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Beyond Pessimism: A Structure of Encouragement in Augustine's *City of God*

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Abstract: Many critics of Augustine target his "pessimism," arguing that his fixation on evil denies the value of this-worldly goods. This article challenges this view by exposing a methodological assumption that often underwrites it—the idea that Augustine's texts can be abstracted from their rhetorical contexts. To illustrate, I offer a close reading of *City of God* 22.22–24, a passage frequently cited as evidence of Augustine's pessimism. By analyzing how Augustine uses rhetoric to "instruct" and "encourage" his readers, I argue instead that this passage should be interpreted as an exercise of hope that helps readers resist temptations toward presumption and despair. This account complicates the common binary between optimism and pessimism and supplies a novel interpretation of key passages in *City of God*.

Augustine loved mosaics. A popular form of Roman art in North Africa, mosaics adorned the homes of wealthy citizens and the floors of many churches, including Augustine's basilica in Hippo.[1] In an early dialogue, Augustine adopts the mosaic as a metaphor for the universe, admonishing those whose fixation on evil blinds them to the beauty of the larger pattern. These cynics are like art critics who, "confined to surveying a single section of a mosaic floor, looked at it too closely, and then blamed the artisan for being ignorant of order and composition."[2] "In reality," Augustine writes, "it is [the viewer] himself who, in concentrating on an apparently disordered variety of small colored cubes, failed to notice the larger mosaic work" and

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[1]On Augustine's interest in mosaics, see Garry Wills, *Saint Augustine* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 3, and William Harmless, introduction to *Augustine in His Own Words* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), xvii–xviii. On mosaics in Roman North Africa, including Augustine's basilica in Hippo, see Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa: Studies in Iconography and Patronage* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 188–95, 238–39.

[2]Augustine, *On Order*, trans. Silvano Borruso (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's, 2007), 1.2. References to the original Latin are from *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense*, ed. Cornelius Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 1995), available via Past Masters at http://pm.nlx.com/.

see how the "apparent disorder of the elements really comes together into the unity of a beautiful portrait."[3]

The same selective vision afflicts many interpretations of Augustine in political theory. Fixating on small fragments of Augustine's texts, particularly his account of earthly evils, many political theorists neglect the larger patterns of the Augustinian mosaic and emphasize one theme—pessimism. John Rawls describes Augustine as one of "the two dark minds in Western thought."[4] Bertrand Russell suggests his "abnormal" obsession with sin "made his life stern and his philosophy inhuman."[5] Even Reinhold Niebuhr, who considered Augustine "a more reliable guide than any known thinker," concedes that his realism is "excessive."[6]

This portrait of pessimism dominates Augustine's reception in much contemporary political theory.[7] Hannah Arendt argues that Augustine's "worldlessness" precludes political action,[8] while Martha Nussbaum complains that Augustine's "otherworldly" longing and bleak view of sin discourage this-worldly striving.[9] David Billings concurs. Citing Arendt, Billings argues that "while Augustine's eschatological ends do provide a kind of hope, they do not provide political hope."[10] Ultimately, he concludes, "Augustine offers a hope against the world (with its great calamities and frightful evils) rather than for the world."[11]

[3]*On Order* 1.2. Cf. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 12.4.

[4]John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 302.

[5]Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 345–46, 355, 365.

[6]Reinhold Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism," in *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 140–41, 128.

[7]Jean Bethke Elshtain notes how "Augustine is usually numbered among the pessimists" in *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 19–21. See also Eric Gregory, "Sympathy and Domination: Adam Smith, Happiness, and the Virtues of Augustinianism," in *Adam Smith as Theologian*, ed. Paul Oslington (New York: Routledge, 2011), 34.

[8]Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 53–55. See also Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. and trans. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[9]Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 550–56.

[10]David Billings, "Natality or Advent: Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Moltmann on Hope and Politics," in *The Future of Hope: Christian Tradition amid Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Miroslav Volf and William Katerberg (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 135–36, endorsing the view in Arendt, *Love*.

[11]Billings, "Natality or Advent," 136. I engage the interpretations of Arendt, Nussbaum, and Billings at greater length in Michael Lamb, "Between Presumption

Many of Augustine's defenders appropriate this pessimism for their own constructive purposes. Realists often invoke Augustine's pessimism to chasten political hope and emphasize the limits of politics. Niebuhr, for example, draws on Augustine to highlight the realities of evil and resist utopian forms of political idealism.[12] Herbert Deane describes Augustine's "grim" pessimism as his most enduring contribution to political theory,[13] and Judith Shklar includes Augustine among the intellectual "giants" who gave "injustice its due."[14] In the aftermath of two world wars, the Holocaust, and the Gulag, in the midst of what Isaiah Berlin describes as the "most terrible century in human history,"[15] it is perhaps no surprise that these realists find Augustine most useful for thinking about evil and domination.

Meanwhile, traditionalists summon Augustine to advance an even more radical critique of politics. John Milbank appropriates Augustine's notion of the "two cities" to impugn secularism and encourage Christians to retreat from the diseased body politic into the purifying body of Christ,[16] while Stanley Hauerwas recruits the bishop to cast the church as the "only true political society," one that resists the violent and dominating politics of the "world."[17] In the hands of defenders as well as detractors, then, Augustine is presented as a pessimist about this-worldly politics.

In many cases, this pessimism is fueled by the assumption that, for Augustine, earthly goods, and hence political goods, have little or no value.[18] Elsewhere, I challenge this assumption by offering an alternative

and Despair: Augustine's Hope for the Commonwealth," *American Political Science Review* (forthcoming).

[12]Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism."

[13]Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), esp. 56–66, 241–43. Deane equates Augustinian "realism" with "pessimism" (56–57, 66, 242–43).

[14]Judith Shklar, "Giving Injustice Its Due," *Yale Law Journal* 98, no. 6 (April 1989): 1136, 1139–40.

[15]Isaiah Berlin, quoted in Arthur Scheslinger Jr., "Forgetting Reinhold Niebuhr," *New York Times*, September 18, 2005, and Eric Hobsbawn, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 1.

[16]John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 382–442.

[17]Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991), 13–44, esp. 40, 19. Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 72–86, 260n46.

[18]Drawing on Arendt, Billings argues, for example, that "Augustine cannot develop an adequate view of politics because loving the world for its own sake is idolatry and secular (worldly) events cannot attain true significance" ("Natality or Advent," 135).

interpretation of Augustine's "order of love" and reconstructing his implicit order of hope, which allows hope for temporal goods as long as it is properly ordered.[19] Here, I expose a methodological assumption that often underwrites Augustinian pessimism: the notion that his texts can be abstracted from their rhetorical and pedagogical contexts. Whether consciously or not, many interpreters project their modern understanding of philosophy as a theoretical discourse onto Augustine's more ancient form and neglect how he uses rhetoric to educate and exhort his readers. While this methodological assumption affects a broad range of issues in Augustinian interpretation, my aim in this article is to show how attending to Augustine's rhetorical purposes complicates influential accounts of his "pessimism" and supplies a more capacious reading of the *City of God*.

The argument proceeds in two parts. Part I examines recent scholarship on ancient philosophy as a "way of life" and situates Augustine within this tradition. Distinguishing ancient philosophy from modern forms, I show how the distinctive rhetorical and pedagogical strategies of an ancient text affect interpretations of its meaning. Since Augustine inherited this form from his Neoplatonic and Stoic predecessors, I show how his texts also employ rhetoric to "instruct" and "encourage" readers.

Part II applies this rhetorically sensitive approach to *City of God*, particularly 22.22–24, a passage often cited as decisive evidence of Augustine's "pessimism." By offering a close reading of this passage and attending to the "structure of encouragement" implicit within it, I argue instead that 22.22–24 functions as a moral and spiritual exercise that encourages readers to cultivate the virtue of hope. Focusing in particular on Herbert Deane's account of Augustine, I challenge influential interpretations of Augustine's pessimism and draw on neglected sermons and treatises to reconstruct his account of hope as a virtue that avoids the vices of "presumption" and "despair." By exposing "pessimism" as an anachronistic description of Augustine's thought, I conclude that Augustine's triad of presumption, hope, and despair offers a more nuanced vision of the posture he recommends.[20]

[19]Lamb, "Between Presumption and Despair." I am developing Augustine's account of hope at greater length in Michael Lamb, "A Commonwealth of Hope: Reimagining Augustine's Political Thought" (unpublished manuscript).

[20]My argument is part of a small but an emerging set of interpretations that attempt to illuminate a less pessimistic and more hopeful account of Augustine's political thought. See, for example, Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*; John von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001); John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth, eds., *Augustine and Politics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005); Kristen Deede Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Charles T. Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University

I. Augustine and the Art of Rhetoric

Recently, scholars have offered radically new interpretations of ancient texts by situating them within their rhetorical and pedagogical contexts.[21] Pierre Hadot's account has been the most influential. In *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Hadot argues that ancient philosophy was a "way of life," an "art of living" focused not only on defending abstract propositions but on cultivating the virtue and vision needed to make moral, intellectual, and spiritual progress.[22] In contrast to modern conceptions of philosophy as a theoretical discourse or abstract mode of analysis, ancient authors saw philosophy more as a discipline "which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual's life."[23] To commend such discipline, ancient philosophers relied not only on rational reflection but on "spiritual exercises," concrete moral and philosophical practices intended to cultivate specific virtues and guide the soul's ascent to higher levels of wisdom.[24] From meditation and memorization to reading and writing, these exercises aided the soul's progress as weight training increases an athlete's strength, growing one's intellectual and moral muscles through a rigorous form of training.[25] Various rhetorical and philosophical forms—from dialogues and treatises to poems and epistles—enhanced these exercises and encouraged the pursuit of wisdom. Indeed, many texts took the form of "protreptics" designed not only to teach readers about the good life, but to exhort them to pursue it.[26]

of Chicago Press, 2008); and Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). Many of these accounts come from scholars in theology and religious studies. One of my aims is to bring this alternative interpretation into political theory.

[21]Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995); Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); John M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[22]Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 83, 264–76.

[23]Ibid., 265. Averil Cameron notes that scholarship on the exchange between early Christian discourse and Greek philosophy "has in most cases focused on content rather than on mode of expression." See Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 9.

[24]Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 59–60, 81–82; *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 6.

[25]Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 59.

