TWO RESPONSES TO UTOPIAN THOUGHT: A COMPARISON OF AUGUSTINE'S AND HOBBES'S CRITIQUES OF POLITICAL "IDEALISM"

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Abstract

One of the fundamental distinctions between classical political philosophy and the political philosophies of modernity is the attempt by modern philosophers to show that classical thought rests on utopian illusions about man and his relationship to nature. One of the early modern philosophers who played a crucial role in developing a conception of politics that rejects classical thought is Thomas Hobbes. However, in one crucial respect Hobbes builds on a conception of political philosophy as developed by the ancients: he believes that the study of politics as a means to the improvement of the human condition is possible and necessary. This is an assumption that he shares with the majority of modern political philosophers.

If modern political philosophy is justified on the basis of its rejection of ancient thought as illusory, and yet shares a crucial assumption of ancient thought, then this raises the question of where to turn in order to gain a critical perspective on the political writings of modernity. One possible answer is the writings of St. Augustine. Augustine's Christian thought cannot be classified as either ancient or modern; it lies somewhere between the two. He is concerned with the development of man's moral virtue, but his conception of virtue and how it is obtained is very different from the ancient understanding of virtue. Moreover, he shares with the modern writers a rejection

of the classical conception of reason, but his rejection goes much further. Augustine is sceptical of the idea that human reason can discover natural standards by which we can orient our lives. This differentiates him from modern writers like Thomas Hobbes. Perhaps then, Augustine can offer an alternative to the assumptions of ancient and modern political philosophers. It is my goal in this thesis to explicate this alternative conception of politics through a comparison of the writings of Augustine with the writings of Hobbes. Specifically, I will focus on Augustine's and Hobbes' critiques of political idealism in the *City of God* and *Leviathan* respectively. I aim to show how Augustine's more realistic political analysis offers a formidable challenge to the modern conception of politics as outlined by Hobbes.

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Introduction

Broadly speaking, ancient political philosophers like Plato and Aristotle are concerned with virtue and with discovering the political order that best allows man to develop his virtue. In contrast, modern political philosophers attempt to ground their perceptions of politics on what they see as more realistic foundations.[1] Hobbes, along with Machiavelli, laid the foundation for this conception of politics. In his writings, Hobbes appears to create a science of politics that is based on a realistic depiction of human nature; it is his hope that such a political science will allow rulers to construct stable temporal states that provide humans with the security to fulfill their material needs. Unlike the classical philosophers, Hobbes is not concerned with constructing political regimes that are conducive to the development of man's highest human potential. Rather, he feels that the only viable goal for political thinkers is to discover the means necessary for the development and preservation of political orders that cater to man's universal physical needs.[2] In short, Hobbes's political thought represents one of the decisive breaks with classical political philosophy and introduces a conception of politics that is at the centre of contemporary liberalism.

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[1]Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*(New York: The Free Press, 1959), p. 40.

[2]Ibid., p. 48.

However, like Plato and Aristotle, Hobbes has a certain confidence in man's reasoning ability. While Hobbes and other modern political philosophers are critical of the ancients' conception of reason, they still believe that some men can use their reason to discover a natural standard by which we can judge existing political orders and construct better and more stable ones. Despite the fact that he is consciously attempting to create a realistic science of politics, in the *Leviathan*, Hobbes admits that his political thought rests on certain normative standards.[3] Thus, Hobbes's thought represents a break with and a continuation of classical thought.

This thesis will start with an examination of Augustine's political thought, focussing on his critique of millenarian tendencies in Christianity and the rejection of reason that this entails. I will then explore how Hobbes's rejection of "political idealism" is similar to Augustine's critique, as well as demonstrating the crucial differences between them by explaining Hobbes's different understanding of the nature of idealism and the role of reason. Finally, I shall attempt to show that a thorough analysis of Augustine's thought provides a framework for the rejection of Hobbes's liberal ideas as excessively idealistic and fundamentally misguided. From the perspective of Augustine, it is futile to attempt to discover natural norms of political practice; he feels that nature is a mystery that can be explained only in the context of God's divine plan; it is the height of arrogance for

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[3]Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* ed. Edwin Curley(Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), p. 135.

humans to presume to have knowledge of this plan.[4]

What follows is a brief outline of the manner in which I will organize my analysis. There are four chapters in this thesis. In chapters one and two, I examine the main aspects of Augustine's political thought in the *City of God*; chapter one is a synopsis of Augustine's views on human nature, while chapter two describes Augustine's thoughts on the purpose and possibilities of politics. Chapter three summarizes the important similarities between Augustine and Hobbes in terms of their perception of human nature and the political programs that they advance. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I outline the crucial differences between the political thought of Augustine and Hobbes; in the conclusion I attempt to show how Augustine's thought provides us with a framework with which to seriously criticize the liberal ideas so well-articulated by Hobbes.

Chapter one begins with a discussion of the crucial aspect of Augustine's thought that largely determines his conception of politics, his distinction between the City of God and the City of Man. He defines the City of God as a mainly transcendent realm wherein Christians "all mutually serve one another in charity, the leaders through their counsel, and the subjects through their obedience." However, it is only with the onset of death that the repenting Christian can fully enter the City of God. As long as they are alive, Christians, along with all men, cannot entirely escape the earthly City which arose from

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[4]Augustine, *City of God* translated by Henry Bettenson(New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 593.

Adam's original sin of pride.[5] I will then proceed to discuss the origins of the City of God and the earthly city in the fall of man, and elucidate the concept of original sin that this entails.

Following this, I will turn to an analysis of how Augustine's conception of original sin makes him very pessimistic of the earthly life in general. In fact, he denies the very possibility of human happiness on earth. Humans can aspire toward virtue, but this merely exacerbates their life of misery because they are continually tempted toward vice. Moreover, the material goods of this world are ephemeral, and they cannot be " in so flourishing a state in this life that they avoid being tossed about at the mercy of chance and accident."[6]

Having established the basis of Augustine's pessimistic view of human life, in chapter two, I turn to the specifics of his political thought. It is not surprising that Augustine has very modest expectations when it comes to politics. He rejects Cicero's idea that a commonwealth is, "a group of people united by a consensus concerning right and a community of interests." Furthermore, Augustine also rejects the idea that a commonwealth only exists, "where there is a sound and just government."[7] In the *City of God* Augustine denies the idea that justice is a necessary condition for the unification of

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[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., p.852.

[7]Ibid., p. 73.

a political community; he says that a "people" exists as long as they agree on the material objects that they love; no matter what these objects are, they are still a people. [8] Furthermore, Augustine does not think that justice can serve as a normative standard for judging political regimes because he does not believe that fallen humans have the reasoning ability to discover natural standards of justice.[9]

Chapter two ends with a discussion of an important consequence of this modest assessment of the possibilities of earthly politics, Augustine's critique of millenarian tendencies in Christian thought. One of the millenarian groups of Augustine's time were a Christian sect called the Donatists, who believed that the Kingdom of God could be established on earth. They came to this conclusion on the basis of a very literal interpretation of St. John's biblical description of Christ ruling the earth with his saints for a thousand years(Revelation 20: 1-6). Augustine disputes this interpretation; in his writings he calls the beliefs of the millenarians "ridiculous fables." His belief in the corrupting nature of original sin is incompatible with a belief in the possibility of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. He argues that the City of God exists on earth as a body of believers, but says that it can reach its fulfilment only in heaven. Consequently, humans must resign themselves to the fact that earthly society will always

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[8]Ibid., p.890.

[9]Ibid., p.213.

experience some injustice.[10] In short, Augustine's Christian understanding of things causes him to be very critical of what we would call political idealism.

In chapter three, I outline the main aspects of Hobbes's political thought that are similar to the political thought of Augustine. First, Hobbes is also very pessimistic about the human condition. Like Augustine, he thinks that human nature is such that conflict is an unavoidable fact of existence, particularly when there exists no sovereign to overwhelm people. He attributes this to the fact that humans are selfish creatures who are primarily motivated by considerations of glory, diffidence and competition.[11] As a result, Hobbes also has a very limited conception of the purpose of political communities. He does not think that it is the sovereign's responsibility to cultivate a high sense of virtue among his subjects; rather, he sees the primary function of the sovereign to be the discovery of the means necessary to create and maintain a stable political order that will allow humans to avoid the inherent dangers of a non-political state of nature.[12] Thus, Hobbes shares with Augustine the view that human nature limits the scope of political action in a fundamental way.

However, despite these similarities, there is a crucial distinction between Augustine's and Hobbes' conceptions of human reason; an explanation of this difference

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[10]Ibid., p.897.

[11]Hobbes, p. 75.

[12]Ibid., pp. 127-135.

and an examination of its consequences forms the basis of my final chapter. Whereas Augustine says that it is impossible for humans to discover any normative political standards, Hobbes denies this contention and *attempts* to establish norms for political behaviour on the basis of a realistic conception of human rationality. Hobbes uses the deductive reasoning of mathematical proofs as his model of the correct way to discover standards of political action. As Edwin Curley notes, "Like Descartes, Hobbes thinks of himself as providing new foundations for philosophy . . . making civil philosophy, the knowledge of the rules of life in society, scientific for the first time."[13] Consequently, in chapters fourteen and fifteen of *Leviathan*, Hobbes formulates various laws of nature which he believes are the necessary conditions for the maintenance of civil society. Thus, while Augustine and Hobbes are both critics of political idealism, their criticisms lead them in fundamentally opposite directions. Augustine's rejection of the classical idea that there is an earthly justice discoverable by human reason causes him to see the search for political norms as a futile endeavour. In contrast, Hobbes also rejects this classical approach, but his rejection results in an attempt to ground the search for political norms on more solid foundations.

After having articulated the nature of this important difference between Augustine and Hobbes, I will conclude the thesis by making some suggestions as to what an analysis of Hobbes's liberal thought in the context of Augustine's Christian thought can teach us

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[13]Ibid., p.ix.

about the nature of modern liberalism. Hobbes's writings serve as an important articulation of some of the theoretical foundations of liberalism. As I hope to show, one of Hobbes main justifications for his approach is his contention that he offers a more realistic means to attain political knowledge than do the ancient political philosophers. I suggest that Augustine's more radical critique of political idealism provides us with a useful way to carefully examine this core justification of liberalism. Augustine's writings allow us to explore questions about liberalism that we might otherwise not ask. Is liberalism really based on a lowering of political standards? If not, is it perhaps the case that it is just as "utopian" as was ancient political philosophy? If this is the case, what does this say about the modern approach to politics, and can Augustine offer us a more realistic and rewarding approach? Obviously I do not propose to definitively solve these questions, but it is my hope that this analysis will suggest some possible answers.

Chapter One

A close examination of Augustine's political thought in the *City of God* reveals that he is very pessimistic about the possibility of humans being able to construct any kind of "just" political order. In order to understand the roots of Augustine's pessimism, it is first necessary to examine his view of the human condition in general.

To that end, this chapter will be organized into four main sections. The first two sections will deal with crucial theological concepts that determine Augustine's views on human nature and the possibilities and limitations of human political action. In the first section, I will discuss Augustine's distinction between the City of God and the earthly city, and explain what he sees as the important differences between them. Section two will include an explanation of the origin of the two cities in man's fall from God, as well as an examination of the stain of original sin that the fall left in the souls of men.

This will provide important context for the analysis in sections three and four, which will deal with an explication of Augustine's view that it is impossible for humans to feel perfectly reconciled to this world; Augustine thinks that this is so because he does not believe that humans can be happy in this life, nor does he believe that they can make sense of the mysterious providence of God.

The Distinction Between the City of God and the Earthly City

Before an appraisal of Augustine's description of human behaviour can be made, his

distinction between the earthly city and the city of God must be understood. Augustine clearly distinguishes between the nature of the two cities.

> We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self. In fact, the earthly city glories in itself, the Heavenly City glories in the Lord. The former looks for glory from men, the latter finds its highest glory in God, the witness of a good conscience. The earthly city lifts up its head in its own glory, the Heavenly City says to its God: "My glory; you lift up my head." In the former, the lust for domination lords it over its princes as over the nations it subjugates; in the other both those put in authority and those subject to them serve one another in love, the rulers by their council, the subjects by obedience. The one city loves its own strength shown in its powerful leaders; the other, says to its God, "I will love you, my Lord, my strength."[14]

In an important passage in the *City of God*, Augustine offers a detailed description of life in the earthly city. Augustine argues that the wicked state of humanity is a result of the wills and desires of humans. Instead of focussing their wills on the "eternity, truth, and love" of God, humans in the earthly city are "delighted rather with their own power,

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[14]Augustine, p. 593.

as though they themselves were their own good."[15] In Augustine's view the earthly city is dominated by humans who have no concern for God; instead, they are dominated by a self-love that is to their detriment. Augustine offers us a vivid description of human behaviour in the earthly city,

> . . . they have fallen away from that Supreme Good which is common to all, which brings felicity, and they have devoted themselves to their own ends. They have chosen pride in their own elevation in exchange for the true exaltation of eternity; empty cleverness in exchange for the certainty of truth; the spirit of faction instead of unity in love; and so they have become arrogant, deceitful, and envious. The cause of the bliss of others is their adherence to God; and so the cause of the misery of the apostates must be taken to be the exact contrary, their failure to adhere to him.[16]

Augustine goes on to argue that unless humans try to adhere to God to the best of their ability, there will be no cessation of their misery.[17] As the above passage demonstrates, he is uncompromising in his assessment of the bleak condition that will result for those who do not seek knowledge of God. Their self-absorption cannot offer them the consolation that they desire; such consolation can only be found by dwelling on

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[15]Ibid., p.471.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid., p. 472.

the eternity and truth that is present in God. I will return to this issue later.

In contrast to his perception of the nature of the earthly city, Augustine sees the city of God in a very different light. According to Augustine, the City of God exists on earth as a spiritual bond between Christians; it does not physically exist anywhere. Like the non-believer, the Christian must live in the earthly city, but he views it in a very different way. Augustine claims that the relationship that a believer has to the earthly city is analogous to the relationship that a traveller has with a foreign country. A spiritual member of the city of God, " . . . looks forward to the blessings which are promised as eternal in the future, making use of earthly or temporal things like a pilgrim in a foreign land . . ."[18] He argues that the spiritual member of the City of God obeys the laws of the earthly city because the preservation of civil peace is in the common interest of the Christian and the non-believer alike.[19] I will discuss Augustine's view of the proper attitude of the Christian to the earthly political order in more detail when I look at the specifics of Augustine's political thought.

One further point about Augustine's view of the City of God deserves emphasis. As we have seen, Augustine does not believe that the City of God has a physical existence in this world; he says that it only exists on earth as a spiritual bond between believing Christians. Accordingly, he reminds Christians that they should not try to found such a

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[18]Ibid., p. 877.

[19]Ibid.

city in this life,

> . . . the City of saints is up above, although it produces citizens here below, and in their persons the City is on a pilgrimage until the time of its kingdom comes. At that time it will assemble all those citizens as they rise again in their bodies; and then they will be given the promised kingdom . . .[20]

In short, Augustine conceives of the earthly city and the City of God in very different ways. In his terms, the earthly city represents the reality of the political situation of fallen man, whereas the City of God only exists on earth as a spiritual bond between Christians. Thus, the Christian must live in the earthly city just like the non-believer; the reality of the City of God cannot be experienced until after death. As we will see later, Augustine's belief that the City of God cannot be established on earth has important consequences for his political thought.

Man's Fall From God

In order to appreciate why Augustine has such a pessimistic view of life in the earthly city, it is necessary to understand his views on man's fall from God, and the creation of original sin that caused this fall. He asserts that there were two paths open to man after his creation; the consequence of man's choice in this decision was nothing less

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[20]Ibid., p. 596.

than, "the origin and propagation of human morality."[21] In other words, this first and most important choice that God gave to man would determine the pattern of his future behaviour. The choice was either to continue in a state of perfect obedience to God, or to disobey and thereby transgress the will of God. The consequence of the former decision would have meant, "an eternity of bliss"; the consequence of the latter decision actually made by man was that humans were, "justly condemned to the punishment of death."[22]

Augustine makes the important point that the depraved state of man after the fall is not the natural human condition. He maintains that humans were meant to resemble the perfection of God, but fell from this state of perfection because they chose to focus on themselves instead of dwelling on the good that is present in God. However, he also argues that humans still have a vestigial trace of this perfection present in their souls, and this trace of perfection enables them to be open to the possibility of redemption and to partially regain the perfection that they have lost,

> . . . yet the other things in the created universe are not in a better condition because they are incapable of misery; for the other members of our body are not to be called better than our eyes, just because they cannot be blind. A sentient nature, when suffering, is better than a stone which is quite incapable of suffering; and in the same way the rational nature, even

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[21]Ibid., p. 510.

