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Augustine's Contribution to the Republican Tradition

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ABSTRACT: The present argument focuses on part of Augustine's defense of Christianity in *The City of God*. There Augustine argues that the Christian religion did not cause the sack of Rome by the Goths in 410 CE. Augustine revised the definitions of a 'people' and 'republic' found in Cicero's *De Republica* in light of the impossibility of true justice in a world corrupted by sin. If one returns these definitions to their original context, and accounts for Cicero's own political teachings, one finds that Augustine follows Cicero's republicanism on several key points. First, civil rule differs from mastery over slaves. Second, political life is indeterminate, so a republic could be any regime suitable for governing free human beings. Third, the prudent man may not abstain from public service. For Augustine the duty to public service is connected to his tragic portrayal of life and suffering in society after 'the fall'. Augustine's contribution to the republican tradition is not to be found in the concept of a natural order, but in an explanation of why that order fails.

KEY WORDS: *Augustine, Cicero, justice, nature, republic, sin, skepticism*

Operating on the assumption that Christianity is more compatible with monarchy than republicanism, historians and political theorists often move from Aristotle or Cicero to a discussion of Machiavelli in their narratives of the development of republicanism.¹ The tendency to contrast monarchy with republicanism is misleading because in the classical context the two concepts were understood not to be mutually exclusive. In Cicero's *De Republica* the term *re publica* is used as a general term that refers to three pure 'forms' of governments (monarchy, aristocracy and democracy) as well as to the mixed regime of the classical Roman republic.² Thus a republic could be a monarchy, an aristocracy, a democracy or some combination of the three. The mixed constitution of republican Rome is central to Cicero's dialogue, while the only republic St Augustine would have known was the later Roman Empire.³

In a recent work Antony Black has argued that the Christian ethos is as consistent with republicanism as it is with monarchy.⁴ Black disposed of the opposition

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between Christianity and republicanism in European political thought in his brief but carefully constructed argument. Strangely the ancient writer who defended Christianity most famously against the charge that it undermined the Roman republic, St Augustine of Hippo, is passed over without mention, as are his famous revisions of Cicero's definitions of 'people' and 'republic'.⁵ Black instead posits a standard contemporary definition of 'republic' and shows how various Christian writings and practices accord with it. Another weakness in Black's approach is his implicit acceptance of the theoretical opposition between republican government and hereditary monarchy.

Cary Nederman suggests a corrective to Black's approach, demonstrating that there is a history of Christian republicanism that assumes a natural hierarchy and is not hostile to monarchy or any other form of constitution.⁶ However Nederman begins his account of Christian republicanism with a passage from Gregory the Great. So despite their points of disagreement, one might say that both authors argue that republicanism develops within Christianity in Europe during the Middle Ages, and that both fail to mention Augustine in their accounts of Christian republicanism.

The decision to avoid Augustine's works in a short essay on republican thought is understandable. Augustine was a bishop and theologian and none of his works is exclusively devoted to civil government. One standard interpretation of his political teaching holds that Augustine believed that the only function of political rule is to remedy sin, and that human beings are not naturally political animals.⁷ In Augustine's late antique world there could be no question of politics leading human beings to happiness, since happiness was not to be found in this life.⁸

This interpretation of Augustine's view of the status of politics has been challenged in a number of recent studies. Peter Burnell has argued that Augustine did consider political rule to be rooted in nature.⁸ John von Heyking also has defended the idea that Augustine's works entail a 'right-by-nature' understanding of politics.¹⁰ Paul Weithman has shown that Augustine considered politics to have a natural directive function distinct from that of domestic society.¹¹ Besides these works by political theorists, some philosophers and theologians working on Augustine have come to reject what has come to be referred to as the 'realist' interpretation of Augustine's attitude towards politics,¹² which holds that Augustine presents a portrait of human nature that is so irredeemably corrupted by sin that the earthly city always requires power and subordination.¹³ These studies come at a time when political events seem to have contributed to a more general interest in Augustine than in recent decades.¹⁴

Here I construe Augustine's attitude toward the Roman republic and civil government in general through statements in various books of *The City of God*. I consider the extent to which Augustine's teaching on political life incorporates some views espoused by Cicero in his many works, but especially in *De Republica*. I follow scholars who argue that Cicero's works suggest that he viewed political life as permanently problematic. Cicero's political prudence recognized that there are

less than reasonable tendencies in political life, and led him to shift his focus from the issue of the best regime to that of the model statesman.¹⁵ Augustine's view of the indeterminacy of political life in book 19 of *The City of God* radicalizes Cicero's concern about the problematic nature of politics while maintaining Cicero's distinction between civil government and slavery, statesmanship and domination. Though Augustine shows little concern about the nature of a model statesman, he makes it clear that he believed that the prudent man was driven by natural necessity to engage in public service, even though it would cause him to suffer.

Augustine's adaptation of Cicero's definitions of a 'people' and 'republic' help clarify Augustine's transformation of Cicero's teachings. To show this I attend to Cicero's revaluation of rhetoric as an integral part of the active life of the statesman and his explicit endorsement of the moderate skepticism of the New Academy of Carneades.¹⁶ Cicero's definitions treat the term 'republic' as a general concept that can apply to any constitution. This activity of defining becomes central to Augustine's argument against the infamous position that there are natural slaves. In the end Augustine follows Cicero in opposing republican government to conquest and mastery over slaves, and not opposing republican government to monarchy. This can be seen in the metaphor of an order of rule and subjection within human nature that corresponds to the order of human society and that is employed by both authors.

