

Analysis of Justice in St. Augustine's Political Philosophy and Nigerian Political System

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Abstract

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430CE) is the most influential Christian philosopher in western Christianity after Paul the Apostle. This paper analyses justice in Augustine's political philosophy as contained in His 'City of God'. It will be argued that, we could learn from his answers to bad politicking which resulted in destruction of State. His answers on various theological and philosophical issues have continued to be relevant in modern theological and philosophical debate. A lot can still be learnt from him even in the area of Church's response to bad governance. Augustine's argument is that Kingdoms (Countries, nations) without justice are robberies, as Kings (Governors) of such are robbers. This supposition is illustrated with three historical allusions namely: the encounter of Alexander the Great with a Pirate, the establishment of Roman Empire by Romulus, and the establishment of Assyrian Empire by Ninus. Contextually, Nigeria as it is today falls into this category of robberies as the British colonial masters forced this unequal union for their personal, self-seeking and self-interest, to satisfy their libido dominandi. An analysis of what Augustine meant by justice will be carried out. Philosophically, Augustine evaluated justice from Neo-Platonic background and theologically from Pauline concept of justice. The Nigerian political context will be evaluated to see whether Augustine would regard Nigerian political leaders as 'robbers'. This paper concludes with recommendations both for the church and state if justice is to be achieved. It's an essay in Philosophical Theology.

Key Words: Justice, St. Augustine, Political Philosophy, Neo-Platonism, City of God, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

St. Augustine, originally named Aurelius Augustinus, was the Catholic bishop of Hippo in northern Africa. Augustine was born on November 13, 354 CE at Thagaste, (Numidia) now South Ahras in Algeria and died seventy five years later on August 28, 430 at Hippo (Numidia) now known as Annaba in Algeria. His father was Patricius, a follower of old Roman religion, while his mother Monica had always been a model of a Christian mother. Augustine schooled at Thagaste, Madaura and Carthage, specializing in Rhetoric. It was at Madaura, and later at Carthage, that he became a "spoilt" youth. It was at Carthage that he took a concubine that was his consort for a long time, and gave birth to Adeodatus for him in 372.

Augustine was a very brilliant and active youth. In reality, however, it was 'meaning' he was searching for. The dualism that he experienced at home from his 'pagan' father and Christian mother continued to plague him, and he was searching for reconciliation. Thus, although, he was living a licentious life, he was quite aware that there was a better form of living which he supposed to, and must live. He might have found satisfaction directly in Christianity, but a study of Cicero's Hortentius in 373 had made the Bible look barbarous to him. A fundamental problem he was wrestling with is the problem of evil. This eventually led him to join Manichaeism, an oriental dualistic religion, in 374.

Manichaeism promised him a “free philosophy unbridled by faith.” Manichean’s promise proved to Augustine to be a lie; hence, he fell into skepticism. In 382 he moved to Rome, after teaching Rhetoric at Thagaste and Carthage.

At Rome, he opened a school of Rhetoric. However, when his students cheated him by not paying their school fees, he moved to Milan in 385 after he had obtained a vacant professorship at Milan through the city prefect, Symmachus. At this time at Milan, Ambrose’s influence was great. St. Ambrose’s kindness and rhetorical power fascinated him; hence, he started to come to church to listen to him. Initially, St. Ambrose confounded him. This made him to undergo a three year struggle. Despite the philosophical and rhetorical soundness of Ambrose’s preaching, he still found it hard to convert to Christianity. However, he moved closer to Christianity, not only by going to listen to the preaching of Ambrose, but also by embracing Neo-Platonic philosophy. This was Platonic philosophy as developed by Plotinus (a colleague of Origen under Iamblichus) and his student, Porphyry. Monica his mother had also joined him at Milan.

The combining influences of Monica, Ambrose and Neo-Platonism, led him to convert to Christianity. In desperation and confusion about his life, he heard a childlike voice telling him to read St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans 13: 13 – 14, which reads “Let us behave decently as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissention and jealousy, Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (concupiscence)” (NIV). This directly addressed his life, and he was thus converted to Christianity. He and his son, Adeodotus were baptized by St. Ambrose at Milan in 387. In the same year, his mother, Monica died in her 56th year. The following year 388, he went back to Africa, through Rome. Unfortunately, his son, Adeodotus died the same year. He was ordained a presbyter against his will in 389 and consecrated assistant to Bishop Valerius of Hippo in 395. When Bishop Valerius died in 396, Augustine succeeded him as Bishop of Hippo.

Augustine was very prolific throughout his life. Usually, he was responding in his writings to concrete issues. His prolificacy became more pronounced after he was converted to Christianity, as he had one issue or the other to respond to. Thus, in 392, he wrote against the Manicheans; in 394, against the Donatists; in 397, his *Confessions*, and *De Civitate Dei*, (*The City of God*) in 413, and completed it 13 years later, in 426. Thus this book, which is the concern of this paper, took the longest time for Augustine to write.

He was a skilled Roman-trained rhetorician, a prolific writer (who produced more than 110 works over a 30-year period), and by wide acclamation, the first Christian philosopher. Writing from a unique background and vantage point as a keen observer of society before the fall of the Roman Empire, Augustine’s views on political and social philosophy constitute an important intellectual bridge between late antiquity and the emerging medieval world. Because of the scope and quantity of his work, many scholars consider him to have been the most influential Western philosopher.

Although Augustine certainly would not have thought of himself as a political or social philosopher *per se*, the record of his thoughts on such themes as the nature of human society, justice, the nature and role of the state, the relationship between church and state, just and unjust war, and peace, all have played their part in the shaping of Western civilization. There is much in his work that anticipates major themes in the writings of moderns like Machiavelli, Luther, Calvin and, in particular, Hobbes. Augustine’s political and social views flow directly from his theology. In the words of Eugene Portalie,

... With St Augustine, the centre of dogmatic and theological development changed from East to West... Up to his time the most powerful influence was exerted by the Greek Church, the east having been the classic land of theology, the great workshop of the elaboration of dogma. From the time of Augustine, the predominating influence seems to emanate from the West and the practical, realistic spirit of the Latin race supplants the speculative and idealistic spirit of Greece and the East.¹

The historical context is essential to understanding his purposes. Augustine, more than any other figures of late antiquity, stands at the intellectual intersection of Christianity, philosophy, and politics. As a Christian cleric, he takes it as his task to defend his flock against the unremitting assault by heresies spawned in an era uninformed by the immediate, divine revelations which had characterized the apostolic age. As a philosopher, he situates his arguments against the backdrop of Greek philosophy in the Platonic tradition, particularly as formulated by the Neo-Platonists of Alexandria.

