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# The Emperor's Two Cities: Augustine's Image of the Good Christian Ruler in *De civitate Dei* 5.24

When talking about Augustine's image of the good Christian ruler, we should not airily assume that the nature of our subject is understood. While the concept of an image seems to imply a descriptive approach towards reality, the good – if not the Christian – ruler points to a normative perspective on the political phenomenon of the ruler. The image becomes the reflection of a reality hoped for rather than one at hand. Even so, it is not quite clear whether it is the ruler that is supposed to be good or if it is the Christian – if one should even make such a distinction. Questions like these arise in view of a text widely taken as Augustine's most prominent image of a good Christian ruler, chapter twenty-four in the fifth book of his *De civitate Dei*. What we can find here is a characterisation – not quite extensive, but very influential[1] – of what an ideal ruler should be like, what he should do and, of course, what he should refrain from. Because of this, it is sometimes referred to as a mirror for princes. In the German translation by Wilhelm Thimme, "Fürstenspiegel" has even been chosen as the chapter's heading.[2] While this is an anachronistic denotation for antique literature in general,[3] there are several reasons to make at least cautious use of the term, particularly when it comes to this chapter of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*.

Although the metaphor of the mirror[4] is widely used in Augustine's writings and even in his correspondence with political agents,[5] he himself did not call his descrip-

**1** Notably in the High Middle Ages, see Hadot, Pierre: RAC 8 (1972) 555–632, s.v. "Fürstenspiegel", 618.

**2** Cf. Aurelius Augustinus, Vom Gottesstaat (De civitate Dei). Vollständige Ausgabe in einem Band. Buch 1–10. Buch 11–22. Trans. by Wilhelm Thimme. Introduction and Commentary by Carl Andresen, Munich, 2007. For the expression in general, see Hadot (cf. fn. 1) and Philipp, Michael/Stammen, Theo: Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik 3 (1992) 495–507, s.v. "Fürstenspiegel", as well as Anton, Hans: LexMa 4 (1999) 1040–1058, s.v. "Fürstenspiegel". For the term and its use for antiquity, see Schulte, Manuel J.: Speculum Regis. Studien zur Fürstenspiegel-Literatur in der griechisch-römischen Antike, Münster/Hamburg/London, 2001, 9–18.

**3** The expression first appears in the twelfth century (Godfrey of Viterbo), cf. Hadot (cf. fn. 1) 556. For want of an alternative, it is used nevertheless by Schulte (cf. fn. 2) who claims: "Die Antike kennt die Textgattung des 'Fürstenspiegels' nicht als eigenständige literarische Erscheinung." (17).

**4** On which, see Jónsson, Einar Már: Le Miroir. Naissance d'un genre littéraire, Paris, 1995. For Augustine, see especially 107–123 and his assertion on 133: "Saint Augustin fut le dernier écrivain antique à développer d'une facon originale le symbolisme catoptrique." For his influence on later thought (via Gregory the Great), see ibid., 149f. and Anton (cf. fn. 2), 1040f. See also van Geest, Paul: Sed ea quae obscura sund praetermitto (Spec 108). Augustine's Selection of Scriptural Quota-


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tion of a virtuous ruler a "mirror" of any kind. One of the reasons for us to use the term cautiously has to do with the addressee, or rather his absence. Whereas Seneca, who famously uses the image of the mirror in his *De clementia*, had young Nero in mind as the very precise addressee of his admonitions,[6] Augustine's text lacks any hint of a possible recipient and does not seem to be addressed to any person in a ruling position. Being an apologetic compendium, packed with anti-pagan ammunition as well as rich dogmatic thought especially in the second part, the twenty-two books of *De civitate Dei* aim at Christians and non-Christians alike shaken by the events of August 410, when a Gothic Army, led by Alaric, took the city of Rome for the first time in centuries and sacked it for three days.[7] While pagans claimed this catastrophe was due to Christianity's suppression of the ancient cult that had protected the Empire since time immemorial, Christians, pampered by the triumphs of the Church under the early Theodosian dynasty, were unsettled as to why their almighty Lord had forsaken them in times of need, not even sparing his most committed devotees, such as sacred virgins and nuns.[8] The former had to be rejected, the

tions in his Speculum as Proof of his Desire to Effect a Confrontation, in: Augustinianum LVII, 2 (2017) 493–513 with further literature.

