

THE POLITICS OF POSSESSION: DEMONOLOGY IN *THE CITY OF GOD*

THE POLITICS OF POSSESSION:
AUGUSTINE'S DEMONOLOGY IN *THE CITY OF GOD*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand the demons found in Augustine's *City of God*, particularly as they appear as an inseparable component of the political thought he develops in this text more broadly. It has been asserted in contemporary scholarship that the presence of demons in Augustine's writing represents a vestige of his years as a Manichee that undermines the greater political vision he develops in *The City of God* to the extent that the postulation of demons *as such* is anti- or apolitical. However, I argue that not only is Augustine's understanding of the nature of demons consistent with his refutation of Manichaeism, but, in fact, Augustine's narration of the origin of demons in the fall of the angels precisely constitutes this refutation. The upshot of this is that, far from being apolitical, Augustine's demons are actually political creatures, and are hence only intelligible when located in his greater political vision. Augustine sees in much of Rome the fellowship of the earthly city in which men and demon alike are bound to one another, captive to the vice that proceeds from their idolatry. I argue that the centrality of demons in Augustine's polemic—Rome cannot be a just commonwealth because it offers worship to demons instead of God—makes a great deal more sense when we appreciate that the worship of God demons occlude is the basis for Augustine's politics. One can only reject Augustine's demons if one has missed the most crucial element of his politics, namely, participation in God through the movement of the Holy Spirit. I conclude by showing Augustine's political demonology to represent the continued development not of a Manichaean sensibility but of a host of biblical traditions regarding the peril of the demonic for God's people.

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INTRODUCTION

In her depiction of Augustine's complex relationship to Vergil, Sabine MacCormack¹ notes a conspicuous shift in Augustine's perception of the classical Roman poet. In Cassiciacum, where concerns about how a Ciceronian understanding of liberal arts and philosophical reasoning related to Christian education predominated, Augustine had quite openly read Vergil, allegorically linking his poetry with Christian theology, including transforming a series of prayers addressed to Apollo into Christian prayers to the Father.² Yet, when it came to relating to contemporary pagan cult worship, Augustine was much more reticent to see a harmony between proper Christian convictions and the pagan mythology he otherwise saw as a legitimate expression of Roman culture. This reflected a wider breakdown in relations between pagans and Christians in the late fourth century that manifested in the imperial prohibition of pagan worship and a series of violent confrontations across the empire.³ There seemed to be a persistent delay of the inevitable overcoming of pagan worship prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures; pagans were not converting. Instead, their worship was simply becoming increasingly furtive. "This hard reality," as MacCormack notes, "led Augustine to think about Vergil's perception of the gods in a new way."⁴

¹ Sabine MacCormack, *Shadows of Poetry: Vergil in the Mind of Augustine* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 26; Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998).

² *Ibid.*, 137-138.

³ *Ibid.*, 139. MacCormack mentions, e.g., Colonia Sufetana, where some Christians decided to enforce the legal prohibition by toppling a marble statue of Hercules, whereupon the pagan majority murdered sixty Christians in retaliation.

⁴ *Ibid.* 140. Perhaps not so new. MacCormack notes that Augustine's conviction that the gods of the nations are demons represents the bringing together of a number of what, by the late fourth century, are standard and even predictable Christian arguments about paganism. But this claim clearly draws upon a

MacCormack notes a corresponding development in Augustine's demonology. When his friend Nebridius wrote him in 388 asking about the relationship between the imagination and sense impression, Augustine declared that poetic divinities can impress images upon the mind according to one's beliefs. Such images are "shadows from hell," and ought to be rejected for images of more pure thought.⁵ When Nebridius pushed him on the matter, inquiring after the appearance of "celestial" beings in dreams, Augustine promptly denounced such beings as demons and thus as evil.⁶ Soon enough, Augustine began to entertain the possibility that "higher powers" are capable of creating images, appearing in dreams, and even inserting themselves into human perceptions.⁷ Thus, as Roman divinities came to be identified with demons in Augustine's thought, there was a concomitant growth in his recognition of their abilities and the nature of their interaction with humanity.

Pagan accusations against Christians after the sack of Rome in 410 CE occasioned the convergence of these two related developments in Augustine's thought. For *The City of God* would ultimately find his critique of Roman politics at the nexus between the idolatrous source of pagan vice and the prolific activity of unclean spirits; namely, that

storied Jewish tradition. Augustine makes explicit reference to both 1 Cor 10:20 and Ps 96:1-5 (95:1-5 LXX), but see also Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37 (105:37 LXX); *1 En.* 19:1; *Jub* 1:11. For Augustine's reference, see Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* (ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson; Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 8.24. Further references will be abbreviated *Civ.*, and be given in the text.

⁵ MacCormack, *Shadows*, 142.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

the gods they worship are, in fact, demons. Neither this judgement⁸ nor the more basic belief that the world is inhabited by all manners of spirits, angels, and demons⁹ were unique to Augustine. Yet modern discomfort may compel us to distinguish between Augustine the credulous old coot that believes in demons and Augustine the lucid political thinker, and isolate the latter from the former. The process by which this is normally attempted is demythologization. In other words, some claim that it is necessary to remove the “mythological” elements of Augustine’s *City of God*—elements that do not cohere with a modern scientific rationality, generally conceived, like spirits, angels, demons. Demythologization is necessary, so the argument goes, in order that the thoughts Augustine’s mythological elements bear—in this case his critique of Roman vice—may be articulated unencumbered by such obsolete categories of thought.

A case in point is Charles Mathewes,¹⁰ who sees Augustine’s demons as a remnant of the Manichaean worldview he strove so hard to overcome. As far as Mathewes is concerned, Augustine’s demons can be exorcised by reading him against himself, so to speak, and showing how Augustine’s account of evil as privation overcomes the politically problematic demonic remainder. Now, Mathewes admits that he is not interested in expositing *Augustine’s* account of evil as such, but rather an *Augustinian* one that shows “how this thought system can become ‘operational’ for our

⁸ Ibid., 140. See also Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 160–89.

⁹ E.g., Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1967), 41, though this is well attested.

¹⁰ Charles Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Further references will be abbreviated *EAT*, and given in the text.

own time” (*EAT* 62). He thus excuses himself from the exegetical work that would require him to reckon with Augustine’s demons, electing instead to focus his treatment of evil in the Augustinian tradition by considering Pelagianism and Manichaeism via the work of Reinhold Niebuhr and Hannah Arendt. Mathewes, in fact, claims that historical exegetical approaches cannot attend to the significance of Augustine’s impact on later thinkers (63).¹¹ However, this inattentiveness to Augustine himself has its own consequences. My sympathies with Mathewes’ desire to show the significance of Augustinian thought for our own time compels me to engage with his argument. But the exegetical tack I take articulates the dangers of positing the necessity of leaving Augustine for the sake of contemporary relevance; when taken on their own terms, the demons in *The City of God* reveal the profound inadequacies of Mathewes’ attempt to propose an Augustinian politics adequate to the challenge of evil in this world.

For it is a central tenet of the present study that the Augustine found in *The City of God* is not merely a mystic, credulous in his old age, who begins to descry more readily the loci of relation between the visible and the invisible, but a political Augustine that begins to understand that the movements of this world are too complex to be accounted for without reference to invisible yet created agents. With a close reading of demons in *The City of God* I will demonstrate the inextricable connection between Augustine’s

¹¹ He mentions G. R. Evans, and here I actually agree with Mathewes. Though her ten-page summary of Augustine’s demonology is not a mischaracterization *per se* (though it can be misleading at points), I ultimately find it unhelpful, abstracted as it is from any account of the deceptive mechanisms of demons in Augustine’s account, like civic and mythical theology, or the imitation of demons through theatre and war. See *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 98-111. But Mathewes is wrong to see this as a problem inherent to historical exegesis. On the contrary, it simply points to the failure of this particular reading to note the political significance of demons.

depiction of demons and his critique of Rome and the earthly city. Our subject is thus Augustine's *political demonology*, since his demons cannot be understood independently of political considerations such as the movement of the soul, its appetites, and virtues and vices, including the earthly city's paradigmatic vice, the lust for mastery. In other words, the two Augustine's—the credulous old coot and the lucid political thinker—are one and the same. But this is a postulation that leaves neither Augustine unaffected by the other. By the end we will have seen both that Augustine's demons are politically intelligible, and that Augustine's politics are substantially "otherworldly."

The discussion of the demons of *The City of God* in the first chapter is predominantly cosmological. Here we develop Mathewes' charge against Augustine, namely that his inclusion of demons represents a vestige of Manichaeism. Mathewes' concern, articulated largely by way of Hannah Arendt, demonstrates that the problem of demons is political from the beginning, insofar as their postulation entails withdrawal from the political for the sake of purity and a concomitant denial of the efficacy of the political in the face of evil. His concept of political ontology is introduced at this point as the articulation of a political mode that *can* respond to evil, unlike Manichaeism, through participation in the good, undermining the apolitical threat of Manichaean demons. Putting the explicitly political discussion on hold, the rest of the chapter is taken up with determining whether it is accurate to say that demons are necessarily Manichaean by definition, as Mathewes assumes. This involves a brief overview of the Manichaean mythos, and the exposition of Augustine's account of the fall of the angels, which is distinct from the strange Manichaean cosmogony to the extent that Augustine

purposefully used this story to distinguish Christianity from Manichaeism. Chapter one ends by demonstrating that the particularity of Augustine's demonology, positing as it does the privative nature of evil, necessitates not that demons are apolitical, but on the contrary, that the only way they are intelligible is politically, in relation to other constituents of creation, particularly humans.

The only direction the discussion of demonology in chapter one can go, then, is toward the political considerations of chapter two. For it is only by setting Augustine's demonology within his larger account of the political that we can see the full extent of the problem of demons. In this way we find that not only do Augustine's demons *not* contradict his political ontology, they constitute its predominant subject. This is because politics, for Augustine, is the soul's movement in the Spirit toward God in love, and demons are among the greatest threats of the obstruction of this movement. This obstruction is observable in Roman worship; the demons they take to be gods deceive the Romans, and the Roman leaders imitate the demons in this deception, cooperating with them, binding all in the vice that proceeds from such idolatry. The example of the Romans demonstrates the appetitive nature of possession, but demons are not without their unwilling victims. Willing victims or not, however, in order to attain the virtue characteristic of the City of God, those afflicted by demons require the freedom offered by Christ in the Holy Spirit. At this point we return to Mathewes' political concerns only to find that his attempt to articulate a political praxis free from the problem of demons utterly sunders him from any semblance of Augustine's political thought, aligning him in a frightening way much more with the Romans that are the object of Augustine's

demonological critique. The chapter closes with the postulation of prayer as a political practice that *is* more in line with Augustine's political demonology.

The conclusion of this work brings us full circle. Since it is no longer tenable to claim that Augustine's demons are a vestige of Manichaeism, we postulate instead that his demonology is consistent with the biblical canon he claims underwrites his work. Through a concatenation of scriptural passages, we develop a portrait of a biblical demonology that provides the impetus behind Augustine's political understanding of demons. From early on angels were associated with the nations as protector gods, but due to their ability to ensnare the Israelites in idolatrous worship, the gods of the nations developed the reputation of being demons. This sensibility developed as early Jewish and Gentile Christ-believers articulated Jesus as the one whom God had anointed to save them from such demonic snares. It is here that the Hebraic conception of the demonic as that which ensnares Israelites in illicit worship is developed into a spirit of disobedience that operates through the power of the law. In this early Christian demonology the Holy Spirit that is so important to Augustine's politics is posited as a central character in Christ's overcoming of the lordship of demons.

I
“HEROIC-DEMONIC, SATANIC WICKEDNESS”

Demons and the Subversion of Ontological Politics

Augustine, in Charles Mathewes’ estimation, attempted constantly to *demythologize* evil. “In all his work, he struggled against the temptation to grant malice any theological, or indeed supernatural purchase” (*EAT* 63). This is an important legacy, Mathewes argues, that Augustine bequeaths to later thinkers. There are, however, mythological remnants within Augustine’s work that blunt this critical edge.¹ This is significant for Mathewes insofar as *demythologization* is the concept by which he understands Augustine to navigate successfully between the twin dangers of taking evil “too seriously” (Manichaeism) and “not seriously enough” (Pelagianism). Mathewes does make an explicit attempt to avoid the pitfall of Max Weber’s “iron cage,” which traps those unable to see the way in which all language is embedded within “mythology”; he recognizes that any attempt at absolutely rigorous demythologization will simply enchant one in the mythology of rationalisation (204; 204n.3). Nevertheless, the persistence of “immaterial demons who tempt humans to sin” in Augustine’s work is, for Mathewes, an unfortunate vestige of the superstitions of the Greco-Roman populace; it is the residue of a worldview from Augustine’s days as a devout Manichee that his demythologization of Manichaeism did not purge (63).

Fortunately, Augustine’s demythologizing thought itself makes the challenge to this worldview possible in the relocation of the demonic from a material or spatial

¹ There are also myths *about* Augustine that need to be demythologized (see *EAT* 207–228).

question to a temporal question:² the demonic is not a dark force independent of God but the struggle of beings to become secular, to live in a world apart from God, who remains prior (*EAT* 63). An “Augustinian” analysis denudes our conceptions of and responses to evil of their mythical pretences. Thus, “Augustine demythologizes evil by subverting popular mythological depictions of evil to reveal that ‘evil’ is not a terrifying, unthinkable, and indigestible fetish, but rather a mundane and banal reality which, while tragic, should not drive us towards either pessimism or despair” (205). Nevertheless, for Mathewes, there seems to be a rupture between Augustine’s metaphysics and his cosmology. The demonic can be consistent with Augustine’s account of evil as privation only so long as it remains conceptual, and a subordinated concept at that. Indeed, his concession that the “demonic” is the struggle to become secular is the one place in Mathewes’ account where he has any use for the term. Every other mention of a “demonic” or “Satanic” conception of evil is invariably set within the context of its obsolescence vis-à-vis a more “Augustinian” account. Such conceptions of evil presumably (it is never explicitly stated) signify the affirmation of demons as ontological manifestations of evil that escape the grasp of Augustine’s refutation of Manichaeism.

So, the very presence of active demons and spirits in Augustine’s account represents for Mathewes the problematic persistence of a mythos that permits evil ontological or even “supernatural” purchase. But why should this be so problematic? Why is it important that we demythologize Augustine? We should note that neither

² Cf. Rowan Williams, “Insubstantial Evil,” in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner* (ed. R. Dodaro and G. Lawless; London: Routledge, 2000), 105–123. To this theme we will return below.

Augustine nor Mathewes discuss ontology for ontology's sake; Mathewes' problem with the presence of demons in Augustine's account is a pragmatic problem. Unfortunately, as is typical with modern dismissals of demonic and other mythological phenomena,³ Mathewes' rejection of demons is extremely brief, unaccompanied by any sustained argument. Perhaps he does not see the need to argue since the very belief in the existence of demons self-evidently reflects the broader Manichaean sensibility with which he is struggling. Because this is the case, however, it seems reasonable to use the well-rehearsed problems with Manichaeism more generally to help us understand the poorly-argued problem with demons more specifically.

As it turns out, the basic problem with Manichaeism is political, a problem of praxis, of one's growth in the good and the very possibility of action. We will have occasion in a moment to discuss Manichaeism more in depth, as well as Augustine's response to it, but for now suffice it to note that in its effort to sunder decisively good from evil within its cosmology, Manichaeism undermined the work of "the political" by rendering good fundamentally impotent and defenceless against evil. As Peter Brown notes, it is this aspect of Manichaeism that Augustine emphasizes most, that he rejects most forcibly.⁴ For it is this ineffectiveness, this passivity that makes Manichaeism a manifestly "static" religion. It was assumed simplistically that once any reasonable person "awoke" to his true state, he would immediately be capable of liberating his own

³ Cf. Phillip H. Wiebe's engagement with Richard Rorty and the relative superficiality of naturalist or eliminativist positions with respect to beliefs in demons and other "supernatural agencies." *God and Other Spirits: Intimations of Transcendence in Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 18–21.

⁴ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1967), 52.

soul. This *setting-free* was so straightforward it bypassed growth and progress, oversimplifying human action and making the labour of healing and renewal ostensibly unnecessary.⁵

Although he has no such developed and articulated cosmology to respond to, Mathewes wants to engage a similarly Manichaean sensibility that is inclined to conceive evil as a “demonic” phenomenon. In fact, Manichaeism itself is but an extreme manifestation of a more general anxiety about the seemingly positive power malice has in the world (*EAT* 63, 73), a concern Mathewes describes as the problem of “taking evil too seriously.” He begins by engaging the work of Mark Edmundson. Although he challenges Edmundson’s constructive project, which he claims is basically Pelagian (45), Mathewes is nevertheless inclined to accept Edmundson’s “acute diagnosis of our problems” (46). Edmundson argues that not only do we as moderns identify evil with otherness, externality, and the strange, but we also conceive this evil as a demonic force lurking behind the social ills manifest in this otherness. Our perception of evil is thus characterised by a “gothic” foreboding that sees our problems as a basically insurmountable challenge from the outside (44). In fact, in Mathewes’ analysis, the “demonic” itself is exterior according to its very concept; to “demonize” someone is precisely to fail to acknowledge one’s own complicity in evil by expelling it from one’s own “moral universe” (51). Evil is demonic to the extent that it is utterly alienated from us, entirely other, and thus acknowledging responsibility becomes for Mathewes a primary function of an Augustinian demythologization of evil (227).

⁵ Ibid., 59.

Of course, Mathewes' discussion of Edmundson is but a prolegomenon to his primary treatment of this theme using the work of Hannah Arendt. Her *Eichmann in Jerusalem* represents an attempt to talk about evil in a way that “does not turn [perpetrators] into demons, something sub-(or super-)human” (*EAT* 150). It is here that we get our closest look at the problem of demons because Arendt is so concerned to show that, contrary to the opinions of the prosecution, Adolf Eichmann was precisely *not* demonic, *not* some manifestation of radical evil in “Miltonic-demonic” form (165). It had become too easy (and perhaps still is) to explain Nazi Germany and the Holocaust by making them the materialization of some monstrous, nonpareil evil. There were, according to Arendt, two problems with this evaluation. The first is that the testimonies did not support it. As far as incarnations of Lucifer go, Eichmann was a huge disappointment; he could hardly be characterized as some deep and ancient will, foul and bent on destruction, because he didn't seem to have much character at all. “He talked only in clichés, borrowed words and phrases, and exhibited no ability to think, nor any capacity for imagination”; an “automatically mendacious idiot,” Eichmann was more “bumbling bureaucrat” than Beelzebul (166–67). Thus, it seemed to Arendt, Eichmann's actions should not be attributed to a malign will but to sheer *thoughtlessness*, a condition so banal it could only be rendered colloquially: he “never realized what he was doing.”⁶

That this non-quality of thoughtlessness should exemplify evil itself for Arendt begins to suggest the second problem with the demonic picture of evil. Conceiving evil as

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (rev. and enl. ed.; New York: Penguin, 1994), 287.

essentially demonic encourages despair in the face of such evil since it exceeds the influence of human (political) activity. Like the postulation that Eichmann was a product of the history and culture of Germany, attributing Eichmann's actions to demonic, superhuman agents attempts to explain away "the responsibility of the doer for his deed in terms of this or that kind of determinism."⁷ In this, it replicates the logic of totalitarianism, engulfing the moral agent within a force that renders him a mere cog within a machine. For what is at stake for Arendt, what evil threatens, is precisely the *vita activa*, the politically active life, central to which is her concept of *amor mundi*, love of the world. The love of world is a political concept, the virtue of the *vita activa* that constitutes the world itself through the creative power of humans in speech and thought, which are the paradigms of action (*EAT* 156–58). Politics in this conception entails that everything is "decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence."⁸ Because this is the framework for human meaning and flourishing, Arendt's conception of evil is determined in relation to it: evil itself is "worldless," that which takes us from this world, that which renders humanity superfluous (163). Anything that stultifies the *vita activa* is fundamentally worldless. This was Eichmann's testimony vis-à-vis totalitarianism, demonstrating the relegation of his own creative thought within a "rigorously systematized 'method' of political decision-making" (166); it is also what Arendt feared characterized modern political trends more generally in their tendencies toward technologization and bureaucratization. But the centrality of *amor mundi* also

⁷ Ibid., 290. Cf. *EAT*, 188.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, quoted in Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 203.

entials that anything “otherworldly,” like Augustinian Christianity or the demonic understanding of radical evil, is equally anti-political, contrary to human flourishing.⁹

Because evil constitutes a turn away from the world, evil cannot be articulated as something that requires us to turn from the world in order to respond to it; if we metaphysically narrate evil such that it cannot be addressed by flourishing human good, by simply *being* more fully (cf. e.g. *EAT* 189–96), then we have given evil too much ontological purchase. For Arendt, to say evil is demonic is to do just this. In other words, demonic conceptions of evil are wrong not because they see *x* as the root of evil instead of *y*, but because they give evil a root at all. On the contrary, we should rather say that there is, properly speaking, *nothing* at the root of evil (here we can see the antecedents of Arendt’s “asymmetrical ontology” in Augustine’s privation). Because evil is banal and not profound, because it is not reality but an unreality that defies thought (cf. 168), it cannot be thought that is directed somewhere else, as though evil could be a thought thinking about a thing; it cannot be any more substantive than the thoughtlessness that characterized Eichmann. Any attempt to address political problems by treating them as manifestations of a deeper spiritual conflict simply amounts to a turn away from the only world in which we can meaningfully act; it is tantamount to avoiding the problem altogether.¹⁰ What humanity needs instead is, in Mathewes’ terms, a proper *political*

⁹ Cf. Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, 205.

¹⁰ A helpful illustration here may come from Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (trans. R. Philcox; New York: Grove, 2004), 18–21. It is a characteristic of colonized peoples to draw upon myths that function to inhibit an aggressive response to the colonisers. “Zombies,” he notes, “are more terrifying than colonists” (p. 19). Hence, there is no reason to confront colonial power when the “real battle” is against the terrifying adversaries of mythology. Eventually, however, the time comes when the colonized is “bound to stop telling stories. After years of unreality after wallowing in the most extraordinary phantasms,

ontology (e.g. 150): an account of being in the world that is itself a response to evil; an account of evil that does not force us to abandon being in the world, constituted as it is by political activities like making promises and forgiving (159), but also, importantly, making judgements about where and when politics has failed, where we have lost the world to thoughtlessness like Eichmann's. Thus, it remains debatable whether "deeper" explanations of evil, like historical determination or demonic impetus, are possible. "But what is not debatable," Arendt insists, "is that no judicial procedure would be possible on the basis of them."¹¹

Of course, it will be required of us to be a great deal more specific about the political visions Arendt and Mathewes propound in contradistinction to the metaphysics of satanic evil that would stifle them. Moreover, Mathewes' position should not be entirely conflated with Arendt's since part of his project is explicitly to address some of her shortcomings. To this we must return in the next chapter, however, because there is a fundamental matter of clarity that must be addressed before we get too deep into their political debate. For whatever their differences, Mathewes is clear that, to a certain extent, Arendt was as right in her banality thesis as Augustine was in his privation thesis. The extent of this agreement is their critical purpose, which is to *demythologize* evil:

Evil is empty, shallow, banal. . . . Just as Augustine used this ontology critically, to deconstruct the Manicheans' claims about the metaphysical reality of evil, Arendt similarly employs it to undermine modern anxieties about the possibility of evil being some sort of heroic-demonic, Satanic wickedness within the world. .

the colonized subject, machine gun at the ready, finally confronts the only force which challenges his very being: colonialism. . . . The colonized subject *discovers reality* and transforms it through his praxis, his deployment of violence and his agenda for liberation" (pp. 20–21).

¹¹ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 290. Cf. *EAT*, 188.

. . . Arendt's use of this asymmetrical ontology, following Augustine's own use of it, deflates and indeed demythologizes such worries. (*EAT* 195)

Now, as we noted above, the most basic meaning behind refuting a conception of evil as “heroic-demonic, Satanic wickedness” seems to be to challenge those that would make evil insurmountable by giving it ontological purchase in the form of active spirits of malice. The contemporary demonic conception of evil can hardly be argued to manifest any remotely developed taxonomy of demons and their activities, so challenging such language attempts to call into question the *general* temptation to renounce the world, the *vita activa*, for the sake of some naïve conception of purity that ultimately destroys the political community.¹² The problem here with the demonic is that it makes evil a force that exceeds the grasp of human political activity, but that nevertheless impinges upon it deterministically. Although the demonic remains a vaguely defined conceptual category in Mathewes' account—there are very few references to demons as beings—it can reasonably be inferred that he would not expect a more nuanced cosmology that accounts for demons as specific historical (if superhuman) agents to satisfy his desire to escape the more general Manichaean malady of insurmountable evil. Mathewes wants a properly ontological politics that refuses evil any purchase, and the postulation of demons cannot but give evil that purchase.

And yet it remains unclear how this judgement can make sense of Augustine's extensive and persistent reference to demons and unclean spirits in *The City of God*, or of

¹² Or, alternatively, it counters the historical tendency to so localize evil as to suggest a strategy for its extirpation via not just exorcisms, but the suppression of those who would call upon spirits to afflict you (see 213).

his highly developed (albeit unsystematic) cosmology. It is strange for Mathewes to attribute to *The City of God* a striking tone of demythologization. Not that he is wrong to identify the primary thrust of the first ten books as Augustine's attempt to unmask Rome's ignoble lies, nor that he is wrong to call this "demythologization"; this is surely a correct application of the term. What is strange is that his usage of this term and his affirmation of its connotations of disenchantment and naturalization obscure the very central role demons play in Augustine's understanding of the earthly city. If anything is striking, it is how bound up Augustine's critique of Rome is with his identification of pagan worship with demon-worship; that the Romans worship demons, in fact, seems to be the centrepiece of his criticism. Mathewes charges that the persistence of demons in Augustine's account is inconsistent with his demythologization of Manichaeism, but the appearance of demons and fallen angels in *The City of God* can hardly strike one as incidental. If, as we have noted, his dismissal lacks careful argument, we must ask whether its constitutive assumptions bear the weight of more detailed scrutiny. For it is questionable whether even *demons* are as demonic as the conception of evil Arendt and Mathewes are attempting to refute. Is Augustine's every postulation of demons a concession to ontological evil by definition? Mathewes offhandedly proposes to expunge demons as a vestige of Manichaeism remaining in Augustine's story of the earthly city; does this not simply beg the question of whether demons *qua* demons are Manichaean?