As a prominent Roman citizen, he understands the Roman Empire to be the divinely-ordained medium through which the truths of Christianity are to be both spread and safeguarded. This significantly influenced his concept of justice. This is the essence of Augustine's concept of justice.

AUGUSTINE'S CONCEPT OF JUSTICE

Augustine's concept of justice is found in his book *The City of God*. Commenting on the importance of his book *The City of God*, Philip Schaff wrote:

The City of God is the masterpiece of the greatest genius among the Latin Fathers, And the best known and the read of his works, except the Confessions. It embodies the results of thirteen years of intellectual labor and study (from AD 413 – 426.) It is a vindication of Christianity against the attacks of the heathen in view of sacking of the city of Rome by the barbarians, at the time when the old Greco- Roman Civilization was approaching its downfall, and a new Christian civilization was beginning to rise on its ruins. It is the first attempt at a philosophy of history, under the aspect of two rival cities or communities- the eternal city of God and the perishing city of the world.²

Even though those elected for salvation and those elected for damnation are thoroughly intermingled, the distinction arising from their respective destinies gives rise to two classes of persons, to whom Augustine refers collectively and allegorically as cities—the City of God and the earthly city. Citizens of the earthly city are the unregenerate progeny of Adam and Eve, who are justifiably damned because of Adam's Fall. These persons, according to Augustine, are aliens to God's love (not because God refuses to love them, but because they refuse to love God as evidenced by their rebellious disposition inherited from the Fall). Indeed, the object of their love—whatever it may be—is something other than God. In particular, citizens of the “earthly city” are distinguished by their lust for material goods and for domination over others. On the other hand, citizens of the City of God are “pilgrims and foreigners” who (because God, the object of their love, is not immediately available for their present enjoyment) are very much out of place in a world without an earthly institution sufficiently similar to the City of God. No political state, nor even the institutional church, can be equated with the City of God. Moreover, there is no such thing as “dual citizenship” in the two cities; every member of the human family belongs to one—and only one.

The Augustinian notion of justice includes what by his day was a well-established definition of justice of “giving every man his due.” However, Augustine grounds his application of the definition in distinctively Christian philosophical commitments: “justice,” says Augustine, “is love serving God only, and therefore ruling well all else.” Accordingly, justice becomes the crucial distinction between ideal political states (none of which actually exist on earth) and non-ideal political states—the status of every political state on earth. For example, the Roman Empire could not be synonymous with the City of God precisely because it lacked true justice as defined above; and since, “where there is no justice there is no commonwealth,” Rome could not truly be a commonwealth, that is, an ideal state. “Remove justice,” Augustine asks rhetorically, “and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale? What are criminal gangs but petty kingdoms?” No earthly state can claim to possess true justice, but only some relative justice by which one state is more just than another. Likewise, the legitimacy of any earthly political regime can be understood only in relative terms: The emperor and the pirate have equally legitimate domains if they are equally just.

Nevertheless, political states, imperfect as they are, serve a divine purpose. At the very least, they serve as vehicles for maintaining order and for preventing what Hobbes will later call the “war of all against all.” In that respect, the state is a divine gift and an expression of divine mercy—especially if the state is righteously ruled. The state maintains order by keeping wicked men in check through the fear of punishment. Although God will eventually punish the sins of all those elected for damnation, He uses the state to levy more immediate punishments against both the damned and the saved (or against the wicked and the righteous, the former dichotomy not necessarily synonymous with the latter). Rulers, as God's ministers, punish the guilty and always are justified in punishing sins “against nature,” and circumstantially justified in punishing sins “against custom” or “against the laws.” The latter two categories of sins change from time to time. In this regard, the institution of the state marks a relative return to order from the chaos of the Fall. Rulers have the right to establish any law that does not conflict with the law of God. Citizens have the duty to obey their political leaders regardless of whether the leader is wicked or righteous. There is no right of civil disobedience.

Citizens are always duty bound to obey God; and when the imperatives of obedience to God and obedience to civil authority conflict, citizens must choose to obey God and willingly accept the punishment of disobedience. Nevertheless, those empowered to levy punishment should take no delight in the task.³

AUGUSTINE'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Justice is an integral theme in Augustine's political theology, and justice is directly correlated and contingent upon his theology of love. Adolf Harnack believe that true justice, for Augustine, begins with the love of God (and thereby extending to love of others since the love of others is the ultimate expression of love of God; the two commandments that embody the whole of the Law).⁴ Since a republic, or any political order, exists in some manner to dispense justice (however imperfect), an understanding of the role of justice in the political thought of Augustine rests upon the role of love in dispensing justice. That is to say what people love affects how justice is dispensed in society since the dispensing of justice will correlate with love of self or love of others. To that end it was necessary to begin with an explanation of Augustine's theology of love before discussing his understanding of political justice.⁵

As Augustine defined justice, justice is something deeply personal but with social implications since humans are not atomized animals but essentially social. "The function of justice is to assign to each his due."⁶ But Augustine's definition does not stop there. Justice is also something interior to the order of humans (in much the same way here, he follows Plato), "hence there is established in man himself a certain just order of nature, by which the soul is subordinated to God, and the body to the soul, and thus both body and soul are subordinate to God."⁷ Thus, the love of God is the fountain from which justice flows; for it is only in the love of God, manifested in the love of others, from which justice can "assign to each his due." And since the city of man is centered on the love of self (and falsity) rather than the love of God (and truth), which prevents the city of man from effectively and charitably loving others, "the general characteristic of that city [of man] is that it is devoid of true justice." It is devoid of true justice because the desires of humans in the city of man are disordered and inevitably exhaust into falsity which prevents true justice from being dispensed:

"So when man lives by the standard of truth he lives not by his own standard, but by God's. For it is God who has said, 'I am the truth.' By contrast, when he lives by his own standard, that is by man's and not by God's standard, then inevitably he lives by the standard of falsehood... Falsehood consists in not living the way for which he was created . . . And hence the falsehood: we commit sin to promote our welfare, and it results instead in our misfortune; or we sin to increase our welfare, and the result is rather to increase our misfortune."⁸

Misery and misfortune, the lust for domination and ethos of coercion, all follow from the interior disorder of human desire no longer guided by the light of truth. Thus, while justice has both external and interior elements it is equally important for the external dispensation of justice to occur that humans have their interior order properly subordinated. This is why true justice belongs to God; it belongs to the order of truth and not the false pretensions of fallen humans.

