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Fons Iustitiae: Justice in the *City of God*

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Abstract: This article seeks to account for the nature of human justice in the *City of God*. I argue that finite justice, for Augustine, is participatory; it always 'refers' itself to the font of justice from which it overflows; it is always received by participation in Christ's justice. This claim implicates both of Augustine's central adversaries in the *City of God*, namely, imperial paganism and Pelagianism. Attention to how Augustine weaves the two major polemical antagonists of the *City of God*, imperial paganism and Pelagianism, into the same cloth reveals a unified claim about justice in the *City of God*. Both of Augustine's antagonists are guilty of claiming a self-referential and self-manufactured conception of justice. Pagans and Pelagians do not confess justice as a gift received; they instead treat it as something constructed on the tottering foundation of collective or personal virtue. Justice in both cases fails and finds its end in self-glorification and pride. Finally, I propose that Augustine's participatory account of justice has implications for a vexed twentieth-century debate about the *City of God*, namely the question of what allegiance, responsibilities and loves citizens of the heavenly city ought to have towards the earthly city in which they live as pilgrims.

Justice is arguably the central theme of the *City of God*. The question I seek to answer is the following: 'Does the *City of God* hold out the possibility of human justice obtaining in the world in which we live?' By 'human justice' I mean both individual justice (i.e. righteousness) and collective justice, that is, a just political regime. I propose that the answer is, yes, Augustine does hold out the possibility of human justice, both individual and collective, but with the crucial proviso that such justice be conceived as a participation in Christ's eternal justice.

One proposes an argument concerning an overarching theme like justice in the *City of God* with trepidation. After all, Augustine's masterpiece has been a

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central text for Christian theology for centuries and the scholarship on the *City of God* is mountainous. However, collective (i.e. political) and individual (i.e. soteriological) questions of justice are rarely considered in tandem. Typically, Augustine's criticism of Roman virtue, glory and justice is treated wholly distinct from his criticism of Pelagian theology of original sin, virtue and grace.[1] And, indeed, at first glance, imperial paganism and Pelagianism seem to have little in common. My argument is that Augustine's conception of human justice, one which is always and necessarily participatory, implicates both of his central adversaries in the *City of God* and thereby offers a singular account of justice that holds together the entire work. Augustine's Roman and Pelagian nemeses share identical conceptions of virtue and justice: a rejection of a participatory ontology and the refusal to admit that claims to virtue and justice are 'mine' only in a secondary, gifted sense.

From the time Augustine initiates his *magnum opus et arduum* in 413 to its completion in 427, the Pelagian crisis is a constant feature on his horizon. It is impossible, therefore, to parse out neatly where theological concerns of justice and justification drive Augustine's thought and where issues attendant to political justice are paramount. Augustine's recurring criticism of Roman pride, self-glory and confidence in their own virtue is equally levied at Pelagius and his associates. Augustine accuses both the Romans and the Pelagians of an overly optimistic account of human nature and of human ability to know and act justly and thereby establish a just *polis*. Only Christ mediates justice to the soul (contra Pelagius) and to the city (contra the Romans).

I will develop my argument in three movements, after which I will suggest how my conclusions contribute toward resolving a long-standing debate over the political theology advanced in the *City of God*. First, I will make a broader claim regarding Augustine's conception of justice as participatory. I will highlight his metaphor of justice emanating from an eternal spring or font of justice (*fons iustitiae*). Second, I will apply this insight to Augustine's critique of Pelagian conceptions of individual justice in the *City of God*. Third, I will demonstrate how Augustine's same logic informs his criticism of collective conceptions of justice, paradigmatically exemplified in Rome. Finally, I propose that Augustine's participatory account of justice has implications for a vexed twentieth-century debate about the *City of God*, namely the question of what

1 One notable exception is Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Dodaro rightly links the political and soteriological justice in the *City of God*. However, the scope of his project is broader. Dodaro engages Augustine's political theology with a wide-angle lens, considering issues of Roman statesmanship, heroism and rhetoric in light of the Bishop's theology of grace. By contrast, my interest is narrower. I am principally interested in elucidating Augustine's participatory theology of justice. I subsequently consider how this account implicates the twin antagonists of the *City of God* and applies to a significant debate in twentieth-century political theology.

allegiance, responsibilities and loves citizens of the heavenly city ought to have towards the earthly city in which they live as pilgrims.

Justice and the *fons iustitiae*

When Augustine (at last!) circles back in Book 19 to the question he postponed in Book 2 – whether Rome was ever a genuine *res publica* – he repeats the definition given by Cicero that a *populus* is a multitude 'united in association by a common sense of right (*iuris consensus*) and a community of interest'.[2] Cicero had linked a sense of right or law (*ius*) with justice (*iustitia*). Law (*ius*) is, in Cicero's estimation, an expression of justice. Unjust human institutions, for Cicero, should not even be considered 'lawful'; rather, human justice flows from the 'font of justice' (*iustitiae fonte manauerit*).[3] Augustine's remark (quoting Cicero) that finite justice is an overflow of the 'font of justice' is deeply embedded within a Platonic frame of reference. Likewise, the two corollary implications to which I just referred – that finite justice must (1) 'refer' to eternal justice and (2) always participates imperfectly in its source – articulate a mainstay of the Platonic tradition. I want to spell out in more detail what Augustine means by such a 'participatory' account of justice.

In Book 8 of *De Trinitate* Augustine asks what it means to say that 'I love a just man.' The question implies some degree of knowledge about the nature of justice. But knowledge of justice is not like the knowledge of material reality known through sense perception. A unitive, participatory knowledge obtains, in which there is an identification of the knower with what is known. The Platonic adage that like is known by like suggests that I must already *be* just (to a degree) in order to understand what justice is: 'If nobody knows what "just" is unless he is just himself, then nobody loves the just man except a just man.'[4] Justice is not in the mind (*animus*) in the way Carthage or Alexandria exist in the mind – there is no mental picture involved (*imaginem quasi picturam*) when conceiving of justice. Rather, a judgement about justice involves the *presence* of justice: 'I am perceiving something that is present (*praesens*) to me.'[5] The knowledge of justice is seen as 'an inner truth present to the mind (*praesens animo*) which is capable of beholding it'.[6] The just mind, suggests Augustine, has a unitive vision of the form of justice that it sees. The mind must 'cleave' (*inhaerendo*) to this form

2 Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin, 2003) (hereafter *civ*), 19.21. I note where I amend his translation. Augustinus, *De civitate Dei*, ed. D. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCL 47–8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955).
3 *civ*. 19.21.
4 Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991) (hereafter *trin*.), 8.9.
5 *trin*. 8.9.
6 *trin*. 8.9.

