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Grace, Confession, and the Pilgrim City

The Political Significance of St. Augustine of Hippo's Creation Narratives

By

Miles Christian Hollingworth

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Submitted to the Department of Politics
School of Government & International Affairs
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(Supervisors: Dr. Robert Dyson & Dr. Julia Stapleton)

2 0 MAY 2009

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Miles Christian Hollingworth
Durham, Michaelmas Term 2008

Note on Texts and Translations

All translations of Augustine's *De civitate Dei* are from the edition by Dr. R. W. Dyson, in the *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* series. All translations of Augustine's *Confessiones* are from the edition by John K. Ryan, widely available under the Doubleday imprint. All other translations of Augustine's writings are my own from the Latin and Italian editions of his works published by the *Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana*. In making them I have consulted the other fine critical editions of his works, a list of which can be found below in the abbreviations. I have indicated all these debts in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all other translations of non-English works are my own.

Abbreviations

The works of Augustine

Contra Fort.	*Acta seu Disputatio contra Fortunatem manichaeum*	Debate with Fortunatus, a Manichee
Contra Crescon.	*Ad Cresconium grammaticum Partis Donati lib. 4*	To Cresconius, a Donatist Grammarian
Ad Emeritum	*Ad Emeritum Donatistarum Episcopum, post collationem Lib. 1*	To Emeritus the Donatist Bishop, after a Meeting
Ad inquis. Ian.	*Ad inquisitiones Ianuarii*	Responses to Januarius (letters 54-55)
Adm. Donat. De maxim.	*Admonitio Donatistarum de Maximianistis lib. 1*	Unfortunately, this work is now lost
Adn. In Iob	*Adnotationes in Iob lib. 1*	Comments on Job
Adv. Iud.	*Adversus Iudaeos Tractatus*	Against the Jews
Brev. coll. cum Don.	*Breviculus conlationis cum Donatistis lib. 3*	A Summary of the Meeting with the Donatists
Coll. cum Maxim.	*Conlationis cum Maximus*	Debate with Maximus
Confess.	*Confessiones*	Confessions
Contra Acad.	*Contra Academicos lib. 3 (De Academicis)*	Against the Skeptics
Contra Adim.	*Contra Adimantum Manichei Discipulum lib. 1*	Against Adimantus, a Disciple of Mani
Contra adv. L. et P.	*Contra adversarium Legis et Prophetarum lib. 2*	Against the Adversaries of the Law and the Prophets
Contra duas ep. pelag.	*Contra duas epistolas Pelagianorum lib. 4*	Against Two Letters of the Pelagians
Contra ep. Don.	*Contra epistolam Donati*	Against the Letter of the Donatists
Contra ep. Man.	*Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant Fundamenti lib. 1*	Against the 'Foundation Letter' of the Manichees
Contra ep. Parm.	*Contra epistolam Parmeniani lib. 3*	Against the Letter of Parmenian
Contra Faustum	*Contra Faustum manichaeum lib. 33*	Against Faustus, a Manichee
Contra Felicem	*Contra Felicem manichaeum lib. 2*	Against Felix, a Manichee
Contra Gaud.	*Contra Gaudentium Donatistarum episcopum lib. 2*	Against Gaudentius, a bishop of the Donatists
Contra Hilarum	*Contra Hilarum lib. 1*	Against Hilarus
Contra Iul.	*Contra Iulianum lib. 6*	Against Julian

Opus imp. c. Iul.	*Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum*	Against Julian, an Unfinished Work
Contra litt. Petil.	*Contra litteras Petiliani lib. 3*	Against the Letter of Petilian
Contra Maxim.	*Contra Maximinum arianum lib. 2*	Against Maximus an Arian
Contra mend.	*Contra mendacium lib. 1*	Against Lying
Contra Prisc. et Orig.	*Contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas*	Against the Priscillianists and the Origenists
Contra q. a. Cent.	*Contra quod adtulit Centurius a Donatistis lib. 1*	Unfortunately, this work is now lost
Contra Secund.	*Contra Secundinum Manichaeum lib. 1*	Against Secundius, a Manichee
Contra Arian.	*Contra sermonem Arianorum lib. 1*	Against an Arian Sermon
De ag. Christ	*De agone Christiano lib. 1*	On the Christian Struggle
De an. et eius or.	*De anima et eius origine lib. 4 (De natura et origine animae)*	On the Soul and Its Origin
De bapt.	*De baptismo lib. 7*	On Baptism
De b. vita	*De beata vita lib. 1*	On the Happy Life
De bono con.	*De bono coniugali lib. 1*	On the Good of Marriage
De bono vid.	*De bono viduitatis*	On the Good of Widowhood
De cath. rud.	*De cathechizandis rudibus lib. 1*	On the Instruction of Beginners
De civ. Dei	*De civitate Dei*	The City of God
De con. adult.	*De coniugiis adulterinis lib. 2*	On Adulterous Marriages
De cons. Evang.	*De consensu Evangelistarum lib. 4*	On Agreement among the Evangelists
De cont.	*De continentia*	On Continence
De corr. Donat.	*De correctione Donatistarum lib. 1 (ep. 185)*	On the Correction of the Donatists
De corrept. et gr.	*De correptione et gratia lib. 1*	On Admonition and Grace
De cura pro mort.	*De cura pro mortuis gerenda lib. 1*	On the Care of the Dead
De div. qq. 83	*De diversis questionibus 83 lib. 1*	On Eighty-Three Varied Questions
De div. qq. ad Simpl.	*De diversis questionibus ad Simplicianum lib. 2*	To Simplicianus, on Various Questions
De div. daem.	*De divinatione daemonum lib. 1*	On the Divination of Demons
De doctr. Christ.	*De doctrina Christiana lib. 4*	On Christian Doctrine
De dono pers.	*De dono perseverantiae*	On the Gift of Perseverance
De d. anim.	*De duabus animabus lib. 1*	On the Two Souls

De fide et op.	*De fide et operibus lib. 1*	On Faith and Works
De fide et s.	*De fide et symbolo lib. 1*	On Faith and the Creed
De fide r. quae n. v.	*De fide rerum quae non videntur*	On Faith in Things Unseen
De Gen. ad litt.	*De Genesi ad litteram lib. 12*	On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis
De Gen. ad litt. l. imp.	*De Genesi ad litteram liber imperfectus*	On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis, an Unfinished Book
De Gen. c. Man.	*De Genesi contra Manichaeos lib. 2*	On Genesis against the Manichees
De gestis cum Em.	*De gestis cum Emerito donatista lib. 1*	On the Proceedings with Emeritus
De gestis Pel.	*De gestis Pelagii lib. 1*	On the Deeds of Pelagius
De gr. Chr.	*De gratia Christi et de peccato originali lib. 2*	On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin
De gr. et l. arb.	*De gratia et libero arbitrio lib. 1*	On Grace and Free Will
De gr. N. T.	*De gratia Novi Testamenti lib. 1 (ep. 140)*	On the Grace of the New Testament
De haer.	*De haeresibus (epp. 221-224)*	On Heresies
De immort. an.	*De immortalitate animae lib. 1*	On the Immortality of the Soul
De lib. arb.	*De libero arbitrio lib. 3*	On Free Will
De Mag.	*De Magistro lib. 1*	The Teacher
De max. c. Donat.	*De Maximianistis contra Donatistas lib. 1*	Unfortunately, this work is now lost
De mend.	*De mendacio lib. 1*	On Lying
De mor. Eccl. cath.	*De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*	On the Morals of the Catholic Church and the Morals of the Manichees
De mus.	*De musica lib. 6*	On Music
De nat. boni	*De natura boni lib. 1*	On the Nature of the Good
De nat. et gr.	*De natura et gratia lib. 1*	On Nature and Grace
De nupt. et conc.	*De nuptiis et concupiscentia lib. 2*	On Marriage and Concupiscence
De 8 qq. Dulc.	*De octo Dulcitii quaestionibus lib. 1*	On Eight Questions, from Dulcitius
De 8 qq. V. T.	*De octo quaestionibus ex Veteri Testamento*	Eight Questions on the Old Testament
De op. mon.	*De opere monachorum lib. 1*	The Work of Monks
De ord.	*De ordine lib. 2*	On Order

De o. an. et de sent. Iac.	*De origine animae et de sententia Iacobi lib. 2 (epp. 166-167)*	On the Origins of the Soul, and Some Thoughts on a Verse in James
De pat.	*De patientia*	On Patience
De pecc. mer. et rem.	*De peccatorum meritis et remissione lib. 3*	On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins
De perf. iust. hom.	*De perfectione iustitiae homini*	On the Perfection of Man's Righteousness
De praed. sanct.	*De praedestinatione sanctorum*	On the Predestination of the Saints
De praes. Dei	*De praesentia Dei lib. 1 (ep. 187)*	On the Presence of God
De pulchro	*De pulchro et apto*	Unfortunately this work is now lost
De quant. An.	*De quantitate animae lib.1*	On the Greatness of the Soul
De s. virg.	*De sancta virginitate lib. 1*	On Holy Virginity
De serm. Dom. in m.	*De sermone Domini in monte lib. 2*	Discourse on the Sermon on the Mount
De sp. et litt.	*De Spiritu et littera lib. 1*	On the Spirit and the Letter
De Trin.	*De Trinitate lib. 15*	On the Trinity
De un. bapt. c. Petil.	*De unico baptismo contra Petilianum Lib. 1*	On the One Baptism against Petilian
De un. Eccl.	*De unitate Ecclesiae lib. 1 (Epistola ad Catholicos de secta Donatistarum)*	On the Unity of the Church (Letter to the Catholics of the Donatist Sect)
De util. cred.	*De utilitate credendi lib. 1*	On the Utility of Belief
De vera rel.	*De vera religione lib. 1*	On the True Religion
De vid. Deo	*De videndo Deo lib. 1 (epp. 147-148)*	The Vision of God
Discipl.	*Disciplinarum libri*	Unfortunately this work is now lost
En. in ps.	*Enarrationes in Psalmos*	Commentaries on the Psalms
Ench.	*Enchiridion ad Laurentium lib. 1 spe et caritate lib. 1)*	*(De fide,* A Manual on Faith, Hope and Charity
Ep.	*Epistulae*	Letters
Exp i. ep. ad Rom.	*Epistolae ad Romanos inchoata expositio lib. 1*	Unfinished Commentary on the Letter to the Romans
Exp. ep. ad Gal.	*Expositio Epistolae ad Galatas*	Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians
Exp. ep. Iac. ad d. t.	*Expositio Epistolae Iacobi ad duodecim Tribus*	Commentary on James' Letter to the Twelve Tribes

Exp. q. p. ep. ad Rom.	*Expositio quarundam propositionum ex Epistola ad Romanos*	Commentary on Statements in the Letter to the Romans
Loc. in Hept.	*Locutionem in Heptateucum lib. 7*	Sayings in the Heptateuch (the first Seven books of the Old Testament)
Post coll. c. Don.	*Post collationem contra Donatistas lib. 1*	After the Meeting with the Donatists
Pr. et test. c. Don.	*Probationum et testimoniorum contra Donatistas lib. 1*	Proofs and Testimonies against the Donatists
Ps. c. p. Don.	*Psalmus contra partem Donati*	Psalm against the Donatist Sect
Quaest. Evang.	*Quaestiones Evangiolorum lib. 2*	Questions on the Gospels
Quaest. c. pagani	*Quaestiones expositae contra paganos numero sex (ep. 102)*	Six Questions against the Pagans
Quaest. in Hept.	*Quaestiones in Heptateucum*	Questions on the Heptateuch
Quaest in Mt.	*Quaestiones septendecim in Evangelium Secundum Matthaeum lib.1*	Seventeen Questions on the Gospel according to Matthew
Regula	*Regula ad servos Dei*	Rule of the Servants of God
Retract.	*Retractationes*	Retractions
Ad Caes. eccl.	*Sermo ad Caesariensis Ecclesiae plebem*	A Sermon to the People of the Church of Caesariensis
Ad cat. de symb.	*Sermo ad catechumenos de symbolo*	On the Creed, to Catechumens
De disc. Chr.	*Sermo de disciplina Christiana*	On Christian Discipline
De urbis exc.	*Sermo de Urbis excidio*	Sermon on the Sack of the City [of Rome]
De util. ieiunii	*Sermo de utilitate ieiunii*	Sermon on the Utility of Fasting
Serm.	*Sermones*	Sermons
Solil.	*Soliloquiorum lib. 2*	Soliloquies
De s. Script.	*Speculum de sacra Scriptura*	The Mirror of Scripture
In Io. ev. tr.	*Tractatus in Epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos*	Tractates on the First Letter of John

* These abbreviations are those used by the *Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana*. They can be found as part of a full concordance of Augustine's writings in the three major critical editions (PL, CSEL, CCL) in Agostino Trapè, *Agostino: L'uomo, Il Pastore, Il Mistico* (Roma, Città Nuova Editrice, 2001), pp. 419-432.

Works of other antique authors

M. Minucius Felix

Oct	*Octavius*	Octavius

Plotinus		
Enn.	*Enneads*	The Enneads
Polybius		
Hist	*Historiae*	The Histories
Possidius, Bishop of Calama		
Vita	*Vita Sancti Aurelii Augustini, Hipponiensis Episcopi*	The Life of Saint Aurelius Augustinus, Bishop of Hippo
Justinian		
Dig.	*Corpus Juris Civilis*	The Digest of Justinian
Tertullian		
Ap	*Apologeticus*	The Apology

Critical editions of Augustine's works

BA	*Bibliothèque Augustinienne, Œvres de saint Augustin,* (Paris, Desclée, 1948-)
CCL	*Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina,* (The Hague, Nijhoff, 1953-)
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum,* (Vienna, 1864-)
NBA	*Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, l'opera omnia di Sant'Agostino,* Eds. Agostino Trapé & Remo Piccolomini (Rome, Città Nuova Editrice, 1965-)
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina,* Ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1844ff)

Periodicals and series

AS	*Augustinian Studies*
Aug	*Augustinianum*
DR	*The Downside Review*
EA	*Études Augustiniennes*
IJE	*The International Journal of Ethics*
JEH	*The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*
JHI	*The Journal of the History of Ideas*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
PT	*Political Theory*
RA	*Recherches Augustiniennes*
RAf	*Revue Africaine*

REA — *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*

Standard works of reference

AL — *Augustinus-Lexikon*,
Ed. hrsg von. C. Mayer (Basel, Schwabe, 1986-)

ATA — *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*,
Ed. Allan Fitzgerald, O.S.A. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1999)

BEPT — *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought*,
Ed. David Miller (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987)

CDT — *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology*,
Eds. The Very Rev'd Monsignor H. Francis Davis, The Right Rev'd Abbot Aidan Williams O. S. B., The Very Rev'd Ivo Thomas O. P. & The Very Rev'd Joseph Crehan S. J. (London, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962)

CE — *The Catholic Encyclopedia*,
Eds. Charles G. Herbermann, Edward A. Pace, Condé B. Pallen, Thomas J. Shahan & John J. Wynne (New York, The Encyclopedia Press, 1913)

CS — *Church and State through the Centuries*,
Eds. Sidney Z. Ehler & John B. Morrall (London, Burns & Oates, 1954).

DECT — *Documents in Early Christian Thought*,
Eds. Maurice Wiles & Mark Santer (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975)

DGRA — *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*,
Ed. William Smith & Samuel Cheetham (London, John Murray, 1875).

DRGA — *A Dictionary of Roman and Greek Antiquities*,
Ed. Anthony Rich (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901).

DThC — *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*,
Eds. A Vacant, E. Mangenot et E. Amann (Paris, Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1923)

EI — *Enciclopedia Italiana, di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*,
Ed. (Roma, Istituto Giovanni Treccani, 1929-81)

GE — *La Grande Encyclopédie: Inventaire Raisonné, des Sciences, des Lettres et des Arts*,
Ed. F.-Camille Dreyfus (Paris, H. Lamirault et Cie, Éditeurs, 1886-1902)

GEL — *A Greek-English Lexicon*,
H. G. Liddell & R. Scott (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1951)

HMPTW — *A History of Mediaeval Political Theory in the West*, 6 Vols.,
Sir R. W. & A. J. Carlyle (Edinburgh : London, William Blackwood & Sons Ltd., 1962)

LCD — *Lempriere's Classical Dictionary*,
J. Lempriere (London, George Routledge & Sons, Ltd)

LD — *A Latin Dictionary*,
Charlton T. Lewis & Charles Short (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1962)

NMH — *A Notebook of Mediaeval History*,
C. Raymond Beazley (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1917)

OCP — *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*,
Ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford : New York, Oxford University Press, 1995)

ODP — *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics*,
Ed. Iain McLean (Oxford : New York, Oxford University Press, 1996)

PDP — *The Penguin Dictionary of Politics*,
David Robertson (London, Penguin, 2003)

PDPh — *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*,
Ed. Thomas Mautner (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 2000)

PMDPT	*The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought*, Roger Scruton (Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)
SM	*Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, Eds. Karl Rahner, Cornelius Ernst & Kevin Smyth (London, Burns & Oates, 1968)

Chronology of the Main Events in Augustine's Life up to His Thirty-Fifth Year (showing, in addition, the periods in his life covered by each of Chapters Eight through Ten)

Beginning of Chapter Eight

354 – Augustine is born to the pagan Patricius and the Christian Monica at Thagaste, in Roman North Africa. The day is the 13th November, a Sunday. On the insistence of his mother, he is signed with the sign of the Cross and seasoned with salt as he leaves her womb.

354-365 – Infancy and begins to undergo his first studies.

c. 365-369 – Goes to study in Madauros, a small but relatively well known intellectual centre, also in Roman North Africa.

370 – Returns from there to Thagaste, where he is forced to spend a frustrating year in idleness while Patricius gathers together the funds to send him to the University of Carthage. His morals suffer during this time.

371 – With the help of a rich relative, Romanianus, Patricius obtains the funds and Augustine travels to Carthage for the first time. He is struck by the licentiousness of the big city, and his morals suffer further.

372 – The death of Patricius. Augustine takes a concubine whom he will remain faithful to for fifteen years.

373 – Reads Cicero's *Hortensius* and is inspired by it to a love of wisdom. Probable date for the birth of his son, Adeodatus. At this time he also comes under the influence of the Manichees, becoming an auditor in their sect. He will retain this status for eleven years.

End of Chapter Eight; Beginning of Chapter Nine

375 – Returns from Carthage to Thagaste with the plan of teaching there.

376 – The death of a great friend hastens his return to Carthage.

380 – Writes *De pulchro et apto*, which has since been lost.

383 – Faustus of Milevis, the famous Manichean teacher, arrives at Carthage to meet Augustine and answer some of his more pressing questions on Manichean doctrine. Augustine likes the man but finds his answers very unsatisfactory. Later in the same year he departs to teach at Rome.

384 – In the Autumn, under the aegis of the pagan Prefect of Rome, Symmachus, he is nominated Professor of Rhetoric at Milan. On the 22nd November he pronounces the eulogy of Valentinian II. Begins to formally dissociate himself from the Manichees and starts to take a professional interest in the sermons of Ambrose, the brilliant and charismatic Bishop of Milan.

385 – On the 1st January he pronounces the eulogy of Bauto. In the late Spring, Monica arrives at Milan. Encouraged by Monica, Augustine begins to come under the influence of Ambrose's teaching and personality. Having completely

given up his Manicheism, and now, as it were, faithless, he begins to style himself as something of a Skeptic after Cicero and the Academics.

End of Chapter Nine; Beginning of Ten

386 – Probably in June, he reads the books of the Platonists for the first time. These equip him with the language and concepts of Idealism. With their help he begins to clear his mind of its former materialism and starts to see sense in Christian philosophy. By supplementing these books with the writings of Saint Paul, he learns of the necessity of Grace and conceives new hope of finding the truth. Towards the end of June he receives Ponticianus; and shortly after that he is converted in the garden of the villa he is renting from a friend at Milan. In September he travels to Cassiciacum with his mother, son, other close relatives and like-minded friends to establish his new life as a Christian intellectual. In November he writes *Contra Academicos* and *De beata vita*. He also promises his patron, Romanianus, a book on *De vera religione*. In December he writes *De ordine*. Some time in Winter he writes the *Soliloquia*.

387 – He returns to Milan at the beginning of March. On the 24th April he is baptized alongside Adeodatus by Ambrose. In either the Autumn or Summer he travels to Ostia Tiberina, where he experiences a vision of the Divine Wisdom with Monica. Shortly after this Monica dies. In this year he also writes *De immortalitate animae* and makes a start on *De musica*, part of an ambitious encyclopaedia of the sciences arranged to show that all knowledge has its consummation in God.

388 – He returns to Rome from Ostia. Towards the end of July or August he travels back to Africa, stopping first in Carthage and then moving on to Thagaste in September. There he takes up residence in the family home. In this year he also writes *De quantitate animae*, the first book of *De libero arbitrio*, *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*. Most significantly, though, he also begins *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*.

End of Chapter Ten

389 – The completion of *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* and the founding of a religious community at Thagaste; but also the death of his beloved son at the age of only sixteen. He had evidently shown great intellectual promise, already contributing significantly to the philosophical discussions at Cassiciacum (if his part in the retrospective dialogue *De Magistro*, written in this year, is anything to go by), and was firm in the Christian faith. Augustine is thirty-five years old.

INTRODUCTION

Very briefly, the political significance of St. Augustine of Hippo's Creation Narratives consists in this: that they represent a remarkable act of public confession – remarkable for being so frank an acknowledgement of intellectual weakness by a man widely regarded as one of the greatest minds of Western Christendom.[1] In fact it is well worth considering the intellectual position that Augustine's Creation Narratives effectively commit him to.

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[1] In one of the most well known modern commendations of Augustine's influence over the Western mind, Eugene TeSelle has claimed that the theology of the West, '...is largely a series of annotations to his work.' (Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (London, Burns & Oates, 1970), p. 19). Then there is also Eugene Portaliè's insistence that, 'His authority as a Christian writer is second only to the canonical writings and the official pronouncements of the Church.' (Eugene Portaliè (tr. Ralph J. Bastian), *A Guide to the Thought of St. Augustine* (London, Burns & Oates, 1960), p. xxxvi). At the risk of oversimplification, it might further be added that he made Christianity intellectually respectable by restating much of it in technical language borrowed from the philosophers (see John F. Callahan, *Augustine and the Greek Philosophers* (Villanova, Villanova University Press, 1967); John Newton, Jr., 'The Importance of Augustine's Use of the Neo-Platonic Doctrine of the Hypostatic Union for the Development of Christology', *AS*, vol. II (1971), pp. 1-17); that he habituated the Western mind to thinking of salvation, enlightenment and happiness in terms not of sudden access to privileged knowledge, but of a fundamental reorientation of heart (see in particular his observation at *De b. vita*, I, 5: 'For what stable things [of the truth] could I hope to grasp while my soul remained tossed this way and that [by its loves]?'); and finally, that in pioneering his illumination theory of truth (the notion that ideas must be related to truth as language is to reality (see, for instance, his claim at *De Trin.*, VII, 4, 7, that, '...God is more truly thought of than he is spoken of; but behind the thought He is more truer still.' This idea is taken up fully in his dialogue *De Magistro*. See Ann K. Clark, 'Unity and Method in Augustine's *De Magistro*', *AS*, vol. VIII (1971), pp. 1-11.) he laid the foundations for all subsequent philosophy, as acknowledged by such modern luminaries as Ludwig Wittgenstein, who came first to admire and then later to revolt against what he called the 'Augustinian picture of language' (See below, n. 59, pp. 23-24, for an illustration of Wittgenstein's early admiration of Augustine's theory of truth. On Augustine's influence on Wittgenstein, see L. Perissinotto, 'Ludwig Wittgenstein. I limiti del linguaggio', in L. Alici, R. Piccolomini, A. Pieretti (eds.), *Verità e linguaggio. Agostino nella filosofia del Novocento / 3* (Roma, Città Nuova Editrice, 2002), pp. 21-44. For a more general opinion on his anticipation of modern linguistic philosophy, see H. I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris, de Boccard, 1938), p. 16). As B. B. Warfield wrote, 'No doubt there had been a long preparation for the revolution... but the whole preceding development will not account for the act of genius by which he actually shifted the basis of philosophy, and... became "the true teacher of the middle ages,"... "one of the founders of modern thought." He may himself be said to have come out of Plato, or Plotinus; but in even a truer sense out of him came Descartes and his successors.' (B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine* (Westpoint, Connecticut, Greenwood Press Publishers, 1970), p. 135).

In confessing that the first three books of Genesis furnish an accurate account of events as they occurred at the beginning of time, he is declaring himself for what would in some quarters today be regarded as a most extreme and pernicious form of creationism. He is saying that the events recorded in those three books must unquestioningly be accepted as articles of the Christian faith: that they occurred in time, and are as much a part of human history as anything else. He is saying, in effect, that the human condition is correctly and fully diagnosed by them. But what is so politically significant about all of this?

The answer to this question is straightforward; but at the same time it is a little long, for really, it is the story of Augustine's life, from his nineteenth year to his thirty-fifth: that is, from his first reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* to the publication of his *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, the first of his four Creation Narratives. It is the story of a brilliant young man struggling to make intellectual terms with the blunt authority of Scripture, and it is a political story for the simplest of reasons: for if its main theme is Augustine's growing disillusionment with the practices and institutions of one city, its climactic event is his spectacular declaration of citizenship for another. It is really the story, then, of Augustine's doctrine of the Two Cities, but told through the events of his life as intellectual biography. Yet is there any pressing need to tell the story of Augustine's most famous political statement in this way? For after all, the main lines of his doctrine of the Two Cities are well enough understood and little controversy surrounds the events of his life.[2] What new clarity could possibly come from attempting

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[2] Although, as William S. Babcock points out, '...the decade following Augustine's conversion remains something of an uncharted field, a period in his intellectual evolution which has failed to attract the intense scholarly attention that has been devoted to other aspects of his life and thought.' (William S. Babcock,

to combine the two in this way: that is, from attempting to see in the events of his early intellectual struggles an analogue of his later political ideas?

(a) On the need for a work of this nature

Anyone who chooses to write on St. Augustine of Hippo's political ideas faces an immediate and well-documented problem. It is that in approximately five million words of books, treatises, sermons and letters, he never once wrote to an explicitly political purpose. It is a problem that has been acutely felt by teachers of the subject. Herbert A. Deane is a good example:

> In no single work by Augustine, comparable to Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics*, Hobbe's *Leviathan*, or Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie*, can his leading ideas about man, society, and the state be found. Nor can the student be sent to a work where Augustine expounds his entire philosophy, including his teachings on these subjects. He never produced a synthesis of his thought like the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas, which contains orderly, systematic treatments of such topics as law, justice, and obedience.[3]

Not surprisingly, the absence of such an authoritative work has decisively influenced the transmission and reception of Augustine's political ideas down to the present day. For nearly sixteen hundred years they have been subject to all manner of

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'Augustine's Interpretation of Romans (A.D. 394-396)', *AS*, vol. X (1979), p. 55). Peter Brown echoes these thoughts in his *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London, Faber & Faber, 1967), n. 1, p. 146.

[3] Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York : London, Columbia University Press, 1963), p. vii. Cf. Robert Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo: The Christian Transformation of Political Philosophy* (London, Continuum, 2005), pp. 4-5; Norman H. Baynes, *The Political Ideas of St. Augustine's* De civitate Dei (London, G. Bell and Sons, Ltd, 1936), pp. 3-4; D. J. MacQueen, 'The Origin and Dynamics of Society and the State According to Saint Augustine: Part I', *AS*, vol. IV (1973), pp. 72-75; and Henry Paolucci (ed.), *The Political Writings of St. Augustine* (Chicago, Henry Regnery Company, 1967), pp. vii-ix.

mercenary treatment at the hands of thinkers committed to making capital out of their ambiguity. That makes for an extremely complicated tradition of interpretation, far too complicated to be considered in any serious detail during the course of this dissertation; however, if this dissertation's foundations are to be properly laid, it is imperative that at least some attempt is made to consider it, even if only cursory. Consequently, just such an attempt forms the subject of Chapters Four through Seven, where the tradition is considered under what are taken to be its four main aspects: first, political Augustinianism (Chapter Four);[4] second, Augustinian political-theology (Chapter Five); third, Augustinian political theory (Chapter Six); and fourth, Augustine in the history of ideas (Chapter Seven). It should be pointed out that these aspects follow a rather loose chronological order; loose in the sense that there is in reality a great deal of overlap between them. Nonetheless, it is an order that is worth persisting with for the clarity that it brings to what has already been labeled a complicated tradition. The expectation is that each of these aspects will stand for a period in which elements of Augustine's thought were harnessed to promote political agendas other than his own. In this sense they are a little like lenses that when held up against his writings bring certain areas of them into sharper focus than others. Making for these peculiar qualities of refraction are, of course, the political and religious preoccupations of each period, and in a way this really highlights the nub of the issue: in the absence of an authoritative Augustinian work on politics one must always view his political ideas through someone else's lens: that is to say, there is simply no getting at their original arrangement in his mind. Of course it goes

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[4] This term is, of course, H.–X. Arquillière's, from his *L'augustinisme politique: essai sur la formation des theories politiques du moyen-age* (Paris, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1972), p. 19.

without saying that some lenses are significantly less distorting than others, but ground into each is a distinctly un-Augustinian agenda, and that is the problem.

Chapters One to Three are by way of an introduction to this contextualist history. Chapter One presents the effect of Augustine's influence on the political tradition of the West in terms of main themes and trends. It is followed by a chapter detailing the key features of the move from Classical to Medieval political philosophy: this is, in effect, the preliminary matter to Chapter Three, where the opportunity is taken to establish Augustine's political ideas in the form in which it is hoped to recover them later through the events of his life.

(b) Some methodological considerations

The plan is to recover the original arrangement of Augustine's political ideas in his mind by exploiting the fact that his formative intellectual experiences are a striking analogue of his doctrine of the Two Cities. And yet the fact that there is such correspondence between the events of his life and his most enduring political statement should really come as no surprise, for after all, the latter was never written with any political intention in mind. It was from first to last a work of theology, or discipleship. In fact this general point could be made of all Augustine's so-called 'political ideas'. For the fact is that Augustine, though customarily given a position of great importance in the political tradition of the West, is not strictly-speaking a political thinker. He is a thinker (that is, a fifth-century Church theologian) some of whose ideas went on to have considerable political repercussions. This means that it is inaccurate to talk of Augustine's 'political ideas' or of

his 'political theory'; though it need not, as Dyson has pointed out on a number of occasions, be in any serious sense misleading.[5] For from the historical point of view, the factors that go into making a particular idea 'political' are complex, and often it is the case that context turns out to be of far greater moment than the author's original intentions. This has largely been Augustine's fate. As this dissertation will show, his political ideas are singularly depressing in their original arrangement; indeed, it is difficult to imagine a less inspiring set of remarks on man, society and the state; and upon further reflection, it becomes possible to imagine that had a definitive Augustinian political treatise been circulating in the medieval period, the history of political thought in the West might have followed a very different line of development.[6] For instance, the papacy would have found it extremely difficult to enlist Augustine's 'support' and 'blessing' for its ambitious political programme and consequently, Pope Gregory the Great's policy of deference towards the temporal authorities might have come to set the terms of debate. Perhaps it is now possible to gather these methodological considerations together into a few main points.

1. Nowhere in his many writings is Augustine what one could comfortably call a 'political thinker'.

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[5] His latest statement to this effect comes in his *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 5. But see also his *The Pilgrim City: Social and Political Ideas in the Writings of St. Augustine of Hippo* (Suffolk, The Boydell Press, 2001), p. xi-xii. Dino Bigongiari calls Augustine's social and political ideas 'by-products' of his theology; though he is careful to point out that they are 'fully as important as the theological ideas themselves'. (Dino Bigongiari, 'The Political Ideas of St. Augustine', in Paolucci (ed.), *The Political Writings of St. Augustine*, p. 343).

[6] This is a point that Sir Ernest Barker draws special attention to in his Introduction to the reissued 1931 edition of John Healey's translation of *De civitate Dei*. He quotes Professor Harnack's remark that, 'The history of Church doctrine in the West is a much disguised struggle against Augustinianism.' (Sir Ernest Barker, in his Introduction to John Healey's translation of the City of God (London, J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1931), p. lv).

2. To the contrary, his preoccupations are always identifiably those of a Catholic bishop, and in those cases where he does offer a plain political thought, it always refers to some explicitly theological purpose.
3. For this reason any issues with Augustine's political ideas are best settled at this original, theological level of meaning. Afterwards they can, as it were, be transported back up to their secondary, political level of meaning.[7]
4. This, essentially, is the insight that is going to be exploited in this dissertation. Augustine's doctrine of the Two Cities will be treated as theology; as theology it will be interpreted through the events of his life; but as politics it will finally be presented in its full and authoritative form. This treatment corresponds approximately to Olivier du Roy's *Méthode Phénoménologique*.[8]
5. For these reasons it is helpful to bear in mind that Augustine's genius did not consist in working up a system and harvesting its implications, but rather in maintaining an original poise and perspective which he was able to bring to bear successfully on diverse subjects. For the fact is that Augustine's political ideas are of this nature: they have unity and coherence not so much by their relations to each other, but by their participation in a common mind. And it is largely in consequence of this fact that Augustine's doctrine of the Two Cities, however

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[7] Cf. Deane: '[I]f we have really understood his religious teachings, we can virtually deduce from them his views on the nature of man, society and the state.' (Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, p. 14).

[8] See O. du Roy, *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon saint Augustin* (Paris, Études Augustiniennes, 1966), p. 15. For measured criticism of this methodology and others put forward by du Roy and also Pierre Hadot, see John J. O'Meara, 'Research Techniques in Augustinian Studies', *AS*, vol. I (1970), pp. 277-284. Frederick E. Van Fleteren employs it with success in his article, 'Authority and Reason, Faith and Understanding', *AS*, vol. IV (1973), pp. 33-71. See also MacQueen's comment that, 'Augustine did possess... as a foundation for future achievements and insights in the domain of politics, one providential asset denied... to his illustrious commentator – and critic to be [MacQueen is here referring to St. Thomas Aquinas]: the fecundating alluvial soil accumulated by thirty-three years of pre-conversion experiences as a *homo terrenas*.' (MacQueen, 'The Origins and Dynamics of Society and the State', p. 75).

open to abuse, is traditionally taken as his supreme political statement. For of all his doctrines, it is the one that most satisfactorily relates his leading political ideas in theory.

6. This means that it is also the doctrine that most satisfactorily relates his leading theological ideas in theory (as per points 3 and 4 above). For nearly the whole of his mature life, Augustine was a reactionary writer, unfolding his thought in response to the major heresies, schisms and pastoral concerns of his day. This has had the effect of obscuring his 'original poise and perspective' (point 5 above) underneath the appearance of fundamental developments in his thought, the most paradigmatic of these being the development of the uncompromising, Pauline theologian out of the young sentimental philosopher during the early 390s.[9] That aspects of his thought did develop was acknowledged by Augustine, most famously in his *Retractiones*; however, these were superficial in relation to his understanding of discipleship, which remained unchanged from his baptism in 387 onwards. This understanding – effectively Augustine's interpretation of what St. Paul meant by calling men to be born again as new creations[10] – was developed during the formative intellectual experiences begun in his nineteenth year: by the end of his time at Cassiciacum, it was complete. Those Augustinian scholars who have resisted the temptation to frame their thinking by conceptions of pre and post-Pauline Augustines have traditionally argued in terms of a

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[9] Peter Brown has been the most influential exponent of this view. His *Augustine of Hippo* argued that Augustine's intellectual development was decisively influenced by his reading of St. Paul in the early 390s. The new mature Augustine was less a Christian philosopher than a dogmatic theologian, disillusioned about the human capacity for good and resigned to following through the logic of Genesis. Accordingly, Brown decided to entitle his chapter on this subject *The Lost Future*.

[10] See 2 Cor. 5: 17.

fundamental continuity to his central beliefs. The most recent and prominent of these has been Carol Harrison in her *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006). This dissertation will commend the instincts[11] of these scholars but argue instead that the continuity in Augustine's thought should, in the first instance, be accounted for out of his understanding of discipleship which privileged will over belief.[12] So long as Augustine's understanding of discipleship continues to be associated with what Janet Coleman calls, 'The undivided will to believe... [-] itself... the consequence of God's gift of Grace to the individual...',[13] the practical political reality of the Pilgrim City will remain obscured. In the mature Augustinian schema, belief is not the reward of willing, for as Augustine points out on many occasions, belief could not have been decisive in Paradise when God was the greatest living reality on earth – as present to beast as He was to man. Consequently, when Adam and Eve disobeyed Him and were expelled from Paradise, they did not stop believing in Him; rather, they became committed to living in terms of their own understanding.

7. Bearing this in mind, it would be more accurate to think in terms of the 'private' and the 'public' Augustine than the pre and the post-Pauline. For a thinker to bring his thought out in response to hostile agendas is never satisfactory. He must work defensively, responding to the various points of attack; and this inevitably

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[11] Instincts evident in Harrison's question whether it is possible to, '...appreciate an author's mature thought without examining his earlier, formative years?' (Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, p. 4).

[12] As is emphasized across Chapters Eight to Ten, the decisive factor in Augustinian conversion is 'will' or 'love'. It is this that makes it such a political event. See below, pp. 33-36, for an amplification of this point.

[13] Janet Coleman, *A History of Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Oxford, Blackwell, 2000), p. 325. Cf. *Retr.*, I, 9, 4.

issues in a negative approach with little opportunity for positive expression.[14] In Augustine's time, this was not helped by the apologetic strategy of the early Church: in most cases it was enough for him simply to argue towards established Church doctrine. This abstract, conceptual approach militated against him revealing the living reality of his discipleship.[15]

Before continuing with this Introduction, it is necessary to identify the chief ambiguities in Augustine leading political ideas. These can then serve as a useful point of reference for the rest of this dissertation as well as its eventual measure of success. For after all, if its conclusions prove able to resolve the more mysterious and puzzling aspects of Augustine's thinking on man, society and the state, then its aim will have been achieved.

(c) The chief ambiguities in Augustine's leading political ideas

First, Augustine's leading political ideas in his own words:

> 'We find that, in every case, as the apostle says, "that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is animal; and afterwards that which is spiritual" [1 Cor. 15: 46]. So it is that each man, because he derives his origin from a condemned stock, is at first necessarily evil and fleshly, because he comes from Adam; but if, being reborn, he advances in Christ, he will afterwards be good and spiritual. So it is also with the

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[14] See what Augustine has to say about this at *De dono pers.*, XXI, 54.

