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CHAPTER 3

Augustine

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The fate of St. Augustine in the world of political theology has been mixed. He is a thinker of great discursive power who favors powerful narration over deductive systematicity. What is "political" about his theology must, for the most part, be teased out. He never penned a specific treatise on the subject. Despite this, it is fair to say that more words have been spilled on figuring out what an Augustinian political theology is, or might be, than on the tomes of other, more explicit, political theologies. There are particular features to St. Augustine's work that make him a tough nut to crack. From the time of his conversion to Catholic Christianity in 386 to his death as Bishop of Hippo in 430, Augustine wrote some 117 books. He touches on all the central themes of Christian theology and Christian life: the nature of God and human persons, the problem of evil, free will and determinism, war and human aggression, the bases of social life and political order, church doctrine, Christian vocations: the list is nigh endless.

Although a number of his works follow an argumentative line in the manner most often favored by those who write political treatises, especially so given the distinctly juridical or legalistic cast of so much modern political theory and political theology, most often he paints bold strokes on a broad canvas. His enterprise is at once theological, philosophical, historical, cultural, and rhetorical. His works are characterized by an extraordinarily rich surface as well as vast depth, making it difficult to get a handle on if one's own purposes are not so ambitious. He traffics in what we generally call "universals," but he is also a nuanced "particularist" and historicist.

Given this towering enterprise it is, perhaps, unsurprising that attempts have been made to reduce Augustine to manageable size. To that end he has been tagged a political realist and canonized, if you will, as the theological grandfather of a school of thought called "Christian realism" but, as well, of a tradition that includes Machiavelli and Hobbes. For thinkers in the political realism camp, most of whom are not theological thinkers, Augustine, if he is read at all, is read primarily in and through excerpts from his great works that most favorably comport with this "political realism." To this end, his *Confessions* are ignored and book XIX

of his 1,091-page masterwork (in the Penguin Classics unabridged version), *The City of God*, is reproduced with certain bits highlighted. Perhaps also a chunk from book I, chapter I, on “the city of this world, a city which aims at dominion, which holds nations in enslavement, but is itself dominated by that very lust of domination” (Augustine 1972: 5). Book II, chapter 21, is helpful on Augustine’s alternative to Cicero’s judgment (according to Scipio) on the Roman commonwealth. Book XV, chapter I, traces lines of descent of the “two cities, speaking allegorically”; Book XIX, chapter 14, as already noted, is mined for a few precepts about the interests government should serve; chapter 15 makes an argument against slavery “by nature” and chapter 21, in which Scipio’s definition of a commonwealth as advanced by Cicero makes a second appearance, also seems pertinent. Chapter 7 of Book XIX is culled as the “justification of war” argument. Perhaps – just perhaps – excerpts are drawn from chapters 14, 15, and 16, in order to demonstrate Augustine’s insistence that there is a connection between the peace and good of the household in relation to the city. Take all these snippets, plus his scathing comment that what pirates do with one boat, Romans do with a navy, but the one is called brigandage while the other is named Empire, and the student has her quick intake of what I have called “Augustine Lite” (1996). The upshot is a diminished Augustine, numbered among the pessimists and charged with being one of those who stress human cruelty and violence with a concomitant need for order, coercion, punishment, and occasional war as the upshot.

Recognizing the inadequacy of this “normalized” Augustine doesn’t mean one has an easy task if one’s purpose is to be fair to Augustine’s complexity with the enterprise of political theology in mind, in part for the reasons noted above concerning Augustine’s way of writing and arguing. But even more pertinent is a political theologian’s sense of his or her task. If one construes that task, at least in part, as a way of putting together anthropological presuppositions (what those of us trained as political theorists called “theories of human nature,” at least until one dominant contemporary school of thought decided there was no such thing), claims about the political and social order in light of those presuppositions, the role of political theology in relation to these interrelated tasks, and the perils and possibilities inherent in any political activity or order, then Augustine’s expansiveness is a welcome thing indeed. If one’s aims are narrower or more modest, Augustine’s expansiveness is a frustration. I begin from the point of view that his expansiveness is welcome. What follows is a way of highlighting key points of theoretical demarcation in Augustine’s work that are rich with implications for political theology. I should make clear – as will be obvious to any reader of Augustine – that I can only scratch the surface of things in a single essay.

