

# **Politics, Peace and Predestination**

---

Política, paz y predestinación

# 10

Miles Hollingworth  
Independent researcher, United Kingdom



## Abstract

This chapter is intended to show that Augustine's political philosophy can speak with a radical voice into situations of extreme ideological conflict today—most especially where these involve gross disparities of wealth. The key to allowing this radical Augustinian voice to speak, is first to spend a good deal of time identifying the exact coordinates into which it can speak. These coordinates may surprise us, and they are the chief innovation of this chapter. For convenience sake, I lever the search for these coordinates against the general idea of radical socialism, understood as a philosophy of history. The result of this approach is that it eventually brings us out on Augustine's doctrine of predestination; and allows us to begin to see it as the practical touchstone of a new radical Augustinianism. This new radicalism does not need to make use of the device that liberation theology made use of, viz., a preferential option for the poor. Instead, it moves beyond all such class distinctions to direct itself against the very dynamics which have shaped political logic in the West since Plato.

*Keywords:* Marxism-Leninism, Plato, predestination, rationality, utopianism.



## Resumen

El objetivo de este capítulo es mostrar que la filosofía política de Agustín puede hablar hoy en día con una voz radical en situaciones de conflicto ideológico extremo, especialmente cuando estas implican grandes disparidades de riqueza. La clave para permitir que esta voz agustiniana radical hable es pasar primero mucho tiempo identificando las coordenadas exactas en las que se puede hablar. Estas coordenadas pueden sorprendernos y son las principales innovaciones de este capítulo. Por razones de conveniencia, comparto la búsqueda de estas coordenadas con la idea general del socialismo radical, entendido este como una filosofía de la historia. El resultado de este enfoque es que finalmente nos revela la doctrina de la predestinación de san Agustín y nos permite comenzar a verlo como la piedra de toque práctico de un nuevo agustinismo radical. Este nuevo radicalismo no necesita hacer uso del dispositivo que la teología de la liberación utilizó, a saber una opción preferencial para los pobres. En cambio, va más allá de todas estas distinciones de clase para dirigirse contra la misma dinámica que ha configurado la lógica política en occidente desde Platón.

*Palabras clave:* Marxismo-leninismo, Platón, predestinación, racionalidad, utopismo.



**Sobre el autor** | About the author

**Miles Hollingworth** [[www.mileshollingworth.com](http://www.mileshollingworth.com)]

Miles Hollingworth is the author of several books, including *Saint Augustine of Hippo: An Intellectual Biography* (OUP, 2013) and *Ludwig Wittgenstein* (OUP, 2018). He has received the Jerwood Award for Non-Fiction from the Royal Society of Literature and the Elizabeth Longford Scholarship from the Society of Authors. His book *The Pilgrim City* (Bloomsbury, 2010) was shortlisted for the Gladstone History Book Prize. He is founder and editor of the international book series *Reading Augustine* (Bloomsbury, 2017–) and co-editor of *The Edinburgh Companion to Political Realism*.



**Cómo citar en MLA** / How to cite in MLA

Hollingworth, Miles. "Politics, Peace and Predestination." *Agustín de Hipona como Doctor Pacis: estudios sobre la paz en el mundo contemporáneo*, edited by Anthony Dupont, Enrique Eguiarte Bendimez y Carlos Vilabona, Editorial Uniagustiniana, 2019, pp. 291-320, doi: 10.28970/9789585498235.10

## Some Necessary Preliminaries

In this chapter, I hope to show readers how to recover and deploy Augustine's radical voice for peace. The urgent need for this voice continues in many places around the world. I am particularly thinking of those places where people are separated by vast differences of circumstance and fortune. Note that I am being careful not to use the word "class." That word automatically invokes the idea—made famous by socialism—of political history as coordinate upon a conspiracy; namely, the conspiracy of the wealthy against the poor. Socialism says that this conspiracy has been the chief animating force in the post-industrial modern world. That is to say, the property-owning class, qua the property they own, have lived in *automatic consciousness* of what they would *automatically* stand to lose were their position to fall. Which means that in inheriting their material advantage over the working classes—or in building it up within their lifetimes—they have had to pursue an unusually active degree of self-interest.

All humans are self-interested, so this argument continues; it is the basis of our survivalist impulse. But whereas the working classes have experienced this impulse blamelessly, at its most basic level of daily bread, the capitalists have had always to devise and plot in order to present their unbridled pursuit of it in the best possible light. They have *controlled* history, both in the sense of keeping the working classes in a state of resigned, or even awed, submission and in enculturating the mystique of their own hallowed lot. It is by reason of this, its apparently cynical and unceasing manipulation of all around it, that socialism has regarded this capitalist class as the coordinating point for any true and viable thinking on *change*. More, it is the very existence of this class by means of its giant self-conscious effort (to perpetuate itself) that makes the very thought of change possible. For if the way things were in capitalist societies were instead akin to a law of nature, then change would be as inconceivable as changing the law of gravity. However, if it can be seen to be the result of a culpable human attitude of mind, then why should radical measures not present themselves? History itself might now be redirected or realised anew. The vigilance and awareness that was the preserve of those with property to lose might now be transferred to the classes beneath them, such that they would become enlightened and indignant at the injustice put upon them all these years, and receptive to a new education that would show them how now to set things right. The long-term virtue and issue of this vision would then be a kind of world society without class, in which the conscious and active participation in the making of history

would fall equally and indiscriminately to every human being. A true and final, Stateless democracy.

## Augustine and Socialism

For a long while now, it has been recognized that numerous conceptual associations can be made between Augustine and socialism, and Augustine and communism.<sup>1</sup> One does not even have to reach very far to make the case. Augustine was after all at the forefront of early Christianity's mission to present itself as the religion of the weak and unprotected—of the lowest in society, of the poor. He stressed alms giving and charity. He gave up his own family inheritance to the Church and as Bishop and Judge, he routinely took the part of his needy parishioners in Roman North Africa, insofar as they were continuously beset by greedy officials and steeping taxes. What is more, he showed a lifelong commitment to the communistic ideal. His own journey to the Church had pivoted on what he came to regard as a shameful inability to give up on worldly ambition and success. When he was finally able to convert, in 386, he would round on this aspect of his life decisively and dramatically. His first attempt at an ideal Christian community at Cassiciacum would be based upon an *active* and *conscious* denunciation of Mammon, understood as the rival god—the preoccupation which keeps a man in belief of his own self-sufficiency. Later on, when it came to working out the form of organization for his priestly household at Hippo Regius, his focus would turn to private property as an obstacle to human friendship and fellowship, but most of all, to the true love of God. It would become a staple of his mature thought that holy communities are, as it were, always waiting to spring into life, but for the difficulty of human nature and pride, whose first and most devastating expression is in private possession. In this, he was referring to the logic that pride can be nothing without something of which to be proud. When you add to this the fact that all creation is God's—that God made it and that it is good as God made it—then you can see at once why Augustine could feel so confident about singling out the institution of *private possession* for such sustained attack.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his priestly career, he would argue that devotion to the common possession of the necessities of (material) life can give to a Christian community its optimum chance to come into a high and sustained understanding of

---

<sup>1</sup> Beginning, in the 20th century with Ryan (26-39).

