Augustine and the Common Good

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Introduction: The State of Humanity and the Call to Transcendence

Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) lived his entire life within the confines of the Roman Empire,[1] which was popularly perceived in his day as extending towards the ends of the earth. Despite this, today's notion of "globality" would probably have been alien to him, as he was vaguely aware that radically different "worlds" existed beyond these confines. Nevertheless, his experience of a crumbling political and economic system comprising a considerable part of the known world may to some extent be compared to the experience of the West today. He certainly could not have imagined *himself* to live outside this system. It was his world.

Accordingly, as far as jurisprudence was concerned, he could think only in terms of Roman law. He knew that cultures beyond the Roman empire (Persians, Indians, etc.) had other legal traditions, and there were also the concepts of divine and natural law.[2] But "real" life was governed by the practice of Roman law. Although its workings were frequently brutal and corrupt,[3] it guaranteed order and peace. The alternative was mob justice.[4] Augustine's thinking was conservative in this regard. He was not a political or social reformer who systematically and consistently campaigned for or worked towards

[1] The classic modern biography of Augustine is still Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, ^{2}2000); among the more recent biographies see Robin Lane Fox, *Augustine: Conversion to Confessions* (London: Allen Lane, 2015).
[2] See Michèle Ducot, "Ius," *Augustinus-Lexikon* 3 (2010): 854–59, and Domenico Marafioti and Michèle Ducot, "Lex," *Augustinus-Lexikon* 3 (2010): 931–54; see also below in the next section.
[3] As Augustine himself had to experience bitterly, when a high-ranking friend, the *comes* Marcellinus, to whom he had dedicated the *City of God*, was arbitrarily executed as a consequence of court intrigues in 412; see Volker Drecoll, "Marcellinus," *Augustinus-Lexikon* 3 (2010): 1160–65. For wider evidence of state brutality (coercion, persecution, etc.) see Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), passim.
[4] Thus Augustine, *City of God*, 3.24.

structural improvements to government or the legal system.[5] As a bishop he was able to offer assistance through church aid—locally but also, as we might say today, nationally and internationally, in communities far away.[6] In that sense, he stood for what we might think of today as NGO intervention and civil society (transcending the boundaries of nationalist state interests), but he did not think of these things in modern, legal terms.

To be sure, he did not expect much of government. For him, the "common good" was not, as it is widely perceived to be today, a set of benefits which society, or individuals in it, could legally claim from the state or from anyone in a position of power such as heads of extended families, magistrates, provincial governors, landlords, military commanders, and similar agents of power.[7] Far too many people were inescapably trapped in inhuman conditions, whether they were slaves, women, refugees, immigrants, peasants, or tenant farmers. They had no redress. They could only hope for the good will of those in power to allow them to live a dignified life. This hope was always at risk, as higher powers could intervene at any time, and one's benefactor could fall from grace. Even those at the very highest social levels were not exempt. To a large extent the thrill of studying the history of the later Roman Empire lies precisely in exploring the many and varied instances in which functionaries of the state used the political and legal instruments of government to compete with each other, to challenge

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[5] However, I would not go as far as Ralph Mathisen, who concludes that Augustine "was a most effective spokesperson for the social and political establishment;" see Ralph Mathisen, "Society, Social Thought," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald O.S.A. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 803–6 at 806. Some aspects of Augustine's political thought, as we shall hopefully see below, were potentially deeply subversive to the dominant strands of society in his day.

[6] For a broad understanding of church aid in Augustine's time, see Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), passim and especially 322–38.

[7] For a recent example of such an understanding of the common good, see Robert Reich, *The Common Good* (New York: Knopf, 2018). For previous studies of Augustine's understanding of the concept, see Raymond Canning, "Common Good," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine Through the Ages*, 219–22.

authorities, to ascend and achieve dominance, sometimes reaching the very top, only to end their careers by being executed, assassinated, or exiled.

On the other hand, with regard to those who still had choices and could opt for a life in pursuit of the common good, Augustine had very specific individual advice about how he thought such a life could be realized, within limits, under earthly conditions, not only individually but also in community.

To understand the strengths and limitations of Augustine's thoughts on the common good, of the kind that could inform an emerging Christian concept of global law today, one has to consider his historical context, the extent to which Augustine (with his thoughts) remains trapped in that context, and the extent to which he was nevertheless able to liberate himself from it and transcend it with some theoretical thinking that could still resonate in the present, many centuries later.

To be sure, Augustine found the state of affairs in his world an outrage.[8] He made a massive theoretical effort — he referred to it as "arduous work"[9] — at analyzing the root causes of the problem and pointing to solutions. This is his work known to us as *The City of God*.[10] But Augustine was also someone who held a privileged position in that society and culture. He owed much of his stature as a thinker and religious leader to that culture, and if that culture were ever to disappear from the face of the earth, his literary and religious legacy would be lost too. There is therefore a dialectic between Augustine's distancing himself from this ancient Greco-Roman culture and his

[8] See, e.g., *City of God* 1 praef. his reference to the earthly state (*civitas terrena*, by which he means not only but also the Roman Empire), which he has no choice but to inhabit, as constantly seeking to enslave people, while it is itself enslaved by lust for domination (*quae cum dominari adpetit, etsi populi serviant, ipsa ei dominandi libido dominatur*).
[9] Ibid.: *magnum opus et arduum*.
[10] For a good introduction to this work, see still G. J. P. O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

transcending it towards a universal Christian vision while at the same time preserving that culture as the only earthly vehicle available to communicate his vision and translate it into a viable theory.

This dialectic dominated his life. Born in 354 CE to a Christian mother and a pagan father in a small town of Roman North Africa, he was dedicated to the church as a child (though not baptized). Yet as a boy he received a classical education from a pagan tutor. He became a classical orator and professor of rhetoric, first in Carthage, then in Rome, and finally in the service of the emperor himself in the imperial capital of Milan. Yet again, already as a young adult, he was not satisfied with the intellectual chill of pagan literature but yearned for some spirituality that would also satisfy his heart. He initially found it in the teachings of Manichaeism,[11] which offered a gnostic path to purification and salvation without the discipline required by the church. From about 374 to 384 he remained an adherent of Manichaeism before he slowly edged, under the influence of Neoplatonism, towards a conversion to orthodox Christianity. In 387 he was baptized by bishop Ambrose of Milan. After that, Augustine went back to Africa, assumed an ascetic life style, and became a monk, a priest and, in 396, a bishop. As bishop in the Christianized Roman Empire, he had to fulfill certain public duties, for example sitting as judge in court. This work brought him in daily contact with Roman law in action.[12] The tension between his spiritual duties as a bishop and monk and his obligations to earthly institutions such as state and the institutional apparatus of the church thus remained to the end of his life.