(*ipsi formae*) in such a way as to be 'formed by it' (*formentur*).[7] Only by this formation according to eternal justice can the mind make a right judgement regarding finite justice.[8]

The form of justice, however, is obscure. Augustine is intent to distinguish the justice obliquely perceived by the wayfaring citizens of the heavenly city from the 'form of justice' that is in Christ. In *En. Ps.* 61.21 Augustine asks rhetorically, 'From where does your just standard derive? Does it have a spring (*fontem*) of its own? Does the standard of justice originate with you? Can you endow yourself with justice? No one can give to himself what he does not have.'[9] Rather, the person who aspires to make a just judgement must have 'seeing eyes' (*uidentibus oculis*) to perceive the 'norm of justice' (*regula iustitiae*).[10] Finitude and frailty, not to mention the ignorance and weakness of original sin, cloud the human ability to perceive justice. Human beings are 'unjust' (*iniustum*) and 'cannot be just except by turning towards a justice that abides'.[11] The eternal form of justice is not subject to the vagaries of finite existence: 'If you depart from it, you are unjust, but if you draw near to it, you are just. When you turn your back on it, it does not dwindle; if you approach it, it does not increase.'[12] Augustine writes:

> You will find the font of justice (*fontem iustitiae*) where you find the font of life (*fons uitae*) . . . If you aspire to judge what is just, and what unjust, on the strength of the scanty dew that dampens you, can there be injustice in God, the fountain of justice (*fonte iustitia*) from which flows to you what discernment of justice you have? . . . God possesses the very source of justice (*fontem iustitiae*).[13]

7 Augustine's understanding of the process of human judgement by means of participation in the form of justice is inseparable from his conception of divine illumination through which Christ, the interior teacher, instructs the soul. Cf. Gareth B. Matthews, 'Knowledge and Illumination', in Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 181. Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, vol. 3 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), ch. 9.

8 Augustine points out that this judgement necessarily involves the affections. 'How is one to cleave to that form except by loving it?' In answering the question of what it means to say that I love a just man, Augustine suggests it is to recognize that I love the form of justice in which a just man participates: 'Unless we also loved this form we would in no wise love him whom we love and appreciate by this form.' *trin.* 8.9.

9 Augustine, *Exposition on the Psalms*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000–2004) (hereafter *En. Ps.*), 61.21.

10 *En. Ps.* 61.21.

11 *En. Ps.* 61.21.

12 *En. Ps.* 61.21.

13 *En. Ps.* 61.21.

Two things are worth highlighting in Augustine's Platonic account of participatory justice. First, human brokenness and sin imply, quite simply, that humanity, taken on its own, is 'unjust'. There is no *innate* human justice. Second, the possibility of human justice exists only where justice is recognized as gift, as an overflow from an eternal 'font of justice'.[14] This 'overflow' of justice, as it is received by creatures, is necessarily derived and contingent; it is perceived obliquely – through the clouds, as it were. This limited mode of reception entails that finite justice is a 'scanty dew' compared to the 'primordial spring'. Human justice remains, for Augustine, penultimate and elusive.

When justice is principally understood through the category of grace, no quarter is given for glorying in one's own virtue. Justice always flows from Christ, the 'font of justice'.[15] This also means that finite justice will always be derivative and secondary, limited and contingent. Even the citizens of the heavenly city who are still on pilgrimage know justice only in a limited degree. Self-referentially understood virtues, remarks Augustine famously in Book 19, 'are themselves vices rather than virtues, if the mind does not bring them into relation with God'. Here Augustine brings to a head his criticism of both pagan and Pelagian conceptions of virtue:

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14 In the anti-Pelagian work *De spiritu et littera*, Augustine describes the humble disposition of those who recognize that their holiness is God's gift:

> They hope to be inebriated by the richness of his house and to drink at the torrent of his pleasure. For with him is the source of life, and in his light we shall see the light . . . But they only do the works of righteousness to the extent that they draw from that fountain and share in that light. (*De spiritu et littera* 11, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997) pp. 155–6)

For further articulation of Augustine's conception of the *fons iustitiae* see also *Io. eu. tr.* 5.1; *pec. mer.* 2.6; *gr. et lib. arb.* 45. An architectonic Platonic feature of Augustine's metaphysics is that transcendent realities such as truth, goodness, beauty and justice pre-exist perfectly and eternally as a 'fountain' in the Eternal Word. In his earliest commentary on Genesis, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (389), Augustine allegorizes the text, *Fons enim ascendebat de terra et irrigabat omnem faciem terrae* (Gen. 2:6). This font, contends Augustine, is the interior truth that immediately and perfectly illumines humanity prior to the Fall. When Scripture says that God had not yet sent rain on the earth, this means God had not yet sent teachers of doctrine because, as yet, there was no need: before the Fall man received truth directly and immediately from the interior *fons*. Only after the Fall, when man began to work the earth, did he need the rain of the prophets and preachers. The immediate participation in the *fons* of the Word will be restored to the saints in heaven:

> After sin he was sent from the happy life which he enjoyed in paradise . . . For now we see in obscurity, as if seeking nourishment in a cloud, but then face to face (1 Cor. 13:9, 12) when the whole face of our earth will be watered by the interior font of living waters. (*De Gen contra Manichaeos*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 2.4.5)

15 *civ.* 19.21.

> For although the virtues are reckoned by some people to be genuine and honorable when they are related only to themselves (*referuntur ad se ipsas*) and are sought for no other end, even then they are puffed up and proud, and so are to be accounted vices rather than virtues. For just as it is not something derived from the physical body itself that gives life to that body, but something above it, so it is not something that comes from man, but something above man, that makes his life blessed.[16]

As he concludes Book 19, Augustine remarks: 'Our righteousness (*iustitia*) itself, too, though genuine, in virtue of the genuine Ultimate Good to which it is referred (*ad quem refertur*), is nevertheless only such as to consist in the forgiveness of sins rather than in the perfection of virtues.'[17] Two things are worth noting. First, finite justice must necessarily 'refer' to the font of justice, apart from which there can be no justice. Second, this 'overflow' of justice is emphatically limited; it does not consist in moral heroism or in glorious displays of virtue. Rather, in this life justice expresses itself principally in a penitential mode, particularly in the prayer uttered every day by 'the whole City of God on pilgrimage': 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.'[18]

A person who presumes himself above such a petition is not great (*magnus*) with virtue, but 'puffed up and swollen with pride', and is 'with justice resisted (*per iustitiam resistit*) by him who gives grace to the humble, as it says, in the Scriptures, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."'[19] Justice is equivalent with right order: when man obeys God, the body obeys the mind, and reason governs and subdues the vices. In the regime of sin, however, this justice invariably fails. As such, 'justice is also present when from God himself favor is sought for good deeds and pardon for offences, and thanks are dully offered to him for benefits received'.[20] Justice, at least in this life, involves the constant prayer for pardon of sin and for the gift of Christ's justice. Our justice, remarks Augustine, ought always to be 'related' (*referenda*) to eternal justice, which we will fully receive only when we will be 'healed by immortality and incorruption'.[21] In sum, the human soul that does not participate in the mediation of Christ's justice to his Body remains mired in a vicious state.

16 *civ*. 19.25.
17 *civ*. 19.27.
18 *civ*. 19.27. Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, pp. 111–12, rightly describes the polity of the heavenly city while on pilgrimage as 'penitential' rather than virtuous:

> 'True justice' for pilgrim members of the city of God consists in sharing with others the forgiveness of sins, rather than in the achievement of a perfected virtue . . . In effect, [Augustine] argues that the just society is penitential. True justice requires believers to seek from God the forgiveness of their sins and the grace to perform good works.

19 *civ*. 19.27. Translation slightly altered.
20 *civ*. 19.27. Translation slightly altered.
21 *civ*. 19.27.

According to the same logic, there is no autonomous civic justice apart from that which participates in Christ's own justice mediated to his Body.[22] For Augustine, human justice is not independently intelligible; it must always 'refer' beyond itself. Human justice is the finite participation in the 'overflow' of the font of eternal justice.