We know the intentions of Augustine's arguments from his own brief comments on the *City of God* in his work *Retractations*.¹⁷ Augustine intended to comfort Christians who had suffered through the sack of Rome and to persuade the pagans who argued that Christianity caused the sack. The present discussion ranges from the first five books of the *City of God*, which are a response to the pagan view that the fall of Rome was due to the failure to worship the Roman gods, to the final section on the respective ends of the earthly and heavenly cities. This is appropriate to an interpretation of Augustine's discussion of Cicero's definitions, which arise in book 2, where Augustine promises to return to them at a later point. That return is found in book 19.

1

One obstacle to a clear understanding of Augustine's revision of Cicero's definitions of a 'people' and a 'republic' is the complexity of Cicero's own position in *De Republica*.¹⁸ That complexity is magnified by the fact that the dialogue comes down to us in fragments. Cicero's preface to book 1 set out an argument against the Epicurean notion that the wise man pursues a private life of ease. He argues that nature gives human beings a need for virtue and the protection of the common safety that overcomes their desire for the enjoyment of pleasure.¹⁹ Walter Nicgorski and J. Jackson Barlow both offer evidence that this work entails a shift in ancient political science away from a focus on the 'best regime' toward a focus on the 'ideal statesman'.²⁰ The implications of such a shift have to be made clear

before proceeding, and one implication has to do with a modification of the Aristotelian approach to slavery.

Cicero's main interlocutor, Scipio, gives his famous definitions in book 1 of the dialogue. Scipio says that a republic (*res publica*) is the people's property (*re populi*). He then defines a 'people' (*populus*):

But a people is not any collection of human beings brought together in any sort of way, but an assemblage of people in large numbers associated in an agreement with respect to justice and a partnership for the common good.²¹

The definitions are based on the idea that justice has a basis in nature, and that no republic can be governed without justice. Scipio attributes this idea to Plato and Aristotle.

In his subsequent discussion of the best regime, Scipio argues that Rome's republic is the best regime. Using Aristotle's typology of regimes based on the rule of one, the few, and the many, he is pressed into naming monarchy as the best regime in theory. However, Scipio concludes that a moderate mixture of monarchy, aristocracy, and popular rule would be best in practice. This is his understanding of the Roman constitution.²² He then recounts innovations in Roman politics over a number of centuries in order to show that a constitution modified by many statesmen over generations is superior to the constitution of a single lawgiver. Scipio is praised by Laelius for having invented a new style of political dialogue. Unlike the Greek philosophers, Scipio argues that the best regime is one founded over a long period of time by many wise statesmen.²³

Rome's laws and the men who governed Rome were not always just and virtuous, since innovations in the laws were needed to avert tyranny and quell disorders. Another interlocutor, Lucius Furius Philus, makes this point. He urges Scipio to reconsider the question since another common view is that no state (*civitas*) can be ruled without injustice.²⁴ Philus is chosen to present an argument in favor of the view that bases the state on injustice. He agrees with the understanding that the arguments he will present are not his but those of Carneades, a skeptic and the leader of the New Academy, who once visited Rome on an embassy from Athens (155 BCE). Carneades made two public speeches on consecutive days, first defending the idea of natural justice and then refuting it. According to Plutarch, Carneades became very popular with the young men of Rome. Cato was offended by Carneades' attack on conventional Roman virtue and had him and the other philosophers expelled from the city.²⁵

The order of the speeches is reversed in Cicero's work. First Philus makes the case against natural justice, and against the idea that the state cannot be ruled without justice. Justice is not natural because peoples have different and conflicting laws, and because states change their laws over time. Further, justice is foolish and conflicts with prudence. Prudence teaches one to pursue his or her own interest, whereas justice teaches one to pursue the interests of others. Utility teaches statesmen to expand their state and its resources regardless of justice.²⁶

These arguments are supported with observations about Roman practices (Rome built shrines for the men who expanded the state by conquest). Justice is at best conventional and seems contrary to the interests of the republic.²⁷ Philus asserts that all who exercise the power over life and death are tyrants, though they prefer to be called kings.²⁸

Laelius responds to these points in the famous 'vera lex' passage.²⁹ There is a true law that embodies natural justice that is the same everywhere and is comprehensible through right reason. The fragments of Laelius' speech are convoluted but he appears to develop the passage on natural justice into a 'just war' defense of Roman conquests. Then there is a paraphrase of Aristotle's views on slavery.³⁰

Do we not observe that dominion has been granted by nature to everything that is best, to the great advantage of the weak? For why else does god rule over the man, the mind over the body, and reason over the lust and anger and the other evil (*vitiosis*) elements of the mind . . . But we must distinguish different kinds of subjection. For the mind rules over the body, and also over the lust; but it rules over the body as a king governs his subjects, or a father his children, whereas it rules over the lust as a master rules his slave, restraining it and breaking its power. So kings, commanders, magistrates, senators, and popular assemblies govern citizens as the mind governs the body; but the master's restraint of his slaves is like the restraint exercised by the best part of the mind (*animus*), the reason, over its own evil and weak elements, such as lustful desires, anger, and the other disquieting emotions.³¹

