

# The structure of dialogue in Augustine's corpus and its role in a democratic society<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the structure and role of dialogical discourse in Augustine's earlier dialogues *viz.*, *De Magistro* and *Soliloquies*. The two dialogues connote empirical and metaphysical relationships that serve as practical and speculative pathways to discovering one's true self in a democratic society. Furthermore, the pedagogical value of examining one's mindsets is a precedent for exploring alternative ways of imagining and expressing democracy. For this reason, dialogue was the dominant genre in Augustine's corpus and played an important role in liberating his mind. Moreover, Augustine structured his dialogues three-fold: (1) self-refutation, (2) Socratic questioning, and (3) metaphysical intervention. By actively critiquing himself, Augustine also structures the whole human reality and its dependence on divine grace. The results of this study indicate the importance of dialogue in the development of sustainable democratic societies. In developing a hypothesis, the study also drew from contemporary scholarship on dialogue as a discourse.

## Contribution

This study contributes to the ongoing debate on democracy and freedom. Through Augustine's dialogues, this paper offers an alternative perspective on rational inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge in a democratic society through his notion of inner dialogue. It further presents the historical framework of democracy on the Platonist notion of the Philosopher King in contrast to Augustine's "City of God". By establishing a basic principle

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of what makes us free, we can transform our behaviour to achieve a balance between spiritual and earthly pursuits.

### Keywords

*Democracy; dialogue; Socratic Method; self-examination; De Magistro; Soliloquies*

## Introduction

Augustine's Cassiciacum dialogues are a continuation of Plato's dialogues with rationality where Socrates meticulously examines perennial philosophical questions through collaborative inquiry. The structure of the dialogues builds the foundational cognitive skills that are essential for self-examination and thought-provoking interaction between people as sovereign authority. For Augustine though, sovereign authority was a notion he understood on an idealistic supposition and averred for divine authority instead. In this regard, Augustine exhibited more Platonism than Plato as he averred that the "City of God" is immutable and thus the only noteworthy sovereignty to be concerned with.

His negative existential posture<sup>2</sup> was because of his past life where he struggled with sin. Therefore, argued that sovereign authority cannot be found on anything that reflects lesser ontology. Moreover, his idealistic worldview posits that all material objects are secondary to abstract concepts. In his *City of God*, he argued that the "City of Man" was established for the glorification of self rather than for God.

Thus, in his early dialogues, he demonstrated the inability of human reason to achieve true emancipation without the aid of divine intervention. Moreover, these dialogues foreshadow his political philosophy in his *City of God*, in which he contrasts the infallible authority of the "City of God" to the questionable authority of the "City of Man". Thus, his *City of God* is a continuation of his earlier dialogues that structured his faith and political thought.

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2 A view interpreted as Augustine's political philosophy by scholars such as Hannah Arendt and R.A. Markus

The context of his political philosophy should moreover be interpreted through his systematic thought on anthropology and original sin. As a Christian Platonist, Augustine's corpus sought to shed light on various existential and metaphysical topics like the role of the empire in political and divine procession. According to Markus (1988:72), Augustine's thoughts about the Roman Empire were a result of a debate among the Christians on the role of the Empire in divine plan and salvation. The other was his self-refutation on what his theology implied. He went on to explain that:

When we come to enquire into Augustine's own "political theory" we are faced with ... difficulty. There are certainly elements of reflection on political theory to be found in his writings, but his explicit remarks in this area constitute no clear body of "political thought" (p.73).

Augustine considered a collective and personal phenomenological praxis as the basis for his political assertion. He, however, emphasised the Scriptures as authoritative on matters of morality and sovereignty. For instance, in his debate with the Manichaean bishop, Faustus, Augustine insisted on *Sola Scriptura* which later influenced the Reformation movement of the 16th century.

In contrast to Augustine, Plato's dialogues offer a valuable lens for examining contemporary global challenges, such as democracy and politics. In his *Republic*, he explores the deep-rooted nature of anthropology and politics which had a profound impact on Western thought and culture. Fundamental to his philosophy was a concept that influenced Augustine of self-examination as an inward process of self-refutation and self-discovery. The Platonists posit that through self-examination and self-refutation, self-discovery is possible, and this process is essential to a true democracy that is structured on continuous dialogue.