Augustine on the Self

In his wonderful biography of St. Augustine, the noted historian of the late antique world, Peter Brown, claims that Augustine has “come as near to us . . .

as the vast gulf that separates a modern man from the culture and religion of the later empire can allow” (1967: 181). *How so?* One reason, surely, lies in Augustine’s complex ruminations on the nature of selfhood. This is a theme close to our own preoccupations. Augustine, in fact, anticipates postmodern strategies in dethroning the Cartesian subject even before that subject got erected. For Augustine, the mind can never be transparent to itself; we are never wholly in control of our thoughts; our bodies are essential, not contingent, to who we are and how we think; and we know that we exist not because “I think, therefore I am,” but, rather, “I doubt, therefore I know I exist.” Only a subject who is a self that can reflect on its-self can doubt. His *Confessions* is a story of a human being who has become a question to himself (Augustine 1961).

Augustine begins the story with an infant – unlike so many who, over the years, begin with adults: in political theory the image of adults signing social contracts pertains, as if human beings sprang full-blown from the head of John Locke! Augustine, however, starts with natality and intimates a developmental account featuring a fragile, dependent creature who is by no means a *tabula rasa*, but, rather, a being at once social and “quarrelsome.” Each child enters a world whose Creator declared it good. Each child enters a world as the heir of Adam’s foundational sin. Each child, therefore, is in need of God’s grace and forgiveness. All human beings are driven by hunger and desire and experience frustration at their inability to express themselves fully and decisively, in a way that prompts others to respond, to be at one’s beck and call. Becoming an adult does not mean jettisoning such emotions – these are key ingredients of our natures and our ability to understand – but is, rather, about forming and shaping our passions in light of certain presuppositions about human beings, human willing, and our faltering attempts to will and to act rightly. Augustine’s awareness of the sheer messiness of human existence lies at the heart of the withering critical fire he directs at Stoic *apatheia*. For the mind to be in a state “in which the mind cannot be touched by any emotion whatsoever, who would not judge this insensitivity to be the worst of all moral defects?” (Augustine 1972: 565). We begin as, and we remain, beings who love, who yearn, who grieve, who experience frustration. The most important point here is Augustine’s insistence that thought can never be purged of the emotions, and that the thinking self expresses complex emotion through thought and in a language that is, hopefully, up to the task.

This leads directly to Augustine on language and the constraints imposed on us by language. *As par excellence* the language users among God’s creatures, we bump up all the time against opacity and constraint. In Book XIX, chapter 7, Augustine muses about the ways in which humans are divided by linguistic differences. These differences make it very hard for us to understand one another.

The diversity of languages separates man from man. For if two men meet and are forced by some compelling reason not to pass on but to stay in company, then if neither knows the other’s language, it is easier for dumb animals, even of different kinds, to associate together than these men, although both are human beings. For when men cannot communicate their thoughts to each other, simply because

of difference of language, all the similarity of their common human nature is of no avail to unite them in fellowship. So true is this that a man would be more cheerful with his dog for company than with a foreigner. I shall be told that the Imperial City has been at pains to impose on conquered peoples not only her yoke but her language also, as a bond of peace and fellowship, so that there should be no lack of interpreters but even a profusion of them. True; but think of the cost of this achievement! Consider the scale of those wars, with all the slaughter of human beings, all the human blood that was shed. (Augustine 1972: 861)

Here Augustine moves from the murkiness of language, how it divides us despite our common human nature, to the imposition of a language on diverse peoples but at a truly terrible price. We find, then, a drawing together of notions of human nature, language and its centrality in constituting us as living creatures; the complexity of a search for fellowship; and a pithy critique of the enforced homogeneity of empire. Augustine's powerful theological anthropology compels attention to the ways in which human beings, created in God's image, communicate. Unsurprisingly, given original sin, language necessarily reflects our division – the ways in which the self is riven by sin; the ways in which human societies, too, bear the stain of sin and sinfulness. Human beings can achieve only what Augustine calls "creature's knowledge." Full knowledge is not available to human knowers, no matter how brilliant and learned they may be. We are both limited and enabled by the conventions of language. No one can jump out of his or her linguistic skin. We are obliged to bow to "normal usage" if we hope to communicate at all, and we are driven to communicate by our sociality, a sociality that goes all the way down. This sociality lies at the basis of Augustine on the nature of human societies.