There are two key points to be drawn from this passage. One is that Laelius describes two types of natural rule and subjection. One type is characterized by reasoned command and obedience, while the other is characterized by coercion. Notice that rule in a republic and paternal rule are placed into one category and that slavery is placed into the other. Also notice that Laelius follows Scipio's earlier discussion by listing the ruling offices for each of the three pure forms of constitutions in his analysis of the order of nature. In this sense the concept of a divinely ordained natural order and hierarchy that Cary Nederman ascribes to the Christian republicanism of the medieval period is present in classical thought.

The second point is that Laelius' account of the order of nature is different from Aristotle's. Aristotle had characterized the rule of the mind over the body as that of a master over a slave, and the rule of the intellect over the appetites as political and monarchical. Scholars have taken two distinct approaches to this issue. The first approach is to deny that this matters and assert that Laelius is simply giving another version of the defense of slavery as natural.³² The other approach understands Cicero to be substituting a justification for slavery based on character defect for Aristotle's justification based on nature.³³ This second approach seems more probable given the discussion of Rome's history by Scipio following Laelius' speech.

Scipio returns to the discussion and draws the speakers' attention back to his definitions and the issue of natural justice. He reminds Laelius that all existing republics, including Rome, had engaged in unjust wars or at times had fallen under

control of unjust factions. Scipio adopts the view that the true republic exists only in theory. In practice the term may be used to refer to imperfect regimes.³⁴ A republic then is the people's estate, but no people remains permanently united in the pursuit of justice. No state can exist without justice, but the conduct of public affairs leads to injustice.³⁵

Cicero's discourse should be seen to have important consequences for the way we understand Roman attitudes toward slavery. To begin with, Aristotle's idea of a type of slavery that does not arise from coercion is excluded. Slavery is by definition coercion, and has its origins in conquest. But if slavery has its origins in conquest, and if only some conquests are just, then many slaves suffer a penalty that they do not deserve. The practical implications of this perspective for relations between masters and slaves are spelled out in some detail by Cicero in the *De Officiis*.³⁶ There in his account of justice Cicero discusses duties arising from the virtue of justice connected to war. He expressly argues that masters have obligations of justice to their slaves, a view that directly contradicts Aristotle's account of mastery. This interpretation points to the doctrine of slavery as it developed in classical Roman law, where slavery is held to be justified but contrary to nature. The point is that slavery, like tyrannical rule, has its origins in coercion while republican rule per se arises from natural necessity.

These passages reveal the way in which Cicero's commitment to the philosophical skepticism of the New Academy may reinforce the great value that Cicero placed on statesmanship and rhetoric.³⁷ Cicero's use of the skeptical method arises from his conviction that Carneades saved Socratic philosophy from the tendency of the Stoics dogmatically to assert explanations that seemed disconnected from the natural necessities of human life.³⁸ As John von Heyking has noted, Augustine adopted key aspects of Cicero's defense of rhetoric in his treatise *On Christian Doctrine*. Like Cicero, Augustine believed that rhetoric was a noble art that could serve to instruct, delight, or move one's listeners.³⁹

2

Paying close attention to Augustine's rhetoric, one quickly realizes that this skeptical dimension of Cicero is pervasive in those passages of *The City of God* that involve Augustine's assessment of the status of political rule and the Roman republic. Augustine recounts a famous anecdote about Alexander the Great and a pirate in book 4 of the *City of God*. It is fair to assume that the immediate source of the anecdote was the speech given by the character Philus in Cicero's *De Republica*, and that the story may have originated with Carneades himself.⁴⁰ Alexander's soldiers captured a pirate. Alexander asked the pirate what he meant by keeping hostile possession of the seas. The pirate replied:

What do you mean by seizing the whole earth, but because I do it in a small ship, I am called a robber, while you who do it with a great fleet are styled 'emperor'.⁴¹

Does Augustine consider all political ruling to be tyrannical? Is political rule in the same class of human relations as is mastery over slaves, or the rule of pirates over their captives?

Book 4 had begun with a summary of Augustine's arguments concerning the history of the Roman constitution in response to the claim that the pagan religion of Rome had been the cause of Roman greatness. Pleasing the gods ensured happiness in life and Christianity undermined civic virtue and led to decline. Augustine uses the testimony of Roman authors against those who would condemn the Christian religion (he uses material from Sallust and Cicero against Varro).⁴² It turns out that the 'good old days' of the republic were not really that good. When Rome was not embroiled in wars with other peoples, it was embroiled in civil wars at home. The republic often punished some of its most virtuous citizens.⁴³ Sallust had shown that the Romans were 'virtuous and moderate' only when they were compelled by a fear of Carthage.⁴⁴ 'But after the destruction of Carthage there came the highest pitch of discord, greed, ambition, and all the evils which generally spring up in times of prosperity.'⁴⁵

Augustine's rhetoric may be seen as a reformulation Cicero's discussion of the problematic nature of Roman conquests and of politics in general from book 3 of *De Republica*. To use von Heyking's language, the Roman ordinate love of glory was only constrained from becoming the degrading lust to dominate by the fear of Carthage.