[26]See Dirk M. Schenkeveld, "Philosophical Prose," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period (330 B.C.–A.D. 400)*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 195–264, esp. 204–13.

Recognizing philosophy as a "way of life" has significant implications for how we interpret ancient texts. If a text is not intended simply to expound timeless ethical truth but to educate followers in a particular time and place, then the text's historical, rhetorical, and pedagogical contexts will affect its meaning. Proper interpretation thus requires considering the conditions and constraints that shaped an author's pedagogical practices, from the norms associated with particular literary genres and rhetorical traditions to the moral commitments that defined a specific school of thought, all of which affect how a text shapes readers' character.[27] "Whether the goal was to convert, to console, to cure, or to exhort the audience," Hadot concludes, "the point was always and above all not to communicate to them some ready-made knowledge but to *form* them."[28]

Many modern interpreters neglect the pedagogical functions of ancient texts. Trained in a more abstract form of philosophy, contemporary political theorists often miss how ancient thinkers use rhetoric to transform audiences. This temptation is especially strong when texts appear in a more "systematic" form, where abstract language, reasoned analysis, and a declarative style can seduce interpreters into assuming that authors are operating within a modern theoretical discourse. As Hadot shows, however, even many seemingly "systematic" texts were "written not so much to inform the reader of a doctrinal content but to form him, to make him traverse a certain itinerary in the course of which he will make spiritual progress."[29] Augustine's works are no exception.

[27]Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 61.

[28]Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 274, emphasis original. Cf. Cameron, *Christianity*, 28, 46, and Ellen Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 120–49.

[29]See Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 64; cf. 267–68. One of Hadot's favorite examples is Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* (59–60, 179–205). Against modern readers who interpret *Meditations* as a repository of pessimism, Hadot argues that "Marcus' seemingly pessimistic declarations are not expressions of his disgust or disillusion at the spectacle of life; rather, they are a *means* he employs in order to change his way of evaluating the events and objects which go to make up human existence" (186). In other words, Marcus's clinical statements attempt to objectify, and thereby sterilize, the pleasures he finds so tempting (186). The "consciously willed application of rhetoric" constitutes a "discipline of desire" aimed at reorienting Marcus's vision and thereby reforming his desire (59–60, 187, 197). Considering the *Meditations* within its rhetorical context casts new light on Marcus's "pessimism" and illustrates the importance of a text's rhetorical form. The same insight, I believe, applies to many passages typically seen as evidence of Augustine's "pessimism."

Instruction and Encouragement

Augustine knew the power of philosophical exhortation.[30] It was Cicero's exhortation to philosophy, the *Hortensius*, that first "fired [his] passion for the pursuit of wisdom."[31] After turning to *philosophia*, Augustine became especially enamored by the Neoplatonists, whose philosophy he found largely compatible with the Christian tradition.[32] Although he eventually distances himself from Neoplatonic emphases on the sufficiency of reason and the corruption of the body, he maintains aspects of his Platonic inheritance, arguing as late as *City of God* that "no one has come closer to [Christianity] than the Platonists."[33] Importantly, this Platonic tradition includes distinct appreciation for philosophy as a way of life, what Augustine sometimes describes as the "art of living."[34] Neoplatonists employed a variety of exercises—including oral commentaries on texts, dialogues between teacher and pupil, and practices of "attention"—to teach new ideas and exhort practitioners to traverse an "itinerary" intended to purify their souls and enable their "ascent" toward the divine.[35] Augustine incorporates this Neoplatonic way of life into his Christian vision of ascent.[36]

[30]For an insightful analysis of Augustine's appropriation of the classical rhetorical tradition, see Paul R. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Reviving a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

[31]Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 6.11.18; cf. 3.4.7–8, 8.7.17. Cf. Augustine, *The Happy Life*, in *Trilogy on Faith and Happiness*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2010), 9–53, at 1.4.

[32]*Confessions* 7.9.13–15; 8.2.3; *Happy Life* 1.1–4.

[33]*City of God* 8.5. For Augustine's later assessment of his early Platonism, see *The Retractions*, trans. Mary Inez Bogan (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), 1.1.3–4, 1.3.

[34]*City of God* 19.1. In *City of God* 4.21, Augustine notes that his predecessors described "virtue" as "the art of living well and rightly. Hence, they considered that it was from the Greek word *arete*, which means 'virtue,' that the Latin-speaking peoples derived the word 'art.'" For discussion of Augustine's "more practical" mode of philosophy, see Bonnie Kent, "Augustine's Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 205–6.

[35]On Neoplatonism as a way of life, see Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 146–71, and Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom*, 305–87. On Neoplatonic practices of commentary and "books as guides to living," particularly in relation to Augustine, see Gillian Clark, "City of Books: Augustine and the World as Text," in *The Early Christian Book*, ed. William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 117–38, esp. 134–38.

[36]Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 241–42. Nussbaum traces Augustine's appropriation of Platonic "ascent" (*Upheavals of Thought*, 527–56), but ignores the more rhetorical aspects of Augustine's account.

Less recognized is Augustine's appropriation of Stoic ideas and rhetorical practices. Many interpreters—including Arendt, Rawls, Niebuhr, and Nussbaum, an accomplished scholar of Hellenistic thought—reduce Augustine's classical influences to his Neoplatonism and neglect how he adapts insights from Cicero, Seneca, and other Stoics to develop his moral and theological vision. In a recent book, Sarah Byers offers a detailed account of Augustine's "Stoic-Platonic synthesis," highlighting how he integrates Stoicism and Platonism into his Christian account of perception and moral motivation.[37] In particular, Byers argues, Augustine combines the Platonic notion that love motivates action with a Stoic account of how objects are loved under certain descriptions or perceptions, particularly as "beautiful," "useful," or "good."[38] To encourage these perceptions, Augustine adapts Stoic rhetorical strategies and "cognitive therapies" to transform vision and redirect desire.[39] Byers is especially attentive to Augustine's use of "encouragement" or "exhortation" (*exhortatio*), a Stoic addition to the list of classical rhetorical forms.[40] Augustine often relies on exhortation to "arouse the will" of his audiences.[41]

Augustine's use of exhortation reflects his early education. It is notable that Augustine first read Cicero's exhortation to philosophy while studying rhetoric,[42] which points to an aspect of late antiquity often ignored by many political interpreters: Augustine was steeped in a rhetorical culture where learning and practicing the art of rhetoric were an essential part of the curriculum.[43] Before he became a pastor and theologian, Augustine was an accomplished student of rhetoric, winning oratorical contests as a teenager and eventually emerging as the "ablest student in the school of rhetoric" at Carthage.[44] He went on to teach rhetoric in Thagaste, Carthage, and Rome before being appointed the emperor's professor of rhetoric in Milan. Although he eventually abandoned his prestigious post, he often employed the rhetorical devices he had perfected early in his career.[45] In debates with

[37]Sarah Catherine Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), esp. chaps. 2–3.

[38]Ibid., 45–54.

[39]Ibid., 1–22, 55–69, 151–71.

[40]Ibid., 27–28.

[41]Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms, 99–120*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003), 118.1.1, cited by Byers, *Perception*, 28.

[42]*Confessions* 3.3.6–3.4.7; *Happy Life* 1.4.

[43]See Cameron, *Christianity*, 47–88, 139–40, and Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 56–57.

[44]*Confessions* 1.17.27, 3.3.6.

[45]For Augustine's indictment of Roman rhetoricians, see *Confessions* 4.2.2, 9.2.2, 9.5.13. On Augustine as an "antirhetorical rhetorician," see Wills, *Saint Augustine*, 27–28, 144–45; cf. Cameron, *Christianity*, 35, 66–68, 85–87.

religious dissenters, councils with Catholic bishops, letters to Roman officials, and sermons to Christian congregations, he exercised the arts of rhetoric with great frequency and skill. Ultimately, he knew that "one who tries to speak not only wisely but eloquently will be more useful if he can do both."[46]

Augustine's defense of rhetoric's moral purposes reflects his understanding of human nature and its two primary defects: ignorance (*ignorantia*) and weakness (*infirmitas*).[47] After the Fall, Augustine believed that human beings lack both the capacity to *know* fully what is good and the settled *will* to do it. As a result, moral education must address both human needs: "On every question relating to moral life there is need not only for instruction (*doctrina*) but also for encouragement (*exhortatio*). With the instruction we will know what we ought to do, and with the encouragement we will be motivated to do what we know we ought to do."[48] In his own teaching, Augustine practiced both instruction and encouragement and counseled others to do the same.

Nowhere is this more evident than in book 4 of *On Christian Teaching*.[49] Modeling the book partly on Cicero's rhetorical writings, Augustine appropriates the classical art of rhetoric to educate Christian orators in the spirit that Cicero had instructed Roman senators.[50] In particular, Augustine

[46]Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.5.8, using the translation in Nello Cipriani, "Rhetoric," trans. Matthew O'Connell, in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 724–26.

[47]See, e.g., *The Augustine Catechism: The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Charity*, trans. Bruce Harbert (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 22.81. For discussion, see Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 27–32, 66–67, and Joseph Clair, *Discerning the Good in the Letters and Sermons of Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 54–55.

[48]Augustine, *The Excellence of Widowhood*, in *Marriage and Virginity*, trans. R. Kearney (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 111–36, at §2. I am indebted to Clair, *Discerning the Good*, 54, for bringing this passage to my attention.

[49]For overviews, see R. P. H. Green, introduction to *On Christian Teaching*, vii–xxiii; James J. O'Donnell, "*Doctrina Christiana, De*," in Fitzgerald et al., *Augustine through the Ages*, 278–80; Carol Harrison, "The Rhetoric of Scripture and Preaching: Classical Decadence or Christian Aesthetic?," in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (New York: Routledge, 2000), 214–30; and George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 174–82.