[15] The classic example of this was his involvement in the Pelagian controversy. During its course Augustine could be seen hardening his views on the vitiation of human nature and its corresponding dependence upon Divine Grace; this, as J. Patout Burns explains, was motivated neither by, '...a new insight into the morality of intentionality nor even in a realization of the centrality of charity in good action.' It was done, '...in order to protect the position of Christ as the sole Mediator before God and only source of salvation for humanity.' (J. Patout Burns, 'The Interpretation of Romans in the Pelagian Controversy', *AS*, vol. X (1979), pp. 46-47. Cf. Burns' further contention that, 'The assertion of the uniqueness of Christ also served as the dogmatic foundation for Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin.' (p. 47).

whole human race. When those two cities began to run their course of birth and death, the first to be born was a citizen of this world, and the second was a pilgrim in this world, belonging to the City of God. The latter was predestined by Grace and chosen by Grace; by Grace he was a pilgrim below, and by Grace he was a citizen above. So far as he himself is concerned, he arises from the same lump which was wholly condemned originally; but God, like a potter – and this simile is not impudent, but wisely introduced by the Apostle – made "out of the same lump, one vessel unto honour, and the other unto dishonour". But the vessel unto dishonour was made first, and afterwards came the vessel unto honour; for in every case, as I have said already, man is first reprobate. But though it is of necessity that we begin in this way, we do not of necessity remain thus; for later comes the noble state towards which we may advance, and in which we may abide when we have attained it. Hence, though not every bad man will become good, it is nonetheless true that no one will be good who was not originally bad. Yet the sooner each man changes for the better, the sooner will he secure for himself the title belonging to his attainment and hide his former name under the later one.'[16]

That, effectively, is Augustine's doctrine of the Two Cities. Because of Adam's Original Sin and expulsion from Paradise, all men are born into the necessity of paying a price they do not owe:[17] they arrive into this fallen world apart from God and condemned to die. Augustine characteristically calls them a *massa peccati* 'mass of sin'.[18] These two

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[16] *De civ. Dei*, XV, 1.
[17] *De vera rel.*, XXVII, 50. Cf. *De civ. Dei.*, XII, 22; *Contra Faustem*, XXXII, 14; *Contra Iul.*, IV, 16, 83.
[18] *De div. qq. ad Simpl.*, I, 2, 16. Cf. *De div. qq. 83*, LXVIII, 3; *Confess.*, I, 7; *Ep.*, CXC, 3, 12; *De civ. Dei*, XXI, 12; XIII, 3.

punishments are the conditions of their citizenship of the first, earthly city;[19] and it is out of their nature that the first causes for ambiguity arise.

The claim that every human being pays the price for Adam's Original Sin in a corrupted nature generates obvious philosophical difficulties. Aside from it seeming terribly unfair that everyone should be implicated in a crime of such antiquity, there is the question whether this apparently unqualified assertion should invalidate Augustine's conception of human nature, the premiss for his bleak diagnosis of the human condition and all that follows from it.[20] Traditionally, the most successful political pessimists have sought to ground their conclusions about human nature in something more quantifiable than religious dogma (observed behaviour or scientific reductionism, for example),[21] and at a first glance it seems that Augustine does indeed derive the full authority for his conclusions from the Christian Scriptures. From a scholarly point of view this must seem inexcusable. However, thanks in no small part to his keen powers of observation and description, Augustine has managed to leave behind him a conception of human nature which is still considered respectable today.[22] It may well have been the case that *he* had

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[19] *Ench.*, VIII, 26; *De nat. et gr.*, III, 3.

[20] See Dyson's comment that, 'This view of human nature is... the major obstacle that Christianity encountered in coming to terms with pagan theories of moral action. Augustine is the first Christian author to confront this obstacle with a view to specifying in detail its implications for social and political life and relationships. It is this fact above all that gives his political thought its character.' (Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 12).

[21] See for instance how G. H. Sabine chooses to describe Niccoló Machiavelli as possessing the thought of, '...a true empiric, the result of a wide range of political observation and a still wider reading in political history...' (G. H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (London, George G. Harrap & Co., Ltd., 1949), p. 301).

[22] Probably the most enduring statement of this view, though tainted somewhat (unfairly) by its proximity to certain world events, is Deane's: 'We may have learned our lessons by reading Freud and by observing the new barbarism of our century rather than by listening to Christian realists. Nevertheless, the optimistic beliefs of many nineteenth-century liberals and Marxists – the certainty that the future would inevitably bring a sharp reduction, if not the complete elimination, of the need to employ coercion in social life, and the faith that men could be educated to cooperate voluntarily in a just and harmonious social order – strike

to believe before he could understand;[23] but the modern student of his political ideas has the luxury of being able to pass belief and go straight to understanding, so compelling, entertaining and numerous are the insights that Augustine furnishes into human psychology. Many of these insights bear no obvious traces of their Scriptural origins, and when gathered together, present a surprisingly contemporary perspective on the human condition.[24] To this end it has often been remarked by scholars how peculiarly modern many of Augustine's social and political ideas are. As Stephen Sykes points out,

> ...Augustine is by turns startlingly post-modern and disturbingly theological on the subject of justice. He seriously considers that the proper definition of a 'people' and 'commonwealth' is the neutral concept of an 'assembled multitude of rational creatures bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their love.' But his preferred standpoint on 'justice' is that it can only exist when the true God is acknowledged and worshipped.[25]

Later on in this dissertation there will be the opportunity to comment on the modernity of his theory of political justice as well as his sociology of the Roman religion.[26]

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us as hopelessly irrelevant as guides to present and future action and shamelessly hypocritical if offered as descriptions of present realities. We know that pride, self-assurance, and a sense of being the instruments of Providence or of historical necessity, as well as the more obvious vices of avarice, lust for domination, and hatred, can lead men and nations to perpetrate enormous crimes. We know too that we must be prepared to use awful weapons to defend ourselves and our civilization from threats of destruction, although we also recognize that our use of these weapons and techniques renders us liable to fall into the same vices. For, like Augustine, we have learned that greed, pride, aggressiveness, and hatred are not simply characteristics of other men and other states. We know that since these impulses dwell within each of us and in our society, we too are capable of translating them into action once the pressures acting upon us rise beyond a certain level.' (Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, p. 242).

[23] See *In Io. Ev. tr.* XXIX, 6.

[24] In this respect, Sabine's description of Machiavelli in n. 21, p. 12 above, could just as well be applied to Augustine.

[25] Stephen Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology* (London, Continuum, 2006), p. 52.

[26] On the former see below, pp. 43-45; on the latter see below, p. 78.

Nearer to Augustine's own time, issues tended to congregate more around the logistics and practicalities of the term 'Earthly City'. For instance, if everyone is at birth a citizen of the Earthly City, what serious political significance can the term possibly have? Does such a definition make it so wide as to be practically meaningless? Perhaps Augustine merely intended for it to refer to the greatest or most notorious of the cities or empires on earth at any one time? And from here it would be easy to go on unfolding the possible difficulties of interpretation. Suffice it to say, then, that Augustine's medieval interpreters, both ecclesiastical and secular, and many of his later ones too, found it extremely difficult to take his studied indifference to the various forms of politics seriously. This indifference issued, as MacQueen has explained, in a broadening of the standard Classical connotation of the term *civitas* 'citizenship': 'Within the Roman Empire, [citizenship] had been based upon circumstances of birth or upon a grant made by the Roman people: in the *Civitas Dei*, however, as also in its opposition, citizenship depends upon a deliberate act of free will involving the acceptance or rejection of Divine Grace.'[27]

Far more mysterious than these ambiguities, however, are those surrounding the second, Heavenly City. Augustine does not say that men are condemned to their first citizenship without hope: there is the possibility for them to take up new citizenship of the Pilgrim City (that portion of the Heavenly City still sojourning on earth – Augustine variously calls them *peregrini* or *viatores*[28]). Once again there are problems of practicality and logistics, but these pale into insignificance besides those which surround

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[27] MacQueen, 'The Origins and Dynamics of Society and the State', p. 80.
[28] See *En in ps.*, CXLIX, 5.

the conditions of the new citizenship. In order to become a citizen of the Heavenly City, a man must be reborn; literally, as he was born into his first, earthly citizenship, so he must be reborn into his second, Heavenly citizenship. But this time of course, it is not through his mother's womb but by Divine Grace that he is born. However, and here is the most mysterious thing, this Divine Grace is not given according to merit; it is given entirely according to a hidden but perfect justice, and then only to certain men.[29] In other words, it absolutely cannot be earned by good deeds; and this, of course, is tantamount to saying that those undeserving men who receive Divine Grace are pre-selected or predestined to receive it. From the general human wreck God chooses to save them for reasons known only to Himself. He sends them the power to will to obey His sovereign commands and thus to persist as pilgrims of the Heavenly City while they are on earth.[30] As Bertrand Russell concluded his exposition of this aspect of Augustine's thought, 'Damnation proves God's justice; salvation, His mercy. Both equally display His goodness.'[31]

As it stands, this doctrine is clearly a scheme of salvation: it is political in what could only be regarded as a metaphorical sense. But the distinction begins to break down

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[29] *De dono pers.*, XIII, 33. Cf. *Ench.*, XXV, 99; *Contra duas ep. pelag.*, IV, 6, 16.

[30] For an analysis of Augustine's political ideas from the point of view of his doctrine of Predestination, see Dino Bigongiari, 'The Political Ideas of St. Augustine', in Paolucci (ed.), *The Political Writings of Saint Augustine*, pp. 343-358. Bigongiari's comment that the facts of Augustine's doctrine of Predestination are 'hard to scrutinize' is generous: most thinking men would find them unconscionable insofar as they seem to preclude human freedom of will. However, as Dyson has neatly pointed out, the logic of Augustine's position can be softened at the expense of grammar: '...God knows eternally that Adam would sin.' (Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 27). Augustine himself explained this on a number of occasions, most notably at *De civ. Dei*, V, 9-10 and *De lib. arb.*, III, 1, 1 – III, 4, 11. The crux of Augustine's argument was always that God effectively chooses, or predestines, only those men whom He foreknows will freely choose to face Him with the truth of their hearts. See *Exp. q. p. ep. ad Rom.*, LV. Cf. *De div. qq. ad Simpl.*, I, 2, 13; *De corrept. et gr.*, IX, 23; *De praed. sanct.*, XVIII, 36 & 37; *Ep.*, CII, 2.

[31] Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London, George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1946), p. 383. Cf. *De civ. Dei*, XIV, 27: 'Yet God preferred not to remove the choice of whether to sin or not from their power; and, in this way, He showed how great is the power of their pride for evil, and of His Grace for good.'; *Opus imp. c. Iul.*, I, 22: 'This is the Catholic view: a view that can show a just God in so many pains and in such agonies of tiny babies.'

when one considers how often politics has claimed to be the salvation of mankind. The classical Greeks believed that politics was an ethical enterprise; that human fullness of nature could only be achieved in political community.[32] Since then there have been any number of attempts to realise fullness of nature or freedom or enlightenment or whatever one prefers to call it through political means; and by the same token, schemes of salvation have just as often claimed to be political.[33] In the case being considered here, Augustine was writing as a bishop of the Catholic Church in the Christian Roman Empire; it was somewhat inevitable, then, that his thoughts should raise important questions concerning the actual correspondence between his doctrine and real earthly institutions, both secular and spiritual. Later on, there will be the opportunity to go into the historical details of this (in Chapters One to Seven). For now, a brief analysis of the main questions raised is all that is required.

First of all it should be pointed out that Augustines 'Two Cities' are not really cities in the ordinary sense of the word. They are more like categories or classes of person; F. C. Copleston has helpfully called them 'camps'.[34] But at the same time this

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[32] Emblematic of this attitude is Aristotle's dictum, 'He who is without a polis, by reason of his own nature and not of some accident, is either a poor sort of being, or a being higher than man...' (Aristotle (tr. Sir Ernest Barker), *Politics* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1960), 1253*a*, p. 6).

[33] This strange determination is, in the opinion of Erich Fromm, explicable from the point of view of individual psychology: 'We see that the process of growing human freedom has the same dialectic character that we have noticed in the process of individual growth. On the one hand it is a process of growing strength and integration, mastery of nature, growing power of human reason, and growing solidarity with other human beings. But on the other hand this growing individuation means growing isolation, insecurity, and thereby growing doubt concerning one's rôle in the universe, the meaning of one's life, and with all that a growing feeling of one's own powerlessness and insignificance as an individual.' (Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London, Kegan Paul, 1945), p. 29). Cf. *De civ. Dei*, XIV, 15: 'For although, in Paradise, before his sin, man could not do everything, he did not at that time wish to do anything that he could not do, and therefore he could do all that he wished.'

[34] In his *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 2 (New York, Doubleday, 1962), p. 100. See also MacQueen's comment that, 'For Augustine the beginnings of the *civitas*, as an organised expression of man's social and political life, antedate the earliest records of secular history. Nevertheless this institution stems from a unity

wide meaning need not preclude them from providing the framework for detailed and insightful political theory. As students of Augustine's political ideas have discovered, if the limitations of his doctrine of the Two Cities are borne in mind, it can still give a pleasing and intuitive shape to his political ideas. But what sort of shape exactly?

Starting with the Earthly City, it makes it the setting for an uncompromising form of political pessimism. Broadly speaking, Augustine's political thinking is reductionist in the extreme: that is, he derives all political practices and institutions, from the smallest to the largest, out of a particular conception of human nature. Needless to say it is an extremely ungenerous conception. Augustine thinks that on their own, outside of God's continuing Grace, men are unable not to sin.[35] Correspondingly his definition of sin is so wide as to seem practically meaningless: sin is, for Augustine, any action committed apart from God's Will. This means that in their natural fallen state, men are unable not to sin as the logical consequence of their being born apart from God.[36] For Augustine, this fact leads to the difficulties that call politics into being. As part of the rational creation, men are gifted with the ability to choose what it is that they think will bring them true

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itself prior even to the most ancient forms of communal existence. The unity here in question is actually one of "racial stock" (*genus*) or origin, and the fellowship to which it has given rise precedes and in a sense transcends the entire human domain of the social and of the secular politics.' (MacQueen, 'The Origins and Dynamics of Society and the State', pp. 78-79).

[35] See *Contra duas ep. pelag.*, II, 5, 9. Cf. *De pat.*, XXI, 19. See also J. N. Figgis' conclusion that, '...a man can choose between ambition and self-indulgence, between the pride of heroism and the meanness of cowardice.' (J. N. Figgis, *The Political Aspects of St. Augustine's 'City of God'* (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1921), p. 46, quoted in Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, n. 15, p. 251).

[36] See *De civ. Dei*, XIV, 27: 'By the experience which followed from that [original] sin, however, He demonstrated to all rational creatures, angels and humans alike, how great is the difference between each creature's presumption and God's protection.' Cf. *Confess.*, VII, 20, 26.

happiness and to direct their wills towards its attainment.[37] This ability is a gift because it allows their love to be the expression of their entire orientation as a being.[38] Augustine thinks that naturally, they choose to seek happiness in all manner of things other than God, and that this brings them out of alignment with His Will and the created order and into conflict with each other.[39] For him, then, 'politics' is the term that traditionally describes the attempt to reconcile these competing interests in a conception of the common life; and insofar as by doing so, it seeks to provide a stable structure within which different 'experiments of living'[40] can play out, he considers it the most articulate expression of fallen human nature: '...for the sway of anyone wishing to glory in his own lordship is clearly less extensive if his power is diminished by the presence of a living

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[37] The non-rational creation do not possess this ability. In their case, instinct determines what will make them happy, and not possessing reason, they cannot question its judgment. See what Augustine has to say about this at *Serm.*, VIII, 8.

[38] This thought is a commonplace of Augustine's mature theology and a major plank of his political thinking. A man reveals his character most clearly in what he loves; so does a people; and it is this fact that Augustine draws on when making his most famous distinction between the Two Cities: 'Two cities, then, have been created by two loves: that is, the earthly by love of self extending even to contempt of God, and the Heavenly by love of God extending to contempt of self.' (*De civ. Dei*, XIV, 28. Cf. *En. in ps.*, LXIV, 2; XXXIII, 2, 10; *In Io. Ep. tr.*, VII, 8; VII, 7; *Confess.*, XIII, 9, 10; XI, 2, 3; II, 1, 1; II, 5, 11; *Ep.* CXL, 18, 45; *Serm.* CCCI, 11, 11. For a general discussion of the theme of 'love' in Augustine's thought see, Giovanni Reale, *Agostino: amore assoluto* (Milano, Bompiani, 2001)). As will be explained in Chapter One below, this unsentimental approach to the human condition allowed Augustine to dispense with the philosophical problems traditionally associated with the concept of 'justice' – a fact which has long been recognised by scholars. See for instance, *HMPTW*, Vol. I, pp. 165-170. To this longstanding fact of scholarship, this dissertation will contribute the insight that the Western conception of political justice is dispensed with by Augustine because it is implicated in the attempt to close the epistemological distance between man and God (a good early example of this is Heracleitus' assumption that, 'Sun will not overstep his measures; otherwise the Erinyes, ministers of Justice, will find him out.' (Heracleitus, fragment. 229, in G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 203)). This attempt to close the epistemological distance between man and God is effectively Augustine's interpretation of the events in the Garden of Eden. See below, pp. 103-107. It should finally be pointed out that these aspects of Augustine's understanding of political justice are poorly treated in many popular accounts of the subject. Cf. the articles 'Augustine', in *PDP* and *PMDPT* (the latter is misleading at almost every point). On the contrary, *ODP* gets it approximately right with its article 'Augustine, St.'.

[39] Augustine characteristically describes this disposition by means of a distinction between *frui* 'enjoying; serving' and *uti* 'using'. Only God is to be enjoyed or served as the *Summum Bonum* 'Greatest Good'. Man, however, insists on choosing other things for the *Summum Bonum*, and in this lies one of the chief practical manifestations of his estrangement from God. See *De doctr. Christ.*, I, 4, 4; *En. in Ps.*, XCV, 14. Cf. *Confess.*, IV, 12, 18; *De civ. Dei*, XV, 5.

[40] This useful term is, of course, borrowed from John Stuart Mill. See John Stuart Mill (ed. Geraint Williams), *Utilitarianism; On Liberty; Considerations on Representative Government* (London, J. M. Dent, 1993), p. 124.

colleague... The wicked, therefore, strive among themselves; and, likewise, the wicked strive against the good and the good against the wicked.'[41]

In short, Augustine thinks that there was no politics in Paradise. The ethical problem which politics is the preferred solution to – the question what everyone should be doing at every point in order to bring about a useful and meaningful combination of interests[42] – could not have arisen in Paradise where Adam and Eve knew God and devolved all responsibility for the conduct of the 'actual present'[43] to His infinite Wisdom.[44] This means that for Augustine, politics never refers to some best constitution or theory; it is at one and the same time more and less than that: it is the condition of life in this fallen world.[45] Without its remedial effects, he thinks it is evident that men would simply fight each other to extinction. It is this important insight which allows him to be astonishingly indifferent to the various forms of government, for so long as each does the job of maintaining the apparatus of civilized life, he cannot legitimately fault it. As Deane points out,

> When [Augustine] tells a Christian ruler or magistrate that he ought to use his power not only to secure peace and prosperity for the people but also to promote and foster true religion and piety among them, he is reminding him of his duties as

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[41] *De civ. Dei*, XV, 5.

[42] In Augustine's words, '...the Earthly City... establishes... a kind of co-operation of men's wills for the sake of attaining the things which belong to this mortal life.' (*De civ. Dei*, XIX, 17).

[43] This term will be used throughout this dissertation to stand for the point of obedience to God's commands. As George MacDonald pointed out many years ago, from the philosophical point of view, this 'point of obedience' must have an interesting consequence: 'The bliss of the animals lies in this, that, on their lower level, they shadow the bliss of those – few at any moment on earth – who do not "look before and after, and pine for what is not" but live in the holy carelessness of the eternal *now*.' (quoted in C. S. Lewis (ed.), *George MacDonald: An Anthology: 365 Readings* (New York, Touchstone, 1990), reading 314, p. 130.

[44] See n. 30, p. 15 above.

[45] See *De doctr. Christ.*, II, 39, 58; II, 25, 40.

a Christian who is seeking to win eternal salvation – he is not discussing what a state must do if it is to be a state, nor is he advising the ruler to neglect the fundamental functions of the political and legal order.[46]

Moving now to the Heavenly City, one could say that it is what the Earthly City would desperately like to be but can't. That is to say, it is in the Heavenly City that Augustine places all the virtues normally associated with the best kinds of political activity – peace, justice, freedom, happiness, enlightenment and so on.[47] When the Earthly City imagines that it has realised these virtues, it has in fact realised only imperfect imitations of them. That it can strive to realise them at all is because God allows men to retain an impression of the laws of nature on their hearts.[48] In practice this operates by a process of anamnesis as a faint recollection of what they once had but have since lost.[49] All of this has an important implication for the political theorist: the Heavenly City can have no exact counterpart on earth; that is, no city or empire, however great or saintly, and not even the institutional Church, can presume to take on its rôle. The Heavenly City cannot, in other words, be the inspiration for anything made with hands, whether secular or spiritual. It is remembered in the common morality of men and forgotten in the imagination of their hearts. As Dorothy F. Donnelly writes, 'The appointed end of the City of God is an ideal life where man will enjoy everlasting and perfect peace, no longer subject to the wretchedness of mortal life. Thus unlike the utopists' description of an ideal organization of the State, Augustine's conception of an

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[46] Deane, *The Social and Political Ideas of St. Augustine*, p. 133.
[47] See *De civ. Dei*, XV, 1-2.
[48] *Ep.*, CLVII, 15; *De div. qq. 83*, LIII, 2; *De sp. et litt.*, XXVIII, 48; *De div. qq. ad Simpl.*, I, 2, 16; *De div. qq. 83*, LXXXII, 2; *In Io. ev. tr.*, XIX, 11-12; *Serm.*, IV, 6-7; *En. in ps.*, LXI, 21.
[49] See *De Trin.*, XIV, 15, 21.

ideal existence is a vision of a mystical or spiritual state of being – in no sense is it an idealization of temporal life.'[50]

Now there have, of course, been many 'heavenly cities' in history, each one judged on its outstanding virtues and proclaimed as the leaven of civilization,[51] but for Augustine, it is precisely the fact that they are 'heavenly cities in history' that disqualifies them from consideration as such. For to his mind, human history as it has unfolded since the Fall is very different to what it might have been had Adam obeyed God. Since Adam's Original Sin, men have been walking apart from God, fashioning this world according to their own fallen understanding. In the imagination of their hearts they are apt to think that in its finest points, it is a paradise comparable to that which they left behind all those years ago; and this leads them into regarding this world of their own construction as a perfectly legitimate point of reference for their thoughts on larger things.[52] For Augustine it seems that no weight of fact concerning their insignificant position in the grand scheme of things can dent this staggering presumption, nor convince them that their wills cannot influence the universal run of affairs:

> 'Just because human affairs appear all awry, let it not seem to us that they are ungoverned. For every man has been appointed to his place; and yet to each it seems that there is no order. You just see what you want to be: for no matter what it is, the Master knows just where to put you. Imagine a painter: before him are placed various colours and he knows where to put each one. The sinner, of course,

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[50] Dorothy F. Donnelly, 'The City of God and Utopia: A Revaluation', *AS*, vol. VIII (1977), pp. 122-123.
[51] See Sir Ernest Barker's discussion of them in the Appendix to his *Greek Political Theory: Plato and His Predecessors* (London, Methuen, 1960), pp. 445-452.
[52] See *In Io. ev. tr.*, VI, 8, 16; *Serm.*, CXXIV, 3; *De civ. Dei*, X, 7; *Serm.*, CCCXVI, 16; *De div. qq. ad Simpl.*, I, 2, 16; I, 2, 22.

is determined to be the colour black; is the painter then at a loss to know where to put him? What things can be done with the colour black? What adornments can the painter make from it? From it he can make the hair, the beard, the eyebrows; though not, of course the face, for which he must use white. You just see what you want to be, then: do not concern yourself with where He puts you Who cannot err, for He knows just what He will do with you. And so it is that we see this accomplished in the common laws of the world. Some man (I do not know who) wants to be a house-breaker: the law of the judge knows that he has acted contrary to the law; the law of the judge knows where to place him; and it orders him most properly. He indeed has lived evilly; but not evilly has the law ordered him. From a house-breaker he will become a miner: and from the labour of the mines, how great works are constructed? [53]

To Augustine, considerations such as these make it pointless (but not altogether unhelpful) to speculate on how history might have progressed had Adam not sinned in the Garden of Eden: for speculation is not the privileged, objective activity that men imagine it to be. To Augustine it simply cannot be when the conditions of life are the categories that help men to understand it. A striking example of what he surely means by this is the birth of Western philosophy in Greece, in the sixth-century B.C. For then the Greeks set the habit of the Western mind by projecting the customary arrangements of the *polis* onto the universe:[54] in other words, they presumed that justice must pervade the universe and

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[53] *Serm.*, CXXV, 5. Cf. *De civ. Dei*, V, 11; XIV, 27; *De Cath. rud.*, XIX, 31.

[54] See Bernard Bosanquet's comments in his *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (London, Macmillan, 1925), pp. 1-15; and most especially his observation that, 'The [Greek] mind which can recognise itself practically in the order of the commonwealth, can recognise itself theoretically in the order of nature.' (p. 5).

give a certain harmony to its parts because this is what it manifestly does in the *polis*.[55] But against this intellectual trajectory, the trajectory of Western science,[56] Augustine would teach that there is no possibility of an independent perspective *vis-à-vis* God.[57] Categories like justice and goodness cannot legislate for the mind of God because by the logic of creation they are anterior to Him. Contrary to popular opinion, reason is just as much fallen as the rest of man; for the categories which it must operate by are not shared by God but are given by Him: 'I did not know that [reason] must be enlightened by another light in order to be a partaker in the truth, since it is not itself the essence of truth...'[58] Correspondingly, at any points at which this world seems pellucid to the human mind, it is only because it has been constructed by human hands. Otherwise in its deepest and most mysterious aspects, the aspects which Augustine accounts for out of the greatness of God's Mercy, it is utterly impenetrable.[59] The finest efforts of the

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[55] For further general discussion of this subject see Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, pp. 35-38; T. A. Sinclair, *A History of Greek Political Thought* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1967), pp. 10-19; Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, pp. 47-63; Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (London, George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1961), pp. 28-34; Raymond G. Gettell, *History of Political Thought* (London, George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1932), pp. 39-41; Malcolm Schofield, 'The Presocratics', in David Sedley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 42-73; John Burnet, 'Law and Nature in Greek Ethics', *IJE*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (April, 1897), pp. 328-333; Anthony Kenny, *Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 2004); and especially Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (London, Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 53-61.

[56] Recently, attention has been drawn to this fact by Pope Benedict XVIth, himself an Augustinian scholar of some distinction: 'Modern scientific reason quite simply has to accept the rational structure of matter and the correspondence between our spirit and the prevailing rational structures of nature as given, on which its methodology has to be based. Yet the question why this has to be so is a real question...' (Pope Benedict XVIth, 'Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections', lecture delivered to the Representatives of Science at the University of Regensburg, on the 12th September 2006).

[57] See *De civ. Dei*, XIV, 11: 'God is, indeed, said to change His decrees; and we even read in the Scriptures that, figuratively speaking, God "repented" [Gen. 6: 6; Exod. 32: 14; 1 Sam. 15: 11; 2 Sam. 24: 16; cf. *De doctr. Christ.*, III, 40]. But such statements reflect a merely human perspective...'

[58] *Confess.*, IV, 15, 25.

[59] A comparison with one of the early speculations of Ludwig Wittgenstein goes a long way towards helping to explain what Augustine means. The speculation, strung out in a series of decimally-numbered propositions, comes, of course, from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, p. 11: '3.01 – The totality of true thoughts is a picture of the world; 3.02 – A thought contains the possibility of the situation of which it is the thought. What is thinkable is possible too.; 3.03 – Thought can never be of anything illogical, since, if it were, we should have to think illogically; 3.031 – It used to be said that God could

philosophers over the ages have shown that there is, for instance, no accounting by reason for the traditional lights of conscience; that is, for platitudes such as 'treat others as you would have them treat you', 'don't take another man's wife', and so on: the so-called laws of nature. This epistemological distance between man and God is one of the least appreciated aspects of Augustine's thought; it is intimated in a great deal of what he has written but never stated explicitly; and as a number of distinguished Augustinian scholars have helped to show, including R. P. Mandonnet, Étienne Gilson and H.-X. Arquillière,[60] some of the most persistent misinterpretations of Augustine's political ideas have been justified on this perceived ambiguity in his understanding of the difference between what Mandonnet has called, '...the order of rational truth and that of revealed truth.'[61] As such, one of the main aims of Chapters One to Seven will be to confirm this fact as the dominant or recurring theme in the history of the reception and interpretation of Augustine's political ideas. And further to this, it will be a major aim of this dissertation to show that Augustine's political thought in particular, but also his entire mature outlook, is based in a firm and clearly worked out distinction between the truths of reason and revelation, verification and illumination. This distinction, or watershed, is kept in place by the twin processes of Grace and Confession and stands between the citizens of the Two Cities.[62] Naturally, it corresponds closely with Augustine's understanding of

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create anything except what would be contrary to the laws of logic.-The truth is that we could not *say* what an 'illogical' world would look like.' Wittgenstein's disarming point here is that thought is not the dispassionate tool men imagine it to be. To the contrary, it is fully implicated in the world it purports to judge.

[60] Others are Mathias Joseph Scheeben (*Dogmatique* (tr. Belet), t. III, p. 495), Paul Dumont ('Le supernatural dans la théologie de saint Augustin', in *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, XLIV (1931), p. 515) and Charles Boyer (*Essais sur la doctrine de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1933), p. 184).

[61] P. Mandonnet, *Siger de Brabant et l'Averroïsme latin au XIII siècle* (Louvain, 1911), p. 55.

[62] From what has just been said, it is clear that the argument of this dissertation is going to turn on a particular understanding of Augustine's illumination theory of truth. What is particular about it and how does it differ from conventional wisdom on the matter? Very briefly, it contends that Augustine's

discipleship and is represented in his thought by such striking statements as this: 'But any who have risen beyond even these words, and begun to think worthily of God as far as

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illumination theory of truth accommodates two types of knowledge: 1) knowledge of *a priori* analytical or logical principles (the kind of knowledge that is traditionally associated with illumination theories) and 2) knowledge of God's spoken commands in the present moment. Standard treatments of Augustine's epistemology tend to focus on the former, because in the course of his writings, he did indeed develop an impressive theory of knowledge in the Neo-Platonic tradition, claiming that principal ideas – that is, the ideas that stand behind the realities of the world and make a universal appeal to reason – reside in the mind of God and from there illuminate human minds. It is this theory of knowledge that Augustine applied to understanding the laws of nature, and which he presents most clearly in his dialogue *De Magistro* (see n. 1, p. 1, above). A very clear exposition of it is Bruce Bubacz, *St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge: A Contemporary Analysis* (New York, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), pp. 133-162. However, the point being made here is that this theory cannot account for the knowledge that Augustine associated with God's Will – the knowledge that sustained Adam and Eve in Paradise – and which was also a form of illumination. In this respect, this dissertation is in large part an attempt to show that of Augustine's two understandings of illumination, it was this second one which was the more politically significant; for it came to represent, in a purely negative and technical way, the achievement of the Pilgrim City in separating itself from the ordinary course of human history. In certain respects, Eberhard Simons comes close to representing this view; at any rate, he regards Augustine's illumination theory of truth as the point of departure for all his thought: '[Augustine] proposes that that which makes man what he is, is primarily his relation to truth; in all knowledge "truth" is also known as the indispensable light of consciousness; and in every activity its goodness is willed, as the necessary life of all freedom. Truth, in the form of illumination and the source of vitality, is not something which is possessed by man, like a fixed attribute or condition of reason. For Augustine it is rather an event – the confrontation of man with God. Truth is thus in one way the constant illumination of man by God, to which man, however, does not always actually respond in his free decisions (because of his original sinfulness); and in another way it is those individual instances of illumination in which the glory of God, both judging and forgiving, is experienced as salvation.' (Eberhard Simons, *SM*, p. 123. The attempt to refer all of Augustine's remarks on Divine illumination to a single type of knowledge is hazardous, and has led scholars into great difficulties in the past. Of these, Gilson is the least misleading insofar as he attributes a merely formal quality to Divine illumination in Augustine's thought: it accounts for only the certainty of human judgments (Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine* (New York, Random House, 1961), pp. 79-91). Ronald H. Nash, on the other hand, makes the error of presuming that Neo-Platonism inspired Augustine's interpretation of the *Imago Dei*: 'The knowledge possessed by man can be regarded as a reflection of the truth originating in the mind of God. To be more specific, God has endowed man with a structure of rationality patterned after the Divine ideas in His own mind.' (Ronald H. Nash, 'Some Philosophic Sources of Augustine's Illumination Theory of Truth', *AS*, vol. II (1971), p. 49. In making this point, Nash is only arguing in the long-established line of the intellectual tradition of the West – a tradition summed up most elegantly in this sentiment from Henry Drummond: 'The Natural Laws then are great lines running not only through the world, but, as we now know, through the universe, reducing it like parallels of latitude to intelligent order. In themselves, be it once more repeated, they may have no more absolute existence than parallels of latitude. But they exist for us. They are drawn for us to understand the part by some Hand that drew the whole; so drawn, perhaps, that, understanding the part, we too in time may learn to understand the whole.' (Henry Drummond, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1884), p. 6)). In conclusion, the effect of referring Augustine's remarks on Divine illumination to a single type of knowledge is always to close the epistemological distance between man and God to a point where it runs up against his numerous, characteristic statements about Divine omniscience in all matters (for instance, his declaration at *En. in ps.*, XXXVI, 3 that, 'The Will of God is the Law of God). For an excellent short summary of the intellectual tradition of which Augustine's illumination theory is in large part a continuation, see Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 9-15.

human beings are permitted to, will find a silence that is to be praised by the inexpressible voice of the heart.'[63]

To the political theorist surveying this scene, there must appear a troubling theoretical lacuna in the space between the political pessimism represented by the Earthly City, and what Henry Paolucci calls the 'prophetic utopianism' of the Heavenly City.[64] For ultimately, politics is a practical activity – the art and the science of government;[65] and yet there seems little in Augustine's doctrine of the Two Cities to support a practical arrangement of his leading political ideas. And that this is indeed a problem becomes apparent when one considers how many of them (the Sociable Nature of Man, Natural Law, the Spiritual and Temporal Spheres, The Christian Ruler, Just War and Religious Persecution, to name only the most obvious) do seem to point beyond the bleak diagnosis of his political realism to some cure, some positive reconciliation, however tentative, between politics and theology. It is this area of overlap and interaction between the Two Cities – the space effectively occupied by the Pilgrim City – that is naturally of most immediate concern to students of Augustine's political ideas. Understandably, then, they do not find it helpful to discover that the Pilgrim City's characteristic feature is a citizenship defined by a mysteriously administered Grace; and consequently it has been Augustine's fate to have his political ideas put into practical form by generations of

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[63] *Serm.*, CCCXVI, 16.

[64] Paolucci (ed.), *The Political Writings of St. Augustine*, p. vii. In a note, Paolucci quotes Étienne Gilson to amplify what he means by this phrase: 'In [Augustine's] notion of a universal religious society is to be sought the origin of that ideal of a world society haunting the minds of so many today.' (Étienne Gilson, in his foreword to the *Fathers of the Church* edition of the *City of God* (New York, Catholic University of America Press, 1950), vol. 1, p. xi) and see also *Les metamorphoses de la Cité de Dieu* (Louvain, Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1952), p. 288.

[65] The phrase preserved in Justinian's *Digest*, though actually referring to law, is *ars boni et aequi* 'the art of what is good and equitable' (*Dig.*, liber I, titulus I, *De Iustitia et Iure*).

scholars, many of them determined to claim his genius and authority for some or other cause. The crux of the problem as it has been identified in the preceding pages is the lack of an authoritative Augustinian political treatise; or what is really the same thing (see points 1-7 on pp. 6-9 above), a systematic presentation of his understanding of discipleship. Evidently such a work would challenge many of the assumptions governing the use of Augustine in political theory today, as well as calling into question his customary position in the history of political thought in the West. What really is the relationship between the Laws of Nature and the Will of God in Augustine's thought? If the former are, as Dyson suggests, the backbone of the 'pagan theories of moral action',[66] how are they incorporated by Augustine into his Christian political philosophy? Is he simply prompted by dogma into a point by point rejection of all that is idealistic in Classical political philosophy or does his alternative consist in something more substantial? When he gave up the books of the Neo-Platonists for St. Paul, how were his expectations about salvation affected? It has long been accepted by scholars that Augustine, '...closes ancient thought and begins medieval thought.';[67] however, it is in the answers to these questions that the true significance of his rôle in this process lies.

(d) The design of this dissertation

This dissertation has been designed on a plan of ten chapters. As has already been mentioned above, Chapters One to Seven combine to give a history of the reception and interpretation of Augustine's political ideas from shortly after his death in the first half of the fifth-century to the present day. They make up the first section of this dissertation and

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[66] Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 12.
[67] G. G. Coulton, 'Augustine', in *Studies in Medieval Thought* (London, Thomas Nelson, 1940), p. 24, quoted in Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 4.

in effect, serve to justify the intellectual biography of the second section. As a history, they try to be less a literature review than a synopsis of the main themes and trends; and overall they attempt to present the history as a recognizable tradition with its own norms and canons of (mis)interpretation. For the fact is that the character of Augustine's political ideas has made them susceptible to certain patterns of use and abuse. As has already been pointed out, the chief of these patterns is the tendency to underestimate the epistemological distance that Augustine places between man and God. This is established in Chapter One; then Chapters Four through Seven develop this tendency as one of the main, unifying themes in the tradition and argue that the citizens of Augustine's Two Cities are best distinguished by their attachments to two very different theories of knowledge.

It is somewhat inevitable that in producing such a history of ideas, the historian becomes involved in giving some account of the ideas in their original, pristine state. Here this has been taken as an opportunity to anticipate the definitive statements of Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten. The account forms the subject of Chapter Three and is introduced by Chapter Two, which details the key features of the move from Classical to Medieval political philosophy.

Chapter Eight, *Augustine's Early Life and Education*, provides a short account of Augustine's life up to his nineteenth year and the beginning of his early intellectual struggles. It makes no claim to be exhaustive but simply gives enough information to make the intellectual biography of Chapters Nine and Ten intelligible. Its final section is

written from the point of view of Augustine's own initiation into the Earthly City, anticipating many of the themes taken up in the following chapters. In particular, Augustine is shown to be a brilliant and curiously unsentimental boy, forced to confront the ironies of the Earthly City from an early age in the bourgeois[68] ambitions and kindnesses of his parents. This inability fully to reconcile himself to the compromises that make untroubled living in the Earthly City possible continues through his university years. It culminates, following a reading of Cicero's *Hortensius*, in a determination to resolve the crisis in an embrace of all that the Earthly City is not.

Chapter Nine, *The Earthly City*, is the beginning of the serious attempt to exploit the correspondence between Augustine's early life and his doctrine of the Two Cities. It marks the point, then, at which the manifesto of Section Two is decisively taken up. Augustine is joined as he begins to pursue an ambitious intellectual programme for himself – it is a programme that is shaped by his own expectations about salvation, expectations worked out with reference to a city built with human hands. In terms of its structure, this chapter is a chance to follow Augustine as he runs a gauntlet of the major philosophies and religions available to him. Manicheism, Skepticism, Neo-Platonism – all are tried as resting-places for his unquiet heart; but in the end, all prove to be unsatisfactory. For the striking feature of this period is Augustine's singular unwillingness to trust the witness of his heart. Evidently it would have had him sentimentalize his efforts at salvation into a flattering pilgrimage, but it seems that it was only because he insisted on subjecting it to a relentless and logical interrogation by his

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[68] It is Dyson who uses the term 'bourgeois' to describe the limitations of Patricius' outlook. It is reproduced here in acknowledgement of the fact that it is very well chosen. (Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 1).

mind (prompted and helped, as he would discover later on, by Divine Grace) that he was not completely deceived by it and left with some inferior happiness of its choice. The chapter ends with Augustine on the cusp of conversion to Christianity at Milan, in 386. He was then thirty-two years old.

As regards methods, this chapter has, as promised, both a theological a political aspect. The theological aspect is Augustine's gradual coming to terms with the blunt authority of Scripture, with the fact that, in his own famous words, 'one must believe in order to understand'. This realization is properly speaking the point at which it slowly began to dawn on him what 'confession' means, and why it is so important. Writing some years later in his *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (the work which this dissertation contends is his most remarkable act of public confession), he would recommend to the Manichees the very treatment which he was beginning to undergo himself at this time:

> 'If, at some time, they could be turned towards God by the flaming swords, that is, by temporal trials, knowing their sins and groaning for them, and not also blaming them on some external nature that does not exist, but on themselves entirely, just as they deserve to; and loving God by charity (which is the completion of science) – God Who is above all else incommunicable; and what is more, loving Him with the whole of their heart, with the whole of their soul and with the whole of their mind, and loving their neighbour as themselves: if they do all of these things they will surely arrive at the Tree of Life, and live in Eternity.'[69]

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[69] *De Gen. c. Man.*, II, 27, 41. Cf. *De civ. Dei*, XI, 29: 'Yet, when these works are referred to the praise and veneration of the Creator Himself, it is as if dawn has broken in the minds of those who contemplate them.'; and *In Io. Ev. tr.*, XXVII, 5: 'Science becomes useful when it is combined with charity; not useful for itself, that is, but for charity.'

