

ABSTRACT

A Foundations Approach to Augustine of Hippo on Grace, Free Will, and Predestination:
Understanding the Theological Constraints of Prosper of Aquitaine and John Scotus
Eriugena

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The Christian Tradition has long struggled to reconcile grace, free will, and predestination. As one of the earliest Christian theologians to explore these topics, Augustine of Hippo laid much of the groundwork for centuries of theological development in this arena. Unfortunately, due to Augustine's unacknowledged change in his position, the Augustinian viewpoint is inherently ambiguous. In light of a lingering difficulty in synthesizing the Augustinian position, this thesis argues for a foundations approach in which the strain and apparent contradictions in Augustine's writings are left unresolved. First, three foundations representing each thread of grace, free will, and predestination will be constructed from Augustine's work. Then, to demonstrate the hermeneutic and its merits, the relevant writings of Prosper of Aquitaine and John Scotus Eriugena—two writers in the Augustinian tradition—will be surveyed through a foundations lens. Through this, the advantage of the foundations approach's understanding of the constraints on patristic and medieval Augustinian writers will be revealed.

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A FOUNDATIONS APPROACH TO AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO ON GRACE, FREE
WILL, AND PREDESTINATION:
UNDERSTANDING THE THEOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS OF PROSPER OF
AQUITAINE AND JOHN SOCUTS ERIUGENA

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Tenuous Beginnings of a Controversial Doctrine

In many respects, the theological difficulties surrounding grace, free will, and predestination in the Christian tradition stem from an inability to understand why the will of God to save all persons is not realized (1 Tim. 2:4). Often, human free will, specifically the free choice to reject God, is identified as the frustrating agent in God's will. Moreover, actually constructing a position that gives power to free will without also allowing for salvation itself to be solely within the power of the free choice of the will is not without difficulty. Prosper of Aquitaine, for example, observed that if the non-actualization of God's will lies with the wills of individuals, then there seems to be no room for grace.¹ In other words, if the free choice of the will accounts for whether or not a person is saved then grace would seem to serve no role in salvation. On the other hand, if the answer to why not all are saved lies with grace, then God denies the free gift of salvific grace to those who cannot of their free choice choose salvation. On its surface, either horn of the dilemma seems fatal. If God, who is both all-loving and all-powerful, only gives the grace of salvation to some, it would seem that either God is unjust or does not truly will that all would be saved. If it is that humanity simply doesn't choose the path that leads to salvation, then it seems that only human free will, not the gift of grace, is necessary for salvation.

¹ Prosper of Aquitaine, *The Call of All Nations*, bk. 1.1.

Although this characterization of the issue does not encompass the entirety of the positions that have developed throughout church history, it reveals the core tension inherent to the puzzle. When all three of grace, free will, and predestination are affirmed, it isn't clear how, or even if, they fit together in a consistent, coherent, and satisfying manner. Augustine of Hippo, as one of the first to thoroughly and systematically explore this tension, would go on to shape centuries of discourse on these topics within the church.

Born to a Christian mother and a pagan father in 354 AD, Augustine would not convert to Christianity until 386 AD. However, he would not wait long after his conversion before entering the arena of Christian theology. In 388 AD, only two years later, Augustine completed the first book of a three-work volume titled *De libero arbitrio*. In it, Augustine emphasizes the role of the human will in both right moral action and the presence of evil in the world. Still heavily influenced by Augustine's pagan past, the work is rich with Neoplatonic and Stoic themes. Ultimately, Augustine identifies the human will, almost singularly, as responsible for humanity's adherence to or rejection of God's divine commandments.²

However, as Augustine aged, it seems as though his views on free will did not merely develop but were substantially altered. By the time he would write works like his *Enchiridion* in the 420s, Augustine not only rejected the idea that the human will was sufficient for following God's commandments but scoffed at the idea.³ Wary of infringing on God's sovereignty in all things good, Augustine placed divine grace in the

² Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, bk. 1.13.

³ Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, sec. 30.

place of free will. For this Augustine, grace was paramount; without it, free will was incapable of good. Within the framework of Prosper's dilemma mentioned earlier, Augustine appeared to commit fully to the primacy of grace.

Interestingly, despite these apparent contradictions in Augustine's thought, Augustine would never admit that he changed his mind. Although at times he seemed to twist himself into logical knots to do so, Augustine would never renounce his early position and always maintained, at least nominally, the importance of the free choice of the will in matters related to right moral action and salvation. However, partly as a consequence of his absolute insistence on grace, Augustine's view of predestination grew increasingly stricter. As grace was necessary for salvation, only those given the grace needed for salvation were predestined. Moreover, Augustine's ideas would go on to characterize this grace as not only necessary but irresistible.⁴ Thus, fully embracing the *grace* horn of the earlier dilemma, Augustine's view of God often appears unloving or unmerciful. Regardless, Augustine never saw it this way. Committing to his views, even if they seemed contradictory, Augustine would go on to shape the debates concerning grace, free will, and predestination for centuries.

The Lingering Effects of an Unacknowledged Change

As a respected authority in the church, Augustine's prominence would later cause difficulties for those entering theological debates. To have Augustine and his views on one's side in a theological debate was a great ally, and to openly oppose Augustine was akin to heresy. Thus, two problems emerged. First, concerning free will, there was not a single Augustine. While the early Augustine could support one side of the debate, the

⁴ Augustine, "Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician: First Book," sec. 2.13.

later Augustine could support the other. Second, those within the church engaged in such debates were not willing to admit that Augustine had changed his mind. To suggest such would be to disagree with Augustine himself and would both weaken one's argument and place the stink of suspected heresy upon the individual. Thus, the rhetorical realm surrounding grace, free will, and predestination during and after Augustine's life was constrained and precarious. It is within this tenuous space, a tension present in and propagated by Augustine's body of work, that this thesis will operate.

Controversies surrounding Augustine's formulation of grace, free will, and predestination arose both during and after Augustine's life. Prosper of Aquitaine—whose articulation of the dilemma I mentioned earlier—entered the controversy during Augustine's life and then argued on Augustine's behalf after Augustine's death in 430. Unlike Augustine, not much is known regarding Prosper's early life. However, it seems as though he was born into the aristocracy in Aquitaine around 380.⁵ There, he was well-educated and lived until the invasions of various barbarians near 406. In 416, Prosper relocated to Marseilles and shortly after entered into the theological realm with his first known work *De providentia Dei*. A decade later, in 426, Prosper wrote his first work defending Augustine, a letter to a Rufinus. In both this letter and his other works around this time, Prosper embraced the breadth of the Augustinian position on grace, free will, and predestination.⁶ Moreover, as controversy began to brew in Gaul over the proper understanding of those terms, Prosper defended the bishop with passion both during and immediately after Augustine's life. In these works, Prosper upheld a position much like

⁵ Hwang, *Intrepid Lover of Perfect Grace*, 2.

⁶ Hwang, 98.

that of the later Augustine—despite the inherent tension in its understanding of the relevant topics.

Whether because of the tension or some other source of theological reflection, in some of his later works near the end of the Gallic controversy, like *De vocatione omnium gentium* in 450, Prosper modified his position and shifted away from pure Augustinianism.⁷ Since he would never formally reject the bishop, his silence about disagreements with Augustine's points mirror that of Augustine's silence concerning his own theological development. Still, although Prosper would eventually introduce ideas into his position that were foreign to the framework established by Augustine, Prosper's work was still heavily Augustinian in character. Moreover, due to the natural tension in the work of Augustine himself, it is not initially clear whether Prosper's disagreement is with Augustine *in toto* or merely with a specific time period of Augustine's thought. The answer to that ambiguity, as well as an exploration of how a later author can develop doctrine within a framework established on apparent contradiction, will be explored in the following pages. His chronological overlap with Augustine, his initial complete embrace of the Augustinian position, and his later development into a somewhat novel direction make Prosper an excellent figure for such an investigation.

Centuries later, a controversy directly sparked by the internal tension of the widely accepted Augustinian position reignited the old debate on grace, free will, and predestination. Around the year 850, Gottschalk, a monk in Orbais—an abbey near Rheims—began to propagate the idea that Augustine viewed God as dictating two predestinations, one for the elect unto salvation and one for the reprobate unto

⁷ Hwang, 208.

damnation.⁸ Though equipped with a wealth of apparent support from Augustine's works, Gottschalk was quickly condemned at a set of councils and restricted to a monastery. Still, those leading the charge against Gottschalk's interpretation worried about the potential of other powerful figures siding with the monk. Thus, the bishops opposing Gottschalk—namely Hincmar of Rheims—enlisted the help of a prominent scholar, John Scotus Eriugena, to write a thorough rebuttal of Gottschalk.⁹

An Irish philosopher, Eriugena was an anomaly for his time. Unlike his contemporaries, Eriugena possessed an aptitude for the Greek language. Able to read Greek manuscripts from pagan philosophers and Christian theologians alike, Eriugena's breadth of knowledge was remarkable for a scholar in the Latin world.¹⁰ As a consequence, Eriugena's Neoplatonic worldview was more similar to an earlier Latin West—that is, the one in which Augustine operated—than the world of Eriugena's contemporaries.

In his rebuttal of Gottschalk, *De divina praedestinatione*, Eriugena chooses to adopt an Augustinian framework, quoting extensively, and nearly exclusively, from Augustine. The work, operating as both an Augustinian apologetic and anti-Gottschalkian polemic, openly commits to and attempts to tackle the tensions and apparent contradictions in the Augustinian position. Moreover, rather than favoring the later Augustine, Eriugena pulls primarily from Augustine's earlier writings. Perhaps due in part to the greater influence of Neoplatonism on the early Augustine, Eriugena finds the

⁸ Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy*, 78.

⁹ Marenbon, 79.

¹⁰ Marenbon, 78.

most support for his position in these early works. Still, Eriugena was not unaware that Augustine appeared to change his mind in his later writings about the role of human free will and its effects on predestination. Rather than claiming that the late bishop's ideas had changed, however, Eriugena—whether out of fear of the potential consequence of such a claim or genuine belief in an alternate position—employs a creative solution regarding Augustine's potential use of figurative language to attempt to resolve the seeming contradictions. Unfortunately for Eriugena, his rebuttal would later be condemned regardless.¹¹ For his timing within another budding controversy over the Augustinian understanding of grace, free will, and predestination, his varied influences relative to his contemporaries, and his apparent understanding and attempted resolution of the tensions in the Augustinian position he commits himself to, Eriugena is another excellent case study for an investigation into whether Augustine's work can truly be synthesized, potential alternatives to synthesis, and the ability to operate within a framework founded on apparent contradictions.

In this thesis, I will first survey a selection of Augustine's work to highlight the unsatisfactory nature of any Augustinian synthesis, while supplying an alternate framework by which to analyze later authors in the Augustinian tradition—the “foundations” approach. Next, I will perform a similar analysis on a selection of works by Prosper of Aquitaine in light of the Augustinian foundations I have identified. Then, I will analyze Eriugena's relevant work in a similar manner. Finally, I will review the analysis of the three authors and put them more directly into conversation. Through this, I will argue for the superiority of the foundations approach due to its charity for the

¹¹ Marenbon, 80.

original author's work and the space it allows for later writers to develop within the framework.

CHAPTER TWO

Augustine of Hippo

The Context of the Pelagian Controversy

Although a majority of the needed context was provided in the introduction, there is one last area I must cover in detail before I can properly analyze Augustine's works on grace, free will, and predestination—the Pelagian Controversy. I will now briefly overview the portion of Pelagius's thought Augustine contested here to highlight its importance in the development of Augustine's views. As will be made clear throughout this chapter, Augustine was increasingly concerned with the role of God in the human path to salvation. As a counterpoint to Augustine's theories of grace, Pelagius emphasized the role and power of humanity in salvation. As I will elaborate on more later in the section, Pelagius's challenge to Augustine shaped the formation of his writings. Therefore, to properly read Augustine, we must first touch on the Pelagian view.

To look at Pelagius's view, I'll first borrow from another scholar, Annette Evans. She notes that upon his arrival to Rome from the British Isles around 385, Pelagius was appalled by the amount of perceived corruption in the clergy. He harshly criticized those who would amass land and wealth as un-Christian, and he eventually began to associate these immoral tendencies with a line of thought—one highly associated with Augustine—that God must initiate moral actions in humanity.¹ According to Evans, Pelagius interpreted this as a lack of personal responsibility on the part of the clergy, and

¹ Evans, "Augustine and Pelagius as a Cameo of the Dilemma between Original Sin and Free Will."

he confronted this apparent injustice by arguing that “divine grace cannot perfect our sanctity without the exercise of our own free will.”² Thus, for Pelagius, humanity was central in the understanding of moral actions. As Eugene TeSelle puts it, Pelagius “asserted that human beings were endowed at their creation with an intelligent will, capable of choosing between good and evil, and thus they are able to avoid sin and maintain natural righteousness.”³

As both TeSelle and Evans recount, Pelagius’s motivation was in part to argue against the Augustinian position. Upon hearing Augustine’s prayer in the *Confessions*, “Give what you command, then command what you will,”⁴ Pelagius was spurred to write against Augustine’s position. TeSelle further describes that for Pelagius, free choice, due to its status as both a divine gift and a natural necessity of humanity, was an inherent capacity within human nature that could not be stripped away due to sin. Moreover, as Pelagius sees this gift of free choice stemming from God, in addition to further gifts of divine aid more readily enabling the human choice of the good, he ultimately locates all good human action as from God.⁵ Still, though these good actions may have their source in the divine, Pelagius emphasizes the active role of humanity in actually living out the commandments through the free choice of their will.

Turning now to Pelagius’s writings, one of the clearest expressions of Pelagius’s thought can be found in a letter to Demetrias. Concerning the ability of humans to keep all of God’s commandments, Pelagius writes the following:

² Evans.

³ TeSelle, “Augustine and the Pelagian Controversy.” 3.

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 10.29.40.

⁵ TeSelle, 4.

No one knows better the true measure of our strength than he who has given it to us nor does anyone understand better how much we are able to do than he who has given us this very capacity of ours to be able; nor has he who is just wished to command anything impossible or he who is good intended to condemn a man for doing what he could not avoid doing.⁶

For Pelagius, each commandment given by God is within humanity's power to uphold.

While some commandments may seem impossible to keep, we would be foolish to say that God commanded us to do something that was impossible. Moreover, there can be no just punishment without an alternative to do otherwise. As God is perfectly just, it must follow that we have the ability to not sin. Therefore, not only is it possible that each person may keep the commandments but that they do so by their own will. Pelagius expresses this clearly earlier in the same letter:

What blind madness! What unholy foolhardiness! We accuse God of a twofold lack of knowledge, so that he appears not to know what he has done, and not to know what he has commanded; as if, forgetful of the human frailty of which he is himself the author, he has imposed on man commands which he cannot bear. And, at the same time, oh horror!, we ascribe iniquity to the righteous and cruelty to the holy, while complaining, first, that he has commanded something impossible, secondly, that man is to be damned by him for doing things which he was unable to avoid, so that God - and this is something which even to suspect is sacrilege - seems to have sought not so much our salvation as our punishment!⁷

For Pelagius, the insinuation that humanity, by humanity's own strength, would be unable to bear and fulfill God's commandments goes against God's nature. Therefore, for Pelagius, it must be the case that humanity can fulfill the law, or avoid sin, through their own will. Again, although grace played a role in Pelagius's framework, both as a continual gift to more readily enable moral action or the initial gift of free will given to

⁶ Pelagius, "Letter to Demetrias," chap. 16

⁷ *ibid*

humanity, his emphasis on human choice leads to an omission of grace from many of his extrapolations.

Moreover, when Pelagius does mention grace, he does so in a manner different from that of Augustine. Where Augustine tends to emphasize the sovereignty and potency of God—a subject that will be explored later—Pelagius again emphasizes human action. Pelagius argues that “now that we have been instructed by the grace of Christ and reborn as better men: [we are] purified and cleansed by his blood, encouraged by his example to pursue perfect righteousness⁸...” Where Pelagius uses “encouraged,” Augustine might pen “enabled.” Additionally, as mentioned before, for Pelagius, the grace a person receives in their life is not necessarily received prior to their good works. On the writings of James, Pelagius notes in the same letter that “[God] shows how we ought to resist the devil, if we are indeed in submission to God, and, by doing his will, to merit divine grace also and to resist the evil spirit more easily with the aid of the Holy Spirit⁹.” Therefore, the continual gift of grace is not necessary for performing good works or keeping the commandments. Instead, God gives his grace as a reward for previous good works by which humanity may more easily adhere to the divine will. Consequently, although Pelagius includes grace within his framework, it is far less prominent than in a thinker like Augustine. Ultimately, for Pelagius, one can live a sinless life and merit salvation in a manner far different than Augustine.

Throughout his later years, almost all of Augustine’s writings will be concerned, at least indirectly, in challenging Pelagianism. For Augustine, the rejection of the

⁸ Pelagius, chap. 8

⁹ Pelagius, chap. 25

primacy of grace was morally reprehensible and contrary to the Christian faith by diminishing the part of God in salvation. In doing so, Augustine saw the Pelagian position as exalting humanity and ascribing to it what should only be given to God. Thus, his anti-Pelagian writings must be understood by their intended goal. In nearly all of these works, Augustine's primary intended audience were fellow Christians that Augustine saw as erroneously denying an essential Christian doctrine. Consequently, his letters and treatises have an essentially polemical aspect. For Augustine, the submission of his readers to his, and thus the Church's, opinion was paramount for their eternal salvation. Furthermore, as noted in his *Retractationes*, Augustine's opponents were fond of finding passages in his writings that appear to support their position.¹⁰ As a result, Augustine's word choice was not entirely free but rather constrained by his circumstances. Therefore, when analyzing his writings, it must be noted that his primary concern was often not predestination, regardless of how later readers interpreted Augustine's views of the subject. That is, although Augustine invokes predestination, his writing is shaped such that it avoids any phrasing that may be mistaken as supporting Pelagian ideas and intends, at the least indirectly, to oppose Pelagianism entirely. Thus, just as the Doctor of Grace intended, grace must come first in the lens used to analyze his writings.

A Foundations Approach to Augustinian Interpretation

There are two types of difficulties I will encounter as I attempt to interpret and articulate Augustine's thought. The first kind of difficulty is on Augustine's part. As mentioned earlier, from 411 onward, Augustine was concerned with the Pelagian

¹⁰ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, bk. 1.9.

controversy. As such, he was limited in exactly what he could say for fear of his own words being used against him. This fear was well founded as, again, Augustine notes in his *Retractationes* that some Pelagians claimed to find support for their claims in his earlier writings. Additionally, many of his letters were pastoral in nature. Augustine was not merely a philosopher or theologian but also a pastor. As a bishop, Augustine had a great deal of responsibility for the people entrusted to his guidance. As a leader of the Church in North Africa, he was responsible, in part, for the salvation of his fellow Christians. As his influence grew and others reached out to him to settle disputed matters, his pastoral role grew accordingly. Therefore, as Augustine produced his works, his language was constrained by both the constant threat of the Pelagians and shaped by his pastoral goals. As such, some of his language is heavily formed by his circumstances. Augustine was not, of course, concerned with what scholars 2000 years later would get out of letters; he was concerned with what the current church would get out of his work. Unlike Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, Augustine's letters do not represent systematic theology. Instead, they are personalized, pastoral letters meant to guide the recipient. Consequently, it is problematic to try to fit the entirety of Augustine's work into a singular synthesized framework.

As will be shown below, Augustine's thought is not consistent. As he aged and continued writing, his thoughts on grace, free will, and predestination developed. In fact, many scholars view Augustine's position at the beginning and end of this development as contradictory.¹¹ In the case of such a development, it is simply not possible to synthesize Augustine's works. That said, such syntheses have been attempted. In a later section of

¹¹ Eric Jenkins, *Free To Say No?*, 103

this chapter, I will present an attempted synthesis by scholar and philosopher John Rist. Although Rist's analysis is both thorough and well-intentioned, it is not obvious that the nature of the body of Augustine's work lends itself to such a project.

In such an attempt, one must often choose which Augustine, either the younger or the elder, to fit into the other. By identifying which statements must serve as the conclusion, portions of Augustine's work are given a greater interpretive weight than others. Should we conclude, as I will demonstrate that Rist does, that Augustine views men as puppets?¹² If so, we must view Augustine's expression of what appears to be double predestination in certain letters as an exact expression of his view and his apparent emphasis on the true freedom of the will in works like *De libero arbitrio* only with reference to his later works. Or, do we find that worries about Pelagianism and the pastoral nature of the letters shape his language in a manner that leads his views to be expressed in the extreme? Then, it is rather in *De libero arbitrio*, written not as a letter in response to a question or controversy but as a philosophical exploration of free will, where Augustine most clearly, and somehow chiefly, articulates his views. In one instance, the synthesis would need to elevate the earlier works while denigrating most of the later works. In the other instance, the opposite is true. And though not every passing phrase should be treated with the same interpretive weight, Augustine's apparent contradictions do not merely lie in passing phrases but in the core message of entire letters or works.