**5** The image of the mirror can be found in a letter written by Augustine to the *comes* Bonifatius, where it is clearly used in the sense of moral admonishment, albeit Augustine seems to deny it (Aug., epist. 189.8 (transl. Baxter): "This letter, then, may rather serve as a mirror to you, in which you can behold what manner of man you are, rather than as a lesson to you what manner of man you ought to be." (*ita ut haec epistula magis tibi sit speculum, ubi, qualis sis, uideas, quam ubi discas, qualis esse debeas*). All Latin quotations from Augustine are taken from the latest editions as available in the CAG (either CSEL or CCSL).

**6** Sen., clem. proem. 1.1 (transl. Basore): "I have undertaken, Nero Caesar, to write on the subject of mercy, in order to serve in a way the purpose of a mirror, and thus reveal you to yourself as one destined to attain to the greatest of all pleasures." (*Scribere de clementia, Nero Caesar, institui, ut quodam modo speculi vice fungerer et te tibi ostenderem perventurum ad voluptatem maximam omnium*). Notably, it is Seneca himself who serves as a mirror, not his text. The writing itself is merely a display of its author's character that is to be imitated, or mirrored, by the recipient. In this way, Seneca's mirror is not only bound to a specific addressee, but to a specific author as well. As can be seen in fn. 5, Augustine's comparable use of the metaphor alludes to the letter, i. e., the text itself.

**7** Cf. Aug., civ. proem. and 1.1 and Aug., retract. 2.69.1. For a general introduction into the work and its composition, see Brown, Peter: Augustine of Hippo. A biography (Forty-Fifth Anniversary Edition), Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000, 297–311; see also Horn, Christoph: Einleitung. In: idem (ed.): Augustinus. De civitate dei (Klassiker auslegen), Berlin, 1997, 1–24, van Oort, Johannes: De ciuitate dei (Über die Gottesstadt). In: Drecoll (ed.): Augustin Handbuch, Tübingen, 2007 and O'Daly: The City of God: A Reader's Guide, Oxford, 1999. That Augustine reacted to more than contemporary events, was already pointed out by F. Edward Cranz: "The De Civitate Dei, though the sack of Rome in 410 A.D. was its immediate occasion, is fundamentally a solution to the older problem of the relation of Rome and Christianity. Augustine's answer is that Roman Empire and Christian ecclesia are not essentially connected." (Cranz, F. Edward: De civitate Dei XV, 2, and Augustine's Idea of the Christian Society. In: Spec, 1950 (25/2), 215–225, here 220).

**8** Cf. Aug., civ. 1.16.

latter reassured. As we will see later, Augustine's discussion of the ruler and his virtues must be seen in this context.

The emperor Honorius, the most probable imperial addressee, is unlikely to be among the anticipated readership, although Augustine surely would not mind him reading his works. Since Augustine's image of the good ruler does not aim at an actual or designated ruler, it lacks one of the main characteristics that distinguish a mirror from a more general discussion about virtue or rulership.[9] There is little, if any, connection to the contemporary political landscape in Augustine's political thought. Though this be neglect, yet there is method in't.

Augustine's text shows a particular deviation from another salient feature of mirrors in antiquity and later times, the mirroring correspondence between heavenly and earthly rulership.[10] This has to do with his focus on the person of the ruler and his personal virtues more than on an abstract concept of rulership itself. Although Augustine's text may very well be entitled a mirror for princes out of habit, the examination of the title's inaccurateness leads right to the heart of the peculiarities of Augustine's image of an ideal Christian. In what follows, I will argue, that rather than depicting a Christian ideal of rulership, Augustine looks at the ruler from the perspective of his strongly individualised, religiously grounded ethics.[11] If what we find in *De civitate Dei* is to be called a mirror, it is a mirror for Christians who are rulers, rather than a guide for Christian rulership. As a consequence, Augustine's image of the Christian ruler sets itself apart from the metaphysical structure of contemporary political theology[12] and presents itself as a predominantly pastoral document; we shall see, however, that it never disclaims its deeply ingrained premodern view on the relation between politics and religion, making him a disputable forefather of modern era secularity.[13]

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**9** Schulte (cf. fn. 2). 257. See Tornau, Christian: Zwischen Rhetorik und Philosophie. Augustins Argumentationstechnik in De civitate Dei und ihr bildungsgeschichtlicher Hintergrund, Berlin/New York, 2006, 328, with fn. 827: "Die Bezeichnung 'Fürstenspiegel' ist wegen des panegyrischen Tonfalls treffend, wenn auch etwas irreführend, weil Augustinus hier keine pädagogischen Vorschriften gibt, sondern nach dem Glück des christlichen Herrschers innerhalb eines authentischen uirtus-felicitas-Zusammenhangs fragt."