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[11] See for this Jason BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma 1: Conversion and Apostasy, 373–388 C.E.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

[12] For a recent study of this aspect of his life, see Daniel Edward Doyle, "Augustin als Bischof: Visitator und Richter," in *Augustin Handbuch*, edited by Volker Henning Drecoll (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 218–24.

The main themes of his thought on the common good can be seen arising from the various stages of his biography. His classical education enabled him to engage with the main philosophical and political theories, above all those of Cicero, Plotinus, and Porphyry. His life in a monastic community, which he founded and for which he wrote a set of rules, stands for his attempt to put into practice, in however limited a way, the theories that emerge from his analysis of human nature and society. His work as a bishop, finally, transcended his scope as an individual and member of a monastic community towards what one might call civic society, and to humanity as a whole.

Major Themes in Augustine's Thought

Crisis and failure of the ancient civic project: the example of Rome

Eugene TeSelle once observed that Augustine, rather unbiblically, spoke of the "city" (rather than the "kingdom" or "reign") of God.[13] Consequently, the inhabitants of that city would be "citizens," not "God's people" (in the sense in which, for example, the book of Exodus uses the term).[14] Interestingly, TeSelle adds, Augustine thought of the city not primarily in physical but in constitutional terms. He spoke of *civitas*, not *urbs*. He meant the community, not the built-up area. His concept of citizen therefore was civic, not urban, and focused on duties, not amenities. Unlike the book of Revelation, Augustine offers no description of the build of the city.

The concept of Christians as citizens reveals an indebtedness to classical political theory, an indebtedness that is shared by Saint Paul's reflections on individual

[13] Eugene TeSelle, "The Civic Vision in Augustine's City of God," *Thought* 62 (1987): 268–80. To be sure, Augustine did speak of the "reign of God," namely within the "City of God" (*City of God* 19.24).
[14] See for this Jan Assmann, *Exodus. Die Revolution der Alten Welt* (Munich: Beck, 2015), 223–34.

and collective interests,[15] though not by the Synoptic Gospels. Warren Carter argued many years ago that the apocalyptic political ideas expressed, for example, in Matthew (chapters 24 and 25) were ironically self-contradictory: the Gospel depicted a future in which Roman power would be crushed, and an "empire of God" would impose itself, violently and by force (24:27–31).[16] Augustine offers a subtler, more sophisticated reflection on the relationship between the classical and Hellenistic civic traditions, on one hand, and the social and political hopes of the Christians on the other, although his conclusion is no less radical and rests on the same foundations: ultimately, for Augustine, no earthly city, of whatever culture, can fulfill its promise of delivering "true justice" (and thereby the common good), for the simple reason that the rule of God is absent from it.[17] We will find out in the next section what Augustine means by this.

To drive home his point, Augustine uses an element of classical Roman discourse, the idea that the city had long been in crisis. The populism triggered by the socialist reforms proposed by the Gracchi had led to riots and mob justice.[18] But the fact that reforms had been deemed necessary at all showed that the "cause of the people," the *res populi* or *res publica*, the public or common good, was not served in the city. Rather, particular interests prevailed. Justice was not served. Thus, according to Augustine the republic or common good was already de facto nonexistent even at that early stage in the demise of the Roman Republic, a century before Caesar.[19] At the same

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[15] See for this Kei Eun Chang, *The Community, the Individual and the Common Good.* To Idion *and* To Sympheron *in the Greco-Roman World and Paul* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); TeSelle, "Civic Vision," 276, too, assumes Pauline influence on Augustine in this regard.
[16] Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 176.
[17] *City of God*, 19.24.
[18] *City of God*, 3.24. Even today, the period of the Gracchi is still seen as marking the beginning of the end of the Roman republic; see, e.g., Edward Watts, *Mortal Republic: How Rome Fell into Tyranny* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 45–118.
[19] *City of God*, 2.21; 3.21–23. A sense among people that justice (economic, social, juridical) is no longer served by the public system is still seen as one of the root causes for the total breakdown of social order,

time, however, Augustine continues, the suppression of traditional values (free association, equality, etc.) is not necessarily a denial of justice: if domination (of Rome over its provinces, master over slave, soul over body, God over the universe) brings about order and peace, *it* (rather than the old and spent values of freedom and equality) will deliver the common good.[20]

The common good had been defined by earlier thinkers, particularly Aristotle, as the benefits or interests of all members of the community, common and individual: it could be attained only through a common effort by all, while it then would benefit each individual.[21] In antiquity, unlike in modern discourse, where the pursuit of private interest is seen at least as contributing to the common good, this principle of common effort was never called in doubt. The question was not whether the common good should be pursued, but what the common good was and how it should be pursued.[22] Whether a particular constitution worked or not could be measured by the extent to which it delivered the common good. When the Roman constitution failed, as was acknowledged by writers such as Cicero or Sallust,[23] imperial domination offered a solution. Yet domination, as it was adopted in the empire, was not meant to be an atrocious dictatorship that did away with all the old institutions. Rather, it was intended as an adjustment to the constitution, an introduction of a new office or constitutional element, the *princeps*, or "first among equals" in the Senate, who would "help" the

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as it happened for example on the occasion of the riots engulfing several cities in the UK around August 9, 2011; see Tim Newburn and others, "David Cameron, the Queen and the Rioters' Sense of Injustice," *The Guardian* (December 5, 2011), http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/dec/05/cameron-queen-injustice-english-rioters

[20] *City of God*, 2.21 with reference to Cicero, *Republic*, 2.42ff.; 3.5.

[21] Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 3.6–7.12.

[22] See Martin Jehne, "Der römische Senat als Hüter des Gemeinsinns," in *Gemeinsinn und Gemeinwohl in der römischen Antike*, edited by Martin Jehne and Christoph Lundgreen (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2013), 23–50 at 24–25.