This brings us to the second kind of difficulty. Augustine, the only potential arbiter for navigating the apparent contradictions in his work, failed to do so.

¹² John Rist, *Augustine on Free Will and Predestination*, 440

Interestingly, Augustine did take up the task of reviewing and clarifying body of work in his *Retractiones*. However, when presented with the opportunity to admit that he had changed his views, Augustine is silent. Thus, although Augustine left a large corpus, he failed to provide a way to navigate, synthesize, or otherwise resolve the tension in his views of grace, free will and predestination. As a result, any attempted synthesis can never be certain that it properly represents the Augustinian view. Though this is true for any ancient author, for one like Augustine whose views are so markedly different at different points in his life, the interpretation of the entire body of work is especially difficult. Thus, I posit that one cannot attempt a true synthesis of Augustine's view in a way that accurately and truthfully represents the entirety of his thought.

Rather than try to fit all of the theological and philosophical pieces Augustine left into one neat synthesis, it will be more advantageous to simply appreciate the pieces themselves. Therefore, as I present his work, I will not be aiming at a clear harmony. Rather, I will attempt to lay out the key foundational ideas that Augustine holds to. I will put the works in conversation with each other so that their connections and discrepancies are highlighted, but I will not attempt to completely dissolve the tension. Rather than offer a holistic synthesis, I will identify the key foundations of Augustinian thought that must be present in any attempted presentation or development of the Augustinian view of grace, free will, and predestination. It is through the lens of these foundational points that I will later analyze the works of Prosper of Aquitaine and John Scotus Eriugena.

Finally, I will posit that the core Augustinian foundations for grace, free will, and predestination are as follows:

- (1) We have free will and it means something.

(2) There is a primacy of grace in all good things.

(3) Without consideration of their future actions, God definitively predestines some people to heaven and some people are destined for destruction.

Again, these foundations do not represent a synthesis of Augustine's work. They are not comprehensive. Furthermore, Augustine may not have held to each point I presented throughout his life. Some may have been expressed earlier and some may have been expressed later. However, all of them were expressed at some point and, for the aforementioned reasons, they must be considered as a part of the Augustinian view, or views. To provide a basis for why I have chosen these three points, the next section of this chapter provides a relatively thorough treatment of three of Augustine's works. From these works, I will show not only the development of the key points that I listed, but also how the works exist in tension.

An Early Augustine on Free Choice: De libero arbitrio

De libero arbitrio is one of Augustine's earliest works on the subject of free will. The three books that comprise the work were written sequentially, beginning shortly after his conversion in 387 AD and finishing around 395 AD as a priest in Africa. Although the work is relatively short, the density of Augustine's thought on topics from free will to the fall of humanity to ethical theory cannot be overstated.

Before beginning my project, I will note that this work was produced by a young Augustine before the Pelagian controversy. However, my earlier preface concerning the importance of effect of the controversy on Augustine's thought need not be ignored. Rather, the absence of Pelagian influence in *De libero arbitrio* results in a less constrained presentation of Augustine's thought on free will. Whereas an older Augustine

would need to watch his words for fear of being misrepresented by Pelagians, this Augustine was free to express his points in the language he felt best represented his ideas. Furthermore, as Augustine did not recant his views in his *Retractationes* but merely noted his language was sloppy,¹³ either the later Augustine still claimed to believe what he wrote in *De libero arbitrio* to be accurate, or he was unable to admit of any change in his views. As a result, I argue that not only does any attempted synthesis of Augustine's work on grace, free will, and predestination need adhere to his principles in *De libero arbitrio* but that due to the work's complete independence from Pelagian debate, it offers a unique perspective on Augustinian free will. In this way, Augustine's views of free will may be introduced not by the extreme conclusions of his rejections of Pelagianism but by an explanation of Augustinian free will *qua* Augustine.

Unsurprisingly, the purpose of *De libero arbitrio* is to argue that humans have free will. In the work, Augustine converses with a man named Evodius in a style similar to a Platonic dialogue. Overall, the work reads as a theodicy. Taking all three books of *De libero arbitrio* together as one work, Augustine defends the goodness of God despite the apparent existence of evils.

In Book One, the guiding question posed by Evodius is "Isn't God the cause of evil?"¹⁴ In response, Augustine first distinguishes between evil that has been *done* and evil that has been *suffered*. As Augustine presumes that God is just, evil *suffered* is merely our perspective of God's divine justice. However, the second kind of evil, evil *done*, cannot stem from a perfectly good God. Therefore, Augustine concludes that

¹³ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, bk. 1.9.

¹⁴ Augustine, bk. 1.1.

“everyone who does evil is the cause of his own evildoing” as “they would not be punished justly if they had not been performed voluntarily.”¹⁵ Later in the text, Augustine identifies the evil *done* as springing from the will. Thus, it appears as though Augustine begins his theodicy by separating the source of any evil from God. In doing so, he concludes that each individual must have voluntary, or free, choice to perform evil actions.

However, to fully understand why Augustine concludes that evil results from a poor use of the will, we must first understand what Augustine thinks of evil. For this purpose, I will look to Augustine’s *Confessions* and its clear expression of Augustine’s view. In Book Seven of the *Confessions*, Augustine notes of corruption, “all things that are corrupted suffer privation of some good.”¹⁶ Furthermore, “if they were deprived of all good, they would not exist at all.”¹⁷ For Augustine, evil exists as an *ontological parasite*. Evil itself has no reality. Evil is real; corruption is real. Yet, both exist only as a deprivation of some good reality. As he notes in *De civitate Dei* Book XI Chapter 9, “For evil has no positive nature; but the loss of good has received the name ‘evil.’”¹⁸ Although this depiction of evil is articulated most clearly elsewhere, it is clear that Augustine operates under this same assumption in *De libero arbitrio*.

Returning now to Augustine’s claim that evil *done* springs from the will, he argues that the explanation for *why* any action done is evil is the *inordinate desire* that

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 7.12.18.

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, bk. 11.9.

motivates it.¹⁹ This inordinate desire, or cupidity, is the internal volition to sin rather than the external act. Therefore, evil cannot be rightly attributed to anything external but only to the movement of the will. Later, Augustine concludes that for a mind in control “only [the mind’s] own will and free choice can make the mind a companion of cupidity” as anything greater than the mind would be too just to lead the mind to sin, and anything below the mind would be lesser and thus too weak.²⁰ This conclusion follows from Augustine’s understanding of evil as a privation of the good. As evil is an ontological parasite, anything lesser than the will is naturally weaker as it suffers from some deficiency.

Therefore, on the problem of evil, Augustine presents the following theodicy:

- (1) A perfectly just God exists.
- (2) Evil is a privation of some good.
- (3) God is perfect and has no privations
- (4) God cannot be, or be the cause of, evil

At this point, any conclusion that is reached must by necessity put the ultimate source and cause of evil on something other than God. And yet, God is the source of all creation.

Therefore, there must be something that was created good that was allowed to fall into evil. Consequently, we arrive at the next portion of the theodicy:

- (5) Those who commit evil are justly punished by God
- (6) A punishment is only just if it is enacted on someone who voluntarily wills the evil

¹⁹ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, bk. 1.3.

²⁰ Augustine, bk. 1.11.

(7) Human beings that commit evil must voluntarily will to do evil

(8) All evil that is done by humans stems from the human will

At this point, Augustine has largely completed his project in this work. The rest of Book One and the subsequent two books largely aim to defend certain premises and conclusions in the above argument. For instance, Augustine later tackles the questions of “why God gave human beings free choice of the will”²¹ and what constitutes “the source of the movement by which the will turns away from the common and unchanging good toward its own good.”²² Although these questions are key to the defense of Augustine’s theodicy, they are largely unimportant to the greater purpose of this paper and its specific focus on grace, free will, and predestination save for the few instances which I will discuss now.

At the beginning of Book Three, Augustine provides an analogy of a falling stone to explain the downward movement of the will away from God. Augustine writes:

This movement of the will is similar to the downward movement of a stone in that it belongs to the will just as that downward movement belongs to the stone. But the two movements are dissimilar in this respect: the stone has no power to check its downward movement, but the soul is not moved to abandon higher things and love inferior things unless it wills to do so.²³

In this analogy, Augustine depicts the will as able to either stay in the same place or move to lower things. Of note to later concerns of the wills operation without grace, he does not say that the stone is capable of free movement upward to higher things. In fact, a few pages earlier, Augustine notes that “since we cannot pick ourselves up voluntarily as

²¹ Augustine, bk. 2.1.

²² Augustine, bk. 3.1.

²³ Augustine, bk. 3.1.

we fell voluntarily, let us hold with confident faith the right hand of God... which has been held out to us from on high.”²⁴ Again, Augustine does not allude to the idea that the will is capable of choosing to move from lower things to higher things but rather that God’s assistance is needed to move up the ladder.

Furthermore, Augustine notes that God’s foreknowledge does not necessitate the movement of the human will. He notes succinctly, “although God foreknows what we are going to will in the future, it does not follow that we do not will by the will.”²⁵ Therefore, Augustine explicitly rejects that God’s foreknowledge has any causal power within the human will. In other words, God’s knowledge does not impose on our will. Our wills are capable of voluntary action as God has given humanity free choice of the will.

Thus, at this point, we have clearly arrived at an articulation and defense of my first foundation: humans have free will, or free choice of the will, and it means something. Augustine states that a will capable of free choice is a precondition for just punishment. Additionally, God’s foreknowledge of our actions does not translate to causal power on our wills. And although he does limit the will’s ability to move *upward* unaided, it is clear that this free will is a free will worth having. In as far as it can keep itself from falling, it is a free will capable of real choice. To this point, Augustine says that one can be happy simply by willing it.²⁶ Far from viewing humanity as puppets, Augustine’s key point throughout the work relies on the causal power of the will. As I

²⁴ Augustine, bk. 2.20.

²⁵ Augustine, bk. 3.3.

²⁶ Augustine, bk. 1.13.

will explain next, Augustine's emphasis on the role of the will was even mistaken for support of Pelagianism.

Finally, Augustine's *Retractationes*, or *Reconsiderations*, of *De libero arbitrio* deserve a brief mention. Some time after Augustine's initial writing of *De libero arbitrio*, some Pelagians found apparent support for their view of free will in Augustine's presentation of it in *De libero arbitrio*. In his *Retractationes*, Augustine defends his work and denounces any Pelagian interpretation of his writings. Augustine begins by noting that his work was intended to argue against the Manichees, who believed that evil had a supernatural source. He continues, "since this was the debate we had in mind, there was no discussion in these books of the grace of God, by which he so predestines his chosen people that he himself prepares the wills of those who are already using their free choice."²⁷ Therefore, as readers aware of the later controversy surrounding free will and grace, it is imperative to note the audience of *De libero arbitrio* when evaluating it in light of Augustine's other works. Indeed, when a younger Augustine is called upon to support free will, his position was so close to that of the Pelagians that they later found support in his view. Thus, the principles established in *De libero arbitrio*, namely that humanity has a free will that means something, are no less important than any other works, but their emphasis is on a specific topic and a specific audience.

Augustine and Predestination: Ad Simplicianum

To contrast to the view presented in *De libero arbitrio*, I will now analyze another work, *Ad Simplicianum*, from 396 AD. Augustine notes in his *Retractationes* that the letter, written to Simplician as the successor of Ambrose as bishop of Milan, was

²⁷ Augustine, bk. 1.9.

composed, like *De libero arbitrio*, before the Pelagian controversy had developed. This suggests that the letter demonstrates Augustine's views as he directs them in a letter to a friend rather than a polemic against a heretic. In a further contrast, this letter is not a treatise of philosophy but rather one of biblical exegesis. Though Augustine would have held these conclusions to be true nonetheless, unlike *De libero arbitrio*, *Ad Simplicianum* is less an exploration of Augustine's thought on free will and more a direct interpretation of a singular biblical passage. Therefore, not only is the content of *Ad Simplicianum* different from *De libero arbitrio*, but the mechanism, biblical exegesis rather than philosophical discourse, is also radically different.

Though the content of *Ad Simplicianum* is no less important for any synthesis of Augustine's work, it should be understood as a product of Augustine the *Theologian* rather than Augustine the *Philosopher*. As apparent discrepancies in these texts are presented, it will become clear that these two halves of Augustine do not always harmonize. As will be demonstrated later, a produced synthesis of Augustine's works will be shaped greatly by whether one views Augustine primarily as a philosopher or a theologian. As I will then argue, the best manner for the harmonization between these halves of Augustine is to not reconcile them at all but to live within their discord.

For the purposes of this paper, I will be focusing on the Second Question of the First Book. In this section, Augustine gives a commentary on a large portion of Romans 9, chiefly verses 6 through 24. For clarity, I will give a brief summary of the passage to better frame Augustine's claims.

In Romans 9, Paul weeps over Israel. For although they were given the old covenant, many of them have rejected Christ, the new covenant. However, Paul notes that

this does not mean the word of God has failed as “not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel:” as “it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants” (Rom. 9:6-8). Paul then compares this new understanding of the children of God to Jacob and Esau. Although they were twins and neither had done good or bad works, “in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, [Rebecca] was told, ‘The elder will serve the younger.’” He adds, “as it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated’” (Rom. 9:11-13). Paul notes that although God’s favor for Jacob over Esau may seem unjust, God has mercy on whom he has mercy. Referencing God’s use of Pharaoh to make his power known, Paul writes “So then [God] has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills.” Next, comparing God to a potter and man to molded clay, Paul notes that we are not to question God’s motives as the potter has a right to “make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use” (Rom. 9:18-21). Finally, Paul presents the following imagery:

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (Rom. 9:22-24)

For Paul, God’s knowledge and will are beyond our own, and we are not to question God. Therefore, in reading Augustine’s exegesis of this passage, it should come as no surprise that his opinions on free will and predestination approach *double predestination*, the view that God actively predestines some to heaven and some to hell. It seems, on a surface-level reading, that Paul himself may be professing that very idea.

First, Augustine notes that Paul emphasizes the enormous similarity between Jacob and Esau at the moment God chose Jacob. As they were twins, conceived at the

same moment and equally devoid of any works, Augustine concludes that “grace, therefore, comes first, and good works are second.”²⁸ This idea, that grace always precedes good works or merit, even future good works, is central for Augustine.²⁹ Furthermore, he notes that “Jacob did not even have faith in God yet as “the merits of faith follow the call rather than precede it.”³⁰ Additionally, he notes that Esau’s condemnation does not come from an act of Esau’s will, as Esau was not yet capable of willing.³¹ Turning now to Phil 2:12-13, Augustine concludes that “even a good will itself comes about in us through God’s working.”³² He continues, despite his earlier conclusions about humanity’s free choice of the will, with the observation that as

...the human will does not suffice for us to live in rectitude and righteousness unless we are aided by God's mercy, it can therefore also be said that it is not a matter of a merciful God but of human willing, because God's mercy alone does not suffice unless our will's consent is joined to it. But it is evident we will to no avail unless God is merciful. I do not know how it may be said, on the other hand, that God is merciful to no avail unless we will. For if God is merciful, we also will.³³

Notably, Augustine seems to wrestle with a reconciliation between human free will and divine grace. While he does empathize that God’s grace has a primacy, he does acknowledge the necessity of the will. Still, the actual free choice of the will is called into question by his final comments concerning the necessity of the will’s movement in

²⁸ Augustine, “Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician: First Book,” sec. 2.3.

²⁹ Augustine, sec. 2.7.

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ Augustine, “Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician: First Book,” sec. 2.8.

³² Augustine, sec. 2.12.

³³ *ibid*

response to grace. Thus, while Augustine does struggle to find his ideal balance between grace and free will, he ultimately sides with grace.

As he aged into the Pelagian controversy, Augustine continued to find the decision to side with grace easier. In a particularly telling example from his *Enchiridion*, a work intended to combat Pelagius and his supporters, Augustine no longer hesitates to give God sovereignty in matters of salvation and human righteousness. He confidently writes: “Can [sinners] be restored through the merit of their own works? God forbid. For what good work can a lost man perform, except so far as he has been delivered from perdition? Can they do anything by the free determination of their own will? Again I say, God forbid.”³⁴ For Augustine at this point, sinners, of which all humanity are now born, are as the dead. He notes that they are incapable of helping themselves and “the freedom of his (sic) will was lost” at the moment of the first sin.³⁵ A far cry from the Augustine of *De libero arbitrio*, the Augustine of the *Enchiridion* is the clear end point of the progression that has already taken place in the short period before he writes *Ad Simplicianum*.

Returning to *Ad Simplicianum*, we arrive at one crux of Augustine’s argument in Chapter 13 of *Ad Simplicianum*. Augustine now applies Matthew 20:16, “many are called but few are chosen,” to understand the interaction between God’s call and those who follow it. Ultimately, to simultaneously hold that it is not a matter of willing or running but of a merciful God, that many are called but few are chosen, and also respect the free will of humanity, Augustine concludes that “although many have been called in one way,

³⁴ Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, para. 30.

³⁵ *ibid*

yet, because not all have been touched in one way, only they would follow the call who are found fit to grasp it.”³⁶ Therefore, although God calls the many, the few that are chosen are those who were called in a way *appropriate* for them to follow the call. For Augustine, some of those called are not chosen because they were not called in such a way that they would respond to God’s call, even though there was some manner they *could have been called* that would have resulted in both the movement of their will and their being chosen. Furthermore, as God “has mercy on no one in vain,” Augustine claims that “the person on whom [God] has mercy he calls in such a way as he knows is appropriate for him, so that he may not reject [God].”³⁷

Thus, in *Ad Simplicianum*, Augustine posits that the human will cannot choose God or even have faith before the working of God’s grace. Moreover, God chooses some people, not because of any past or future merit, to respond to his call in a manner that necessitates their following of God’s call. Continuing on, Augustine keeps in this line of thought when discussing Paul’s metaphor of the two vessels: the vessels of wrath made for destruction and the vessels of mercy prepared for glory. In Augustine’s framework, God uses those prepared for destruction to demonstrate his justice to benefit the vessels of mercy. For Augustine, all of humanity was damned in Adam’s sin, and thus we are all of the same clay and a single damnable mass.³⁸ Therefore, we cannot question God “who from the same lump condemns one person and makes another righteous.”³⁹ In the most

³⁶ Augustine, “Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician: First Book,” sec. 2.13.

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ Augustine, “Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician: First Book,” sec. 2.16.

³⁹ Augustine, sec. 2.21.

telling passage of the entire document, Augustine writes, “The free choice of the will counts for a great deal, to be sure. But what does it count for in those who have been sold under sin?”⁴⁰ As Augustine later notes, the ability to be freed from sin is not something humanity may accomplish. He adds that “the will itself, unless it comes into contact with something that attracts and beckons the soul, can by no means be moved. But that it may come into contact with this is not in a person's power.”⁴¹

Hence, the overall Augustinian position presented in *Ad Simplicianum* is rather bleak. The human will is weak. So weak, in fact, that it cannot move towards good unless God works in the will first. Additionally, there are two classes of people: those made for wrath and those predestined for glory. Yet, the question of why God chooses some for glory and not others is not something for humanity to know. Thus, it seems to follow that those who have not been called to be numbered among those predestined for glory can make no use of their free will to choose God. Furthermore, although God has the ability to call the vessels made for destruction in a manner appropriate for them, God instead uses them to demonstrate divine justice. Moreover, of those chosen by God for glory, they are called in such a way that they could not reject God’s call. Thus, although Augustine maintains the term *free choice of the will*, as far as humanity is concerned, it seems that neither those destined for glory nor especially those made for destruction could have done anything to affect their eventual outcome.

Additionally, Augustine also notes that the division between those predestined to glory and those destined to destruction is not done with any consideration of their future

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ Augustine, sec. 2.22.

action. For Augustine, God's predestination is "not of a choice based upon merits, which occur after a person has been made righteous by grace, but of generosity of God's gifts."⁴² Therefore, for Augustine, the predestination of any individual does not come from foreknowledge of their merits. Instead, Augustine maintains an absolute primacy of grace such that even the future actions of an individual, even if they result from grace, are not considered in whether God chooses to give them the grace of perseverance unto salvation.