**10** Schulte (cf. fn. 2) 255 f.

**11** Similarly, Robert Dodaro places emphasis on the person of the ruler (or official), who (ideally) will "bridge the gap between the two cities" (Dodaro, Robert: Ecclesia or Res Publica, in: Boeve (ed.): Augustine and Postmodern Thought, Leuven/Paris/Walpole, MA, 2009, 237–271, here 271).

**12** This structure primarily means the platonically phrased analogy between a celestial archetype and an earthly image or effigy of kingship. See Peterson, Erich: Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem. Ein Beitrag zur Geschicht der politischen Theologie im Imperium Romanum, Leipzig, 1935; O'Meara, Domic J: Platonopolis. Platonic political philosophy in late antiquity, Oxford, 2003. For a helpful introduction into the concept, see Assmann, Jan: Herrschaft und Heil. Politische Theologie in Altägypten, Israel und Europa, Munich/Vienna, 2000, 15–28.

**13** My use of the term is, of course, indebted to the work of Robert Markus, for whom the secular is the sphere of shared values and practices, regardless the religious dissent. While the elements of Roman culture that are perceived as secular are acceptable for Christians (since they are neutral in

## Apologetics, Consolations and the Emergence of the Secular

As has been noted above, from the many faces of Augustine's twenty-two books of the *De civitate Dei*, the apologetic one glances most insistently at the reader. This is particularly true for the passages surrounding the chapter in question. According to the disposition Augustine gives us in his later review of his own writings, the *Retractationes*, book five concludes the refutation of "those persons who would so view the prosperity of human affairs that they think that the worship of the many gods whom the pagans worship is necessary for this."[14] Within this book, Augustine asks why God has given the Roman Empire its extent and durability and, of course, concludes that it has nothing to do with pagan gods.[15] This is, however, what those sceptic about the religious transformation of society had blamed Christians for, claiming that it was by no means a coincidence for such a disaster to happen in the *tempora christiana*. It only confirms their suspicion that to risk the well-tried relation between adherence to the traditional imperial cults and the well-being of the empire was a road to ruin. For Augustine the ultimate cause of all political realities lies within God's providence, which can never be fully apprehended by the human mind.[16] This holds also true for the latest events in Italy, where the Roman troops

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a certain sense), the profane comprises all that is seen as opposed to Christianity and hence is to be rejected. See Markus, Robert: The End of Ancient Christianity, Cambridge, 1990, 15; see also idem: The sacred and the secular: from Augustine to Gregory the Great. In: idem: Sacred and Secular. Studies on Augustine and Latin Christianity, Aldershot/Brookfield, 1994, 84–96, 85; idem: The secular in Late Antiquity. In: Rebillard/Sotinel (eds.): Les frontières du profane dans l'Antiquité tardive, Rome, 2010, 353–361, 357 and Markus, Robert: Christianity and the Secular, Notre Dame, Ind., 2006, 5f. et passim, especially chapter 3, where Markus discusses Augustine's thought in the context of modern liberalism and communitarism.

**14** Aug., retract. 2.69(43).1 (transl. Green): *quorum quinque primi eos refellunt, qui res humanas ita prosperari volunt, ut ad hoc multorum deorum cultum, quos pagani colere consuerunt.*

**15** Cf. Aug., civ. 5, praef. (transl. Green): "Now therefore let us see for what reason God willed that the Roman Empire should be so great and so lasting – God who can also grant such goods as even those men who are evil, and hence unhappy, can possess. For we have already argued at length that the great number of false gods which they used to worship did not do this, and we shall argue further when it seems proper." (*iam consequenter videamus, qua causa deus, qui potest et illa bona dare, quae habere possunt etiam non boni ac per hoc etiam non felices, romanum imperium tam magnum tam que diuturnum esse voluerit. quia enim hoc deorum falsorum illa quam colebant multitudo non fecit, et multa iam diximus, et ubi visum fuerit oportunum esse dicemus*).