[23] See for this Fabian Knopf, "Gemeinsinn und Gemeinwohl in der politischen Rhetorik Ciceros und in den Geschichtswerken Sallusts," in Jehne and Lundgreen, *Gemeinsinn und Gemeinwohl*, 51–74.

Senate make decisions, wield its power more effectively, and thus dispense justice and bring about the common good more "economically."[24]

Augustine, of course, did not think that the Roman Empire (as a manifestation of the earthly city) was really governed by true justice or ruled by God, even under Christian emperors.[25] He uses the concept of imperial rule, as he finds it in Cicero's *Republic*, as an analogy for divine rule in his reflections on good and evil, truth, justice, power, and ultimate fulfillment, all topics developed in *The City of God*, book 19. //I'm assuing that this number is intended to identify a book number.// "Analogy" here also means that for Augustine, although earthly power is a reflection of divine power and therefore has to be respected by Christians, it is also far more unlike divine power than like it and must therefore not be mistaken for the latter. Earthly power is not "the real thing." One always has to take into account that when reflecting on the earthly state, Augustine is not engaging in political philosophy. His interest is ultimately not in the Roman constitution, or how the Roman or indeed any political system on earth could be improved for the benefit of its people, let alone humanity. Rather, his reflections aim beyond any political notion of the common good (as something that could be realized in a this-worldly social entity) and explore instead the anthropological, theological, and in particular the eschatological dimensions of the concept. However, by doing this, as we shall hopefully see in the next two sections, he will indirectly say a lot about which kind

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[24] Meaning more "distributively" and "equitably," in tune with and for the benefit of the general public. Considering the actual amount of power held by the *princeps* (who was called *imperator* for a good reason) and the damage to the common good caused by the abuse of this power, the arrangement under the Principate may have been a cruel pretense; thus famously Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939). But it was (admittedly) nevertheless remarkably successful and enduring despite being in a state of permanent crisis and transformation.

[25] For Augustine, the Christian emperors had not made a fundamental structural difference to the empire (*City of God*, 5.24–26). Some of them seem to have been blessed by God as individuals, which also had a positive effect on their reign and resulted in benefits for the people. But that was all. A persecutor such as Julian the Apostate could re-emerge at any time and reverse the situation (18.52).

of politics can be favorable to the common good and which kind is in all likelihood detrimental.

Natural law and *ius gentium*: new meanings for existing concepts

Let us first look at aspects of Augustine's thought that suggest that he might stand for a kind of politics that is more favorable to the common good, especially suggestions for better ways of legal living, or kinds of living that accord with divine, natural, and biblical law. To be sure, Augustine does not artificially distinguish between such different types of law.[26] For him, the natural law can be each of these kinds of law, or all of them taken together. It can be the eternal law of God as manifest in the order of nature—that is, the actual workings of the natural world and the natural universe—or God's will transcending that order—that is, the law by which "God rules all creation."[27] It can also be the law corresponding to human reason, by means of which human beings can gain insight into the natural order.[28] Natural law is, as such, implanted in the conscience ("inscribed in the hearts of the godly," Romans 2:15)[29] and therefore eternal and unchangeable, unlike human-made, law, which is temporal and changeable;[30] but the authority of natural law is grounded not in human reason but in its being inserted into creation from the beginning.[31] For Augustine, therefore, unlike for the Enlightenment, human beings have no absolute lordship over creation just because they possess rationality. Rather, their rationality is something that holds them responsible for

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[26] See for what follows Richard J. Dougherty, "Natural Law," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, 582–84.
[27] Dougherty, "Natural Law," 583; *Against Faustus*, 22.27; 30.33; *Sermon*, 81.2; *Diverse questions*, 53.2; *Quantity of the Soul*, 36.80. Typically, for Augustine, God, by virtue of divine will, is not bound by the law which God created, but can, and indeed does, override it; this is not unnatural but supernatural; see *City of God*, 21.8.
[28] *Letter*, 157.3.15; *City of God*, 11.27.
[29] *Confessions*, 2.4.9; *On the Trinity*, 12.15.24–25; see also Josef Lössl, "How 'Bad' is Augustine's 'Bad Conscience?'" *Studia Patristica* 86 (2017): 89–96.
[30] *Confessions*, 3.7.13; *On the Trinity*, 14.15.21; *Letter*, 138.1.4, 8; *Diverse questions*, 31.1.
[31] *On Christian doctrine*, 1.26.27; *On the literal interpretation of Genesis*, 9.17.32.

living according to a higher, divinely instituted order, a natural law[32] that works to the good of all creation, from the level of inanimate objects and the simplest forms of organic life to that of the highest life forms, where creation becomes conscious of itself, such as human beings.

Furthermore, since natural law is grounded in creation, it is not, in effect, dependent on any particular religious tradition but applies universally to all human beings. The "law inscribed in the hearts of the godly" is explicitly a law given (by God / nature) to all those who have not been given the law of Moses. They are called upon by that law "to do 'by nature' what is required by the law [of Moses]" (Romans 2:14). On the other hand, this particular formulation (Romans 2:14–16) derives from a particular tradition and its authority from the authority of that tradition. Romans 2:14–16 is not a Stoic principle, as far as Augustine is concerned; it is biblical, and it implies a specific Christian (Pauline) message, namely that neither those who have been given the law of Moses nor those who have had God's law inscribed in their hearts are able to fulfill the demands of that law without divine assistance (grace). From Augustine's perspective, therefore, this principle is incomparably more authoritative and capable of delivering true justice than the traditional Roman *consensus iuris*.[33]

It is also more universal and offers a new perspective to the traditional concept of *ius gentium* or law of the nations, which in traditional Roman jurisprudence had in certain areas been found contradicting natural law, for example in the case of slavery: although it was accepted that all human beings were born free according to natural law, slavery was seen as a legally justifiable institution on grounds of its existence in

[32] See Dougherty, "Natural Law," 583 the expression *summa ratio* with reference to *On Free Will*, 1.6.14–15 and *On true religion*, 31.58.
[33] See Robert Dodaro, *Christ and Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14.