<sup>2</sup> A mere sample would be *civ.*, 5, 15-16; *Gen. litt.* 11, 15; *lib. arb.*, 2, 19, 53, 199-200; *tr.*, 12, 9, 14; *en. Ps.*, 39, 7; *Io. ev. tr.*, 6, 25-26; *en. Ps.*, 83, 3; *s.*, 113, 4.

the unique goodness of God. Here, Augustine was singling out a key difference between the Christian God and the gods of the pagan world. Unlike those latter gods, the Christian God (of the New Testament) was not partial in his blessings; nor could he be influenced by invocation or sacrifice. To Augustine, those ideas belonged firmly to the world of the Earthly City, in which justice must be understood from within the parameters of space and time. Against this entire conception, he placed the Christian God in a new vision of justice, beyond space and time altogether, in eternity: the Heavenly City of Jerusalem, the City of God. This God was quite simply above and beyond the schemings of human acquisitiveness. He was somehow and miraculously the same to one and all. He did not (anymore) belong to a particular people, or a particular class. As Augustine would put it in his *Confessions*: “You are good and all-powerful, caring for each one of us as though the only one in Your care, and yet for all as for each individual” (3, 2, 19).

### ***Caveat Lector***

When then you couple these observations to the fact that Augustine did not leave an explicit political vision—or for that matter write an explicit political treatise—you can see at once how it becomes possible to enlist him as the father of radical action and change in the world on the socialist model. Because in the absence of any specific veto in writing from Augustine, these interpretations of his message can and do remain fair and valid. What I wish to do in this chapter, however, is to move away from the question of “class” and what it immediately brings into a conversation today. I want to move away from the idea that the fundamental unfairness of human life—which is today addressed by the term “social justice”—is something that has a natural, human cause; such that it could, and should, then, have a natural, human remedy. I want to get away from that dynamic, or mechanism, by which so much of human history is still automatically understood.

And I want to stress again that the “getting away” from it is not a reaction, or an argument against it. No. It is simply an experiment. An investigation conducted against the normal direction of travel. An attempt to find Augustine’s radical political voice at the far end of his most uncompromising and otherworldly theology: his doctrine of predestination. As well as an attempt, when we have done that, to present it as a *practical* message of peace; notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary.

## Western Science and the Status Quo

I want to begin here by repeating the key point from my opening above. Socialism, and at its extreme end, communism, reacts against the long and venerable idea of the *status quo*. The idea that in its fundamentals, human history is inert and unblinking—and that most fundamental of these fundamentals is that one part of humanity shall lord it over the other. Think of Heraclitus' dictum: "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" (Heraclitus, 215, tr. Kirk).

The point of dictums like these is to make you realise that to react against their wisdom would be like changing the seasons (or "changing the law of gravity," as I put it above). More, they are meant to encourage you to pour your intelligence into discovering and enumerating the sense in which they are true. With this activity itself then to be considered as yet one more act of recognition and obedience—the recognition that man is liable to rebel against the manifest destiny of Nature and God, and the obedience by which he apologises and repents of that. This neatly captures the spiralling logic which has always defined Western political thought; most especially through its Christian era—and against which, therefore, radical socialism was bound to feel that only violence might prevail.

Think of it like this. The first great discovery of Western political thought is that man is a *zoon politikon*. That is to say, the very same rational faculty which can dislocate him from all around him in the twists of self-consciousness and subjectivity is also that which can bring him into the wider and higher view of science and ethics. The discovery of classical Greek political thought is the idea that rationality only comes home to man when once he begins to feel and appreciate his power to bring himself, and his society, into positive alignment with the world out there; with the Universe and its laws; with the gods. In other words, man is subject to the same forces of life as any other *zoon*; the difference is that whereas they can align themselves thoughtlessly, according to pure instinct, man must each time choose to do so. This act of choosing, enacted moment upon moment, is what actually puts him into time—it is what creates time from his point of view of it. The non-rational animals cannot be aware of time because they do not face the series of choices which define the human animal's *moment in time*.

Now, of course, if we are here defining the human animal on its basic difference to all other animals, then we are defining something that has all along existed, and we are therefore in danger of losing the sense of what the clas-

sical Greeks discovered; for indeed it was a proper discovery with major consequences. What the classical Greeks discovered was that the human animal, bound everywhere by its rational faculty to endeavour to choose to live well, does so by myriad different customs. Sail the seas (as the classical Greeks did) and you will discover at once that each new society has its gods and its laws, its customs and taboos. These will vary endlessly from place to place, such that they must simply be learnt anew by the traveller each time, upon each new shore. In a world like that, there is not yet any conception of what we would today call “knowledge.” There is nothing underlying, there is nothing foundational. There is instead only what is conventional; what is subject to change. What the classical Greek mind would then do against all of this flux and confusion would be to notice that, deep down, this very chaos is in actual fact being generated by forces which are foundational. Strictly speaking, this discovery is something that the classical Greek mind would first make in its speculations on the physical world. The so-called Presocratic philosophers—the “first philosophers” of the Western world—would concern themselves nearly solely with the investigation and enumeration of the laws of the natural world. They produced the first rational explanations for the phenomena of the land and the sea and the air that for eons before could only be accounted for by supernatural devices. Socrates would then become notorious as the philosopher who would take it upon himself to apply this new tool to the human world, and to the business of “living well.”

The overall story, and the overall discovery, however, is as I have described it. The classical Greek mind begins to learn to treat the outward phenomena of the natural and human worlds as merely the exempla—or products—of the stable and predictable forces which generate them. Behind the 1000 different cultures of 1000 different shores is now seen to be the foundation—the constant—of the human animal qua the mechanism of its basic form. Qua its basic, instinctual requirements of life.

Put yourself down amidst any human society, anywhere in the world, and what you will see behind the feathers and smoke and tribal dances is something that can be documented, by the impartial observer in a notebook, as *knowledge*, in just the way of the modern anthropologist. This way of always looking through to what is *really going on*, is what can be attributed, correctly, to the classical Greek mind. It is its discovery. The discovery of the power of the observing human mind. And it is a great power! For whatever is being observed by the observing human mind, is at that exact same moment rendered pow-

erless, objective and inanimate—whether it be the thundering heavens or the beating heart of man himself. The tribe dancing before the anthropologist is just as powerless and deceived as to the true meaning of its actions as Plato's prisoners were down in the cave. This power is potent, this power is unstoppable. And, as per my example *par excellence* of the modern anthropologist, it continues to dominate today. And therefore, we say that the high point of its expression remains—for student and citizen—what can be read plainly in the great works of Plato and Aristotle. There you will encounter, time and again, the great and apparent virtue of *surrender*. That is, the surrender of the passionate part of man to his rational part. The surrender of the heart to the mind. In other words, what the anthropologist does to the newly discovered tribe in the jungle is only possible because of what she has first done to herself. It is only because she has first been educated into the virtue of the *surrender*; it is only because she has first looked through herself, and ordered herself, that she can now sit so quietly and concentratedly in front of the tribe, and not be moved by the feeling and energy in their dance, and instead catalogue it for knowledge and posterity, as an example of behaviour *x*.