In the same passage Augustine asks, 'Justice being taken away, what are kingdoms but great robberies? For what are robberies themselves, but little kingdoms?' In doing so he draws us back into the classical debate over the relationship between justice and political rule. Notice that this question reorients Augustine's rhetoric. Here he assumes the view that no republic deserving of the name is entirely without justice, and this is an orientation that he never abandons. As Burrell argues, Augustine's decision to omit justice from his definition of a people and a republic in no way precludes him from understanding justice to be necessary to the existence of a republic.⁴⁶ On the other hand, Augustine asks whether Roman wars of conquest were morally distinct from the actions of pirates and brigands. Augustine's rhetoric raises doubts about the meaning of 'republic', but also maintains a distinction between the love of glory during Rome's republican history and the lust to dominate other peoples that arose later. One disposition is consistent with civil ruling, the other with tyranny.

So, was the Roman republic a great robber band? Did Augustine associate Rome with his understanding of the corrupt 'earthly city'?⁴⁷ When speaking specifically of the wars that led to Rome's expansion he is willing to accept that some of these were justified.⁴⁸ This merely shows that Rome benefited from the wickedness of others, and that Rome's love of glory was the source of its own corruption:

Let them ask, then, whether it is fitting for good men to rejoice in extended empire. For the iniquity of those with whom just wars are carried on favors the growth of a kingdom, which would certainly have been small if the peace and justice of neighbors had not by any

wrong provoked the carrying on of war against them; and human affairs being thus happy, all kingdoms would have been small, rejoicing in neighborly concord . . .⁴⁹

If not for the wickedness of its neighbours, Rome would not have been able to preserve its austere virtue as exemplified by four great Romans whom Augustine upholds as model citizens: Regulus, Scaevola, Scipio and Fabricius.⁵⁰

3

It should be clear that it is necessary to understand Augustine's discussion of the anecdote of Alexander and the pirate in the context of his analysis of Cicero's definitions. Augustine takes up Cicero's definitions to demonstrate that Cicero and other great Romans had identified the corruption and decline of the Roman republic in times long before the birth of Jesus.⁵¹ Augustine promises to revisit the issue of defining a republic later, and to show that even at the pinnacle of Roman virtue, Rome did not conform to the definition. Without Christ there can be no true justice, without justice there can be no 'people', and no 'republic'. Augustine takes up the problem where Scipio leaves it, and proceeds to give a Christian explanation of the factors that prevent any temporal republic from conforming to true justice. The groundwork for his explanation is found in his discussion of creation, original sin and the order of nature,⁵² and in his defense of natural liberty.⁵³

In his discussion of the origins of the two cities Augustine gives his famous treatment of the philosophical problem of evil, and in doing so addresses the theme of the order of rule and subjection in human nature. There he argues that human goodness, and especially the good will of the first man, was dependent upon God's grace. When the human will defected from God it ceased to be good. At that point the order of human nature was lost, and the subject elements of human nature ceased to obey the ruling elements. The earthly city has its origin in sin.

On this account human beings are born into strife, since our flesh lusts against our spirit.⁵⁴ Later Augustine takes up the issue of the relationships among the parts of the soul, particularly the reasoning part and the appetitive parts. There he grants the philosophical views stated by Laelius that in this life the 'law of wisdom' must restrain the anger and the lusts, but denies that this is due to human nature. This disobedience is just punishment for the first man's disobedience. Before sin human appetites would have been ordered and would not have caused suffering.⁵⁵

The notion of the order of nature created by God reappears in book 19 as Augustine begins his discussion of the ends of the two cities. That book opens with a discussion of Marcus Varro's account of the various views of happiness held by the philosophical schools, and Varro's defense of the view of the Old Academy founded by Plato. On this view the *summum bonum* is a combination of the virtues of the soul and primary natural goods of the body, both of which were understood to be desired as good in themselves.⁵⁶ Augustine then turns back to the biblical

account of human origins, and points out that Christians reject the philosophical identification of the *summum bonum* with any kind of temporal good. He eventually works his discourse back to the philosophical school endorsed by Cicero, the New Academy.

Augustine gives an account of the cardinal virtues in light of his doctrine of the Fall. The order in which he takes up the virtues follows from his understanding of fallen human nature. Virtue is not natural, but rather something brought in by instruction to fight the perpetual war with vice. Temperance is necessary to free the mind from the lust of the flesh that would lead to crimes of every sort. Prudence is the vigilant discrimination between good and evil. The function of Justice is to assign to each his due. Human beings were made according to the image and likeness of God and were placed in what Augustine calls the 'right order of nature' (*justus ordo naturae*). The body was subject to the soul, and the soul was subject to God, and so the body and the soul were obedient to God. When human beings chose to ignore God's command and act according to their own wills, this order and the integrity of human nature were lost. The result is the privation of the right order of nature, original sin. This makes justice obscure to human reason and an impossible standard for temporal society. Fortitude involves suffering this disorder with patience.⁵⁷