Christ's justice and the Pelagian controversy

It is not sufficiently recognized that a major motif animating the *City of God* is a denunciation of Pelagian theology.[23] In the opening preface, Augustine establishes the motif of the work, namely, the fundamental demarcation between the proud and the humble. This is the contrast between those who in pride revel in their own power and are driven headlong by the *libido dominandi* and those who in humility rely on 'divine grace'.[24] In the opening preface, Augustine quotes a text that runs like a leitmotif through the *City of God*: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble' (Jas 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). And, in a reprise of the argument at the beginning of Book 15, Augustine reminds the reader that it is the presence and operation of grace that distinguishes the heavenly city from the earthly. It is grace that establishes Abel as the first citizen of the pilgrim city: 'He was predestined by grace, and chosen by grace, by grace a pilgrim below, and by grace a citizen above.'[25]

22 In a telling phrase, Augustine remarks that what is called 'earthly peace', should properly speaking not be so called. There is no peace, justice, or order that is *proper* to the earthly city. Any shadow or pale imitation of peace, justice, or order in the earthly city is intelligible only in light of true peace, justice and, order, which is the mutual love of creatures for each other in God in the heavenly city. As such, the critical phrase, *terrenam pacem refert ad caelestem pacem* (*civ*. 19.17), suggests that the earthly city is not a discrete secular order with *its own* peace; rather, inasmuch as it has some semblance of peace, this peace must be 'referred' to the heavenly city to be truly peaceful. In this vein, Graham Ward remarks: 'When love, justice, society, and peace are predicates of the *civitas terrena* then they are parodies of predicates of the *civitas dei;* they find their true significance in relation to Christian eschatology.' Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 230.

23 A few significant exceptions include Philippe Curbelié, *La Justice dans La Cité de Dieu* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2004); Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*; Volker Henning Drecoll, 'Augustin und Pelagius - Vergleich zweier Mentalitäten *Civ*. 11–14 auf dem Hintergrund des Pelagianischen Streits', in *Conflict/Dialogue? Augustine's Engagement with Cultures in ‹De ciuitate dei›. International Symposium, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Roma, 25–29 September 2012* (Würzburg: Augustinus bei Echter, 2015), pp. 367–86.

24 *civ*. 1.1.

25 *civ*. 15.1. Augustine continues: 'As far as he himself [Abel] is concerned he has his origin from the same lump which was condemned, as a whole lump, at the beginning. But God like a potter . . . made "out of the same lump one vessel destined for honor, and another for dishonor" [Rom. 9.21].'

The anti-Pelagian tenor of the *City of God* becomes most explicit in Books 13–14, which deal with the origins of death and original sin as the result of Adam's fall.[26] Augustine and Pelagius have radically divergent visions of the human condition. Pelagius is indomitably optimistic about human nature: it is not born sick or corrupt; rather, human nature is whole and wholesome and possesses a will capable of moral greatness. By contrast, Augustine conceives post-lapsarian human nature as fallen and utterly incapable of acting well by its own volition. Life is gift from God and a good life is the work of grace:

> The soul therefore derives life from God, when its life is good – for its life cannot be good except when God is active in it to produce what is good – while the body derives life from the soul when the soul is alive in the body, whether the soul derives its life from God or not.[27]

Our current state of sin and death, contends Augustine at the outset of Book 13, is the result of the fall of our first parents, through whom sin and death were propagated to the entire human race. While Pelagius insists that death is natural, Augustine holds there was no death in paradise before the Fall. Death is not a natural condition but the result of original sin.[28] Our first parents, having become the 'first sinners', were condemned to produce only vitiated stock, 'for whatever was born from them could not have been different from what they themselves had been'.[29] In that first sin, human nature itself was fundamentally changed for the worse: 'The whole human race was in the first man, and it was to pass from him through the woman into his progeny.'[30] In a sobering passage that is sharply anti-Pelagian, Augustine remarks:

> Man was willingly perverted and justly condemned, and so begot perverted and condemned offspring. For we were all in that one man, seeing that we all *were* that one man who fell into sin through the woman who was made from him before the first sin. We did not yet possess forms individually created and assigned to us for us to live in them as individuals; but there already existed the seminal nature from which we were to be begotten. And of course, when this was vitiated through sin, and bound with death's fetters in its just condemnation, man could not be born of man in any other condition. Hence from this misuse of free will there started a chain of disasters: mankind is led from that original perversion, a kind of corruption at the root, right up to the disaster of the second death, which has no end.

26 Cf. Appendix, 'The Pelagian Controversy and *City of God* XIII–XIV', in Augustine, *De Civitate Dei, Books XIII & XIV*, trans. and ed. P.G. Walsh (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), pp. 210–16.
27 *civ*. 13.2.
28 *civ*. 13.11.
29 *civ*. 13.3.
30 *civ*. 13.3. cf. *civ*. 13.14.

> Only those who are set free through God's grace escape from this calamitous sequence.[31]

For Augustine there is no salvation apart from a humble acknowledgement of one's weakness and radical dependence upon grace. Justice is not an innate property of fallen man, but a gift of grace.

Like so much of Augustine's corpus, the *City of God* is forged in controversy. Augustine often fuses his antagonists, launching multi-pronged offensives against various theological and philosophical adversaries at once. Pelagian opponents are in Augustine's scope even when the purported target is, for instance, Stoic philosophy. Thus, in criticizing Stoic *apatheia* in Book 14, Augustine is equally leveling an attack on the over-realized eschatology of the Pelagians. It is wholly unrealistic, remarks Augustine, to assume that in this life we can achieve perfect emotional health and stability. Frequently and often unintentionally, we suffer emotional disturbances and passions contrary to reason, which unsettle the mind. Augustine quotes 1 John 1:8 ('If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us') and comments: 'At present, however, we do well if our life is free from external blame. But anyone who thinks that his life is without sin does not succeed in avoiding sin, but rather in forfeiting pardon.'[32] The imperfectability of the human condition under the regime of sin is a recurring anti-Pelagian theme in Books 13 and 14. The will is weak, sick, and bound by sin. As such, free will to act justly is not an innate property of (fallen) human nature but is wholly a gift of grace:

> The choice of the will, then, is genuinely free only when it is not subservient to faults and sins. God gave it that true freedom, and now that it has been lost, through its own fault, it can be restored only by him who had the power to give it at the beginning.[33]

The fierce polemical tone that marks the anthropology of Books 13–14 becomes intelligible when we consider that Augustine has Pelagian antagonists in mind.

I have been arguing that lurking behind Roman and Pelagian conceptions of virtue and justice, Augustine discerns the rejection of a participatory ontology; a refusal to recognize that claims to virtue and justice are 'mine' only in a secondary, gifted sense. As Augustine sees it, the refusal of a participatory ontology has its root in Genesis 3. There we discover the disordered will that desires to be independent, ontologically autonomous – 'to abandon God and to exist in oneself'.[34] However, the Serpent's promise that Adam and Eve would be like God could be true for them only by participation:

31 *civ*. 13.14.
32 *civ*. 14.9.
33 *civ*. 14.11.
34 *civ*. 14.13.

> They would have been better able to be like gods if they had in obedience adhered to the supreme and real ground of their being, if they had not in pride made themselves their own ground. For created gods are gods not in their own true nature but by participation in the true God. By aiming at more, a man is diminished, when he elects to be self-sufficient and defects from the one who is really sufficient for him.[35]

The first sin (as well as pagan and Pelagian anthropology), in Augustine's account, has its root in a perverse and prideful desire for self-sufficiency and a rejection of a participatory ontology that recognizes all life as gift and all good life as the work of grace. As we have seen, this is also the essential claim regarding finite justice: it does not exist per se, but only as a participation in Christ's eternal justice.