But this is not to say that there is no justice in the city of man, or that there are no signs of justice in the city of man. It is to say that the justice dispensed in the city of man is deeply flawed – often failing to dispense justice according to the dues that each person deserves.⁹ Since social justice is the realization of the common good, founded on love of God extending to love of others, then justice is necessarily dispensed in accordance with the oriented love which defines the political.¹⁰ In this way the justice of the city of man which is oriented to solely the self is flawed but retains seeds of the truths about the nature of justice defined by Augustine as both incorporating interior and exterior elements. This is crucial in understanding Augustine's view of justice – it is not that there is "no justice" in the city of man; it is that the justice dispensed in the city of man is incomparable to the "true justice" found in love of God which has relational and social ramifications for loving other creatures of God and coming to know the proper ordering and degree of loves given to each person.

Justice in the city of man is held in tension between being self-oriented because the city of man is defined by the love of self over the love of God and others, and being oriented to a common good and common love because the principle of justice implicitly acknowledges the wronging of persons and a natural order of human action and flourishing that has been corrupted as a result of the Fall of Man but not completely eliminated from the human conscience (or soul). The nature and structures of justice in the city of man, however, is primarily retributive in nature.¹¹

Persons seek justice only for themselves which generally prevents reconciliatory justice, including the love of others, from taking root in society. Augustine's fallen humanity and depravity of sinful humans is not the wholly bleak version of John Calvin's theology. Even in a fallen world, the fallen condition of humans retain some signs of their pre-fallen condition (although those signs remain marred by coercion, domination, and exploitation).¹² Justice is one of those signs. For even in retributive justice, the idea of justice involves more than the self.

Augustine's city of man is not without some sense, or sign, of justice as already stated. Justice is one of the cornerstones of all political society and a cornerstone on which the state itself is founded. As Augustine stated in a series of rhetorical questions on the topic of justice and the city, "Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale? What are criminal gangs but petty kingdoms?"¹³ There can be no republic without justice as justice is the public good.¹⁴ Thus, the most important function of the political order in Augustine's political theology is to dispense justice. Any state that is not engaged with the dispensation of justice is no state at all, but a criminal gang writ large masquerading as a state. While it is also true that the supreme good, and supreme justice, comes from God and not corrupted political entities,¹⁵ the nobility and grandeur of any political society – which is the same as saying any human society – rests upon justice. From Augustine's perspective, "Justice is the cornerstone of civil society. Upon it depend the unity and nobility of any human society."¹⁶

The classical philosophers of Greece and Rome acknowledged the importance of justice in the polis, but they also acknowledge the shortcomings of the actuality of justice therein (which was often a stumbling block for them to address).¹⁷ Augustine's assessment of justice in the city of man includes an agreement with the classical philosophers concerning the importance of justice and justice being an integral cornerstone of any society, but he is more interested in also exploring why justice fails in the city of man instead of posturing and propagandizing the past glories and splendor which mask the internal failings of the city or offering a specific path to justice as, say, in Cicero.

But Augustine's low-view of the state does not preclude him from realizing the importance of the state and of state action and the state's role in society.¹⁸ The justice which is dispensed by the state is, however imperfect, an important and necessary corrective to the coercive and domineering ethos of a fallen and depraved humanity.¹⁹ Augustine's low-view of the state is not that he opposes political structure and order; it is that he is skeptical of the possibility of the state in providing the highest life possible for the human being.²⁰ The state, in other words, cannot socially engineer or coerce humans to their teleological end (which, for Augustine, is ultimate happiness which is to be found in the interior self-coming to know God). To this end Augustine's critique of the justice in the city of man is that it is devoid of true justice because it is self-oriented rather than relational and restorative.

The very function of justice, however, implicitly acknowledges a concern for others instead of being wholly and entirely concerned with only oneself. The need for justice would be non-existent without others. Justice is, by its very nature, something relational and social. While justice has a self-oriented nature to it (since justice is directed to a self), the justice which is dispensed in politics is a multi-person transaction which – in its multi-person nature – retains a dim recognition of the other as something more than a mere object. Justice is also the only one of the cardinal virtues that Augustine directly linked to a theological virtue.²¹ Justice is rooted in faith. Accordingly, justice is something that all Christians should be concerned with and seek to live by. For by living in accord with justice one is living in accord with nature and with God.

Since humans are social animals, and the political is a social body, then justice is necessarily social in its application. The function of justice is important but the action of dispensing justice is more important. The dispensation of justice in the city of man is not done out of love of other. But the functionary role of justice recognizes the other, takes some sort of concern into consideration for the other, which ultimately reveals the traces of *imago Dei* and cooperative love in how justice is meant to function.

The nature of justice is concerned with correctives of the affronts against a person's property or body (e.g. physical harm done to another).²² Slander against someone's character is, interestingly enough, not something that Augustine concerned himself with. Rather, justice recognizes ownership of property and body which should not be violated by others in their own lusts for satisfaction or domination, "The laws should punish offences against another's property, not offences against a man's own personal character. No one should be brought to trial except for an offence, or threat of offence, against another's property, house, or person."

Law and justice have corrective, and therefore educational, purposes.²³ The very idea of justice, even justice rooted in the self and concerned with the self, acknowledges that a wrong has occurred and must be redressed.