This formula as Augustine would come to understand it, is straightforward: confession is a charitable exercise because it involves a man in acknowledging the truth, where the truth is always the gift of God's inspiration.[70] As has now been shown, Augustine's writings offer robust support for what philosophers term an 'illumination' theory of truth. Augustine believes that insofar as a man can see it, the truth belongs to God. This is presumably what he means when he says that 'charity is the completion of science'. True science or knowledge or wisdom comes about as a man refuses to allow pride to be his inspiration; for the fact is that pride will continue to make him fearful of the reproving potential of truth in its unqualified state.[71] To live in freedom from this agenda, and the strange and desperate constructions of mind that it drives men to (in Augustine's case, the Manichean cosmogony), was the choice that Augustine had continually to make at this time: 'I strove towards You, but I was driven back from You, so that I might taste of death, for You resist the proud. What more proud, than for me to assert in my strange madness that I am by nature what You are?':[72]

> What did it profit me that I, who was then a most wicked servant of lusts, should read and understand all the books on the liberal arts, as they are called, whatever of such books I could get to read? I found joy in those books, but I did not know the source of whatever was good and certain within them. I had my back to the light and my face turned towards the things upon which the light fell: hence my face, by which I looked upon the things that were lighted up, was not itself in the light...

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[70] See *Confess.*, VII, 10, 16: 'Whomsoever knows truth knows You; and whomsoever knows You knows eternity. Charity knows You. O eternal truth, and true charity and dear eternity! You are my God; and I sigh for You day and night.' As will become more apparent during the course of this dissertation, this association of God, Truth, Eternity and Charity is effectively the key to Augustine's mature intellectual outlook. See, for instance, *Confess.*, XIII, 38, 53.

[71] See below, pp. 252-255.

[72] *Confess.*, IV, 15, 26.

You know this, O Lord my God, for quickness in understanding and keenness at analysis are Your gift. But of that gift I made no sacrifice to You.[73]

Clearly such an illumination theory of truth clearly calls for a more dynamic conception of confession than the formal acknowledgement of sins. Consequently, Augustine always writes as though confession refers to an actual conversation carried on with God. To him, it is symbolic of the fact that truth is a consequence of man's constant face to face communion with God, and for this reason it occupies a place of central importance in his understanding of discipleship.[74] In combination with Grace, it is the chief device holding the Pilgrim City to its metaphysical location; and from the evidence of the *Confessiones* it is clear that Augustine believed its absence from his life at this time was one of the chief reasons why he had become an exemplary citizen of the Earthly City.

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[73] *Confess.*, IV, 16, 30. Cf. *Serm.*, CCCI, 4, 3; *In Io. ev. tr.*, XXII, 9.

[74] The motif which Augustine characteristically uses to describe this process of illumination is that of *forma* 'form or formation'. An excellent example is his careful explanation of the epistemological aspect to conversion at *De Gen. ad litt.*, I, 4, 9: 'God in His eternity says all through His Word, not by the sound of a voice, nor by a thinking process that measures out its speech, but by the light of Divine Wisdom, coeternal with Himself and born of Himself. Now an imperfect being which, in contrast to the Supreme Being and First Cause, tends to nothingness because of its formless state, does not imitate the exemplar in the Word, Who is inseparably united to the Father. But it does imitate the exemplar in the Word, Who exists forever in immutable union with the Father, when in view of its own appropriate conversion to the true and eternal Being, namely, the Creator of its own substance, it also receives its proper form and becomes a perfect creature.' As was pointed out in n. 1, p. 1, above, one of Augustine's great contributions to the development of the Western mind was to restate large parts of Christian teaching in technical language borrowed from the philosophers, in particular, the Neo-Platonists. Here is a prime example of that. As John Hammond Taylor, S.J., points out in the notes to his translation of book I of *De Gen. ad litt.*, 'This passage also echoes the ideas and language of Plotinus. In *Enn.* 2.9.2, the Nous is said to imitate the Father; in *Enn.* 1.6.6, the soul in becoming a noble and beautiful thing is made like to God; in *Enn.* 5.3.7, the soul in turning to the Nous is likened to the source of its being.' (John Hammond Taylor, S.J., (tr.), *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Vol. I (New York, Newman Press, 1982), n. 17, p. 225). For a discussion of this process in relation to Augustine's cosmology, and in particular, his understanding of the term *ordo*, see MacQueen, 'The Origins and Dynamics of Society and the State', pp. 75-78.

Chapter Ten, *The Heavenly City*, opens with Augustine's conversion in the garden of his friend's villa at Milan. Finally, in the presence of his great friend Alypius, he commits himself to will to ignore the promptings of pride and persist in speaking the reality of his heart to God in the actual present.[75]

It is natural that Augustine's conversion has attracted a great deal of attention from scholars over the years. Generally, they have tended to regard it in terms of an event of immediate and isolated significance, constructing debates around what it was that Augustine was actually converted to: orthodox Catholicism or some Neo-Platonic compromise?[76] However, this dissertation maintains that in the light of Augustine's subsequent theology, that is, his understanding of discipleship, this is not the correct approach to take. All the passion of Augustine's conversion in the garden at Milan – the tears he shed, the hair he tore – was everything to do with the old man that he was committing himself to giving up, not some new set of beliefs that he was professing to adopt. Tellingly, there is absolutely nothing in his account of it to suggest that it was a particularly happy or joyous occasion for him. To the contrary, he describes genuine terror and uncertainty as he hauled himself round to face a future without the securities, hopes, and habits of old. Conversion of this sort is the promise to persevere in becoming a New Creation: to learn to do without the compromises that characterize living in the Earthly City. It is the promise, in other words, to do what at the time must seem utterly impossible: nothing less than to give up the private morality of one's previous existence: that is, to abandon the mode of life that one pioneered against the unique and unasked for

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[75] See pp. 14-15 above.
[76] Joanne McWilliam's article, 'Cassiciacum Dialogues', in *ATA*, pp. 135-143, is a cautious assessment of the debate.

circumstances of one's birth. As such, the mark of this sort of conversion is the way that it completely undoes a man; the way that it leads him to face what his fallen heart holds most dear, and the cruelty with which it asks him to give it up. And the point as Augustine is so often at pains to make, is that it cannot just be given up once in a symbolic act; it has to be continuously given up in the actual present of a man's life, in what can fairly be regarded as repeated acts of death and resurrection.[77] These features make conversion an intensely political act. Not a naturalization ceremony, however, where the intention is to publicly signify oneself once and for ever, by a new set of beliefs, but a complete and continuing reorientation of heart.[78]

Such considerations as these allow a fresh perspective on the greatest and most troubling mystery of Augustine's doctrine of the Two Cities: namely, the question what, '...kind of life the citizens of the City of God must lead during this pilgrimage [?]'[79] Due to the demands placed upon him as a Catholic Bishop in Roman North Africa, Augustine was only able to address this question through the forced forms of his polemical and

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[77] See *De Trin.*, XIV, 5, 22-23; *Serm.*, IX, 13; *Serm.*, IV, 9; *Serm.*, CCCXLIV, 4.

[78] They also suggest a reason for the presence and purpose of the last three books of Augustine's *Confessiones*. As James J. O'Donnell noted in the Introduction to his recent critical edition of the *Confessiones*, 'When on the first page we hear that the heart is restless until there is repose in God, the reasonable expectation is that the text will move from restlessness to rest, from anxiety to tranquility... But the conversion story leaves the Augustine of this text far more uneasy than we might have expected. The proper culmination for an optimistic *Confessiones* would be mystic vision as fruit of conversion. But instead the last half of Bk. 10 and the whole of Bks. 11 to 13 – not incidentally the parts of the work that have most baffled modern attempts to reduce the text to a coherent pattern – defy the expected movement from turmoil to serenity and show an Augustine still anxious over matters large and small.' (James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: Confessions*, Vol. 1 (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1992), p. xvii). A commitment to giving up the private morality of one's previous existence cannot issue in serenity; herein lies the key to understanding the unexpected arrangement of the *Confessiones* as autobiography. This matter is taken up again in Chapter Ten, across pp. 250-257.

[79] *De civ. Dei*, XIV, 9.

apologetic works;[80] and this, as Dyson has pointed out in the Introduction to his translation of *De civitate Dei*, has made it all too easy for his characteristic doctrines to be dismissed as products of their time:

> Because of the original sin, then, each one of us comes into the world worthy of damnation: subject to the 'necessity of death'. This, to Augustine's mind, is the dominant fact of our individual and social existence. He does not really explain to us why or how the original sin has such consequences for all mankind, rather than merely for those who committed it; and he does not discuss the obvious difficulties which his view encounters. God's dispensation is hidden from us, but we are not entitled to question its fairness. It is, he considers, a matter of faith that the subsequent condition – moral, social and political – of mankind has been determined by the sin of our first parents.[81]

And yet this conviction was not merely a 'matter of faith' for Augustine: his *Confessiones* show that he was convicted of it in every act of his life, however trivial. As W. J. Sparrow Simpson pointed out, it was precisely for its, '...inability to correspond with the facts of human experience...'[82] that Augustine was not satisfied by Neo-Platonism. Consequently if scholars are apt to be fascinated by the combinations of Reason and Faith in his thought, then it is only because they are not taking the events of his life seriously enough; or at any rate, as seriously as he seems to have wanted men to take them:

> Such is the benefit of my confessions, not of what I have been, but of what I am,
>
> that I may confess this not only before You in secret exultation with trembling and

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[80] That is, in dogmatic statements such as at *De civ. Dei*, XIV, 9: '...they must live according to the spirit and not according to the flesh; that is, according to God, and not according to man.'
[81] R. W. Dyson, in the Introduction to his translation of the Cambridge edition of *The City of God against the Pagans* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. xvii.
[82] W. J. Sparrow Simpson, *St. Augustine's Conversion* (London, SPCK, 1930), p. 91.

in secret sorrow with hope, but also in the ears of believing sons of men, partakers of my joy and sharers in my mortality, my fellow citizens and pilgrims with me, those who go before me and those who follow me, and those who are companions on my journey... Yet this Your Word would be but little to me, if He had given His precepts in speech alone and had not gone on before me by deeds. I do this service by deeds as well as by words: I do this 'under Your wings,' with too grave a peril unless 'under Your wings' my soul had been subdued to You and my infirmity made known to You... In this manner, then, let me be heard.[83]

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[83] *Confess.*, X, 4, 6.

On the Reception and Interpretation of Augustine's Political Ideas in History

Cur praecipit vobis Deus [?]...

Genesis 3: 1

Chapter 1

AUGUSTINE'S INFLUENCE ON THE POLITICAL TRADITION OF THE WEST

It is generally accepted that the history of political thought in the West begins with the start of serious philosophical thinking in Greece in the sixth-century B.C.; and that from there it runs roughly parallel with the history of philosophy, initially existing only as the practical aspect of moral philosophy but later emerging as a subject in its own right in accordance with the general secularization of European thought in the sixteenth-century.[1] During this time it is shaped by three significant events.

(a) Temporality, eternality, and the idea of a law of nature

The first of these events is the intellectual preoccupation with absolute truth conceived as a function of the reasonable and benign ordering of the universe – the intellectual preoccupation first associated with the Pre-Socratic philosophers and their curious determination to explain the universe on a principle of natural justice.[2] This scientific approach immediately supersedes the mythopoeic outlook of old and makes possible the conception of politics as a practical activity chiefly concerned with the correct rational

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[1] Niccoló Machiavelli's (1469-1527) *Il Principe* and Thomas Hobbes' (1588-1679) *Leviathan* are landmark attempts to begin political thinking from the consideration of facts and experience rather than revelation and received wisdom.

[2] See what F. M. Cornford has to say about this in his *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (London, Edward Arnold, 1912), pp. 1-7. Cf. Henri Frankfort et al, *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1961), pp. 250-254.

ordering of the community. Furthermore, by suggesting the pregnant association of 'correct rational ordering' with the moral language of terms such as δίκε 'the way of righteousness' and λόγος 'the justifying word', it also equips the mind to think of politics as a possible vehicle for human fullness of nature:[3] that is, the prototype for all subsequent thinking on ideal states, utopias and heavenly cities.[4]

The second event consists in the concerted efforts of Plato (427-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) to see in the form of the Greek city-state and its unique institutions the possibility of political perfection on the lines laid down above. Although the momentum of events about them is moving against the viability of the city-state as a discrete political unit (and towards the federated empire of Alexander), they persist in allowing its language and customs to frame their thoughts on such perennial political themes as 'justice', 'equality', 'obligation', 'law' and 'freedom'.[5] This romantic approach

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[3] For an excellent introductory discussion of classical Greek political language see Sinclair, *A History of Greek Political Thought*, pp. 10-33; and Barker, *The Politics of Aristotle*, pp. xi-xxvii.

[4] As John Bowle writes: '...far from theorizing *in vacuo*, that curse of much Western European and Eastern practice, the Greek thinkers tried to find out what the good life was, and to act upon it.' (John Bowle, *Western Political Thought: From the Origins to Rousseau* (London, Methuen, 1961), pp. 36-37).

[5] Very briefly, the presumptions and preoccupations of the Classical Greek political tradition as represented by Plato and Aristotle include the following:

- That through an application of abstract reason to the problems of living, man can reduce the 'good life' to a science called politics (accepted by both Plato and Aristotle);
- That the science of politics achieves its practical expression in law, the distillation by abstract reason of social truth from custom and myth (rejected by P. in the *Republic*, but accepted with qualifications in the *Statesman* and the *Laws*. Accepted by A.);
- That this makes politics an ethical enterprise, and ethics a political one (accepted by both P. and A.);
- That the symbol of this convergence is the State: the one true vehicle for human perfection (accepted by both P. and A.);
- That the state mobilizes the good life through its division of labour, which furnishes the various stations of life (accepted by both P. and A.);
- That these stations correspond to foundational differences in human nature (accepted by both P. and A.);
- That because of this, the state is ontologically prior to man: it is the whole within which his life, as part, makes sense (accepted by P.; exemplified in A.);

causes them to neglect the rôle of human nature in society and overstate the possibilities of politics.[6] Consequently the keynote of Classical moral and political philosophy is its justification, '...of the *polis* as a community ordered to a common and rational good.'[7] Only politics can fully form a man in accordance with his better nature and place him in alignment with the universal scheme of things.

The third event is Augustine's systematic dismantling of this enthusiasm as he receives it in the form of the pagan Roman empire. To the Greek political tradition which it inherits wholesale, Rome adds a characteristic note of hard-nosed pragmatism. For to the Roman mind the essence of politics must lie in what is practically possible: political thought must address real problems of rule and order. This difference of disposition shifts political thought away from the question of the good or ideal life and towards problems of efficiency and organization; and the chief expression of this becomes the Roman preoccupation with law.[8] Furthermore, the need to govern a growing empire of diverse peoples sees a corresponding emphasis in Roman political practice on the individual and his rights. For traditionally recognised by the Roman people as an institution of necessity, as one of the conditions of civilized life, the Roman State is never called upon to furnish the good life as in Greece. To the contrary, it comes to conceive its great gift to the world

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- That this makes a) Classical Greek political thought ideological in the extreme, the archetype of all political doctrines that conflate the best interests of the individual and the community; and b) the supreme expression of political idealism, the romantic belief that politics represents both means and end (exemplified in both P. and A.).

[6] As Barker points out, 'Politics is a matter for thought, and government is a concern of the wise. But wisdom is not the conclusion of the whole matter; nor can we afford to forget – what Socrates, and Plato after him, too, often tended to forget – those elements of will and of instinct which count for so much in political affairs.' (Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, p. 112).

[7] R. W. Dyson, *Natural Law and Political Realism in the History of Political Thought*, Vol. I (New York, Peter Lang, 2005), p. 101.

[8] As Cicero would seem to confirm in the opening declaration of his *De re publica* (I, 2, 2).

as the imposition and administration of the proper apparatus of life. This apparatus eventually finds its characteristic expression in the innermost convictions of the Roman lawyers about certain foundational principles of right, and of their embodiment in the outstanding examples of Roman political practice.[9] However this practical approach does not mark a break with the chief assumption of Classical political philosophy: the assumption that a kind of universal justice *will* vindicate the best efforts of men: the assumption, in other words, that the universe must submit to human categories of understanding, and that in this submission lies the key to human freedom and enlightenment. Correspondingly, the characteristic feature of Roman moral and political philosophy (even if it is very seldom stated explicitly by the authors in abstract terms), comes to be the conviction that ethical truth *is* practical wisdom revealed in time by the natural growth of the best (that is, Roman) institutions.[10] And this means that there is, as Sir A. J. Carlyle has noted, this striking similarity between the Roman approach to politics and that pioneered in England towards the end of the eighteenth-century and represented chiefly by the ideas of Edmund Burke: '...the conception of the constitution of a state as an organic growth in contradistinction to the conception of it as a mechanical product.'[11]

As such, to the theoretical universe constellated by the Greek words δίκε, λόγος, νόμος 'political right' and εύδαιμονία 'happiness', the Romans add *jus naturale*, *lex*

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[9] These convictions are expressed in the Roman lawyers' language of *ius* or *lex naturale* 'natural justice' or 'natural law'. For general discussions of their efforts at clarifying these ideas see A. P. d'Entrèves, *Natural Law: An Introduction to Legal Philosophy* (London, Hutchinson University Library, 1970), pp. 22-50; *HMPTW*, Vol. I, pp. 33-44 & 71-79.

[10] A good example is Cicero's approving use of Cato's dictum at *De Republica*, ii, 1, 2.

[11] *HMPTW*, Vol. I, p. 14.

naturale and *re publica* 'commonwealth'. Of the last of these terms, *re publica*, there is something more to say; this is by focusing attention on the strategy of Augustine's attack on the Roman moral and political tradition.

(b) Human nature, reason, and political expectations

The main theme of the narrative to this point has been the commitment of the Western political tradition to a recognisably scientific understanding of justice. From the Pre-Socratics onwards, political right becomes permanently associated with a quality that might fairly be called 'cosmic alignment'. The best and most outstanding political arrangements are those that are demonstrably 'natural'; where to the Greeks demonstration might consist in abstract theory and to the Romans, successful practice. And of course it goes without saying that this has continued to be the trajectory of the Western political tradition up to the present day; though now the criteria of truth are rather more exacting, as even the most cursory examination of the recent landmark works on political justice will show.[12] It is against this particular understanding of political right and its utopian tendencies, that Augustine directs his attack. What is it about the traditional Western approach to political justice that is so inimical to his understanding of the human condition?

The straightforward answer emerges from a consideration of what is effectively the suppressed premiss to the Western approach to political justice: the belief that men

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12 The most famous of these is, of course, John Rawls', *A Theory of Justice* (London, Oxford University Press, 1973); but see also Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1974); Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York, Basic Books, 1983); and for something of a general overview, see the relevant chapters in Brian Barry, *Political Argument* (New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990).

can achieve and maintain perfection in their social arrangements – a perfection that must by its very nature stand for the consummation and vindication of the universe and its processes. For in the first three books of Genesis, books that Augustine is apt to believe furnish a complete and accurate diagnosis of the human condition, God plainly teaches that men are born fallen, and, as such, can bring nothing truly good or just into being by the use of their wills. Indeed he thinks that even to qualify human endeavour by reference to goodness or justice or as it has been rather clumsily termed above, 'cosmic alignment', is to ignore the metaphysical restrictions of life under temporal conditions. For if it is the case that God conceives His plan for the universe in the eternity of His Mind, then it is logically impossible for its goodness and justice to translate into any kind of morality. It is logically impossible because moralities are by their nature constraining devices, designed to bring future actions under the jurisdiction of past priorities. As such, they can only exist in situations where the future is the subject of active speculation and the past the only possible point of reference. Moralities, in other words, were no part of Adam and Eve's experience in Paradise. For there, they had only to look to God's Face in the actual present, '...and, without any syllables of time, they read upon it what Your eternal Will decrees. They read Your Will; they choose it; and they love it. They read forever, and what they read never passes away. For, by choosing and loving, they read the actual immutability of Your Counsel.'[13]

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[13] *Confess.* XIII, 15, 18. This is, of course, Augustine's description of the *supercaelestes* 'supercelestials', or 'angels'; but there is ample evidence to suggest that it was a description that he would also have applied to Adam and Eve's epistemological condition in Paradise. For instance, at *De civitate Dei*, XI, 12, he states his belief that, '...the angels are not the only parts of the rational and intellectual creation whom we think it proper to call blessed. For who will venture to deny that the first human beings in Paradise were blessed before they sinned...' Generally speaking, Augustine defined the *rationalem vel intellectualem creaturam* as a class by their capacity to be illuminated, and thus formed, by the Light of God's Countenance. See his description of this process at *De Gen. ad litt.*, I, 1, 17: 'For when the eternal and unchangeable Wisdom, Who is not created but begotten, enters into spiritual and rational creatures, as He is wont to come into

As was suggested in the Introduction, this outlook prevents Augustine from imagining that ethical terms such as 'goodness' and 'justice' intimate the possibility of an intellectual meeting place with God.[14] The truths of reason and revelation are categorically different because men live in temporality and God lives in eternity: '...for those three kinds of time which we call past, present and future, though they affect our knowledge, do not change that of Him "with Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning".'[15] Augustine's point is made by saying that reason is just as much fallen as the rest of man. Of course it is in man's best interests to believe that it is not; that it exists as a kind of spark of the Divine substance; but Augustine seems genuinely to think that fallen human reason offers no way to understanding God and His Wisdom.[16]

This amounts to a very different approach to politics than that pioneered in the Western tradition. The expectations customarily associated with political thinking are absent from Augustine's analysis of man, society and the state, for unlike other canonical political thinkers in the West, he is under no obligation to redeem politics.[17] Expressed in

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Holy souls, so that with His Light they may shine, then in the reason which has been illuminated there is a new state introduced...' Cf. *Serm.*, IV, 4.

[14] See above, pp. 21-26.

[15] *De civ. Dei*, XI, 21.

[16] See *Serm.*, LII, 16: 'If you have understood him, he is not God.'

[17] This immediately places him at odds with the medieval political tradition which he is said to have initiated: for insofar as that tradition is represented by the 'two swords' language of Pope Gelasius I (see his letter to the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius I, in *CS*, pp. 10-11), that is, by the conviction that Church and State can play a coordinated rôle in achieving the rational good of mankind, then he can be no part of it. He can be no part of it because to his mind, it is precisely the desire to achieve the rational good of mankind that taints all pagan philosophy – that makes its exponents 'vain in the imagination of their hearts'. Correspondingly, whenever Augustine recommends that secular rule should, in Dyson's formulation, 'be conducted according to universal spiritual imperatives', (Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 142) he is not expressing a conviction that could be justified in theory. He rather has in mind the Christian ruler standing as an individual before God, prompted by God's Will in the actual present and unencumbered by any ideological considerations.

its most general configuration, the motif of the Two Cities has been an element in the political thought of the West since its inception. To justify the good life by referring it to some Weberian 'ideal type' – some heavenly city – was the genius of the classical Greeks. Since them, the West has been more or less continually committed to justifying its most cherished convictions about justice, freedom and rights on a principle of cosmic alignment.[18] In today's intellectual climate, this commitment has issued in a powerful irony. As Dyson puts it, '...the ambiguities and dangers of the "postmodern" world have both intensified the desire to believe in a universal morality and undermined the persuasive power of the "grand narratives" about reason and human nature upon which such belief depends.'[19] This disquieting clash between the moral and intellectual consciences[20] of man is addressed directly by Augustine and made the centerpiece of his political vision. In his willingness to take the Genesis narrative seriously, that is, in his willingness to see in it a possible diagnosis of the most troubling aspects of his life (chief

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[18] This was recognised by G. E. Moore in his work *Principia Ethica*. There, he attempted to show that human thinking about predicates such as 'goodness' and 'justice' is absolutely confounded by a strange determination to view them as properties rather than labels. This became the foundation for what Moore called the 'naturalistic fallacy': 'It may be true that all things which are good are *also* something else, just as it is true that all things which are yellow produce a certain kind of vibration in the light. And it is a fact, that Ethics aims at discovering what are those other properties belonging to all things which are good. But far too many philosophers have thought that when they name these other properties they were actually defining good; that these properties, in fact, were simply not "other," but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness.' (G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 10). Cf. what Augustine has to say at *Confess.*, IV, 11, 17: 'Why, then, are you perverted, and still following after your own flesh? Let it follow you who have been converted. Whatever you perceive by means of the flesh exists but in part; you do not know the whole of which these things are parts, but yet they give you delight. But if fleshly sense had been capable of comprehending the whole, and had not, for your punishment, been restricted to but a part of the universe, you would wish that whatever exists at present would pass away, so that all things might bring you the greater pleasure. For by the same fleshly sense you hear what we speak, and you do not want the syllables to stand steady, you want them to fly away, so that others may succeed to them and you may hear the whole statement. So it is always with all things out of which some one being is constituted, and the parts out of which it is fashioned do not exist all at once. All things together bring us more delight, if they can all be sensed at once, than do their single parts. But far better than such things is He Who has made all things, and He is our God, and He does not depart, for there is none to succeed Him.'

[19] Dyson, *Natural Law and Political Realism in the History of Political Thought*, Vol. II, p. 228.

[20] So far as the author is aware, this distinction between the moral and intellectual consciences is first made by Olaf Stapledon in his article, 'Mr. Bertrand Russell's Ethical Beliefs', *IJE*, Vol. 37 No. 4 (Jul., 1927), pp. 390-402.

amongst these being his propensity to do evil for evil's sake), Augustine liberates himself from the desire to seek a comforting correspondence between the earthly city and the Heavenly City. The result is an unexpected independence of perspective and a true objectivity that raises serious questions about his position in the history of political thought in the West.

(c) Cicero, Augustine, and the assumptions of classical political philosophy

It is this outlook that informs Augustine's unequivocal definition of political justice at book XIX, 21 of his *De civitate Dei*, the definition that he produces in response to Cicero's qualification of the Roman *re publica*. Against Cicero's contention that a *re publica* is *rem populi* 'the property of the people',[21] where the people are *coetum multitudinis iuris consensu et utilitatis communione sociatum* 'a multitude united in fellowship by common agreement as to what is right and by a community of interest',[22] Augustine proposes the following:

> In the course of the discussion, [Cicero] explains what he means by 'common agreement as to what is right', showing that a commonwealth cannot be maintained without justice. Where, therefore, there is no true justice there can be no right, For that which is done according to what is right is invariably a just act, whereas nothing that is done unjustly can be done according to right. But the unjust institutions of men are neither to be called right nor supposed to be such... Where there is no true justice, then, there can be no association of men 'united in fellowship by common agreement as to what is right', and therefore no people according to the definition of Scipio or Cicero... If, therefore, a commonwealth is

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[21] Cicero, *Re publica*, I, 25, 39.
[22] *Ibid*; Cf. *Ep.*, CXXXVIII, 2, 10.

'the property of a people', and there is no 'people' where there is no 'common agreement as to what is right', and if there is no right where there is no justice, then it follows beyond doubt that where there is no justice there is no commonwealth. Moreover, justice is that virtue which gives to each his due. What kind of justice is it, then, that takes a man away from the true God and subjects him to impure demons?[23]

By claiming that the pagan Roman commonwealth cannot be the natural and perfect embodiment of justice because it manifestly does not grant to the One True God the praise that is due Him by rights, Augustine proclaims his intention to break with the Western political tradition. It is not that he is suggesting that 'justice' and words like it should be struck from the political vocabulary, but rather that they should refer to the reality of life in a fallen world. This is the logic that leads him to make his infamous suggestion that, '...justice removed, then, what are kingdoms but great robber bands?'[24] If true justice on earth is impossible because the truths of reason are categorically different to the truths of revelation,[25] then politics should not be considered a privileged activity – the vehicle for human fullness of nature, or any such thing. The virtues which politics produces and perpetuates are real and valuable in the sense that they furnish the conditions of life in a world turned from God;[26] but by the same token, they cannot

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[23] *De civ. Dei*, XIX, 21.
[24] *Ibid.*, IV, 4. To amplify his point, Augustine mentions with approval the story of Alexander and the pirate, which Dyson thinks would probably have been known to him in the version given at book III of Cicero's *Re publica*. When asked by Alexander what he meant by infesting the seas, the pirate apparently answered: 'the same thing as you mean by infesting the world; but because you do it with a great fleet, you are called an emperor, and because I do it with a small ship, I am called a pirate!'
[25] See *ibid.*, XI, 21: '...He views things in quite another fashion than we do, and in a way far and greatly different from our manner of thought. For His thought does not change as it passes from one thing to another, but beholds all things with absolute immutability.'
[26] See what he has to say about this at *ibid.*, XV, 4.

intimate the first principles of God's Will. They cannot be both the conditions of life in a fallen world and the source of its renovation and renewal. For as Augustine points out,

> ...we do not see our good, and hence we must seek it by believing... The philosophers, however, have supposed that the Final Good and Evil are to be found in this life... With wondrous vanity, these philosophers have wished to be happy here and now, and to achieve blessedness by their own efforts. The Truth has mocked such philosophers in the words of the prophet: 'The Lord knoweth the thoughts of men' – or, as the apostle Paul gives the passage, 'The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise' – 'that they are vain' [Ps. 94, 11; cf. 1 Cor. 3, 20].[27]

(d) Augustine's 'politics of indifference' in the history of political thought in the West

In terms of the subsequent trajectory of political thought in the West, this 'politics of indifference' is not Augustine's legacy. He lived through the sack of Rome in 410 and died just as the barbarians were starting to make good their hold on the Roman empire. Political history from this point onwards would be dominated by the growing ascendancy of the Catholic Church relative to the newly developing barbarian kingdoms and in time, the emergence of the new geopolitical concept of Latin Christendom: two coordinate powers, Church and State, triumphantly ruling a territory conceived in terms of the old Roman empire. Nothing could be further removed from the stark image of the Pilgrim City, a sojourner in a hostile world, '...ambushed and beset by fugitives and deserters, under their leader, the lion and the dragon.'[28] Yet throughout the Papacy's rise as a viable political enterprise, during the political-theology of the Reformation and after that, for the time in which political theory developed as a distinct, secular discipline, Augustine

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[27] *De civ. Dei*, XIX, 4.
[28] *Confess.*, VII, 21, 27.

continued to exert a significant influence; to inspire thinkers with his language and ideas; and to set the terms of debate in many areas of political discourse. How is this discrepancy between his ideas and their misuse to be explained?

A useful start would be to adapt those words of Professor Harnack's quoted earlier in the Introduction: 'that the history of Church doctrine in the West is a much disguised struggle against Augustinianism.'[29] The inspiration for these words was evidently Harnack's consideration of the fact that Augustine took seriously the fallenness of this world; that he remained convinced that although it is absolutely subject to God's Sovereign Will, and thus pursues an end that men are obliged to call good and just, the logic of this state of affairs will very seldom be reflected in its arrangements (or at least in those arrangements subject to fallen human volition).[30] Consequently, the Church has often been tempted to step into this breach and establish doctrinal grounds for a more positive understanding of God's plan for the world; and naturally, these grounds have involved it in thinking of itself and Christian society as something substantially more than Augustine's Pilgrim City.

By the same token, might not the history of political thought in the West after Augustine be interpreted as, 'a [not so] much disguised struggle against Augustinianism'? For after all, it was always Augustine's intention that his bleak diagnosis of the human

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[29] See n. 6, p. 6 above.

[30] The last point in parentheses refers to Augustine's 'privation theory of evil': his understanding that all created things being good as a condition of their existence, evil can have no existence in itself, but is the consequence of volition apart from God. See *De civ. Dei*, XI, 17: 'For there is no doubt that wickedness can be a blemish or flaw only in a nature that was not previously flawed.' Cf. *Confess.*, II, 5, 10; *De civ. Dei*, XV, 22; *De Gen. ad litt.*, VIII, 14, 31.

condition should be the antidote to what he considered the moral optimism of the fallen imagination, and nowhere is this more clear than in his damning indictment of Rome's claim to be the leaven of civilization. His contention that individual and social perfection is only possible in a world where all are unceasingly illuminated by the Will of God places him outside the mainstream of developments in the intellectual history of the West. As a kind of political utopia, his City of God is unique for being a paradise where all share equally in the knowledge that makes true peace and justice possible.[31] Unlike in Plato's Republic, it is not just the Philosopher Kings who can apprehend truth and act on it; all citizens of the City of God, whether they are pilgrims below or saints above, behold God's Face, hear His Voice and act on His Will. As a political proposition this goes squarely against the habits of the Western mind. Either it is the case that one man should rule on the basis of his claim to privileged knowledge; or it is the case that the possibility of such privileged knowledge should be discounted altogether, and a system of government established on the principle that all being equally ignorant of absolute truth, all should have an equal input into the decision making processes of their community. The former state of affairs has traditionally gone by the name of 'monarchy' or 'dictatorship'; the latter by the name of 'democracy'. Together they encompass the unique predicament of the Western political tradition: that short of taking fallen human nature and its effects seriously, one is impelled towards romantic expectations about politics.

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[31] See his description of this epistemological state at *De civ. Dei*, XV, 3.

In conclusion, then, the extent of Augustine's influence over the development of political thought in the West is to be measured not in terms of how much he contributed in a positive sense, but rather in terms of how his uncompromising vision of the human condition gave the West its first clear picture of the reality that it must at all costs reject: 'Let them no longer suppose that the Final and Supreme Good is something in which they may rejoice while in this mortal condition. For, in this condition, those very virtues than which nothing better or more advantageous is found in man clearly attest to his misery precisely by the great assistance that they give him in the midst of perils, hardships and sorrows.'[32]

As will be demonstrated presently, the so-called political Augustinianism of the medieval period was the most cynical attempt to reject this vision insofar as it greedily prostituted the carefully wrought distinctions of Augustine's leading political ideas (ideas such as the Two Cities, The Spiritual and Temporal Spheres, The Christian Ruler, Religious Persecution, and so on) in the name of temporal power. In contrast the political theology of the Reformation comes off rather better. Generally speaking, the new context of the smaller, centralised European kingdoms meant that less was at stake, and that consequently, the political schemes of men such as Luther and Calvin were able to miss the point far more subtly. However, the rise of political theory as a discipline in its own right coupled with the rapid development of Western science and technology sparked new interest in the possibilities of politics. In a period which the historian Carl. L. Becker chose to characterise by the phrase 'the heavenly city of the eighteenth-century

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[32] *De civ. Dei*, XIX, 4.

philosophers',[33] the Augustinian vision of the human condition would come under renewed attack. This, after all, was the time when men like Emmanuel Kant were waking from their 'dogmatic slumbers'[34] to proclaim that,

> *Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity* is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is *self-incurred* if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of the Enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own understanding![35]

Carl L. Becker explains the general mood with reference to the dialogue of the character Cleanthes in David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*:

> We note at once that the logical process has been reversed. Cleanthes does not conclude that nature *must* be rational because God *is* eternal reason; he concludes that God *must* be an engineer because nature *is* a machine. From this reversal of the logical process it follows that natural law is identified with the actual processes of nature. What ravishes Cleanthes into admiration is not the exceeding beauty of a logical concept of the world, but the exceeding intricacy and delicate adjustment of the world itself.[36]

It was somewhat inevitable, then, that this new scientific optimism about the human condition, about nature and its laws, and the capacity of human reason to understand them, would seek to position itself more aggressively than ever against an Augustinian

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[33] This is, in fact, the title of his fascinating book: Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (London, Yale University Press, 1969).
[34] Kant always claimed that it was David Hume whose thought first 'woke him'.
[35] Emmanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', essay dated 30th September 1784, quoted in David Williams (ed.), *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 2.
[36] Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p. 56.

vision proclaiming the ineffability of God, the poverty of reason and the inability of man to follow even his most basic calling as a social creature:

> As, therefore, we are saved by hope, it is in hope that we have been made happy; and as we do not yet possess a present salvation, but await salvation in the future, so we do not enjoy a present happiness, but look forward to happiness in the future, and 'with patience'. We are in the midst of evils, and we must endure them with patience until we come to those good things where everything will bestow ineffable delight upon us, and where there will no longer be anything which we must endure. Such is the salvation which, in the world to come, will also itself be our final happiness. Yet these philosophers will not believe in this happiness because they do not see it. Thus, they endeavour to contrive for themselves an entirely false happiness, by means of a virtue which is as false as it is proud.[37]

At Jeremiah 1: 13, Augustine would have read that, 'My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.'[38] This is surely what he meant by setting up against the optimism and pride of the Earthly City, the Grace and Confession of the Pilgrim City.

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[37] *De civ. Dei*, XIX, 4.
[38] This verse is taken from the New International Version.

Chapter 2

FROM CLASSICAL TO MEDIEVAL POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

What political and religious preoccupations influenced the transmission and reception of Augustine's political ideas during the medieval period? Without any serious risk of oversimplification it is possible to represent them at the outset as three interrelated themes:

1. The persistence of the concept of *imperium* (empire) as the major focus of political hope and ambition;
2. The persistence of the concept of the *res publica Christiana* (Christian Commonwealth) as the major focus of religious hope and ambition;
3. The large question of *auctoritas* (authority) thrown up by the overlapping of these two jurisdictions.

Taken together they represent a cast of mind, an unmistakably medieval cast of mind. This last fact becomes apparent once the suppressed premiss to all three themes is noted, namely, the belief that, '...secular rule can and should be conducted according to universal spiritual imperatives'.[1] In many ways this simple but heartfelt conviction,

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[1] Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 142. In practice this implied that all serious thinking about socio-political matters should carry on within a framework established by the Catholic Church. 'It is here,' as Gordon Leff explains, 'that the thought of the middle ages must be sharply distinguished both from the classical thought of Greece and Rome and from modern post-Renaissance thought. This framework was provided by the Christian faith; it was regulated by Church authority; and it was largely sustained by

rendered neatly here by Dyson for it was in practice a most untidy idea, proved to be the greatest political consequence of Christian monotheism. And it was a revolutionary consequence. The medieval, according to John B. Morrall, was,

> ...the broad period within which the classical world's approach to the problem of political life was reversed, 'stood on its head', as Marx would have put it. Instead of religion, as hitherto, forming the buttress for a communal political tradition, it was now elevated essentially above the political sphere and from this position of transcendence it bestowed on political authority whatever limited justification the latter possessed.[2]

(a) Rome, cosmopolitanism, and the idea of the natural equality of man

As might only be expected of such a momentous reverse, it was some time in the making. First the post-Aristotelian philosophies helped to establish freedom as an individual pursuit: that is to say, men were no longer obliged to look upon the state or the community as the one true vehicle for their fullness of nature. Then Rome helped to reclaim this vision for politics: where the city-states of Greece had proved too small for the new cosmopolitanism in religion and philosophy, Rome with her Empire was big enough to provide it with a meaningful political expression. To her must go the credit for

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ecclesiastics.' (Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought: St. Augustine to Ockham* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1965), p. 11.