Christ is the only truly just man, and in 'justifying', Christ endows people with his own justice. Book 10 relates the mode in which the gift of justice is mediated from Christ the head to his body. A great exchange is effected, in which Christ takes on the human weakness, vulnerability and sin of his members and communicates to them his own divine power, justice and virtue. As such, participation is the bedrock of Augustine's theology of atonement. The members of Christ's body are made just inasmuch as they participate in Christ the Head. It is only the one Christ, head and members (*totus Christus*), who are just. As the body cannot exist apart from the head, so too, it cannot claim an autonomous justice. Finite justice is a participation in the overflow of the justice that belongs to Christ the head.[36] The anti-Pelagian theology of the *City of God* repeatedly insists that justice is not a human prerogative; justice is not self-manufactured through acts of heroic virtue or moral probity, but is received in humility as a divine gift from the overflow of the font of justice.[37]

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35 *civ*. 14.13.

36 Cf. Gérard Remy, *Le Christ médiateur dans l'œuvre de saint Augustin* (Paris: Champion, 1979), 1:436–56, 1:503–38; Basil Studer, 'Le Christ, notre justice, selon saint Augustin', *Recherches augustiniennes* 15 (1980), pp. 99–143; Goulven Madec, *La Patrie et la voie. Le Christ dans la vie et la pensée de saint Augustin* (Paris: Desclée, 1989), pp. 98–104; and Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, pp. 94–104.

37 *civ*. 10.22:

> The power [of the enemy] is conquered in the name of him who assumed human nature and whose life was without sin, so that in him, who was both priest and sacrifice, remission of sins might be effected, that is, through the 'mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,' through whom we are purified of our sins and reconciled to God. For it is only sins that separate men from God; and in this life purification from sin is not effected by our merit, but by the compassion of God, through his indulgence, not through our power; for even that poor little virtue which we call ours has itself been granted to us by his bounty. Yet we should have a high opinion of ourselves, in this life in flesh, were it not that, right up to the time of our departure, we live under pardon.

Rome: no justice, no *res publica*

If Augustine cannot imagine a native justice proper to the individual *sui juris*, by the same token he cannot fathom a just political regime apart from that which participates in the eternal font of justice. In Book 2 of the *City of God*, Augustine strikingly rejects the idea that Rome was ever a real commonwealth (*res publica*), and the reason he gives is that it lacked justice. He quotes Cicero's definition of a commonwealth: 'An association united by a common sense of right (*iuris consensu*) and a community of interests'.[38] In *De Republica*, Cicero had questioned whether Rome was appropriately designated a 'commonwealth' (*rem publicam*) because its moral turpitude seemed to preclude any *consensus iuris* proper to the definition of a commonwealth. Augustine suggests that, a fortiori, the current state of the *imperium*'s injustice in his own time renders the name 'commonwealth' even more dubious. Justice is essential to Cicero's definition of a commonwealth. And it is this definition that implicates Rome as deficient with respect to justice. A commonwealth is not simply a group with 'common interests' – if this were the case, it would be no different than a gang of robbers. Rather, maintains Cicero, justice, as a shared understanding of rights and laws (*consensus iuris*), is integral to the nature of a political community. The classical account of justice is 'giving to each his due' (*suum cuique reddere*).[39] Augustine points out that if this is so, then the highest injustice is the failure to give God his due worship. There can be no justice, concludes Augustine, where God is not known and worshiped: 'True justice (*uera iustitia*) is found only in that commonwealth whose founder (*conditor*) and ruler (*rector*) is Christ.'[40]

Augustine summarily abandons his discussion of Rome's status as a *res publica*, explaining that he will return to it later, which he does in Book 19. This protracted delay has long puzzled commentators. However, Augustine cannot properly evaluate Rome as a commonwealth until he has considered the character of true justice (*uera iustitia*), and this analysis constitutes Books 2–19. Augustine first considers the deficiency of pagan religion and philosophy in knowing and worshiping God (Books 2–10) and by implication their inability to render *uera iustitia*. Augustine then offers an account of the Christian faith (Books 11–19), which reveals knowledge of the true God and how he is to be worshiped, thereby providing the framework within which the conditions of *uera iustitia* might be met. As such, Books 2–19 transform the classical account of what constitutes a commonwealth as a community bound by *consensus iuris* into a Christian understanding of a commonwealth as a community bound by

38 *civ*. 2.21: *coetum iuris consensu et utilitatis communione*.

39 Cf. Cicero, *De invention* 2.160. For a classical account of this definition see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1129a, 1130a; *Rhetoric* 1366b9; Cicero, *De finibus* 5.65; *Digesta* 1.1. Augustine also engages with Cicero and Aristotle's definition of justice in *civ*. 19.4, 19.21. Cf. *diu*. *qu*. 31.1; *ord*. 1.19, 2.22; *lib*. *arb*. 1.27.

40 *civ*. 2.21.

uera iustitia, which is nothing less than the knowledge and worship of the true God.[41]

The quest for glory

The contrast between the putative *res publica* of Rome (established through *consensus iuris*) and the genuine *res publica* of the heavenly city (established through the gift of Christ's *uera iustitia*) is stark.[42] The former is a republic founded on and nourished by glory. The early success of Rome is due to her founders' singular pursuit of glory: 'They were passionately devoted to glory . . . This unbounded passion for glory, above all else, checked their other appetites.'[43] As Augustine pores over the *History* of Sallust, two men stand head and shoulders above the rest: Marcus Cato and Gaius Caesar. Their military triumphs and moral rectitude were driven by a 'greed for praise and a passion for glory' (*laudis auiditas et gloriae cupido*).[44] These 'great men of renown' (*magnos et praeclaros uiros*) incarnate Rome's burning ambition for glory (*gloria … cuius illi cupiditate flagrabant*).[45] Likewise, the paradigmatic Roman statesman, Cicero, taught that Rome's leaders must be 'nourished on glory'.[46]

Rome's devotion to glory is, in Augustine's estimation, nothing but unrelenting pride and the free reign of the *libido dominandi*. Nevertheless, he admits that Rome's thirst for glory checked her sloth, greed, self-indulgence and other vices.[47] Augustine concludes: 'The desire for human praise and glory makes them, not indeed saints, but less depraved men.'[48] Rome's military heroes and statesmen aim at an ersatz immortality in the memory of those who will

41 Cf. Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, p. 16. Throughout Books 2–19 of *De civitate dei* we witness Augustine transforming the classical definition of justice as giving each his due, by informing the virtue of justice with the chief theological virtue of love. What is 'due' each person is fulfilled in obedience to the two-fold command regarding love of God and neighbor. In the Heavenly City the justice that is owed (giving to each his due) is understood through Romans 13:8: 'Owe no man anything, but to love one another.' What is owed (i.e. justice) is fulfilled in charity. Cf. *civ*. 17.4; *diu. qu*. 61.4; *en. ps*. 83.11; *trin* 8.9. Indeed, Augustine suggests love is interchangeable with justice. Cf. *nat. et gr.* 84; Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, p. 76.

42 *Gloria* is a word that comes up 74 times in *civ*. 5.

43 *civ*. 5.12.

44 *civ*. 5.12. Augustine is quoting Sallust, *Cat*. 7.3; 7.6.

45 *civ*. 5.12.

46 *civ*. 5.13.

47 Rowan Williams comments: 'The longing for public praise, for glory and good name, controls the *libido dominandi* which so ruins the unity of any state. In this way (under the providence of God) a specious unity is given to the existing order, even a measure of stability.' Rowan Williams, 'Politics and the Soul', *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987), p. 61.

