

Sustaining Temporal Peace: A Worldview for Sustainable Living Inspired by Saint Augustine's Philosophy

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Abstract

My paper aims to use the philosophical resources of Saint Augustine's thought, particularly as found in the City of God, in order to sketch a basic worldview which can educate and lead people towards living lives that promote sustainable development. Specifically, I wish to show how Saint Augustine's concepts of order, rightly ordered love, and temporal peace can serve as material to create a rough metaphysical framework in which human beings are understood to be an integrated part of a greater whole which is the earth. The ethical corollary of this framework is that human beings should act in such a way that does not damage this greater whole but rather preserves its order and

integrity. In doing this, I also hope to show that Saint Augustine's thought can still have relevance for contemporary issues.

Keywords: *sustainable development, sustainable living, Saint Augustine, City of God, order, rightly ordered love, temporal peace*

Introduction

The concept of "Sustainable Development" has been an important issue ever since its definition was formulated by the World Commission on the Environment and Development in 1987.¹ An equally important issue, however, is the discussion on how to implement the ideas of sustainable development in everyday life. One suggestion regarding this is that there is a need for individuals to imbibe a "holistic worldview" that sees human beings as an integrated part of the universe, instead of being isolated from it. For example, Moacir Gadotti stresses the necessity of a "cosmic perspective" that takes into account that human beings and their activities are ultimately connected to other beings of the earth and the universe.² Gadotti claims that

¹ Alan Reid, "Values in Sustainable Development," *Teaching Geography* 21, no. 4 (1996): 168, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23754452.a>.

² Moacir Gadotti, "Education for Sustainable Development," (Brazil: Instituto Paulo Freire, 2004), 25, last modified 2016, <http://earthcharter.org/>

such a perspective can lead to the adoption of lifestyles that can preserve the well-being of both humanity and the natural environment since people will become more sensitive precisely to the fact that they are an integrated part of a whole which they should respect and not damage.

In this paper, I wish to contribute to Gadotti's idea by suggesting a possible resource for a holistic worldview that can, in turn, promote a way of life conducive to sustainable development. More precisely, I wish to utilize the philosophy of Saint Augustine of Hippo, particularly as it is found in the *City of God*, to make a rough sketch of a metaphysical and ethical framework for living sustainably. I believe that there are three connected concepts in Augustine's philosophy which can serve as material for this framework. One is Augustine's concept of order, while the other two are corollaries of these, namely, rightly ordered love and temporal peace.

My paper will then proceed as follows: I will begin by discussing the definition of sustainable development and how it is a debated concept because of the different understandings that people have of it. I will then put forward Gadotti's opinion that these different understandings stem from a lack of a holistic view of the world. I will then briefly discuss the claim of Gadotti and other scholars that this holistic view

along with its corollary, ethical values, is necessary for sustainable living and thus what is also primarily necessary for sustainable development. After this, I will propose that the aforesaid philosophy of Augustine can serve as a resource for this holistic worldview. Before further exploring Augustine's philosophy, I shall answer certain objections to applying his thought to the contemporary endeavor of sustainable development. After this, I shall elaborate the three aforesaid concepts of order, rightly ordered love, and temporal peace. In the penultimate section, I will attempt to utilize these concepts in order to provide a basic sketch of a holistic worldview for sustainable living. I will then end with a brief concluding remark.

Sustainable Development and the Need for a Worldview for Sustainability

The World Commission on Environment and Development, also called the Brundtland Commission, defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."³ This is a noticeably loose formulation, as it defines neither what needs to be sustained, nor what "development" actually means.⁴ According to Annick Hedlund-de Witt, the formulation was made in

³ Reid, "Values in Sustainable Development," 168.

⁴ Annick Hedlund-de Witt, "Rethinking Sustainable Development: Considering How Different Worldviews Envision 'Development' and 'Quality of Life,'" *Sustainability* 6. (2014): 8312, doi: 10.3390/su6118310.

order to accommodate the multiple meanings that people might attach to the concept, and so as to precisely foster cooperation among these peoples who might have different convictions.⁵ However, as broad as it might seem, sustainable development is not a totally vacuous concept. For Witt, sustainable development is essentially the attempt to combine economic growth with the conservation of the environment.⁶ He says that one of the insights expressed by the Brundtland Commission is that economic and ecological well-being go hand-in-hand. Economies cannot hope to flourish if the methods that they use for growth are environmentally destructive with the environment itself as their main resource. Ultimately, the human race itself cannot preserve its own existence if its economies drain the natural resources of the planet in a much faster rate than the renewing of these resources. Sustainable development therefore seeks to support “human progress not just in a few pieces or years, but for the entire planet into the distant future.”⁷

Despite this, sustainable development still remains a hotly contested concept.⁸ Some have interpreted sustainable development to primarily mean preserving the well-being of

⁵ Hedlund-de Witt, “Rethinking Sustainable Development,” 8312.

⁶ Ibid., 8313.

⁷ Ibid., 8314.

⁸ Sophia Imran, Korshed Alam and Narelle Beaumont, “Reinterpreting the Definition of Sustainable Development for a More Ecocentric Reorientation,” *Sustainable Development* 22. (2014): 135, doi: 10.1002/sd.537.

the ecosystem.⁹ Others understand sustainable development as chiefly pertaining to human beings, and that stewardship of the environment is just a means to achieve this goal.¹⁰ These ecocentric and anthropocentric conceptions, respectively, assume a dualism between nature and humanity which, however, need not be assumed. Indeed, it is this dualistic view which certain educators of sustainable development believe to be a part of the problem. Gadotti, for instance, stresses the fact that social and environmental problems should not be treated separately because they are ultimately connected. He considers the dualistic perspective as a lack of a holistic worldview, which sees all things as interconnected.¹¹ It is this holistic view in turn which Gadotti believes necessary for sustainable development.