[50]According to Frederick Van Fleteren, "Augustine knew Cicero's *De oratore* and *Orator ad Brutum* well," but "did not follow them slavishly." See "Augustine and Philosophy," *Augustinian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010): 267n67. See also Green, introduction to *On Christian Teaching*, xviiii–xix; James J. O'Donnell, "*Doctrina Christiana, De*," 278–80; Harrison, "Rhetoric," 219–29; and Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 114, 174–82.

adapts Cicero's dictum that an orator should speak so as to "instruct, delight, and move" his audience.[51] While Augustine insists that "instruction" (*doctrina*) is "a matter of necessity,"[52] he recognizes that knowing what is right does not ensure that people will do it: "when one is giving instruction about something that must be acted on, and one's aim is to produce this action, it is futile to persuade people of the truth of what is being said, and futile to give delight by the style one uses, if the learning process does not result in action."[53] Good teachers must learn to delight and motivate their audiences: "A hearer must be delighted so that he can be gripped and made to listen, and moved so that he can be impelled to action."[54]

Augustine connects these three purposes of rhetoric—instructing, delighting, and motivating—to Cicero's three rhetorical styles: the restrained, mixed, and grand. While all three styles aim at "persuasion," each serves a different pedagogical purpose: "The eloquent speaker will be one who can treat small matters in a restrained style in order to instruct, intermediate matters in a mixed style in order to delight, and important matters in a grand style in order to move an audience."[55] While Augustine holds that all matters regarding the Christian life are "important" and thus merit the "grand style," he recognizes that the grand style does not fit every purpose.[56] When attempting to present "facts," analyze a "difficult and complicated matter," or solve "knotty problems," the restrained style is most fitting: it produces the clarity and precision needed to analyze "factual evidence" and avoid rhetorical flights of emotion.[57] On its own, however, the restrained style is insufficient:

[51]*On Christian Teaching* 4.12.27. See Cicero, *Orator*, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 21.69; cf. Cicero, *The Best Kind of Orator*, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 1.3–4, 5.16, and Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, trans. James M. May and Jakob Wisse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.114–15, 2.121, 2.128–29, 2.176, 2.310–12.

[52]*On Christian Teaching* 4.12.27–28; cf. Harrison, "Rhetoric," 220.

[53]*On Christian Teaching* 4.13.29.

[54]Ibid., 4.12.27, cf. 4.13.29 and *On Order* 2.38.

[55]*On Christian Teaching* 4.17.34; cf. Cicero, *Orator* 29.101. "In the restrained style," Augustine adds, the orator "persuades people that what he says is true; in the grand style he persuades them to do what they knew to be necessary but were not doing; in the mixed style he persuades people that he is speaking attractively or elaborately" (4.25.55). Erich Auerbach suggests Augustine's emphasis on "context and purpose" is a departure from the classical tradition, which distinguished styles by the "subject matter" discussed. See *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 34–39. See also John von Heyking, "Disarming, Simple, and Sweet: Augustine's Republican Rhetoric," in *Talking Democracy: Historical Perspectives on Rhetoric and Democracy*, ed. Benedetto Fontana, Cary J. Nederman, and Gary Remer (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2004), 170–72.

[56]*On Christian Teaching* 4.18.35–4.19.38.

[57]Ibid., 4.4.6; 4.19.38–4.20.39; 4.21.46.

> To clarify disputed issues there must be rational argument and deployment of evidence. But if listeners have to be moved rather than instructed, in order to make them act decisively on the knowledge that they have and lend their assent to matters which they admit to be true, then greater powers of oratory are required. In such cases what one needs is entreaties, rebukes, rousing speeches, solemn admonitions, and all the other things which have the power to excite human emotions.[58]

The mixed and grand styles serve these functions. The appealing ornament of the mixed style helps to secure the attention of the audience, especially when "censuring or praising something," while the affectively charged rhetoric of the grand style is effective for arousing emotion and "moving minds to action."[59]

Augustine's defense of all three styles highlights his complex pedagogical practices and the need to understand his political teachings in light of the style in which they appear. Yet when many political theorists read or teach Augustine, they tend to focus narrowly on *City of God*, especially book 19, which they excise from its context in the larger work.[60] They seldom read *On Christian Teaching*, which is typically perceived as a theological treatise. When they do, they tend to focus, with Arendt and Nussbaum, on book 1, where Augustine offers a brief exposition of Christian doctrine and introduces his controversial formulation of the "order of love." Rarely do they consider his teaching on interpretation or rhetoric in books 2–4.

Such an approach is at odds with recent trends in the history of political thought. In the last few decades, scholars have made interpretative innovations by attending to the rhetorical culture of prominent thinkers. By considering not only what an author is *saying* but also what an author is *doing* in saying it, they have shown how influential political philosophers unite both "wisdom" and "eloquence" to persuade audiences, "arguing in such a way that our hearers are not only instructed in the virtues but incited to the performances of virtuous acts."[61] By attending to the connection between

[58]Ibid., 4.4.6.

[59]Ibid., 4.19.38, 4.22.51.

[60]Elshtain notes that many political theorists teach what she describes as "Augustine Lite," focusing primarily on book 19 and other "political" fragments from *City of God* (*Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, 19–20). One reason may be the sprawling length of *City of God* and the pedagogical need to assign a manageable excerpt focused on politics. Eric Gregory and Joseph Clair observe that book 19 "provides perfect length of assigned reading for Augustine's political theology in a survey course." See Eric Gregory and Joseph Clair, "Augustinianisms and Thomisms," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology,* ed. Craig Hovey and Elizabeth Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 183.

[61]Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1, *The Renaissance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xiii–xiv, 88–89, referencing Petrarch, who, notably, took inspiration from Augustine. On Skinner's account of "saying"

"reason" and "rhetoric," these scholars have offered novel accounts of canonical thinkers such as Plato, Machiavelli, and Hobbes.[62] However, with a few notable exceptions,[63] political theorists have not yet applied the same sensitivity to Augustine.

In her dissertation on Augustine, for example, Hannah Arendt advances a "purely philosophical" interpretation, adopting a stance of "intentional detachment" that eschews the rhetorical and "dogmatic elements" of Augustine's texts, along with the historical "evolutions" that shaped his development.[64] Niebuhr focuses only on Augustine's attitudes and utterances, weaving together passages from treatises, sermons, and commentaries without considering their historical context or rhetorical effect.[65] Herbert Deane situates Augustine's ideas within specific historical contexts but largely ignores their rhetorical and pedagogical contexts, assembling quotations from letters, sermons, and treatises without recognizing how their rhetorical styles or purposes shape their meaning. As his title suggests, Deane is more interested in the "political and social ideas of St. Augustine" than his implicit pedagogical practices.[66]

Perhaps most surprising is Martha Nussbaum's neglect of Augustine's rhetorical forms. Nussbaum devotes an entire book to Hellenistic philosophy as a "therapy of desire," arguing that these texts can be fully understood only when interpreters are sensitive to their literary genres and the pedagogical

and "doing," see Holly Hamilton-Bleakley, "Linguistic Philosophy and *The Foundations*," in *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, ed. Annabel Brett, James Tully, and Holly Hamilton-Bleakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 20–33.

[62]See Melissa S. Lane, *Method and Politics in Plato's "Statesman"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[63]See von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing*, 17–50; von Heyking, "Disarming, Simple, and Sweet"; Andrew Murphy, "Augustine and the Rhetoric of Roman Decline," *History of Political Thought* 26, no. 4 (2005): 586–606; and Thomas W. Smith, "The Glory and Tragedy of Politics," in *Augustine and Politics*, ed. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 187–213.

[64]Arendt, *Love*, 4–6. In his formal assessment of Arendt's dissertation, Karl Jaspers notes that Arendt's "method does some violence to the text. The foreword and the execution of the whole make clear that no attention is given to the great transformations in Augustinian thought that came about in the course of his life. Neither historical nor philosophical interests are primary here." See Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence, 1926–1969*, ed. Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1992), 689n1.

[65]Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism."

[66]Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*.

purposes they serve.[67] Since Nussbaum confines her study to a period between the late fourth century BCE and the first two centuries CE, it would be unfair to criticize her for neglecting a fifth-century thinker like Augustine. But she does not simply neglect Augustine's account; she actively sets her account against it. Contrasting her "therapeutic" model to the Platonic approach, she suggests that Augustine's Christian Platonism relies on a rationalistic and dualistic deductivism that is incongruous with the more indirect and immanent forms of Hellenistic philosophy she prefers.[68] By focusing on Augustine's abstract ideas and doctrines, Nussbaum neglects the possibility that Augustine may also be practicing a form of therapeutic philosophy.

Recently, scholars in philosophy, theology, and religious studies have elevated the rhetorical and pedagogical functions of Augustine's theological and philosophical texts, focusing on the *Confessions*,[69] Cassiciacum dialogues,[70] sermons,[71] letters,[72] and even "systematic" treatises such as *On the Trinity*.[73] These scholars have shown convincingly that Augustine appropriates classical therapies to educate his Christian audiences, but they do not usually attend to more "political" passages in *City of God*.[74]

[67]See Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, esp. x–xi, 6–8, 35–37, 44–47.

[68]Ibid., 18–19, 32–36.

[69]Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961), 1–171; Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 52, 68; Thomas F. Martin, "Augustine's *Confessions* as Pedagogy: Exercises in Transformation," in *Augustine and Liberal Education*, ed. Kim Paffenroth and Kevin L. Hughes (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 25–51.

[70]Brian Stock, "Ethical Values and the Literary Imagination in the Later Ancient World," *New Literary History* 29, no. 1 (1998): 1–13.

[71]See, e.g., Aaron Stalnaker, "Spiritual Exercises and the Grace of God: Paradoxes of Personal Formation in Augustine," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 24, no. 2 (2004): 137–70; Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls*; Byers, *Perception*; Clair, *Discerning the Good*; John C. Cavadini, "Simplifying Augustine," in *Educating People of Faith, Exploring the History of Jewish and Christian Communities*, ed. John Van Engen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 63–84; and Jeffrey Bullock, "Augustinian Innovation: A Spokesperson for a Post-classical Age," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 20, no. 1 (1997): 5–13.

[72]See, e.g., Clair, *Discerning the Good*; Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*. E. M. Atkins and R. J. Dodaro's edition of Augustine's *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) has helped to reorient scholars' attention to the political relevance of Augustine's sermons and letters.

[73]Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 107; Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, 120–49; Stalnaker, "Spiritual Exercises," 138–40.

[74]In contrast to Augustine's theological works, von Heyking notes, "comparatively little has been done on his political rhetoric in the *City of God* beyond demonstrating Augustine's antipolitical rhetoric" (*Augustine and Politics*, 17).

