

The natural order and historical explanation in St. Augustine's «City of God»

It is perhaps not inaccurate to state that St. Augustine, as a philosopher of history, no longer holds the high place he once enjoyed in the critical esteem of those historians and philosophers who pursue an interest in theoretical problems of history. Even those who would defend Augustine's contributions to historical thought are prone to accept, without significant challenge, much of the thrust of modern criticism of his masterpiece in the field, the *City of God*. Christopher Dawson, one of the most prominent modern champions of the great African Father, has expressed the essence of much current opinion where he observes that St. Augustine's method is now frequently characterized by his critics as «fundamentally anti-historical, since it interprets history according to a rigid theological scheme and regards the whole process of human development as predetermined by timeless and changeless transcendental principles». Yet Dawson himself is willing to concede that, «Certainly *The City of God* is not a philosophical theory in the sense of rational induction from historical facts. He does not discover anything from history, but merely sees in history the working out of universal principles»¹). This reflects the majority estimate, which holds that Augustine's view of history is not a theory in the proper sense, derived from the data of history, but is based upon an *a priori* scheme of interpretation by which his philosophy, or rather theology, is externally imposed upon history, and with inevitable damage to the historical evidence itself. It is a theory which is essentially non-empirical and non-inductive and is hence untestable, and therefore hardly in accord with the modern

¹) Christopher Dawson, «St. Augustine and His Age», in M.C. D'Arcy et al., *St. Augustine* (New York, 1957), 41-42. It should be added that Dawson considerably modifies this latter statement in the balance of his essay. I nevertheless object to the categorical assertion that Augustine «discovered nothing» from history.

critical spirit, quite apart from the technical deficiencies of Augustine's scholarship. Furthermore, it is stressed that Augustine's interpretation is grounded upon a principle of universal determinism. For all of these reasons, the *City of God* is subject to serious censure as embodying all the leading tendencies of that approach to history which Sir Karl Popper has identified and termed « historicism »²).

Should this be our definitive judgment? St. Augustine was, of course, the founder of a major tradition in Western intellectual history, the tradition of the great universal interpretations of history — that *genre* of historical literature which is now commonly denoted (with a gain in clarity, I believe) as « metahistory » rather than philosophy of history. But it would seem that Augustine, like other representatives of this tradition, has fallen heir to blame for many of the sins of Georg Friedrich Hegel. Certainly, the major points of modern criticism cannot be fully denied; the charge of historicism is at least true of the manner in which St. Augustine structured his argument in the *City of God*, where his thesis is a Procrustean concept, i.e., God's ordering of history, and his method is rational demonstration of that thesis by deduction, a procedure not uncommon in much of ancient science and philosophy as well as in rhetoric, the discipline in which he was professionally trained. Yet to wholly accede to the prevailing judgment of the Augustinian view of history as exclusively historicist is to accept not so much an incorrect as an incomplete understanding of this important and highly sophisticated body of thought and, in the bargain, to risk the loss of much within it of potential value to contemporary speculation. The *City of God* is more properly to be regarded as a synthesis, incorporating not only an historicist approach in its structure and theological presuppositions, but also what may be termed a « naturalistic » approach to history — an approach which, although it inheres mostly in certain modes of interpretation and is not strictly inductive in method, is nevertheless at many points firmly based upon extensive knowledge of leading historical events and much careful thought about the nature of historical knowledge itself. It is the purpose of this essay to somewhat redress the balance of critical opinion by illustrating the thesis just stated, with particular attention to this second, and often neglected, aspect of Augustine's treatment of history.

²) In *The Poverty of Historicism* (London, 1957) and further elaborated in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 4th ed. rev. (2 vols., Princeton, 1963).

This will be done by first examining certain facets of Augustine's concept of nature in order to demonstrate that, in his general ideas about the physical world and his basic notions of natural order interpretation, he was no more radically dissimilar from any present-day person of intelligence and education than any other leading thinker of antiquity; in the process, certain stereotype misconceptions stemming from his reputation as a Platonist theologian and mystic will perhaps be corrected. Secondly, it will be shown how his view of nature was integrated into his formal thought most significantly by means of historical synthesis, resulting in formulation of several of his more important contributions to historical theory. The purpose here is not to present Augustine as a « modern » thinker; our proposal is the more limited one of demonstrating certain points of this influence upon the Western tradition in historical scholarship, and also to emphasize elements of his thought which, as set forth in the *City of God*, may not be altogether without new value to modern ways of thinking about history.

St. Augustine was, in a sense, very practical in the aims and motivations of his scholarship; his basic concern was with the presuppositions of the Christian faith and his objective was not to prove these presuppositions, by Aristotelian or any other methods of strict demonstration, but rather to understand them, and to communicate this understanding to others. Hence one does not find formal epistemological discussion in any exclusively philosophical setting in the Augustinian *corpus*, but rather his notion of understanding is always conceived and elaborated in its relationship to faith, the famous theme in medieval philosophy of *credo ut intelligam*. And we thus find these two concepts, in numerous contexts, treated as complementary and co-equal functions of human intelligence. It is not surprising that the extra-logical category of faith and many other theological concepts which Augustine, as a Christian thinker, necessarily treated in his writings gave rise to a distinctive and emphatically nonclassical dialectic which can only be fully appreciated by considerable reading in his various works. However, in discussions of the problem of knowledge in such treatises as *Against the Sceptics*, *On the Trinity*, *On the Magnitude of the Soul* and elsewhere, and especially as a literary psychologist and one of the greatest practitioners of the introspective method in the *Confessions*, he did distinguish an apparatus and process

of perception according to categories of analysis which would be understandable to a classical philosopher. This means that Augustine was fully aware of the classical problems of epistemology and, further, fully cognizant of the range of metaphysical problems involved in understanding the data of experience, that is to say, the everyday world of the average man. How does he treat this range of problems?

The Platonic and Neoplatonic elements in Augustine's thought are inevitably discussed by commentators, and this is, of course, an entirely proper subject in Augustinian studies. However, it is precisely in these epistemological and metaphysical areas that Augustine's debt to the Platonists and Neoplatonists can be overly emphasized. Of the three principal non-Christian sources of his earlier thought, Manicheism, Scepticism, and Neoplatonism, it is clear from the autobiographical evidence in the *Confessions* that Neoplatonism, at least in the initial stages of his intellectual and spiritual development, was mainly of service to Augustine in liberating himself from the materialistic pseudo-metaphysics of the Manichees. His reading of the Platonists freed him from the conceptual bondage, so to speak, of a materialistic world-view, or of what Augustine himself described in several contexts as «substantial» theories of the two primary entities, God and evil; the role of Platonism was to enlarge his intellectual perspective to include a transcendent realm, and to give him new insights concerning the nature of God's existence and resolve what were for him personally agonizing problems concerning the nature of evil³). But upon examining Augustine's opinions as his Christian philosophy matured, it becomes apparent that his practical view of the natural world remained essentially unchanged. Augustinian idealism, as it regarded nature, was something quite different from conventional idealism; although, like the Platonists, he conceived of the universe in terms of multiple levels of existence and considered the realm of the transcendent as most real, he granted the physical world a measure of ontological autonomy which was altogether foreign to the Platonic conception and more akin to the natural law theories of the Stoics.

There are at least two reasons which the present writer can discern to explain why Augustine did not take his Platonism whole and go over to a position of extreme idealism (indeed, the fact that he did not

³) The principal exposition of this is in the *Confessions* vii, *passim*.

simply make a reactionary leap from one extreme system to another is a key to the subtlety and depth of his intellect). First is the Biblical account of the Creation which, by any literal interpretation, implies a universe of real existence in that God authored a temporal-spatial order which is essentially intelligible to men in the form it presents itself to the human senses and reason. At the risk of some simplification, one might say that, presuming a divinely-ordained economy of nature, there was no necessity for Augustine to construct a theory to explain appearances as being anything other than what they portend — rather, the particular time sequence specified in the very concrete Genesis account of the Creation led Augustine to first accept the fact of the physical reality of the universe, then move past this point to philosophize about it in certain important ways, especially with regard to his theory of time ⁴). In the Augustinian definition, nature is the sum of « visible things », whose order, created by divine *fiat*, is for practical purposes simply given and needs little philosophical explanation.

