

THE NOT-SO-DIVIDED SELF: READING AUGUSTINE IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY

According to the conventional account, it is the monumental figure of Saint Augustine of Hippo who is responsible for the dichotomization of the human being, dividing the spirit against the flesh, and thus the City of God against the City of Man. In the words of one commentator,

"The Christian view that the principal function of the state is the repression and punishment of the wicked is at the opposite pole from the classical, and especially the Greek conception that the purpose of the state is to promote the good life and to train and educate its citizens so that they become good and virtuous men... [Augustine] made definite and clear the sharp cleavage between the Christian view of the nature and function of the state and the classical doctrine"¹.

This commonplace understanding of the Christian view of politics is related to two other ideas also often attributed to Augustine; a negative view of the body and a general anti-intellectualism. While all three of these views can be found among writers and thinkers generally labelled Christian, their source must not necessarily be construed as Augustinian, since there is good evidence that, at least in the eyes of John of Salisbury, considered by his twelfth century contemporaries to be the best educated man in Anglo-Norman Europe, Augustine was the major authority for a radically different view of political life². John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* uses Augustine's philosophical anthropology to validate what is essentially a Christianized classical view of the good society. John's goal is not a heavenly City of God, but a practical, ordered, interdependent society on earth, with rational laws and institutions that could correct fallen human

¹ H.A. DEANE, *The Social and Political Ideas of St. Augustine*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1963, 7-11.

² Augustine's views on politics, human nature, freedom and the problem of grace, like all of his ideas, are extremely complex, and John's view of them differs from that of many twentieth century scholars, especially on the dichotomy of flesh and spirit. Yet, Augustine followed by Cicero and Boethius, is clearly the most important influence on John's thought. See E. GILSON, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin*. Paris, Vrin, 1949; F. COPLESTON, *History of Philosophy, Volume Two, Medieval Philosophy*, New York, Doubleday, 1962, 1 83-89, 96-101, and my own essay, *The End of Dualism; Human Nature in Augustine's 'City of God'*, a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Northeastern Political Science Association, Philadelphia, 1984.

nature, as well as provide for the individual pursuit of the highest good, a society where the highest good could be achieved in the active life of politics. In this paper, via an analysis of John's understanding of Augustine, I will show that in the twelfth century, at least, Augustine could be understood as validating the physical body and the art of letters, and thus as a proponent of political life in the world.

The human being is defined by John of Salisbury as consisting of rational soul and mortal flesh, *anima rationale et carne corruptibili*³. This understanding of humankind is fundamentally Augustinian, and was very influential in the elaboration of a twelfth century view of human nature. A fresh reading of Augustine's idea of the human person as elaborated in the *City of God* will help us to understand how the twelfth century thinker viewed political life. Fundamental to a "Salisburian" reading of Augustine is a reexamination of the interdependent and harmonious relationship between the rational spirit and corruptible flesh. At our best and most perfect we are neither body alone nor spirit alone, but rather our true nature is to be found in the creative tension that comes from the unification of two opposing elements. Augustine elaborated his view of human nature in his monumental work *De Civitate Dei*, in which he refutes both pagan and heretical opinions, postulating a view that we are neither spirit alone as in Gnosticism, nor flesh alone as in Epicureanism. He argued by showing how authoritative language, particularly Scripture, allows us to speak of humanity interchangeably as flesh or spirit. If, he contends, we can call humans "flesh," for example, and then attribute to that flesh ideas and thoughts which we usually associate with the mind, then clearly, Augustine stated, we mean something more comprehensive than "mere" flesh.

"Scripture in fact does not use the term "flesh" only of the body of an earthly and mortal animate being....There are, on the contrary, many other ways in which it employs the meaning of the noun, and among these different usages is that whereby man himself, that is, man's natural being, is often designated by flesh"⁴.

³ IOANNIS SARESBERIENSIS, *Policraticus* [=Polic.], ed. C.C.I. WEBB, Oxford, Oxford UP, 1909, 1:171. All English translations are from JOHN OF SALISBURY, *Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers*, trans. Joseph PIKE, New York, Octagon Books, 1972, hereafter referred to as PIKE or JOHN OF SALISBURY, *Statesman's Book*, trans. John DICKINSON, New York, Russell and Russell 1963, referred to as DICKINSON. Both translators worked from Webb's critical edition, but neither translated the entire work. Dickinson translated Books 4-6 and parts of 7; Pike translated Books 1-3, 8, and parts of 7. For the sake of comparison, see *homo constans ex anima rationali et carne mortali*, Augustine, *Serm.* 150.4.5. See also *De Civitate Dei* [DCD] 13.24.6, *De Trin.* 15.7.13 and 15.13.22.