A handful of interpreters in political theory have been more sensitive. Andrew Murphy, for example, analyzes Augustine's use of the "rhetoric of Roman decline" in *City of God*, while Thomas W. Smith highlights the book's "pedagogical and hortatory dimension," showing how Augustine seeks to redirect readers' love away from human glory toward the glory of God.[75] Similarly, John von Heyking highlights how Augustine employs an "antipolitical rhetoric" to tame Romans' "lust for domination" and a "dialectic of excess over excess" to "form the inordinate passions into ordinate love."[76] These interpreters helpfully illuminate how Augustine's rhetorical and pedagogical purposes shape his political thought. In what follows, I aim to extend this approach in novel ways to illuminate key passages in *City of God* and complicate the "pessimism" they seem to commend.

II. Into Hell and Out Again

City of God is a difficult text to interpret, not least because of its length. Comprising twenty-two books and over one thousand pages, Augustine's magnum opus is, as Peter Brown argues, a "loose, baggy monster."[77] Its sprawling expanse makes analyzing Augustine's diffuse claims challenging, and this difficulty is magnified by the duration of its composition. *City of God* was written over a period of thirteen or fourteen years in which Augustine was constantly interrupted by political and ecclesial responsibilities and drawn into theological controversies that demanded his attention.[78] "Barbarian" armies surrounded the edges of the empire while religious critics hammered away at the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church, leaving both institutions embattled in a fight for survival. Augustine's shifting arguments and tone in *City of God* reflect his diverse audiences and the changing temper of his times.[79] Over thirteen years, a book that began as a polemic against pagan

[75]Andrew Murphy, "Augustine and the Rhetoric of Roman Decline"; Smith, "Glory and Tragedy," 202; cf. 188–97. On *City of God*'s hortatory dimension, see also Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 36–37. On Augustine's attempt to redirect the love of glory, see also Veronica Roberts, "Augustine's Ciceronian Response to the Ciceronian Patriot," *Perspectives on Political Science* 45, no. 2 (2016): 113–24.

[76]Von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing*, 12, 20, cf. 17–50; "Disarming, Simple, and Sweet," 176–77.

[77]Brown takes this phrase from Henry James's description of nineteenth-century Russian novels. See Peter Brown, "Political Society," in *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. R. A. Markus (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 311.

[78]See *Retractions* 2.69; Letter 23A*.4 in Augustine, *Letters 211–270, 1*–29**, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2005).

[79]See R. W. Dyson, introduction to *City of God*, xi–xiv; R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 70–71; Brown, "Political Society," 311–12; and Carol

critics who blamed Christianity for the sack of Rome becomes a broader reflection on a range of theological and political topics, from the nature of virtue to the glories of the heavenly city.[80]

Given these changing circumstances, we should not be surprised that Augustine uses different rhetorical styles for distinct persuasive purposes, applying the three rhetorical styles mentioned in book 4 of *On Christian Teaching*, which—importantly—was completed around the time he was finishing *City of God*.[81] Since *City of God* grapples with many complex theoretical and textual issues, Augustine writes much of it in the restrained style, which affords more analytical precision and is "easier to tolerate over a long period than the grand style."[82] Yet *City of God* does not employ only one style, as most interpreters assume. In *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine explicitly warns against using a single style, suggesting that it can become "flat," "tedious," and "less absorbing" for the audience.[83] Keeping listeners engaged requires varying styles so that "the intensity of our speech ebbs and flows like the tides of the sea."[84]

In particular, Augustine suggests combining the mixed and grand styles when the aim is not simply to "delight" an audience through eloquence, but to motivate an "audience's assent and action."[85] Beginning with the ornament of the mixed style can secure an audience's attention while concluding with vivid description in the grand style can inspire action, particularly when exhorting an audience to "love good behaviour and avoid the bad," recognize "the evils of the present time," and develop an "assured hope in the assistance of God."[86] This, I believe, is how Augustine proceeds in *City of God*, where he combines the mixed and grand styles in the final book to reorder readers' hopes toward the eternal city.[87]

Augustine suggests as much in a recently discovered letter to Firmus, who had written Augustine after reading and listening to several books of *City of God*.[88] The "whole fruit of so many books that you love," Augustine writes, "… does not consist in delighting the reader or in making someone know many facts that he does not know but in persuading a person either to

Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 197–99.

[80]O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God*, esp. 27–38, 272.

[81]Harrison, "Rhetoric," 215.

[82]*On Christian Teaching* 4.22.51.

[83]Ibid.

[84]Ibid.

[85]See ibid., 4.22.51–4.25.55.

[86]Ibid., 4.23.52, 4.25.55, 4.20.42–43.

[87]Von Heyking highlights Augustine's use of the three styles in *City of God* (*Augustine and Politics*, 36; "Disarming, Simple, and Sweet," 172n16, 176–77).

[88]Letter 2*, in *Letters 211–270*. For discussion, see O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God*, 36–37.

enter into the City of God without hesitation or to remain there with perseverance."[89] Augustine's *City of God*, in other words, aims not simply to instruct but to encourage.

That Augustine employed the art of rhetoric in systematic treatises like *City of God* would not have surprised his contemporaries: the composition and reception of *City of God* have more in common with spoken rhetoric than modern interpreters often realize.[90] Many contemporary readers—like the medieval artists who painted Augustine alone in his study—assume the bishop wrote his books in solitude, using a stylus to record his innermost thoughts. Composition in Augustine's age, however, was often a more oral and social affair. Like many of his predecessors and contemporaries, Augustine composed many of his systematic works, including parts of *City of God*, by dictating to scribes, who then transcribed the text on wax tablets. Once they were combined into a coherent draft, Augustine often reviewed and revised the text, making edits before the codex was complete.[91] The initial composition, however, was often an oral performance, which allowed Augustine to build on his extensive training as a rhetorician.

If the composition of *City of God* was largely rhetorical, so was its reception. Today, we assume that reading is a private, silent, and solitary act of an individual alone with a text, but in late antiquity, reading was often communal, public, and performative.[92] Because of the cost and labor involved in producing scrolls and codices, access to written texts was limited, which meant that many citizens in late antiquity would encounter texts only through oral readings.[93] Although those with access could read silently, as Augustine observes of Ambrose in the *Confessions*,[94] many philosophical texts were recited aloud

[89]Letter 2*.3.

[90]Clark describes *City of God* as Augustine's "most consciously and consistently Ciceronian work, both in content and in style" ("City of Books," 126).

[91]For evidence of Augustine's dictation, see Letter 23A*.3. For allusions to his process of review, see Letter 212A and Letter 1A* and Possidius, "The Life of Saint Augustine," in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, trans. F. R. Hoare, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), §28. For a summary of research on Augustine's process, see Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 288n79. For a history of *City of God* as a book, see Clark, "City of Books," and Mark Vessey, "The History of the Book: Augustine's *City of God* and Post-Roman Cultural Memory," in *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide*, ed. James Wetzel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 14–32.

[92]Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 5–6; Patricia Hampl, preface to *Confessions*, xiii–xxvi, esp. xvii.

[93]In Letter 212A, for example, Augustine encourages Firmus to share *City of God* with those in Carthage who lack access. Possidius ("Life," §18) describes how many of Augustine's texts were copied and shared.

[94]*Confessions* 6.3.3.

rather than read in solitude.[95] Augustine's letter to Firmus provides a striking example: while Firmus read the first ten books of *City of God* on his own, Augustine notes that the Catholic layman "listened attentively along with us when [book 18] was read on three consecutive afternoons" and was "set afire with a blazing desire to have all the books."[96] This reference highlights the oral practice of reading in Augustine's community and the pedagogical effect that such performances had on audiences. Knowing that *City of God* would be received aurally would undoubtedly have shaped Augustine's intentions, allowing him to use various rhetorical styles to instruct and encourage his readers.

Between Good and Evil

This rhetorical influence becomes clear in a close reading of *City of God* 22.22–24, a set of chapters situated within Augustine's final book on "the eternal blessedness of the City of God."[97] In book 22, Augustine explains God's creation, will, and promises of blessedness for the saints (22.1–3), defends the bodily resurrection, Christ's resurrection, and the possibility of miracles (22.4–11, 26–28), addresses questions about what kinds of bodies and bodily features will be resurrected (22.12–21), and presents a vision of the final felicity of the heavenly city (22.29–30). Within this context, Augustine's account of earthly goods and evils in 22.22–24 serves to contrast the miseries of earthly existence with the peace of the heavenly city and point readers to signs of God's goodness and grace.[98]

A quick glance at 22.22–23 reveals why interpreters cite this passage as evidence of Augustine's pessimism. In book 22, Augustine provides a lengthy list of the "many great evils" that accompany this "life under condemnation":

> gnawing cares, disturbances, griefs, fears, insane joys, discords, litigation, wars, treasons, angers, hatreds, falsehood, flattery, fraud, theft, rapine, perfidy, pride, ambition, envy, homicides, parricides, cruelty, ferocity, wickedness, luxury, insolence, immodesty, unchastity, fornications, adulteries, incests, and so many other impure and unnatural acts of both sexes of which it is shameful even to speak; sacrileges, heresies, blasphemies, perjuries, oppression of the innocent, slanders, plots, prevarications, false witness, unrighteous judgments, acts of violence, robberies, and other such evils which do not immediately come to mind, but which are never far away from men in this life.[99]

[95]Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 5.
[96]Letter 2*.3.
[97]*City of God* 22.1.
[98]For a summary of book 22, see O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God*, 225–33.
[99]*City of God* 22.22–23.

Augustine goes on to lament the "fear and distress [that] accompany widowhood and mourning, injury and condemnation, the deceptions and lies of men, false accusations, and all the violent crimes and wicked deeds of others." In addition to moral evils arising from human sin, he also bemoans the "innumerable other evils" that "threaten our bodies from without," from "tempest, rain and flood" to "the opening up of chasms in the earth," from the "poisons" in plants and the attacks of "wild creatures" to diseases "so numerous that all the books of the physicians cannot contain them."[100] If this was not enough to capture the "condition of misery common to us all," he extends his litany of evils into the next chapter, describing the darkness, suspicion, and sin that reign even among the most righteous.[101] Ultimately, Augustine's verdict seems clear: "This is a state of life so miserable that it is like a hell on earth."[102] Taken in isolation, it is hard to find a more powerful expression of Augustine's pessimism.

