

Augustine vs Pelagius

Key Idea: At the risk of over simplifying Augustine’s view of human nature is negative whereas Pelagius has an optimism about human nature. For Pelagius humans are not fallen and damaged by original sin. They are also able to be morally good through their own free will if they so choose.

Augustine (356-430) was by the end of his life one of the most influential and powerful bishops in the church. During this time, he was a key figure in the Pelagian controversy. Pelagianism gets its name from the teachings of Pelagius – although there is debate about whether the views we read are actually the views of Pelagius or his followers. Pelagius (circa 360-418) was a British monk. (or possibly Irish – as one church leader unkindly said that he was ‘stuffed with Irish porridge’) He spent time in Rome and Jerusalem and was noted for living a simple life. Pelagius preached and wrote against Augustine’s ideas of grace fearing that it was causing immoral behaviour. (*THINK: Why would this be the case?*) As a result of church politics, personalities, and language/communication issues, Pelagianism was condemned at the council of Carthage in 418.

	Augustine	Pelagius
Human nature	Human nature is damaged by the Fall. It is sinful	We can’t have a flawed nature. If we did, then God would be commanding the impossible when he asks humans to be holy. Sin can only be sin if it is freely chosen
Sin	Humans are incapable of avoiding sin. The will is now such that it has a tendency away from goodness	Humans do not have to sin. It is theoretically possible for people to be good.
Guilt and Original Sin	Adam’s sin affects all of us. The Fall transmits guilt to the whole human race. Human beings are sinful at birth	We are all created in the same state as Adam. We are only responsible for our own sin. We become sinners not at birth but when we actually sin.
Death	Death is the consequence and punishment for sin.	Death is a biological necessity but not a punishment
Grace	Humans cannot do any good deeds apart from God’s grace.	God’s grace assists us in doing the right thing and showing us what’s right but humans carry out the actions. Pelagius saw grace as the natural human faculties, given by God
Salvation	Salvation is the free and unmerited gift of God. The Parable of the workers (Matthew 20:1-16) shows God rewards how he pleases– the reward is not because of actions -	For Pelagius humans use their free will to choose God – their actions in choosing bring the reward. For Augustine and his followers this sounds like Pelagius is downplaying the role of grace.
Suffering	All suffering is deserved – even infant deaths as all are in original sin	Augustine makes God sound arbitrary(random) in punishing innocent babies