According to Augustine the Christian understands and accepts the tragic uncertainty of the present life, and is better able to bear suffering with fortitude than pagan priests and philosophers. This suffering is discussed in chapters 5–10 of book 19. Augustine argues that all human beings suffer in this life, not because they are evil, but simply because of the ignorance and uncertainty to which one is subject in human society. Augustine speaks of three circles of human society: the household and family, the city, and the world. Even in the smallest circle based on natural affection, one is not safe from pain and misunderstanding. One will experience the death of loved ones, or even the betrayal of a malevolent child.⁵⁸

To drive home the political implications of this uncertainty Augustine describes the vocation of a judge. In Roman society the judge was required by law to torture witnesses in order to obtain evidence. Worse still, the judge had to condemn men to death knowing that some were bound to have been innocent. Unlike the Stoic philosophers who had argued that the just judge could remain happy by becoming detached from this suffering, the Christian must acknowledge that even the virtuous judge cannot be immune to the pain caused by one's ignorance of the complete truth. Worse still, it would be wrong for the judge to withdraw from public life, since a duty is owed to society.⁵⁹ It is not surprising that a study of Augustine's political activity reveals him frequently interceding for clemency on behalf of criminals, even those condemned to death.⁶⁰

In our present condition we frequently mistake friend for enemy, and enemy for friend: And if we escape this pitiable blindness, is not unfeigned confidence and mutual love of true and good friends, our true solace in human society, filled as it is with misunderstandings and calamities?⁶¹ If such uncertainty exists among people who are part

of the same civil society, and even the same household, what of the uncertainty experienced by strangers? For if two men, each ignorant of the other's language, meet, and are not compelled to pass, but, on the contrary, to remain in company, dumb animals, though of different species, would more easily hold intercourse than they, human beings though they be. For their common nature is no help to friendliness when they are perverted by diversity of language from conveying their sentiments to one another, so that a man would more readily hold conversation with his own dog than with a foreigner.⁶²

Note Augustine's insight into the classical claim that human beings are naturally political animals. Aristotle argued that the key attribute of human nature that makes humans political animals is the ability to speak about the just, the good, and the noble.⁶³ Augustine explains that the inability of people to communicate about these things is the central cause of war. The point is not to show that human beings are not social and political animals, but to show that the corruption of original sin has made true society impossible.

War is part of the human condition. Yet the act of war aims at the kind of good people can attain in this earthly space, peace. It is the order of temporal peace that can and must guide a judge and the statesman. Yet no virtuous judge or ruler can preclude the suffering of innocent people.⁶⁴

One may now summarize Augustine's view of the Roman Republic. Augustine agreed with Cicero that Rome's love of glory was superior to the lust to dominate in the empire. The early republic, because it had been motivated by the fear of Carthage, loved an 'austere virtue'. Imperial expansion, at first motivated by fear of other cities, eventually instilled into Romans the lust for domination. Augustine illuminates the political importance of the seemingly apolitical morality of the Gospels. Christianity teaches one to love God and to love one's neighbours as oneself. Augustine interpreted this to mean that one must harm no one and that one must do what one can to help others. The commandment to love one's neighbour, then, is not entirely distinct from the order of justice, since it is itself a command to do justice, but it also imposes duties that transcend those of justice. Far from encouraging us to seclude ourselves into an Epicurean circle of friends, Augustine places anyone exercising authority in the position of the just judge. It may seem rather simple to avoid doing harm, but one surely will suffer if he acts on the duty to help others, and the Christian may not put aside that duty.⁶⁵

All human actions, good or evil, aim at some kind of peace. The highest good for human nature is eternal peace, but human beings also seek temporal peace.⁶⁶ Augustine gives an extended analysis of universal peace as concentric circles of human society, each of which has its own order (i.e. 'the arrangement of equals and unequals which gives each its proper place'):

The peace of the body consists in the duly proportioned arrangement of its parts. The peace of the irrational soul is the harmonious repose of its appetites, and the rational soul the harmony of knowledge and action. The peace of body and soul is the well-ordered and harmonious life of the living creature. Peace between man and God is the well-ordered obedience of faith to eternal law. Peace between man and man is well-ordered concord. Domestic peace is the well-ordered concord between those in the family who rule and

those who obey. Civil peace is a similar concord among the citizens. The peace of the celestial city is the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God, and one another in God. The peace of all things is the tranquility of order. Order is the distribution which allots all things equal and unequal, each its own place.⁶⁷

In this description of the order of peace Augustine does not mention directly an order of rule and subjection between a master and a slave. That may be because one part of the Greek and Roman practice of slavery was to include the slave as a member of the complete household, and therefore part of domestic peace. Be that as it may, the subsequent chapters of the book clarify the issue. There is a civil rule that is not, like slavery, coercive.