**16** Cf. Aug., civ. 5.21: "Seeing that these things are so, let us not ascribe the power of granting kingdoms and empires to any except the true God. To the religious alone he grants happiness in the kingdom of heaven, but earthly kingdoms he grants both to the religious and the irreligious according to his good pleasure, which is never unjust. Although I have discussed some points that God has chosen to make clear to me, still it is too great a task, and one far surpassing my strength, to search into the secrets of human affairs and by a clear test to pass judgement on the merits of kingdoms." (*quae cum ita sint, non tribuamus dandi regni atque imperii potestatem nisi deo uero, qui dat felicitatem in regno*

now were defeated even though not long ago the Gothic warlord Radagaisus had been fended off. Augustine cannot ascribe this to an intelligible logic underlying the historical events, but he can nevertheless give a finger wagging explanation: God does not want to encourage idolatry (Radagaisus was a pagan) nor does he want Christians to have the illusion that their faith would necessarily be remunerated on earth (rather than in heaven).[17] It is against the background of this double-sided unsettledness, that Augustine sets forth his image of the good Christian ruler.

So what does he actually say? Augustine starts *ex negativo*, enumerating what Christian rulership is not about:

> If we call certain Christian emperors happy [*felices*], it is not for the reason that they enjoyed a longer reign than others, or died a peaceful death and left sons to reign after them, or that they vanquished the foes of the state, or were able to forestall the attacks of hostile citizens who rose against them, or to crush them. These, and many other rewards or consolations in this life of trouble, were obtained by some worshippers of demons, men who have no part in the kingdom of God, as the Christian emperors have. All this came to pass in accordance with his mercy, to prevent those who believe in him from desiring these boons as if they were the highest good.[18]

Seen in connection with Augustine's insistence on the vanity of temporal goods, the negative approach betrays a positive meaning. The seemingly arbitrary distribution of earthly goods is a means to God's, so to speak, pedagogical scheme (pedagogy of salvation/Heilspädagogik), which disassociates all unambiguous connections between piety and inner-worldly recompense.[19] As is evident from our brief contextu-

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*caelorum solis piis; regnum vero terrenum et piis et impiis, sicut ei placet, cui nihil iniuste placet. quamvis enim aliquid dixerimus, quod apertum nobis esse voluit: tamen multum est ad nos et valde superat vires nostras hominum occulta discutere et liquido examine merita diiudicare regnorum*).

**17** Cf. Aug., civ. 5.23: "Thus the true lord and ruler of the world scourged the Romans with his merciful rod and also showed by the incredible defeat of the worshippers of demons that their sacrifices are not necessary even for safety in this present world. Thus those who are not stubborn in argument, but give prudent attention to facts, will not desert the true religion on account of present tribulations, but will rather hold fast to it in the sure expectation of eternal life." (*ita verus dominus gubernator que rerum et romanos cum misericordia flagellavit, et tam incredibiliter victis supplicatoribus daemonum nec saluti rerum praesentium necessaria esse sacrificia illa monstravit, ut ab his qui non pervicaciter contendunt, sed prudenter adtendunt, nec propter praesentes necessitates vera religio deseratur, et magis aeternae vitae fidelissima expectatione teneatur*).

**18** Cf. Aug., civ. 5.24: *neque enim nos christianos quosdam imperatores ideo felices dicimus, quia vel diutius imperarunt uel imperantes filios morte placida reliquerunt, uel hostes rei publicae domuerunt uel inimicos cives adversus se insurgentes et cavere et opprimere potuerunt. haec et alia vitae huius aerumnosae vel munera vel solacia quidam etiam cultores daemonum accipere meruerunt, qui non pertinent ad regnum dei, quo pertinent isti; et hoc ipsius misericordia factum est, ne ab illo ista qui in eum crederent velut summa bona desiderarent.*

**19** This does not have to conflict with Augustine's moralizing interpretations of historical events, as he gave with the invasions of Radagaisus and Alaric (or as he would give with the lives and deaths of various Roman emperors). When referring to events of the past, biblical or non-biblical, Augustine is practicing an exegesis of facts that can have various meanings, admonition being one of the most

alisation of chapter twenty-four, this thought is in no way new to the book, but fits well into Augustine's overall (and regularly repeated) argument.

What is new here and, in fact, new to political thought, is the way Augustine transfers his theology of history to the person of the emperor, commencing with his use of the word *felix*. Augustine uses it as an attribution to the emperors he talks about and it serves as a lexical hinge between Augustine and older traditions, pagan and Christian alike.[20] Since the late second and early third century, *felix* was, always in connection with *pius*, part of the imperial title.[21] Augustine explicitly rejects the traditional pagan vision of rulership that relates *felicitas* to earthly achievements,[22] meaning success in political enterprises as well as securing the succession.[23]