This whole approach to life, this whole method of life, in which reality and truth are that which the wise man, which the philosopher, must always *see through* to, is as much a discovery for “thought” as it is for “politics.” But in pressing it to its extreme in tightly argued dialogues, Plato and Aristotle ensured that its enduring image would indeed be the *polis*: or the final setting in which the human animal is able to observe itself acting in perfect obedience to Nature. This classical Greek idealism is taken to such a high pitch that it is possible to “walk right the way around” the ideal image of man in society which it presents and see always the same thing; that is to say, to see no difference of genesis between society and man. Society can look back at man and see the mirror image of itself; and man can look back at society and see the same. Man stands in relation to society as the acorn stands in relation to the oak tree. In this perfect idealism which so pleases and soothes the mind, there is also—I repeat—a *perfect ambiguity of genesis*. Man, who before was disordered and disobedient, heart to mind; man, who before stood apart and fearful of Nature in his “self-consciousness and subjectivity,” is now as seamless a part of its wholesale operation as the acorn, or the squirrel. He is no longer the spanner in the works. He has instead been conformed to the highest instinct (to the highest *telos*) of his being. From his point of view, this is *virtue*. From the point of view of the world of ideas, it is *justice*.

To recap. The classical Greek discovery of man as a *zoon politikon* is in actual fact the discovery of a perfect and eternal world of ideas from which man stands in alienation by virtue of his disobedience. His rational faculty makes it possible for him to disobey; and this disobedience is experienced by him in the first instance as the series of choices that he must make. A series of choices whose linear progression mark out the dimension which he calls “time.” From this starting place, the ladder of perfection must be to use knowledge (*science*) with the purpose of now beginning to make these choices correctly (*ethics*). This ladder, properly scaled, returns man to the state of perfect justice; which for him, is the true and ideal *polis*. Or should it rather be said, that the scaling of this ladder introduces man to the state of perfect justice? Here we encounter again that key phrase of mine from above: “A perfect ambiguity of genesis.”

For all that it does, then, classical Greek political thought also launches the Western mind into the paradox of this phrase. I repeat again, the idealist solution to the problem of human life, when taken to its classical Greek extreme of conclusion, actually eradicates all proof, save of itself. Plato’s great work, *The Republic*, eradicates all proof, save of itself. Plato’s *Republic* uses human beings. It arranges them in the perfect patterns which then *become* it, and become justice itself.<sup>3</sup>

Reason allows man to “wake up!”—to see the Universe as science sees it, and to see at once his messy discordance from it. It allows him to develop and learn the way back into coordination with it. The good life, the happy life. But the moment that this new life has been achieved; the moment that he has moved from time into eternity; this same reason of his offers him no explanation (or we should say even “memory”) of where he once was, or how he entered into the perfection that he now has. For he, and the Universe, are now in unshakable *status quo*.

I wrote at the start of this section that this idea of the *status quo* is precisely that which socialism and communism react against. However, students of Western political thought have for a long time now been coached to see it somewhat differently. Ever since World War Two, in fact; and then the Cold War, and the 20<sup>th</sup>-century experiments in totalitarianism. I must explain what I mean by this.

---

<sup>3</sup> I discuss this thesis of mine at length in my book *Inventing Socrates*, but especially in chapter 2, “The way of truth.”

## The Dominance of the (Psychological) Problem of Evil

The fact is that these telling events have tended to be analysed theoretically, in the universities, as gigantic assaults on the colour and spice of individual freedom. The image of drab and uniform Eastern bloc streets has been paraded as the proof-horror of what happens when “freedom” is permitted to be defined collectively, as the corporate destiny and national possession of a people—rather than as the personal destiny and possession of the single-unit “man” of modern, constitutional, liberal democracy. An entire generation has been taught in this way to regard the *status quo* as the special and peculiar conspiracy of ethical monism.<sup>4</sup> This is true as far as it goes. From the point of view of individual freedom and ethical pluralism, the *status quo* is something that can only come into being through an enormous, total effort of policing, repression and control. In this picture, the *status quo* is what happens when your birth-right is taken from you. This birth-right is your freedom to pilot your own course through life. (It is the antithesis of obeying the orders of Plato’s *philosopher kings*). However, for precisely this way that it constructs and presents itself, this analysis—this theory—can really only then be a partial view of the matter. Partial in the sense that it is dominated and directed by the great question of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, which being the question of “human evil”—namely, “How could the atrocities of National Socialism and International Communism have occurred?” Or more to the point, “How could human beings have been manipulated so as to have been their willing instruments?” The answer, from the point of view of the (Western) liberalism of today, is that they were made to act as *one*. However, if you can now peel yourself away from this great question of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and if you can focus instead on where I began this section—viz., with Heraclitus and his realism—then you may begin to realize a whole wider and longer look on the matter.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, if Heraclitus was merely being rational in relation to the true facts, if he was merely stating the proto-science that the history of philosophy credits him with, and if the post-Socratic science of the good life was really this realism’s high example, then the *status quo* that it brings about must be just as much socialism’s nemesis as it is the capitalist West’s (as ethical monism). If the daily exempla of the human condition and human nature are to be seen through and studied for

---

<sup>4</sup> In the English-speaking world, the landmark works of this School are still Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and its Enemies*, and Isaiah Berlin’s *Four Essays on Liberty*.

<sup>5</sup> For cutting-edge accounts of the cracks now appearing in the Western edifice of the “Open Society,” see Kaufman (494-507); and Breyfogle (554-566).

the reality which underlies them, and if this cold hard fact looks like Heraclitus' dictum, or Plato and Aristotle's aristocratic inequality of man, then the socialist impulse for fairness and justice must run up against the immovable object of the "scientific condition of man," or "human nature."