Demons in the Manichaean Mythos

To begin with, the charge that there are remnants of Manichaeism within Augustine's thought should be made with great care. The charge may or may not be true, but

Augustine devoted far more space in writing to refute the Manichaeans than any other heretical group,¹³ which suggests that such holdovers would not have remained without a hard-fought battle. This is not to put Augustine above critique, but to submit that such a hasty dismissal of demons says more about modern scholarship than it does about Augustine. What should instead be said about Augustine is said by Neil Forsyth, who notes that the diverse cosmological myths developed in early Christian theology—e.g. by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen in repudiating the Gnostics—were suddenly inadequate to counter the renewed vigour and success of the unified and developed Manichaean cosmology.¹⁴ Augustine’s work constituted an attempt to navigate the Scylla and Charybdis of Manichaeism and Pelagianism;¹⁵ to this spirit Mathewes is rightly attuned. What Forsyth makes clear that Mathewes glaringly misses, however, is that to navigate these troubled waters, Augustine turned to cosmology no less than did his forefathers.

For, according to Forsyth, the problem the early church ultimately had with Manichaeism was bound up with its cosmology; unlike the Qumran and New Testament apocalypics, Manichaean dualism was not confined to the ethical or eschatological but was principally cosmogenetic.¹⁶ Originally, according to Manichaeism, Light and

¹³ Cf. Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 397.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 387.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 417: “The oscillation of Augustine’s thought always tries to maintain the simultaneous presence of both parts of the paradox, even if they can truly merge only in moments of the greatest understanding. If the Pelagian, or Platonic, Augustine threatens dominance, he will dig for the Manichaean, descending into his darkness. If the Manichaean darkness becomes too enticing, then he will summon the Pelagian.”

¹⁶ The following account is a précis of *ibid.*, 390–93, supplemented by Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas: Vol. 2, From Gautama Buddha to the Triumph of Christianity* (trans. W. R. Trask; Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 389–92.

Darkness, Good and Evil, God and Matter were separate. Evil raged against only itself until it became aware of the Light and, in jealous desire for the better, attacked it. Bereft of any instruments of war, God was forced to create the Primal Man, a divine hypostasis more suited to combat. Primal Man and his five assistants, his “soul” and “armour” fashioned from five lights, were defeated; demons (the Ἄρχοντες) devoured the assistants and Satan devoured part of the Light of the Primal Man. This defeat mixed the Light and the Darkness for the first time—matter now possessed a portion of the Light—but also consigned the Darkness to its eventual defeat, as the Light acted as a poison from within. The Spirit of the Light was sent by God to rescue Primal Man by descending toward matter, grasping him by the hand, and pulling him up to his celestial homeland of light. The light that remained devoured by Satan and his demons remained to be saved, however, and this required the creation of the visible world, which the Spirit fashioned from the material bodies of defeated Ἄρχοντες. This creation was intended to unmix what had improperly been mixed by imprisoning both matter and light in creation to make space for the purification of the latter;¹⁷ initial success in this came with the creation of the sun, moon, and stars from light that had not been too corrupted by its contact with matter.

But in order to recover the light devoured by demons, God emanated the Third Messenger, who appeared to the male demons as a naked virgin and to the female demons as a naked young man. In desire the male demons spilled their semen and, along

¹⁷ Thus, as Forsyth notes, creation itself for Manichaeism should be seen as a redemptive ploy of God rather than a strategy of the satanic demiurge. *The Old Enemy*, 393.

with it, the light they had devoured, from which came vegetable matter. The female demons who were already pregnant, on the other hand, aborted their offspring at the sight of this young man and berthed them; the aborted offspring subsequently ate the buds of trees, assimilating the light contained therein. As a counter-coup to prevent the separation of light from matter by these methods, the Prince of Darkness—Matter itself now as personified lust—attempted to stay his defeat by creating a stronger prison, one fashioned in his own image. A male and female demon devoured all the abortions, trapping all¹⁸ or almost all¹⁹ the remaining light, came together, and became Adam and Eve. Thus, the human becomes the battlefield of the struggle, his body being the animal form of the demonic Ἄρχοντες, his material desire compelling him to reproduce and perpetuate light's prison; hence, Eve is Satan's greatest weapon. Another messenger, the incarnation of the saving intelligence, is sent to warn Adam of the power of the demonic lust he embodies with his flesh, but does not get to Adam before he falls asleep and Eve appears to him. The messenger appears as the serpent in the Garden to show Adam the tree of knowledge in order that he might begin saving the light within himself. A succession of messengers has since come to renew the revelation: Seth, Enoch, Noah, Buddha, Zarathustra, Jesus Christ, and Mani, the final messenger. The end will come in a manner not unlike the apocalypses contemporary with Manichaeism. There will be a series of trials and tribulations, followed by the judgement of all souls culminating in the vindication of all the Elect and the personifications of Good, who will ascend into

¹⁸ Cf. Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, 391.

¹⁹ Cf. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 393.

heaven. The world itself will be annihilated, and all of Matter in all its personifications and demons will be bound and cast into a huge pit sealed with a rock, and never again shall the Light and Darkness mix.

Man's condition is the slumber of Adam; the divine soul must work to "awaken" those portions of it remaining bound to matter in men and vegetable life. It is, as Mircea Eliade notes, a tragic, pessimistic system, perhaps the most humiliating anthropogony there is.²⁰ The world itself is created from demonic matter, man its most offensive creature by virtue of being the very incarnate image of Darkness. He is the centre of the soteriological play not in himself, but only because he is at the centre of the mixture of darkness and the light hidden within him. This is surely a counsel of despair; there is no hope for the material, which is bound to the fate of the Darkness of which it is a personification. There is thus nothing to *do*. Salvation is a three-stage pattern of gnoseological awakening, revelation, and anamnesis²¹ that prescribes nothing for the body except its total rejection via strict asceticism. It is anti-political in precisely the sense Arendt would mean it: it seeks not to create the world through communion but to destroy it, and so save not oneself but that bit of God within oneself.

The "true religion" consists in escaping from the prison built by the demonic forces and in contributing to the definitive annihilation of the world, of life, and of man. The "illumination" obtained through gnosis suffices for salvation because it inspires a particular behavior that separates the believer from the world. Rites are useless, except for a few symbolic gestures (the kiss of peace, the fraternal greeting, the handclasps), together with prayers and songs.²²

²⁰ Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, 393.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 391.

²² *Ibid.*, 394.

This mythology gained a following in Augustine's time (and its sensibilities continue to compel even today)²³ to the extent that it was able to make sense of the human condition to those like the young Augustine, who were aware of how divided against itself human nature seemed to be. Once awake, the Manichee would become aware not only of the divine light within him, but also that the one desire the light within him had—to be set free to return to the Kingdom of Light—it was powerless to accomplish. It was too imprisoned by this body of habitual and seemingly autonomous sin that could not possibly have come from God.²⁴ “I have known my soul and the body that lies upon it/ That they have been enemies since the creation of the worlds.”²⁵ But the particular articulation of this war, disparaging the bodily and its manifestly evil nature, ironically led not to moral abasement but a kind of self-righteousness. Manichees were austere men who recognized the gravity of sin; the flesh could not but do evil. But, as Brown notes, their guilt was not intimate. “Their religion was directed to ensuring that this, the good part of themselves, would remain essentially untouched and unaffected by their baser nature.”²⁶ The Manichaean Elect always had the consolation that whatever the failures of the flesh, one's sins remained finally external to one's immaculate core.

The self-assurance of the Manichee, of course, was undermined by his own cosmology.²⁷ There was clearly an eschatological confidence; based upon what, though,

²³ According to Mathewes' understanding (*EAT* 92–93).

²⁴ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 47.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 49, quoting *A Manichaean Psalm-book, Part II* (ed. C. R. C. Allberry; Stuttgart : W. Kohlhammer, 1938), 56.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

it is difficult to tell. The primary actor is always the Darkness, always relegating God to a responding role, often an inept one at that. The Father of Light was so unaware and unprepared for the initial onslaught of the Darkness he “could not even enter into conflict with the invaders, without undergoing a drastic and belated transformation of his being.”²⁸ God created the setting for salvation and sent messengers, but the dominant offensives were all Dark; this God was scarcely omnipotent.²⁹ And the Manichee’s ethics took the same form as his cosmology; his asceticism was his only soteriological performance, and it indelibly bore the mark of good’s fundamental passivity. A crude gnosis³⁰ was to left do all the work. As we noted above, this presumed an unduly facile account of action. Once awoken, the Manichee simply freed his speck of unblemished goodness from those disagreeable parts of him, and there was ostensibly nothing more to do than this. “If he knows how to observe the rituals, he will awaken: the fragment of luminous mind in him will return to its full purity; and the ‘foreign’ nature of good that resides, temporarily, in his body will disengage itself from all dangers.”³¹

To return to the focus of our present argument, demons in this mythology are evil all the way down, so to speak. They are the “Rulers” (Ἀρχοντες) under the Prince of Darkness; they have their being not according to Light but according to Darkness; they are evil in the beginning of all things, evil with respect to their constitution, and they will share the fate of evil in their final imprisonment. Although there is not enough material to

²⁸ Ibid., 52.

²⁹ Ibid., 53.

³⁰ Ibid., 59.

³¹ Ibid., quoting A. Chavannes and P. Pelliot, “Un traité manichéen retrouvé en Chine,” *Journal Asiatique* 10/18 (1911): 546.

speak of a proper “demonology” in the Manichaean cosmogony recounted above, demons are nevertheless a part of the tapestry that is characterized by that which most worries Mathewes and Arendt. They can be seen to mark the insurmountability of evil, the passivity of the good, and the rejection of any responsibility humans might have for the evils in creation; they are a determinative force in creation to which no political response is possible, and in this Arendtian sense they are “otherworldly.” They are, in their very being, at the ontological root of evil. They are other, they are the reason there is evil in creation, that creation is evil; they are *us* as *other*, that of us that must be utterly denied to save the good that does not coincide with us. If demons *qua* demons reflect this sensibility, it is clear why we might be inclined to reject them from our political or theological accounts. For what hope is there here? What is there to do?

The parallels between the Manichaean cosmos and the cosmos of the mature Augustine have been noted. Augustine’s position can be difficult to distinguish existentially from the Manichaean one³² as the power of the Devil and the free movement of demons in Augustine’s work make his universe, not unlike the Manichaean universe, invaded by Darkness.³³ But my hope is that the sheer peculiarity of Manichaeism’s cosmogony might make us pause in this judgement. It is a very strange story that Augustine is charged with clinging to. In fact, perhaps the primary reason the Manichaean mythos sounds so bizarre to modern ears is because of our (ostensible) familiarity with a cosmogony that Augustine himself is largely responsible for

³² Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 401.

³³ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 395.

developing and popularizing, namely the fall of angels. So it may be, as one commentator argued, that Augustine depicts history as a present age characterized by Manichaean dualism but framed by a beginning and end that are neo-Platonist or “rationalist” pictures of harmonious and intelligible order;³⁴ but the *particularity* of the story he tells to connect beginning, middle, and end makes all the difference.

This, at least, we can learn from Forsyth. His work on the “combat myth” from Gilgamesh to Augustine brings to light the way in which Christian theology in its earliest instances was developed over against problematic or rival theologies through retelling the biblical story, and in particular the story of God’s struggle with the Adversary, Satan.³⁵ This was never done *ex nihilo*, but was always a matter of reworking and adapting older narratives like the combat myth to make good theological sense, even when their source materials (e.g. the various books of *Enoch*) were not finally canonized.³⁶ Forsyth notes that this is particularly the case when it came to the attempts of early church theologians to reckon with the problem of evil: “What they tried to do was to find narrative answers, to construct a story that would situate the devil in time and so explain their own relations to him and to his adversary, God.”³⁷ This was notably the case with Augustine. His early years consistently led him to develop his theology vis-à-vis Manichaeism. Far from being a holdover from the religion of Augustine’s youth, the idea of the Devil and his demons

³⁴ See Williams, “Insubstantial Evil,” 116–17, and his treatment of Kathleen Sands’ objection to Augustine.

³⁵ Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

would make it possible to distinguish proper Christian behaviour from the heresy of Mani, but only insofar as he could tell the *right story* about them.³⁸

The manifest difference between the two stories is that whereas for Manichaeism, evil was the cause of sin, for Augustine, sin is the cause of evil.³⁹ Early on in his response to Manichaeism, Augustine's primary task was to narrate evil as a result of human will and not a cosmic force. Of course, his early sketch on sin as a result of free will did not in the end adequately address either the experience of evil and the bondage of the will, or the Pelagian temptation that man's salvation consists in simply choosing not to sin.⁴⁰ Forsyth is rightly cautious about trying to insist upon a consistency throughout Augustine's thought that would unduly turn him into a dogmatic theologian;⁴¹ his occasional and rhetorical approach to theology at times made him too Pelagian against the Manichaeans and too Manichaean against the Pelagians.⁴² But *The City of God* should be seen as countering both temptations,⁴³ charting a path between them.⁴⁴ However, if we want to explicate Augustine's repudiation of Manichaeism, what must not be understated is how crucial the story of Satan and his demons is for his success.⁴⁵

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 14, 401, 410, 419.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 400–01.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 397.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 400–01, 406, 417.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁴⁴ In charting this path Augustine equally held Manichaeism and Pelagianism together. For it was only by maintaining the insights of both, but fully conceding to neither, that Augustine and early Christian theology were able to capture the paradox of what had already been accomplished in Christ and the persistence of sin. *Ibid.*, 406.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 417.

The Fall of the Angels

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” To this the angels themselves are witnesses, speaking to those prophets whom its truth befits (*Civ.* 11.4). In his exposition on the Hexaemeron in Book 11 of *The City of God*, Augustine understands the light of evening and day before the creation of the sun to be the knowledge of created angels turned in praise and love of the Creator (11.7, 9). The light they have to be the light of day they have by virtue of partaking in that eternal Light, who is the Son of God.⁴⁶ It is this light that lightens every pure angel, precisely in order that he might not be a light unto himself but only in God. Angels were created thus so that they might live not in any way they would choose, but in perfect wisdom and blessedness (11.11), which is the enjoyment without interruption of God, and the certain knowledge that one will remain in this enjoyment for eternity (11.13). And though they were all made with this nature, all made light and not dark at any time before their fall (11.11), some angels became impure, indeed became unclean spirits, when they turned away from God. The difference between the angels and demons is thus their contrasting appetites, which arise from their will and desires. The will and desire of the good angels is to cleave to God as they have done since they were created; the will and desire of the fallen angels is to delight not in Good and Truth itself, which is God, but in their own power. They do not, we will note, reject God for another order, but for themselves, turning away from

⁴⁶ Elsewhere Augustine says they were created *before* all times, in accordance with the fact that there was never a time when God was not Lord. Indeed, time itself is the very movement of the angels, whether they were created at or prior to the creation of the heavens and earth. Either way, Augustine is clear that although there was no time without angels, they are nevertheless *created* and thus not co-eternal with the Creator (12.16).

communion that they may be their own private good (12.1, 6). But because evil has no nature of its own, in turning the unclean spirits abandoned themselves to their own darkness (11.9), leaving the knowledge of the Light of eternal blessedness.

Yet how is it that the holy angels, whom we know to be perfectly blessed in their knowledge of their eternal participation in the immutable Good, could have the same created nature as those who have fallen away from this blessedness? How could some, at their creation, have foreknowledge of their perseverance, and so be eternally blessed, and some have no such knowledge of either their perseverance or their fall, and so not be eternally blessed (*Civ.* 11.13)? “For if they had shared equally in Wisdom, then the wicked angels would have remained eternally blessed with the good, because both would have been equally sure of the eternity of their blessedness” (11.11). Either they would have to have been created unequally, or, if equal, good angels would have to have received the certain knowledge of their blessedness only after the downfall of others (11.13). In both cases it is clear that the fall of the angels is not a defect of creation, but a creaturely act of will foreknown by God (e.g. 11.19). Both are good according to their nature, but one is righteous in will and the other perverse (11.33). To be sure, however, this perversity of will cannot be traced to created nature; the goodness of God and His creation are not in question. To oversimplify a rather complicated argument, the cause of blessedness is God, it is given by God, and it is received by cleaving to God. The cause of the demons’ misery is in their failure to so cleave, turning to themselves in a selfish desire that leaves them with a less than perfect degree of being (12.6; cf. 12.1). This movement of the will has no efficient cause but is the very movement of the will back

towards the nothing out of which it was made (12.6; 14.13); it is a deficient cause, a defect that is not a *cause*, but rather the *effect* of an evil will: “where the will becomes evil, this evil would not arise in it if the will itself were unwilling; and its defects are therefore justly punished, because they are not necessary, but voluntary” (12.8). But the good will of the holy angels is the love of God itself, with which the fallen angels themselves were created (12.9). Thus the deciding factor between the holy and fallen angels, and, as we shall see, the two cities of which they are the origin, is that the fallen angels “either received less of the grace of the divine love than those who remained steadfast in the same love; or, if both good and bad angels were created equal, then, while the latter fell by their evil will, the former were more amply aided by God” (12.9).

And from what a great height did those angels fall. The angels are the greatest in God’s creation, surpassing all others in dignity (*Civ.* 11.15). The idiom of Augustine’s “angelology” is *in part* derived from Platonist physical philosophy (cf. 8.6).⁴⁷ All creation is arranged from heaven to earth, and nothing within it can have being without God. There is that which nourishes and conserves, like the trees; that which does this but has sensation as well, like the beasts; that which has all these properties with intelligence as well, which is humanity; and the angels, who are conserved, have sensation and intelligence, all without the property of needing to sustain themselves with food. They are higher even than humans, while still being below the uncreated God of immutable

⁴⁷ To see this we need to suspend for the moment the debate about the meaning and translation of the word δαίμονες or its Latin cognate, *daemones*. It is a semantic stretch to call the δαίμονες of a Platonist account “angels,” but, as we will see, this is part of Augustine’s argument against the Platonists precisely where he refuses to inherit their cosmology.

simplicity in whom they have their being (8.6). Of course, as “rational souls,” humans share with angels mind, intelligence, and will (5.11); indeed, they are the only others within creation that share these faculties. It is precisely this that elevates these two groups in the “elemental” hierarchy of creation; angels and humans alone have the capacity for blessedness because they alone are endowed with the capacity for volition. Their excellence resides in the fact that, although they remain mutable, humans and angels can *choose to cling* to the immutable good, a capacity that is not shared by the rocks and the trees and the beasts (12.1).

As we noted above, the angelic *telos* is the enjoyment of God without interruption and the certain knowledge that one will remain in such enjoyment forever. This, in fact, is the blessedness that is the goal, the created purpose of all intellectual creatures, and so humans too have this *telos*. But angels exceed the splendour of man in this regard for having been created with a superior capacity to achieve this blessedness. For their superior intelligence (cf. *Civ.* 9.20–22) and their immortality place them above the mortal (11.16), allowing them *eternal* enjoyment and *certainty* of its eternity in their present form. This higher created capacity for blessedness can be understood by extrapolating from the character of the Stoic wise man. In Augustine’s discussion of Aulus Gellius, he notes that the difference between the mind of a foolish man and the mind of a wise man is that the foolish man will experience the passions and his mind will yield to them and adapt itself to them. The wise man, on the other hand, is not one who does not experience passions, but one who in the experience of certain necessary passions does not let his mind be ruled by them. The mind of the wise Stoic is the master of the passions (9.4).

The same can be said *a fortiori* of the angels: the excellences of their bodies and minds have made them all the more impassive. Of course, whereas the philosophy of the Stoics has erroneously led them to cast aside the virtue of compassion, the angels excel in this righteousness. Although they cannot properly be said to be “compassionate” because they are not disturbed by the passions *with us*, nevertheless we rightfully speak anthropopathically of the angels because they are able to accomplish the righteous works of compassion. In the same way, Augustine notes, we speak of “God’s anger” according to the works of his vengeance, not from some claim that God is disturbed by the passion of anger (9.5).

The higher elemental faculties of the angels together constitute this impassivity when they are directed toward the worship of God. Under these circumstances they are able to move toward the Truth *without drawing back*, endowed with a steadfast piety (cf. *Civ.* 16.6, 11.9) that can only be *imitated* by humans, whose minds are still subject to the passions whatever their rational accomplishments. And, to reiterate, it is in this steadfastness that the matchless magnificence of their blessedness is constituted. Thus, the angels surpass in dignity all else that God has made (11.15), and are able to “hear” the ineffable speech of God without needing it translated into a native idiom, as humans require (16.6). But we can see how the steadfastness made possible by the angels’ created nature is more fundamentally predicated upon the angels voluntarily using this created nature in the service of God. Consequently, demons must be depicted altogether differently, and this represents Augustine’s break with the Platonist metaphysics.

Augustine, of course, could not agree more with the Platonists in recognizing an uncreated, incorporeal, immutable God in whom all things have their being, and whom it is the duty of all to seek and enjoy (cf. *Civ.* 8.6–8). And yet the Platonists maintained an order of rational souls below God that included the gods and demons, followed by men (see 8.12). Gods and demons represent a metaphysical division within the single concept of δαίμονες (whence the Latin cognate *daemones* and, eventually, the English *demons*).⁴⁸ Although popular Greek (and Roman) religion would intractably insist that heavenly beings are morally ambivalent at best and malicious and wicked at worst, it was metaphysically important for Plato to settle the moral ambivalence of δαίμονες by asserting the goodness of the gods by virtue of their cosmological superiority.⁴⁹ Thus, to the extent that a δαίμων was good, it was a god (like Zeus, Athena, etc.); to the extent it was wicked, it ought to be excluded from the ideal republic (cf. 8.13). While it is still right for humans, according to Plato, to offer honour to the gods through sacred rites, the grotesque performances of the theatre please only the demons and similarly have no place

⁴⁸ On the definition of δαίμονες, see Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), x–xi.

⁴⁹ The stark division between good and evil *superhuman* agents according to volition in Augustine’s cosmology was generally not shared by Greek philosophy, Platonist or otherwise. In fact, Martin traces a philosophical sensibility from the fourth century B. C. E., through Plato and the early Platonists onwards that seeks to confound the *superstition* (δεισιδαίμονία, literally “fear of the gods”) of popular religion that understood the universe to be inhabited by unpredictable and capricious gods (δαίμονες) who were wont to favour some men and harm others (see *ibid.*, esp. pp. 51–78). To the Platonists, all gods are by definition good. A “wicked god” is a contradiction in terms: if a being is superhuman, it is so elementally *and* morally. Martin illustrates the significance of this nicely: “The important revolution in ancient thinking that Plato here represents (I do not believe he invented it) is . . . the assumption that the different hierarchical scales *match one another*: that superior beings are superior with regard to morality as well as intellect, power, and beauty. Ontological hierarchy is matched by axiological hierarchy” (p. 60). But though Platonists would struggle to assert their “optimal universe” (*passim*), they would ultimately be unsuccessful in the face of the popular religious experience of hidden malice and deception (e.g. 237–39), which is a sensibility Augustine would inherit and go some way toward legitimating.

in the republic. For one reason or another, however, this banishment of wicked δαιμόνες did not take hold amongst the Platonists, who then had to try to account for the ontological priority of morally ambivalent yet superhuman beings (cf. 10.1).⁵⁰ For these Platonists the gods dwell in heaven, men upon the earth, while the demons remain in the air intermediate between them, notably superior to men by virtue of their higher dwelling (see 8.14). Of the Platonists, Augustine holds Apuleius of Madaura to give the chief account of this (8.14).

Although honour is due to the gods, there is a prohibitive distance—in order to prevent the contamination of the gods (*Civ.* 9.16)—between the earthly dwelling of the men who owe this honour, and the aetherial heaven of the gods to whom this honour is due. By placing them in the air between, Apuleius bestows a certain honour upon the demons, making them intercessors able to carry the petitions of men to the gods above and bring back what the gods have granted (8.18). As Augustine rejoins, however, this means that a man of modesty and chastity, one who is moral and detests the magical arts, must place himself at the mercy of those boastful creatures who delight in those very magical arts, sating themselves upon blood sacrifices and the despicable crimes of the theatre. According to Apuleius, ostensibly good gods will not hear a righteous man such as this unless his very enemies mediate (8.18)! For Apuleius only speaks of those qualities that make demons like the basest men, and more wicked yet. Lest we deceive

⁵⁰ Perhaps they shared the traditional desire for control over nature with Diodorus Siculus. See *ibid.*, 91: we may imagine Diodorus as “embodying something like a ‘practical knowledge’ of nature and the gods. He is perfectly aware of the philosophical teachings on the nature of the universe and the gods. He knows that there are other explanations for disasters than the anger of the gods or the pollutions of daimons. But he has no intention of giving up the techniques for manipulating nature and superhuman beings that has been passed down dependably through the ages.”

ourselves into thinking that it is perhaps *good* demons we must entreaty, Apuleius gives no description of the capacity for goodness in demons. They are rational in nature but have none of the virtue required to resist even the most elementary of irrational passions.

Augustine quotes him at length:

It is of this category of demons that the poets are wont to write—and they are not far from the truth—when they depict the gods as hating or loving some particular men. They prosper and uplift some; but others, by contrast, they oppose and afflict. The demons, then, experience mercy, indignation, grief, joy and every aspect of human feeling. *Their hearts are moved in the same way as ours, and their minds are tossed upon a heaving sea by all their thoughts.* All such storms and tempests, then, banish them far from the tranquillity of the celestial gods. (9.3)⁵¹

In fact, the only thing the poets have wrong is that they have called demons “gods.” What Apuleius does not argue is that the poetic depiction of the crimes of the gods, their arbitrary favour of some and disdain for others, applies only to *evil* demons; he refuses this moral distinction. It may have been a mistake to call them *gods*, but as far as Apuleius is concerned, the poets give an accurate description of those beings whose “minds are tossed upon a heaving sea,” the ones who are intermediate between men and gods by virtue of their aerial bodies, an accurate description of demons as such (9.7). “What a wonderful thing the holiness of a god is, then, if he has no dealings with a man who offers supplication to him, yet allies Himself to a presumptuous demon!—if he has no dealings with a penitent man, yet allies himself to a lying demon” (8.20).