[2] John B. Morrall, *Political Thought in Medieval Times* (London, Hutchinson University Library, 1960), pp. 10-11. Perhaps the clearest effect of this revolution was in law. As Ernst Cassirer explains, '...it is impossible to put the Mosaic and the Platonic conception of the law on the same level. They are not only widely divergent but incompatible. The Mosaic law presupposes a *lawgiver*. Without this lawgiver who reveals the law and guarantees its truth, its validity, its authority, the law becomes meaningless. This idea is far removed from what we find in Greek philosophy. The ethical systems developed by the Greek thinkers, Socrates and Democritus, Plato and Aristotle, Stoics and Epicureans, have a common feature. They are all expressions of one and the same *intellectualism* of Greek thought. It is by rational thought that we are to find the standards of moral conduct, and it is reason, and reason alone, that can give them their authority.' (Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, p. 81).

pioneering a new conception of politics as the science and art of government; in other words, for making it self-conscious. For before, it had simply been the consequence of a group religious practice: the original cities of Greece and Latium had been congregations of families, choosing to unite under some common worship and organizing themselves according to its rites and customs.[3] There was government of a fashion, there were even activities that a modern might recognise as political; but the point was that none of it was comprehended in abstraction from the overbearing religious context. There was, in other words, no political theory.[4]

By the time of the Roman Empire this state of affairs had been comprehensively upset by the development of the philosophical criterion of truth and the collection of new anthropological data.[5] Men became accustomed to seeking better authorities than tradition for their customs and beliefs, a habit which the discovery of new cultures did nothing to discourage.[6] In most cases, this effort to establish certainty took the normal course: increasingly, men began to look upon their particular experiences as intimations of a more general reality.[7] In a natural movement of the human mind, it became ever

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[3] See Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society* (Chicago, Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1877), pp. 222-223.
[4] The standard modern work on the arrival of Rome into the world of Greek Hellenism is Erich S. Gruen, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome* (London, University of California Press, 1984).
[5] Herodotus (born sometime between 490 and 480 B.C.) produced one of the most well known collections in the form of his *Histories*. On Herodotus' regard for custom and convention, and the skepticism that underlay it, see John Burnet, *Greek Philosophy* (London, Macmillan, 1943), p. 107.
[6] See Heinrich A. Rommen (tr. Thomas R. Hanley, O.S.B.), *The Natural Law: A Study in Legal and Social History and Philosophy* (London, B. Herder Book Co., 1955), pp. 3-5.
[7] Herbert Spencer gives a very good definition of this view of intelligence: 'From the lowest to the highest creatures,' he writes, 'intelligence progresses by acts of discrimination; and it continues so to progress among men, from the ignorant to the most cultured. To class rightly – to put in the same group things which are of essentially the same natures, and in other groups things of natures essentially different – is the fundamental condition to right guidance of actions.' (Herbert Spencer, 'The New Toryism', in *The Man Versus the State, With Six Essays on Government, Society, and Freedom* (Indianapolis, IN, Liberty Fund Inc., 1982), p. 11). Cf. William James: 'The first thing the intellect does with any object is to class it along

more common to, '...place certain principles beyond discussion, by raising them to a different plane altogether.'[8] This intellectual fashion was the beginning of what has come to be called the Natural Law tradition in the West[9] but it would have to undergo a great many revisions before it was taken up by the lawyers of the Roman Empire and turned into a coherent principle of political right.[10] However, once this work was done, Rome would be left with an accurate idiom in which to express the reality of her political achievements and ambitions. For her gift to the antique world had been its first truly universal system of rule; that is, a system of rule founded on efficiency and effectiveness rather than the narrow morality of a particular people. As Zeller continues:

> Stoic apathy, Epicurean self-contentment, and Sceptic imperturbability, were the doctrines which suited the political helplessness of the age. They were therefore the doctrines which met with the most general acceptance. Suited, too, was that sinking of national distinctions in the feeling of a common humanity, that severance of morals from politics which characterise the philosophy of the Alexandrian and Roman period. Together with national independence, the barriers between nations had been swept away. East and West, Greeks and barbarians, were united in large empires, placed in communication, and compared in most important respects. In declaring that all men are of one blood and equally privileged citizens of one empire, that morality rests on the relation of man to man independently of his

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with something else.' (William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London, Longmans Green & Co., 1913), p. 9).

[8] A. P. d'Entrèves, *Natural Law*, p. 16.

[9] A. P. d'Entrèves, *Natural Law*, is probably the most accessible short introduction to the subject, and much can be learnt from its sensible methodology. Dyson, *Natural Law and Political Realism in the History of Political Thought*, 2 Vols, is a comparative approach that again offers a great deal. Paul E. Sigmund, *Natural Law in Political Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., Winthrop Publishers, 1971) is a classic.

[10] The work accomplished by the Roman lawyers was significant. An excellent short summary of their achievements can be found at Gettell, *History of Political Thought*, pp. 69-72. A fuller treatment, incorporating a great deal of original material can be found at *HMPTW*, Vol. I, pp. 33-77. A fascinating collection of Roman legal instruments with commentary is E. G. Hardy, *Roman Laws and Charters* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1912).

nationality and his position in the state, philosophy was only explicitly stating a truth which had been already partly realised in actual fact, and which was certainly implied within.[11]

It was Dr. A. J. Carlyle who first suggested that if there was to be such a thing as a rupture in the history of medieval political theory in the West, then it is best conceived as coming somewhere between Aristotle and Cicero. For in the history of ideas, there is surely no more dramatic turn around than Cicero's insistence, against Aristotle and the whole tradition which he stands for, on the fundamental equality of man.[12] In Cicero's mind this sentiment becomes elevated and established as a kind of logical principle: it stands *a priori* behind all that he has to say about man, society and the state, and its recognition and recovery is, he thinks, Rome's outstanding gift to mankind: 'For one might say that whoever has been given reason by nature has also been given law: for reason is the same thing as right reason, and right reason consists in commanding and prohibiting. Wherever you see law, then, see justice also; and if you remember that reason has been given to all, then you will realise that justice has also been given to all.'[13]

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[11] Eduard Zeller (tr. Rev. Oswald J. Reichel), *The Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics* (London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1880), p. 17.

[12] *HMPTW*, Vol. I, p. 8.

[13] Cicero, *De Legibus*, I, 10. 28-12. 33. Writing in the seventh-century, Isidore of Seville mentions this delightful old Roman nursery rhyme: 'A king you will be if you hold steadfastly to what is right; a king you won't be if you don't.' Horace mentions an earlier version of it (Horace, *Epistulae*, I, I, 59): 'As it is customary to say to frolicsome boys, 'You might be a king some day if only you behave.' It seems clear that in both versions of the rhyme, a play is being made on some deep-seated conception of popular sovereignty. Might it not perhaps come from the same theoretical universe as Cicero's sentiments? A good sketch-outline of political life in Rome is provided by John R. Patterson in his *Political Life in the City of Rome* (London, Bristol Classical Press, 2000). The interested reader should supplement it with F. E. Adcock, *Roman Political Ideas and Practice* (Michigan, The University of Michigan Press, 1966); Donald Earl, *The Moral and Political Tradition of Rome* (London, Thames & Hudson, 1970); Léon Homo, *Roman Political Institutions: From City to State* (New York, Alfred Knopf, 1929); A. H. M. Jones, *Studies in Roman Government & Law* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1960). An excellent short narrative treatment of the subject is Alain Michel, *Histoire des doctrines politiques a Rome* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1971).

And over a century and a half later, notwithstanding the greed and corruption of the intervening years, it was still possible to find a Stoic Emperor like Marcus Aurelius engaged in the following reflection:

> If the thinking faculty is common to us all, so also is that reason in virtue of which we are rational beings. If this is common, so also is that reason which prescribes what we should, and should not, do. Grant this, and it follows that law is common; if so, we are all fellow-citizens and share alike in a certain form of government. It follows that the World is as a State or City. For in what other City will it be said that the whole human race shares in common? Hence, therefore, from this common City comes the very thinking faculty, as well as the reasoning faculty and the force of law: else whence should they come?[14]

It was largely upon sentiments such as these – intimations of a new undiscriminating ethic – that Rome would stake her claim to be the leaven of civilization. In the words of Dr. A. J. Carlyle:

> The Latin bought indeed, in his genius for law and administration, his own contribution to the cosmopolitan culture of the world, but that was all he bought. It was impossible for him to imagine himself to be the man possessed of reason and capable of virtue and deny these qualities to others. The Roman Empire continued and carried on the work of the Macedonian Empire in welding the countries of the Mediterranean basin into one homogenous whole. The homogeneity of the human race was in the Roman Empire no mere theory of the philosophers, but an actual fact of experience, a reality in social and political conditions. If the philosopher had

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[14] Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, *Meditationes*, IV, 4; tr. Hastings Crossley.

> learned to believe in the homogeneity of mankind under the Macedonian Empire, he was confirmed and strengthened in his belief by the experience of the Roman.[15]

Educated Romans genuinely felt that they had been gifted the chief responsibility for sustaining and promoting this new wide morality amongst men.[16] And reality only served to confirm them in this belief. For where once a man had been a citizen of his city, with all the charge of parochialism that that bought, he now found himself a citizen of the world. And the point, of course, was that the world had become Roman.[17] As Professor Flint puts it, 'Rome had made the world Roman and become herself cosmopolitan.'[18]

(b) Individualism, relativism, and the inadequacy of a municipal politics

But what would need to change for it to become Christian? That this is no obvious question is attested to by the fact that a scholar than Augustine devoted considerable time to answering it. During his gradual conversion to Christianity he had initially been impressed by how close certain of the Neo-Platonist philosophers had come to anticipating some of the fundamental truths of Christian doctrine;[19] and during the course of his work as a bishop he found himself continually pressed to establish the proper

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[15] *HMPTW*, Vol. I, pp. 10-11.

[16] She certainly conceived her destiny as a type of calling. Typical is Vergil's bold pronouncement in the *Aeneid* I, 275-282. Cf. *Eclogae*, I, 19-25. For more on Vergil's interpretation of the Roman imperial idea see the helpfully arranged passages from his writings in David Thompson (ed.), *The Idea of Rome: From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1971), pp. 57-67.

[17] See Lidia Storoni Mazzolani's assessment of the mood in her, *The Idea of the City in Roman Thought: From Walled City to Spiritual Commonwealth* (London, Hollis & Carter, 1970), pp. 173-182.

[18] Robert Flint, *History of the Philosophy of History* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), p. 56.

[19] See *Confess.*, VII, 9-21, for Augustine's account of how the books of the Neo-Platonists first affected him. Much has been written on the extent to which he was influenced by the Neo-Platonists, and which of their books he read. The relevant articles in *ATA* contain the most up to date wisdom on the matter. See especially the narrative treatments in Agostino Trapè, *Agostino: l'uomo, il pastore, il mistico* (Roma, Città Nuova Editrice, 2001), pp. 109-116; and Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 88-101.

relationship between reason and faith.[20] This was quite natural at a time when the Church was still working to establish herself in distinction from the intellectual and moral traditions of classical antiquity. Augustine's letters give a full indication of the trouble he had with the lingering pagan practices of his parishioners. In his *Confessiones*, he tells the story of how his mother, a devout Christian, used to take pottage, bread and wine to the memorial shrines of the Saints in imitation of pagan practice. In the end she was stopped by the authority of Bishop Ambrose, whom she adored.[21] Some eight centuries later, St. Thomas Aquinas would famously take up the same question, though his treatment of it would be from a mainly philosophical rather than pastoral standpoint. Like Augustine he would conclude that it is possible for unaided human reason to anticipate a great many of the more important Christian teachings;[22] where he would differ from him would be over the question of the epistemological distance between man and God and its implications for the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty. In his Confessiones, Augustine would produce a list of the Christian truths which he was able to discover by studying the Neo-Platonists alone. It is impressively full and suggests a great deal about the favourable intellectual climate that Christianity encountered in the Classical world:[23]

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[20] Very nearly one of Augustine's first public acts as Bishop of Hippo was to pronounce on the Faith and the Creed at the General Council of Africa, in December 393 A.D.. The address is preserved as his *De fide et symbolo.*

[21] *Confess.*, VI, 2, 2: 'As soon as she found that by order of that famous preacher and patron of devotion such things were not to be done, not even by those who would do them in a sober fashion, so that no opportunity would be offered for sots to get drunk, and because such tributes to the dead were too much like Gentile superstitions, she most willingly gave them up. Instead of a basket filled with the fruits of the earth, she learned to bring to the martyrs' memorial a breast filled with purer oblations. Thus would she give what she could to the poor, and thus would the communications of the Lord's body be celebrated in those places where, in imitation of his passion, the martyrs were immolated and received their crowns.' Cf. *Ep.*, 36, 14, 32; *Ep.*, 54, 2, 3.

[22] See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 3, 4, 7, 8.

[23] On this subject, see Brooke Foss Westcott, *Essays in the History of Religious Thought in the West* (London, Macmillan, 1891), pp. 1-194. Cf. Alexander Nairne, *Every Man's Story of the New Testament* (London, Mowbray & Co., 1930), pp. 9-14; and T. R. Glover, *The Influence of Christ in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1929), pp. 1-20. Vergil's Fourth Eclogue, with what seems to be

It was first Your Will to show me how You resist the proud and give grace to the humble, and how great is Your mercy in showing men the way of humility, for the reason that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among' men. Therefore, by means of a certain man puffed up with most unnatural pride, You procured for me certain books of the Platonists that had been translated out of Greek into Latin. In them I read, not indeed in these words but much the same thought, enforced by many varied arguments, that, 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made. What was made, in Him is life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.' I read that the soul of man, although it gives testimony of the light, is not itself the light, but the Word, God Himself, is 'the true light, which enlightens every man that comes into this world,' and that, 'He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.' Again, I read there that the Word, God, was born, not of the flesh, nor of blood, 'nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God.' I found out in those books, though it was said differently and in many ways, that the Son, 'being in the form of the Father, thought it not robbery to be equal with God,' for by nature He is the same with Him.[24]

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its striking allusion to the coming of Christ, has ever been the most tantalizing piece of evidence for the providential preparation of the human mind for Christianity. See the essay in E. V. Rieu (tr.), *Virgil: The Pastoral Poems* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1961), pp. 136-143. But naturally, this observation can cut both ways. Is Christianity the final explanation of intellectual tendencies begun as far back as men can remember? Or is it explained away by them? Bertrand Russell is probably the most famous exponent of the view that Christianity, and indeed all religion, can be accounted for by a variety of materialist arguments. A good place to start would be his *A History of Western Philosophy*, pp. 322-353. If supplemented with the anthology of his religious essays edited by Paul Edwards, *Why I Am Not a Christian, and other essays on related subjects* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1957), one could expect to obtain to a very clear understanding of his views on the subject.

[24] *Confess.*, VII, 9, 13-14. See also the extended discussion of this subject in book 10 of *De civ. Dei.*

However, what was so noticeably missing from this long list was, of course, the person of Christ. In Augustine's words, 'I did not read there that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."'[25] And he continues:

> But those books do not have it that He 'emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man,' and that 'he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God has also exalted Him' from the dead, 'and has given Him a name which is above all names: that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bend down of those that are in Heaven, on earth, and under the earth: and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus is in the Glory of God the Father.'[26]

The fact remains that, however one looks at it, Christianity arrived into a world peculiarly ready to receive it. Rome had established a moral and intellectual tradition strikingly sympathetic to its general outlook, while in scope and organization, the empire presented the perfect vehicle for its proselytizing mission. Yet for its first three-hundred or so years, Christianity stubbornly refused to exploit these facts; and even with the semi-official Christianization of the Empire upon the Emperor Constantine becoming a catechumen, in 323 A.D.,[27] she did not immediately change this modest policy. As for the

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[25] *Confess.*, VII, 9, 13-14.
[26] *Ibid.* Cf. *Confess.*, VII, 18-21.
[27] In keeping with a practice not at all uncommon among early Christians, Constantine was only baptized on his deathbed, in 337 A.D. The logic was that it allowed the least possible time for a sinful relapse to occur. At *Confess.*, I, 11, 17, Augustine recalls how he was the subject of a similar decision when a young boy and stricken with a life-threatening stomach affliction. To return to Constantine, it should be pointed out that the substance and quality of his Christianity is a subject of much debate amongst scholars. C. Raymond Beazley, in his *NMH*, p. 2, runs through the facts as follows: 'In large measure he recognizes Christianity as the most favoured state religion. Yet he abstains from open war against Pagan cults as a whole, professing indeed a wish to reform them. His court remains largely, his bureaucracy almost wholly, Pagan. But he forbids the State sacrifices of Paganism, and the occult and openly immoral parts of Pagan worship (witchcraft, divination, "evil magic", "lying oracles", and the religious orgies of certain Oriental rites and their imitators in the West). This involves the neglect and disfavour of Pagan beliefs and cults, as

reasons why, the distinguished historian of ideas, Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, provides a full and accurate answer:

> As to the government of the state, we cannot say that Christianity essentially altered that, precisely because it did not occupy itself with the state. In the ancient ages, religion and the state made but one; every people adored its own god, and every god governed his own people; the same code regulated the relations among men, and their duties towards the gods of the city. Religion then governed the state, and designated its chiefs by the voice of the lot, or by that of the auspices. The state, in its turn, interfered with the domains of the conscience, and punished every infraction of the rites and the worship of the city. Instead of this, Christ teaches that His kingdom is not of this world. He separates religion from government. Religion, being no longer of the earth, now interferes the least possible in terrestrial affairs. Christ adds, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' It is the first time that God and the state are so clearly distinguished... Now Christ breaks the alliance which paganism and the empire wished to renew. He proclaims that religion is no longer the state, and that to obey Caesar is no longer the same thing as to obey God.[28]

Christianity will not, like other creeds of the Graeco-Roman World, take the position of one among many.' These events were in some part anticipated by the *Edict of Milan*, signed in 313 A.D. by the Emperors Constantine and Licinius. It presented a stance of religious neutrality on the part of the Roman empire, and was in substance typical of the religious and intellectual climate of the times. Mention was made, for instance, of the *Summa Divinitas* 'Supreme Godhead', an indiscriminate reference to the type of Neo-Platonic deity then popular in educated circles. There is an English translation of this edict with a brief commentary, in *CS*, pp. 4-6. As a conclusion, Sheldon S. Wolin's words are appropriate: 'The nature of Constantine's conversion is a vexed issue which need not detain us, for the important point was that his policies retained much that was reminiscent of older modes of thought concerning the relationship between religion and the political order. The danger came not so much from the favoured position enjoyed by Christianity, but rather from its being converted into a chosen instrument for political regeneration, a "civil religion" shaped to the old classical model.' (Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, p. 120.

[28] Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Classic Study of the Religious and Civil Institutions of Ancient Greece and Rome* (New York, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1956), p. 393. It is worth drawing attention very to the last sentence of this quotation from de Coulanges: 'He proclaims that religion is no longer the state, and that to obey Caesar is no longer the same thing as to obey God.' One suspects that de Coulanges may have been thinking of Thomas' distinction between the philosophical and

It would not be putting it too strongly to suggest that the world had never before encountered such a radical set of political ideas as these. In particular, the implied divorce between religion and state caused much disquiet, for this had been a cherished association in the mind of the ancient. Then there was the equally provocative delimiting of the state's ethical portfolio: to advertise human fullness of nature by some route other than the laws of the civil authority was unprecedented. It cut deeply at the root of the ancient world's conception of freedom, a positive conception that completely conflated the interests of the individual with those of the state.[29] Yet once again Rome had done something to prepare the ground – as T. R. Glover explains, she ended up with a

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theological definition of sin when he wrote this. 'The theologian,' says Thomas, 'considers sin principally as an offence against God, whereas the philosopher considers it as being contrary to reason.' (*Summa Theologica*, I*a*, II*ae*, 71, 6, *ad* 5; tr. F. C. Copleston). Thomas is saying a great deal here about the fundamental change that Christianity wrought in the conceptualization of sin and immorality: men had suddenly to ask what sort of obligations the Christian God might put them under, and how these might differ from the ordinary obligations of right reason. But then he is also saying very little; for his distinction might equally be interpreted as implying that the theologian and philosopher are simply separated by their preference for a certain type of language. In other words, that the theologian's God and the philosopher's reason actually render the same fundamental idea.

[29] It was, of course, Isaiah Berlin who first described the freedom of the ancients as 'positive'. In his famous paper 'Two concepts of Liberty', given as the inaugural lecture for the Chichele Chair of Social and Political theory at the University of Oxford, on the 31st March 1958, he argued that the history of ideas has furnished two main conceptualizations of 'freedom' or 'liberty'. The first, 'positive liberty', is the more ancient. It is, Berlin explains, '...involved in the answer to the question "What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?"' The second, 'negative liberty', is more modern: for, '...it is involved in the answer to the question "What is the area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?"' In large part this paper was a vehicle for Berlin's strong views on the dangers of ethical monism in modern industrial societies. He had himself lived through the St. Petersburg Revolution of 1917, and as a Jew, was personally touched by the horrors of the Second World War. Suffice to say that for Berlin, 'positive liberty' was and continues to be the intellectual justification for tyranny, whilst 'negative liberty' stands against it as the supreme argument for the value of public and private spheres in the business of government. For as he concludes his famous discussion of the two concepts of liberty: 'Pluralism, with the measure of "negative liberty" that it entails, seems to me a truer and more human ideal than the goals of those who seek in the great, disciplined, authoritarian structures the ideal of "positive" self-mastery by classes, or peoples, or the whole of mankind. It is truer because it does, at least, recognize the fact that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and in perpetual rivalry with one another. To assume that all values can be graded on one scale, so that it is a mere matter of inspection to determine the highest, seems to me to falsify our knowledge that men are free agents, to represent moral decision as an operation which a slide-rule could, in principle, perform.' (Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', in *Four Essays on Liberty* (London, Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 171).

government that was simply too good, too efficient, too bureaucratic. Looking back it is impossible not to appreciate how modern it was; to the ancients, however, this made it seem impersonal and cynical.

> 'Rome gave them peace,' writes Glover, 'but could not restore their energy [sapped by the centuries of warfare and luxury that followed the break up of the Greek city-states and their ideal of the good life]; and she lost her own, sick of the self-seeking of her own demagogues and military adventurers. "Indifference to the state as if it were no concern of theirs" made men ready to accept the Imperial government; and, as the indifference grew, the civil service rose, and the ancient world declined into bondage and despair. "Do not hope for Plato's Republic", wrote Marcus Aurelius in his diary.'[30]

Already in the early days of the Empire it was possible to find social commentators like Polybius sounding the keynotes of despair. For by then, the ancient Roman religion had already begun its descent into cynicism and farce.[31] The plays of politics and power

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[30] Glover, *The Influence of Christ in the Ancient World*, p. 33. The quotation from Marcus Aurelius can be found at Book IX, 29 of his *Meditationes*: 'How puny are these little public men, wisely practical as they believe themselves to be. They are like children with running noses. What then is a man to do? Do what nature now requires. Start now, if this be granted to you; do not look around to see whether anyone will know about it. *Do not expect Plato's ideal republic*; be satisfied with the smallest step forward, and consider this no small achievement.'; tr. G. M. A. Grube.

[31] It is possible to speculate that by its form and character, the Roman religion was always destined to this fate. For like everything else they did, the Romans approached religion in a strictly business-like manner. The gods were there to provide extraordinary services to individuals, families and the State, and as such, they were transacted with according to strict customs and rites. Talking of the Roman propensity to ancestor-worship, J. B. Jevons comments that, 'The early Greeks and Romans, like the Chinese of the present day, were more interested in the way in which they themselves might be affected by the spirits of their dead than they were in the fortunes of the departed, or the nature of their abode.' (J. B. Jevons, *Comparative Religion* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1913), p. 65). This mercenary aspect became, over time, much the greater part of the Roman religion. The modern is struck by how little abstract thinking was involved; there is nothing to suggest a continuing form of worship or a comprehensive world view. There are, instead, a bewildering number of gods offering services in every conceivable department of life, from manuring the fields (*Sterculinus*) to stepping out in war (*Mars*). And as one might only expect of the Romans, there is an instrument of law to regulate the whole business: the *Indigitamenta*. This is in effect a long and continually updated list of the gods and goddesses, their titles and functions – and it is

were what really held the imagination of the Roman statesman; religion was simply a relic from the past – even the language of its rites and formulations was now a subject for the specialist. He tolerated it in much the same way that the modern tolerates religion in today's secular states: that is, he treated it like a superstition: useless in itself, but potentially of some use in managing the psychology of the masses.[32] To men as astute as Polybius, it was clear enough what was going on; and in time it would help them towards believing that, '...religion in general was nothing more than a deep political scheme devised by early rulers and moralists to awe their subjects into good behaviour when human devices for detecting and punishing their irregularities were not likely to succeed.'[33] As for the ordinary man, it was possible for him to get lost in a vast, impersonal state apparatus like Rome's. The freedom that the Greek might have taken for granted when ensconced in his city-state, in his 'charmed circle of law and custom', to use Burnett's phrase,[34] was increasingly the subject of nostalgia and longing. For most it

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difficult not to think of it in terms of today's *Yellow Pages*: a kind of supernatural version (see *DGRA*, p. 941a). Clearly, then, the Roman religion had much about it that would today qualify it as a type of superstition. Collectively the gods exercised an impersonal and indiscriminate power called *Numa*, presumably from the Latin root *nu*: literally, to nod one's head; but here in its figurative sense to will an action. And otherwise, they were very much bound by the ambitions and hopes of the Roman imagination. In respect of this last point, Vergil's fifth *Eclogue* is very revealing: 'The wolves contrive no ambush for the flock; the nets are innocent of guile towards the deer. Good Daphnis stands for peace. For very joy the shaggy mountains raise a clamour to the stars; the rocks burst into song, and the plantations speak. "He is a god" they say; "Menalcas, he is a god!" Daphnis, be gracious to your friends and bring them luck.' (Vergil, *Ecloga V*, 60-65; tr. E. V. Rieu). The relevant chapters in H. J. Rose, *Religion in Greece and Rome* (New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1959) make an excellent starting point for further investigation of this subject. For a comparative approach, see A. C. Bouquet, *Comparative Religion* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1954), pp. 77-86. Finally, there is a great deal of truth in the following observation from A. N. Whitehead: 'The cult of the Empire was the sort of religion which might be constructed to-day by the Law School of a University, laudably impressed by the notion that mere penal repression is not the way to avert a crime wave [!] (A. N. Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Cambridge, The Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 31).

[32] Augustine has something to say about this. At *De civ. Dei*, IV, 32, he accuses certain wicked Roman 'princes' of having, '...persuaded the people in the name of religion to accept as true those things which they knew to be false: they have done this in order to bind men more tightly, as it were, in civil society, so that they might likewise possess them as subjects.'

[33] H. J. Rose, *Religion in Greece and Rome*, p. 248.

[34] Burnet, 'Law and Nature in Greek Ethics', p. 332.

was all too clear that the destiny of the individual was coming apart from that of the state.[35] Men suffered simply because the political vision of Rome was so far in advance of its time. It would have to wait until the libertarianism of the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries before such a clear understanding of the public and private spheres would once again be at the heart of a government. As Raymond Gettell explains:

> In Roman thought the state did not absorb the individual, as in the theory of Plato, nor was the state considered non-essential, as in the teachings of the Epicureans. The Romans separated state and individual, each having definite rights and duties. The state was a necessary and natural framework for social existence; but the individual, rather than the state, was made the center of legal thought, and the protection of the rights of the individual was the main purpose for which the state existed. The state was thus viewed as a legal person, exercising its authority within definite limits; and the citizen was viewed as a legal person, having rights which were to be safeguarded against other persons and against illegal encroachment by the government itself. On the basis of this conception, the elaborate system of Roman private law was created.[36]

It is a testament to Rome's practical wisdom[37] that she was able to pioneer such a conception of positive law, and in many respects, it became her chief qualification to rule the world. For so long as law remained the expression and codification of a particular people's ethic, it could play no rôle in the promotion of cosmopolitanism. And cosmopolitanism needed law: it needed the stability of some lowest common

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35 See Jérôme Carcopino (ed. Henry T. Rowell & tr. E. O. Lorimer), *Daily Life in Ancient Rome: The People and the City at the Height of the Empire* (London, George Routledge & Sons, 1943), pp. 121-122).
36 Gettell, *History of Political Thought*, pp. 67-68.
37 S. S. Laurie produces a very perceptive sketch of the practical Roman character in his *Historical Survey of Pre-Christian Education* (London, Longmans, Green, & Co., 1907), pp. 315-316.

denominator if it was to take root and grow. In the end, this is exactly what Rome was able to provide. Culture and learning she left largely to the Greek; law, government and administration she made her own; and by her success she completely altered the intellectual equipment of the ancient. Government is not this or that constitution or state or religion; it is, to use one of Dr. Carlyle's phrases, the method of life.[38]

In conclusion it could be said that Rome helped to turn politics from a first into a second order activity. In her hands it became firmly established it as the science and art of government. That is, rule through *divinarum atque humanarum notitia* 'the science of divine and human things' and *ars boni et aequi* 'the art of what is good and equitable'.[39] Yet crucially, none of this took in the feelings of the ordinary man. In the midst of all this change, and without the comforts and pleasures and interests that make individualism such an attractive prospect to the modern, he was left pondering to what he should now give his heart and his mind, if not to the state and its gods as before.[40] Rome had carved out a new ideal for the state – centralized power established through administrative efficiency – but in doing so she had neglected to bring the ideal of the good life into line with this achievement.[41] Men generally were happy to accept the new orientation in secular affairs, indeed they praised and acknowledged the peace and stability of Roman

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[38] *HMPTW*, Vol. I, p. 14. As E. C. Dewick points out, '...the Roman of old (like the average Englishman of to-day) was not, as a rule, much interested in the abstract truth of this or that religion. He viewed these mainly from the political angle, as useful – or, it may be, mischievous – factors in the administration of the Empire. He had little desire to impose his religion on others, beyond requiring all subjects of the Emperor to show veneration to the imperial image. Nor did he interfere with foreign beliefs or modes of worship, unless these tended to stimulate sedition, or violated Roman ideals of decency and morals.' (E. C. Dewick, *The Gospel and Other Faiths* (London, The Canterbury Press, 1948), p. 32).

[39] Justinian, *Digest*, liber I, titulus 1, *De Iustitia et Iure*, quoted in A. P. d'Entrèves, *Natural Law*, p. 24.

[40] On this point see Herbert A. Deane, 'Classical and Christian Political Thought', *PT*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (Nov., 1973), p. 416.

[41] Wolin sees this change reflected most spectacularly in the fortunes of the concept of Roman citizenship. See his *Politics and Vision*, pp. 91-92.

rule; but the widening spiritual lacuna worried them.[42] Polybius writes of disillusioned Greeks who losing their nerve completely, were driven to commit appalling acts of race suicide.[43]

(c) The Christian solution to the problem of political life

Then Christianity arrived on the scene with its novel solution to the problem of political life in these new and troubling times. There is not really one city but two: the earthly city and the Heavenly City. The earthly city is concerned solely with the material conditions of life; it is quite right, in other words, that Rome attempts no more than a superficial and external justice – the friend of merchants and shopkeepers, trade and commerce, but never the companion of the soul –, for there is another city altogether to provide for the needs of man's inner, spiritual life. This is the Heavenly City. Its law is true justice and its end is true peace and like the Greek cities of old, a man can only be born into its citizenship. And yet this birth is open to all, even those who have already been born citizens of the Earthly City: so long as a man is given the necessary gift of Grace, a kind of Divine dispensation, he can be 'born again', as it were.[44] What earns him this gift is, however, another matter altogether, for it is absolutely not given on the basis of reward or merit. It is not given on the basis of reward or merit because the moral categories that

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[42] See Ernst Troeltsch (tr. Olive Wyon), *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, Vol. I (London, Goerge Allen & Unwin, 1931), p. 41.

[43] Polybius, *Hist.*, xxxvi, 17.

[44] *De civ. Dei*, XV, 2: 'We find, therefore, that the earthly city has two aspects. Under the one, it displays its own presence; under the other, it serves by its presence to point towards the Heavenly City. But the citizens of the earthly city are produced by a nature vitiated by sin, while the citizens of the Heavenly City are produced by grace, which redeems nature from sin. Hence, the former are called "vessels of wrath" and the latter "vessels of mercy". This is signified also in the two sons of Abraham, one of whom, Ishmael, was born to the handmaid Hagar according to the flesh, while the other, Isaac, was born to Sarah according to the promise. Both sons came indeed of Abraham's seed; but the one was begotten by the usual means, as a demonstration of nature's way, whereas the other was given by a promise, signifying God's grace. In the one case, the ordinary human condition is shown, whereas, in the other, we are reminded of the beneficence of God.'

ordinarily decide these things do not translate the Sovereign Will of the Heavenly City's King. In a disquieting way, He remains wholly incomprehensible: *Si cepisti, non est Deus* 'If you have understood Him, He is not God',[45] as Augustine explains it.[46]

This is certainly something different to arrangements in the Earthly City, where the kings do not generally rule by such a voluntarist conception of law. If Cicero's remarks are recalled, law is nothing other than right reason (*recta ratio*), which nature gives in common to all men. The city, as such, is really a public thing (*res publica*) or commonwealth, because its law and therefore its justice, is really the common possession of its citizens. Insofar as they have been given rational faculties by nature, they are each of them, in effect, the authors of the laws which they obey. Laws, as Thomas would explain some thirteen centuries later, are in this sense always 'ordinances of reason'.[47]

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Couched in these terms the Christian solution could not fail to impress, for it seemed to be able to account for all the least satisfactory aspects of Roman government. It offered the unmatched liberation of seeing a thing for what it really is. To the man looking to Roman rule for ethical leadership and spiritual direction, it could only be a profound disappointment; but to the same man looking to it to provide a stable apparatus of

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[45] *Serm.*, 117, 5.
[46] Once again, Troeltsch is the authority on these matters. See his *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, Vol. I, pp. 39-40.
[47] *Summa Theologica*, Ia, IIae, 90, 4; tr. F. C. Copleston.

civilized life, why should it not appear satisfactory, exemplary even?[48] It seems that what Christianity was able to offer the ordinary man, then, was a truly fulfilling private sphere, an individualism so rugged that it might proof him against any disappointment with arrangements in the Earthly City. And in this sense it should not be doubted that the motif of the 'unquiet heart', later to be made so famous by Augustine, was already at the core of this vision: 'You [Lord] have made us for Yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in You.'[49] In Henry Tudor's words, 'The Christian felt no... identity, either with the city in which he lived or with the natural order, the cosmopolis of which the Stoics asserted that all men were citizens. He was the total outcast whose lot was death unless he could establish a relationship with God in Whom alone there was life.'[50]

However, this simple vision could not on its own account for the numerous practical problems thrown up the establishment of Christianity in the Roman Empire. For the most part these concerned the Church more than they did the Emperor, for he could always frame his thinking by the enlightened cynicism of his forefathers – the enlightened cynicism that it is customary to associate with the municipal religions of pagan antiquity. To the contrary, the Church was faced with a crisis that Wolin has characterised in the following questions:

> ...how could Christianity support the state and be supported by it and yet avoid becoming yet another civic religion? what was the identity of the state in an

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[48] It may be mentioned in passing that nearly all the early Christian apologists praised and esteemed the Roman Empire as a God-given source of peace and prosperity to men. See Gillian Clark's comments in her article, 'Let Every Soul be Subject: The Fathers and the Empire', in Loveday Alexander (ed.), *Images of Empire* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp. 251-275.

[49] *Confess.*, I, 1, 1. Cf. *En. in ps.*, XXV, 5: 'For dismissed by Thee from Paradise, and having taken my journey into a far country, I cannot by myself return, unless Thou meetest the wanderer: for my return hath throughout the whole tract of this world's time waited for Thy mercy.'

[50] Henry Tudor, *Political Myth* (London, Pall Mall Press, Ltd., 1972), p. 94.

historical situation where the Church had grown steadily more political in organization and outlook? what was the identity of the Church when the state undertook to advance the faith and police the behaviour of the believers? could this hurry the Last Judgment? where did both the Church and the political community stand in relation to the time-dimension of history?[51]

These questions, avoided by so many in their philosophical and metaphysical complexity, where taken up decisively by Augustine. His answers form the subject of the next chapter.

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51 Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, p. 121.

Chapter 3

AUGUSTINE'S DOCTRINE OF THE TWO CITIES

It should be pointed out that the Christian solution to the problem of political life would not immediately have been stated in terms of two cities. The doctrine of the Two Cities proper was Augustine's creation in the fifth century A.D. Yet the language is not at all misleading: from the first Christianity was forced to defend itself from the charge that it was a politicizing religion. In other words, that it sought somehow to challenge the Imperial authority of Rome, or at least to dilute men's allegiance to it by teaching them not to deify the Emperor. As such, if never made explicit, the language of the Two Cities was certainly implied in all the Church's early dealings with Rome; and it is significant in this respect that a great deal of the apologetic material from the period is directed towards allaying fears about Christianity's subversive and seditious character. Here, for instance, is what Tertullian has to say in defense of those Christians who will not worship the Emperor:

> Another charge against us concerns treason with respect to the person of the Emperor. Yet Christians have never been found among the followers of Albinus or Niger or Cassius. Those who have actually been found in practice to be enemies of the Emperor are the very same people who only a day before had been swearing by his genius, had been solemnly offering sacrifices for his safety, and not infrequently had been condemning Christians as well. A Christian is an enemy to

no man – certainly not to the Emperor, for he knows that it is by God that the Emperor has been appointed. He is bound therefore to love him, to revere him, to honour him and to desire the safety not only of the Emperor but of the whole Roman empire as long as the world endures – for as long as the world endures, so also will the Roman empire. So then we do 'worship' the Emperor in such manner as is both permissible to us and beneficial to him, namely as a man second only to God. All that he is he has received from God, and it is God alone Whom he ranks below. This surely is what the Emperor himself will desire. He ranks above all else; it is the true God whom he ranks below.[1]

(a) The historical context of the De civitate Dei

In Augustine's time the charges being leveled at the Church were slightly different. When he began his *De civitate Dei*, in 413 A.D., a newly-Christian Rome had recently been sacked by Alaric and the Visigoths (410 A.D.), an unprecedented event that had deeply scarred the Roman psyche. The Romans had simply not thought it possible that their 'eternal' city could be so easily overrun by uncivilized barbarians. As so often happens in these situations, a scapegoat was sought and quickly found in Rome's recent adoption of Christianity as its official religion by the edict *Cunctos populos*, signed by the Emperor Theodosius I in 384 A.D. Amongst other proscriptions, this edict comprehensively abolished the worship of Rome's ancient gods, traditionally her protection and help. To many, this was an open invitation to lay the blame for the recent outrage squarely at Christianity's door. In his *Retractiones*, Augustine gives a clear indication of the height at which feelings were running:

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[1] Tertullian, *To Scapula*, 2; translation from CCL 2, 1127-8, reproduced in *DECT*, pp. 226-228.

Meanwhile, Rome suffered a powerful invasion of Goths under their leader, Alaric, and with an attack of great devastation was overthrown. The worshippers of the false and many gods whom by custom we call by the name of pagans, trying to refer this disaster to the Christian religion, commenced to blaspheme the true God with more than usual acerbity and bitterness. This inflaming me to love with zeal the City of God, I began to write the books of *De civitate Dei* against their blasphemies, or what is really the same thing, their errors.[2]

These circumstances explain the immense labour that Augustine would pour into this, his most celebrated work. Christianity was at the crossroads: the recently-converted empire had suffered a defeat of symbolic dimensions: and now it seemed as if the gains of the last four centuries might be lost in a moment of panic and superstition. It was imperative that someone in a position of intellectual authority speak out against the general scaremongering before the conservative elements in Roman society, the upper classes, turned it to their advantage. And so Augustine took up the task. In the first ten books of his *De civitate Dei* he would argue meticulously against Rome's claim that her gods had always protected her from calamity; that by giving them up for the One Christian God, she had forfeited their protection and help; and that subsequently the Christian God, that is, the Christian God Who teaches meekness and submission, had been unable to divert the impending disaster.