[22]Ibid.

> in wretchedness, is superior to the nature which is bereft both of reason and sense and therefore cannot be the victim of misery.[23]

When humans cling to God, they are moving towards a fulfilment of their true potential.[24] In summary, Augustine does not think that humans are naturally wicked; their wickedness is a perversion of their nature which cannot be overcome except through the mercy of God; the fall has made it impossible for people to overcome their wickedness through their own efforts. This idea must be kept in mind later on, when we explore Augustine's views on the possibilities and the limitations of earthly politics.

The Impossibility of Happiness

As I hope to make clear, the unifying theme of Augustine's discussion of earthly politics is his attempt to demonstrate that perfect political justice cannot be achieved. This conclusion is based on his assessment that it is impossible for humans to overcome their self-pleasing and self-destructive proclivities that result from the stain of original sin in their souls. Augustine believes that humans are so constrained by their deformed natures that it is impossible for them to achieve any kind of happiness in this life. He attempts to support this contention by demonstrating the inadequacy of the behaviours which are usually thought to create happiness. He critically assesses a variety of things

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[23]Ibid., p. 472.

[24]Ibid., p. 473.

which are thought to produce happiness. I will focus on his treatment of three of them: the physical pleasures of the body, the pleasures of mental stimulation, and the pleasures of virtuous behaviour.

To begin with, Augustine is very sceptical as to the ability of physical pleasures to bring people happiness. It is his view that physical pleasure is ephemeral because human bodies are subject to the pain and decay that mortality entails. He argues that the state of humans' souls is directly connected with their mortality; original sin had the consequence of making human nature subject to " . . . all the process of decay which we see and feel, and consequently to death also. And man was distracted and tossed about by violent and conflicting emotions, a very different being from what he was in paradise before his sin . . ."[25] Augustine attributes the source of man's "violent and conflicting emotions" to be his disobedience to God. Since man could not follow the simple command not to eat the forbidden fruit, God punished him by making his desire oppose his will. Man's desire was not in opposition to his will when he committed the original transgression in the garden of Eden; rather, God created an internal war between his will and his desire as a punishment for this act of disobedience.[26] As Augustine puts it, " . . . the retribution for disobedience is simply disobedience itself."[27]

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[25]Ibid., p. 571.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., p. 575.

Augustine believes that this punishment fits the crime in every way. In his state of innocence in the garden of Eden, man had no desire to do that which he could not do; in contrast, in his diminished state after the fall, man wills to do what he cannot. Whatever man may will to do is now hindered by the many desires that God has created in order to distract his will. We are prevented from doing what we will by such things as, " . . . the lust for vengeance called anger; the lust for possession of money, called greed; the lust for victory at any price, called obstinacy; the lust for boasting, called vanity."[28]

Thus, the corruption of human nature means that humans are now far from the true source of being, God. The somewhat paradoxical result of this is that the prouder man is, the more miserable he is; only a state of humility in the face of God can allow man to achieve a semblance of happiness on Earth.

> Yet man did not fall away to the extent of losing all being; but when he had turned towards himself his being was less real than when he adhered to him who exists in a supreme degree. And so, to abandon God and to exist in oneself, that is to please oneself, is not immediately to lose all being; but it is to come near to nothingness. That is why the proud are given another name in holy scripture; they are called "self pleasers." Now it is good to "lift up your heart," and to exalt your thoughts, yet not in self-worship of pride, but in the worship of God. This is a sign of obedience,

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[28]Ibid., pp. 574-575.

and obedience can belong only to the humble.[29]

Thus, according to Augustine, man's disobedience to God made him a slave to the Devil; that is, a slave to his own wicked desires. Augustine also makes it clear that only the grace of God can give man some relief from this perpetual discomfort; he argues that man's transgression against God meant that " . . . he was dead in spirit; of his own will; but doomed, against his will, to die in body; forsaking eternal life, he was condemned also to eternal death, unless he should be set free by grace."[30]

In order to understand Augustine's meaning here, it is crucial to realize that he is denying that man can achieve any happiness through his own actions. Obviously, this is not a self-evident argument. After all, one could well question the seeming extremity of an argument that denies that humans can achieve *any* earthly happiness that is independent of the grace of God. However, Augustine makes quite a compelling case. He does so by pointing to the litany of sufferings and distractions that prevent man from doing what he wills.

> For who can list all the multitude of things that a man wishes to do and cannot, while he is disobedient to himself, that is, while his very mind and even his lower element, his flesh, do not submit to his will? Even against his volition his mind is often troubled; and his flesh experiences pain,

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[29]Ibid. Augustine's quote from scripture in this passage comes from Matthew 7:18.

[30]Ibid.

grows old, and dies, and endures all manner of suffering.[31]

Thus, for Augustine, the sufferings that man must endure in the earthly city are connected to his mortal condition. This is not surprising because man's mortality was part of God's punishment for original sin. There is therefore a connection between man's suffering and his mortality; God made man prone to suffering by denying him eternal happiness and making him entirely dependent on the grace and mercy of God. In short, God's punishment for original sin means that all men must now endure the pains and distractions of the flesh that go along with having a mortal body.

However, Augustine is not cynical only about the possibility of achieving happiness through bodily pleasures; he also says that man's earthly life is such that he can find no joy in mental pleasures. He argues against those who claim that man can gain the satisfaction of the knowledge of the truth through the use of his mental faculties of sensation and understanding. He suggests that the enjoyments of the mind are no more exempt from the sufferings of life than are the enjoyments of the body.

> Then what about the primary goods, so called, of the mind itself? The two ranked first are sensation and understanding, because they lead to the apprehension and awareness of truth. But what kind of sensation is left, and how much of it, if a man becomes blind and deaf, not to mention other disabilities? And whither will reason and intelligence retire, where

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[31]Ibid.

will they slumber, if a man is rendered insane by some disease?[32]

There are two key points in this passage. First, Augustine reminds us of what it is perhaps easy to forget: our mental faculties are dependent to some extent on the condition of our fragile, mortal bodies. If a man's senses become disabled, then it is difficult for him to escape the sufferings of the body by taking consolation in the pleasures of the mind; both mental and physical pleasures are dependent on the correct functioning of the senses. Second, Augustine points out that our intellects can become disordered if we are unfortunate enough to become insane. In short, Augustine thinks that the pleasures of the body and of the mind are equally vulnerable to the misfortunes of life in the earthly city.

It is important to understand that when discussing the sufferings of the mind and body, Augustine is not claiming that all men inevitably experience the worst forms of suffering; he is simply saying that all men inevitably experience some suffering, and no man can be sure that he will not suffer to as great an extent as is possible. Thus, according to Augustine, happiness in this life is impossible.

Another important aspect of Augustine's denial of the possibility of earthly happiness is his pessimism regarding the ability to escape suffering through virtuous action. Augustine believes that the righteous man will be in a better spiritual condition than someone who does not accept God. However, he maintains that even the righteous

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[32]Ibid., p. 853.

man cannot attain true happiness in the earthly city; this can only be achieved in the City of God, after death. Consequently, there is a certain futility in trying to achieve happiness through virtuous behaviour. In Augustine's terms, no man can be happy unless he is righteous, and since no one can be righteous in this life, no man can achieve earthly happiness. Augustine claims that men cannot be happy in their earthly life because it cannot offer them the eternal life that they truly crave.[33]

One might say that Augustine explores the limits of the earthly virtues by putting them in their proper place. As he points out, when we examine the activity of the virtues, we see that they are engaged in a constant war with the vices that God gave us as a punishment for original sin.[34] He then analyses the power of the virtues to make us happy, in the context of the perpetual struggle in our souls between virtue and vice.

He limits his analysis to the cardinal virtues of the Greeks: temperance, prudence, justice, and fortitude. First, he shows the limitations of that virtue that is particularly involved in the struggle against vice, temperance. Augustine admits that temperance can help us to use our spirit to oppose our desires of the flesh, but he stresses that what we really want is to achieve a state where no such opposition between spirit and flesh exists. Augustine argues that no one in this life can attain such a state.[35] That is, we remain at

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[33]Ibid., p. 589.

[34]Ibid., p. 853.

[35]Ibid., p. 854.

war with our selves, and are thus unhappy.

Augustine's discussion of the other three cardinal virtues is no less sober. Considering the virtue of prudence, he asks whether it can help us to distinguish good from evil, and thereby ensure that we shall always chose good and not consent to do evil. He answers by repeating what he said in his discussion of temperance; evil is an inherent part of earthly existence. Moreover, Augustine says that man's reason is so ineffectual, that he is unable to distinguish between good and evil. I will elaborate on this point in the next section.[36]

Similarly, Augustine maintains that the virtue of justice is exposed to the same limitations. He says that it is the task of justice to create a certain right ordering of nature; justice tries to ensure that " . . . the soul is subordinated to God, and the body to the soul, and thus both body and soul are subordinated to God."[37] However, Augustine argues that justice can never fully create this right ordering; rather, it is constantly engaged in this unending task. The soul is never completely subordinated to God, and the body is never fully controlled by the soul. "So long therefore, as there is in us this weakness, this disease, this lethargy, how shall we dare to claim that we are saved?"[38]

Finally, Augustine also dismisses the power of fortitude to overcome evil, because

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[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.

the very purpose of this virtue is to help us to patiently endure the ills of life.[39] In short, Augustine does not think that the practice of the virtues can make us happy, because we need the virtues precisely because they help us to cope with misfortunes that can never be eliminated from human life.

In summary, in Augustine's terms, earthly happiness is impossible to attain because we cannot escape the inevitable sufferings of life through the enjoyment of the pleasures of the body or mind, and we cannot fully overcome these sufferings through the practice of the virtues, as some philosophers think. The reason for this inevitable suffering is the weak mortal condition of man. Our fragile bodies and minds can never escape the possibility of pain, and virtuous behaviour can never fully overcome the powerful desires that constantly thwart the will of man.

The Limitations of Reason

As I have shown, Augustine does not believe that humans can ever be happy in this life. We have seen that a large part of his justification for this assertion is his denial that the experience of pleasure or the practice of virtue can alleviate the inevitable sufferings of human life. I now turn to Augustine's denial that man can alleviate his suffering through an understanding of God's divine providence.

One of the main themes of the *City of God* is Augustine's insistence that the

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[39]Ibid., p. 855.

providence of God is inscrutable to human reason. Augustine claims that the only way to make sense of our mutable universe is to recognize God as its immutable creator. Consequently, it is impossible for man to understand the universe as an intelligible whole through the study of nature. Rather, the seeming chaos of nature means that we can begin to make sense of the world only when we accept the mysterious providence of God.

Augustine tells us that God acts in accordance with the order of events in history " an order completely hidden from us, but perfectly known to God himself."[40] Furthermore, God is in no way subordinate to this order of history; as Augustine puts it "he is himself in control, as the master of events, and arranges the order of things as a governor."[41] In short, there is a purpose to the unfolding of events in the earthly city; but this purpose is known only by God, and is inscrutable to human reason.

In Augustine's terms, it is thus futile to attempt to use our reason to discover the meaning of God's divine providence. Augustine maintains that the only answer that can be given to those who presume to question the providence of God is that " . . . the providence of the Creator and Governor of the universe is a profound mystery, and 'his judgements are inscrutable, and his ways cannot be traced.'"[42]

It is not surprising then, that Augustine is sceptical of those philosophers who do

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[40]Ibid., p. 176.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid., p. 39. Augustine's quote from scripture is from Romans 11: 33

presume to try and understand the mysterious providence of God. As we saw earlier, Augustine thinks that an important consequence of the fall was that it diminished man's capacity to reason, " . . . the mind of man, the natural seat of his reason and understanding, is itself weakened by long-standing faults which darken it."[43]

Augustine gives concrete examples of the misguided attempts of philosophers who try to use their reason to discover natural standards of justice. For example, Augustine discusses the motivations of the pagan philosophers. He says that these men tried to "discover the secrets of the physical universe, to find out what ends were to be pursued and what avoided in the sphere of human behaviour . . ."[44] Augustine concedes that these men were very intelligent, but says that they did not sufficiently realize that they, " . . . were hindered by human weakness, especially when divine providence rightly opposed their presumption, in order to show, by contrast, the way of piety, which starts from humility and ascends to the heights."[45] Thus, Augustine believes that there is something presumptuous and arrogant about attempting to explain what only God himself can understand. From Augustine's perspective, this presumption is just another example of the misguided pride of man that resulted from the fall. Instead of focussing his mind on

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[43]Ibid., p. 430.

[44]Ibid., p. 54.

[45]Ibid., p. 55.

God, man is now complacent, and concentrates all his energy on pleasing himself. [46] It was thus the mistake of the pagan philosophers to look for an explanation of the universe in the world of man rather than in the mysterious workings of God's providence.

When elaborating on the misguided efforts of the pagan philosophers, Augustine makes it clear that he does not object only to their arrogance; he also believes the attempt to discover natural standards of justice in nature to be useless. The reason for his pessimism on this point is that he thinks that the use of human reason inevitably creates disagreements between philosophers, and therefore gets us no closer to their misguided goal of trying to appreciate " . . . how we should regulate our lives towards the attainment of happiness."[47] He attributes the cause of philosophical disagreements to two factors. First, many people have the desire to seek for truth as a means of self-aggrandizement. Rather than rely on the doctrines of others, they prefer the more conspicuous route of trying to create their own opinions, and thereby " . . . seem wiser and cleverer than the rest . . ."[48] Moreover, even though some philosophers are motivated by a genuine love of truth, the frailty of human reasoning powers necessarily creates disagreement between philosophers.[49] Augustine concedes that some of these men are able to " . . . perceive a

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[46]Ibid., p. 571.

[47]Ibid., p. 815.

[48]Ibid., p. 816.

[49]Ibid.

certain amount of truth, among all their false notions . . ." However, they are still ignorant of the fact that God is the source of all these truths, and that the only true path to wisdom is through an awareness that the providence of God cannot be understood by human reason.[50]

In short, Augustine believes that man can be partially reconciled to life in the earthly city only through an understanding of God. According to Augustine, none of the various philosophical sects can unify man and prepare him for death; only a knowledge of God can help man come to terms with his mortality. [51]

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[50]Ibid., p. 819.

[51]Ibid., p. 421.

Chapter Two

In the previous chapter, we saw that Augustine is pessimistic regarding humans' ability to be happy, and regarding the power of human reason. On the basis of his denial of the possibility of happiness on earth, and his skepticism regarding the ability of human reason to discover ways of reordering the world in such a way as to rectify this problem, he draws some important conclusions as to the possibilities and limits of politics in the earthly city. This chapter consists of two sections that deal with the specifics of Augustine's political views in light of his overall pessimism. The first is a discussion of what Augustine understands by political justice; the second section describes his critique of the millenarian political idealists of his day. In brief, this chapter provides the necessary context for a subsequent comparison of Augustine and Hobbes.

Augustine's Understanding of Political Justice

Augustine's discussion of the proper political goals of the earthly city is divided into two parts. First, he tells us about the necessary evils of politics that we must accept, then he informs us what the realistic pursuits of earthly statesmen should be. In terms of what we should not expect from the politics of the earthly city, Augustine is quite clear. To begin with, he says that it is a necessary part of God's divine providence that he does not discriminate in his distribution of political offices. Consequently, we should not expect

God to grant political power only to the just. As in all aspects of life,

> God dispenses freely to the good and evil alike- just as he gives to all alike the world, the light, the air, earth and water and the fruits of earth, and man's soul, body, senses, intelligence, and life. Among those gifts is dominion, of whatever extent; and this God bestows in accordance with his government of temporal affairs.[52]

Augustine urges us simply to accept the wisdom of God's choices as to who should and who should not be granted political power. He also recognizes that this may be a difficult thing to accept. For example, he shows that he is aware of the irony that the same God can grant power to a just Christian ruler like Constantine, and to a tyrant like Julian the Apostate, a man who, through his lust for domination, burnt the ships carrying essential food supplies to his city, and thereby left his army destitute and at the mercy of their enemies. Despite harsh examples like this, however, Augustine still maintains that the inscrutability of God's reasons does not mean that they are unjust.[53]

Although Augustine is adamant that this seemingly unjust distribution of power is part of God's divine plan, he makes it clear that there is nothing arbitrary about it. As we have seen, Augustine tells us that God acts in accordance with an order of history that we

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[52]Ibid., p. 223.