This is how many political realists interpret the passage.[103] Deane alludes to Augustine's description of life as a "hell upon earth" four times, invoking the passage to compare Augustine's view of human nature with that of Hobbes.[104] Deane's most extensive use appears in his chapter "The Psychology of Fallen Man," where he repeatedly cites book 22.22 to sketch "Augustine's grimly pessimistic picture of the evils and sufferings that inevitably mark the lives of men as they live, work, struggle, and die in the world."[105] Alternating between books 19 and 22, Deane sees both as evidence of Augustine's singular focus on sin: "His picture of man's life on this earth is a somber one; life is indeed a hell on earth, filled with suffering, sorrow, disappointment, strife, and bitterness, and ended by death."[106] "Pessimistic realism," Deane concludes, is the attitude that Augustine endorses.[107]

A decontextualized, disproportionate emphasis on evil in 22.22–23, however, ignores important contextual and structural features of this passage. Consider its relation to the next chapter. After cataloging earthly evils in 22.22–23, Augustine goes on to offer a long litany of earthly *goods* in 22.24, celebrating how God has "filled the whole of His creation with

[100]Ibid., 22.22.
[101]Ibid., 22.22–23.
[102]Ibid., 22.22.
[103]See, e.g., Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 61, 66, 92–93, 236; Markus, *Saeculum*, 95; and R. A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 56. While acknowledging the goods listed in 22.24, O'Daly describes 22.22–23 as "an uncompromisingly grim picture of the human condition" (*Augustine's City of God*, 230–31).
[104]Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 61, 66, 92–93, 236.
[105]Ibid., 59–60.
[106]Ibid., 66, cf. 60–2, 234–43.
[107]Ibid., xiii, 230, 241.

many good things of all kinds."[108] He points to the "visible forms of beauty which we behold" and praises the "wondrous nature" of human beings, who possess "a certain spark of that reason in respect of which [they were] made in the image of God," which even in their miserable condition "has not been wholly quenched." He extols God's many gifts to humanity, from "reason" and "intelligence" to the "virtues" and the "arts," from the delights of music and poetry to the "wonderful spectacles" of the theater, from the "colour and fragrance of the flowers" to the "manifold and varied beauty of the sky and earth and sea." Even the body receives Augustine's lavish praise: "how clearly does the providence of our great Creator appear even in the body itself!" For Augustine, goodness is so abundant that it surpasses our ability to describe it: "Who could give a complete account of all these things? … If I had chosen to deal with each one of them in turn—to unfold each of them, as it were, and discuss in detail what I have indicated only broadly—what a time it would take!"[109] Rather than simply indicting earthly evil, the final book of *City of God* offers a soaring testament to creation's goodness.[110]

Some political interpreters do not acknowledge this overflowing affirmation of goodness.[111] Others are more careful, acknowledging Augustine's affirmation in 22.24 but only in passing, as if it were window dressing for a more fundamental account of evil. Deane, for example, cites Augustine's description of the "rich and countless blessings" in 22.24 to suggest that "even in the depths of the misery of human life in this world, God has not completely abandoned the fallen human race."[112] Eventually, he declares that "Augustine's pessimism and despair are not ultimate": "the sorrow and pain of earthly life, when seen in their proper context, are the means by which the ultimate triumph of good is being accomplished."[113] Given these claims, one cannot accuse Deane of neglecting Augustine's theological

[108]*City of God* 22.24. Bonnie Kent also cites this passage to suggest that "Augustine never reduces the present life to some miserable waystation on the train route to heaven. *De civitate Dei*'s notorious, often-reprinted catalogue of all the troubles of mortal life—a staple of late twentieth-century anthologies—comes followed by a much less noticed catalogue of all the goods of the present life" ("Augustine's Ethics," 211).

[109]*City of God* 22.24.

[110]See Wills, *Saint Augustine*, 138. Peter Brown describes 22.24 in passing as an "argument for hope," but does not elaborate on its specific relation to the virtue or how it is cultivated (*Augustine of Hippo*, 328). Elshtain also challenges a disproportionate emphasis on evil and insists on Augustine's affirmation of goodness (*Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, 89, 117), but does not attend explicitly to the rhetorical and pedagogical features of book 22.

[111]See, e.g., Billings, "Natality or Advent," 132–36.

[112]Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 64, cf. 43.

[113]Ibid., 66–67.

superstructure, but in other places, Deane seems to excise 22.22–23 from its context to support his emphasis on Augustine's "grim realism."[114] Since Deane's account has been so influential in political theory, a closer look at his reconstruction can illuminate assumptions that frequently plague realist accounts of Augustine.

First, consider Deane's emphasis. In "The Psychology of Fallen Man," Deane includes a few paragraphs that affirm God's goodness or providence, but the majority of the chapter, as its title indicates, focuses on Augustine's portrait of "fallen man." Most tellingly, Deane's concluding chapter attends exclusively to Augustine's "pessimistic realism" and "one-eyed" vision of "man in his fallen condition as completely vitiated by sin."[115] Given this emphasis, it is no surprise that Deane focuses narrowly on one piece of a more complex mosaic. Like other realists, Deane assumes that the description of life as a "hell on earth" reflects Augustine's fundamental judgment of earthly matters and hence political ones.

Realists are right to recognize Augustine's awareness of evil. This is one of the distinct advantages of his political thought: Augustine punctures the illusions that disguise the ignorance, weakness, and self-interest that often arise in human affairs. Yet focusing exclusively or disproportionately on evil downplays Augustine's consistent attempts to contextualize evil within a larger frame of goodness.[116] By fixating solely on the realities of earthly evil, realists risk obscuring the realities of earthly goodness and making pessimism a filter through which they interpret the rest of Augustine's political thought. We must resist this temptation. While we can follow Shklar in recruiting Augustine to give "injustice its due,"[117] we should also follow Augustine in insisting that "both good and evil are given their due."[118] A more capacious realism recognizes, as Augustine does in 22.24, that "in this river or torrent of the human race … both elements run side by side."[119]

The problem with Augustinian pessimism, however, is not simply its disproportionate emphasis. Augustine's claim that good and evil run "side by side" also points to a rhetorical feature of 22.22–24 often missed by

[114]Ibid., 60–62, 66, 243.

[115]Ibid., 230, 241, 237–39.

[116]Charles T. Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 75–103. I agree with Ernest Fortin that "Augustine was neither the starry-eyed idealist for which he has been taken by some, nor the hard-nosed realist for which he has been taken by others," and that to see him as such is to take his "long series of hyperbolic statements" "out of context." See Fortin, "Augustine and the Problem of Modernity," in *Classical Christianity and the Political Order*, ed. J. Brian Benestad (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 142, 146.

[117]Shklar, "Giving Injustice Its Due," 1139–40.

[118]*On Order* 1.19.

[119]*City of God* 22.24.

interpreters who focus solely on Augustine's explicit ideas and utterances. His juxtaposition of good and evil reflects distinctly pedagogical purposes.

Augustine suggests as much in book 11. There, he describes how God uses evil to reveal the good, "adorning the course of the ages like a most beautiful poem set off with antitheses."[120] The former professor of rhetoric then explains the functions of these "antitheses," which he describes as one of "the most elegant figures of speech." Although "not a usual feature of our vocabulary," he observes, "Latin speech, and, indeed, the languages of all nations, make use of the same ornaments of style." [121] Cicero, for example, describes antithesis as a device where "things inconsistent are placed side by side, and things contrasted are paired," and includes it "among the chief features that give our speeches distinction."[122] Ultimately, Augustine suggests such oppositions can be employed rhetorically to help illuminate the goodness in the world: "Just as the opposition of contraries bestows beauty upon language, then, so is the beauty of this world enhanced by the opposition of contraries, composed, as it were, by an eloquence not of words, but of things."[123]

Augustine's appropriation of this ancient rhetorical device casts new light on book 22. By putting good and evil "side by side," Augustine *performs* the same rhetorical technique that he endorses in book 11. In both content and form, Augustine offers "a most beautiful poem set off with antitheses." Rather than simply cataloging sins to emphasize the prevalence of evil, he also accentuates evils to enhance our awareness of goodness. As he writes in *On Order*, "This clashing of contraries, which we love so much in rhetoric, gives body to the overall beauty of the universe."[124]

Why do many political theorists miss this aspect of book 22? Focusing primarily on book 19 and other "political" passages, many theorists do not consider the entirety of *City of God*, particularly book 11, a more "theological" book that focuses on God's work of creation. As a result, they miss clues that hint at Augustine's later rhetorical purposes.

Textual selectivity, however, is not the only explanation. Deane, whose textual breadth is unmatched, explicitly cites 11.18 to illuminate Augustine's "aesthetic argument" about why God allows evil in the world.[125] Yet Deane does not recognize that Augustine himself may be employing the very same technique in 22.22–24. Focused on Augustine's explicit political ideas rather than his implicit rhetorical practices, Deane takes Augustine's claims at face value and largely reduces them to their

[120]Ibid., 11.18.
[121]Ibid.
[122]Cicero, *Orator* 38; *On the Ideal Orator* 2.263, cf. 3.207.
[123]*City of God* 11.18.
[124]*On Order* 1.18.
[125]Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 70–71.

propositional content, neglecting the possibility that Augustine is using excessive rhetoric for moral purposes.

Many political interpreters share this methodological habit. Reading *City of God* as a systematic treatise written in the restrained style, they tend to take Augustine's declarations as neutral descriptions of reality. If Augustine devotes two chapters to the "grave evils" of our "miserable" condition, that must mean he has a bleak picture of earthly affairs. The assumption that such statements are literal representations of Augustine's views licenses interpreters to abstract passages from their literary context and assemble them into an overarching political "theory." If each statement is a "restrained" description of reality, its relation to other passages is less relevant; it can be extracted without losing its meaning. This approach enables interpreters to take Augustine's description of the world as a "hell on earth" and present it as evidence of his "grim realism."

If, however, Augustine is practicing philosophy as a way of life and using rhetoric to delight and move his audience, it is a mistake to interpret *City of God* solely in the restrained style. While certain passages suggest more analytical aims, the aim of book 22 is not merely to inform readers but to transform them, to redirect their loves and hopes toward the heavenly city. Rather than offering a neutral description of good and evil simply to instruct, Augustine uses excessive rhetoric in the mixed and grand styles to convey the significance of good and evil and motivate readers to pursue the good. By leading his audience through these oppositions, Augustine helps his readers become agents capable of recognizing—and enduring—good and evil. In this way, the experience of moving through the text itself becomes a "spiritual exercise,"[126] a moral itinerary that functions not to promote pessimism but to cultivate the virtue of hope.