But of course *De civitate Dei* contains more than ten books. While Augustine was still shaping-up the main lines of this argument, he received a letter from a friend and

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[2] *Retract.*, 2, 43, 2.

fellow Christian named Marcellinus. This unfortunate man had been given the complicated task of trying to resolve the dispute between the Christians and the Donatists in Africa; but now he had come into the circle of a number of educated pagans who had begun to probe his Christianity with difficult and searching questions. He was unsettled, and wanted to know whether Augustine might be able to help. In the Introduction to his translation of *De civitate Dei*, Dyson gives this useful paraphrase of the more difficult questions that Marcellinus was facing:

> Why are the miracles of Christianity regarded as anything special? Paganism has many more miracles to boast of, some of them more spectacular than the miracles of Christ. If God was pleased with the sacrifices offered to Him by the people of the Old Testament, and if He is immutable, why is He not pleased with such sacrifices now? What good has Christianity bought to Rome? Is it not true that, ever since the old religion was abandoned and Christianity taken up, the political and military fortunes of the empire have gone from bad to worse?[3]

Initially Augustine gave Marcellinus what help he could in two letters (*Ep.* 137 & 138); but at some point he realised that a more comprehensive treatment was required and promised this in the form of either another letter or a book. Busy as he always was, it must have occurred to him that the best solution would simply be to extend the original plan of *De civitate Dei* along the lines suggested by Marcellinus' questions. The result, after some thirteen years of work, was the *De civitate Dei* as it now stands, in twenty-two

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[3] Augustine (ed. & tr. R. W. Dyson), *The City of God against the Pagans*, pp. xii-xiii.

books.[4] One can only guess at how thrilling it must have been for Marcellinus to read in the preface:

> Most Glorious is the City of God: whether in this passing age, where she dwells by faith as a pilgrim among the ungodly, or in the security of that eternal home which she now patiently awaits until 'righteousness shall return unto judgment', but which she will then possess more perfectly, in final victory and perfect peace. In this work, O Marcellinus, most beloved son – due to you by promise – I have undertaken to defend her against those who favour their own gods above her Founder. The work is great and arduous; but God is our helper.[5]

(b) The De civitate Dei *as a work of political theory*

As a work of Christian apologetics, then, *De civitate Dei* is prosecuted according to an unusually wide, ambitious and passionate plan; its many editors and translators have all commented on the formidable challenges posed by its fluidity of style and structure. It is written, as so much was in those days, to be read aloud; and this should always be borne in mind when reading it. Augustine, always the master-rhetorician, was writing to an educated pagan audience. All the repetition, every laboured point, is for their benefit: it is to help them as they come to terms with the shock of having their whole moral, intellectual and political tradition turned against them. Not until Karl Marx in the nineteenth-century would the West have its most cherished ideals so spectacularly deconstructed. Against Rome's claim to be the moral and political education of mankind,

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[4] Of course it is one of the chief contentions of this dissertation that the intellectual material for the doctrine of the Two Cities had been collecting in Augustine's mind for some time, probably from a point shortly after his removal from Cassiciacum, where he had begun to face the necessity of Grace and Confession. Augustine first mentions his intention to write *De civitate Dei* at *De Gen. ad litt.*, XI, 15, 20. The latter work was written between 401 and 415 A.D; *De civitate Dei* was begun in 413 A.D.

[5] Augustine (ed. & tr. R. W. Dyson), *The City of God against the Pagans*, Preface.

Augustine likens her to a robber-band;[6] in place of her ancient gods, he substitutes a humiliating sociology of religion.[7]

But these considerable achievements do not describe the enduring interest of *De civitate Dei* to historians of ideas. Credit for this must rather go to the clarity and constancy of its central thesis. In the argument that Church and State each have their role to play in a coordinated plan for the general good, Augustine lays down what would go on to become the main lines of the solution to the problem of political life in the Christian era. But in his further insistence that the 'general good' cannot account for the true and most fulfilling end of man – that politics and the whole apparatus of civilized life can only touch it in the most external and superficial way – he inserts a cruel and unexpected caveat.[8]

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[6] See above, p. 46.

[7] The following passage from *De doct. Christ.*, II, 40, 60, is typical of the way he goes about this: 'Moreover, if those who are called philosophers, and we particularly mean the Platonists, happen by chance to have said anything that is true and in keeping with our faith, we are not only required not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have, so to speak, unlawful possession of it. For, as the Egyptians had not only the idols and heavy burdens which the people of Israel hated and fled from, but also vessels and ornaments of gold and silver, and garments, which the same people when going out of Egypt appropriated to themselves, designing them for a better use, not doing this on their own authority, but by the command of God, the Egyptians themselves, in their ignorance, providing them with things which they themselves were not making a good use of; in the same way all branches of heathen learning have not only false and superstitious fancies and heavy burdens of unnecessary toil, which every one of us, when going out under the leadership of Christ from the fellowship of the heathen, ought to abhor and avoid; but they contain also liberal instruction which is better adapted to the use of the truth, and some most excellent precepts of morality; and some truths in regard even to the worship of the One God are found among them. Now these are, so to speak, their gold and silver, which they did not create themselves, but dug out of the mines of God's providence which are everywhere scattered abroad, and are perversely and unlawfully prostituting to the worship of devils. These, therefore, the Christian, when he separates himself in spirit from the miserable fellowship of these men, ought to take away from them, and to devote to their proper use in preaching the gospel. Their garments, also,—that is, human institutions such as are adapted to that intercourse with men which is indispensable in this life,—we must take and turn to a Christian use.' Cf. *De civ. Dei*, II, 16; *Confess.*, V, 3, 5; and *Serm.*, 198, 35.

[8] H. St. L. B. Moss' estimation of the work is close to the mark: 'Viewed from the standpoint of his age, the *Civitas Dei* of Augustine is less a "philosophy of history" than a passionate assertion of Divine intervention in human affairs; less a prophetical formulation of the future limits of Church and State than the ecstatic vision of a philosopher-mystic, transcending the mournful realities of his time in the description of an ideal society, founded on the principal of true justice, whose gaze is fixed, not on the world of sense, but on the

(c) Augustine and the 'politics of indifference'

Augustine is the beginning and the end of a unique tradition in the intellectual development of the West. One might, as was suggested earlier, call it the 'politics of indifference'.[9] It is unique because it marks the complete separation of politics from history. Unlike the two other great philosophers of history with whom he is often compared, Augustine's vision of history does not redeem politics. For both Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx, politics labours as the unwitting servant of history before eventually winning its freedom. With Augustine it is not so lucky. For him politics can never be redeemed because it is the archetypal sinful activity. It is the archetypal sinful activity because it is the ultimate expression of man's willed estrangement from God. Had Adam not sinned in the Garden of Eden, he would have continued to look to God for all his understanding, discerning and acting on His Sovereign Will in the actual present of his life. So too would his offspring, and so on, until there would have arisen a community of men and women united in their obedience to The Sovereign Will of God, '...because man was created righteous, to live according to His Maker and not according to himself, doing his Maker's Will and not his own...'[10]

Seen from this perspective, politics is the inevitable conclusion to man's original catastrophic decision. In its hopes and ambitions, it stands symbolic of his refusal to participate in the utopian history of the Garden of Eden, in what could justifiably be

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battlements of an eternal city not made with hands.' (H. St. L. B. Moss, *The Birth of the Middle Ages, 395-814* (London, Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 14).

[9] See above, p. 47.

[10] *De civ. Dei*, XIV, 4.

called the Divine Dictatorship. But it is symbolic, too, of God's amazing Grace:[11] for politics is, after all, only possible because God has allowed man to retain an echo of Paradise in his heart. This 'still small voice'[12] is his conscience, and it equips him to fulfill his calling as a sociable creature by speaking out against his evil and corrupt nature. Considered at its most general, this advice consists in imploring him to put the needs of others first:

> I charge thee, fling away ambition
>
> By that sin fell the angels. How can man then,
>
> The image of his maker hope to win by it?
>
> Love thyself last: cherish those hearts that hate thee;
>
> Corruption wins not more than honesty
>
> Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,
>
> To silence envious tongues: be just, and fear not.
>
> Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,
>
> Thy God's and truth's.[13]

So discovered Cardinal Wolsey after a long and distinguished career of selfishness, pride and greed in Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII*; and so too discovers every man who looks to his conscience for inspiration and direction in these things. To Augustine, such discoveries are to be taken as the ultimate proof that God illuminates the hearts and

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[11] *De civ. Dei*, V, 11: '...when man sinned, He did not permit him to go unpunished, but neither did He abandon him without mercy.'

[12] This evocative phrase comes from the popular hymn by J. G. Whittier: 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind'.

[13] William Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII*, act 3. As Peter Brown has pointed out, the Christian ethic, and in particular its concern for the poor, arrived into the ancient world as something of an innovation; though not without its precedent in the traditional Jewish ethic. See his *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH, The University Press of New England, 2002), pp. 1-45, but in particular p. 6, where Brown explains how the Christian concern for the poor helped to challenge the strictly municipal vision of pagan society and usher in a new all-embracing conception.

minds of men with merciful truths,[14] merciful because they play the chief part in blunting the destructive edge of their fallen natures:

> To all men, as it were to an audience consisting of the whole human race, the Truth cries: 'If truly indeed you speak justice, judge right things, you sons of men.' For is it not an easy thing to speak of justice even to the unjust man? What man, if asked about justice when his own interests are not at stake, would not be able to tell you what is just? This is because the hand of the Maker has written the truth into our very hearts: 'That which you do not wish to have done to yourself, do not do to another.' Even before the law [of Moses] was given no one was permitted to be ignorant of this truth, so that there might be some standard by which even those to whom the Law was not given could be judged. But lest men should complain that something was lacking to them, that which they did not read in their heart has been written on tablets. For it was not that they did not have it written, but that they would not read it... There has been placed before their eyes that which they would [in any case] be compelled to see in their conscience... Who has taught you that you do not want other men to make advances to your wife? Who has taught you that you do not want to have someone rob you? Who has taught you that you do not want to suffer injustice? And indeed what other examples, both universal and particular, might you come up with? For there are many such questions to which each and every man would reply, in a clear voice: 'I do not want to suffer it.'
>
> Come, if you do not want to suffer these things yourself, are you the only man? Do you not live in the society of the human race? He who is made together with you is your companion; and all men have been made in the image of God, even though they wear away what He has formed by their earthly desires... For you declare that

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[14] Augustine follows St. Paul in explaining why and how this happened. See *De sp. et litt.*, 48.

> there is evil in that which you do not wish to suffer; and this is something that you are constrained to know by an inward law written into your own heart.[15]

Augustine never does try to understand the mechanics of how morality makes this claim on the minds of men; indeed to do so would be to contradict his illumination theory of truth. For after all, if it is the case that God has gifted men the higher order moral precepts fully-formed, what is the point in trying to rationalize them? One should simply accept that they are premisses rather than conclusions: that there is no getting beyond them to something more fundamental: 'A man who knows that he owns a tree, and gives thanks to You for its fruit, even though he may not know how many cubits high it is or how wide it spreads, is better than one who measures it and counts all its branches, but does not own it and does not know or love its Creator.'[16]

Illustrations such as these are well-chosen by Augustine to express his epistemological position. Truth is always God's prerogative; a man grasps only so much of it as he is allowed to; and little should it be wondered at, then, when attempts to overstep this mark end in farce:

> It is just as if a man wishing to give rules for walking should warn you not to lift the hinder foot before you set down the front one, and then should describe minutely the way you ought to move the hinges of the joints and knees. For what he says is true, and one cannot walk in any other way; but men find it easier to

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[15] *En. in ps.*, 57:1; tr. R. W. Dyson. Cf. *In Io. ev. tr.*, 49:12; *Confess.*, III, 7 & 8.
[16] *Confess.*, V, 4, 7. Cf. *Confess.*, XI, 3, 5; *Serm.*, CCXCIIIA, 8; *Confess.*, X, 6, 8:; *Confess.*, VII, 7, 6, 8; *Confess.*, X, 24, 35; *De Gen. ad litt.*, VII, 1, 1; *Serm.*, XXVIIIB, 2.

> walk by executing these movements than to attend to them while they are going through them, or to understand when they are told about them.[17]

(d) Augustine's political vision

These considerations make politics a desperate business. It exists because men are thoroughly wretched by nature and it persists only so long as they remain blind to its first principles. The best that one should hope for, says Augustine, is a ruler who is happy to acquiesce in the order of things: that is, a ruler who is prepared to take up his position beneath the law of nature, and to seek to increase its sway in his kingdom. By contrast, all the most tragic episodes in human history have been initiated by rulers who, refusing to accept this limiting premiss, imagined that they might express a higher and more perfect law in their will. These facts point towards an unexceptional place for politics in the grand scheme of things: however different and interesting the many outward forms that it might take, they are merely so many cosmetic variations on a single unflattering theme.[18] This theme is the continual collision of venial human nature and unmerited Grace:

> Now the sway of the kingdom of death over men was so complete that all would have been driven headlong, as their due punishment, into that second death to which there is no end, had not some of them been redeemed by the unmerited Grace of God. Thus it is that, though there are a great many nations throughout the world, living according to different rites and customs, and distinguished by many

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[17] *De doct. Christ.*, II, 37, 55. It is helpful to know that the context of this passage is a lesson on the true importance and usefulness of rhetoric and dialectic to the Christian. Augustine is arguing that like all such things, they should be used by the Christian as tools to the end of God's Will. The moment that they cease to fulfill this modest function and become ends in themselves, all is lost. It should be pointed out that this is really Augustine's general position on the appropriate Christian attitude to earthly goods. It is undergirded by his privation theory of evil (see n. 30, p. 48 above).

[18] Hence Augustine's depressing thought at *De civ. Dei*, V, 17: 'As far as this life of mortals is concerned, which is spent and ended in a few days, what does it matter under whose government a dying man lives, provided only that they who govern him do not force him to do what is ungodly and wicked?'

> different forms of language, arms and dress, there nonetheless exist only two orders, as we may call them, of human society; and, following our Scriptures, we may rightly speak of these as two cities [Eph. 2, 19; Phil. 3, 20].[19]

(e) The historical aspects of Augustine's political vision

The effect of this outlook on history is what one might expect: it goes on, but human affairs no longer play an active part in it; for the theme has now changed from 'utopia' to 'salvation'. Man has fallen and must be rescued; God decides to do this by cultivating and sustaining a community of pilgrims; and so this community can have its love and faithfulness tested in the face of adversity, human society is spared as a kind of proving ground, a veil of tears as Augustine often calls it.[20] This, insists Augustine, is the true value and significance of human affairs: that they have been established by God as a kind of gauntlet for the pilgrims to run: 'Alas for me! Lord, have mercy on me! Alas for me! See, I do not hide my wounds. You are my physician; I am a sick man. You are merciful; I am in need of mercy. Is not "the life of man upon earth a trial?"'[21]

This is unquestionably an extreme position to take up. By timely and judicious injections of morality, God keeps the human compound alive,[22] but then only while there still remain souls to be saved from the general wreck. Such outlooks generally support undemanding philosophies of history. Oscar Cullmann calls them by the name

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[19] *De civ. Dei*, XIV, 1.

[20] At *Serm.*, XXB, 8, Augustine gives four reasons why God might feel it necessary to test pilgrims: one, 'to test their mettle'; two, 'to scourge them'; three, 'to reveal their worth to those who may not already be aware of it'; four, 'to reveal them to themselves'.

[21] *Confess.*, X, 28, 39. Cf. *En in ps.*, CXIX, 17-20; *Serm.*, XLVII, 1; *Serm.*, XXIIIB, 12; *En. in ps.*, CXLVI, 4-5.

[22] *De civ. Dei*, I, 34: 'Nonetheless, it is thanks to God that you are still alive: to God Who, in sparing you, warns you to correct yourselves by repentance.'

Heilsgeschichte 'salvation history', after the fact that they relegate the purpose of history to the end of salvation.[23] For this reason they often appear disarmingly simple, the usual complexities of human history dismissed as sirens to draw the faithful onto the rocks.[24] But can Augustine really mean to be so dismissive of politics? Does he seriously think that at best, it has the crude utility of a life-saving device, something for men to cling to before they sink beneath the waves? And then what of the context to these unflattering and provocative opinions? It will be remembered that Augustine was writing with the Roman empire expressly in mind, and what is more, a Roman empire in which public feelings against Christianity were running high. *Pluvia defit, causa Christiani sunt* 'No rain: blame the Christians'[25] was already a popular saying when he began *De civitate Dei*; and given that the primary purpose of this work was apologetic, was it wise for him to do such violence to Rome's moral and political pretensions?

(f) The practical aspects of Augustine's political vision

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[23] See his study (tr. Sidney G. Sowers), *Salvation in History* (London, SCM Press, 1967). Professor R. A. Markus thinks that the term 'sacred history' is more properly applied to Augustine. His reasoning is that, '...Augustine's conception [of history] presupposes a clear distinction between "history" as what has happened ("the past") and "history" as the record of what has happened. In the phrase "sacred history", "history" is used in the second of these senses, and "sacred history" is defined by the special character of the record. This special character derives from the privileged status of the writers and of their interpretative judgement on the events recorded by them. This is the "prophetic" quality of inspiration in the biblical canon.' (R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 231). Professor Markus does not see a similar distinction in Cullmann's concept of 'salvation history', and so prefers his own when dealing with Augustine. Professor Markus is undoubtedly correct, indeed his comments are amply borne out by Augustine's illumination theory of truth (an apposite example occurring at *De civ. Dei*, VI, 6: 'O Marcus Varro, you are without doubt the most acute and learned of men. But you are still a man and not a god, and you have not been raised up into the truth and freedom by the Spirit of God, to see and proclaim things divine.'), but from a strictly political point of view, the term 'salvation history' might be preferred in this instance as a more straightforward rendering of what Augustine means.

[24] See, for instance, *Serm.*, LXXII, 10; *Serm.*, CCXXXI, 5; CCXCVII, 9; CXIVB, 14; *De Trin.*, XIII, 6-12.

[25] *De civ. Dei*, II, 3. Cf. *En. in ps.*, 80, 1; *Serm.*, CXIVB, 14; *Serm.*, CCCXI, 8; 346C; Tertullian, *Ap.*, 40.

At first glance one has to agree that he might have done better to adopt a more conciliatory tone.[26] But then closer inspection reveals the 'politics of indifference' to be really a rather good advertisement for the Christian citizen. Ordinarily, the main cause of unrest in a political community is the lust for power. Augustine calls it *libido dominandi* 'lust of ruling'. This lust causes instability by encouraging citizens to vie with each other for influence over the affairs of the community. At various places in *De civitate Dei*, Augustine paints vivid pictures of the damage done to Rome by her many civil wars;[27] and more generally, of the effects of war and strife in the earthly city as a whole.[28] Yet to those who think seriously about it, the Christian citizen is positively disqualified by his religion from taking part in such subversive activities. As a man he is just as much afflicted by the itchy sore of *libido dominandi*, but as a Christian he is enjoined not to scratch it.[29] But more than that, his religion actually encourages him towards a model citizenship that might even extend to fighting for his city:[30]

> If our religion were heeded as it should be, it would establish, consecrate, confirm and increase the commonwealth far more than Romulus, Numa, Brutus and all the other outstanding men of the Roman people ever did... Let those who say that the

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[26] Though it should be pointed out that Augustine never hesitated to praise the Romans when he felt that they had acted 'according to the lights of the earthly city' (*De civ. Dei.*, V, 19). For instance, at *De civ. Dei*, V, 18, he holds the Romans' achievements up as an admonishment to the Christian to strive the more ardently to bring a similar glory upon the City of God.

[27] *De civ. Dei*, III, 23; 24; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30. Cf. *De civ. Dei*, XIX, 5.

[28] For instance, at *De civ. Dei*, XV, 4.

[29] This metaphor owes much to Augustine. He uses it at *Confess.*, IX, 1, 1 to describe his early bondage to lust for the flesh.

[30] At *Ep.*, CLXXXIX, 4, Augustine gives examples of notable Christians who served as soldiers; at *De civ. Dei*, I, 21, he expounds the general law that he thinks governs the subject of Christian killing: '...he to whom authority is delegated, and who is but the sword in the hand of him who uses it, is not himself responsible for the death he deals.'; at *Ep.* CXXXVIII, 2, 15, he cites the advice given by John the Baptist to the soldiers: 'Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.'; and at *Contra Faustem*, 22, 75, he gives his answer to perhaps the most difficult dilemma facing the Christian soldier: '...a righteous man, even if serving under an ungodly king, may do the duty belonging to his position in the commonwealth by fighting according to the command of his sovereign... [for] the soldier is innocent because his position makes obedience a duty...'

doctrine of Christ is inimical to the welfare of the commonwealth therefore give us an army composed of such men as the doctrine of Christ commands soldiers to be. Let them give us such subjects, such husbands, such wives, such parents, such children, such masters, such servants, such kings, such judges, indeed, even such taxpayers and tax gatherers as the Christian religion has taught that men should be, and let them dare to say that it is inimical to the welfare of the commonwealth. On the contrary, let them no longer hesitate to confess that this doctrine, if it were obeyed, would contribute greatly to the health of the commonwealth.[31]

It is difficult to imagine how this message to the kings and princes of the world could be made any clearer. 'Do not fear the Christians; they do not conspire to threaten your worldly aspirations. The things that you seek happiness in, namely, power, wealth, and glory, do not interest them in the same way.[32] They prefer to direct these earthly goods, and others, towards a different type of happiness and peace;[33] and because it is a happiness and peace that touches the inner, spiritual part of man, it need not interfere with your designs on the outer, civil part.[34] Even if you attempt to lord it over the Christians they will not complain, or rise up in rebellion against you; for again, their religion teaches them that all power has its origin and purpose in God; that it is, as it

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[31] *Ep.*, CXXXVIII, 2, 10-15. Cf. *Ep.*, CLXXXV, 2, 8; *En. in ps.*, LI, 6 & CXXIV, 7 & CXVIII[XXXI], 1; *De lib. arb.*, 1, 15, 31; *Serm.*, LXII, 5, 8-10 & 15 & CCCXXVI, 2.

[32] *Serm.*, XXIIIB, 13: '...for there must be no respect... of the world and the age itself...'

[33] *De civ. Dei*, XIX, 14: 'In the earthly city, then, the whole use of temporal things is directed towards the enjoyment of earthly peace. In the Heavenly City, however, such use is directed towards the enjoyment of eternal peace.' This raises the important point that evil is never to be understood on an ontological level in Augustine's thought. Evil is not a quality of created things; it is an expression of ill will. See note n above.

[34] See, for instance, Augustine's comments on Christian dress and manners at *De civ. Dei*, XIX, 19: 'The dress or manner of whoever embraces the faith that leads to God does not matter to the Heavenly City, provided that these things do not contravene the Divine precepts. Hence, when philosophers become Christians, they are required to change their false doctrines; but they are not compelled to change their dress or their customary mode of life: for these are not an impediment to religion.'

were, a foundation of civilized life in this fallen world.[35] By their grand scheme of things, it matters not whether they are ruled with tyranny or justice; though like any man they prefer justice to tyranny, and Christian rule best.[36] As such, they can be expected to acquiesce in all aspects of your rule and execute their citizenship with an outstanding virtue, while asking only one thing in return. This is that you do not attempt to interfere in or regulate their religion.[37] They are ready to admit that this marks a dramatic departure from the days of old, when religion and politics were united in a single conception, but they ask you only to try to think in terms of the great material benefits which their citizenship will surely confer on your rule.' In Augustine's own words:

> ...for as long as this Heavenly City is a pilgrim on earth, she summons citizens of all nations and every tongue, and brings together a society of pilgrims in which no attention is paid to any differences in the customs, laws, and institutions by which earthly peace is achieved or maintained. She does not rescind or destroy these things, however. For whatever differences there are among the various nations, these all tend towards the same end of earthly peace. Thus, she preserves and follows them, provided only that they do not impede the religion by which we are taught that the One supreme and true God is to be worshipped. And so even the

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[35] At *De civ. Dei*, V, 21, Augustine explains that God gives earthly kingdoms to, '...the godly and ungodly alike, as it may please Him, Whose pleasure is never unjust... He, therefore, Who is the one true God, Who never forsakes the human race either in His judgment or His aid, gave a kingdom to the Romans when it pleased Him and to the extent that it pleased Him to do so. He also gave one to the Assyrians, and then again to the Persians... So also in the case of individual men. He Who gave power to Marius also gave it to Gaius Caesar; He Who gave it to Augustus also gave it to Nero...' Cf. *De civ. Dei*, V, 19.

[36] To speculate on the subject of Christian rule was a pleasure that was largely denied Augustine by his general outlook. Consequently, he has very little to say on it, a fact which has contributed a great deal to the misinterpretation of his leading political ideas. What he does say is absolutely characteristic, though; for it amounts to a series of warnings to the Christian ruler not to a) take things to himself and b) neglect to promote the worship of the one true God in his kingdom. *Ep.*, CLV, 3, 10-13 is typical of his attitude. Cf. *De civ. Dei*, V, 24-26.

[37] *En. in ps.*, IV, 8: 'And I believe this to be the bearing of that which some understand skillfully; I mean, what the Lord said on seeing Caesar's tribute money, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." As if He had said, in like manner as Caesar exacts from you the impression of his image, so also does God: that as the tribute money is rendered to him, so should the soul to God, illumined and stamped with the light of His countenance.' Cf. *Serm.*, CCCLIXB, 13.

Heavenly City makes use of earthly peace during her pilgrimage, and desires and maintains the co-operation of men's wills in attaining those things which belong to the mortal nature of man, in so far as this may be allowed without prejudice to true godliness and religion. Indeed, she directs that earthly peace towards heavenly peace: towards the peace which is so truly such that – at least so far as rational creatures are concerned – only it can really be held to be peace and called such... This peace the Heavenly City possesses in faith while on its pilgrimage, and by this faith it lives righteously, directing towards the attainment of that peace every good act which it performs either for God, or – since the city's life is inevitably a social one – for neighbour.[38]

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In terms of its pessimistic psychology of man, rude philosophy of history and utter lack of worldly ambition, this is a singular political theory, if indeed it can be called a political theory at all. Augustine is at pains to portray Christianity as an apolitical religion outside the mainstream of intellectual developments in the West. Correspondingly, his leading political ideas ignore many of the standard presumptions and preoccupations of the ancient world, the chief of these being the expectation that a religious community will seek to assert itself politically.[39] His language of the Two Cities, though it is in part a nod to this popular sentiment, utterly radicalizes the relationship between ethics and freedom:

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[38] *De civ. Dei*, XIX, 17.

[39] M. Minucius Felix seems to admit this when he says that, 'We distinguish nations and tribes: to God the whole world is a single household' (M. Minucius Felix, *Oct.*, XXXIII).

the political community is still an ethical community, just as it was for Plato and Aristotle and Cicero, but now ethics can no longer account for the true happiness of man.[40] This supreme end – freedom – is elevated by Augustine to a different plane altogether; and insofar as man is enjoined by his nature to pursue it,[41] this plane must assume the greatest significance for him: '"Our citizenship is in heaven." To cling therefore to earthly things is the soul's death.'[42]

Such lofty language does away with the normal terms of political discussion. As Norman H. Baynes explains, 'To Augustine forms of government are really irrelevant: the character of the State is determined by the character of the citizens who compose the State. The two great *civitates* of Augustine's vision are distinguished by two *loves*: "Two *loves* formed two cities" – love of self leading to contempt of God – love of God leading to contempt of self.'[43] From this perspective it is inevitable that all human endeavour should form a single piece: 'For these are the practices that pass from tutors and teachers, and from nuts and balls and birds, to governors and kings, and to money and estates and slaves. These very things pass on, as older years come in their turn, just as heavier punishments succeed the birch rod.'[44] There is this depressing inevitability about the human condition, whichever aspect is being examined. This is the sense that the term 'politics of indifference' is an attempt to convey. As Professor Markus puts it: 'The complexity and poise of [Augustine's] final estimate of politics stems from his conviction

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[40] See, for instance, his declaration at *De Gen. ad litt.*, IX, 9, 14.
[41] See *Confess.*, X, 21, 31; *De civ. Dei*, XIV, 4.
[42] *En. in ps.*, CXIX, 25. Cf. Tertullian, *Ap.*, 41: 'nothing matters to us in this age but to escape from it with all speed.'
[43] Baynes, 'The Political Ideas of St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei*', p. 16.
[44] *Confess.*, I, 19, 30.

that the quest for perfection and happiness through politics is doomed. The archetypal society, where alone true human fulfillment can be found, is the society of the angels and saints in heaven: not a *polis*.'[45]

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[45] Markus, *Saeculum*, p. 103.

Chapter 4

POLITICAL AUGUSTINIANISM

It can now be appreciated just how far Augustine's doctrine of the Two Cities was from a manifesto for positive political action, let alone Christian Empire; yet within a little over half a century of his death, in 430 A.D., that is exactly how it was coming to be construed. The letter sent by Pope Gelasius I to the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius I, in 494 A.D., has already been mentioned above as a possible terminus for the medieval period. This is because it represents the first concrete expression of an idea the reality of which was just beginning to be seen towards the end of Augustine's lifetime as the Goths closed in on the walls of Hippo. These Germanic invaders were just one of a number of barbarian tribes that had begun to tear into the empire from the beginning of the fourth-century. By their sheer numbers and vigour they quickly broke up the machinery of centralized Roman rule, establishing their small kingdoms in its place. This confronted the Church with a new and unexpected prospect. Under the old empire she had mainly been concerned with maintaining her autonomy *vis-à-vis* the established authority and power of the Emperor. Now she found that with the barbarian invasions, this position of established authority and power had transferred to her; in terms of her organization and style, she was now the most meaningful expression of the Roman imperial ideal.[1] For

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[1] It is important not to forget how this meaningfulness would have appeared to the ordinary man of late antiquity. As Brown has persuasively argued, through the fourth and fifth centuries, circumstances

their part, the barbarians were happy to recognise in her a culture and learning far superior to their own; and soon the more enlightened among them began to desire to ornament their rule with the new treasures of Hellenic thought. Great was the peril that faced the West, then, as she approached her middle age.[2]

(a) The concept of Latin Christendom and the ideas of Pope Gelasius I

Something that the Church was able to do in the meantime, however, was to, '...attempt a theoretical delimitation of the respective functions of spiritual and secular authority within the Christian Commonwealth.'[3] In this she might steal a march on the barbarians, as yet unschooled in the delicate history of Church and State relations.[4] It is this development which the letter of Pope Gelasius I exemplifies. Historians of ideas talk freely of the 'Gelasian' theory, or even just 'Gelasianism'. By this they mean Gelasius' suggestion that in any Christian civilization, two distinct and unequal powers prevail: the spiritual and the secular, or *regnum* and *sacerdotium* as they came officially to be known. They are distinct because they reflect the two chief categories of human need: that is, the

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conspired to make the Church the unofficial social safety net of the middling classes and the destitute poor. When, by the seventh-century, many towns in the West had changed dramatically from their Roman heydays, '...the continuing residence of the bishop and his clergy... combined with the town-based structures of the bishops "care of the poor," provided an element of real continuity.' (Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Late Roman Empire*, p. 50). From a purely socio-political perspective, the continuing presence of the Church offered the middling classes of the later Roman empire a route to a new and legitimate civic identity. This was important because in traditional Hellenic culture, rights and obligations had always referred to specific civic identities rather than the wider categories of medieval and modern thought.

[2] See B. D. Alexander, *A Short History of Philosophy* (Glasgow, Maclehose, Jackson & Co., 1922), p. 153.

[3] *CS*, p. 2.

[4] It is acceptable to use 'Church/State' language in a medieval situation if the following is born in mind. What the modern understands by Churches and States does not apply in the medieval period. To the medieval mind, Church and State formed a single piece: in other words, his, '...dominant political conception during this period was not that of separate "States" in relation to which the Church might stand as a distinct institution, but of a spiritually-transformed successor of the pagan empire of Rome: a united Christian civilization containing both clerics and laymen, priests and princes.' (R. W. Dyson, *Normative Theories of Society and Government in Five Medieval Thinkers: St. Augustine, John of Salisbury, Giles of Rome, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Marsilius of Padua* (Lampeter, The Edwin Mellon Press, 2003), pp. 69-70).

material and the spiritual. To minister to his purely material needs man has the kings and princes of the world; to minister to his purely spiritual needs, he has the clergy. They are unequal because by the nature of the case, spiritual needs must be considered more important than temporal needs. In Gelasius' own words:

> There are indeed, most august Emperor, two powers by which this world is chiefly ruled: the sacred authority of the Popes and the royal power. Of these the priestly power is much more important, because it has to render account for the kings of men themselves at the Divine tribunal. For you know, our very clement son, that although you have the chief place in dignity over the human race, yet you must submit yourself faithfully to those who have charge of Divine things, and look to them for the means of your salvation... For if in matters pertaining to the administration of public discipline, the bishops of the Church, knowing that the Empire has been conferred on you by Divine instrumentality, are themselves obedient to your laws, lest in purely material matters contrary opinions may seem to be voiced, with what willingness, I ask you, should you obey those to whom is assigned the administration of Divine mysteries?[5]

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[5] *CS*, p. 11. It is worth pointing out that in the Eastern half of the Empire, comparatively unmolested by barbarians, Gelasius' ideal was very nearly perfectly realized. By way of example, the following statement of the Emperor Justinian I on the relations between Church and State: 'The greatest gifts which God in His heavenly clemency bestows upon men are the priesthood and the imperial authority. The former ministers to Divine things, the latter presides and watches over human affairs; both proceed from one and the same source and together they are the ornaments of life.' (*CS*, p. 10) In this and other things, the Byzantine Empire stands in enlightening contrast to the fortunes of the West. In form and outlook it largely continued the trajectory of the great pagan states of antiquity, its Emperors assuming supreme authority over both State and Church. Since Professor Ullmann, this unique mode of rule has been described by the term 'caesaropapism'; though Dyson notes that it actually first appeared on p. 349 of the *Edinburgh Review* of April, 1890. (R. W. Dyson, *Normative Theories of Society and Government*, p. 80, n. 2.). For further information see J. M. Hussey, *The Byzantine World* (London, Hutchinson University Library, 1967), p. 84; and Sir Ernest Barker, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 23-77.

It will immediately be noticed how Gelasius' ideas seem to draw on a general Augustinian outlook; indeed, it would not be too difficult to prove that they all have their antecedent in something Augustine said. Yet there remains something about their arrangement here that is unfamiliar, un-Augustinian. This is the assumption of Christian rule and of the hopes and ambitions that naturally attach to such an outlook. Nothing could be more foreign to Augustine's mindset than this characteristically medieval optimism. It might be recalled how earlier, the term 'indifference' was applied to Augustine's leading political ideas: that their radicalism was pinpointed to their foundation in a frankly dogmatic scheme for the salvation of mankind. 'Perhaps,' Dyson thinks, 'it is better to call it an eschatological politics.'

> He does not so much abandon the traditional values of peace and justice as postpone the hope for their realization to the next world. The best that mortals can hope for in this world is a set of arrangements that is less bad than it might be. Any government is better than nothing, because without restraint there could only be chaos. But all government is defective because its mechanisms are the devices by which a fallen world is regulated. Even pagan governments can accomplish justice and peace of a kind. States presided over by Christian rulers can accomplish these things better than other States, at least partly by devoting their resources to the service of spiritual needs. But the virtues of the Christian State are not, strictly speaking, political virtues. They arise from the use that righteous individuals make of faulty instruments; but the instruments remain faulty, and not even Christian government can rise above imperfection.[6]

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[6] Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 185.

The outstanding feature of Dyson's analysis is the suggestion that it is individuals who are redeemed, not societies: that the advantage of Christian rule when it occurs is not that it perfects politics, but that it turns it to the salvation of souls. Revealingly, the State is always a neutral concept for Augustine – another point on which he stands outside the political tradition of the West. Unlike Cicero, St. Ambrose and the other Fathers, Augustine's definition of the State does not include justice and law in their normal configurations (the configurations that have here been associated with the political tradition of the West); it is, on this point, surprisingly modern. But how can it, says Augustine, when no State can be sure that all its citizens worship the one true God?[7] Elsewhere he buttresses this view with comments such as, 'What is a State but a multitude of men, bought together into some bond of agreement?';[8] and, 'A State is nothing else but a harmonious multitude of men.';[9] and finally, '[Thus] who is so unseeing that they cannot discern how great an ornament the human race is for the earth, including even those who do not live praiseworthy lives; and consequently, how greatly the State prevails in coercing sinners into a kind of pact of peace?'[10]

These thoughts, the premisses to all Augustine's conclusions on man, society and the state, were never taken up with any great enthusiasm after his death; and throughout the medieval period they continued to be studiously ignored. For the fact is that for the whole of this time, Church and State remained embroiled in a dispute constructed from a quite different set of premisses – a dispute that would have been anathema to Augustine. These

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[7] See above, pp. 45-47.
[8] *Ep.*, CXXXVIII, 2.
[9] *Ibid.*, CLV, 3.
[10] *De Gen. ad Litt.*, IX, 9.

premisses will be familiar as the three interrelated themes (or religious and political preoccupations) from the beginning of Chapter Two.[11] Of these it may now be said that they suggest a revealing fact: that Rome cast a long shadow over the medieval period: that long after she had ceased to be a meaningful political force, the language of her achievements continued to resonate in the minds of her barbarian conquerors. In James Viscount Bryce's description:

> No power was ever based on foundations more sure and deep than those which Rome laid during three centuries of conquest and four of undisturbed dominion. If her empire had been an hereditary or local kingdom, it might have fallen with the extinction of the royal line, the overthrow of the tribe, the destruction of the city, to which it was attached. But it was not so limited; it was imperishable because it was universal; and when its power had ceased, it was remembered with awe and love by the races whose separate existence it had destroyed, because it had spared the weak while it smote down the strong; because it had granted equal rights to all, and closed against none of its subjects the path of honorable ambition.[12]

(b) The medieval political lens

This awe and respect was not something that the Church had always enjoyed under the Roman Emperors: schooled in the municipal character of the old Roman religion, they had often struggled to understand the privileged position that she sought for herself. Up until the ninth-century, nearly all the friction between Church and State in the West was generated by misunderstandings of this sort. From Constantine to Charlemagne the

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[11] See above, p. 53.
[12] James Viscount Bryce, 'Rome's Legacy to the Middle Ages', in David Thompson (ed.), *The Idea of Rome*, p. 145.

dominant rulers sought to bring Church matters under their own personal authority while the Church stubbornly resisted such lay interference along the lines suggested by Gelasius. Indeed, Gelasius' solution – a dualism of power, or clearly defined spheres of interest for the secular and spiritual authorities – might have met with more success had the disputants not persisted with the old imperial language. For this language had grown up at a time when no clear distinction between the secular and spiritual was imagined. As has been shown, the ancient did not view his life in terms of separate departments that might necessitate equally separate institutions to minister to them. To the contrary, his life *was* his city; and he saw no reason why it should not form him for all needed as a man. And notwithstanding the great violence done to this ideal by the cold efficiency of Roman imperial government, it was to leave its mark on the language of politics. In the main, it manifested itself in the inability of either Church or State to conceive their authority in anything other than absolute terms. This unconscious commitment to an ancient habit of mind would eventually drive them towards two quite incompatible theories of *world* government.[13] To the Church, this would mean moving from the largely defensive posturing of her first thousand years to the aggressive policies of the Gregorian Reformation, and finally, on to the staggering papal plenitude of power. By the nature of the case, the State's strategy would be reactionary in relation to this unprecedented chain of events. As time went on, it developed a noticeably conservative character. Increasingly imperialists could be found countering the irresistible logic of the Church's position with appeals to historical precedent and sympathetic Biblical example.

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[13] Professor Walter Ullmann's 'ascending' and descending' theses of government can provide a helpful framework for thinking on this subject; though their simplifying tendencies should not be forgotten. See his *Law & Politics in the Middle Ages: An Introduction to the Sources of Medieval Political Thought* (London, Sources of History Limited, 1975), p. 32.

