Introduction

James Wetzel

> *In this world, the two cities are indeed entangled and mingled with one another; and they will remain so until the last judgment shall separate them.*
>
> – *civ. Dei* 1.35

In his *Retractations* (*retr.* 2.43.2; cf. *ep.* 1A*.1), Augustine suggests that there are basically two ways, not in his mind opposed, of reading *City of God*: as a defense of Christianity's superiority over paganism, and as a treatise on the two cities – one that "most glorious" city (*civ. Dei* pref.) of which the Psalmist sings (Ps. 87:3), the other the heavenly city's earthly antithesis. The latter Augustine mostly refers to as the "earthly city" (*terrena civitas*), but he also calls the city "diabolical" (*diaboli*), "demon-revering" (*daemonicola*), "death-bound" (*mortalium*), "ungodly" (*impia*), and "of the age" (*huius saeculi*).[1]

The more damning designations are reminders that the earthly city has its roots in hell, where fallen angels, having become demons, are doomed to reside. Members of the earthly city bind themselves through sin to a demonic love – a profound, soul-defining love, but a love so thoroughly perverted that it has become both impossible to satisfy and an endless source of suffering. Meanwhile, members of the heavenly city on earth, who through grace are being made fit company for angels, endure the purgation that rids their love of its demonic propensities. They are part of a city on pilgrimage (*peregrinatur in mundo*; *civ. Dei* 1.35). Having to share an earthly politics with their dispirited alter-egos is undoubtedly part of their spiritual adventure. But Augustine realizes that it is far from a simple matter to translate the messy antipathies of historical beings into an antithesis between two, all-encompassing cities, each defined by an unseen end, that of heaven or hell. In *City of God*, pagan Rome and the earthly city keep close company, but for the most part Augustine keeps them conceptually

[1] See Van Oort 1990: 116, 130 for references and further elaboration.

distinct. Analogously, Christian Rome and the heavenly city on pilgrimage have close ties, but they are not identical. For while it is inconceivable to Augustine that redemption would come to human beings other than through Christ, he does not assume that church membership is enough; there are some who take the sacraments without benefit (*civ. Dei* 1.35).

The first ten books of *City of God* most naturally read as Augustine's critique of classically Roman paganism. It divides into two parts: a critique of pagan claims that the gods provide happiness to those who revere them (Books 1–5), and a critique of pagan claims that the gods do so, not necessarily in this life, but certainly in the life to come (Books 6–10). This lengthy polemic, which he began writing in 413 and finished by 417, didn't just come out of the blue.[2] In August of 410 the Visigoths under the command of Alaric pillaged and bloodied the city of Rome for three long days, sending shaken refugees to places like Roman North Africa, where their presence fueled old order resentment over 'Christian times' (*tempora Christiana*).[3] Augustine tells us that he felt compelled to answer the complaints of pagan sophisticates who were missing their gods and blaspheming against "the true God" (*deum verum*) more than usual (*retr.* 2.43.1).

Ten books of relentless assault against the worship of false gods certainly sets up an ample stage for reintroducing true worship and its benefits. And indeed Augustine does say that the next twelve books of *City of God*, written over a markedly longer stretch of time, 417 to 426, can be read as his positive case for the Christian religion. But they can also be read, he adds, as a tripartite treatise on the two cities: four books on their respective origins, four books on their joint concourse through history, and four books on their ultimate – and radically divergent – ends.

It is hardly surprising, given the firmness of Augustine's belief in the superiority of the Christian faith over rival pieties, that he would have failed to make much of the difference between a positive apologetic and a meditation on the two cities. But, to be frank, if there were not much of a difference, if the two-cities meditation were more of a rhetorical flourish than a substantive transformation of apologetic discourse, then *City of God* would be a long footnote in the history of religious chauvinism and not the work of abiding fascination that it is and deserves to be. As a work of Christian apologetics, *City of God* is quick to turn an antiquated paganism into the standard-bearer of a

[2] For the composition history of *City of God*, see O'Daly 1999a: 27–36.