Augustine on Social Life

Human beings are, I noted above, social all the way down. Created in the image of God, we are defined by human relationality. The self is not and cannot be free-standing. Social life is full of ills and yet to be cherished. Thus, civic life, among those social forms, is not simply what sin has brought into the world but what emerges, in part, given our capacity for love and our use of reason, as well (alas) as a pervasive lust for domination attendant upon human affairs. "The philosophers hold the view that the life of the wise man should be social, and in this we support them heartily." Indeed, the city of God – Augustine's way of characterizing the pilgrim band of Christians during their earthly sojourn in and through a community of reconciliation and fellowship that presages the heavenly kingdom – could never have had "its first start . . . if the life of the saints were not social" (Augustine 1972: 860). All human beings, without exception, are citizens of the earthly kingdom – the city of Man – and even in this fallen condition there is a kind of "natural likeness" that forges bonds between us. These "bonds of peace" do not suffice to prevent wars, dissensions, cruelty, and misery

of all kinds, but we are nonetheless called to membership based on a naturalistic sociality and basic morality available to all rational creatures. A kind of unity in plurality pushes toward harmony; but the sin of division – with its origins in pride and willfulness – drives us apart.

Yet it is love of friendship that lies at the root of what might be called Augustine's "practical philosophy": his history, ethics, social and political theology (Burt 1999). Pinioned between alienation and affection, human beings – those "cracked pots" – are caught in the tragedy of alienation but glued by love. Our sociality is given, so for Augustine the question is not "Should we be social?" or "Should we trust enough to love?" but rather "What shall I love and how shall I love it?" (Burt 1999: 5) His complex ethical theory follows; I can only touch on it here, but it must be noted that political life is one form that human social and ethical life assumes. We are always in society and we always seek the consolation of others. Society, for Augustine, is a species of friendship, and friendship is a moral union in and through which human beings strive for a shared good. All of Augustine's central categories, including war and peace, are in the form of a relation of one sort or another. And the more we are united at all levels in a bond of peace, the closer we come to achieving that good at which we aim and which God intends.

For Augustine, neighborliness and reciprocity emerge from ties that bind, beginning with familial bonds and extending from these particular relations outward: the filaments of affection must not stop at the portal to the *domus*. Augustine writes: "The aim was that one man should not combine many relationships in his one self, but that those connections should be separated and spread among individuals, and that in this way they should help to bind social life more effectively by involving in their plurality a plurality of persons" (1972: 623). The social tie is "not confined to a small group" but extends "more widely to a large number with the multiplying links of kinship" (p. 624). The importance of plurality, of the many emerging from a unique one – for God began with the singular – cannot be overestimated in Augustine's work. It is his way of putting into a single frame human uniqueness and individuality with sociality and plurality. Bonds of affection tied human beings from the start. Bonds of kinship and affection bound them further. These relationships got dispersed, finally encompassing the entire globe.

In light of the confusion and confounding of human languages, it is sometimes difficult to repair to this fundamental sociality; but we yearn for it and seek it in and through the social forms we create: thus civic order becomes a primary requisite for human existence. This civic order is a normative good although, *pace* Aristotle, civic order, or what we routinely call "the state," does not fulfill or complete our natures; rather, it expresses them and may do so in ways deadly or ways less cruel. Here it is important to note that, for Augustine, no human being has natural dominion over any other. There is no slavery by nature. We are by nature social, but that doesn't dictate any particular form of social order. Nor does Augustine analogize from the authority of fathers in households to political rule. Classical patriarchal theory holds that rule by fathers is at once natural and

political; that a natural right translates into political authority and legitimation. But for Augustine, political authority is different from familial authority. To the extent that one is subject to a ruler, one is subject to him in status only and not by nature.

There are temporal goods that are worthy, peace first and foremost. So human civic life is not simply a remedy for sin – with order and coercion needed to constrain our wickedness – but an expression of our sociality; our desire for fellowship; our capacity for a diffuse *caritas*. It follows that Cicero's definition of a *res publica*, as refracted through the writings of Scipio, is wanting. For Cicero, civic order is an association based on common agreement concerning right and on shared interests. Insufficient, argues Augustine; rather, a people gathered together in a civic order is a gathering or multitude of rational beings united in fellowship by sharing a common love of the same things. Using this definition, we not only define what a society is, we can also assess what it is people hold dear – what *sort* of society is *this*? It is worth noting at this juncture that a debate in current Augustinian scholarship concerns precisely how one should rank the good of political society for Augustine. The traditional, and overly simple, claim that, for Augustine, civic order is simply a remedy for sin has been effectively challenged (Burt 1999). Now the question seems to be just how important to Augustine's thought overall is the good at which civic life tends, and how much this derives from and can be achieved through the exercise of human voluntary activity. The dangers inherent in earthly political life are manifest: the fruits of pride that seeks domination over others and glories only in the self or the "empire." The goods to be attained through civic life are sketchier, but begin with Augustine's basic rule of thumb for human earthly life: namely, that we should do no harm and help whenever we can (a requisite of neighbor love).

