

A Philosophical Look  
at Social Justice in  
Saint Augustine's  
City of God

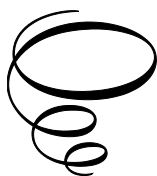


# A Philosophical Look at Social Justice in Saint Augustine's City of God

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To my Mother and her great legacy of faith  
(in memoriam)



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## PREFACE

As a result of the recent financial and health problems, there has been a renewed emphasis on the importance of “social justice.” As a matter of fact, the demand for social justice is still alive and well in modern discussions over the future of Western civilization.

This book argues for a philosophical examination of social justice in the light of St. Augustine’s City of God. According to Augustine, a philosopher-thinker, comprehending the complexity of human phenomena requires not only solely rational thinking, but also a thorough comprehension of human desires and life-style. This book also considers different perspectives from Machiavelli, Arendt, Polanyi, and Foucault, besides the Marxist and postmodern traditions, in order to highlight some interconnections and differences in an attempt to highlight the relevance of Augustine’s ethics, taking into account the evolution of political thinking in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Despite the fact that Saint Augustine did not expressly develop a vision of “social justice”, the purpose of this book is to investigate the philosophical underpinnings and meanings of this concept in contemporary political philosophy. With his writings, Augustine calls into question the nature of man as well as the ethical choices that allow social bonds to remain stable and cohesive. In the context of Augustine’s philosophy, charity and justice are the motivating forces behind the ethos when the concept of “social justice” is discussed. It is also feasible to assert that “social justice” is the social dimension of justice, and that it is founded on a love of Truth and a sense of urgency in the face of suffering and injustice. Therefore, while living justly, from the standpoint of the durability and cohesion of social ties, the moral, ethical, and political implications of the Augustinian perspective are decisive since only through social justice can a sustainable social existence be configured.

Because of the necessity to call into question the ethical choices that allow social bonds to remain stable and cohesive in our times, the philosophy of Saint Augustine is still relevant today. It is anticipated that the issues chosen might result in substantial progress in both the revival of the tie between the ethics of general purposes and political life, as well as the development of a philosophy of social justice. As social and economic policy problems become more complex, it is urgent to revise our conceptual

outlooks in political philosophy in a non-trivial way. This is especially true in a context where the evolution of globalization has contributed to unprecedented social, political, and environmental challenges.

It takes a certain amount of courage and imagination to challenge our preconceived conceptions and conceptualizations of social problems and reinterpret them in new multidisciplinary settings while dealing with issues of social justice. By bringing together Augustine's philosophical foundation with the influential economic concepts of contemporary political philosophers, it is possible to engage in a debate that may lead to the development of new frameworks and solutions for a variety of problems. This book is appropriate for such a conclusion, as it prepares the reader for participation in current and relevant real-world debates on social justice.

## INTRODUCTION

The study of human nature in society, his cognitive and emotional dimensions, his destiny and the circumstances for reaching happiness characterize the writings of St. Augustine, in which philosophy and theology are intertwined. Moreover, his contributions provoke further reflections on the philosophical foundations of “social justice”, as well as its ethical and political implications. Considering this background, this book deals with the conceptualization of “social justice” in *The City of God*, by Saint Augustine, understood as the earthly and social dimensions of justice.

The Bishop of Hippo was a defender of justice, and a lover of peace, paying attention to the cries of the poor, and an opponent of iniquity and arbitrariness. As an example of the depth of the social and political criticism present in *The City of God*, Augustine highlighted the moral suffering of human beings in order to combat the abuse of power in earthly life as an illustration. This full dimension of his philosophy and conduct is expressed in the words of his biographer Posidius, who reveals Augustine’s concern on the relief of the poor. The Saint was committed to transform men’s life styles and actively participated in the religious, social and political controversies of his day. Indeed, he was committed to denouncing the roots of social and political ills. In this historical reality, human happiness was axial in philosophical debates.

The author of *The City of God* had the audacity to think about a “new man”, against the prevailing style of life. According to him, all things in the universe exist because of God, through God and in God. His philosophy focuses on the relationship between God and man, considering that man’s ultimate goal is Wisdom, that is to say, the understanding of God who is “all in all things”. Thus, he presents a cosmological vision in which man’s goal is the knowledge of the God-Truth that is also God-Love. God is the higher metaphysical idea in the boundaries of the cognisable. The philosopher states that faith and reason are compatible and develops a philosophy at the service of love. On behalf of this, the analysis of the multiple dimensions of the concept of justice characterizes the thought of Augustine. He establishes new philosophical foundations to think about justice, freedom and peace of pilgrims in the historical becoming.

In *The City of God*, the Saint develops reflections on the social bonds of the Christian people in an historical period in which two relevant issues can be identified: on the one hand, the Roman Empire was weakened by the Germanic invasions and domestic conflicts; on the other hand, the evolution of Christianity was gradually imposing itself as a new style of life. At the time of the Roman Empire, Augustine's thought reveals a turning point since it proposes a new philosophical foundation for the meaning of human history. His critique of the classical Greco-Roman tradition posits the need to ground human justice in a higher form of justice. Thus, in reflecting on the just society, the philosopher studies the relation between society and justice in a new approach. As a result, the Saint *christianises* the concept of "justice" and underlines that true justice is related to God ruling society. Based on the belief of providentialism, the philosopher presents an interpretation of the evils in social life such as selfishness, iniquity, injustice. In this line of thinking, the affirmation of an eschatological hope and the transcendent judgment after History underlie the redefinition of the terms of the debate about politics and the just society (Lima Vaz 2001, 170).