Thus, at this point, we have the beginnings of our second and third foundational points. As was quoted earlier, Augustine clearly believes in the primacy of grace in all good things. Additionally, Augustine holds that there are those who are predestined for salvation and those who are made for damnation. Clearly, the first foundational point, that humans have free will *and that it means something* is not to be found in this work. In fact, it seems as though it has been rejected or perhaps taken for granted. However, due to all of the reasons listed in earlier sections, I will not be doing away with this foundation point. Rather, I only want to call attention to the particular difficulties in reconciling these differences.

Augustine's Final Thoughts on a Continuing Issue: De gratia et libero arbitrio

Unlike the previous works, *De gratia et libero arbitrio* illuminates Augustine's thought in a time entrenched in the Pelagian controversy. In the work, his primary goal is to bring fellow Christians back to his view of orthodoxy and away from any Pelagian temptations. Consequently, he must clearly avoid any semblance of Pelagian conclusions in his letter. Being careful with his language, this older, more experienced Augustine

⁴² Augustine, sec. 2.6.

understood that the Pelagians would use his quotes against him if given the opportunity. Additionally, this text highlights the tensions between what I have called Augustine the *Philosopher* and Augustine the *Theologian*. In *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, Augustine seemingly commits himself to a position that exists in clear tension if not blatant contradiction. Again, rather than attempting to synthesize these positions by carefully defining terms and re-fitting one position to fit within the other, I posit that both halves of Augustine are better understood as living in tension.

In *De gratia*, Augustine is writing to the monks of Adrumetum to dispel controversy surrounding grace and free will. Historically, this work is attributed to either 426 AD or 427 AD as the *Retractationes* include *De gratia* as the final work, and the *Retractationes* were finished in 427 AD.

Early on in *De gratia*, Augustine makes it abundantly clear that humans have free will. In reference to the proof of free will in the scriptures, he understands that “wherever it is said, ‘*Do not do this,*’ and ‘*Do not do that,*’ and wherever there is any requirement in the divine admonitions for the work of the will to do anything, or to refrain from doing anything, there is at once a sufficient proof of free will.”⁴³ In this passage, Augustine harkens back to the view of free will established in *De libero arbitrio*. Taken alone, this passage suggests that human free will constitutes, on some level, the ability to choose to fulfill or reject a divine commandment. Else, it does not seem that the commandment alone would be proof of a free will. Yet, at this point, Augustine has not declared who would have this free will or what conditions must be in place for a will to be capable of exercising this freedom. He does, however, assert that this proof of free will removes the

⁴³ Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will*, chap. 4.

culpability for sin from God and places it on each person.⁴⁴ This further suggests that the type of free will Augustine has in mind in the previous statement is one that allows each person the freedom to choose sin, or not to choose sin, as otherwise, this free will would not impute the fault of sin to the individual. Curiously, recalling the previous exposition on Pelagius and his reasons for believing in the free choice of the will, Augustine's argument seems to align completely with Pelagius's position.

Later in the work, when discussing the ability to uphold chastity, Augustine adds grace to free will. He writes: "If he should say in respect of these commandments, 'I wish to keep them, but am mastered by my concupiscence,' then the Scripture responds to his free will, as I have already said: 'Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.' In order, however, that this victory may be gained, grace renders its help."⁴⁵ Therefore, as was alluded to in *De libero arbitrio* and made explicit in *Ad Simplicianum*, a will cannot move to good without grace. In continuing the thought from earlier, namely that it seems humans have the choice to choose between sinning and not sinning, the choice to do good must be aided by grace. For, if people are to be culpable for their sins as Augustine claims, it would seem that they must need the ability to not sin. Thus, although it is absent in Augustine's writings, it seems there must be some sort of grace available to each person during their sin, or at least their first sin, that they did not cooperate with, and that it is truly within man's power to either accept the grace offered or to sin. However, Augustine does not take this leap. Although later writers in the Augustinian tradition may hold this view, Augustine did not hold to this view of cooperation and the idea, in itself,

⁴⁴ Augustine, chap. 4.

⁴⁵ Augustine, chap. 8.

deviates from Augustinianism. However, as a brief aside to call attention to the Augustinian Foundations, while this would be a position seemingly supported by *De libero arbitrio* and in line with the first foundation, it is explicitly rejected by *Ad Simplicianum*. Specifically, in the portion of *Ad Simplicianum* referring to all of humanity as one damned mass in Adam's sin, Augustine has no qualms about a person never receiving the grace to move their will to a higher good. Still, though the idea cuts against certain expositions, it does not contradict the three foundations identified in this paper.

In a subsequent chapter of *De gratia*, Augustine offers further support for portions of his thought found explicitly in *De libero arbitrio*. In a manner remarkably similar to the stone passage,⁴⁶ he argues that “it is plain that when [grace] has been given, also our good merits begin to be — yet only by means of it; for, were that only to withdraw itself, man falls, not raised up, but precipitated by free will.”⁴⁷ In a manner synonymous with all of Augustine's works so far discussed, Augustine notes that man cannot ascend the ladder of goodness unaided by grace. Furthermore, as he did in *Ad Simplicianum*, Augustine puts grace before faith when he writes that “the spirit of grace, therefore, causes us to have faith, in order that through faith we may” become able to do what we are commanded.⁴⁸ He then goes on to argue that free will also has a function in the heart's conversion. Augustine writes:

There is, however, always within us a free will — but it is not always good; for it is either free from righteousness when it serves sin — and then it is evil — or else it is free from sin when it serves righteousness — and then it is good. But the

⁴⁶ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, bk. 2.1.

⁴⁷ Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will*, chap. 13.

⁴⁸ Augustine, chap. 28.

grace of God is always good; and by it it comes to pass that a man is of a good will, though he was before of an evil one.⁴⁹

It is in this passage that Augustine clearly identifies a will in bondage to sin as free.

Regardless of the will's inability to choose the good, Augustine considers it free. The will must be converted, and it is from this converted will, converted solely by God's grace, that man gains the ability to pray for a better will and thus fulfill the commandments through divine assistance. Once the will has been given this grace, it becomes of use as it gains the ability to perform what is required, albeit only with continued grace. Although Augustine thinks it possible to keep the commandments, he says this is only "because the will is prepared by the Lord" so that we may then ask of Him "such a force of will as suffices to make us act by willing."⁵⁰ For Augustine, the will is prepared by God so that it may ask God for more grace in willing. In his own words, he writes that God "operates, therefore, without us, in order that we may will; but when we will, and so will that we may act, He co-operates with us. We can, however, ourselves do nothing to effect good works of piety without Him either working that we may will, or co-working when we will."⁵¹ Therefore, Augustine argues that operant grace works within us without our wills so that our wills might be prepared for cooperant grace.

John M. Rist and the Problem of Augustinian Synthesis

Before presenting my commentary on the interplay between Augustine's work, I will present John Rist's attempt at synthesis. Furthermore, I will do so through the lens of

⁴⁹ Augustine, chap. 31.

⁵⁰ Augustine, chap. 32.

⁵¹ Augustine, chap. 33.

the previously outlined Augustinian Foundations to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of a complete synthesis. Finally, I will interweave certain criticisms of Rist's synthesis by other authors to more fully demonstrate the difficulty of Rist's project.

At the onset of his article "Augustine on Free Will and Predestination," Rist is clear about his intentions. Not only does he plan to author a synthesis, but he asserts that "the synthesis I shall attempt to present, if correct, negates other syntheses, and that all Augustinian texts which are relevant to the subject-matter are in harmony with it."⁵² A bold claim to say the least. Rist does skillfully navigate through many contested issues. However, as will become clear, Rist's analysis is far from final.

To begin the discussion of free choice, Rist explores Augustine's understanding of the will. Rist claims that the will, or *voluntas*, for Augustine is not the decision making faculty of later philosophers, but "the human psyche in its role as a moral agent" or even one's "moral self" or "moral personality."⁵³ From this, Rist concludes that for Augustine all choices must be free because psychological influences do not compel the will but are merely another part that contributes to the same moral person. Therefore, even if someone develops bad habits or is in some way psychologically prevented from choosing the good, that person still has free choice. Rist writes:

When Augustine says our choices are free, he does not mean that we are autonomous beings, able to weigh up good and evil courses of actions and decide upon one or the other... When Augustine says that fallen man is free and has free choices, he means that he is free from virtue and slave to vice, free from one kind of love, that is, devoid of *caritas*, but the servant of its opposite, namely *cupiditas*. Man belongs to one of two camps and obeys one of two rulers.⁵⁴

⁵² Rist, 421

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ Rist, 424

Therefore, Rist identifies the will as the moral self of an individual, and he emphasizes that the will is constantly in a state of servitude, yet free in its servitude to sin or to God. However, this view of the will as a servant is no issue for Rist as the will is the moral life of the person themselves rather than being a separate faculty for decision making.

It is here that Jasper Hopkins levies his first systematic criticism of Rist's work. Where Rist would identify Augustine's *voluntas* as the human soul, Hopkins asserts that Augustine uses *voluntas* to denote a variety of things: "the will, an act of willing (i.e., a volition), a willingness, a wish, a desire, an intent, an inclination."⁵⁵ Moreover, with reference to *De Civitate Dei*, Hopkins notes that Augustine acknowledges that animals have wills and that what truly separates humans from animals is a rational will. Furthermore, with reference to *De Trinitate*, Hopkins notes that Augustine does not consider *voluntas* to be the human soul but merely a part of the human soul "just as our memory and understanding,"⁵⁶ although Hopkins notes these are not three parts of a soul but merely three faculties belonging to one soul. In response to Rist's view of the will as a servant to one of two rulers, Hopkins writes:

When fallen men will what is evil, they are free with respect to their being able to will without constraint what is willed by them. Their freedom of will consists not in their servitude as such but in this ability which accords with their servitude. By comparison, the redeemed are said to be servants of justice, or righteousness (*iustitia*), because they willingly submit their wills to God's commands; yet, their freedom does not consist in their servitude as such but rather (1) in their ability to will without constraint what is upright and (2) in their uncoerced delight in so willing. It is anti-Augustinian to identify a man's freedom principally with his servitude rather than principally with his uncoerced willingness (*inclination, consent, or choice*) to serve. One has freedom of choice insofar as one has the power of choice (i.e., insofar as one's choice is in his own power); and one

⁵⁵ Hopkins, *Augustine on Free Will and Predestination: A Critique of John M. Rist's Interpretation*, 42

⁵⁶ Hopkins, 43

chooses freely whenever he exercises this power. Unredeemed fallen men, teaches Augustine, do not have the power to perform a morally and religiously perfect act (whether of willing or of doing), because even when they will to do that which is right, they are unable to will to do it both because it is right and out of love for God. Their motives are supposed by Augustine to be contaminated—with selfishness, pride, self-righteousness. These men do not will to obey, in holy servitude, God's commands. Indeed, they are unable so to will—unable apart from the motivating and converting influences of grace.⁵⁷

In this view, we see a very different conception of the Augustinian view than the one found in Rist's synthesis. Indeed, Hopkins even identifies Rist's portrayal as "anti-Augustinian." As I mentioned in the previous section, to propose a total synthesis of Augustine's work is to emphasize some portions of his work and diminish others. Here, Hopkins is identifying where Rist has downplayed Augustine's insistence on the freedom of the will by connecting it solely with servitude. For Rist's purposes, this makes complete sense. As mentioned earlier, Rist ultimately concludes that for Augustine, "man is a puppet."⁵⁸ By focusing on Augustine's claims about predestination, Rist has seemingly read back his conclusions about these texts into earlier texts on the will. Regardless of whether or not Rist intentionally retrofitted Augustine's earlier works to support his final conclusions, Hopkins's critique undermines a great deal of Rist's synthesis. Without a correct understanding of the will, a successful synthesis on free will and predestination will be impossible.

At this point, before Rist has even gotten his project off the ground, Hopkins has taken issue with almost every one of Rist's claims. For the sake of brevity, I will not go into any further detail about each of Hopkins's objections to Rist than to merely state where they occur. For my project, it is not necessary to know the exact nature and reasons

⁵⁷ Hopkins, 51

⁵⁸ Rist, 440

for each objection. That reasonable and strong scholarly disagreement persists among such points sufficiently demonstrates the difficulties of any Augustinian interpretation but particularly that of a synthesis.

Following his elaboration of the will, Rist turns to grace. He notes that Augustine thinks this grace needs to be present at every moment to keep the will on a righteous path. Specifically, Rist claims that “[Augustine] imagines the relationship between grace and the soul in the same way as that in which Aristotle imagined the relationship between force and a moving object. Unless the object is kept in motion by the continued pressure of the mover, it will come to a halt.”⁵⁹ Therefore, grace not only sparks the will to good but sustains it at every instance.

Moving now to Rist’s interpretation of Augustine on predestination, Rist’s sees his as arguing that God does not seem to cast anyone into Hell, but he is “willing to let it happen in certain circumstances.” Ultimately, despite some troubling phrases, such as “predestined to death,” Rist concludes that Augustine thinks God actively predestines some to heaven and others are not helped and allowed to go to hell.⁶⁰ However, Rist notes that Augustine views fallen humanity as having a fallen will. Although Adam was capable of true free choice, humanity today, culpable through Adam’s sin, are slaves to sin. Rist then asks, what of Adam’s free will is left of humanity today? Ultimately, Rist concludes that Augustine did not leave any of Adam’s free will left in us. Rist writes:

It seems, therefore, that there is material in Augustine's thought from which he could have developed a theory that, although grace precedes works and 'prepares' the will of fallen man, yet man could still accept or reject it. However, he chose

⁵⁹ Rist, 426

⁶⁰ Rist, 428

not to develop this possibility and man is a puppet, free in the sense only of being arranged to act in a way which is not subject to external pressures.⁶¹

Therefore, it would seem as though humanity does not have a free will that means something. Indeed, humanity is not able to even accept the grace of God by use of free will. All must be given by God. Although all have a free will, many are a part of the *massa damnata*—servants of sin.

Throughout his critique, Hopkins takes issue with most of Rist's key points. Regarding Rist's limited view of the freedom of humanity's will, Hopkins claims Rist's writing "serves only to caricature Augustine's views."⁶² Hopkins asserts that Augustine *does* claim that individuals respond to God's grace willingly, and that Rist describes "God's salvific, inducing influence on the will...in a way totally foreign to Augustine's theory."⁶³ Moreover, Hopkins concludes that all of these previous errors lead to an inevitability of failure in Rist's presentation of Augustine in predestination.⁶⁴

In view of our Augustinian foundations, Rist clearly accepts the later two, that there is a primacy of grace in all good things and that God predestines some people to heaven and some people are destined for destruction. However, the first, that there is free will and that it means something, is minimized in such a way that the other two foundations supersede it. Hopkins, on the other hand, seems to more greatly emphasize, or even defend, the first foundation against Rist's synthesis. That said, the work of the critic is much easier. To build a framework of Augustinian interpretation on grace, free

⁶¹ Rist, 440

⁶² Hopkins, 58

⁶³ Hopkins, 68

⁶⁴ Hopkins, 71

will, and predestination that is without serious criticism or complaint has remained elusive. Therefore, for the purposes of my interpretation of Saint Prosper of Aquitaine and John Scotus Eriugena, I will merely stick to those Augustinian foundations.

A Foundations Approach to the Presented Works

At this point, I will take a closer look at the previously presented works in light of this foundations approach. As I do so, I will also highlight the tension between works that causes a true synthesis to be impossible. I will begin by recounting the picture Augustine painted in *De gratia*. First, Augustine holds that men have free will. Although it seems he changed his mind about what it means for humanity to have free will, be it full voluntary choice or freedom in servitude, Augustine never fails to maintain that humans have free choice of the will. Furthermore, the fault for sin is imputed to each man and not God. Therefore, each man must be culpable for their own sin. Although Augustine does not make the logical jump, for man to be culpable for his sin, it would seem there must be some ability, whether aided by grace or not, to do otherwise, else, man is held culpable for a sin he had no ability not to commit. At this point, we see that Augustine is holding to that first principle I identified earlier. Here, humanity has a free will truly means something. However, as we shall see later, Augustine's lack of an explicit formulation of this logical progression serves a rhetorical purpose. His letter is concerned with rebutting certain Pelagian doctrines, and Augustine wants to emphasize the primacy of grace over the will. As evidence of this, as was shown earlier, Augustine notes that all individuals have a free will, but that it is either free from righteousness to serve sin or free from sin to serve righteousness. Furthermore, to even have a good will in the first place requires

God's grace. This grace first prepares our will so that our wills may then cooperate with grace, and it then enables us to keep the divine commandments.

Ultimately, the first portion of this summary favors the foundation illuminated in *De libero arbitrio* while the latter favors those of *Ad Simplicianum*—particularly the second foundation concerning grace. Clearly, in both *De libero arbitrio* and the early portion of *De gratia*, human beings are responsible for their sins. For Augustine, there is no other proof necessary for free will than that God issues commandments and punishes those that fail to meet them. However, he immediately extends this principle out to include the necessity of grace in salvation.

Turning now to focus on the tension in these works, much of the thinking in *Ad Simplicianum* seems to contradict the aforementioned proof of free will. He writes that it is impossible for humans to choose God without God and that if God chooses someone He does not do so in vain. Furthermore, still within *Ad Simplicianum*, Augustine even muses what the free choice of the will counts for in those enslaved to sin. Thus, in reading the passage of *De gratia* concerning the two types of free wills, we are to understand that the will in service to sin is incapable of not being in service to sin without divine intervention. But at this point, the earlier conclusions of *De libero arbitrio* and *De gratia* are called into question: how is it possible that scriptural commands are evidence of a free will if they cannot be kept unless God grants continual, multiple forms of grace? For Augustine, it seems that all wills are free and objects of just punishment, even those that can only freely choose to sin with no possibility of choosing the good.

The true question, then, is similar to one Evodius asks in *De libero arbitrio*: if scriptural commands can only be kept by those to whom God gives the grace, how can

those men who fail to keep the commands due to a lack of grace be at fault for not keeping them? In this tension between grace and free will, Augustine tended to side with grace. However, when applied to matters of salvation, this emphasis on grace leads to a position that seems unsavory. Ultimately, the focus on grace to the apparent or function exclusion of a will capable of even cooperating with grace without other grace can lead to a kind of fatalism in salvation. This tendency is evident in *Ad Simplicianum*, where Augustine suggests that there is ultimately little, if any, role for mankind to play in their salvation. Despite this, Augustine maintains that God's grace works within the elect in such a way that they necessarily will the good, but that consent of the will is always present.

Ultimately, there is a significant tension in Augustine's corpus surrounding grace, free will, and predestination. Despite only surveying a few works in this paper, the internal strain is manifest not only between *De libero arbitrio* and *Ad Simplicianum* but even within *De gratia* itself. In *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine notes that we must have free will or else we could not be justly punished and that God's foreknowledge does not necessitate our willing. In *Ad Simplicianum*, God foreknows those vessels made for wrath, and they are never given the grace needed to will a path that escapes punishment or departs from evil. In *De gratia*, Augustine flirts with both ideas, boldly proclaiming the freedom of the will at the onset of the work while affirming the supremacy of grace in the latter portions. Augustine highlights this tension at the end of *De gratia* when he notes that God rewards "grace for grace."⁶⁵ How then are we to understand those never given grace? Augustine merely notes that they are guilty through Adam and thus

⁶⁵ Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will*, chap. 45.

punished justly.⁶⁶ However, one wonders how just it is for a man to be eternally punished for a sin he never committed with no possibility of helping himself. Although Augustine argues that “all die in Adam” and are debtors to God as though they sinned as well in Adam, Augustine largely punts on the individualistic portion of the issue. While the justice of the punishment for Adam’s sin can be used to explain mass damnation, its difficult to reconcile this explanation with the individual souls of those impacted by Adam’s sin who are never given the grace to repent. Ultimately, he leaves that reason to God’s inscrutable, but necessarily just, divine will.⁶⁷ In that way, it seems Augustine’s conclusion depends on his premise. Since Augustine begins with the premise that God is just in all His actions, he sees no problem in arriving at a conclusion that may appear unjust to some. As he finds his reasoning to be correct, then his conclusion must fall within the limits of God’s justice because God is necessarily just.

It is in large part due to the tension highlighted in these last few paragraphs that I have chosen not to identify a way that I profess to adequately synthesize all of Augustine’s work. As to whether or not there is continuity in Augustine's thought or whether his concept of free will is radically altered, I will default to the words of Eric Jenkins: “There is certainly debate on this issue.”⁶⁸ As no adequate synthesis can be constructed I will stick to those key Augustinian foundations in my analysis of other authors. Rather than comparing their presentation of Augustine’s thought to an anachronistic synthesis, I will analyze the extent to which they adhere to or deviate from

⁶⁶ Augustine, chap. 43.