Human beings are rational and pursue peace through an ordered agreement of knowledge and action. In our sinful state we require divine instruction, which teaches us to love God and to love our neighbour.⁶⁸ These commandments require that a person harm no one, and that he help everyone if possible. This second requirement is most true in the order of domestic society. Domestic peace requires that husbands must rule their wives, parents their children, and masters their servants; and that the response to this guidance is due obedience. Yet this in itself is not enough, since the just person must rule out of a dutiful concern for others.⁶⁹ The proper motivation of any ruler toward his subjects is determined by the subjects' nature. In the order of nature, man was made in a state of natural liberty. Slavery came into being because of sin and was not part of God's created order. Commenting on Genesis 1: 26, Augustine defends the idea that people were created in a state of natural liberty:

He did not intend that his rational creature, who was made in His image, should have dominion over anything but irrational creation – not man over man, but man over beasts.⁷⁰

Later Augustine reinforces this point, saying that God first created human nature so that no one would be a slave to sin or to man. However, slavery was ordained by the natural law that bids us to preserve the natural order by punishing those who sin. Slaves taken in the conduct of war actually suffer the penalty of sin. Notice that this view coincides with the understanding of slavery in classical Roman law.⁷¹

When Augustine returns to Cicero's definitions, he deconstructs them in the light of the Christian understanding of the disordered state of temporal life.⁷² Original sin makes true justice impossible. With no justice, then there can be no sense of right and a people cannot be united in their common understanding of right. Rome never could have been a people or a republic. Laelius' attempt to defend Roman conquests in terms of the right order of nature falls into the error of defining natural justice as the advantage of the stronger over the weaker.⁷³ Justice is properly defined as the virtue that assigns to each his due. It is unjust for some people to serve others as masters and an 'imperial city, embracing a mighty state, cannot command provinces without pursuing injustice'. Augustine agrees with Laelius that there is an order of nature but rejects its application in a justification of Roman conquest.⁷⁴ He points out that this description is introduced in

Cicero's dialogue 'as if' it were drawn from nature. It displays Laelius' confusion of the disorder caused by sin with the natural order.

When human beings serve God, the soul does indeed command the body and reason moderates the appetites. However, when a person does not serve God, there can be neither a right order of the individual nature nor an order of justice in society. Rome, even during the earliest days of the republic, failed to be truly just because it did not teach its citizens to love the one true God. Rome's civil religion, far from contributing to Rome's glory, actually sowed the seeds of Rome's corruption. As Cicero admits, no temporal republic could fit Scipio's definitions.⁷⁵

Augustine's treatment does not end with this deconstruction. He posits a definition of a people that is applicable to temporal republics. A republic is the people's property, and a people is 'a large gathering of rational beings united in fellowship by their agreement about the objects of their love'.⁷⁶ Peoples may be judged based on the objects loved. Augustine would consider the best temporal republic to be one in which the government and the laws reflect the people's love of God and neighbour. This is the morality of the heavenly city, but it entails precisely the perfect justice that is not possible for any temporal regime.⁷⁷

Augustine argues that Christianity, because it teaches public morals more effectively, is superior to Rome's pagan religion. Like the regime of the ancient Hebrews, which was provided with a simple but comprehensive system of laws in the language of the people,⁷⁸ Christianity encourages genuine virtue among the citizens of any republic.⁷⁹ Given this, it is quite impossible to conclude that Augustine considered political rule to be simply a coercive remedy for sin. In his discussion of universal peace he clearly sets political or civil rule apart from domestic rule, suggesting that civil authority has a natural directive function in society distinct from domestic life.⁸⁰ He even argues that the household should be organized to reflect the order of civil peace, since the end of the part is directed to the end of the whole.⁸¹

4

Contemporary theorists of civic republicanism locate the practical and theoretical origin of republicanism in ancient Rome.⁸² Based on this narrative St Augustine's appraisal of the Roman republic must be seen as an important chapter in the historical development of the republican tradition. We have argued that St Augustine's political teaching in *The City of God* may be seen to be consistent with Cicero's republican political thought on three key points. First, Augustine distinguished between the rule that was consistent with slavery and political rule or, in other words, between domination and liberty. Second, Augustine saw political rule as being necessarily problematic and indeterminate. Though Augustine believed that Christians could accept the doctrines of the faith with certainty, and that dogmatically doubting the evidence of the senses was madness, he acknowledged that one may entertain doubts about a range of issues that were not ascertained by

the senses, taught by the scriptures, or witnessed by the Apostles.⁸³ Clearly much of what we seek to know about and to act upon in the world of civil governance fits into these categories.

Finally, though the life of leisure in contemplation of the one true God may be the most contented life, it cannot be chosen by a prudent person. Society is necessary for the continuation of life, and the virtuous person accepts his duty to serve even as he recognizes the suffering service entails. The prudent ruler rules for the common good, and not out of the lust to dominate. As a result the virtuous ruler is always placed in the tragic situation of the just judge described by Augustine, potentially punishing or even killing the innocent.

This emphasis on the tragic nature of political action is itself a major contribution to the history of republicanism. Nederman is quite right to stress the importance of the idea of a natural order of rule and subjection in medieval republicanism, but a close study of Augustine's *City of God* reveals the way in which this organic metaphor is adapted from classical sources and transformed in Augustine's Christian account.⁸⁴ When we look for Augustine's contribution we find it not in the concept of a natural order, but in an explanation of why that order fails.