But Augustine is playing with a multiplicity of definitions in understanding justice. He defines true justice as that “just order of nature” which is the interior subordination of body and soul to God which allows for the proper ordering of love in life which has exterior implications since humans are a combination of body and soul. This definition, however, carries with it an informing ethos of the disordered love of the city of man. For the wrongs against one’s property and one’s body seems to imply that the wronging is understood from the perspective of the *incurvatus in se* (the inward curve to the self) whereby the person is concerned with themselves.

This is not to presume that Augustine has a contradictory attitude or understanding of justice. Rather, just as one must turn inward to understand their failings and shortcomings as a result of sin (the introspective self being a major Augustinian theme which, when done right, leads to the discovery of God and the self simultaneously since we cannot know ourselves apart from God), one must also turn inward for justice to have those corrective and educational purposes. The feeling of being wronged implies that “just order of nature.” For one to wrong you there must be a just order of nature otherwise justice is as the sophists describe in Plato’s *Republic*, the law of the mighty over the weak.²⁴ This further indicates that despite the Fall and the ramifications of Original Sin in Augustine, there are still traces and signs of that pre-fallen condition and nature in the city of man which can be awakened and known.

Justice emerges as something necessary to pursue in the city because justice is the response to the lust for domination of human interaction. Therefore, justice manifests itself in opposition – and correction – to the human lust for domination and coercion. Those corrective and educational purposes are attempts to curb the lust for domination of humans, and, by that extension, the lust for domination in a society at large. This curb of *libido dominandi* implicitly pushes humans, and human society, away from the inculcated sin of fratricide and the residue of Original Sin and the Fall which defines the city of man and its love of only the self.²⁵ For in the curbing of the lust for domination there remain traces of the *imago Dei* and the “original condition” of humanity in that harmonious and mutually cooperative state that defined existence before the Fall. The reconciliatory aspect of justice pushes humans toward a return to that original condition but cannot, on its own, propel either humans or society there. Thus, the restraint of law “safeguards the innocent; it constrains certain sins; and it contributes to an environment in which a more holistic healing of the sinner may take place.”²⁶

But it is the function of justice, in its dispensation of “assign[ing] each his due,” that allows for that environment of a more “holistic healing” to take place (which pushes humans, and society, toward that “just order of nature”). For law does not completely prevent the sins of humanity and humanity’s lusts for domination from occurring, which is why justice becomes necessary to pursue in the city of man. The shortcomings of law and self-control in humans leading to coercive action and domineering abuse of others demand justice to be dispensed. The very internal logic of justice already recognizes that law will have its shortcomings, which is why structures of justice exist in the first place. For if law was perfect then there would be no need for justice. Justice, in Augustine’s thought, actually retains a remnant of that original human condition. Though certainly imperfect, it is the most magnanimous sign of what was lost in the Fall and what is to be restored by the love of God and love of others. The shortcoming of the justice in the city of man, while still exhibiting this implicit corrective against the lust for domination, is because the city of man is oriented to love of self rather than embracing the relational aspect of human nature which requires the love of others, world, and ultimately, of God – which requires that interior subordination that Augustine speaks of first.

Fitting with Augustine’s theme of love, love of God would recognize God’s justice. Imitation and union of God logically implies that one would imitate justice. A decisive aspect of Augustine’s understanding of justice is the fact that humans are, as already mentioned, social and relational creatures. For Adam was not fulfilled by himself in the garden while naming the animals. It is true, as Augustine recognized, that Adam had a harmonious relationship with the creation – in the sense that he was not exploiting creation or engaged in coercive domination of it – but he remained, on the whole, unsatisfied. The creation of Eve, while Augustine also reads this as a prefiguration and foreshadowing of the relational nature of the Church with God, was also meant to bring about a unity between each other in a mutually loving relationship that was a reflection of the love exhibited by the relations of the Trinity. “The woman, then, is the creation of God, just as man; but her creation out of man emphasizes the unity between them.”²⁷

Joseph Torchia has written about the four dimensions of Augustine's understanding of human nature: that humans possess the gift of reason since God is Reason and Reason is God, a free will which makes one culpable for one's actions, the want for love and to give love (affectivity), and most importantly, the capability (and need) for human relations which magnifies the human capacity for love.²⁸ Torchia wrote, "[the] relational dimension to Augustine's understanding of human personhood . . . raises the bar of human affectivity to a higher plane." Justice, in its very state of being, is relational. Since human nature is not lost in the Fall from Augustine's perspective, merely corrupted inward to the self – the incurvatus in se – the magnanimity of God's restorative and healing justice in salvation should illuminate the justice to be sought and dispensed by relational creatures in the body politic.²⁹

What Adam and Eve shared prior to the Fall was a blissful union under the Divine Order of Nature, which is to say the rational order of creation which emanated from the Logos (Christ). This was one of the many things lost in the Fall. One of the crucial things lost in the Fall was the relational unity and mutual love between people. But if justice is relational, and if justice is a sign pointing humanity back to their pre-fallen condition, what exactly does this entail?

Etienne Gilson argued that human relations and interactions "are not performed under the compulsion of the divine order; they have a purpose of their own, and this purpose is to realize the divine order. With them it is not a matter of being subject to the law but of willing it and collaborating in its fulfillment."³⁰ If justice was one of the central foundations for the salvation of humanity, whereby they could be re-awakened (made alive again) to love and know God, God's order, and God's creatures (including other humans), then it follows that human flourishing in the post-fallen condition cannot be manifested without justice. For God's natural order is just, God's soteriological actions in history involved justice, and the binding of the rupture of relational wounds from humanity's lust for domination and self-immolation upon the altar of love of self involves a recognition of God's just and loving actions toward humans which allows humans to begin loving God and loving their neighbors; for the love of God is not mere abstraction but incarnational. That God took on a body means that to love God one must love others; this is, after all, Christ's summary of the whole Law to the disciples.