⁴ DCD 14.2.

In an analogous argument, Augustine showed that our use of the word "spirit" to designate the whole human being indicates that we are both spirit and flesh.

"Both terms, animal [spiritual] and carnal, illustrate the same figure of speech, that is the use of a part for a whole. For both the soul (*anima*) and the flesh, which are parts of a man, can serve to indicate the whole which is man"⁵.

In our paradisiacal state, the two elements were in a perfectly ordered relationship. The spirit ruled the body, not because the body was evil but because, in their proper relationship, the higher rules the lower⁶. But unlike the severe asceticism of Origen and the Greek fathers, Augustine specifically affirms the innate goodness of the body as a part of his refutation of Gnosticism. The beauty and natural goodness of the ordinary world, including the body, stem from its creation by a God who is good. The natural world then is not evil, it is merely mortal. Its splendor is of a lower order only because it is impermanent; it is none the less real beauty. The flesh cannot therefore be the source of sin, but it cannot be the source of salvation either.

"[T]hose who think that all the evils of the soul arise from the body are in error. It is the sinful soul that makes the body subject to decay"⁷.

For Augustine, a human is a kind of bridge between two different kinds of being: he is the rational animal; between the angels who are entirely spirit and the beasts which are entirely flesh. We are the pivot in creation - the joining together of spirit and flesh. Furthermore, we were internally ordered at our creation, not divided against ourselves. Both elements of our being were able to work together harmoniously, the body under the control of the spirit, so that the resultant ordered tension made human life heavenly. A human being was able to enjoy the pleasures of the senses without being enslaved by them.

This harmony within human nature was the consequence of our willingness to live according to God's vision of what a human being was supposed to be. The result of that willingness was that we lived

"... in a paradise that was both corporeal and spiritual. This paradise was not merely corporeal to supply the good things of the body without also being spiritual to supply the good things of the mind; nor was it merely spiritual for

⁵ DCD 14.4.

⁶ The concept of hierarchy was of critical importance in the twelfth century. All other hierarchical relationships; whether natural, ecclesiastical, or social, were thought to be reflections of the celestial order and thus directly from the mind of God. See J. LECLERCQ, *The Spirituality of the Middle Ages*. London, Burns & Oates, (1968) 3-30 and HUGH OF SAINT VICTOR, *On the Celestial Hierarchy*. New York, Harper and Row, 1962.

⁷ DCD 14.3.

man to enjoy through his inner senses without being corporeal for him to enjoy through his outer senses. It was clearly good for the good of both"⁸.

But came the Fall, because in Augustine's view, humans chose to violate their own being in order to embrace something thought better. Sin, which to Augustine was the decision to disorder one's proper and natural relationship with God, could only have been followed by a resultant dislocation of one's relationship with oneself. The consequence of the first sin was the divided self and a body that was out of control, with ungovernable appetites, and insatiable desires. Reason lost the ability to govern the body because it had lost the authority to do so. "For the evil act could not have been arrived at if an evil will had not gone before."⁹ The cause of an evil will was the desire to exist completely on one's own terms, without reference to other human beings. It was the itch to choose one's own nature and behave like a god and not like a created being. This, to Augustine, was a form of vanity, called pride.

"Further, what but pride can have been a the start of an evil will?... Moreover, what is pride but a craving for perverse elevation? For it is perverse elevation to forsake the ground in which the mind ought to be rooted and be, in a sense, grounded in oneself. This happens when a man is too pleased with himself and such a one is thus pleased when he falls away from that unchangeable good with which he ought rather to have been pleased than with himself. Now this falling away is voluntary..."¹⁰.

The decision to turn away from the good has consequences for us, not only in our relationship with God, but in our own integrity and authenticity since

"...by turning to himself he ended by having less true being than he had when he was rooted in him who has the highest being. Therefore to leave God and to have being in oneself... is not to be nothing already but to come nearer to being nothing"¹¹.

The solution to this problem and thus the recovery of self to our true nature is, as is well known, to be found in the proper ordering of one's loves. It is not the act of loving that has moral stature, but the object of that love. Love is an activity of the will which, like the rest of our nature, was created good and correctly directed at our creation. A right will is therefore love of a good object and a wrong will is love of a bad object¹². First and foremost of the goods towards which the will should be directed is God, since he is by definition, the Good. The rest of our loves

⁸ DCD 14.11.