practically all jurisdictions of the time. It was a matter of *ius gentium*.[34] The change in perspective which Augustine offered was not, in the first instance, one of political or social improvement. He did not campaign to free all slaves or to outlaw slavery, which would have been an impossible goal. Rather, he took a step back and asked what the prevailing conditions said about the state of humanity—that is, of human nature, or what is common to all human beings, slaves and non-slaves alike—before thinking about possible changes for the better.[35] As noted earlier, as a political thinker and campaigner Augustine does not think much outside of his immediate political context, the later Roman Empire. He campaigns for individual improvements, small steps, not for fundamental reform, let alone revolution. Where his thought does offer new perspectives, however (and this does have implications for political thought, although it is not primarily "politological"), is in the radical analysis of the principal "human condition in this *saeculum*."[36]

Common vs. particular / public vs. private: wider (and deeper) implications

Augustine deals with the notion of "the common" long before he enters the realm of political thought.[37] He thinks of the concept in philosophical terms, resorting also to synonyms such as "universal," "social," and "public" as opposed to "partial," "private," "proper" (*proprium*). He also deals with the opposition of the ideal (immaterial) and the material (physical). For Augustine the Platonist, "the common" or

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[34] Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World AD 275–425* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 213: "Slavery belonged to the *ius gentium*."

[35] Note in this context *Retractions*, 1.8.2: "It is one thing to inquire into the source of evil and another to inquire how one can return to his original good or reach one that is greater." To be sure, in the case of slavery as well as in other cases (capital punishment, social care, economic injustice) Augustine did offer very concrete and compelling ideas for improvement; see Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethics of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 54; against Harper, *Slavery*, 213, who seems to suggest that church leaders were resigned to the prevailing state of affairs.

[36] Harper, *Slavery*, 213.

[37] See for this also Goulven Madec, "Commune-proprium," *Augustinus-Lexikon* 1.7–8 (1994): 1079–81.

"universal" was real only in the noetic world.[38] The common good, therefore—the republic (*res publica*) in the true sense, the perfect Christian fellowship as depicted in Acts 4:32–35, the perfect charity (*caritas*) as described in 1 Corinthians 13:5—was an ideal; that is, it was real in the world of ideas.

The difference between a common good in this sense and a material good (such as nutrition, wealth, the air we breathe, etc.) is that the common goods (in Augustine's sense) are inexhaustible. Material goods are finite. When material goods are appropriated (privatized), they are converted into goods serving particular interests.[39] Some people accumulate them and then possess them in abundance, while other people lack them. This uneven distribution of material goods leads to inequality, injustice, insecurity, tensions, and conflict. Spiritual goods, in contrast, are freely available to all and can be enjoyed without limits, by way of the spiritual senses.[40] There need not be any competition for them, and there is no danger that they might get lost. Augustine argues that truth, also known as wisdom, is a common good in this sense. In *On Free Will*, book 2, he elaborates:

> No one is secure in enjoying goods that can be lost against one's will. But no one can lose truth and wisdom against one's will … What we called separation from truth and wisdom is really just a perverse will … No one tears off a piece [from truth] as his own food; you drink nothing from it that I cannot also drink. For what you gain from having it does not become your private property … It is always wholly available to everyone.[41]

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[38] Cf. Plotinus, *Ennead*, 6.4–5; Porphyry, *Sentence* 40, as reflected, for example, in *The Immortality of the Soul*, 6, or *Soliloquies*, 2.22 (something is "in the mind" even before I think of it).
[39] *On Free Will*, 2.19.
[40] *Confessions*, 10.8.
[41] *On Free Will*, 2.37.

Augustine's point here is not to advocate that human beings should live off plain air without concern for material goods, but to set the right priorities. In order for material goods to be distributed more justly and equitably, higher goods (sense of truth, wisdom, justice, etc.) would need to be held in higher esteem, according to their nature as higher goods. However, human beings miserably fail in this regard. A certain perversion of the will, an excessive sense of their own pre-eminence (*amor excellentiae propriae*), makes them anxious always to protect what they perceive to be their own, individual, particular interest, whatever the cost, and persuades them to abandon the perspective of truth and wisdom and to scramble for the finite resources of the inferior, worldly goods.[42] People consider their own individual selves to be of such paramount importance that they rather put the common good in the widest sense of the word—the integrity of the entire world, of creation itself—at risk of descending into strife, war, injustice, inequality, destruction.

Augustine identifies this primeval sin as pride (*superbia*). The sinful act consists in a perversion of the will, away from holding on to an immutable and universal (commonly held) good towards an inferior, limited, external, and private resource.[43] This primeval act of privatization, so to speak, leads to the ruin of humankind. It is entirely wilfull. No external condition compels human beings to act like this: "No will wills unwillingly," Augustine says in *On Free Will* 2.37.

The pursuit of the particularist advantage, according to Augustine elsewhere, is a completely false economy.[44] The perverse and harebrained logic behind this pursuit seems to be the idea that the common good has a surplus value which can be exploited

[42] *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, 11.14.18.
[43] *On Free Will*, 2.53.
[44] *On the Trinity*, 12.14.

for private ends when it is appropriated and converted into a private property. Harebrained indeed, says Augustine, for how could something that is already universal increase in value by being made into something particular? Rather, what happens is that it will decrease in value.[45] Thus, avarice results not in an increase of wealth but in poverty: what is desired always exceeds what can satisfy the desire.[46] What is growing is merely the desire, whose fulfilment becomes ever more elusive. The result is despair.

These findings point back to the basic idea behind the concept of the *City of God*. In this work, Augustine sets out two fundamental ways of looking at reality, one leading to salvation, the other to perdition. The one leading to perdition has at its root love of self, pride, avarice, the desire to make what is not private (but common, universal) into private property and thereby diminish it. The way leading to salvation does not seek its own private advantage; it does not desire what it does not own; it takes delight in the common good.[47] While the earthly city adheres to the love of self, of having one's own will, and pursues the private interest, it is inescapably caught up in strife and war. By contrast, the heavenly city, devoted to love for the common good, which is eternal and immutable, gradually moves from being many individuals towards becoming one heart and soul.[48]

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[45] Ibid. A similar idea is expressed by Plotinus, *Ennead* 6.5.12: Attempts to increase the "all" by adding a particular ("something") will lead to diminution; for what the particular adds to the all is negativity. The problematic nature of privatizing public goods and concerns (adding a private interest to the common interest) has also been recognized in economics including for the sphere of social media, e.g., Facebook, where "public networks" are in reality devices that generate profit for private companies, sometimes with devastating consequences for their users; see Mariana Mazzucato, *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 249–59, and Shoshanna Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (Public Affairs: New York, 2018), 446–54, especially 449. Zuboff's analysis of surveillance capitalism has generally a very Augustinian ring; see, e.g., pp. 26–27 on the weakness of human nature.