⁶⁷ Augustine, “Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician: First Book,” sec. 2.16..

⁶⁸ Jenkins, *Free To Say No?*, 103.

the three foundations. Thus, just as Augustine's works themselves exist in a state of tension, the later authors of the Augustinian tradition may also need an inherent juxtaposition in their views to adequately capture Augustine's thoughts. However, while that tension may exist, it should only do so in areas where it was generated by Augustine, not by the invention of the later author. As I apply the lens of the foundations approach to the texts of Prosper of Aquitaine and John Scotus Eriugena, I will evaluate the extent to which they both develop their thought within the bounds of the foundations and depart from Augustine's views.

A Note on the Sacramental Church

Having now laid out the entirety of my argument for this first chapter, I find it important, if only briefly, to note one other aspect of the context in which Augustine was writing. Augustine's Christianity does not function like nondenominational or American Evangelical Christianity; rather, Augustine's Christianity is steeped within the *sacraments*—temporal, often physical, vehicles of grace. Therefore, a regeneration of the will was possible, even if not to the levels of prelapsarian Adam, only a few days after birth through baptism. Additionally, an individual's will could be further nurtured through the Eucharist and other sacraments. Thus, there is an active participation on the part of both God and humanity built into Augustine's Christianity: God continues to pour out the grace he has tied to the sacraments, and the humanity continues to receive them, even if only by grace. Therefore, Augustine's view reads, in part, as an expression of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Humanity is incapable of moving upward from sin without God's grace; however, reared in the loving arms of the Church, the grace of God would be given to each member mere days after birth. Though God may give his grace to whom he

pleases, and for this one cannot accuse God of being unjust, God has tied grace to his sacraments and made them plentiful in his Church. Again, while God may give grace outside of his Church, he has promised grace to those who receive them. Thus, although the grace needed to stay in the Church with the sacraments would need to be given by God, it is important to recognize that for Augustine grace is not merely some distant theological term for the invisible, mystical working of God, but something tied to specific rituals that were entrusted to the Church. Augustine himself expresses this in his letter *De Catechizandis Rudibus*. After outlining the essentials of the faith, Augustine writes:

Concerning the Sacrament, indeed, which he receives, when it has been well impressed upon him that these are visible seals of things divine, but that in these the things themselves being invisible are honoured, and that he must not account of the outward token, when hallowed by a blessing, as it is regarded in any common use, he must be told also the meaning of the rite which he has heard, what is the inward savour whereof that outward substance bears the likeness.⁶⁹

In this passage, Augustine characterizes the sacrament as a physical sign of a spiritual reality. Thus, the physical matter, for Augustine, signifies the deliverance of grace transmitted to the recipient of the sacrament. Therefore, Augustine sees an intrinsic connection between receiving grace and the reception of the sacraments. Although God's will remains inscrutable, his promise of the deliverance of grace to all who receive the sacraments, even as infants, provides a constant encounter with divine grace so that it may act on the recipient. Thus, while no promise of salvation can be given to anyone for Augustine, one can be assured that they have access to grace.

⁶⁹ Augustine, *The Catechizing of the Uninstructed*, 50.

CHAPTER THREE

Prosper of Aquitaine

Introduction and Overview of the Chapter

Despite Augustine's best efforts, and perhaps as a consequence of his refusal to publicly acknowledge that his positions on grace, free will, and predestination may have developed or changed over time, controversies surrounding such issues continued throughout the history of the church. While some continued from periods during Augustine's life through his death in 430, others arose after Augustine had already passed. With Augustine no longer able to defend his positions himself, defenders of the Augustinian position argued in his absence. One of those individuals, Prosper of Aquitaine, will be the subject of this chapter. Prosper is somewhat unique in his position within these controversies as he both publicly defended Augustine while the bishop was still alive—even asking for the bishop's help in a letter—and in the period following his death. While Prosper would never admit to any change in his thought or a deviation from his commitment to Augustine, an analysis of his works reveals that his thought developed over time. The extent of this development, and whether or not it constitutes a departure from Augustine's thought, will be the subject of this chapter.

In this chapter, I will first present some of the current scholarship on the interpretation of Prosper of Aquitaine. Next, I will introduce and perform an analysis of three of Prosper's works: his "Letter to Rufinus," *De gratia Dei et libero arbitrio liber contra collatorem*, and *De vocatione omnium gentium*. Then, although this analysis will

include some reference to the three foundations outlined in the first chapter, I will briefly conclude with a summary of Prosper's relationship to these foundations in a final section.

While the scholarship on Prosper is somewhat scant, Alexander Hwang offers great insight into this layman's thought in his book, *Intrepid Lover of Perfect Grace: The Life and Thought of Prosper of Aquitaine*. The book not only gives an account of Prosper generally but also of Prosper's work during the controversy pertinent to this paper. As I analyze Prosper's works, I'll do so with reference to Hwang's scholarship.

Beginnings as a Passionate Augustinian Defender

In *Intrepid Lover of Perfect Grace*, Hwang begins with the thesis that though Prosper initially defended Augustine with great tenacity, he ultimately began to move away from certain troubling or problematic parts of Augustinianism to submit wholly to the Catholic Church.¹ However, despite this development, Hwang presents Prosper as remaining consistent in his desire to follow the authority of the Catholic Church. During his years proudly defending Augustine, he was convinced of "the correctness and authority of Augustine *in toto*, the catholicity of Augustine's doctrine of predestination, and the authority of the Catholic Church, broadly defined."² For Hwang, Prosper saw Augustine's doctrines as synonymous with the positions of the Church. Thus, as the authority of the Church was ever central to Prosper, he defended Augustine as though he were defending the very bedrock of his faith. However, as Prosper would come to privately acknowledge that the bishop did not represent the Church in all matters, Prosper

¹ Hwang, *Intrepid Lover of Perfect Grace*, 9.

² Hwang, 91.

began to contradict some of his older views.³ And though, much like Augustine himself, Prosper would never admit to this change, it does mean that Prosper's status as a defender of Augustine and all of Augustine's doctrines must be called into question. Again, the extent to which Prosper strays from Augustine in his attempts to best represent the position of the Church will be explored throughout this chapter.

Hwang in his book claims that "Prosper should be viewed not so much as a disciple of Augustine as he was a disciple of the Church."⁴ It was, however, Prosper's conflation of the two that led to his vehement defense of the bishop. To this point, Prosper's devotion to Augustine is abundantly clear in his request for Augustine to offer insight into a budding controversy over grace in Marseille in which certain figures disagreed with Augustine's positions.⁵ The letter is titled "Prosper to Augustine, his saintly lord, indescribably wonderful and incomparably honorable prelate and illustrious patron."⁶ While a certain level of flattery would be expected of any layman seeking the aid of a bishop as well regarded and eminent as Augustine, Prosper's language toward this particular bishop, one "on guard to protect all the members of the body of Christ against the snares of heretical doctrines"⁷ is particularly strong.

In his "Letter to Rufinus," written c.428, Prosper describes how those in Gaul reacted to Augustine's writings.⁸ Again demonstrating his high view of the bishop in the

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Hwang, 95.

⁵ Casiday, "Rehabilitating John Cassian," 276.

⁶ Prosper of Aquitaine, "Letter 225: Prosper of Aquitaine to Augustine."

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Casiday, "Rehabilitating John Cassian," 272.

letter, Prosper lauds Augustine as “Augustine, the greatest man in the church today.”⁹

Prosper continues:

Augustine also, at the time the first and foremost among the bishops of the Lord, refuted [the Pelagians] abundantly and effectively in a number of tracts. Among many other divine gifts showered on him by the Spirit of truth, he excelled particularly in the gifts of knowledge and wisdom flowing from his love of God, which enabled him to slay with the unconquerable sword of the word not only the Pelagian heresy, still alive now in some of its offshoots, but also many other previous heresies. Against this doctor, resplendent with the glory of so many palms and so many crowns which he gained for the exaltation of the Church and the glory of Christ, some of ours, to their own great misfortune, speak and murmur in secret; but we came to know their criticisms.¹⁰

As someone who would later work under the pope and mention Augustine’s role in the Pelagian controversy only with prior reference to Pope Innocent’s condemnation of Pelagianism, Prosper’s language during this period exemplifies his view of Augustine’s catholicity.

In that same letter to Rufinus, Hwang notes that Prosper “details the essential Augustinian elements with remarkable efficiency.”¹¹ To that effect, I will now examine this letter through the lens of the three foundations, and—with Augustine’s language still ringing from the previous chapter—analyze the extent to which Prosper held to both the letter and spirit of these foundations.

First, concerning the foundations on free will and grace, Prosper adheres fully to a later Augustine in his letter. With regard to the primacy of grace in all things, he queries “who can doubt that free will obeys the invitation of God calling only when His grace has

⁹ Prosper, “Letter to Rufinus.”

¹⁰ Prosper, chap. 3.

¹¹ Hwang, 98.

aroused in him the desire to believe and to obey?”¹² Thus, for Prosper, nothing efficacious to salvation can be attributed to free will without first acknowledging that grace must come first. Consequently, Prosper adheres to the foundation that *there is a primacy of grace in all good things* in both spirit and letter: in letter by his concise presentation of the position and in spirit by his evident conviction of the primacy of grace in the action of a good will.

Further commenting on free will, Prosper offers the following:

Accordingly, whomsoever God's grace justifies, it makes them, not better from good, but good from bad. Later, when they make progress, it will make them better from good, not by taking away their free will but by setting it free. When free will was unaided by God, it was dead to justice and living for sin. But when the mercy of Christ enlightened it, then it was brought out of the kingdom of the devil and became the kingdom of God. And to continue in this happy state, man's free will is not sufficient unless he be also given perseverance by Him who gave him that diligence.¹³

For Prosper, a human devoid of grace is incapable of good. After the initial fall from grace, man “became an exile and a lost man, walking without knowing whereto, straying into ever-deeper error.”¹⁴ Though they are free, in the classic Augustinian sense, they are free only to sin and dead to justice. That is, “when unaided and left to itself, free will acted only for its own perdition.”¹⁵ Hwang himself notes that “there is an evil free will and a good free will, never a neutral free will.”¹⁶ Furthermore, it is only grace that returns free will to dignity and goodness. Thus, in the sense offered by Augustine in his later

¹² Prosper, “Letter to Rufinus,” chap. 5.

¹³ Prosper, chap. 9.

¹⁴ Prosper, chap. 8.

¹⁵ Prosper, chap. 17.

¹⁶ Hwang, 98.

years, *humanity has free will and it means something*, though not to the full extent of the early Augustine. Moreover, the final sentences of this quote lead into a discussion of predestination. Prosper notes that free will alone is not enough for salvation even after the will is regenerated, but that God's grace must be continuously given to the elect. He continues after noting the consequence of this doctrine of grace:

From this profession of faith in God's grace some draw back for fear lest, if they accept the doctrine on grace as shown in Holy Scripture and manifested by the effects of its power, they be compelled to admit also that of all men born in the course of the centuries the number of the predestined, chosen according to the design of God's call, is fixed and definite with God. But it is as much against holy religion to deny this as it is to gainsay grace itself. For it is no secret, but evident to all who open their eyes, how for so many centuries countless thousands of men were left to their errors and impieties...¹⁷

Here, finally, we see the reference to predestination. Prosper emphasizes an active role in the predestination of those bound for glory by noting that they were chosen. Furthermore, this number is fixed and foreknown to God. Conversely, Prosper only describes those left out of the predestination to beatitude—those destined for wrath—with passive language. That is, they were not actively chosen but merely left out. Once again, this perfectly aligns with the foundation that *God definitively predestines some people to heaven and some people are destined for destruction*. In the letter, the only portion of a foundation not covered in the first clause of the third foundation, *without consideration of their future actions*. Although Prosper does not explicitly reference this topic, his treatment of predestination in the letter is less thorough than that of grace and free will. However, concerning all other aspects of the foundations, in both the exact phrasing of his writing and its implication, Prosper adheres to an Augustinian framework. Thus, Hwang's assertion of Prosper's conformity to Augustinian doctrine at the time of his "Letter to

¹⁷ Prosper, "Letter to Rufinus," chap. 11.

Rufinus” cannot be questioned. Clearly, at this point, Prosper was a staunch defender and apparent disciple of the bishop. Should Prosper’s positions begin to evolve from those outlined in this letter, it would represent a move away from representing Augustine and development into new, or at least differing, thought.

The Seeds of Departure

Continuing into the 430s, Hwang makes it clear that Prosper continued to faithfully defend Augustine following the bishop’s death. After two Genoese priests requested clarification on passages from Augustine’s final works on predestination,¹⁸ Prosper’s response “demonstrates his absolute endorsement of and fidelity to Augustine’s doctrine of predestination.”¹⁹ Hwang goes on to note that, as is typical of Prosper, he set anyone opposed to Augustine’s view—that is, what he perceived to be the catholic and sensible view—as Pelagian. In fact, it was from Prosper’s characterization of certain opponents to Augustine’s positions of grace that we owe the misnomer *Semi-Pelagian*. For Prosper, to argue against Augustine was tantamount to heresy. It wouldn’t be until 433 in his response to John Cassian’s challenge of the Augustinian position that Prosper would begin to falter in his wholehearted commitment to Augustine.

As a monk from Gaul—the very region’s reactions to Augustine that Prosper relayed to Rufinus—Cassian presented a view of grace and free will that differs from that of Augustine. Like Pelagius, Cassian also emphasized the importance of the will in right action. As the staunch Augustinian that he was, Prosper immediately conflated Pelagius’s and Cassian’s positions. Unfortunately, there is a lot of nuance in Cassian’s view that

¹⁸ Hwang, 138.

¹⁹ Hwang, 141.

Prosper seems to overlook or ignore. Augustine Casiday, in a work evaluating Prosper's response to Cassian, translates Cassian as arguing that "at times the beginning of a good will arises from the gifts of nature bestowed by the liberality of the Creator—a beginning however that cannot reach the perfection of virtue without the guidance of God's grace."²⁰ For Prosper, this view was equatable with Pelagianism for allowing the possibility of a good will, even if just the beginning, seemingly bereft of grace.

In his response to Cassian, Prosper largely maintains an Augustinian position. The most noticeable change in Prosper's work is not the position itself but his presentation. Having mentioned the beginning of Prosper's other works and how they betray his personal views of Augustine, it seems appropriate to analyze Prosper's reference to Augustine at the beginning of this work, *De gratia Dei et libero arbitrio liber contra collatorem*. He writes that "there are some bold enough to assert that the grace of God, which we are Christians, was not correctly defended by bishop Augustine of holy memory; nor do they cease to attack with unbridled calumnies his books composed against the Pelagian heresy."²¹ Here, there is a marked difference from the language Prosper used to discuss Augustine in his earlier works. Before, the bishop was a magnanimous figure ordained by God to fight heresy. Here, Augustine is still held in high esteem, but the language is more ordinary than that of his earlier letters. Rather than write a paragraph recounting the greatness of the bishop, Prosper only includes a few lines. Though he still holds the bishop in high regard, it appears that his previous emblazoned passion for Augustine may have waned. As the letter continues, that fact is made clear.

²⁰ Casiday, "Rehabilitating John Cassian," 279.

²¹ Prosper of Aquitaine, "Grace and Free Will," chap. 1.

Concerning the first two foundations, that *humanity has free will and that it means something* and *there is a primacy of grace in all good things*. Prosper largely remains Augustinian. Regarding the interplay between grace and free will, Prosper argues that “there is no danger for the free will from the grace of God, nor is the will taken away, since there is generated in it to will well.”²² He goes on to note that “the will is taken away from no man, because the power of grace does not destroy wills; rather, it makes bad wills good, and faithless ones faithful.”²³ Taken together, these positions align both with Augustine and the views of Prosper that have been demonstrated thus far. As always, there is an emphasis on the efficacy of free will despite the necessity of grace. Turning now to the primacy of grace, Prosper claims that “we assert and defend that the beginning, not only of our acts, but also of our good thoughts is from God.”²⁴ Furthermore, he adds that “For, if merits do not precede grace, and if faith cannot be without merits, then, faith does not precede grace. Whatever the source of merit, it is totally from grace.”²⁵ Once again, Prosper represents both Augustine and his earlier self both adeptly and adequately. Ultimately, Prosper adheres to the two foundations on grace and free will almost exactly as he did in his earlier works.

However, despite his harmony with the other foundations, Prosper fails to include predestination in his response to Cassian. Rather than over-emphasize this point, I will provide Hwang’s words of caution on this very issue:

The discussion of predestination is uncharacteristically absent. It is the earliest work in which Prosper does not argue for predestination, after embracing

²² Prosper of Aquitaine, chap. 4.

²³ Prosper of Aquitaine, chap. 8.

²⁴ Prosper of Aquitaine, chap. 8.

²⁵ Prosper of Aquitaine, chap. 17.

Augustine, terms that were so consistently and zealously defended in his previous works. However, the absence of the defense of predestination may be attributed to the method of his argument rather than an indication of change in Prosper's convictions. Moreover, Prosper's defense of predestination is implied in Prosper's assertion that Celestine's approval included Augustine's later works.²⁶

Thus, according to Hwang, although Prosper did not actively argue for Augustine's position, it seems he may have implied it. Furthermore, an absence of evidence—by itself—is not evidence of absence. While it is possible Prosper was struggling with the Augustinian view of predestination at this point, he may have simply thought it prudent to omit a lengthy discussion on a topic he felt adequately covered by other areas of his response. Consequently, while it does seem as though Prosper may be shying away from certain language he previously employed to describe Augustine, at the time of his response to Cassian, Prosper was largely in line with Augustinian thought. Though he omitted any discussion on predestination, it is clear that his views of grace and free will still owed themselves to Augustine.

Despite the relative continuity in Prosper's view in his response to Cassian, his decision to remain silent on predestination revealed a development in his thought. Regardless of the charity given to Prosper in the previous paragraph, it is impossible to avoid his contradiction with the Augustinian position in his *Answers to the Gauls*. While not perfectly clear, this work is typically dated to around the time of his response to Cassian, if not slightly later. In this work, Prosper takes up perceived objections to the Augustinian position he found stemming from writers in Gaul.

Although he does not mention any changes to his thought, at the end of both Article 3 and Article 4 of the work, Prosper contradicts both Augustine and his past self

²⁶ Hwang, 165

on the motives behind God's predestination. Of those who were baptized but not elected, he writes that "though they were reborn from sinfulness and made just, yet they were not predestined by God, who foreknew that they would be impenitent."²⁷ Taken charitably, Prosper is arguing that those given the saving grace of baptism are not necessarily saved. However, rather than just stating such, Prosper identifies a causal link between the lack of predestination and God's foreknowledge of future impenitence. Similarly, in Article 3, Prosper writes of a person who fell away from the faith, "since God's prescience was neither uncertain nor mistaken about the future actions of this man, He never elected nor predestined him, nor did He set apart from eternal damnation him who was to be a reprobate."²⁸ This contradicts Augustine's position in *Ad Simplicianum* wherein he emphasizes that no one is either elected or passed over because of any foreknowledge of their future actions. Thus, regarding the foundation on predestination—*without consideration of their future actions, God definitively predestines some people to heaven and some people are destined for destruction*—Prosper has chosen to depart from Augustine. Though Prosper remained committed to Augustine's view of free will and predestination, how those played out in the divine plan of predestination are called into question by his departure from the third Augustinian foundation. Despite his previous complete endorsement of Augustine, by the time of his *Answers to the Gauls*, Prosper had begun to alter his views. Although Prosper would never recant the Augustinian framework, he chose to deviate from Augustine concerning the cause of divine predestination.

²⁷ Prosper, "Answers to the Gauls," sec. 4.

²⁸ Prosper, sec. 3.

The Thoughts of a Hardened Interlocutor

Departing from the 430s and arriving in the 450s, I will now focus on Prosper's *magnum opus* concerning the present topic. In his *De vocatione omnium gentium*, Prosper sets out to give closure to the controversy of his age. Unlike the other works covered in this chapter, *De vocatione* is not addressed to a single individual nor is it polemical in nature. Rather, as Hwang notes, having served as an advisor to Pope Leo for a decade and attaining a certain celebrity, "Prosper sought to provide his own solution to the conflict he helped begin and maintain."²⁹ At the beginning of the work, he notes pervasive issues surrounding these doctrines: "Some people set up an untenable cleavage between this will of men and God's grace, holding that by predicating grace one denies free will. They do not notice that it could be objected equally well that they deny grace when they consider the latter not as meeting, but as following, the human will."³⁰ Prosper, ever committed to both grace and free will, continues to support a harmony rather than a division between the two ideas. As the work continues, he never fails to emphasize the due part owed to both subjects.