In order to preserve the unity of ontology and axiology—and perhaps in fear of offending the superstitious people by whom the demons were served (*Civ.* 8.22)—the

⁵¹ Quoting Lucius Apuleius Aufer, *De Deo Socratis*; emphasis mine.

Platonists have made demons necessary agents of mediation between men and the gods. But in doing so they have destroyed the very unity they would preserve because the necessity of demons in mediation cannot but compromise the goodness the gods ostensibly hold over against the deceptive and criminal ways of the demons beneath them (cf. 8.21); if the gods need to be separated from man to avoid contamination, what prophylactic do they have against the demons (cf. 9.16)? The necessary link between the elemental hierarchy and the moral hierarchy of the Platonists is thus broken down: “By this, we are to understand that, even though Plato’s classification of bodies seems to be the correct one, the same order is not to be observed when assigning merits to souls; for it may well be that a superior soul will inhabit an inferior body and an inferior soul a superior body” (8.15). Apuleius describes demons as being “animal in genus, passive in soul, rational in mind, aerial in body, and eternal in time” (8.17, 9.8). The first three they have in common with men, good and bad alike. The last they share with the gods, but eternity does them no good since their existence is defined by the mind’s subjection to the passions; immortality only ensures their immortal misery. The only quality left to set them apart is their aerial bodies. But it can be said that all manners of beast inhabit bodies superior to man’s without suggesting that they are more dignified than humans. It is the rational soul that gives humans their high place in the created order, and this cannot simply be surpassed by the strength of the lion, the speed of the stag, or the loftiness of the bird; blessedness, which is the theological term for axiological ascendancy, is contingent upon voluntary participation in the light of God for both humans and angels. And it is precisely this that demons have rejected. Thus, although angels rank above

humans in the natural or elemental order, because of the fall, humans rank above fallen angels in the order of righteousness; the merits of creatures are not to be judged simply according to bodily attributes (8.15, 11.18) because blessedness is not simply an elemental attribute but a capacity of a volitional creature taken as a whole.

When a creature, created with the capacity of the angels to be blessed for eternity in knowledge of its eternity, turns by an act of will away from the God in whom it has its being, towards itself that it might be its own light, there is an inversion that is all the more complete for the original height of its created nature. Like the foolish man of the Stoics, the mind of the demon yields itself to the passions, adapting itself to them, allowing itself to be moved by the vicissitudes of desires arbitrary and proud, moving it to favour some and hate others. In this, Apuleius admits, they are like humans, far from the gods: “Their hearts are moved in the same way as ours, and their minds are tossed upon a heaving sea by all their thoughts.” Indeed, they are even worse than men. For wise men are able to achieve a constancy of mind that maintains the path of righteousness despite the disturbances of the soul, analogously to the steadfastness of the angels as we noted above. Demons, on the other hand, are afflicted by the passions in their very mind, the very faculty that make them a rational soul. The only attribute that sets them apart from the most foolish of men is the glory of their immortal bodies. But this in fact makes them worse than fools because, where the ontological superiority of the angels led to an unhesitant and steadfast movement toward God when directed in right praise, the ontological superiority of demons, when turned away from the light of God in the pride of self-glorification, only ensures the hardness of the demons’ hearts, their unwavering

and eternal obstinacy; at least it is still possible to correct wicked men through punishment (cf. *Civ.* 9.3). Their wickedness has therefore suspended demons upside down as intermediaries between their former nature of blessed and immortal fellowship with God, and the mortal misery of humans. They are head downwards because they share the superior part of their created being—their soul—with inferior beings, and only the inferior part of their created being—their body—with superior beings (9.9). Instead of being either eternally blessed among the angels, or miserable but mortal among humans, the fallen angels are eternally miserable (9.13). Thus, though Augustine agrees that these demons are mediators between men and the gods in the sense of being intermediaries, they are entirely incapable of bringing men to the one true God.

The human need for mediation Augustine does not dispute. Humans in Platonic thought are separated from the everlasting happiness they seek because they are low in elemental location, mortal, and miserable, whereas the gods are ontologically sublime, immortal, and blessed (*Civ.* 9.12). Man cannot save himself, for how can the lowly raise themselves to the divine? But neither can the gods intervene, for they are too aloof in their eternal blessedness, lacking any quality that would make them intermediate. The demons are properly intermediate, delicately balanced upon the pivot of their aerial bodies (9.13), sharing immortality with the gods and misery with humans. Yet humans need not a mediator who is immortal and miserable, one whose capacity to contaminate the holy exceeds even the most wicked of men because of the gifts of its ontological eminence; against the Platonists, humans need one who is mortal and blessed (9.13), one who can bring the blessedness of God to mortals with the power to elevate their mortality

to immortality, leading them from mortal misery to eternal blessedness. In short, humans need a mediator who is not only man, but is also God (9.15). Augustine thus proposes a different understanding of creation in between man and God. Following the narrow semantic range of the Biblical use of δαίμονες (usu. δαίμόνια), Augustine asserts that demons are only malign spirits (9.19).⁵² Hence, a “good demon” is not a demon at all, nor even a god, but an *angel* (8.24–25). And to reach the divine we must not invoke the demons, who are as separate from the angels as “vice is from virtue and malice from goodness” (8.24). But neither are we to invoke the angels themselves; in their righteousness they would not have us worship themselves as the demons would, but worship *with* them the one whom they worship. Therefore we are not to invoke the angels but imitate them, not sacrifice *to* them but to become a living sacrifice *with* them (8.25; 10.25–26). And in this holy fellowship, we must rely on the mediation by the Word whom God made flesh in order to bring us to eternal blessedness with him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Envyng us the blessedness that they have rejected, demons “mediate” only to interpose themselves between men and God to prevent our passage to the divine, separating loved ones (*Civ.* 9.15) and continuing their contamination (9.16). The sole desire of fallen angels is to harm us, as they are “alien to justice, swollen with pride, livid with envy, and subtle in deceit” (8.22). They accomplish this through a fellowship that

⁵² He suggests that this is indicated in the word’s etymology (understood allegorically, it would seem). Demons, Augustine argues, receive their name from a Greek word signifying “knowledge,” which, as the Apostle notes, only puffs up without charity. The evil of demonic pride therefore does not come from ignorance; for they still have knowledge of temporal and mutable things, even “great knowledge.” In Mark 1:24 and Matt 8:29, for example, the demons know of their coming destruction. On the contrary, their pride comes from sundering knowledge from charity (9.20–21).

has as its archetype the fall of the angels toward themselves in self-glorification. It is under these circumstances that we find the Devil in the Garden. His fall is metonymic for the fall of all.⁵³ He sinned not according to his nature but by his own prideful will, by which he fell away from the truth according to the foreknowledge of God (11.13-15, 17).⁵⁴ That pride is the very (anti-)structure of the fall, of course, will be significant for our understanding of the demonic politics of Rome. For it is the devil, “that proud angel,” with the “ambition of a tyrant,” who preferred not to *be* a subject but to have dominion *over* subjects, who sought to “insinuate himself into the heart of man” by speaking through the serpent in the garden of Paradise (14.11). Though the prior fall of the angels and the seduction by the devil in the garden seem to bear a straightforwardly causal relation to the fall of man, the nature of the fellowship between men and demons must ultimately be seen to be circular; for the success of Satan’s “insinuation,” and hence culpability, lies in the evil will of Adam (and Eve). And from him proceed the two societies of humans, some of whom will fellowship in the society of the wicked angels, some of whom will fellowship in the heavenly city of the good (12.28). The origin of Adam’s evil will that subsequently binds human and demon in fellowship is, of course, pride, which is nothing if not a perverse appetite for the elevation of one’s self (14.13). Thus, this is what constitutes the political movement of the earthly city: the imitative

⁵³ This is not to say that the devil is merely a metaphor. Augustine certainly speaks as though there is a particular angel of whom it can intelligibly be said that the demons are “his angels,” “his accomplices” (14.11).

⁵⁴ Cf. John 8:44b, which Augustine is here exegeting. Augustine has already quite carefully navigated the fall of angels in order to maintain God as the sole source of the angels’ blessedness without placing the fall in His will. So too is he careful to articulate that even though John here *seems* to indicate that the cause of the devil’s fall is the truth not being in him, it is in fact the devil’s withdrawal from partaking in the truth that the truth is not in him (11.14).

disorder of lifting one's heart to one's self in pride and accordingly subjecting others to one's own dominion, rather than lifting it to the Lord in humble obedience as the citizens of the heavenly city are wont to do (cf. 14.13).

The Political Cosmos

Augustine's response to Manichaeism here is clear. Evil is not the cause but the effect of sin, the effect of a will making a voluntary movement away from God in pride. Evil is thus not *natural*, for even if not all the angels were created equal, they were all equally *created*, and thus created good and for the purpose of the love of God. Augustine thus posits a metaphysical distinction between evil and being that runs right through creation. But if this distinction divides creation then it must divide demons, no matter how settled they may be in their ways. That is to say, Augustine's cosmology here is fully consistent with his metaphysics; or better, his cosmology is precisely the articulation of his metaphysics: evil is not natural, but the result of denying one's nature by turning away from the one in whom all nature has its being. Thus, against Mathewes' basic dismissal, demons permit evil no ontological or "supernatural" purchase, as sin is privative for them no less than it is for humans. He is sceptical of Augustine's demons because he thinks they are a remnant of Manichaeism that occludes an Augustinian political ontology, warranting demythologization. But as we can see, Augustine's account of demons itself already constitutes the removal, the demythologization, of the ontological stumbling block of the Manichees. There is no contradiction here.

When reading *The City of God*, then, one cannot help but notice how *natural* demons and angels seem; demons are, as Apuleius' words indicate, a lot more like *us*

than we typically think.⁵⁵ For, contemporary practices of nomenclature notwithstanding, demons, in Augustine’s cosmology, are not *supernatural*, simply because they were created according to the will of God, than which, as Augustine would say, there is nothing more *natural* (*Civ.* 21.8).⁵⁶ But the occlusion to political ontology that demons are thought to manifest is predicated upon the understanding that they are not in any way like us, that the divide between us is the difference between two *orders* that struggle against each other. Mathewes and Arendt rightly reject the demonic conception of evil that reflects this Manichaean logic because it turns the political, which is inescapably bodily, into the prison of the good that must be escaped; the subjection of the passive good to an overactive evil, which can only be “overcome” by the rejection of material being, sunders thought and speech from its intelligibility as human ontological activities, making thought and speech *otherworldly* and anti-political, and politics *thoughtless* and

⁵⁵ Cf. Morton Smith’s comments regarding the variety of cultural conceptions of magic in the ancient Near East (though I take issue with the terminology of the *supernatural* below, n.56). Though we must attend to their differences, “all these cultures shared the belief that this world has an enormous supernatural population—gods, angels, demons, spirits of the dead, and so on. ‘Orthodox’ Jews, it is true, thought there was only one god, but they believed in as many angels and demons as did their neighbors, and for practical purposes gods, angels, and demons were much the same. Whatever forms they were thought to have, all were conceived as being psychologically like ordinary people. Each had his own tastes and could be angered, placated, persuaded, bribed, and so on. Like people, they differed in status.” *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 69.

⁵⁶ To suggest, as Mathewes does, that demons *qua* demons permit evil supernatural purchase seems to be part of the more general error of conceiving angels and demons as “supernatural.” This word is certainly part of the colloquial parlance when it comes to understanding spirits. Academics, however, would do well to remember that in more self-reflexive uses of the term—the Catholic debates over the supernatural, for example—the “supernatural” is typically conceived as *what God does* for the sake of the redemption of the natural. See J. P. Kenny, “Supernatural,” *NCE* 13:616–22. Of course, as we can see in 21.8, we need not even anachronistically retroject later Catholic definitions onto Augustine, whose opinions are clear enough. To *be*, under God, is to *be created*, to be *natural*. And if even the lowest beasts qualify, “how much more, then, is the angelic creation, which surpasses in dignity all else that He has made, the handiwork of God!” (11.15). The only *supernature* there can be is He according to Whose will and handiwork all nature exists. Demons by definition could never have given evil supernatural purchase. I owe the genesis of this point to Wiebe, *God and Other Spirits*, 150–51.

totalitarian. If there is but one supernature, however, then the God in whom the angels must participate to realize the fullness of their being is no different than the God in whom humans must so participate. There is plurality in Augustine's cosmology, certainly, both ontological (differences in created capacities) and volitional (differences in willingness to cling to the good). But these pluralities all exist at the same "level," within the same *order*. And it is this ontological coexistence that explains why Augustine's evil-as-privation is not merely a theological sleight-of-hand that theoretically robs evil of its ontological purchase while nevertheless preserving an existentially Manichaean cosmos in which humanity is still in utter subjection to fallen angels. When we see demons, we are not simply "seeing" evil. On the contrary, we "see" evil in demons the same way we "see" evil in humans, not as a *thing*, an object to behold, but, in the language of Rowan Williams,⁵⁷ as a particular *arrangement* of things. There is no straightforward subjection of humanity to demons because we exist in a flux of arrangements *with* them, where meaningful action is still possible; the site of our being is the play, within a *single order* created by God, of a variety of finite, created agencies existing in relation to one another, some human, some superhuman. Augustinian privation is thus not a trick that forces us to contend with demons while allowing our otherwise comprehensive political vision to remain intact; it changes the paradigm of political ontology itself.

This is clear when we see that the fundamental error Augustine is refuting, the error made by not only the Manichaeans but also the Platonists (though obviously they

⁵⁷ See Williams, "Insubstantial Evil."

get more right), is the attempt to “spatialize” evil, to locate it territorially.⁵⁸ The Manichaeans locate it south of the Light, cosmologically extended into the materiality of creation itself; Platonists like Apuleius attempt to locate it by conflating the ontological and axiological: the higher the being—which will literally be higher, in the air, aether, heaven, etc.—the more moral. For Augustine, though, the ontological order itself is good by nature regardless of station, endowed with harmony between beings and between the parts within beings, from the greatest angel down to the tiniest flower or the leaf on a tree (*Civ.* 5.11). But two sets of beings, angels and humans, have been endowed with rational minds that set them apart from all other creation in their capacity to inhabit the world in a way that does not take up space, that is not territorial.⁵⁹ It is here that Augustine articulates the origin of evil, in the mind, the thought, the will, as we saw in the fall of the angels. To say that evil is the effect of sin, that the origin of evil is *moral*, is to say that evil is a *temporal* problem rather than a *spatial* one.⁶⁰ For the rational mind of the angel and human alike reflects the non-territorial activity *par excellence* of its creator,⁶¹ and to the extent that it uses this capacity to participate in its source in God, it is more blessed than all of creation not so endowed. But it is the nature of the gift of the rational mind that it can fail to choose to participate in the Fount of Light, and so the gift of blessedness unparalleled within creation is also the locus of the downfall of such higher beings. Evil appears as a disruption in the relation between creator and creation, which can be seen

⁵⁸ Williams develops this concept in *ibid.* From his essay I will draw upon freely in order to highlight the significance of Augustine’s cosmology.

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, 109.

⁶⁰ See *ibid.*, esp. 106–110.

⁶¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 110.

paradigmatically in the subordination of the activity of thought to selfish and material desires, and to the pride of self-glorification.⁶² We speak of demons as upside down because both of these subordinations invert a being by confining the mind, conceiving it “as if it were a kind of material thing, the more free and flexible mode of presence . . . being subjected or reduced to the less, the ‘higher’ to the ‘lower,’ the more active to the more passive.”⁶³ In the first instance, the freedom of the mind is confined by competition over finite resources; in the second, the attempt to self-ground being likewise turns glory into a competition for a finite resource, such that one is deprived of whatever praise another, like God, receives. Evil is not a territorial *thing* but the attempt to make God territorial by trying to put the mind that reflects that God in competition with him. But God has no rival, and is not changed by the decisions of a finite being; when the angels fell, they had no one to turn to but themselves.

The discord of evil in the original harmony of nature, like a poorly played musical instrument, is thus not the effect of an external agency called discord, but the discordant movements of an order created to sound beautiful.⁶⁴ Such a musical analogy is apt because it can help us see that our judgement of and response to evil is not a question of defending one order against the onslaught of another, but rather consists in the *active playing out* of a single order. Williams notes the importance of “despatialising” evil, God, and the created mind all at once:

⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, 109.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

If God—the most fundamental form of activity that there is—cannot be properly thought of as occupying a territory, and if the human mind or spirit reflects this primary activity in its own non-territorial character, if, in short, the relation between God and the mind is rightly spoken of in terms of time, rather than space, evil, as that which interrupts the relation of creator and creature, belongs in the same frame of reference. Its origins are to be sought in the *interactions of the world's history*, not in a classification of substances within a single territory, a single medium of extension. Furthermore, if this is what Augustine is pursuing, the charge of teaching a resolution of the problem of evil in terms of “essences” rather than “personal relationships” is a caricature.⁶⁵

In seeking a political ontology that can adequately respond to evil, Mathewes is obviously not proposing such a caricature. However, when we come to understand the cosmology we have been discussing in the temporal terms Williams proposes for us, we can see consequences for an Augustinian “politics” that Mathewes’ demythologized ontology does not adequately take into account.

Both Mathewes and Williams are aware that the attempt to despatialise evil through privation has drawn the scepticism of many who think that privation gives only a facile account of evil as it is experienced.⁶⁶ As Williams notes, however, it is only *because* evil is parasitic upon the good that we are able to speak intelligibly of its profundity; to “take evil too seriously” robs the created order of its intelligibility.⁶⁷ For “demonic” instances of evil—the Killing Fields of history—may give us the impression that evil is a force unto itself, but this obfuscates how evil gets its “power” precisely from those elemental excellences of activity that bear it. If evil is not a territorial invasion by a subject but the misuse of good faculties through time, then the better the faculties the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 110, emphasis mine.

⁶⁶ Williams’ interlocutor is John Hick, *Evil and the god of Love* (London: Collins, 1966), but see also *EAT* 170–78, on whether Augustine is providing mere consolation.

⁶⁷ Cf. Williams, “Insubstantial Evil,” 110–13.

more powerful the evil. Coherence, effectiveness, and intelligence make evil all the more terrifying precisely because coherence, effectiveness, and intelligence are good gifts provided us by God. Thus, as Williams notes, “a wicked human is an immeasurably greater problem than a wicked hamster,” precisely because of the rational mind by which God set humans above beasts in creation. But we have seen that angels were created with even greater faculties than us, which is why “Augustine and the majority of Christian theologians up to the Enlightenment would have added that a corrupted *angelic* will is an immeasurably greater problem than a corrupted human will, and that a fair number of our difficulties in this world derive from just this problem.”⁶⁸ Thus, where demons are otiose in Mathewes’ account of evil, for Augustine demons are a *profound* problem precisely because the faculties by which they *could have* ensured their eternal and steadfast blessedness are instead being used to make them eternally and obstinately wicked.⁶⁹

The reason this metaphysics is not just a sleight-of-hand that preserves a pseudo-Manichaeism in an ontologically “sound” account is, of course, because a corrupt angel, just like a corrupt human, is not a problem *in itself*, as if we could perceive demons and humans as isolated monads. It is by virtue of being interdependent within an order that corruption is a problem,⁷⁰ which is to say that evil is a matter of, and only perceivable as, world history, as a political problem. Interdependency undermines the postulation that evil has intelligible goals that are in direct, zero-sum competition with the goals of the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 111–12.

⁶⁹ The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for social bodies. For it is good for a people to come and work well together with organization and purpose in a spirit of unity; but when the *spirit* of a people directs those goods of organization, purpose, and unity toward the nationalist and eugenic elevation of the people itself in self-glorification . . .

⁷⁰ Ibid., 112.

Good, because it undoes the ontological alienation of evil. Augustine’s account of the original goodness of the entire created order and the harmony among its parts necessitates that any good we articulate accounts for the good of all creation, including the angels and demons. But moreover, Augustine’s cosmology sets apart humans and angels alike by their unique capacity to inhabit the world non-territorially through the activity of their rational minds (which is why no matter how sunken demons are in their eternal misery, they are not lower than those beings for whom the lack of intelligence makes misery impossible [*Civ.* 12.1; cf, 11.11]). Since we inhabit time *together*, the relation of demons and angels to man cannot be unilateral imposition; it must be *political*, it must occur according to the complexities of our wills and desires for our lives, bound as they are to one another’s. The integrity of the moral agent is thus preserved. For without a Kingdom of Darkness, people associate with whomever they want; culpability for evil remains with humans and angels as we use the desire for communion with which we were created to reject that communion in the attempt to be a light unto ourselves.⁷¹ Hence, when Williams argues that seeing evil as anything other than a problem of “personal

⁷¹ Of course, due to the created inequalities of elemental faculties, the political fellowships of men and spirits are more complicated than a balanced equation of the movement of demons and the desires of humans. It may be true that we need a mediator to save us from ourselves; but it is equally true that we need to be saved from the grip of others. We will have occasion in the next chapter to consider those times when demons use their elemental excellence independently of human will. But suffice it to say that the temporalisation of evil and the naturalisation of demons suggests that allowing space for the ability of demons to “impose their will” upon us need not re-inscribe Manichaeism and undermine the voluntary origin of evil any more than the admission that humans, too, can “impose their will” upon us. The fact of the matter is that some of us are susceptible to deception and can be tricked into wanting what we do not really want, so to speak. Indeed, some of us are better than others at deceiving and manipulating others for our own benefit; to see demons as natural, political, volitional beings is to say that the same can be said *a fortiori* of them.

relationships” is a caricature, Augustine would insist that angels and demons are to be included in these relationships.

Humanity is not to invoke the angels any more than demons because they were not created to be lords over us but to fellowship with us in the praise of God. This explains why cities of men and angels or demons are Augustine’s dominant political image: demons and angels are political agents. The intermingling of men and demons is thus not an ontological confusion of orders, as it was for Manichaeism, but the mis-arrangement of *the* good societal relation for which we were created. The earthly city becomes Augustine’s paradigm for political dysfunction only because it is corruption of creation’s greatest possible activity—humans and angels united in fellowship to praise our creator in the City of God—toward the sourest trajectory, namely praise of the self. It is because this interdependency between men and angels is such a high good that the effects of its corruption are so far reaching;⁷² in other words, a corrupted angelic will is a profound problem, but only because it is by definition a *political* problem. Because it is political, however, our response to its corruption is nothing other than our return to our created being through restored participatory fellowship. But since our greatest fellowship is with the angels, demons must figure prominently within an adequately Augustinian political ontology, contra the dismissal of Mathewes. Whether any judicial procedure is possible on the basis of them is debatable; what is not debatable is that angels and demons may always be hidden in our political practices and processes.

⁷² Ibid., 112.

On the one hand, then, we must conclude that Mathewes' (and Arendt's) worries have been adequately addressed. Augustine's demons are not dissonant with the development of a political ontology. Demons are ontological just as they were for the Manichaeans, associated with the created order; unlike Manichaeism, however, this assertion does not consign the material order to evil but instead recognizes the created goodness of demons. Participation in ordinary good fellowship will thus be a tenable response to evil contra the Manichaeans, just as Mathewes suggests it should be. On the other hand, angels and demons are not merely *not dissonant* with Augustine's political ontology; they are, in fact, quite consonant, an integral component that must affect our articulation of the precise nature of ontology's *politics*. The task thus remains to give an account of Augustine's politics such that we can adequately recognize the problem demons pose within it. From there we will be able to account for the political consequences of Mathewes' expulsion of demons from his ostensibly Augustinian political ontology. I would suggest, though, that if Mani's problem was that his cosmology destroyed the political, Mathewes compromises the political by making it inadequately cosmological. His inability to incorporate the hidden agencies of angels and demons into his political account has skewed his depiction of an Augustinian politics by rendering it altogether unapocalyptic. Of course, this means that if one of our goals is to argue that demons *qua* demons do not destroy the possibility of politics, it is equally our goal to confess that their inclusion within an Augustinian political ontology gives our politics a certain "otherworldly" quality that cannot but disappoint the likes of Mathewes and Arendt. It is to the elaboration of this point that we must now turn.

II
“SIMULTANEOUS FALSEHOODS”

In the last chapter we began to give an account of Augustine’s demonology by way of defending it against the charge that demons *qua* demons are Manichaean. This charge entailed that any postulation of demonic influence is harmful to the political life that Augustine’s account of evil as privation is intended to make possible. However, we discovered that Augustine actually uses the story of the fall of the angels itself to refute the Manichaeans. Thus, instead of being a vestige of his early years that contradicts his better insights, the presence of demons in Augustine’s account is of central importance to his articulation of Christian theology vis-à-vis the Manichaeans. For, in accordance with the logic of privation, demons were originally created as good angels capable of the highest blessing of all creation, but fell thence, turning in a movement of the will toward themselves to be their own private good. Thus, (contrary to the claims of the Platonists) demons are superior to humans in bodily nature but morally worse than the most foolish of men. The crucial distinction from Manichaeism, however, is that this comparability of demons and humans is not predicated upon the differences between two orders—one good, one evil—but upon differences within a single created order.

The fall of such blessed creatures is only visible within the order of all creation; that is, we can only see the corruption of demons in terms of their interdependence within creation, particularly with reference to their relations with humanity and against the backdrop of the original communion of worship for which we were all created. Hence, the paradigmatic evil of demons is that they confound God’s order by obstructing the

path by which humans must reach God; that is, they are the inversion of the true mediator, focussing their sublime created capacities on the occlusion of divine assistance. Deception by demons is therefore a great—perhaps the greatest—political problem. Contrary to the claims of Charles Mathewes, the “problem of demons” does not consist in being a *conceptual* foil to an *account* of human political flourishing (a political ontology); the “problem of demons” in Augustine’s account is that they are a *phenomenological* foil to human political flourishing *itself*, and a powerful one at that. Hence, if we want to understand the activity of demons we cannot but recount their role in the vices of the earthly city as revealed in Augustine’s critique of Rome. After all, it is the deception of the nations in their dedication to idols that Augustine holds to be the greatest witness to the great and malign power of demons (*Civ.* 4.31).