⁹ DCD 14.11.

¹⁰ DCD 14.13.

¹¹ DCD 14.13.

¹² DCD 14.3.

should be loved in their proper order. Virtue and happiness follow from the recovery of self which is the consequence of this right ordering of loves. The desire for happiness spurs us to action but is in itself a consequence, not a true end.

Among Augustine's many contributions to the history of philosophy, this refusal to accept the philosophical division of the human being is surely one of the more important, although in our own time overlooked. While the Augustinian view acknowledges our inner conflict, our duality between flesh and spirit, it denies that the only resolution to the dilemma is dichotomization. Augustine's view is that humans must not choose to be either body or spirit, but must be both, in their proper order, body subordinate to spirit, with the will as a mediator between them. The Augustinian solution to the problem of dualism, while easily misunderstood, was able nonetheless to provide a philosophic base upon which medieval thinkers were to build and which held until Descartes divided body from mind once again. As noted above, for John of Salisbury, a human being is also a rational being, *anima rationali et carne corruptibili*. His understanding of *anima*, however, was undoubtedly different from that of Augustine, since by this time the word no longer had the classical meaning of the vital, essential part of the soul, but rather had a specifically Christian sense¹³.

¹³ This is a very complex problem. For comparison, see John's discussion of soul and body in JOHN OF SALISBURY, *The Metalogicon* [= *Meta.*], transl. Daniel D. MCGARRY. BERKELEY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, 1955; Book III, 149ff. The soul in medieval Latin is *anima*, defined as a) the immortal, immaterial part of person, credited with thinking and willing (in classical Latin *animus*). "As it perceives things, our soul stores up their images within itself, and in the process of retaining and often recalling them, builds up for itself a sort of treasury of the memory. And as it mentally revolves the images of things, there arises imagination, which proceeds beyond the recollection of previous perceptions, to fashion by its own activity, other representations similar to these". (*Meta.* 217, McGarry's interpolations removed). It is also b) the vital or essential part (in classical Latin *anima*). "...certainly the soul can neither be cut nor divided, neither chopped into pieces nor torn asunder. Hence it is imperishable". (*Meta.* 234). Or, in the *Polic.* we find: "The soul of life is God, the body's life is soul..." (PIKE, 153). Both elements (a and b) are combined in John's view of the soul. The term soul excludes the body and is immaterial, unique and incommensurable. It is both subject and object - an object in having been created by God; a subject because, according to Christian doctrine, it is the most important entity after God. It is not socially defined, except in a very limited but important sense. "Society" for the soul consists of the soul and God. God has brought the soul into being, but that he has brought other souls into existence is in a sense irrelevant. The incarnation and passion of Christ would have taken place if only one soul had existed to save. The question of value is also irrelevant, since the soul's relationship and value come from God. Because souls are incommensurable, the idea of equality is irrelevant to the medieval view of the soul. In contemporary use, we have the same definition of soul, but we see it as an entity separate from God, thus the social aspect of

The relationship that exists between this mortal body and rational soul is one of interdependence¹⁴. Despite the fact that the body is good because created by God, its fundamental condition is one of inertia. The ultimate inertia is, of course, lifelessness, but the body can derive life, and thereby activity, from the soul.

"Flesh, however, derives its life from the soul, since from no other source can the body possess it, being always quiescent by virtue of its paralyzing inertia and moving only by virtue of the spiritual element"¹⁵.

The soul, unlike the body, derives its life directly from God. In fact, writes John, "God is its life." Moreover, paraphrasing Augustine, John notes

"the soul of life is God, the body's life is soul;
At flight of soul the body dies;
And soul is lost when God's support is gone"¹⁶.

The soul needs the body nonetheless in order to act in the world. Both body and soul need each other, but their relationship is hierarchical. As is expressed in the verse above, the body is related to the soul as the soul is related to God: the soul is meant to be superior to the body. But, in contrast to Augustine, its superiority stems not from its immortality, but rather from the fact that it has certain activities of its own, that are independent of the body.

"... so the soul derives life from the fact that it possesses activities in its own realm, undoubtedly receives its impulse from God, obeys him with complete devotion, and acquiesces in all things. In proportion as it fails so to respond it fails to live"¹⁷.

The natural harmony between the soul and the body was lost with the Fall, which was the consequence of greed and disobedience, causing humankind to acquire knowledge via physical experience. By implication, disorder in the relation of body and soul came from the use of the body rather than the soul to obtain knowledge.