Augustine's Virtue of Hope

To see how 22.22–24 functions to cultivate hope, a brief sketch of the virtue is instructive. Augustine's most systematic treatments are scattered throughout theological treatises and sermons rarely read by political theorists. Elsewhere, I recover these neglected texts to explicate Augustine's complex account of hope and its implications for politics.[127] Here, I show how several basic features suggest a new interpretation of 22.22–24.

In the *Enchiridion* and several sermons, Augustine analyzes hope by considering its relations to faith and love. Faith supplies the ground of hope, "the conviction of things not seen."[128] Faith provides the epistemic evidence

[126]Cf. Smith, "Glory and Tragedy," 189.

[127]See Lamb, "Between Presumption and Despair" and "A Commonwealth of Hope."

[128]Hebrews 11:1, cited in *Enchiridion* 2.8; Augustine, *Sermons (341–400) on Various Subjects*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1994), 359A.3.

needed to warrant a belief that an object of hope is possible to attain, for "what is there that we can hope for without believing in it?"[129] Yet faith is idle or inert without desire to prompt movement toward an object. Hope provides this movement, supplementing faith with affective and volitional movement toward a future good and supplying resolve in the face of difficulties or delays.[130]

For this movement, hope relies on love. For Augustine, love is the basic spring of human action, the "weight" that carries our soul toward what we desire.[131] As the fundamental affection of the will, love provides hope with its motivational force: "you can't even hope for anything that you don't love. Love, you see, kindles hope, hope shines through love."[132] Hope thus reflects a love for goods perceived to be future, possible, but not yet possessed.[133]

For Augustine, hope is both an affection and a virtue. Since affections depend on love, the moral quality of affections reflects the quality of the love: "these feelings are bad if the love is bad, and good if it is good."[134] A virtue, by contrast, is always good since it is ordered toward the proper goods in the right way.[135] If affections of hope are to be good, then, they must be ordered by a corresponding virtue. A virtue of hope is the disposition that guides, directs, and orders the affection of hope toward proper objects in the right ways.

For Augustine, the ultimate objects of hope are eternal goods, primarily union with God. Yet in the *Enchiridion* and several sermons and letters, he acknowledges that temporal goods may also be proper objects of hope, as long as these objects are properly ordered.[136] Thus, if virtue consists in

[129]*Enchiridion* 2.8.

[130]See Sermon 359A.3–4; Augustine, *Sermons (148–183) on the New Testament*, trans. Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1992), 158.7–8; Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 1–32*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 31(2).5.

[131]*City of God* 11.28; *Confessions* 13.9.10.

[132]Sermon 359A.4.

[133]*Enchiridion* 2.8.

[134]*City of God* 14.7; cf. 14.6.

[135]*City of God* 15.22; Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, in *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.18.50.190–2.19.50.192.

[136]See, e.g., *Enchiridion* 30.115; Augustine, *Letters 100–155*, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003), 130.6.12–130.7.14; Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms, 121–150*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 129.11. For discussion, see Lamb, "Between Presumption and Despair." See also Alan Mittleman, *Hope in a Democratic Age: Philosophy, Religion, and Political Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 155; and Basil Studer, "Augustine and the Pauline Theme of Hope," in *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, ed. William S. Babcock (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990), 201–25. To be clear, Augustine

"rightly ordered love"[137] and hope depends fundamentally on love, Augustine's virtue of hope consists in rightly ordered hope.[138]

While explicating Augustine's complex conception of "right order" is beyond the scope of this article, one feature is most relevant for us: Augustine characterizes right order by identifying corresponding forms of *disorder*, particularly vices of perversion and privation.[139] This connection highlights a distinctive feature of Augustinian hope: the virtue of hope avoids corresponding vices of perversion and privation, namely *presumption* and *despair*.[140]

Presumption is the perversion of hope, a rashness that characterizes those who "hope in the wrong way."[141] The presumptuous person hopes "too much" for future goods that are not possible or appropriate, or without an awareness of the risks involved.[142] Presumption characterizes those whose hope is blind, false, or excessive. Despair, by contrast, reflects not excess but deficiency, the privation of hope. Those who despair withdraw from goods that are possible to attain and therefore fail to endure or overcome obstacles that inhibit their pursuit.[143] For Augustine, both presumption and despair reflect a distorted vision about the possibility of an object and therefore lead to recklessness or premature rest: one either presumes one will attain an object without any additional effort or despairs of attaining it at all.[144] The virtue of hope resists these vices of perversion and privation.[145]

believes that hope remains a *theological* virtue ordered ultimately to God; he does not identify a separate *natural* or *temporal* virtue of hope. However, Augustine does include temporal goods as proper objects of the theological virtue, and he recognizes that hope is a time-bound virtue characteristic of our temporal life on earth. Since we can hope only for objects that are unseen, Augustine argues that there will be no hope in heaven, for "we shall not hope for the reality, but embrace it." Hope falls away, but love remains. See Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms, 73–98*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 91.1; cf. *On Christian Teaching* 1.38.42.

[137]*City of God*, 15.22.

[138]On the relation between Augustine's explicit order of love and implicit order of hope, see Lamb, "Between Presumption and Despair."

[139]See Mathewes, *Evil*, 75–81.

[140]For more detailed discussion, see Lamb, "Between Presumption and Despair."

[141]Sermon 352A.9; cf. *Expositions on the Psalms 1–32*, 31(2).6.

[142]Sermon 352A.7–9.

[143]Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms, 121–150*, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: 2004), 129.10; *Sermons (Newly discovered)*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 352A.8–9; *Sermons (51–94) on the Old Testament*, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), 87.10.

[144]See, e.g., Sermon 352A.3–9; Sermon 87.10–11; *Sermons (148–183) on the New Testament*, trans. Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1992), 157.5; *Expositions of the Psalms 1–32*, 31(2).1, 5–6.

[145]Sermon 87.10–11. Given that Augustine's virtue of hope finds a way between vices of excess and deficiency, its conceptual structure parallels Aristotle's doctrine

For Augustine, properly ordering one's hope and avoiding vices of presumption and despair cannot be reduced to applying an abstract formula.[146] The virtue of hope also requires the cooperation of *prudence*, the virtue of practical reasoning that helps us to distinguish "things to be pursued and avoided"[147] and take "precautions against pitfalls."[148] In particular, Augustine identifies prudence as a form of love, namely, "love that wisely separates those things by which it is helped from those by which it is impeded."[149] Since hope depends on love, the virtue of hope requires

of the "mean," though Aristotle never develops an explicit virtue of hope and Augustine read only a smattering of Aristotle, probably only the *Categories* (see *Confessions* 4.16.28). Augustine, however, was familiar with Aristotelian ideas in his Roman predecessors and may have implicitly appropriated an Aristotelian structure from Cicero, who explicitly discusses the "intermediate course between too much and too little" when identifying virtues that relate to the affections (Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], 1.88; cf. 2.59–60). Strikingly, Cicero gestures toward such a mean when discussing the virtue of "magnanimity" or "greatness of spirit" in a statesman: "he must take thought so that indolence does not make him despair prematurely, nor greed spur him to over-confidence" (*On Duties* 1.73). Though Augustine does not explicitly mention the mean in his sermons on hope, the structure of his concept is similar: the virtue of hope emerges as a way between a vice of excess (presumption) and a vice of deficiency (despair).

[146]Even in his most famous account of the "order of love," Augustine suggests that the "person who lives a just and holy life is one who is a *sound judge* of these things" (*On Christian Teaching* 1.27.28, emphasis added). Clair, *Discerning the Good*, analyzes Augustine's sermons and letters to offer an illuminating account of the role of "discernment" in ordering loves for various goods.

[147]*Free Choice of the Will* 1.13.27.89. See also Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions: A New Translation*, trans. David L. Mosher (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 61.4.

[148]Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, 2nd ed. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2015), 14.9.12. In *City of God*, Augustine identifies the function of prudence as "distinguishing good things from bad, so that no error shall creep in as we seek to pursue good and avoid evil" (19.4; cf. 22.24). See also Augustine, *The Catholic Way of Life and the Manichean Way of Life*, in *The Manichean Debate*, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), 1.25.46.

[149]*Catholic Way of Life* 1.15.25. Since God is the highest good, Augustine indicates that prudence can also be defined as "love distinguishing correctly those things by which it is helped toward God from those things by which it can be impeded." Whereas Aristotle and Cicero ground the interconnection of the virtues in prudence, Augustine unifies the virtues through love. See *Catholic Way of Life* 1.15.25, 1.25.46; Letter 155.12–13, in *Letters 100–155*; and Letter 167, in *Letters 156–210*, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004). For insightful discussions, see John Bowlin, "Augustine Counting Virtues," *Augustinian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010): 277–300,

prudence to guide its pursuit of temporal and eternal goods and avoid the pitfalls of presumption and despair.[150]

Between Presumption and Despair

With this basic conception in view, I now want to suggest that *City of God* 22.22–24 functions to cultivate the virtue of hope and help readers resist its opposing vices. If virtuous hope depends on faith, love, and prudence, then reordering hope requires reorienting readers' faith and love and cultivating their capacity for prudence.

Augustine's first aim in 22.22–24 is transforming his readers' faith, which he identifies with a kind of vision.[151] While a complete vision of God will be the faithful's possession in eternity, he acknowledges that human beings can experience a partial vision in this life: "Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face."[152] In order to redirect his readers' hopes, Augustine must correct their vision, helping them see traces of the divine, even if through a glass darkly. The problem is that our vision remains distorted, our beliefs disordered.[153] In particular, Augustine believes we are tempted to see earthly goods as the ultimate source of happiness, casting them under false descriptions and thereby failing to recognize their dependence on God or acknowledge our tendencies toward pride and domination.[154] Acting under false perceptions, we grasp at these temporal goods for selfish purposes, loving and hoping for finite goods too much or in the wrong ways. Our loves and hope become disordered, and vice ensues. For Augustine, then, the first step in reordering love and hope is changing what we believe and how we see. For this purpose, he uses vivid and excessive rhetoric, offering negative descriptions of earthly goods to pierce illusions that the world is an unadulterated source of goodness. By highlighting how cherished earthly goods and relationships are fleeting and flawed, he enables readers to see these goods in new ways and develop more realistic views of their social and political world.

and John P. Langan, "Augustine on the Unity and the Interconnection of the Virtues," *Harvard Theological Review* 72, no. 1/2 (1979): 81–95.