Political Loves

There are “two distinct and contrasted societies of angels, in which the origin of the two human communities of which we presently intend to speak is also found” (*Civ.* 11.34). Concomitant to the fall of the angels is the fall of humanity; there are two human communities intermingled in the present life that are constituted by their fellowship with the invisible angelic communities whence they are derived. Thus, it is “not improper or inconsistent to speak of a society consisting of both men and angels. For we may properly speak not of four cities or societies . . . but rather of two in all, one composed of the good angels and men together, and the other of the wicked” (12.1). It is not the case, however, that God intended such a division in communion. For all of creation was created that it might fellowship in the enjoyment of God. But in an act of will that would characterize

all that follow in their fellowship, the founders of the secondary city—the Devil and his angels on the one hand, Adam on the other—fell away from God’s intended communion, dividing themselves against the holy communion, and against themselves (14.15).

Our articulation of Augustine’s political demonology rests upon a claim that these two cities are the dominant political imagery of *The City of God*, since they represent the two basic ways created rational wills can negotiate their place within creation. This claim may be more controversial than it seems at first blush because of the definition of *the political* it entails. For whatever we may *see* in the defining moments that distinguish the two cities, this public distinction is based upon the hidden movements of the souls of the citizens that constitute the cities. Due to much of modern political thought, we may not be prepared to consider movements of the soul as essentially political, but contemporary liberal notions of the political as a consideration of institutions and structures independently of the people that constitute them are nowhere to be found in Augustine: “for a city is nothing other than a concordant multitude of men” (*Civ.* 1.15).¹ This means, however, that in order to understand the profound problem demons pose as a *political*

¹ Cf. P. Travis Kroeker, “Ethics, Immortality, and Political Judgement” (unpublished, 2008): Augustine “(like Plato before him and Hobbes after him) will ground the act of political judgment in the ‘human writ large.’ ” Internal reference from *Civ.* 4.3. See also Robert Dodaro: “Augustine’s views on justice and society stem more from his analysis of the capacities and limits of the human soul than from his thinking about social and political structures.” *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 27. Thus there is a question of terminology and whether the present semantic range of the word *political* permits such usage; we might elect, e.g., to use the word *ecclesiological* for the public movements of the City of God, reserving *the political* to refer to that with which secular authorities concern themselves. Yet *the political* still carries descriptive power for what Augustine is attempting because, although I think the church needs to be a distinct social organization from modern sorts of societies like nation states—and the ecclesiological-political axis can help emphasize this—this is not exactly the distinction of the City of God-earthly city in Augustine’s work. Moreover, in *The City of God*, part of Augustine’s task is to argue that the Heavenly City makes use of the same goods as the earthly city in this life (18.54), and so the language of the *political* helps point out the broad playing field that the multiplicity of societies presently share, and over which they can disagree.

problem, we need to reorient ourselves to what we must (anachronistically, we should note) consider to be the *political* in Augustine's *City of God*. It is that which concerns him the most throughout the work, that which distinguishes the two cities: the soul's orientation toward the one true God through worship in fellowship with the saints and angels so oriented.

Consider that Charles Mathewes' trouble with demonic conceptions of evil reflected Hannah Arendt's apprehension that the articulation of political problems as manifestations of deeper spiritual conflicts necessitates a turn away from the one locus of being in which we have to act, namely the world. He suggested that humanity instead needs a *political ontology*, a properly ontological account of politics. However, nothing is more clear in *The City of God* than that the only way humans, indeed all creation, have their being is by turning to the Father: "turn to Him and become what you are" (*Civ.* 5.14). Thus, although Mathewes is right to identify the Augustinian antecedents in Arendt's account of evil as thoughtlessness, his account of ontological participation is more dependent on her account of *amor mundi* than on Augustine's love of God. We will return to Mathewes below to find that his attempt to give an "Augustinian" political ontology is defective precisely to the extent that he fails to recognize that it is the love of God that gives the privative account of evil its intelligibility. For one cannot articulate a loss of being without giving an account of the circumstance within which one participates in the fullness of being. And it is not in "lov[ing] the world more fully" (*EAT*, 223), as Mathewes will suggest, but in loving God: "When [man] turned towards himself . . . his

being became less complete than when he clung to Him Who exists supremely” (*Civ.* 14.13).

Although the behaviours of the body are more obviously political, love of God is the necessary orientation of a soul if it is to govern the body through the will to the most virtuous of these behaviours.² This is why all the more typical political categories Augustine discusses—like peace (even “earthly” peace; *Civ.* 19.17) and justice (19.23–24)—have their sole referent in God. For Augustine, all activity, whether we are inclined to think of it as *political* or not, happens according to some will; there is no efficient cause that is not a voluntary cause. In fact, all things that come to pass have an efficient cause in volition. For, in contradistinction to Cicero, even those things designated “Natural” or “Fortuitous” are but the manifestations of God’s hidden will, the supreme *voluntas*. However, every will that is not God’s has been created by him to exercise its volition within the ordination of the Holy Spirit; every will “belongs” to and is animated by the Spirit of God, who is the creator, ordainer, and judge of all spirits and bodies (5.9). Just as the sanctity of the body is dependent upon the direction of a holy will, so too the good will depends solely upon the direction of divine aid (cf. 1.18). Thus every action, to the extent that it is good, comes from God (5.9).

It is possible, however, for a created will to deny that it has its being and volition in the Holy Spirit; that is, it is possible for a will to sin. And since this is a movement of

² We should note, as John M. Rist does, that the “will” in Augustine is a translation of *voluntas*, which refers not to a decision-making faculty of a person, but the moral person taken as a whole. Thus, because the will is the person himself, “he cannot disclaim responsibility for his actions on the ground that he did not ‘will’ it. For Augustine, if a man does something, he ‘wills’ it.” “Augustine on Free Will and Predestination,” in *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays* (ed. R. A. Markus; Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1972), 220. Although the subject of demons will complicate this picture, generally speaking, good actions are willed by good people, bad actions are willed by bad.

the will against, and hence independent of, God, culpability for sin and evil remains entirely within creatures. This does not mean that the will itself becomes independent of God—in such a case it would lose all being and could not exist at all (cf. *Civ.* 14.13)—but that the power that a will has to sin, it has from God, who foreknows its volition (5.9), as we saw with the fall of the angels. Because sin is a movement of the will, then, although the fall of the angels temporally preceded the fall of man, and although there was a deliberate act of deception on the part of Satan, who envied man his unfallen state, desiring to implicate man in his sin (14.11), nevertheless, with respect to their wills, the sin of Adam and Eve exactly parallels the fall of the angels. For “the devil would not have been able to lure man into the manifest and open sin of doing what God had prohibited had not man already begun to be pleased with himself” (14.13). The fatal fruit was only tasted because the action was preceded by an evil will. But it is equally clear that this evil will is a movement of a soul toward an evil love: the souls in the Garden made to love God in a movement of cleaving instead loved themselves in a movement of rejecting the commands of God.

In fact, the distinguishing movement of the will is its *love*. Since a wicked will is not of a different ontological order, but of a different trajectory, it remains intelligible to speak of a good and evil will each having its own love: “a righteous will, then, is a good love; and a perverted will is an evil love” (*Civ.* 14.7). The semantic ambiguity in the word love is instructive here, as there is a direct correspondence between *love* as it indicates an “inward” disposition of the mind and *love* as it indicates a public behaviour, as it does in the command to love one’s neighbour. The relation between the two is the

relationship between worship and imitation: just as worship imitates (cf. 8.17), so the will loves publically. Hence, the assertion that Augustine’s politics is the love of God does not efface the public within private “spirituality,”³ but claims that—making a hard distinction only for heuristic purposes—the spiritual is manifestly political, and the political is spiritually constituted.⁴ For the distinction between the City of God and the earthly city, divided between which is the entire human race throughout history (15.1), is precisely Augustine’s attempt to illustrate the difference between virtuous and vicious love (i.e., *caritas* and *cupiditas*; 14.7; cf. 14.28). We may speak of these cities as having “founders” because the citizens of each city mimetically manifest the movements of the will, the loves, that mark their constitutive moments. The founder and ruler of the City of God is Christ (e.g. 2.21); the founders of the earthly city are the apostate angels (e.g. 11.34) and Adam (12.28).

Those of that first city, of course, love God, and desire nothing other than to cling to him (*Civ.* 10.3), as the blessed angels have done from the beginning. According to the ordination of wills, the love the City of God has for God comes from God. All the activity of the Heavenly city is thus oriented within the end of the love of God. Such activity, that is, “every work done in order that we may draw near to God in holy fellowship,” is named “true sacrifice” after Hebraic tradition; and according to this

³ This is a point of contention between Augustine and Arendt. See Rowan Williams, “Politics and the Soul: A Reading of *City of God*,” *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987): 55–72; Ronald Beiner, “Love and Worldliness: Hannah Arendt’s Reading of Saint Augustine,” in *Hannah Arendt: Twenty Years Later* (ed. L. May and J. Kohn; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1996), 269–84.

⁴ We are here in dangerous territory, for we could be mistakenly understood to speak of the spiritual and the political the way people normally speak of theory and practice, whereas worship is most certainly a manifest activity for Augustine. Although we may need to keep hidden and public loves conceptually distinct, it is important to realize that with Augustine we simply do not get one without the other.

tradition, all sacrifice is to be a “visible sacrament of an invisible sacrifice,” that is, a manifestation of the dual commandment upon which all the Law and the Prophets hang: love of God and love of neighbour. One becomes a sacrifice when one dies to the world in order to live to God; only so does the body properly obey the soul, when it is used with reference to the creature’s end in God (10.4–6); only so is one made virtuous (10.3). True sacrifice must take a particular form, however, namely mercy⁵ and the humility of a servant. This is because the citizens of the Holy City can only properly be spoken of as a sacrifice to the extent that their self-sacrifice is offered through her founder, the High Priest, who called for it to be in imitation of his own sacrifice, his Passion. In this way Christ’s servanthood unto death makes possible the unified communion of saints who love God, and make this love known by offering themselves in humble works of mercy for their neighbours that imitate the founder of their communion (10.6).

The wills of those in the second city move according to the love its founders had not for God, nor even for themselves with reference to God (cf. *Civ.* 10.3), but for themselves in themselves, turning away from communion that they may be their own private good. Thus, in this self-serving pride, these citizens imitate the devil (14.3): “when man lives according to man and not according to God, he resembles the devil” (14.4). And since imitation is the most important category of worship, it follows that the pride of the earthly city is manifest in sacrifices made to the demons they take to be gods. In this Augustine follows Rom 1:22-23 (NRSV): “Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal

⁵ Cf. Augustine’s exposition of Hos 6:6, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice,” in 10.5.

human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles” (14.28). In his justice, God let the disobedience of his creatures itself stand as its own punishment, and he handed them over to themselves to be subject to their own lusts (further in the logic of Rom 1): just as man in his will is disobedient toward God, rejecting the animation of the good Spirit, so too is his body disobedient toward his will (14.15). Thus the will “after the flesh,” in a “perverse imitation of God” (19.12),⁶ seeks what is at best an inversion of the just peace of God: it sacrifices itself not out of love for others, but to ensure the exaltation of the earthly city, that it might have dominion over others, while the city makes sacrifices to those demons they think are gods who will help them in their enterprise of mastery. The earthly city thus reflects the movement of the will in pride toward tyrannical ambition displayed by the devil in the Garden. The desire for mastery that belongs in its purest form to Rome (1.30) is the result of a self-love that imitates the founder of the earthly city taken generally: this malignant love is not content with freedom *in* God, but seeks freedom *from* God and the humble service it entails (cf. 5.12).⁷

Articulating the political this way helps us understand Augustine’s judgement of Rome and its relation to his demonology. The problem with Rome is that it offers to demons what can only rightly be offered to God: worship, the service the Greeks call λατρεία. Since politics is fundamentally about right worship, justice is predicated upon

⁶ Given the inverted nature of demons, it is noteworthy that inversion is precisely how Augustine here defines “perversion”: “If someone were to hang upside-down, this position of the body and disposition of the limbs would certainly be a perverted one. For what nature places above would be beneath, and what nature intends to be beneath would be above.”

⁷ Cf. Dodaro, *Just Society*, 68: “Satan’s is, therefore, the archetypal seduction because it embodies the form of all future misdirection of the soul. Similarly, it constitutes the prototype for all secular political discourse, in that it displaces within the soul the original blessing of life lived for the sake of authentic spiritual communion, and introduces in its stead the illusion of self-sufficiency and of satisfaction with a lack of moral rectitude.”

giving God his due through the obedience of citizens in the love of God and their neighbours (*Civ.* 19.23; cf. 19.21). Rome thus cannot be said to be just, whether it is technically a commonwealth or not,⁸ because it is a “city of demon-worship” (18.41). In this it is one with all the empires who have exercised their rule over the nations: the Athenians, Egyptians, Assyrians, the earthly city throughout the ages, rose (and continues to rise) to power under the lordship of fallen angels (16.17)—though not by the power of these demons (for they have none other than that which God allows them), but by the mysterious will of God. All of these empires ruled according to their lust for domination, united in the common thread of the object of their love: themselves.⁹ From a demonological perspective, however, the problem is not simply that demons exist as one more thing to which disordered wills in disordered cities can offer what they should only offer God. The political problem of demons is more insidious even than this. For demons have the agency—that is, the will oriented to their own exaltation, and the subtle and powerful means of a glorious created nature—to demand this worship of humans like the Romans, to extort it from them and possess them by it.

⁸ Here I am reflecting Rowan Williams’s reading of a certain equivocation in Augustine’s thought at 19.24. Williams is arguing against those who contend that Augustine’s second attempt at defining a people is an attempt to deal more constructively with the Roman polity after his first attempt excluded Rome from his discussion of commonweal by definition (cf. 19.23). Williams argues that Augustine is being ironic: “We may call them commonwealths if we will, since there is no doubt that they exist as identifiable social units, but their character and structure are [still] inimical to the very nature of an ordered unity in plurality, a genuine *res publica*.” “Politics and the Soul,” 60.

⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 59-60: “There is a continuum between the ideal of classical politics and its antithesis, the tyrannies of the Orient; for without God’s justice, the one is merely on the way to becoming the other.” The idea of a “thread of continuity” comes from John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 5.

Politics of Deception

Exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images of created beings has more dire consequences for proud idolaters than simply being forsaken to their fallen desires; in a sense, they get more than they asked for. Augustine begins this monumental work by claiming that when the earthly city “seeks mastery, [it] is itself mastered by the lust for mastery even though all the nations serve it” (*Civ.* 1.Preface). What does this mean other than that when this city seeks mastery rather than the Lord’s humble service it is mastered, indeed *possessed*, by those archetypes of self-aggrandizement, those who falsely demand worship as though they were gods?¹⁰ For the “citizens of the earthly city prefer their own gods” (11.1), but it is clear that this “preference” is not without influence, “not merely by their own ignorant submission” (2.8), though it is a bondage consented to by virtue of sin (14.15; cf. 10.22; 12.6). On the contrary, Augustine makes clear that it is the character of demonic pride to *demand* worship of those they would rule. It is their (fallen) nature to look selfishly after their own affairs, taking care to be regarded and worshipped as gods (2.24). They do so using “a thousand harmful and deceitful arts” (2.10), requiring of their worshippers the perverse and ignoble displays of the civic theatres (2.19), which are all the more deceiving for attributing false crimes to

¹⁰ We ought not impose too narrow a semantic range on the word “possession.” Possession likely calls to mind specifically the manipulation of a person by a malign spiritual entity, requiring technical methods of exorcism that come from traditions that have long since forgotten the social, political, and theological concerns surrounding their genesis. Martin points out that in Classical Greece, popular opinions regarding δαιμόνες saw demons/gods more in terms of pollution or contamination, though nevertheless as the causal agent in something like an attack. *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 38. Martin’s comment is suggestive, for though Augustine does include the narrower conception of possession within the range of demonic action, demons in his account have a much broader range of action that includes polluting or contaminating people in political ways. However, Martin’s comment is directly apposite since it has been postulated that the language of “possession” with which we are more familiar only comes into play around Augustine’s time anyway (252n.4), making the imposition of a narrow meaning of possession anachronistic.

the gods. But not only is the falsity of the iniquities attributed to the gods admissible; for what do such lies matter, if by them demons can ensnare minds and possess them all the more (2.10)? On the contrary, it is injurious to the unclean spirits to deny them such poetic inventions (4.27); by them they are propitiated (18.12). According to this necessity, and their desire for man to do injustice to God as they have done (18.18), they demand worship from willing men, extorting it violently from those unwilling (10.21). Even their own authors attest to this: “It was the gods themselves who commanded that these performances be exhibited in their honour. They fiercely demanded them; they threatened us with destruction if they were not performed; they most severely avenged any neglect, and they showed themselves to be pleased when such neglect was made good” (4.26).¹¹

By this worship the men of the earthly city are enslaved and possessed by the demons they worship (*Civ.* 7.14). The *modus operandi* of this possession is deception, and its idiom is imitation: the citizens are enslaved by being deceived into thinking not only that the gods did all manner of crimes they in fact did not do, but that these reprehensible demons are gods at all and hence worthy of emulation. This deception is their great power (6.9), “for human infirmity cannot be restrained from the perpetration of damnable deeds for as long as a seemingly divine authority is given to the imitation of such deeds” (4.1). The possession of the Romans by demons thus cannot be articulated apart from its expression in their archetypal sin of the lust for mastery. For the demons fabricate religious worship in cooperation with the leaders of the earthly city. Though

¹¹ Quoting Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*.

many, including the demons themselves, have confessed to false and superstitious nature of the mythical traditions,¹² the ostensibly “wise” rulers and forefathers of the earthly city deemed it preferable that citizens not know inexpedient facts about their own religious worship.¹³ In fact, they have increased the number of gods to whom impure souls might prostitute themselves under the auspices of maintaining a strong and stable empire. But the real effect of the increase was not that “more gods should rule you, but that more demons should possess you: demons who take delight in such vanities and falsehoods!” (7.21-22). Such truth is inexpedient because of the control the theatre gives Roman leaders. But this civic control is simply the mimetic manifestation of the demons’ desire to possess others in defiance of the virtue of humble servitude. By enforcing the worship of false gods, the Roman leaders bind themselves and their citizens with evil demons in an unholy fellowship of pride, idol-worship, and tyranny. A more damning critique of Roman politics, indeed the politics of the earthly city, Augustine could not have uttered:

Supposedly prudent and wise men made it their business to deceive the people in matters of religion. In doing this, they not only worshipped, but also imitated, the demons, whose greatest desire is to deceive. For just as the demons cannot possess any but those whom they have falsely deceived, so also men who are princes—not, indeed, righteous princes, but men like the demons—have persuaded the people in the name of religion to accept as true those things which they knew to be false: they have done this in order to bind men more tightly, as it were, in civil society, so that they might likewise possess them as subjects. For what weak and untutored men could escape the simultaneous falsehoods of both the rulers of the city and the demons? (4.32)

They are mastered as they master, they enforce worship as they are forced to worship. It is because all possess and are possessed alike in the earthly city that

¹² E.g. Varro, Numa, Hermes, Balbus; 4.30, 31; 7.35; 8.24.

¹³ So, Scaevola, 4.27; Varro, 4.31-32; Seneca, 6.10; Numa, 7.34.

Augustine is so perplexed at Varro's distinction between civic and mythical theology. To divide these is to divide wrongly the ends of the city from the means by which it attains them; for civic theology depends on the worship of these gods to structure the city, while mythic theology depicts the crimes by which these same gods operate (cf. *Civ.* 6.6). But both theologies are mythical by virtue of their obscenity, and both are civic by virtue of the power they have to animate society's behavioural standards (6.8); together they work to confound the love of God and neighbour in the worship of demons and the imitation of their desire to dominate others. It would have been more accurate to say that, vis-à-vis natural theology, civic and mythical are but two expressions of a human institution that brings priests and poets into a fellowship of falsehood pleasing to the demons. For in one, wicked men pollute us by "insinuating" themselves into our affections, and in the other, demons pollute us all the more when we celebrate their crimes (6.6).

Yet the mechanisms of civic deception are not limited to the theatrical; or rather, the theatrical is not limited to the poet's stage. Augustine knows the demons to confirm the noxious opinions by which they infect ungodly minds by using false evidences, wonders, and "miracles" (*Civ.* 6.4).¹⁴ In order to confirm the atrocities of the theatre and give licence to crimes of war, the demons staged a battle amongst themselves in the time of the civil wars between Sulla and the Marians. Men heard the sounds of fighting, even witnessed it for several days, and found the marks of men and horses in battle afterwards

¹⁴ Including moving great quantities of water around (18.9); giving men phantom bodies of beasts of burden while the demons themselves carrying any such burdens, so as to convince all of some dark transformation by magical arts (18.18); or concocting a phantasm in order to affect the procreation of cattle (18.5), which is perhaps most remarkable not for the phantasm, but for this ancient belief, which Augustine shares, that the physical characteristics of offspring can be affected by the mother's desire for things she can see.

in the field. Augustine judges that the demons staged such a battle in order that men might take more delight in war than in civic affection. The theatre and the battlefield are thus united as grounds of imitation of the crimes by which demons deceive men (2.25). Beyond the work of corrupt poets, war itself is a theatre for the perverted worship that replicates the demonic desire to rule others, even at the cost of slaying one's own kin.

Rome extended its empire in this mimetic theatre of war, imposing its laws upon all under its power just as the worship of demons was imposed upon it; indeed, Romans spread this superstitious worship itself as an extension of their rule (*Civ.* 22.6). Rome ended the peace of Numa in order to satisfy its lust for mastery, even willing to have brother slay brother for this satisfaction, in the perverse conviction that “the greatest glory belongs to the greatest empire” (3.14).¹⁵ In accordance with their perverted worship, the Romans credit the gods with the breadth and power of their empire. But in imitating his pride, the Romans replicated the devil's fall from truth. The purpose of Augustine's fourth and fifth books is to show how such power is not due to the will of the gods, but in spite of it; to this, the great history of Rome itself attests (3.10). For the breadth of an empire and its influence comes from the only One who is capable of giving such gifts (4.28; 5.12). In blaming the Christians for the sack of Rome, citing their failure to worship the gods, Augustine's contemporaries simply reveal themselves to be standing in a long line of Romans who seek the glory of inebriate luxury, forsaking the peace of moderation, allying themselves with demons in the hopes that these “gods” will aid them to these ends. For their part, seizing an opportunity for self-glorification in the worship of

¹⁵ Quoting Sallust, *The Conspiracy of Catiline*.

men, the demons failed to give Rome any instruction of the good morals it would have taken to prevent Rome's greatest downfall, its fall from virtue (see 1.30–33; 2.23). Thus, although rewarded by God with a great empire for what modicum of virtue it once possessed (5.15–16), Rome ultimately fell away from the truth just as the devil did. For what could be more false? “We commit sin so that things may go well with us, and, instead, they go ill with us” (14.4). Indeed, had they ignored these false gods and worshipped the one true God in faith and virtue, “they would have had a better kingdom here, whatever its extent” (4.28).

Because the lust for mastery is an operation of demon worship, it is no coincidence that the very same Nasica who was one of very few Roman leaders to show prudence by restraining the lust for mastery (however imperfectly motivated), should also check the development of the theatre by which demons are worshipped. Nevertheless, this movement of restraint was incomplete as far as Augustine is concerned, because theatrical displays ought to be banished altogether, and Nasica did not dare do so, either because he did not know the gods to be demons, or else thought they should be appeased rather than condemned. To be released from this lordship of demons and their concomitant lust for mastery, one needs that “sublime doctrine” that sanctifies and humbles the heart, directing it away from earthly glory toward heavenly things (*Civ.* 1.31). Thus, despite showing some relatively virtuous restraint, Nasica shares a common lack with those other “wise” leaders of Rome who exemplify the desire to dominate: they all remain to be freed by the Holy Spirit.

The sublime doctrine that frees men from the demonic possession of the earthly city is the gospel of the grace of God through Jesus Christ (e.g. *Civ.* 2.24; 4.26): “when He chose to take the form of a servant, lower than the angels, so that He might be our Mediator, He remained above the angels in the form of God, being Himself both the Way of life on earth, and life itself in Heaven” (9.15). That Christ is “the Way of life on earth” means that freedom from demons has its purpose in the transformation of the will, that it might act in accordance with the volition of the Holy Spirit. Thus, it is insufficient to simply admire Jesus without taking on the yoke of his servanthood; such a man will not, even “cannot,” be saved by him (19.23; cf. 21.27). For it is by the gospel that the gods of the nations are revealed to be demons (7.33), and it is by that same gospel that such graven images and idols have been cut off (18.31). And the manifestation of this gospel in the gathering of a church freed from the grip of demons was foretold in the title of Psalm 95 LXX, “When the house was built after the captivity”:

And a house is indeed now being built for the Lord in all the earth: the City of God, which is holy Church, after that captivity in which demonic forces held prisoner those men who, because they believed in God, have become living stones in His house. For although man made the gods, he who made them was not any the less possessed by them when he was degraded into their fellowship by worshipping them: into the fellowship, I say, not of stupid idols, but of cunning demons. (8.24)

The distance between the two polities is thus traversed by an invitation to participate not in the empty worship of idols, but in the grace of God, through the Word made flesh, in the communion and virtues of the church. “Desire these things instead.” For only in these do we find true political participation: “distinguish them from the most shameful emptiness and deceitful malignity of the demons. If by nature there is anything in you

truly worthy of praise, it will be purged and perfected by true godliness alone, and by impiety it will be ruined and brought to punishment” (2.29).