"Man stretched out his hand to the tree of knowledge, satisfied his greed, and contrary to the promise of the false friend and in accordance with the prohibition of the true God, was cast down into darkness and hunger, entering into a league with death, and making a covenant with hell. He acquired the knowledge of good and evil by experience (*per experientiam*), he made place in himself for manifold misery"¹⁸.

With the loss of that harmony, came the torpor of the body and the

the soul has disappeared.

¹⁴ Cf. also *Meta.* 3.149.

¹⁵ *Pol.* 1 171, PIKE, 153.

¹⁶ *Pol.* 1 171, PIKE, 153.

¹⁷ *Pol.* 1 171, PIKE, 153.

¹⁸ *Pol.* 2 419-420, PIKE, 406.

obtuseness of the soul; the condition of frailty. Our human frailty is a source of sorrow for us all. As John notes in his introduction to the *Policraticus*,

"...the shortness of life, our obtuseness, our careless indifference, and our sterile activities permit us to know but little; and even this is straightaway driven from our minds by forgetfulness, that betrayer of knowledge, that ever faithless and hostile counterpart of memory"¹⁹.

Just as it is the proper nature of the body to be alive and active when it is obedient to the soul and can be vitalized by it, so God vitalizes the soul that lives a perfect life.

"As long therefore as the body is alive in all its parts, it is entirely subject to the soul, which is diffused not part to part but exists as a whole and functions in each and every part. God also takes entire possession of the soul that lives the perfect life, governs it and vitalizes the whole to such an extent that no nook or cranny eludes him"²⁰.

What relevance does the problem of salvation have for political life? The recovery of the person from the dislocation of the self caused by the fall is very important for the future of politics. If there is no recovery, political life is by definition corrupt. If one can achieve an Augustinian reordering of loves, then, according to John of Salisbury, we can have both virtue in the individual and justice in civil society. How is this to be accomplished? Human freedom, human rationality and the art of letters, with God's grace, will allow the recovery of our true human nature.

The significance of John's discussion of the relationship between the body and the soul should not be overlooked. John of Salisbury was the first medieval political thinker to develop the metaphor of the body politic to describe society, and not just the church. His, in his view, Augustinian understanding of an harmonious soul and body is essential for his revolutionary vision of a "policratic" interdependent society. Of particular significance in an age where "the two swords" was the dominant metaphor used to define the relationship between church and state, is the fact that in John's metaphor, the clergy are assigned the part of the soul. A lifeless body is directly the consequence of a lack of soul. By extension, a lifeless "body" politic is directly the consequence of a lack of "soul"²¹.

¹⁹ *Polic.* 1 12, PIKE, 6.

²⁰ *Polic.* 1 171, PIKE, 153.

²¹ When the "soul" disappears from the metaphorical use of the body politic has great significance. This is the subject of another article I am writing comparing the use of the corporate metaphor in Christine de Pisan's *Book of the Body Politic* with John of Salisbury's. The corporate metaphor forms the heart of books four, five, and six of the *Policraticus*.

Building on this fundamentally Augustinian base, John explores the problems of freedom and rationality, and the role they play with the art of letters in the recovery of self. John of Salisbury, who elsewhere in the *Policraticus* acknowledges his intellectual debt to Boethius, uses an argument very similar to that in the *Consolatio*, in order to show that humans have free will. Significantly, John's argument is to be found within the context of a discussion of soothsaying and other occult practices, as was Augustine's²². Medieval ideas about divination are founded on the inevitability of future events and a lack of human freedom. The logical status of soothsaying is an important issue in the *Policraticus* because human decision-making must be rational, as will be examined below.

In Book II, chapter twenty, the *Policraticus* begins its discussion of the problem of God's omniscience. Soothsayers, according to John of Salisbury²³, use the fact that our familiarity with natural phenomena can be used to tell the future. Farmers and sailors, for example, can "foretell" the weather²⁴. While certain kinds of prevision are credible to John for reasons which will be explored below, the idea itself conceals poison beneath the honey²⁵ by imposing upon things

"... a sort of fatality under the pretext of humility and reverence for God, possibly in fear that His decrees be nullified unless necessity be a concomitant of events"²⁶.

First, we know on the testimony of Christ himself, according to John, that knowledge of some events has been reserved for God the Father alone. Secondly, the kind of fatalism engendered by attempts to discern the future is harmful to human character. It may raise false hopes or lead one to despair. But, states the *Policraticus*, while the course of events does not alter God's foreknowledge, neither does God's foreknowledge annihilate the laws of nature. The combination of God's omniscience and natural laws seems to leave the realm of human freedom very narrowly confined. Despite appearances, we are free to choose within this constricted perimeter. Caught as we are between God's omniscience, the laws of nature, and our own sinfulness, we have only the choice to sin or not to sin.