[150]For Augustinian applications of prudence to politics, see von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing*, 110–149, and Todd Breyfogle, "Toward a Contemporary Augustinian Understanding of Politics," in *Augustine and Politics*, ed. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 217–36.

[151]*City of God* 22.29; *Enchiridion* 1.5.

[152]1 Cor. 13, cited in *City of God*, 22.29.

[153]Smith also emphasizes "vision" and Augustine's aim to "give his readers new eyes" ("Glory and Tragedy," 190).

[154]See Bowlin, "Augustine Counting Virtues."

Changing beliefs about good and evil, however, is not enough to transform the character of Augustine's readers. Instruction alone is insufficient; readers also need encouragement. This points to a second purpose of book 22: Augustine uses excessive rhetoric to reorder his readers' loves.[155] Since human beings are tempted to love earthly goods too much or grasp them for their own purposes, [156] part of his purpose in *City of God* is to diagnose the effects of excessive self-love and highlight how pride fuels a "lust for domination."[157] Augustine insists that ordering one's love to God can help to prevent such domination,[158] and in book 22, he uses antitheses to facilitate this reordering. By censuring the "grave evils" of this "hell on earth," Augustine attempts to change his readers' vision of earthly goods and thereby disrupt their excessive love of them, and by praising the abundant goodness of the heavenly city, he attempts to expand their vision and reorder their loves to God. His "pessimistic" descriptions are not necessarily indicative of a metaphysical belief that earthly goods have no value, but of a psychological recognition that human beings are tempted to give earthly goods too much value or love them in the wrong ways.[159] Augustine's rhetorical undervaluation thus attempts to chasten moral overvaluation. "I am not saying that you should have no loves," he preaches. "I simply want your loves to be properly ordered."[160]

Some critics may worry that ordering one's loves to God only affirms the otherworldly dualism they find so troubling. Augustine, however, does not conceive of the City of God as an entirely transcendent realm, as many critics assume.[161] He constantly notes how pilgrims participate in the

[155]My analysis here is compatible with, and complementary to, von Heyking's account of Augustine's use of a "dialectic of excess over excess" to "form the inordinate passions into ordinate love" (*Augustine and Politics*, 20; "Disarming, Simple, and Sweet," 176–77), Smith's emphasis on Augustine's "pedagogical and pastoral" attempt to reorder our loves away from human to divine glory ("Glory and Tragedy," 189), and Fortin's analysis of Augustine's "hyperbolic" statements to persuade the Roman elite to moderate their devotion to the empire and accept the Christian faith ("Augustine and the Problem of Modernity," 146–47).

[156]See Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 39–42.

[157]*City of God* 1.Preface, translation altered; 19.12.

[158]*City of God* 15.22, 19.25–27; *On Christian Teaching* 1.3.3–1.5.5, 1.22.20–1.29.30.

[159]Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 39. According to Gregory, Augustine's "philosophical and theological energies are devoted more to *how* one is to love in an actively ordering way rather than to an abstract metaphysical speculation on *what* one is to consider as appropriate objects of love" (221; cf. 39–41). See also Rowan Williams, "Language, Reality and Desire in Augustine's *De Doctrina*," *Literature & Theology* 3, no. 1 (1989): 138–50; Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 89–90; and Bowlin, "Augustine Counting Virtues," 297–98.

[160]Sermon 335C.13, in *Political Writings*, 59.

[161]To borrow a distinction that Melissa S. Lane applies to other varieties of Platonism (*Plato's Progeny: How Plato and Socrates Still Captivate the Modern Mind* [London:

heavenly city "even now, albeit in a far different and far inferior way."[162] Human beings can be "citizens" of the heavenly city during their sojourn on earth.[163] Augustine develops this inaugurated, or partially realized, eschatology most explicitly in book 20, but it is also apparent in book 22, where he locates goodness not only in heaven but on earth, within God's creation. He celebrates the "visible forms of beauty which we behold" and the "manifold and varied beauty of sky and earth and sea," and significantly, he does not limit these goods either to nature or God's original creation.[164] While he emphasizes God's grace, he also describes the goodness that is mediated through human agency. He praises the "many arts invented and exercised by human ingenuity," the "achievements of human industry in devising clothing and shelter," and "achievements in pottery, painting, and sculpture."[165] While Augustine does not mention explicitly political goods in 22.24—his account of "civic peace" and the goods of the "commonwealth" appears in book 19—many of the goods he catalogs are, as Todd Breyfogle notes, "the work not of single individuals but of persons in *societas*."[166] Moreover, many of these communal achievements—progress in "agriculture and navigation," the "wonderful spectacles" of the theater, and the "ornaments of oratory"—originated as distinctively pagan contributions.[167] Augustine even goes so far as to praise "the great ingenuity displayed by philosophers and heretics in defending even errors and false doctrines."[168] Rather than encouraging otherworldliness, Augustine alerts readers to the goods that exist as part of God's larger order.

Augustine's celebration of goodness points to a third pedagogical purpose most relevant for us: by reorienting faith and love, Augustine is attempting to reorder readers' hope and help them resist temptations toward presumption and despair. By vividly describing the evils that afflict earthly life, his account

Duckworth, 2001], 53–96), *City of God* 22.22–24 does not simply provide a *foundationalist metaphysics* from which we can "deduce" the principles of morality, but an *aspirational ethic* intended to reorder readers' loves. This view challenges the rationalistic and deductive Platonism that Nussbaum and others impute to Augustine. By applying the indirect methods that Nussbaum celebrates in Hellenistic writings but fails to identify in Augustine's, the bishop is exhorting readers to desire the good, not simply to understand it.

[162]*City of God* 20.9.

[163]Ibid., 15.1, 20.5–6, 20.17.

[164]Ibid., 22.24.

[165]Ibid., 22.24.

[166]Todd Breyfogle, "Citizenship and Signs: Rethinking Augustine on the Two Cities," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought*, ed. Ryan K. Balot (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 508.

[167]*City of God* 22.24.

[168]Ibid.

in 22.22–23 helps his audience develop the prudence needed to recognize possible pitfalls and discourages them from placing their hopes only in temporal goods. Indeed, in 22.24, Augustine explicitly lists "prudence" as one of the "virtues … by which a man is equipped to resist errors and the other vices implanted in him, and to conquer them by fixing his desires upon nothing but the Supreme and Immutable Good."[169] Augustine's catalog of evils thus serves to cultivate prudence and chasten perverse hope, warning readers against presuming earthly life will provide ultimate satisfaction. Yet Augustine also recognizes that chastening presumption risks leaving readers in a debilitating despair, causing them to dwell only upon the evil they see. His catalog of goods in 22.24 thus seeks to dispel this despair by unfolding the abundant goodness in the world. The experience of reading the text sets his readers on a journey through the oppositions of presumption and despair that attempts to cultivate the virtue of hope.

The rhetorical structure of 22.22–24 reinforces this pedagogical effect. Trained in the rhetorical technique of arranging a text (*dispositio*),[170] Augustine is sensitive to how ordering an argument can shape readers' attitudes and emotions. He explicitly offers reasons for his ordering of books 21 and 22: given what readers are likely to find credible or incredible about heaven or hell, he structures the discussion in a way that is sensitive to their current level of belief while attempting to take them beyond it.[171] The same pedagogical sensitivity emerges in 22.22–24. Knowing that readers may be tempted to despair, he offers a spiritual exercise that acknowledges these temptations while also supplying grounds for hope. In this way, 22.22–24 enacts what Kenneth Burke describes in a different context as a "structure of encouragement": "Suppose, that, gnarled as I am, I did not consider it enough simply to seek payment for my gnarledness, the establishment of communion through evils held in common? Suppose I would also erect a structure of encouragement, for all of us? How should I go about it, in the sequence of imagery, not merely to bring us most poignantly *into* hell, but also *out* again?"[172] In 22.22–24, Augustine supplies a similar "structure of

[169]Ibid.

[170]Cicero argues that *dispositio* is "so powerful in oratory that nothing contributes more to winning a case" (*On the Ideal Orator* 2.179–81, cf. 2.307–49).

[171]*City of God* 21.1. Cameron highlights the early Christian practice of "working through the familiar, by appealing from the known to the unknown" (*Christianity*, 25; cf. 121). See also Murphy, "Augustine and the Rhetoric of Roman Decline," 597; Smith, "Glory and Tragedy," 190–91; and Mary M. Keys, "Augustinian Humility as Natural Right," in *Natural Right and Political Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Catherine Zuckert and Michael Zuckert*, ed. Ann Ward and Lee Ward (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 97–113.

[172]Kenneth Burke, "Semantic and Poetic Meaning," in *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), 138–39. For the introduction to Burke, I am indebted to Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,

encouragement." By taking readers into a "hell on earth," he alerts them to the presence of evils and thus deflates their presumptuous fantasies about the world and their own self-sufficiency. Yet he does not establish communion with readers simply by emphasizing the evils they hold in common. While he takes readers into hell in 22.22–23, he brings them out again in 22.24, helping them see the abundant goodness in the world as a ground for hope. Through this sequence of imagery—into hell and out again—Augustine offers an itinerary meant both to instruct and encourage.

This analysis of Augustine's "structure of encouragement" highlights a new reading of 22.22–24 and points to the dangers of abstracting other books in *City of God* from their larger literary and rhetorical contexts. Consider book 19, another text frequently cited as evidence of Augustine's pessimism. There, Augustine identifies the "great mass of evils" that accompany social and political life (19.5–9), laments the realities of war and peace (19.11–13), and concludes with a vivid description of the "everlasting misery" that the wicked will experience in hell (19.28). If interpreters focus exclusively on book 19, as many political theorists do, readers are likely to see Augustine as a dour pessimist: both its substance and structure tempt despair. But if book 19 is interpreted within its larger context in *City of God*, it becomes clear that Augustine takes his reader through hell in book 19 but also out into the "felicity" of heaven in book 22.[173]

This reading is supported by Augustine's own description of *City of God*'s structure.[174] In the *Retractions* and his letter to Firmus, Augustine divides his "huge work"[175] into two volumes with five parts.[176] The first volume—books 1–10—consists of two parts: books 1–5 argue "against those who claim that the worship clearly not of gods but of demons contributes to the happiness of this life," while books 6–10 challenge "those who think that either such gods or many gods of any sort whatever should be worshiped by sacred rites and sacrifices on account of the life that will exist after death."[177] While the first ten books "refute the vanities of non-believers," the last twelve books constitute Augustine's more constructive attempt to

2004), 55, and Jeffrey Stout, "The Transformation of Genius into Practical Power: A Reading of Emerson's 'Experience,'" *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 35, no. 1 (2014): 3–24, esp. 6n12.