Accordingly, salvation is articulated in the parlance of possession. By true godliness, Augustine says, men of God “cast out the power of the air,” by “exorcising” it.¹⁶ Since the devil can only conquer those in league with sin, only the one who took human form and lived without sin can triumph over Satan. In this way the godliness that exorcises our enemy is identified with the cleansing and remission of sin (*Civ.* 10.22). To be set free from the lordship of demons is to receive a most merciful cleansing of mind, body, and spirit (10.27).¹⁷ The sacraments of God, in particular baptism, are revealed to have the power of such cleansing expulsion. Thus, a certain physician was cleansed of gout, which was caused by black woolly-haired demons that forbade him to get baptised, by the “fount of regeneration” in which he was determined to be washed (22.8). In fact, this seems to be a basic characteristic of the baptism of all Christians, who are “not only to be baptised but also to be justified in Christ, and so to pass over from the devil to Christ” (21.16). Perhaps most extraordinarily, Augustine speaks of God possessing us (*possidere*), as if to fill the void left by dispossession, and vanquishing the enemy thence (17.4).¹⁸

¹⁶ In a previous note (n.11) I argued that we should not impose too narrow a semantic range upon the language of “possession.” The same applies for exorcism. When reading Augustine it would be an obvious anachronism to think about exorcism in terms of an ordained office and technical procedures for forcing invasive spirits to take their leave. It should hopefully be clear by now that the divesting of demons that “exorcism” suggests is far more bound up with the theological and political, that is, matters of deliverance and virtue, than modern popular notions suggest, though *no less a matter of confronting superhuman agents*.

¹⁷ For demons as polluting and contaminating, see 6.6 and 9.16 respectively.

¹⁸ Cf. Luke 11:24-26.

Burying the Will

Given our analysis thus far, the first word regarding Augustine's political demonology ought to be that possession as a political phenomenon is in keeping with the appetitive nature of the political. The fall of angels and men is a matter of proud desires, and so the earthly fellowship is among those who, as we have already mentioned, have consented to it in sin. As such, those who are deceived by Satan and his demons are those who "deserve to be deceived 'because they received not the love of the truth'" (*Civ.* 20.19; cf. 21.8). Even the demons themselves are "bound by the chains of their own desires" (8.24), and "enticed to take up their habitations by the action of created beings" (21.6). In other words, demonic affliction for Augustine is largely a question of self-induced susceptibility; possession is socially mediated via the political vice of the perverted imitation that belongs to false worship. In this sense it is simply concomitant to the fall away from humble worship of the true God, when God handed man over to his desires.

We will note, then, that there is an important connection between the visible and the invisible in Augustine's thought. The political has a hidden will at its centre, but because it operates according to a mimetic logic with respect to its love, the orientation of the will can be publically observed. We have already seen that the lust for mastery and Roman imitation of the theatre work this way. But consider figures such as Marcus Regulus, who demonstrated love for Rome and the verity of his worship (though it was worship of false gods), and moreover that this love was not for the sake of gain in this life, by adhering to his oath and returning to Carthage to his death (*Civ.* 1.24). Or, better, consider Theodosius, who "rejoiced more in being a member of the Church than in being

the ruler of the world,” exemplifying his love even more marvellously in public humble penance for his harsh treatment of the Thessalonians than in his prohibition of all pagan worship (5.26).

It would seem, then, that the two cities should be easily and clearly distinguished, and rhetorically it often seems this way with Augustine. If this were in fact the case, a consideration of Augustine’s demonology would contribute nothing to our understanding of his political ontology; politics could be exhaustively understood in terms of human loves and wills, and things would be precisely as they seemed to a discerning eye. Even if demons were operative, they would only be so according to a nominal sense of agency because they would have no efficacy of action except as their wills coincided with the wills of the humans they “possess.” Mathewes’ rejection of “deeper” explanations of human behaviour is based upon this understanding of demonic activity. Whether such explanations exist is debatable, but they are harmful for politics because they obscure the fact that humans are exclusively responsible for their actions. But our depiction of the Heavenly City must not give the false impression that, in the present life, it is not marred by the fall of creation that so decisively marks the earthly city.

“All men are dead in sin, then, and no one at all is exempt: whether in original sin or intentional sin added to it, committed either in ignorance or by failing to do what is known to be right” (*Civ.* 20.6);¹⁹ is it not for precisely this reason that humanity needs a mediator? However, this means that the human condition is characterized by an ignorance and weakness that occludes the eternal felicity of the enjoyment of God in

¹⁹ Cf. Dodaro, *Just Society*, 27n.2.

eternal life for which we were all created.²⁰ We must look to God alone for felicity—which is the name for everything we desire rightly (e.g. 4.23–25)—because its sole source is the enjoyment of God, which is the love of God in knowledge and imitation of him (8.8). But although Augustine’s articulation of the highest good benefits from Platonic philosophy, its orientation is fundamentally different than that of the philosophers, for whom the final good, whether in the body or soul or both, or in rest or virtue or both, etc., can be found in this life (19.4). For the blessedness of the supreme good, as we have seen with the angels, is only true when it is everlasting and free from the vicissitudes that plague the present life. Hence we can look forward to it only in eternal life. In the meantime, however, it is obstructed by, as Robert Dodaro puts it, our “incapacity to know oneself, others, and God with utter moral clarity.”²¹ We cannot thus fully see our end, which means that we can neither fully distinguish our city: “For this reason it is written, ‘The just man lives by faith.’ For we do not yet see our good, and hence we must seek it by believing” (*Civ.* 19.4).

Politics for Augustine is thus fundamentally apocalyptic and eschatological: if *the* political distinction in *The City of God* is between fellowshiping with angels or demons, then although the cities have discernibly visible moments, there is an irreducibly hidden element constitutive of the political that conditions our comprehension of the cities, remaining to be revealed (hence, apocalyptic) at the end of all things (hence, eschatological). Already at the beginning of the work Augustine admonishes his readers to remember that the true nature and destiny of people is not always borne by them

²⁰ Ibid., 27–29.

²¹ Ibid., 28.

visibly, and moreover that we cannot presume to judge those things hidden from us (*Civ.* 1.26). There are among the enemies of the City of God those who will one day worship in the Truth with them, and those visibly bound by the sacraments of the church whose enmity toward God’s people is for the moment concealed (1.35). Hence we can simply equate neither the City of God with the church, nor the earthly city with Rome, Greece, Assyria, or any empire before or since. In this life things are not always as they seem because the cities are entangled with one another from the beginning until they reach their end (*ibid.*; cf. 18.54).²²

This apocalyptic nature of the political complicates the appetitive pattern of possession. To begin with, there is plenty of space within Augustine’s account to find the affliction of demons among those in or destined for the City of God: “Can anyone trust in his own innocence as a defence against the incursion of various demons?” (*Civ.* 22.22). Possession is one of a host of bodily and spiritual ailments that indicate that our final happiness is not achieved in this life. Demonic affliction can still be a matter of the vicissitudes of fortune, a calamity or natural disaster on a small scale, if you will. We can imagine that Augustine has in mind those cases we think of most typically associated with the language of possession; that is, when the behaviour and speech of a person are unusual and appear to be under the control of an alien agency, as we find in Jesus’ exorcisms, for example. But it is possible to understand the kind of political demonic activity that we have been discussing—which is manifest not primarily as “typical”

²² Though Augustine periodically identifies the City on pilgrimage through this world with the Church a number of times (8.24; 13.16; 16.2; 20.9), it is not without remainder. He is careful to note that, following 1 John 1:8, “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” There is a “Church as she will be then” that is distinct from the “Church as she is now,” whose sins must still be purified by the last judgement (20.26).

possessions but in the vices that mark the earthly city—operating in this manner as well. Instead of operating from within a prior appetitive defect in the one afflicted, the elemental superiority of demons enables them to overbear the will of a human from without. Just as the serpent was made an instrument of Satan by his superior nature (14.11), a demon can possess a human whose “intelligence lie[s] hidden and buried while the malignant spirit makes use of their soul and body according to his own will” (19.4).²³ For the demons desire to confuse and afflict even if they are unable to seduce men to their worship (22.22).

That not all of those who are possessed are so due to their own volition is intelligible within Augustine’s apocalyptic understanding of history. In his reading of Rev 20:1-6 by way of the Binding of the Strong Man of Matt 12:29 // Mark 3:27, Augustine is clear that the present age is within the 1000 years in which Satan has been bound, but is not without power to deceive the nations and hold captives. It is part of the Messiah’s task to plunder the “property” of the “strong man,” who are those the devil holds captive in sin but who are nevertheless to become Christ’s faithful (*Civ.* 20.7). To suggest that demons can extort worship violently from among those unwilling is to suggest that there are those captive to the devil now, even among those who oppose the church, who will become the living stones out of which the house of the Lord will be built (8.24; cf. 21.24).

²³ Cf. Rist’s comments, “Free Will and Predestination,” 221: “It makes no sense, Augustine will argue, to say that a man is ‘compelled to will’ (*cogi velle*). If a man is compelled, he claims, he does not will, though he may later come to will what he is now compelled to do. Evidently this analysis only recognizes external compulsion as compulsion. . . . Thus in Augustine’s view all action is done willingly or unwillingly, and all unwilling action is done after a conscious struggle in which the individual is overborne by external pressure.”

The crucial moment of Augustine's demonology thus comes in Book 19 where it takes its proper place within Augustine's schematic articulation of the basic problem of all social relations, characterized as they are by ignorance. In the last chapter we argued that humans and angels are participants together in a common order and that we must therefore speak of them in political terms, as we have done in this chapter. In 19.5–9, Augustine substantiates this argument by showing that the problem demons pose to human flourishing shares its nature with the occlusions to human flourishing found in all spheres of society: the household, the city, the world, and friendship.²⁴ "Hiddenness: there for Augustine is the nub of the matter. . . . It is this . . . that casts a shadow over all social relations: *we can be deceived in one another.*"²⁵ It is according to our capacity to be deceived that demons operate, and the superiority of their bodies are focused upon exploiting this weakness of humanity. This is why Augustine returns to 2 Cor 11:14, where Paul warns the church of Corinth not to be deceived by false apostles as Satan is able to transform himself into an angel of light (cf. 10.10). Human infirmity is such that we can be deceived into serving false gods and seeking the wrong mediators, and we are consequently bound such that our only hope is rescue at the hands of the only one who is the origin of the good.

Hence, the great mercy of God is necessary to prevent anyone from supposing that he has the friendship of good angels when he has wicked demons as his false friends. For, otherwise, he will suffer the enmity of those whose hurtfulness is in proportion to their cunning and deceit. To whom, indeed, is the great mercy of God most necessary, if not to those who, in the great misery of human life, are so

²⁴ The divisions of society he names are four, which he gets from an unspecified group of philosophers: the household, the city, the world, and the universe, in the last of which we find demons. Friendship is an interpolation by Augustine. See Oliver O'Donovan, "Augustine's *City of God XIX* and Western Political Thought," *Dionysus* 11 (1987): 106–110.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 109, emphasis mine.

burdened with ignorance that they are easily deceived by the devices of those demons? (19.9)

The problem of demons is intelligible within the ignorant disposition of this present life: demons confound our ability to see our true good, blurring the clear distinctions between the cities; they make it impossible to discern between the two in this life with any finality, the true censuses remaining to be revealed only at the end of time.²⁶ We may desire to determine finally who resides in which city, but our ineptitude with regards to these judgements should call us back toward the soul's dependence upon God; for it is this relationship that demons confound, and thus it is here that we can address the problem of demonic fellowship upon which our civic division is predicated. Demons desire to mount an attack at the level of the soul's love that erects a system of mimetic worship that is stable²⁷ to the extent that its founding deception is habituated.²⁸ It is an

²⁶ To the extent that this apocalyptic distinction is revealed *historically* and not just *eschatologically*, judgement apropos of the Church must take its form from the historical revelation of the *logos* of all things, that is, the incarnation. Thus, as Kroeker notes, the conscience of believers can discern divine agency as the *principium* of political judgement only to the extent that they take on the humble form of the servant that was the form of God's embodiment within history. See "Ethics, Immortality, and Political Judgement."

²⁷ Cf. *EAT* 187, where Mathewes discusses the moral inversion of Nazi Germany, to which we will return shortly. Cf. also the similarity between the perverse will described by Augustine and Jonathan Lear's discussion of neuroses in *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000). He notes how neuroses tend to operate according to a structure, an "idiosyncratic 'ethics'" (p. 118), a *neurtue* that, like a virtue, stabilizes the neurosis through repetition (p. 65–67). "There is a widespread assumption among psychotherapists that 'psychic synthesis' is good, that 'integration' is good. But any analyst who actually thinks about his clinical practice will recognize that one of the most synthetic functions of the mind is neurosis. A high-functioning neurotic will 'heal over' all sorts of breaks in neurotic structure by further elaborating the neurosis. Some neuroses have remarkable integrative powers—and that is why they are so stable" (p. 119–20). In other words, just because the soul's love is disordered does not mean it is easily reordered; its desires will not necessarily appear incoherent, nor its will weak, nor its mind unreasonable.

²⁸ Again, habituation does not exculpate: "we make choices, clearly enough, under the sway of certain kinds of motivation. If we have formed good habits and delight in the good in a certain area of human activity, then we shall make good choices 'freely' in that area; if, however, our habits are bad, then our choices in that area are bad. Yet although they are bad, they are still for Augustine free choices for which we are individually responsible. Our habits are like a weight around our necks, and they reflect, or rather they are identical with, our likes and dislikes." Rist, "Free Will and Predestination," 221.

attack strong enough to found a city. Thus, because *all crimes* of wicked men proceed from that perverse love that imitates demons (cf. *Civ.* 22.22), and so turns demons into gods to be worshipped, the fundamental imagery of political salvation is freedom from the lordship of demons. But one cannot work one's way out of deception within the terms of deception: one needs the intervention of God, for only in a confrontation with the Truth can one's will return from deception to the causal order of the Holy Spirit within whom it has its being.²⁹ Thus, Satan is given latitude by God "to tempt those who stand in need of discipline, or who deserve to be deceived" (19.9), in order that humans might return to the principle movement of the political, which is God's grace. A political ontology that fails to take this into account will fail to address the political movements about which Augustine is most concerned. Therefore, because it does not recognize the apocalyptic nature of the political, in which two contrary fellowships are contained; because it transforms the hiddenness of the distinction between the two cities into univocal politics in which one must participate; because its political praxis of "deontologizing evil" is too "this-worldly," too alienated from the order of God's love in the imitation of Christ's humility, the only order that can rescue us from the lordship of demons; because, in fact, it is altogether too Roman, Charles Mathewes' political ontology fails to escape entirely the idolatry of the earthly city, and so remains an insufficient political account.

²⁹ Cf. Milbank's discussion of the relationship between Christianity, Stoicism, and Aristotelianism. He notes that something of a Stoic account "of 'conversion,' and of a discontinuous leap which can break the force of habit, is required to solve the *aporia* of Aristotelian ethics whereby virtue must be always first possessed if it is to be enacted." He claims that such conversion is also central to Christian ethics, but does so without providing any corrective to the purely pedagogical conversion of Stoicism. Thus, while he is right to identify the *aporia*, Milbank's account of Christian conversion seems to be insufficiently pneumatological. See *Theology and Social Theory*, 413.

The Demon of Social Responsibility

One of the most important challenges that Charles Mathewes must overcome if he is to successfully appropriate Hannah Arendt's work for his Augustinian conception of evil is the charge that her evil-as-thoughtlessness offers little but metaphysical consolation in the face of existential evil. Such arguments claim that, in the end, Arendt actually subverts politics by being overly nostalgic and elitist. In response, Mathewes is primarily concerned to show that Arendt's is fundamentally a "*practical critique*" (*EAT* 184, emphasis original). In fact, contrary to the dominant criticism, if there is anything that makes Arendt nostalgic and elitist, it is not that she is too metaphysical but rather that she is not metaphysical enough (152, 170–71); Arendt falters not because her conception of *evil* is too facile, but because her conception of *agency* is. Her conception of free will necessitates that good human action must be so unconditioned and spontaneous that it robs us of any criteria by which we might distinguish it from the banal, thought-defying acts of evil it ostensibly rejoins. In other words, proper political freedom, which is public, excludes by definition any private ends or orientations that would constrain it, and cannot but see such ends as totalitarian (172–73). Action must be so unconditioned, in fact, that it is rendered irrational and the will loses all coherence. But this essentially subjects us to the caprices of our own wills. Thus, in order to counter totalitarianism, Arendt has fashioned a conception of will and action that are formally totalitarian (170–78). But Mathewes argues that the isolation of public political activity from private ends is erroneous, and so attempts to retrieve Arendt's insights by overcoming her subjectivism through the re-introduction of ends-oriented action (183). The "compelling" parts of her

analysis—the world-destroying “banality of evil” and the world-creating *amor mundi*—can be rehabilitated, with their practicality demonstrated, by retrieving her ontology from its setting within the human condition as we find it in the world, and placing it within a “re-theologized Augustinian framework” of being as agential response to God’s prior action (182–84). Once we see that any good action is ontologically good, Arendt’s political insights not only become available to us, they themselves become an argument for an Augustinian ontology (183). With only this slightest of shifts, Mathewes contends, we can gain a political praxis (otherwise almost entirely) from Arendt without the problematic of her “subjectivism.”

It is certain that Augustine would have understood created agency to have its being solely in response to God, who is the source of all action. But Mathewes’ reticence to speak about God when asserting the ontological priority of the good begs the question of exactly how Augustinian an account of agency he can give. He claims to differ from Arendt in the postulation of divine providence as the condition of intelligibility of human action, but he does so in no specific terms. It is unclear how his framework is “re-theologized” and “Augustinian” when his concept of political participation is fundamentally derived from Arendt’s *amor mundi*, which by definition lacks any of the explicit theological orientation of Augustine’s political ontology (cf. *EAT* 182). This is particularly the case since, as Ronald Beiner notes, Arendt’s orientation to the world is precisely the inverse of Augustine’s: “For Augustine, we are more ‘at home’ in the world than we ought to be; for Arendt, we are more estranged from the world than we ought to

be.”³⁰ As a result, the politics Mathewes articulates as a response to evil is constituted in practices that bear little resemblance to an Augustinian politics in which one orients oneself to God, imitating Christ in the causal order of the Holy Spirit.

In light of his Augustinian proviso, Mathewes proceeds to explicate a political praxis based upon Arendt’s theses of the banality of evil and *amor mundi*, each of which we will consider briefly in turn. First, Arendt’s conception of the banality of evil, though a metaphysical concept, has practical purchase that can be seen in her criticism of the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem (*EAT* 184–89). As we touched upon in the last chapter, Arendt’s problem with the Jerusalem proceedings was based upon the judges’ misunderstanding of what Eichmann represented; in Eichmann they sought an exemplar of what appeared to be a satanic impetus behind the atrocities of Auschwitz. They assumed Eichmann was demonic in character such that he knew the good and chose the evil anyway from the malice of his will, according to a Manichaean or spatial logic of evil. But, according to Arendt, this presumed a faulty conception of judgement that overly internalized it. According to the logic of the prosecution, Eichmann must have been demonic because humans are capable of telling right from wrong even when what is

³⁰ “Love and Worldliness,” 281. In *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), Eric Gregory explores the possibility of a limited reconciliation between Augustine and Arendt on this matter. Although the two options appear mutually exclusive—Arendt certainly took them as such (see pp. 197–240)—closer attention to the Trinitarian nature of Augustinian love reveals that love of God is precisely what motivates love of neighbour. Thus, Augustinian Christianity cannot be understood to be essentially “anti-political” as Arendt would have it (p. 221). And yet, we will find that Augustine’s orientation toward God still compromises the world-love Mathewes enlists to articulate his political ontology. Augustine’s “world” is apocalyptically divided, and the political hangs on this division; thus, Augustinian Christianity equally cannot be understood to be essentially “pro-political” either.

“right” happens to contradict the unanimous opinion of those around them.³¹ On the contrary, the people of Nazi Germany did not *know* the right but *choose* evil anyway; they inverted the right. “Evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which most people recognize it—the quality of temptation. Many Germans and many Nazis, probably an overwhelming majority of them, must have been tempted *not* to murder, *not* to rob, *not* to let their neighbors go off to their doom, . . . and not to become accomplices in all these crimes by benefiting from them. But, God knows, they had learned how to resist temptation.”³² In response, Arendt sketched an alternative picture of judgement that takes seriously the truly banal nature of evil; that is, she sought to depict a judgement that was not predicated upon the imposition of a demonic agency that we cannot control, against which we can have no defence. She suggests that (in Mathewes’ words) “we should appreciate the absolute inexplicability of these crimes . . . and affirm the absolute responsibility of the person, *qua* free agent, for their actions, *precisely* because there is no explanation for them other than the agent’s inexplicable ‘decision’ ” (188). For on the basis of demonic explanations “no judicial procedure would be possible.”³³ Instead of trying to judge the wickedness of Eichmann, we should accept that the greatest evil can be perpetrated by the most un-extraordinary of people. Thus we should give up the search for understanding that the postulation of Eichmann’s demonic character entails, and “simply judge him for his deeds” (189). The banality of evil is practical in that it keeps us

³¹ Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (rev. and enl. ed.; New York: Penguin, 1994), 294–95.

³² *EAT* 187, quoting Arendt, *Eichmann*, 150.

³³ *EAT* 188, quoting Arendt, *Eichmann*, 290.

from misplaced fears of demonic agency by maintaining the possibility of judgement through the assertion of the absolute responsibility of humans *qua* agents.

Second, since evil *unworlds* the *worlding* processes of the political, political engagement as love of the world becomes our most practical response to privation by reaffirming the good. Mathewes highlights an initial example from Arendt's *Eichmann* found in the story of Sergeant Anton Schmidt, who attempted to stem the slaughter of the Jews by helping them to escape and giving them food. Schmidt was ultimately executed for his subversion (*EAT* 193).³⁴ It would have been better had Mathewes stopped here, but he goes on to refer to an instance in *The City of God* that he argues is another example of *amor mundi*.³⁵ Mathewes claims that Augustine's reputation for immobilizing human action with the impossible demands of moral purity is misconstrued, and he does this by pointing to the judge of 19.6 as an example of the kind of love of world that is suitable for an ontological politics. For the judge illustrates that we are not paralyzed but freed to act precisely because we are without pretences regarding the possibility of moral purity (220). Although he has no access to the conscience of the accused, the judge must act anyway, even if this means torturing an innocent man to spare him wrongful execution. It may even be that the innocent will die from the tortures intended to save his life, his innocence never finally revealed. Nevertheless, the judge is bound by the duty of human society to carry out his office, often to the detriment of the innocent, in a world

³⁴ See Arendt, *Eichmann*, 230–33.

³⁵ To be fair, Mathewes mentions two political practices that constitute the “limit situations” of our confrontation with evil. The first is embodying forgiveness, by which we confront our own suffering of unmerited evil; the second is deontologizing evil, which is to be our approach when we are called to public service that may entail our infliction of suffering upon others (207). The former I am happy to agree with provisionally, and so will not discuss it here; the latter, however, is considerably more problematic.

constrained both by the ignorance that makes judgement impossible, and by the exigencies of human life that make judgement unavoidable. We see here a practical response to evil that “de(-)ontologizes” it, by which Mathewes seems to mean both a response to evil that adequately asserts its lack of being, and a more traditional understanding of deontology that locates the idiom of this response in the fulfilment of obligations. The participation in the good that constitutes political ontology’s response to evil is thus inhabiting and fulfilling a role that “contributes to the social good” (222), even if it entails “restraining evil by force” (ibid.) and “engaging in acts of violence . . . upon the innocent” (220). As Augustine says of the judge, it would be “wicked” (*nefas*) to refuse such duty. We have already seen that such inactivity, non-participation, is basically Manichaean (and, paradoxically, Pelagian; cf. 232); refusing to participate in the given social order is tantamount to consigning it to a realm of evil that in reality does not have any positive existence. By participating in one’s duty, then, one affirms that only goodness has existence and, to the extent that it is stained by a sin that makes some evils necessary, can transform the social order for the better from within it (222). With Augustine’s judge, Mathewes hopes to argue that the de-ontologization of evil engages us within a cycle of social transformation: “in coming to love the world more fully, we are transforming ourselves, or are being transformed, in ways that enable us to inhabit (and love) the world more fully” (223).

Mathewes is reluctant to compromise the possibility of human political participation by allowing factors that would mitigate agential responsibility, and so denies that Eichmann should be depicted as a demon. However, we must note that

Augustine would not call Eichmann a demon, and Mathewes' misleading and ill-founded assumption of demythologization in Augustine's work has prevented him from stopping to notice this point, much less explore what difference it might make. It is clear from our analysis that Augustine would not claim that a demonic influence over someone like Eichmann exculpates him from moral responsibility. Moreover, articulating the problem of Eichmann's evil in terms of a fellowship with unclean spirits is not simply an attempt to explain or understand, as if we suffered from some Oedipal lust for knowledge that aggrandizes us. On the contrary, the postulation of hiddenness as the basic problem of the political, and the concomitant assertion that demons can prey upon precisely this weakness, instead compels us to take issue with Mathewes' easy adoption of Arendt's commitment to the possibility of judicial procedure. It may be that no judicial procedure is possible on the basis of demonic influence, but the question remains whether it is really a task of the City of God to found a judicial order, particularly one predicated upon a level of visibility (i.e., simply judging people for their deeds) humans cannot possibly access.

Judgement, of course, is extremely important for Augustine; it has to be since his politics is primarily articulated as the *distinction* between two cities. Hence, early in the work, Augustine calls Christians not to neglect "the duty of teaching and admonishing, and sometimes even of rebuking and correcting, sinners" (*Civ.* 1.9). But this judgement does not flow from a judicial order but from a desire that all created beings love God. It is first and foremost directed at oneself, so that one's conscience might be motivated to return to God in repentance for one's misdeeds. It is only secondarily directed at others,

but with the specific end of loving one's neighbour, that is, directing one's neighbour toward the love of God (10.3; 19.14). Thus, when Arendt reformulates judgement, she concludes that Eichmann ought to be hanged because "no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with [him]."³⁶ But, according to Augustine, with respect to those unwilling to share fellowship with the church, "let them be borne and loved as enemies; for, as long as they live, it will always be uncertain whether their minds will not be changed for the better" (1.9).³⁷ Human judgement, therefore, cannot serve the question of "who is in" and "who is out," which is ultimately invidious. This is not to suggest that Augustine would entirely reject Arendt's judgement of Eichmann, or that we must see it as coming from the pride of ruling (cf. 19.14); we might see it as an operation of earthly peace, and thus as the kind of thing we can expect to transpire within a city maintaining its order. But a judgement of such finality as the pronouncement of death cannot but put more stock in the visibility of the conscience than it can be expected to bear.³⁸ We may be able to hear the voice of conscience through the ear by the testimony of others (1.26), but we cannot be secure from the deceptions of demons, which is why Augustine is very careful not to prescribe any action that

³⁶ Arendt, *Eichmann*, 279.