"So we see that, exercising complete freedom of the will, he had the power to sin or not to sin (*Itaque peccare et non peccare potuit mera praeditus libertate arbitrii...*), for by no harsh dispensation, no compulsion of fate, no spur of

²² DCD 4 and 5.

²³ *Polic.* 1 68, PIKE, 58.

²⁴ *Polic.* 1 68, PIKE, 58.

²⁵ *Polic.* 1 113, PIKE, 99.

²⁶ *Polic.* 1 113, PIKE, 99.

stipulation, nor by any fault of nature was he urged on to sin, and this as indubitable cause almost of his free will into death"²⁷.

To pursue goodness actively is not within the realm of freedom but, as in the Augustinian position, is only possible aided by God's grace. Or so it would appear.

"The only sphere in which he now exercises freedom of will is in that of iniquity and he rises to goodness only when forestalled and aided by the grace of God. Thus voluntarily leaving the path of justice he is led on to sin and death, with the result that burdened by the yoke of slavery he finds himself subject to the destiny of sin and death, although this was not brought about by the chain of fate but by the result of his own transgression"²⁸.

But this is cold comfort indeed, as John of Salisbury acknowledged.

"Otherwise there is no justice that will condemn man, since the blame would recoil not upon him but on his Maker"²⁹.

We have a preliminary statement of the problem: Humans must be free or God cannot be just or good. Yet God must have foreknowledge or he cannot be God. And where then are we, caught between the millstones of God's omniscience and his justice? John addresses this troublesome issue by examining the riddle of omniscience. To be omniscient means to have perfect knowledge that is complete and true. God cannot forget, or change his mind, or know what he does not know.

"God's knowledge is the true comprehension and full knowledge of all that is, has been, and is to be. All that he knows is true and only that, for he disdained to have acquaintance with the false, which however, he judges and condemns"³⁰.

God's complete omniscience raises the perplexing problem of necessity. While there is some mutability in the knowledge of which God is capable, which John of Salisbury had already described, it is the changeability of the object itself, not God's awareness of it that renders it variable:

"God's knowledge therefore remains everywhere intact and immovable, and if there be any variability in anything it is a mutability due not so much to the One who knows it as to the thing known"³¹.

God's absolute knowledge, immutable and indivisible, because difficult for our limited minds to comprehend, is called by a variety of names; foreknowledge, disposition, foresight and predestination, for example³². Simply because God's knowledge is infinite, and God himself lives in

²⁷ *Polic.* 1 114, PIKE, 100.

²⁸ *Polic.* 1 114, PIKE, 100.

²⁹ *Polic.* 1 114-115, PIKE, 100.

³⁰ *Polic.* 1 118, PIKE, 103-104.

³¹ *Polic.* 1 116, PIKE, 102.

³² *Polic.* 1 118, PIKE, 103.

eternity, there is no necessity imposed by his omniscience. In language very reminiscent of Boethius, John of Salisbury explains:

"For just as what I see is impending does not occur of necessity from the fact that I see it, so also what his eye contemplates is under no compulsion of coming to pass"³³.

The realm of human freedom is not diminished by God's foreknowledge, since that knowledge takes place in the eternal present.

"Thus it is assuredly certain that he has foreseen all things from eternity, not because time by its flux had withdrawn anything from his vision but because the gaze of him who in universal time is first in nature, always compasses all things"³⁴.

While John of Salisbury has shown that we do have real freedom and that God's omniscience is not incompatible with his justice, we still have quite a narrow field of choice. While we can choose to do evil or not, our ability to choose to do good, or more especially, to choose the Good, is still problematic. The Augustinian concept of grace and its dependence on God's goodness are not yet satisfactorily resolved. The essential human characteristic of reason functions in the solution of these problems.

The second element that will help to compensate for the frailty of human nature is the ability to reason. The importance of reason as the foundation for human knowledge in the *Policraticus* and the *Metalogicon* cannot be overestimated. While in the *Policraticus* there is no formal definition of reason, the *Metalogicon* gives a very clear one, as well as an extensive discussion.

"Reason is that power of the soul which examines and investigates things that make an impression on the senses or the intellect"³⁵.