[53]Ibid., p. 216.

cannot fathom.[54] Thus, although we may not understand it, there is a purpose to the seemingly random way in which God grants political power to people. Morover, Augustine puts the desire for political power into perspective by reminding us that it is impossible to achieve happiness in this life; the only true felicity comes in the next life. He tells us that God grants dominion to good and evil alike so that the citizens of the earthly city do not covet political power as if it were something of importance.[55] Thus, Augustine implies that although accepting the divine providence of God may seem to be unjust, it is not really so.

However, despite the fact that Augustine does not think that we can understand God's purposes, he does believe that we can discern at least one important function of the earthly city: it is a means of securing the civil peace which is as important for spiritual members of the City of God as it is for non-believers. In the context of a discussion of the people of the earthly city, he writes, " . . . even such a people loves a peace of its own; which is not to be rejected . . . it is important for us also that this people should possess this peace in this life, since so long as the two cities are intermingled we also make use of the peace of Babylon . . ."[56] In the third chapter of this thesis, I show how Augustine's emphasis on politics as a means of creating peace is one

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[54]Ibid., p. 176

[55]Ibid., p. 177.

[56]Ibid., p. 892.

of the important similarities between his political thought and that of Hobbes.

Thus, although Augustine believes that there are fundamental limitations on what worldly politics can achieve, he seems to suggest that politics in the earthly city does serve some purpose; it is therefore natural to inquire as to what his views are on the purposes and possibilities of human politics. There are several passages in the *City of God* which shed some light on this question. The two parts of this work which are most helpful here are Augustine's discussion of the inadequacies of Cicero's definition of a commonwealth in the early parts of the *City of God*, and his own conception of the nature of the political community, which he develops in Book nineteen.

Augustine argues that Cicero's definition of a commonwealth is based on an inadequate understanding of justice. Therefore, before we turn to an examination of his critique of Cicero, it is important to describe Augustine's understanding of justice. As we saw from his discussion of the Greek cardinal virtues, he defines justice as a right ordering of the soul, where all things are given their proper due, " . . . the soul is subordinated to God, and the body to the soul, and thus both body and soul are subordinated to God."[57] In Augustine's terms then, justice entails a correct disposition where everything and everyone is given its proper due.

However, Augustine makes it clear that he does not think that it is possible for a political community to perfectly reflect this conception of justice. He points out that it is

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[57]Ibid., p. 854.

often impossible for a judge to know if an accused man is really guilty; consequently, it is impossible to always give people their proper due.[58] More significantly still, Augustine says that it is impossible for a political community to be just because no society will be able to give God his proper due.[59] Thus, when Augustine criticizes Cicero's definition of justice, he is criticizing Cicero's inability to appreciate that no city can measure up to the true standard of justice.

Augustine discusses the definition of justice advanced by the character Scipio in Cicero's *Republic.* Scipio claims that a commonwealth is " . . . not any and every association of the population, but an association united by a common sense of right and a community of interest."[60] Drawing on this initial definition, Scipio further asserts that a true commonwealth only exists where,

> . . . there is a sound and just government, whether power rests with a monarch or with a few aristocrats, or with the people as a whole. But when the King is unjust . . . or the nobles are unjust . . . or the people are unjust . . . , then he holds, the commonwealth is not corrupt . . . but, by a logical deduction from the definition, it ceases to exist at all- for there can be no "weal of the community," if it is unjust, since it is not "associated

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[58]Ibid., p. 859.

[59]Ibid., p. 891.

[60]Ibid., p. 73. The original quotation from Cicero's *Republic* can be found in Book two, apter forty-four.

by a common sense of right and a community of interest," which was the definition of a community.[61]

Augustine is quick to point out that, on the basis of these harsh standards as to what does and does not constitute a community, no true political community has ever existed.[62] The definition of community is inadequate on two grounds. First, it is too narrow; Rome, for instance, could certainly be classified as a commonwealth, " . . . according to more plausible definitions."[63]

Second, Cicero's definition expects too much from human cities. The standard of justice that Cicero demands from earthly cities can only be found in that city " . . . whose founder and ruler is Christ."[64] In other words, such a standard of justice can only be found in the City of God, which as we have seen, exists only in a spiritual sense and not in a temporal sense.[65] According to Augustine, Cicero is wrong to say that where justice does not exist, a commonwealth does not exist, because no human city can be just. An illuminating example of this is Augustine's description of how earthly cities look when we do not view them through the filter of a perspective on the nature of

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[61]Ibid., pp. 73-74. This passage is Augustine's paraphrase from Cicero's *Republic*, Book ?e, chapter one.

[62]Ibid., p. 75.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Ibid.

[65]See, for example, a passage I have previously cited, where Augustine makes it clear that the fall, man cannot have access to the city of God in this life- Book thirteen, chapter one.

justice. "Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale? What are criminal gangs but petty kingdoms?"[66] Augustine maintains that when we look at cities without the preconception that they are just, what we actually find is an association of people that is not radically different from a gang of criminals; both cities and criminal gangs plunder material resources for their own use. The only real difference is that whereas criminals are usually punished, cities can plunder with impunity.[67] The reason for this impunity is that cities disguise the real nature of their activities under the pretension that they act justly. As we have seen, in Augustine's terms, the only real justice is the correct ordering of the soul wherein all things and people are given their proper due. Consequently, Augustine believes that although cities may profess to be just, their understandings of justice are merely conventional; these conventional understandings of justice allow cities to obfuscate the fact that, in reality, they have the same goal as a band of robbers: the plundering and distribution of material goods. Thus, by making justice his criterion for the existence of true commonwealths, Cicero is forced to deny the existence of any commonwealth. Augustine implies that Cicero expects too much from earthly politics because he fails to realize that true justice cannot exist on earth.

In opposition to Cicero's misguided definition of a commonwealth, Augustine

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[66]Augustine, p. 130.

[67]Ibid.

offers a definition that he thinks conforms more to the realities of earthly politics. Instead of defining a city as a community of men united by "a common sense of right, and a community of interest," as does Cicero, Augustine suggests that it is more plausible to define a city as an " . . . association of a multitude of rational beings united by a common agreement on the objects of their love."[68] He points out that his definition, unlike Cicero's, does not lead to the conclusion that no political association can be called a commonwealth. Indeed, Augustine's definition can be universally applied; not only Rome, but also, " . . . the Athenians and any other Greeks, or . . . Babylon of the Assyrians . . . and . . . any other nation whatsoever" can be defined as a commonwealth.[69] The reason for the universal applicability of Augustine's definition is that it does not require that human cities be just in order to be described as real political communities. He reminds the reader that justice cannot exist in any city because in each of these cities, " . . . God does not rule there . . ." Consequently, the characteristic feature of every human city is that "it is devoid of true justice."[70] No human political order can give everyone and everything its proper due.

However, despite the fact that he eliminates justice as criteria for the evaluation of cities, Augustine does not dismiss such evaluations altogether. He tells us that we can

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[68]Ibid., p. 890.

[69]Ibid., p. 891.

[70]Ibid., p. 891.

judge a city on the basis of the nature of the things it loves; " . . . the better the objects of this agreement, the better the people; the worse the objects of this love, the worse the people."[71] In short, Augustine believes that he offers a definition of the city that allows us to evaluate human politics in a realistic manner.

It is important to note here, that although Augustine's estimation of the possibility of justice in earthly cities may seem hopelessly pessimistic, his pessimism is derived from an understanding of what justice really entails. As we have seen, Augustine defines justice as giving everyone and everything its proper due; this includes the body, the soul, other people, and God. Measured against such a standard of justice, it is not surprising that Augustine believes that earthly cities' conventional understandings of justice are inadequate. As Ernest Fortin remarks,

> . . . instead of taking moral phenomena as they appear to decent non-philosophers, as does Aristotle, for example, Augustine habitually chooses to study them in the light of their highest metaphysical principles . . . Viewed in that light, all human endeavours fall short of the mark and must be qualified as defective.[72]

Thus, in the context of giving everyone and everything its proper due, Augustine rejects conventional political understandings of justice because he does not think that any

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[71]Ibid., p. 890.

[72]Ernest L. Fortin, "Introduction," in *Augustine: Political Writings*(Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), p.xv.

such definition can give to each its proper due. In his terms, those who use conventional notions of justice to try and understand earthly politics are mistaken because they do not understand that justice cannot exist on earth; it is a strictly other-worldly phenomenon.

The Critique of Millenarianism

Augustine is not concerned only with those who fail to appreciate the gap between their understandings of justice, and the ideal of perfect justice which is known only to God. His greatest concern is with those groups in his time who believed that they had a direct knowledge of justice that could be readily applied to concrete political circumstances; this knowledge of justice could then be used to create the conditions for the attainment of complete happiness in this life. These groups called themselves, "millenarians," and they based their supposed understanding of God's divine plan on a particular interpretation of the Book of *Revelations.*[73] Augustine strongly criticises the millenarians, and in his criticism of them we see his clearest rejection of the principles underlying what we might refer to as political idealism.

Before we can properly evaluate Augustine's attempt to refute millenarian ideas, we must first understand the interpretation of *Revelations* subscribed to by the millenarian groups. The basis of their interpretation of God's providence was the following passage from *Revelations.*

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[73]Augustine., p. 907.

> Then I saw thrones, and those who sat on them; and judgement was given. And the souls of those slain because of their witness to Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast and its image, or received its mark on their forehead or hand, these reigned with Jesus for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not come to life until the end of the thousand years. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the man who shares in this first resurrection. Over them, the second death has no power; but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and will reign with him for the thousand years(Revelations: 20, 1-6).[74]

As Augustine explains, this passage was interpreted by the "millenarians" to mean that God's kingdom would be actualised on earth for a thousand year period preceding the final judgement of mankind. Those who had been true believers of Christ in their lifetime would be resurrected and would rule with Christ in his thousand-year kingdom. Moreover, the "millenarians" also believed that the arrival of this kingdom of God was imminent. Their evidence for this was the scriptural passage which says, "With the Lord, one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like one day"(2 Peter: 3,8). On the basis of this passage, the "millenarians" believed that after a six-thousand year period, the seventh millennium, like the seventh day of creation, would be a time of rest. Thus, they interpreted the passage from *Revelations* to mean that God's kingdom would

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[74]This passage of scripture is translated by Henry Bettenson in the Penguin edition of the *City of God*, p. 906.

be actualised on Earth at the start of the seventh millennium.[75]

Some Christians in Augustine's time believed that they had detected a pattern in historical events which made God's providential plan evident to them. Consequently, they thought that they should begin to prepare for the imminent arrival of God's kingdom on earth. On the basis of their interpretation of history, they thought they had reason to believe that they were passing through the latter stretches of the sixth millennium, and that they would soon experience the actuality of God's Kingdom on earth as described in the book of *Revelations*.[76] An example of a Christian who held such an interpretation is Orosius, a young priest who was a colleague of Augustine's in North Africa. Orosius wrote a book entitled, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans.* In this work, he claimed that the recent worldly successes of Christianity were a portent for the earthly arrival of the kingdom of God. According to Orosius, . . .

> Old Testament prophecies relating to the blessings of the messianic age were gradually being fulfilled: swords were being turned into plowshares, justice and peace were on the verge of forging a lasting alliance, and under the aegis of the new emperors, the kingdom of God was about to be inaugurated, not just in heaven, as some less worldly-minded apologists

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[75]Augustine., p. 907.

[76]Ibid., p. 908.

for the Christian faith had predicted, but here on earth.[77]

In the *City of God*, Augustine responds to this type of scriptural interpretation, and he engages in a comprehensive analysis of *Revelations* that is considerably more subtle than the one provided by Orosius. To begin with, Augustine denies that the "first resurrection" spoken of by John is a physical, bodily resurrection; rather, Augustine argues that this refers to the spiritual conversion to Christ that happens to Christians in their mortal life. It is the "second resurrection" that refers to a bodily resurrection; this resurrection happens after the final judgement at the end of time:

> For in this first resurrection only those take part who will be blessed for eternity, whereas in the second, about which Jesus is soon to speak, he will teach us that the blessed and the wretched alike take part. The one is the resurrection of mercy, the other the resurrection of judgement.[78]

Thus, Augustine argues that the "first resurrection" referred to in *Revelations* is only a spiritual resurrection. He emphasizes this point, because the millenarians had argued that the "first resurrection" was a bodily one, and that John was referring to a thousand-year resurrection of the saints who would rule alongside Christ, before the final judgement.[79] Augustine points out that the millenarians believe that this thousand-year

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[77]Fortin, p. xviii.

[78]Augustine, pp. 904-905.

[79]Ibid., p. 907.

period will be a paradise, " . . . those people assert that those who have risen again will spend their rest in the most unrestrained material feasts, in which there will be so much to eat and drink that not only will those supplies keep within no bounds of moderation, but will also exceed the limits even of incredibility."[80] Augustine reproaches the millenarians for their anticipation of the arrival of a materialistic paradise, and for their ignorance of the spiritual nature of Christianity.[81]

Augustine also criticises other aspects of the millenarians' interpretation of *Revelations.* The millenarians believed they had found other clues in this passage that suggested that the arrival of a thousand-year earthly paradise was imminent. For example, they pointed to John's description of the Devil being chained up for a thousand years; they took this to mean that the Devil would be incapacitated for the duration of the thousand years of paradise, and would be let loose again at the time of the final judgement.[82] Augustine denies that the thousand-year period described in *Revelations* refers to a literal period of time. He suggests that the number one thousand, in this context, refers to the entirety of time.[83] Thus, Augustine argues that John is saying that the Devil is shut up for eternity, not just for one thousand years.[84] Also, the fact that John

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[80]Ibid.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Ibid.

[83]Ibid., p. 908.

[84]Ibid., p. 909.

says that the Devil is chained up, does not mean that he will cease to seduce men and have influence over events. It simply means that the believing Christian is immune to the Devil. Augustine says that when John writes that the Devil was chained up so he should not lead the nations astray, John is using "nations" to refer to the church of believing Christians.[85]

In short, contrary to the very literal reading of *Revelations* by the millenarians, Augustine interprets this passage as a metaphorical description of the proper behaviour of a Christian in this life. The "first resurrection" refers to a genuine conversion to Christ, and the "second resurrection" refers to the final judgement at the end of time; only those who were believing Christians in their life will be immune from the "second death" of the final judgement.[86] Thus, Augustine, in contrast to the millenarians, argues that there will be no earthly paradise preceding the final judgement. The injustices of the world will continue until the end of time, and no one but God knows when that will be.

It is natural to wonder whether Augustine's criticism of "millenarianism" can have any relevance to our own time. Much modern scholarship would suggest that it does. This scholarship claims that the misguided historical interpretations of the "millenarians" is a perennial human problem; if this is in fact the case, then it is possible that Augustine's criticism of the "millenarians" is still of value to us today. Although the

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[85]Ibid.

[86]Ibid., p. 918.

"millenarians" of Augustine's time were "idealists" in a specifically Christian sense, some modern thinkers claim to have uncovered similar interpretations of history in the modern world.[87]

Perhaps the most important piece of recent scholarship that has dealt with this issue is Eric Voegelin's *The New Science of Politics*. Voegelin maintains that the mistaken notion that the Christian idea of a final realm of heavenly perfection can be actualized in historical existence, has been a recurrent problem since the "millenarians" of Augustine's time.[88] Voegelin believes this belief to be a folly, and he contrasts it with Augustine's idea that humans can only attain a state of perfection in the transcendental and trans-historical city of God. He says that "speculation on the meaning of history," must be contrasted with,

> . . . the Christian philosophy of history . . . that is, . . . Augustinian speculation. Into the traditional speculation had entered the Jewish-Christian idea of an end of history in the sense of an intelligible state of perfection. History no longer moved in cycles, as it did with Plato and Aristotle, but acquired direction and destination. Beyond Jewish

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[87]Three of the best pieces of scholarship in this area are, Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), Karl Lowith, *Meaning in History*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), and Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

[88]Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 121.