Secondly, Neoplatonism contributed decisively to Augustine's concepts of the soul or mind and of evil; but these were developed rather differently from previous formulations into his well-known doctrine of sin as a defect of soul and the product of an evil will, resulting in a completely internalized and psychological account of evil with an ethics built upon a morality of intention (here, too, Scriptural authority is ubiquitous, for Augustine was only philosophically elaborating the ethical teachings of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount). The significant point for the present argument is that Augustine dissociated evil from the natural order. To illustrate his contention that substance is not intrinsically evil, but rather that evil results from a bad use of substance which may even be a temporal good when properly used, Augustine went so far as to state that the Tree of Forbidden Fruit in the Garden of Eden was not in itself evil ⁵). It is a matter of principle for Augustine that the universe, the creation of a God who is in one of His necessary attributes the source of all goodness, is itself essentially good. Moreover, the universe is largely knowable, since Augustine's doctrine of the soul also provides the outlines of a naturalistic epistemology. The senses do not give knowledge except as they are judged by the soul, but the soul is by nature a warrant for the validi-

⁴) *City of God* xi, 4 et seq.; *Confessions* xi, passim.

⁵) *Of True Religion* xx, 38.

ty of perceptions, because man has truth in the form of first principles within himself by which to judge his sensory experiences. And while the universe itself does not manifestly declare the nature of God, it gives evidence of God to those who compare sensory knowledge with the inner truth of the soul ⁶).

From these considerations, one may infer several characteristics of Augustine's overall view of the physical universe; and these are important because analogues are found to each in his historical thought. First, nature is not arbitrary or capricious in its basic aspect, and its operations are not subject to irrational forces or interventions. His system left ample provision for an endorsement of the Stoic notion of a Providentially-ordered universe governed by unvarying physical laws. His essentially rational explanation of the universe was of great significance in the context of later ancient thought, for it repudiated both philosophical scepticism, on the one hand, and the various forms of fatalism evidenced by the appearance of popular cults of Fortune and Chance, on the other. He therefore sharply dissociated both himself and the Christian tradition from these and other manifestations of religious pessimism and philosophical exhaustion prevalent among the considerable pagan remnant of the period. Further, there are elements of a genuinely scientific world-view in Augustine. One finds in his writings that his basic vocabulary when discussing mundane things is the naturalistic scientific vocabulary which was current and accepted among educated men of the time. He did not, of course, regard scientific knowledge as ultimate; C.N. Cochrane has analyzed the extent of scientific reason in his thinking as follows:

... its character is merely economic or functional. In human life it fulfills a role precisely analogous to that of sense-perception on those levels of apprehension which are common to man and animal. This it does by providing him with a body of systematic knowledge, the «knowledge of temporal and mutable things», adequate to the conduct of his affairs ⁷).

Although Augustine's viewpoint is thus limited to a lay viewpoint, that of a man not professionally concerned with explaining the workings of nature, it nevertheless went beyond a merely casual acceptance of current scientific knowledge. His scientific naturalism had

⁶) *Confessions* x, 6.

⁷) C.N. COCHRANE, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New York, 1957), 434-35.

practical value as he made use of scientific knowledge at several important points in his teaching in what from a modern standpoint, would be regarded as a progressive direction. For example, in at least two notable passages he categorically rejected astrology along with a number of other popular superstitions of the period ⁸). From these and other contexts it can be shown that Augustine had a good basic knowledge of astronomy and was familiar with the nature of eclipses, solstices, equinoxes and other astronomical phenomena, and also had some acquaintance with the various cosmological theories of the universe which had been proposed in ancient times. It was as much by means of knowledge drawn from ancient scientific sources as by doctrinal authority that he debunked a host of popular superstitions of his period with scornful rhetoric and ridicule ⁹). Indeed, the only elements of what would today be considered as non-naturalistic or superstitious modes of explanation are his acceptance of miracles, a penchant for numerology (the ancient world never quite recovered from its intoxication with the epochal discoveries of Pythagoras), and a rather robust demonological theory. In Augustine, however, this demonology was scientifically and morally somewhat innocuous in that demons and malevolent spirits stand outside the economy of nature; that he credited astrologers with « certain pacts and contracts with demons » does not alter his firm opinion that the facts of nature themselves stand in rebuttal to the seductive errors of demons. In any event, demons do not have the power to cause evil, for they can only persuade — there must always be a free consent of the human will in

⁸) *Confessions* iv, 3; *On Christian Doctrine* ii, 21 et seq.

⁹) In both the *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine presented the familiar patristic argument against astrology concerning the example of twins, who, although born at approximately the same time and hence under the same astrological signs, most often do not have the same fortunes in life. He noted the counter-argument of the astrologers that there is always a short interval between the birth of twins, even if only of a few minutes, and that this makes all the difference. To which Augustine replied: « Whatever significance in the natural order the astrologers may attribute to this interval of time, it is too short to be appreciated by human observation and no allowance can be made for it in the charts which an astrologer has to consult in order to cast a true horoscope ». *Confessions* iv, 3 (I quote the translation of R.S. Pine-Coffin [Baltimore, 1961], 142). This indicates that Augustine was aware of the observational limits of ancient visual astronomy (« eyeball astronomy ») and had some notion of the fact that scientific knowledge is inherently limited by the limitations of available methods of observation and measurement—a notion usually considered of only fairly modern provenance.

the commission of any sin or error ¹⁰). Similarly, his belief in the miraculous is not altogether uncritical and does not seriously vitiate his naturalistic world-view, since he does not regard miracles as unnatural, simply as extraordinary and unexplainable events — he says « a miracle is not contrary to nature but to what is known of nature » ¹¹). In most other respects Augustine was a thorough-going naturalist; he believed the ordinary course of natural events to be governed by natural laws, his views especially in accordance with various Stoic theories. The Augustinian viewpoint has been summarized as combining « Stoic faith in natural law and providence with sceptical insistence on the limitation of human knowledge » ¹²). His Christian faith was for him, in part, a necessary result of his scepticism — his measured view of the limits of naturalism which he derived from his knowledge of ancient philosophical scepticism ¹³). But throughout his writings he maintains the primacy of naturalistic explanation in matters appropriate to it. In this regard, Augustine's standards of scientific knowledge should be judged by the general level of scientific culture in late antiquity. When the absurdities of the astrologers and soothsayers, the cabalistic theories of the Alexandrian alchemists, and all the other fantasies of late classical pseudo-science are compared with the earlier scientific and technical achievements of the ancient world, the extent of the decadence in the field of science in this period is dramatically obvious. The fact that an educated thinker in the West, such as Augustine, largely retained the basic naturalistic modes of explanation of an earlier and greater scientific era is a matter of considerable significance to cultural history and, for that matter, an antidote to any facile association of Christianity with popular superstition on the part of modern historians. This writer assents to the view of Cochrane and others that Roman Christianity as expounded by the patristic theologians was, until the Dark Ages, an effective check against a rising tide of superstition in Western civilization.

The second area where the naturalistic strain in Augustine had practical effect was in his ready acceptance of all the then-known tools

¹⁰) *Of True Religion* xv, 29.

¹¹) *City of God* xxi, 8; cf. Robert M. GRANT, *Miracle and Natural Law in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Thought* (Amsterdam, 1962), 215-220.