As Ramos (1984) points out, it is Augustine himself who states, in one of his earliest letters written to his friend Nebridius, that of every "existent" one must inquire about its nature and value.<sup>1</sup> The solution to the question of what are the philosophical underpinnings of the conceptualization of "social justice" in *The City of God* unfolds in a series of questions throughout this book:

- What does "social justice" therefore mean?
- What is the nature and significance of it?
- How may "social justice" be conceptualized?
- Is "social justice" a necessary component of human action?
- How else would it be accomplished if not through justice?
- What are the obstacles to promoting a just society?
- In the light of this, how can justice itself be defined?
- What are the conceptual underpinnings of power?
- How can Christian people promote a truly social and just life?
- What are the social and political implications of the ethics of charity?

In order to answer these problems, this book is led by numerous principles, the most important of which are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Ramos (1984, 36) refers to Augustine's letter of the Epistolary (11, 4).

- “Social justice” refers to the earthly social dimension of justice that is founded on divine law;
- Establishing a philosophy of “social justice” requires an understanding of the link between immanence and transcendence in man, as *imago Dei*;
- The conversion of the will, according to ordered love, is necessary for the establishment of “social justice”;
- Earthly “social justice”, which might be established over time through human responsibility, is grounded on a love for the Truth and the urgency of charity;

Against this backdrop, the goal of this book is to give an insight into the understanding of Augustine's Christian philosophy's conceptualization of justice in the social order, particularly as it relates to the notion of justice in the social order. It is founded on the metaphysics of Truth and Good, which underlies not just anthropology and ethics but also politics. Ramos (1984, 74) describes morality as “a morality of happiness and responsibility, of love and freedom”. We want to identify the connection that may be established between divine law, moral righteousness, conversion of will and charitable ethics in the process of building a just society, which is considered to be a society that is organized around the concept of fairness, as our ultimate aim. The real man, a being injured by sin and rescued by divine intervention, was constantly in the mind of the philosopher.

All attention will be given to *The City of God*, mainly Books II, IV, XII, XIV and XIX.<sup>2</sup> Although Augustine did not expressly define “social justice”, it is reasonable to consider its meaning and roots via the lens of the author's social philosophy. This book contributes to the analysis of the dimensions of justice in St. Augustine's thought. In particular, it contributes to an explanation of the concept of “social justice” in *The City of God*, insofar as it refers to the social dimension of justice based on the ethics of charity. Augustine presents an integral vision of man and highlights the relevance of the comprehensive nature of the subjective and intersubjective dimensions of human life in the historical becoming. Indeed, Augustine's contribution improves understanding of

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<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine wrote *The City of God* between 413-414 and 426-427. The first three books begin in September of 413; books IV and V, in 415. In 417, Augustine wrote book XI. However it is only after writing the *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* and the *Locutiones* that he finishes and writes books XV and XVI, that is, around 420. In 425, he wrote book XVIII, and sometime in 427 he finished the other books. In this regard, see Aurell (2013).

the Christian underpinnings of social order, as well as of the ethical and political implications of justice. This task is challenging in the face of modern philosophical thinking and postmodern culture that take into account the influence of capital accumulation and consumerism on human life style. In this context, according to Kelsen (2012), the relativism of values introduces an element of ambiguity and uncertainty in relation to the meaning of human existence.

Indeed, Western civilization is currently undergoing a profound crisis as a result of the commodification of life, which reifies human connections. Significant ethical and political issues arise in defence of the global economic superpower's hegemony and the *ethos* of short-term profit maximisation, which not only configures social dynamics but also legitimizes the most diversified disparities. The global economic process is geared toward financial capital accumulation, which makes money an end in itself. Therefore, men become a mere instrument to achieve this end. Financial accumulation is axial to the reorganization of business and markets and, as a result, the meaning of human purpose is crossed by the "promise" of productivity gains in a scenario of disruptive innovations and technologies. Moreover, the so called economic rationality is transformed into unemployment, job insecurity, social exclusion and impoverishment. As a result, the cult of earthly goods, which has been elevated to the category of ends in earthly life, has had an impact on subjectivity and values. In other words, new ways of being in the world dictate the course of social life, and the "ethics of the present moment" dictate the norms of existence. In a historical context in which individualism prevails, social ties become weakened and fragmented.

Undoubtedly, Augustine's actuality refers to the contemporary debate on the need for universal principles for ethical choices that make possible the permanence and cohesion of social ties in the 21st century. The Saint introduces two central problems: the meaning of man's existence and the ethical orientation of his actions. In his philosophical interpretation, Augustine considers that Christian metaphysics is the foundation of ethics, morality and politics. In promoting a just society, he condemned the dissociation between ethics and politics, or even between morality and justice.

This book was initially influenced by the reflections of Robert Dodaro (2014, 17) concerning just society in Augustine's thought. In his comments, Dodaro highlights that the apprehension of the conception of a just society must keep in mind the use that the Bishop of Hippo makes of the term "*iustitia*". According to Dodaro, such a usage involves the combination of three meanings. The first meaning expresses the classical

sense of the Greek and Roman tradition and considers justice as a virtue through which each individual receives what is due to him. The second meaning reveals the influence of the New Testament and Latin Patristics. It equates justice, as a virtue, with love for God and our neighbours. Indeed, the true virtues, and justice in particular, are a form of love for God, who is the source of justice. Finally, the third meaning, translated as "righteousness", denotes the influence of the Pauline notion of "*dikaioσύνη*" that refers to the condition of the soul in a "right" relation with God, the Creator. This, justice is conceived in conjunction with the concept of the "order of love" (*ordo amoris*), which conveys the hierarchy of goods established by God. These three interpretations open up perspectives for thinking about the dimensions of justice in *The City of God*.