Similarly, Augustine in his philosophical dialogues adopted Plato's approach to epistemology when he argued for his inner-man concept. According to Stock (2010:4), Augustine contrasts between exterior and inner dialogue to emphasise his attitude towards his philosophy of language found in *De Magistro*. Moreover, *De Magistro* is arguably influenced by Plato's dialogue

*Meno* where learning is merely the soul's recollection of truths it already possesses (85d4 and 85d6).

Nevertheless, he established a logical framework for discussing epistemic praxis for his fellow colleagues like Deogratias in his treatise on *Instructing Beginners in Faith*. Thus, the link between self-refutation, Socratic questioning, and divine intervention is first and foremost because of his lived experience. His earlier struggle with sexual desire convinced him of man's inherent sinful nature. As a result, he developed a systematic theology constituted around sin. These reflections on anthropology and original sin continue to be problematic in our contemporary democracies.

Therefore, the self-refutation and Socratic questioning nature of his dialogues were meant to invoke higher consciousness in the process of learning. Dialogue for Augustine is the holistic approach to learning and well-functioning of free humans in any democratic society. Unlike Socrates and Plato though, discerning what his actual views on democracy remained a subject of speculation. His political views are scattered all over his corpus<sup>3</sup> where he addresses existential topics such as responsible citizenship, the relationship between the church and state, religious coercion, and just war and peace.

Therefore, by examining the affiliation of Augustine's structure of dialogue to that of the Platonist rhetorical tradition, I hope moreover to bring into greater relief the role of dialogue in the process of re-shaping modern democracy that is based on authority and rational thought. Moreover, I shall offer a critical review of Mpfu-Walsh's book *Democracy & Delusion: 10 Myths of South African Democracy* through Plato's criticism of democracy.

## The delusions of democracy

According to Van Beek in *Democracy Delivered* (issue 15, 15 May 2024), by the end of 2024, almost half of the population in more than 60 countries will have voted for their new political leadership. Thus, the notion of democracy seems to be at work. However, does democratic South Africa have a good

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3 Especially in his Letters and Sermons. Augustine however did not write a systematic document on his political philosophy.

story to tell after 30 years of democracy? According to Mpfu-Walsh (2017), the ANC party had in 2014 election year campaigned on the slogan, “We have a good story to tell”. He argues such a slogan was misleading based on the living conditions of the majority of South Africans. “Beyond the slogans, who can say they have seen progress with their own eyes? Who can point to the material changes in people’s lives that are sustainable and secure? “(p.12).

When the same economic conditions of poverty, inequality, and unemployment are examined 10 years later, the same challenges remain. What then can we say constitutes democracy? Is it freedom of speech minus economic freedom? Is it free education minus quality of life? Mpfu-Walsh examines the role of the ruling elites in upholding democratic values and the need to revisit and reinterpret democracy more authentically.

South Africa as a democracy can be classified not only as a tale of two cities but as a cautionary tale. Cautionary in the sense that Mpfu-Walsh (2017) points to the structure of power that is disguised as “liberation”, “non-racialism”, and “prosperity”, but only serves the interests of the few elites (p. iv). While there are general liberties in the constitution of the country, Mpfu-Walsh argues that there has been too much use of meaningless definitions of “progress” that don’t focus on tangible change (p. 1). The economic gap between the poor and the rich is the obvious example of a failed democracy that on paper advocates for a better life for all. The crisis of democracy, however, is not limited only to South Africa and can be traced as far back as Athens.

Likewise, Socrates in his criticism of democracy points to the inherent ignorance of the people and the rulers. He argued that, if most of the people have a low level of consciousness that limits them to unpalatable behaviours, they simply cannot do better. This according to Augustine simply highlights the nature of man as a fallen being. It is on this grounds that Socrates advocated for self-examination as a way of life. He understood the importance of human reason as the instrument for true freedom.