¹²) GRANT, *op. cit.*, 218; cf. 27-28.

¹³) That Augustine's scepticism is akin to modern scientific scepticism has been persuasively argued by G.L. KEYES, *Christian Faith and the Interpretation of History; A Study of St. Augustine's Philosophy of History* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1966), 36-82.

of reason and scientific scholarship in the service of Christian learning. The treatise *On Christian Doctrine* is a sort of handbook to this purpose, specifically in the fields of Biblical exegesis and homelitics. In the interpretation of Scripture, Augustine outlined the use of linguistics and philology to establish principles of textual criticism of considerable sophistication. In this treatise, as well as in the scholarly researches in the fields of history and chronology in the *City of God*, he unhesitatingly advised the use of pagan history and other secular sources of data as auxiliary aids to Biblical studies. The final book of *On Christian Doctrine* is a comprehensive treatise in itself on the use of purely classical canons of rhetoric for the Christian preacher. These and other characteristic viewpoints toward profane learning reveal a liberal temperament, a thinker who consistently gave due regard to the validity of reason in matters appropriate to it and appreciated the value of scholarly procedures in matters of religious inquiry. Above all, Augustine insisted that Christian teaching «fulfills the rule of all rational discipline»¹⁴).

But if St. Augustine was not anti-intellectual and anti-scientific, and even had an abhorrence of the intellectual vacuum of scepticism as well as a contemptuous attitude toward superstition — and in these ways shared much of the common spirit of enlightened men of either ancient or modern times — his scientific outlook had its marked limitations and is strictly subordinated in his overall sense of values. Symptomatic of this is, as H. Marrou observes in another connection, that Augustine was also singularly unresponsive to the philosophical and aesthetic splendors of nature and the cosmos; he is unlike the Greek Fathers who celebrated the glories of the cosmos in hymns and praises to its Creator¹⁵). While Augustine maintained the goodness of nature as a theological principle, there is a certain ambivalence in his attitude in the detailed formulations of his moral theology, where nature is regarded as a rather passive and neutral entity and not as a good in itself. The criterion which he established to make value judgments concerning natural objects and usually expresses is that of their relative usefulness for the Christian, whose ultimate concerns should always give priority to the transcendent order. The same criterion holds good for human knowledge about nature;

¹⁴) *Of True Religion* xvii, 33.

¹⁵) Henri MARROU, *Saint Augustine and His Influence Through the Ages* (New York, 1957), 72-73.

this is definitively stated in *On Christian Doctrine*, where the various disciplines of human knowledge are canvassed and Augustine magisterially pronounces upon their relative utility for the Christian thinker. He approved of «spoiling the Egyptians»¹⁶⁾ but emphatically warned that positive knowledge gained from the scholarly disciplines, which in Augustinian terminology are referred to as «human institutions», is not identical with truth in its highest sense, that is, wisdom; for example, his opinion of formal logic is typical: «... a knowledge of inference, definition, and division aids the understanding a great deal, provided that men do not make the mistake of thinking that they have learned the truth of the blessed life when they have learned them»¹⁷⁾.

This latter distinction is salutary for any age, although one must conclude that Augustine's general attitude is to take nature and science for granted. For the transcendental concerns of Augustine's system, scientific knowledge is of relatively slight importance. The essence of the Augustinian attitude is summed up, as is much of the so-called Augustinian synthesis, in the little book entitled the *Enchiridion*:

When, then, the question is asked what we are to believe in regard to religion, it is not necessary to probe into the nature of things, as was done by those whom the Greeks call *physici*; nor need we be in alarm lest the Christian should be ignorant of the force and number of the elements—the motion, and order, and eclipses of the heavenly bodies; the form of the heavens; the species and the natures of animals, plants, stones, fountains, rivers, mountains; about chronology and distances; the signs of coming storms; and a thousand other things which those philosophers either have found out or think they have found out. For even these men themselves, endowed though they are with so much genius, burning with zeal, abounding in leisure, tracking some things by the aid of human conjecture, searching into others with the aids of history and experience, have not found out all things; and even their boasted discoveries are oftener mere guesses than certain knowledge. It is enough for the Christian to believe that the only cause of all created things, whether visible or invisible, is the goodness of the Creator, the one true God; and that nothing exists but Himself that does not derive its existence from Him ...¹⁸⁾.

¹⁶⁾ *On Christian Doctrine* ii, 40.

¹⁷⁾ *Ibid.*, ii. 37.

¹⁸⁾ *Enchiridion* ix; translation of H. Paolucci (Chicago, 1961), 9-10.

It might be added parenthetically that, for the history of medieval thought, it was significant that Augustine felt no obligation or imperative necessity to preserve the classical heritage of science and philosophy, but conversely it is also noteworthy that neither is there any pronounced *contemptus mundi* in his concept of nature. Nor can this writer detect any marked attitude of suspicion toward secular learning, although Marrou believes this negative element to be very prominent in Augustine ¹⁹). The more excessive proponents of medieval world-contempt, with their fundamentalist tendencies toward anti-intellectualism and extreme asceticism, were not strictly Augustinian in their inspiration (as many medievalists are wont to assert) but rather products of the Dark and early Middle Ages, men whose views were shaped by the circumstances of their own times as much as by the classical Christian heritage. Their appeals to Augustine for authority were interpretations of Augustine and based upon citations of isolated contexts in such works as the *Confessions*, a work full of the zeal of the recent convert and hence especially susceptible of such interpretation, rather than a reflection of the total Augustinian teaching. But, although Augustine's particular theological orientation precluded the development of a fruitful philosophy of nature, his general philosophical viewpoint made possible a quite different level of achievement with regard to historical thought. It was in this discipline that Augustinian « naturalism » was most felicitously exercised in producing a rational account of the universe, and where scholarship and Christian doctrine were combined in a synthesis which, if enlightened by transcendental concepts of Christian theology and framed according to its distinctive terminology, nevertheless at many points retains the character of an inductive study of the nominal facts of human history.

History is of capital importance in Augustine's systematic thought, for it is a keystone of his entire concept of the Christian religion, as he unequivocally stated in *Of True Religion* :

In following this religion our chief concern is with the prophetic history of the dispensation of divine providence in time—what God has done for the salvation of the human race, renewing and restoring it unto eternal life. When once this is believed, a way of life agreeable to the divine commandments will purge the mind and make it fit to

¹⁹) MARROU, *op. cit.*, 73.

perceive spiritual things which are neither past nor future but abide ever the same, liable to no change ²⁰).

But since so many of Augustine's treatises, including the *City of God*, are occasional writings in response to specific issues or controversies of the day, a brief review of the historical circumstances surrounding the writing of this work is relevant. The fall of Rome in 410 A.D. brought on a grave ideological crisis in Christendom. Eusebius of Caesarea, writing the first history from a Christian viewpoint at the beginning of the fourth century, had postulated the optimistic theory that the triumph of Christianity in the Empire had ushered in an era of progress and happiness, discernable and exemplified by the abolition of wars and the establishment of peace under the reign of the Christian emperor Constantine. Although set forth in a Christian frame of reference, it was nothing other than an appeal to, and perhaps the last restatement of, the noble old ideal of the *Pax Romana* ²¹). As a practical object of policy, this ideal fell into immediate obsolescence upon Alaric's entry into the Eternal City. Among the abundant evidences of the general consternation caused by this event is the fact that the ablest Christian thinker of the time was called upon to answer disquieting pagan accusations that Christianity had caused the fall of Rome, and to refute infidel assertions that the ancient gods of the city had been the font of the social prosperity of the Empire and that prohibition of pagan worship was « the source of many calamities » ²²). The result was Augustine's monumental treatise, the *City of God*. Augustine, however, did not limit himself to a polemic against pagan religion, the immediate occasion of the work and which he disposed of rather handily in the first nine books, but, as the writing progressed, addressed himself to a second and more fundamental purpose of setting forth a comprehensive body of positive doctrine touching all phases of Christian life and belief. The *City of God* took the form, with

²⁰) *Of True Religion* vii. 13; translation of J.H.S. Burleigh (Chicago, 1961), 14.