Moreover, among other important references for the construction of our argument, the reading of Markus, Arendt, Curbelić, Ramos and Lima Vaz pointed to the need for an interdisciplinary vision that considers the relations between philosophy, history and anthropology in order to face the multiple insights that emerge from Augustine's writings. Aware of the difficulties of making a synthesis of the Augustinian philosophical contribution in *The City of God*, this book is organized in five chapters. The first one aims to elaborate an analysis about the relation between justice and divine law, considering Books II and IV. The goal is to highlight how the Saint moves away from the concept of "just" in Roman law and proposes a new foundation for the Christian conceptualization of justice. This chapter demonstrates how Augustine presents the founding principle of justice, which is divine law, and how truth, justice, happiness and faith are articulated in his thought. When all these ideas are considered, the role of divine law in a just society is further discussed.

The second chapter privileges the reading of Books XII and XIV to analyse the relation between justice and righteousness from the perspective of the author of *The City of God*. The Augustinian concept of justice understood as righteousness denotes the condition of the soul through which a man finds himself in a "correct" relationship with God, the Creator. The Bishop of Hippo unfolds his philosophical reflections on the split of the human will as an opposition and tension between the two cities: the City of God and the Earthly City. From the above, the goal is to elaborate a reflection about the righteousness of men in a just society.

The third chapter is focused on Book XIX in order to explore the relation that the Saint establishes between justice and the true virtues. According to the philosopher, man is a being of social nature who wants to be happy. This chapter is oriented to show how Augustine, while reflecting on the social order, redefines the relation between the Supreme Good and

the virtues so as to found the conceptualization of a just society in a new way. Indeed, the Augustinian analysis of the conversion of the human will and the highlight of social ethics is a central aspect of the author's thought in *The City of God*. The fourth chapter further analyses Book XIX of *The City of God* and clarifies St. Augustine's philosophical questions about the being and conduct of Christian people. It presents the Augustinian analysis of Christian people's conduct, namely, the influence of the love for Truth and the urgency of charity. Considering the pillars of the social philosophy of St. Augustine, the chapter shows the relevance of the ethics of charity and its relation with justice and politics in the formation of a just society. The fifth chapter is oriented to highlight a dialogue between Saint Augustine and relevant political thinkers, such as Hanna Arendt, Machiavelli, Foucault, Polanyi, and others from the Marxist and post-modern tradition, in order to grasp the unfolding ethical challenges from the point of view of modern and contemporary political philosophy.

Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the pillars of the Augustinian philosophy of "social justice" which considers Christian metaphysics as the underpinning of social ethics founded on charity. In this line of interpretation, the conceptualization of "social justice" refers to an earthly good in the hope of a happy life, which is an expression of *love for God* and of the urgency of charity.

In Augustinian philosophy, the promotion of "social justice" requires the conversion of man's will. Thus, the pilgrim Christian people, whose conduct is based on the love for Truth and on the duty of charity, live according to the order established by God and are aware of their responsibility in promoting a *truly* social justice. Such "social justice" should not be misunderstood either as philanthropy or as a spirituality which disregards social structures in historical life.

According to Augustinian thought in *The City of God*, true justice is the goal and also the intrinsic measure of all politics. By considering the complexity of the experience of human life in historical change, Augustine draws attention to the implications of ethical responsibility in the process of building "social justice".



# CHAPTER 1

## JUSTICE AND DIVINE LAW

In the context of the lower Roman Empire, Augustine's thought reveals a turning point and proposes a new foundation for the meaning of human history. According to Eslin (2008), Augustine was the first Roman philosopher to introduce a turning point into the history of Western philosophy. Thus, the understanding of St. Augustine's thought in *The City of God* cannot be dissociated from the evolution of Christian doctrine that progressively imposes itself as a new system of thought.<sup>3</sup>

Grounded in Christian faith, the Bishop presents a new interpretation of human history, which is based on the Metaphysics of Truth and Good. Such an interpretation underlies the redefinition of the terms of the discussion on justice and the question of a just society (Lima Vaz 2001). In the Augustinian perspective, the founding principle of justice is inseparable from Truth.

### **Truth, justice and happiness**

It is opportune to remember that, in Book I, Augustine develops reflections on the attack on Rome by Alaric in 410 A.C., and on the role of Christians in this episode. He analyses the historical reality of the Roman crisis, which is characterized by corruption, social injustice, and the decadence of political institutions. In describing the style of life of the people of his time, the Saint points out that the greatest problem was moral evil or a "perverse heart" (*City of God*, Book I, 1). Reflecting on the evils

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<sup>3</sup> According to Peter Brown (2006), in the fourth century, the Roman Empire faced political, economic, and social tensions. In addition to invasions by barbarian bands in the north, the Empire was challenged by the well-organised and militaristic kingdom of Persia in the east. Economically: taxes had doubled or even tripled; the poor were victimised by inflation while the rich accumulated property. Any offence against the emperor or his servants could bring about the destruction of an entire community of villagers by mutilation through torture or by reducing them to the status of beggars.

of social life, he draws attention to the consequences of human behaviour because of the “fetters of certain passions” that lead to wrong, illicit judgements, which encourage torture, violence, and iniquity (City of God, Book I, 9). In his view, man reveals an ambivalence which is translated into moral conflicts: man loves peace and desires power; man loves peace and practises iniquity because he turns away from the contemplation of Truth (City of God, Book I, 27).