[173]*City of God* 22.30.

[174]I am grateful to Charles Mathewes for discussion of this connection.

[175]*City of God* 22.30.

[176]Several scholars emphasize that this division in Letter 212A/1A* reflects both the substantive content of *City of God* and the practical necessity of publishing such a massive work in more manageable codices. See Clark, "City of Books," 120–21; Vessey, "History of the Book," 29–30; and O'Daly, *Augustine's City of God*, 72–73.

[177]Letter 212A/1A*; *Retractions* 2.69.1.

"demonstrate and defend our religion."[178] Augustine divides this second volume symmetrically into three equal parts: books 11–14 focus on the "origin of the two cities," books 15–18 describe their "growth or progress," and books 19–22 analyze their "destined ends."[179] Strikingly, then, although book 19 appears near the end of *City of God*, it actually constitutes the first book of the section dealing with the "proper ends of these two cities."[180] Augustine begins with a vivid description of the evils of the earthly city in book 19 before concluding with a soaring account of earthly and heavenly goods in book 22. As a whole, *City of God* enacts the structure of encouragement that we find in microcosm in 22.22–24.

Political theorists who fixate on Augustine's "pessimism" neglect this structure of encouragement. Some even invert the order altogether. When Deane briefly acknowledges Augustine's affirmation of goodness in 22.24, he immediately returns to the realities of evil, reversing the order we find in Augustine.[181] Deane ultimately concludes his book by highlighting the advantages of Augustinian pessimism.[182] Similarly, both Niebuhr and Shklar stress how Augustine's realism deflates political optimism, concluding their account in a way that chastens presumption but also risks tempting despair.[183] Rather than being faithful to Augustine's structure of encouragement, they tend to plug bits of Augustine into their own structure of discouragement.

This tendency reflects the limitations of the simple binary between "optimism" and "pessimism" so influential in Augustinian studies.[184] By emphasizing Augustine's diagnosis of evil, realists rightly argue that Augustine is no

[178]Letter 212A/1A*; cf. *Retractions* 2.69.1–2.

[179]*Retractions* 2.69.2; cf. Letter 212A/1A*.

[180]*City of God* 19.1.

[181]Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 60–62, 92–93.

[182]Ibid., 221–43.

[183]Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism," 140–41; Shklar, "Giving Injustice Its Due," 1139–40.

[184]See Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism," 128, 140; Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 60, 68, 242. As Donald Burt argues, "Whether St. Augustine was an optimist or pessimist continues to be a matter of debate, and reasonably so. The Bishop of Hippo seems to go through violent mood swings on the issue, saying of the world at one time that it is a 'smiling place' and at another that it is like an old man groaning in his bed, saying of human beings that they are the 'best of creation' and at another that they are 'cracked pots.'" See "Courageous Optimism: Augustine on the Good of Creation," *Augustinian Studies* 21 (1990): 55. Henry Paolucci opens his introduction to Augustine's political writings by asking whether Augustine was a "political pessimist" or "prophetic utopian." See Henry Paolucci, editor's introduction to *The Political Writings of St. Augustine* (Chicago: Regnery, 1962), vii. Miles Hollingworth cites Paolucci to frame his discussion in *The Pilgrim City: St. Augustine of Hippo and His Innovation in Political Thought* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 16, 85–87; cf. 204 on "optimism" and "pessimism."

optimist. But because they often equate hope with optimism and limit their options to either optimism or pessimism, they see no other alternative but to describe him as a "pessimist." This description obscures Augustine's complex account of hope as the virtue between presumption and despair.

Some scholars recognize the limits of the binary.[185] A few attempt to categorize Augustinians either as "pessimistic optimists" or "optimistic pessimists,"[186] while others distinguish Augustine's position with some sort of qualifier, describing his position, for example, as "courageous optimism."[187] Still others try to escape the dichotomy by arguing that Augustine's "realistic, pessimistic analysis of human nature" is qualified by an "ultimate optimism" in God's providence.[188] Yet even this attribution of otherworldly "optimism" does not accord with Augustine's warnings against presumption.[189] Augustine explicitly cautions individuals not to presume they will become members of the heavenly city; to assume certain salvation is itself an expression of pride.

Ultimately, the opposition between optimism and pessimism is anachronistic and conceptually confining. "Pessimism" and "optimism" are modern concepts, originating with Leibniz and Voltaire in the seventeenth century.[190] Their application to Augustine emerges largely in the work of Niebuhr and Deane. While their emphasis on "pessimism" may have been an appropriate response to the utopian ideologies advanced amid the horrors of the mid-twentieth century, it neither exhausts the conceptual possibilities nor accurately reflects Augustine's own views.[191] A more accurate rendering would abandon this binary and adopt the more nuanced triad of presumption, hope, and despair, which offers conceptual resources for recognizing a posture that avoids both extremes.[192]

[185]See Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 363–84; Mathewes, *Evil*, 56–103; Richard Avramenko, "The Wound and Salve of Time: Augustine's Politics of Human Happiness," *Review of Metaphysics* 60 (June 2007): 784–85, 810–11.

[186]Robert McAfee Brown, editor's introduction to *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr*, xi–xxiv, describing Niebuhr.

[187]Burt, "Courageous Optimism."

[188]Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 68.

[189]See, e.g., Sermon 87.10 and Augustine, *The Gift of Perseverance*, in *Selected Writings on Grace and Pelagianism*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011), 22.57–62.

[190]For a history of "pessimism" in modern political thought, see Joshua Foa Dienstag, *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[191]Note how Burt anachronistically organizes his discussion around a distinctly Leibnizian question, asking if Augustine believed that "this is the best possible world" ("Courageous Optimism," 61–64).

[192]While this article is largely interpretative, I engage the larger debate around political hope and pessimism and relate Augustine's account to contemporary politics in Lamb, "Between Presumption and Despair" and "A Commonwealth of Hope." For

Presumption is the vice that concerns Augustinian realists. In preferring "pessimism," realists seek to chasten the "optimism" they see as presumption and advance a more realistic account of politics that attends to the presence of evil, injustice, and self-interest. Undoubtedly, when optimism becomes a universal disposition or attitude applied in every circumstance—the expectation or certainty that something good will always come about—realists are right: optimism can morph into the vice of presumption, assuming more certainty than the facts warrant. Yet pessimism has the tendency to collapse in the opposite direction, sliding into a habitual despair that assumes no good can come. Paradoxically, this vice of despair also reflects a kind of presumption: by presuming something bad will inevitably happen, pessimists exhibit a certainty about the future not warranted by reality. By minimizing the realities of goodness, pessimists downplay the possibility that goodness can emerge when possibilities seem dim.

By registering temptations that surround hope on both sides, the Augustine I have brought into view exposes the binary between optimism and pessimism as too simplistic. Unlike optimism, Augustine's virtue of hope does not gloss over dark and unpleasant realities. To do so would encourage the vice of presumption, not the virtue of hope. But neither does Augustine's account license a debilitating despair. Although we may see through a glass darkly, darkness does not overwhelm our vision. As 22.22–24 affirms, we can see grounds for hope even when we experience our condition as a "hell on earth."

examples of recent discussions of hope, see, e.g., Robert Mangabeira Unger and Cornel West, *The Future of American Progressivism: An Initiative for Political and Economic Reform* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1998); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999); Patrick Shade, *Habits of Hope: A Pragmatic Theory* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001); Victoria McGeer, "The Art of Good Hope," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 592, no. 1 (2004): 100–127; Philip Pettit, "Hope and Its Place in Mind," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 592, no. 1 (2004): 152–65; Margaret Urban Walker, "Hope's Value," in *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations after Wrongdoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Judith M. Green, *Pragmatism and Social Hope: Deepening Democracy in Global Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Mittleman, *Hope in a Democratic Age*; Roger Scruton, *The Uses of Pessimism and the Dangers of False Hope* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Adrienne M. Martin, *How We Hope: A Moral Psychology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Terry Eagleton, *Hope without Optimism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015); Ingolf U. Dalferth and Marlene A. Block, eds., *Hope* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016); Michael Lamb, "Aquinas and the Virtues of Hope: Theological and Democratic," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 44, no. 2 (2016), 300–332; Joseph R. Winters, *Hope Draped in Black: Race, Melancholy, and the Agony of Progress* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); and Nancy E. Snow, "Hope as a Democratic Civic Virtue," *Metaphilosophy* 49, no. 3 (2018): 407–27.

Conclusion

By reading influential passages of *City of God* within their rhetorical and pedagogical context, I have attempted to offer a constructive reading of 22.22–24 as an exercise of hope. When situated within an ancient view of philosophy as a "way of life," Augustine's vivid description of earthly evils in book 22 emerges not as a straightforward expression of pessimism in the restrained style, but as an excessive use of rhetoric in the mixed and grand styles that reorients his readers' faith, love, and hope. By putting good and evil "side by side," this "beautiful poem" forms a protreptic intended not simply to instruct readers about the City of God but to encourage them to pursue it.

Book 22.22–24, of course, is only one selection in Augustine's massive corpus, and it does not address how distinctly political goods can be proper objects of hope. Developing that argument requires analyzing Augustine's account of the commonwealth, a task I take up elsewhere.[193] Here, I have simply attempted to dissolve one major methodological assumption that fuels accounts of Augustinian pessimism and show how a more contextualized reading of *City of God* can improve textual interpretations. If we can step back and see these neglected patterns in Augustine's texts, we will be better equipped to appreciate the complexity of the larger Augustinian mosaic.[194]

[193]See Lamb, "Between Presumption and Despair" and "A Commonwealth of Hope."

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