²¹) Cf. COCHRANE, *op. cit.*, 184: « To Eusebius the glorious and unexpected triumph of the Church constituted decisive evidence of the *operatio Dei*, the hand of God in human history. At the same time, by an easy and natural confusion of thought, it suggested the dangerous error that Christianity was a success-philosophy. » The best concise account of the Christian optimism of the fourth century and the consequent ideological crisis after the fall of Rome is the essay by Theodor E. MOMMSEN, « St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress », *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951), 346-374.

²²) *Retractions* 69.

numerous digressions, of a commentary upon the historical narrative of the Scriptures, developing in context his characteristic doctrines of the Creation, of the fall and redemption of mankind, and of the progress and destiny of the Church. The unifying theme of the work is the concept of the Two Cities — the Heavenly City or the City of God, and the Earthly City — and their genesis, progress, and a prediction of their destined ends. The master thesis throughout is that Gods works out His plan for the world in history; the *City of God* is therefore a massively comprehensive descriptive analysis of the *operatio Dei* in human history. The author, beginning in 413, spent fifteen years working on this treatise. It is therefore monumental in length and incorporates a vast number of arguments and concepts. Since these are extremely varied and not always systematically related, no attempt can be made here to summarize the numerous points of doctrine contained in the work, nor even elucidate all of Augustine's views on history. The endeavor here will be to point out those elements of Augustine's philosophy of history which bear directly on his working concepts of interpretation.

Such an analysis is complicated by the fact that, although purportedly a history of the Heavenly and Earthly Cities, the work is not an historical narrative but rather an explication and far-ranging commentary; only four books are historical in format and, although these books together cover all known world history to his time, they are epitomes and the narrative is but a selection of data, presented with a view to supporting various theological hypotheses. Further, Augustine's intention was to show purpose in history, not to educe causes and causal explanations. This is a typical classical scientific attitude, but where the entelechic scheme of Aristotle's natural philosophy, for example, is transformed in Augustine from a teleological into an eschatological frame of reference. He concluded the *City of God* with four chapters describing the ends of the Two Cities, the whole chronological sequence of world history viewed as tending toward an eschatological conclusion. Augustine's view of history is therefore schematic and *a priori* rather than an inductive theory based upon empirical consideration of historical data. And because this *a priori* view of history is, at base, derived from revelation, Augustine's explanation of history is essentially a religious one, both in purpose and method; one must perforce agree with Gilson in describing Augustine as a

«theologian of history»²³), and that this «monumental treatise of Augustine ... has precisely for its object to retrace in bold outline a theology of history for which all historical events are so many moments of implementing a plan which has been foreseen and willed by God»²⁴). In broad concept, therefore, the *City of God* is a species of metahistory, and, to the extent implied by the arrangement of materials and the theological purpose of its argument, it also answers to the specifications of those critics who label it as historicist. Nevertheless, there are certain more properly philosophical and historical aspects of Augustine's concept of history that stand out clearly in the midst of the vast eschatological design of the work. These are to be seen both as Augustine defends a naturalistic world-view philosophically and as he applies his distinctive principles of causal interpretation.

Two aspects in particular have found ready appreciation among modern scholars. The first is that history on Augustinian principles is universal history; it encompasses the individual histories of all races, nations, and institutions. This represents a important advance in historiography since, as Collingwood has remarked, «Graeco-Roman oecumenical history is not universal history in this sense, because it has a particularistic centre of gravity», i.e., the Mediterranean cultures²⁵). A notable presupposition in Augustine, stemming from his philosophy of human nature as it was influenced by Stoicism, is that mankind is a unity, a doctrine comparable to the concept of the «psychic unity of mankind» of modern anthropology; considering «the sum total of rational beings», he concludes that «all appear to be subject to the same history ...»²⁶). In spite of his grand division into the Two Cities, human history forms a unity, both for this philosophical reason and because it is within the continuum of history that God works out His plan of grace and redemption which predestines some for eternal salvation, others for eternal damnation, but affects all of humanity. Augustinian history therefore provides a theoretical framework which makes it possible to view the phenomena of history

²³) E. GILSON, in an introductory essay to the *City of God* in the abridged Image Books edition of the Fathers of the Church translation of G.G. Walsh et al. (New York, 1958), 31.

²⁴) E. GILSON, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London, 1955), 80.

²⁵) R.G. COLLINGWOOD, *The Idea of History* (New York, 1956), 49.

²⁶) GILSON, in *City of God* introductory essay, 30.

with comprehensiveness and also with a critical impartiality, because all persons and events are viewed existentially as participating variously but with a sort of metaphysical equality in a grand «drama» (a metaphor which has occurred to many commentators), this drama being the fulfillment of God's will in the created universe. The gain here is substantial, for such a concept insures a certain objectivity in viewpoint — Augustine exhibits no subjective bias as to persons or nations, for his value judgments derive strictly from stated theological principles.

The significance of these observations concerning Augustine as a universal historian, however, should not be unduly exaggerated, for the points of analysis derive from a modern perspective and not from any conceptions central to Augustine's own systematics. It would appear that much of the praise of Augustinian universalism stems more from contemporary enthusiasm for the idea of *Universalgeschichte* rather than its intrinsic merits; some have been overly impressed by the fact that Augustine managed to reduce all of history to some semblance of overall intelligibility simply because this is also the goal of universal history, even if he did so according to a theological system that these same persons may find incompatible with their own views. Such an evaluation is also dependent upon a value-judgment of classical historians as being more parochial than is perhaps justified, and a restrictive definition of what constitutes universal history (note Collingwood's «in this sense» above). Augustine did not set out to write universal history as such; it only emerges peripherally as a logical result of his overall purpose rather than by conscious design, and as a corollary of the universality of Christian belief. And it led to no immediate advances in subsequent medieval historiography. History seen as a function of God's omnipotence was a regulative principle so self-evident to medieval historians that it was neither questioned nor further developed as a methodological postulate. The universalistic tendencies to be seen in these writers, most notably the twelfth-century bishop and historian Otto of Freising, mark no conceptual advance over Augustine. Indeed, the only influence of this universalism on historical method in medieval historiography was the rather negative one of an occasional and unfortunate tendency to minimize all but the leading trends in history, with a consequent inattention to the accuracy and importance of lesser detail. The critical value of Augustine's treatment lies in other directions.