Augustine presents, in Book II, the following question: are the pagan gods effective in ensuring the prosperity of the city? The philosopher develops his remarks on the role of the pagan gods in the prosperity of Rome and initially situates his answer on the plane of history (Guy 1961). In this sense, faced with this question, the Saint offers a negative answer to demonstrate that evils happened to the Romans when, before the spread of the Christian religion, they offered worship to pagan gods (City of God, Book I, 36). Thus, he demonstrates that the Romans were not preserved from misfortune by their gods. In his words:

But of the evils of the soul, the evils of life, the evils of morals (so great that it is from them that the Republic will collapse, even if the cities remain standing, as their most learned men testify) the gods did nothing so that these evils would not strike their worshippers. Quite the contrary -they have sought by all means to increase them [...] (City of God, Book II, 16).

According to the excerpt of text quoted, the Romans were oppressed by the pagan gods with the only, or at least the greatest, of all calamities, the corruption of customs and the vices of the soul. In his argument, the author mentioned takes up the historical evolution of institutions and customs in the cultural tradition of the Roman Empire, with emphasis on the importance of law. In fact, Augustine’s goal is to rescue this relevant aspect of social life among the Romans to support his criticism of the foundations of justice. Moreover, the Saint affirms: “I will be careful and, as a witness, I would rather present Salustius, who, when he spoke in praise of the Romans, said this with which we began this exposition: *Among them, the right, like the good, drew its value more from nature than from laws*” (City of God, Book II, 17).

In the understanding of Augustine, Salustius indicates the existence of a right that has its origin and foundation in human nature. According to this conception of natural law, the norms established by men for living in society can be judged on the basis of natural law, that is, the law that reflects right reason, immanent to nature, and which governs the rationally ordered universe. Thus, natural law takes as its reference the natural law that was inscribed within the human being. In this context, the

concept of justice is founded on the natural law inscribed in man's soul. Since he is a rational being, man has to know the natural law and apply it in his conduct. Moreover, from the moral point of view, the good (the just) is the result of the observance of natural law. Thus, the natural feeling of justice, a product of natural reason, conditions the moral behaviour of all men. In this sense, natural reason is the foundation of law, justice and morality. In the sphere of social life, the identification of the order of nature with the moral order creates bonds between men whose souls have a natural inclination to identify what is just, and always good (Barros 2007, 43-45).

Although Augustine was a Roman citizen, his conception of justice departs from that which affirms that the foundation of the right and the good (just) is in nature. In fact, he would not allow the categories of natural law to identify the foundation of justice or even the identity of the just man (Badiou 2009, 21). In order to develop this reflection, the Saint presents a second question that is decisive for the continuity of his analysis: What presides over the development of the city in the course of history? In other words, what presides over the temporal destiny of men?

To answer the above-mentioned question, the author leads his analysis to the terrain of morality to underline that moral evil must be considered the greatest and true evil.<sup>4</sup>In his argument, he not only refutes paganism, which seeks the High Good in temporal life, but also introduces the saving dimension of Christian doctrine (Guy 1961). Let us recall his words:

Then, why do they impute the present evils to Christ, who with his saving doctrine forbids the worship of false and fallacious gods, detests and condemns with divine authority these noxious and scandalous passions of men, and little by little everywhere subtracts from this world, which staggers and falls into these evils, the family with which he will found an eternal city, the most glorious, not for the applause of vain superficialities, but for the authentic value of truth? (City of God, Book II, 18).

From this passage of text, it is clear that Augustine establishes a new foundation for justice. Christ is the authentic judge and, therefore, justice is founded in the divine law. Thus, the Saint underlines that God is just and the source of justice. Indeed, he emphasizes the transcendent judgment of human actions and affirms the eschatological hope in happy life, which is eternal. In particular, the Saint proposes to analyse the relation between

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *The City of God*, Book III, Augustine deals with the evils linked to the body and to external things that are subject to mutation.

divine justice and justice in human soul: human justice must be subordinated to divine justice. Therefore, the Bishop of Hippo establishes a relation between truth and justice. In this regard, the interpretation of Curbelié (2004, 94) emphasizes that this binomial will be decisively present in *The City of God*.

Following his argument, when reflecting on the extent of the impact of the pagan gods on the lives of men, a new question arises in Augustine's thought: what is the relation between justice and happiness? In this regard, let us recall his own words:

And yet they continue not to impute to their gods that before the coming of Christ the State has become the worst and most depraved because of pomp, avarice, cruel and torpid customs. But of all that they are going through in these times because of their pride and their pleasure they accuse the Christian religion. If the kings of the earth and all the peoples, the rulers and all the judges of the earth, the young men and the maidens, the old with the young, all the adult age of both sexes, the tax collectors and the soldiers of whom Baptist John speaks, would hear and practise these precepts about the just and good customs -the republic would have adorned the lands already here with the happiness of the present life and would have risen to the summit of eternal life to achieve a reign of complete happiness! (City of God, Book II, 19).