> messianism in the strict sense the specifically Christian conception of history . . . advanced toward the understanding of the end as a transcendental fulfilment. In his elaboration of this theoretical insight, St. Augustine distinguished between a profane sphere of history in which empires rise and fall and a sacred history which culminates in the appearance of Christ and the establishment of the church. . . . Only transcendental history, including the earthly pilgrimage of the church, has direction toward its eschatological fulfilment. Profane history, on the other hand, has no such direction; it is a waiting for the end . . .[89]

Thus, Voegelin contrasts the idea that history has a meaning and purpose, with Augustine's important distinction between the "profane" events of the earthly city and the divine providence that exists in the City of God. As we have already seen, Augustine does not think that human reason can presume to comprehend this providence; consequently, it does not make sense to try and find a meaning to the events of the earthly city. Voegelin clearly prefers the Augustinian conception of history to that of "gnostics," be they Christian or secular. In Voegelin's terms, "gnostics" are those groups throughout history who fail to realize that, "What comes into being will have an end, and the mystery of this stream of being is impenetrable."[90] Like the "millenarians" of

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[89]Ibid., p. 118.

[90]Ibid., p. 167.

Augustine's time, "gnostics" are people, " . . . who will not leave the transfiguration of the world to the grace of God beyond history but will do the work of God himself, right here and now, in history."[91]

Voegelin elaborates on the dangers of the various "gnostic" groups that have emerged throughout history, and this elaboration can help us to appreciate why Augustine's criticism of this type of historical understanding can have relevance to the politics of our own day. Voegelin sees "gnostic" thinking as a cause of much of the violence of modernity.[92] He contends that although "gnosticism"first appeared in a Christian form, its true nature is not Christian, and this fact soon became evident. Voegelin believes that the idea that man can find meaning and purpose in history runs directly counter to the Christian idea of "the truth of the open soul," and the soul's quest to come to grips with "differentiated reality."[93] It will be remembered that Augustine speaks of this kind of "truth of the open soul" when he says that the only way that man can gain a modicum of peace and happiness in this life is by contemplating the mystery and beauty of God's unfathomable providence.[94]

However, perhaps the most important part of Voegelin's analysis is his contention

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[91]Ibid., p. 147.

[92]Ibid., p. 173.

[93]Ibid., p. 163.

[94]Augustine., p. 471.

that man's tendency to believe that he has found a meaning in history that culminates in the actualization of a perfect society on Earth, is a perennial human problem; he sees it as a problem because he claims that "gnostic" groups are often willing to take drastic action in order to establish heaven on earth. They are so sure that they are fulfilling an historically necessary purpose, that they are impervious to reasonable argument. Consequently, violence becomes a given because "gnostics" are more than willing to use it to achieve their ends, and governments must use it as it is the only way to prevent "gnostics" from overthrowing the political order.[95] If Voegelin is correct in his assessment of the behaviour of "gnostic" groups, then it is not difficult to see how Augustine's criticism of the "gnostics" of his time is as important to understand today as it was when it was written.

Indeed, all of Augustine's political insights can have value for us today; Augustine offers the reader of the *City of God* a comprehensive critique of idealism in the realm of politics. Moreover, it is by no means a shallow critique; Augustine's pessimism about the possibilities of earthly politics are a direct consequence of his pessimism about human life in general. As we have seen, Augustine argues that the only way that fallen humans can gain any peace in this life is to come to an understanding of God as the immutable creator. As a result, the earthly city cannot offer people happiness because it can only offer them material pleasures under the guise of a hypocritical profession of

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[95]Voegelin., p. 144.

justice. Augustine also teaches us to be wary of those who claim to have an understanding of justice; even if one does not agree with him that God is the source of all being, Augustine makes it clear that it is no easy task to try and discover standards of justice in nature. In short, by judging politics in the context of what a complete understanding of the purpose and meaning of human life would entail, Augustine helps us to appreciate the fundamental limitations of political action.

Chapter Three

This chapter will deal with some of the main similarities between Augustine and Hobbes, in terms of their views of human nature, their conceptions of reason, and their political prescriptions. I argue that their similar understanding of human nature and the role of reason lead them to have similarly modest expectations from political regimes. However, although I do not discount the importance of these similarities, the main intent of this chapter is to provide the necessary context for my analysis in chapter four, where I argue that despite their similarities, Hobbes is the more "idealistic" political thinker.

Augustine's and Hobbes's Similar View of Human Nature

I first examine Hobbes's description of the natural condition of humans, and then compare it with Augustine's description of the nature of fallen man. Hobbes advances his view of human nature by explaining what humans would be like if they were to exist without a government to over-awe them. He refers to such a condition as a state of nature. He makes it clear that when describing this state of nature he is not referring to a particular historical time in which man existed without an effective government. Rather, he is describing the conditions that would emerge if men did not submit to a common power that governs their actions. Hobbes justifies his description of these conditions by looking at " . . . the manner of life which men that have formally lived under a peaceful

government use to degenerate into, in a civil war."[96] In short, Hobbes believes that man without constraints is predisposed to act in a certain way; he thus believes that the behaviour of men in situations where there is not an effective government is indicative of their natural inclinations and desires.

In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes describes the characteristics of men existing in a non-political state of nature in some detail. This description has three main features. First, he claims that in the state of nature there is a fundamental equality among men. Next, he maintains that where there is no effective government to restrain them, people are primarily motivated by considerations of competition, diffidence and glory. Finally, Hobbes argues that the state of nature is analogous to a state of war.

The first main contention that Hobbes makes about men in the state of nature is that there is a fundamental equality among them. Hobbes does not deny that there are important differences among people; for example, he is willing to concede that one man may be, " . . . stronger of body or of quicker mind than another . . ."[97] However, Hobbes does not believe that these kinds of differences can provide some men with a claim to certain benefits, the right to which is denied to others. In Hobbes's view, physical differences between people are put into perspective once we realize that people are equal in one important respect: they are equally capable of killing one another. Differences in

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[96]Hobbes, p. 77.

[97]Ibid., p. 74.

bodily strength do not give some men an advantage in the ability to kill, since, " . . . as to the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others that are in the same danger with himself."[98] In short, advantages of physical strength do not change the fact that a weaker man can kill a stronger man, through the use of guile or by cooperating with others.

Not only does Hobbes think that we are equal in the physical sense of being equally capable of killing one another, he also maintains that we are equal in regards to the "faculties of the mind." Indeed, Hobbes argues that in this area we find, " . . . a greater equality amongst men than that of strength."[99] According to Hobbes, men gain prudence from experience, " . . . which equal time equally bestows on all men in those things they equally apply themselves unto."[100] Hobbes says that although we may find it difficult to believe that men have an equal potential for the attainment of wisdom, our disbelief is simply a product of our own vanity. He claims that while most people are usually willing to acknowledge others as their betters in the areas of wit, eloquence and erudition, it is a human characteristic to, " . . . hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves."[101] In short, since we are all equally contented with our share of wisdom, this is a sign that we

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[98]Ibid.

[99]Ibid., pp. 74-75.

[100]Ibid., p. 75.

[101]Ibid.

are equal in a very important respect, for Hobbes claims that, " . . . there is not ordinarily a greater sign of the equal distribution of anything than that every man is contented with his share."[102]

For Hobbes, then, mens' equal capacity to kill one another, and their equal contentment with their share of wisdom, is indicative of a fundamental equality of ability. As a result of this equality of ability, Hobbes claims that there are three principal motivations of men in the state of nature. First, Hobbes says that this equality of ability means that men are equally hopeful in their ability to attain their ends. Consequently, competition emerges between men when they both, " . . . desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy."[103] Hobbes explains that all men experience " . . . a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, that ceaseth only in death."[104] Even if a man is content with a moderate amount of power, Hobbes says that he must still continually try to increase his power, because he cannot insure that the power he has at present will be maintained if he does not try to acquire more.[105] In such a situation, Hobbes warns, men will try to destroy one another, because they must all increase their power in order to ensure that they procure the things that are necessary for

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[102]Ibid.

[103]Ibid.

[104]Ibid., p. 58.

[105]Ibid.

their self-preservation.[106]

Also, Hobbes points out that some mens' desires go well beyond those things that are needed for the sake of self-preservation. These are men who take, " . . . pleasure in contemplating their own power in the acts of conquest . . ."[107] As a result, it is prudent for all men to increase their power since they are always in danger of attack from those who are augmenting their power for the purposes of survival, or from those who enjoy conquest for its own sake.[108] Thus, a fundamental mistrust, or diffidence, exists between men in the state of nature.

The final main motivation of men in the state of nature that is identified by Hobbes is men's desire for glory. As we have already seen, Hobbes believes that an important indication of men's equality is the fact that each man thinks himself to be wiser than his peers.[109] In Hobbes's view, this has important consequences for men's behaviour.

> For every man looketh that his companion should value him at the same rate he sets upon himself, and upon all signs of contempt, or undervaluing, naturally endeavours, as far as he dares(which amongst them that have no common power to keep them in quiet, is far enough to make them destroy

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[106]Ibid., p. 75.

[107]Ibid.

[108]Ibid.

[109]Ibid.

each other), to extort a greater value from his contemners, by damage, and from others, by the example.[110]

In short, Hobbes believes that men are also driven to destroy one another out of a need to have others value them as much as they value themselves. He makes it clear that this motivation is so strong that a seemingly trivial matter can drive a man to avenge a perceived slight. For example, " . . . a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons, or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name" may be enough to drive a man to violence.[111]

To summarize, the three principal motivations of men in the state of nature are: a need to compete with others for the necessities of life; a prudent fear of the possibly excessive power-drives of others, and the consequent need to increase one's power for the purpose of self-protection; and a need to ensure that others respect one as much as one respects oneself. Hobbes concludes that the ubiquity of these motivations means that the state of nature is analogous to a state of war. He provides a very explicit definition of what constitutes a state of war.

According to Hobbes, men are in a state of war where there is no effective government to over-awe them. He explains that there does not have to be actual combat

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[110]Ibid., pp. 75-76.

[111]Ibid., p. 76.

between men for a state of war to exist; all that is required is that there be a known disposition to fight. "For War consisteth not in battle only, or the act of fighting, but in a tract of time wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known."[112] Thus, for Hobbes, a state of war exists where there is a known disposition for men to fight, and no assurance that they will not, such as the situation of mutual mistrust that exists in the state of nature.[113]

Hobbes argues that the characteristics of a state of war are present where there is no effective government, because in such a situation, " . . . men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal."[114] In short, with no effective government to check mens' behaviour, each man must rely on his own strength for self-defence; as a result, a state of war exists. Hobbes provides a vivid description of what life in the state of nature/state of war is like.

> Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of war, where every man is enemy to every man, the same is consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently, no

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[112]Ibid.

[113]Ibid.

[114]Ibid.

> culture of the earth, no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require arts, no letters, no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.[115]

To those readers who think that it strange that without a power to over-awe them, men are apt to destroy one another, Hobbes challenges them to confirm his assessment by considering their own experience:

> Let him therefore consider with himself- when taking a journey, he arms himself, and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his doors; when even in his house, he locks his chests; and this when he knows there be laws, and public officers, armed, to revenge all injuries shall be done him- what opinion he has of his fellow subjects . . . Does he not there as much accuse mankind by his actions, as I do by my words?[116]

Thus, Hobbes is suggesting that even where there is an effective government, we all implicitly recognize the truth of his assertions about human nature. That is, at some level, we all recognize that we ourselves and others are primarily motivated by considerations of competition, diffidence, and the desire for glory.

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[115]Ibid.

[116]Ibid., p. 77.

As the above summary of Hobbes on human nature reveals, Hobbes is like Augustine in one important respect. Both of these thinkers have a rather bleak view of human nature which affects their political thought in a fundamental way. In general, they have a pessimistic understanding of the behaviour of men; for the most part, they do not believe that humans are motivated by a desire to improve themselves through the cultivation of virtue. Rather, they feel that humans are primarily motivated by such low and conflict-producing things as the desire for power and glory. As a result, both Augustine and Hobbes see the main purpose of politics as the enforcement of order through coercion and punishment, and the securing and protection of worldly goods.

To begin with, there are some important similarities between Hobbes's understanding of human behaviour in the state of nature, and Augustine's description of the nature of fallen man. As we have seen, Hobbes believes that humans in the state of nature are motivated by considerations of competition, diffidence and glory. He also thinks that the state of nature is analogous to a state of war; in this state of war, "nothing can be unjust."[117] There are important parallels with this description of human behaviour in Augustine's account of the consequences of the fall of man.

First of all, Augustine and Hobbes both claim that humans possess an strong desire for material goods. Hobbes writes that we all have, " . . . a perpetual and restless desire

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[117]Ibid., p.78.

for power after power, that ceaseth only in death."[118] The reason for humans' perpetual desire for power is their corresponding desire to ensure that they will always be able to possess the things that they covet. Even if a man is moderate in his desires, he must still try to increase his power in order to ensure that he can protect his material goods from those with more insatiable appetites.[119] Augustine also believes that a strong desire for material goods is an important part of human nature. According to Augustine, it is part of man's punishment after his fall from God to be burdened with innumerable desires that he can never fully control. Indeed, Augustine describes this state as an internal war within each man between his will and his desire.[120] It seems that both Augustine and Hobbes recognize desire as a fundamental motivating force in humans. Not only do they both think that humans have a strong desire for material things, but they describe this phenomenon in similar terms; Hobbes refers to "restless" desires that last for the duration of our lives, while Augustine claims that we are perpetually enslaved to our desires.[121]

Another important aspect of Hobbes's account of human behaviour in the state of nature is his contention that humans have a love of glory and honour. As we have seen, he believes that each man wants others to value him as highly as he values himself; if a

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[118]Ibid., p. 58.

[119]Ibid.

[120]Augustine, p. 571.

[121]Hobbes, p. 58. Augustine, p. 575.

man does not receive such recognition, then this can be enough to drive him to violence.[122] Again, we find a similar account in Augustine. Augustine makes it clear that vain and honour-loving behaviour is an important part of the punishment bestowed on man after the fall. When describing the characteristics of the earthly city, Augustine attributes man's motivation to conquer to his strong desire for glory. The resident of the earthly city, " . . . looks for glory from men." Consequently, residents of the earthly city are driven by a " . . . lust for domination . . ."[123]

Furthermore, both Augustine and Hobbes believe that man's pride manifests itself in many different ways.[124] It is evident not only in his desire for domination; it can also be seen in the proclivity of each man to think himself wiser than everyone else. We have seen that according to Hobbes, men are equally contented with their share of wisdom. For Hobbes, it is a characteristic of man to " . . . hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves."[125] Similarly, Augustine maintains that one of the main characteristics of fallen man is their vain desire to overstate their own worth.[126] Hence, one of Augustine's main reasons for distrusting philosophers' quest for truth, is his belief that very few men

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[122]Hobbes, pp. 75-76.

[123]Augustine, p. 593.

[124]In chapter four, I will provide an explanation of the differences between Augustine's and Hobbes's conceptions of pride.

[125]Hobbes, p. 75.

[126]Augustine, pp. 576-577.

are actually motivated by a desire to discover the truth. According to Augustine, a much stronger motivation is man's desire to " . . . seem wiser and cleverer than the rest . . ." Men therefore prefer to make up their own opinions; it is not wisdom that they care about, but only the appearance of wisdom.[127] For both Augustine and Hobbes then, an important aspect of human nature is man's proud desire for glory and honour.

The result of Augustine's and Hobbes's view that men are primarily motivated by their desires and a love of glory, is that both think that it is natural for men to have difficulty living in peace. One of Hobbes's main contentions about the state of nature is that there is a fundamental diffidence, or mistrust among men.[128] As for Augustine, he sees conflict as an important part of the life of fallen man. Indeed, Augustine points out that anger and the desire for vengeance are so strongly ingrained in men, that they can even become angry with inanimate objects. Such irrationality is the consequence of the fact that the need for retribution is a strong motivating force in man.[129]

Thus, Augustine and Hobbes both feel that human nature is such that the life of man is miserable, conflict-ridden, and full of suffering. Augustine goes so far as to say that it is impossible for man to be happy in this life.[130] This reminds us of Hobbes's famous

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[127]Ibid., p. 816.