The freedom of our modern democracy in contrast does not require any type of examination. In my mind, this is the inverse of democracy at least as a concept. By virtue of citizenship, one qualifies to vote for whoever into power regardless of the characteristics endeavoured in a democratic

society. Socrates was opposed to such an idea and believed that only those with a deep understanding of political issues should be allowed to vote.

During the time of Socrates and Plato (427-347 BCE), Athens was a democratic state, a state that encouraged dialogue among its citizens. However, both were known for their criticism of Athenian democracy. Thus, Plato, in his corpus adopted a non-deterministic position that sees democracy as a stochastic system. In book 6 of *The Republic*, Socrates argued against democracy as the rule by the mob through the votes of the impressionable masses. He argued that democracy only functions well when the masses are well-informed (which is hardly the case in many democratic societies we can argue).

Through his criticism of democracy, Socrates emphasised the undesirable nature of majority rule by making several technical arguments by analogy from other skills such as sailing, and carpentry. Thus, his main criticism of democracy was the lack of expertise of the ruling class as constituted by the democratic society and the resulting disorganisation. Through its failure to procure stability and equality, democracy, therefore, defeats its mandate to empower the very people at the centre of a democratic society.

To give context, when Socrates criticised democracy, he was talking about direct democracy in contrast to our democracy that is characterised using representatives of the people, elected through elections, to govern on the people's behalf. Nonetheless, the idea of representation whether of art, music or politics was refuted as mimetic behaviour thus by nature not favourable in Plato's *Republic*.

## **The role and structure of dialogue in a democratic society**

Dialogue has always been an integral part of democracy and in turn democracy through dialogue shaped and gave rise to ancient civilisations. Around 5th century BC, the Athenians are thought to have developed the first democracy that can be characterised as direct democracy where the people themselves met to discuss questions of governance and implementation of policies. Thus, the link between democracy and dialogue remained strong, for as democracy expanded, dialogue as a programmatic

structure was central to dissolving polarisation by bringing people toward collective understanding and common solutions.

In the same vein, former President Thabo Mbeki called for an inclusive national dialogue on the state of the nation after 30 years of democratic rule. Such a call is vital for us to recognise that even though we might be experiencing political polarisation, the well-being of the state as an organ is something we all depend on. Thus, such a dialogue as a means for self-reflection and self-examination is now more than ever necessary. However, from a scholarly perspective, how can one structure such a dialogue to foster public discussion and interactive reasoning, which is integral to democratic rule?

According to Plato's *Republic*, such a dialogue should be structured on his philosophical concept of the Philosopher-King. Plato argued that a republic should only be led by a Philosopher-King with the wisdom to look after the needs of the masses. As an individual, the Philosopher-King is a ruler of oneself through constant self-examination. Thus, the character traits that define such a ruler are incorruptible and knowledgeable than most people. To reach this level of consciousness, the Platonist structured their dialogical discourse three-fold to address the following: (1) self-refutation, (2) Socratic questioning, and (3) metaphysical intervention.

Using dialogue, Socrates interprets and argues whether acting justly leads to a better life or success compared to acting unjustly. Socrates interprets his concept of the Philosopher-King and eudaimonia through virtuous acts and examines different conceptions of eudaimonia presented by Glaucon and Adeimantus. Moreover, he argues that democracy can be flawed when based on public opinion rather than rational understanding. He emphasised the importance of Philosopher-King as an ideal for making sound political decisions.

As a consensus, the Platonists recognised that dialogue requires perceptiveness, both in honesty and humility in recognising the truth in oneself and through self-refutation, an individual can develop a virtuous character through understanding one's limits and internalised prejudice. Thus, through constant self-refutation, one develops a remarkable way of understanding what it means to live well and by extension what it means to have a virtuous character. The ancient termed this way of life

the contemplative life – a process of trying to reach a state of eudaimonia through consciousness.

Regarding Augustine, in his personal development, he describes how he was providentially governed by divine grace. As a result, he understood that a contemplative life requires more than an active life in terms of studying and searching for truth. This ideal life of good citizenship was the objective of the curriculum in their schools. On this basis, dialogical discourse was for the ancients not only an activity but also a metaphysical and spiritual exercise.