In this way, socialism allows us to see something very clearly (but which it is in the habit of the history of Western political thought to overlook). The scientific cast of mind—which is the Western mind to this day—and which began with the classical Greek reduction of the natural and human worlds to their laws and processes—must inevitably tend, in the first instance, to the kind of dictatorship and eugenics that Plato proposed. What is more, this political programme, because it is based upon a total belief in the possibility of total knowledge—plus the belief that man has nothing occult in him (such as the Christian "original sin") that would withstand this knowledge—must then go on to rub out all historical trace of man's deviant condition before enlightenment. If Plato is telling us that the whole problem of the human race up until *philosophy* was the straightforward lack of the proper knowledge of how to order itself individually and collectively (because man, when enlightened, cannot but act in accordance with it), then his human race post-*philosophy* must by this very logic contain no "memory" of its previous state: for any such retention would provide for the possibility (and it needs only be a "possibility" to negate the force of Plato's system) of a return, or a fall, to it. I believe that this is what Ernst Troeltsch (404) meant when he talked of Platonism's "rationally necessary conceptual element." The purely idealist solution to the problems of human life, and by that we mean to politics itself, must for all its purity deliver man into a Heaven on Earth that is eternal, and that in being eternal, "cannot account for why he would have entered it in the first place." Man is redeemed, but at the expense of the sense of that word, which disappears from view. This unforeseen result is the shadow which haunts Western political thought. But which, as I hinted at earlier, is hardly if ever remarked upon; for it has been covered over by the theoretical explanations and denunciations of radical socialism which I have given above. These fixate on the spectacle of mass psychology, and walk it back to Plato. All the while, radical socialism itself looks to Plato, and finds in him the parent of its own great fear, which is that Western rationalism will become such a sharp blade that it will cut right through all human hope of change and peace and show the inequality of man to be, in fact, the first and last law of history—quite impossible to resist, once discovered. Like when Charles Darwin discovered the comparable role of the law of "natural selection" in the kingdom of the non-rational animals.

What radical socialism—and by that, I mean the new theory of human history developed and preached by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels—correctly sees, is that the Platonic—then Aristotelian—idea of true knowledge “as knowledge of what is conceptually stable and predictable in the Universe” must have the eventual, and irreversible, consequence of delivering the human race into the method of life by which it would finally line up on that *reality*. And once that were to happen, history would be “locked in” to its eternal pattern. In effect, there would be no human element in it—no man to make appeal to. No man to make the emotional appeal of social justice to. Instead, it would be like trying to appeal to a stone, or a planet, or mathematics, or physics. The radical socialism of Marx and Engels requires the engine of history to become something that can bear regret; and as I put it at the start of this chapter, “culpability.” Only man, or better, only a class of men, can do this. Only a class of men can be viably identified as the engine of history, then logically redirected under a comprehensive programme of re-education, and yes, redemption. Only a class of men can be subject to the valence of “right” and “wrong.” If man is the pilot of history, rather, say, than God, or even atoms, then there is a chance that he might yet still arise and save himself (his corporate self, the Stateless, final communistic world society).

## A Perfect Ambiguity of Genesis

Some pages earlier, I talked of the “spiralling logic” of Western political thought and noted that it became especially tight in its Christian era. I can now set this comment down in its proper context. In attempting to understand the world and his place in it by means of his mind, critically and reductively, man births reason and science—along with the final proof of universal “process,” if not “design.” Of course, Christian philosophy comes quickly to learn to emphasise “design,” and to use science as the final proof of what its doctrine had been teaching all along. This goes well, until eventually there come those, like Thomas Hobbes, who can see the long-hidden danger in this confluence. If obeying God is now the same thing as obeying the laws of nature, and vice versa, and if this obedience (this “surrender,” as I put it earlier) stands to reason (indeed, is the definition of reason), then Man has become like unto an automaton, and all the great questions of humanism, including the greatest question of all, which is the question why man should submit to God and law (and society) in the first place, become unanswerable (because they can no longer sensibly be asked). We are back to the strange situation that I have characterised in the phrase, *a perfect ambiguity of genesis*. And “genesis” is very much the operative word

here, for we can at once see that the question of human obligation is in actual fact subset to the terminating question of any human life, which goes: “Why was I born into this station of life, rather than some other? Why should some be born free, and others slaves?” Hobbes’s famous and ingenious solution to all of this is to craft, or contrive, a genesis for the great law which this great question anticipates. Moreover, a *human* genesis. That is, a human genesis for a law which should otherwise stand outside and apart from all such historical generation because really it is a precondition, or axiom, of history itself—*The Leviathan*. Let us be clear: Hobbes solves at great effort and length what Emmanuel Kant said that it would be better that we simply accept. Namely, that the ultimate “laws of the Universe” can only be what they are if we first accept that no human hand played a part in their creation. In other words, human rationality is plainly such that it needs laws. But by the same token, it needs those laws to be *inhuman* and *ahistorical*. As the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein put it best:

To ask whether a formal concept exists is nonsensical. For no proposition can be the answer to such a question. (So, for example, the question, “Are there unanalysable subject-predicate propositions?” cannot be asked. (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4; 1274).

Clearly the laws of logic cannot in their turn be subject to laws of logic. (There is not, as [Bertrand] Russell thought, a special law of contradiction for each “type”; one law is enough, since it is not applied to itself) (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6, 123).

Mathematicians do not in general quarrel over the result of a calculation. (This is an important fact.) (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, II, 11).

In sum, the theoretical picture of the world which science has given man the power to construct turns out to contain no natural place for him. Law is perfect and eternal, and man, it seems, is neither of those things—or more accurately, he can only ever be partly those things. He can touch eternal perfection in his mind, but he cannot hold to it for any serious length of time, for want of the will and concentration. This “want” is precisely what has always been addressed and treated in the coercive aspects of life in society. Classical Greek political thought notes this, but includes this coercion in its general, positive conception of reason and law—it teaches that man will always choose willingly to submit to law as soon as he sees that it is the same thing as right reason. The Christian tradition after Paul and Augustine, learns to take a different view of the matter. This is because it has a radical alternative to the idea of human

perfection as something that must be realized and proved in society on Earth. It has the Heavenly City, to which it transposes all true and final justice and happiness. This allows it to take a more literary and artistic view of man's inveterate deviancy. This deviancy is sin, yes, and is therefore "bad." But it also signifies and demonstrates the way that the heart and soul of a man is secret and subject only to God's final judgement to come. That is to say (*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*), it is precisely because no utopianism—no totalitarianism—has ever been able to succeed on Earth that we get to see the proof of man's final, supernatural destination. This Christian tradition says, then, that society and its coercion is important, but that it is only *remedial*—it cracks a man on the back, but it doesn't reach inside him and judge and correct his inner self. Only God can do that.

I repeat, the Pauline and Augustinian view of political life actually gives to sin the role of a radical "double-life." In the first doctrinal instance, it is the sense in which we are born damned, and in which there can never be a "heaven on Earth," no matter how hard we try. Then, in the second instance, it is the very reason why every giant historical scheme to create monism and conformism has failed. For in every instance, these schemes have succeeded only in showing that there is something in the human animal that makes it naturally resistant and impervious to God's Law as much as to "human law presented as God's Law." There is art in the human animal that will simply always rebel. And what it will rebel against each time, is not the content of the laws, but the prison of the concept of law itself. Christian orthodoxy is obliged to call this art "sin," simply because it cannot logically call it "good." But at the same time, it is well aware—at least, it is in the purpose of this chapter of mine to show that it *should be* well aware—that this very art by which Adam and Eve first disobeyed God's Law and fell, must also then be the route back to him; for it is no more, or less, than what Augustine would set down for all time as the *cor inquietum* ("restless heart") (*conf.*, 1, 1, 1).