[3] The phrase connotes the ascendency of the Christian religion to imperial favor, particularly under the emperor Theodosius (d. 395), whose favoritism included a campaign against the old paganism. Augustine's sense of the providential value of this ascendency will have changed significantly by the time he begins writing *City of God*. See Markus 1988: 22–44.

debased desire – a "lust for mastery" (*libido dominandi*; *civ. Dei* pref.) – and to grant Christians living in a Christian empire the benefit of their professed humility. As a reflection on the two cities, *City of God* acknowledges an eschatological gap between Christians and their virtues, one that leaves Christ alone the master of humility. His students will have to relearn humility in all the contexts where worldly necessities and spiritual imperatives have yet to be sorted out. And perhaps needn't be: Augustine contends that the two cities, while remaining antithetical in their ultimate aims, both value earthly peace in the interim – no civil war, no domestic violence, public civility, a common and orderly use of temporal goods (*civ. Dei* 19.17; cf. 19.14).

The two-cities framework presses the question of the secular upon Augustine's Christian apologetic. If Christians do not fully own their virtues, nor pagans their vices, then what would it mean for them, in the time before their self-formations fix, to mingle? Partly it means that it is possible for a pagan to convert to Christianity and for a Christian, living in a once pagan empire, to revert to the old reverences. But when set within the two-cities framework, conversion and reversion mask a more basic rigidity of identity: the pagan who converts never was not a member of the heavenly city on pilgrimage, bound for life in the celestial city; the Christian who reverts never was not a member of the earthly city, doomed, despite the occasional show of virtue, to sink into an untenable love. The implications of this extraordinary framing are, to say the least, far from obvious.

It is tempting for a modern reader of *City of God*, especially a liberally inclined one, to downplay Augustine's association of a pagan form of reverence with a demonic perversion and leave the alternative to Christianity less tendentiously described.[4] In that way the eschatological framing lends itself to a more neutral conception of the secular: where no one knows the ultimate disposition of souls, it is possible for religious rivals to put aside disputes over ultimates and concentrate on basics – the terms for peaceful co-existence within a worldly order of finite goods (the earthly city, but here no longer demonized). This is the line interpretation advanced by Robert Markus, whose pivotal study of the two-cities framework shaped more than four decades of *City of God* debate.[5] Markus

[4] For Augustine, paganism and Judaism are Christianity's primary rivals (leaving aside the issue of competing versions of Christianity). His attitude towards Judaism differs markedly from his stance against paganism. He is far less tempted either to demonize or to evangelize the Jews. The story of Augustine's relation to Judaism is in Fredriksen 2008.

[5] Markus 1970; rev. ed. 1988. Markus revisits his reading of Augustine in his Blessed Pope John XXIII lectures on the Christian roots of secularism. To my mind, his reading remains fundamentally the same. See Markus 2006; cf. Wetzel 2007.

reads Augustine as having founded his theology of the *saeculum*, of worldliness, on the indiscernibility of the two cities in historical time. The result, Markus contends, is a secularization of political life that requires, even if it does not outrightly announce, "a pluralistic, religiously neutral civil community."[6]

The readings of Augustine in this volume, all of which touch upon the complexity of the two-cities distinction, are in significant ways post Markus. I mean by this basically two things. The dominant critical response to Markus has been to accept his emphasis on eschatology but veer from his insistence on the historical invisibility of the two cities.[7] Pagan Rome may not be identical to the debased earthly city, but surely for Augustine it can be seen to be closer to that city than, for all its imperfections, the Roman Church is? Given the influence of Markus and the tradition of critique that his reading of Augustine has inspired, it is very hard to write about *City of God* from within Augustinian studies and make Augustine out to be either some Eusebian-style theocrat, ready to bless a Christian empire, or a post Vatican II Catholic liberal, ready to celebrate the diversity of faiths. But if Augustine's thinking does not obviously incline him towards either option, how does he think about the intersection between temporary and ultimate realities?