Moreover, this holistic worldview should be lived out in practice. Gadotti believes that what is of primary importance in promoting sustainable development is that people adapt lifestyles that are sustainable and not wasteful of the planet's resources. This requires that the emotional, rational, and intuitive capacities of people should be educated to care more for the earth.¹² Likewise, values that have concrete behavioral effects such as simplicity, austerity, and concern

⁹ Imran, et al., "Reinterpreting," 136.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Gadotti, "Education for Sustainable Development," 8.

¹² Ibid., 22.

for others, should be promoted by such an education.¹³ It is when people live sustainably, then, that sustainable development can become widespread, since a predominantly sustainable society can only come to be if the values of sustainability are already lived out by each of its members.¹⁴ This is also the opinion of other scholars such as Jesse and Eric Pappas, who envision “sustainable individuals” as the key or “foundation for action in social, economic, and environmental sustainability.”¹⁵ Pappas defines such individuals as follows:

Sustainable individuals are characterized by creating harmony, interconnection, and relatively high levels of self-awareness in their values, thoughts, behaviors, and actions as well as cultivating continued individual growth in their physical, emotional, social, philosophical, and intellectual abilities. Individual sustainability includes possessing a well-developed and demonstrated value system that acknowledges the importance and interconnectedness of all global biological and social systems, and our appropriate place within them.¹⁶

¹³ Gadotti, “Education for Sustainable Development,” 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵ Jesse Pappas and Eric Pappas, “The Sustainable Personality, Values and Behaviors in Individual Sustainability,” *International Journal of Higher Education* 4, no.1 (2015): 12, doi: 10.5430/ijhe.v4n1p12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

That sustainable individuals should have a “value system” that recognizes the interconnectedness of global systems resonates with Gadotti’s belief that people interested in living sustainably should adopt a new paradigm. Gadotti calls this the Earth’s paradigm and its chief purpose is to inform people that their “common destiny in the planet is to share life in the planet with others.”¹⁷ People should be taught not to view the world as a compartmentalized thing, “composed [of] separate parts or bodies.”¹⁸ Rather, the universe is a “sacred and mysterious whole” in which what happens to one part resonates with the entirety.¹⁹

Scholars such as Gadotti and Pappas believe that what is necessary for sustainable development is an alteration of behavior on the part of individuals. A person must begin to live in such a way that her actions become beneficial and not harmful to the world around her. Her life must manifest an efficient use of natural resources so that she does not deprive her fellow human beings, whether present or future, of the natural resources that they would need for their own well-being. This change of attitude in turn should go hand-in-hand with, and indeed be a corollary of, a holistic understanding of the universe—one which sees humanity and the rest of creation as parts of an ordered whole.

¹⁷ Gadotti, “Education for Sustainable Development,” 22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Augustine's Philosophy and Sustainable Development

Objections

As said above, I believe that the philosophy of Saint Augustine can serve as material from which to draw this holistic understanding of the world, along with its ethical corollaries. Now, Augustine's philosophy might initially seem to be a strange choice for this purpose, as I foresee three objections with regards to using his philosophy for this contemporary issue of sustainable development. The first is that Augustine's philosophy gives too much emphasis on the individual's relationship with God, while giving little relevance to the world. The second is that it promotes authoritarianism, which, in turn, is no longer acceptable to the sensibilities of our contemporary world. The third objection has to do with the role of grace in Augustine's thought. Augustine considers God's grace as an indispensable element of any human attempt to achieve goodness. This seems to be difficult, even impossible, to integrate in a paradigm of sustainable development, where there is no necessary place for something like Augustine's Christian God. I will answer these objections below, although I do not claim that these answers will definitively solve the difficulties of using Augustine's philosophy for sustainable development. At best, I hope that my answers make it less improbable for Augustine's thought to be appropriated for living sustainably. By giving these answers, I

hope to provide a context for my interpretation of Augustine's thought and its relation with other interpretations.

Let me then address the first objection. There is an understanding of Augustine that views his philosophy as too focused on one's relationship with God, to the point of ignoring the world. This is represented for example by Gordon Kaufman's opinion of Augustine in his article, "Ecological Consciousness and the symbol 'God'." For Kaufman, Augustine gives main interest only to "God and the soul," while the other beings of creation, with the exception of angels, have mostly been left out in serious theological discussions.²⁰ Uta Ranke-Heinemann also accuses Augustine of having an "urge to break away from everything earthly and beloved on this earth" and of ultimately having recourse to an "escapist version of Christianity," due to him being influenced by ascetic Neo-Platonism.²¹ Indeed, Augustine himself seems to vindicate these opinions. After all, it is he who said in his *Soliloquies* that he desires to know only God and the soul and nothing more.²² Also, in the *City of God*, Augustine often expresses his dismal view of earthly life with all its hardships, in contrast to the happiness of eternal life in heaven. He also demolishes the belief of the

²⁰ Gordon D. Kaufman, "Ecological Consciousness and the Symbol 'God,'" *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 20 (2000): 6, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1390316>.

²¹ Both quotations cited are from: Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom* (New York: Doubleday), 81.

²² *Soliloquia*, 1.4. I have used the translation by Robert P. Russel (2008).

philosophers that happiness can be had in earthly life, by enumerating the many miseries that plague man both on the individual and societal levels.²³ Some of these miseries are disease, death, misunderstanding, and injustice, which Augustine believes will always harass humans while they live in this world.

