removed or countered by the redemption in Christ. Augustine proposed also that God is omnipotent, benevolent, and omniscient.

If God, being omniscient, had foreknowledge of the fall of humanity as a result of free will, then why did God not create humans that would freely do right? Another related question is, could humans, being in proximity to the Divine, turn away from that proximity towards lesser things? The nature of the first question implies that if God did have the foreknowledge of the fall of humanity, as a result of freely turning away from God, and yet continued with the creation of humans, then God might not be benevolent. This is because God would have knowingly and willingly created humans with a

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[90] *Ibid*, 61 and Loren Meierding, *God, Relationships, and Evil.* (San Jose: Writes Club Press, 2000), 47.

predisposition for failure. But, even in these bleak circumstances, it is certain that God is not unable to cultivate good out of these evils. There is an overwhelming sense of pervasive redemption in Tolkien and Augustine's view of evil. But can this possible redemption comfort those who suffer?

The fourth and final contention point against the Augustinian understanding of evil lies within the aesthetic view of evil and how this relates to those who are suffering the reality of evil, and are not comforted by this view. Augustine understood that all things, all forms of greater and lesser good, even those, which could be termed 'evil', serve a special ordained purpose to perfect the universe. The problem enters when this view begins to detract or subtract from the comfort of those who suffer evil. With even evil as some form of good, by Augustine's definition, it is very difficult to understand or realize how such blatant and gross suffering could in any way be beneficial to the process of life. This perception of evil only "cheapens" evil and neglects all responsibility to those who are in the throws of evil, experiencing the terrible and powerful reality of evil. This idea goes too far in one direction, but the concept of an aesthetic view of nature is beneficial, however, because it affirms the ultimate sovereignty of God, and God's victory over the reality of evil.

Conclusion

The Augustinian view of evil as a privation of good implies a particular Christian understanding of the universe and is founded on outdated premises of *creatio ex nihilo*. Not only does the Augustinian understanding of evil imply certain interpretations of cosmic events and outdated premises, but since the innovation of scientific method and

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[91] *Ibid*, 63.

theory, Augustine's belief that the fallen human condition was transmitted seminally, through the semen of the father has been disproved. This first argument against an Augustinian understanding of evil as *privatio boni* can be classified under problems with the metaphysical reality of the universe.

The second contestable portion is in regards to the empirical rather than the metaphysical nature of evil as a phenomenon of human experience. Augustine says that which is evil is approaching non-essence or is becoming insubstantial, as it turns from that which is good. But the history of humanity reinforces is the potency, integration, and sophistication of evil. The evil or person, instead of approaching the threshold of nothingness or non-essence, is often times actually taking strides towards increasing in power and substance. An evil will is a dangerous force to experience. The ravings of the *average* lunatic accomplish nothing compared to the massive potential danger posed by the evil wills of the Hitlers, Stalins, and Husseins. To refer to the systematic murder of over six million Jews in the Holocaust as a simple privation of some good is inadequate and serves more as an element for anger and outrage rather than an acceptable and comforting perception of evil.

Besides the metaphysical baggage accompanying the Augustinian view of evil and it inconsistency with the empirical data concerning the reality of evil in realm of human history, evil does not accurately account for the reality of 'natural evil'. Morally bad actions by human beings almost never cause natural evils or animal pain, sparing the occasional nuclear disaster or animal hater. This theodicy falls short in explaining God's permission of animal pain. However, the problem of animal pain is of much lesser significance than justifying permission of the horrific moral evils.

Conclusion

Tolkien sees evil as an aspect of free-willed beings. Beings have either the choice to align with the Divine or follow their own selfish desires for power and wealth and become more evil. Those who have chosen to traverse this path of evil slowly become more demented and depraved. Characters like Sauron, Saruman, the Ringwraiths, and Gollum were good at one time, but they were tricked, captivated, or taken by evil forces and corrupted.

It is difficult to think of evil Melkor (Morgoth) as a good character, but he too was once a member of the high court of heavenly eternal spirits. He was numbered among the good at one point, but he desired to add a melody of his own devising, counter-melodic to the divine melody they were singing at first. Pride and lust for power and wealth are common among all those who have fallen into evilness.