48 *civ*. 5.13.

commemorate their glory. But this reward (*merces*) operates on a finite horizon. Augustine writes:

> Those Roman heroes belonged to an earthly city (*ciuitate terrena*), and the aim (*finis*) set before them, in all their acts of duty for her, was the safety of their country . . . What else was there for them to love save glory? For, through glory, they desired to have a kind of life after death on the lips of those who praised them.[49]

Augustine does not shortchange this temporal glory; he recognizes a degree of human nobility and even a type of virtue in Roman glory.[50] Rome's greatest statesmen subordinated their own self-interest to the common good (*res communis*); they resisted greed and avarice and served their country (*patria*) with selfless devotion; they were guileless in following external laws and inner conscience: 'By such immaculate conduct they labored towards honors, power and glory, by what they took to be the true way.'[51] But, in this way, as Augustine mentions twice, 'they have received their reward in full' (cf. Mt. 6:2, 6:5, 6:16).[52] Augustine's critique of Roman glory centers on its immanent and self-referential frame of reference and, as such, its inability to account for genuine justice.

Augustine contrasts the 'greed for glory' (*cupiditas gloriae*) with 'the love of justice' (*dilectio iustitiae*), which marks the heavenly city.[53] True justice (*uera iustitia*) recognizes that glory belongs to God and not to man. The apostles and martyrs model action that seeks God's glory. These Christian heroes are now celebrated as 'the glory of Christ and his Church', but in their lifetime they were despised and rejected. They did not glory in their own strength and virtue, but 'refered' all success to the glory of God (*ad Dei gloriam referentes*).[54] (Note Augustine's use of the verb *referre*. I have noted how throughout *De civitate dei* he uses this verb to articulate how goods of the earthly city, particularly justice,

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49 *civ.* 5.14. *Dodaro*, *Christ and the Just Society*, p. 54, summarizes this discussion well:

> In Augustine's view, the Romans have subverted virtue by anchoring it to glory. Desire for glory is a byproduct of ignorance and weakness; the longing for it always counteracts justice. In the end, the soul easily mistakes human glory for transcendence. Roman heroes sacrifice their lives in pursuit of the security (*incolumitas*) of the earthly city.

50 See two studies devoted to Augustine's evaluation of the possibility of pagan virtues: T.H. Irwin, 'Splendid Vices? Augustine for and against Pagan Virtues', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999), pp. 105–27 and James Wetzel, 'Splendid Vices and Secular Virtues: Variations on Milbank's Augustine', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 32 (2004), pp. 271–300.

51 *civ*. 5.15. Cf. *civ*. 5.17: 'Let us consider all the hardships these conquerors made light of, all the sufferings they endured, and the desires they suppressed to gain the glory of men. They deserved to receive that glory as a reward for such virtues.'

52 *civ*. 5.15.

53 *civ*. 5.14.

54 *civ*. 5.14.

are to be valued and understood, which is by 'referring' them to the heavenly city, in which they have their true or proper existence and intelligibility.) While Roman heroes were spurred on by the 'greed for glory', the humility of Christian heroes seeks only God's glory. The 'rewards' (*merces*) for the heroes of the heavenly city, likewise, greatly differ from those of Rome. The heroes of the heavenly city seek no reward at all in this life but await the rewards of the city that 'God hath prepared for them' (Heb. 11:16). They endure scorn and ridicule in this life and die with no expectations to be gloriously immortalized in this life. They are driven not 'by a burning desire for empty glory, but for the love of eternal blessedness'.[55] Any virtues and successes they have are ascribed to God's grace. They live in 'humility, compassion and prayer' and are made 'happy in hope'.[56] In summary, Augustine diametrically opposes Roman conceptions of glory with those of the heavenly city. For the Roman, the source of glory is human virtue, and the aim of glory is self-aggrandizement. For the Christian, the source of glory is God's grace (in which he participates), and the aim is the greater glory of God.

These contrasting accounts of glory demonstrate why Rome was never a truly just society. The nobility of the Romans never reached the level of 'true virtue' (*uera virtus*) because, as Augustine explains, 'no one can have true virtue without true piety (*uera pietate*), that is without the worship of the true God; and that virtue which is employed in the service of human glory is not virtue'.[57] The pride that animates Rome's quest for glory is diametrically opposed to the humility of *uera pietas* – a gift from God – which is the necessary precondition for *uera iustitia*. True justice, claims Augustine, is the preserve of that city 'whose founder (*conditor*) and ruler (*rector*) is Christ'.[58] In Books 2–19 of the *City of God* Augustine transforms the standard for evaluating the legitimacy of a *res publica* from that of unity in *consensus iuris* to unity in *uera iustitia*, which entails knowledge and worship of the true God. *Uera iustitia* is in the first place an eschatological and christological reality that is received as gift. By this evaluation, concludes Augustine, Rome fails to meet the standard of a *res publica*.

The nature of justice: ordo

In Book 19 Augustine returns to the question he postponed in Book 2: whether Rome was ever a genuine *res publica*. Justice, Augustine is now able to argue, is the expression of ordered peace.[59] Justice and peace result when each thing is constituted in its proper place (*ordo*) within the context of the whole:

55 *civ*. 5.24.
56 *civ*. 5.24.
57 *civ*. 5.19.
58 *civ*. 2.21.
59 Cf. *diu. qu*. 36.1–3; *lib. arb*. 1.11–15; *c. Faust* 22.27; *cat. rud*. 14.1–2; *ep*. 140.4; *trin*. 9.14; *civ*. 11.17, 15.22.

> The peace of the body, we conclude, is a tempering of the component parts in duly ordered proportion; the peace of the irrational soul is a duly ordered repose of the appetites; the peace of the rational soul is the duly ordered agreement of cognition and action. The peace of body and soul is the duly ordered life and health of a living creature; peace between mortal man and God is an ordered obedience, in faith, in subjection to an everlasting law; peace between men is an ordered agreement of mind with mind; the peace of a home is the ordered agreement among those who live together about giving and obeying orders; the peace of the Heavenly City is a perfectly ordered and perfectly harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and a mutual fellowship in God; the peace of the whole universe is the tranquility of order – and order is the arrangement of things equal and unequal in a pattern which assigns each its proper position.[60]

Unhappiness and injustice make for a lack of peace, that is to say, a lack of right order. In wisdom, God created all things and 'ordered them in perfect justice'.[61] Justice involves the recognition of the *ordo* inscribed in all things and a willingness to abide in that *ordo*. With this more elaborate theological foundation, Augustine repeats in Book 19 the conclusion that he arrived at in Book 2: Rome, in no way, qualifies as a *res publica*. If justice involves an *ordo* that 'assigns to everyone his due', Rome is unjust in a superlative sense:

> What kind of justice is it that takes a man away from the true God and subjects him to unclean demons? Is this to assign to every man his due? (*Hocine est sua cuique distribuere?*) Or are we to say that a man is unjust when he takes an estate from a man who has bought it and hands it over to someone who has no right to it, while we give the name of just to a man who takes himself away from the Lord God who made him, and becomes the servant of malignant spirits?[62]

Justice is absent in the earthly city that does not submit to God; this *ordo* is the foundation of all political *ordo* and the precondition for all finite justice and peace.[63]

60 *civ*. 19.13.
61 *civ*. 19.13.
62 *civ*. 19.21.
63 Williams, 'Politics and the Soul', p. 59, writes:

> Thus if the pagan *res publica* is deficient as a commonwealth, it is not because Augustine polemically sets a standard of unattainably high righteousness or religious probity, but because a society incapable of giving God his due fails to give its citizens their due as human being made for the quest and enjoyment of God.