That the Church's logic was irresistible was down to the simple fact that it had its ancestor in that commonplace of ancient thought: the presumed superiority of spirit over matter. Plato is the outstanding early example of the political potential in this idea; and though the Church might well have produced a similar effect out of her own early teachings,[14] the reality of her uncomfortable situation in the empire and the other-worldly character of her mission conspired to make this an unrealistic prospect. All this would change, however, with the Christianization of the empire, and then again, with its dissolution at the hands of the barbarian invaders. But still, it would need a man of genius and deep learning to fashion a coherent political theory from the materials on offer, to set about transforming classical moral and political philosophy from the point of view of the Scriptures. Naturally the Church felt that in Augustine, and his extended synthesis of Christianity and Neo-Platonism, she had found such a man. For after all, with some careful editing, might not his doctrine of the Two Cites (though ostensibly teaching political indifference) become the vehicle for an enthusiastic message? It would, however, be inappropriate to tell the story of how Augustine came to be recruited for this unlikely cause here. It is enough to have shown why the Church might have wanted to recruit him in the first place. What needs to be said now is something about how his political ideas appeared through the medieval lens: that is, which of them were bought into particular focus, and why. In addition, it should be borne in mind how much depends on this discussion. As was made clear in the Introduction, Augustine's medieval interpreters effectively laid down the main lines for all subsequent misinterpretation of his political ideas. By rejecting his vision of the human condition, of the irredeemable

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[14] See the texts and discussions in Sykes, *Power and Christian Theology*, pp. 27-54.

character of institutions made with hands – both secular and spiritual – they fudged his carefully wrought distinction between the truths of reason and revelation, effectively turning political pessimism into prophetic utopianism.

(c) *Augustine: political pessimist or prophetic utopian?*

A theme which will recur in this discussion of the reception and interpretation of Augustine's political ideas is their silence on certain key points. It is the argument of this dissertation that this silence can be got round; that Augustine can be made to speak of things, which, for reasons of time and inclination, he was never able to write down. Taking the case of the medieval period, one might fairly presume that had he been able to anticipate the future political pretensions of the Church, he would at least have written in clarification of whether he was a political pessimist or a prophetic utopian. To Henry Paolucci, these were the two outlooks that most adequately conveyed the distance of possible opinions on his political ideas. As examples, he gave Friedrich Meinecke's suggestion in his *Die idee der Staatsräson* that Augustine is the precursor to Machiavelli and Étienne Gilson's assertion that he is in fact the chief source of 'that ideal of a world society which is haunting the minds of so many today.'[15]

That Paolucci chose his poles exceptionally well is shown by the question that all new students of Augustine's *De civitate Dei* ask: 'How can such an optimistic philosophy of history account for such a pessimistic set of social and political ideas?' How, in other words, can a dogmatic belief in the wisdom and providence of a good and just God be reconciled with an unshakeable conviction in the futility and hopelessness of human

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[15] See above, p. 26.

endeavour? It will be recalled from the previous Chapter that unlike Hegel and Marx, Augustine's philosophy of history does not redeem politics; that in fact it leaves it largely untouched, treating it as something natural rather than conventional; so natural that it becomes one of the conditions of life in this fallen world. Such talk invariably brings Hobbes to mind, as well as Machiavelli. To both these men politics was a brutal and cynical game forced upon men by the sheer terror of the alternative;[16] and that Augustine has plenty to say in support of this diagnosis is clear enough and quite beyond contention. What is not so clear, though, is what he has to say by way of a cure. To recall that uncompromising passage from his sermon CXXV quoted in the Introduction (pp. 21-22 above), men are everywhere sinning and openly flouting the laws of their cities yet not disturbing God's eternal plan. In fact, Augustine thinks that it is even through actions as reprehensible as theirs that God works His plan. Sometimes it is possible for human hearts and minds to see this happening, as when criminals are sentenced to do productive work for the city whose laws they have contravened. But as Augustine readily concedes, these are rare instances and more usually, God's Will is not clearly reflected in earthly arrangements.

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[16] To Hobbes, the alternative is, '...no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently, no culture of the earth, no navigation nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.' (Hobbes (ed. Edwin Curley), *Leviathan* (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), XIII, 9). Cf. Thucydides, I, 2-8. To Machiavelli, 'One can make this generalization about men: they are ungrateful, fickle, liars, and deceivers, they shun danger and are greedy for profit; while you treat them well, they are yours. They would shed their blood for you, risk their property, their lives, their children, so long, as I said above, as danger is remote; but when you are in danger they turn against you.' (Niccolò Machiavelli (ed. Giorgio Inglese), *Il Principe* (Torino, Giulio Einaudi Editore S.p.a., 1995), p. 110).

Evidently, then, there is a troubling epistemological distance between Augustine's thinking on nature, morality and politics and this, his grand historical vision. How is it that men can freely disobey the various normative laws laid down for their benefit yet not disturb the higher, eternal law of God's Sovereign Will? If the various normative laws are moral, that is to say, if they stand to reason, then what is the eternal law? Is it moral in any intelligible sense, or does it represent something else altogether? Indeed, does it have any positive existence at all, or does it merely express the conviction that God will mysteriously work all things to a good and just end? To ask these questions is to touch upon an interesting issue raised earlier: the difference between utopian and salvation histories. It was said then that Augustine believed Adam had forfeited his right to a utopian history by disobeying God in the Garden of Eden, and that from that point onwards, salvation history began on the initiative of God's Grace and Mercy. The point was also made how disconcertingly independent salvation histories are of the normal strategies for human improvement; or to put the matter from the other perspective, the distinguishing feature of any utopian history must surely be the way that it ennobles human activity and coordinates it in the pursuit of some rational good. One might say that utopian histories are vindicated by the ordinary experiences of men: that they produce arrangements the fundamental goodness and justness of which appeal to the normal categories of human understanding. Not so the salvation histories, or at least, not so the salvation history of Augustine. Something has already been said about the extraordinary generosity of Augustine's remarks on Divine Sovereignty: that he seems to think that the goodness of God and of His actions comprehensively outreaches the limited terms of human understanding. Morality, the laws of nature; these things are truly good – time and

time again Augustine is at pains to point this out.[17] Yet at the same time he always insists that for all their suggestion of a foothold in the Divine scheme of things, they do not translate the Sovereign Will of God. This insistence offers the greatest clue to where Augustine stands on the spectrum between political pessimism and prophetic utopianism. Its basis is his literal interpretation of the first three books of Genesis.

(d) Augustine's interpretation of events in the Garden of Eden

At *De Genesi ad litteram*, VIII, 6, 12, Augustine interprets the name of the 'Tree of Good and Evil' to be a reference to the virtue by which the rational creation pleases God:

> It was proper that man, placed in a state of dependence upon the Lord God, should be given some prohibition, so that obedience would be the virtue by which he would please his Lord. I can truthfully say that this is the only virtue of every rational creature who lives life under God's rule, and that the fundamental and greatest vice is the overweening pride by which one wishes to have independence to his own ruin, and the name of the vice is disobedience. There would not, therefore, be any way for a man to realize and feel that he was subject to the Lord unless he was given some command.

This bold statement is really the clue to Augustine's understanding of the Creation Narrative as it unfolds across the first three books of Genesis. The rational creation, that is, man and the angels, is distinguished by its capacity to hear, to understand and to obey God's commands.[18] The true gift and value of intellect, or reason, is that it places one in a position to choose to obey the commands of God's Will; this is a position that is denied

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[17] For instance at *De civ. Dei*, XII, 5.

[18] Augustine seems to confirm this fundamental similarity between man and the angels when he says at *Serm.*, IV, 3: 'It is hoping you will live the life of angels, not in carnal corruptions, not in pleasures and excitements, not in fornication and drunkenness and the enjoyment of carnal revels, not in the pride of possessions and earthly power – but just the kind of life that angels live.'

the non-rational creation, who have wills but not intellects.[19] This is the same point that Augustine chose to make in his *De libero arbitrio*, an early work begun in 388 A.D., just a year after his baptism and the formative intellectual experiences of Cassiciacum:

> It is one thing to be rational (that is, to be capable of thought), and another to be wise. Through reason, everyone is capable of comprehending a command, obedience to which is the first duty of faith, so that he can do what he is commanded to do. Just as it is the nature of reason to understand commands, it is the will which carries them out. Just as the importance of a rational creature lies in its capacity to receive commands, so the value of obeying commands lies in the wisdom thereby received.[20]

Such a clear understanding of the use of intellect has important epistemological consequences, the essence of which might be summed up in the following question: 'What sort of knowledge did Adam possess in Paradise if his intellect was entirely inspired and directed by God?' The answer to this question is also the definitive answer to the question whether Augustine was a political pessimist or a prophetic utopian. For it is only by understanding what Augustine thought Adam gave up in Paradise that one can begin to appreciate what he might have thought possible this side of it. If Adam was able to share in the first principles of God's Wisdom in Paradise, then there might be reason to suspect that outside of it he was able to fashion a mode of life in concert with the created order. This would support those who would seek to find in Augustine's political ideas the justification for ambitious ethical schemes, and thus a continuation of the trajectory of the Western political tradition.

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[19] See *De Gen. ad litt.*, VI, 12, 21: 'The pre-eminence of man consists in this, that God made him to His own image by giving him an intellect by which he surpasses the beasts…' Cf. *In Io. ev. tr.*, VIII, 6.
[20] *De lib. arb.*, III, 24.

The type of knowledge that Adam possessed at any one time in Paradise and the nature of the Wisdom which he might one day hope to attain, is best described in terms of the experience of a child growing up. For it is evidently true that Adam knew nothing that God had not first told him, or allowed him to discover for himself; what is more it was simply not in his created nature to question the truth of what God was telling or revealing to him. Adam was like a child because he was ignorant of a great deal but not conscious of this fact. He was happy in a way that it is not permitted for men to happy today amidst the pressures of becoming their own source of truth. His obedience of God's commands was absent of the impulse to understand why they were right, and so, following the course that God had established for him, he proved the rightness of His commands and grew into the wisdom of His ways.[21] In technical language borrowed from legal philosophy, one would say that Adam was subject to a voluntarist conception of law: that his obedience did not refer to the content of the law but to its source: the Voice of God. Augustine points out that when Adam's disobedience was discovered, God addressed only his ambition and pride with the words, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil.'[22]:

> God spoke these words not so much to heap opprobrium on Adam as to instill in the rest of mankind, for whom these words have been written down, a fear of being filled with a similar pride. God said, "The man has now become like one of us,

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[21] See *De civ. Dei*, XII, 24: 'It is God Who has given the human soul a mind. In the infant, reason and intelligence are in a certain sense dormant, and it is as if they were not present at all. But they are soon awakened and exercised as the years pass; and in this way the individual becomes capable of knowledge and learning, able to perceive the truth and love the good. This capacity enables the mind to drink in wisdom...' Cf. *De mag.*, XIV, 46: 'By His favour I shall love Him the more ardently the more I advance in learning.'

[22] Gen. 3: 22.

knowing good and evil." How are we to interpret this except to say that it is an example presented for the purpose of inspiring us with fear because the man not only did not become what he wanted to be but did not even retain the condition in which he had been created?[23]

Adam had, in other words, achieved nothing other than a descent into an inferior type of knowledge. In A. E. Housman's words: When Adam walked in Eden young, / Happy 'tis writ, was he, / While high the fruit of knowledge hung / Unbitten on the tree. / Happy was he the livelong day; / I doubt 'tis written wrong: / The heart of man, for all they say, / Was never happy long. / And now my feet are tired of rest, / And here they will not stay, / And the soul fevers in my breast / And aches to be away.[24]

A consideration of Adam's epistemological status in Paradise allows for certain conclusions to be reached regarding the nature of the society that he enjoyed there. From the evidence of his writings, Augustine seems genuinely to have thought that Adam and Eve would have gone on to found a numerous human race by conjugal union even if they had not sinned. As such, some sort of human society was always part of God's plan for Paradise:

> The vast number of angels in the heavenly city cannot be adduced as proof that man and woman would not be joined in conjugal union if they were not to die. Indeed, the perfect number of saints destined to rise and join the angels was foreseen by the Lord when He said, "In the resurrection they will neither be

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[23] *De Gen. ad litt.*, XI, 39, 53.

[24] A. E. Housman, 'When Adam Walked in Eden Young', in Christopher Ricks (ed.), *A. E. Housman: Collected Poems and Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1988), p. 201. See also Augustine's remarks at *De civ. Dei*, XXII, 30: 'Knowledge of evil, therefore, is of two kinds. On the one hand it is accessible to the power of the mind; on the other, it arises from sensory experience. Again, all vices are known in one way through the teaching of the wise, and in another way in the evil life of the foolish... But when we are restored by Him and perfected by His greater grace, we shall be still for all eternity...'

married nor take wives; for they will not be subject to death, but will enjoy equality with the angels of God." [Matt. 22: 30]. Here, indeed, the earth was to be filled with men, and in view of the close ties of relationship and the bond of unity so earnestly desired, it was to be populated by men from one common ancestor. For

> what other purpose, then, was a female helper similar to the man sought unless it was to have the female sex assist in the sowing of the human race, as the fertility of the earth does in the sowing of crops?[25]

Working backwards from the epistemological condition of Paradise, this society would evidently have taken the form of a union of men and women, equal in respect to their shared access to the privileged knowledge of what to do in the actual present in order to bring about a complete reconciliation of interests and the manifestation of God's Will. In the attitude of its members to their Lord, this society would have resembled something of a dictatorship; but crucially, Augustine seems to think that it would have achieved what no human dictatorship can: true freedom through perfect submission and obedience – a state that has elsewhere been described by the term 'The Perfect Law of Liberty'.[26]

(e) Law, human society, and the requirements of freedom

To achieve true freedom through law has forever been the problem of political life; though it might be more accurate to say that it has forever been the problem that has made human life political. Everyone knows the opening lines to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Du contrat social*: 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.'[27] And those more

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[25] *De Gen. ad litt.*, IX, 9, 15.

[26] This phrase is taken with gratitude from the title of a book by the Rev'd R. R. Williams, late Principal of St. John's College, Durham, and Honorary Canon of Durham Cathedral. The book is his *The Perfect Law of Liberty: An Interpretation of Psalm 119* (London, A. R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1952).

[27] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social, ou principes du droit politique* (Paris, Éditions Garnier Frères, 1962), p. 236.

familiar with his work will know that he overcomes this dilemma by confounding freedom and chains in a kind of popular dictatorship, the dictatorship of the *Volonté Générale* 'General Will'. That is certainly one way to get around the problem of combining the two most mutually antagonistic categories of the human mind: 'liberty' and 'law'.[28] It might be noted in passing that the fact that it is a heartless and rather cynical way around would not have troubled Rousseau.[29] Another way is simply to seek an utter reconciliation between one's personal will and the will of the law. It might fairly be called the freedom of the happy slave, for it consists in so delimiting one's expectations that they come in time to match exactly the proscriptions of the law. This is the kind of solution that thinking men are apt to imagine on Christianity's behalf.[30] T. H. Green is typical in this regard:

> The law, merely as law or as an external command, is a source of bondage in a double sense. Presenting to man a command which yet it does not give him power to obey, it destroys the freedom of the life in which he does what he likes without recognizing any reason why he should not (the state of which St. Paul says 'I was alive without the law once')... Freedom (also called 'peace,' and 'reconciliation') comes when the spirit expressed in the law... becomes the principle of action in the

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[28] 'To find a form of association that defends and protects with the whole force of the community, the person and the property of each associate; and in which each associate, though unified with all, nevertheless obeys himself, whilst also remaining just as free as before.' Such is the fundamental problem which the *Contrat Social* gives the answer to.' *Ibid.*, p. 243.

[29] 'Finally, each man, in giving himself to all, gives himself to nobody; and as there is no associate over whom he does not acquire the same right as he yields others over himself, he gains an equivalent for everything he loses, and an increase of force for the preservation of what he has.' *Ibid.*, p. 244. The reader will appreciate the disquieting conclusion that this neat logic must imply: '...whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free...' *Ibid.*, p. 246.

[30] And Augustine seems to think so too when he says that, '...although, in Paradise, before his sin, man could not do everything, he did not at that time wish do to anything that he could not do, and therefore he could do all that he wished.' (*De civ. Dei*, XIV, 15). However the crucial fact is that in Paradise, Adam had known nothing else. That is, he was not choosing this course in preference to another. The significance of this is made clear below.

man. To the man thus delivered, as St. Paul conceives him, we might almost apply phraseology like Kant's. 'He is free because conscious of himself as the author of the law which he obeys.' He is no longer a servant, but a son. He is conscious of union with God, Whose Will as an external law he before sought in vain to obey, but whose 'righteousness is fulfilled' in him now that he 'walks after the spirit.'[31]

But this solution, though it seems to give a very satisfactory philosophical phrasing of St. Paul, is still some way from Augustine's thinking on the matter. To a certain extent it is possible to anticipate this by the way in which it grants man ownership of the 'spirit of the law'. It will be remembered how some time ago, Thomas' definition of law was given in a similar context[32] – now it seems that that definition would do very well here as a neat rendering of Green's thesis. To Thomas, laws were always 'ordinances of reason'.[33] They were always ordinances of reason because whether or not Divinely inspired, they had first to stand before the bar of human understanding before they could be passed into law. This power of veto is noticeably absent from Augustine's thought. He never imagines to put conditions on Divine inspiration or to qualify it in any way. When it comes to the Sovereign Will of God, there are no 'slide-rules' or criteria of truth that can constrain it.[34] In fact, Augustine is quite certain that its content can have no bearing whatsoever on its goodness and justness; and this conviction stems from his literal reading of events in the Garden of Eden.

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[31] T. H. Green, 'On the Different Senses of "Freedom" as Applied to Will and to the Moral Progress of Man', in *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1907), pp. 4-5.
[32] See above, p. 70.
[33] *Summa Theologica*, Ia, IIae, 90, 4; tr. F. C. Copleston. See above, p. 70. The two best introductions to Thomas' specifically political ideas are R. W. Dyson (ed.), *Thomas Aquinas: Political Writings* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Paul E. Sigmund (ed.), *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics* (New York : London, W. W. Norton & Company, 1988).
[34] See *Confess.*, III, 9, 17; *Confess.*, X, 29, 40.

For when Adam chose not to be part of a utopian history, he consigned all men to pay the price of his decision. The moment his eyes were opened in the Garden of Eden, he saw God for the dictator He really was. In that instant, the freedom of perfect obedience in the Garden seemed a small and cruel thing compared to the great experiment in living that awaited him outside. To stay inside the Garden would have meant remaining in a state of naïve and loving submission to God, obeying commands whose first principles would always remain hidden from him; to leave it would have meant becoming the architect of his own destiny; and as a host of clever men might have told him, 'better the devil you don't know than the God you do'.

It is clear, therefore, that the devil would not have been able to lure man into the manifest and open sin of doing what God had prohibited had not man already begun to be pleased with himself. That is why Adam was delighted when it was said, 'Ye shall be as gods.' But Adam and Eve would have been better fitted to resemble gods if they had clung in obedience to the highest and true ground of their being, and not, in the their pride, made themselves their own ground. For created gods are gods not in their own nature, but by participation in the true God. By striving after more, man is diminished; when he takes delight in his own self-sufficiency, he falls away from the One Who truly suffices him.[35]

And so Adam stepped out of the Garden of Eden to fashion a new world in his own fallen likeness, a hard world driven by selfishness, pride and greed; but a world also softened by a mysterious still small voice: mysterious because it is not at all clear where

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[35] *De civ. Dei*, XIV, 13.

it comes from, and still, because it expects to be obeyed.[36] In short one might call it a political world. And this step that Adam took was of eternal significance because in taking him out of the Will of God, it took him out of utopian history too.

This, essentially, is Augustine's answer to those who question how the eternal law works its purpose through the various normative laws laid down for man's benefit. It is characteristically human to presume that at some fundamental level, all the laws of the universe form a single piece; that a clever man can begin at the bottom – with just a handful of dim intuitions –, and from there work his way by sound reasoning to very nearly the summit of wisdom.[37] In fact it is characteristically human to presume that the universe has laws at all;[38] but this particular philosophical stone must be left unturned: to try to turn it here would be inappropriate; and it has, in any case, been well-turned by others.[39] The point in emphasizing all of this is the fact that if one is willing to discount these presumptions, then the question how the various normative laws reconcile themselves to the eternal law ceases to be meaningful. It ceases to be meaningful because one is no longer talking about a difference of degree between the laws, but one of kind;

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[36] See *Confess.*, IX, 2, 4.

[37] As a young new convert, Augustine remained similarly convinced for some time. He even conceived a substantial work called the *De libris Disciplinarum*, designed on the plan of an encyclopaedia of secular learning and arranged to show that all knowledge finds its consummation in God ('To move passionately from things corporeal to things incorporeal, which progress is made almost with fixed steps that lead or are led' (*Retr.*, I, 6)).

[38] The chief moral and political consequence of this presumption has been the Natural Law Tradition. An excellent definition that explains this can be found at Dyson, *Natural Law and Political Realism in the History of Political Thought*, Vol. 1, p. xii.

[39] Preeminently by David Hume, of course. In his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume argued that the inductive mode of reasoning is based upon an outrageous assumption, and that men are compelled to believe it by an inexplicable habit of mind. The best short account of his ideas can be found in the abstract which he published in support of his work. See David Hume, 'An Abstract of a Book Lately Published, Entitled, *A Treatise of Human Nature, Etc.*', in David Hume (Ed. D. G. C. Macnabb), *A Treatise of Human Nature, Book One* (London, Collins, 1962), p. 348, Appendix A. There is an excellent analysis of Hume's argument in Karl Popper's *Objective Knowledge, An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 3-4.

and that leaves no hope for human understanding. The common morality of man anticipates nothing of the Divine goodness; neither, for that matter, does the peace and justice of earthly politics anticipate anything of the true peace and true justice of the City of God; and the clearest proof, if proof be needed, is the nonsense that comes of trying to rationalize, or verify, the gifts of Divine illumination. No doubt Augustine would have approved of C. S. Lewis' explanation of this last point:

> There are progressions in which the last step is *sui generis* – incommensurable with the others – and in which to go the whole way is to undo all the labour of your previous journey. To reduce [morality] to a mere natural product is a step of that kind. Up to that point, the kind of explanation which explains things away may give us something, though at a heavy cost. But you cannot go 'explaining away' for ever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on 'seeing through' things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that the window should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use trying to 'see through' first principles. If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To 'see through' all things is the same as not to see.[40]

In order to see in this world man must swallow his pride. He must realise that the lights which illuminate his heart and mind are a Divine gift.[41] And if he will only begin to realise this, he will find himself suddenly facing that most profound of all profound

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[40] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York, HarperCollins, 2001), p. 81. Undoubtedly, however, C. S. Lewis gave his best and most accessible defense of Natural Law in a short broadcast talk, which first aired in 1941. It can be found reprinted, with some alterations, as, 'Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe', in *Broadcast Talks* (London, Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1942), pp. 9-37. For more on what he sees as the destructive power of reason, see another short paper, 'Meditation in a Toolshed', in *Compelling Reason* (London, HarperCollins, 1996), pp. 53-8.

[41] See *Serm.*, CCCVI(E), 5.

mysteries: The Perfect Law of Liberty. For it is the desire to achieve perfect freedom through law that haunts all of man's social and political endeavours today; indeed this is the predicament that has catalyzed and shaped the political tradition of the West. As Pascal observed, 'It is odd, when one thinks of it, that there are people in the world who, having renounced all the laws of God and nature, have themselves made laws which they rigorously obey...'[42]

(f) The Will of God, the will of man, and the implications of a universal rationality

Here for Augustine is the clue why the commands of God's Sovereign Will appear so intolerable to men this side of Paradise: they simply aim at an end separated from the actual present by an impossible distance of time.[43] This difference between eternality and temporality is how Augustine believes the Creator/creature relationship should appear from a metaphysical perspective. It is the reason why God's commands do not, '...tell [a man] along the line of [his] natural senses what to expect.'[44] In Paradise none of this could matter while Adam remained obedient to The Perfect Law of Liberty; for then, looking to God for all his seeing, he shared in an eternity not of endless intervals of time – the way that eternity must appear from a temporal perspective – but of an actual present without end. To not have to worry about what the future may hold; to not have to apply forethought in order to secure tomorrow's necessities; to not be haunted by the fleeting

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[42] Quoted in the preliminary matter to A. P. d'Entrèves, *Natural Law*.

[43] *Serm.*, XXVIII(B), 10. Julian of Norwich had a good way of putting the difficulty: 'Things which God's foreknowledge saw before creation, and which He so rightly and worthily brings to their proper end in time, break upon us suddenly and take us by surprise. And because of this blindness and lack of foresight we say they are chances and hazards.' (Julian of Norwich (tr. Clifton Wolters), *Revelations of Divine Love* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1978), p. 80).

[44] Oswald Chambers, *Not Knowing Whither* (London : Edinburgh, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1957), p. 11.

and transient nature of pleasures;[45] these are among the advantages associated with unquestioningly devolving all responsibility for the conduct of the actual present to God.[46] But the point, of course, is that it was not for these advantages that Adam first obeyed God's commands. He obeyed them because he loved God with the whole of his heart and mind.[47] To conceive his situation before God in terms of advantages would have made no sense to him at all; it would have been logically impossible; for if it was true that he had known nothing else, what could it realistically be an advantage on?

This is something of a truism, but to Augustine's mind it is of the first importance. It is the watershed between two epistemologies. The one accepts knowledge on the Word of God; the other looks to substantiate it with reference to something else.[48] The one

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[45] For instance, *Confess.*, X, 28, 39.

[46] George MacDonald has a characteristically intuitive way of explaining this phenomenon: see n. 43, p. 19 above. Seneca's description of this phenomenon is more elaborate; but for its brilliance, and in view of the fact that it is constructed out of the Stoic materials which Christianity was later to make its own, it is well worth reproducing here: 'Fear keeps pace with hope. Nor does their moving together surprise me; both belong to a mind in a state of anxiety through looking into the future. Both are mainly due to projecting our thoughts far ahead of us instead of adapting ourselves to the present. Thus it is that foresight, the greatest blessing humanity has been given, is transformed into a curse. Wild animals run from the dangers they actually see, and once they have escaped them worry no more. We however are tormented alike by what is past and what is to come. A number of our blessings do us harm, for memory brings back the agony of fear while foresight brings it on prematurely. No one confines his unhappiness to the present.' (Seneca (tr. Robin Campbell), *Letters from a Stoic* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969), p. 38). But it should be pointed out that Augustine is prepared to admit that Adam might have been happier still had he had some certainty about the future integrity of his free will. See *De civ. Dei*, XI, 12.

[47] See *Confess.*, X, 22, 32; *Serm.*, XXII(A), 3.

[48] Having said this much about Augustine's thoughts on the poverty of reason, it is now possible to put forward a more advanced statement of Aquinas' position; at any rate, it will help very much if it can set Augustine's thoughts in starker relief. The advanced statement comes from Ernst Cassirer's last book, *The Myth of the State*, p. 111: 'To Thomas Aquinas, as well as Dante, Aristotle was *il maestro di color che sanno* – the master of the knowing ones. And Aquinas wished not only to believe but also to know. According to him there is no contradiction between these two desires – they are not only compatible but complement each other. Since reason and revelation are two different expressions of one and the same truth, the truth of God, no disagreement between them is possible. If such a disagreement appears it must depend upon merely subjective causes. In this case it is for philosophy to discover these causes and to remove them. Reason may err; revelation is infallible. If there seems to be any discord and discrepancy between the two we may, therefore, from the first be convinced that the error is on the side of reason and we must try to find out and to correct this error. That is the true relation between philosophy and theology.

imagines no intellectual meeting-place with God; the other that such a common understanding is possible. Augustine has a characteristic way of illustrating what he means by this. He often talks of how one can know something in a positive or negative sense: that is, one can either know exactly what something is, and nothing more, or one can know what something is by setting it in relief against the experience of what it is not.[49] Thus,

> A person who loves the good without having had any experience of evil, namely, one who before feeling the loss of the good chooses to hold on to it so as not to lose it, is of all mankind most worthy of praise. But if this were not a matter of singular merit, it would not be attributed to the Child of the race of Israel Who receiving the name Emmanuel, 'God is with us,' reconciled us to God... Concerning Him the prophet said, 'Before the Child knows good or evil, He will reject evil-doing in order to chose the good.' How does He reject or choose what He does not know except that these two are known in one way by the knowledge of good and in another way by the experience of evil? Through the knowledge of good, evil is known, although it is not felt. Good is held on to lest by loss of it evil be experienced. Furthermore, by the experience of evil, good is known, since a person feels what he lost when he finds it is evil to have lost the good. Hence, before the Child knew by experience a good which He would lack or an evil which He would feel in the loss of a good, He rejected evil to do good, that is, He was unwilling to lose what He had lest He feel the loss of what He ought not to lose. He gave a unique example of obedience, because He did not come to do His own will but the Will of Him by whom He was sent. In this He differed from him who chose to do

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In all our philosophical efforts we must be guided and enlightened by the revealed truth. Yet when accepting this guide, reason may trust its own forces.'

[49] He explains this at *De Gen. ad litt.*, VIII, 16, 34. Cf. *Confess.*, VIII, 3, 6-8; *En. in ps.*, I, 6. See also *De civ. Dei*, XI, 18, for a discussion along more strictly aesthetic lines.

his own will, not the Will of his Creator. Hence, it is rightly said, 'As by one man's disobedience many have been made sinners, so by one man's obedience many are made just, because as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.'[50]

Augustine's point is that it makes all the difference whether one thinks that 'God is good' or 'good is God'. For if God is good, then goodness has a certain independence *vis-à-vis* God; and thus to understand goodness is to bring an aspect of God under the legislation of the mind. But if good is God, then goodness is entirely bound up in the mysterious movements of God's Sovereign Will; it has no independence and cannot be reduced to some lowest common denominator – T. H. Green's 'spirit of the law', perhaps.[51] The human mind is so configured that it needs something of this sort to stand apart as its ultimate source of reference; its criteria of truth all demand some standard to which they can refer. Augustine seems genuinely to see an explanation of this fact in the events of the Garden of Eden, and consequently he is inclined to attribute all subsequent history to a catastrophic change of mind initiated by an equally catastrophic change of heart. But this does not make his outlook on temporal affairs especially idealistic – far from it, in fact. Salvation history is a fundamentally private matter, the narrative of discrete and uncoordinated events of individual salvation – each one miraculous, each one an instance of the private soul participating, through obedience, in the eternal

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[50] *De Gen. Ad litt.*, VIII, 14, 32.

[51] *Serm.*, CCCXLI, 16: 'I call God just, because in human terms I can't find anything better; in fact, He is beyond justice. It says in the Scriptures, "The Lord is just, and loves deeds of justice." But it also says there that God repents, it also says there that God doesn't know things. Who wouldn't be horrified at the idea? God doesn't know things, God repents? All the same, Scripture does descend to the salutary use of these terms which horrify even you, precisely in order to save you from imagining that terms you think are fine are said about God fittingly and worthily... But any who have risen beyond even these words, and begun to think worthily of God as far as human beings are permitted to, will find a silence that is to be praised by the inexpressible voice of the heart.' Cf. *In Io. ev. tr.*, VI, 8, 16.

purpose of God's Sovereign Will.[52] By contrast, his understanding of strictly temporal matters is markedly materialist, surprisingly so for a Catholic bishop in the fifth-century. Men fool themselves into thinking that their exertions intimate, or even realise, an eternal plan. Or worse still, they attempt to justify them by discerning in history a pattern of progress and development. Quite fantastic constructions of the mind have been thrown up by men determined not to face the precariousness of their existence alone,[53] and of

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[52] This statement marks a good point at which to explain how this view of Augustinian salvation history relates to the received wisdom on the subject. First it is important to reiterate how close a relationship has been forged in these pages between history and epistemology. What has been called the 'utopian history' of Paradise consisted in Adam's ability to act in perfect concert with God's Will. After he had sinned and turned away from God to become his own source of truth, he effectively became an historical actor without the perfect knowledge of how to act. This was the start of what has been called 'ordinary human history'. Correspondingly, 'salvation' history describes what happens when individual men return to God and begin to act on His Will for their lives. According to this analysis, most current conceptions of 'salvation history' are more akin to what has been defined here as 'utopian history'. That is, they understand that the ordinary processes of history have been hijacked and are now working mysteriously to the end of salvation. However, although this understanding is partly implied in Augustine's fulsome views on Divine providence, enough has been said now to show that from the point of view of man's temporal perspective, Augustine thought that God's piloting of the universe could be of no moment in the interpretation of history. This scheme can be made to correspond well with Markus' seminal views. In his *Saeculum*, he argues against imposing the traditional historicism of salvation histories on Augustine. Instead, he recommends an approach that begins with accepting that history of any sort is recorded history: that it consists in a human interpretation of events. This links it with the question of knowledge. From this position Markus then argues that Augustine's mature conception of history – the conception that informed his *De civitate Dei* – was based in a distinction between secular and sacred historical knowledge. This conception allowed him to claim that the Biblical interpretation of history was sacred because the authors had been gifted a Divine, prophetic perspective on events. Crucially, it was this gifted perspective and not a more generally accessible pattern in history that allowed them to produce their unique interpretation of events. In Markus' words: 'Sacred history is simply what is written in the scriptural canon. It is history written under divine inspiration and endowed with divine authority, presenting, under this inspiration, its secular material within a perspective which transcends that of the secular historian... [Consequently] until the end of the world, all history is homogeneous... it cannot be mapped out in terms of a pattern drawn from sacred history... it can no longer contain decisive turning-points... Every moment may have its unique and mysterious significance in the ultimate divine *tableau* of men's doings and sufferings; but it is the significance to which God's revelation does not supply the facts.' (pp. 16-21). For more on the intellectual climate in which, and against which, Augustine shaped up his understanding of history, see the thought provoking essays in Jacob Neusner (ed.), *The Christian and Judaic Invention of History* (Atlanta, Georgia, Scholars Press, 1990). In particular, the Introduction makes the important point that Christian historical writing really began in response to a momentous political fact: the Christianization of the Roman empire by Constantine. This event bought revelation into a tantalizing alignment with human history and moreover, introduced numerous new questions about Christian conduct and discipleship that might only be answered by the creation of a linear, patterned historical narrative.

[53] It is possible to speculate that this sense of enervation before the future unknown has been the impulse to a great deal in human history; and that when once a man has paused to consider his relative insignificance in the grand scheme of things, he has felt it. There have been so many attempts to capture the mood in art,

Augustine's legendary cynicism and scathing towards them something has already been said.[54] But whatever comfort men may take from inventing gods and philosophies and imagining that through them they can influence the general run of affairs, history, that is, temporal history – history viewed from the limited perspective of the actual present – will always be a matter of material causes, both inside and outside of man's control. If one were to call it a continuous collision of selfish wills set against the backdrop of a capricious and mysterious (natural) world, one would not be far off Augustine's original meaning.

Here, then, is the stuff of his political pessimism: that unflinching vision of human history as a procession of the depressingly familiar, each episode just as bad as the last, and now with the added bleakness of a truly damning epistemology. The human mind is not sufficient to create anything truly new; indeed it is parasitic and must always discover some premiss from which to ratiocinate.[55] So that they do not devour each other in their hunger, men are tossed the laws of nature like scraps from the Divine table; and though the food is nourishing and good for their moral wellbeing, in its inexplicability, it is harmful to their pride.[56] And where does this leave those who would claim Augustine for

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but one stands out in particular. In 1917, amidst the heightened uncertainties of trench-life in World War One, Wilfred Owen penned a poem entitled *The Fates*. It is well worth looking up.

[54] See above, pp. 90-91; and also *De civ. Dei.*, IV, 32.

[55] As the Italian thinker Massimiliano Finazzer Flory writes: 'Augustine's thought addresses itself beautifully to that journey which describes the relationship between reason and faith; or perhaps more properly speaking, to that journey which describes the chief consequence of this relationship. For the simple fact is that one cannot but believe. This is because in order not to believe, one has still to believe in something. That is to say, one is always seeking some belief [for one's actions]; and this same fact presupposes general thought too. For it is manifest that no thought stands alone; that all thought moves either from a premiss, which, in the nature of the case, must be taken on conviction, or else that it is called forth by some concern or other.' (Massimiliano Finazzer Flory, 'Introduzione', in Giovanni Reale e Carlo Sini, *Agostino e La Scrittura dell'Interiorità* (Milano, Edizioni San Paolo, 2006), pp. 7-8).

[56] See C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, pp. 43-44. In his much debated twelfth essay, Montaigne parades the poverty of un-aided human reason, at one point drawing on Augustine to make his point that, '...to

prophetic utopianism: 'that ideal of a world society which is haunting the minds of so many today', to recall the words of Étienne Gilson? Is there anything in Augustine's thinking to support a wider and less discriminating portfolio for salvation history? Or what is effectively the same thing, are there any grounds for a positive Christian politics, some theory of world government to fill the void between the Two Cities and meet God halfway? On the evidence presented, the straightforward answer must be 'no', for although it is tempting to underestimate the significance that Augustine attaches to the watershed between temporality and eternality, it is manifest that he believes there is no overcoming it. It may well be the case that God pilots the universe with exquisite control, but this fact can have no bearing on conditions within a time-bound world. It can have no bearing because even reason, man's one realistic hope of independence *vis-à-vis* God, is affected by it: man, part of the rational creation, has been designed to live in the enjoyment of loving obedience so that it is natural to him to live under law.[57] But it is not natural for God the Creator to live under law, for He is the source of the law and its inspiration. Consequently He does not pilot the universe according to principles or methods, that is, principles or methods the essence, or spirit of which, might be appropriated for use on earth. Augustine thinks that it is characteristic of fallen human nature to think that He might. For when Adam turned away from God, he did not turn away from law and its necessity; he became, rather, a 'law unto himself'. Augustine is

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convict our reason of weakness, there is no need to go sifting out rare examples, and that she is so lame and so blind that there is nothing so clear and easy as to be clear enough to her; that the easy and the hard are one to her; that all subjects alike, and nature in general, disavow her jurisdiction and meditation.' (Montaigne (tr. Donald M. Frame), *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 328).

[57] See *De civ. Dei*, XIII, 20. The virtue of a 'pure and simple obedience' and its anticipation of what Sir Ernest Barker called the 'pure rigour of an unswerving general order' is beautifully sketched by Wordsworth in his poem *Ode to Duty*. Barker himself recommended it as a clear reflection of the Augustinian philosophy of history. (Barker, in his Introduction to the John Healey translation of the *City of God*, p. lvi).

not surprised, then, when men insist on presuming that the universe should submit to human categories of understanding: for the fact is that human categories of understanding are inextricably bound up with the metaphysics of temporality.[58] And as such, he is not surprised either when men insist on conceiving eternality in temporal terms, as intervals of time without end rather than one endless actual present.[59] For the fact is that though men may have escaped their duty of obedience to God, they have not escaped the limitations of their design and equipment.[60] This gives uniformity to their efforts to establish a kind of paradise on earth.[61]

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[58] See *Serm.*, CCCLXB, 3.

[59] *Serm.*, CCLXXXIII, 3-4: 'That was the watchword of the martyrs; they didn't lust after the day of men, in case they should fail to reach the day of God. They didn't lust after the day so soon to end, in order to reach the day that has no end... Finally, after the labours of a short time, one comes to enjoy rest, not for a long time, but simply without time. We come to the enjoyment of rest, you see, not in a place where time will be long, but where time will not be at all. Our maturity, after all, will be eternity, where there's neither any growing up nor growing old, and no day being added to our age, because no day is left behind.'