However, as Arthur Ledoux says, there is more to Augustine's apparent *contemptus mundi* than meets the eye. For Ledoux, this focusing of Augustine on God and the self is not a way of escaping the world. Rather, it is the initial step in transforming one's self to be able to transcend one's own limitations due to sin, and be able to see and act upon the world in accordance with God's will.²⁴ For Augustine, union with God is the ultimate goal that human beings should strive for. However, Augustine believes that humanity's sinfulness prevents them from achieving this. Thus, a person would need to distance herself from her own selfishness as well as the attractions of the world that accentuate such selfishness, in order to be united with God. His proclamations about the misery of earthly life, therefore, is for the purpose of leading the readers' mind toward contemplating the absolute happiness one can attain through union with God, against which happiness in this

²³ *De civ. Dei* 19.4–10. Unless otherwise noted, I have used the abridged version of the translation by Gerald G. Walsh et al. (1958) in all citations.

²⁴ Arthur Ledoux, "A Green Augustine: On Learning to Love Nature Well," *Theology and Science* 3, no. 3 (2005): 333–334, doi: 10.1080/14746700500317313.

world pales in comparison.²⁵ Instilling a certain devaluation for earthly life is a required step for desiring and achieving this union. Despite this, Augustine strongly believed that all creation is naturally good, being a manifestation of God's own goodness and wisdom.²⁶

We can better see Augustine's appreciation for creation by looking at his answers against his theological rivals, namely, the Manichees. The Manichees affirmed, unlike Christianity, that there were two eternal principles responsible for all things, one principle being good and the other evil.²⁷ The principle of good was attacked by the principle of evil in the beginning of time. This resulted in "portions" of the principle of good being trapped within bodies, which in turn are of the principle of evil. For the human being, this meant that her soul, which is of the principle of good, is caged in her evil body. Salvation then consisted of freeing the soul from the body and its carnal urges so that the soul may be reunited with the principle of good. The Manichees thus considered the physical world of bodies as evil and something to be transcended. Consequently, the Manichees attacked the Christian doctrine that the universe

²⁵ George Lawless, "Augustine's Decentering of Asceticism," in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (New York: Routledge, 2000), 142.

²⁶ *De civ. Dei*, 11.21.

²⁷ Ronald J. Teske, *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, vol. 84 in *The Fathers of the Church* (New York: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 8.

is ultimately good because of having been made by a good God. The Manichees' objection to the Christian position may be summed up in two questions. One is that, if the Christian position is true, then what accounts for the existence of evil? The second is that if the Christians are right, then why do there seem to be useless creatures?

Augustine's reply to the first question is that evil is not a positive reality, but merely a privation, or lack of such a reality. Therefore, God cannot create evil, nor can evil be a principle equal with God. For instance, in his work, *On Genesis Against the Manichees*, Augustine ridicules the Manichees for thinking that the "darkness," from which God separated the light in *Genesis*, signifies actual entities competing with God, since the darkness is not said to be created by God.²⁸ Augustine says that the darkness simply signifies the lack of light before God created such light, and that the darkness is not a "something" that existed even before creation. Thus, it would be silly to think that this darkness contended with God, just as it is silly to think that silence literally fought against sound, or that nakedness fought against being clothed.²⁹ The other side of this denial of the substantiality of evil would be Augustine's affirmation of the natural goodness of all things. All natures, as he says, are good insofar as they exist because God made them to be

²⁸ *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, 1.4.7. I have used the translation of Ronald J. Teske (1991) in all citations.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

good and because of this the whole universe “is filled with every kind of good.”³⁰

However, Augustine does not deny the reality of evil. In *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, Augustine affirms that evil indeed exists, though it is not found in the nature of things. On the contrary, “evil is either sin or the punishment of sin. Sin is nothing but the evil assent of free will, when we incline to those things which justice forbids and from which we are free to abstain. [Sin] does not lie in the things themselves, but in their illegitimate use.”³¹ Evil occurs when human beings desire and use things in a way that is contradictory with God’s ordained order for the universe. More will be said of this later in discussing rightly ordered love. As for the “punishment of sin,” Augustine means by this the fact that human beings are susceptible to death and all the bodily frailties that we know of today, in contrast to their original state before the fall. Consequently, certain beings, which previously could not harm man, such as ferocious animals, poisonous plants, and harsh elements have become dangerous and even fatal to him. Still, these beings are not intrinsically evil, because God created them with good natures.

When it comes to the Manichees’ second objection which is that there seems to be creatures that are not good in the

³⁰ *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, 2.29.

³¹ *De Genesi ad litteram*, 1.3. I have used the translation of Ronald J. Teske (1991).

sense of being useless, Augustine's reply is that these creatures only seem superfluous because humans have a limited view of the world and thus do not appreciate how each being contributes to the greater scheme of things. For Augustine, each individual thing contributes to the beauty of the whole universe. He gives a number of analogies to convey this idea³² and one is the human body. Certain parts of the human body may not be attractive, or as attractive, if considered in isolation. And yet if considered in terms of how they contribute to the beauty and unity of the entire body, then they will be better appreciated. Another analogy is that of a beautiful speech. The individual letter and syllables of such a speech are likely not as splendid as the speech itself. Indeed, they would be senseless if considered by themselves and not in unity with each other. The error of the Manichees, then, is that they focus only on the isolated creature and not its relation to the universe, when judging its worth. Furthermore, they judge the goodness of a creature based on its utility to human beings.³³ But to do so betrays a very limited and anthropocentric kind of view, in which the value of everything is relative only to humans.