This brings me to the other, broader way in which the essays in this volume are post Markus. *Saeculum* came out in 1970, a boon time for religious liberalism. In the decades to follow, the book would fascinate largely due to its stunning suggestion that secular liberalism, with its dream of an urbane and cosmopolitan peace, could take its inspiration from a religiously conservative source, from the doctor of sin and grace himself. But now that we are well into the second decade of the fractious twenty-first century, with its resurgent fundamentalisms, it seems increasingly unlikely that secular liberalism will find within itself the conceptual resources for framing and really illuminating the global debate over religion. The Augustine of most interest to our cultural moment is the one who weds his philosophical ambitions to his cultic identity, but without entirely conflating the two. This Augustine, if we can find him, may give us some reason to think that a religious philosophy is something other than an impossible compromise between a skeptical liberalism and a dogmatic faith.

[6] Markus 1988: 173.
[7] I think especially of Williams 1987, Milbank 1990 (rev. ed. 2006), O'Donovan 2004, and Dodaro 2004.

I am not claiming that the contributors to this volume would frame the cultural moment the way that I do, or even that they have a similar view of Augustinian studies and of the influence that Markus has had on readings of *City of God*. What I am willing to claim is that it is no accident that the most fruitful new forays into that massive text tend not to read a neutral secularity into the space of the "mingled cities" (*permixtae civitates*; *civ. Dei* 1.35). Nor do they adopt a secularity of this sort into their respective analytical perspectives. The historians of this volume are too historicist to favor the (modernist) imposition; the theologians and the philosophers, who are often also the historians, favor a more fluid, less fixed engagement between reason and faith. They collectively give us a *City of God* with the potential to reshape a philosophical landscape.

I turn now to a synopsis of the individual offerings.

The volume begins with Mark Vessey's essay, "The history of the book." Take that reference to "the book" in at least two ways. Vessey means to refer, unsurprisingly, to *City of God*, but he embeds that reference within a nod to the readerly technology that *City of God* so effectively exploits. The literary high culture of Virgil's day stored its poems, oratory, and historical writings on scrolls; the papyrus or parchment codex, the ancestral form of the book (pages bound between two covers), became widely available in imperial times. Christian writers, unconcerned with culturally pagan precedent, readily used the codex for their most cherished literary productions. The codex, more than the scroll, is a technology that facilitates synopsis – a view of the whole set within the compass of readily surveyable parts or, in this case, pages. For most of his essay, Vessey works to give us some sense of the synoptic ambitions of *City of God*. It is a book that attempts to situate all of human history within a Christian reading of the Bible (yet another meaning of "the book"), and it offers to its non-Christian readers especially terms for rendering themselves foreign to their own self-descriptions. Vessey calls *City of God* "Augustine's greatest work of writerly and 'bookish' coercion."

The next two essays, by Paul Griffiths and Peter Kaufman respectively, are the ones that deal most directly with the problematic of history. Augustine endorses a thickly providential reading of history in *City of God*, but he also claims that no one, not even a bona fide heavenly pilgrim on earth, is able to read divine purposes off historical events. With providence being so hidden, how are we not consigned in practice to an unstable order of agonistically imposed human purposes, the world of a God-vacated secularity?

In "Secularity and the *saeculum*," Griffiths works methodically to differentiate Augustine's use of the Latin term "*saeculum*" from the meaning of the etymologically related English term "secular." His ultimate aim is to assess whether an Augustinian secularity, properly delineated, has any normative purchase on the modern conception. He proceeds on the assumption that Markus exaggerates the difference between the eschatological and the empirical, turning a distinction into a disparity. To a significant degree, it is possible for the faithful to detect and convey the signs of a divinely governed order, but only if they look through the lens of the Biblical witness and only if they have learned to use the language of this witness within a properly liturgical context. The Augustine that Griffiths uncovers has predictably little to say to secularists still intent on secular fundamentalism, but perhaps quite a bit to those who can see in religious integrity something other than a political threat or a philosophical non-starter.