Reason is not only the cornerstone on which is built our recovery from the consequences of our own frailty, but also provides a foundation for our ability to discover the nature of the Good and thereby, the nature of God himself as well. As described in the *Metalogicon*:

"...nature, the most loving mother and wise arranger of all that exists, has, among the various living creatures which she has brought forth, elevated man by the privilege of reason and distinguished him by the faculty of speech... Borne aloft, so to speak, by this felicitous shortcut, to outstrip all other beings, and to attain the crown of true happiness"³⁶.

³³ *Polic.* 1 120, PIKE, 105.

³⁴ *Polic.* 1 123, PIKE, 109.

³⁵ *The Metalogicon*, written in the same year as the *Policraticus* (1159), is John's work on education, in which he discusses current philosophical debates, and thus "defines his terms" in ways useful for an understanding of the *Policraticus*. Cf. *Meta.*, MCGARRY, 35. See also 224ff.

³⁶ *Meta.*, MCGARRY, 9.

The exercise of reason is essential to the restoration of our true human nature. It trains the body (*disciplina*) to the needs of the soul. For John, this training is crucial, not only to life in the cloister (where it is perhaps easier) but in the world, where its demands are less vigorous but the immediate temptations, at least for the body, are far greater.

This emphasis on the importance and goodness of the body permeates John's thought; in his more conventional use of the language of the body - Christ's in the Eucharist and the *corpus mysticum* of the Church-- and his development of the body politic. Indeed, John's *Metalogicon* extends the metaphor to the entire universe:

"The creative Trinity, the one true God, has so arranged the parts of the universe that each requires the help of the others, and they mutually compensate for their respective deficiencies, all things being, so to speak, members one of another"³⁷.

Eastern Christianity seems, by contrast, "pneumatic"-- the body is axiomatically corrupt. It is Eastern Christianity, not the Western Augustinian tradition, where the body it cannot serve as metaphor for an ideal social institution, whether church or state.

Reason is important not only in the discipline of the physical body, but the discipline of the corporate body. For example, it plays an major role in political life by establishing criteria of proof, an essential legal restraint, and in the discernment of policy alternatives. John is well aware of the fragility of reason in politics, especially in life at court. One real menace to our tenuous hold on intelligence is the deceptive power of flattery. A second threat to our rationality is the inordinate pursuit of leisure activities which cloud or corrupt our judgment. The perilous nature of both activities, often a normal part of court life, is a major theme of the *Policraticus*. John considers human reason as the means to an end, not an end in itself, and it is a tool that can be misused or misapplied. Consequently, it is absolutely essential that reason be applied within the context of the law of nature, which serves as a kind of moral plumb line in the making of choices, since John, following Plato, defines nature as the wisdom and goodness of God³⁸. It is not, however, a sufficient guide, but serves rather as a starting point, or a *point d'appui*.

"That which does not follow from principles of nature or duty is termed *alienum*, "belonging to another." If, as a matter of fact, it is ever proper to employ the word *alienum* to express that which with more propriety should never have belonged to anyone"³⁹.

³⁷ *Meta.*, McGARRY, 10.

³⁸ *Polic.* 1 85, PIKE, 73.

³⁹ *Polic.* 1 20, PIKE, 12.

After this gentle wit, John of Salisbury continues,

"The principles of nature are binding upon all alike; considerations of duty on particular individuals. Consequently, the dictates of duty and those of law are different, though obedience to natural law is a part of duty"⁴⁰.

This view of the law of nature and the duty of individual persons is extremely significant. It clearly sets the stage for the possibility of conflict between individual duty and natural law, revealing a willingness, on John's part, to at least contemplate a separation of legality from morality, which is a distinction conformable with a more conventional understanding of Augustine. While discussion of this conflict comes later in the *Polycraticus*, in the chapters discussing the commonwealth and the problem of tyrannicide, it is clear that this is a conflict for the individual person *qua* individual, not in some socially determined role. It is within the context of *self*-knowledge and *self*-betrayal that the differences between obedience to duty and obedience to natural law are indicated.

There is another element, which, while not a part of human nature itself, is a gift from God that, with reason, natural law and a free will, can bring us to the Good itself. That gift is the "art of letters," the liberal arts. This is where John of Salisbury, twelfth century renaissance man, most clearly departs, at least in the modern view, from the patristic period, and embraces a classical ideal. Yet John himself traces his view of the art of letters to Augustine. In a remarkable paragraph, John construes Augustine's discussion of Cicero and Varro as demonstrating Augustine's approval of knowledge, even when flawed by the absence of grace, a position John wished to advance.