This quotation indicates that the author of *The City of God* distinguishes between the happiness of the present life and complete happiness. Thus, the Saint mentions his concern with the theme of happiness, present also in Greco-Roman philosophy. However, he presents changes in the conception of a happy life. From the Augustinian philosophical perspective, happiness is only complete in eternal life.<sup>5</sup> To be truly happy, man cannot guide his life by the possession of earthly goods, which are changeable and which he can lose. According to Augustine, earthly goods cannot satisfy man's natural desire for happiness as men are happy only if they possess an immutable good, which is God. Augustine thus makes explicit a relation between truth and happiness, that is, happiness is found in the possession of Truth-God. Then, in Book II of *The City of God*, the Bishop of Hippo identifies the foundation of justice and underlines the relation between justice and the will of God. The Saint distinguishes his philosophical

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<sup>5</sup> The theme of happiness is dealt with by Augustine in the dialogue *The Happy Life*. The philosopher makes an argumentative itinerary, together with his disciples, and asks: What is the good that the soul must possess to be happy? And what are the ways for the soul to obtain happiness?

thought on justice from the Greco-Roman tradition by presenting the God-Truth as the ultimate foundation of justice. In effect, the author affirms that the will of God is the eternal law. In his words:

But because this hears, that despises, and the majority are more friendly to the blandishments of vice than to the useful harshness of virtue, the servants of Christ are commanded, whether they be kings or rulers, judges or soldiers, soldiers of the provinces, rich or poor, free or servants of both sexes, to tolerate the State, even if it be the worst and most depraved, and to acquire for themselves, at the price of such tolerance, a splendid abode in the most holy and august curia of the angels, in the heavenly republic where the will of God is law (City of God, Book II, 19).

In this statement, Augustine establishes a relation between divine justice and law within the framework of the order created by God. For the philosopher, God is the founding principle of the law that governs the order created by him.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, Chroust notes that divine law and the concept of order are inseparable in the Saint's thought. Order is a fundamental norm according to which all creation exists. Order also manifests the harmony of coexistence between the parts, each in its proper place according to the divine law which is the will of God (Chroust 2011, 60).

In the Augustinian perspective, eternal law is the supreme norm of justice, is of an immutable nature and implies the existence of a just, provident and omniscient, eternal, and perfect God. It is the eternal law that constitutes the universal source of justice and is identified with the will or wisdom of God, that is, with the plan according to which God orders and directs all created things towards his own end, which is the happy life of man. Moreover, the divine law is transcendent and has ontological precedent over human beings. Since the eternal law is the will of God, men must subordinate completely to it. Following the interpretation of Flórez Pérez (2005, 27), it can be said that, for Augustine, divine law does not coincide with natural law. However, the divine law corresponds to a natural law that is inscribed in the human soul. Thus, for the Saint, natural law is the expression of eternal law.

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<sup>6</sup> The reflection on the divine law is developed by Augustine in Book I of *The Free Will*.

## True justice and politics

After grounding his conception of justice in the God-Truth, Augustine's goal is to reflect on the foundations of politics in earthly life. Thus, in Book II of *The City of God*, the Saint presents a discussion of the relation between justice and politics in the context of Roman institutions.

It is worth remembering that the Roman *res publica* was a form of government linked to the period of the ancient Roman civilisation, between the 5th and middle 1st centuries BC. It began with the fall of the monarchy and its replacement by the Senate, magistrates and popular assemblies. The term "*res publica*" literally means "the public thing" and is the political expression of the people as a whole, and hence it is also called the people's enterprise. In effect, the private interests of each man must be subordinated to the superior interests of the whole, the *res publica*. Although the Roman Republic was never restored, the term "*res publica*" continued to be used to refer to the State. During the period of the Republic, the performance of Roman men in public life, as citizens, led to the establishment of civic values, which endured as an ideal of behaviour throughout Roman history. In this context, civic life refers to a set of rights and duties common to citizens based on a communion of interests. Moreover, the city (*Roman civitas*) encompasses the spaces common to its men: the forum, the courts, and also the temples, because religion is part of civic life (Corassim 2006).

In Book II, 21, the Saint considers Scipio's talk in Cicero's *Da Republica* on the topics concerning the organization of the State (*res publica*) and the relations of men in civil society (*civitas*). At the end of the second book of *The Republic*, Scipio is reported to have said: "What musicians call harmony in song, is called concord in the city, the surest and best vehicle for the security of the whole state. And it is this concord without justice that cannot be admitted" (*City of God*, Book II, 21). In his line of interpretation, Scipio defines "republic" as an "enterprise of its people", and "people" as the association based on the acceptance of law and the communion of interests. He concludes: "Without the strictest justice, a republic cannot be governed" (*City of God*, Book II, 21). Thus, in a tyrannical government, the republic would not only be corrupt, but also the republic would not exist, because it would not be identified to the "enterprise of its people" or "people" associated by consent on the mutual recognition of rights and communion of interests. As a result, in Scipio's view, there is no concord without justice; there is no *res publica* without justice. Underlying his argument is the conviction of a civil law founded in nature on which concord in social life is based (Barros 2007).