From these answers to the Manichees, we can see how Augustine indeed acknowledged and appreciated creation's value. The world, for him, was not something intrinsically

³² *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, 1.21.32.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1.16.26–27.

evil that had to be transcended. Rather, the universe and its beauty were a manifestation of God's benevolence. As such, all things, whether taken individually or taken together, are of their nature good. It is only due to the sinful wills of rational creatures, such as humans and angels, that evil was introduced into the world. One last thing to note is that we can see, from Augustine's metaphor of the body, that his understanding of the universe does appear to resonate with Gadotti's holistic view of the world. For both Gadotti and Augustine, the universe is a whole which consists of the harmonious connection of its parts. Furthermore, this whole should be treated with respect by man. For Gadotti, the reason for this is because the universe is "sacred" while for Augustine the reason is that the universe is a manifestation of God's goodness. Finally, similar to Gadotti, Augustine believes that what happens to one part of this whole affects the whole itself. This can be seen when the latter says that if ever the body loses one of its parts, then the lost part, together with the other parts that still form the body, become ugly.³⁴

Let me go then to the second objection: Augustine's philosophy promotes authoritarianism. I admit that there is a way of understanding Augustine's political thought that leads to authoritarianism. This is especially true when one considers that elements in Augustine's works themselves

³⁴ *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, 1.21.32.

appear to promote authoritarianism. For example, in the *City of God*, Augustine insists that the ideal Christian citizen should leave the governing of society to the people in authority, and that these Christians should not resist the abuses that they might experience from authority, unless such abuses prevent one from living out the Christian faith.³⁵ This is because the people in authority, whether secular or ecclesiastical, are chosen by God and it is the duty of Christians to accept their rule. The abuses of such authority should be accepted by the faithful with pious perseverance—these abuses being considered as means given by God for the faithful’s increase in virtue. Another example in Augustine’s thought that encourages authoritarianism is his belief in physically coercing people into believing a certain creed. This can be seen in Augustine’s dealing with the Donatists. After experiencing the violence that the Donatists afflicted on his fellow Catholics, and also after witnessing how certain Donatists that were forced to convert to Catholicism actually came to embrace that latter faith, Augustine became convinced that the state’s use of physical coercion against these aforesaid Donatists was warranted.³⁶ Putting these two examples together, it seems that Augustine’s philosophy would condone the idea that people

³⁵ Alan Ryan, *On Politics* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 180.

³⁶ E.M. Atkins and Robert Dodaro, eds., *Augustine: Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), xxiii–xxiv.

with institutional authority have the absolute right to impose the beliefs that they favor on those under their jurisdiction.

However, there are alternative ways of interpreting Augustine's thought that do not result in promoting authoritarianism. Examples of these are what Hoon Woo lists as two modern appropriations of Augustine's political philosophy. The first is what Woo calls "soft realism." Soft realism accepts Augustine's view that state authority is indeed God-given, however it is "regarded as limited in [it's] ability to achieve [it's] moral ends and necessarily tolerant of diverse customs."³⁷ Though Woo does not explain further, what I think soft realism capitalizes on is Augustine's belief that there can ultimately be no perfect society on earth, due to all human beings having a sinful nature. From this, it can be argued that the over-zealous desire of authorities to coercively impose upon others what to their mind is the right way of life may betray an inordinate desire to establish a perfect society here on earth, which is precisely what Augustine goes against. Those in authority should be wary of coercively imposing their beliefs on others, for such an intention may stem more from the sinful desire to dominate others, instead of a genuinely good desire of reforming them.

³⁷ B. Hoon Woo, "Pilgrim's Progress in Society: Augustine's Political Thought in The City of God," *Political Theology* 16, no. 5 (2015): 427, doi:10.1179/1462317X14Z.000000000113.

Aside from soft-realism, Woo identifies a “confessional” appropriation of Augustine’s philosophy.³⁸ This emphasizes the sinful nature of human beings in Augustine’s thought. It does not recommend any action on the part of institutions or people in authority, nor does it focus on purposely changing society at the macro-level. Rather, in this approach, the Christian prioritizes the overcoming of her own sinful condition which Woo calls the “‘monstrosity’ of [one’s] own divided will.”³⁹ In a confessional approach, what is given importance is the personal transformation of a human being from her state of sinfulness into union with God. This approach also considers the condition of larger society as simply symptomatic of the sinful or non-sinful condition of each individual. Thus, the confessional approach does not completely ignore the world beyond the individual, although it does not focus on directly using the institutions of larger society. It is this confessional approach then which seems to be the least authoritarian interpretation of Augustine since it focuses more on personal transformation than institutional change. It is also for this reason that I think this approach squares most with the way that I wish to use Augustine’s philosophy for sustainable living. The confessional approach’s focus on individual transformation resonates with Gadotti’s idea of changing one’s personal values and

³⁸ Hoon Woo, “Pilgrim’s Progress”, 428.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

attitudes in order to live sustainably. The implicit argument of the confessional approach, namely, that it is through one's rectifying of one's self that society can also be rectified, parallels Gadotti and Pappass' idea that sustainable development can only truly come about if there is a change of values in the individual level. In light of this, I shall also consider my appropriation of Augustine's philosophy as a variant of the confessional approach, which aims to use Augustine's thought to bring about positive personal transformation.

Finally, let me proceed to the third objection which is the problem of how a crucial element in Augustine's philosophy, namely "grace," can be integrated in a contemporary framework for sustainable living. It is well known that Augustine stresses the necessity of grace for man to achieve anything truly good. This implies the well-known dichotomy between man's "natural capacity" and God's "supernatural grace," the former being unable to achieve true goodness without being supported by the latter. Of course, the difficulty of applying this idea to a non-theological worldview of sustainability is that there is no God to grant grace. It would seem then that judged from an "Augustinian" lens, all the efforts at character improvement that the aforesaid worldview would promote will ultimately be in vain, since such a natural effort will not be suffused by supernatural grace. A further difficulty is that even if somehow supernatural grace were to be incorporated in the

aforesaid worldview, Augustine believes that only a limited number of human beings actually receive this grace.⁴⁰ From these considerations, it must be admitted that it is simply not possible to reconcile Augustine's original views about grace with the above-mentioned worldview.