This radical double-life of sin is famously described by Paul as a whole new law of its own, supervening on and wrecking the hitherto certainty of pagan humanism, that it can both know and isolate good and evil—and then act decisively and faultlessly on the former: "I find, then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom. 7, 21).

Augustine's development on it, is to create a whole new literary register and genre based upon it. We have since learnt to call it "autobiography;" though in Augustine's case, we are more strictly talking of "spiritual autobiography."

This whole new way of thinking about the human condition takes the double-life of sin—takes Paul’s new law—and sets it within the meta-narrative of the Garden of Eden. Man bites the apple in order to enter into an intellectual freedom from God. Man bites the apple in order to find himself, by himself (pride), within the law of the Universe which his freedom from God now gives him scope to discover. Yet each time he is doomed (and the story of every human life to Augustine now becomes the story of this tragedy played out) to discover only that law qua law is sufficient unto itself; that it takes care of itself; and that in discovering it, man therefore discovers nothing, save what a Universe bound by law would look like.<sup>6</sup> As Augustine will explain it (in his Wittgensteinian voice), the postlapsarian question of God and law is really a question of measurement rather than truth. If we decide to measure God’s creation by laws, then it is laws that we will discover (in the same way that we would discover kilograms, if we chose to measure God’s creation by them rather than pounds). The truth doesn’t enter into it. It is simply a case of man’s choosing—of man’s choosing apart from God. Of man’s prideful choosing apart from God. Of original sin.<sup>7</sup>

The poet William Blake would put the situation rather brilliantly succinctly in his poem, “The Human Abstract” (Blake). Its final stanza shows that the tree of knowledge did not represent something ontological, that God forbid man to possess, but that man only found what he went looking for. Man went looking his pride, and he found it in his brain: “The Gods of the earth and sea/Sought ‘thro Nature to find this Tree; /But their search was all in vain: /There grows one in the Human Brain.”

Augustine’s innovative description of all of this is to say that we are never really searching for the truth, but for ourselves in the truth: “What do I want to say, Lord, except that I do not know whence I came into what I may call a mortal life or a living death” (*conf.*, 1, 6, 7).

In other words, when we are scripting monumental theories of justice such as Plato’s, or more recently John Rawls’, we are never really depicting what we think we are depicting. We think we are depicting the future careers in happiness of men and women, but really all that we are depicting is the unfeeling career of *rationality* itself. Yes, only rationality is being described in these

---

<sup>6</sup> I explain the implications of this for historical and future philosophy (mathematical and political) at length in my *Ludwig Wittgenstein* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2018); but in this instance, see especially, pp. 1-32.

<sup>7</sup> For more on this, see Hollingworth (195-213).

hundreds of thousands of pages. As for men and women, their only part in the scheme can be to play their part and surrender and obey. In other words, it is men and women, correctly arranged, who create the ideal conditions for “deliberative rationality” (Rawls 566).<sup>8</sup> They become the precondition of the condition which is to bind them.<sup>9</sup> Or what is the same thing, rationality incorporates itself out of the third-person perspective which it collects from everyman and everywoman.<sup>10</sup> By this means, Western political thought—and especially its modern form—has learnt to disregard what I have called “the terminating question of any human life” (viz. “Why me, here, now?” “Why was I born into the 3<sup>rd</sup> World rather than the 1<sup>st</sup> World?”). How far this is from Augustine’s view of the matter—from his radical political voice—will now be made apparent.

Finally, I have invoked Ludwig Wittgenstein to make a point bearing vitally on this essay. Consequently, I have spoken of Augustine’s “Wittgensteinian voice” as something readily apparent. If the reader remains concerned by this, or would simply like to know exactly what I mean by the latter term in particular, they should consult my essay “Time and Freedom in the *Confessions* and the *Tractatus*,” in the volume *Augustine and Wittgenstein*. They should also consider the other essays in that volume as excellent examples of the dynamic possibilities of reading these two thinkers together (Hollingworth “Time and Freedom” 151-168).

## Predestination in the City of God

Let us consider the following passage from Augustine’s *The City of God*, which may be considered the highpoint of his predestinarian view of human society:

Wicked men do many things which are against God’s will. So great is his wisdom, however, and so great his might, that all things which seem to be at odds with his will tend towards those outcomes or ends which he himself has fore-known as good and just. For this reason, when God is said to change his will—

---

<sup>8</sup> “The idea is to approximate the boundaries, however vague, within which individuals and associations are at liberty to advance their aims and deliberative rationality has free play” (566).

<sup>9</sup> See Rawls (587): “The perspective of eternity is not the perspective from a certain place beyond the world, nor the point of view of a transcendent being; rather it is a certain form of thought and feeling that rational persons can adopt within the world.”

<sup>10</sup> See Plato (*The Republic*, 604d): “One must accept the way the dice fall and then order one’s life according to the dictates of reason. One ought not to behave like children who have stumbled, wasting time wailing and pressing one’s hands to the injured part.”

as, for example, when he becomes angry with those towards whom he was formerly gentle—it is the people who change, rather than God. They find him changed, but only in the sense that their experience of him has changed, just as, to injured eyes, the sun “changes” and becomes, in a sense, harsh where once it was mild, and hurtful where it was once delightful, even though, in itself, it remains exactly as it was before. By God’s “will” we mean that which God produces in the hearts of those who obey his commandments, of which the apostle says, “For it is God who worketh in you both to will” [Phil. 2:13]. So too, God’s “righteousness” is not only that whereby God himself is called righteous, but also that which God produces in the man who is justified by him. Again, what we call the “Law of God” is really the Law of man, given by God. For it was assuredly to men that Jesus spoke when he said, “It is written in your Law” [John 8:17]; and, in another place we read that “the Law of his God is in his heart” [Ps. 37:31]. Thus, according to this will which God produces in men, He is said to will what he does not actually will in himself, but causes his people to will; just as He is said to know what he causes the ignorant to know... According to this sense of “God’s will,” therefore, whereby we say that God “wills” what He causes others to will, to whom the future is not known, God “wills” many things which he does not actually perform. His saints, for example, with a holy will inspired by him, will that many things should come to pass which do not in fact do so: as when they offer pious and holy prayers for others but what they pray for does not happen, even though, by his Holy Spirit, God has produced in them the will to pray. Thus, when, according to God’s teaching, the saints will and pray that someone may be saved, we can, in a manner of speaking, say that God wills it but does not perform it. For what we mean when we say this is that God wills something when he causes others to will it. According to his own will, however, which, together with his foreknowledge, is eternal, God has certainly already made all things in heaven and on earth which he has willed: not only things past and present, but also things future. But before that time arrives at which he has willed that something is to come to be which he has foreknown and disposed before all time, we say, “It will come to pass when God wills it.” This does not mean that God will then have a new will which he did not have before; but that something will then come to pass which has been prepared in his immutable will from all eternity (*civ.*, 22, 2).