Now turning to Kaufman: in "Augustine's dystopia," he entertains the idea that the earthly city – or what he punningly calls, "the city of gaud" – is dystopian. There is a long tradition of darkly pessimistic readings of *City of God*, where Augustine is made out to be a world-blackener, a preacher of life's unrelenting miseries. In the midst of such a dystopia, all hope is insignificant – there is literally no sign of it. Kaufman's reading of *City of God* is a corrective to the pessimistic tradition, as well as to its kissing cousin, the tradition of "things are not so bad" optimism. Both traditions bring too limited a conception of dystopia to the table. To call a society "dystopian" is not necessarily to claim that it has realized its worst possibilities of chaos and oppression; the adjective can also be applied, notes Kaufman, to societies that are perpetually on the verge of becoming hells. Kaufman charts with great care Augustine's sense of the limits of Christian politics. What is the best that the Church can do for the World? Not bring it closer to heaven, for it has always been too late for that, but perhaps keep it another day from hell, the one it is so intent on becoming. That may seem to describe a dystopian scenario, in the extended sense of dystopia, but Kaufman ends his essay with a provocative suggestion: that the *City of God* itself, in its insistence on two divergently oriented cities, has become the greatest consolation of all – the one in regard to which none of the others matter. For the dystopian coincidence of the two cities on earth is also, in the framework of Augustine's eschatology, the symbolism of human redemption.

The next two essays, by Margaret R. Miles and John Cavadini respectively, take up the question of the good of the body, or more precisely, the value of an incarnate life. If there is serious doubt about the possibility of history

being an arena in which irreducibly particular agents labor for their share in the good that is greater, perhaps infinitely so, than themselves, then the question of whether it is good for me to have my particular body and history, or you yours, is sure to follow. As theologians, Miles and Cavadini share the same sense of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection: that it is an affirmation not just of bodily life in general, but also of the irreducible goodness of all the particular bodily lives that have been. Augustine has a reputation both for disdaining the life of the body, particularly in its sexual expression, and for idealizing, à la Platonism, the life of the disembodied soul. We get quite a different Augustine from Miles and Cavadini.

In "From rape to resurrection," Miles proposes to treat *City of God* as a history of bodies – suffering, sexual, gloried – and not simply a compendium of ideas, and she underscores the striking and rather surprising attention that Augustine devotes to the female body. Her main contention is that the female body functions in *City of God* as "the normative body." In its dramatic transfiguration from object of use to object of "useless" but still fully female beauty, it best discloses the meaning of pilgrimage.

In "Ideology and solidarity in Augustine's *City of God*," Cavadini explores the critical edge of Augustine's incarnational ethic and theology. Philosophers who see nothing of wonder or beauty in the linking of soul to body are, for Augustine, more than just aesthetically impaired; the ones who belittle that linkage and elevate the life of the soul to some vacant and immobile abstraction are not just making an intellectual mistake. To ignore or deny the value of an incarnation – God's or anyone else's – is to invite the reduction of the body, and the life conjoined it, to an object of exploitation. Empires typically exploit embodied subjects and their abilities for the glory of empire. Cavadini argues that Platonists in *City of God* come off as ideologues of Empire, not because they are overt apologists, but because their disincarnate spirituality leaves the field wide open for exploitive conceptions of an embodied life. He also develops Augustine's notion of solidarity, the contrast to ideology, based on what Augustine has to say about the quality of the bonds in the pilgrim city. (It is ironic that only the city whose love is on the move is solid.)