Augustine recognised philosophical dialogues as a process of engaging the inner teacher, rather than simply debating different positions. As a Christian philosopher, Augustine used both textual intervention and spiritual meaning to come to truth in his political and theological thought. His political thought could be summarised as a relational ordering of all things with a priority of relation over substance; hence, he, promoted the notion of the “City of God” in place of a Philosopher-King.

## **Socratic Method in Augustine’s dialogues**

In this section, we will look at the influence of some of the ancient methodologies on Augustine’s pedagogy. Like Augustine, Socrates’ works (written by his student Plato) were composed in dialogue frame as more or less casual discussions between teacher and student welcoming more profound comprehension through carefully guided, driving questions. As part of this process, Socrates has developed three distinct, but also coherent methodologies known as (1) Elenchus, (2) Aporeia, and (3) Dialectic as a form of holistic pedagogy towards our didactic intent.

Elenchus which in Greek means repudiating or testing someone so that the initial claim needs correction or replacement was a method used by Socrates throughout his earlier dialogues. In retrospect, it could be argued this methodological approach became more prevalent than the other two. In his search for the wise man, Socrates repudiated or rather proved his ideological opponents wrong by applying a constructive analysis and open dialogue which led to a more in-depth inquiry.

In consequence, he not only amortised the claims of the so-called wise men of his time but proved to them the incoherence of their views. Socrates in his search for truth went about questioning every purported wise man not to infer Scepticism, but to prove that the wisest man is the one who does not claim to be wise -at least by perceptual knowledge. Through consistent probing and questioning, Socrates had realised that one becomes more critical and thus starts questioning ontology as it has been presented.

Inevitably, the supposedly wise man discovers the contradictions of his claims and epistemological approach. Socrates used this method during his trial in *The Apology* (24d-27e) when he counter-examined Meletus' inconsistent ideas about what constitutes the gods and what counts as corrupting youth. Similarly, in his other dialogue *Euthyphro*, he employs the same method to refute Euthyphro's religious claims to godliness (which is good because of the Divine Order of religious texts).

This refutation is known as the dilemma of Euthyphro and is the notion that morality comes from God. In the dialogue, Socrates questions the nature of the Divine Command Theory and wants to know if morality is good. After all, it comes from God or if God commands morality because it is good. Like any other paradox, such is a rhetorical exercise without a satisfactory answer. This dilemma makes morality arbitrary if it is something good because God commands it. This would later be a view taken by Augustine in formulating his Just War theory as he held that God could not be bound by morality.

Socrates intended, however, to point out the inconsistency of truth in Euthyphro's ideas. Remember that for Socrates, the wise man is the one who knows that he knows nothing. Thus, the aim of the Socratic Methods was to reassess the ontological knowledge given based on the discovery of Ideal Forms. In summary, Socrates demonstrated the weakness of adhering to a multiplicity of propositions since the "many" would ultimately imply opposite views. In many of his discussions, both with young men and the allegedly wise, Socrates seeks to know what some morally valuable property is. He, however, refrained from religious objectivism. Thus, in his early works written by Plato, Socrates does not profess anywhere that an adequate result has been established. Archie (2016:17) however, states that:

1) Socrates' intellectualism holds that virtue is the property of the intellect and that knowledge by itself motivates action.

2) Socrates' principle means of exercising his intellectualism, the elenchus, rarely changes the mind and often irritates the interlocutor because the elenchus' operating assumption is that only benefit can come from having an interlocutor give a rational account of his conduct and presumed knowledge.

In *Meno* and *De Magistro* respectively, the learner is perplexed (aporetic) and asks probing questions that lead them to profound and open-ended realities about all manner of forms. These profound realities, however, are not new but are due to a critical and inquiring spirit. Aporeia is, therefore, the first step to philosophy and when Socrates was accused of corrupting the youth, it was on the grounds of instilling such an inquisitive mindset that questioned the status quo of the day. Thus, at its core, the Elenchus Method through a standardised set of critical procedures can aid the liberation of any ignorant mind that perceives too much of itself.