Here we see, spectacularly clearly, the main elements involved in this view of Augustine’s—and how they have made it so notorious down the years. On the one hand, there is the insistence that no matter what, the Christian God

is good in everything he does, and indeed doing everything that is done to constitute being. He is the eternal, all-seeing Author of life Itself. On the other hand, there is the recognition that from the human point of view at least, the course of this life can, and will, throw up events which could not, on any sane view, be called "good." Moreover, as we have been noticing throughout this chapter, political logic in the West since Plato has relied completely on the human mind's facility to correctly differentiate between what is good, and what is not; then on developing scientific methods of attaching the human mind permanently to the former, by means of encountering it at the level at which there can be no mistakes of misapprehension, and no dissolution of what is there: the essential level. Over the millennia, this science of the Good Life has been advanced to such a degree, that even great wars have been fought in the name of the certain knowledge of what is good for man, and what is not. They continue to this day. So, we—in the Christian West at least—say that we know exactly what good and evil are; and believe that we have techniques for holding to and furthering the former. Yet according to the orthodoxy and doctrine of Christianity, God is just as much responsible for the evil that we shun as he is for the good that we embrace. This brings us to the tipping point of Augustine's predestinarian view. In order for God to be the author of all that is, he has also then to have been eternally aware of what he was always going to author. (The point stretches even our grammar here on the page; but then it has to). Thus, situated as he is in eternity, God is in foreknowledge of all that is. Every good thing and every evil thing, is in his gift. This sets up an immediate collision between our wisdom and God's. If we are not Christians, this collision will be more than enough to confirm us in our decision not to be. If we are Christians, then it must become the immediate source of some considerable anxiety on our part. This anxiety is referenced in what Augustine has to say in the passage above on the saints, and how they pray for the souls of men and women, and how only a certain number of those prayers can ever be answered by God.

God already knows who is going to Heaven and who is not, because he was the one who made the decision in the first place, in his eternal foreknowledge. There are two logical responses to the anxiety of this thought. The first is apathy—to sit on one's hands and do nothing; for on this view there is clearly no point in doing anything (if the ultimate prize of life has already been distributed). The second is a redoubled effort at Christian virtue. In this second response, made famous as Max Weber's *Protestant Work Ethic*, the pilgrim grasps to the fact that, if God has preordained life, then man is nonetheless

still living it (out in time). And if man is doing that, and if in Church on Sundays he still hears of the Ten Commandments, and of how he can and must cling to them, or repent and amend his ways if he has not; and that all of this will be reckoned and weighed at the end on the scales of his final judgement; then he can only conclude that notwithstanding the devastating logic of predestination, he has yet been granted the responsibility for his actions and the course of his life. Given this, might he not then work and earn his way into Heaven? This ethic, made consciously or unconsciously against the withering onslaught of God's majesty, has therefore gone on to become the beacon of modern Capitalism's sense of wellbeing when it is in bullish mood. And because it was made in the face of predestination's towering logic, as a means of effectively harnessing it to ride with it, it is curiously then also as non-Christian as it is Christian. To fully take this in, we need to think of everything compassed above under our investigation of—to use Troeltsch's term again—the “rationally necessary conceptual element” of Western thought, after Plato.

For example, look at our passage above from Augustine. Look at the enormous care he takes to distance God from any condemnation according to the vicissitudes of life. Does this not remind us of what I said above on Hobbes, and of his own reaction to the imputation of this view, that obeying God becomes no more than obeying the laws of Nature? It should. Hobbes saw that when God is distanced like this in answer to the great, troubling questions of life (Why was I born poor and unprivileged? Why did God provide for the (manifest) evil of it?), then he also dissolves into the very logical—into the very scientific—view which has made the questions visible to us in the first place. That is to say, as man comes into the full power of his ability to explain the Universe rationally, on a principle (à la Greek philosophy), he also comes into the full power of his ability to script passages like Augustine's above. It is only when once we can conceptualize the Universe irreligiously—as atoms and process rather than living forces and daemons—that we can mount the full, Augustinian, predestinarian view. It is only when once we have rendered the Universe inanimate, that we can bring in the idea of ultimate responsibility for its state as such.<sup>11</sup>

Think of it like this. You first have to have defined the crime before you can bring in the accused. If God is now in the dock, then it is for the crime of having knowingly created this apparently unfeeling Universe, in which good and evil come to be distributed arbitrarily.

---

<sup>11</sup> Consider, for example, how this twist of logic is replicated in Adam Smith's “invisible hand”—the beneficent Deity who makes it that free-market forces will work to the higher good (182-183).

Now relate this to the ground that we have covered in this chapter. We are saying that materialism—whether it be of the presocratic or Marxist-Leninist kind—replicates exactly the logic that Augustine has put to work in his passage above. In reaching as far as Augustine is prepared to, right to the very summit of God’s omniscience, we do two things. One, we render God indistinguishable from the totality of operations that constitute the universe of being—and then call that awesome spectacle his “majesty.” And two, we then fall automatically to using man, the human animal, as the increment and metric of the universe of pleasure and pain—for if we are disbarred from saying that God undergoes anything that could constitute the changes associated with volition or emotion, if we are disbarred even from saying that he can undergo the revelations in time that constitute the “point of experience,” then it is man who must be recruited into this role instead. Augustine makes this quite clear in what he says above. By declaring God responsible for the “totality of operations,” as I have called it, Augustine logically disqualifies him from bearing responsibility for any particular moral event in time. In fact, the definition of such a “moral event in time,” becomes the description of the partial line of sight which it is man’s lot to bear as a created being. All that can be said of God in relation to moral events—and by that we mean to the cruel happenstance of them—is that he will somehow and mysteriously work them all to good in the end. The effect of all of this, then, is no different to the effect of materialism. Materialism kills religion and kills God, only to find that it has not killed the “religious question.” The scientist looks into the cosmos’s unblinking eye and realizes that it is now up to him to do good or evil with the knowledge he has come into. So, too, does the political ideologue. So, too, again, does Weber’s protestant worker. From within theology, this has also been the source of the charge often levelled at Augustine, that his God is so far distanced from man as to be no different, in practice, to such severe conceptions as Plotinus’ One.

To me, however, all of this comes as positive news; for it is, in fact, what I regard to be the essence of Augustine’s radical political voice.