Nevertheless, I do believe that a qualified notion of grace can still be incorporated in a contemporary worldview for sustainability. But why even attempt such incorporation? My answer is that the notion of grace can engender in people a sense of gratitude for all the good things that they have received. This in turn can serve as an impetus for sustainable living. I will discuss more of this later.

A modified understanding of grace can be integrated in a worldview for sustainability. In Augustine's thought, grace may be understood in two ways, and this is what Eugene Teselle calls the notion of "double gratuity" in Augustine's works.⁴¹ The first gratuity is the actual existence of a creature, while the second gratuity is the grace that God gives to the creature so that it can achieve its perfection. For instance, in the *Confessions*, Augustine says that not only is the everlasting experience of the beatific vision by the good angels a grace from God, but the very capacity of these

⁴⁰ *De civ. Dei*, 21.12. For an English translation, it is advised to see the translation of Marcus Dods (1887) since the translation of Walsh et al. does not contain the cited book and chapter.

⁴¹ Eugene TeSelle, "Nature and Grace in Augustine's Expositions of Genesis I, 1-5," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 5 (1968): 97.

angels for the vision, that is to say their existence, is also itself a grace.⁴²

I believe that grace in this sense of “first gratuity” is what can be better adopted for a worldview of sustainability. This is because grace as “first gratuity” is not Divine favor given only to a particular group of beings. Rather, this first gratuity extends to all beings insofar as they exist. It may be objected though that this grace would still require a God who gives it. However, contemporary conceptions of grace show that this need not be the case. For example, John Caputo considers as grace the very wonder that is our existence—something which we did not ask for, but received nonetheless, like a gift.⁴³ He does not exclude the possibility of a God giving this grace to us, but he also does not consider it necessary. To illustrate this, Caputo uses an example from Friedrich Nietzsche. In his essay, “On Truth and Lies in the Nonmoral Sense,” Nietzsche begins with this short anecdote:

Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of the universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious

⁴² *Confessionum*, 13.1. I have used the translation by John K. Ryan (1960) in all citations.

⁴³ John Caputo, *Truth: Philosophy in Transit* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 259–260.

minute of ‘world history,’ but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die.⁴⁴

The implication of this story is that humans are but insignificant and fleeting specks in the universe, and that it is conceited of them to think that they are something more, particularly in the sense of them being able to know the true knowledge of things. However, Caputo suggests an alternative to Nietzsche’s trivializing view. For Caputo, the fact that, for a moment in the universe’s life, there was a place in it where creatures fortuitously arose capable of thought and language—a place where the universe could “know itself” as it were—should be considered a thing of wonder, and indeed, of gratitude.⁴⁵ It is both this “cosmic luck” that brought us to existence, as well as the very wonder of our existence as creatures aware of the universe, which Caputo believes can be considered as a grace given to us, regardless of whether there is a divine giver of this grace or not.

This idea of grace as existence itself also leads us beyond the dichotomy of “natural” human effort and “supernatural” grace mentioned above. If grace is the very gift of our being, then this means that grace is already “natural.” In other

⁴⁴ Caputo, *Philosophy in Transit*, 193–4.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 258–60.

words, grace is that which is already given to human beings at the very start, and whatever striving for goodness they carry out is only possible due to this grace, and is only a response to this grace. In the context of living sustainably, grace need not be considered as supernatural aid which is necessary to ensure the perfection of one's actions. Rather, grace can be considered as the very "givenness" of one's existence. The effort to live sustainably can be understood as a response to this grace, similar to how Augustine believed that his striving for union with God was already a response to the initial graces of being created and converted by Him.⁴⁶ This leads to what I said above about how the notion of grace can promote an attitude of gratitude. If indeed human beings have received life from the universe without them even asking for it, then it seems that the primary disposition that human beings should have in relation to the universe is one of gratitude. Again, this attitude does not need to be directed at a specific deity or personality, although there is nothing that prevents this either. It can be directed to the natural world that continues to nourish humankind and also to the human world to which all human beings owe their cultural and social identities. In any case, having this "virtue" of gratitude can serve as an impetus for people to live sustainably, leading them to realize that they have received so much from the

⁴⁶ *Confessionum*, 13.1.

world. In return, they respond to the world's generosity by being responsible in their use of the its resources—although it is likely that they can never fully repay their “debt.”

Augustine's Potential Contribution to the Idea of Sustainable Development

Now that I have addressed the objections, I would like to show how ideas from Augustine's philosophy can enhance the concept of sustainable development in such a manner that address the issues alluded by Gadotti above. I provide two ways: One is that Augustine's conception of a hierarchical universe, which shows that things have unequal ontological value but are nevertheless all intrinsically good, can help strike a balance between the two extreme interpretations of sustainable development, namely, that of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. The second has to do with the focus of Augustine's philosophy on love as the primary force that directs and molds human beings. For Augustine, the loves that people have determine their character, and ultimately, their effects on the world. Indeed, so fundamental is love that in the *City of God*, Augustine divides the entire human race based on the two basic, but opposing, loves, namely, love of God over self and love of self over God.⁴⁷ I believe that this focus on a person's loves resonates with Gadotti and Pappas' emphasis on the importance of a person's values in promoting sustainable

⁴⁷ *De civ. Dei*, 14.1.

development. In other words, sustainable development can only come about if the values or loves of human beings are ordered towards achieving sustainability. Again, more of this will be expounded in the succeeding section, where I further explain Augustine's ideas in the *City of God*.