Nevertheless, the Bishop of Hippo radically criticizes the idea that a just man is the one who obeys the laws of the State. Indeed, in *The City of God*, Augustine leaves behind the reference of the “just” present in the classical “jus-naturalist” tradition, which considered natural reason as the foundation of justice, law and politics. Let us recall his words:

I shall endeavour elsewhere to show that Rome was never a State (Republic) because true justice never existed there -according to Cicero’s own definitions, according to which, briefly, and through the mouth of Scipio, it refers to what the State is and what the people are (I also rely on many other statements made by him and other partners). However, according to the most authoritative definitions, in a certain way there was a republic, and it was better governed by the ancient Romans than by the more recent ones. For true justice exists only in that republic whose founder and governor is Christ, if it is appropriate to call it a republic, because we cannot deny that it is “the enterprise of its people.” But if this name, which in other places has been disseminated in another sense, has perhaps departed from the usage of our conversation -what is certain is that there is true justice in that city of which Holy Scripture says. *Glorious things have been said of thee, City of God* (City of God, Book II, 21).

One can see, in the passage of text quoted, that the author highlights the importance of justice in the sphere of politics and in the constitution of the structures of the state as an expression of the cultural tradition in the Roman world. However, Augustine highlighted that true justice only exists “in that Republic, whose founder and governor is Christ”; in other words, it exists in the City of God, which is an “enterprise of its people” because it expresses the communion of interests of men committed to the love for God.

Therefore, according to Augustine, the construction of the identity of the Christian man departs from the identity of the Roman man, founded on a feeling of continuity tied to the Roman *res publica*, even after its crisis and subsequent fall. In the Roman civic tradition, there was the feeling that the basic structure of social existence, the institutions, and the value system inherited from the past were, fundamentally, the only legitimate one for Roman men (Finley 1985, 36).

On behalf of this, the Saint’s thinking on justice in *The City of God* reveals his rejection of the juridical conception and the conditions of Roman civic life that defined the just man. Although the notions of classical “jus naturalism” influenced his thinking, the Augustinian perspective redefines, in terms of the Christian faith, the foundation of justice. According to the author, the will of God is the law and the founding principle of justice, and politics, as the expression of the people’s

enterprise, cannot be dissociated from true justice. In other words, politics cannot be dissociated from love for God and, as a result, the conceptualization of politics is linked to Truth. Therefore, the Bishop of Hippo redefines the terms of the identity of the Christian people in historical events.

### **Power, faith and justice**

In order to reflect on the relation between power and justice in temporal life, Augustine continues to explore, in Book IV of *The City of God*, some ideas concerning the destiny of men. At the beginning of his argument, he presents the parable of the rich man and the poor man or the man of average condition:

The rich man is tormented with fears, consumed with grief, greedy, never secure, always restless, breathless in perpetual conflicts of enmity, increasing his wealth without limit at the cost of these miseries, but adding to these also increases the most bitter cares. The average person, however, is satisfied with his small and tight family patrimony, is very dear to his own family, enjoys the sweetest peace with relatives, neighbours, and friends, is piously religious and endowed with great affability, has a healthy body, sparing in life, chaste in manners, serene in conscience. I do not know if anyone is so mad as to doubt which he should prefer (City of God, Book IV, 3).

In other words, while Augustine challenges the very basis of justice and happiness, he also suggests that God has a plan for mankind, the meaning of which humanity must endeavour to discover. According to him, there is a relationship between justice and happiness. He goes on to say that piety and justice, two of God's greatest gifts, are sufficient for true happiness: "that of living rightly in this life and subsequently attaining eternal life" (City of God, Book IV, 3). He points out that earthly life does not contain the fundamental founding principle of happiness and justice, as stated by the philosopher. All mortal men are subjected to trials, tribulations, and misery. The pains of virtuous persons should not be interpreted, however, as "punishment for a sin, but rather as the trial of virtue" in this worldly life (City of God, Book IV, 3). Indeed, the mixture of blessings and curses that God bestows on man during his earthly existence teaches him what kinds of blessings he should seek. To put it another way, in order to appreciate the proper relationship between temporal commodities and man, he must first comprehend the significance of earthly life in the context of eternal life. Regarding man's transitory existence, Augustine writes: "Therefore, the good, even if reduced to slavery, remain free;



whereas the wicked, even as king of a nation, remain a slave, not of a man, but, what is more serious, of as many masters as there are vices, which is the most serious of all” (City of God, Book IV, 3). Using the contrast between slavery and freedom, the Saint suggests a new way of looking at the human predicament, as well as a call to challenge appearances as the basis for men’s judgments in the world of the temporal.

In Book IV of *The City of God*, the Bishop of Hippo seeks to unmask what lies beneath the appearances of the conduct of men and of noble Roman ancestors in order to question the vision that the Romans themselves had of their past glory and power (Brown 2006). Regarding appearances in the conduct of men, kings, or pirates, the Saint asks: “Apart from justice, what are kingdoms really, if not great bands of thieves?” (City of God, Book IV, 4). Remembering the encounter between Alexander the Great and a pirate who had been imprisoned, Augustine compares and contrasts the kingdom of the former with the gang of thieves led by the latter. The Christian philosopher judges the pirate’s answer to Alexander to be “true”:

[...] when the king asked the man what it seemed to him of infesting the seas, he answered with frank audacity; “The same as it seems to you of infesting the world; but to me, because I do it with a small ship, they call me a thief; and to you, because you do it with a great armada, they call you an emperor (City of God, Book IV, 4).