To begin, Prosper distinguishes between an animal will, a natural will, and a spiritual will. While a natural will is superior to an animal will insofar as it is guided by reason, the spiritual will is superior to the natural will insofar as it is guided and empowered by God's grace. However, when speaking of the natural will, Prosper writes that "when led by it at this level, human hearts do not, it is true, undergo the shameful slavery of bodily pleasures, but rule their desires, according to the laws of justice and

²⁹ Hwang, 208

³⁰ Prosper, *The Call of All Nations.*, bk. 1, chap. 1.

probity. They do not, however, merit any higher reward, than earthly glory.”³¹ Here, Prosper grants that those apart from God’s grace may access and act on justice and morality. However, this seems to go against his claims in his *Letter to Rufinus*. Before, Prosper was clear—and in line with Augustine—when he claimed that “when free will was unaided by God, it was dead to justice and living for sin.”³² As Hwang summarizes succinctly, for an earlier Prosper, “there is an evil free will and a good free will, never a neutral free will.”³³ Now, not only is there a growing gray area between a good will and an evil will, but it seems that the natural will is able to act on principles of justice. Thus, while this certainly supports the foundation that *humanity has free will and it means something*, it exists in tension with the foundation that *there is a primacy of grace in all good things*. Indeed, Prosper seems to grant the possibility of justice and morality apart from a will regenerated by God’s grace. However, lest this allotment of justice granted to the natural will be taken as final, Prosper also notes that:

With [evils] assailing human nature, with faith lost, hope abandoned, the intellect blinded, the will enslaved, no one finds in himself the means of a restoration. Although some tried, guided by their natural reason, to resist vices, the life of decency they led here on earth was sterile. They did not acquire true virtues and attain eternal happiness.³⁴

Thus, although Prosper grants the natural will certain natural goods, he thoroughly denies that any true virtue or supernatural merit could come without the grace of God.

Therefore, Prosper’s foundation would read *there is a primacy of grace in all good things worth having or all supernaturally or eternally good things*. Interpreted this way,

³¹ Prosper, bk. 1, chap. 4.

³² Prosper, “Letter to Rufinus,” chap. 9.

³³ Hwang, 98

³⁴ Prosper, *The Call of All Nations.*, bk. 1, chap. 7.

Prosper's view of grace and free will reads more like Cassian's position than Augustine's. By making room for some goodness prior to God's continual gift of grace, Prosper certainly disagrees with his former self, and by extension, Augustine.

However, even noting this, it is important to note that as this work continues, Prosper elaborates on the presence of grace throughout creation, and the distribution of grace—not efficacious grace, but grace nonetheless—to all people. When taken in context, it does not seem as though Prosper would functionally deviate from the foundation on grace. Still, that he would grant such faculties to an unregenerated will is contrary to much of the spirit of the foundation. That is, throughout much of Augustine's, and certainly Prosper's, works, there is a polemical element hyperfocused on denouncing any Pelagian tendencies. While Prosper's view of these wills in *De vocatione* may not formally reject the Augustinian understanding, as it is formulated in the foundation, it is somewhat foreign.

Continuing throughout the work, evidence of Augustine's influence remains prominent. Regarding the primacy of grace, Prosper argues that “merit begins with grace, which was itself received unmerited.”³⁵ This theme is repeated throughout the book with inclusions like “every good word, and every holy action is inspired by the Holy Spirit, without whom we can do nothing that is right.”³⁶ Additionally, concerning God's choice of who to elect, Prosper—in a manner similar to Augustine in *Ad Simplicianum*—argues that we cannot seek to understand God's will on such questions.³⁷ He emphasizes this

³⁵ Prosper, bk. 1, chap. 18.

³⁶ Prosper, 1, chap. 24.

³⁷ Prosper, bk. 1, chap. 21.

problem throughout the work. On the topic, he quotes from 1 Corinthians 4 and writes the following:

For who distinguishes there? Or what hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadn't not received it? Accordingly, this profound problem of which we confess, with the awestruck Apostle that it cannot be fattened, is not solved by appealing to the acts of the free will. For, although it lies in a man's power to reject what is good, yet, unless it is given him, he is unable by himself to choose this good.³⁸

Here, we find the classical Augustinian dilemma. Despite Prosper's years of reflection and willingness to depart from Augustine on certain doctrinal points, Prosper has been unable to escape it. Regardless, his exposition on the nature and scope of grace does at least state explicitly what was only implicit in Augustine—God's mercy has made his grace abundant. Still, Prosper cautions that "even in our own day when streams of ineffable gifts flood the whole world, grace is not bestowed on all men in the same measure and intensity."³⁹ Thus, although Prosper would give an inch, he will fail to concede a mile. Ultimately, God's reasons are withheld from those on earth, and humanity must assent to the presence of justice in all God's actions despite inequality in the distribution of grace.

At this point, I will turn my attention to Chapter 12 of Book 2. In the translation, de Letter rendered the following heading for the chapter: "When we turn away from God, this is our doing, not by his ordinance. Man merits by persevering, because he could fall away."⁴⁰ Clearly, the first sentence aligns with Augustine. Even in his earliest works, Augustine was convinced that it was our free will that led humanity to reject God and

³⁸ Prosper, bk. 1, chap. 25.

³⁹ Prosper, bk. 2, chap. 6.

⁴⁰ Prosper, bk. 2, chap. 12.

cling to earthly things. However, the second point seems to go against Augustine's position on the irresistibility of the grace of election in *Ad Simplicianum*. For Augustine, someone who is chosen for election will necessarily be called in such a way that they will persevere. Thus, there is no potential for actually falling away from the faith. Here, the heading provided seems to suggest that Prosper would reject this. Before exploring the content of the chapter, I will provide the words themselves:

God never forsakes any of the faithful who do not first turn away from Him, and that His ordinance never plans anyone's fall. Rather, many who have attained the use of reason are left capable of turning away from him that they may be rewarded for not having done so, and that the merit of a behavior which is not possible without the help of the spirit of God, may yet belong to man by whose will it could have been absent. This will is by itself able to sin, but cannot by itself perform good works. Though true virtue is in conformity with his nature, still the viciousness that has infected his nature following his evil will, cannot be overcome by the power of nature, but only by grace.⁴¹

Though the language surrounding "many" is left unclear, it does seem as though Prosper concludes that these people are truly capable of falling away from God's grace by their free will and choose not to do so. However, this begs the question of those who are not the many. Are they not given the capacity to turn away from God? If so, that would be more in line with the Augustinian answer. Furthermore, does Prosper actually think that any of those "many" will not fall away and persevere to the end? That is, can any of those given the grace to initially free their wills be saved without receiving an irresistible grace?

In the answer to this question, Prosper seems to provide a tenuous position. On the one hand, Prosper claims that "He who inspires men with the desire to obey him, does not take away from them, even from those who will persevere, the fickleness by which

⁴¹ ibid

they can still refuse obedience”⁴² and “thus, while no one was to fall from the number of the promised elect, *except those who would fail to make progress or would neglect to profit by his help*, He was to exalt in glory above all the elect whom he chose from all mankind”⁴³ (emphasis is my own). On the other, he argues that “we must, then, not fancy that, in spite of the immeasurable mercy and justice of almighty God, a man who is not a reprobate would be lost” and that “the number of the elect who were foreknown and forechosen in Christ before all times, can in no way be diminished.”⁴⁴ It’s clear that those who are elected can still sin while on earth, but to what extent does their fickleness remain? Prosper seems committed to the position that the number of the elect is set, a product of God’s existence outside of time⁴⁵, so why does he state that there are some that will fall away after election? Furthermore, why entertain those “many” who have the capacity to stay in God’s grace despite not being given the gift of irresistible grace? Though Prosper himself does not use the term “irresistible grace,” such a concept is not foreign to the Augustinian tradition. While Prosper could have argued that the elect receive an irresistible grace, as Augustine does in *Ad Simplicianum*, he instead wavers in his position. Regardless, it seems clear that certain portions of this thought regarding predestination run counter to the Augustinian foundation. Though he at times affirms it, Prosper nevertheless has continued to stray from Augustine’s position on predestination as began in his earlier years.

⁴² Prosper, bk. 2, chap. 28.

⁴³ Prosper, bk. 2, chap. 29.

⁴⁴ Prosper, bk. 2, chap. 31.

⁴⁵ Prosper, bk. 2, chap. 34.

Ultimately, Prosper's final thoughts on grace and free will continue to align with Augustine's. In the final pages of the work, he writes that "our fickle nature whose integrity depended on the changeless Essence, tore itself away from the supreme Good when taking pleasure in that which is its own. It is for this fall that God's grace now brings the remedy."⁴⁶

Truly, this embodies the Augustinian explanation of the fall present as far back as *De libero arbitrio*. Additionally, it emphasizes the necessity of the primacy of grace that would become so foundational to Augustinian thought.

Concluding Thoughts

In the final chapter of this work, I will offer greater insight into the exact nature and extent of Prosper's deviation from Augustine. Regardless, it would be prudent to summarize the development in Prosper's position and his relationship with the Augustinian foundations before moving on to the next chapter.

As argued at the beginning of the chapter, after first discovering Augustine, Prosper wholeheartedly supported the bishop and took his words as doctrine. Concerning all three foundations, Prosper vehemently defended Augustine both before and immediately following his death. Furthermore, Prosper was well-versed enough in the Augustinian doctrines to provide skillful and effective presentations of Augustine's works. To that point, he, a layman, was even sought after by priests for explanations of Augustine's works. However, as time went on, Prosper began to diverge from the Augustinian view. Although this process started slowly—with merely a more reserved

⁴⁶ Prosper, bk. 2, chap. 34.

attitude towards his favoritism and the absence of a discussion of predestination—

Prosper eventually completely contradicted the Augustinian foundation on predestination.

Ultimately, by the time he would pen *De vocatione*, Prosper had developed his own extending beyond the bounds of Augustinianism. Although he remained largely supportive of the foundations of grace and free will—with only mild deviations in his account of the natural, unregenerated will—Prosper deviates more broadly from Augustine's expressions of predestination. What was first stated in his *Answers to the Gauls* reached fulfillment in his *magnum opus*—Prosper had strayed from his Augustinian origins into new territory. Therefore, although Augustine's influence never disappeared, Prosper became much more than merely a defender of Augustine. For Prosper, Prosper's ultimate concern with the authority of the Church won out. As he would go on after Augustine's death to serve under Pope Leo, his views, specifically those on predestination developed out of the Augustinian position into something distinct. Still, Prosper's extension of grace and the recognition of the potential for natural goods outside of a continuous infusion of grace operates within the framework of the Augustinian foundations even as it pushes their bounds. Although such development might be contradictory within a pure synthesis, the foundations invite some amount of internal tension insofar as there is tension in the source material. However, while much of Prosper's later work does attempt to create new development within the Augustinian foundations rather than merely abandoning them, such as his apparent reevaluation of Cassian's position, Prosper ultimately developed beyond the Augustinian doctrine rather than merely conforming to it.

CHAPTER FOUR

John Scotus Eriugena

Introduction and Overview of the Chapter

Moving forward from the end of the Patristic period, issues around grace, free will, and predestination persisted in the church. Though Augustine's writings had been cemented as authoritative on such topics, a consensus about what to make of the apparent contradictions in his writings never emerged. Of those instances in which controversy over Augustine's teachings arose, the occurrence that carved a place in the 9th century historical record is that of a monk, Gottschalk of Orbais, and those who responded to him. One particular respondent, John Scotus Eriugena, will be the subject of this chapter. Recruited by the Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims to defend one particular interpretation of Augustine, Eriugena's work would later be condemned by the very people he hoped to defend. A fascinating character, Eriugena was unusual in his day for his ability to read Greek. While this capacity is more apparent in his Greek titled work *Periphyseon*, there is a question as to how much Eriugena's Greek influence, at that time exceedingly rare in the West, shaped his defense and interpretation of the Latin-loving Augustine.

Interestingly, where the controversy of Prosper's time largely focused on the grace and free will portions of Augustine's thoughts, the controversy in the ninth century found its roots in predestination. Thus, where Prosper, and consequently the previous chapter, tended to shy away from predestination, Eriugena and, thus, this chapter, confronts it directly and unashamedly.

As with the previous chapter on Prosper of Aquitaine, the scholarship and extant material surrounding Eriugena are relatively scant. Compared to writers like Augustine, the scholarly discussion of Eriugena's *De praedestinatione* is less rich. For this reason, I will draw heavily from the relevant chapters of three sources: a study on Eriugena in John Marenbon's *Medieval Philosophy*, Matthew Levering's *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths*, and Brian Matz's article, "Augustine, the Carolingians, and Double Predestination."

In this chapter, I will first continue this brief overview of Eriugena with context provided by modern scholarship. Next, I will analyze his defense of his interpretation of the Augustinian position in Eriugena's *De divina praedestinatione*. Finally, I will evaluate Eriugena's position in light of the previously established Augustinian foundations.

Eriugena, A Novel Approach to a Continual Dilemma

Before exploring what the aforementioned scholars have to say about Eriugena's work itself, I will outline the context they provide to give a background for both their and my analyses. For this, I will primarily draw from Marenbon's text while supplementing it with other work as needed.

Concerning Eriugena himself, little is known of his life outside the controversy. He was likely born in the first quarter of the ninth century, and he lived in France from 845 to 877 largely at the court of Charlemagne's grandson, Charles the Bald.¹ A great patron of the arts, Charles commissioned Eriugena to translate the works of Pseudo-

¹ Mary Brennan, "Foreword," in *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, ix.

Dionysius, a writer deeply influenced by Neoplatonism. Scholars suggest that either Charles was already aware of Eriugena's interest in Greek sources or that this may have introduced Eriugena to such texts.² Regardless, by the year 850, Eriugena was regarded as a "gifted teacher of the Liberal Arts."³ Due to his reputation, Eriugena, a scholar of 'no ecclesiastical rank' would be called on to write a treatise to defend a position of Augustinian interpretation, a treatise that would be condemned as 'Irish Porridge.'⁴

Turning now to the context of the controversy, Marenbon notes that Augustine left Christians a "confused picture" of how they were to understand predestination.⁵ However, it was clear that his later works focused heavily on humanity's dependence on grace. Building from this emphasis, Gottschalk, a Saxon monk in Orbais, developed a theory of dual, or double, predestination. Marenbon articulates the position as: "Every human being is either predestined to be saved, or else predestined to be damned."⁶ Though Gottschalk was supported by some, including abbot and Latin classics scholar Servatus Lupus of Ferrières, Prudentius of Troyes, and Florus of Lyons, several key figures in the church opposed his interpretation of Augustine.⁷ Among them were Hincmar, archbishop of Rheims, and Hrabanus Maurus, archbishop of Mainz. Contrary to Gottschalk, they supported a single predestination: "Some human beings are predestined

² Brennan, xii.

³ Brennan, x.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy*, 78.

⁶ Marenbon, 78.

⁷ Matz, "Augustine, the Carolingians, and Double Predestination," 237.

to be saved, and only they will be saved. All other human beings are not predestined at all.”⁸ Marenbon aptly notes that “since those who are not predestined, and so do not receive the grace they need, will therefore be damned, the difference between [double predestination] and [single predestination] seems, at most, to be that between doing and allowing.”⁹ Still, that difference was so relevant to the ninth-century writers that Gottschalk was condemned for his position in 849 and confined within a monastery for life. Even after Gottschalk’s condemnation, the leaders of the single predestination position were worried both about the double predestinarian’s potential portrayal of God’s justice as arbitrary and the removal of any motivation to pursue a pious life on the part of the individual. Wanting a thorough rebuttal of Gottschalk’s position, in 850, Hincmar asked Eriugena to compose such a work.¹⁰ It was for this purpose that *De divina praedestinatione* was written.

Concerning the debate itself, Matz notes that “no one displayed any knowledge of the earlier debate’s historical context.” That is, “two decades of the ninth-century debate passed before anyone began to take seriously the II Council of Orange... [and] Augustine, Prosper, and Fulgentius were believed to support both sides of the debate.”¹¹ The second Council of Orange, a council held in response to the position against which Prosper of Aquitaine argued, temporarily suspended the previous debates over Augustine. Now, centuries later, the earlier context was largely ignored. In Matz’s words, “to put it crassly, the ninth-century debate was little more than an opportunity for different people

⁸ Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy*, 79.

⁹ Marenbon, 79.

¹⁰ Marenbon, 79.

¹¹ Matz, “Augustine, the Carolingians, and Double Predestination,” 235–36.

to rehash an old debate.”¹² As mentioned earlier, though the debate itself was similar to the one of Prosper’s time the debate of the ninth-century focused more on the predestination portion of the problem rather than the interaction between grace and free will. Still, as these issues are all interconnected, many of the same problems arose. Despite the similarities in argumentation, the extent to which the ninth-century controversy, or at least Eriugena’s role in it, is a simple rehash of an old problem is debatable. As will be clear from both the later analysis of the work itself and Marenbon’s commentary on it, Eriugena integrates new lines of thought into his position.

Overall, the three scholars paint an interesting picture of Eriugena and his place in the ninth-century debate. Unlike most other contemporary Westerners, Eriugena’s thorough knowledge of Greek sources both influenced his thought and gave him a more holistic understanding of the semantics. Moreover, Eriugena maintained an emphasis on reason in resolving theological issues. Exactly how Eriugena’s thought fits within the Augustinian tradition will be explored in the following section. The following analysis will not only be guided by the contribution and context of these scholars but also by the Augustinian foundations. Rather than supporting the view of a single scholar, the analysis of the text through the lens of the three foundations will once again illuminate the Augustinian core of Eriugena’s treatise and whether or not it is developed, encroached upon, or abandoned.

Novelty in Action: De divina praedestinatione

Having given the work a proper introduction, I will now analyze Eriugena’s response to Gottschalk’s version of double predestination, *De divina praedestinatione*. As

¹² Matz, 236.

Eriugena formatted the work logically, my analysis will follow the structure of the original. However, although the analysis will be thorough, I will not cover the entirety of the book. For brevity, I will condense those sections in which Eriugena spends several chapters on a single topic or provides separate proofs for a single point. Moreover, I will omit a select few portions of the work as they are only tangentially related to the overall goal of this paper or adequately covered elsewhere.

In the opening chapter, Eriugena begins by laying out the problem of double predestination to which he is responding. As Eriugena's understanding of what he is arguing against will inform an understanding of what his position is, I will start here as well. Yet, before he explores Gottschalk's position, Eriugena explains how he will approach the issue. Explaining that he is in the tradition of Augustine, Eriugena notes that it is "taught as the fundamental principle of man's salvation that philosophy, that is the study of wisdom, is not one thing and religion another... that true philosophy is true religion and conversely that true religion is true philosophy."¹³ Eriugena, then, views reason as sufficient to solve this dilemma. Concerning this peculiarity, Matz notes that while the other members of the debate focused on "properly interpreting the Scriptures and the Church Fathers, Eriugena argued the problem was rather about a proper understanding of the divine nature."¹⁴ Thus, despite Eriugena's Augustinian framework, the lens Eriugena uses to approach the problem diverges from that of his peers. Unfortunately, Matz identifies this difference in approach—specifically Eriugena's

¹³ Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 1.1.

¹⁴ Matz, 253.

arguments from reason—as playing a role in the condemnation of *De divina praedestinatione*.¹⁵

. However, it is worth noting that Eriugena is not throwing away other sources of reflection. Rather, he sees multiple paths to the same divine truth. In a brief return to a thread from the first chapter of this thesis, Eriugena’s connection between philosophy and religion gives a new perspective on the original problem of Augustine the philosopher and Augustine the theologian. While I noted previously that the two are often at odds, Eriugena’s connection between philosophy and religion suggests that both halves of Augustine are reconcilable; they are properly one and the same thing.

Still, even as he conflates the two, it is noteworthy that Eriugena begins with philosophy rather than religion. He continues: “Every true and complete doctrinal system by which the theory of all things is most assiduously inquired into and most clearly ascertained is established within that discipline which the Greeks usually call *philosophia*.”¹⁶ Thus, not only has Eriugena made his primacy of philosophy clear but he also reveals his Greek influence.

Regarding this effect of this influence, Marenbon remarks that the work itself is “strange.”¹⁷ That is, although *De praedestinatione* was written from a Latin foundation and quotes extensively from Augustine, it has the marked influence of Greek writers, especially pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory of Nyssa. Additionally—as will be explored later—Levering notes that Eriugena criticizes Gottschalk’s lack of understanding of the

¹⁵ Matz, 254

¹⁶ Eriugena, 1.1.