Order, Ordered Love, and Temporal Peace in Augustine's *City of God*

I believe that there are three distinguishable, but intertwined, concepts in Augustine's *City of God* that, given some modifications, can serve as material for a basic worldview for living sustainably. The first is the concept of "order," which Augustine believes presides, or should preside, over all of creation. The second is the concept of *ordo amoris*, or rightly ordered love. For Augustine, human beings should nourish love for things that correspond to the cosmic order just mentioned. The third concept is "temporal peace," which, for, Augustine is the end of a strictly earthly life. In the remainder of this section, I will elaborate on these three concepts, and in the last section (An Augustinian-Inspired Worldview for Sustainable Living) I will suggest how they can be modified to serve as material for a worldview of sustainable living.

On Order

Let me begin then with the concept of order, which Augustine defines as "an arrangement of like and unlike things whereby each of them is disposed in its proper

place.”⁴⁸ For Augustine, order encompasses the whole of creation and this order is manifested in the fact that all creatures are part of a hierarchy in which they have varying degrees of value. In the *City of God*, Augustine describes this hierarchy as follows:⁴⁹

Among all things which somehow exist and which can be distinguished from God who made them, those that live are ranked higher than those that do not . . . [among] living things, the sentient are superior to the non-sentient, for example, animals to trees. Among sentient beings, the intelligent are higher than the non-intelligent, as with men and cattle. Among the intelligent, the immortal are superior to the mortal, as angels to men.

Now it might seem that, by establishing gradation, and therefore inequality, among beings, Augustine is in danger of reducing the worth of certain beings, particularly those in the “lower tiers” of the hierarchy. However, if one looks at the context of Augustine’s overall thought, one will see that the purpose of this hierarchy is not to degrade the worth of beings but to affirm their goodness. As was said above, Augustine believed in the natural goodness of all creatures. Aside from this, he also believed that creatures have value,

⁴⁸ *De civ. Dei*, 19.13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.16.

insofar as they contribute to the beauty of the universe. But, as was also mentioned above, creatures contribute to the overall beauty of the universe not by being all equally beautiful in the same respect. Rather, it is precisely by being different from each other, and yet still acting in harmony with each other, that creatures are able to make up the beautiful whole that is the universe—just like how the different parts of the human body are not uniformly alike, and yet by their very non-uniformity form the elegant whole which is the body. With regards to the beauty of the universe therefore, even the most insignificant, unseemly, and even harmful creature is a necessary contributor to it.

Augustine's idea of a hierarchy, then, far from being an instrument for the devaluation of creatures, is meant to convey the inherent worth that all creatures have as being part of a beautiful universe, which in turn is the manifestation of God's wisdom. The idea of the hierarchy also gives a sense of interconnection among all creatures since it implies that every creature ultimately has a place in the greater scheme of things. And as said above, this concept of hierarchy can strike a balance between the extremes of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. On the one hand, Augustine believes that human beings are at the top of this hierarchy of earthly creatures, and that means that human beings can legitimately use and consume animals and plants for their own benefit. Simultaneously, precisely by being part of this hierarchy of beings created by God,

animals and plants also have intrinsic goodness apart from the utility that human beings see in them. Therefore, it would also be an evil if human beings destroy animals and plants to the point of extinction. This would mar the beautiful order made by God, similar to what Augustine said above of how a body in losing its parts would be deprived of its beauty. Moreover, wantonly destroying non-human living beings would, as also mentioned above, betray a very narrow, anthropocentric view of the world. Finally, the desire of humans to annihilate entire species of animals simply because they are an inconvenience is, Augustine believes, likely brought about by passion instead of reason, which in turn is a deviation from rightly ordered love.⁵⁰ To this idea we turn to next.

On Rightly Ordered Love

According to Francisco Benzoni, Augustine understands love in two ways. Love can be understood as a tendency toward an object (desire) and the rest that results from attaining the object (joy).⁵¹ Understood this way, these two senses of love are just two distinct parts of the process of loving. For Augustine, this process of loving and the order of the universe are closely connected. This is because the

⁵⁰ *De civ. Dei*, 11.16.

⁵¹ Francisco Benzoni, “An Augustinian Understanding of Love in an Ecological Context,” *Quodlibet Journal* 6, no. 3 (2004), <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/benzoni-love.shtml>.

aforesaid order consists of the things of the universe tending towards their proper places, if not already resting in it. Thus, Augustine at times use the word love analogically to describe the movement of all kinds of beings toward their proper “niche” within the greater scheme of things. For example, in the *City of God*, Augustine says that animals love the “carnal life of the senses” which is their “sufficient good,” and that once they obtain this they would “seek nothing further.”⁵² Likewise, Augustine says that trees, although not having any consciousness, tend toward fruitfulness.⁵³ Finally, even lifeless things like “waves, winds or flames,” tend toward their proper places due to the gravity of their bodies.⁵⁴ For example, flames would go up because of their lightness, while water would go down because of its weight.