[46] Again, *On the Trinity*, 12.14 referring to 1 Timothy 6:10. One could almost replace the term "avarice" with "addiction."

[47] *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, 11.15.19–20; *City of God*, 14.28.

[48] *City of God*, 15.3; 15.14.

Now Augustine concedes that there was indeed much public-mindedness among the ancient Romans,[49] even sacrificial love for their fatherland, heroic acts committed in the service of the people. However, he concludes, all these acts were ultimately committed out of love for a particular interest, namely the domination of Rome over all the other nations on earth. This is why the virtues of the Roman heroes are ultimately dazzling vices. What the early Christians tried to achieve when they had everything in common and shared according to individual need (Acts 2:44; 4:32) was something different: “They,” he concludes, “did this to attain the fellowship of the angels.”[50] It is this model of early Christian “communism” as depicted in Acts which Augustine sees as a practical Christian way of living the pursuit of the common good. This is also suggested by the way in which he elaborates on some of the details in his treatise *The Work of Monks*. We will look at some of these details in the next section.

The Pursuit of the Common Good in Christian Practice: *The Work of Monks*

Augustine did not see a global earthly institution which in his view could have claimed to represent the City of God or the Heavenly Jerusalem. In his view, the City of God was so unlike anything on earth that it was futile to draw comparisons. For example, in the City of God there would be no more civic concerns. God would be all in all.[51] Earthly institutions beyond the humblest of dimensions, however, are inevitably preoccupied with their self-aggrandizement—not just the Roman Empire but also, one

[49] See *City of God*, 5.18 with a multitude of examples.
[50] *City of God*, 5.18.
[51] *Enarration in Psalm*, 105.34.

may assume, ecclesiastical institutions.[52] Notwithstanding this problem, Augustine developed ideas about how the common good could be served in the individual and communal Christian life. But in doing so, he was thinking very much on a local rather than a global level.

Around the year 400 CE, five years after he had been appointed bishop of Hippo, he wrote a series of treatises which were triggered by controversies but contain a series of thoughts that are also universally relevant. Among these are *The Good of Marriage* and *The Work of Monks*. Although the work on marriage was written later, I will briefly examine it first, because for Augustine, while marriage has potential for realizing the common good on earth, its potential is more limited than that of the monastic life .[53]

Augustine begins by emphasizing the benefits of marriage on social grounds: it was created by God as a social institution (*sociale quiddam*).[54] Through conjugal, parental, and filial love, marriage has the potential of maximizing social goods. It is a

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[52] This is not to say that the institutional *ecclesia* could not claim for itself truth and demand allegiance in Augustine's view (similar to the way any earthly authority could), but one could not expect from it visible and palpable perfection here on earth. For Augustine, the church's perfection was "mystical." It was only real insofar as the church represented aspects of the City of God. This put Augustine at odds with groups such as the Donatists, who claimed that their members were perfect by definition, that is, by virtue of having been baptized into their church, which was by definition perfect; or the Pelagians, for whom the church's perfection was visible in the ascetic perfection of at least some of its members. Todd Breyfogle writes on this: "Augustine's theological and ecclesiological contestations with the Donatists and Pelagians are also political in that both sects represented, for Augustine, an impatience with the Christian's pilgrim status and with the mystical character of the Church." Todd Breyfogle, "Citizenship and Signs: Rethinking Augustine's *On the Two Cities*," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought*, edited by Ryan K. Balot (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 501–26 at 522.

[53] Augustine wrote *The Good of Marriage* in a context of controversy. A Roman monk, Jovinian, had put forward the argument that marriage and celibacy were equally meritorious forms of the Christian life. To this Jerome responded with a series of polemical letters (48–50) which seemed to disparage married life in favor of monastic celibacy. By focusing on the social benefits (as well as limitations) of marriage rather than on sexual ethics (abstinence vs. concupiscence) Augustine (in *The Good of Marriage*) put forward a moderate position; for a comprehensive account see David G. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); see also id., "Bono coniugali, De," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine Through the Ages*, 110–11.

[54] *The Good of Marriage*, 1.1.

societas amicalis, an association based on loving friendship[55] between the sexes and different generations and families. It spreads a veil of dignity (*dignitas*) over an otherwise problematic aspect of human life (sexuality)[56] and supports social virtues such as loyalty and trust (*fides*).[57] It appears, therefore, that for Augustine the "good (*bonum*) of marriage" played a very important part in the realization of the common good,[58] although the term as such does not occur in *The Good of Marriage*. However, Augustine refrains from recommending marriage as a preferred option for the pursuit of the common good, and he cites for this a theological reason. He argues that in the Old Testament (among the ancient Israelites), marriage (which includes the wish to have children) was spiritually motivated: the aim there was building up the people of God, not carnal desire.[59] After Christ, however, this purpose no longer applies. In the new dispensation, Augustine concludes, "spiritual perfection is to be sought in celibacy, not in marriage."[60]

This difference between the Old and the New Testaments is not merely a formal one for Augustine. Elsewhere he recalls (also from personal experience) how marriage can hinder intellectual pursuits, which, as we have seen earlier, he rates more highly in terms of the common good than the goods of marriage.[61] On the other hand, while in many of his works Augustine seems to single out sexual activity as the aspect of marriage that poses the main obstacle to higher (spiritual and intellectual) goods,[62]

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[55] *The Good of Marriage*, 9.9.
[56] Ibid., 3.3.
[57] Ibid., 5.5, 6.6, 11.12.
[58] To that extent he agrees with Jovinian (see above n. 53).
[59] *The Good of Marriage*, 13.15, 19.22.
[60] Hunter, "Bono coniugali," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine Through the Ages*, 110; cf. Augustine, *The Good of Marriage*, 17.19.
[61] See for this, e.g., the episode in *Confessions*, 6.14.24 according to which marriages prevented a group of young men from following their intellectual pursuits; more references like this in David G. Hunter, "Marriage," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine Through the Ages*, 535–37 at 535.
[62] See, e.g., *Soliloquies*, 1.10.17.

celibacy (that is, sexual abstinence) alone is not sufficient for fruitfully pursuing the monastic life, which in *The Work of Monks* he recommends as the life most conducive to the common good. As noted in the previous section, the key vice that causes the primeval sin is not sexual desire but pride. Consequently, the key virtue that helps to overcome sin and to realize the common good (fully in the City of God, and partially here on earth) has to be humility. All other virtues follow from that.