In this portion of his text, Augustine introduces the metaphor of successful banditry as the fundamental paradigm of any earthly empire that is to come into being (Brown 2006). As a result, he opposes the notion of justice that is related to ambition, fame, and power, all of which are prevalent in earthly governments. For the most part, as Ramos (1984) explains, the Saint rejects the notion of justice when it is applied to the realm of relations between governing authorities and the people they govern. In order to better understand the relationship between power and justice, Augustine points out that pagans have made allegations against Christians, accusing them of allowing traditional civic virtues to become loose in their conduct. The divine purpose that he believes marks the ineluctable trajectory of historical evolution is highlighted in his reinterpretation of global history and emphasis on it. The philosopher demonstrates that the pagan gods cannot be held responsible for the lengthy continuance of the Roman Empire since their religious cult is useless in producing the true virtues. After thinking about the inconsistencies inherent in pagans’ notion of god, the Bishop of Hippo

expresses the following idea:

Even if they understood that in truth Virtue must be distributed by four species - prudence, justice, strength, temperance. And since each of these has its own species, Faith is linked to Justice and holds the first place among us who know what it means for *the just to live by faith*. (City of God, Book IV, 20).

In other words, Augustine establishes an inseparable relationship between faith and justice and characterizes the just man as one who lives by faith. He redefines the concept of the just man by attributing to the relation between justice and divine law the key to understanding the identity and meaning of the life of the Christian man. In effect, his remarks aim to point out the differences between the identity of the Roman man and the identity of the Christian man. Regarding the characteristics of the identity of the Romans and their worship of pagan gods, in Book IV of *The City of God*, the author asks: "How is it possible that one has not understood that Virtue and Happiness are gifts from God and not goddesses?" (City of God, Book IV, 21). As a matter of fact, the philosopher puts into question power, and glory as false auspices of the gods venerated by the Romans, such as Jupiter, Mars, and Happiness, Faith, Virtue, and adds:

Consequently, they could by no means have an empire if they had the true God against them. But, on the other hand, if they had ignored and despised this multitude of false gods, and had known and worshipped with sincere faith and pure customs the one God, they would have had here, whatever their greatness, a better empire; they would then have received a sempiternal one (City of God, Book IV, 28).

In this excerpt of the text from Book IV, Augustine criticizes the false conceptions of divinity of pagan polytheism and concludes that the success of Rome is due to the one true God, by whose power and judgment earthly kingdoms are founded and maintained (Fortin 2004). Thus, contrary to the pagan foundations of glory and power in earthly life, the Saint criticizes the fact that pagan gods are worshipped for the temporal advantage of glory and power that men can obtain. In short, the author expresses the view that the power of the pagan gods did nothing to prevent the evils of mankind (Guy 1961). On the contrary, these gods have harmed men with their deceptions and lies (City of God, Book IV, 36). Furthermore, in his confrontation with paganism, the Bishop of Hippo refers to those philosophers who clearly distinguish the difference between the creator and creatures can arrive at Truth, which is the foundation of true justice, glory and power. It is worth remembering that in other books of the First

Part of *The City of God*, the author chooses two extreme types of paganism to develop his critique of false divinities: Varro and the Neoplatonists.

As a witness against himself in Book VII, Augustine employs Varro's philosophy to demonstrate the weakness of civil theology by presenting the thought of the pagan philosopher Varro as a witness against Augustine.<sup>7</sup> According to the Saint, Varro did not take his gods seriously because the care of human things came first before the treatment of celestial matters.<sup>8</sup> In this way, this pagan philosopher was interested in how men exhibit their religiosity through a variety of attitudes and cults, as opposed to how women do so (Guy 1961, 50). While Varro did not explicitly state it, he inferred that gods of the cities did not exist independently of man, but rather that gods were a result of human spirit.<sup>9</sup> According to Augustine, the fault of the pagan philosopher is found in the fact that he does not accept divine nature as superior to human nature, but rather inverts the natural order. The human soul, or at least its reasoning half, takes on a divine character, transforming man into a god rather than merely a servant of the Almighty. So the Saint believes that this kind of civil theology mixes man with God and is therefore disputed from a reasonable perspective, because man's inability to be perfect can't be reconciled with the perfection of the Supreme Being, as the Saint believes. Augustine's major thesis in Book VII of *The City of God* is that paganism fails completely when it comes to the understanding of divinity: the gods of Varro, for example, cannot be regarded as gods since they are not deities. The theologian Augustine comes to the conclusion that such gods are nothing more than "divinized" mankind (Guy 1961, 56). Also in Book

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<sup>7</sup> In this regard, Markus (1970) affirms that "Augustinian politics" is a critique of Roman civil theology.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, quoting Cicero, constantly refers to Varro as a "very acute and educated" man (*City of God*, Book XIX, 2).

<sup>9</sup> Taking into account the reflection of Varro, an exponent of Roman civil theology, St. Augustine divides pagan theology into three basic forms: mythical; natural or philosophical; and civic or political. Mythical theology is the theology of the poets: it appeals directly to the multitude, and its many gods are revered by men for temporal goods or material advantages in this life. On the other hand, natural or philosophical theology is monotheistic and is based on the authentic notion of God, and, therefore, it is superior to mythical and civil theology. However, it is accessible only to the learned and is therefore incapable of exerting a beneficial influence on society as a whole. Finally, civil theology, also associated with the worship of various gods, is the official theology of the city, which all citizens must know in order to know which gods are to be worshipped and which rites and sacrifices are to be celebrated. Such theology seeks to improve men through the development of political virtues. See *The City of God*, Book VI.