If language divides us, then, it can also draw us together insofar as we acknowledge a common humanity. Augustine's critique of the political life of the late Roman Empire was not so much an assault on the edifice of any ordering of corporate life, but based rather on the failure of that public life ever to attain a genuine *res publica*. This, at least, is an argument made by Rowan Williams. A commonwealth is an identifiable social unit. But beyond this obvious fact, how do we distinguish a polity in which the disorder of dominance by the *libido dominandi* pertains from one in which a well-ordered social life pertains – a world in which ordinary peace (*tranquillitas ordinis*) permits the moral formation of citizens in households and in commonwealths to go forward (Williams 1987: 55–72)? A true form of corporate life is "purposive," Williams argues, "existing so as to nurture a particular kind of human life: in both [family and polis], authority is determined in relation to a specific goal" (p. 64).

There are authentic political values, those of civic order, fairness, and the safeguarding of soulcraft: all under God's providence and dauntingly complex for Christians, that pilgrim people, who by definition cannot simply absorb and reflect the norms and understanding of what is worthy that pertain in the surroundings in which they find themselves outside of the body of Christ, the *ecclesia*. Christians are not to hunker down in the church, but to approach the world

with a loving worldliness, born out of a recognition of the world's many goodnesses and blessings, and the responsibility of human beings to honor and to sustain those goodnesses as best they can in and through those social institutions they create to sustain human life.

Pace many criticisms of Augustine that charge him with having replaced a public ethic with a "private" and apolitical ethic of *caritas*, Williams insists, correctly, that

Augustine's condemnation of "public" life in the classical world is, consistently, that it is not public enough, that it is incapable of grounding a stable sense of commonality because of its pervasive implicit elitism, its divisiveness, its lack of a common human project; and . . . that the member of the city of God is committed *ex professo* to exercising power when called upon to do so, and, in responding to such a call, does not move from a "church" to a "state" sphere of activity, but continues in the practice of nurturing souls already learned in more limited settings. (1987: 68)

It is the interplay of *caritas* and *cupiditas* that is critical, and whether one or the other prevails at a given point in time, either within the very being of a single person or within the life of a civic order. Augustine would tame the occasions for the reign of *cupiditas* and the activation of the *libido dominandi*, or lust to dominate, and maximize the space within which *caritas* operates. For a lust to dominate taints and perverts all human relations, from family to city. Similarly, a decent love, a concern for the well-being of all in the household or in the city, strengthens the delicate filaments of peace. The sin that mars the earthly city is the story of arbitrary power or the ever-present possibility of such. By contrast, the basis for a more just order is fueled by love. The theme of the two cities is the metaphor that enables Augustine to trace the choreography of human relations. Every human community is plagued by a "poverty stricken kind of power . . . a kind of scramble . . . for lost dominions and . . . honors," but there are simultaneously present the life-forgiving and gentler aspects of loving concern, mutuality, domestic and civic peace (Augustine 1972: 429). There are two fundamentally different attitudes evinced within human social life and enacted by human beings. One attitude is a powerful feeling of the fullness of life. A human being will not be denuded if he or she gives, or makes a gift of, the self to others. One's dependence on others is not a diminution but an enrichment of the self. The other attitude springs from cramped and cribbed selfishness, resentment, a penury of spirit. The way one reaches out or down to others from these different attitudes is strikingly distinct. From a spirit of resentment and contempt, one condescends toward the other; one is hostile to life itself. But from that fellow feeling in our hearts for the misery of others, we come to their help by coming together with them. Authentic compassion (the working-out of *caritas*) eradicates contempt and distance. But this working out can never achieve anything like perfection in the realm of earthly time and history (the *saeculum*).