With this idea in mind, Augustine wrote *The Work of Monks*.[63] Again, as in the case of *The Good of Marriage*, the treatise was an intervention in a recent controversy. In and around Carthage, many monks had taken to a particular ascetic lifestyle, originating from Syria,[64] which made them reject monastic discipline. In particular, they refused to engage in manual labor, which was partially meant as an exercise to practice humility (in antiquity, manual labor was associated with low social status) but also had the practical purpose of earning the monks their keep. Instead, they neglected their outward appearance, refused to live in regimented communities, and begged for food and money in public places. They justified their behavior with biblical references—for instance, the passage in the Gospel of Matthew (6:25–34) that says one must not worry about the next day but should learn from the birds in the sky and the flowers in the field.[65]

Augustine refutes these arguments by referring to what he calls "apostolic discipline" (*apostolica disciplina*),[66] that is, the injunction formulated by Paul in 2

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[63] For what follows, see George Lawless, "Opere Monachorum, De," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine Through the Ages*, 596.
[64] See Peter Brown, *Treasure in Heaven: The Holy Poor in Early Christianity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), especially 89–108, where Egyptian monasticism is credited with a work ethic that tended not to be shared by Syrian monasticism, and 65 and 70 on Augustine's *The Work of Monks*.
[65] Augustine discusses these arguments in *The Work of Monks*, 1–30.
[66] *The Work of Monks*, 28.36.

Thessalonians 3:10: "If anyone will not work, let him not eat!" But he goes further than that: following the example and the rules (*praecepta*) set up by the Apostle, he argues that the monks ought to have compassion for the weak, abandon the love of private wealth, labor with their hands in a common effort, and obey their superiors without murmur.[67] Consistent with the evidence cited earlier, this exhortation highlights the major virtues necessary for the pursuit of the higher common goods: charity (the highest form of love), rejection of greed and embrace of poverty, humility (voluntary acceptance of the shame of physical labor), and obedience to one's superiors (that is, acceptance of existing social-political power structures).

The argument Augustine makes in advocating this way of life, especially in *The Work of Monks* 25.32, is intriguing. Considering that the monastic life does not seem very attractive at all at first glance, one might expect him to invoke a Kantian-style categorical imperative (all duty and no reward); or he might have held out the prospect of a deferred reward in the afterlife for those who embark on the monastic way. But he does neither. Rather, what he tries to do is to convey to his audience that a regular monastic life, despite its physical and mental hardships, is an attractive option, a life with substantial rewards already on earth. His rhetoric in *The Work of Monks* is more like that of a political campaigner than an eschatological preacher. To explain precisely what he means by the benefits he holds out to his audience, he cites not only biblical (New Testament) sources but also sources related to classical Roman political thought,[68] which invoke the concept of the common good (*res communis*) and the communal spirit (*sensus communis*) that manifested itself in the heroes of the republic.

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[67] *The Work of Monks*, 16.19: *compatiantur infirmis, et amore privatae rei non inligati manibus suis in commune laborare, praepositis suis sine murmure obtemperare*.

[68] Compare for these above nn. 22 and 23.

In the following passage from *The Work of Monks* he compares a particularly striking example of this ancient Roman public-mindedness with his own ideal of the City of God, which he believes can be at least partially realized on earth in the monastic way of life:

> For if, as their own writers regularly proclaim in most splendid eloquence, even the ancient princes of this earthly republic (*huius terrenae rei publicae*) put the common good of the general public of their city (*rem commune universi populi suae civitatis*) to such a degree before their private interests (*privatis suis rebus … anteponebant*) that a certain one of them, who was honored with a triumph after he had defeated Africa, would not have been able to provide his daughter with a dowry, had he not, by decree of the Senate, received financial support from the public purse (*ex senatus consulto de publico dotaretur*), how much more passion (*animus*) for his republic (*in re publica sua*) ought one to have who is a citizen of that eternal city (*civis aeternae illius civitatis*), the heavenly Jerusalem? Ought not he to have that which he earns from the labor of his own hands in common with his brother, and should not that which he lacks be supplied from the common store?[69]

The reason why Augustine has to cite classical references is that his audience is classically educated and still subscribes to a code of classical social ethics according to which physical labor is shameful. At least some of his addressees therefore must have

[69] *The Work of Monks*, 25.32. "He who was honored with a triumph after subduing Africa" (Augustine, pandering to his addressees' regard for classical education, even uses the technical term, *Africa edomita*) was of course Scipio Africanus, who was perhaps *the* most highly regarded Roman in Antiquity. By the writers celebrating him, Augustine may in the first instance have thought of Valerius Maximus, *Facts* 4.4 and Seneca, *Consolation to Helvia* 12.6. Both authors relate the anecdote of Scipio's inability to pay his daughter's dowry.

come from the more respectable (*honestiores*) parts of society. They complain that it is no use for anyone if someone who "converts" to the spiritual life and struggle ([*qui*] *ad hanc spiritalem vitam militiamque convertitur*) and becomes an (officially recognized) ascetic, a "servant of God" (*servus Dei*), is reduced to shameful physical labor like an ordinary laborer (*opifex*).

Before Augustine retorts with the above cited classical example, he references two New Testament passages: (a) the parable of the rich young man whom Jesus tells that if he wants to be perfect he ought to sell all he possesses, give the proceeds to the poor, and then follow him (Matthew 19:21); and (b) Saint Paul's exhortation to his audience in Philippians 2:16 that they should hold on to his teaching that he had not "run" and "labored" in vain (*non in vacuum cucurri nec in vacuum laboravi*). The keyword in the second passage is *laboravi*, which Augustine understands to be physical labor, although Paul was here probably referring to his preaching. But Augustine needs this second reference because passage (a) refers not to work but only to selling one's possessions and distributing the proceeds among the poor.