[128]Hobbes, p. 75.

[129]Augustine, p. 576.

[130]See Augustine, pp. 571-575, as well as chapter one of this thesis, pp. 21-29.

description of man's life in the state of nature, " . . . solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."[131] As we will see, their common view that the human condition is a miserable one leads both Augustine and Hobbes to have modest expectations when it comes to politics.

Augustine's and Hobbes's Similar Conception of Reason

Another important similarity between Augustine and Hobbes is their respective views on the proper use of human reason. First, in the *Leviathan*, Hobbes is sceptical of the ability of human reason to solve the problem of how humans should regulate their lives in order to conform to an objective notion of virtuous behaviour. Indeed, Hobbes says that the greater part of the philosophy of the past has been, " . . . rather a dream than science . . . set forth in senseless and insignificant language."[132] Hobbes believes that Cicero is correct in saying that , "there can be nothing so absurd, but may be found in the books of philosophers."[133] His dissatisfaction with previous philosophers stems from his conviction that they did not know how to properly reason about things. They did not realize that,

The use and end of reason is not the finding of the sum and truth of one

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[131]Hobbes, p. 76.

[132]Hobbes, p. 456.

[133]Ibid., p. 24.

> or a few consequences, remote from the first definitions and settled significations of names, but to begin at these, and proceed from one consequence to another. For there can be no certainty of the last conclusion without a certainty of all those affirmations and negations on which it was grounded and inferred.[134]

Thus, Hobbes takes exception with previous philosophers because they did not know how to properly reason about things. They made sweeping, general assertions that were not substantiated by any actual evidence. Instead of following the model of reasoning that is outlined above, previous philosophers were apt to reason with the use of what Hobbes call absurd speech.

> . . . when we reason in words of general signification, and fall upon a general inference which is false . . . it is indeed an ABSURDITY, or senseless speech. For error is but a deception, in presuming that somewhat is past, or to come, of which, though it were not past, or not to come, yet there was no impossibility discoverable. But when we make a general assertion, unless it be a true one, the possibility of it is inconceivable. And words whereby we conceive nothing but the sound are those we call *absurd*, *insignificant*, and *nonsense*.[135]

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[134]Ibid., p. 23.

[135]Ibid., p. 24.

Hobbes thinks that the problem with this type of erroneous reasoning, is that it leads to violence. When men do not know how to reason properly, conflict will be the likely result, unless there is someone who can resolve their disputes for them.

> . . . therefore, as when there is a controversy in an account, the parties must by their own accord set up for right reason the reason of some arbitrator or judge to whose sentence they will both stand, or their controversy must either come to blows or be undecided, for want of a right reason constituted by nature, so it is also in all debates of what kind soever.[136]

In order to understand fully Hobbes's dissatisfaction with the traditional conception of reason, it is necessary to examine in more detail what Hobbes sees as the right way to use reason. Whereas the tradition that he opposes had a teleological conception of reason, Hobbes eliminates this conception of reason from his own analysis of politics. At least in the first two parts of *Leviathan*, he does not think that there is an end to human existence other than mere self-preservation. Consequently, Hobbes proceeds on the basis of a mathematical conception of reason; in this way, he begins from the premise that man has a natural right to self-preservation and deduces his political prescriptions accordingly.

We can see Hobbes's break with the teleological tradition most clearly by

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[136]Ibid., p. 23.

examining his definition of felicity. In this definition of felicity, we can see that, for Hobbes, there is no end to human life other than life itself. He defines felicity as,

> *Continual success* in obtaining those things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say, continual prospering, is that men call *Felicity*; I mean the felicity of this life. For there is no such thing as perpetual tranquillity of mind, while we live here; because life itself is but motion, and can never be without desire, nor without fear, no more than without sense. What kind of felicity God hath ordained to them that devoutly honour Him, a man shall no sooner know than enjoy, being joys that now are as incomprehensible as the word of school-men *beatifical vision* is unintelligible.[137]

Thus, unlike previous political philosophers, Hobbes does not think that we should take our bearings by an attempt to discover the proper ends of human life. Rather, we should begin with the supposition that man's primary desire is self-preservation. Human happiness consists of the fulfilment of our desires; it does not consist of the discovery of what we should be desiring. For Hobbes, there can be no distinction between the good and the pleasant. As Hobbes puts it, "*Pleasure* . . . or *delight*, is the appearance, or sense, of good; and *molestation* or *displeasure*, the appearance, or sense, of evil."[138]

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[137]Ibid., pp. 34-35.

[138]Ibid., p. 29. See also, Strauss, *Natural Right and History*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953). p. 167.

When we view our desires in this way, it changes our conception of reason. If we are interested in the proper ends of human life, we use reason in the manner that it was used by the tradition that Hobbes is opposing. That is, we use it to try and discover the highest end of human life and rank man's various desires in accordance with this end. However, if like Hobbes, we do not think that the highest end of human life can be discovered, the role of reason changes. Reason now becomes a means of satisfying a predetermined end, rather than a means of discovering what the end of our life is. In Hobbes's case, that predetermined end is our fundamental desire for self-preservation, and our corresponding desire to make our life as comfortable as possible. As a result, we use our thoughts as, " . . . scouts and spies, to range abroad and find the way to the things desired . . ."[139]

Further evidence that Hobbes conceived of reason as a means of discovering the requirements of self-preservation can be found in his definition of moral philosophy. In the context of justifying the proposition that his laws of nature are, "the true and only moral philosophy,"[140] Hobbes argues that it is not the role of moral philosophy to discover what is good and what is evil; good and evil are relative terms. It is the task of the moral philosopher to determine, "what is good and evil in the conservation and society of mankind."[141]

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[139]Ibid., p. 41.

[140]Ibid., p. 100.

[141]Ibid.

> *Good* and *evil* are names that signify our appetites and aversions, which in different tempers, customs, and doctrines of men are different; and divers men differ nòt only in their judgement on the senses . . . but also of what is comfortable or disagreeable to reason in the actions of common life . . . from whence arises disputes, controversies, and at last war. And therefore so long a man is in the condition of mere nature (which is a condition of war) as private appetite is the measure of good and evil; and consequently, all men agree on this, that peace is good; and therefore also the way or means of peace . . . are good . . . and their contrary vices, evil.[142]

Hobbes goes on to say that the fault of previous moral philosophers is that they failed to realize that the goodness of virtues is the fact that they are a, "means of peaceable, sociable, and comfortable living."[143] In short, Hobbes believes that it was the error of traditional philosophy to try and discover the end of human existence; in opposition to this, Hobbes believes that the proper role of reason is to discover the means of creating peace so that men can preserve themselves, and thereby enjoy their respective material pleasures. In the next chapter, I will examine how Hobbes uses his model of the right way to reason as a method for creating what he sees as a realistic political science.

Since I have already explored Augustine's conception of reason in the first chapter

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[142]Ibid.

[143]Ibid.

of this thesis, I will briefly recapitulate this position in order to compare it with Hobbes's view of reason. To begin with, Augustine also has a limited notion of the scope of human reason. For Augustine, the providence of God cannot be understood by human reason; God controls the order of events in history, " . . . an order completely hidden from us, but perfectly known to God himself."[144] Thus, there is a purpose to the events of history, but this purpose is inscrutable to human reason.

Consequently, Augustine believes that it is futile for humans to attempt to use their reason to discover the meaning of divine providence. He thinks that the philosophers who try to do this are engaged in a futile and prideful exercise. However intelligent these philosophers may be, it does not change the fact that they have always been, " . . . hindered by human weakness, especially when divine providence rightly opposed their presumption, in order to show, by contrast, the way of piety, which starts from humility and ascends to the heights."[145] The attempt to look for an explanation of the events of history in the world of man, instead of simply accepting the mysterious providence of God, is the mistake made by philosophers. From Augustine's perspective, it is yet another example of the misguided pride of man that resulted from the fall.[146]

Like Hobbes, Augustine thinks that the misguided presumption of most

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[144]Augustine, p. 176.

[145]Ibid., p. 55.

[146]Ibid., p. 571.

philosophers is their belief that they can discover the answer to the question of " . . . how we should regulate our lives towards the attainment of happiness."[147] Augustine does not think that this question can be answered. We must simply accept that God is the source of all truth; and that this truth cannot be understood by human reason.[148] Also like Hobbes, Augustine believes that the result of misguided philosophical speculation has been continual conflict and disagreement. This perpetual conflict stems from mens' use of reason as a means to self-aggrandizement, and from the fact that the frailty of human reason prevents philosophers from having access to the truth.[149] In short, for Augustine, divine providence cannot be explained through the use of human reason; this causes him to be very cautious in his prescriptions for proper political behaviour.

Thus, both Augustine and Hobbes take a similarly sceptical view of the ability of human reason to discover man's proper end in life, and they both believe that man's misguided use of reason has been a source of conflict. This is not surprising, for as we saw in our discussion of their views of natural man, Augustine and Hobbes view man as being very selfish; consequently, neither one of them believes that a political community can be governed on the basis of an agreement on a high conception of the nature of justice. This leads both to have low expectations from politics.

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[147]Ibid., p. 815.

[148]Ibid., p. 819.

[149]Ibid., p. 816.

Augustine's and Hobbes's Similar Political Views

Before I examine Augustine's and Hobbes's similarly low expectations from politics, I will first outline Hobbes's views on the proper function of a political regime. On the basis of his description of the reality of human nature, Hobbes is very specific about the necessary purpose of any kind of effective political order. In chapters fourteen and fifteen of *Leviathan*, Hobbes outlines various laws of nature that he believes must be followed if men are to avoid the dangers of the state of nature through the construction of a commonwealth. In chapter seventeen, Hobbes describes what kind of commonwealth must be created if obedience to these laws of nature, which he sees as the necessary condition for social peace, is to be enforced.

The most important of the laws of nature is the ninth law, the law against pride. This ninth law is, " . . . that every man acknowledge other for his equal by nature. The breach of this precept is pride."[150] That Hobbes believes that it is necessary for peace for men to esteem one another as equals is a necessary consequence of his description of human behaviour in the state of nature. As we have seen, Hobbes believes that every human being thinks himself to be superior in wisdom to every other man.[151] Consequently, he does not think that people will agree to "enter into conditions of peace"

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[150]Hobbes, p. 97.

[151]Ibid., p. 75.

unless their mutual equality is acknowledged.[152]

Hobbes is aware of Aristotle's argument that nature has made some men more fit to rule than others;[153] however, for two main reasons, Hobbes takes exception to this view. First, he thinks that there are very few people who would rather be governed by others than govern themselves. Second, he argues that, " . . . nor when the wise in their own conceit contend by force with them who distrust their own wisdom, do they always, or often, or almost any time, get the victory."[154] In short, Hobbes believes that it is impractical to treat people as unequals in a political sense; most people prefer to govern themselves, and the wise cannot be assured of victory if they initiate a battle with those that distrust them. To claim a right to govern others on the basis of superior wisdom is thus a futile undertaking. Consequently, it does not so much matter whether or not people are equal; what matters is that there can be no social peace unless people are *treated as if they were equal.*[155]

In short, Hobbes believes that an acknowledgement of men's equality is a necessary condition of social peace. He is aware that it is difficult for men to acknowledge others to be their equal, and that some men, " . . . require for themselves that which they would

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[152]Ibid., p. 97.

[153]Aristotle, *Politics* ed. Carnes Lord(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1254b

[154]Hobbes, pp. 96-97.

[155]Ibid., p. 97.

not have to be granted to others . . ."[156] Since there are, "very few so foolish that had not rather govern themselves than be governed by others,"[157] Hobbes feels that an acknowledgement of this equality is a necessary condition of an effective political order. The political difficulty that Hobbes is trying to overcome is the problem of how to reconcile authority with men's fundamental equality. He solves this difficulty by making consent the only viable claim to political rule; I will explore the intricacies of Hobbes's notion of consent in a moment.[158] Thus, Hobbes tries to solve the problem of men's pride in relations withone another by basing political authority on the equality of men. Consequently, for Hobbes's political project to work, he must rhetorically persuade men that it is to their advantage to treat one another as equals; this is what he tries to do in chapter thirteen.

In this chapter, Hobbes stresses the advantages of life in civil society by contrasting it with existence in the state of nature. He does this by emphasizing the material possibilities of life in civil society. Hobbes thinks that men should value civil peace because it is the precondition for the attainment of material possessions that make their life easier; in other words, men should value civil peace because it allows for prosperity. In consequence of this, he feels that the most that one can expect a commonwealth to do

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[156]Ibid.

[157]Ibid., p. 96.

[158]Ibid., p. 109.

is to create the civil peace that is a necessary condition for the attainment of wealth. Hobbes is satisfied to say that a commonwealth provides for the peace and common defence of its subjects,[159] in order that they, " . . . may live a more contented life thereby . . ."[160] By a more contented life, Hobbes means the possibility of acquiring, " . . . such things as are necessary to commodious living . . ."[161] In other words, although it is difficult for men to treat one another as equals, Hobbes believes that a prudent sovereign will utilize, "the passions that incline men to peace . . ."[162] These passions of men are, " . . . fear of death, desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living, and a hope by their industry to obtain them."[163]

Hobbes expands on the advantages of treating others as equals for the procurement of social peace in his tenth law of nature against arrogance. The tenth law is the precept that, " . . . *at the entrance into conditions of peace, no man require to reserve to himself any right which he is not content should be reserved to every one of the rest.*[164] He justifies this law by pointing out the benefits of the civil peace that he says results from a mutual acknowledgement of equality.

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[159]Ibid., p. 109.

[160]Ibid., p. 106.

[161]Ibid., p. 78.

[162]Ibid.

[163]Ibid.

[164]Ibid., p. 97.

> As it is necessary, for all men that seek peace, to lay down certain rights of nature (that is to say, not to have the liberty to do all they list), so it is necessary, for man's life, to retain some (as, right to govern their own bodies, right to enjoy air, water, motion, ways to go from place to place, and all things else without which a man cannot live, or not live well). If in this case, at the making of peace, men require for themselves that which they would not have to be granted to others, they do contrary to the precedent law, that commandeth the acknowledgement of natural equality, and therefore also against the law of nature. The observers of this law are those we call *modest*, the breakers *arrogant* men.[165]

As we can see, Hobbes argues that there are enormous benefits to civil peace; and we cannot achieve civil peace without acknowledging others as equals. Hobbes thus admits that we do have to sacrifice some of our freedom to attain civil peace, but he clearly believes that there are important material rewards for doing so.

Hobbes thus argues that the laws of nature are based on the " . . . passions that incline men to peace . . ."[166] They are designed to prevent men from falling into the condition of the state of nature, where men will be worse off than they would be in civil society. The discovery of these laws is not enough however; Hobbes argues that they

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[165]Ibid.

[166]Ibid., p. 78

must be enforced through the mechanism of a powerful sovereign. Only in this way can men avoid the dangers of the state of nature.

> The final cause, end, or design of men (who naturally love liberty and domination over others) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves in which we see them live in commonwealths is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of war, which is necessarily consequent . . . to the natural passions of men, when there is no visible power to keep them in awe, and tie them by fear of punishment to the performance of their covenants and observation of those laws of nature set down in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters.[167]

Thus, for Hobbes, the purpose of government is clear: to keep men out of the state of nature through the enforcement of the laws of nature that incline men to peace, and enable them to secure their lives and the means of their lives. Hobbes is very specific about what constitutes a government that is conducive to this end. He defines a commonwealth as,

> . . . one person, of whose acts a great multitude, by mutual covenants with another, have made themselves every one the author, to the end he may

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[167]Ibid., p. 106. See also, p. 219, where Hobbes makes it clear that a government must do more than foster "a bare preservation." It is also the government's responsibility to protect, "all other contentments of life, which every man . . . shall acquire to himself."