In following their proper “loves,” therefore, all things contribute to the order of the universe. Humans are no different, and their capacity for intellect and free will allow them to love in the full sense of choosing and desiring a good that is consciously apprehended. Now, Augustine believes that the primary good that man should tend towards is none other than God, the supreme good. However, since human beings have free will, they do not automatically tend towards their proper object of love like other earthly creatures do. Moreover, human beings often

⁵² *De civ. Dei*, 11.28.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

do not love God in the manner that they should, mainly due to the effect of original sin. According to Augustine, the first sin of Adam and Eve had two disastrous effects on the rest of the human race.⁵⁵ One is ignorance, or the lack of the intimate knowledge of God that the first couple enjoyed in the Garden of Eden. The second is the difficulty of human reason to control the baser appetites, leading humans to lust over created things. These two effects can be summed into only one: that human beings no longer love God above all things, but instead tend to love themselves most of all.

This disordered love in turn harms the order that exists in human beings themselves and the rest of creation. This disordered love disrupts the order of the human being because, as mentioned, it results in the loss of reason's power over the passions or lower appetites. But, aside from inflicting harm on the order of the human's soul, inordinate desire can also injure the order of the human body. It is a common notion, after all, that things often hurt people when acquired and used excessively. Augustine gives the example of food and drink, which although are necessary for the physical well-being of humans, can nevertheless harm them when taken immoderately.⁵⁶ Finally, besides inflicting damage to the order of their own selves, humans also

⁵⁵ William E. Mann, "Augustine on evil and original sin," in *Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. Eleonore Stump and Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 47.

⁵⁶ *De civ. Dei*, 11.22.

damage the order of the external world because of their immoderate desires. This is what Augustine means when he says that the desire of human beings to extinguish species of animals is due more to their passions than their reason. That is to say, it is due to the irrational drive to convenience themselves that human beings are led to the extreme of wishing, and indeed acting out, the extinction of entire species.

It is because of these undesirable consequences of inordinate love that the idea of rightly ordered love becomes vital. To clarify, for Augustine, loving God above all things does not mean that one should not love creatures. Rather, it means that love of creatures should never be in the same degree of love for God. More specifically, a person should love creatures ultimately out of love for God, so that one's love for creatures must always be such that it aligns with one's love for God. Thus, one should not commit sin against God for the sake of loving a creature. For example, my love for my friend does not mean that I cooperate with him in murder. Similarly, my love for food should not lead me to gluttony. In other words, rightly ordered love entails that in all my relationships with creatures, I should take care not to damage the most important relationship which is that between God and me. And indeed, it is precisely by preserving my primary relationship with God that I also ensure that the relationships I have with other creatures are

correct, and that, consequently, I do not disturb the order of the world through inordinate desires.

Now I believe that Augustine's philosophy of rightly ordered love can play a significant role in a worldview for sustainability, because it shows a way of remedying the disordered attachments to things that people have, which often lead to excessive material consumption and unsustainable living. As Benzoni says, in our increasingly materialistic culture, people often define themselves in terms of material possessions.⁵⁷ The solution for this, then, is that people should learn to love material goods in a non-absolute way, just as how Augustine's rightly ordered love entails loving creatures non-absolutely. This means that material goods are not supposed to be the ultimate object of love but, rather, they are supposed to be objects of love that are subordinated and referred to a higher principle. For Augustine, this higher principle, is of course God, and his philosophy of rightly ordered love would never allow it to be otherwise. Hence, similar to Augustine's idea of grace, I do not think that Augustine's original philosophy of *ordo amoris* can be integrated in a contemporary worldview for sustainability.

However, I believe that there is still a possibility to reconcile Augustine's philosophy of rightly ordered love

⁵⁷ Benzoni, "Augustinian Understanding of Love," <http://www.quodlibet.net/articles/benzoni-love.shtml>.

with the goal of sustainability. This is because Augustine does provide another principle or object of love that, although subordinate to God, is still something he considers most important for earthly life. Moreover, this object can be made as a goal by a person, whether or not she believes in something like Augustine's God. This object is what he calls "temporal peace."

On Temporal Peace

To explain what temporal peace is, it would be good to first explore Augustine's understanding of peace itself. In the *City of God*, Augustine defines peace as "the calm that comes from order."⁵⁸ This means that peace is what results when the order in the universe is realized, which in turn occurs when things move towards and finally rest in their proper places. Analogically, peace can refer to the purposes or ends of these very movements. For example, when it comes to living things such as animals, Augustine says that self-preservation and propagation of their species is their peace.⁵⁹ With regards to human beings, Augustine believes that their ultimate peace is eternal life with God. However, although Augustine acknowledges that life in heaven is where man will achieve his true peace, he also admits that in this mortal life there is a kind of peace that is still worth

⁵⁸ *De civ. Dei*, 19.13.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

striving for, namely, the peace of human societies on earth.⁶⁰ This “temporal peace” consists of an “ordered harmony of authority and obedience between citizens”⁶¹ through which these citizens attain for themselves the material goods necessary for mortal existence.⁶² These goods include those needed for the preservation of “health, security, and human fellowship” such as “air to breath, water to drink, everything that goes to feed, clothe, cure, and beautify the body.”⁶³ From this definition, it can easily be understood why Augustine thinks that those who have God as their highest goal should still exert effort in promoting this temporal peace. This is because having the necessary amount of material goods for physical living is a general condition for being able to live virtuously.

Temporal peace then is the fulfillment of a “purely human life”—a life which does not take into account the supernatural and highest end of man, which is eternal life with God.⁶⁴ Although Augustine does not believe that this earthly peace is man’s highest good, he considers it of enough significance that he expects both the people who have a rightly ordered love and those who have a disordered love, to work together in establishing it. As he says in the

⁶⁰ Donald Burt, *Friendship & Society: An Introduction to Augustine’s Practical Philosophy* (Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 1999), 172–173.

⁶¹ *De civ. Dei*, 19.13.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 19.17.

⁶³ Both quotations cited are from *Ibid.*, 19.13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.17.