"I myself am of the opinion of those who believe that a man cannot be literate without a knowledge of the authors (*auctorum*). Copious reading however, by no means makes the philosopher, since it is grace alone that leads to wisdom. Hence Augustine, that teacher of the church whom no one keeps in mind as much as he should, criticized Varro, and yet in order to show that he was a very scholarly man he added, after other remarks in which he gives him unique praise, "Finally, Cicero himself in the book entitled *Academica* testifies to his merits... a man [mark his words] (John's interpolation) easily surpassing all in keenness and undoubtedly, in knowledge. [Yet] who can believe that from reading alone, without the presence of grace, which illuminates, creates and gives life to the virtues, man can attain wisdom?"⁴¹

The theme of the frailty of life and of human shortcoming is one that pervades earlier medieval writing. Man is a fallen creature, divided against himself and having no direct knowledge of God. Until the twelfth century, whenever the liberal arts are discussed we see generally one of two views.

⁴⁰ *Polic.* 1 20, PIKE, 12.

⁴¹ *Polic.* 2 128-129, PIKE, 249-250. See *DCD* 6.2.

On the one hand, the art of letters may be dismissed as a worldly impediment to man's relationship with God. This is the view taken by a number of medieval writers, coming out of the ascetic tradition exemplified by Jerome whose fear, as was revealed to him during a severe illness, was that he was more "Ciceronian" than Christian. In his letter to Eustochium, Jerome wrote that, dragged before the judgement seat of God, he was asked to state his condition. He responded that he was a Christian. "You lie," was the response, "You are Ciceronian not Christian; where your treasure is, there your heart is also." Jerome continued

"In the stress of that dread hour, I would have been willing to make even larger promises, and taking an oath I called upon his name: "Lord, if ever I possess worldly books or read them again, I have denied you""⁴².

Jerome taught that to avoid the temptation of letters, it was perhaps best to be ignorant of them. This ambivalent, if not antagonistic, fear of "Ciceronianism" has consequences for political thought. Despite his reputation as a moralist and stylist, Cicero was an eminently political philosopher, one whose admiration of the philosopher-statesman ties him into the tradition of Plato which also includes John of Salisbury. Reputation of Cicero entails a rejection of politics and life in the world, a stance which, while part of the renunciatory asceticism of the patristic period, is one reason that Christianity has been so often characterized as anti-political by modern political theorists such as Rousseau. Among John of Salisbury's contemporaries, this anti-worldly tradition is seen most clearly in Cistercian asceticism, as in for example, the works of Bernard of Clairvaux. For our purposes, however, it is essential to note that the primary interpreter of Cicero, as well as the sole source of the ideas of *De Re Publica* was Augustine.

The other traditional attitude seen among Christian thinkers was that the art of letters is propaedeutic. Education is merely a form of preparation for Christian thought - one must be able to read in order to study the scriptures. Reading should not, therefore, be an end in itself, but rather, a means to certain necessary skills (although character formation or moral training might also result from the discipline of letters). Hugh of Saint Victor, for example, was an exponent of this view.

In the works of John of Salisbury on the other hand, the art of letters is more than a means of edification. Although it is certainly that, it is also a gift from God to console us for the loss of paradise, "for solace in sorrow, rest in labor, cheerfulness in poverty"⁴³.

⁴² JEROME, *Letter to Eustochium*, (Letter 22.30. Translation my own).

⁴³ *Polic.* 1 13, PIKE, 7.

"For arts had inevitably perished, law disappeared, fidelity and religion itself crumbled, and even the proper use of language been lost, had not divine commiseration, to offset human frailty, provided mortals with the knowledge of letters"⁴⁴.

This is *not* however an early example of the doctrine of the "fortunate fall" that appears in the seventeenth century, particularly in Milton. John of Salisbury believes that the punishment for original sin, which is to be enslaved by our animal nature, was a natural consequence of that sin, and therefore not a punishment properly speaking at all, but a fundamental diminution of our humanity. Since we as individuals are not guilty of original sin because we did not consent to it, our added "animality" is not our fault; therefore God gave us the gift of letters to bolster our rational side, to compensate for our loss, and to give us greater access to the knowledge necessary for the recovery of our human nature. This is no *felix culpa*; since John is absolutely certain that we would have been better off had there been no original sin.

The art of letters is directed towards many activities: it allows us to "banish time and space," giving us communication with each other in the form of letter writing - a terribly important function at a time when the simplest journey was difficult and communication was necessarily interrupted by lengthy periods of isolation. It allows us to know more about things that are interesting or important to us whether in the past or the present.