> use the strength and means of them all, as he shall think expedient, for their peace and common defence.[168]

Hobbes is clear that the authority in a commonwealth must be vested in one man, or one group of men. When people agree with one another to form a commonwealth, they must agree to, " . . . reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will, . . ."[169] This is done by everyone agreeing to submit their will to one man, or group of men, whom they authorize to make all the decisions concerning their common peace and safety. Such an agreement, says Hobbes, is more than consent, it is a binding covenant, " . . . as if every man should say to every man *I authorise and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him, and authorise all his actions in like manner".*[170]

Moreover, Hobbes places few limitations on how such a commonwealth can be legitimately established. He claims that in the absence of a formal agreement among a group of men, it is perfectly acceptable for a commonwealth to be established by force. If a man who is powerful enough to subdue others to his will, agrees to spare their lives, then they must obey him in return for his protection.[171] The only occasion when Hobbes

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[168]Ibid., p. 109.

[169]Ibid.

[170]Ibid.

[171]Ibid., p. 110.

thinks that it is legitimate for subjects to withdraw their allegiance to the sovereign, is when the sovereign is no longer powerful enough to offer them the protection of their lives, and the means of their lives, that was the sole reason for their submitting to the him in the first place. As long as the sovereign can offer them this protection, then the subjects are obligated to obey him.[172]

Hobbes anticipates that some may think that this is analogous to tyranny. He responds by denying the validity of the traditional distinctions between regimes. For Hobbes, those regimes which are usually considered to be unjust, tyranny, oligarchy, and anarchy, are simply the names given to legitimate forms of government by those who happen to dislike them. "For they that are discontented under monarchy call it tyranny; and they that are displeased with aristocracy call it oligarchy; so also, they which find themselves grieved under a democracy call it anarchy . . ."[173] In short, Hobbes believes that a regime is just as long as a sovereign can offer his subjects the protection in return for which they obey him.

To those who still doubt the necessity of a government that is based on an agreement among men to be subjected to a powerful sovereign, Hobbes argues that the necessity for subjection is a result of the necessity for government. If men were such that they did not need to be subjected in this manner, then there would be no need for

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[172]Ibid., pp. 144-145.

[173]Ibid., pp. 118- 119.

government at all.

> For if we could suppose a great multitude of men to consent in the observations of justice and other laws of nature without a common power to keep them in awe, we might as well suppose all mankind to do the same; and then there neither would be, nor need to be, any civil government or commonwealth at all, because there would be peace without subjection.[174]

In summary, Hobbes believes that the miserable condition of man in a state without a government makes the purpose of government clear. It is the function of a commonwealth to avoid the horrors of the state of nature through the strict enforcement of the laws of nature that are necessary for social peace.

One other aspect of Hobbes's discussion of the purpose of government deserves emphasis here, and that is his criticism of those religious groups that undermine the authority of the sovereign by claiming a divine right of command. Hobbes takes exception to those Christian sects in his time, particularly the Catholics and Presbyterians, that claim that their churches represent the kingdom of God on earth. A good part of the second half of *Leviathan* is spent in trying to undercut claims of this sort.

To begin with, Hobbes is very specific about what the kingdom of God is.

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[174]Ibid., p. 107.

According to Hobbes, the kingdom of God,

> . . . is a civil kingdom, which consisted first in the obligation of the people of Israel to those laws which Moses should bring unto them from Mount Sinai . . . and which kingdom having been cast off in the election of Saul, the prophets foretold should be restored by Christ, and the restoration whereof we daily pray for when we say in the Lord's Prayer *Thy Kingdom come . . .*[175]

In short, the kingdom of God did once exist as a pact between God and the people of Israel; but it has not existed since it was dissolved with the election of Saul. After the election of Saul, " . . . there was no other kingdom of God in the world by any pact, or otherwise than he ever was, is and shall be king of all men and of all creatures, as governing according to his will, by his infinite power."[176] God still rules mankind through his infinite power, but the kingdom of God does not now exist on earth; it is something whose realization we pray for.

Consequently, Hobbes does not accept the claim of some churches and priests that they represent the kingdom of God on earth. Hobbes says that "The greatest and main abuse of Scripture" is the attempt to use it to prove that a particular earthly church

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[175]Ibid., p. 276.

[176]Ibid., p. 413.

represents the kingdom of God.[177] This type of scriptural interpretation is in error, because the kingdom of God will not exist until the second coming of Christ. Since this second coming has not yet occurred, Hobbes argues, " . . . the kingdom of God is not yet come, and we are not now under any other kings by pact, but our civil sovereigns."[178]

Hobbes thinks that this belief on the part of some churches, that they represent the kingdom of God on earth, is harmful because it undermines the authority of the sovereign. He provides several examples of how various churches' claim to rule on behalf of God has hindered the power of sovereigns. First, the Catholic church's belief that it represents the kingdom of God means that it thinks of itself as the only legitimate source of earthly sovereignty. The Catholic church thus refuses to recognize any king who has not been crowned by a bishop. The result of this is confusion among the subjects of a legitimate ruler; people no longer know their ruler from " . . . a stranger that thrusteth himself into the throne of their lawful prince . . ."[179] Confusion also results from the fact that the Catholic church draws a distinction between civil and canon law; in the eyes of the church, its own canon law takes precedence over the civil law of any given country. The reason for this is that, " . . . the Pope pretendeth that all Christians

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[177]Ibid., p. 412.

[178]Ibid., p. 413.

[179]Ibid., p. 414.

are his subjects."[180] In short, Hobbes sees the church's claim to rule as a problem because it divides people's loyalties, and thereby undermines the authority that a given sovereign needs to be effective.

In trying to understand why certain churches would proclaim doctrines which are " . . .contrary to the peaceable societies of mankind," Hobbes asks the question, *cui bono?* How could it benefit them to do this? He is very clear in his answer. Both the Presbyterians and the Catholics claim to represent the kingdom of God because it gives them the opportunity to exploit others through the power that they gain. Hobbes points out that the claim on the part of Catholic priests that they represent God's kingdom on earth through the church, allows them to gain exemption from certain civil laws, and to enrich themselves thorough the sale of indulgences and other such practices.[181] In short, Hobbes believes that those who claim to rule on behalf of God are motivated, not by legitimate religious considerations, but by a crude desire for power.

> For what is it for men to excommunicate their lawful king, but to keep him from all places of God's public service in his own kingdom? and with force to resist him, when he with force endeavoureth to correct them? Or what is it (without authority from the civil sovereign) to excommunicate any person, but to take from him his lawful liberty (that is, to usurp an

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[180]Ibid., p. 415.

[181]Ibid., pp. 478-480.

> unlawful power over their brethren)? The authors, therefore, of this darkness in religion are the Roman and the presbyterian clergy.[182]

When we compare Hobbes's formulation of the purpose of a political regime with that of Augustine, we see that they are similar in four main respects. First, both see the main purpose of government to be the maintenance of civil peace. As a result, neither of them thinks that it is appropriate to expect political regimes to cultivate virtue amongst its citizens, in any high sense of the word. Also, Augustine and Hobbes have remarkably similar definitions as to what constitutes a commonwealth. Finally, they are both critical of religious groups that claim to represent God's kingdom on earth.

First then, both Augustine and Hobbes believe that the main role of government is to secure civil peace. As we have already seen, Hobbes argues that commonwealths are created to enforce the laws of nature that incline men toward peaceful behaviour.[183] Augustine also places a high value on civil peace. Although he is generally sceptical about our ability to discover the ends of government, Augustine does argue that the securing of civil peace is a function of government that is relatively clear. Augustine reminds his readers that despite the fact that the believing Christian is only a pilgrim passing through the earthly city, it is important for all members of the earthly city to have peace. Even Christians need civil peace because, " . . . so long as the two cities are

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[182]Ibid., p. 478.

[183]Ibid., p. 106.

intermingled we also make use of the peace of Babylon . . ."[184] Thus, Augustine believes that temporal peace is a good that is needed by all members of the earthly city.

Since Augustine and Hobbes both put forward civil peace as the main aim of government, it is not surprising that they both reject claims that political orders should conform to high standards of justice. Hobbes thinks that a regime that can offer its subjects protection is a just regime.[185] Consequently, he dismisses the notion that a regime that can offer its subjects protection could be considered unjust. When people call a form of government unjust they are merely saying that they do not happen to like it; it does not follow that the regime that they do not like is in fact unjust.[186]

Similarly, Augustine is also suspicious of the notion that it is appropriate to judge regimes on the basis of how just they are. To begin with, he does not think that it is for humans to say which regimes are just and which are not; only God can know that.[187] Moreover, the expectation that human regimes can be just in any high sense of the word, is indicative of a misunderstanding about what is possible in the realm of politics. This is why Augustine takes exception to Cicero's definition of a commonwealth as, " . . . an association united by a common sense of right and a community of interest."[188] As

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[184]Augustine, p. 892.

[185]Hobbes, p. 110.

[186]Ibid., pp. 118-119.

[187]Augustine, p. 223.

[188]Cicero, *Republic*, Book two, chapter forty-four. Add edition.

Augustine points out, if we held political regimes to this standard of justice, then we would be forced to conclude that a real commonwealth has never existed.[189] When we look closely at human political orders, says Augustine, we must remember that, " . . . because God does not rule there, the general characteristic of that city is that it is devoid of true justice."[190] Thus, like Hobbes, Augustine does not believe that it is sensible to hold political regimes to high standards of justice.

On the basis of their similarly low expectations from politics, Augustine and Hobbes are both led to advance rather modest definitions of what constitutes a true commonwealth. As well as sharing the notion that civil peace is of primary importance, Augustine and Hobbes both think that men value civil peace because it is the precondition for the attainment of material possessions that make their lives easier. As we have seen, Hobbes believes that it is the function of a commonwealth to secure the means of self-preservation through the enforcement of the laws of nature that incline men toward peaceful behaviour.[191]

Augustine also has a low conception of what constitutes a commonwealth. He defines a commonwealth as an, " . . . association of a multitude of rational beings united

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[189]Augustine, pp. 73-74.

[190]Ibid., p. 891.

[191]Hobbes, p. 106.

by a common agreement on the objects of their love."[192] Augustine also makes it clear that he expects that the objects that the people love will be low ones.[193] One does not have to look too hard to see that this is very similar to Hobbes's idea of a commonwealth. They both see a commonwealth to be the result of an agreement among a group of people who wish to improve their lives through the attainment of material possessions. Neither one of them believes that men set up commonwealths in order to conform to a lofty notion of justice. Rather, they both feel that men establish commonwealths for their self-preservation, and for the expectation that they will be able to improve their lives thorough the attainment of material possessions.

The final main similarity between the political thought of Augustine and that of Hobbes is their common criticism of those religious groups that claim to represent the kingdom of God on earth. We have already seen that Hobbes is sharply critical of those churches and priests of his own time that believe they represent the kingdom of God, and therefore possess a claim to temporal power. Augustine is equally critical of those who claim to represent the kingdom of God on earth. As I argued in chapter two, Augustine takes exception to millenarian Christians sects who believe that they must prepare for the imminent coming of Christ's kingdom.

The millenarian groups of Augustine's time believed that God's kingdom would be

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[192]Augustine, p. 890.

[193]Ibid.

actualized on earth, and that they were part of an elect group that would rule with Christ for one-thousand years before the final judgement. They based this belief on a very literal reading of the book of *Revelations*.[194] According to the millenarians, the first resurrection spoken of in the book of *Revelations* refers to a bodily resurrection of the saints who will rule with Christ for a thousand- year period. This kingdom of Christ will be akin to an earthly paradise, with many opportunities for sensual indulgence.[195] Moreover, the millenarians believed that the arrival of this heaven on earth was imminent.[196]

As we have seen, Augustine challenges the millenarians' interpretation of *Revelations*. Augustine takes the first resurrection referred to in *Revelations* to mean the spiritual resurrection of the believing Christian in this lifetime. He does not think that it refers to an actual bodily resurrection before the final judgement; and he is especially critical of the millenarians for anticipating a bodily resurrection that will allow them to partake of endless material pleasures.[197] Augustine also denies the millenarian claim that the kingdom of God is imminent. Only God knows when the final judgement will be; the thousand-year period referred to in *Revelations* represents the eternity of time, not

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[194]Ibid., p. 907. See chapter two, p. 40 of this thesis for the excerpt from *Revelations* that is at issue here.

[195]Ibid.

[196]Ibid.

[197]Ibid., pp. 904-905, 907.

an actual earthly kingdom that will exist before the final judgement.[198]

Thus, just as Hobbes takes issue with the Catholics' and Presbyterians' allegedly divine right of command, so Augustine criticizes the millenarians' presumption to rule in the name of God. In both cases, what is being criticized is a prideful assumption of sweeping political power. The millenarians of Augustine's time believed themselves to be part of an elect group that had the responsibility to prepare for the imminent arrival of Christ's kingdom on earth. The Catholics and Presbyterians that Hobbes opposes also believed that they had the responsibility of being God's representatives on earth. Moreover, both the millenarians and the Catholic and Presbyterian churches are criticized for their desire for and abuse of power. Augustine reproaches the millenarians for their expectation that the coming kingdom of God will be a sensual paradise; and Hobbes attacks the Catholics and Presbyterians on the grounds that they desire power for the material luxuries that it affords them. In summary, Augustine and Hobbes both dislike the dangerous effects of broad, religiously-based claims of power. Their common rejection of broad claims to power that rest on weak foundations, is another example of their mutual dislike of idealistic politics.

This is far from an exhaustive account of the similarities between Augustine and Hobbes in terms of their views on human nature and politics. Nevertheless, I believe I have summarized the main aspects of their common agreement as to the nature of man

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[198]Ibid., p. 908.

and the ends of politics. The fact that both Augustine and Hobbes believe that man is primarily motivated by very low things, such as desire, competition and vanity, leads them to conceive of a similar role for politics. According to each of them, the main function of government is to enforce civil peace; the need for civil peace comes from the miserable condition of man without it. In an effective political order that maintains peace, man has a much better chance of preserving his life, and of acquiring things that make his life more comfortable. However, as I hope to show in the next chapter, in spite of their similar ideas on human behaviour and politics, there is a fundamental difference between Augustine and Hobbes in terms of their confidence in politics as a means to improve the human condition.

Chapter Four

In the previous chapter, we established that there are a number of important similarities between Augustine and Hobbes, in terms of their views of human nature, their conceptions of reason, and their political thought. In this chapter, I will explore the fundamental differences between Augustine and Hobbes. Specifically, I will attempt to show that Hobbes is much more confident in the possibility of a political solution to the problem of human nature than is Augustine. The reason for their different degrees of confidence on this matter can be traced to their different degrees of confidence in the possibility of constructing a useful political science. Thus, the first section of this chapter is an analysis of the main differences between Augustine and Hobbes in terms of their confidence in the political as a solution to their similar views of the problem of human nature. The second section of the chapter explains how these differences are indicative of Hobbes's political idealism. In the conclusion, I will explore the significance of Hobbes's idealism relative to Augustine.

Hobbes's New Conception of Political Science

In the last chapter, we saw that Augustine and Hobbes are both critical of the attempt by philosophers to discover the meaning and purpose of a human life. However, this common insight of Augustine and Hobbes leads them in opposite directions.

Implicit in Augustine's political philosophy is the idea that the political problem of man's selfishness is unsolvable. As I discussed in chapter one, Augustine thinks that the only way to come to terms with the political situation of man is to accept the divine providence of God. In contrast to this "trans-political" "solution," Hobbes proceeds in a very different way. Rather than trying to discover a notion of the common good that can bind people together, as did previous political philosophers, he attempts to construct his political philosophy on the basis of man's selfish nature. Moreover, while Hobbes is sceptical of the efforts of previous political philosophers, he is confident in his political philosophy. His confidence comes from his belief that he is proceeding in a scientific manner, and from what he sees as the realistic aim of his goal of this-worldly peace.

Thus, while Augustine is generally dismissive of the ability of human reason to come up with a political "solution," Hobbes does not give up on the idea of providing a normative political philosophy. On the contrary, he believes that his insight into the selfish nature of man will allow him to create a realistic political science; unlike his predecessors, he will not build such a political science on the assumption that man is a political animal.