Furthermore, according to Sahamid (2016):

A person who trains and disciplines his mind to think in a prescribed manner, consistently using the same set of procedures to guide that thinking, would be able to raise his standard of thinking. In the context of learning, this implies that students' critical thinking can be developed if teachers have the skill to conduct questioning and to ask appropriate questions. (p.62)

Greek philosophers attributed ignorance, like every other type of external alteration, as a form or state of imperfection. In the process, they have developed all sorts of dialogical disciplines as the escapism to such a desolate state. Moreover, such dialogical disciplines are supposed to contribute to the attainment of what we call progressive education that enables learners to become a better version of themselves.

However, as Socrates had already stressed, the use of progressive methods does not necessarily guarantee the attainment of the commonly professed objectives of progressive education. Dialectic method is nonetheless necessary as Plotinus in *The Six Enneads* (1.4.130) attests the following function to dialectics as one of the Socratic Method:

... it must be understood, not by seeming knowledge [“sense-knowledge”] but by authentic science. All this accomplished, it gives up its touring of the realm of sense and settles down in the Intellectual Kosmos and there plies its peculiar Act: it has abandoned all the realm of deceit and falsity, and pastures the Soul in the “Meadows of Truth”: it employs the Platonic division to the discernment of the Ideal-Forms, of the Authentic-Existence and the First-Kinds [or Categories of Being]: it establishes, in the light of Intellection, the unity there is in all that issues from these Firsts, until it has traversed the entire Intellectual Realm: then, resolving the unity into the particulars once more, it returns to the point from which it starts.

The above statement not only resonates with Augustine’s assertion but also influenced his pedagogy that infers that there is no better way to learn than by questioning and answering (*Soliloquies* 2.7.14). “Lord, let me know myself, let me know Thee,” laments Augustine in the *Soliloquies*. It can, therefore, be asserted that dialogue becomes dialectical when ideas or reasoning come into conflict with each other and more importantly, it judges both sides of an issue critically and abstractly.

For progressive education, this is by far the best method we could apply across humanities courses. That is why Socrates referred to dialectics as a critical analysis and philosophical method of formal research. In addition, according to Augustine, dialectic is a critical part of the Seven Liberal Arts and thus becomes the best teaching and learning method because of this dialogue between learner and teacher, which ultimately leads the learner to the inner teacher. The learner, in this context, indicates his or her consciousness of sin and its consequences, so he or she relies instead on the inner teacher.

In accord with both Socrates and Plotinus, the pedagogy of Augustine is concerned with the metaphysics viz., beyond matter, complete, immutable, and endless. Although Morahan (2001:5) is right to remind us that:

Another fundamental reason his [Augustine’s] writings continue to speak to us is that his thinking relates education to what it means to be human. Augustine does not offer us a simple recipe to follow but rather an approach. This approach is both less than and much more

than a simple set of instructions about what to do. His approach is based on the experience of ourselves as human beings “on the way”, i.e. people searching, seeking ultimately for God and an understanding of self.

It is, therefore, no surprise that dialectic is referred to as the “discipline of disciplines” precisely for its approach in unifying not only the liberal arts but also the Inner teacher and the overall learners’ experience. For this reason, the Socratic method of questioning has long been included in all faculties of the human sciences as a means of fostering critical thinking and achieving holistic goals.

In addition, as an educational approach based on dialogue, even modern scholars have presented this long after Socrates. Augustine, for his part, had developed an educational approach based on dialogue as a conceptual framework of divine knowledge but acknowledged the pedagogical superiority of Socratic dialogue. In *Confessions* (12.25.35), he indicates how the cognitive approach is necessary, but still a lacking premise in his theory of knowledge. He asks:

If both of us see that what you say is true and that what I say is true, then where I ask do we see this? I do not see it in you, nor you in me, but both of us see it in the immutable truth which is higher than our minds ... the light of the Lord our God.