Notes

1. A recent example of this approach is the fine work of Iseult Honohan (2002) *Civic Republicanism*. London: Routledge. Also see John J. G. A. Pocock (1975) *The Machiavellian Moment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Hans Baron (1966) *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Some scholars interpret the rise of modern republicanism in terms of a more or less continual development of different strands of republican discourse throughout the middle ages and into the Renaissance. See for instance Quentin Skinner (1978) *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Skinner (1998) *Liberty Before Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Maurizio Viroli (2001) *Republicanism*. New York: Hill & Wang. Viroli (1995) *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. And the contributions in James Hankins (ed.) (2000) *Renaissance Civic Humanism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2. Walter Nicgorski (1991) 'Cicero's Focus: From the Best Regime to the Model Statesman', *Political Theory* 19: 230–51. Also see Maurizio Viroli (1990) 'Machiavelli and the Republican Idea of Politics', in Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli (eds) *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, pp. 143–71. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
3. Even the autocratic Roman Empire of Augustine's era was called a republic. Peter Brown notes that: 'Even in the barbarian states of the sixth and seventh centuries, the Roman Empire, as it survived in Constantinople, was still regarded as the greatest state in the world: and called by its ancient name, the *Res publica*.' Brown (1989) *The World of Late Antiquity*, pp. 18–19. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. On the complexity of the historical meaning of 'republicanism' see Cary Nederman (2000) 'Rhetoric, Reason, and Republic: Republicanisms—Ancient, Medieval, and Modern', in James Hankins (ed.) *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, pp. 247–69. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Cary Nederman (2005) 'Empire and the Historiography of European Political Thought: Marsiglio of Padua, Nicholas of Cusa, and the Medieval/Modern Divide', *Journal of*

- the History of Ideas* 66: 1–15. For further explanation of the way in which the opposition between republic and monarchy can be a false dichotomy in our understanding of the history of political thought see Janet Coleman (2000a) *A History of Political Thought: From Ancient Greece to Early Christianity*, pp. 229–91. Oxford: Blackwell. Coleman (2000b) *A History of Political Thought*: vol. 2, *From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, especially her comments on Machiavelli's notion of liberty and popular rule at pp. 266–71. Oxford: Blackwell.
4. Black (1997) 'Christianity and Republicanism: From St. Cyprian to Rousseau', *American Political Science Review* 91: 627–56.
 5. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 2. 21 and 19. 21 and 24. See (1950) *The City of God*, tr. Marcus Dods. New York: Random House. I have consulted the Latin text from the Loeb Classical Library, nos. 411–17.
 6. Nederman (1998) 'The Puzzling Case of Christianity and Republicanism', *American Political Science Review* 92: 913–18. On the importance of Cicero to this tradition of political thought see Nederman (n. 3) as well as (1988) 'Nature, Sin and the Origins of Society: The Ciceronian Tradition in Medieval Political Thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49: 3–26. Also see Black's response (1998) 'Christianity and Republicanism: A Response to Nederman', *American Political Science Review* 92: 919–21.
 7. Herbert Deane (1963) *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*. New York: Columbia University Press. R. A. Markus (1970 and 1988) *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Oliver O'Donovan (1987) 'Augustine's *City of God* XIX and Western Political Thought', *Dionysius* 11: 89–110. Coleman (2000a, in n. 3).
 8. John M. Rist (1994) *Augustine*, pp. 48–53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 9. P. Burnell (1992) 'The Status of Politics in St. Augustine's *City of God*', *History of Political Thought* 13: 13–29.
 10. John von Heyking (2001) *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.
 11. Paul Weithman (1992) 'Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin and the Function of Political Authority', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30: 353–72.
 12. See John Milbank (1993) *Theology and Social Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell. Donald X. Burt, OSA (1999) *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
 13. R. Neibuhr (1953) *Christian Realism and Political Problems*. New York: Scribner.
 14. Jean Bethke Elshtain (1995) *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press.
 15. Niegorski (n. 2). J. Jackson Barlow (1987) 'The Education of the Statesman in Cicero's *De Republic*', *Polity* 19: 353–74.
 16. Walter Niegorski (1984) 'Cicero's Paradoxes and his Idea of Utility', *Political Theory* 12: 557–78.
 17. Augustine, *Retractations* 2. 69.
 18. Cicero (1928) *De Re Publica, De Legibus*, tr. C. W. Keyes. London: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 213.
 19. *De Republica* 1. 1–2.
 20. See Niegorski (1991) and Jackson (1987).
 21. 1. 25. 39 'res publica res populi, populus autem non omnis hominum coetus quoquo modo congregatus, sed coetus multitudinis juris consensus et utilitatis communione sociatus'.
 22. 1. 29. 45.
 23. 2. 11. 22.