## **The Unfairness of Birth**

We must think again of the passage from *The City of God* above. We must think carefully of quite what exactly establishes the distance in it, between us and God. Is it not the very fact that we have had no input or control as regards the cardinal decision of our life, which has been our birth into this Universe? In a temporal world, it is logically impossible for any of us to choose to be born.

That decision must always be made for us by others, by our parents, and by their parents before them, and so on; all the way back to Adam and Eve. And from them, to God. God, in other words, is the termination of what I have been calling “the terminating question of a human life.” And this, I now want to suggest, comes out as the principal difference—and distance—between him and us. It is the very difference between temporality and eternity. And it is the difference that has made for the logic of politics in the West, as I have defined it in this chapter. If we are each of us catapulted into life on the whim of God, some rich some poor, then it is God who must bear the final responsibility for the social injustice—the social unfairness—which it has become the principal business of ethics and politics to correct. And if, like Augustine, we are Christians, then we have simply like him to shrug our shoulders and state it as an article of Christian faith that the ultimate justice of it all will one day be seen at the final reckoning. What we cannot do, however, is to go so far as to actually try to “reverse engineer” God’s whim. What we cannot do is to go as far as Plato went in *The Republic* and apply systematic eugenics in the attempt to eradicate the accidents of birth. And let us remember as well, the resurgent popularity of eugenics closer to our own time, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and how it was coterminous with the development of the modern, cradle-to-grave State of the capitalist West. Nor, for that matter, can we make the philosophical move of radical socialism, and call the accident of birth the accident of class—and try to resolve the matter at that level.

That we must not try to reverse-engineer God on his whim (or his wisdom), is because of the supreme danger of rationality—not of the danger of it identified in the post-World War Two years, to which I have already made reference in this essay. The danger of historicism and what another analyst of the problem, Michael Oakeshott (29), was to call the “bogus eternity of an ideology.” No. The supreme danger of rationality to which I refer is the mesmerism by which we lose touch with our true home, our true cry, our true nostalgia. Augustine’s *restless heart*.<sup>12</sup>

I mean how any grand, systematic and orchestrated solution to the problem of the unfairness of birth—any ideal city—must always also have the consequence of explaining away the very door which Augustine is trying to leave open.

Augustine knew full well that the plain act of looking for God’s majesty in words must eventually reproduce the exact same logic of realism that godless

---

<sup>12</sup> The same mesmerism by which Pelagius reverse-engineered Grace so as to arrive at the “debt” which it repays. See Augustine, *grat. Chr.*, 1, 24.

science claims for its own. Whether you are a Pre-Socratic believing in eternal cycles of just retribution, or a biologist believing after Darwin that Nature selects, or a Marxist believing that history progresses, you are all of you believing what the Augustinian Christian believes when he refuses to be detained by the (mere) appearance of chaos and caprice in the Universe and holds steadfastly to the conviction that there is some underlying—or in his case overlying—purpose to it all. However, in Augustine’s case, this does not mean that these beliefs are all of a piece. Instead, it is all of it an illustration of the chief limitation, that is the chief pride, of the fallen human mind. When Adam and Eve turned from God, they began humankind’s long journey of losing contact with the supernatural part of its story. For Augustine, it becomes the very definition of the fallen human mind that it relegates the supernatural to the realm of appearance. That, technically speaking, is the first and only positive move that it makes. From then on, everything that it does is negative and tautological. It is the description of what is there, for what it is—plus the ethic of doing that.

Ultimately, the tragedy of this comes home to man as his own peculiar form of self-harm and self-mutilation. In creating a new, natural, Godless, inanimate and material Universe for himself to inhabit, man really only succeeds in placing himself at odds with the rationality of that schema. In constructing the grand theories of society and peace which would require the perfect cooperation of humans for their proof, man really only succeeds in proving the inveterate disobedience of his species. As painstaking and detailed a manual for peace as Rawls’ theory is (and all such like it), it is a manual for insects not men. There is a reason why the word “utopianism” has its force of meaning.

For Augustine, the difference between a man and an insect is that the man has a supernatural meta-narrative. For the insect, everything of importance in its life, plays out within the span of its life, birth to death. For the man, it is the opposite: “For God will not judge a man according to how he changes for better or worse in the midst of his life; rather, he will judge him according to how he is found at the end of it (*civ.*, 17, 4).

Augustine’s radical political voice uses predestination to bring us alive to this fact. Insects move like atoms and can have no sense of the difference between the natural and the supernatural, whereas man is the centre of exchange who makes out the balance. For example, only a man—only a fallen man—can write as Augustine did in book XXII above, because only a fallen man satisfies the conditions required for the “sense of injustice.” When Augustine observes that God “wills” what He causes others to will,” he is observing nothing more re-

markable than were he to observe that “God wills for the ants to build nests and collect food.” Likewise, when he observes that on occasions, the saints may “offer pious and holy prayers for others but what they pray for does not happen,” he is marking out the difference between the human sense of injustice and the rational principle of *Divine Fiat*. From the point of view of establishing that latter principle in words on the page, the content of what God ordains cannot be relevant; just as were we to use the example of a martyr being burnt at the stake to establish the principle of the second law of thermodynamics. Or—and here is the real point of this chapter—were we to follow Marx in using the concept of class to establish the law of revolutionary change. If you will only zoom far enough out, then every little thing becomes the example of some law; while laws seduce us into certainty concerning political good and evil—for that is how rationality works. What matters, and what Augustine is really wanting to draw our attention to, is man’s role in breaking this pattern.

When man chooses, as Augustine does above, to praise God’s law, he is doing what no citizen of an earthly political utopia could, or would, ever do. Man can only write and praise as Augustine does when he knows as certain fact that God has damned him then enlightened him. His knowledge of this certain fact is what makes his choice real and meaningful. He loves God’s law not because it makes sense, but because it does not make sense. And as he continues in this radical love, he learns to be radically suspicious of all institutions and arguments—all polities—that present us with something that it would make sense to love. For in us, as Augustine puts it, there is a *distinguitur tempore* (“distinction in time”): “because we were first darkness, and then were made light” (*conf.*, XIII, 10, 11). In us, then, there is always the “sense of genesis”; and because our genesis is always in God’s hands not our own, there can be the sense also of the injustice of it as we survey a world of rich and poor and our own, unasked for beginning in it.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

Augustine was deeply moved by human suffering and would do whatever he could to alleviate it. At the same time, he was the first major Christian philosopher to grasp the otherworldly trajectory of Christian hope and love—plus the political implications of that new stance in a hitherto pagan world

---

<sup>13</sup> See Augustine, *ench.*, 8: “None of us is born because he will, and none of us dies when he will: [Christ], when he would, was born; when he would, he died: how he would, he was born of a Virgin: how he would, he died; on the cross.”