The Two Cities

In his book *Saeculum* (1970), widely acknowledged as one of the most important attempts to unpack Augustine and to situate him as civic and political theorist, Robert Markus argues that Augustine aimed to achieve a number of complex things with his characterization of the two cities. One was to sort out the story of all earthly cities. Augustine, he argues, provides an account of the earthly city (*civitas terrena*) from Assyria through Rome, and shows the ways in which even the cherished goal of peace all too often ends in conquest and domination, hence no real peace at all. The fullness of peace is reserved for the heavenly city (*civitas dei*) and its eternal peace. In this way Augustine creates barriers to the absolutizing and sacralizing of any political arrangement. His repudiation of the theology underwriting the notion of an *imperium Christianum* lies in part in his worry that any identification of the city of God with an earthly order invites sacralization of human arrangements and a dangerous idolatry. At the same time, earthly institutions have a real claim on us, and our membership in a polity is not reducible to misery and punishment. Augustine begins with a presumption of the priority of peace over war, and he repudiates all stories of mythical human beginnings that presume disorder and war as our primordial condition. The earthly city derives from our turning away from love and its source (God) toward willfulness and a "poverty stricken kind of power." Because earthly *potestas* is tied to the temptations inherent in that form of power we call *dominion*, there can be no such thing as an earthly sacral society or state.

Augustine begins his unpacking of "the origins and ends of the two cities" in *The City of God*, part II, book XI. The poverty stricken kind of power is here referenced and human beings are likened to the fallen angels who have turned away from God. In book XII Augustine continues the theme of "turning away," tying the two cities to ordered or disordered wills and desires. With book XIV we get the disobedience of the first man leading not to death everlasting, as would have been the case without God's grace, but to division – within the self, between self and other, between nations and cultures. Whatever the culture or nation, none is whole unto himself or itself, complete and perfect; each is marked by the divisions Augustine here calls "the standard of the flesh" by contrast to "the standard of the spirit" (1972: 547). This is not a screed against the body but against the abuse of the body under the rule of the flesh.

With book XV he writes of "two classes" or "two cities, speaking allegorically": a warning to any who would conflate specific earthly configurations with his dominant metaphor. It is an allegorical representation of a great mystery. The clean and the unclean come together within the framework of the church, within the boundaries of human communities (1972: 648). But the city of God is turned toward God's will, with which it hopes to be in accord; the city of man is constructed and run according to man's standards and designs. Given that there is a "darkness that attends the life of human society," few should sit comfortably on "the judge's bench," but sit there the judge must, "for the claims of

human society constrain him and draw him to this duty; and it is unthinkable to him that he should shirk it" (p. 860).

One must not shirk worldly responsibilities, because temporal peace is a good, whether it is the peace of the body, or fellowship with one's own kind, or the provision made for food and clothing and care. Amid the shadows that hover over and among us, there are, as already noted, two rules within our reach and that we should follow: "first, to do no harm to anyone, and, secondly, to help everyone whenever possible" (1972: 873). The most just human civic arrangements are those that afford the widest scope to non-harm-doing and to fellowship and mutuality. If mutuality, even of the earthly imperfect sort, is to be attained, there must be a compromise between human wills and the earthly city must find a way to forge bonds of peace. This she finds very difficult by definition, given the distortions of the lust to dominate.

By contrast, the heavenly city on earthly pilgrimage is better able to forge peace by calling out "citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages." She – the *civitas dei* – does this not by annulling or abolishing earthly differences but even through maintaining them so "long as God can be worshipped" (1972: 878). The life of the saint, the life of the citizen, is a social life. There must be a balance in our attention to earthly affairs; thus a person ought not "to be so leisured as to take no thought in that leisure for the interest of his neighbor, nor so active as to feel no need for the contemplation of God." If we are to "promote the well-being of common people," we must love God and love our neighbor and the one helps to underscore and to animate the other (p. 880). In his reconsideration of book XIX of Augustine's masterwork, Oliver O'Donovan argues that Augustine reformulated

something like the traditional concept of society and morality in new terms which would give due recognition both to the reality of the moral order which makes social existence possible and to its fundamentally flawed character. Augustine embarks on a radical, but not revolutionary policy of characterising all politics in terms of moral *disorder*, which itself provides an explanation of their political *order*, since, in Augustine's firmly Platonic view, disorder is nothing but a failure in the underlying moral order . . . A vice, in other words, is a perversion of *virtue*; it is a *disorder* which is predatory on some *order*. (O'Donovan 1987: 102)

Refusing to grant a free-standing originary status to disorder or to sin is not only one way Augustine argued against the Manicheans; it remains a radically provocative account that bears profound political implications for our understanding of political evil and evil-doers, a theme I consider in the concluding section below (Elshtain 1995).