Justice, to be effective, requires the right degree of loving other humans. Without this right degree of loving others the possibility of justice becomes null and void as it sinks back into the incurvatus in se and becomes purely retributive – that is, self-centered. Self-centered justice is indicative of the lack of the right degree of loving. Justice works to restore the enjoyment of God through the proper loving of humans. "Loving the God who becomes human for us means that *fructio Dei* does not inhibit human action in the world or extricate it from the world but frees it by ordering it rightly in the world."³¹ In order to love God, in the fullest sense, Augustine does not forsake God's creation and God's creatures. In fact, part of the enjoyment of God comes in enjoying (in the right degree and proportion) the natural order God has bestowed to the world. Love of the beauty of the whole cosmos is the greatest wisdom one can attain.³²

Given that this right degree of love was lost in the Fall, and justice points the human back to the pre-fallen condition, justice takes on an even greater meaning in Augustine's political theology given that justice is the cornerstone upon which society stands or falls. And since society is a relational construct and endeavor, the ebb and flow of justice is indicative of humanity's loves: either the love of self to the point of contempt of God and all that God has created (including other humans) or the love of God to the point of contempt of the self in the sense the self is not the "measure of all things" in the cosmos or the city. Justice, in of itself, is an act of love of others – which is an expression of the love of God.³³ Augustine is at pains to reiterate that love is incomplete without justice, and justice is incomplete without love, and no city can endure – let alone be called a republic – without the twin marriage of love and justice:

"It follows that justice is found where God, the one supreme God, rules an obedient City according to this grace, forbidding sacrifice to any being save himself alone; and where in consequence the soul rules the body in all men who belong to this City and obey God, and the reason faithfully rules the vices in a lawful system of subordination; so that just as the individual righteous man lives on the basis of faith which is active in love, so the association, or people, of righteous men lives on the same basis of faith, active in love, the love with which a man loves God as God ought to be loved, and loves his neighbour as himself. But where this justice does not exist, there is certainly no 'association of men united by a common sense of right and by a common interest.' Therefore there is no commonwealth."³⁴

That love and justice are tied together is of the utmost importance to recognize in Augustine's political theology, and that this love and justice corresponds with the right degree of loving God's creation and creatures for this leads to a fuller enjoyment of God. The capacity for reasoning, affectivity, and relationships are all heightened through justice which is necessary because of the residue of the Fall and of Original Sin. Additionally, justice heals the will and the idea of justice accepts that the will is morally culpable for its actions.

The city that loves God to the point of the contempt of self is not a nihilistic self-hatred as critics of Augustine have sometimes maintained. For Augustine maintained that there was no law needed to instruct one to love oneself.³⁵ Everyone knows this by their nature. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, ever the Augustinian, placed love of self as one of the four pillars of love (but the lowest one at that). When love of self becomes the only love one exhibits this leads to humanity's (self) destruction and is why love of self (and only the self) is the root of sin.³⁶ The contempt of self through love of God is not self-hatred; it is the fulfillment of the self because the self was not made for self-use and self-enjoyment. Returning to Augustine's fourfold understanding of human nature humans have a strong capacity for affection which can be turned inward (love of self) or outward (love of others and the world). The relational aspect of human nature is what magnifies affectivity and situates affectionate desires to others, world, and God.

Augustine's critique of the justice in the city of man is not that he is opposed to the dispensation of justice as some of his critics misleadingly charge. It is that he is critiquing the shortcomings of the justice being sought in the city of man. Where is this great republic of Cicero's? Where is the great republic (in name) of the current state of the Roman people? It is nowhere to be found because Rome was interiorly divided like the lot of fallen and corrupted humanity. Since sinful, coercive, and domineering people controlled Rome, justice was nowhere to be seen. This is because, as Augustine tells us, the justice sought in Rome was curved to the self. It was retributive in nature. "That commonwealth [of Cicero's] never existed, because there never was real justice in the community...But true justice is found only in that commonwealth whose founder and ruler is Christ."

In countering the nature and structures of justice in the city of man Augustine often leans in favor of reconciliatory (or "restorative") justice over and against retributive justice.³⁷ Thus, it is very reasonable to conclude that "social justice, [for Augustine], is first and foremost a work of love."³⁸ I would also contend that justice is the work of life when matched with the totality of Augustine's works.

What is justice, then, to return to that most seminal question? For Augustine it seems that justice is the re-ordering of the loves within the self, so as to love – to the right degree – all that God had created to which the fullest enjoyment of God is possible: self, others, world, God.³⁹ The "assigning each his due" is the love that is due to all persons. In the context of the political, the justice that is dispensed is meant to be a restorative justice that would foster a healing ethic of love between aggressor and aggrieved, and between dominator and dominated. The love expressed to others leads to the greater appreciation, or love, of the world – which is the greatest created sign pointing to God whereby the love of the world, properly understood, leads to the love of God and all that God has created.⁴⁰

In Augustine's account of restorative justice, of which love is the central core from which restorative justice flows, the healing of rupture orients persons back to the love, harmony, and unity of pre-fallen humanity. This entails orienting oneself to the proper degrees of love, whereby that reorienting of love in the self has social effects of loving one's neighbor and redressing the wrongs committed against him. For if love is an essential aspect of human nature as Augustine claims, it follows that the depravation of love is a stripping away of one's essential human dignity and worth. This is what the lust for domination does. And this is what justice seeks to recompense. It is also the case that justice seems to be a fifth aspect of human nature, for justice is the elevated plane which gives back to human rationality, free will, affectivity, and the relational animus, and makes healing in the post-fallen condition possible among humans.

AUGUSTINE'S CONCEPT OF JUSTICE AND THE NIGERIA CONTEXT

Augustine claim in his book the City of God that any kingdom (country, nation) whatsoever where there is no justice is not distinguishable from robbery. Augustine went further by claiming that these kingdoms without justice are not just like robberies, they are robberies. He gave analogical explanations to support his initial claim (kingdom without justice are "like robberies" and historical evidences to support the latter claim (that such kingdoms are robberies.)