Tolkien poses a view of evil that comes from an apparently good root. Good creatures can become corrupted or twisted into being evil. As creatures progress further and further into evilness, their physical being is lost or reduced. We can see this manifest in Sauron, the Ringwraiths, and Gollum. They do not possess the physical matter they had when they first started down the evil path. Evil is unable to create, but only corrupt or twist what is good. In this sense, evil is simply a corruption or privation of good. It lacks a certain substance, which it had in the beginning. But this is not to say that evil is a non-reality or is in any way to be ignored. If you were to ignore evil, then you would be caught up in it or destroyed by it. Evil is a very strong and terrible force, and evil has other ways of working, besides through physical ways. Sauron can control the perceptions of others even though he is not in physical form. Its (evil's) non-substance

does not imply its non-existence. These themes resemble the Augustinian view of evil in very profound ways.

Augustine understood that all evil and suffering in the world is caused by free-willed humans. Adam and Eve were created in a state of original perfection, but even before tempted by the serpent, they had already made the decision to live for themselves. They turned away from God and toward themselves. Augustine said that evil is *privatio boni*, a privation of good, a deficit or absence of good qualities. Evil has no positive or primary existence, but is secondary and parasitic on the good for survival. Evil has no existence apart from the good it is a corruption of. Augustine also identified being with goodness, so all that has being is also good at the same time, although God had created things with less goodness than others. There is no inherent evil in being created with less goodness than another being, but the problem arises when that evil being decides to relinquish its natural 'measure, form, and order.' But since all things are good insofar as they exist, all creation contributes to the ordered perfection of the universe. Good and evil alike prove the perfection of the universe as ordered by God. This is called Augustine's 'aesthetic' view.

Both Augustine and Tolkien have a very poignant view of how the melodies of good and evil combine to form a very perfect and ordered harmony in the universe. For Tolkien, every single evil act in the history of his mythology can be seen as a contribution to the ultimate harmony. Augustine also uses the musical metaphor to describe how evil contributes to the perfect order of the universe. Everything works out in the end; the good are rewarded while the wicked receive their just rewards and are punished. Gollum deserved the Ring in the end because he desired it with such fervor, an

unquenchable passion. He received what he deserved, though, in the sense that he finally

got the Ring, but also in the sense that he was punished for his life of evildoing. And he

also served as the instrument of good in destroying evil. Evil in Tolkien's mythology is

set up as a partial duality because Ilúvatar and the good creatures are in conflict, seeking

to destroy each other, with whatever form the forces of evil decide to take (Melkor,

Morgoth, and Sauron). It is partial because all the evil characters and forces ultimately

serve to destroy evil, and are therefore instruments of the good. But does this mean that

God was controlling them as well, making them do evil to accomplish the will of Good?

Such questions can be asked of the Augustinian aesthetic view of evil. But there

are other more fundamental problems with the Augustinian theodicy to notice first.

Augustine was working from premises of original perfected order and original sin

that have since been redefined or disproved by the advances of science. The

acknowledgement of genetic evolution at work in history seems to contradict the idea that

humans were once in a state of perfection. Rather it seems that humans started from a

state of imperfection or disorder and is moving forward to higher and higher orders of

perfection. Augustine also believed that the guilt and depravity of sin was transferred

from father to child through the semen. Modern genetics has not discovered the "sin-

gene", which is passed from parent to child through conception. Augustine's view of

evil also poses a problem for the Character of God.

Augustine loved God. One has only to read his *Confessions* to realize that

Augustine was in-love with God. Coming from Manichaeism to Neo-Platonism, and then

to being converted to Christianity, Augustine had been exposed to a wide variety of

different Pagan beliefs before coming to love the Christian God. Augustine also realized

that evil was a very real and threatening reality, and that people were blaming God for this. His life's work was dedicated to apologizing the Christian faith to those on the outside and those about to leave. The problem of evil was a very difficult subject for him to maneuver around or explain. But by attempting to demonstrate God's omnipotence and benevolence in this way, Augustine dealt a very lethal wound to the character of God.