An 'alternative definition': common objects of love

In *civ*.19.24 Augustine famously advances an 'alternative' definition of a *res publica*:

> If, on the other hand, another definition than this is found for a 'people', for example, if one should say, 'A people is the association of a multitude of rational beings united by a common agreement on the objects of their love' (*rerum quas diligit concordi communione*), then it must follow that to observe the character of a particular people we must examine the objects of its love . . . And obviously, the better the objects of this agreement the better the people; the worse the objects of this love, the worse the people. By this definition of ours, the Roman people is a people and its estate (*res*) is indubitably a commonwealth (*res publica*).[64]

This paragraph is frequently read as Augustine's second attempt at defining the *res publica*. Thus, if the *civitas terrena* fails to meet the impossibly high standard of a *res publica* required by *iuris consensus* (*civ*. 2.21; 19.21) it can at least still qualify as a commonwealth under the less arduous requirement of a *populus* founded *rerum quas diligit concordi communione*. In this reading it is supposed that Augustine was deliberately hyperbolic throughout his argument (made explicit in *civ*. 2.21 and repeated in 19.21) that Rome (and any *civitas terrena*) fails to qualify as a *res publica* because it lacks right worship (and therefore justice).[65] And so, the argument goes, in *civ*. 19.24, Augustine proposes a more reasonable definition, which conforms to the common usage of the term *res publica*.[66] Two towering figures in twentieth-century Augustinian political theology – Robert Markus and Oliver O'Donovan – have argued that *civ*. 19.24 represents *the* decisive turn in the *City of God* towards a less idealistic, and more pragmatic, positive evaluation of the earthly city. This reading has become normative for much of the last four decades.[67]

But it strains credulity to propose that at this point (*civ*. 19.24) Augustine would overturn the entire trajectory he has laid out in the *City of God*, namely,

64 *civ*. 19.24.

65 See Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 122; Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), p. 39; and Gilbert Meilaender, *The Way That Leads There: Augustinian Reflections on the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 90–1.

66 Robert Markus writes: 'Augustine was perfectly well aware that this rhetorical mode of expression was not suited to the realities with which political discourse is concerned. This is the reason why he gave an alternative definition *of res publica*, in entirely neutral, positivistic terms.' Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 65.

67 Cf. Markus, *Saeculum* and Oliver O'Donovan, 'The Political Thought of City of God 19', in Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, eds., *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 48–72. This essay is a revision of Oliver O'Donovan, 'Augustine's *City of God* XIX and Western Political Thought', *Dionysius* 11 (1987), pp. 89–110.

that the only genuine commonwealth is the community that in justice knows and worships God.[68] Moreover, it would make little sense for Augustine to argue that the *civitas terrena* fails to be a commonwealth because it lacks *uera iusitia*, while it *is* a commonwealth if only we lower the bar slightly by redefining a *populus* as a community sharing common objects of love. For Augustine, justice and love are correlative terms; they are both regulated by *ordo*, such that justice is rightly ordered love and rightly ordered love is justice. As such, there can be no genuine *dilectio* where there is no genuine *iusitia*.

Indeed, *civ*. 19.24 should be read in continuity with *civ*. 19.21–3 (not to mention the rest of the *City of God*). Rowan Williams has pointed to the irony with which Augustine laces his 'alternate definition' of a *populus* in 19.24. If we were to define a *populus* as a community united by common objects of love, suggests Augustine, then *any* collection of people, no matter how misguided their loves, would have to qualify as a commonwealth. Augustine points out that under this 'alternate definition', Athens – perhaps the ideal *polis* – and Babylon, the very embodiment of despotism, would both be considered a *res publica* as they are both united by common aims.[69] In fact, *civ*. 19.24 is not proposing a more pragmatic definition of a *res publica*, under which Rome (or any *civitas terrena*) might qualify. This becomes evident in the next chapters (*civ*. 19.25–6), in which Augustine underscores that even the imagined unity provided by common objects of love in the *civitas terrena* quickly reveals itself to be an ersatz unity ridden by vice and injustice and thus profoundly unstable and corrosive to its very nature as *res publica*.[70]

In sum, it is only the 'end' (*finis*) of the heavenly city that makes possible the right 'use' of the earthly city's finite goods. If the 'end' of the *usus* of finite goods is taken to be strictly immanent – that is, a secular 'justice' closed off within its own finite horizon – it fails to be just precisely because it is dis*ordered*; it remains

68 As Gregory Lee points out, the more 'pragmatic' reading also runs counter to the aim of Book 19, which defines the two cities by their contrasting accounts of the *summum bonum* and ultimately (in Books 21–2), by their distinct ends: heaven and hell. Lee remarks: 'Given the structural purpose of Book 19, it seems prima facie unlikely that Augustine's chief concern in it is to set forth the grounds for a positive valuation of non-Christian political communities.' Gregory W. Lee, 'Republics and their Loves: Rereading *City of God* 19', *Modern Theology* 27 (2011), p. 558.

69 *civ*. 19.24. Cf. Williams, 'Politics and the Soul', pp. 59–60.

70 Williams, 'Politics and the Soul', p. 60, writes:

> A state may claim to possess the necessary concord as regards the objects of its *dilectio*; but what degree of stability can such a society possess? . . . In short, while it may be empirically an intelligibly united body, it is constantly undermining its own communal character, since its common goals are not and cannot be those abiding values which answer to the truest human needs. So far from XIX.24 representing a shift in Augustine's analysis toward a more pragmatic and positive view of the state, it is in its context a final stage of the argument begun in XIX.21.

See also John Cavadini, 'Spousal Vision: A Study of Text and History in the Theology of St. Augustine', *Augustinian Studies* 43 (2012), pp. 127–48.

locked in a vicious cycle of self-glory and the exercise of the *libido dominandi*. Justice in the *civitas terrena* is possible only when it 'refers' to the peace of the heavenly city. Augustine holds that if there is to be a public square – a political realm in the earthly city that has elements of genuine justice – it will be such only to the degree that it 'refers' this realm to the heavenly city.

The question regarding the possibility of a just earthly regime in Book 19 requires a consideration of how the *City of God* as a whole recasts the definition of justice away from the initial Ciceronian definition of *consensus iuris* to what Augustine terms *uera iustitia*, which is a participation in Christ's own eternal justice. Just as Augustine castigates Pelagian conceptions of justice that speciously imagine human justice to spring from native reserves of moral greatness, so too, he maintains that Rome, despite the human nobility of her great founders, generals and statesmen, was never a just regime on account of her failure to participate in the eternal justice of Christ. Christ is the only truly just man, and in 'justifying', Christ endows people with his own justice. Justice is not a human prerogative, insists Augustine throughout *De civitate dei*; it is not something that stems from the human person but is received in humility as a divine gift.