Here it is important to note that whatever Augustine's acquiescence in the received social arrangements of his time, he left as a permanent legacy a condemnation of that lust for dominion that distorts the human personality, marriage, the family, and all other human social relations, including civic life and membership. Augustine is scathing in his denunciation of arrogant pridefulness; unstinting in his praise of the works of service, neighborliness, and a love that

simultaneously judges and succors (judges because we must distinguish good from evil, selfishness from kindness, and so on). Love and justice are intertwined, on earth and in heaven. Yet the world is filled with horrors, including war. How does Augustine square his regretful justification of a certain sort of war with his call to love and peace? It is to this theme that I now turn.

Augustine on War and Peace

A full treatment of this theme would require an assessment of Augustine's complex theodicy. That is beyond the scope of this essay. But a brief discussion is needed in order to grasp Augustine's theology of war and peace. Augustine acknowledges the seductive allure of evil. He famously tells the story of a youthful prank – stealing pears – that was done not from hunger but from pleasure in the deed itself and in the fellowship with others who took part in the deed. It took Augustine many years, including a sustained detour through Manicheanism, before he rejected decisively metaphysical dualism and repudiated any claim that evil is a self-sustaining, generative principle of opposition to good. The Manicheans had located evil in creation itself as the work of a demonic demiurge; thus the body was tainted by definition. But, for Augustine, creation is good. The body is good, not polluted. It is what we do with the body; what we do to creation, that either marks our bodies with the stain of sin, wickedness, and cruelty or does not, at any given point in time. Augustine's famous articulation of human free will enters at this juncture – a concept Hannah Arendt credits with being an original contribution by Augustine. We can choose to do wrong and we often do, for we are marked from the beginning with the trace of originary disobedience. The choice of evil is in and of itself “an impressive proof that the *nature* is good” (Augustine 1972: 448).

Evil is a falling away from the good, and we are the agents of this falling away – not because the body is corrupt, but because we can defile it. There is no such thing as evil “by nature.” Evil is the turning of a limited creature from God to himself and, hence, to an absolutizing of his own flawed will. This turning may become habitual, a kind of second nature. In this way, Augustine gives evil its due without giving it the day. Evil is the name we give to a class of acts and putative motives. The fruits of this turning away include a hatred of finitude and a fateful thirst for what might be called a kind of anticreation: a lust to destroy. War is a species of that destruction; hence, war is always a tragedy even “when just.” But if war is first and foremost an example of human sinfulness and a turning from the good, how can it possibly be justified under any circumstances?

It works like this. Augustine begins by deconstructing the Roman peace as a false claim to peace. Instead, Rome conquered and was herself conquered by her own lust to dominate over others. “Think of all the battles fought, all the blood that was poured out, so that almost all the nations of Italy, by whose help the Roman Empire wielded that overwhelming power, should be subjugated as if

they were barbarous savages” (Augustine 1972: 127). Rome was driven by a lust for vengeance and cruelty and these impulses triumphed under the cherished name of peace. The Empire became a kingdom without justice, its rulers little more than a criminal gang on a grand scale. Here Augustine famously repeats the story of the rejoinder given by a captured pirate to Alexander the Great when Alexander queried him about his idea in infesting the sea. “And the pirate answered, with uninhibited insolence, ‘The same as yours, in infesting the earth! But because I do it with a tiny craft, I’m called a pirate; because you have a mighty navy, you’re called an emperor’” (Augustine 1972: 139). Augustine even suggests that the Romans should have erected a monument to the foreign “other” and called her “Aliena” because they made such good use of her by proclaiming that all their wars were defensive; it was, therefore, necessary to conjure up an implacable foreign foe in order to justify these ravages. For Rome, peace became just another name for *dominium*. If war's ravages are, in part, a punishment for sin, human beings sin, often savagely, in enacting that punishment. Primarily, however, Augustine emphasizes the freely chosen nature of war and assigns responsibility to those who engage in it.