"The pleasure of letters, agreeable in many respects, is especially so for the reason that all inconvenience due to interval of time or space is banished, friends are brought into the presence of one another and matters worth knowing do not remain unknown because of their separation [in time or space]"⁴⁵.

The art of letters provides us with access to classical and Christian works that teach us to reason, to apply the rationale of proofs, and to know the law, giving us examples of good and bad conduct and the consequences to both the individual and society of our decisions. Stimulated by the classics, we reflect on our intentions and motives, acquiring self-knowledge and cultivating the virtues.

The relationship between knowledge, grace, and reason is demonstrated by metaphor in the *Metalogicon*.

"It is accordingly evident that grammar, which is the basis and root of scientific knowledge, implants, as it were, the seed [of virtue] in nature's furrow after grace has readied the ground. This seed, provided again that

⁴⁴ *Polyc.* 1 12, PIKE, 6.

⁴⁵ *Polyc.* 1 12, PIKE, 6.

cooperating grace is present, increases in substance and strength until it becomes solid virtue, and grows in manifold respects until it fructifies in good works, wherefore men are called and actually are "good." At the same time it is grace alone which makes a man good. For grace brings about both the willing and doing of good. Furthermore, grace, more than anything else, imparts the faculty of writing and speaking correctly..."⁴⁶

The art of letters is a gift of grace, a gift which can be refused. "For if despised, it rightly departs, leaving the one who has spurned it no excuse for complaint"⁴⁷. Next to mystical contemplation itself, it is the highest activity of the soul⁴⁸. Grace, for John, has two elements. It both enables the will to accomplish what it was created to do - in this case by means of the art of letters - which the will can refuse. This view of grace can be found in Anselm. But grace also has an Aristotelian element of habit, a concept that is more fully developed by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, called "habitual grace."

From the art of letters, therefore, comes self-knowledge, which leads to wisdom and happiness. Love of human knowledge, love of the arts produced by human beings, and delight in human variety and uniqueness, are all major themes in the *Policraticus*. While the art of letters may be the next best thing to mystical contemplation, "the taking of God into the soul," it is not a replacement or substitute for that activity, which is the highest good of all. Neither the humanities, art, literature and philosophy, nor even self-knowledge, is to be pursued merely for its own sake. Knowledge in the light of reason leads to self-knowledge. Free will exercised in the light of the law of nature and of self-knowledge leads to knowledge of the good and to virtue. The perfection of the virtues leads to wisdom and happiness. A beneficent God has given human beings the art of letters to give us pleasure and to bring us closer to the knowledge of the Good. The remedy for the frailty of human nature is in knowledge, not merely in theory but by its everyday practice in the courtier's life. Knowledge inspires in us not only the desire to reorder our lives, but the practical wisdom necessary to achieve it.

John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* is the first medieval and Christianized attempt to reconcile the demands of practical politics with an equally exigent moral philosophy, on the model of the great *Republics* of Cicero and Plato. Like his contemporaries, John addresses issues central to his age, such as the relationship between secular and temporal power and the primacy of the contemplative life. But, in contrast to them, by combining

⁴⁶ *Meta.*, MCGARRY, 65.

⁴⁷ *Meta.*, MCGARRY, 65.

⁴⁸ *Polic.* 1 13.

these problems with reflections on how to be a good prince or courtier, John reformulates the entire issue: How can the courtier be active in political life and remain a moral being? He is enabled to do this, I believe, via his reading of Augustine's *City of God* in ways very different from our own.

In attempting to understand how a twelfth century political thinker read Augustine, what do we really accomplish? Does such an activity have any other than antiquarian interest? Is this merely eavesdropping on "edifying conversation" through the ages? I believe it tells us something very important about historiography. Our conventional view of Augustine, may in fact be "true," that is, based on a more accurate knowledge of both text and context, but it is also conventional, in that we agree, more or less, that it is true. But if we can concede that another age thought otherwise, then we are forced to reexamine our assumptions and thus our conventional wisdom. If, to paraphrase John of Salisbury, in any age, we are merely dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants, can they help us see a little farther? If our reading of both Augustine and John forces us to rethink our assumptions and reformulate our questions, if we can breathe life into old metaphors or question new ones, maybe civilization, such as it is, will flicker on a little longer, until as Augustine hoped, we reach that final day on which we shall "rest and see, see and love, love and praise"⁴⁹.

Loudonville

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⁴⁹ DCD 22.