Implications for a twentieth-century debate

The question of whether and to what extent Augustine proposes bonds of fealty and love to impinge upon the citizens of the heavenly city for the political regime in which they live is perhaps one of the most debated topics in twentieth-century readings of the *City of God*. I would suggest that attention to the participatory nature of justice (both individual and collective) for which Augustine argues throughout the *City of God* invites a way beyond the impasse. In this intensely debated question, one might distinguish (in an admittedly overly general manner) two broad and opposing schools of thought. The first maintains that Augustine offers an endorsement of the Lockean liberal project *avant la lettre*. This position, which we might call the 'Whig' reading of the *City of God*, draws heavily on select paragraphs in Book 19 where Augustine affirms that the heavenly and earthly cities have a shared *use* of earthly goods despite their differing ultimate *ends*.[71] Augustine

71 Lord Acton describes Thomas Aquinas as the first 'Whig'. 'Whig Thomists' attempt to show the compatibility of the Enlightenment post-Lockean liberal regime with the political philosophy of Aquinas and the mainstream of the Catholic tradition. The leading light in this regard is John Courtney Murray, who was intent to demonstrate the continuity between Vatican II (particularly *Dignitatis Humanae*) and the American constitution, particularly with respect to the non-establishment clause of the first amendment. Cf. John Courtney Murray, 'Contemporary Orientations of Catholic Thought on Church and State in the Light of History', *Theological Studies* 10 (1949), pp. 177–234. 'Whig Thomists' might include Michael Novak, George Weigel and Richard John Neuhaus. Cf. Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 16; Michael Novak, 'The Return of the Catholic Whig', *First Things* 1 (1990), pp. 38–42. I am indebted to Edmund Waldstein, O.Cist. who alerted me to this taxonomy in his article 'Integralism and Gelasian Dyarchy': https://thejosiasdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/integralism-and-gelasian-dyarchy.pdf

maintains that the citizens of the heavenly city are called to make 'use of earthly and temporal things like a pilgrim in a foreign land'.[72] Famously, he remarks: 'Thus both kinds of men and both kinds of households alike make use (*usus*) of the things essential for this mortal life; but each has its own very different end in making use (*finis utendi … diversus*) of them.'[73] This shared *usus* among the two cities suggests, to some political theorists, an affirmation of peaceful coexistence between the cities. It is imagined that in their shared commitment to 'earthly peace', the citizens of the heavenly city are involved with the 'compromise between human wills' regarding temporal goods, which marks the political order of the *civitas terrena*.[74]

Similarly, the pilgrim citizens obey the laws of the earthly city in which they find themselves so that 'a harmony (*concordia*) may be preserved between [the two cities] in things that are relevant to this [mortal] condition'.[75] In a justly celebrated passage, Augustine concludes:

> Thus even the Heavenly City in her pilgrimage here on earth makes use (*utitur*) of the earthly peace and defends and seeks the compromise between human wills in respect of the provisions relevant to the mortal nature of man, so far as may be permitted without detriment to true religion and piety.[76]

According to this first reading, then, not only is justice operative in the earthly city, but those on pilgrimage to the heavenly city have a responsibility to work to promote such justice. Augustine's commitment to a shared 'use' of earthly peace, his vision of a 'compromise between human wills', and his apparent acknowledgement of an autonomous sphere of human operation 'relevant to the mortal nature of man' secure a pivotal place for this Augustinian account within the 'Whig' theological tradition. This reading of the *City of God*, which envisions two legitimate and autonomous cities, serves as a fountainhead for magisterial Reformation theology and Lockean liberal politics. In this account, the *City of God* endows both 'church' and 'state' with autonomous spheres of operation. Here one could point to Robert Markus's reading of the *City of God*, which has held sway for nearly fifty years:

> Augustine's attack on the 'sacral' conception of the Empire liberated the Roman state, and by implication, all politics, from the direct hegemony of the sacred. Society became intrinsically 'secular' in the sense that it is not as such committed to any particular ultimate loyalty. It is the sphere in which different individuals with different beliefs and loyalties pursue their common

72 *civ*. 19.17.
73 *civ*. 19.17.
74 *civ*. 19.17.
75 *civ*. 19.17.
76 *civ*. 19.17.

> objectives in so far as they coincide. His 'secularisation' of the realm of politics implies a pluralistic, religiously neutral civil community.[77]

Published over half a century ago, Markus set the tone for imagining an Augustinian endorsement of Christian civic engagement in a neutral, secular, pluralistic polity.

The second reading presents a diametrically opposed understanding of the *City of God*. I will label this the 'Radical Orthodoxy' position because this reading of the *City of God* is advanced by many clustered around this theological movement. This position maintains that Augustine imagines no common bond between the two cities whatsoever. The two cities have rival founders, histories, heroes, loves and goals. Pride and the *libido dominandi* are the driving forces of the earthly city, while humility and self-gift animate the heavenly city.[78] As such, there can be no justice in the earthly city; it is unequivocally the realm of sin. John Milbank, for example, maintains that for Augustine the *civitas terrena* is 'an essentially tragic reality' devoid of justice.[79] In opposition to the 'Whig' reading, Milbank contends that in no way does the *City of God* offer a proto-theological account of church–state relations:

> The *civitas terrena* is not regarded by [Augustine] as a 'state' in the modern sense of a sphere of sovereignty, preoccupied with the business of government. Instead this *civitas*, as Augustine finds it in the present, is the

77 Markus, *Saeculum*, p. 173. Markus suggests that secular pluralism, for which Augustine advocated, had to wait until the modern period to be realized:

> Historically, of course, such a society lay entirely beyond the horizons of Augustine's world. After centuries of development it has begun to grow from the soil of what has been Western Christendom; but it is still far from securely established in the modern world. It is assailed from many sides. Even Christians have not generally learned to welcome the disintegration of a 'Christian society' as a profound liberation for the Gospel. Augustinian theology should at least undermine Christian opposition to an open, pluralist, secular society.

Elsewhere, Markus, *Saeculum*, p. 71, writes: 'The sphere of politics is relative and restricted; within its restricted area it is autonomous; but in its very autonomy it is a matter of deep concern to the citizen of the heavenly city.'. Similarly see Paul Weithman, 'Toward an Augustinian Liberalism', *Faith and Philosophy* 8 (1991), pp. 461–80. Two recent studies in political theology that draw on Markus's reading of Augustine (but whose political liberalism is more explicit) are Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). I am indebted to Gregory W. Lee who pointed out these connections. See Lee, 'Republics and their Loves.'

78 Ward, *Cities of God*, p. 227, maintains that Augustine's 'two cities are founded upon two antithetical economies of desire', in which one is a 'perverse imitation of the other'.

79 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 425.

> vestigial remains of an entire pagan mode of practice, stretching back to Babylon. There is no set of positive objectives that are its own peculiar business . . . The realm of the merely practical, cut off from the ecclesial, is quite simply a realm of sin.[80]

In short, the Radical Orthodoxy reading of the *City of God* rejects the claim that Augustine's affirmation of shared *usus* regarding earthly peace cordons off a neutral public square in which citizens of both cities may come to some type of concordat about temporal goods. Book 19 is essential also for the Radical Orthodoxy reading. There Augustine insists categorically that there is no justice in the earthly city because 'justice is found where God, the one supreme God, rules an obedient city'.[81] This *ordo* is the necessary precondition for any other possible *ordo* (or justice and peace). The soul cannot rule the body, nor reason rule vice, where the human person does not submit to God.[82]

The 'Whig' and the 'Radical Orthodoxy' camps represent two opposing ways of reading the *City of God*, and, more particularly, arrive at two opposing conclusions regarding the possibility of justice within the earthly regime. Both readings stake their claim in Book 19. And yet, I believe both readings miss an essential feature of Augustine's account in Book 19, namely, his contention that finite justice flows from the 'font of justice' (*iustitiae fonte manauerit*).[83] We have seen that this is an essential reference point for understanding what Augustine means by justice and how he envisions the possibility of human justice. For Augustine, justice is in the first place an eternal reality; finite justice, the justice of the earthly city and the justice of righteous soul, exists only to the extent that it 'refers' itself to the justice of the heavenly city. Augustine's Platonic vision of human justice entails both that (contrary to the Whig reading) finite justice is not a discrete, autonomous reality that can be considered independent of eternal

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80 Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 410–11.