¹⁷ Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy*, 79.

Greek language.¹⁸ While the Latin terms tend toward ambiguity, Eriugena finds the Greek terms for predestination, foreknowledge, and the like are both clear and in support of his position.

Already, in the first paragraph of the work, the ultimate path of Eriugena's argument is taking shape. While he will stick to quoting exclusively and extensively from Augustine, he is clear about his preference for understanding the problem in a rational, Greek framework. Thus, where Augustine would use Latin terms, Eriugena prefers the Greek. However, in many ways, as Augustine was closer to the original Greek works which influence Eriugena, Eriugena's preference doesn't necessarily shift him away from Augustine despite the movement away from a Latin bias.

Finally, Eriugena fully lays out the problem he plans to tackle. Outlining the issues he finds in the position, he notes that Gottschalk:

...maintains that there are in God two predestinations, and ...the unavoidable and operative cause of all the just is, as he affirms, established in one predestination; similarly the cause of the wicked in the other. For one predestination, as he says, is of the just, the other of the wicked, so much so that no one, except by the immutable necessity of the one predestination, can either attain to his just reward or to his highest end, that is eternal life, nor anyone, except by an equal necessity of the other, be compelled to sink into the punishment his wickedness merits, or into the eternal torment which is its end.¹⁹

Just as the scholars found earlier, Eriugena takes primary issue with the characterization of God having two distinct predestinations; one for the just unto salvation and one for the wicked unto punishment. Moreover, Eriugena also finds an issue with the suggestion that such predestination was by necessity rather than by God's free choice. Thus, as his

¹⁸ Levering, *Predestination*, 70.

¹⁹ Eriugena, 1.4.

argument unfolds, Eriugena will take special care to target both the necessity and dual-nature of Gottschalk's predestination.

Despite his emphasis on reason, Eriugena does not neglect an immediate turn to the scripture. At the end of the first chapter, he writes:

This foolish and merciless lunacy is in the first place refuted by divine authority; secondly it is annulled by the rules of right reason. Why! Is it not said by the prophet: "all the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth"? This is explained more clearly elsewhere: "I shall sing to your mercy and justice, O Lord." In those words the generosity of God's gifts and the equity of his justice are most clearly commended.²⁰

Again, while he lists both, here it is the divine authority that is listed before reason. While his immediate proof texts for the single predestinarian position are not absolute defeaters of his opponent but merely references to God's mercy and justice, it at least reveals that Eriugena finds Gottschalk's position contrary both to justice and to mercy.

In the second chapter, he argues against Gottschalk's suggestion that there is any necessity within God by an appeal to divine simplicity. For, if God has a will, Eriugena finds it must necessarily be free. In a manner reminiscent of the Euthyphro dilemma, he argues that if something could move God's will by necessity, that force would be God. He writes: "Come now: if all that is in God is God, and if the will of God is in God, the will of God is therefore God. For him there is no distinction between being and willing; rather for him being is identical with willing."²¹Essentially, a necessity within God's will, and thus within God himself, is a logical impossibility for Eriugena. Next, he moves to include predestination within the concept of God and thus within the same divine

²⁰ Eriugena, 1.4.

²¹ Eriugena, 2.1.

simplicity which cannot contain necessity. Quoting Augustine's definition of predestination, Eriugena finds that "divine predestination is, as Augustine says, the preparation and arrangement before time began of all God is going to do."²² Thus, by use of reason, if predestination was completed before time began, it was completed before creation. Therefore, predestination was when only God was. It follows, then, that God's predestination must also be God.

Next, Eriugena describes God's singular predestination in ways that go beyond but also include Augustine's aforementioned definition. For Eriugena, there is a sense in which God foreknows both good and evil, but his good works he foreknows are his predestination. More completely:

The work of God is, in fact, discerned not only in the creation of all creatures but also in those whom God, through the favorable purpose of his grace, has prepared for eternal life. It is also discerned in that most secret operation by which he rightly abandons the evil motions of the wicked and attends to the exercise of justice on behalf of those whom by his predestination he has called. It is also in the very qualities of the elements which, while by their nature they appear to be good because they derive from the highest good, nevertheless are experienced as punishment by those for whom, according to their just desserts, the just judge has prepared eternal torments.²³

Though brief, the above quote is rich with theological import. First, Eriugena mentions grace as the action by God which prepares individuals for eternal life. Much in line with Augustine and within the bounds of the Augustinian foundation on grace, Eriugena affirms that God's grace is necessary for anyone to achieve salvation. Second, Eriugena is careful to say that while God actively gives grace to those prepared for eternal life, God merely abandons those who will receive punishment. Thus, although he has not yet

²² Eriugena, 2.2.

²³ Eriugena, 2.5.

interacted with the first portion of the foundation—that God predestines without reference to future merits—Eriugena finds himself within the bounds of the Augustinian foundation on predestination. Furthermore, while he does reference the motions of the wicked being responsible for their punishment, there is not yet an explicit mention of free will. Thus, I will refrain from issuing a judgment concerning the final foundation.

Finally, Eriugena explains that it is all a single predestination that affects those called and the wicked in two different ways. While those prepared for eternal life experience the elements of predestination as goodness, the wicked are punished by them. Together with the previous passage, Eriugena suggests that there is only a single predestination because there is only ever a *one* within God, and, in a very Neoplatonic sense, it is all the same *one*. In Neoplatonism, this *oneness* is the unchanging, unmoving source of all things.²⁴ Although this would merge with the Christian tradition, Eriugena would have been more familiar with the pure Neoplatonic, rational sense of the One more so than his peers. Though not definitive, this again speaks to Eriugena's Greek influence.

In chapter three, Eriugena begins with a summary of all that he has explained thus far. Throughout the work, Eriugena will often take time to summarize his previous thoughts before moving on. However, as mentioned earlier, for the sake of brevity, I will not re-analyze those same topics at a similar depth. Instead, I will continue with the new content he introduces. In this chapter, Eriugena adapts Augustine's view of evil to further refute Gottschalk. Regarding the impossibility of a double predestination, he notes:

God cannot be both the cause of those things that are and the cause of those things that are nothing. But God is the cause of those things that are. Therefore he is not

²⁴ Marenbon 17–18.

the cause of those things that are not. Sin and its effect, death, to which unhappiness is conjoined, are not. Of them, therefore, neither God nor his predestination, which is what he himself is, can be the cause.²⁵

Here, Eriugena takes the Augustinian view that evil is a privation of the good, and he takes it to its limit: evil is the absence of being. Since God is being, and God is his predestination, God cannot be the cause of the death of those that fall away. Therefore, God cannot, by necessity, cause anyone to sin. Here, Eriugena begins a defense of free will. Though he has not yet concluded that God forces anyone to will good, he does claim God cannot force anyone to will evil. Regarding the Augustinian foundation on free will, Eriugena is coming closer to meeting its standard.

In chapter four, Eriugena reintroduces grace into his arguments with a classic polemical turn, associating his opponent, Gottschalk, with Pelagianism.²⁶ Curiously, Eriugena finds that Gottschalk's position is actually in between both what he would call Pelagianism and its opposite; between denying grace and denying free will. For Eriugena, it is a given that in salvation there must be grace. Furthermore, since the world does have salvation, grace necessarily must be in the world.²⁷ He also argues that free will must be a part of salvation as we know there will be judgment.²⁸ Just as I found Augustine arguing in the second chapter, Eriugena believes there can be no just judgment if there is no free choice. Here, we again see Eriugena within the framework of the Augustinian foundations. Now, he has fully accepted that humans have free will and that it means something. However, regarding grace, while he is thus far within the bounds of the

²⁵ Eriugena, 3.3.

²⁶ Eriugena, 4.1.

²⁷ Eriugena, 4.3.

²⁸ Eriugena, 4.3.

foundation, he has not filled those bounds with content. Perhaps aware of his insufficiency, Eriugena writes: “Free choice must not be defended in such a way that good works are attributed to it without the grace of God; nor must grace be so defended that, as it were from the safety afforded by it, evil deeds may be habitually performed.”²⁹ While his second point addresses Marenbon’s aforementioned worry by the single predestinarians that the double predestination position leads to a moral laxity due to the insistence on grace and the necessity of the two predestinations, Eriugena’s first point fulfills the foundation on grace. Though he respects free choice, he does not allow for it to complete good works unless grace comes first. Eriugena, at this point in the work, is now in harmony with all three of the Augustinian foundations.

Moreover, to further support the position that humanity has free will and that it means something, Eriugena writes:

For there cannot at the same time exist free choice and the gift of grace side by side with the necessity of predestination. How indeed can there be in one both the necessary cause compelling and the voluntary cause effecting? For freedom, either of grace or of will, has no place where there is an unchangeable captivity of nature.³⁰

Here, Eriugena at once pushes back against the insistence of necessity within God and his predestination and further maintains a meaningful freedom of choice for the individual. Though the late Augustinian view of grace, free will, and predestination often leads to an apparent denigration of actual free choice, Eriugena emphasizes that there is no compulsion within the individual that stems from God. Indeed, he sees it as contrary to God’s nature to give free choice to rational creatures and then constrain it. For Eriugena,

²⁹ Eriugena, 4.3.

³⁰ Eriugena, 4.4.

God made rational creatures so that they could contemplate God.³¹ By using their will in a good manner, they live happy and just lives. By using it poorly, unhappiness follows as a punishment. In his own words:

And so that very art by which all things were made...has by predestining so arranged the making of the rational creature as to impose upon it no necessity which would by an inevitable force compel it, although unwilling, to serve its God or to abandon him, though willing to cleave to him. God would not give us reason just to constrain it, and he would not be wicked.³²

In a final note for this chapter, Eriugena inquires into what humanity lost in the Fall.

Ultimately, he concludes humanity lost neither its free will nor its nature. Instead, it lost the strength of the will to keep the commandments without the aid of grace.³³ For Marenbon, this line of thinking remains within the Augustinian tradition. He claims that “Eriugena stresses that humans retain the free choice of their will...[and] he holds that they *have* lost the ‘strength and power’ of the will: without the help of unmerited grace, they cannot use their wills well enough to be saved.”³⁴ Ultimately, this thinking aligns neatly with the thinking of the mature Augustine.

In a slightly different development, Eriugena also argues that “human nature was better at that time when it possessed the will and the ability, one by substance, the other by grace, than it is now when it has only the will without the ability.”³⁵ In this instance, Eriugena suggests that humanity may actually will the good but only to no avail. If they wish to see any good come from their willing and keep the commandments; however,

³¹ Eriugena, 4.5.

³² Eriugena, 4.5.

³³ Eriugena, 4.6.

³⁴ Marenbon, 79–80.

³⁵ Eriugena, 4.7.

they must have grace. For Marenbon, this marks a new line of thought relative to the Augustinian tradition. He notes that Eriugena “wishes to distinguish between the rational will and human nature itself.”³⁶ For Marenbon, Eriugena argues that while human free will was an, or even *the*, essential feature of humanity and that humanity will be punished for choosing evil, the human nature did not sin and was not corrupted. Instead, it is only the evil will that will be punished.

In this case, Eriugena skirts the boundary of Augustine’s foundation on grace. On the one hand, he affirms that grace must come prior to any good action. On the other, he allows for the possibility of a will to keep the commandments that is inherent to human nature. If one is to hold that the will to keep God’s commandments is a good thing, Eriugena seems to allow for the possibility to do so without grace. For Levering, this means that Eriugena lacks Augustine’s “appreciation that everything good is radically God’s gift.”³⁷ Ultimately, the key operator is “radically.” In many ways, Eriugena’s development seems consistent with a similar line of thinking in Prosper’s work concerning the potential for natural virtues. Thus, although Eriugena’s ideas do conflict with the mature Augustine, they still do not violate the foundation but rather push it to its limit.

The next several chapters consist of Eriugena largely emphasizing previous points or quoting pages from Augustine. As such, I will not spend too much time analyzing these chapters. Still, with regards to the most recent point at the end of the previous paragraph concerning the will devoid of grace, Eriugena adds, “[the will’s] punishment

³⁶ Marenbon, 80.

³⁷ Levering, 69.

impedes it from either willing to live righteously, or should it so will, from doing so.”³⁸

As noted previously, Eriugena does seem to allow the ability to will the good without grace. Still, his interpretation of Augustine fits the general spirit of the foundation of grace as the potential good that may come from the individual’s willing cannot be realized into any good effect without that aid of grace. Moreover, his notion that the human “will is a free one, and its freedom is not false but true,”³⁹ confirms that the free will of humanity is meaningful. Although a later Augustine would likely see this contradictory to his view point, in light of the complete body of Augustine’s works, including those like *De libero arbitrio*, Eriugena’s thoughts are not without grounding in the Augustinian tradition.

Additionally, Eriugena further develops his idea of the impossibility of God compelling the free will of a rational agent. He writes:

For God is neither the necessary cause of all good things as fire is of burning, sun of heating or lighting, nor the compelling cause, as inclination is of sleeping, thirst of drinking; but he is the voluntary cause in the same way as wisdom is the cause of the wise man, sight of the seeing man, reason of the reasoning man.⁴⁰

Here, Eriugena suggests that God’s goodness may be said to be the cause for all other good things insofar as it is ontologically prior to all other good things. Moreover, it is the actual good that an individual may access. Interestingly, however, he rejects the notion that God is the necessary cause of all good things. Perhaps in an effort to maintain the freedom of the will, Eriugena suggests that while God is still necessary for any good action or choice, he does not bring them about by necessity. While this fits with his

³⁸ Eriugena, 5.4.

³⁹ Eriugena, 5.4.

⁴⁰ Eriugena, 5.5.

argument against the necessity of Gottschalk's predestination, it does seem close to violating the foundation that grace must come before any good. However, as the term grace is absent from the passage, it is possible that Eriugena would still hold that grace must be given to the wise man such that he may access wisdom. Considering the context of the work as a refutation of the predestination of Gottschalk, Eriugena is likely not intending to denigrate the sovereignty of God but to maintain a meaningful free choice for humanity given their fallen wills. Again, while a late Augustine would likely take great issue with Eriugena's position, given Eriugena's exact framing of the issue, it does seem to fit within the Augustinian tradition as outlined by the foundations approach.

Marenbon argued that in the eighth chapter, Eriugena distinguishes humanity's nature from its free choice. In describing the human will, Eriugena claims that it is essential to what it means to be human.⁴¹ Moreover, he says that the movement of the will comes entirely from within the will itself. More specifically, the movement of the will is "from itself because it is free."⁴² That is, as noted earlier, the will is not compelled by God to act in one way or the other. Again, Eriugena defends the meaningful free choice of humanity as the foundation outlines. However, in a manner conscious of his Augustinian position, Eriugena prefaces the notion of free will with grace:

Therefore...the causes of all right deeds, by which one obtains the crown of just happiness, are placed within the free choice of man's will by means of the gratuitous and manifold gift of divine grace which prepares it and cooperates with it; but that principal root of evil deeds, by which there is a headlong fall into the contumely of just unhappiness, is fixed within the perverse movement of free choice at the devil's urging.⁴³

⁴¹ Eriugena, 8.3.

⁴² Eriugena, 8.7.

⁴³ Eriugena, 8.9.

In a manner reminiscent of Augustine's framework of the will as free to serve either righteousness or unrighteousness, Eriugena cements grace as necessary not only for the preparation of the will but also for its cooperation. That is, the good will is only possible through divine aid. On the contrary, the perverse will is stuck in the choice of evil deeds so long as grace is absent.

Moreover, he suggests that the wicked, those bereft of grace, have their free choice fixed in perverse movements. Although this does seem to be in tension with his earlier comments about God not restricting the free choice of a rational creature, he sees the unjust will as merely abandoned by grace rather than actively restricted. Moreover, concerning those who are recipients of grace, Eriugena understands grace as acting on the substance of the will. After that, the free movement of the will is then capable of cooperating with the grace applied to its substance. Ultimately, this is exactly what Rist argued Augustine made room for but never executed. That is, while Augustine made room in his thought for the preparation of the will by God for our cooperation, he instead seemed to go down a path of compulsion. It is for this reason that Levering argues that Eriugena repudiates the Augustinian position, that is, Eriugena makes the journey to cooperation that Augustine paved but never traveled. However, while Rist and Levering would need to reject Eriugena's development as fitting within the Augustinian framework for the sake of synthesis, this position aligns with the foundations. For one, it respects both the foundation on meaningful free choice and the ultimate primacy of grace in all good things. Thus, within this framework, Eriugena's position is not an untenable deviation but a development within the framework that Augustine himself laid.

In the ninth chapter, Eriugena begins to explore the words typically used to describe God and his actions in the world. He writes that “it is to be noted—since no expression is adequate to God—that almost no speech-signs, whether nouns or verbs or other parts of speech, can be properly affirmed of God.”⁴⁴ As Marenbon said earlier, the pseudo-Dionysian influence in this apophatic statement is clear. Though Eriugena himself credits this idea to Augustine, Eriugena would certainly be closer to the Neoplatonic influences than many of his contemporaries.

Next, Eriugena turns to a theme that will run throughout the rest of the work—contrariety. Concerning how the terms predestination and foreknowledge apply to God, Eriugena claims these are used partly by likeness and partly by contrariety. For instance, Eriugena notes that scripture claims that “cursed is every man who has hung on a tree” and that this is also said of Christ. And yet, though Christ was cursed, he alone was truly blessed. In another example, Eriugena sees “he who knew not sin committed sin on our behalf” as another example. Although sin and sacrifice are opposed, as sacrifice is performed for the abolition of sin, they are equated here such that Christ may be emphasized as “the universal victim for the sin of the whole world.”⁴⁵

However, as regards predestination, Eriugena sees this kind of figurative language as contrary by relation. In this manner, the words relating to foreknowledge and predestination are used in part by contrariety and in part by likeness as “these and such like terms, whether nouns or verbs, cannot be properly predicated of God” because “it might be said that God has foreknowledge of something by foreknowledge, or

⁴⁴ Eriugena, 9.1.

⁴⁵ Eriugena, 9.4.

foreordains by predestination, when to him nothing is in the future.”⁴⁶ No time passes for God, yet he is said to foreknow things before they happen. Thus, as these terms cannot apply to God in the truest sense, they must be meant in a figurative sense. Moreover, because “all predestination is foreknowledge,” he argues similarity for predestination.⁴⁷

Ultimately, Eriugena concludes “that foreknowledge and predestination are metaphorically applied to God on the basis of a symbol to temporal things”⁴⁸ just as anthropomorphic language is often applied to God. The question is, then, how this aligns with the foundations. As Eriugena has since and will continue to use the term predestination to describe God, he is not saying that it is wholly improper to refer to God in this way. Thus, he is not necessarily contradicting the Augustinian foundation concerning predestination. He still holds that God predestines the elect to eternal life, he just clarifies that any person who discusses any predestination concerning God necessarily uses the terms metaphorically due to the prior nature of the divine. Though he is, in a sense, denying a literal predestination insofar as it relates to the experience of God, he is clarifying the terms of the debate by separating the experience of humanity from that of the divine. As Matz notes:

...although Eriugena agreed God’s predestination was the same as God’s will, and that God’s will is worked out in our conceptions of time and space, he considered it improper even to speak about God as predestining anything...[because] God does not know anything as future that he does not know as immediately present to him.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Eriugena, 9.5.

⁴⁷ Eriugena, 9.6.

⁴⁸ Eriugena, 9.7.

⁴⁹ Matz, 253.

Therefore, regarding the actual position itself, Eriugena affirms a single predestination. Thus, although his framing is unusual for the Augustinian framework, it does not violate the foundation on predestination.

In chapter ten, having now concluded that God's predestination is not done in advance but in an ever-present now, Eriugena argues that sin and a perverse will cannot be the work of God. Once again extending Augustine's principle of evil as a privation of the good, he argues that God cannot predestine evil as God is being itself. For Eriugena, being cannot be the cause of nonbeing.⁵⁰ Regarding wickedness, he concludes that it is "in fact nothing" and contains "neither divine foreknowledge nor divine predestination."⁵¹ Once more, though not something explicitly found in Augustine, it does fit within the foundations framework. Here, it is not God's active will that predestines the wicked to eternal punishment but a permissive will that leaves the wicked responsible for their fate.

In a fascinating chapter, Eriugena then turns his attention to the phrases in Augustine's writings that seem to support a double predestinarian position. Regarding the multiplicity of statements such as "He predestined the wicked to death, or eternal punishment," Eriugena affirms that they are "characteristic of the ungodly" and plain wrong. If Eriugena is to be a defender of Augustine, his clear condemnation of Augustine's words is troubling. To explain himself, Eriugena begins:

The holy father Aurelius Augustine was indeed a most prolific author of Christian eloquence, a most skilled investigator of the truth, and a most noble instructor in the literal and transferred use of language for the improvement of those who were going to read him. Yet at different times in the course of his writings he is found to have said that God predestined the wicked to perdition or punishments, and for

⁵⁰ Eriugena, 10.3.