In the attempt to protect the omnipotence and benevolence of God, by saying that free-willed humans were the cause of evil and suffering, Augustine in essence creates a God who, though having full knowledge of humans' fall and suffering, continued with God's plan and made a humanity prone to failure. God knew that humans had been created out of nothing, 'from God', and not 'of God', and therefore they were corruptible. Humans fell miserably into the depths of evildoing, since then, and now are incapable of using their free will to do rightly. If God knew this, then why not create a humanity that was unable to fall or be corrupted? Why create humanity prone to turning away from God's Self? If this God let humanity fall, then this God is not benevolent. If this God could not make humanity love God enough not to turn away, then this God is not omnipotent. According to the logical nature of this argument against the free will defense, then, God is neither omnipotent nor benevolent, but a mixture of both at certain times. This is the major problem with Augustine's theodicy.

Some critics say that Augustine's aesthetic view of evil serves to 'cheapen' sin, removing the significance of such a terrible and powerful force. They do not understand how evil can be 'good', serve the good. For people who are experiencing the terrible affects of evil in their lives, "it will all turn out for the better" or "don't worry, you will

be fine" does not take the pain away. But the fact is that for most people who hold a Christian perspective, suffering and pain are expected aspects of Christian living. Is this aesthetic view of evil sufficient for them? Is it adequate for me in my own suffering? If I cannot take comfort in the fact that God has a greater plan, that involves my suffering or can account for it, then I do not have a very strong faith indeed. If I cannot hope in the God of the Christian tradition, whom I have come to love and adore as Augustine did, then there is no hope or meaning through suffering. But does this mean that I must endure it? Should I do nothing and allow it to ravage my life? Should I fight it? To what extent should I fight it? And now, we come to the largest problem in balancing out the aesthetic view with a dualistic view.

There is great difficulty and ambiguity in deciding which things are evil and which things are simply a part of life, and should be taken in stride. Life has many different circumstances and avenues through which to experience. But there is a strong feeling of hatred and resentment of those things that are more evil than everyday experiences of evil, which occur all the time. That greater evil must be combated with every ounce of strength. It must be resisted and removed from my life or the life of my friends. The problem is, that I do not want to place too much emphasis on the evil forces, so that I create a dualism between good and evil, between evil and me. But at the same time the alternative to a dualistic view of good and evil is somehow aesthetic in nature. My Christian faith allows me to rest in the knowledge that God has everything under control, whether I understand it or not, whether it is logical or not. To say that evil is beyond the reach of God, that God cannot use or account for evil in my life and the lives of those who suffer around me is unacceptable to me. I am not a fatalist. I believe that

all evil should be fought with great vigor and undying passion, but is there balance between acknowledging the dualism and fighting against evil and resting in my faith that God has everything under control? This is a good question. One does not want to stray too far to one side, for penalty of decreasing either the power and goodness of God, in the case of moving toward a dualism, or the significance of sin and suffering, in the case of an ultra-aesthetic view of the universe. A guideline or answer for this question is worthy of inspection.

At this time in my life, while I am still young and virile, I want to take every opportunity to follow my passions, seeking God for direction, and fight the evil resident in my own heart and the evil around me. You could say that an aesthetic view of evil is in some way the easy way out of the theodicy debate—if God controls everything in secret then why bother with the question at all—but does that make it any less true or applicable in our own lives. I am not posing an apathetic view, but one of proactively standing against the evil we know and suffer, and to join in with the suffering of others, as we are told to bear one another burdens. Whether evil has its place in God's universe, as an aesthetic view, or if it serves to disprove an omnipotent and benevolent God that is up to the reader but please understand that an aesthetic view of the universe does not imply apathy.

The battle between good and evil in Tolkien's trilogy may turn out to be the way that evil actually works. The aesthetic view of the universe may prove to be a correct view. Some things are not knowable at this time. There are things, which go beyond logic and science that affect our lives, and we should seek to understand where evil fits in. We look forward to the day when we will know, in full, the answers to our questions.

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