81 *civ*. 19.23.

82 Radical Orthodoxy rightly points to the unmitigated hostility between the *libido dominandi* and injustice of the *civitas terrena*, on the one hand, and the peace and justice of the heavenly city, on the other hand. While I am broadly in agreement with this assessment, it seems to me incomplete. Augustine's richly Platonic account of justice involves the 'overflow' of Christ's justice to his members who are, then, called to work for this justice in the earthly city. In a less polemical tone, *Lumen Gentium* 13 states:

> Since the kingdom of Christ is not of this world the Church or people of God in establishing that kingdom takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people. On the contrary it fosters and takes to itself, insofar as they are good, the ability, riches and customs in which the genius of each people expresses itself. Taking them to itself it purifies, strengthens, elevates and ennobles them. The Church in this is mindful that she must bring together the nations for that king to whom they were given as an inheritance, and to whose city they bring gifts and offerings.

83 *civ*. 19.21.

justice in which it participates and that (contrary to the Radical Orthodoxy reading) finite justice does – albeit imperfectly – reflect its eternal source. Attention to how Augustine weaves the two major polemical antagonists of the *City of God*, imperial paganism and Pelagianism, into the same cloth reveals a unified claim about justice in the *City of God*. Both of Augustine's antagonists are guilty of claiming a self-referential and self-manufactured conception of justice. Pagans and Pelagians do not confess justice as a gift received; they instead treat it as something constructed on the tottering foundation of collective or personal virtue. Justice in both cases fails and finds its end in self-glorification and pride.

Conclusion

I have argued that a major aim of *De civitate dei* is to recalibrate the definition of justice so that *uera iustitia* is, in the first place, the knowledge and worship of God. As such, apart from Christ, a just society is an impossibility. The solution that the *City of God* proposes is that Christ, the founder (*conditor*) and ruler (*rector*), establishes the just city in his own person.[84] For Augustine, it is not only the political order that is bereft of justice apart from Christ; the individual also lacks native justice. Original sin leaves the human soul in a vicious state – darkness occludes the intellect, and weakness binds the will to vice. Like Plato, Augustine views the soul as a microcosm of the city. The soul, like the city, exists in a state of brokenness and disorder and requires the mediation of Christ's justice.

The fusion in Augustine's mind of wrongheaded pagan and Pelagian conceptions of justice and virtue is particularly evident in *civ*. 17.4, where Augustine interprets, at length, Hannah's canticle (1 Sam. 2:1–10).[85] Hannah is speaking prophetically of 'the City of God itself, whose king and founder (*conditor et rex*) is Christ', explains Augustine. She speaks of 'the grace itself, from which the proud are estranged so that they fall, with which the humble are filled so that they rise up'. Hannah sings, 'For there is none who is holy as the Lord is holy; there is none just as our God is just'; and Augustine comments, 'For he is holy – and he makes men holy; he is just – and he makes men just.'[86] The blistering critiques of Pelagian self-righteousness and of pagan conceptions of glory are woven together:

84 Cf. *civ* 2.21; 19. This is the major premise of Dodaro's masterful study, *Christ and the Just Society*.

85 Pierre-Marie Hombert, '*Gloria gratiae.' Se glorifier en Dieu, principe et fin de la théologie augustinienne de la grâce* (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Augustiniennes, 1996), pp. 248–9, views this paragraph as unambiguously anti-Pelagian.

86 *civ*. 17.4.

> These words are directed to the adversaries of the City of God, who belong to Babylonia, who presume on their own strength, and glory in themselves, instead of in God . . . [They] 'know nothing of God's righteousness' [Rom. 10:3] – that is the righteousness which God gives, who alone is righteous and makes men righteous – 'and desire to establish their own righteousness' – that is, they suppose it to be something gained by themselves, instead of given by God.[87]

Hannah's canticle is directed against 'those who seem to themselves so powerful that without the gift of God (*Dei dono*) and without his aid they can fulfil the divine commands in human self-reliance'.[88]

Finite justice, both political and individual, does not, in Augustine's estimation, spring from innate reserves of collective or personal virtue. It is always received as gift; justice in this life is grace overflowing from the primordial *fons iustitiae*. There is no native justice according to which the soul can claim a righteousness on account of personal virtue. Likewise, the earthly city, unhinged from Christ's justice, is emphatically unjust and fails even to qualify as a *res publica*. The Whig reading of the *City of God* fails to account for how the justice of a secular city (supposing that to be at all possible) participates in the justice of Christ. (How non-Christians and an explicitly non-religious state are to gain this participation remains an outstanding question.) Radical Orthodoxy, on the other hand, fails to recognize that wherever justice exists – in no matter how diminished a form – it is necessarily a participation in divine justice; for a public realm to be wholly bereft of justice is to cease to exist as a community. Both readings of the *City of God* require a more full-orbed account of participatory justice. This raises the specter of a desperate theological prospect, both with respect to the city and the soul. If the earthly city is, by definition, devoid of true justice (*uera iustitia*), what possible allegiance could heavenly citizens owe to the earthly city? Would not all good effort to work for the betterment of the earthly city be a collusion with the 'principalities and powers' diametrically opposed to the justice of the City of God? Similarly, if I have no justice that is self-produced, but am ever and wholly reliant on grace for Christ's justice, must I resign myself to a passive quietism?

The enduring significance of *De civitate dei* lies in Augustine's unwillingness to follow the logic of this binary. Although finite justice in the *civitas terrena* is

87 *civ*. 17.4.

88 Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, p. 108, notes:

> Chapter 4 of Book 17 therefore reveals [Augustine's] logic in framing his criticisms of Roman religion and pagan philosophy throughout Books 1–10 within his critique of Pelagian conceptions of virtue. According to Augustine's interpretation, Hannah's canticle aims to reject moral self-sufficiency and affirm that the source of strength (*uirtus*) within Christ's 'city' lies in God, not in the self.

fragile and flickering, and even destined ultimately to fail, the citizens of the heavenly city have a responsibility to work towards justice both within the city and within their own soul. Of course, as we have seen, this justice is not independent or autonomous; it is not the justice of a discrete secular order or the successful result of a rigorous moral regime. Rather, it is a justice that always 'refers' itself to the font of justice from which it overflows; it is always *received* by participation in Christ's justice.[89] A self-referential and autonomous conception of civic or personal justice is Augustine's chief polemical target in the *City of God*: 'True justice (*uera iustitia*) is found only in that commonwealth whose founder (*conditor*) and ruler (*rector*) is Christ.'[90] Christ, the font of justice, mediates his own justice to the city and the soul.[91]

89 It is Augustine's Platonic participatory ontology that allows him to affirm the (limited) goods of justice, peace and order in the earthly city, that is, when they 'refer' them to the heavenly city: 'it is altogether right (*optime*) that the soul should learn to look for those temporal blessings (*ea ipsa quae temporaliter*) from God, and from him alone'. *civ*. 10.14. Likewise, *civ*. 19.10:

> But virtue is truly virtue (*uera uirtus*) when it refers all the good things of which it makes use, all its achievements in making good use of good things and evil things, and when it refers itself also, to that end (*finem refert*) where our peace shall be so perfect and so great as to admit of neither improvement nor increase.

90 *civ*. 2.21.

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