The analogical argument ran thus. Like any State, kingdom or country, robbery bands are knitted together by 'pact of the confederacy,' and by force. Nobody or section of the band or kingdom can freely break away without war and blood being shed. Moving in the direction of making the second claim, he observed further that, it was such robbery band that had developed into kingdom, when it has acquired or hold a particular place for a time. The development of an established robbery band into a State does not remove greed, which initially pushed the gang into action; rather, it is impunity that is added. In Augustine's own words,

If, by the admittance of abandoned men, this evil increases to such a degree that it holds places, fixes abodes, takes possession of cities and subdues people, it assumes the more plainly the name of a kingdom, because the reality is now manifestly conferred on it, not by the removal of covetousness, but by the addition of impunity.⁴¹

To support this latter claim that kingdoms are development from robberies, he referred to a response of a sea. In response to the Emperor's question, the sea robber answered, "... what thou meanest by seizing the whole earth; but because I do it with a petty ship, I am called a robber, while thou dost it with a great fleet art styled Emperor."⁴²

Augustine agreed with the sea robber. Moreover, this observation is a keen insight into what transpires in human societies anywhere, that the small 'thief' is always accorded respect and even given more authority for his brazen and brutal greediness. This is a usual thing in the 'City of Man' where there is no justice, in contrast with the City of God' where justice reigns. Keen observers of human societies throughout history have pointed this out. Hence, about 6000 BCE, Lao Tzu, the founder of the Chinese tradition, Tao, had observed: "Here is one who steals a hook (for his girdle): he is put to death for it; here is another who steals a State: he becomes a prince."⁴³ Similarly, in October, 2010, a Nigerian newspaper columnist aptly described the justice system in Nigeria in the same light:

... irrespective of constitutional provisions that guarantee equality for all citizens and the facile pronouncements of judges and law teachers to that effect, in reality there are two sets of laws operating side – by – side in the country. The first set applies to the anonymous "common man", the downtrodden, the ordinary Nigerian, distant from the centres of power as Pluto is distant from the sun. Under this very law, a man who stole a goat will have one of his arms amputated; if he stole a million, he will be in prison for up to ten years. The other set applies to "sacred cows", the big men and thick madams who run things in Nigeria. This group includes top politicians, former heads of state and governors, high ranking members of the business elite, well-heeled clergymen and women, etc. Under this law, former military dictators, kleptomaniac bank executives and failed politicians who misappropriated billions of naira are not only "free" to enjoy their stinking wealth; they even have the audacity to contest election! A big man or thick madam who stole billions can return a small part of what he or she had stolen, enter into plea bargain with the relevant authorities, and go home to mock the morbid system.⁴⁴

The foremost Nigerian jurist and former Chief Justice of Botswana, late Akinola Aguda was of the same view as can be seen in the following quotation: "To the best of my knowledge and experience, there is nothing like equality before law, at least not the way the law is operated today. It is nothing but a myth created by our political rulers and the lawyers to give cold comfort to the "common man", so that they, our political rulers and lawyers, can have a peace of mind..."⁴⁵. The prevailing political situation in Nigeria since independence is a classic example of lack of equality before the law.

To return to Augustine, he also made two further historical allusions to support the equation of kingdoms without justice with robberies. The first is that of Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome. Romulus and his twin brother Remus founded the city of Rome by gathering together brigand slaves. The twin got wives for the slaves by kidnapping women of surrounding cities. In further power tussle, Romulus killed Remus to become the sole governor of Rome.

The second historical allusion is Ninus, the founder of Assyria. Quoting an ancient historian Justin on this, Augustine wrote:

Ninus, king of the Assyrians, first of all through new lust of empire changed the old, and as it were ancestral custom of nations. He first made war on his neighbours and wholly subdued as far as to the frontiers of Libya, the nation yet untrained to resist.⁴⁶

Therefore, rulers like Alexander the Great, Romulus and Ninus were originally and in reality robbers. According to Augustine, they were robbers because they established their nations by forced acquisition of what did not originally belong to them, but most importantly because there was no justice in their kingdoms.

‘City of Man’ or earthly kingdoms are a necessity; but they cannot be compared with the ‘City of God’, primarily because there is no justice in them. But, what is justice? Does it exist in Nigeria? Let us go back to St. Augustine.

Augustine’s concept of justice is found primarily in Book XIX of the City of God. In Chapter 4, the function of justice is defined as, “to render to every man his due, whereby there is in man himself a certain just order of nature.” Like Plato, Augustine compared human society to a human person. Hence, justice can simply be defined as harmony, the reconciliation of diverse or opposing forces into a harmony or balance. Both the individual and the society can experience injustice, chaos, discord or imbalance. However, it is ‘justice’ that brings order; order in turn brings peace and happiness.

This principle is applicable not only to individual, but also the society. How is this so? Augustine’s answer is aptly summarized by Mary T. Clark: “Rightly related to God, man is properly related within himself and to the external world of people and things.” In Augustine’s own word:

Where there is no true justice, there can be no assemblage of men associated by a common acknowledgement of right, and therefore, there can be no people, as defined by Scipio or Cicero; and if no people, but only of some promiscuous multitude unworthy of the name of people... Further, justice is that virtue which gives everyone his due. Where then is the justice of man, when he deserts the true God and yields himself to impure demons?⁴⁷

In summary, then, Augustine conceived of justice as balance or harmony within an organism – social or personal. This concept of justice is a direct take-over from Plato. As already emphasized above, Augustine was heavily influenced by Platonism in its Neo-Platonic form. The meaning of justice is the preoccupation of Plato in his major work, *The Republic*. A simple Platonic definition of justice is thus: “... One man should practice one thing only, the thing to which his nature was best adapted; now justice is this principle or a part of it.” In Athens of Plato’s day and as it were in much principle or part of it were in many ancient Indo-European societies, human society is divided into three classes: the guardians, the auxiliary and the trader. Thus Plato wrote:

... a State was thought by us to be just when the three classes in the State severally did their own business, and also thought to be temperate and valiant and wise by same classes.. And so, of the individual; we may assume that he has the same three principles in his own soul which are found in the State....⁴⁸

Plato illustrated his division thus: the traders are by nature greedy, for they like money. The Phoenicians and Egyptians were categorized into this class. A State where such greedy people govern will not have justice; hence, there would be neither order nor peace. The auxiliary classes on the other hand are people of a passion and emotion. The Thracians and Scythians belonged to this caste. It is the people that naturally have love of knowledge such as the Athenians of Plato’s day that are the guardians, the philosopher-kings. They are the ones that are fit to govern.