He attempts to create an "adequate"political science on the basis of a new conception of philosophy. While he shares with Augustine a general scepticism toward traditional philosophy, he does believe that it is possible to reason about politics in a scientific manner. As with many other terms in the *Leviathan*, Hobbes provides a very specific definition of philosophy. He defines philosophy as,

> *the knowledge acquired by reasoning from the manner of the generation of anything to the properties, or from the properties to some possible way of generation of the same, to the end to be able to produce, as far as matter and human force permit, such effects as human life requireth.*[199]

Hobbes goes on to compare this definition of philosophy with the practice of geometry. "So the geometrician, from the construction of figures, findeth out many properties thereof, and from the properties, new ways of their construction, by reasoning, to the end to be able to measure land and water, and for infinite other uses."[200] As Edwin Curley notes,

> Like Descartes, Hobbes thinks of himself as providing new foundations for philosophy, in his case, as making civil philosophy, the knowledge of the rules of life in society, scientific for the first time. To claim this he must give some account of science. He takes as his model geometry . . .[201]

Thus, like a geometrician, Hobbes believes that the correct way to reason about things is to begin from indubitable first principles and deduce accordingly. Hobbes is sceptical of the power of human reason, but unlike Augustine, he does believe that we can use our reason to solve political problems. More specifically, we can use reason to

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[199]Hobbes, pp. 453-454.

[200]Ibid., p. 454.

[201]Edwin Curley, "Introduction to Hobbes' *Leviathan*," in Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley(Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), p. ix.

construct a commonwealth that will help us to achieve the goal of preserving ourselves, and protecting our material goods. We can do this by gaining an understanding of, " . . . the knowledge of consequences and dependence of one fact upon another, by which, out of what we can presently do, we know how to do something else when we will, or the like another time." Such an understanding will allow us to see that, " . . . when we see how anything comes about, upon what causes, and by what manner, when the like causes come into our power, we see how to make it produce the like effects."[202] Thus, Hobbes does not think that we can use reason to gain knowledge of the proper end of life; we can use reason only to gain knowledge of how to construct things through an understanding of cause and consequence; that is, we cannot have absolute knowledge; we can have only conditional knowledge of those things that we ourselves construct.

In short, for Hobbes, reason is a methodology for discovering means conducive to the end of comfortable self-preservation. Thus, while he is sceptical of our ability to use reason to discover the purpose of human life, he is confident that reason can be used to discover the means toward the end of self-preservation.

Thus, whereas Augustine is dismissive of our ability to understand nature, Hobbes believes that there is a fundamental right of nature, on the basis of which he can deduce a "realistic" political science. As we have seen, for Hobbes, the right of nature is man's fundamental right to his self-preservation.

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[202]Hobbes, p. 25. See Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, p. 174

> The Right of Nature, which writers commonly call *jus naturale*, is the liberty each man hath to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature, that is to say, of his own life, and consequently of doing anything which, in his own judgement and reason, he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto.[203]

In short, Hobbes deduces his laws of nature from every human's right to preserve his own life. He distinguishes between a right and a law, " . . . right consisteth in liberty to do or to forbear, whereas law determineth and bindeth to one of them . . ."[204] He believes that by nature, every man has a right to everything.[205] The purpose of law then is to help men to avoid falling into the state of nature, where everything is permitted, in order that each man may enjoy his right of self-preservation. Since each man has a right to life, Hobbes says that it is a general rule of reason, "*that every man ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of attaining it, and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war.*"[206] Consequently, Hobbes lays down as his first law of nature that humans are, " *to seek peace and follow it.*"[207] From this first law of nature, Hobbes deduces the political solution to the problem of the state

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[203]Ibid., p. 79.

[204]Ibid.

[205]Ibid., pp. 78, 80.

[206]Ibid., p. 80.

[207]Ibid.

of nature that we examined in chapter three.

Thus, it would seem that Hobbes differs from Augustine in an important respect. While Hobbes and Augustine are both sceptical of philosophy as it has traditionally been practised, Augustine does not think that we can rectify this problem. Whereas Hobbes sees past philosophical errors as the product of faulty methodology, Augustine sees them as the inevitable consequence of the weak reasoning powers of fallen human beings.[208] According to Augustine, fallen men cannot understand the mysterious workings of God's providence; this is a divine mystery.[209] Consequently, the only way to come to terms with the human condition is to have faith in God's unfathomable providence.[210] Moreover, unlike Hobbes, who believes that with the correct use of reason we can figure out how to have a more contented life, Augustine does not think that humans can extricate themselves from the miserable condition which resulted from the fall. It is impossible to be happy in this life.[211]

The Idealism of Hobbes

To summarize, we have seen that while Hobbes shares with Augustine a general

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[208]Augustine, p. 430.

[209]Ibid., p. 39.

[210]Ibid., p. 819.

[211]Ibid., pp. 571-575.

scepticism toward philosophy, Hobbes differs from Augustine in an important respect. For Augustine, there are very definite limits to the power of human reason, limits that cannot be overcome. In contrast, Hobbes believes that the inadequacy of traditional political philosophy has been due to a problem of methodology. He does not think that political philosophy needs to be concerned with discovering the ends of politics; rather, political philosophy should concern itself with finding the means to what is for Hobbes the only end that we can be sure of: self-preservation. It is on this basis that Hobbes attempts to construct his political science. He deduces rules governing political life from his understanding of man's right to self-preservation as the fundamental right of nature, and from his understanding that the need to seek peace is the first law of nature.

Hobbes's confidence in his ability to create a realistic political science makes him seem idealistic when compared with Augustine. Although Hobbes's political science seems particularly hard-headed and realistic, concentrating as it does on low things such as the desire for self-preservation, when we look at Hobbes's analysis of politics from the point of view of Augustine, we can see how Hobbes's political project might be considered idealistic. This idealism is evident in three main respects. First, for Hobbes's political scheme to work, a major transformation of human character must be undertaken. When Augustine looks at politics, he is more reconciled to accepting human beings the way that they are. The second aspect of Hobbes's idealism is his ignorance of some of the harsh facts of political life. Specifically, from the perspective of Augustine, Hobbes overestimates the potential for civil peace, and underestimates the potential

problems for political order, in a regime based on comfortable self-preservation. The final way that Hobbes's political philosophy can seem idealistic from an Augustinian point of view, is its millenarian inflexibility. Whereas Augustine's belief that the city of God cannot be established on earth makes him willing to compromise with a number of inferior regimes, Hobbes's confidence in his political science causes him to outline the features of one legitimate regime; Hobbes believes that if people follow his suggestions carefully, this regime can be implemented anywhere, and can last in perpetuity.

To begin with, Hobbes needs to simplify human nature for his political scheme to work. Hobbes wants to establish a regime where people are primarily motivated by their fear of violent death. As we have seen, Hobbes believes that this motivation is strong enough to make people desire to submit to a powerful sovereign. However, for a politics based on peoples' desire for self-preservation to work, people must be convinced that the most important thing is the preservation of their lives at the expense of everything else. In other words, if people are not focussed on self-preservation as the most important goal of their lives, then Hobbes's project requires a transformation of their characters. The most obvious factor standing in the way of the implementation of Hobbes's scheme is peoples' religious beliefs. If people take the divine more seriously than the human, then they will not think that their self-preservation is as important as Hobbes wants them to think it is.

That Hobbes was aware that the success of his political project was dependent on his ability to change peoples' opinions about the importance of religious matters can be

seen by examining some key passages from the *Leviathan.* He knows that he will have to try and convince some people in order to get them to agree to his doctrine that the church has no claim to rule on earth, and that " . . . we are not now under any other kings by pact, but our civil sovereigns."[212] However, he is confident that men are malleable enough for him to be able to change their minds on this subject.

> But they say, again, that though the principles be right, yet common people are not of capacity enough to be made to understand them . . . the common peoples' minds, unless they be tainted with dependence on the potent, or scribbled over with the opinions of their doctors, are like clean paper, fit to receive whatsoever by public authority shall be imprinted in them.[213]

Despite his confidence here, in other parts of the *Leviathan* Hobbes implicitly acknowledges the difficulty involved in trying to disenchant people with religion. Hobbes admits that " . . . because the fear of darkness and ghosts is greater than other fears,"people are often inclined not to obey the sovereign authority, and thereby increase the likelihood of civil war.[214]

From the point of view of Augustine, the difficulty of Hobbes's undertaking is that it

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[212]Hobbes, p. 413.

[213]Ibid., p. 221.

[214]Ibid., p. 216.

is highly questionable as to whether the spiritual dimension of man can be completely eliminated. According to Augustine, men's concentration on their passions is a distortion of their true nature; when people pursue the satisfaction of their material desires at the expense of everything else they are engaged in an impossible attempt to gain happiness. As we have seen, Augustine denies the very possibility of happiness in this life; what men really desire is to be closer to God and this desire cannot happen this side of death.[215] Augustine emphasizes that men do not really want to indulge themselves in their desires; what they do want is to achieve a state where there is no longer an opposition between their will and their desires.[216] Consequently, a concentration on their passions will not help men to gain the spiritual satisfaction that they crave; on the contrary it will provide them with a spurious sense of happiness, and will in fact make them more miserable. In short, Augustine believes that man's spiritual cravings are an ingrained part of his nature; he is thus more sceptical than Hobbes as to the possibility of getting men to focus primarily on earthly pleasures.

Another illuminating example of the difference between Augustine's and Hobbes's expectations of the possibility of changing human behaviour can be seen by examining their respective conceptions of pride. For Hobbes, as we have seen, pride is the breach of

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[215]Augustine, pp. 574-575.

[216]Ibid., p. 854.

the precept that, "*every man acknowledge other for his equal by nature.*"[217] When Hobbes talks about human pride, he means pride in the sense of men's relations with each other.

An examination of Augustine's understanding of pride reveals that it is in some ways very different from Hobbes's understanding. Augustine has a much broader conception of what constitutes pride. Whereas Hobbes is concerned with the pride that men feel in relation to each other, Augustine focuses on man's pride in relation to God. Augustine says that the earthly city had its origins in "self-love reaching the point of contempt for God . . ."[218] The citizens of the earthly city are self-absorbed , "arrogant, deceitful and envious."[219] The reason for this is their concern for themselves at the expense of their concern for God. Augustine also says that this misguided pride means that the citizens of the earthly city are miserable: " . . . to abandon God and to exist in oneself, that is to please oneself, is not immediately to lose all being; but it is to come near to nothingness."[220]

Thus, because of his larger conception of what pride entails, Augustine is much less sanguine than is Hobbes about the possibility of altering man's proud behaviour. In a

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[217]Hobbes, p. 97.

[218]Augustine, p. 593.

[219]Ibid., p. 471.

[220]Ibid., pp 574-575.

political sense, Augustine does not believe that pride can be eliminated; it is a characteristic of earthly cities that they are full of prideful men.[221] Thus, for Augustine, men's prideful behaviour is a permanent part of the nature of man. This is one reason why political regimes will always be unjust.[222] Hobbes bases his hopes for civil peace on the expectation that men's prideful behaviour can be tempered to an extent that will allow them to treat each other as equals. From Augustine's perspective, Hobbes has underestimated how prideful humans can be. It is not simply a matter of altering peoples' behaviour toward one another as Hobbes would have it; Augustine believes pride to be an ingrained human characteristic. Thus, when Augustine looks at politics, he expects pride to be a permanent feature of human cities. In short, Hobbes seems to think that human nature is much more malleable than does Augustine.

The second main way that Hobbes's thought can seem idealistic from an Augustinian perspective, is Hobbes's belief that a regime based on comfortable self-preservation can increase the chance of achieving civil peace. It is not that Augustine disagrees with Hobbes that people are mainly motivated by self-pleasing passions; the point on which Hobbes's undertaking is futile from the point of view of Augustine, is Hobbes's belief that by encouraging people to submit to a sovereign power with the promise that they will live a more comfortable life, he will thereby make them more

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[221]Ibid., pp. 574-575.

[222]Ibid., p. 891.

amenable to political obedience. Augustine believes that man's fall from God created an internal conflict within him that cannot be eliminated in this life.[223]

As we have seen, Augustine does not think that a concentration on their passions can make men happy. On the contrary, each man experiences a conflict between his will and his desire; what we really want is to achieve a state where there is no longer a conflict between our wills and our desires, and this cannot happen before death.[224] Augustine believes that this perpetual state of misery has important consequences for civil peace. As long as each man must exercise control over his "vicious propensities," there can be no "perfect peace . . ."[225] This is because no man can achieve complete mastery over his vices.

> . . . the battle is fraught with peril while those vices that resist are being reduced to submission, while those which have been overcome are not yet triumphed over in peaceful security, but are repressed under a rule still troubled by anxieties.[226]

Augustine admits that earthly goods are important for a city, but he believes that an over-emphasis on earthly goods at the expense of what we might call spiritual goods,

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[223]Ibid., p. 854.

[224]Ibid., p. 854.

[225]Ibid., p. 893

[226]Ibid.

causes the individual to have a perpetual internal conflict between his will and his desires; this conflict creates a state of misery.

> . . . if the higher goods are neglected, which belong to the City on high, where victory will be serene in the enjoyment of eternal and perfect peace- if these goods are neglected and those other goods are so desired as to be considered the only goods , or are loved more than the goods which are believed to be higher, the inevitable consequence is fresh misery, and an increase of the wretchedness already there.[227]

Augustine hints that this internal war within each individual can manifest itself politically as external conflict between people.

> In fact, even though command be exercised over the vices it is assuredly not by any means without a conflict. And even when a man fights well and even gains the mastery by conquering and subduing such foes, still in this situation of weakness something is all too likely to creep in to cause sin, if not in hasty action, at least in a casual remark or a fleeting thought.[228]

In other words, even if a man makes some progress in overcoming his vices, his state of misery will ensure that he will act in a rash and potentially dangerous manner.

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[227]Ibid., p. 600.

[228]Ibid.

Moreover, Augustine thinks that the state of misery experienced by each person, as a result of the battle between his will and his desire, has an important spiritual consequence. He tells us that this state of misery causes people to long for a situation where their internal war can come to an end.

> . . . [T]his situation of weakness and in these times of evil such anxiety is even not without its use in leading them to seek, with more fervent longing, that state of serenity where peace is utterly complete and assured . . . Here in this world we are called blessed, it is true, when we enjoy peace, however little may be the peace- the peace of a good life- which can be enjoyed here. And yet such blessedness as this life affords proves to be utter misery when compared with that final bless.[229]

Augustine's point here is an interesting one, particularly when we apply it to the context of the regime outlined by Hobbes. Augustine argues that as important as earthly goods and peace are, they cannot really give people the spiritual satisfaction that they crave. On the contrary, Augustine says that an over-emphasis on worldly goods will make people even more miserable, as it will exacerbate their internal war between their will and their desires. Consequently, people will begin to long for a situation where they will be at peace with themselves. This raises the interesting possibility that people in a liberal regime like the one that Hobbes argues for, will become particularly susceptible

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[229]Ibid., p. 864.

to utopian political movements that offer them a spurious version of the divine peace that they crave.[230]

In short, from Augustine's perspective, even if Hobbes is at least partially successful in making mere life peoples' primary motivation, to the extent that he is successful, he will be unable to provide people with a "more contented life thereby."[231] As a result, a political order that concentrates on the cultivation of this-worldly life cannot eliminate men's politically dangerous passions; no political order can make men happy; the satisfaction that they crave can only come from the grace of God.[232] Consequently, unjust behaviour will remain in all earthly cities.[233]

From the point of view of Augustine, there is another important component of Hobbes's thought that appears idealistic - its dangerous inflexibility. Compared with Augustine, Hobbes is both more confident and less prudent in his expectations from political regimes. On first appearance, it may seem that Augustine is less flexible than Hobbes. After all, whereas Hobbes focuses on the construction of an earthly regime, Augustine takes the City of God as his standard of judgement, a regime that cannot exist by his own admission. However, a careful analysis reveals that it is precisely

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[230]For a discussion of this issue in regards to Hobbes, see Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, pp. 179-186.

[231]Hobbes, p. 106.

[232]Augustine, pp. 574-575.

[233]Ibid., p. 891.

Augustine's disbelief in the possibility of the political reality of the City of God that makes him politically cautious. In contrast, it is Hobbes's confidence that he is preceding in a "realistic" manner that causes him to reject as unstable every regime other than his own.

Indeed, whereas Augustine sees men's political difficulties as an inevitable consequence of their fall from God, Hobbes argues that the unstable nature of most earthly commonwealths is the result of an inadequate understanding about how to properly construct them.