Augustine continues that these highly authoritative (*tanta auctoritas*) teachings ought to motivate his audience to relinquish their original sources of income and resort instead to working with their own hands (*relinquendi pristinas facultates et manibus operandi*). With regard to those original sources of income, his audience is divided into two groups: (a) rich people (*divites*), who could previously live off the proceeds of their wealth and enjoy a life of leisure (*otium*); and (b) people who converted to the monastic life from a state of poverty (*ex paupertate*), in which they had already relied on physical

labor to "augment their meager private possessions in pursuit of their own interest" (*augendae quantulaecumque rei privatae … quaerens quae sua sunt*).[70]

Both, Augustine argues, should now embrace physical work, each with the benefit of their own background. The rich, if not impeded by infirmity (*nulla infirmitate corporis inpeditur*), may taste the savor of Christ (*sapor Christi*) and how they are healed of the swelling of the old pride (*prioris superbiae tumor sanetur*), having gotten rid of the excess baggage of their old lives, which had poisoned their minds, and may instead procure the little (*modica*) that is naturally necessary for their present life with the work of a humble laborer (*opificis humilitas*).[71] The poor, in turn, should learn to use physical labor not in pursuit of their own private interest but for that which belongs to Christ; that is, they should hand themselves over to charity (*caritas*) and lead a common life (*communis vita*) with those (*in societate eorum*) who have one soul and one heart in God, so that no one calls anything his or her private property, but "all have everything in common" (Acts 4:32).

The references to *caritas* and the being of one soul and one heart in God indicate that Augustine is here thinking of his concept of the City of God, nearly two decades before he wrote the work of that title.[72] He does not believe that this state of being can ever be fully realized in this life. However, if any way of life can come close

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[70] This passage suggests that those who "converted [to the monastic life] from the state of poverty" may not all have been poor in the economic sense. If they were healthy and skilled, they may well have earned a good living from manual labor and even become prosperous. But their reliance on manual labor kept them socially at a low level. For more details on Roman society in the time of Augustine see Mathisen, "Society, Social Thought," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine Through the Ages*, 804.

[71] With the expression *sapor Christi* ("savor of Christ") Augustine invokes the concept of the "spiritual senses." It is significant that he does so when addressing the "better off," those better educated and used to a more refined and sophisticated lifestyle. They need to learn to "savor" Christ's values (humility and deprivation of food and other sensual pleasures) instead of physical pleasures. The message would have been less appropriate for those joining the monastic life from poorer backgrounds, who were better used to sensual deprivation but also less sophisticated in the use of their senses; for Augustine's teaching on the spiritual senses, see Carol Harrison, "Senses, spiritual," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine Through the Ages*, 767–68.

[72] See for this above n. 48, with references to *City of God*, 15.3 and 15.14.

to it, it is the monastic life. The reference to the mythical communism of the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem in Acts underlines this. Augustine never would have advocated the abolition of private property in wider society, but he thought he could realistically propose it for those who voluntarily retreated from that world to "live in fellowship with the angels."[73] Similarly, the equal treatment of *honestiores* and *humiliores*, those who were rich (*divites*) and of higher social status who did not have to work manually but engaged in *otium*, and those who were poor (*pauperes*) and reliant on the *negotium* of having to earn their living as *opifices*, through manual labor, could happen only —if at all — in the monastic life. Yet the fact that Augustine had to invoke ancient (pagan!) Roman ethics in order to counter the argument that those from higher social backgrounds should not work manually, or even that those who had become "holy monks" or *servi Dei* had thereby been elevated to such higher social status and were therefore exempt from manual labor, shows how limited the possibilities were in Augustine's lifetime to implement his theories, even in relatively contained and church-controlled contexts. At the same time, it also illustrates how original and radical Augustine's teaching on the common good potentially — and actually — was.

Conclusion: Towards an Augustinian Civic Ethics for the Twenty-First Century

These last points relativize the view that in his ethical teaching, Augustine was merely a "spokesperson for the social and political establishment."[74] It is true that he was not a social and political reformer. He had a conservative view of the established

[73] Cf. above n. 50 and in *The Work of Monks*, 25.32 the expression *societas eorum quibus est anima una et cor unum in deo*. See also Goulven Madec, "Le communisme spirituel," in *Homo Spiritalis. Festgabe für Luc Verheijen OSA*, edited by Cornelius Mayer and Karl Heinz Chelius (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1987), 225–39.
[74] See above n. 5.

order and accepted worldly authority in principle as established by God. However, he also knew that the present state of affairs was the result of a long transition from a civic order that offered greater individual liberties and was established to serve the common good, to a more autocratic order under the empire, which took over when the old order failed to meet its purpose. With reference to this failure, he questioned the idealized view of a more libertarian and common-minded Roman past, but he also subscribed to this view himself, drawing analogies between the high standards of social ethics held by ancient Romans and the values of Christians who were drawn to a life of perfection.[75]

To understand Augustine, one also has to consider that his thought is grounded in a metaphysics in which the common good is essentially a spiritual and intellectual reality. The earthly life falls short of this reality because of the Fall, the attempt (on the part of the first angel and the first man) to render the common good (a gift from God shared by all) into a private property withheld from others. The result of that primeval evil act was corruption, leading (in the social sphere) to poverty, inequality, injustice, strife between the different strata of society, and social and political decline generally. Augustine sees this at work in the "secular" world around him. Despite his social conservatism, he has no faith in earthly institutions. He considers them corrupt and ultimately bound to fail.