The next three essays are centrally concerned with Augustine's critique of pagan (heroic) virtue and classical conceptions of the good life. In *City of God* 19.25, Augustine condemns as vices virtues that lack appropriate reference to God; that leaves condemned, by his previous reckoning, every school of philosophy that could have come out of a pagan animus (and apparently there are 288 of them; *civ. Dei* 19.1). *City of God* 19.25 has been a *locus classicus* for scholars looking to authenticate the break between

classicism and Christianity and Augustine's role in bringing that break about. The great temptation, when filling out the picture, has been to downplay the two-cities framework of Augustine's critique and interpret that chapter's reference to God as an invocation of supernatural power. Pagans, having false or non-existent gods, or better, gods that never enter into their ethical theories, get to be the naturalists; that leaves Augustine to call upon higher power. But Augustine does not vilify pagan Roman virtue for its lack of power; he can admire, to a point, the extraordinary courage of a Regulus (*civ. Dei* 1.15); he worries more about misconception, or virtue that proves to have its origins, all theatrics to the contrary aside, in self-love. His pagan philosophers are certainly not the only exponents of earthly city wisdom, but they are dangerously good at making it seem noble, and even self-sacrificing. Once their self-deception is exposed, Augustine can more properly address the fraught issue of divine power: the only access to it is through humility, and humility is the form, as well as the prerequisite, of whatever power is received.

In "The theater of the virtues," Jennifer Herdt links Augustine's critique of pagan virtue to his critique of pagan worship, and she reminds us that, for Augustine, worship always draws deeply from the power of spectacle. Think of Dido weeping over Aeneas, who has left her for good, much against his private desires, in order to fight battles, serve the gods, and found a new city. It is not obvious that all the dramas that feed the piously pagan imagination are at bottom exultations of self over God. Herdt affirms what is usually claimed about Augustine's critique – that it is "fundamentally a critique of pride" – but she sees Augustine's alternative to pride not as willful self-abasement but as openness to the true spectacle of humility: God in the flesh and on a cross. As that is an openness that already requires humility, it is not a power that can be cultivated. The conceptual summit of pagan virtue, which remains, at heart, a cultivation of personal power, is virtue that is pursued for its own sake and not for love of praise or glory. For Herdt's Augustine, this is virtue that is still caught up in the spectacle of a self curved in on itself (*curvatus in se*) and averting divine compassion.

In an essay that pairs well with Herdt's, Sarah Byers offers a close reading of *City of God* 9.5, where Augustine faults Stoics for failing to find the virtue in compassion (*misericordia*). He has been in the previous chapter musing on the small drama that Aulus Gellius recounts in *Attic Nights* (*civ. Dei* 9.4; cf. *NA* 19.1): "a distinguished Stoic philosopher" pales and shudders when the ship he is aboard seems about to go down in a storm; when the storm subsides, "a wealthy and pleasure-loving Asiatic" teases him for not being very Stoic; the philosopher repays his critic with ridicule in kind, but then

goes on to explain to Aulus Gellius why involuntary responses to a fearful situation are, in a wise man, no indications of real fear. Augustine is less preoccupied with the plausibility of the proffered explanation than he is struck by the Stoic's hard-heartedness (*civ. Dei* 9.5): "But how much more honorable it would have been if the Stoic in Aulus Gellius's story had been disturbed by compassion for a fellow man, in order comfort him, rather than by fear of shipwreck." In his more developed critique, not just of one Stoic, but of Stoicism itself, Augustine does not content himself with a rant against cold and unfeeling self-control. As Byers is careful to argue, Augustine never confuses the Stoic ideal of *apatheia* – freedom from passion – with a total shutdown of affective receptivity. His critique of Stoic lack of compassion is both particular and subtle, and, as Byers sets it out, it rests on two key assertions. First, in wishing not to be grieved by the suffering of those who suffer from real evils, the Stoics are unreasonably privileging their own virtues (they are curving in on themselves); by their own lights they should simply be valuing virtue. Second, their privatization of virtue, having no clearly Stoic motive, speaks to their unacknowledged fear of having to feel the pain of another's pain (in this they are closet Epicureans). The philosopher who emerges from Augustine's critique is not dead to compassion, but subconsciously is trying to be.