> Though nothing can be immortal which mortals make, yet if men had the use of reason they pretend to, their commonwealths might be secured at least from perishing by internal diseases. For by the nature of their institution they are designed to live as long as mankind, or as the laws of nature, or as justice itself, which gives them life. Therefore, when they come to be dissolved, not by external violence but intestine disorder, the fault is not in men as they are the matter, but as they are the *makers* and orderers of them. [234]

Nothing could be a clearer statement of a key difference between Augustine and Hobbes. For Augustine, if a political regime experiences internal disorder, the fault lies with man as the matter of the commonwealth. That is, the fault lies with the unalterable

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[234]Hobbes, p. 210.

characteristics of human nature that are a result of original sin.[235] In contrast, for Hobbes, civil disorder is a result of poor design on the part of men as makers of the commonwealth. He clearly has more confidence in the power of institutions to shape men than does Augustine. This confidence in men's ability to construct a stable commonwealth through the proper use of reason causes Hobbes to be less flexible about political problems than is Augustine.

As we have already seen, Hobbes has a very different understanding of the power of reason than does Augustine. Hobbes's rejection of natural teleology leads him to subscribe to the view that we can have only conditional knowledge of those things that we construct for ourselves.[236] Augustine is even more sceptical of our ability to look for natural political ends; he does not believe that human reason is powerful enough to provide us with guidance in our political choices. For Augustine, only the grace of God can redeem us from our sins; there is no political solution to the human problem.[237]

The result of Hobbes's confidence is a belief that the recurring political troubles that beset mankind are not a result of insoluble problems, as Augustine would have it; rather, Hobbes maintains that it is man's inadequate understanding of how to construct a

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[235]Augustine, p. 471.

[236]Hobbes, pp. 25, 453-454. See also, Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, pp. 174-175.

[237]Augustine, pp. 55, 571.

stable regime that has been the source of the difficulty.[238] According to Hobbes, the fact that there has always been political instability, does not mean that this must always be so.

> For though in all places of the world men should lay the foundation of their houses on the sand, it could not thence be inferred, that so it ought to be. The skill of making and maintaining commonwealths consisteth in certain rules, as doth arithmetic and geometry, not . . . on practice only; which rules, neither poor men have the leisure, nor men that have had the leisure have hitherto had the curiosity or the method to find out.[239]

In short, Hobbes believes that the political troubles of the past were a result of inadequate understanding on the part of men. Consequently, Hobbes sees himself as the first philosopher who is really capable of giving sound political guidance to statesmen.

> Time and industry produce every day new knowledge. And as the art of well building is derived from principles of reason . . . long after mankind began (though poorly) to build, so, long time after men have begun to constitute commonwealths, imperfect and apt to relapse into disorder, there may principles of reason be found out by industrious meditation, to make their constitution (excepting by external violence) everlasting. And

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[238]Hobbes, p. 221.

[239]Ibid., p. 135.

such are those which I have in this discourse set forth . . . [240]

It is not only the extent of Hobbes's aspiration that makes his political philosophy idealistic; it is also his expectation that his properly constructed regime can last in perpetuity. Looked at from the point of view of Augustine, this could be seen as another form of millenarianism. Augustine's main criticism of the millenarian groups of his time was that these groups believed they lived at a propitious time for the establishment of an ideal political order.[241] There are passages in the *Leviathan* which suggest that Hobbes shares this attribute of the millenarians. Hobbes reminds his readers that, "Time and industry produce every day new knowledge." Hobbes believes that mankind has evolved past the point where commonwealths were constructed on the basis of inadequate knowledge, " . . . long time after men have begun to constitute commonwealths . . . there may principles of reason be found . . . to make their constitution(excepting by external violence)everlasting."[242] In short, like the millenarians, Hobbes thinks that history favours his enterprise.

Eric Voegelin's concept of Gnosticism can help us to understand the millenarian aspect of Hobbes's thought. As I explained in the first chapter, Voegelin defines Gnosticism as the failure to realize that, " . . . what comes into being will have an end,

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[240]Ibid., pp. 220-221.

[241]Augustine, pp. 907-908.

[242]Hobbes, p. 221.

and the mystery of this stream of being is impenetrable."[243] Clearly this definition applies to the millenarians that Augustine is concerned with. But could the term also be applied to Hobbes? Voegelin thinks that it can, and he justifies this conclusion by pointing to Hobbes's attempt to create a commonwealth that will be "everlasting."

> With this idea . . . of abolishing the tensions of history by the spreading of a new truth, Hobbes reveals his own Gnostic intentions; the attempt at freezing history into an everlasting constitution is an instance of the general class of Gnostic attempts at freezing history into an everlasting final realm on this earth.[244]

To summarize, Hobbes believes that he is the first to offer a truly scientific analysis of government that will allow for the creation of everlasting commonwealths and will avoid the civil disorder that has plagued mankind in the past. Hobbes has hopes that his analysis will, " . . . fall into the hands of a sovereign who will consider it himself . . . and by the exercise of entire sovereignty in protecting the public teaching of it, convert this truth of speculation into the utility of practice."[245]Thus, Hobbes's enterprise is ultimately one of trying to implement the reality of what he sees as an ideal regime.

Turning to Augustine, we see that he is much more flexible in his judgement of

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[243]Voegelin, p. 167.

[244]Ibid., p. 180.

[245]Hobbes, pp. 243-244.

regimes than is Hobbes. Like Hobbes, Augustine judges earthly regimes on the basis of an ideal standard, in his case the City of God; but unlike Hobbes, Augustine does not think that his ideal standard can come into being. In fact, Augustine criticises Cicero on this very point. Augustine takes issue with Cicero's definition of a commonwealth because it is too inflexible. Cicero defines a commonwealth as, "an association united by a common sense of right and a community of interest."[246] On the basis of this definition, says Augustine, no commonwealth has ever existed.[247] Cicero forgets that no earthly regimes can be just, as injustice is an inherent part of earthly existence.[248] Unlike Hobbes, Augustine does not think that any earthly regime can be just. Whereas Hobbes claims that with the right instruction, men can construct regimes that will last "as long as mankind,"[249] Augustine reminds us that God, " . . . grants earthly kingdoms both to the good and to the evil . . .[250]

Thus, Hobbes believes that man can improve his political situation through the correct use of reason; this causes him to outline the components of an ideal regime. Hobbes implies that if men follow his instructions carefully, this regime can be

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[246]Cicero, Book two, chapter forty-four.

[247]Augustine, p. 75.

[248]Ibid.

[249]Hobbes, p. 210.

[250]Augustine, p. 215.

implemented anywhere.[251] In contrast, Augustine believes that the political situation of man is controlled by the workings of divine providence; consequently, he does not think that man can have any control over his political situation. Moreover, Augustine's understanding of man's fall from God means that he does not think that any earthly regime can be just, as injustice is a permanent part of the earthly city. As a result of these differences between them, Hobbes has much higher expectations from politics than does Augustine.

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[251]Hobbes, p. 135.

Conclusion

I have argued thus far that Hobbes is a more idealistic political thinker than is Augustine. By way of concluding, I will explicate Hobbes's idealism relative to Augustine in more general terms. This can be done by examining their respective views on what is the most important aspect of human life. This will allow us to see why they have different opinions on the importance of human government. I will then try to explain the significance of Hobbes's idealism.

Government Versus the Grace of God

Hobbes's entire political project is based on the idea that political regimes are artificial creations designed to keep men out of the state of nature. As Hobbes describes it in chapter thirteen of *Leviathan*, man's existence in the state of nature is a dangerous and miserable condition.[252] Consequently, the only way that men can enjoy their natural right to self-preservation is through the creation of a stable political regime. Such a regime will allow men to escape from the state of nature, and thereby enjoy a more contented life.[253] Thus, for Hobbes, their existence under a stable government is a necessary condition for men to enjoy a comfortable life. As a result, government

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[252]Ibid., pp. 74-78.

[253]Ibid., pp. 78-79.

becomes very important for Hobbes. The ills that have plagued mankind for so long are a result of an inadequate understanding of political matters.[254] In brief, Hobbes believes that there can be a political solution to the problem of man's miserable natural condition.

We have already seen that Augustine shares Hobbes's view that the human condition is a miserable one. Indeed, Augustine denies the very possibility of human happiness.[255] However, we have also seen that Augustine is far less confident than Hobbes in the ability of human governments to rectify this problem. Augustine believes that all earthly cities are unjust and must necessarily be so. The most important aspect of life is not the attempt to preserve onself in as comfortable a manner as possible; rather, it is the acceptance of the grace of God. Since Augustine sees man's relationship with God as the most important aspect of human life, he does not think that political regimes can or should try to make people content in the way that Hobbes lays out.

The Significance of Hobbes's Idealism

If Hobbes is in fact an idealistic political thinker, then what is the significance of this fact? The answer to this question depends on how important a political theorist Hobbes is. There is a case to be made that Hobbes's political project has largely been followed by our modern, liberal-democratic regimes. As Leo Strauss argues,

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[254]Ibid., pp. 220-221.

[255]See chapter one of this thesis, pp. 21-27.

> If we may call liberalism that political doctrine which regards as the fundamental political fact the rights, as distinguished from the duties, of man and which identifies the function of the state with the protection or the safeguarding of those rights, we must say that the founder of liberalism was Hobbes.[256]

Whether we view Hobbes as *the* founder of liberalism, or simply as one who contributed to its foundation, it is difficult to deny the fact that the majority of liberal-democratic states follow Hobbes's prescriptions to a certain degree. This can be seen in our concern with individual rights, our belief that government is not legitimate unless it is founded on the consent of the governed, and in our paramount concern with self-preservation, and the extension of our comfort through the accumulation of material wealth.

If we do pattern ourselves after Hobbes's political program, and if, as I have argued, Hobbes is an idealistic political thinker, then this raises the possibility that our modern liberal- democracies have idealistic political aims and expectations. This possibility is an important one, for as we have seen with our analysis of Hobbes, liberalism was founded on the idea that the ends of previous political philosophers were too utopian. Perhaps, then, liberalism was a utopian undertaking from the start, and we were prevented from seeing this because of our belief that our modern political societies seem

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[256]Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, pp. 181-182.

to be concerned with the kinds of low things that Hobbes wants us to be concerned with.

Indeed, when we first look at Hobbes's political philosophy, it certainly does seem that Hobbes is the furthest thing from an idealist. The prosaic nature of his concerns, and his low expectations of human behaviour, would lead us to suggest that Hobbes does not suffer from any utopian illusions. As we have seen, when we compare Hobbes's political thought with the political thought of Augustine, in many ways Hobbes shares Augustine's sober attitude toward the realities of political life. Both Augustine and Hobbes feel that humans are primarily motivated by low and conflict-producing things, such as the desire for power and honour. Consequently, both of these thinkers believe that the main purpose of politics is the enforcement of order and the protection of material wealth. Neither one of them thinks that it is sensible to expect a political regime to cultivate virtuous behaviour in men. Thus, a comparison of Hobbes's thought with the cautious political thought of Augustine, allows us to see that there is some truth to the notion that Hobbes is a hard-headed political philosopher who suffers from no false illusions.

In fact, Hobbes seems to be such a "realistic" thinker, that we are liable not to see the idealistic nature of his thought. This is another way in which a comparison between Hobbes and Augustine can help us. Viewing Hobbes's political project from an Augustinian perspective, makes us appreciate the truly radical nature of Hobbes's undertaking. Comparing Hobbes's and Augustine's political philosophy is useful because Augustine allows us to judge Hobbes's seemingly realistic enterprise from a higher standard. Augustine's Christian outlook causes him to be much less optimistic

than Hobbes about man's ability to escape from what they both see as a miserable human condition. Augustine does not think that there is a political solution to the problem of the human condition. Thus when we consider Hobbes's political thought from an Augustinian perspective, as I have tried to do, then we are able to appreciate how Hobbes's undertaking is much more radical than it at first seems. Hobbes dismisses previous philosophers for their high expectations that through politics, man can become more virtuous. However, in opposition to them, he outlines the features of one ideal regime; one could argue that his confidence that the low aims of this regime can be realized causes him to expect too much from politics.

Hobbes offers his "realistic" approach to politics as an escape from the erroneous ways of the past. He particularly stresses his new conception of reason as the only proper way to analyse political matters. His entire political project in the *Leviathan* is an example of his understanding of the proper way to reason about things. He begins from his belief that man's drive to preserve himself is a fundamental natural right. From this beginning point, Hobbes constructs the political edifice that we have examined. It is Hobbes's belief that by beginning from the passions that primarily motivate men, he will be able to construct a regime with solider foundations than those regimes constructed by previous political philosophers.

As we have seen, an understanding of Augustine's political thought allows us to question the underlying premises of Hobbes's argument. Augustine would emphatically deny the idea that self-preservation is as important as Hobbes thinks it is. Moreover,

Augustine does not think that the miserable natural condition of man can be overcome through the construction of a regime that caters to man's self-preservative instincts and earthly desires. He does not think that any regime can solve the problem of man's natural condition because he sees this problem as insoluble; man cannot be happy in this life.

What can Augustine's insights into the nature of Hobbes's thought teach us about the possible idealism of modern liberalism? As I argued in the last chapter, examining Hobbes's political project in the context of Augustine's thought suggests that Hobbes's enterprise is idealistic in the sense that it depends on a transformation of human nature, it ignores some of the harsh necessities of political life, and it is millenarian in the Augustinian sense of the term. The aspect of Hobbes's thought that connects these three aspects of Hobbes's idealism is his focus on self-preservation.

Following Hobbes, we base our modern liberal-democracies on self-preservation; consequently, our insights into Hobbes's idealism may suggest some possible ways that modern liberalism is idealistic. First, Hobbes must change human nature by persuading people that mere life, as opposed to an understanding of the meaning of life should be their goal. Hobbes focus on self-preservation also means that he is forced to ignore some harsh political facts; specifically, he must ignore the possibility that a regime that focuses almost exclusively on the preservation and comfort of its citizens will be particularly vulnerable to the danger of civil disorder, as its citizens may chose to satisfy their spiritual cravings in an dangerous manner. Finally, Hobbes's thought is millenarian in

the sense that he expects that a properly designed commonwealth can last in perpetuity.

In general terms, each one of these criticisms of Hobbes could also be applied to modern liberalism. First, liberalism requires that people focus on the preservation of their lives, and the accumulation of material comfort, at the expense of everything else. To say that this has created a spiritual crises for modern man is an understatement. The spiritual malaise suffered by people today is evident to even the most superficial observer of our modern societies. There is no question that Hobbes, and other enlightenment thinkers, have been very successful in getting us to concentrate on life as opposed to the purpose of life. To the extent that they have been successful however, have they may have created more problems than they have solved. From the point of view of Augustine, it is certainly idealistic to expect that man can be made happy through an attempt to eliminate the spiritual side of his nature.

Secondly, the idea that self-preservation can be the main concern of the citizens of a political regime is another aspect of Hobbes's thought that has been adopted by modern liberalism. Our modern democracies are justified on the basis of their ability to protect the human rights of their citizens; these rights revolve around the individual's fundamental right to preserve him or herself. This focus on individual preservation and comfort means that liberal citizens are more likely to lead spiritually impoverished lives. As a result, they may become easy prey for utopian political movements that promise them the spiritual comfort that they do not receive in their day to day lives. Certainly the success of utopian mass-political movement in the twentieth century seems to lead some

credence to this claim.

Finally, modern liberalism also absorbs the millenarian aspects of Hobbes's thought. Hobbes explicitly says that he has profited from the errors of the past, and is the first to present an adequate understanding of politics. Hobbes maintains that if his instructions are properly followed, a regime can be constructed that will be "everlasting."[257] Although we are not as explicit as Hobbes in voicing our expectations, a strong case can be made that, like Hobbes, we feel that liberalism is vastly superior to the political regimes of the past, and that it is an enterprise favoured by history, and thus destined to last, if not forever, then for a long time. From an Augustinian perspective, this is just another kind of millenarianism; we believe we can understand the forces of history, but this is a divine mystery beyond our comprehension.

We are thus confronted with the paradox that the liberal expectations that Hobbes bequeathed to us may be more idealistic than we think. Hobbes, and liberalism in general, seem to aim for very little when compared with previous political philosophers and philosophies. Augustine teaches us that by aiming for so little, Hobbes, and the liberalism he helped to create, may expect too much.

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[257]Hobbes, p. 221.

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