⁵¹ Eriugena, 10.5.

this reason he has become, as the apostle says, for those who understand him, "an odor of life leading to life" but for those who do not understand, "an odor of death leading to death." Hence the reasoning of the present case requires that we cite his own words as if in contradiction of himself, so that the discerning reader may more easily direct his attention to the kind of language in which he said that divine predestination is appropriate for both classes of men, namely for the elect through grace, and for the abandoned through justice.⁵²

Immediately following this passage, Eriugena quotes several passages and phrases from many of Augustine's works which Eriugena claims lead uneducated people to the false belief of double predestination. Regarding these tricky passages, Eriugena muses, "Who indeed, among those not familiar with the turns of speech which the holy fathers tend to use, could not be easily led astray by hearing of those predestined to eternal fire..?"⁵³ By "turns of speech," Eriugena intends to say that Augustine simply used figurative language in the relevant passages. To show that Augustine could not have been literal, he cites Augustine's definition of predestination from his letter to Prosper and Hilary:

Predestination is that which without foreknowledge cannot be. For by foreknowledge God foreknew beforehand those things which he had been going to do; hence it has been said; "He has made the things that are going to be." But he can know beforehand even those things he does not himself do, such as whatever sins are committed.⁵⁴

From this, Eriugena concludes that predestination can only be those good things God foreknows. That is, sin can in no way be a part of God's predestination, though it can be a part of his foreknowledge. Borrowing further from Augustine, Eriugena quotes him as saying "Therefore the predestination of God in the good man is the preparation of grace;

⁵² Eriugena, 11.4.

⁵³ Eriugena, 11.6.

⁵⁴ Eriugena, 11.6.

but grace is the effect of predestination itself.”⁵⁵ For Eriugena, this means that the only effect of predestination is grace. Thus, it cannot be the case that the deprivation of grace could be a part of God’s predestination.

Refining this definition, Eriugena explains in chapter 12 that “all foreknowledge relating to the elect is predestination; there is no predestination except of the elect; therefore no for knowledge relating to the elect is not predestination.”⁵⁶ Thus, again, Eriugena articulates the classic single predestinarian position that fits within the Augustinian foundations.

Next, Eriugena transitions to discussing Augustine’s use of figurative language. To do so, he sets up a parallel between the elect and chosen to those God predestines: “Is it perhaps that, just as some are called elect who have not been chosen, so also by writers people are often called predestined who have not be predestined, children of God who are not his children, in that mode of contrariety mentioned earlier?”⁵⁷ For Eriugena, contrariety, that is, antiphrasis, is the use of language that means the opposite of what it says as what it is literally understood as is clearly contrary to the truth. Essentially, he claims that Augustine wrote what was false as though it were true to draw attention to his claim, though it was obvious what the true meaning actually was.

Anticipating any potential blame that could be placed on Augustine for his use of language in this way, Eriugena finds that the biblical authors often used similar language. In Augustine’s commentary in *De correptione et gratia*, in a passage concerning Judas’s

⁵⁵ Eriugena, 11.7.

⁵⁶ Eriugena, 12.5.

⁵⁷ Eriugena, 12.5.

election or lack thereof, Augustine himself found that *children of God*, and *elect* are often used in equated ways with those *chosen*.⁵⁸ And yet, Judas was chosen but not elected.

Thus, Eriugena again concludes that scripture also uses language in this contrarian, antiphrastic manner. In chapter thirteen, Eriugena argues directly:

Accordingly I do not see why the holy fathers would hesitate, with a fine turn of phrase, to speak out confidently about those predestined to punishment or death or other things of that sort, whenever they decided to consider the matter in the course of their writings, since they did not doubt that truth itself and spoken in the same fashion... If, therefore, the Lord was not embarrassed to refer to his betrayer as chosen, why should his imitator, Saint Augustine, blush to call the same man, that is the betrayer, predestined? And likewise, why would he hesitate to say that the Jewish people...were predestined to destruction.⁵⁹

For Eriugena then, no blame can be imparted to Augustine for his imitation of the biblical writers. In his view, this particular type of figurative language is misleading to the uneducated but completely legitimate.

If how Eriugena sees this use of contrariety playing out in a particular context is not clear, he explains its use in the following passage:

Accordingly, who can explain the description of the perfidious Jews to whom the savior said: 'You are from the devil your father,' as predestined by God to destruction, when everyone predestined by God must be his chosen, and for that reason his child, unless one considers that 'basis of opposites', which we have often repeated, from which such a form of statement is taken 'by contrariety'?⁶⁰

For Eriugena, as those people could not actually be predestined, the use of the term predestination to describe them cannot be taken literally, but only by contrariety. Though such matters may not seem so obviously wrong to audiences in either the ninth or twenty-first centuries, Eriugena thinks that such language was clearly intended to be figurative.

⁵⁸ Eriugena, 12.6.

⁵⁹ Eriugena, 13.2.

⁶⁰ Eriugena, 13.3.

Thus, when Augustine spoke of the predestination of the wicked to punishment, Eriugena concludes that Augustine was only following the tradition of the scriptures and not speaking literally. Although he believes this was obvious to either those educated or those within the original context, Eriugena finds it equally as obvious to all given Augustine's aforementioned definition of predestination. Rather than musing that Augustine could have changed his mind or misspoke, Eriugena concludes that the use of figurative language is the only satisfying explanation.

Now, moving to chapter eighteen, Eriugena begins the chapter with a practical, rather than theological, explanation for the current controversy. He explains that a lack of education in the liberal arts leads people to become heretics when they cannot properly understand how the holy fathers were exegeting scripture. More specifically, he thinks that knowledge of the Greek, in which the confusion between predestination and foreknowledge is absent, is more favorable for such exploration. He writes:

I would think, therefore, that the gravest error of those who confusedly, and hence fatally, reduce to their own distorted meaning the opinions of the venerable fathers, and for the most part Saint Augustine, had its beginnings from an ignorance of the useful arts which wisdom itself wanted to be its own companions and investigators, and on top of that, ignorance also of Greek writings in which the interpretation of predestination generates no mist of ambiguity.⁶¹

Then, after giving a small lesson on the Greek concerning the terms of the current debate, he remarks that in "these three words, [foresight, predefinition, and predestination], there is either the same sense or so great a closeness in meaning that any one of them can be put in the place of the other."⁶² Consequently, it seems that not only is the issue of double

⁶¹ Eriugena, 18.1.

⁶² Eriugena, 18.2.

predestination due to a neglect of the use of right reason but also due to a deficiency in the proper understanding of language. From both his emphasis on the knowledge of Greek to his insistence on the figurative language in Augustine's writings, Eriugena's argument is nearly as focused on semantics as it is on reason or theology.

To finish this analysis, I will end with two lengthy quotes that connect his thoughts on grace, free will, and predestination. In a particularly revealing passage that Eriugena himself calls to the reader's attention, he writes:

He did not, then, wish his words, "those whom he justly predestined to punishment," to be understood in the same way as his words, "those whom he favorably predestined to grace." Take note of these words that follow. All creation, before it was made, was so predestined, that is, predefined and foreseen, by the creator that it entirely fulfilled the limits of its own nature, within which it was to have been created, and in no way exceeded them...but there are also some in which reason and intellect are substantially implanted. Of these one part, indeed, freed by the grace of its creator, voluntarily obeys the eternal laws and by cleaving to them is made happy; but the other, deservedly abandoned to pride and disobedience, refused to be confined within the order of the forementioned divine law, but it was unable to surmount it...Accordingly, the supreme and ineffable divine wisdom predestined limits in its laws beyond which the wickedness of the ungodly cannot advance...Therefore, God predestined the ungodly to punishment or destruction, that is, he circumscribed them by his immutable laws which their impiety is not allowed to elude.⁶³

Once more, Eriugena emphasizes that Augustine used figurative language in the difficult passages he quoted earlier. Additionally, he elaborates further on why the singular predestination of God's laws has different effects on the elect and the wicked. For the elect, the laws bring happiness. The wicked, conversely, using their wills to will to be nothing in spite of the same eternal laws are punished by the frustration of their wills. Thus, God's laws keep the wicked trapped in their own unrighteousness. Additionally, Eriugena's concept of God's predestination seems to fit within the entirety of the

⁶³ Eriugena, 18.6.

foundation on predestination: without consideration of their future actions, God definitively predestines some people to heaven and some people are destined for destruction. That is, it was not with consideration of the actions of the unjust that he abandoned them or called the elect. Rather, it was his singular creation of the eternal laws which then affect the two parties in different ways. Though certainly not what Augustine had in mind at the time of his writing, it does fit within the framework of the foundation as a development. As to the *definitively* portion of the foundation, Eriugena adds "...he predestined, that is before they were made he defined, both the number of them which by his grace he would set free and the number of them which by his justice he would abandon."⁶⁴ While this does not reference the ability for any to fall away from election *per se*, it does affirm that there is a definite number of those predestined. Placing this portion of Eriugena's position as firmly within the Augustinian tradition, Levering notes that Eriugena shares Augustine's view on the set number of the elect.⁶⁵

Moreover, Eriugena stresses the role of the will, but notes that the elect are freed by grace such that they may will rightly. Here, however, Marenbon's concern regarding Eriugena not fully integrating his new ideas into Augustine's framework of grace is understandable. Although Eriugena mentions grace, it is certainly not as prominent as in Augustine's writings. Yet, as Eriugena was primarily focused on predestination, some brevity concerning the nature of grace is understandable. Regardless, though Eriugena has not thoroughly explained the function of grace at every instance of its mention, it is not necessarily a slight against him. With such great tension, or even contradiction,

⁶⁴ Eriugena, 18.8.

⁶⁵ Levering, 74.

within Augustine himself, Eriugena may be wise to merely state that there is both grace and free will rather than seek to explain them both.

In a final passage, Eriugena offers final insight not only into the role of grace, but also into the mechanism of predestination:

Indeed, just as God freed the will of the elect whom he predestined to grace, and filled it with the compassion of his love, so that not only are they glad to be confined within the bounds of the eternal law, but do not even doubt that the greatest gift of his glory is that they are neither willing nor able to overstep them; in the same way he represses the will of those rejected, whom he predestined to the most shameful punishment, so that, contrariwise, whatever pertains to the joy of the happy life is for them turned into the torment of unhappiness.⁶⁶

Here, the fullness of contrariety is revealed. To set up the contrast between the effects of the singular predestination on the elect and the wicked, Eriugena uses the language of predestination to describe the fate of the unjust. However, as he maintains Augustine also did, Eriugena highlights the contrast between the lots of the two groups of people by using the word figuratively such that the double effect of God's singular laws may be better emphasized.

Additionally, though his method is unusual for the Augustinian framework, Eriugena maintains the foundation on grace. It is only by grace that the wills of the elect may be free to keep the law and please God. Moreover, the mechanism of God's predestination, that is, the one set of eternal laws that lead to the happiness of the elect in conforming to their nature and the sorrow of the wicked in failing to go beyond it, is emphasized. For Marenbon, Eriugena's explanation for how the wicked are responsible for their own punishment is novel, though still rooted in the Augustinian tradition. In an apt summary of Eriugena's position, Marenbon writes:

⁶⁶ Eriugena, 18.7.

John thinks of predestination, not as a decision taken by God about each individual person, but rather as a single set of laws, which affects the good and the wicked differently. God gives every being a nature, and that nature has certain bounds. Nothing is able to go beyond its natural bounds, but rational creatures (humans and angels) have the power to will to go beyond them. Modifying the idea (found in Augustine and very explicitly in Boethius's *Consolation* IV.2.32-5) that evil is a deficiency of goodness and being, and that the wicked in a sense cease to exist, John explains that evil people wish to withdraw so far from God, the supreme essence, that they entirely cease to be to be and become nothing. God's laws have set up a measure that prevents them from realizing their wish.⁶⁷

Thus, it is the very same laws that allow the blessed to be happy that cause the wicked to be punished. Moreover, it is not a direct punishment from God, but rather a self-punishment on account of the wicked making poor use of their wills to will beyond the limits of their nature. For Eriugena, there is only a single predestination on God's part, a single creation of laws, which both bless the blessed and curse the cursed.

Concluding Thoughts

Ultimately, Eriugena's arguments would not be received well by his contemporaries. As Levering notes, *De divina praedestinatione* was condemned at an 855 synod in Valence.⁶⁸ Similarly, Matz notes that although Eriugena was recruited by Hincmar to defend the single predestination position, "his text served to be more of an embarrassment to his predestinarian comrades than a source of comfort to them."⁶⁹

In identifying the root cause of the condemnation, Matz argues that the actual content of Eriugena's work cuts between the traditional positions of single and double predestination. Matz notes that "perhaps surprisingly, [Eriugena's] remarks, although

⁶⁷ Marenbon, 80.

⁶⁸ Levering, 70.

⁶⁹ Matz, 253.

discounted by both sides of the debate, actually provide a roadmap toward a compromise position.”⁷⁰ That is, despite his explicit purpose to refute the double predestinarian position, the content of Eriugena’s response bridges the gap between the two parties. For Matz, Eriugena argues that while God only actively predestines what is good, this includes the distribution of judgement to those left out of the gift of predestination’s grace. Consequently, “the end result of Eriugena’s teaching is the same as that from the double predestinarians [as] the only thing Eriugena removes from double predestination teaching is the demand that God will act in one way or another toward human persons by necessity.”⁷¹ Thus, if the double predestinarians had conceded that “God’s predestination is not a function of any necessity in God’s nature,” then they could fully embrace Eriugena’s position.⁷² For Matz, this portion of the position, in combination with Eriugena’s emphasis on reason, are the likely cause of his work’s condemnation.

However, as argued for in the analysis, Eriugena was careful to remain within the boundaries of the Augustinian foundations. Again, it is relevant that his treatise was created to respond to a debate over predestination. As such, Eriugena naturally devoted a greater portion of his time to the topic of predestination. In truth, knowing the typical articulation of the position Eriugena argued for—some human beings are predestined to be saved, and only they will be saved, all other human beings are not predestined at all, as Marenbon puts it—it would have been difficult to violate the foundation that some are predestined to eternal life and some are destined for damnation. Interestingly, the actual

⁷⁰ Matz, 253–54.

⁷¹ Matz, 254.

⁷² *ibid*

foundation itself is not necessarily closed to the idea that those who are destined to be damned may be predestined. As such, even if Eriugena was closer to a compromise view as Matz suggests, he would still remain within the boundaries of the foundation. Thus, while his contemporaries may have condemned his work for a possible suggestion of double predestination, Eriugena's suggestion, if present, still remains within the framework of this thesis.

As regards the other two foundations, Eriugena seems to agree with both of them. Although he tends to emphasize free will over grace, he does his best to “cross his Augustinian t's” and notes that grace is necessary to free the will for good action. Eriugena's greatest trouble comes from his comments that the will may will the good even if the person does not have the ability to do good bereft of grace. Still, as he does not allow any good to come from this willing without grace, it is not clear that this violates the foundation on grace even though a will to do good would typically be understood as a good in itself.

Finally, I will offer some comments on his view about Augustine's claimed use of figurative language. In many ways, it almost seems like a back way out of the dilemma. Gottschalk puts forward evidence for his views from Augustine, and then Eriugena discredits it by saying Augustine was not being literal in every instance. While it does seem convenient, Eriugena made a relatively thorough case for his view. Moreover, it is not clear what other options were available to him. While he could have simply made the same arguments others had centuries before—as Matz noted most did—he attempted to find a new path forward in the debate. Furthermore, in Eriugena's time, Augustine's words had to be taken as essentially infallible. For Eriugena to blatantly say that

Augustine changed his mind yet did not admit it would have been seen as heretical. Instead, he pursued the next best option, that Augustine, in line with the scriptures, used figurative language that can lead certain people into confusion. Finally, as I mentioned above, Eriugena was able to complete his project without abandoning the Augustinian framework to which he committed himself. Although he worked hard to get around Augustine's words, he stayed within the foundations.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Augustine: A Return to the Foundations

Having now thoroughly explored the scholarship and primary works of Prosper of Aquitaine and John Scotus Eriugena, I will now return to how I arrived at the foundations hermeneutical framework. In this final chapter, I will first recount how I developed the three foundations before summarizing how the two later authors fit within them. Then, I will put Prosper and Eriugena in conversation. By looking at both how well they remain within the framework and the work they do within its bounds, I'll discuss the merits and difficulties of both their approaches.

As I noted in the first chapter, many scholars view Augustine's thoughts on grace, free will, and predestination at different stages in his life as contradictory.¹ In *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine argues for the explicit position of the title of the work—that humans have free choice of the will. With regards to God's foreknowledge, he finds that “although God foreknows what we are going to will in the future, it does not follow that we do not will it by the will.”² Moreover, as to what causes sin, Augustine notes that “only [the mind's] own will and free choice can make the mind a companion of cupidity.”³ Essentially, neither God nor anything else compels the will of a rational

¹ Jenkins, *Free To Say No?*, 103.

² Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, bk. 3.3.

³ Augustine, bk. 1.11.

creature. Indeed, for Augustine at this time, an individual may be happy simply by willing to be happy by keeping the eternal law: “all who will to live upright and honorable lives...attain such a great good so easily that they have it by the very act of willing to have it.”⁴ Moreover, grace is largely absent from the work. Rather than referencing the role of God in the possession of a good will—a will that wills rightly—Augustine muses, “what is so much in the power of the will as the will?”⁵ Thus, for Augustine at this stage, the free choice of the will features at the forefront of the righteous life. It was from writings such as these that the first Augustinian foundation was created: We have free will and it means something. In this case, that meaningful free will allows humanity to will to live an upright and just life in accord with the eternal law.

However, only a year after the completion of *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine penned a letter to Simplician that seems to contradict his previous thought. In his exegesis of a passage from Romans 8, Augustine emphasizes the sovereignty of God and the necessity of grace. Now, regarding the free choice of the will, Augustine concludes that as “...the human will does not suffice for us to live in rectitude and righteousness unless we are aided by God's mercy, it can therefore also be said that it is not a matter of a merciful God but of human willing, because God's mercy alone does not suffice unless our will's consent is joined to it.”⁶ Ultimately, this would culminate in a view like that articulated in Augustine's *Enchiridion*—written sometime after 420—in which the Fall has destroyed humanity's free will and “the freedom of his [sic] will was lost.”⁷ Thus, the

⁴ Augustine, bk. 1.13.

⁵ Augustine, bk. 1.12.

⁶ Augustine, “Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician: First Book,” chap. 2.12.

⁷ Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, sec. 30.

will is not sufficient for a just life in accord with the eternal law. Instead, God's grace is needed as well. However, as to who will receive this grace, Augustine notes that God "has mercy on no one in vain," and that "the person on whom [God] has mercy he calls in such a way as he knows is appropriate for him, so that he may not reject [God]."⁸ Here, not only is the free choice of the will insufficient, but if God chooses to give the grace needed to live a righteous life, that person will necessarily act righteously. While Augustine maintains the term *free choice of the will*, it is unclear what use it is to humanity. It seems the righteous life is completely out of reach of the will and that even a will freed by grace is compelled by necessity. Moreover, Augustine states that God's predestination is "not of a choice based upon merits, which occur after a person has been made righteous by grace, but of [the] generosity of God's gifts."⁹ Therefore, for Augustine, the predestination of any individual does not come from foreknowledge of their merits. Taking these insights together, I formulated my next foundation: Without consideration of their future actions, God definitively predestines some people to heaven and some people are destined for destruction.

As Augustine continues his development, he eventually finds a position like the one expressed in *De gratia et libero arbitrio*. In it, he first maintains that humans have a free will. For him, that humanity is given commandments to follow and judged for their adherence to them is sufficient proof of free will.¹⁰ However, as concerns grace, Augustine fully embraces the primacy of grace in good action and willing, and he notes

⁸ Augustine, chap. 2.13.

⁹ Augustine, chap. 2.6.

¹⁰ Augustine, "On Grace and Free Will," chap. 4.

that “we can, however, ourselves do nothing to effect good works of piety without Him either working that we may will, or co-working when we will.”¹¹ That is, God not only gives grace prior to the will’s ability to move to the good but God also supplies the grace necessary to sustain the good will and bring about the good action. Thus, I formed my final Augustinian foundation: there is a primacy of grace in all good things.