³⁷ It would be inaccurate to rationalize Augustine's love of enemies as being rooted in invulnerability, or as applicable only to certain (non-threatening) enemies. First, it is consistent with the biblical foundation of his theological writing, particularly his Christological humility; second, his time was not without opportunities for Christians to suffer at the hands of their enemies (see Sabine MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry: Vergil in the Mind of Augustine* [The Transformation of Cultural Heritage 26; Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1998], 139; see also *Civ.* 1.10); third, Augustine explicitly warns against thinking that persecutions against the Church have forever ceased, as they can still be used to discipline the Church (*Civ.* 18.51–52); fourth, his emphasis on the godliness of martyrs confounds any easy distinction between the *kinds* of enemy love that will and will not put Christians in harm's way at the mercy of their enemies.

³⁸ In a later chapter, Mathewes does admit, "we must always judge in fear and trembling, with the knowledge that our judgment is not the *final* one" (*EAT* 222). But by then it is too little, too late; hiddenness is not a proviso, but a structural challenge of politics in this life.

diminishes a person's opportunity to repent and join the heavenly fellowship; the only one who can pronounce an exception to the law against killing is the very one who set down the law to begin with, who is, not coincidentally, the only one who can judge the hearts of men without error (1.21).

That Mathewes' political ontology lacks any sense of the apocalyptic explains why he is unable to understand the role of the judge in the argumentative trajectory of Book 19. As we pointed out above, and Oliver O'Donovan argues, the judge is one in a series of examples taken from the "four spheres of society" that demonstrate that, although the final good is social, our present social experience is inseparable from the grief and calamities of sin in this life, and thus, expounding the argument of 19.4, the final good cannot be found in this life.³⁹ There may be a legitimate discussion to be had about the barbarous practices of Roman law, or the extent to which Augustine assumed them without question; it may even be that, as O'Donovan argues, we ought not necessarily refuse to participate in civic judicial processes for the reasons of their barbarity.⁴⁰ But this does not make the judge a figure of exemplarity, or an answer to the question of how Christians should participate in the social life, as he is for Mathewes (*EAT* 220).⁴¹

³⁹ O'Donovan, "Augustine's *City of God*," 106–07.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴¹ This argument partly rests upon my reticence to see the figure of the "wise man" in *The City of God* as a straightforwardly exemplary figure. Christian paragons are unquestionably Christ, primarily, along with the martyrs and apostles. The "wise man" is an argumentative locution, a quasi-hypothetical figure that embodies that for which philosophy most strives. Now, Augustine has, at times, a great deal of respect for philosophers; but he remains ambivalent about their relationship with demons, and so, without equating them, the wisdom of Augustine's "wise men" ought not be read independently of the world's wisdom of 1Cor 1:20, which God has made foolish.

If the true social life is after the final judgement, then it is a mistake to make social duty *as such* in the present life the paradigm for participation in the Good. The present life is marked by hiddenness, and yet Augustine demands not that we participate in politics as such, but that we participate in the *right* politics, the politics of the City of God, the only politics that is truly political, the worship of God.⁴² Without the apocalyptic distinction between two intermingled cities that make use of the same temporal goods but with distinct ends, there is only a single social order left in which one can participate in the good, the obverse of which is inaction and a-sociality.⁴³ “What matters is that some modicum of social order be sustained, even at the cost . . . of unmerited and innocent suffering, which will in any case be requited in heaven” (*EAT* 225). Our participation in the good, then, may require our securing the social order through the kind of torture in which the judge engages, where a failure to so act would not be adequately ontological. This entails that Mathewes worries so much about inaction and irresponsibility that he makes torture imitative of Christ. According to him, fulfilling our duties, even when they are “tragically torturous to fulfil,” becomes *imitatio Christi* to the extent that it weaves our enmeshment within moral conflict into the incarnation of God by which he engaged with the world, thereby redeeming it. Mathewes’ content-less and deontological account of participation can thus lead to a frightening mimesis: “the necessities we experience in confronting evil are transformed into the necessities which

⁴² Cf. Williams, “Politics and the Soul,” 58: “the spiritual is the *authentically* political” (emphasis original).

⁴³ Mathewes’ functional conflation of Augustine’s two cities explains, I think, his perplexing articulation of Augustine as “universalistic.” Cf. p. 233.

Christ undertook for our salvation” (226). Hence, “our participation in violence is a form of suffering injustice in Christ” (228)!

By postponing all moral purity until the end of time, and equating all attempts to participate in it in the present life with “inactivity,” Mathewes robs the incarnation of its power to redeem in *this* life, while paradoxically making it an agent of transformation predicated upon the given social order, which must be secured for any progress to be possible (cf. *EAT* 224); Messianic redemption is reduced to positive change within the boundaries of the status quo. Thus, “the point is to promote true religion and piety . . . while still admitting that many attempts to promote it . . . are simply too costly, too harmful to the fabric of the social order, to be pursued” (222). Augustine, of course, says precisely the opposite of this (cf. *Civ.* 19.17) because it is only in true religion and piety that there can be any such thing as social order in this life. For social order, like every good thing, must by definition come from God; it is manifest in this life to the extent that the wills of creatures are attuned to the will of the Holy Spirit that is their cause. But this means that true order is precisely the kind of thing that cannot be secured. The security Mathewes is calling for is the kind Augustine articulates as the goal of all of Rome’s heroes, who sought not eternal life but the glory of their city in this life; to the extent one can achieve this one “receives one’s reward” (5.14–15). The martyrs, on the other hand, exemplify the security of true social order, which “is of such a kind that it can be possessed, or rather acquired, only with faith and through faith; and when faith is lost, no one can attain to that safety” (22.6). The point at which religion and piety are sacrificed for the security of the social order is the point at which the social order itself is

sacrificed.⁴⁴ The incarnation makes redeemed living in this life possible, if only for a glimpse at a time, but only within the recognition that true religion is but an anticipation of its fulfilment in the eternal life to come. Instead of subordinating piety to the security of the social order in the hope that we might one day transform it, the incarnation calls the Heavenly city to the practice of patience, which recognizes the ambiguity of social progress,⁴⁵ and confounds any simple opposition of action-as-participatory and inaction-as-non-participatory: “we are in the midst of evils, and we must endure them with patience until we come to those good things where everything will bestow ineffable delight upon us, and where there will no longer be anything which we must endure” (19.4).⁴⁶

Mathewes’ purgation of demons from his ostensibly Augustinian political ontology, and the concomitant concern that their inclusion inevitably draws people away

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 66: “Ultimately, the true bonds of human speech and meaning, the *sense* of the human world, are preserved in God’s eternal will and in the *ordo* of the universe as a whole. It is not contingent upon the survival of any human system of meaning. To defend the city of God would thus be a sign of unfaith, an abandonment of the Church’s integrity.”

⁴⁵ See O’Donovan, “Augustine’s *City of God*,” 103–10, where he clarifies that Augustine’s political thought “lacks a theory of progress” (p. 103). “For the truth is, not that Augustine had no sense of historical development, but that he had a strong sense of it, and found it inherently ambiguous” (p. 105). Thus, after more than a century, Johannes Weiss’ distinction between modern Protestantism and early Christianity is still apposite to the distinction between Mathewes and Augustine: “the real difference between our modern Protestant worldview and that of primitive Christianity is, therefore, that we do not share the eschatological attitude, namely, that τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου παράγει [‘the form of this world is passing away,’ 1 Cor 7:31]. We no longer pray, ‘May grace come and the world pass away,’ but we pass our lives in the joyful confidence that *this* world will evermore become the showplace of the people of God.” *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (ed. and trans. R. H. Hiers and D. L. Holland; Reprints and Translations Series; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1971), 135. Unlike Weiss, however, I am more interested in the fruitful ethical consequences of letting early Christianity’s eschatology become normative again for the Church.

⁴⁶ Thus, for Augustine, contra Mathewes, we await the future life not so that we can finally live a redeemed life, but so that the redeemed life we already live can finally be lived without the virtually constant interruption of our own sins and the evil of others. Cf. 20.9: “for the saints of Christ are reigning with Him even now, albeit in a far different and far inferior way: those saints to whom He says, ‘Lo, I am with you always, even to the consummation of the world.’ Otherwise, the Church of the present time could not be called His kingdom, or the kingdom of heaven.”

from political participation, can thus be seen to manifest a greater fear of the collapse of the social order. And since we know that no true lack of social order is possible, his fears betray a desire to enforce a particular social order, which is precisely the Roman attitude about their homeland that Augustine locates at the root of their accusations against the Christians; an attitude, we will recall, that issues from worship of demons in the guise of idols. Mathewes' political ontology thus displays a disturbing likeness to Varro's supposedly prudent wise men that promoted, in the name of religion, the worship of gods they knew to be false, in order that they might bind their citizens within civil society. Augustine claims that such men wanted to possess their citizens as subjects just as demons possess humans. Obviously we should not overstate the connection, but Mathewes' political ontology may yet be hiding its own demons. Our lack of idols "resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles" does not guarantee our freedom from idolatry. For our behaviour is of one piece with our desires and appetites, but the objects of our desires (like a particular social order), which are mimetically connected to our wills through worship, can all too easily become gods for us. And as the Psalmist (Ps 95:5 LXX) puts it so clearly, and Augustine repeats so often, "all the gods of the nations are demons" (πάντες οἱ θεοὶ τῶν ἔθνῶν δαιμόνια).⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Cf. Michael Hanby, "Democracy and its Demons," in *Augustine and Politics* (ed. J. Doody, K. L. Hughes and K. Paffenroth; Lanham, Md.: Lexington, 2005), 117–44: "If an empire is sustained not merely by force but by consensus, and if a people is an order of love, then the maintenance of empire requires a rhetoric whose purpose is to 'delight and move' its subjects in a common desire constitutive of the body politic. Augustine's analysis of imperial power thus becomes a critique of the organs of imperial discipline which manufacture and enforce that desire, flowing quite naturally into criticism of Roman civil religion and its counterpart, the fabulous theology of the stage" (p. 119). Although it lacks an explicit "theology of the stage," the predication of politics upon maintaining societal order is inherently "religious" to the extent that it binds people into a social body (p. 121). In other words, there is an implicit theology because its form is the malignant civic religion of patriotism (cf. 120–21).

Familiar with Augustine's work, Mathewes knows that human action cannot solve human perversion, and that such a solution must come in the form of redemption (*EAT* 56). But Mathewes is so anxious about delusions of moral purity stultifying the practicality of his politics that he idolizes responsibility for the social order, which compels him to reject any account of salvation that rescues the saved ("separatists") by inviting them into a *distinct* social order that refuses any means of social maintenance other than faith in the God that sustains all order (231–32). But, as Williams notes, "no particular *ordo* is identical with the order of God's city, and so no state can rightly be defended as an absolute 'value' in itself."⁴⁸ Christians, on the other hand, who know that true order gains its intelligibility from the coming life eternal, know that it does not matter under what man's rule one spends one's brief, mortal life, "provided only that those who rule him do not compel him to do what is impious and wicked" (*Civ.* 5.17). For "true liberty" is that "love that will set men free not from King Tarquin, but from demons and the prince of demons" (5.18). Salvation from demons, then, is precisely at the crux of the matter, for idolatry still lies at the heart of our political problems.

Mathewes argues that we do not need a "solution" to evil, but a praxis for living a life vexed by evil (*EAT* 10), and so rejects a cosmological idiom for a political one (228). In doing so, however, he rejects the basic early Christian conviction that the visible political order is but the manifestation of the greater cosmological order, and moreover, that there has already been a victory in the cosmological order, a "solution" that it is not

⁴⁸ Williams, "Politics and the Soul," 66. "So we arrive at the paradox that the only reliable political leader, the only ruler who can be guaranteed to safeguard authentically *political* values . . . is the man who is, at the end of the day, indifferent to their survival in the relative shapes of the existing order, because he knows them to be safeguarded at the level of God's eternal and immutable providence, vindicated in the eternal *civitas dei*" (p. 67, emphasis original).

yet consummated, but nevertheless cuts through and divides earthly politics. Instead of upholding a given social order regardless of the injustices necessary to sustain it, Christians are freed from the demonic powers that would enslave us to our sins for the sake of civic order, freed to participate in true order through humble service: “for the sake of that true liberty which has set us free from the dominion of iniquity and death and the devil, we are required not to slay our sons, but to regard Christ’s poor as our sons” (*Civ.* 5.18). Augustine’s demonological politics must thus be more “otherworldly” than Mathewes will want to admit because it will inevitably call humans to participate in the true political order of the love of God *instead of* the false order of the love of self that dominates earthly political bodies, even as we struggle against our demonic desires, our demons, which incessantly confuse the distinction between the two. As a result, it may be that Christians must resist making themselves at home in the world, and pass through it as the Israelites wandered in the desert.⁴⁹

The Politics of Prayer

It is difficult to know if Mathewes’ ignorance of the apocalyptic orientation of Augustine’s politics is predicated upon his insistence of demythologization or vice versa. But without the paradigm of distinct angelic fellowships, his political ontology cannot be distinguished from the idolatrous politics of the earthly city. Thus, a practice of a political

⁴⁹ We might follow Beiner and articulate this as the crux of the difference between Arendt and Augustine. As he notes, where Augustine claims “this world is for the faithful what the desert was for the people of Israel,” Arendt asks, “why should we make a desert out of this world?” See “Love and Worldliness,” 272, 281. Cf. *EAT* 179, who also notes this moment in Beiner’s essay. Mathewes takes it as his task to show how Augustine need not be seen as making a desert of the world. It should be clear that, although I have sympathies with this argument, we must not efface Augustine’s desert to make him more amenable to politics based upon anything other than the love of God.

ontology that is broadly Augustinian in scope, that is, one that is oriented to the worship of God and takes demons seriously, remains to be suggested. It must be a practice that orients our wills to their cause in the Holy Spirit, freeing us from the lordship of demons; it must enable us to participate in the order that “binds the strong man” and “builds the house after the captivity.” We may glean such a practice from Augustine himself:

It is by true godliness that men of God cast out the power of the air which is the enemy and adversary of godliness: not by placating it, but by exorcising it. They overcome all the temptations of their enemy not by praying to him, but by *praying to their own God against him*. For the enemy cannot conquer or subdue any but those who are in league with sin. Therefore, the enemy is conquered in the name of Him Who took human form and lived without sin, so that He Himself, as both priest and sacrifice—that is, as the Mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ, through Whom we are cleansed of sin and reconciled to God—might bring about the remission of sins. For men are separated from God only by sins, from which we are cleansed in this life not by our own virtue, but by the divine compassion: not by our own power, but by His favour; for whatever virtue we call our own, no matter how small, is bestowed upon us by His goodness. (*Civ.* 10.22, emphasis mine)

As a political practice, ours is unusual to the extent that it attends to the spiritual nature of the political and its challenges in a way not normally recognized in Western political thought; assuredly, it will never maintain the social order in the manner prescribed by Mathewes. However, given our bodily inferiority compared with those of unclean spirits, and the locus of demonic assault most profoundly in our wills, prayer has the kind of efficacy needed in a political practice, not because of its inherent power to effect things, but because of the directness of its participation in the power that *does* effect things, the Spirit of God.

Prayer also operates according to the mimetic logic required of it to be a practice of the City of God in two formal aspects: the church prays as Jesus prayed (Luke 22:31–

32), and, in locating its power in nothing more than an act of speech, embodies the weakness of the Christ because the prayer that calls upon God to exercise his power is the admission that the church has no power.⁵⁰ But it is for this very reason, Oliver O'Donovan argues, the prayer of the church *is* its power, for the kingdom of God is at work in the very prayer itself. As such, it is political power, because the power of prayer is “the power to elicit political co-operation and community. By ‘the power of the church,’ then, is meant ‘the authority of the church,’ its effective enablement to be the political community that it is, the community of God’s rule, manifesting his Kingdom to the world.”⁵¹ The politics of prayer is thus properly ontological, exercising its authority over demons through manifesting the kingdom of God on earth. We can discern its operations in three modes: intercession, contemplation, and repentance.

Prayer as Intercession

It is true that Augustine’s most typical response to the possession of the Romans by demons is to exhort the Romans themselves to move their own wills back toward God; we spoke earlier of the invitation to desire the things of the Heavenly City rather than those of the earthly city. Practices imitative of Christ, such as humility, almsgiving, and baptism, since they require the proper turn of the will, are effective in exorcising demons and the manifold lusts they engender. But in those instances where a morally depraved life is the result not of a malign will but a malign spirit, the intercession of others is needed, with a power suitable to the nature of demonic affliction; the Strong Man must be

⁵⁰ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 189.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

bound before his goods can be plundered. It is clear that God is the only one with such power, whether he performs such miracles by directly producing temporal effects out of his eternal nature, or by the agency of angels, over whom he exercises authority. To the extent, however, that he accomplishes it through those saints in the body, such miracles are done not by their act but by their prayer and petition (*Civ.* 22.9). The power of God in prayer to exorcise demons is thus amply demonstrated in the miracle stories of 22.8. In each miracle, prayer exorcises by participating in the Spirit that displaces the false kingdom of the demons by manifesting the kingdom of God through the restoration of the exorcised to proper communion.⁵²

Instead of being located in willingness to torture even the potentially innocent, the war the kingdom of God wages against sin and death thus operates according to a non-violent logic that is appropriately cruciform. The displacement of palimpsestic evil by participation in what is ontologically prior does not entail an affront against those who still have time to repent, but redirects the battle against those whose judgement is assured. Whereas she does not pray for the demons, who are irretrievably lost, the Church “prays now for her enemies among the human race because they still have time for fruitful repentance. And what does she especially pray for on their behalf if not that, as the apostle says, ‘God will grant them repentance, that they may return to soberness out of the snare of the devil, by whom they are held captive according to his will?’” (*Civ.*

⁵² Cf. *ibid.*: “The prayers of the church seek one thing only, the final manifestation of God’s rule on earth. Nevertheless, because it is called into existence in order to witness to that coming manifestation through its own life and word, it prays also for God’s power at work within itself. Prayer is invocation of the Spirit, calling upon God’s power *now* to witness to God’s power *then.*”

21.24). If it remains intelligible to speak of the City of God waging war,⁵³ it is a battle the faithful engage through prayer against not humans but their captors, those that have refused repentance by refusing to humble themselves before their Creator. Thus, to put it schematically, to the extent the church is a paradoxical union of the suffering of Christ and the works of power that display his triumph,⁵⁴ the church suffers at the hands of its human enemies, but actively triumphs over the spiritual powers that animate them. Prayer as intercession calls forth and embodies this triumph without contradicting the enemy love of the cross in which its victory is rooted.

Prayer as Contemplation

The goods Christ has plundered from the devil are freed in order to be made into living stones, out of which the House of the Lord can be built. In fact, the good deeds that constitute the heavenly abode's *haustafeln* require this freedom. Otherwise, in sin, the mind lacks control over the body, and even subordinates itself to the lusts of the body. "For what kind of mistress of the body and the vices can the mind be if it does not know the true God and is not subject to His rule, but is instead prostituted to the corrupting influence of most vicious demons?" (*Civ.* 19.26). Prayer, in fact, orients the soul in its freedom from demons toward the source of its good will, that God might sustain its freedom. The contemplative function of prayer is thus a crucial aspect of its political power, contra Arendt's disdain for the *vita contemplativa*.⁵⁵ For it is in contemplation of

⁵³ Cf. Williams, "Politics and the Soul," 66.

⁵⁴ Cf. O'Donovan, *Desire of the Nations*, 161.

⁵⁵ Augustine's idea of contemplation is not necessarily the *vita contemplativa* Arendt opposes with her *vita activa*, as it is not opposed to action, but finds its fruit in the love of neighbour (cf. above, n.30). It is not the "inner migration" that precluded Germans from opposing the injustices of the Holocaust (cf. *EAT*

God that the soul subordinates itself to God (19.4) such that its will might resonate with the will of the Holy Spirit, and, through divine compassion, be brought back into union with God.

Prayer as Repentance

And yet the House of the Lord will not finally be built, nor will the devil cease taking captives, as long as the spirit and flesh continue to lust against one another. For, it is in the sinful condition of this present age that “we cannot do the things that we would” (*Civ.* 19.4; cf. Gal 5:17). Mastery over this sin is only attained by the pardon of God sought through the penance commanded of his people (*Civ.* 15.7). Heavenly citizens thus watch with vigilance that they might not be deceived, and pray in repentance for those grievances they will not but have committed (22.23). In order that they might be heard in their prayers of repentance they do good works; the forgiveness offered by Christ is not a licence to persist in sin (21.27). But, as Jesus himself teaches in the Lord’s Prayer, people are forgiven only insofar as they pray for the forgiveness of those who sin against them. Thus, those of the City of God do good works not only so that the prayers for themselves are heard, but also so that their prayers may have the power to intercede for the salvation of others. In this way they are to participate in the conquest of the enemy by accepting the offer of the forgiveness of sins by which Christ defeated him, and offering it to others. It

192). Nevertheless, we still must see, in the background of his understanding of contemplation, the figure of monastic withdrawal that should be right at home in Mathewes’ ontological correction to Arendt’s *action*, but remains “otherworldly” to the extent this ontology is manifested in a politics that would have us participate in the given social order at all costs.

is thus that the three modes of prayer cohere by participating in the power of the Holy Spirit to constitute the community of angelic fellowship, the City of God.

Concomitant to our discovery in the last chapter that demons operate politically is the recognition that politics for Augustine is bound up with the movement of created souls towards their Creator. The postulation that demons are natural for Augustine, and thus only intelligible in terms of their placement among other beings within the created order, was enough to suggest that their activity must be understood “politically”; but it is only in the context of a more nuanced account of Augustine’s politics that we can descry the profundity of the problem of demons. Turning to God in worship makes humans and angels what they are; it is the condition upon which the true fellowship of men and angels is possible. Thus it is worship that must be the basic principle of political ontology. But it is this worship that demons occlude, deceiving humans into mistaking fallen angels for gods, extorting false worship from them and possessing them by it in order that humans may join demons in their wickedness. From this false worship—whether in the form of explicit idol worship, or the imitation of demonic pride that constitutes such worship—proceeds all human wickedness, including Rome’s paradigmatic vice, the lust for mastery. In their desire to have dominion over their peers the Romans imitate demons, thereby collaborating with them in order to possess subjects, fulfilling the demonic desire to ensnare mankind in an unholy fellowship.

Speaking generally, demons fellowship with humans to the extent that humans already desire such false communion in the interest of personal gain; in this way, the

possession by demons that is the result of Roman worship is the manifestation of the judgement by which God hands humanity over to its lusts for exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images of created beings. However, the power of demons to extort such worship from the unwilling mitigates any simple, exhaustively visible delimitation of the Heavenly City from the earthly; there are those among the earthly city destined for the City of God who have yet to be freed by the Holy Spirit. Thus, any politics that is predicated upon the transparency of human action, or the conflation of the apocalyptic distinction between the cities within the givenness of the present, visible social order, is ontologically inadequate for two symmetrical reasons. Such a politics does not account for human flourishing in terms that allow us to comprehend the grave problem demons pose to political flourishing. In other words, it is incapable of considering hidden agencies at work and so is prone to sometimes-egregious errors in judgement, and yet makes such judgement paradigmatic of political participation instead of seeking freedom from those who exploit our ignorance and the weaknesses of those we would judge, a freedom offered by Christ through the Holy Spirit. An adequately ontological politics—one that participates in the manifestation of the kingdom of God, which is a fellowship with the angels—will not torture the innocent in the name of order; but neither will it concern itself with judging who is in what city, or whether a man's *apparent* vice is appetitive or perhaps the result of some superhuman agency operating without his consent. Or rather, such a politics will not concern itself with such judgements *as such*, independently from the imperative of neighbour-love that prays in order that its enemies may be free from the lordship of demons and united with the angels in praise of God.

Politically harmful only to the extent that it renounces control over the social order by claiming that such responsibility is God's alone, the recognition of the political import of fellowship with or affliction by demons simply enlists practices of Christian worship like prayer or even exorcism alongside humble servitude in the vocabulary of Christian political activity (cf. 21.24).⁵⁶ The power with which the City of God faces evil comes not from the ability of its judgements to found a judicial order, nor in its willingness to do evil because it is better to do something than nothing, but in the power of the Holy Spirit working through saints and angels. A closer look at Augustine's demonology thus points us toward a political ontology of the worship of the one true God, the practices of which manifest in spiritual power and cosmological authority, even as the mysterious provision of God sustains the imperial expansion of unjust political orders. In other words, the City of God has power to be righteous over and against the deceptive power of demons behind earthly thrones, whatever the power such thrones have over their subjects. But it is a politics for which one must constantly be rescued, either from oneself or from the deception of demons. The City of God thus first and foremost relies on the prior saving action of its founder,⁵⁷ who opens the way of salvation: "This state of life [in which even good men are sometimes deceived by the trickery of malign demons] is so miserable that it is like a hell on earth; and there is no

⁵⁶ Note the pride of place authority over unclean spirits is given in the Synoptic accounts of the commissioning and sending of the disciples: Matt 10:1 // Mark 3:13-15; Matt 10:8; Mark 6:7, 13; Luke 10:17-19; cf. Matt 17:16 // Mark 9:18 // Luke 9:40; Luke 9:49-50.

⁵⁷ Thus, the particular fellowships of people and angels are still a matter of election to such an extent that should probably make moderns uncomfortable: "it is true that many of those who are not written in the book of life will succumb to the . . . persecutions and deceptions of the devil" (20.8).

escape from it other than through the grace of Christ, our Saviour, God and Lord. The very name Jesus shows this, for it means Saviour” (*Civ.* 22.22).

III
“ . . . SIN THAT DWELLS WITHIN ME”

A Biblical Precedent

It has been the burden of this thesis to argue that the demons in Augustine’s *City of God* are neither inconsistent with nor superfluous to the development of its greater political vision. As such, we have found that explication of demonic operations in this *magnum opus* is only intelligible within Augustine’s particular account of what constitutes the political. In short, demons represent a problem for human flourishing because they occlude the worship of God that is its condition of possibility, the worship for which all creation was made. Since we began by refuting the accusation that demons in Augustine’s thought were a holdover from his early years as a Manichee, it is appropriate to conclude by showing the extent to which his demonology is in continuity with the texts that he takes to be foundational to his politics; namely, the Christian Scriptures.

