Free Will and Grace

Evil and Sin
Pelagianism
Free Will

I. Augustine faces a dilemma over the concepts of Evil and Sin.
   A. The dilemma arises from his solution the Problem of Evil.
      1. Augustine denies the existence of evil, to preserve God's goodness and omnipotence.
      2. But then the evil of sin cannot be denied without rejecting God's commandments.
   B. Augustine resolves the dilemma by distinguishing dual perspectives.
      1. In the eternal perspective of God, there can be no evil, only lack of perfection.
      2. In the temporal perspective of humanity, lack of perfection appears as sin, and disobedience of God's perfect will.
      3. These dual perspectives resemble Plato's ideal world of ideas and unreal world of sense.
   C. Augustine has a theory of Sin:
      1. All our actions result from desires we choose to satisfy.
         a. Bodily desires do not cause our actions.
         b. There is no causal path from body to soul.
      2. When we sin, we willfully act on corrupt desires, because our will is corrupted.
         a. Pride (wanting to be like God) is the corruption of our will.
         b. We all have this original sin because of Adam & Eve.
      3. The doctrine of original sin is the "flip-side" of Plato's doctrine of recollection.

II. Pelagius (c. 350) was a British monk who opposed the doctrine of original sin on grounds of unfairness.
   A. He thought humans are originally free to choose between goodness and sinfulness.
      1. Belief in an originally sinful nature obscures individuals' responsibility for wrong actions.
      2. It also undermines the motivation to improve.
   B. Christian philosophers had strong objections to Pelagianism.
      1. If humans are not originally sinful, then they might choose never to sin, and so wouldn't need God in order to be good.
      2. It would also be possible to earn God's favor.
   C. The Pelagian heresy was condemned in 529.

III. Augustine's theory of Free Will opposes Pelagianism.
   A. Freedom of will is not the ability to choose between good or evil (as Pelagius supposed).
      1. Augustine held that the will is free when it acts according to its nature.
      2. A sinful will freely sins: "He serves freely who freely does the will of his master."
   B. We cannot choose between a sinful nature and a good nature.
      1. Only God can convert us from sinfulness to goodness.
      2. God converts us only if we ask for conversion.
         a. He "prepares our will" to ask for conversion.
         b. But we cannot earn conversion.
         c. God freely gives it to us, by Grace.
1. The Pelagian view of free will that St. Augustine rejected is the idea that:
   A) We have free will only when we do what is right or good.
   B) We are free only when we choose in accordance with our nature.
   C) We are originally free to choose between good and evil (sin).
   D) Human nature is originally sinful.

2. True/False: St. Augustine explains “original sin” in terms of the emotion of envy.

3. True/False: A central problem with the Pelagian view of free will was that, theoretically, a person might choose never to sin.