Augustine did not accept the tripartite division of human society into castes or functions. He however agreed that those having the characteristics that Plato attributed to traders – selfishness and greed for money and power, or in Augustinian theological jargon, *concupiscentia* – should not govern. Therefore, when every politician and governor is a trader, having companies that execute contracts, as it is in Nigeria, Augustine, like Plato, would not expect justice in such society. Such individuals are not in harmony within themselves, and the state they govern would not be in harmony. Since these ‘traders’ are greedy for possession (*cupidity*) and power (*libido dominandi*), they are unfit to govern.

CONCLUSION

Augustine’s philosophy of justice is premised on purely theological cum anthropological grounds. The Fall stripped from humanity the mutual relational nature that binds persons together in love. Moreover, justice is the corrective against *libido dominandi* between fallen humans. It is also a corrective against the lust for domination exhibited by states in the form of those aforementioned universal empires. Augustine’s pluralism and justice, rooted in his understanding of human nature, was a profound argument against coercive and domineering lust of man and everything he touched and therefore corrupted. In the words of Christopher Dawson, “the Western ideals of freedom and progress and social justice owe more than we realize to the profound thought of the great African,’ Augustine.⁵⁰

Nigeria resembles the Roman Empire of Augustine’s day by being a construction of an external force. The British Empire established Nigeria solely for her own selfish interest. Nigerians, who took over from the British colonialist, behaved like their colonial masters.

They were regional war lords and opportunists who could not bring the various tribes together for the development of the nation. The resultant effect of this was the selfish and unjustifiable civil war the country was plunged into by these tribal leaders. This unfortunate scenario has given birth to clannish tribalism, nepotism, unbridled corruption and ignorant and archaic leadership, idiotic religiosity, blind fanaticism and godless practice of faith. On this, it can still be said that the class that Plato termed 'traders' are the 'governors' of Nigeria. Our political and religious landscape is infested with traders, rogues and robbers who are in leadership for mundane reasons. Thus, the 'governors' and politicians are glaringly selfish and greedy for possession (cupidity) and power (libido dominandi). This results in a variety of injustices.

To reverse this, justice has to be introduced. This can only be done, according to Plato, when everybody does that for which his/her nature is best adapted; that is when there is harmony, both within individual and in the society comprising such individuals. There should be a redefinition of personhood in our context, namely; who is a moral person? What is our understanding of common humanity? Who are the minority and majority in the Nigerian project? What is the proper role of religion in nation building? These and many more questions are posed those that truly want to be agents of justice in Nigeria must of necessity answer. On this crucial point of the role of religion in national development, the Nigerian Christians must see themselves first as Nigerians. One of the major problems any kin observer of the role of the Church in Nigeria's political development would see is 'identity crisis'. What is the understanding of Christians about the kingdom of God and the Nigerian State? Where are we standing when it comes to who lead Nigeria, politically? 'Political pacifism' is not an option. Apathy to civil participation in political development of the country and by extension the world is a moral sin (Romans 13:1-7).

The just 'governors' the platonic guardian or those who are 'justly related' are those who can make Nigeria reflect Augustine's 'City of God', where justice reigns and the church must provide this needed leadership. The fact that there are many churches and mosques in Nigeria and that 'governors' are religious does not make them 'rightly related' to God as Augustine recommended. The evidence that Nigerians and their governors are rightly related, balanced or harmonious is when they not only love wisdom and knowledge like platonic guardians, but when they come to the awareness that their individual self-interest can better be fulfilled by the general good. This is a basic religious ethics of governance and Nigeria must rise from its myopic and self-centred religiosity in order to be counted as a just State.

ENDNOTES

¹ Eugene Portalie, "Life of St Augustine of Hippo," *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, Volume 2, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), < <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02084a.htm> > Retrieved on 20th January, 2011. However, both Western and Eastern forms of Christianity recognized him as the greatest "Doctor of the Church." Hence, his feast is celebrated on June 15 in the East and on August 28 in the West.

² Philip Schaff, "Editor's Preface," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: St Augustine's Volumes*, Volume 1, Christian Classic Ethereal Library CD-Rom (Version 4) Vol. 1

³ Eugene Portalie.

⁴ Adolf Harnack wrote, "No man since Paul is comparable to him." Quoted in Eugene Portalie, "Life of St Augustine of Hippo." Similarly, K.A. Latourette echoed this when he wrote, "No other Christian after Paul was to have so wide, deep and prolonged an influence upon Christianity of Western Europe and those forms of faith that stemmed from it." See K.A. Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, (New York: Harper, 1953), 97.

⁵ Mary T. Clark, "Augustine on Justice," in *Augustine and Social Justice*, eds. Teresa Delgado, John Doody, and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 3, 10

⁶ Here Augustine agrees with Cicero that the task of the state, in some meaningful manner, is the function of justice. See *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 19.21. Augustine, nevertheless, critiques Cicero for believing "true justice" was ever dispensed by the Roman Republic since it lacked the common love of God, which prevented Roman judicial structures from dispensing justice to each according to his due in love. This is a common theme in Augustine's encounter with Greek and Roman philosophy, wherein aspects of Greek and Roman philosophy show signs of truth but fall short of the Supreme Good due to lack of love of God and others. This does not prevent Augustine from utilizing Ciceronian philosophy.

⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, 19.4.

⁸ Ernest Fortin, “St. Augustine,” in *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd ed., eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 182.

⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, 19.4.

¹⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, 19.26.

¹¹ Augustine, *City of God*, 14.4.

¹² It seems that Augustine’s understanding of exterior justice is similar to Aristotle’s notion of “just deserts.”

¹³ Mark Doorley, “The Pursuit of Social Justice,” in *Augustine and Social Justice*, 14.

¹⁴ Teresa Delgado and Kim Paffenroth, xvi.