It should be made clear, however, that Augustine’s demonology is not *reducible* to the biblical traditions. To begin with, he simply wrote more on these matters than the biblical authors did and, as we saw with his response to Manichaeism, was forced to clarify his theological cosmology in a way not required of pre-Gnosticism Christ-believers. Augustine was also an heir to more than just the texts that would become the Christian canon. We have already seen him apply a number of Roman authors to the Jewish denunciation of the pagan gods as demons to articulate how demons *demand* to be worshipped as gods. But the theological traditions that produced the biblical texts themselves continued to develop after those texts had been written, sometimes utilizing

texts that would ultimately be found to be unworthy of canonization.¹ So, instead of equating it with a biblical demonology (which is even less systematic than Augustine's), we can trace the scriptural precedents of Augustine's political demonology by highlighting some themes that permeate the biblical texts.² There are a number of patterns that emerge and develop, the language of which is not always shared by Augustine. For example, a strong anticipation of his demonology will come in the language of powers, elemental spirits, and the relationship of law and sin. As such we should not insist on too technical a definition of *demons*. Demonological conceptions changed continually throughout the time the scriptural traditions were developed and recorded, so there is no single depiction of demons to be identified throughout the writings. Instead, just as one cannot *see* demons themselves but typically only hypothesize their presence according to the confluence of observable effects,³ so too will we highlight biblical traditions that allow us to palpate the demonic by tracing its effects on the development of a sensibility

¹ One particularly apposite example is the way in which the denunciation of gods as demons gets bound up with the antediluvian fall of the angels as told in the *Book of the Watchers* of *1 En.* 1–36, an innovation of Justin Martyr. See Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 160–89. In an attempt to distinguish the Christians from the pagans, Justin equates the Roman pantheon with the demonic offspring of the sons of God and daughters of men. He invokes the illicit instruction motif of *1 En.* 8 to articulate the origin of human wickedness in the corrupt teachings of demons and bequeaths to early Christian theology an important anti-pagan argument in the form of a demonology. Thus, although the books of *Enoch* were falling out of favour by Augustine's time (pp. 190–232, esp. 202–03; cf. *Civ.* 18.38), we can still descry remnants of the instruction motif in Augustine's castigation of Roman wickedness in *The City of God*. E.g., the demonic demonstration of battle (*Civ.* 2.25) and teaching of magic and divination (*Civ.* 21.6) recall the teachings of Asael (*1 En.* 8:1) and Semhazah, Hermoni, Baraqel, Kikabiel, Zikiel, Arteqif, Simsel, and Sahrel (8:3).

² The reader should note that our purpose is also not to discuss how Augustine thinks he is inheriting biblical demonological thought by examining his explicit treatment of relevant scriptural passages. In our treatment of both Augustine and his biblical predecessors our purpose is to try to put schematically what they do not, and to show the continuity between the two schemata.

³ See Phillip H. Wiebe, *God and Other Spirits: Intimations of Transcendence in Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 111–52.

that posits unseen forces that affect the struggle to live as the people of God. Our account will thus remain highly suggestive, rather than conclusive. But our portrait of biblical demons itself should be adequate to the task of highlighting the main themes of our discussion, and locating Augustine's demonology within the development of Judaeo-Christian theology concerning the role of superhuman agencies in political affairs, particularly in contradistinction to the Manichaean cosmology discussed in chapter one.

It is fitting that we should argue for the continuity between Augustinian and biblical demonologies in order to distinguish them from a Manichaean cosmology because one way in which they are continuous is in their usage of demonology as a point of self-distinction.⁴ "From the time when the Israelites entered Canaan . . . they were almost continually confronted with the problem of foreign religion. What attitude was the worshipper of Yahweh to adopt towards pagan deities?"⁵ G. B. Caird argues there were three possible approaches the Israelites could take vis-à-vis these foreign gods: syncretism, suppression, and subordination, and all three were tried. Syncretism was a natural choice, and a common practice among the nations, but centuries of protest by the prophets were ultimately successful in asserting the incompatibility of the demands of the God of Israel and the moral concessions of pagan worshippers. The prophets themselves preferred suppression, but the persistence of pagan gods as an influence on the people of Israel demanded another solution. The subordination of the gods of the nations to the God

⁴ Cf. Jonathan Z. Smith's discussion of "Devil Worship" as a locative category. " 'Devil Worship,' properly understood, is not a substantive category. It does not refer . . . to people worshipping devils or demons. Rather it is a measure of distance, a *taxon*, a label applied to distinguish 'us' from 'them.' " "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity," *ANRW* 16.1:427, 429.

⁵ G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 1.

of Israel is the theological position that would prove most tenacious,⁶ and is the starting point of our exploration.

The Gods of the Nations

“Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD, a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and awesome above all that are around him?” (Ps 89:5–7). For the ancients, the forces of nature and superhuman agencies were significantly less distinguishable than they might appear to us (cf. *Jub.* 2:2). God created all the host of heaven with the breath of his mouth (Ps 33:6), which is why winds were spirits (the two being the same word in both the Hebrew, *ruahot*,⁷ and the Greek, πνεύματα; cf. Ps 104:4 and 103:4 LXX); God travelled in the company of these spirits in storms (cf. Job 38:1; 40:6; Ezek 1:4; Zech 9:14), his voice was thunder (Exod 19:19; Job 37:2; 40:9); stars were angels that rejoiced at the creation of the world (Job 38:7; Ps 148:3), named by God when he set their number in the heavens (Ps 147:4).⁸ God’s dominion over the heavenly hosts was thus his dominion over all creation. Yet this power over creation is inseparable from the claim of God’s lordship over the gods of other nations, particularly as Israel encountered those nations with astral deities, as such gods could be nothing more than angels among the Lord’s hosts. By the

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷ I am indebted to Jeremy Penner for his assistance with the Hebrew. Any mistakes are my own.

⁸ See “Cosmology” and “Demons” in *DBI*: 173, 202.

time the Deuteronomic school was writing, such angels, the “protective spirits”⁹ of the nations, became central to establishing God’s relationship with the nations in light of God’s calling of his own people. “When the Most High apportioned the nations, when he divided humankind, he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the gods; the LORD’s own portion was his people, Jacob his allotted share” (Deut 32:8–9). Israel is ruled directly by God, where all other nations worship subordinate beings assigned to them.¹⁰

It should thus come as no surprise that, in the Hebrew Scriptures, foreign gods are largely depicted as powerless, especially in comparison with the God of Israel. “For all the gods [*'elohim*] of the nations are ungod[s] [*'elilim*]”; in a Hebrew pun, Ps 96:5 asserts the worthlessness of the so-called gods of the nations.¹¹ To the extent that the nations forged representations of their gods, the objects of their worship fail to impress: the gods of the nations are mute, deaf, immobile. “Such are no gods!” Jeremiah exclaims (16:20). They are creations of human hands and as such, their creators are just as powerless (Ps 115:4–8; Isa 44:9–20). But the angels that stand behind the nations are no more innocuous than the nations themselves; in fact, the angels themselves personify the nations over which they preside.¹² They have failed to give justice to the weak, maintain

⁹ Bernard M. Levinson, “Deuteronomy” in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (ed. M. D. Coogan; aug. 3d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 301 Hebrew Bible.

¹⁰ Caird, *Principalities and Powers*, 4–5.

¹¹ The translation is Robert Alter’s, who is attempting to translate the pun he identifies in Hebrew into English. The usual rendering of *'elilim* is *idols*. See *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2007), 339. Cf. Marvin E. Tate, who notes that the word *'elilim* denotes weak or worthless things. The gods of the nations are *mere* idols. *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 510, 514.

¹² Caird, *Principalities and Powers*, 7.

the right of the lowly, rescue the needy, and deliver them from the hand of the wicked. Thus God takes his place in the divine council and holds the gods of the nations in judgement, for all the nations belong to God (Ps 82).¹³ But there remains opposition to God and his people by the angels and their nations, out of whom God will make a footstool (Ps 110).¹⁴

The opposition between God and these tutelary deities coincides with Israel's covenant to remain distinct from the surrounding nations in law and worship. In the curses of Moses in Deut 28, idolatry is linked with the political decimation that comes as a result of Israel's failure to adhere to the law and fear the Lord (Deut 28:64; cf. 28:36). The human parallel to God's dominion over adversarial gods is thus not primarily military dominance but the worship of God and righteousness with respect to his law. God promises to grant Israel a dominion over the nations that parallels God's own dominion over the angels of those nations (Deut 28:7, 9–10, 12b–14), but it is a work of God's hands, not his people's.¹⁵ Thus, in Daniel's final apocalyptic vision, the prince of

¹³ See *ibid.*, 8: Israel's "pagan neighbours appeared to her to be tyrannical, immoral, and superstitious; and if the earthly kingdoms were tainted with evil, the angelic rulers could hardly be acquitted of responsibility for sins committed under their supervision."

¹⁴ The superhuman reading of the enemies of Ps 110:1 is, of course, not demanded by a historical reading, as Forsyth notes. Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 262–66. Yet I am less hesitant than Forsyth to see allusions to the superhuman in early Christological interpretations of the Psalm, particularly in Eph 1:20–23, though I think it is also implied in Rom 8:34–39.

¹⁵ Thus, we must understand military conquest to be a subset of the obedience righteousness requires. When Ps 106:34 links the Israelite's failure to destroy their enemies with the anger of the Lord against his people, it is not because they were not powerful enough in battle, but because they were not faithful enough in worship (Ps 106:35–39, to which we will return below). Here we should recall the argument of John H. Yoder's chapter, "God Will Fight for Us" in *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 76–88. "Even when Israel uses the sword, in a most fearful and destructive way, the victory is credited not to the prowess of the swordsmen or the wisdom of the generals, but to the help of YHWH" (p. 77–78).

Persia¹⁶ contends against the messenger Gabriel, and Michael, the prince of Israel, who serves the Lord as the protector of his people (Dan 10:13–21; 12:1). Meanwhile, the Israelites engage in a correlative struggle with the kingdom of Persia that would destroy them. But their victory over the “king of bold countenance,” who would rule in cunning and deceit, is accomplished not through human war, but in the heavenly battle: “but he shall be broken, and not by human hands” (8:25c). The angelic struggle is a war that is won or lost at the human level by righteousness (Dan 9; 11:32–35; 12:1–3).

The articulation of peoplehood as the unison movement of worship and ethics in Deut 28 anticipates the identification of demon worship as the Israelites’ political failure in the song of Moses of Deut 32. No sooner does God affix the nations according to the number of gods than Israel grows fat upon the provision of God, transgressing the command to remain separated from the nations by forsaking God for their tutelary angels. But more than just identifying idol worship as a political problem, i.e. a problem of the constitution of a people, this passage implicitly identifies these national angels as demons (*shedim*; Deut 32:17).¹⁷ In Ps 106, which contains the only other usage of *shedim* in the

¹⁶ As Caird notes, the princes of Persia and Greece in the book of Daniel “are not to be identified with Alexander the Great and Darius III. They are the angelic guardians of the two nations; for in a later passage a third prince appears on the scene, whose name is Michael, the great prince who stands for the people of Israel.” *Principalities and Powers*, 6.

¹⁷ The term *shedim* itself seems to witness to this identification of foreign gods with demons, since it is in the later periods that it signifies *demons*, originally (perhaps) coming from the Akkadic *sedu*, a good spirit, in which case its usage in Deut 32 and Ps 106 represent a polemical reversal of foreign religious value. See Dan Ben-Amos, “On Demons,” in *Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought: Festschrift in Honor of Joseph Dan on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (eds. R. Eilior and P. Schäfer; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 29. Its original use may also have referred to a cult of “Shadday gods” that included child sacrifice, which would make sense of both the psalmic usage and the particularly negative connotations of its later meaning, *demon*. See Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12* (WBC 6B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 806.

Hebrew Bible, this implicit identification takes the flavour of diabolical agency with which Augustine was quite familiar. The ancestors of God’s people

mingled with the nations and learned to do as they did. They served their idols, *which became a snare to them*. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons [*shedim*]; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood. Thus they became unclean by their acts, and prostituted themselves in their doings. (Ps 106:34–39)

The Psalmist shows the coincidence of the idolatry, ritual impurity, and moral wickedness that are antithetical to God’s call upon Israel to remain a polity distinct from the surrounding nations. But the Old Testament’s second implicit identification of the idols of the nations as demons moves further toward a demonological account of pagan gods by depicting these idols as *ensnaring* the Israelites (cf. Exod 23:32–33). The Israelites do not simply need to “get their act together”; they need to be *freed*.

The identification of the gods of the nations as demons that remains implicit in the Old Testament becomes explicit through the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek. “All the gods of the peoples are idols [*’elilim*]” (Ps 96:5) becomes, in the LXX, “all the gods of the nations are demons [*δαίμόνια*]” (Ps 95:5), in what is as much of a theological judgement (upon which Augustine draws regularly) as a translation. Of course, the translation of *δαίμόνια* as *demons* should not deceive us into excising all the ambiguity out of the term. This usage helps form the linguistic basis¹⁸ for the distinction between angels and demons that would continue to develop, as we have noted, until the time of Augustine and beyond, but we should be cautious about reading the absoluteness

¹⁸ Werner Foerster, “δαίμων, δαιμόνιον,” *TDNT* 2:11.

of the distinction that would develop back onto these earlier texts.¹⁹ Nevertheless, we can descry in the LXX translation what the inheritors of this tradition would work to clarify; namely, a move toward identifying the gods Israel is forbidden to worship with superhuman agents powerful enough to enslave the people of God if they are not sufficiently disciplined.²⁰

Christ and the Demonic Powers

It is in the context of the national gods—that is, the parallelism between the nations and the angels that oversee them, as well as the denunciation of those angels as demons—that we must understand the demonology of the New Testament. This “common tendency of Judaism to project political repression onto the cosmic stage”²¹ is most obviously taken up in the Revelation to John. For here the corrupt Babylon is infested with demons (Rev 18:2), and those bearing the mark of the beast are in fellowship with demonic powers that

¹⁹ Caird makes this point, *Principalities and Powers*, 12–13, linking the use of δαιμόνιον in this context with the “qualified approval that Jewish thought extended to the guardians of the nations” (cf. p. 5), rather than Israel’s simultaneous judgement over her neighbouring nations and their princes (cf. p. 8). Caird, however, fails to note the connection made in Deut 32 between the national gods and the *shedim*, which, among other things, begins to collapse the distinction he finds between the worship of heavenly bodies, which is misguided but pardonable, and the devising of idols, which is the beginning of fornication (p. 13, with reference to Wis 13–14).

²⁰ Foerster notes that Ps 95:5 LXX, in its use of δαιμόνιον, here clarifies the gods of the nations as *wicked* demons in distinction from the ambivalence of both the Hebrew traditions and the Greek concept of δαίμων as a potentially benevolent deity. “The LXX takes for granted something which is by no means certain in the Mas., namely, that δαιμόνιον is a contemptuous term for heathen gods. The point of the translation is not simply to express the fact that Israelites must have no more dealings with heathen gods than with demons, but also to show that δαιμόνιον signifies the spirits of popular belief which are so dreadful to man: such beings are the gods of the heathen.” *TDNT* 2:12. This is demonstrated in the Letter of Jeremiah (Bar 6), which develops the Jeremian theme of Israel’s rejection of God and prostitution of herself to the weak and worthless idols of the nations (Jer 2:11; 5:7; 16:20). “Now in Babylon you will see gods made of silver and gold and wood, which people carry on their shoulders, and which cause the heathen to fear. So beware of becoming at all like the foreigners or of letting fear for these gods possess you when you see the multitude before and behind them worshipping them. But say in your heart, ‘It is you, O Lord, Whom we must worship’ ” (Bar 6:4–6).

²¹ Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 257.

force them to worship (Rev 13:15), though they remain unrepentant (Rev 9:20–21). But despite trials and persecutions, those written in the book of life are marked by the Father (Rev 14:1) and are blameless, set apart from the corruption of pagans (Rev 18:4), redeemed and led by a new prince among the nations (Rev 14:4–5), one who surpasses even Michael as the overseer of God’s people (cf. Heb 1): the Messiah.

Any study of the relationship between the Christ and the demonic powers that animate the nations must reckon with the uncertainty of how Christ’s power over demons relates to his lordship over the nations that his followers profess.²² While commentators are typically more than willing to acknowledge that the power Jesus has over demons in the Synoptic Gospels constitutes the supernatural *legitimation* of his mission,²³ it is rarer to find scholars willing to see Jesus’ authority vis-à-vis demonic powers as itself constitutive of his mission. It seems that whereas the nations are the reference point for Old Testament cosmological thought, the Gospels excise the nations and concentrate on Jesus’ battle with the demons. But there are good reasons to think that Jesus’ authority over such powers is politically significant.²⁴ First, Jesus’ temptation by Satan²⁵ in the

²² Yoder is central for establishing the political import of Christ’s work against those that think Jesus to be politically irrelevant, and he does so in part by showing how the gap in theological ethics matches precisely the reticence of moderns to talk about angels and demons, principalities and powers. See *The Politics of Jesus*, 139. Yoder himself, however, relied largely upon the precedents set by biblical scholars. See his bibliography at *ibid.*, 140n.5.

²³ David E. Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” *ANRW* 2.23.2, 1527.

²⁴ Contra Graham Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism Among Early Christians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007). Apparently, “Mark did not intend his readers to interpret the demonic as socio-political domination, or to see exorcism as symbolic of socio-political liberation. Rather, Jesus and (by implication) the readers of this Gospel were battling Satan, not the Romans, and that liberation came not through political freedom but on a personal level through exorcism” (p. 111). Our analysis should confound the straightforward opposition between Satan and the Romans, political freedom and personal freedom. Twelftree’s denial of the politics of possession stems from his inability to see eschatological ethics as politically significant.

desert (Matt 4:1–11 // Luke 4:1–13) may be formally continuous with ancient Near Eastern hero stories,²⁶ but the particular content of the temptations functions to disassociate Jesus from demonic power *politically*, subsequently distinguishing each of their kingdoms. For Satan's three temptations are each ways of being king²⁷ that are all essentially self-aggrandizing. But as each of Jesus' answers makes clear, all of the options are idolatrous since they fail to orient themselves in proper, humble worship of God. Jesus succeeds where the Israelites typically failed: the worship of Satan will give him the nations (Luke 4:6), as though all national gods were in his charge, but Jesus' kingdom will worship God alone.

Second, the Beelzebul controversy (Matt 12:22–30, Mark 3:22–27, Luke 11:14–23) makes it clear that Jesus' power over demons is a political power. The polemic of the crowds (in Mark 3:22 it is the scribes) reveal that Jesus' exorcisms are considered by some to be socially deviant,²⁸ but Jesus escalates the significance of the charge by locating it within the struggle between opposing kingdoms. It would be tactically imprudent for Beelzebul, the prince of demons, to empower one to cast out demons; the

²⁵ A word should be said about the development of Satan as a figurehead or leader of demons, given that we will assume a certain interchangeability between the two. The origin of Satan is an extensive topic unto itself, hence Forsyth's *The Old Enemy*. Suffice it to say that already in the intertestamental period (esp. *Jubilees*) we begin to see Satan "not simply as the personification of hostility but as a cosmic force behind the earthly enemies of Israel and the aggressive sins to which they are tempted—a force with power over the angelic adversaries" (p. 190), angels we may associate with the national gods. See also Caird, *Principalities and Powers*, 31–53.

²⁶ Cf. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 286.

²⁷ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 24–27.

²⁸ Cf. Aune, "Magic in Early Christianity," 1527.

charge is fallacious. “But if it is by the Spirit of God²⁹ that I cast out demons, *then the kingdom of God has come to you*” (Matt 12:28). Exorcism is thus a principle of political ontology; in it the kingdom is constituted (in part). We should note two things. First, exorcisms in the Ancient Near East were typically performed by adjuring the demon through the invocation of superior powers by name.³⁰ That Jesus exorcised without invoking anyone’s name while citing the power of the Spirit puts the conjunction of these two in an unparalleled position of authority within the kingdom Jesus is proclaiming.³¹ Thus, second, when Jesus sends his followers out, they are able to make demons submit by invoking *Jesus’* name, which Jesus interprets as the very fall of Satan from heaven (Luke 10:17–18). The meaning of this fall is indicated back in the context of the Beelzebul controversy: “how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property, without first tying up the strong man? Then indeed the house can be plundered” (Matt 12:29). Jesus’ exorcisms in the power of the Spirit, and consequently the exorcisms of Jesus’ followers in his name,³² overpower Satan, the strong man, and abduct people, his possessions, to bring them to the kingdom of God.³³ Each exorcism participates in the “eschatological harvest”³⁴ that unites the people that constitute the kingdom. The Israelites were wont to worship foreign gods that enslaved them, but Jesus has come to

²⁹ In Luke 11:20 it is by the “finger of God,” i.e., the power of God. See Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 89–91. His extensive discussion notwithstanding, for our purposes, the Spirit and finger of God amount to the same thing: “in Jesus, God himself is performing the exorcisms” (p. 91).

³⁰ Aune, “Magic in Early Christianity,” 1531; Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 141.

³¹ Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus*, 93.

³² *Ibid.*, 96.

³³ *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

bind their captor and free them for true worship;³⁵ exorcisms manifest the kingdom because they provide the freedom from demons necessary to worship properly.³⁶

Yet the focus of any examination of Jesus' political opposition to demonic powers should be the cross. For it is by this that he is said to have "disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it" (Col 2:15). Testimony to this victory comes predominantly in the early church's epistles.³⁷ It is due to his humble obedience, obedience even unto death, that "every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth," at the declaration of the lordship of Jesus the Christ (Phil 2:10–11). Thus, in the resurrection, God put his power into Christ, seating him at God's right hand in the heavenly places, "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come" (Eph 1:20–21). Whether or not these terms³⁸ may have only referred to earthly civil authorities (ἐξουσίαι) in their native Greek contexts, our discussion of national gods helps render intelligible why in an early Jewish-Christian epistle their

³⁵ Though, already in the Synoptics, this is a freedom extended to the Gentiles. E.g. Mark 7:24–30, and, depending on whether you think Gerasa was inhabited by Jews or Gentiles, Mark 5:1–20.

³⁶ Forsyth notes that the exorcisms of Mark shift cosmic combat with the devil "from a combat with external forces into a model of personal transformation," in accordance with Jesus' rejection of political leadership in the temptation story. *The Old Enemy*, 291. Twelftree echoes this non-political reading of the temptation story. *In the Name of Jesus*, 106–07. As I claimed above, however, what Jesus rejected was not a political program altogether, but ways of being political that were inconsistent with the demand placed upon the people of God to orient their lives in worship to him. If the external combat is metamorphosed into the demand of moral transformation, it is not thereby any less public or political, but concerns the very being of creation, and is thus ontologically political: "so if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor 5:17).

³⁷ Although the cross as a victory over Satan is foreshadowed when the devil leaves Jesus after the temptation to return at a more opportune time (Luke 4:13), which turns out to be when he enters Judas Iscariot just prior to his betrayal (Luke 22:3) and scatters the disciples before the trial (Luke 22:31).

³⁸ Aune notes that this list of terms should probably be taken as interchangeable, though this does not preclude more narrow original meanings that the authors of these texts did not deem necessary to make explicit. David E. Aune, "Archai," *DDD*: 147.

referent in visible human structures and institutions is indistinguishable from the superhuman agencies that stand behind them, animating them.³⁹ The apocalyptic assertion of the importance of the struggle with the unseen powers that give impetus to the visible powers in Revelation and the Gospels thus permeates the epistolary literature of the New Testament as well.⁴⁰

However, the letters maintain an ambivalent attitude toward the powers and authorities.⁴¹ They were created in Christ, and so serve a good purpose (cf. Rom 13:1–7; Titus 3:1); yet their present existence is in contrariety to the Christ that is lord over them, warranting his triumph over them and their complete destruction by him at the end of time (1 Cor 15:24–25).⁴² The language of rulers and authorities reveals the mediation of

³⁹ Cf. Oscar Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1956), 100. It should, of course, be noted that this reading is disputed. See Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic: The concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 42–51 for a survey of the literature on this topic. However, like Arnold, I find the arguments to the contrary to be unconvincing, as they typically employ modern sensibilities of demythologization that fail to take into context either the Jewish setting, of which we have attempted to give a précis, or the common beliefs of a Hellenistic setting as evidenced in materials like the Greek Magical Papyri. See *ibid.*, 47, 51. Yet Arnold himself errs on the opposite side. He acknowledges that the language of ἄρχων and ἄρχαί are used for human rulers, but notes that although spiritual and human rulers may share a common “sphere of power,” the two nevertheless represent “two distinct dimensions” (p. 49). It is not clear what he means by this, but he takes the Ephesian referent to be exclusively spiritual, and after this point human political rulers are nowhere to be found in his monograph. Thus, our interpretation of powers language will take as normative Cullmann’s statement about ἐξουσίαι, namely that it does not refer to angels alone, but “to the empirical state *and* to the angel powers.” *Op. cit.*, 98.

⁴⁰ Dale Martin notes that the “rulers of this age” of 1 Cor 2:6,8, should be seen as both human and angelic, and that it is a modern conceit to insist on a decision between the two. Such a choice, he says, inadequately accounts for the importance of apocalypticism in Paul. “In apocalypticism, *all* human rulers are stand-ins for cosmic agents.” Thus, “although Paul invokes a dualism of ‘this world’ and the ‘other world’ . . . no concept of ‘mere’ politics understood independently of higher cosmic conflicts is possible in Paul’s thinking. For Paul, ‘this world’ is not the closed system of nature but the dark, confused world of rebellion against God.” Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 62.

⁴¹ Cullmann, *The State*, 110.