City of God, “For as mortal life is the same for all, there ought to be common cause between the two cities [that is to say between the people who have rightly ordered love and disordered love] in what concerns our purely human living.”⁶⁵ This idea that temporal peace is such a significant goal that even people aiming for different ultimate ends should work together to achieve it, is something which I believe can make temporal peace an appropriate goal of a worldview for sustainable living. This I will explore in the next section below where I shall attempt to utilize the concepts of Augustine that I have discussed to draw a rough sketch of, precisely, this aforesaid worldview.

An Augustinian-Inspired Worldview for Sustainable Living

To begin this application of Augustine’s philosophy to a worldview of sustainable living, I would first like to expand the scope of temporal peace from Augustine’s original interpretation. If temporal peace should be the aim of sustainable living and development, then this peace should be enlarged to include the world beyond human civilization, namely, that of nature and the environment. Specifically, I suggest that the scope of temporal peace should encompass the biosphere of the earth itself. In any case, this modification is pretty much in line with Augustine’s thought. If peace for Augustine is the state where all things

⁶⁵ *De civ. Dei*, 19.17.

rest in their proper niche in the universe, it would indeed seem appropriate if temporal peace includes not merely human civilization but the natural world beyond it. Also, if Augustine believes that the universe is a whole that depends upon its parts, then taking care of only one of its parts, namely human civilization, will not result in its peace. Now, as said above, the idea of temporal peace being the highest goal for human beings cannot be reconciled with Augustine's original understanding of rightly ordered love wherein God is precisely the ultimate goal. However, as also mentioned above, when it comes to "purely human living," Augustine does consider temporal peace to be the primary goal. Now a worldview for sustainability is arguably one that is confined to this purely human living since it does not concern itself with the supernatural or other-worldly ends that human beings might have. Therefore, it would not seem inappropriate to posit temporal peace as the highest goal for this worldview.

Thus, in my sketch of a worldview for sustainability, temporal peace, understood as the goal of maintaining the integrity of the earth's biosphere, would serve as the highest goal. And as long as we precisely keep in mind the qualification that this worldview is only concerned with the purely human life, then even those who believe in a greater goal for human beings beyond this life should generally not find anything objectionable with such a worldview—much like Augustine himself, who saw no incongruence between

striving for temporal peace on the one hand, and loving God above all things on the other.

What then would be the more specific implications of this worldview? For one, such a worldview would entail that the desire that people have for creatures, whether plants, animals, or fellow human beings, should ultimately be referred back to their love of the continuous existence and “peace” of the biosphere. In other words, people’s love for other creatures and even for themselves should not threaten to disturb or damage the biosphere as a whole. To give a concrete example, let us say that I am walking through a nature reserve and am currently enjoying what I am experiencing. As I take pleasure in the pleasant milieu, I am careful not to litter carelessly even though it might be more convenient for me to just throw my trash in some obscure place in the park than finding a garbage bin which might be far off. And this is because I have the desire not simply to enjoy the nature reserve but to preserve it because it is ultimately part of the biosphere. Moreover, I am aware that, in taking care of the biosphere through this action of maintaining the cleanliness of the nature reserve, I would also ultimately contribute to the general well-being of all living creatures in the planet.

Now perhaps a less easy example is when it comes to consuming animals or plants. It might not be that self-evident as to how a person still primarily values preserving the biosphere if he is engaging in the activity of eating other

life forms. Nevertheless, I also believe that desiring the good of the biosphere is possible even when one is consuming plants and animals. As said above, Augustine believed that the peace of animals is in their continuing survival and propagation. If that is the case, then as long as a person is careful that she is not consuming animals in such a way that she is contributing to drastic reduction of their species, then she can still consume or use such animals without going against temporal peace. The same principle can be applied to plant species, and I believe even to the inanimate physical world. Inanimate resources of nature, such as water, should be used but not to the point of reducing the amount in a manner that proves detrimental to the environment. To be sure though, the worldview that I am sketching out will still follow Augustine's belief that humans are the most valuable of earthly creatures. Considering the preservation of the biosphere as the highest goal does not mean compromising human worth, but it simply means that human beings should not love themselves to the point that they are endangering the totality of beings on the earth by substantially reducing or even extinguishing species of living beings. It is this excessive destruction of species and natural resources that is more likely the effect of disordered love and the disturber of the biosphere's order.

Perhaps borrowing from Augustine's metaphor of the body would help clarify my point more. It is no great harm for the human body to lose certain parts such as hair, nails,

skin, or baby teeth. The reason for this is because these parts grow back anyway, and sometimes it is even in line with the body's natural growth for these parts to be removed. What is however often considered a substantial harm to the body is that if it loses a part which cannot grow back, and if such loss is not part of its natural growth; for example, if a certain limb is maimed. It is arguably this kind of loss which Augustine considers as that which mars the general beauty of the body. Applying this metaphor to the biosphere, it might be said that it is no great harm to the biosphere if certain life forms are consumed as long as the rate of consumption is such that it allows the regeneration of the species of these life forms. Moreover, it is part of the nature of the biosphere that life forms consume each other. However, the consumption of living creatures at a rate which does not allow them to regenerate their population, and thus a consumption that can be generally considered unnatural, can be understood as that which truly mars the beauty and peace of the biosphere.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to show how the resources of Saint Augustine's philosophy can serve as material for sketching a basic worldview that can promote sustainable living, which in turn is urgently needed in these times. In doing this, I hope not only to point out the perennial value of the Saint's thought, but also the possibility for those who work for sustainable development

to look for resources in the wisdom of past thinkers who may initially seem remote to their concerns. It might just be these thinkers who have the answers to what they are looking for.

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