Although scholars like Rist have attempted a synthesis of Augustine, the inherent tensions, or even contradictions, in his work frustrate such ends. Indeed, recognizing that Augustine may have changed his mind about certain portions of his thought but failed to admit it, I put forth the foundations approach as a way to understand the tension inherent in Augustine’s writings and the later authors of the Augustinian tradition. Then, using the said approach, I moved to apply it to the work of two self-proclaimed defenders and right interpreters of Augustine: Prosper of Aquitaine and John Scotus Eriugena.

Prosper of Aquitaine: An Enthusiast Turned Moderate

Prosper of Aquitaine, at one point a contemporary of Augustine, initially seemed to almost parrot Augustine in all matters of grace, free will, and predestination. However, as Alexander Hwang noted, he later moved away from certain problematic portions of Augustinianism.¹² Indeed, Prosper would eventually come to contradict some of his older views.¹³ However, since Augustine himself contradicted his own views later in his life, it is possible, *prima facie*, that Prosper could have maintained a position within the bounds of the Augustinian foundations despite these changes.

¹¹ Augustine, chap. 32.

¹² Hwang, *Intrepid Lover of Perfect Grace*, 9.

¹³ Hwang, 91.

Concerning the foundation on grace, Prosper wonders “who can doubt that the free will obeys the invitation of God calling only when His grace has aroused in him the desire to believe and obey?”¹⁴ in his “Letter to Rufinus.” Thus, in his earlier years, he held to the foundation on grace. Moreover, as he aged, he never failed to affirm the primacy of grace. In his defense of Augustine against Cassian, Prosper argues that “we assert and defend that the beginning, not only of our acts, but also of our good thoughts is from God.”¹⁵ Thus, in the purest sense, Prosper defends the primacy of grace in all goods, even those of the mind. In *De vocatione*, at times, Prosper suggests that certain natural goods may come from a will without God’s grace; however, he ultimately notes that these are sterile as regards the merits required for salvation. For Prosper, those only guided by natural reason will “not acquire true virtues and attain eternal happiness.”¹⁶

Concerning free will, Prosper also holds to the term *free will* in the sense that Augustine meant it in his later years. Prosper affirms that “when unaided and left to itself, free will acted only for its own perdition.”¹⁷ As Hwang summarizes, “there is an evil free will and a good free will, never a neutral free will.”¹⁸ Thus, humanity does have free will, but exactly what it counts for, or rather what meaning it has for humanity, is somewhat unclear. Although Prosper does hold to the foundation on free will in the loosest sense, it is only in the way defined by the mature Augustine.

¹⁴ Prosper of Aquitaine, “Letter to Rufinus,” chap. 5.

¹⁵ Prosper of Aquitaine, chap. 8.

¹⁶ Prosper of Aquitaine, *Call of All Nations*, bk. 1 chap. 7

¹⁷ Prosper of Aquitaine, “Letter to Rufinus,” chap. 17.

¹⁸ Hwang, *Intrepid Lover of Perfect Grace*, 98.

In his later writings, however, his explicit argument for free will takes a more charitable shape. In the letter set against Cassian, Prosper writes that “there is no danger for the free will from the grace of God, nor is the will taken away, since there is generated in it to will well.”¹⁹ That is, Prosper argues that grace is maintained with free will as the very act of willing the good stems from grace. However, though Prosper maintains free will, the necessity of a prior grace calls into question—just as it did for Augustine—exactly what that free will means. As he ages into his greatest work, *De vocatione*, Prosper even muses how some individuals believe that affirming grace in some way denies free will.²⁰ While he never contradicted the foundation, he certainly aged more into full agreement with the second portion, that is, that the free will means something. Ultimately, Prosper’s view of free will developed into a position much like that of Augustine’s earlier writings.

Finally, as regards predestination, Prosper initially aligns closely with Augustine’s thought. Prosper claims that “of all men born in the course of the centuries the number of the predestined, chosen according to the design of God’s call, is fixed and definite with God.”²¹ And of those not called, he writes “it is no secret...how for so many centuries countless thousands of men were left to their errors and impieties.”²² That is, only those actively called and chosen by God, are those predestined to salvation. Conversely, those left to their own impiety are only passively allowed to proceed to their damnation. Therefore, just as the wording of the foundation suggests, God has

¹⁹ Prosper of Aquitaine, “Grace and Free Will,” chap. 4.

²⁰ Prosper of Aquitaine, *The Call of All Nations*, bk. 1.1.

²¹ Prosper of Aquitaine, “Letter to Rufinus,” chap. 11.

²² Prosper of Aquitaine, chap. 11.

predestined some to eternal life and left others for punishment. Interestingly, although Prosper's letter against Cassian discussed the subjects of the two previous foundations at length, it was silent regarding predestination. Though not a deviation in and of itself, Prosper's apparent minimization and of movement away from his public adherence to Augustine's view of predestination continues.

In his *Answers to the Gauls*, Prosper claims that God withheld the grace of predestination to those He foreknew would sin, writing of a particular individual that "though they were reborn from sinfulness and made just, yet they were not predestined by God, who foreknew that they would be impenitent."²³ Taken most charitably, Prosper is arguing that those given the saving grace of baptism are not necessarily saved. However, rather than just stating as such, Prosper identifies the cause of that lack of predestination as God's foreknowledge of their impenitence, since their actual impenitence itself would have been caused by a lack of grace given to the individual.

Finally, in his *De vocatione*, Prosper seems to claim that there are certain people who are able to refuse God's call who "are left capable of turning away from him that they may be rewarded for not having done so."²⁴ However, it is a little unclear as to whether he actually thinks that any individual can or would reject God's grace. Certainly, such a suggestion would signify a massive shift away from the mature Augustine's position—the very position Prosper so vehemently defended in his earlier years. Indeed, even Prosper's wavering on an answer to the question of whether or not God's calling of the elect is irresistible highlights a shift in Prosper's views. Still, Prosper seemed content

²³ Prosper of Aquitaine, "Answers to the Gauls," sec. 4.

²⁴ Prosper of Aquitaine, *The Call of All Nations*, bk. 2.12.

to live within tension rather than issue a final judgment either way. In that regard, Prosper still seems to follow Augustine's lead. However, the tension concerning this aspect of predestination is Prosper's alone. As such, insofar as Prosper develops his own thought on the foundation concerning the *definitive* predestination of the elect, he deviates from Augustine for whom it is impossible that a person would be elected and not received into eternal life.

John Scotus Eriugena: An Apologist's Novel Approach

Eriugena's arguments, further chronologically removed from Augustine, are more divergent in style from Augustine's views than are Prosper's. However, when analyzed through the foundations approach, it is not necessary for the styles of the writers to coincide, only that the later writer does not contradict the key foundations of the earlier writer's position.

Writing on grace, Eriugena notes that since there is salvation in the world, there must be grace.²⁵ That is, as there is a good, there must be grace prior to that good. Certainly, whenever Eriugena mentions those who are predestined to eternal life, he almost always adds that they are "freed by grace" or otherwise that it is grace that enables their salvation. While this fits within the Augustinian foundation, it does not seem to fill it as much as Prosper's writings did. However, given the context of Eriugena's work as a response to double predestination, the brevity on grace is understandable. Though grace is an inherent part of predestination, Eriugena's work was not a treaty on grace itself but a divine action that includes the gift of grace.

²⁵ Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, 4.3.

In a manner similar to Prosper, Eriugena does seem to suggest the possibility of some good devoid of grace. He notes that the will is impeded by sin from “either willing to live righteously, or should it so will, from doing so.”²⁶ Thus, it seems as though the potential for a will to will good is granted, but the actualization of the good is not present. Still, as no good action can result from this willing, it does seem to fit within some sense of the foundation on grace.

For similar reasons as before, Eriugena does not devote a great deal of time to writing on free will. Still, he notes that “there cannot at the same time exist free choice and the gift of grace side by side with the necessity of predestination.”²⁷ That is, he sees that there can be no necessity on the part of God that impedes humanity’s free choice. Indeed, Eriugena finds that it goes against God’s nature to constrain the free choice he gave to rational creatures.²⁸ However, he does note that the will has lost its strength to keep the commandments and humanity no longer has the ability to act righteously without the “manifold gift of divine grace which prepares it and cooperates with it.”²⁹ Therefore, Eriugena argues—in a manner reminiscent of the mature Augustine—that humanity does have both free will and a capacity for choice, even if God’s grace is required for good action. It is, rather, exactly how Eriugena understands the cooperation between God’s grace and the free choice of the will that seems to extend beyond what Augustine was willing to commit to.

²⁶ Eriugena, 5.4.

²⁷ Eriugena, 4.4.

²⁸ Eriugena, 4.5.

²⁹ Eriugena, 8.9.

In contrast to the other two foundations, Eriugena's content concerning predestination is almost too vast for a summary. However, Eriugena does hold that "God freed the will of the elect whom he predestined to grace."³⁰ In the very active sense of the foundation's phrasing, Eriugena holds that God actively predestines the elect. Concerning the damned, Eriugena finds that God merely "rightly abandons the evil motions of the wicked" rather than directly predestining them.³¹ With regard to the definitive nature of the predestination, Eriugena notes that God "predestined, that is before they were made he defined, both the number of them which by his grace he would set free and the number of them which by his justice he would abandon."³² Again, while not expressed precisely as Augustine did, he does not violate this portion of the foundation. Furthermore, concerning whether or not God predestines anyone based on foreknowledge of their merits, Eriugena writes that "the supreme and ineffable divine wisdom predestined limits in its laws beyond which the wickedness of the ungodly cannot advance."³³ While this is again not the way such a statement would be phrased in Augustine's writings, Eriugena suggests that God's predestination was not done with thought about the future merits of either the elect or the reprobate. Indeed, in Eriugena's novel phrasing, his immutable laws simply circumscribe all human behavior. Again, this does not relate exactly to who will be called, but his insight does not contradict the foundation. Finally, it must be noted that Eriugena offers a sort of error theory for Augustine's use of the term predestination to describe the lot of the wicked. Again, while it is possible to fit the concept of double

³⁰ Eriugena, 18.7.

³¹ Eriugena, 2.5.

³² Eriugena, 18.8.

³³ Eriugena, 18.6.

predestination within the Augustinian foundation on predestination, Eriugena's suggestion that Augustine used figurative language does not remove him from the Augustinian tradition.

Ultimately, Eriugena's error theory concerning troubling portions of Augustine's works suggests that Eriugena understood that Augustine likely changed his mind. However, due to either a public or private unwillingness to claim as such outright, Eriugena framed Augustine's troubling passages as figurative. In some ways, this allows him to disagree with a traditional understanding of Augustine by claiming to reinterpret the bishop. However, regardless of the truth value of Eriugena's error theory, his developments fit within the Augustinian foundations.

Prosper and Eriugena in Conversation

Now, having reviewed how both Prosper and Eriugena fit within the three foundations of Augustinian thought on grace, free will, and predestination, I will look at how they compare to each other. As mentioned in the individual analysis, it seems that both of them became somewhat uncomfortable with Augustine's absolute insistence on his read of grace. Although neither of them fully contradicted the foundation on grace, they both seemed to allow for the possibility of certain goods outside of grace. Still, as both did so in similar ways, their departure from this foundation was mutual. In evaluating the positions of the two writers simultaneously, any criticism of one author also applies to the other. Moreover, any potential deviation regarding the foundation on grace is limited at best. Ultimately, both writers held that any efficacious good, that is, a good that lends itself toward eternal life, must come through grace.

Regarding free will, both authors again offer similar thoughts. Additionally, both Prosper, at least in his later writings, and Eriugena seem to favor a view of free will in between the extremes found in Augustine. While Augustine in *De libero arbitrio* suggests the will is sufficient for the good life, Augustine in *Ad Simplicianum* and the *Enchiridion* muses what good the will is for those not elected for salvation and refers to free will as lost, respectively. Interestingly, Prosper seems to have developed his thought in the reverse. He began with a greater emphasis on God's sovereignty before later allowing for a greater place for human choice. Both Prosper and Eriugena affirm that humanity has free will and that it exists in harmony with grace. Moreover, they both emphasize that this grace does not take away from free will. Although their explanations of this harmony are often merely the claim alone, this is likely intentional. Most attempts to completely reconcile grace and free will necessarily verge on the anti-Augustinian. Still, for Eriugena, the answer lies in a more fleshed out cooperation than Augustine would have committed to. For Prosper, that grace enabled a good will was often a sufficient answer. Additionally, while neither would claim that free will alone is sufficient for adherence to God's commandments, they would also not wonder what use it is for the wicked. Thus, the two again have a similar adherence to the foundation on free will.

It is in the foundation on predestination, however, that the true differentiation between the two authors takes place. In the trajectory of Prosper's thought, he appears to move further and further from Augustine as he ages. Originally, he held to the foundation so surely that his words might as well have been those of the bishop of Hippo. However, his thoughts on predestination progressed from an absence to apparent contradictions.

Ultimately, Prosper seemed to suggest both that God's foreknowledge of one's future works influences one's predestination and that those elected may fall away. As regards the final point, it is unclear exactly what Prosper believes. However, several passages do seem to suggest that those predestined for election may still choose to reject God and thus not be definitively predestined. Even such a wavering on Prosper's part evidences a move into the anti-Augustinian. Eriugena, on the other hand, develops more novel ideas but keeps them within the bounds of the foundation. Moreover, Eriugena respects the boundaries of the foundations—even though he does not explicitly discuss the portion of the foundations concerning God's foreknowledge of works. Additionally, Eriugena offers an explanation for the tension in Augustine's writings. Although it is not the same explanation offered in this paper, that is, that Augustine likely changed his mind about certain topics, it does show a recognition by Eriugena that he would need to explain away certain passages concerning the predestination of the reprobate as they contradict the single predestinarian position. Where Prosper seemed to shy away from the Augustinian foundation on predestination as he aged, Eriugena's work remains within the foundation, develops new thought concerning the mechanism of predestination, and offers an explanation as to why there seems to be a certain tension in his work.

Thus, through the lens of the foundations approach, Eriugena, the author condemned by his peers and fellow single predestinarians, better defended the Augustinian position. While he did develop some thought that was not found in the original material, he did so within the bounds of the foundational points. Moreover, while today a scholar can entertain the idea that Augustine changed his mind, for those in the ninth century and earlier, this simply was not an option. To criticize Augustine in such a

manner would have had terrible consequences for one's social standing. Therefore, since Augustine did not admit to changing his mind, his early defenders could not admit that he had either. So, while Prosper merely moved *away* from the difficulties in predestination, Eriugena found the only way *out*, that is, that Augustine meant what he said figuratively. Regardless of how convincing his case is, Eriugena even found support for it within Augustine himself by adapting Augustine's exegesis of seemingly contradictory biblical passages. Thus, by finding an explanation for the tension in Augustine's works, developing new strains of thought to combat new opposition to his interpretation, and still remaining within the Augustinian foundations, Eriugena surfaces with a privileged position.

The Benefits of the Foundations Approach

Having now summarized my arguments and analyses from the previous chapters, I will turn my attention to the benefits, as well as the potential drawbacks, of the foundations approach. As noted before, Augustine's work possesses an internal tension due to an unacknowledged change in his position. Not only does this make a true synthesis impossible—as some portion of Augustine's thought that Augustine never formally rejected must be omitted—it also leads to an intense strain, if not a blatant contradiction, in his framework. Aware of these developments, the foundations approach incorporates this understanding into its framework. Essentially, rather than omitting portions of Augustine's doctrines, his entire body of work is respected and understood charitably. Moreover, as the foundations approach does not require a full understanding of the interaction between the individual foundations, it invites the same tension present in the primary sources to take hold in the final framework. While a synthesis would need

to reconcile the apparent contradiction, the foundations approach does not need to uproot Augustine's organic developments. That is, the foundations do not require a coherent, theologically satisfying understanding of how grace, free will, and predestination interact. Instead, in the areas where Augustine left unresolved tension, the foundations approach respects the inherent strain.

Similarly, in so far as it respects the tension present in the original works, the foundations approach allows later writers in the Augustinian tradition a proportional strain in their positions. That is, in the use of the Augustinian framework to counter objections or alternative interpretations, novel formulations or developments need not be free of apparent internal disagreement. Indeed, it is the very spirit of the Augustinian framework to commit oneself to a difficult position and attempt to resolve it without recanting a certain Augustinian doctrine. Though such an extreme is not required by the foundations framework, it is permitted.

As with any hermeneutical tool, the approach is not free of difficulties. For one, its charitable view of both the source author, Augustine, and the later authors, Prosper and Eriugena, often render it incapable of pure critique. That is, if the framework does not hold the totality of Augustine's position as worthy of critique due to the later change in Augustine's doctrine, it seems the approach cannot issue criticism concerning a similar change in a later author's thought.

In response to this objection, though the charity shown to the authors does not lend itself as readily toward critique—particularly the relatively vague formulation of certain foundations—once the Augustinian foundations framework is adopted, a later author's work may still be critiqued for developing ideas foreign to Augustinian thought.

The parallel between charity and critique can be seen in the difference between two of Prosper's developments: the possibility of natural goods without grace and his later views of predestination. When Prosper later allowed for the possibility of certain natural virtues outside of a simultaneous, particular gift of grace, his development was still in line with the foundations due to the earlier works of Augustine emphasizing the role of the will rather than divine grace. On the other hand, when Prosper rejected Augustine's ideas of predestination by allowing divine foreknowledge of future impiety a causal role in predestination, he introduced something completely foreign to Augustine's works. Thus, although both of Prosper's positions contradict the position of the later Augustine, the foundations approach recognizes the entirety of Augustine's works and allows for development within their bounds.

In a parallel turn to Eriugena, although he reframes the perspective of the Augustinian position and goes beyond what Augustine publicly committed to, he does so within the framework of the foundations. In both his reinterpretation of predestination as it exists from the perspective of a timeless God and his purported error theory for Augustine's apparent support of double predestination, Eriugena supports his claims with Augustine's works. Even in his understanding of the cooperativity between the free choice of the will and divine grace—a formulation entirely absent in Augustine's work—Eriugena builds from the foundations Augustine prepared. That is, Augustine made space in his works for such a conclusion but ultimately refrained from binding himself to the position.

While Eriugena attributes a level of freedom to the will that is completely absent in the later Augustine, his claims are well supported by the Augustine of *De libero*

arbitrio. As a result, Eriugena—and his thought in *De divina*—fit firmly within the Augustinian tradition. Although some of Eriugena’s claims may appear incongruent with some of Augustine’s works, the Augustinianism of the foundations is not a particular, restrictive understanding but a framework within which a plurality of positions may be held. Essentially, the foundations provide a bounded field within which later writers of the Augustinian tradition may simultaneously struggle with the tension inherent to Augustine’s work and develop further thought on the issues. For Eriugena, the freedom of the foundations approach allows him to recognize the apparent contradictions within Augustine’s work while continuing to operate from within them. By cooperating with the tension, Eriugena both crafts a new lens for analyzing difficult portions of Augustine’s writings and paves a path forward for future development within the position itself.

Ultimately, the foundations approach is most helpful for understanding those earlier authors whose particular social circumstances heavily dissuaded them from either recognizing, either publicly or privately, the possibility that Augustine changed his views as he aged. If such writers are analyzed through the lens of an attempted synthesis, they will necessarily fail. For instance, if Prosper and Eriugena were analyzed through the lens of Rist’s proposed Augustinian synthesis—one in which individuals are reduced to puppets³⁴—Prosper and Eriugena’s return to a more meaningful free will as it was presented in Augustine’s works is itself anti-Augustinian. That is, such a synthesis dictates that by aligning their view on free will with that of Augustine in his earlier years, Prosper and Eriugena are departing from the Augustinian framework. As it is in the case of Rist’s synthesis, any attempted synthesis used to analyze these authors will have

³⁴ Rist, 440

omitted portions of Augustine's work and/or it will admit the drastic change in Augustine's thought. As these were not true options for many patristic or medieval writers, such a lens is both uncharitable and anachronistic. As an alternative, the foundations approach supplies a lens to analyze and evaluate authors in the Augustinian tradition in their context.

Finally, the foundations approach is only as good as its foundations. While I have argued for and supported the three I outlined in this paper, these do not encompass the totality of Augustine's thought. With regards to the rest of the bishop's extensive corpus, more work needs to be done in finding a complete set of Augustinian foundations. Moreover, for other authors with similar constraining circumstances and inherent tension, the foundations approach would be applicable to both their work and the later authors in that tradition. Through its implementation, the foundations framework moves to a context driven understanding of complex authors and the varied tradition their work began such that later writers may both adhere to said tradition and develop novel concepts within the tenuous framework.

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