If you reflect on the terrible slaughter of war carried out for wicked motives and to unworthy ends, you will determine to wage only limited, justifiable wars even as you lament the fact that they must sometimes be waged, given injustice; so Augustine argues. There are occasional real wars of defense. The wise ruler and polity takes up arms only with great reluctance and penitence. Given Augustine's account of limited justifiability for wars fought only for certain motives, he is frequently lodged as the grandfather of “just war” thinking. (Others, of course, rank him as a forebear of political realism. There is no reason he cannot be both, depending on what one understands by realism and just war respectively.) Augustine appreciates what modern international relations theorists call the “security dilemma.” People never possess a kingdom

so securely as not to fear subjugation by their enemies; in fact, such is the instability of human affairs that no people has ever been allowed such a degree of tranquillity as to remove all dread of hostile attacks on their life in this world. That place which is promised as a dwelling of such peace and security is eternal, and is reserved for eternal beings, in “the mother, the Jerusalem which is free.” (Augustine 1972: 743–4)

One must simply live with this shadow, a penumbra of fear and worry, on this earth. But one must not give oneself over to it, not without overweening justification. When one capitulates to this fear, one gets horrible wars of destruction, including social and civic wars. And each war invites another, given the mimetic quality of instantiations of destruction. Each war breeds discontents and resentments that invite a tendency to even the score.

By contrast, the just ruler wages a justifiable war of necessity, whether against unwarranted aggression and attack or to rescue the innocent from certain destruction. The motivation must be neighbor love and a desire for a more authentic peace. This is a grudging endorsement of a lesser evil; war is never

named as a normative good, only as a tragic necessity. It must be noted that rescuing the self alone is not a justification for violence: better to suffer wrong than to commit it. But our sociality imbeds certain requirements of neighbor love, most powerfully and poignantly so in the case of the ruler, who bears the responsibility for the well-being of a people. It is, then, through our intrinsic sociality, and under the requirement to do no harm and help whenever one can, that war is occasionally justifiable. Augustine's reasoning here falls within the domain of accounts of comparative justice, and his argument, which is not a fully fleshed out systematic theory of war so much as a theological account of war, involves the occasional violation of a fundamental principle – do not kill unjustly, or murder – in the name of an overriding good.

It is important to observe that a close reading of Augustine's account shows that one must lament even justifiable wars and reflect on them, not with vain-glory, but with great sorrow. Not to look back with grief marks one as pitiable and contemptible. There are no victory parades in Augustine's world; for, however just the cause, war stirs up temptations to ravish and to devour, often in order to ensure peace. Just war, for Augustine, is a cautionary tale, not an incautious and reckless call to arms. For peace is a great good, so good that "no word ever falls more gratefully upon the ear, nothing is desired with greater longing, in fact, nothing better can be found." Peace is "delightful" and "dear to the heart of all mankind" (1972: 866).

Augustine Concluded

The vast mountain of Augustinian scholarship keeps growing. It long ago surpassed a book version of Mt. Everest, so much so that no single scholar or group of scholars could master it all. This is true of Augustine's work alone. Peter Brown claims that Isidore of Seville once "wrote that if anyone told you he had read all the works of Augustine, he was a liar" (Brown 1972: 311). One always has the sense with Augustine that one has but scratched the surface. Indeed, his works have not yet been translated entirely into English. That project is now underway, and there are some 17 volumes of his homilies alone that have made their way into translation. Much of the new scholarship on Augustine remarks, often with a sense of critical wonderment, on just how "contemporary" he is given the collapse of political utopianism, by which I mean attempts to order political and social life under an overarching *Weltanschauung* that begins, as any such attempt must, with a flawed anthropology about human malleability and even perfectibility. We recognize, looking back, the mounds of bodies on which so many political projects rest, including the creation of the nation-state system we took for granted for over three centuries and now observe to be fraying around the edges.

The teleology of historic progress is no longer believable, although a version of it is still touted by voluptuaries of techno-progress or genetic engineering that

may yet "perfect" the human race. The presumably solid underpinnings of the self gave way in the twentieth century under the onslaught of Nietzsche and Freud. Cultural anthropology taught lessons of cultural contingencies. Contemporary students of rhetoric have rediscovered the importance and vitality of rhetoric and the ways in which all of our political and social life and thought must be cast in available rhetorical forms.

None of this would have surprised Augustine. What would sadden him is the human propensity to substitute one extreme for another: for example, a too thoroughgoing account of disembodied reason gives way to a too thoroughgoing account of reason's demise. Importantly, one must rescue Augustine from those who would appropriate him to a version of political limits or "realism" that downplays his insistence on the great virtue of hope and the call to enact projects of *caritas*. That does not mean he should be called to service on behalf of "markets and democracy." It does mean he can never be enlisted on behalf of the depredators of humankind.

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