A second philosophical aspect in the *City of God* which has been widely noted and also justly recognized as an intellectual advance of fundamental importance in Western thought is Augustine's concept of time, which enabled him, on philosophical grounds, to refute the Platonic theory of eternal recurrence, especially in its historical form as it appeared in classical thought, the so-called «cyclic theory» of history²⁷). The importance of this achievement in intellectual history is evident upon considering the decadent condition of late antique intellectual culture. By Augustine's lifetime, classical philosophy and, with it, historiography had reached a point of bankruptcy, its stock of ideas exhausted. Philosophical discussion had degenerated into puerile repetition, distinguished only by a vicious, self-defeating circularity of logic. This latter was well recognized by Augustine himself, who quoted a verse from the Book of Psalms, «The wicked walk about in a circle», with the remark that «it is not that their lives will recur *per circulos* as they [i.e., the pagan philosophers] think, but that of such is the way of their errors, that is, false doctrine»²⁸). Centuries

²⁷) However, two recent and important articles have shown that we can no longer associate the cyclic theory with the ancient historians, as has been the conventional view and a commonplace in nearly all comment on the subject. A.D. Momigliano points out that the theory of eternal recurrence is to be found primarily among the philosophers, not the historians of antiquity; he also notes that, although a widely-held doctrine, it was by no means agreed to by all the classical philosophers. Chester G. Starr comes to a similar conclusion: «On the whole Greek—and Roman—historical writing was in practice what we may call «linear» ...»; Starr finds only one clear exception in the case of Pompeius Trogus of an historian «whose whole scheme of thought consciously was built on a cyclic theme ...». (A. MOMIGLIANO, «Time in Ancient Historiography» and Chester G. STARR, «Historical and Philosophical Time», *History and Theory Beiheft* 6 [1966], 1-23 and 24-35). This means simply that Augustine's attack was directed against a conception peculiar to ancient philosophy, and not history, although it may have been a widespread popular notion among educated pagans of his time. Versions of the theory are prominent features of both Platonism and Stoicism, the two schools of philosophy with which Augustine was most familiar and most sympathetic, suggesting that his particular interest in the problem of time may be partly explained as the result of an effort to clarify his own thinking with regard to the single doctrine in these philosophies most directly inimical to Christian belief. One recalls that he also dealt with the subject at length in a celebrated passage in the *Confessions*. In any case, the findings of Momigliano and Starr do not detract from the originality or pertinence of Augustine's discussion, the first adequate philosophical examination of time as related to history.

²⁸) *City of God* xii, 13. I have used the Fathers of the Church translation cited above (n. 23) for this study; however: the reader should be warned that this translation is excessively free and modernizing in many of its renderings, and I have thought it desirable to justify some passages following critical to my argument by inserting key phrases from the *Corpus Christianorum* text.

of debate had reduced a general notion of the cosmos to two possibilities: as subject to eternal cyclic repetition, the visible patterns of which are the seasonal changes and astronomical revolutions, or, alternatively, as governed solely by chance or fortune. In addressing both of these problems with new solutions based upon Christian doctrine, Augustine not only struck a mighty blow for Christendom but also manifested in still another manner the powerful liberating influence of the Christian thought of his time, freeing speculation from its pursuits up blind alleys and along the well-traveled but now dead-ended avenues of classical thought.

Augustine's resolution of the first of these problems, the theory of cyclic recurrence, may be briefly stated as follows: He derived his concept of time as related to motion and change from Aristotle, but dissented from and concentrated his attack upon any notion of time as an absolute and eternal category of existence. His approach was two-fold: First, he made certain modifications of an epistemological nature, asserting that time was more properly a psychological rather than a physical reality (a notion which would have much modern support). For Augustine, time is only the measurement in extension of experience, in terms of past, present and future; it is only mental — time is not to be found outside the mind in the motions of the universe, as was the classical concept of time and motion. As it were, the «soul [i.e., mind] is not in time but time is rather the form in which the soul is presented to itself»²⁹). Therefore, time is subjective, and not a physical or metaphysical absolute. Secondly, and most significant from the point of view of philosophy of history, is Augustine's assertion that time itself was created: «Undoubtedly, then, the world was made not in time but together with time»³⁰). This concept, confounding the pagan idea of the eternity of time, has two important implications, that since God created time it is also an integral component of the providential ordering of the universe, and that time has a beginning and an end. God, as the Lord of time, is even more surely the Lord of history; and history, having a beginning and an end, can therefore be conceived as linear in nature and as a process and progress or «procession» (*procursus*) toward a higher and better destiny.

²⁹) *Confessions* xi, passim; the phrase quote is from R.S. PETERS, ed., *Brett's History of Psychology* (New York, 1962), 212.

³⁰) *City of God* xi, 6; cf. xi, 13 and *Confessions* xi, passim.

For religion, this refutation of the classical concept of time as eternal recurrence meant for the individual a release from the hopelessness of an existence in a universe conceived as a kind of cosmic merry-go-round, and provided an additional buttress to the Christian doctrine of salvation. For history, the Augustinian concept of created time had several important consequences. Philosophically, events and institutions gained a new existential significance as causal agents, as suggested by Collingwood :

This new view of history makes it possible to see not only the actions of historical agents, but the existence and nature of those agents themselves, as vehicles of God's purposes and therefore as historically important. Just as the individual soul is a thing created in the fullness of time to have just those characteristics which the time requires if God's purpose is to be fulfilled, so a thing like Rome is not an eternal entity but a transient thing that has come into existence at the appropriate time in history to fulfill a certain definite function and to pass away when that function has been fulfilled. This was a profound revolution in historical thinking; it meant that the process of historical change was no longer conceived as flowing, so to speak, over the surface of things, and affecting their accidents only, but as involving their very substance and thus entailing a real creation and a real destruction... the gain to history is immense, because the recognition that the historical process creates its own vehicles, so that entities like Rome or England are not the presuppositions but the products of that process, is the first step towards grasping the peculiar characteristics of history ³¹).

Further, this anti-Platonic tendency saved historiography as a discrete discipline by preserving the ordinary spatial-temporal framework upon which all historical scholarship is founded, and prevented history from succumbing to the domination of allegorical (i.e., Origenistic) or mystical modes of interpretation, both strong trends in the theological history of the early Church. And because events are important of themselves, Augustine consistently and stoutly maintained the importance of preserving the integrity of historical facts :

Now, just as I feel that those are greatly mistaken who think that the historical facts in those books [the Old Testament] have no significance other than that things occurred as so described, so I find too venturesome those who maintain that absolutely everything is bound up with allegorical meanings... I do not censure those who

³¹) COLLINGWOOD, *op. cit.*, 48-49.

may have been able to carve out some spiritual interpretation from every historical fact recounted, so long as they take good care first and foremost to adhere to historical fact [... *servata dumtaxat primitus historiae veritate*]³²).

For Augustine, then, historical events are demonstrable as occurring in rational sequence in a consistent temporal frame of reference. His philosophical defense of historical time may be regarded as the most important consequence of his concept of time both as it preserved the fundamental presuppositions of ancient historians and as it gave a new shape to attitudes toward history at the critical juncture between the end of the ancient world and the medieval beginnings of modern Western culture. Undoubtedly its most important effect was to fix the notion of linear time in the consciousness of Western civilization, but it has also had profound effects upon the working methods of historians. Its most immediate effect can be seen as it was manifested in the methodology of early medieval scholars in their emphasis upon chronology, which is the hallmark and chief strength of the critical scholarship to be found in medieval historiography. This indispensable historical sub-discipline came to be of great service to the Church; accurate reckoning of dates was essential to accurate maintenance of the Church calendar, and a considerable number of treatises, the so-called *computus* literature, appeared in the early Middle Ages designed to facilitate such calculations. But it was also of immense service to students of history. The Venerable Bede, for example, was a master of chronological studies in both ecclesiastical reckoning and in historical scholarship. It was due to Bede and other patristic writers in the Augustinian tradition that the clumsy chronological systems of the Greeks and Romans, which necessitated laborious reconciliation of the separate reckonings of each of the city-states with Olympiads, regnal years, and other conventions, was replaced by the uniform and convenient B.C.-A.D. system, and the frequent imprecision found in ancient historical writing was superseded by a standard of accuracy in the best medieval historians which is often excellent even by modern standards. Augustine himself set one of the precedents in the *City of God*. He employed chronology extensively in Books XV-XVIII, the «historical» books, most notably in Old Testament scholarship, although he also attempted to synchronize Biblical and classical history

³²) *City of God* xvii, 3; cf. xiii, 21.

in broad outline. Chronological reckoning enabled Augustine to test empirically, as it were, the credibility of the Scriptural narrative and the validity of prophecy. Although his purpose was apologetic and he of course found the evidential support which he sought, these sections are not without a reputable quantity of scholarly discussion and considerable display of critical ingenuity³³). He may be criticized for « Procrustean treatment of evidence »³⁴), but the important point here is that Augustine's appeal was to the authority of an historical, and not theological, method. One might even argue that the critical study of prophecy in Augustine is merely a reversal of direction from the historian's accustomed backward glance, not a compromise of historical principles (provided, of course, one is prepared to accept the evidence). Yet here, also, Augustine maintained a critical reserve, for he abstained from any rash attempt to predict the date of the Last Judgment; for this, he wisely realized, the data of revelation are insufficient.