The dialogue that takes place is the necessary catalyst to catapult knowledge. Augustine pays tribute to the Seven Liberal Arts especially the trivium as a necessary stage in this process of achieving knowledge. The central concept in the pedagogical model promoted by every critical thinker within and outside the classroom is a Socratic dialogue. This dialogue must be more than an exchange of ideas between all the participants and their immediate social realities. The emphasis should be on mutual respect, empathy, charity and equality for others.

With hindsight, dialogue is a holistic approach not just for education, but also for humanity itself. On the other hand, a teacher-centred pedagogy is criticised primarily for its unilateral and instructive intonation. Moreover, according to its antagonist such a discourse is inconsiderate of the learner as a thinker and a historical entity. The bottom line is that such an approach

to education is not holistic because it promotes a unique perspective and maintains the status quo. As a result, not only is it alienating, but it is also dehumanising culturally, socially, and economically.

Augustine likewise in many of his writings suggested that the main purpose of education goes beyond vocational and ethical training to spiritual enlightenment and dialogue is not an adventitious theme but an integral part of this *nisus*. In this context, Augustine made a strong connection between education (liberal arts) and spirituality. He maintains that education through dialogue must eventually lead to God's participation in the world. This is in connection to his inner teacher concept that urges us to move beyond cognition and empirical praxis and drives us to the perennial attempt of reason to discover the secrets of creation and our primary human purpose.

### **The structure of *De Magistro* as a framework for transformative leadership**

Kenyon (2012) excludes *De Magistro* in his reading of Augustine's dialogues as relevant to contemporary philosophical debates. He regards *De Magistro* as lacking in literary form and methodological praxis. However, in *De Magistro*, Augustine considers a theoretical framework for transformative leadership based on the overlapping Christological praxis of self-emptying and divine intervention of Christ in the process of learning. Consequently, Augustine mimics Christ as a model in his leadership role.

Moreover, he advocates Christ as the only true teacher and regards himself as a fellow learner in the process. He asserts that the human teacher can only guide and inspire his fellow learners because real learning happens within oneself.

In *De Magistro*, Augustine opens the dialogue with his son Adeodatus with this question: What is the purpose of speech? And he answers it by saying that we speak to teach something of value. Thus, speech is assigned to purpose in Augustine's pedagogy. This is particularly relevant since the end purpose of leadership is to guide communication. In explaining his reasoning on the subject, Augustine starts by highlighting the inadequacies

of language as a code system that transfers a set of data. The need for divine intervention stems from his distrust of the human senses.

Through dialogue, his teacher role was not to teach but to initiate inquiry into a specified subject and direct Adeodatus' cognition to within himself. From this dialogical discourse, Augustine developed his divine pedagogy that is learner-centred based on self-refutation of both Augustine and Adeodatus. He employs sceptical arguments to structure philosophical inquiry that ultimately leads to transcendental truth. In the process he explores the role of memory in rational thinking and the limits of cognitive functions.

Moreover, every time Adeodatus (learner) agrees with Augustine (external teacher), is a demonstration of the Logos (inward knowledge) divine intervention on the human cognition. Thus, Adeodatus' understanding comes because of a theological reflection of God's word through self-refutation and dialectic arguments. Augustine employs dialectical arguments to challenge the prevailing thoughts and facilitate critical decision-making much like Socrates. As a result, it leads to critical thinking, ethical reasoning, information fluency, quantitative literacy, collaborative work, written communication, and spoken communication.

According to Kenyon (2012):

Augustine's Cassiciacum dialogues ... pursue two streams of inquiry: one dialectical, and one self-reflexive. The first uses aporetic debates to identify problems with individuals' current beliefs. The second reflects on the act of debate as an instance of rational activity and through this draws attention to features of human rationality. The goal of all this is to change how the inquirer thinks about himself, to bring him to see some final theory as plausible. (p. iii)

This type of pedagogy is required to develop engaged and responsible citizens and can be broken down into inductive inferences which in a literal sense means, God's active Logos. Through these active Logos, we come to infer and understand truth that resides in God's mind. In essence, the Platonists incorporated self-refutation, Socratic questioning, and metaphysical intervention as a holistic approach to knowledge of self.