VIII, the author continues on his critique of pagan philosophy and explores the roots of divinity in Neoplatonism, both of which are discussed in detail in Book VII. Augustine was critical of pagan Neoplatonists in the battle between intellectual schools, despite the fact that his discovery of Neoplatonism was important in getting access to the notion of *logos*.<sup>10</sup> In late antiquity, Plotinus argued that in order to achieve happiness, the soul, which is spiritual in nature, must turn towards the intelligible world and thus ascend to God. In this philosophical interpretation, the ethical problem lies in the soul's distance from the One, insofar as the soul, because of pride, attaches itself to material and transitory goods and forgets its origin. Yet, as Plotinus explains, despite the estrangement, a part of the soul, reason, perseveres in the *nous* and the soul returns to the intelligible world. The intellectual ascension of the soul is predicated on a purification process in which the virtues assist it in becoming aware of its essence and origin and thus detaching itself from transitory goods. When the soul, as *nous*, contemplates, beyond itself, the One, it attains the possession of the Highest Good.<sup>11</sup> In Plotinus' philosophy, the conceptualization of happy life has a metaphysical basis and the virtuous life is the path that man should follow to attain the Highest Good.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> In *Confessions* (Book VII, 9.13), Augustine recalls the importance of the influence of the followers of Plato's books. The Saint states that in these books he read, "[...] not exactly in these words, but with many and varied reasons, that on the whole this was argued: *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and God was the Word: 'this was in the beginning with God; all things were made by him, and without him was nothing made; that which was made was life in him, and the life was the light of men; and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overpower it; and that the human soul, though it bears witness to the light, yet itself is not the light, but the Word, God, is the true light, which enlightens every man that comes into this world; and that he was in this world, and the world was made by him, and the world did not acknowledge him'*". Augustine adds that he did not read in these books: "But that he *came for what was of his own, and his people did not receive him, and that as many as received him he gave them power to become the sons of God, to them that believe in his name, this I have not read there.*"

<sup>11</sup> In Books VIII to X of *The City of God*, Augustine develops an argument against Porphyry (a Neoplatonist) about the principles and metaphysics of the soul.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Brachtendorf (2012, 32-33). In Plotinus' conception, the soul of the human being, which is part of the world soul and belongs to the sphere of the intelligible, emanates, as the third hypostasis, from the *nous*, which, in turn, emanates from the One, the ineffable, foundation and source of being. The world soul looking to the *nous* apprehends the world of Ideas and transmits them to material beings as their forms (*logoi*).

Augustine's debate with the Neoplatonists proposes new terms in which the relationship between man and God should be thought of, given the mistaken response offered by the pagan philosophers.<sup>13</sup> The Saint understood that this philosophical school could not reach the Truth, which requires not only the reading of the Sacred Scriptures, but mainly divine help so that man may take the steps towards the Truth, towards the Highest Good and, therefore, so that he may fulfil the divine law.

### **Divine law in a just society**

Throughout Books II and IV, the Bishop of Hippo underlines man's dependence on the one true God, who helps him in history. In his words:

It is God, therefore, who is the author and dispenser of happiness, because he is the one true God, who grants the kingdoms of the earth to the good and to the bad alike. And He does not do this by chance, as if by chance (for He is the true God and not fortune), but according to the order of things and of time, which is hidden from us but perfectly known to Him. He neither serves nor is subject to this order of time. On the contrary, it is He who, as Lord, governs it and, as moderator, orders it. But as for happiness, that He gives to the good. Those who serve may have it or not; those who reign may have it or not. However, it will only be full in that life where no one will have to serve. This is why He gives the kingdoms of the earth to the wicked as well as to the good: He does not want His worshippers, still children in moral life, to desire this gift from Him as something great (City of God, Book IV, 29).

Augustine considered the "order of things and time" is organized and governed around the principle of justice, whose foundation is the eternal law. The notion of order emerges as a disposition of things created in temporal life according to the divine will or eternal law. Moreover, the eternal law is understood as the foundation of happiness, which is the fundamental problem facing humanity in history. When confronted with the reality of man's eventual demise, the Bishop of Hippo reinterprets the "order of things and of time" in order to give it a new meaning. As a result, he offers a new interpretation of history based on a new concept of telos, that is, the meaning of human life in the context of the evolution of

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<sup>13</sup> As for Neoplatonism, Augustine acknowledges in *Confessions* (Book VII) the central role that the "Platonic books translated from Greek into Latin" played in his philosophical and religious development, including in his final conversion to Christianity in the year 387.

historical events (Lima Vaz 2001). On the basis of this background, the philosopher argues that Christians have a new identity when it comes to the meaning of life and when it comes to their belief in the doctrine of redemption. For this reason, he suggests a new conceptual underpinning for the concept of justice. Augustine, in his discussion of Divine Providence, emphasizes that the affirmation of an eschatological hope, as well as Christ's transcending judgment, are essential to the redefining of the terms of the argument on justice and the creation of a just society. According to the Saint, the concept of justice, which has its base in divine law, can be used to organize a just society in its entirety around this concept. The everlasting law lays out what righteous men who live by faith must do in order to be happy, and it is written in the Bible. To put it another way, from the Augustinian perspective, the normative aspect of the divine law is made clear as the standard of the pilgrim's moral conduct. Understanding the right will of the just man necessitates taking a step further and taking into account not just man's place in God's established order, but also the human nature that has been wounded by sin as well.