Thus both philosophically and in practice, Augustine affirmed the existence and importance of the conventional spatial-temporal continuum of objective history. Augustine was a Platonist only in describing the eternal in his philosophy, the Creator; idealism had little effect upon his notion of the created universe and of history. His rationalism in this regard was of an order sufficient to arouse the qualified admiration of the leading proponent of eighteenth-century rationalism in the field of history, Edward Gibbon, who described the *City of God* as « a magnificent design, boldly and not unskilfully executed »³⁵). Accordingly, if, by this view, the course of history proceeds according to an objective and, at least in its fundamental outlines, a recognizable ordering of the universe, and the study of history may be regarded as an empirical demonstration of this order, it is to be expected that the specific modes of causation which can be discerned in Augustine's account of historical processes must be correspondingly

³³) Augustine's critical conjectures in the *City of God* concerning discrepancies between the Hebrew, Septuagint, and Vulgate texts of the Old Testament are in accordance with the ideal of Christian scholarship which he outlined in *Of Christian Doctrine*, and anticipate several modern principles of internal criticism of documents—e.g., authority and intentions of the writer, semantic and linguistic problems, possibility of falsification or scribal error—as related to collation of differing texts as well as critical exegesis. See esp. *City of God* xv, 8-15.

³⁴) KEYES, *op. cit.*, 83 et seq. This is one of the main theses of this highly critical but important new book on Augustine's philosophy of history.

³⁵) Quoted by COCHRANE, *op. cit.*, 397.

objective and rational. It is presently germane to this discussion to examine Augustine's habitual modes of causal explanation to determine if, in fact, these represent a practical manifestation of the inherent metaphysical potential in his thinking for a theory of causation based on inductive principles of a « scientific » historiography.

Again, the answer must be partly in the negative, although not completely so. In practice, Providence is the most important mode of causation which Augustine employs in the *City of God*. Throughout the context, one meets references to the working of a Platonically immutable God in the mutable course of history. This « providential theory » is extensively developed in Book V, the apologetic burden of which is to prove that the greatness of imperial Rome and its material prosperity, as well as that of other great pagan nations, is explained and subsumed in the often inscrutable but ever just will of God. The complete saturation of great stretches of the context by this concept is not mere rhetoric, but is supported by a specific doctrine associating the concept of causation with Providence, as in this passage : « He has the causes of all things, knows them and disposes them [... *qui rerum causas habet, novit, atque disponit*] » ³⁶). Knowledge of these causes to an ultimate degree Augustine tended to conceive in Platonic categories, to be perceived mystically and introspectively; he approvingly described Socrates as an exponent of such a method :

Socrates realized that his predecessors had been seeking the origin of all things, but he believed that these first and highest causes could be found only in the will of the single and supreme Divinity, and, therefore, could be comprehended only by a mind purified from passion. Hence his conclusion, that he must apply himself to the acquisition of virtue, so that his mind, freed from the weight of earthly desires, might, by its own natural vigor, lift itself up to eternal realities and, with purified intelligence, contemplate the very nature of that immaterial and immutable light in which the causes of all created nature abidingly dwell ³⁷).

Further, ultimate knowledge of the « world of time and change » is not vouchsafed to man, although the angels have somewhat fuller knowledge because « in the Word of God, through whom the world was made, they contemplate the ultimate reasons why, in the cosmic order,

³⁶) *City of God* vii, 30.

³⁷) *City of God* viii, 3.

some things can be used while others are refused, and nothing is confused » ³⁸).

A philosophical result of the « providential theory » was to make it possible for Augustine to resolve the second alternative of the two-horned dilemma of decadent classical speculation — the idea of fate or fortune, deified by the Romans as the goddess Fortuna, governing all events. Augustine repeatedly inveighed against this brand of pessimism in the *City of God*, as in the following typical passage :

The cause, then, of the greatness of the Roman Empire was neither fortuitous nor fatal, according to the meaning or opinion of those who call a thing fortuitous which either has no causes or does not proceed from some rational order, and fatal, whatever happens contrary to the will of God and man by the necessity of a certain order. In a word, human kingdoms are established by Divine Providence ³⁹).

Augustine also explicitly recognized determinism, *necessitas*, as a corollary form of this same pessimism :

There are some, however, who define fate, not as the arrangement of the stars at conception, birth, or other beginning-to-be, but as the total series of causes which brings about all that happens. With these there is no need to enter into a lengthy debate on the use of words, since they attribute to the will and power of God the order and dependence of causes. They are perfectly right in believing that God allows nothing to remain unordered and that He knows all things before they appear to come to pass. All powers are from Him, although not all wills are from him ⁴⁰).

This latter statement involves the difficulty that Augustine, with his concept of Providence, himself imposed a form of necessity upon history; this is nothing other than the historical form of Augustine's celebrated doctrine of predestination and free will, and his success in treating this perennial theoretical problem in terms of historical analysis is dependent upon one's judgment of the debatable merits of his philosophical resolution of the problem, as set forth in the fifth book of the *City of God* and in other writings. Suffice it to say that he does assert an indeterminism and human free will on the mundane

³⁸) *Ibid.*, ix, 22.

³⁹) *City of God* v, 1.

⁴⁰) *Ibid.*, v, 8.

level of history and develops a causal scheme to account for it, as will be noticed shortly; he cannot be dismissed as a determinist and historicist pure and simple. The significant aspect of Augustinian Providence as a mode of historical interpretation for the purposes of this immediate discussion is a more subjective one, and reiterates a previous observation concerning Augustine's view of nature: Providence is neither arbitrary nor capricious. Augustine never made use of any notion of direct divine intervention or miraculous interposition as a device to explain specific historical events. Here he is much closer to the modern spirit and has nothing to do with the hagiographic tradition which completely permeates such early medieval historians as Gregory of Tours. He conceived of miracles as phenomena of the type contained in the New Testament narrative, and these had no historical ramifications for him other than as further proofs of the established historical fact of the divine revelation in Christ. Miracles seldom disturb the empyrean progress of the ages in Augustine's view of history and are of negligible significance in the overall historical process, except as one may consider the ordering of the Creation itself a miracle. Indeed, there is little emphasis upon the miraculous in all of the *City of God*, and in one context Augustine was if anything hard-pressed to prove the continued existence of miracles in his own day ⁴¹). Instead, Augustine's God of history, combining all the attributes of perfect justice and omniscience, is above all a reasonable God. His governance of the world is in the eminently rational Roman spirit: « Augustine », states Cochrane, « represents the divine sovereignty as constitutional rather than arbitrary, an imperium rather than a sultanate » ⁴²). Hence, on balance, Augustine's concept of Providence scarcely violates but rather complements a naturalistic view of history as he regards the realm of mundane detail and treats of events in terms of their specific causes.

Turning to an analysis of immediate causation in Augustine, it is again necessary to commence on a critical note. It has been observed that a conceptual deficiency of the *City of God* is that « ... Augustine failed to relate the first cause, that is, God's providential plan, to the 'secondary causes' operative in the process as such », there is an « absence of a detailed correlation between secular and sacred

⁴¹) *City of God* xxii, 8.