In his philosophical dialogues, Augustine understands leadership as a meta-theory in the process of realising human salvation. This can be argued through his epistemic praxis that encouraged transformative leadership. Thus, for Augustine, leadership is more than just a metaphysical assumption because the common denominator in every leadership role is how a leader communicates (dialogues) and relates to his or her subordinates (interrelationships). Through self-examination, Augustine sets lessons for effective communication and transformative leadership useful for liberating one's mind.

Based on his inner teacher and divine illumination theories, one may therefore, argue that *De Magistro* as a dialogical work may be interpreted and developed into a theoretical model for transformative leadership that imitates Christ as the inner teacher and kenotic leader. In *De Magistro*, Augustine's primary assertion was an ontological ordered structure and the correlation between the empirical (language as a sign system) and the metaphysical (uncreated light).

His theory of divine illumination which is the divine fulfilment of humanity is a correspondent of kenosis whereby Christ became man (through sacrificing his divine nature) for humanity to partake in his divine nature. In this light, dialogical discourse fundamentally enables learning. This method reveals Augustine's view that truth requires not just exchanging ideas or arguments but critically examining the foundations of our reasoning<sup>4</sup>. By focusing on the act of inquiry itself, Augustine offers a model for political dialogue that can serve the common good in a democratic society.

### ***Soliloquies* as a prayer for freedom**

The *Soliloquies* is a prayer of a newly converted Augustine; a prayer for freedom after examining his own heart's cogitation. He begins by examining himself from within to find out his real self, his best good, and the evil to be avoided (1.1). Thus, from the start, the *Soliloquies* are more than just self-refutation but an attempt to rediscover one's true self. His

systematic thought is a constant prayer to know God and himself. He sees God as the ultimate truth and wisdom, the source of all that is true, and the answer to our everyday questions.

In (1.2) he prays for freedom, “O God, Founder of the Universe, help me, that, first of all, I may pray aright: and next, that I may act as one worthy to be heard by Thee: and, finally, set me free”. In (2.1) he tells Reason that he desires to know God and the soul. Moreover, he desires to love rational souls, even those who disagree with him. In (3.8) Reason warns Augustine against arrogance in pursuit of knowledge.

Throughout his prayer, he exhibits a level of humility, desperation, and a deep thirst to be enlightened by God and experience his presence. The prayer reflects Augustine’s structure of dialogue and its role in developing Christian faith and freedom. Moreover, the intrapersonal dialogue prepares Augustine’s identity and his leadership role as a public servant.

As an epistemological praxis, *Soliloquies* help him to learn humility by taking the place of a pupil by relying on the inner teacher viz., Reason. This highlights the importance of narrative in defining the self in a spiritual context. Moreover, the inner dialogue according to Stock (2010) serves as a mechanism for Augustine to restructure his thoughts and beliefs. As a result, Augustine developed a deep understanding of personal identity as a spiritual and social being. This practice of self-reflection is essential for democracy and understanding the complexities of the common good in a community.

## Conclusion

This paper sought to elucidate some of the ways Augustine moved from phenomenology to metaphysics, to the “City of God” as the one true democracy. Through dialogue, Augustine recognized the beauty of democracy as manifested in his “City of God”. The approach of this research contrasted Plato’s and Augustine’s views on true philosophical progress, which requires not only exchanging ideas or arguments but also critically examining the foundations of our reasoning. Through this methodology, we can develop a framework for understanding the self-concerning the other in the process of democracy. Moreover, *De Magistro* and *Soliloquies*

exhibit the use of aporetic debates to identify problems with current beliefs. Thus, the structure of Augustine’s dialogues is crucial to our quest for combating the delusions of democracy as an interplay of narrative and linguistic expression within a framework of continual dialogue. Therefore, the role of dialogue in a democracy is an instance of rational activity that draws attention to features of human rationality. In conclusion, this paper aims to change how an inquirer thinks about himself or herself, in what Augustine calls the imperfect world.

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