This is why his call to a more equal society, even to a form of spiritually grounded "communism,"[76] has to be taken seriously. It is not just a form of pious rhetoric but a call to action with a political dimension. Although his idea of the monastic life that would breach class boundaries, provide social security, and come close to realizing the ideal of the common good on earth would be implemented only in

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[75] See for this also Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, who draws lines between Cicero and Augustine.
[76] See above n. 73.

limited contexts, and even then not without occasional resistance, it inspired future generations.[77] At a more fundamental level, its guiding concepts may still prove useful for civic ethics in the global twenty-first century as well.[78]

For more than a century now, the question of the extent to which this last sentence can hold true has been discussed against the background of two different perspectives in reading Augustine, one represented by Adolph von Harnack, the other by Ernst Troeltsch. While Harnack tended to see in Augustine an early medieval thinker, a mystic, and a theocentrist, Troeltsch tended to emphasize his late ancient identity and the fact that his thought was strongly influenced by ancient philosophical traditions and therefore tendentially more secular and humanist than it is often given credit for.[79] Some of the arguments that we have seen in this chapter certainly point toward Troeltsch's view. Engaging in theological analysis regarding the human condition for Augustine did not exclude social criticism and concrete demands for improvements in specific cases.

How reasonable would it be to have expected more from one individual? Augustine lived in a world in which slavery and human trafficking thrived and dynastic politics led to strings of civil wars, internal strife, oppression and religious persecution, immiseration of large swaths of the population, hunger, poverty, and starvation. There was no less reason to despair of human rationality in the sphere of politics and the economy in Augustine's time than there is today. Yes, "civic virtue," when displayed by

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[77] Following Ernst Troeltsch, *Augustin, die christliche Antike und das Mittelalter* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1915), this is not to say that Augustine's thought provided a blueprint for the Middle Ages. However, it did offer some principal thinking on which later thinkers, above all Thomas Aquinas, could also build.
[78] Or, as Gregory, *Politics*, 57, prefers to call it, "ethics of citizenship."
[79] Troeltsch's position is best developed in Troeltsch, *Augustin*; Harnack's can be traced in Adolph von Harnack, *Augustin: Reflexionen und Maximen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1922); see also the summaries by Bradley E. Starr, "Harnack, Adolph von" and "Troeltsch, Ernst," in Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, 414–16 and 851–52.

the super-rich, could be (and was in many cases) a sham, but the genuine article also existed and could (and ought to) be practiced, as Augustine points out. The fact that slavery and terrible abuse were justified by some on grounds of the *ius gentium* could be taken as a lesson that no earthly society could claim for itself moral superiority over any other. True justice was to be found only in the heavenly city, the City of God.[80]

And yet, for Augustine the heavenly city is not suspended in an inaccessible vacuum, and the path leading to it starts here and now. An Augustinian “ethics of citizenship” (Gregory) may be able to provide a roadmap towards achieving it by (a) anchoring reflection on human affairs in some foundational theological thinking; (b) viewing the human being as a communal animal rather than an isolated, particularist, and self-interested individual; (c) aiming at the common good as the good that is in the most appropriate sense “human”; (d) discovering asceticism as a socioeconomic technique most appropriate for dealing with the limited material resources on earth and thereby maximizing the common good; and (e) converting material into spiritual and intellectual expectations or desires and discovering that the common good, in the true sense, can be only an immaterial good.[81]

All of these points have attracted fundamental criticism in modern discourse. Many find the proposal of a theological grounding of the theory of the common good unacceptable, even more so since Augustine’s theological anthropology depicts humanity within a framework of divine love vs. human sin. Even worse, Augustine’s concept of divine love has in this context sometimes been dismissed as outright monstrous, a “logic of terror,” since it seems to leave no room for meaningful human action and literally disposes of human beings by divine whim, by saving some and

[80] Compare Gregory, *Politics*, 32.
[81] For further discussion of these points see Gregory, *Politics*, 36.

eternally damning others.[82] These aspects of Augustine's thought are undeniable and resist attempts at making them compatible with his thought as a whole—for example, by qualifying love as "risky," "tough," "radical," or "transcending." Still, being fixated on flaws to the detriment of the rest of his thought is counterproductive and neglects Augustine's Troeltschian, late-ancient, unsentimental, realistic, and rationalist side. Whenever Augustine uses the Latin equivalents of the English word "love" (*caritas, amor, dilectio*, etc.), he thinks in terms of ontology and psychology, the construction of the human being as communal, with emotions and directed intentions (*affectiones et intentiones*). For Augustine, each human being is designed to live for something concrete, to fulfill her very own destiny.

Framing this anthropology (under the influence of Plato) in a metaphysical context—that is, placing human love (of one's fellow human being/s) within a framework of God's love for humanity—need not mean disenfranchising or diminishing humanity or exposing humanity to God's whims. Rather, it could also be understood as a safeguard against the danger of idolizing humanity, a "safety feature" of Augustinian humanism that ensures that by being loved for God's sake, the loved one is loved for her own sake rather than for the pursuit of self on the part of the one who loves.[83]

By remaining philosophical and theological in its development of both spiritual and sociopolitical ideas, Augustinian humanism remains grounded in reality, as the theory of labor in *The Work of Monks* and also the thoughts on marriage amply illustrate. *Askesis* (*disciplina*), the way of life of monks and nuns, is a sociocultural practice that enables human beings to keep on pursuing the common good both in

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[82] For an extensive discussion of this problem (including the term "logic of terror," coined by the German philosopher Kurt Flasch) see Josef Lössl, "Augustine, 'Pelagianism,' Julian of Aeclanum and Modern Scholarship," *Journal of Ancient Christianity* 11 (2007): 129–50.
[83] Compare Gregory, *Politics*, 43–44.

affluent conditions and in situations where resources are scarce. The sharing of resources in families, too, is conducive to the common good. Practicing such ways of life does not amount to tokenism in a seemingly hopelessly corrupt world.[84] The (earthly) goods which such ways undoubtedly produce are real goods, not "fake" goods. If such life forms radiate into a wider society, real improvements can and will happen on a larger scale too.

Of course, no everlasting success will ever be achieved on an earthly level. What is happening in the earthly city is limited in time and space. Lasting goodness can be enjoyed only in the *civitas dei*. Still, a recognition that earthly goods are underpinned by higher goods—for instance, that working for the common good may result not only in more and better food and clothing but also in the accumulation of what today is often called social capital (including friendship and love)—creates the living conditions of the city of God already on earth, admittedly to a limited degree, but no less real for that.

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[84] Compare Gregory, *Politics*, 49–54 at 52: Not all societies are equally (hopelessly) corrupt.

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