of strictly earthly allegiances. The long, vexed history of the interpretation and reception of his political ideas since has been the struggle to locate him (and his Pilgrim City) between these diverging facts. All that I have tried to show here, is that the key to the answer at last may lie in how we make the cut. If you try to cut through the history on the question of Christian citizenship of earthly cities, you get nothing more out of Augustine and his adherents than timeworn common sense: render unto Caesar what is Caesar's. However, if you cut through on the question of political knowledge (viz., the scientifically acquired knowledge of the good life), then you release the full resources of his mature theology and arrive at a deep and deeply useful understanding of what he meant by dividing all humanity into two cities according to two loves. When Lenin wrote "Practice is higher than (theoretical) knowledge, for it has not only the dignity of universality, but also of immediate actuality (213)." He was really only being honest about what I have called the "spiralling logic" of Western political thought. The scientific approach to human life seeks out the materialistic common denominator which then threatens to entrench some patrician *status quo* and/or extend to meaninglessness the actuating sequence of change. Marxism-Leninism overcomes this through practice, but at the expense of forcing men to love a vision so picture-perfect—so obedient to itself—that within it, they disappear from view. (Liberal democracy has been able to duck the question altogether by evolving a virtue-moral pluralism—that cannot be distinguished from the free-market capitalism denominating it). For Augustine, this turns out to be the key to our real location and real need—which, of course, is the same for the rich man as it is for the poor. The point of his magnum opus work, *The City of God*, the point of its 1500-page doctrine of predestination, is not what is inside it but that it was written by a man. If no man had written it, Augustine thinks that it would have existed anyway. It would simply be the truth. It would simply be God's immutable will. Heaven and Hell, and who goes where.<sup>14</sup>

Augustine's radical message of peace, his single instruction to rich and poor alike, is that nothing is therefore resolved between the covers of history save history itself. The serial record of natural events may or may not go on to be written up in books like his *The City of God*. But if they are, then the humans writing them will always be left on the outside looking in. And what they will

---

<sup>14</sup> I hope there is nothing disturbing in my calling Augustine's *City of God* a "1500-page doctrine of predestination." My point is no more than the old one that "there are no pockets in a shroud," or to bring in Wittgenstein one final time, 'He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.' (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.54)

see through that window will only ever be the injustice of predestination. For how could it be otherwise? (The ants, if they could see, would only be able to see justice and their seamless part in it; which goes to show what I am saying here, which is that the human eye is a “moral eye,” blinded by its own need to see everything through the lens of *necessity*).<sup>15</sup>

The great projects of pagan social and political theory have always looked to history as the single City in which the final perfection of man will be decided and proved. However, Augustine would use his own life to decide and prove the great counter idea, which is that this single city—this material existence which we call life on Earth—only really exists insofar as it can be observed from out of the vantagepoint called the “supernatural,” which we participate in by means of our soulful selves. This is why his *Confessions* begin with their famous invocation; which is actually Augustine’s astonishment that we can call on God at all, given the evident sufficiency of the psychological and empirical methods of accounting for a life. It is not that those methods are wrong. No! Augustine’s point is rather that because they are logical, whatever they go on to depict must itself then also be perfectly logical. Yet this is clearly an inhuman requirement (remember what I said about the “double-life of sin”), and so man always stands apart from his observed self. “Where can I go beyond heaven and earth!” Augustine will write in desperation, “So that you may come to me, my God, who have said, ‘I fill heaven and earth!’ [Jer. 23:24]” (*conf.*, 1, 2, 2).

Man can only have the intellectual perspective on his own life and wider events in the world—he can only produce normative theories of society and state—because he can never in fact locate himself in those selfsame creations of his. And that he cannot, is because they are never the true diagnosis of who he is, and where he is, and most importantly, where he is from, but rather the set of instructions for how he would have to behave in order to be the agent of those theories of his, on the page, in the city. Augustine’s definition of the Roman “commonwealth” against Cicero in book XIX of *The City of God* is the arch-example of this. It is utterly indiscriminate and impersonal, such that anyone, anywhere, could follow out its rationality, but no-one could recognise it as their home (*civ.*, 19, 24).

Augustine will insist on this distinction between Creator and created—this “distinction in time”—right on up to the City of God in Heaven. There, at the climax of the fulfilment of God’s plan, it is saved from collapsing into the dead-dry predestination of the page by the fact that it clings in willing and self-con-

---

<sup>15</sup> See Augustine’s explanation of this with reference to the Stoics at *civ.*, 5, 9-10.

scious love to its Creator God. Because of this, the *City of God* can never be talked of, and written of, in the second-hand, as though it were like the Earthly City, constituted and known through the mechanical interactions of its parts. No! For the City of God is a person, not a pattern. It has no analysable substance, and cannot be replicated on that basis; for it is no more, or less, than the continuing love of its members for God:

Hence it is in such wise from you, our God, that it is completely other than you and not the selfsame. Not only do we find no time before it, but not even in it, because it is adapted always to behold your face and is never turned away from it. Thus it comes about that it is never varied by any change. Yet there is in it a certain mutability, from which it would become dark and cold, unless it clung to you with a mighty love so as to shine and glow from you as at eternal noontide (*civ.*, 12, 15, 21).



## Works Cited

- Breyfogle, Todd. "Political Realism and the Open Society: The enemy within." *The Edinburgh Companion to Political Realism*, edited by Robert Schuett and Miles Hollingworth, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 554-566.
- Berlin, Isaiah. *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969.
- Blake, William. "The Human Abstract". *Songs of Experience*. 1789.
- Hollingworth, Miles. *The Pilgrim City: St. Augustine of Hippo and his Innovation in Political Thought*. London, New York, Bloomsbury, 2010.
- . *Inventing Socrates*. New York, London, Bloomsbury, 2015.
- . "Time and Freedom in the *Confessions* and the *Tractatus*." *Augustine and Wittgenstein*, edited by John Doody, Alexander R. Eodice and Kim Paffenroth, *Augustine in Conversation: Tradition and Innovation*, New York, Lexington Books, 2018, pp. 151-168.
- Lenin, Vladimir. "Conspectus of Hegel's *The Science of Logic*." *Collected Works*, vol. XXXVIII, Moscow, 1961.
- Oakeshott, Michael. *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*. London, Methuen & Co., 1967.
- Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and its Enemies*. 2 vols., London, Routledge, 1962.
- Kaufman, Peter Iver. "Political Realism and Nationalism: Can Nationalism be Liberalized?" *The Edinburgh Companion to Political Realism*, edited by Robert Schuett and Miles Hollingworth, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 494-507.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Ryan, John A. Were the Church Fathers Communists? *International Journal of Ethics*, vol. 14, no. 1, Oct. 1903, pp. 26-39.
- Smith, Adam. *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1976, pp. 182-183.
- Troeltsch, Ernst. "Empiricism and Platonism in the philosophy of religion: to the memory of William James." *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1912.
- Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010.