⁴²) COCHRANE, *op. cit.*, 442.

events ... » ⁴³). It has been remarked previously that Augustine was not concerned with historical study for its own sake, and that his interest in history extended not to details but to its grand outlines, and this for theological purposes. Therefore it is not surprising that Augustine did not occupy himself in the technicalities of the discipline, and that any philosophy of history, if such can be properly found in the *City of God*, stands incomplete because it does not account for the minutiae of historical occurrences. Augustine himself said, « it would be too much for me and beyond my powers to discuss men's hidden merits and to measure in open balance ... » ⁴⁴). A concept of providential causation in all things tends to subsume subordinate phenomena, and all minor causal relationships become relatively trivial by this view, rendering any detailed exposition unnecessary; this is correlative to his attitude toward positive scientific knowledge. As Gilson has noted, the twin domination of purpose and Providence in the *City of God* is pervasive : « Everything which a modern historian would explain in terms of the efficient cause is here interpreted from the standpoint of finality. Hence the unified, systematic and philosophical character of St. Augustine's account » ⁴⁵).

But Augustine does habitually utilize one mode of causal explanation which is within the category of immediate or efficient causes. It first appears at the very outset of the *City of God* in the concluding sentence of the preface, where Augustine described the Earthly City as « that city which lusts to dominate the world and which, though nations bend to its yoke, is itself dominated by its passion for dominion [... *ipsa ei dominandi libido dominatur*] » ⁴⁶). This theme of « passion for domination » occurs repeatedly thereafter. The fall of Rome was only partially attributed to a surfeit of « ease and plenty », but also to a decline in love of liberty and the ancient virtues, so that honorable ambition in the early Republic was replaced by avarice, all of these being observations which Augustine derived and cited from complaints of the classical writers themselves. Then Augustine added his own interpretation to the pagan evidence, ascribing these symptoms of decline

⁴³) K. LÖWTH, *Meaning in History* (Chicago, 1949), 172.

⁴⁴) *City of God* v, 21.

⁴⁵) E. GILSON, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (New York, 1940) 482, n. 3.

⁴⁶) *City of God* i, preface.

to a « passion » or « lust » for dominion ⁴⁷). The origin of war he found in Cain's fratricide :

In the case of the brothers Cain and Abel, there was no rivalry in any cupidity for things of earth, nor was there any envy or temptation to murder arising from a fear of losing the sovereignty if both were ruling together. In this case, Abel had no ambition for domination in the city that his brother was building [Augustine metaphorically described Cain as the founder of the Earthly City]. The root of the trouble was that diabolical envy which moves evil men to hate those who are good for no other reason than that they are good ⁴⁸).

After drawing a comparison between Cain and Abel and the quarrel of Romulus and Remus, Augustine extended the argument to a general conclusion on the nature of war : « Here we have the very heart of the earthly city. Its God (or gods) is he or they who will help the city to victory after victory and to a reign of earthly peace; and this city worships, not because it has any love for service, but because its passion is for domination [*dominandi cupiditate*] » ⁴⁹). Even profane wisdom is subject to this censure; quoting St. Paul on the wise men of the Earthly City, « For while professing to be wise they have become fools ... », Augustine commented : « ... that is to say, while glorying in their own wisdom, under the domination of pride » ⁵⁰). This theme is finally made the distinguishing characteristic of the Earthly City as opposed to the City of God, « that proud city » as against « the humble city », ⁵¹) and elsewhere described in the following terms :

In the city of the world both the rulers themselves and the people they dominate are dominated by the lust for domination [*dominandi libido dominatur*]; whereas in the City of God all citizens serve one another in charity, whether they serve by the responsibilities of office or by the duties of obedience. The one city loves its leaders as symbols of its own strength; the other says to its God : « I love Thee, O Lord, my strength » ⁵²).

⁴⁷) *Ibid.*, e.g. i, 33; v, 12.

⁴⁸) *City of God* xv, 5.

⁴⁹) *Ibid.*, xv, 7.

⁵⁰) *Ibid.*, xiv, 28 (quoting Rom. 1 : 22).

⁵¹) *Ibid.*, xiv, 13.

⁵²) *City of God* xiv, 28. The statement that « the one city loves its leaders as symbols of its strength », by which Augustine indicates one mode by which ordinary men participate vicariously in the lust for domination, fairly describes some of the phenomena of modern nationalism, especially the cult of personality in totalitarian regimes.

Although this explanatory principle may appear to be a mere rhetorical stock-phrase and the prejudice of a moralist rather than a principle of interpretation to an uncritical reader, it is in fact based upon a carefully elaborated theory with both philosophical and theological support. Augustine's basic doctrine of «passions», for which he cited Scriptural authority, is stated in essence as follows: «... the mind is subject to God to be ruled and aided while the passions are subject to the mind to be moderated, tamed, and turned to the uses of justice»⁵³). From the context immediately preceding, however, it is apparent that the derivation is from Stoicism, although the specific emphasis upon the concept of «pride» (*superbia*) is, at least verbally, inspired by its numerous occurrences in Scripture, especially in the Old Testament⁵⁴). The distinctively Christian doctrine emerges in Augustine's concept of the human will. To briefly summarize a complicated set of ideas, one must have reference to Augustinian psychology, where the will is identified both as the rational faculty of the soul and also the seat of the power of free choice of moral good or evil, this power exercised in controlling both conduct and the emotions. «Man's will, then, is all-important. If it is badly directed, the emotions will be perverse; if rightly directed, the emotions will be not merely blameless but even praiseworthy»⁵⁵). In Christian thought of this period generally there was a strong association of three major concepts, due to Pauline influence: sin, the passions or emotions, and the «flesh». Although for all practical purposes Augustine and other Christian writers seemed to equate these three concepts in a direct and mutually inclusive relationship in Christian ethics, Augustine eschewed this simplification in favor of a more subtle line of reasoning to produce a purely psychological account of sin; this forms his central doctrine of Original Sin. While certain vices may be attributable to fleshly corruption, Original Sin was not of corporeal origin; it is, he argued, an error «to blame our sins and defects on the nature of the flesh, for this is to disparage the Creator»⁵⁶). Corruption of the

⁵³) *Ibid.*, ix, 5.

⁵⁴) One wonders, however, if there is any connection between Augustinian pride and the classical concept of *hybris*. I have not seen this discussed in any of the standard literature, but it would pose a neat problem of research to attempt to trace such a connection.

⁵⁵) *City of God* xiv, 6.

⁵⁶) *Ibid.*, xiv, 5.

flesh is not the cause but the punishment of original sin; it was rather by an act of will, which Augustine elsewhere terms « a bad use of free choice » on the part of the first man, Adam, that the nature of man suffered corruption and became defective. And, in the fourteenth book of the *City of God* where Augustine relates this concept to the historical process, he identifies the source of this corruption :

... our first parents only fell openly into the sin of disobedience because, secretly, they had begun to be guilty. Actually, their bad deed could not have been done had not bad will preceded it; what is more, the root of their bad will was nothing else than pride. For, « pride is the beginning of all sin » [Eccl. 10 : 15]. And what is pride but an appetite for inordinate exaltation? Now, exaltation is inordinate when the soul cuts itself off from the very Source to which it should keep close and somehow makes itself and becomes an end to itself. This takes place when the soul becomes inordinately pleased with itself, and such self-pleasing occurs when the soul falls away from the unchangeable Good which ought to please the soul far more than the soul can please itself. Now, this falling away is the soul's own doing, for, if the will had merely remained firm in the love of that higher immutable Good which lighted its mind into knowledge and warmed its will into love, it would not have turned away in search of satisfaction in itself and, by so doing, have lost that light and warmth ⁵⁷).

The sin of pride, or inordinate self-love, is the most basic concept in the *City of God*, for it provides the fundamental definition and differentiating characteristic upon which the theme of the work, the « Two Cities » metaphor, is founded :

So two loves have constituted two cities—the earthly is formed by love of self even to contempt of God, the heavenly by love of God even to contempt of self. For the one glories in herself, the other in the Lord ⁵⁸).