[60] Most clearly seen in the way that, '...reason considers what value a thing has in itself, as part of the order of nature, whereas necessity considers how to obtain what will meet its need.' In other words, reason preserves its appetite for truth and certainty in all things, and helps to distinguish men from the beasts, for whom necessity (or instinct) suffices to meet their needs. However, where reason once looked to God for all its inspiration, it now, '...considers what appears to be true according to the light of the mind.' (*De civ. Dei*, XI, 16). Augustine thinks, then, that though the source of inspiration may have changed, it is still inspiration that the human mind seeks: that is, self-evident wisdom.

[61] *Serm.*, CXCVIII, 33: 'But what could be prouder than to forsake God through overweening self-confidence? What more avaricious than not being satisfied with God? Pride, therefore, is the same thing as avarice at the origin of sins. That is why the fornicating soul, having forsaken the One true God as its lawful husband, prostitutes itself to many false gods, that is, to demons and finds no satisfaction at all.' And perhaps the clearest intellectual expression of these 'false gods' is 'nature': that is, the philosophical term 'nature'. Something has already been said on this subject in the Introduction. What will be pointed out here is the fact that men have always reserved a special place for 'nature' at the table and have managed to keep it filled. 'Nature' in a moral or philosophical or scientific sense, means 'self-evident'. 'It is natural for us to behave in this way'; 'the negation of a true statement is false'; 'the sun will rise tomorrow' – all of these invoke 'self-evidence' as their vindification; and the point is that self-evidence of this kind is always sought out by men as the guarantee of truth. This habit of the human mind is a well-documented fact: some time ago Professor Ritchie, in his book *Natural Rights: a Criticism of some Political and Ethical Conceptions* (London, Swan Sonnenschein, 1894) drew up a history of the principal usages of the term 'nature' in political science. It still makes for very interesting reading (chapter seven, 'De Divisione Naturae'). More recently, Whitehead has performed a similar service in the scientific sphere (Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, pp. 131-152). Thought-provoking is Pascal's, 'I much fear that this nature is itself only a first custom, as custom is a second nature.' (*Pensées*, I, 42).

And this really marks the limit of what Augustine is prepared to say about events in the Garden of Eden before the Fall: for his method generally is to follow the narrative of the first three books of Genesis to the word; to interpret literally wherever possible; and only to fall back on allegory when literalism can reveal nothing sensible.[62] It is precisely because he treats the Garden of Eden as an episode in history[63] rather than a foundation myth,[64] that he sees no more than a diagnostic potential in it. It represents a unique event, the ending of one type of history and the beginning of another. Paradise is lost; it can have no bearing on earthly arrangements. Man is fallen; his salvation lies in an 'eternal city not made with hands'.[65] These facts, as Augustine sees them, explicitly prevent him from indulging the kind of political imagination that has been associated here with the medieval mindset, and which was beginning to gain ground with certain writers before him.[66] As Dyson puts it:

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[62] For instance, see how Augustine justifies the method of his *De Genesi contra Manicheos* at *De Gen. ad litt.*, VIII, 2, 5. And from other point of view, *De civ. Dei*, XIII, 21. Cf. *De Gen. ad litt.*, VIII, 1.

[63] As he explains it at *De Gen. ad litt.*, VIII, 1, 2: 'The narrative in these books is not written in a literary style proper to allegory, as in the Canticle of Canticles, but from beginning to end in a style proper to history, as in the Books of Kings and the other works of that type.'

[64] The reference is to the understanding of this concept proposed by Tudor in his thought-provoking study *Political Myth*. A political myth generally-speaking is, Tudor, suggests, '...an interpretation of what the myth-maker (rightly or wrongly) takes to be hard fact. It is a device men adopt in order to come to terms with reality; and we can tell that a given account is a myth, not by the amount of truth that it contains, but by the fact that it is *believed* to be true and, above all, by the dramatic form into which it is cast.' (p. 17). Furthermore, 'Like all other myths, a political myth explains the circumstances of those to whom it is addressed. It renders their experience more coherent; it helps them to understand the world in which they live. And it does so by enabling them to see their present condition as an episode in an ongoing drama.' (p. 139). Against this general scheme, foundation myths are distinguished by the fact that they, '...explain the present in terms of a creative event that took place in the past. This act is sometimes sufficiently remote to be little more than a legend, but, in most cases, it is an actual and often quite recent historical event which has been dramatized for the purposes of political argument.' (p. 91). It should be pointed out that Tudor does not himself discuss the Creation Narrative as an example of a foundation myth. His example is the Roman foundation myth. When he mentions Christianity, it is rather in connection with eschatological myths, that is, '...myths concerned with "the last things", the events with which the world as we know it comes to an end.' (p. 91).

[65] The expression is Moss', see n. 8, p. 78 above. It is reproduced here for its elegant simplicity. Cf. *En. in ps.*, CXLVI, 5.

[66] The chief of these was Eusebius in the fourth-century A.D., for whom the conversion of Constantine prefigured the real possibility of an enduring Christian polity. The following extracts from his well-known *Oration in Honour of Constantine on the Thirtieth Anniversary of his Reign* do full justice to his

At the centre of Augustine's conception of political life lie two key ideas: the impairment of our relationship with God by sin, and the conviction that this impairment has consequences for every aspect of man's individual and collective life. It is in light of this conviction that Augustine so largely abandons the kind of political morality associated with Plato and Aristotle. It is also in light of it that he comprehensively dismisses the traditional moral and political claims of Rome.[67]

(g) H. –X. Arquillière and political Augustinianism

With this ground covered it is now appropriate to examine the fate of Augustine's political ideas in the medieval period: that is, the use to which they were put by thinkers determined to reject the Augustinian 'politics of indifference', or, in its purely theological expression, the necessity of Grace and Confession in the Pilgrim City. This is a large and complex subject which it would be unfeasible to investigate in any serious detail here. In keeping with the stated aims of this chapter, then, the discussion will position itself with reference to the Augustinian political vision as it has been presented thus far – the vision that it has been claimed corresponds with the original arrangement of Augustine's

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enthusiasm and make a helpful comparison with Augustine: 'He then must be ruler of this whole universe – the Word of God, whose presence is all-pervasive, over all things, through all things, and in all things both visible and invisible. From Him and through Him the king who is dear to God receives an image of the kingdom that is above and so in imitation of that greater King himself guides and directs the course of everything on earth... Again, the Saviour of the universe is bringing the whole heaven and earth and the kingdom that is above into a condition worthy of His Father. So too the one dear to Him directs those who come under his control on earth to the only-begotten saving Word and makes them fit for his kingdom. The One Saviour of the universe, like a good shepherd keeping wild beasts from His flock, drives away by His Divine and invincible might the rebellious powers which used to fly about in the air above the earth and harass the souls of men. So too the one dear to Him is adorned by Him from on high with the trophies of victory over his enemies; by the rule of war he masters the open enemies of the truth and brings them to a right mind... He himself directs and guides from on high with the reins of an inspired harmony and concord. At one and the same time he traverses the whole world under the sun; he himself is present to all; he himself oversees all. The kingdom with which he is invested is an image of the heavenly one. He looks up to see the archetypal pattern and guides those whom he rules below in accordance with that pattern.' (*DECT*, pp. 231-234).

[67] Dyson, *Normative Theories of Society and Government*, p. 66.

political ideas in his mind. This task is greatly helped by the fact that the leading scholars of the period all recognise that medieval thinkers exploited (consciously and unconsciously) a perceived ambiguity in Augustine's distinction between the truths of reason and revelation.[68] Of these scholars the most significant is H. –X. Arquillière, for it is he who is responsible for bringing the term 'political Augustinianism' to prominence. It is his analysis of the medieval intellectual climate that is going to be leaned on here. Considerable use will also be made of Dyson's commentaries on the period as well as his critical editions of a number of important medieval political texts. With a view to what lies ahead, the aim of this examination is really to establish the main lines along which medieval thinkers misinterpreted Augustine's political ideas, and which went on to set the pattern for all subsequent misinterpretations of them.

As has already been pointed out, the medieval period begins with the reversal in fortunes of two institutions: the Church and the State. The Church, hitherto dependant on the good will of the Roman empire whilst at the same time remaining conscientiously indifferent to its fortunes, finds itself suddenly in a position of authority and influence with the breaking up of the empire by the barbarians. In their turn the barbarians, politically represented by their small kingdoms (and in that sense very loosely rendered by the term 'State'), find themselves faced with an institution and an idea – the idea of Latin Christendom – whose magnificence and potential they cannot but appreciate. Although it is undoubtedly something of an oversimplification, it is probably true to say that it is over the right to exploit the political potential in this idea that Church and State

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[68] See above, pp. 22-24

dispute in the medieval period. Consequently medieval political argument is characterised by the following preoccupations:

1. The need to justify political activity in light of the doctrine of Original Sin: the question of the 'natural right of the State'.
2. The question of the State's position *vis-à-vis* the Church in light of the ontological superiority of spiritual over temporal matters.
3. The source, status and control of political power.

Immediately these preoccupations suggest that medieval political argument is some way removed from the ethical idealism of Hellenic thought. The philosophical individualism that Rome did so much violence to disappears almost altogether in the medieval period. It is instead replaced by a thinly-disguised realism grounded in the importance of political power. This is a situation that plainly could not have arisen while the Church remained true to the political indifference of Scripture.[69] Thus the termini of the medieval period mark the time for which the Papacy remained viable as a political enterprise, as a force for world government (494 – 1493 A.D.).

It might be considered now what aspects of Augustine's thought particularly addressed the medieval situation. In Dyson's opinion, they are best expressed as six 'tightly interwoven themes':

1. The temporal and spiritual powers are separate spheres of authority, ordained to different purposes and employing different methods. But the quality of the two powers is asymmetrical. It is asymmetrical because
2. spiritual power is intrinsically or metaphysically superior to temporal power, and,

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[69] See above, pp. 47-49.

3. unlike spiritual power, political power can achieve only what is negative and external, and is necessary at all only because human beings have become estranged from God. Political power has no positive moral good to contribute to our lives.
4. Ordinarily, inasmuch as the State is a divinely-ordained instrument of order and discipline, obedience is due as a mater of religious duty, even to wicked rulers; but spiritual matters must in the nature of the case take precedence over temporal ones in the event of conflict.
5. Christian rulers have a duty to rule well, to set a good example to those under them and to make their resources available for the advancement and defence of the Church. Their duties include the enactment and enforcement of laws against heretics and schismatics; but
6. those duties are owed by Christian rulers not because they are subject to the Church's command *qua* rulers, but because, *qua* Christians, they find themselves in a position that affords opportunities for service of a particular kind.[70]

These themes, though they are clearly consistent with the exposition of Augustine's political ideas that has been here given, are clearly pregnant with the possibility for a more enthusiastic interpretation. The key to that possibility is the absence of any mention of God's Will. Disputants in the political struggles of the medieval period did not typically concern themselves with this aspect of Augustine's thinking. Their priority was to establish a conceptual understanding of man, society and the state; to use this understanding as a basis for theories of world government; and finally, not to trouble themselves with the question whether their plan might be part of God's. This attitude caused them to pass over, or simply not to see, those aspects of Augustine's thought dealing with the ineffability of God, the metaphysical restrictions of temporality and the

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[70] Dyson, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, pp. 169-170.

realities of man's fallen state. As a consequence, that is, without qualifying their interpretations of Augustine by reference to these aspects of his thought, they indulged an optimism about the possibilities of politics that he could never have shared. Probably the palmary example of this comes from Giles of Rome's *De ecclesiastica potestate*, one of the most forthright assertions of the Papalist position to come out of the medieval period. It was written near the climax of the dispute between Pope Boniface VIII and Philip the Fair of France – probably, Dyson thinks, in 1302.[71] Giles had become the first Augustinian regent-master at the University of Paris in 1285; from 1291 to 1294, he was Prior General of the Augustinian Order of Hermits. In Part I Chapter five of his work, Giles comes up with the following 'Augustinian' argument for the superiority of the Church in all matters spiritual and temporal. It will be noted in particular how he argues from the spiritual government of the universe to the Church's government of the world without any intervening mention of God's Will:

> Therefore, if we wish to see which power stands under which power, we must pay attention to the government of the whole mechanism of the world. And we see in the government of the universe that the whole of corporeal substance is governed through the spiritual... Hence Augustine, at *De Trinitate*, 3:4, says that 'certain more gross and inferior bodies are ruled in a certain order through the more subtle and the more potent; but all bodies through spirit, and the whole of creation by its Creator.' And what we see in the order and government of the universe we must picture to ourselves in the government of the commonwealth and in the government of the whole Christian people... Therefore the most beautiful order of the universe is well reflected in the Church and among the faithful in that, just as

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[71] R. W. Dyson (ed.), *Giles of Rome's on Ecclesiastical Power: A Medieval Theory of World Government* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2004), p. xx.

inferior bodies are there ruled through superior and the whole of corporeal substance through spiritual and the spiritual itself by God, so also, in the Church, temporal and inferior Lords are ruled through superiors and all temporal and earthly power through the spiritual, and especially through the Supreme Pontiff; but the Supreme Pontiff will be subject to the judgement of God alone.[72]

It would seem, then, that Giles' argument is plainly in the line of the political tradition of the West as so wholesomely rejected by Augustine. Indeed his misinterpretation of Augustine is absolutely typical in form, and, as such, usefully establishes one of those 'main lines' talked about above. Giles, like most other disputants in the medieval period, took it for granted that the Christian God is a silent God Who will no longer speak into the actual present as of old. He will no longer speak into the actual present because He has made His Will manifest in the rational order of the universe and the revealed truths of Scripture. Between these two revelations lies enough to form a man for all he might need in life. Correspondingly, the key to God's Will lies not in listening and knowing, but in interpreting and understanding. To attempt to view Augustine's political ideas through such a lens is, however, to distort them badly: it is to take them into a tradition that they were specifically designed to stand against. To take away the living reality of God's Will from Augustine's thought is to force it to bear a false order and logic: it is the order and logic of a system.[73]

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[72] R. W. Dyson (ed.), *Giles of Rome's on Ecclesiastical Power*, pp. 25-29.

[73] What is here implied about the systematic nature of medieval political argument is amply illustrated by the short treatise *Quaestio de potestate papae*, or *Rex pacificus*, as it is known from its incipit. It is an anonymous rejection of papal claims to power, produced at some time between 1296 and 1303, that is, during the dispute between Philip the Fair of France and Pope Boniface VIII. In particular, the opening section giving arguments for the proposition of papal power over spirituals and temporals gives a clear insight into the medieval cast of mind. The only complete critical edition and translation in English is that

Intellectual systems are devices that furnish complete explanations of realities based upon the acceptance of certain premisses. Augustine's thinking on man, society and the state insofar as it is laid out in Dyson's six interwoven themes above is just such a system. Now this does not mean that Dyson's representation of Augustine's thinking is in any sense misleading. In fact it would be difficult to imagine a more clear and accurate analysis of his leading political ideas as they were received into the medieval political tradition; and it should further be added that as an intellectual historian intent on describing Augustine's contribution to the Christianization of Classical moral and political philosophy, it is just such a picture that Dyson is enjoined to give. By contrast this dissertation is committed to recovering Augustine's leading political ideas in their original poise and perspective: that is, not through some distorting lens or other (like the political tradition of the West), but in the shape they took in his mind. Such an aim means taking full account of the importance that Augustine attached to his illumination theory of truth: that is, to Grace and Confession in the Pilgrim City. A brief examination of H. –X. Arquillière's thesis will help to clarify this.

(h) Theories of world government and the Christian rationalization of political right

In explaining what he means by 'political Augustinianism', Arquillière departs from what should now be very familiar ground:

> [In this matter] Saint Augustine does not speak with a different voice to Saints Ambrose and John Chrysostom. Consequently he binds himself tightly to the

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produced by R. W. Dyson: *Quaestio de potestate papae (Rex pacificus) / An Enquiry into the Power of the Pope* (New York, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

tradition [of the natural right of the State], and, through those Fathers who precede him, to the New Testament which impregnates his thought... [As such, he believes that] the Christian is not freed from the obligations that license the citizen to obey those in rightful authority over him; and which being, in this present life, the government of temporal things... However, in distinction from his predecessors, he has been bought by the recriminations of the pagans to formulate an acerbic critique of the pagan State. He has applied his theological conceptions to the problem... He has applied his concept of justice to the State. He has scrutinized the notion of the State. He has made appeal to Cicero and the Stoics. He has confronted their conceptions with the Christian idea of justice. We have seen, indeed, how high this idea exalts "free" justice: that which is born of Faith and Grace;[74] and Augustine seems to think that it is this idea of justice in particular that the Roman State – on account of the fact that it sets up cults to false gods – has set itself against. However, we have also ascertained by means of a most profound analysis, that behind these condemnable rites of idolatry, the grand doctor, in accordance with the tradition [of the Church], discerned the legitimate character of the ancient political constitutions: that is to say, their God-given rôle in maintaining order; and that in addition to this, he affirmed that even when their kings or emperors are apostates or pagans, they do not escape the designs of providence.[75]

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[74] As Arquillière explains elsewhere, 'Here we truly have the central idea, the essence of all the developments, often disparate, that make up the twenty-six books of *De civitate Dei*. It leads to faith, it is the sign of redemption, the opening of Grace, the cause of all the supernatural virtues and the cause of wellbeing. At bottom, this idea is none other than the evangelical justice which Saint Paul turned into a theology applicable to the complications of the lives of the first Christians. Saint Augustine is the first to apply it to the constitution of the State.' (Arquillière, *L'Augustinisme politique*, p. 71).

[75] *Ibid.*, pp. 117-119. Cf. A. J. Carlyle's observation that, 'It must... be recognised that St. Augustine is compelled to abstract the quality of justice from the definition of the State, not by any course of reflection upon the nature of the State, but by his theological conception of justice,- a conception which might be regarded as true upon his premisses, but which can only be understood as related to those premisses. We cannot express a judgment upon the very interesting question whether St. Augustine's definition of the State exercised any great influence upon the course of political speculation. We have not found that this part of his work is often cited; indeed, we have not come across any instance of this in the earlier Middle

Here, for Arquillière, is the kernel of political Augustinianism. In theory, the State can have nothing to do with true, Christian justice; indeed it is the archetypal fallen institution. However, by the logic of providence, it is somehow implicated in what the Christian is enjoined to believe is God's good and just plan for the world. Ostensibly this conundrum is resolved by pointing towards its remedial function as a vehicle for human social life. But the fact remains that 'providence' implies more than this. It is difficult for the human mind not to see in the very real goods of the State – goods such as peace, society, justice, and so on – anticipations of a greater reality. It is in this general movement of the human mind, however one chooses to describe it (from the effect to the cause; from the species to the genus; from the event to the law), that all the joys of purely intellectual speculation are found; for it is really the plan upon which the Western criterion of truth, that is, the philosophical criterion of truth, is established.[76] That also makes it the plan upon which the Western approach to political justice is established. As Arquillière sees it,

> Faced with the Roman State, the Church Fathers tended to affirm the primacy of spirituals in the life of faith. It was through this that the error began; for the primacy of the papacy had naturally to be implied in this idea. That said, the time of the papacy imposing itself on political society, as would occur with Nicholas I

Ages at all. But it is hardly possible to escape the conclusion that, however indirectly, this attitude of St. Augustine towards the conception of justice in society is related to that conception of the unrestricted authority of the ruler, which, as we have seen, takes shape about this period, and was drawn out so sharply by St. Gregory the Great.' (*HMPTW*, Vol. I, pp. 168-169).

[76] Herbert Spencer's thoughts on this have already been quoted: see n. 7, p. 55 above; but Socrates is the outstanding example. In the dialogue *Euthyphro*, he is recorded as asking Euthyphro, a self-proclaimed expert on religious matters, what the meaning of 'piety' is. Euthyphro answers by giving him an example of piety, but Socrates immediately points out that what he really wants to know is, '...the general idea which makes all pious things to be pious.' For he wants, '...a standard to which I may look, and by which I may measure actions, whether yours or those of any one else, and then I shall be able to say that such and such an action is pious, such another impious.' (Plato (tr. Benjamin Jowett), *The Four Socratic Dialogues of Plato* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1903), pp. 16-17).

and Gregory VII, was still a long way off. But once it arrived, it would no longer suffice that the emperors allow Christianity to inspire their actions, like Constantine and Theodosius, and – for me the other concern, - show themselves to be the defenders of the Faith. This would leave the notion of the State to be penetrated by the Christian idea. Moreover, the slow work of breaking up the well-established natural foundations of the State would work towards their dilution in a new conception of the Christian world until they were crystallized into something new and [effectively] issued in the Middle Ages. And of this gradual movement we have said that it is Gregory the Great who furnishes the clearest evidence of this transition from the thought of Augustine to that which we have called 'political Augustinianism'.[77]

Augustine plainly saw the State for what it was – a necessary, remedial device vindicated *ratione peccati* –, and because of this he just as plainly saw what it could never be: that is, transformed and rationalized by the rôle it might play in the coordination of a new universal Christian society. For the justification of any such society must be that it translates into temporal form, eternal principles of political right. And here is the crux of the matter. To Augustine, the whole value and significance of the earth and its institutions, both secular and spiritual, is to bring a select group of men and women (pilgrims) to the point of realising that their salvation lies in nothing other than obedience to God's Voice in the actual present. This is the radical perspective that informs all of his thinking on man, society and the State. It is also the perspective that informs his thinking on the Church, for Augustine does not frame his understanding of Christian action in

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[77] Arquillière, *L'Augustinisme politique*, p. 120.

terms of ideologies and policies. To the contrary, he thinks that it is impossible to legislate for what God will call individuals to do in the actual present, whether they are bishops or princes.[78] To the 'politics of indifference', then, one might add the doctrine of 'Christian opportunism' and conclude, with Augustine, that,

> You [Lord] restrain the wicked lusts of souls, and fix limits for them, as to how far the waters may be permitted to go, so that their waves may break upon one another. Thus do You make the sea by the order of Your sway over all things. But by a sweet and hidden spring You water souls that thirst after You and appear before You, kept apart by a different boundary from the society of the sea, so that the earth too may bring forth her fruit.[79]

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By way of a conclusion to this chapter and an introduction to the next, what features of Augustine's leading political ideas make them apt to be misunderstood?

1. They do not occur together in a single work; they are scattered across myriad works dealing with diverse theological and philosophical themes.
2. The Christian language in which they are expressed means that they are easily typecast.

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[78] See points 5 and 6 of Dyson's thematic representation of Augustine's contribution to the medieval political tradition, on p. 125 above.
[79] *Confess.*, XIII, 17, 20-21.

3. Augustine's unusual metaphysic does not hold his political ideas together as a system, that is, as a scheme exhibiting truth on the principle of verification. Instead it makes them the vehicle for a fulsome illumination theory of truth and an uncompromising theology of discipleship. The chief consequence of this is that
4. his understanding of political justice makes no attempt to translate the Sovereign Will of God; in fact, politics is the archetypal temporal activity.
5. It is the archetypal temporal activity because it addresses itself directly to the most pressing consequence of the Fall: the absence of God's voice from the actual present and the uncertainties and insecurities that this generates.
6. Politics has proved itself, in effect, to be the most enduring replacement for the eternity that Adam experienced whilst unquestioningly obeying God's Will in the innocence and the ignorance of the actual present.
7. In its crude and imperfect way it attends to the material conditions of life and even offers a route to a kind of wellbeing in the manifest goods of society and civilization.[80]
8. However, in buttressing the actual present in this way, it effectively offers a very different type of eternity and wisdom to that which Adam enjoyed in Paradise. If Adam's eternity was 'vertical' in as much as it resulted from him looking upwards to God's Face, then the eternity of politics is 'horizontal' in as much as it vindicates (or verifies) the actual present in terms of what has gone before and what it is envisaged will come to transpire.[81]

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[80] See in particular what Augustine has to say about this at *De civ. Dei*, XIX, 14.

[81] As Dr. A. J. Carlyle pointed out many years ago, when discussing some of the difficulties encountered by the Roman Jurists when attempting to reconcile the *ius civile* to the *ius naturale* and *ius gentium*, 'The regulations of society ought to be just, and yet we are constantly compelled to amend them. Their claim to

9. The chief consequence of this, as Augustine sees it, is that the natural human understanding of morality, justice and political right is absolutely fitted to the conditions of life in a fallen world. This is why he does not attempt to tamper with Classical political wisdom insofar as it attempts to regard the State as an institution of real but limited value.

10. However, it *is* why he takes issue with any attempt to see in the intrinsically fallen idea of horizontal eternity a key to understanding God, His Will and its Justice. This means that for Augustine, everything is a question of perspective: even time itself, and all the philosophical problems associated with it, is understood by Augustine in this way. That is, eternity is not the absence of time but the presence of God's Will in the actual present. As Dyson was perceptive enough to notice some years ago, this conviction leads Augustine to remark on time in two distinct idioms. On the one hand, because the world outside of human senses is real and does not stand still, it is not misleading or unreasonable to associate its transitory character with the quality called 'time'. This is what philosophers call an 'internal-relational' theory of time and Augustine very often seems to be talking in terms of it. However, his belief in vertical eternity means that he is also liable

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the obedience of man is founded upon the fact that they represent justice, and yet they are never in the complete sense of the word just. The perplexity with regard to the past found a solution for many centuries in the theory of a change in the condition of human nature, in the judgement that principles of perfect justice which were adapted to a condition of perfect innocence cannot well be adapted to a condition of vice and perfection. In the eighteenth century, when many thinkers understood very imperfectly the social significance of the faultiness of human nature, the difficulty resulted in the revolutionary bias given to the conception of the return to nature. Gradually men have turned back to the conception of perfect justice as belonging to the future, as being the ideal towards which the institutions of society tend, the principle which governs their development; but the difficulties of the actual condition have not therefore been completely solved. It is a thing worthy of note how few have recognised the significance of the most resolute modern attempt to suggest a solution, the attempt made by Rousseau in his theory of the "General Will". In England Professor T. H. Green and recently, Mr Bosanquet are among the very few who have recognised the real importance of that theory.' (*HMPTW*, Vol. I,, pp. 61-62). In response to Dr. Carlyle's opinion, some attempt has been made above to use Rousseau, and indeed T. H. Green, to illustrate this peculiar predicament of the political tradition of the West. See pp. 108-113 above.

to talk as if time has no existence independent of human awareness of it – the awareness that comes from turning away from God to attempt to buttress the actual present. This is, as Dyson points out, a perspective that philosophers tend to associate with 'idealist' theories of time.[82]

11. In light of these considerations politics, and the moral activities associated with it, has a distinct metaphysical significance for Augustine. In its historical and logical determinism,[83] it represents a complete world cut off from the inspiration of God's Will and functioning independently of it. Politics, though not without foundations in God's Mercy – foundations which Augustine thinks correspond roughly to the so-called 'laws of nature' – is entirely a creation of human hands.

12. Consequently Augustine does not think that politics is a redeemable activity, or that it can play any part in renovating human souls: 'For in truth, society itself... must obtain between God and us.'[84] It is individuals who are the currency of the economy of salvation; God speaks to the unique circumstances of their hearts and turns them into new creations. As pilgrims, they then go on to move apart from the world though they are in it, abiding in the eternity of God's Will and separated from their fellows by a different type of knowledge and wisdom.

13. It is in this sense that Augustine's specifically political ideas do not hang together as a system: they are really what is left over after his theology of discipleship is considered against the social and political realities of Late Antiquity (really his purpose in writing *De civitate Dei*).

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[82] See R. W. Dyson, 'St. Augustine's Remarks on Time', *The Downside Review* (July 1982), pp. 221-231.
[83] This phrase, very useful to the intellectual historian, is Dyson's, from his *St. Augustine of Hippo*, p. 26: 'Philosophy must presuppose faith; it can elaborate and clarify faith, but it cannot create it. It cannot create it because our minds can only work in ways which are logically and historically determinate.'
[84] *Confess.*, III, 8, 15.

By way of a conclusion, it would seem fair to say that aside from obvious, practical issues covered under points one and two above, Augustine's political ideas suffer for addressing themselves too unflinchingly to the besetting difficulty of the political tradition of the West: that being the need to achieve the closest possible correspondence between principles of political right and some notion of eternal justice; or, as has been the case in more recent times, between political right and the most exacting scientific criteria of truth, criteria associated with the methodological schools of empiricism and positivism. For Augustine simply says that no such correspondence is possible; that the desire for such a correspondence is, in the Platonic language which he so often borrowed to express these things, a dim recollection of the vertical eternity that was lost all those years ago by Adam in Paradise. Practically speaking Augustine seems to think along with Plato that this desire asserts itself chiefly in the interactions between the moral and intellectual consciences[85] of man. That is to say, between man's instinct towards certain moral propositions (the propositions that he gathers together under the general term 'laws of nature') and his dissatisfaction with not being able to uncover their first principles (the dissatisfaction that describes Socrates' dialectical mode of enquiry). This has the effect of inserting a clean epistemological break between Augustine's conception of salvation history and human history as it pursues its ordinary course through time. Human history, the history of earthly cities, only touches salvation history in the most incidental and inconsequential ways. Sometimes, through the occasional instance of a pilgrim being elevated to a position of secular prominence, the two histories come into a closer orbit; and Augustine seems genuinely to think that this arrangement works to the material

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[85] See above, p. 44.

benefit of those involved in ordinary human history. However he is insistent that there can be no closer correspondence than this. The goods of political life are as real and as enjoyable as anything is likely to be on this earth; but the point is that they are categorically different from the goods of the Pilgrim City and its final destination, The City of the Saints in Heaven. This is as extreme a 'political theory' as one is likely to encounter. In fact it is impossible to make it fit any of the usual categories of political outlook. In terms of his pessimistic understanding of human psychology, Augustine is a realist; insofar as he locates ordinary morality in the mysterious workings of conscience, he is a conservative; but by reason of his willingness to have all the world and its institutions serve the utility of a predestined band of pilgrims, he outreaches all the normal terms of political discourse. Here is the vision that the West must reject; it is a timeless picture of the absolute, eternal futility of human endeavour. Thinkers have forever been trying to moderate it, to bring Augustine more fully into the political tradition of the West: for once the myopic tenacity of his theology is forgotten, there are suddenly so many insights that can be teased out and exploited. It has now been shown how this process carried on in the medieval period – how the medieval mind studiously ignored Augustine's salvation history in order to fit the magnificently wrought contrasts of his mind to the hierocratic scheme of papal world government.[86] It would be against this distorted Augustinianism that the intellectual movements of the Renaissance, and the political and religious innovations of the Reformation, would react.

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[86] As H. A. L. Fisher commented, 'At the beginning of the thirteenth century the fabric of Christian belief in the West still retained the mould which it had received from the mind of St. Augustine. The City of God stood out sharply against the city of man, eternity against time, perfection against sin.' (H. A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe* (London, Edward Arnold & Co., 1949), p. 281).

Chapter 5

AUGUSTINIAN POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The medieval mind, preoccupied with the political and religious implications of the idea of Latin Christendom, turned away from Augustine's theology of discipleship – away, that is, from his epistemology – and into the austere logic of his ontology. In a theoretical framework dominated by the categorical superiority of spirituals over temporals, there was simply no room for what moderns call 'philosophical individualism', the outlook which had been such a force for good in Hellenic speculation. Major contributing factors to this were the difficult material conditions of medieval society. Almost entire populations lived on the margins of existence and learning and culture existed sporadically in little pockets: in the Church, in the new universities and in the palace courts. In such a context the individual lived a life of relative isolation, for there was nothing to draw him into closer contact with the great intellectual developments of the day. There was no public press and books were expensive; there were as yet no meaningful conceptions of national consciousness with which he might identify himself; there was no effective machinery of state government to call him to account, and to which he might refer his hopes and anxieties; there was no political economy and international relations because there were not yet nation states and consequently, what passed for 'fiscal policy' was impulsive and unsustainable: in short, the apparatus of medieval civilization was not the city-state, as in Greece, or the Empire, as in Rome, but

that unique system called 'feudalism' – the logical product of a time when all that so many men had to give was their word and their strength.

(a) The emergence of the 'individual' in the West

This is, of course, a very sweeping portrayal of a complex period in the development of the West; however it does help to explain why the leading concerns of medieval intellectual history seem to unfold at (what strikes the modern as) an absurd level of abstraction. Medieval social and political ideas do not arise from or refer to the experiences of the ordinary man. They do not because the ordinary man can be of no consequence while there remains no realistic way for him to influence his socio-political context. For large tracts of the medieval period the ordinary man remained cut off, in theory and in fact, from the rarified atmosphere of intellectual discussion: for at the centre of that discussion was the idea of Latin Christendom – an idea that if it was not completely divorced from the actual conditions of life at the start of the medieval period, was certainly so towards its end. *De civitate Dei* was evidently Charlemagne's favourite book, and as he was crowned Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day 800 A.D., he must have felt that he had come tolerably close to realising it on earth. However, by the beginning of the fourteenth-century, various developments on the ground had conspired to create a socio-political context in which the ordinary man could emerge to a new level of prominence and leave his mark on the political tradition of the West. These developments reached their conclusion in the emergence of the nation-state as a viable political enterprise. At the height of the dispute between Philip the Fair and Pope Boniface VIII, the French Chancellor, Peter Flotte, was reported to have met the Pope's

claims to a plenitude of power with what might reasonably be called the silent truth of the medieval period: 'Your power is in words; ours is real'.[1] Such an utterance could only ever mean the gradual demise of political Augustinianism and the beginning of its replacement by something new. That 'something new' would initially be the product of the developments in European statecraft; but in time it would gather strength and momentum from the free discoveries associated with the humanism of the Renaissance before being consummated in that most striking victory of the lay mind: the Reformation. In such an intellectual climate it was inevitable that an attempt should be made to bring Augustine's Two Cities out of their enshrinement in the logic of medieval political argument and into a closer correspondence with the new socio-political reality. Probably the outstanding attempt was that made by Martin Luther. As such, it is his political theology that will be examined in this section.

(b) The political and religious preoccupations characterising this period

In light of the above, what political and religious preoccupations influenced the reception and interpretation of Augustine's political ideas in the period from the Renaissance to the beginning of the Enlightenment?

1. By far the most important was the decline of the Papacy as a serious force for world government.
2. But this was, of course, precipitated by the emergence of the nation-state as a viable political enterprise and the increasing willingness of kings and princes to

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[1] This almost prophetic utterance is recorded by C. Raymond Beazley, in his *NMH*, p. 159.

'call the Papacy's bluff', if such an expression may be excused.[2] The fact was that with the prize of the Holy Roman Empire no longer a realistic possibility, monarchs were far less inclined to wield the sword of temporal power on the Pope's behalf.

3. What is more they were engaged in turning their kingdoms into efficient and centralized political units capable of assimilating the new developments in learning, culture and commerce.[3]
4. In this general secularizing mood certain ideas burst upon the medieval mind with great suddenness and force. Events written into the heart of the political tradition of the West began to unfold with a rapidity that caught the Church by complete surprise. Essentially, all men started to see with the eyes of Flotte; and consequently what they saw bought them remarkably close to the original Augustinian vision of the human condition as presented in *De civitate Dei*. They saw plainly that this is a world that man has made with his own hands and according to the motives of his own heart; that in the natural order of things religion serves the needs of politics (this would have been clear from the posturing of the Church); and that it was upon just such an enlightened cynicism that the great pagan states of Classical antiquity were built. Of course none of this

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[2] As per Peter Flotte's utterance above. it was the prototype of such notable snubs to Papal authority as King Henry VIII's 'Act of Supremacy' (1534) and his daughter Elizabeth I's blatant refusal to acknowledge her excommunication and deposition by Pope Pius V (1570).

[3] As J. R. Hale explains, '...there was a widely shared view among writers on politics that specific problems could be isolated, analysed and dealt with, whether it was social injustice (More) or apparently senseless international rivalries (Erasmus) or military weakness (Machiavelli). Just as historians were explaining history less in terms of a chess game played with human pieces between God and the devil, and more in terms if individual ambition, greed and skill, political writers were aware that men's destinies were to some extent within their own control and that this control depended upon self knowledge.' (J. R. Hale, *Renaissance Europe, 1480-1520* (London, Fontana, 1971), pp. 304-305). See also Jacob Burckhardt's comment that at this time, 'the state became a work of art. It ceased to be dominated by the authority of the Church.' (Jacob Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (Oxford, Phaidon, 1945), quoted in J. Bronowski & Bruce Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963), p. 39).

would make religion redundant; it would simply bring it back into the position it always occupied before the strange circumstances of the medieval period intervened and Christianity became, for a time, a serious force for world government.

5. It was little wonder, then, that a great call for a return to a pristine Apostolic Christianity should go out at this time, and that thinking men should seek its inspiration in the thought of Augustine.[4]

(c) The theology of Martin Luther

At first sight Luther's theology bears some striking similarities to Augustine's as it has been here presented.[5] With Augustine he premisses his thought on a radically pessimistic psychology of man; and with Augustine he also insists that man's fallen nature extends even to his powers of reason, which now totally adapted to his life of sin, cannot hope to fathom the Will of God in the manner of the Scholastics. In distinction from Augustine, however, he insists on seeing the pattern of salvation in the performance of God's Will considered in the abstract, as a concept. Such an outlook was bound to have its effects on

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[4] Two strands of late medieval thought in particular reacted against the presumptions of Thomism and the Scholastic method, and in so doing, prepared the ground for Lutheranism. They were the *Devotio Moderna*, and the *Via Moderna*. The former was a primarily mystical movement premissed on a passive acceptance of the utter futility of human effort towards God and developed by the Brethren of the Common Life in Germany and the Netherlands towards the end of the fourteenth-century. The latter was an intellectual reaction against the Thomistic regard for reason in discerning the Will of God. William of Ockham (c. 1285-1347) was its outstanding early exponent.

[5] In the preface to his *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), an important exposition of his developed early theology, Luther cites his most influential sources as being, '...St. Paul, the especially chosen vessel and instrument of Christ, and also... St. Augustine, His most trustworthy interpreter.' (Timothy F. Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2005), p. 48). For an excellent general discussion of Augustine's influence on Luther's theology, see the article 'Luther, Martin', by Philip D. Krey in *ATA*, pp. 516-518.

a sincere and hard thinking man, who, as H. Daniel-Rops has made clear, was, '...burdened with the tragic sense of sin in all its intensity.'[6]

Around 1505 Luther entered into a profound intellectual crisis that would drive him away from a career in law and into an Augustinian monastery. The story has it that this crisis was precipitated by a walk that he was forced to take alone in a gathering storm: a sudden mighty clap of thunder sent him into a paralysis of shock and awe at God's majesty. Fearing death, he implored God to spare him and evidently promised to become a monk in return. The historian is naturally inclined to doubt such decisive episodes, but Daniel-Rops lets the story stand and buttresses it with a succession of incidents which he thinks probably drove the young Luther to an unusual concern with death: 'A serious illness incurred during adolescence, the sudden death of a friend, a sword wound acquired during a student's duel and which had bled for a long time...'[7] At any rate, Luther entered the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt decided to find peace of heart there. He studied the works of Augustine in the hope of arriving at some remedy; he also followed the traditional monastic cure of prayer and fasting, but nothing availed. Finally, some time in the year 1513, he suddenly saw his way to a solution. Working in the tower room of the monastery at Wittenberg on a new series of lectures on the Psalms, he found himself staring at Psalm 30 – a celebration of God's Mercy –, and in particular at verse four: *in te Domine speravi non confundar in aeternum in iustitia tua salva me* 'In You, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in Your

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[6] H. Daniel-Rops (tr. Audrey Butler), *The Protestant Reformation* (London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1961), p. 285. Daniel-Rops' account of Luther's intellectual crisis is very full and includes synopses of some of the more prominent scholarly opinions on it. See pp. 284-290.
[7] Daniel-Rops (tr. Audrey Butler), *The Protestant Reformation*, p. 282.

righteousness'. In his autobiography, which he appended to the 1545 Wittenberg edition of his Latin works, he described what happened next:

> Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that He was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God Who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, 'As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the Gospel and also by the Gospel threatening us with His righteousness and wrath!...' Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon St. Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted. At last, by the Mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, 'In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written,' 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.' There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith... Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.[8]

Two things spring immediately to mind upon reading this account. The first is that Luther evidently bought himself to an intellectual crisis that was in all important respects similar to Augustine's. Like Augustine he faced the impossibility of being able to engineer his own salvation, and like Augustine, he turned away from a promising secular career to resolve the matter come what may. The second follows from the first: for unlike

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[8] Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (eds.), *Luther's Works: American Edition* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1957-75), pp. 336-338, in Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, pp. 8-9.