⁴² I.e., they are created good but fallen. See H. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (trans. J. H. Yoder; Scottdale, Penn.: Herald, 1962), 21–27.

demonic influence and enslavement through visible human structures,⁴³ developing the antique Jewish sensibility of the dangers of enslavement should God's chosen forsake him for the gods of the nations. Not just foreign religious worship, but governmental structures, the courts, class, moral norms, religious and ethical rules, money, ideologies⁴⁴—Augustine would add the theatre and civic religion, Paul, as we will see, would add law: in all of these things we may see instances of the ἐξουσίαι the New Testament epistles consider in the abstract. Though not evil in and of themselves, they are inseparable from the spiritual authorities that stand behind them, and some have taken these spirits to be gods (cf. Gal 4:8),⁴⁵ as though these institutions were the very *teloi* of human action. If there is a distinction to be made between principalities and powers on the one hand and demonic agents strictly understood on the other,⁴⁶ the applicability of the powers to a New Testament demonology is assured by the fact that they are used idolatrously, and when the nations worship idols they are worshipping demons (1 Cor 10:20). As such, great precaution must be taken in how one relates to them, for it is in exchanging the glory of God by taking created beings to be gods that is the source of all sin (Rom 1:21–32). It is from this contamination of humans by demons through disordered relations between humans and the powers that humans need to be freed, and it is Christ's victory that is to have provided this freedom. But to the extent that there is still

⁴³ For the language of human structures as an illustration of NT powers see Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 137–38.

⁴⁴ Cf. Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, 22, 25, 27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁶ Cf. Marva J. Dawn, "Powers and Principalities," in *DTIB*: 609: the powers "are not merely human beings gone amok, but they affect historical events and structures. Contrarily, they are distinguished from supernatural angels and demons, but instruments such as the state, money, the media, technology and various ideologies bear spiritual powers beyond themselves."

ambivalence regarding the powers—they still have good functions they were created to perform—this freedom is predominantly articulated as freedom from the disobedience the powers produce in humans.

A case in point is the Letter to the Ephesians, which, by maintaining the human and angelic referents of the powers at the forefront of its text, produces the clearest articulation of the principles of the political ontology we discerned in Augustine.⁴⁷ Working against Christ’s lordship over the powers is “the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient” (Eph 2:2). All, both Jew and Gentile, are dead in their trespasses to the extent that they live according to the passions of the flesh, but God has made them alive in Christ through the forgiveness of sins (Eph 2:3–4; cf. 1:7). He has captured the prisoners (Eph 4:8), abolishing the law that imprisoned them in its commandments in order that he might create a single people in the place of the two (Eph 2:15). It is a people constituted in worship, united by the displacement of the spirit of disobedience by the Holy Spirit who unifies them in the Father (Eph 2:18), built into the dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:22), filled with the Spirit in thanksgiving to the Father at all times for all things through the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 5:18–20). As such, this people is to live a life worthy of their calling in the Spirit (Eph 4:1–6); they have been marked by the Holy Spirit of God and, as such, are to imitate God (Eph 5:1) by imitating Christ’s humble, patient love (Eph 5:21–6:9) with a

⁴⁷ Forsyth notes that Ephesians foregoes Paul’s typical reticence to make reference to apocalyptic combat. *The Old Enemy*, 283. Whether or not Paul wrote Ephesians is, of course, irrelevant for our present purposes, but our discussion below of the undisputed Pauline letters should confound any easy distinction between Pauline and pseudo-Pauline cosmologies.

love of their own made possible by the power of the Spirit (Eph 3:16–17).⁴⁸ In so doing they distinguish themselves from the nations,⁴⁹ who are characterized by dark ignorance, hardness of heart, licentiousness, and the practice of every kind of impurity (Eph 4:17–19). Now, distinction from the nations is paramount, but since the occlusion to God’s peace first came from the spirit of disobedience working in all people, this distinction cannot be maintained through a struggle against the human adversaries and visible institutions through which the ruler of the power of the air works, but by a resistance appropriate for the Spirit: standing firm in obedience to God, maintaining righteous conduct, and continuing Paul’s mission of spreading the gospel (Eph 6:10–17).⁵⁰ In this goal prayer is central as supplication for the power required to carry out this offensive and resist the powers that would confound the peaceable communion of the people of God (Eph 1:17–19; 3:14–21; 6:18–20).⁵¹

Now, Paul mentions demons only once (1 Cor 10:20, alluding to Ps 95:5 LXX). The context has to do with maintaining the purity of the Christian social body from external, possibly demonic contaminants, and so is apposite to our discussion.⁵² Since the spirit (πνεῦμα)—in ancient Greece considered to be the substance that is the source of motion, life, rationality, thought, and sensation⁵³—is so susceptible to pollution and corruption, the (social) body’s divestment of the impure spirit of this world (hence the

⁴⁸ Arnold, *Ephesians*, 99.

⁴⁹ At Eph 4:17, the NRSV translates τὰ ἔθνη as “the Gentiles,” but I prefer to retain the political flavour of “nations.”

⁵⁰ See Arnold, *Ephesians*, 118–121.

⁵¹ See *ibid.*, 70–102, 112.

⁵² See Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 179–189.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, esp. 21–25. Cf. also John Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 200–01, on the Spirit as a kind of electricity conducted through the gospel.

“unclean spirits” of the Gospels) and reception of the Holy Spirit of God is paramount (cf. 1 Cor 2:6–16).⁵⁴ However, his singular mention of *demons* does not mean Paul lacks the sense of the demonic we find in the Letter to the Ephesians. In fact, one of the New Testament’s clearest articulations of humanity’s *captivity* to demonic powers through visible human institutions comes in Paul’s description of the relation of sin to the law.⁵⁵ As one commentator has noted, we would get close to Paul’s understanding of sin’s use of the law if we replaced “sin” with “the devil.”⁵⁶

We can begin to see why in the law’s association with the “elemental spirits” (στοιχεῖα) in Gal 4:3,9. In Gal 3:19, Paul reminds his readers of the angelic ordination of the law (cf. Deut 33:2–5, esp. in LXX; *Jub.* 1:27–29; Acts 7:53; Heb 2:2),⁵⁷ which was given for the sake of transgressions until the Abrahamic promise could be fulfilled. But the law cannot “make alive” (ζωοποιῆσαι), instead imprisoning all things under sin (Gal 3:21–22). In this capacity the law is tightly associated with the στοιχεῖα, which appear to be angelic beings about which Paul is ambivalent at best.⁵⁸ concerning this interim

⁵⁴ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 63. See also Ashton, *The Religion of Paul*, 198–213.

⁵⁵ Ashton notes that Paul was peculiar among early Christians in his reticence to invoke the demonic. “Not that his sense of evil was any less than that of his Christian successors, but the demons played a smaller role. For him the enemies ranged against the spirit, that is to say God’s spirit, were primarily three: sin, flesh, and . . . the law.” *The Religion of Paul*, 199. Forsyth also notes that Paul’s shift of focus from a cosmic battle to the law of sin and death is not so much anti-apocalyptic or demythologizing as “an effort to link the common framework of apocalyptic [*sic*] myth with the profound experience of inner transformation registered by Paul and many other Christians.” *The Old Enemy*, 273.

⁵⁶ Ashton, *The Religion of Paul*, 228. This association need not seem far-fetched. The development of Satan as the cosmic adversary of God is inextricably linked with the law, beginning with his role as an agent of divine judgement, a prosecutor according to God’s law. See Caird, *Principalities and Powers*, 31–53.

⁵⁷ Clinton Arnold, “Returning to the Domain of the Powers: *Stoicheia* as Evil Spirits in Galatians 4:3,9,” *NovT* 38 (1996): 62.

⁵⁸ Note that the contextual evidence distinguishes the στοιχεῖα from the angels present at the giving of the law. *Ibid.* Again, our understanding of the στοιχεῖα as angelic beings is arguable. See pp. 55–

period, just as the law functioned as a disciplinarian, imprisoning and guarding until the coming of faith, so too the elemental spirits functioned as guardians and trustees, under whom we have been *enslaved* (δεδουλωμένοι) until the coming of the Son (Gal 3:23–4:7).⁵⁹ They are so tightly bound, in fact, that those who wrongly suggest that the Holy Spirit or justification comes through works of the law (cf. Gal 3:1–14) are in danger of not just slipping back into outmoded teachings, but becoming enslaved once again by weak and beggarly elemental spirits (Gal 4:9).⁶⁰ Paul denounces these στοιχεῖα in the language of the Jewish tradition of denouncing the gods of the nations as demons: they are beings that by nature are not gods (Gal 4:8).⁶¹ Thus, although the law was given by God, and not in contrariety to his promise (Gal 3:21), the Judaizers of Galatia cannot enforce the law without subjecting the called people of God to enslavement under demonic spirits. For there is an apocalyptic division of time such that the law is bound to the “present evil age” by being opposed to Christ (Gal 1:4; cf. 5:4) who frees us from the law by the Spirit (Gal 5:18).

Thus, in dying with Christ, “we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of

57, for a list of different interpretations and bibliographies for them, though Arnold thinks they are demonic beings. Regardless, the astrological association of στοιχεῖα with stars or the gods in the Magical Papyri (p. 57–58) enables us to locate the concept well within the Jewish tradition of denouncing foreign gods as worthless demons (p. 70–72) we have discussed. See also Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 273–74, who notes that even Paul is not completely bereft of cosmic adversaries, describing the στοιχεῖα in terms consistent with our argument: “beings raised by human credulity to divine status, to whom Paul and the Old Testament refer elsewhere, these no-gods or demons have now lost their power, if only human beings will stop giving it back to them” (p. 274).

⁵⁹ Ibid., 60–61

⁶⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁶¹ Ibid., 60. Also, Caird, *Principalities and Powers*, 47–48.

the Spirit” (Rom 7:6). The question remains, however, what we should make of this captivity to sin that comes through the law. “What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means!” (Rom 7:7). Instead, it is the commandment that provides *sin* with the opportunity to produce transgression; “apart from the law sin lies dead” (Rom 7:8). Sin, not unlike the weak and beggarly elemental spirits of Galatians, is powerless to do anything on its own, but is instead able to work death in humanity only through the good power of the commandment. The law in itself remains holy, just, and good, though through it sin works death (Rom 7:7–13). Thus Paul extends the apocalyptic division of time to the law itself, such that there is the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” which has set his followers free from the “law of sin and of death” (Rom 8:2).

Consider here the peculiarity of Paul’s employment of the concept of sin. He arrives at the distinction within the law after a consideration of the paradoxical experience of sin’s use of the good law. “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate,” because, although the law is spiritual (in accordance with its ordination by the angels), “I am of the flesh” (Rom 7:14,15). Paul delights in the law in his inmost self, while his members operate according to another law that wars against the law of his mind, making him captive to the law of sin at work in his members (Rom 7:22–23). It is a dizzying soliloquy, but, as John Ashton points out, the Lutheran interpretation (updated slightly) renders it broadly comprehensible according to the logic of the divided self, classically stated in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: “I see and approve of the better course, but

pursue the worse.”⁶² Paul is here articulating (among other possibilities)⁶³ his unending struggle to live by his own counsel, namely to live according to the Spirit rather than the flesh. Perhaps Paul intended to compose a universalizable image of the Christian struggle for righteous living,⁶⁴ whereby God’s grace has defeated sin and death in Christ, but our Adamic inheritance continues to have unquenchable influence. Christ’s victory has redeemed the law to its spiritual origins while the grip sin had on the law before Christ’s victory continues to be exercised, splitting the law and the Christian existence in a struggle to slough off the latter and adhere to the former.⁶⁵ This interpretation remains a strong one, supported as it is by abundant parallels in Western and Jewish philosophical and theological literature.⁶⁶ It seems to preserve the balance between human culpability and our subjection to social forces and psychological momentum.⁶⁷ It is not wrong, then, so much as it fails to capture the central thrust of Paul’s argument, which is not just being *divided* by sin but being *occupied* by it.⁶⁸ Twice Paul says “if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, *but sin that dwells within me*” (Rom 7:16–17,20), giving sin an agency (we might say “Sin”) throughout Rom 7 that works *in* him, taking up residence and disconnecting his will from his action: “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it”

⁶² 7.20–21, quoted in Ashton, *The Religion of Paul*, 218.

⁶³ See *ibid.*, 217–18.

⁶⁴ There is some debate as to whether the ἐγώ in this passage is to be autobiographical or universal. *Ibid.*, 217. I do not think it is improper to see in Rom 7 a glimpse of the Christian, maybe the human, condition; but as Ashton notes, there is an irreducibly autobiographical impetus to the passage (p. 225).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 220–21.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 223.

(Rom 7:18b).⁶⁹ Thus, as Ashton notes, “Sin, like a malign demon, had seized on the law as an instrument with which to keep Paul in subjection.”⁷⁰ Like the problem facing the Judaizers in Galatia, if Paul so much as *wants* to follow the law, “evil,” like the corrupt στοιχεῖα, “lies close at hand” (Rom 7:21).

Though slightly veiled, Paul’s depiction of sin’s use of the law in its occupation of him thoroughly coheres with the demonological sensibility of the scriptures that we have been developing, particularly as the thrust of Paul’s argument directs us not toward a taxonomy of demons and tabulation of their activities but toward the indwelling, indeed inhabitation of God’s people by his Spirit for the sake of their righteousness. For the agency Paul describes sin as having is matched and exceeded in power by the Holy Spirit of God, of Christ (cf. Rom 8:9), by whom God will succeed in doing what the law could not do captivated by sin (Rom 8:3–4). Because of the war between his mind and his members, Paul cries out: “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24). The answer, of course, is Christ; dying with him, our body of sin is destroyed and we are released from sin’s captivity (Rom 6:6). But, just as Jesus warns Luke’s readers of the dangers of leaving *unoccupied* (as though a house) a person that has been exorcised of her demons (Luke 11:24–26), salvation *from* the law of sin and death must be a salvation *for* the law of the Spirit of Christ Jesus, that the Spirit of God might

⁶⁹ The image seems to be that sin inhabits the faculties of action and places them at a distance from the will: “for willing lies close to me, but accomplishing the good does not” (τὸ γὰρ θέλειν παράκειταί μοι, τὸ δὲ κατεργάζεσθαι τὸ καλὸν οὐ).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

dwell (οἰκεῖν) within those Christ saves (Rom 8:9–11).⁷¹ Thus, out of the death of our crucifixion with Christ, in the Spirit we are given new life (Rom 7:6);⁷² this Spirit “helps us in our weakness,” interceding for the saints “according to the will of God” (Rom 8:26–27); by the Spirit we will “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13); the Spirit is righteousness (Rom 8:10), indeed, he is a necessary condition of the righteousness we receive in Christ (Rom 8:9). The nations, due to their idolatry, were handed over to all manners of wickedness (Rom 1:21–32); we have already seen Augustine appeal to this passage in his genealogy of pagan evil. But the worship of the lord is constituted in all manners of humble servitude (Rom 12:1–15:13), the kingdom of God present “in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). However, because corrupt spirits, because sin has such a tight grip on the law, the law cannot deliver the Spirit; to receive it one must “shift one’s religious allegiance” to a law-free gospel (cf.

⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 234: “in this passage the language of possession or occupancy (οἰκεῖν ἐν, ἐνοικεῖν) is too insistent to miss.” One particularly colourful depiction of this comes from Stephen D. Moore, which he peppers with (sometimes creatively interpreted) biblical references: “The imaginative reenactment of Jesus’ death-torture, especially through the ritual of baptism, has objective effects precisely because it results in the Holy Spirit setting up a command post within the believer: ‘the Spirit of God dwells in you . . .’ (Rom 8:9; also 8:11; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 12:13; 2 Cor 1:22; Gal 4:6; cf. 2 Tim 1:14). You are no longer regulated from without, as formerly, but from within (Rom 8:5, 14; 2 Cor 3:3; Gal 5:16–18, 25; cf. Eph 3:16). No longer must you police your own thoughts, desires, and emotions; they are now overseen by an inner sentinel (cf. 2 Cor 10:5b) whose relationship to you is one of permanent penetration and absolute possession (cf. Rom 8:9b; 1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 10:7), closer than the most intimate act of love, closer than the most exquisite act of torture (cf. 1 Cor 2:10b; 6:17). The Spirit is *in* you, filling your every orifice (cf. Rom 5:5; also Eph 5:18), insinuating itself between you and your self. Its fingers uncoil within you and extend outward until everything you once thought you were is but a tight glove adoring its open hand, always about to become a clenched fist (cf. 1 Cor 5:3–5, 11; 16:22; 2 Cor 10:6; Gal 6:1). But the Spirit is also God’s phallus, a (rigid) extension [*sic*] of his power. It penetrates you, it invades you, it annihilates you, causing you to ‘groan inwardly,’ to expel ‘sighs too deep for words’ (Rom 8:23, 26).” *God’s Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 29.

⁷² Ashton actually takes Paul’s assertion that in dying to the law he has been “crucified with Christ” to be not an insensitive metaphor for the comparably modest sufferings he has experienced in his ministry; instead Ashton takes Paul at his word and understands this image to describe Paul’s “experience of an agonizing death that preceded a new kind of life,” not unlike a violent exorcism. *The Religion of Paul*, 231–233.

Gal 3:1–5).⁷³ But when we have been given this new life from God, through Christ, in the Spirit, no one, not even the greatest of demonic foes, can take it from us: “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38–39).

Conclusions

Through this concatenation of passages from the Christian canon we can discern the biblical antecedents of Augustine’s demonological sensibilities, which, as we have argued, establish the political nature of demons. The precedent for this comes early in the Israelites’ association of the surrounding nations with angels or gods that stand behind them, sharing their characteristics, operating as their heavenly parallel. The command for Israel to remain distinct from the nations corresponded to God’s lordship over their gods, and the struggle to remain obedient to this command was correlated with a heavenly struggle between the angelic representatives of Israel and the “princes” of the nations. What was a struggle for the Israelites to remain obedient to the law and distinct from the nations was a war in heaven among the angels. In light of the difficulty of the struggle, the appeal of the nations, and the troubling failure of the Israelites to adhere to the commandment to worship none but God, strong language developed to distinguish the gods of the nations from God and highlight their powerful ability to capture and enslave those who strayed from true worship: the gods of the nations are demons.

⁷³ Ibid., 202. Cf. Rom 1:16, where Paul says the gospel is “the power of god for salvation to everyone who has faith.”

This language of enslavement also brought to the fore a theme that would be seized and emphasized in the stories and claims of early Christ-believing Jews and Gentiles, namely the need for God to *save* his people from the snare of demonic foes, rescuing them from the idolatry of the nations that possesses them. This work, according to the early Christians, is accomplished by God's own anointed one. One way the Christ accomplished this "re-capturing" of the imprisoned was through exorcising demons and restoring the exorcised to communion. Though perhaps appearing to be simply miraculous indications of Jesus' divinity, these exorcisms actually demonstrated further the political significance of demons for early Christians since through them the very people of God were constituted into a kingdom; a kingdom defined politically vis-à-vis the ruler of all demons by Jesus' insistence upon worshipping God alone.

Yet Christ's most important victory over the demonic foes of God's people would ultimately be located in the cross. God's dominion over the angels of the nations would be nuanced in Christ's staurological triumph over the powers. The language of rulers and authorities develop the conception of national gods by recognizing the spiritual impetus behind not just nations, but the manifold institutions that constitute all human community. Through idolatrously being exalted as gods, the powers enslave humanity; though weak and worthless idols, they have used the power of human institutions to produce sin in humankind. Thus, where the spirit of the power of the air sows disobedience through the law, dividing Jew and Gentile, Christ's victory over the powers and offer of forgiveness breaks down the dividing wall of the law so that God's people may be one in the righteousness of the Holy Spirit. The law in particular is emphasized

by Paul, and his analysis highlights the immense strength of the grip the powers, elemental spirits, sin, can have on a person in their usurpation of God's good law. Although the law itself is good, like the principalities and powers created in Christ, sin seizes it, divides it from its original good purpose, and occupies those under the law by the law, enslaving them to sin. Only by dying with Christ and being raised with him in the Spirit can one be free from captivity to, possession by sin. The dominant image of salvation, then, is exorcistic in character: one must be dispossessed of the spirit working disobedience through the law and repossessed by the Holy Spirit who works righteousness through the gospel.

It is this image of salvation in the Holy Spirit that most clearly aligns the biblical and Augustinian demonologies vis-à-vis Manichaeism. Manichaeism spatialized evil and made it a thing, eliminating any possibility of a political expression of the goodness of God and his people. By consigning the material to the realm of darkness, Manichaeism gave up the possibility that the disobedience observable in the body could be overcome by the body's reanimation in a Spirit more powerful than the demons of the Dark Kingdom. All the Manichee could do was, upon receiving the knowledge of his condition, free the spark of divine light within himself by ascetically abandoning the body to the darkness whence it was formed; purity was ostensibly achievable quite simply through the ritualistic disengagement of the spirit from the body. The Manichaean mythos successfully captured the feeling of division against oneself, but only by bypassing the political struggle to cling to God in an overly simplified depiction of

salvation and a misplaced confidence in the Light to overcome the power of Darkness that has dominated it since the Dark first attacked.

To some, the very presence of demons in Augustine's *City of God* betray remnants of this apolitical mythos that contradict the ontological politics with which he resists Manichaeism. But we have seen that Augustine overcame the apolitical bent of Manichaeism, its weak view of God, and its corrupt view of creation precisely by giving an account of demons that maintained the original goodness of all creation. Where Manichaean demons represented the order of the material that must be abandoned for the sake of good's purity, Augustine would maintain the exigency of the political by making the origin of demons temporal, placing it in the fall of humans and angels, rendering evil a consequence of the sinful movement of the will away from God. In their fall, the angels inverted: their bodily capacities were created so that they might enjoy eternally the blessedness of the enjoyment of God, but their fall conjoined the splendour of their bodies with the most depraved morals and minds more foolish than the most foolish of men. Against the Platonists, such beings cannot mediate between God and humans, but instead use all their capabilities to disorient humans from the proper worship of God made possible by the true mediator. This means, however, that demons are comprehensible to the extent that they are interactive beings within creation. Their presence does not confuse two orders, but rather demonstrates the misuse of the structures of communion that God created for the sake of creation's worship; instead of using it to worship God, demons use fellowship with humans to enslave humanity in idolatrous worship.

Therefore, we found the charge of Manichaeism with respect to Augustine's demons, and the suggestion that they should be demythologized for this reason, erroneous. For demons are not inconsistent with Augustine's political ontology. On the contrary, they are perhaps the most profound problem his political ontology attempts to address. Thus, in chapter two, we attempted to demonstrate the political orientation of Augustine's demonological problem by tracing it as it appears within his critique of Rome and political thought more generally. His political demonology, we can now see, largely inherited biblical sensibilities. The distinction between the people of God as a polity and the nations with their own gods; the identification of the gods of the nations as angelic agents, demons who enslave their worshippers, particularly God's people when they illicitly join with the nations in worship; the manifold institutions through which spiritual agents enslave humans; the need to be rescued from captivity to demons, and the defeat of demons as constitutive of the polity of God, his kingdom; the central role of Christ and the cross in this rescue; salvation conceived as freedom from the spirit of disobedience for a life in God's righteousness; the identification of the Holy Spirit as *the* cause of this righteousness in God's people; all of these themes pervade Augustine's political demonology in *The City of God*.

We determined in chapter two that what is paramount for Augustine is that created souls move toward their Creator. Creation can have no being without this orientation, and it is for this purpose that God ordered men and angels and all of creation in harmony. But in parallel falls, humans and angels turned away from God in the fallacious assumption that they could be their own light, the ground of their own being. In

so doing they established a fellowship oriented not to the love of God for which they were created, but to the love of self. The distinction between God's people—the City of God—and the earthly city lies exactly in the distinction between these loves, which are manifested in imitation of the cities' respective founders: the humble servitude of Christ on the one hand, and the tyrannical pride of the devil on the other. Envy of humans their possibility of redemption, demons, whose created excellence only ensured the unending misery of their fall, occlude the true worship that cleanses people, enslaving them in the earthly city, demanding to be worshipped as gods. It is this false worship that has marked Rome throughout history; from it proceeded their archetypal vices, the lust for domination, and their desire for unpunished luxury. The Romans extended their empire by war, consolidating it through the spread of civic religion, shaping it with the obscenities of the theatre, taking possession of subjects of all nations, thereby imitating the demons they worshipped in form and function, spreading the fellowship of the earthly city.

The mimetic nature of the relationship between the humans and demons of the earthly city ensured their mutual possession. This mutual contamination operates according to God's righteous judgement whereby he gave his creation over to their desires when they first rejected him. But the self-aggrandizement of Rome, like the earthly city in general, takes among its victims those who are destined for the City of God; that is, Satan has captured some whom Christ will plunder. It is within the capabilities of demons to enslave temporarily those whom God has predestined for salvation, thus capitalizing on the reliance of finite humans upon the visible. The Holy

Spirit is at work in the wills of many, preparing the way for freedom in Christ even among those who apparently fellowship with demons. But because of such deceptive spirits we cannot necessarily discern the hidden movements of the Spirit of God in the cleansing of his people. Politics, then, against Charles Mathewes, cannot be predicated upon the visibility of human action, for the visible can misrepresent the hidden movements of the Spirit. In this always-tentative connection between the visible and invisible the visible has the capacity to gloss over the distinction between love of God and love of self at war in the soul, and so cannot be made normative for action *as such*. Mathewes is apparently ready to sentence Eichmann to death or torture the innocent for the sake of the social order and call it *imitatio Christi*, claiming that the invocation of demons only impedes such political necessities by claiming moral purity of the self, or else makes the demonic a force determinative of politics that politics itself cannot address. But Augustine's invocation of demons neither presumes impeccable moral purity nor the abandonment of the social order to deterministic forces. What it does is recognize that there are political forces that threaten us that cannot be addressed in any way other than by the salvation of Christ, the ends of which are proper orientation to God in worship. We may not convince Mathewes of this political ontology because it changes what constitutes the political by undermining political necessity; Augustinian politics refuses to take responsibility for the maintenance of the social order by any means inconsistent with the worship of the only God that sustains order. The only adequately ontological politics, then, comes in that sublime doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which frees the City of God from the lordship of demons now in its pilgrimage on earth

and in the time to come, and gives its citizens the Spirit which is the necessary condition for their love of God. The gospel of Christ is adequately ontological because it frees humanity from the demons occluding their full participation in the worship of God in whom all have their being; and it is political because the Spirit it offers to those it frees animates them so that they might love God in accordance with the humble servitude of Christ, and in so doing constitute by the will of God the kingdom of God on earth.

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