¹⁵ Augustine, *On Man’s Perfection in Righteousness*, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis, Ch. 2. Augustine explicitly states here that the ramifications of the Fall is a weakened and corrupted will that cannot overcome the temptations of sin apart from God’s grace. But sin, as a form of “misdirected love,” nevertheless means that humans – in their sin – are seeking love (but only for the self) and from the lower order of creation and remain, in some sense, in idolatry insofar as never seeing the material world as signs leading to God.

¹⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, 4.5.

¹⁷ Justice as necessary for a republic was also endorsed by Cicero.

¹⁸ Fortin, 183.

¹⁹ Fortin, 181.

²⁰ Dorley, 16.

²¹ Dorley, 15-17.

²² Linda Raeder, “Augustine and the Case for Limited Government,” *Humanitas* 16, no. 2 (2003): 95.

²³ Augustine, *City of God*, 4.20.

²⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, 2.20.

²⁵ Robert George, *Making Men Moral* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 46.

²⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2005), 1.338c.

²⁷ Although Augustine takes much of Genesis to be allegorical, the truths contained in those stories are very much “literal,” e.g. that since the sons of Cain are the founders of the first cities in the Genesis narrative, and Cain’s sons are the offspring of a fallen son of Adam, and sons embodying Cain’s sin of fratricide, envy, and jealousy, the “city of man” embodies the vices and sins in a more explicit way than Abel. The Jewish philosopher Philo, for instance, in *Legum allegoriae*, notes that the story of Cain’s murdering of Abel is a story about the way of death embodied by Cain rather than a tale of simple murder. In this way, paradoxically, Cain is more the victim in that he and his descendants in that they embody the “unrighteous philosophy” of death writ large which characterizes the city

²⁸ Sarah Stewart-Kroeker, “Friendship and Moral Foundations,” in *Augustine and Social Justice*, 254.

²⁹ Joseph Torchia, “St. Augustine: A Harmonious Union,” in *Exploring Personhood: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Human Nature* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 119.

³⁰ See Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 4.12.15. Perhaps shockingly to some, Augustine does not state that Christ’s death for humanity was just about atonement and sacrifice for sin. Rather, Augustine opines and stresses the nature of justice within Christ’s death and resurrection. Life is tied to justice and injustice tied to death. The logic of Augustine implies that the struggle for justice is the struggle for life. God’s justice is what ultimately brings life back to dead humans (dead to sin), but the ramifications of this for social ethics is profound. A city is not healthy unless it is dispensing justice. This makes sense given Augustine’s strides in *City of God* to identify justice as the pillar upon which all republics rest. For without justice, the city is not like God. It is not the truly rational and loving city. It is the city that has given itself over to death: The death of love of self, of vindictive retribution, and the celebration of vanity for vanity’s sake.

³¹ Augustine’s understanding of the Fall of Man is complex and multifaceted. There is a great array of scholarship on the topic. However, as I see it, there are four key ruptures that occur in Augustine’s reading of the Fall. First is the lost harmony and unity between humans – exemplified with Adam and Eve. In particular, when God comes before Adam and asks him about his sin Adam blames God for having created Eve. This marks the rupture between the relationship of man and woman, or between humans more archetypally, wherein distrust seeps into human relations which prevents the ability to fully love one another without distrust and coercion. It also represents, simultaneously, the rupture between humanity and God. Given that love of God and love of neighbor are intertwined together, this reading perfectly aligns with the teachings of Christ and Augustine’s artful reading of Scripture insofar that Adam no longer loved God and no longer loved Eve in this moment of deflected

blame (blaming God and blaming Eve at the same time). Second is the lost harmony between humans the natural world – exemplified by Adam and Eve’s expulsion from nature (the garden). Lastly is the interior rupture of human nature itself where desire and reason are no longer in a unitive harmony with another – with reason guiding desire to its source of fulfillment. A fourth rupture, and perhaps the most famous, is that in Adam all sinned whereby all future progeny suffer from this ruptured relationship with other people, with the natural world, and with themselves.

³² Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, trans. L.E.M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960), 132.

³³ Sarah Stewart-Kroeker, “Resisting Idolatry and Instrumentalism in Loving the Neighbor: The Significance of the Pilgrimage Motif for Augustine’s Usus-Fruitio Distinction,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 27, no. 2 (2014): 215.

³⁴ Augustine, *City of God*, 11.4.

³⁵ Clark, “Augustine on Justice,” 8.

³⁶ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle, (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2015), 1.23.22.

³⁷ Oliver O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self Love in Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 1.

³⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, 2.21.

³⁹ Stewart-Kroeker, “Friendship and Moral Foundations,” 251.

⁴⁰ Clark, “Augustine on Justice,” 9.

⁴¹ Christopher Dawson, “Augustine in His Age,” in *St. Augustine: His Age, Life, and Thought* (New York: Meridian, 1957), 77.

⁴² Karin Heller, “Justice, Order and Peace: A Reading of Augustine’s *City of God*, Book XIX in the Light of His Conversion Experience,” <http://www.viterbo.edu/uploadFiles/centers/.../Heller07.pdf> Retrieved on 21st January, 2011.

⁴³ Augustine, *City of God*, Book IV, Chapter 4.

⁴⁴ Douglas Anele, “The Vicissitude of Justice in Nigeria (1).” <http://www.nigerianelitesforum.com/ng/legal-and-judicial-matters/5016-the-vicissitudes-of-justice-in-nigeria-1-a.html> > Retrieved on 20th January, 2011. A Commentator of *Sahara Reporters ca;;s* this ‘Cobweb Justice’: “This is the analogy that has been drawn with the cobweb which only catches small feeble insects and is incapable of restraining the mightier creatures. Some call this ‘cobweb’ justice.” <http://saharareporters.com/article/nigerian-law-oppressive-poor> Retrieved on 20th August, 2011.

⁴⁵ Akinola Aguda, *The Common Man and the Common Law*, quoted by Akin Oyeboode, “Equality before the Law in Nigeria: Myth or Reality?” <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles/akin-oyebode/the-immediate-removal-of-president-yaradua-from-office-a-constitutional-and-political-imperative.html> Retrieved on 20th January, 2011.

⁴⁶ Mary T. Clark, 2015, 3.10

⁴⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, Book IV, Chapter 5 & 6.

⁴⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, Book IV, 435.