Pride, or man's egoism, is the Original Sin; and if we divorce the theological and ethical implications from this concept for purposes of analysis, the historical thesis is simply that a psychological characteristic is at the root of the discords and strife which form the most fundamental class of events to be observed in human history.

⁵⁷) *City of God*, xiv, 13.

⁵⁸) *Ibid.*, xiv, 29. I have preferred here the more pithy translation of this passage by E.R. Hardy, Jr. in Roy W. BATTENHOUSE, *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine* (New York, 1955), 269.

It may be objected that this elemental theological concept of pride, manifested as « passion for domination », is a quality of individuals, even though it is operative among large groups as a sort of political instinct. What lent plausibility to this idea as a principle of interpretation is another element of Augustine's thought — and one which appears to be purely a supposition, for which Augustine gave no specific theological or philosophical proofs; it was instead derived from the general heritage of classical political theory. It is expressed in a favorite analogy, found in at least four passages of the *City of God*, which virtually equates the individual with the body politic. For example, one statement is as follows : « The happiness of a city and the happiness of individual men spring from the same source, since a city is nothing else than a multitude of men in harmonious association » ⁵⁹). This is, of course, a vast over-simplification; to hold that a political grouping is equal to the sum of, and identical with, its parts is to overlook empirical sociological considerations in favor of purely abstract conceptualization in a manner which is justifiably open to objection by modern scholars. One can only defend Augustine by saying that he shared the views of his time on this point too uncritically, demonstrating the weakness of the rationalistic approach to social theory which was characteristic of ancient thought. The same conceptual tendency is familiar in the Platonic concept of the state as « the individual writ large ». But it is this simplification which enabled Augustine to pronounce judgment upon nations and empires with such magisterial authority and in the same categories of censure as might be applied to individual sinners. And this analogy could explain such phenomena as the divine mass punishments of the Jewish nation recorded in the Old Testament or the concept in general of the collective sin of a nation as accruing from the sins of its leaders and its standards of public morality. « What is true of ... two individuals is likewise true of two families, two nations, two kingdoms; the analogy holds in both cases » ⁶⁰). This sociological simplification also made it possible for Augustine to see mankind as forming a hierarchy of social relationships consisting of family, of city, and of the population of the world as a whole, the last constituting a sociological, if not political, unity. In one notable passage, it is possible to discern a combination of the

⁵⁹) *City of God* i, 15.

⁶⁰) *City of God* iv, 3. It might be pointed out that collective guilt is still an open question, and the events of World War II and following have made it again pertinent.

concept of the instinct to domination with the Stoic ideal of the world society, in what might be regarded as the closest approximation in Augustine of a universal « law » of history :

The city of man, for all the width of its expansion throughout the world and for all the depth of its differences in this place and that, is a single community. The simple truth is that the bond of a common nature makes all human beings one. Nevertheless, each individual in this community is driven by his passions to pursue his private purposes. Unfortunately, the objects of these purposes are such that no one person (let alone, the world community) can ever be wholly satisfied... The result is that the city of man remains in a chronic condition of civil war. Hence, there is always the oppression of those who fail by those who succeed ⁶¹).

The Augustinian view of historical man as a « passionate » being, formally the historical interpretation flowing from the doctrine of Original Sin, is from the point of view of modern historiography Augustine's most important mode of historical explanation. Put in more modern terminology, he was asserting the primacy of a universal will to power in the sociological processes which determine the broad progression of events in history. However, it must be concluded that this very important method of interpretation is not scientific in the modern sense, because it is not an empirically-derived concept from the data of history itself, nor is it demonstrated to the complete satisfaction of the modern historian in the *City of God*. Further, Augustine's ethical categories are not used with the precision of method demanded by scientific historiography, and often lead Augustine into gross oversimplifications and excessive generalization. But these critical deficiencies should not obscure the very real conceptual advance implicit in the *City of God*. Considering the formal problem with which Augustine, like any modern historian, was confronted, the extremely mutable and apparently irrational course of human history, the doctrine of Original Sin is an altogether reasonable hypothesis by which to explain the radical defects in human nature manifestly indicated by the recorded facts. Not only does this theory assert that, although the order of history is of divine institution, the events of history are fundamentally of man's own making and responsibility, thus avoiding the pitfalls of extreme determinism, but it also offers

⁶¹) *City of God*, xviii, 2.

the outlines of a coherent psychological theory of history to explain human motivations, an area in which the performance of modern historiography has been signally inadequate.

And, in this connection, the sophistication of Augustinian psychology should not be underestimated. Its ethical categories do not seem so outworn if one compares the components of the Augustinian «soul» with the Freudian psyche. In general, Augustine's psychology, despite the use of the term «faculties of the soul» and similar language, is not so much a faculty-psychology as a dynamic psychology comparable to Freud's in its behavioral and emotion-centered orientation. The Freudian ego-id complex, for example, is strikingly similar to the self-asserting, domineering defective soul of the sinner in his pride. The super-ego is quite unabashedly compared with the traditional idea of conscience by Freud himself. The American translator of Freud, in his Latinizing of the key Freudian terms, has provided a ready-made linguistic correlation in the term *libido*, which requires little commentary to explain the basic sense of its variant uses in Freud and Augustine. And also in the general field of psychology other parallels may be found. To cite one example, the Augustinian doctrine of sin describes a blinding effect, depicting the sinner as enmeshing himself ever deeper in evil by strengthening evil habits, sin begetting sin by a kind of geometric progression and the sinner becoming progressively less able to control his actions or even to perceive his condition. This is comparable to a clinical description of the vicious and self-defeating patterns of adjustment of the neurotic personality.

In sum, St. Augustine sought for and found «meaning» in history, admittedly in accordance with non-historical purposes. But one need not necessarily accept his metaphysical and theological conclusions to appreciate the conceptual and methodological advances implicit in the *City of God*. Unfortunately, the theological and ethical categories of his discourse tend to obscure the technical merits of some of his key arguments, a fault which can as often be attributed to verbal confusions and modern prejudices as to any defects in his exposition. There is nothing supernatural in his view of history on the human, worldly level, despite the fact that he expressed his theories in the language considered most appropriate for speculative thought in his time. When he spoke of «lust for domination», he was enunciating a theory of *Realpolitik* and concerned with seeking out its sociological and psychological foundations. He utilized his doctrine of Original

Sin as a sort of covering law to explain a number of common phenomena in political history. He can hardly be termed an historicist when, for example, on this theoretical basis he argued that the decline of Rome was at least partly due to a failure in its morals ⁶²). Any objective scheme of historical explanation must take into account such a category of analysis insofar as morals affect (and reflect) human conduct — and, as modern historical scholarship has revealed, standards of morality can be roughly correlated with observable effects in history in some cases, such as the Machiavellian ethic characteristic of a tyrannous or totalitarian government, or the Puritanism of an early modern capitalist entrepreneur. Where Augustine differs from modern, piecemeal interpretations in this vein is in proposing a general theory predicating a causal connection between the nature of man (which he believed, not without reason, to be essentially egoistic) with a certain range of important events in history, chiefly those associated with the human propensity toward violence and the transient nature of human political institutions. Although he achieved limited success in elucidating that theory by any modern critical standard, he nevertheless reached a point in his speculation where he touched upon and defined the problem of historical explanation in its most fundamental and most scientific aspect — explanation of events in terms of general laws of human behavior. Although few historians since have dared confront the problem at this level of theoretical conception, and fewer still have surpassed him in level of insight into it, the contemporary value of St. Augustine's philosophy of history is precisely as it is suggestive of the problem and its place in the agenda of future historical thought.

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⁶²) M.C. D'Arcy, *The Meaning and Matter of History* (New York, 1961), 161.