It is hard not to get the impression, given his sweeping critique of philosophical ethics in *City of God* 19, that Augustine thinks of pagan luminaries as ideologists of the earthly city. They may not be charter members of that city, and yet they all seem to be finding subtle and interesting ways of promoting its campaign of self-love. But consider that, for Augustine, this is a campaign to promote not just any kind of self-love, but a boundlessly self-aggrandizing form, really a kind of madness. The ancient schools were hardly calling for that, certainly not explicitly. Their predominant ethical paradigm was eudaimonist. As an ethical paradigm, eudaimonism is self-regarding but not narrowly egoistic. I can be a eudaimonist and still consistently act out of concern for the well-being of others, albeit on this proviso: that another person's well-being be either a means to my own or an actual constituent of it.

In his essay, "Augustine's rejection of eudaimonism," Nicholas Wolterstorff calls this "the agent-wellbeing proviso." The proviso admits of different elaborations – e.g., Stoic, Peripatetic – but it is basic to eudaimonism. Most interpreters of Augustine have assumed that when he is criticizing pagan eudaimonists for failing to refer their virtues to God, he is criticizing them for their lack of piety and not for their eudaimonism. Theirs is an Augustine who holds fast to the possibility of a *Christian*

eudaimonism and indeed is himself a Christian eudaimonist. Wolterstorff makes a strong case for thinking that the real Augustine breaks with eudaimonism. It is a break that begins to appear in the 390s, especially with the *Confessions*, and is on full display in *City of God*. If Wolterstorff is right, then the eudaimonist philosophies that come under assault in Book 19 are not halfway houses between debased self-love and Christian temperance; they are, for Augustine, formulas for evading compassion, and followed diligently they will drive love mad. There simply is no eudaimonist way to love God "to the point of self-contempt" (*usque ad contemptum sui*; *civ. Dei* 14.28).

The next two essays are closely related in theme and point of view. They are both concerned with, and are troubled by, Augustine's metaphysics of the will. On the face of it, Augustine looks to be a libertarian (the metaphysical kind). Consider Adam in the garden, faced with a fateful choice: obey God, or join the woman. To keep things simple, let's just stipulate that choosing to obey is good; choosing not to obey not so good. "Libertarian" Adam chooses to disobey, but being free, he might have chosen otherwise. Because he retains the ability not to sin while sinning (*posse non peccare*), Adam is, by Augustine's reckoning, justly liable to be punished. The same logic applies to those strange angels who tire of divine light and freely choose to embrace (or create) an inner darkness within themselves; they are culpable for their demonization. But now add two complications. Augustine apparently thinks it possible for "libertarian" freedom to be lost. For unless they are given the appropriate grace, Adam's heirs, all born into sin, make Adam's choice. They choose something over God; they are not, Augustine insists, able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*). Demons have it even worse. There is no grace for them. They have no further possibility of not choosing their darkness. So complication one: it is possible to sin but not be free not to sin. What about redemption? Augustine does not claim that divine grace has the effect of restoring to human beings their original Adamic freedom. It does better than that. It makes it so that saints in Christ, sealed in the Spirit, have no ability (because they have *absolutely* no desire) to break again from God; they are remade so as not to be able to sin (*non posse peccare*). So complication two: there is a freedom that is better than the freedom not to sin. Dwell on these complications, and it will seem increasingly less likely that Augustine was ever talking about libertarian freedom. The freedom that originally makes for culpability – the freedom to sin – ends up a pathology to be cured. It is hard to say what kind of freedom he has been talking about.

In my essay on the origin of evil, subtitled "Myth and metaphysics," I focus on Augustine's story of how the two cities came into being. It is