24. 2. 44. 70.
25. See Plutarch (1942) *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, tr. John Dryden. New York: Modern Library, 428. On Carneades in Rome see J. C. Laursen (1992) *The Politics of Skepticism in the Ancients, Montaigne, Hume and Kant*, pp. 23 ff. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
27. 3. 18. 28 compare to Plato's *Republic* 2. 361–2.
28. 3. 13. 23.
29. 3. 22. 33.
30. Aristotle, *Politics* 1. 1254a–b.
31. *De Republica* 3. 25 ff.
32. See P. A. Brunt (1993) 'Aristotle and Slavery', in Brunt, *Studies in Greek History*, p. 381. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Brunt asserts not only that Laelius' account is the same as Aristotle, but that it is Cicero's own view. Sabine and Smith (1929) refer to this account as 'stoic' but offer no explanation in (1929) Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, pp. 218–19. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press. Peter Garnsey (1996) concludes that, 'In general, Cicero appears to have little to contribute to slave theory', in *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*, p. 43 n. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
33. See J. C. Dumont (1987) *Servus: Rome et l'esclavage sous la république*. Rome: Ecole Française de Rome. Dumont (1983) 'Conquet et esclavage chez Cicero: De re publica en 36–37', *Ktema* 8: 113–28.
34. *De Republica* 3. 31, 43. This is the stoic idea of the city, explained by Malcolm Schofield (1999) *The Stoic Idea of the City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
35. For an argument that St Augustine's political ideas reflect this anti-utopian strain of Cicero's Neoplatonism see Patrick Powers (1994) 'St. Augustine's Transformation of Platonic Political Philosophy: Christian Will and Pagan Spiritedness in *De Libero Arbitrio*', *University of Dayton Review* 22: 89–116.
36. 1. 13.
37. Niegorski refers to this in terms of Cicero's 'loving quarrel' with Plato. See (n. 2), pp. 234–8.
38. Niegorski (n. 16), p. 571.
39. *De Doctrina Christiana* 4. 74; compare to Cicero, *De Oratore* 69. See von Heyking (n. 10), pp. 17–50. Ernest Fortin (1996) 'Augustine and the Problem of Christian Rhetoric', in *The Birth of Philosophic Christianity: Studies in Early Christian and Medieval Thought*. Ernest Fortin: *Collected Essays*, ed. J. Brian Benestad, vol. 1, pp. 79–94. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
40. *De Republica* 3. 14. 24.
41. *City of God* 4. 4.
42. See W. M. Green's (1963) introduction to the Loeb Classical Library edition of *The City of God*, vol. 2, pp. vii–xxxv. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
43. The list of virtuous Romans includes Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus (2. 7), Scipio Africanus the Greater (3. 21) and Cicero (3. 30).
44. *City of God* 2. 18
45. Ibid., quoting Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae* 9–10, fragment 1. 11
46. On the importance of this orientation for Augustine's defining rhetoric, see Burnell (n. 9), pp. 23–4.
47. The late Ernest Fortin (n. 39), pp. 20–39, provides an important exegesis of this passage. After tracing the origin of Augustine's statement to Philus' speech in Cicero's *De Republica* 2, Fortin notes that Philus' argument concludes that 'the perfectly just regime has never existed in practice and never will' (p. 26). In an explanatory note Fortin points out that, 'As a Christian, Augustine was bound to attribute this state of affairs to man's sinful condition rather than to nature itself' (p. 38, n. 14).

48. In book 5 Augustine goes on to argue that Rome's expansion was motivated by a 'glorious vice', the love of earthly glory. Notice that he judges the relative worth of earthly regimes based on the object of their love.
49. *City of God* 4. 15.
50. 2. 29.
51. 2. 2.
52. Books 11–14.
53. 19. 15–16.
54. 13. 13 and Galatians 5: 17.
55. 14. 19.
56. 19. 1–3.
57. 19. 4.
58. 19. 5.
59. 19. 6.
60. Robert Dodaro (2005) 'Between the Two Cities: Political Action in Augustine of Hippo' in John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes and Kim Paffenroth (eds) *Augustine and Politics*, pp. 99–115. New York: Lexington Books.
61. 19. 8.
62. 19. 7.
63. Aristotle, *Politics* 1. 1253a12.
64. Glenn Tinder's (2002) review of John von Heyking's study of St Augustine, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, was wryly titled 'Augustine Lightened Up', *Review of Politics* 64: 190 ff. One point of the present argument is to show that a republican reading of St Augustine in no way lessens the tragic nature of Augustine's understanding of the human condition. See Peter Burnell (1993) 'The Problem of Service to Unjust Regimes in Augustine's *City of God*', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54: 177–88.
65. *City of God* 19. 19.
66. 19. 11.
67. *City of God* 19. 13. See Burt (n. 12).
68. Matthew 22: 37.
69. *City of God* 19. 14.
70. 19. 15.
71. See *Justinian's Institutes* 1, 3.
72. *City of God* 19. 21.
73. Compare with Plato, *Republic* 338c.
74. *City of God* 19. 21, 'why, it is asked, does God rule man, the soul the body, and the reason the passions and the other vicious parts of the soul'.
75. Ibid.
76. 19. 24.
77. See Burnell (n. 64) and von Heyking (n. 10), ch. 7.
78. *City of God* 19. 23.
79. 19. 25.
80. Weithman (n. 11).
81. *City of God* 19. 16.
82. See Benedetto Fontana, Cary J. Nederman and Gary Remer (eds) (2004) *Talking Democracy: Historical Perspectives on Rhetoric and Democracy*, pp. 5–6. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press. Also see Pocock (n. 1), Viroli (2001 and 1995, in n. 1), Nederman (n. 3) and Philip Pettit (1997) *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
83. 19. 18.
84. See Nederman (n. 6).