Augustine, who came to realise that the whole pattern of his thinking on God and salvation was fundamentally misconceived, Luther never gave up the notion that the mystery of salvation must somehow lie in reconciling human intellectual and moral futility with the performance of God's Will.[9] Consequently he ended up finding a solution to the problem which he had claimed could never be solved, and which had completely undone Augustine in the garden of his friend's villa at Milan. In this sense it is very helpful indeed to view Luther and Augustine from the perspective of a shared intellectual crisis. Augustine came out of it convinced that man's only hope lies in being born again a new creation by the gift of God's mysteriously given Grace; Luther emerged believing in a far less laborious method: his justification *sola fide* 'by faith alone'. In fact, it would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast than this. On the one hand Augustine – a man completely broken by his experience and unsure how to take even the first step of his new life; and on the other Luther – flushed with the excitement of a man who has solved a complex mathematical equation and already standing before the gates of Paradise. Both men believed that they had been born again; but only one man faced that this must mean retracing all the steps that he had walked apart from God in order to learn how to walk again with Him: 'So confession, my brothers, humbles us, humbled it justifies us, justified it lifts us up on high.'[10] Somewhat ironically, this meant that Luther's reaction remained very much within the terms of the Scholastic tradition which he had been so keen to reject.

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[9] See, for instance, his *Disputation against Scholastic Theology* (1517), articles 10, 29, 34, 57, 58, 59, 63, 66, 67, 68, 82, 83, 84 & 89, in Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, pp. 34-38.
[10] *Serm.*, XXIIIA, 4.

In contrasting Luther with Augustine, it is important not to lose sight of the very real grievances that had helped to bring him to the point of his intellectual crisis and which were to become immortalized in his *Ninety-Five Theses.*[11] These centred on what had become the most flagrant expression of the Church's worldliness and power from the mid fourteenth-century onwards: the selling of papal indulgences.[12] The theory behind this practice was straightforward enough. Christ's sacrifice had released a store of Divine merit far greater in quantity than that needed to save the whole of humanity. Consequently there was a significant surplus; and this the Church claimed to be able to dispense at her will, and for a fee, to those wishing to confess their sins but avoid doing penance. Unsurprisingly it turned out to be the thin end of a wedge that by Luther's time, had come to include the selling of indulgences on behalf of those who were presumed to be in purgatory, and more insidiously still, the encouragement of the belief that a simple payment to the Church could have immediate beneficial consequences for one's time after death. Luther was not the only man to be troubled and angered by these practices, and in this important respect his thought was very much a product of its time.[13] In a world of increasingly educated and free thinking men, and without being able to presume upon the support of the temporal powers, the Church could no longer claim a monopoly on truth; nor for that matter could she use that monopoly to further her worldly aspirations. A situation was coming to pass which in broad essentials bore a striking resemblance to the early days of Christianity – a resemblance which men like Luther were quick to

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[11] The story has it that Luther nailed these ninety-five theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, but historians have long doubted whether this actually happened. An English translation can be found at Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, pp. 40-47.

[12] The sale of indulgences had been given a theological basis as early as 1343 in the Bull *Unigenitas*.

[13] See Quentin Skinner's comments on the tradition of anti-clerical humanist satire that had begun to gain ground with the publication of Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools* in 1494 (Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. II (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 27-34).

recognise, and which spurred on their efforts at reform. In all aspects of learning and culture, secular society had risen to meet the achievements of the Church, while in morals, the Church had sunk to the lowest depths of ordinary vice. The spell was broken: the time was ripe for the normal order of the world to be resumed. Christ had come into the world as a Man in order to call men out of it; these plain historical facts are the key to the apolitical nature of early Apostolic Christianity, and in turn, to Augustine's theology of discipleship. The medieval Church, on the other hand, had conspired to make God a concept, and in so doing, had succeeded in remaining very much within the world.[14]

From the evidence of his writings it would be fair to say that Luther perceived the general momentum of events and became deeply troubled by them; that he saw in his

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[14] This statement of the nature of Christ's impact upon the world is many respects the consummation of a great deal that has been said in the preceding chapters. It offers an important opportunity to clarify what it is here being claimed Augustine thought was the plain historical significance of Jesus' birth into the world. This is, of course, a subject on which scholarly opinion is very much divided today. As Burton L. Mack points out in his article, 'A Myth of Innocence': 'The goal of New Testament scholarship has been to give an account of the origins of Christianity. For more than two hundred years an amazingly rigorous and critical discourse has pursued this goal, probing the texts produced by early Christians in order to get behind them. Some event, it is thought, or moment, or impulse, needs to be discovered as the source for the novelty Christianity introduced into the world. In spite of this concentrated effort, however, there is no agreement about what that mysterious event was or had to have been. One might think that failure to reach an agreement on such a fundamental objective would eventually call attention to itself and force a reconceptualization of the discipline. That has never happened and the quest continues unabated.' (Burton L. Mack, 'Myth of Innocence', in Neusner (ed.), *The Christian and Judaic Invention of History*, pp. 20-21). As one might expect, the literature on this subject is vast and complicated, though ranged along predictable lines. On the one hand, there are those scholars who take a strictly dispassionate approach, attempting to explain the phenomenal rise of Christianity out of purely social, political and historical considerations. Then on the other hand, there are those who do want to understand it in terms of the person of Jesus, but in what they see as intellectually respectable language. Consequently these scholars make free use of concepts and categories from the social sciences, such as 'charisma' and 'myth'. But what insight does Augustine contribute to this tradition of scholarship? Simply the thought that Jesus was a Man Who could tell people the truth; not some abstract truth about the meaning of life or the arrangements of the universe, but the truth of their hearts. This is presumably what is being implied at Luke 5: 8: 'When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"'; and also at John 4: 1-26, where Jesus faces the Samaritan woman with the truth of her heart; but perhaps most significantly, at Luke 23: 40-41: 'But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?" We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.' Scripture is strikingly consistent about the fact that those who knew Jesus knew themselves too.

own efforts at salvation the greater truth of man's fallibility and God's omniscience; but that crucially, he persisted in conceiving the problem along the lines laid down by the Scholastics. That is, his crisis did not refer to the unique circumstances of his fallen heart, as Augustine's had – indeed, in the autobiographical fragment quoted above, he clearly states that in his opinion, the quality of his life as a monk was 'beyond reproach', and that this fact only helped to heighten his anguish at not being able to satisfy the law of God. As Gerhard Ebeling emphasises, the man Luther can only really be understood from the point of view of his considerable scholarly activities.[15] He was a brilliant university professor who had mastered the philosophical and theological learning of his day and was actively engaged in teaching it to students. His intellectual crisis, though real enough, was a consequence of what he felt he could no longer believe given the evidence in him and around him. Consequently, his salvation was to discover something that he could believe: that being an intellectually satisfying formulation of St. Paul's teaching on what it means to become a new creation.[16] As Daniel-Rops carefully observes, 'It must be admitted that this view was perfectly adapted to set an anguished soul at rest.'[17]

(d) The politics of Martin Luther

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[15] As he points out: 'The various pictures that we have of him: the former monk, the preacher, the writer, the reformer of the Church, the spiritual leader of a movement that spread throughout Europe, make it very easy to forget that his work as a university professor was not just incidental to his other work. In fact, the rest of his work was intimately related to his university post, and the obligations which this imposed was expressed in his doctorate, a degree which at that time was still rare, and one which was held by few professors.' (Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* (London, Fontana, 1975), p. 15).

[16] Contrast this with the following declaration from *Serm.*, 1XVIA, 11: 'And there you have before you Christ as your end. You have no need to go on looking anymore. The moment you have believed, you have already recognised it. But it isn't just a matter of faith, but of faith and works. Each is necessary. For the *demons also believe* – you heard the apostle – *and tremble*; but their believing doesn't do them any good. Faith alone is not enough, unless works too are joined to it: *faith working through love*, says the apostle.'

[17] Daniel-Rops (tr. Audrey Butler), *The Protestant Reformation*, p. 288.

At the point, then, when the moral bankruptcy of the Church had bought men to mourn the loss of a purer, original Christianity, Luther helped them to lose sight of Who had been that early Church. By keeping God in concept and backing to the hilt his own understanding of Him,[18] Luther built his new theology on distinctly un-Augustinian foundations.[19] This prevented him from reproducing Augustine's indifferent stance to politics at just the crucial time when national governments were beginning to organize themselves apart from the Church.

Where Augustine could, at a glance, see the world and its formal institutions (both secular and spiritual) from the crisp perspective of his metaphysic, Luther was confined by the nebulous terms of his theology to a less piercing view. Consequently, although his political ideas incorporate a great deal that is recognisably Augustinian, he never has Augustine's freedom of movement – the freedom that has been described above under the terms 'indifference' and 'opportunism'. This meant that in practice, he was constantly overtaken by events and forced into some remarkable changes of mind.[20] For in committing himself to understanding God's Will and Word in concept, he had effectively implicated himself in the logic of circumstances: that is, at all those points where Augustine would have been able to claim immunity based on the distinct epistemological status of the Pilgrim City, Luther felt compelled to act. As J. W. Allen has pointed out,

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[18] See, for instance, the way in which Luther conceives his position as Doctor in his *Lectures on Galatians* (1535): 'This calls for a wise and faithful father who can moderate the Law in such a way that it stays within its limits. For if I were to...' (Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 20).

[19] For instance, in proof 26 of the *Heidelberg Disputation*, Luther explains that in practice, that is, in the everyday life of the Christian, Christ is a principle not a Person: 'For through faith Christ is in us, indeed, one with us. Christ is just and has fulfilled all the commands of God, wherefore we also fulfill everything through Him since He was made ours through faith.' (Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 60).

[20] See J. W. Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (London, Methuen & Co., 1957), pp. 18-30.

the ambiguity of his chief theological concepts prevented him from forming any sort of clear political theory:

> It seems quite evident that the thought of Luther was essentially unpolitical. If he can be said to have had any ideal of the State it was a theocratic ideal. But it would be wiser, I think, to say that he had none at all. Vaguely there floated before his mind a vision of a State ruled by the Word of God and by love and reason and natural law. Actually he acquiesced in the construction of such states and churches as the "Lutheran" Princes chose to build. For his profoundest feeling was that of his early teachers, the mystics, that in the long run only God's Will and God's Word counted or mattered.[21]

For Allen, then, Luther's historical and political significance lies not in the fact that he produced a coherent alternative to political Augustinianism at a time when the political tradition of the West was returning to its pre-medieval trajectory, but that he released a number of hazy and emotive concepts into the intellectual climate. The most important of these was a kind of doctrine of the 'Two Cities'; though for the reasons outlined above, Luther was never able to locate his 'Pilgrim City' in the new world situation with any degree of accuracy or consistency. He drew the line between spirituals and temporals clearly enough, but crucially, his understanding of what it would mean to be a new creation was too impractical to point towards any particular earthly arrangements:

> We set forth two worlds, as it were, one of them heavenly and the other earthly.
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> Into these we place these two kinds of righteousness, which are distinct and

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[21] Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 28.

separated from each other. The righteousness of the Law is earthly and deals with earthly things; by it we perform good works. But as the earth does not bring forth fruit unless it has first been watered and made fruitful from above – for the earth cannot judge, renew, rule, and nourish the earth, so that it may do what the Lord has commanded – so also by the righteousness of the Law we do nothing even when we do much; we do not fulfill the Law even when we fulfill it. Without any merit or work of our own, we must first be justified by Christian righteousness, which has nothing to do with the righteousness of the Law or with earthly and active righteousness. But this righteousness is heavenly and passive. We do not have it of ourselves; we received it from heaven. We do not perform it; we accept it by faith, through which we ascend beyond all laws and works. 'As, therefore, we have borne the image of the earthly Adam,' as Paul says, 'let us bear the image of the Heavenly One' (1 Cor. 15: 49), Who is a New Man in a new world, where there is no Law, no sin, no conscience. no death, but perfect joy, righteousness, grace, peace, life, salvation, and glory.[22]

(e) The legacy of Martin Luther's Augustinian political theology

At a time when the moral and intellectual countenance of the West was ripe for a return of Augustine's political ideas in their pristine state, Luther offered up a sincere but unfortunate distortion of them. In a word, his thought lacked the timelessness of Augustine's. The personal intellectual crisis from which it sprang was in every sense a product of its age: that is, of the German mysticism of his student days and the profligacy of the Church. Viewed through such a lens it was natural that Augustine's political ideas

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[22] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galations* (1535), in Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 21.

should come to take the shape of an ideology: for by the terms of his developed theology, Luther had bound himself to a conceptual understanding of God's Will which he had also taken chief responsibility for interpreting correctly. He was in this sense thinking very much within the political tradition of the West. A true break with Scholastic theological method would have seen him challenging the contention that salvation lies, as Aristotle taught, in conforming the will to some highest rational standard (in the case of the Scholastics, God's Will). By contrast, his theological innovation was simply to invert what he saw as the heretical relationship of cause and effect propagated by this scheme, (and which begged the question whether man could not in theory obey a Divine Will Whose first principles appealed directly to his unaided reason.). Thus, it is not the case that, '...the righteous person does nothing, [that is, that he does not see the pattern of his salvation in the performance of good works,] but that his works do not make him righteous, rather that his righteousness creates works.'[23] This amounted to an effective undermining of the Church's claim to be able to dispense indulgences, but it did not augur a return to Augustine's independence of perspective.

It may be true that historical circumstance prompted Augustine to develop his political ideas, but it cannot be said that they are unintelligible apart from it. For taken as a whole, they make a complete concession to the fact that this is a world of man's own making – a world that from a purely temporal perspective, the only perspective that practically matters, God has absolutely nothing to do with. As so many modern thinkers have discovered, Augustine's political ideas are intrinsically secular, having a basis in his

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[23] Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), in Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 59.

careful observations of the material conditions of life. This means that his theory of the natural right of the State is both complete and generic. In addition, his location of the Pilgrim City is in a place of metaphysical distinction from the normal processes of history. The pilgrim lives in the private eternity of God's discrete plan for his life and does not therefore possess an ideological perspective. He never acts from principle but in response to a command from God in the actual present. This is not to say that he does not live a full and useful life in his capacity as a member of human society; indeed, the arbitrary nature of God's Will positively enjoins him to do so because he cannot use it as the basis for any independent socio-political projects of his own. To the contrary, all he can do is wait upon it.

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These are the things that Augustinian political theology forgets and it continues to this day.[24] However, in the interests of producing a coherent and ordered exposition, the line must be drawn somewhere and the next period introduced. Augustinian political theory begins approximately with the enlightenment of the West. A kind of enlightenment had, of course, preceded Luther's attacks on the traditional hierarchy of Latin Christendom (though it has, of course, come to be known as the Renaissance in terms of how it drew

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[24] A classic recent example is Oliver O'Donovan's, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999).

so much of its inspiration from the past),[25] but it could not match the sheer endeavour and audacity of what was to unfold two centuries later. According to Luther, every baptized Christian was a priest; in the eighteenth-century, every educated man was a philosopher. This was in many respects the florescence of the individualism of the Renaissance and the Reformation.[26] Developments in commerce, in government and in education and culture had contrived to raise the ordinary man to a position of account in the world.[27] Now the institutions and processes and beliefs which had for so long repressed the natural enthusiasm of the mind were lifted. Up rushed a madness of ideas as men discovered that they had been labouring under a thousand misapprehensions. Dogma, myth and superstition disappeared and everywhere, men found themselves in Athens. But what really was the essence of their euphoria? W. E. H. Lecky surely provides the answer: 'He who has realised, on the one hand, his power of acting according to his will, and, on the other hand, the power of his will to emancipate itself from the empire of pain and pleasure, and to modify and control the current of the emotions, has probably touched the limits of his freedom.'[28]

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[25] See Walter Ullmann, 'The Medieval Origins of the Renaissance', in André Chastel et al, *The Renaissance: Essays in Interpretation* (London, Methuen, 1982), pp. 33-83.

[26] Bronowski and Mazlish make this very clear in their excellent short account of this period in the intellectual history of the West. By using Leonardo da Vinci as the outstanding example of the Renaissance outlook, they produce an insightful and intuitive exposition. See in particular their contention that, '...to an age still dominated by the traditional categories of Aristotle and Aquinas, [Leonardo] bought the right mind. When almost all thinking was still guided by universal and *a priori* plans of nature, he made a single profound discovery. He discovered that nature speaks to us in detail, and that only through the detail can we find her grand design.' (Bronowski & Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition*, p. 37).

[27] The nature of his new account in the world lay in his indispensability. As Gerhard Ritter explains, this first manifested itself on the battlefield, where in particular, the English middle-class crossbowmen and archers began to wield a decisive influence. Later, '...the urban middle-class with its great fund of money took its place as a very self-conscious third estate alongside of the clergy and the nobility. It challenged the clergy's monopoly in education and the nobility's in the bearing of arms. The more money proved itself indispensable to monarchical governments as a means of power, the greater became the influence of the middle class and especially the capitalists.' (Gerhard Ritter, 'Origins of the Modern State', in Heinz Lubasz (ed.), *The Development of the Modern State* (London, Collier-Macmillan, 1964), p. 21).

[28] W. E. H. Lecky, *History of the Rise and Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (London, Longmans Green & Co., 1910), p. xi.

Chapter 6

AUGUSTINIAN POLITICAL THEORY

It is at this point that the attempt to persist with an historical narrative style becomes unnecessary, for the period of Augustinian political theory begins, as Lecky suggested above, with the general realisation that the human will lies in its own power: that it operates in an objective and determinate world of cause and effect. This marks the beginning, to use Francis Bacon's words, of, '...a just and legitimate familiarity betwixt the mind and things.'[1] Here, finally, are the conditions in which religion and myth can take their proper place in the scheme of human endeavour as catalogues of man's desperate rages against the caprice of the actual present. In the sixth-century B.C., Xenophanes was able to see the following:

> Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods everything that is a shame and reproach among men, stealing and committing adultery and deceiving each other. But mortals consider that the gods are born, and that they have clothes and speech and bodies like their own. The Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black, the Thracians that theirs have light blue eyes and red hair. But if cattle and horses or lions had hands, or were able to draw with their hands and do the works

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[1] Joseph Devey (ed.), *The Physical and Metaphysical Works of Lord Bacon* (London, George Bell & Sons, 1901), p. 1.

that men can do, horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies such as they each had themselves.[2]

Remarkably it would take until the Enlightenment for men to be able to see so clearly again, this great clue to the reality of the human condition. Man's will is free, so is his mind; but as the writer of Ecclesiastes said, 'I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.'[3] It is this 'eternity' that Augustine's famous motif of the 'unquiet heart' is an attempt to describe. His understanding of it is that it is a relic from man's time in Paradise, left in his heart out of the greatness of God's Mercy in the hope that it will prompt him to question the happiness and enlightenment that he has achieved for himself. But crucially, he thinks that this is all this relic is required to do. For its call is to hopelessness rather than hope; and following his own experiences, it is in this call that Augustine thinks the key to salvation lies. The man who tries his hardest to live a good life, to do the very best he can by his family and friends; the man who keeps the motives of his heart under a constant interrogation and who recognises that beauty and goodness and the laws of nature enjoy a real and independent existence apart from him (*primum ut nulli noceat*): such a man, if he can remain honest about himself and bear the unquiet that that honesty brings him, is close to knowing God.[4]

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[2] Xenophanes, fragments 11, 14, 16 & 15, in Kirk and Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 168-169.
[3] Eccles. 3: 10-11.
[4] See, for instance, Mark 9: 38-41, especially, '...for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.'

(a) The role played by enlightened thinking in Augustine's scheme of salvation

For this, after all, was Augustine's experience as a young man: having run the gauntlet of all the most promising religions and philosophies then available to him, he washed up on the shores of despair – a man shown to himself and ruined by what he saw. To a man thus undone by the truth of his heart there can be hope of renewal or renovation. He has butted up against the wall of the world: he has seen that the horizontal eternity of his hopes, and more despairingly still, of the institutions and processes surrounding him, is no replacement for the vertical eternity which his heart so desires. And the point of real significance is that he has been bought to this place not by dogma or myth or superstition, but by hard, confident and unencumbered thinking; for as Augustine experienced it, the truth that saves is not abstract or conceptual, that is, it is not a set of beliefs; it is instead the truth of a life lived out of a unique set of circumstances and in accordance with a free will.

From considerations such as these it is possible to conclude that Augustine believed that the Church had nothing to fear from enlightened thinking; that to the contrary, it was the precondition to salvation:

> Do not be foolish, O my soul, and do not deafen your heart's ear with the tumult of your folly. Hear you: the Word Himself cries out for you to return, and with Him there is a place of quiet that can never be disturbed, where your love cannot be forsaken, if itself does not forsake that place. Behold, these present things give way so that other things may succeed to them, and this lowest universe may be constituted out of all its parts. 'But do I depart in any way?' asks the Word of God. Establish there your dwelling place. Entrust to it whatever you have, my soul,

wearied at last by deceptions. Entrust to the truth whatever you have gained from the truth, and you will suffer no loss. All in you that has rotted away will flourish again; all your diseases will be healed; all in you that flows and fades will be restored, and made anew, and bound around you. They will not drag you down to the place to which they descend, but they will stand fast with you and will abide before the God Who stands fast and abides forever.[5]

Here is Augustine's timeless message to all ages; but, perhaps, a message with particular resonances in this post-Enlightenment age where the world has never been seen so clear, and men everywhere are accustomed to thinking of themselves as individuals, in distinction from it: 'I do not know who you are; I do not know where you were born; I do not, for that matter, know which custom you were initiated into. But I do know that you are a man, and that because of it, you want more than anything else to be happy. Know this, then: that there is nothing about this world that can ever make you happy in the way that you want to be. For you have eternity in your heart. You have a faint recollection (Plato was right) of the perspective that the first man enjoyed in Paradise as he looked to God for all his seeing. But this, as you can see, is a temporal world built by men to stand against the actual present which they have chosen to reject. It is always moving and will never be still in the way that you want to be. Indeed in its movement lies its logic and sense: notice how all pleasures and hopes are conceived across time, so that their enjoyment requires intervals of time to succeed each other, and their existence is a fleeting thing made up of parts which do not stand still. And there is no escaping this fact because even language is implicated in this scheme: observe how it relies for its sense on

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[5] *Confess.*, IV, 11, 16. Cf. *De civ. Dei*, X, 28: 'He does not, however, destroy and bring to naught His own gift in them, but only what they arrogate to themselves, and do not attribute to Him.'

syllables that must not stand still. Look at the words on this page. Look at yourself; look at your family; look at your city; look at empires and constitutions and laws: do not all these aspects of life in this world attempt to achieve a kind of stability of being either side of the actual present? Now ask yourself whether the happiness that you seek can be anywhere in this. You will find many men to tell you that it can be, but beware their puffed up hearts and vain imaginations; and do not on any account follow their example. For they either take the eternity in their hearts to themselves, making it something that it is not, or else come to hate it so much that they try to stamp it out altogether. Do not deafen your heart with this folly even though these men claim to have found the happiness that you seek: for they must be lying if they claim to have found it in this temporal world. No, you must be in this world but not of it: the happiness that you seek lies in obeying the Word of God in the actual present. He will speak to you without syllables of time; and His judgement will be His love; and as you obey Him, He will make you a new creation.'[6]

(b) The Augustinian Political Theory of Jean Bethke Elshtain

It is evidently in the attempt to reconcile this call to the pilgrim with the other more conventional aspects of his political ideas that the fascination of Augustine for the modern political theorist lies. Without any apparent effect on its overall consistency, his thinking is able to accommodate a carefully directed attack on the heart of the Western political tradition – that is, on the epistemological foundations of its concept of political right – and a characteristically gracious affirmation of all that is good about the sociable

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[6] This message is a paraphrase of various passages from Augustine's *Confessiones* run together. They are: *Confess.*, IV, 9; 10; 1 & 12; and X, 22-24.

life of man. One of the more prominent contemporary political theorists to be drawn in by this unusual scenario is Jean Bethke Elshtain. In her book, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*,[7] she attempts to make the case for Augustine's relevance to the political tradition of the West today. It is a sincere book, written in part out of her own experience of trying to make her way in the world with Augustine; but perhaps more importantly, in recognition of the fact that Augustine is peculiarly well-placed to speak into a world exhausted by its repeated attempts to achieve perfection through politics, and now painfully coming to terms with the insufficiencies of the human self.[8] However it also qualifies as a typical work of Augustinian political theory by virtue of harbouring a distinctly un-Augustinian agenda. In her concern to show that Augustinian insights into the human condition can be the sources for a new kind of politics grounded in an acceptance and celebration of the limits of human endeavour, she is guilty of distorting his political ideas. It is at times a very subtle distortion, and one should not forget the good work that Elshtain has done in defending Augustine against his more outspoken modern critics,[9] but it is a distortion nonetheless, and a very telling one at that. To return to one of the points made above, Augustine's political ideas, '...are really what is left over after his theology of discipleship is considered against the social and political realities of Late Antiquity...'[10] What unity and purpose they have is in relation to this

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[7] Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

[8] This is what she seems to say in the conclusion to her article, 'Augustine', in *BCPT*, pp. 35-47: 'The teleology of historic progress is no longer believable, although a version of it is still touted by voluptuaries of techno-progress or genetic engineering that may yet "perfect" the human race. The presumably solid underpinnings of the self gave way in the twentieth century under the onslaught of Nietzsche and Freud.' (pp. 46-47).

[9] See in particular, Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, pp. 1-18; and also her comment on p. 118 that, '...This man who desired "not only a devout reader, but also an open-minded critic," gets too few of each, or both, in our harsh and cynical time. But he perdures.'

[10] See above, p. 135.

theology; apart from it they are dislocated and rudderless. In the Introduction, they were described as, '...having unity and coherence not so much by their relations to each other, but by their participation in a common mind.'[11] What these statements are an attempt to convey is the truism that Augustine's purpose in diagnosing the human condition was not to find a cure. As his comparison with Luther hopefully showed, he wanted to bring men to the pointing of losing all hope in themselves and the world. He wanted broken men, willing to be born again in the love of God's Judgement. Correspondingly, any attempt to isolate his diagnosis of the human condition and develop it into a cure must logically result in a distortion of his political ideas. For the hope that drives it is part of an agenda that was never his own. Elshtain's work on Augustine's political ideas is driven by just such a hope, and in this sense it is an excellent example of Augustinian political theory.

What does Elshtain's hope actually manifest itself as? The answer is in the following:

> ...Augustine offers us not merely a condemnation of [our] appetite for unbridled *cupiditas* in the form of the *libido dominandi*, he gives us the great gift of an alternative way of thinking and being in the world, a way that is in many vital respects available to those who are not doctrinally Augustine's brothers and sisters. In the twentieth century, justification and rationalization of violence as the *modus operandi* of social change introduces an element of remorseless moral absolutism into politics. The delectation of mounds of bodies stacked up as our handiwork, the riveting possibility of salutary bloodletting, grips the imagination. The result is a pile of garbage and a pile of bodies. The fact of death becomes the primary political

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[11] See above, p. 7.

> statement. Inflamed militatnts march to the Grim Reaper's habituating drumbeat. The cadence is nigh irresistible to many. Augustine would have us resist – in the name of love.[12]

This is, in fact, a very clear statement of Elshtain's position. To say that Augustine 'would have us resist' strikes the reader as incompatible with his insistence that the world is as it is because it is fallen: that is, because it is the creation of humans willing apart from God. To recall a quotation from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* used earlier in the Introduction to illustrate Augustine's metaphysic, 'It used to be said that God could create anything except what would be contrary to the laws of logic.-The truth is that we could not say what an 'illogical world would look like.'[13] Viewed from a purely historical perspective, Augustine's achievement as a 'political' thinker was to establish a metaphysical watershed between Christian salvation history and ordinary human history; to use that watershed as the ultimate vindication of all that is manifestly good in the political tradition of the West (as opposed to using a presumed correspondence between principles of political right and eternal justice); and to attempt as far as he was able, to analyse the mechanism of life in this fallen world. In not basing her perspective in this, Elshtain is guilty of viewing Augustine's political ideas through a distorting lens. Indeed it is tempting to say that in doing so, that is, in finding an Augustinian solution to the problem that Augustine never wanted solved, she is staying ironically close to her Lutheran roots.[14]

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[12] Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, pp. 114-115.
[13] See above, n. 59, p. 23.
[14] See Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, p. xi: 'As I struggled with belief and unbelief, faith and skepticism, abandoning (so I then thought) my Lutheran beliefs and identity, I found I could not bid Augustine adieu.'

How, then, does Elshtain see a solution to the problem of political life in Augustine's understanding of love? The answer is by reading too much into his use of 'love' as a diagnostic tool. To Augustine, the surest way to discover the true character of a people was to investigate what it is that they love. He thought that this stood to reason when one considered that all men are moved by their loves. Consequently he based his famous refutation of Cicero's definition of justice on his observation that the Roman people cannot be considered just when they manifestly do not all love the One True God.[15] Even more famous definition of the Two Cities draws on a distinction based in love: 'These two cities are constructed from two loves: Jerusalem is made from the love of God; Babylon is made from the love of things secular. It follows, then, that one need only question another's love to discover their citizenship.'[16] In light of these considerations, it is surely not then open to Elshtain to infer that, 'No single man can create a commonwealth. There is no ur-Founder, no great bringer of order. It begins in ties of fellowship, in households, clans, and tribes, in earthly love and its many discontents. And it begins in an ontology of peace not war [she means to refer here to the ancient glorification of war, something that Heracleitus captured in his fifty-third fragment: 'War is the father of all and king of all, and some he shows as gods, others as men; some he makes slaves, others free.'[17]].[18] This was plainly not the trajectory of Augustine's thought at the time; for by his definition of love, it is no more than the orientation of the whole towards something. That is to say, it has no substantive existence in itself. It is useful as a diagnostic tool because it furnishes an instant insight into where

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[15] See above, pp. 45-47.
[16] *En. in ps.*, LXIV, 2.
[17] Kirk and Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, p. 195.
[18] Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, p. 97.

a man's will lies: 'Valeric the Vandal loves raping and pillaging; Vergil the poet loves letters'.[19] In each case it is love's object that tells us about the man. Elshtain, on the other hand, seems intent on reading a positive definition into Augustine's understanding of love: 'Even in our good works we are dislocated creatures, torn by discord, but striving to attain some measure of *Concordia*. But love abides. And the more we try to emulate God's love, the stronger will be our hope; the more decent our lives with and among one another.'[20] By the terms of his metaphysic, this is not something that Augustine could ever have said. It is impossible for man to emulate God's love when it is made manifest in His arbitrary Will spoken into the actual present: for it is not something that can be understood and copied. God's love is His judgement; Luther saw this and it appalled him so much that he intuited an entire theology into denying it.[21]

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Once again, it is important to stress that Elshtain's motives in pursuing this interpretation of Augustine are entirely laudable. She has clearly thought long and hard about the political tradition of the West in its contemporary manifestation; she has rightly become disturbed by what she has seen of it in the culture around her; but unfortunately, she has badly misunderstood what Augustine's life as a pilgrim consisted in. The thought with

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[19] See in particular Augustine's discussion of this at *In Io. ev. tr.*, VII, 8.
[20] Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, p. 89.
[21] The useful phrase 'intuited an entire theology' is Gary Wills'. He uses it to describe the depth to Augustine's understanding of the word '*confessiones*'. (Gary Wills, *Saint Augustine* (London, Phoenix, 1999), p. xiv). Wills' understanding of this key Augustinian term is not, however, supported by the argument of this dissertation.

which she prefaces her book, that it has been written 'one *peregrinus* to, and with, another',[22] is a sentimentalization of Augustine's experience. For his pilgrimage was not an earnest intellectual exploration of what it should mean to be a man living between Two Cities. It was something that Elshtain might find it difficult to like: a perfect subjection and obedience to the Will of God: The Perfect Law of Liberty. Reading Elshtain's book, one suspects that she would, in fact, be loath to see her journey ended by something so hard and clear. And Augustine would be able to tell her why. Men are born on the path from Paradise, believing the Lie to be true; on this journey to becoming their own sources of truth they travel with open eyes, committed to a catastrophic broadening of horizons. It is against this celebration of human endeavour that Augustine's pilgrimage squarely stands:

> ...may the soul, whose pilgrimage has become long, understand that if she thirsts for You, if her tears are now made her bread, while it is said to her each day, 'Where is your God?' if she seeks of You one thing, and desires it, that she may dwell in Your house all the days of her life – and what is her life except Yourself? And what are Your days except eternity, just as are Your years, which do not fail, because you are ever the same? – from this, then, may that soul, which can do so, understand how far above all times are you, the Eternal. For Your house, which is not on pilgrimage, even though it is not coeternal with You, yet unceasingly and unfailingly clings to You and thus suffers no change in time.[23]

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[22] Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, p. xiii.
[23] *Confess.*, XII, 11, 13.

Chapter 7

AUGUSTINE IN THE HISTORY OF IDEAS

Now begins the least tasteful part of this contextualist history of the reception and interpretation of Augustine's leading political ideas; though in terms of what there has already been opportunity to say, it can at least be kept short. For in effect what is about to be said here is by way of a conclusion to this history; it is intended to make the point how elusive are Augustine's thoughts on man, society and the state.

Enough has now been said to show that the peculiarity of Augustine's political ideas is the fact that they are effectively a receptacle for his theology of discipleship. In the greater scheme of his thought, the measure of their value and significance is what they contain. Correspondingly, when most intellectual historians encounter them it is with the theology of discipleship poured out: they are, to use Dyson's elegant metaphor, like fragments of a pot retrieved from an archeological site:

> ...reconstructing Augustine's social, political and historical thought is like putting together the fragments of a pot retrieved from an archaeological site. The fragments are distributed throughout written works of various kinds, none of them specifically 'political' in character: essays in biblical exegesis, letters, sermons, controversial exchanges, philosophical and theological treatises, and so on... The task of piecing these fragments together is therefore complex, laborious and not seldom

conjectural... In the nature of the case, such a reconstruction cannot be wholly satisfactory. Our archaeological simile is not completely apt. We cannot 'reconstruct' what was never constructed in the first place...[1]

Such examples of scholarly integrity only help to make it seem all the more harsh that intellectual historians should be included in what has otherwise been a catalogue of mercenary approaches to Augustinian thought. However the point must be made just how far-reaching the influence of an absent Augustinian work on politics has been. It has made his political ideas fair game for all manner of thinkers, from first-time pamphleteers to full-blown papal apologists, from cold war realists to postmodernist decriers of the traditional state apparatus. And it has made even those honest attempts to give his political ideas a fair hearing appear contrived. Indeed it would seem that no re-construction or systemization of Augustine's political ideas, however sensitively carried out, can possibly survive the shock of their removal from the body of his writings. In a rather devastating simile they turn up dead upon arrival, cut off from the lifeblood of his experiences as a man. But then again, it was just this that made Augustine so unique and loved in his time. Unlike an Aquinas, to name just one example, he had no need of a constraining morality or rational system. No, his was the genius of the man unbidden by proof. If there is truth running through his political ideas its source is not some single, inviolable premiss. There is, of course, the temptation to say that it is; that Aquinas's

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[1] Dyson, *The Pilgrim City*, xi-ii. Deane further warns that, 'Commentators have sometimes been drawn into this temptation by the striking manner in which [Augustine] expresses his ideas; as a consequence, they have allowed themselves to reduce his complex insights into a simple, consistent theory.' [Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, ix]

maxim 'Do Good and avoid Evil'[2] finds its counterpart in Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin; and that for this reason both thinkers are rationalists, though differing greatly as they stand on their original positions. But whereas Aquinas's maxim blushes with the self-consciousness typical of the Scholastic temperament, Augustine's doctrine thunders with the Patristic reverence for Scriptural authority.[3] It is the stark difference between a rational and irrational God – between a God Who may do as He likes so long as He does not attempt anything that the cleverest men might consider unreasonable, a kind of *deus ex machina*,[4] and a God Whose Will defies all human categories of understanding.[5] When Augustine says, *si cepisti, non est Deus* 'if you have understood

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[2] This is a paraphrase of the conclusion to *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 3: 'When someone uses his intellect to act, he always chooses an end that he thinks is good because the object of his intellect only moves him when it appears to be good – and good is the object of the will. Everything in nature moves and acts for an end that is a good since the end of something acting in nature is the result of a natural appetite. Therefore everything that acts acts for a good.' (tr. Sigmund, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics*, p. 6).

[3] And Augustine was exceptional in this regard. Frederick van der Meer has said that, '...it would be difficult to point to a man who was more completely filled by Holy Scripture than was Augustine. Origen is the learned visionary, Jerome the "three-tongued" scholar, but Augustine is, above all, the believing Bible student... He literally lived in Holy Scripture...' (Frederick van der Meer (tr. Brian Battershaw & G. R. Lamb), *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church* (London, Sheed & Ward, 1961), p. 343). The following extract from *Serm.*, XXIII, 15, which takes the form of a regression, is a particularly helpful example of Augustine's general attitude in this matter: 'You ask me what God uses to present Himself, as though I could explain what He made the world from, what He made the sky from, what He made the earth from, what He made you from. "I know that one," you answer; "from clay." So much for you, made from clay. What was clay made from? "From the earth," you answer. But not, I suppose, from an earth someone else made, but from the earth which He made, "Who made Heaven and earth." So where did this earth come from, what were Heaven and earth made of? "He spoke, and they were made." Excellent, a splendid answer. You declare, "He spoke, and they were made;" I've nothing more to ask you. But just as I've nothing more to ask you, when you say "He spoke and they were made," so you shouldn't have anything more to ask me when I say, "He chose, and he revealed Himself." He revealed Himself as He judged suitable; He remained concealed as He was.'

[4] The literal meaning of this Latin phrase is 'the god from the machine'. It comes from Greek and Roman drama, where it is used to describe any god introduced to a play as a device to resolve the plot.

[5] As Au. Gu. writes: 'In this way, Augustine was contrasted with Thomas whenever it was felt that the latter's intellectualism had gone too far in depressing the purely affective energy of the soul. Indeed it came to pass that, in much the same way as Plato was turned to when Aristotle (notwithstanding his greatness) came to appear arid, technical and over-worldly, so too was Augustine turned to when the wonderful lucidity of the Thomist mind seemed in danger of ignoring the needs of the heart.' (*EI*, p. 926a). This analysis is true enough as it stands; but at the same time it does not quite capture the nature of the difference between Thomas and Augustine. For Thomas, imbued as he was with the philosophy of Aristotle, understanding a thing was synonymous with knowing its *substantia* 'substance' (see Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, II, 3). This reasoning he extended even to God (see *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 3). As such, to Thomas, God was ineffable simply because His substance did not come down in its entirety to the

Him, He is not God',[6] he is perhaps suggesting the very revision that would bring Dyson's excellent metaphor in line with this thinking. For after all, if you cannot by any turn of logic reconstruct what was never meant to be constructed in the first place then you can just as little claim to have discovered the fragments of a pot. In the nature of the case, to see any such shape to their arrangement is really the same thing as not to see them at all.

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human senses. Some of it did, of course, indirectly, in the effects of His creation, but this could never be enough to allow man to get a firm grasp on the substance of God (see *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 3). To Augustine, on the other hand, God was ineffable because man could not know His Will unless it was revealed to him in the actual present. To return to the point made in the main body of the text, this really amounts to two very different conceptions of God.

[6] *Serm.*, LII, 16.