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important. The main principle for all exegesis is to serve the double law of love towards God and the neighbour (see Aug., doctr. christ. 1.40: *quisquis igitur scripturas divinas vel quamlibet earum partem intellexisse sibi videtur ita ut eo intellectu non aedificet istam geminam caritatem dei et proximi, nondum intellexit*; cf. Pollmann, Karla: Doctrina Christiana. Untersuchungen zu den Anfängen der christlichen Hermeneutik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustinus, De doctrina christiana, Fribourg, 1996, 124). History, therefore, is a question of hermeneutics (Maier, Franz Georg: Augustin und das antike Rom, Stuttgart, 1955, 168 f.: "Auslegung der Offenbarung auf die Geschichte hin"). When, on the other hand, Augustine insists on the impossibility of predicting future events, he tries to confound any belief in historical necessity, which would result in understanding the ways of God's providence. Past events can and should be explained in a way that strengthens the faith; future events are not ours to foresee, but to be expected in piety and confidence; questions about the future are considered an impertinence (see Aug., civ. 18.53: *inportune omnino*). Augustine's interpretation here is essentially *ex post facto* and primarily of pastoral concern. It is not to be confused with the systemizing reorganisations of the past, characteristic of modern philosophies of history. For a different view, see Horn, Christoph: Augustinus über politische Ethik und legitime Staatsgewalt. In: Fuhrer (ed.): Die christlich-philosophischen Diskurse der Spätantike: Texte, Personen, Institutionen, Stuttgart, 2008, 123 – 142, 142, who claims that Augustine is justifying God's actions by giving reasons for them and making them intelligible. In my opinion he misses Augustine's pastoral-hermeneutical approach, which aims at making ethically explicable what is in itself not intelligible for mortals, namely God's providential action.

**20** On felicity in antiquity, see Gagé, Jean (transl. Winkler): RAC 7, 711 – 723, s.v. "Felicitas", where on 719 he points out, that for all its pagan implications, the concept was too important for Christians to dismiss. Anton (cf. fn. 2) 1041 speaks of an "Umakzentuierung des heidn. Imperator felix-Konzepts," although "reaccentuation" may be too cautious of an expression. See also Hadot (cf. fn. 1) 618. For the use of *felicitas* in *De civitate Dei*, see especially Tornau (cf. fn. 9) 254 – 262. I will avoid a translation as far as possible, to keep the oscillating meaning between the spiritual fulfilment of the *beata vita* that is to be sought (and only to be found in God) and the more mundane successfullness (*terrena felicitas*) that is associated with the deeds of an imperator *felix*. Augustine develops his Christianised understanding of *felicitas* in Book 4, rejecting the pagan cult of *felicitas* and *virtus*.

**21** Hadot (cf. fn. 1) 618.

**22** According to the ThLL, the meaning of *felix* here reaches from the state of being blessed by fortune to rich progeny. *Felix* can also mean 'happiness in the afterlife' (cf. 6.1.443.48sq.), anticipating Augustine's transformation of the word.

**23** It should be noted that Augustine seems to place limitations on the emperors whom he would call *felix* at the chapter's beginning by using the limiting phrase *quosdam imperatores*. The term *felix* in

Despite Augustine's own suggestion, this semantical shift of *felicitas* towards a more transcendent meaning is not an exclusively Christian development. In the middle of the fourth century, the self-confidently pagan (soon to be) Emperor Julian in his second oration to Constantius[24] sketches the image of an ideal king based on traditional elements of political philosophy and contemporary neoplatonic theology.[25] In a strikingly similar fashion, he sets out to redefine what it means to be of noble descent (*eugeneia*). He points out that neither power nor extended reign[26] and material riches[27] should define nobility but only the soul and its virtues.[28] Real kingship (*basileia*) stems from virtue, while power and wealth can only provide sheer dominance (*dunasteia*).[29] Since true virtue is inconceivable without the proper relation to the gods, Julian places piety at the top of his catalogue of virtues. Piety, however, does not guarantee earthly well-being, since fate gives wealth, power and other temporal values more often into the hands of people who do not deserve it based on their lack of virtue. Because of this, virtue is a question of character and visible goods tend to mislead.[30]

To find an astonishing degree of resemblance between Julian's and Augustine's rejections of earthly goods, should warn us to narrow down the scope of *De civitate Dei* to apologetics written against tradionalist pagans, especially in the West, who were still trying to fight off the ever more visible Christianisation of the Roman soci-

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this particular moment does not appear to entail the fully Christianised meaning it has later on in which every truly Christian emperor must be called *felix*.

**24** For the speech in general, see Bringmann, Klaus: Kaiser Julian, Darmstadt, 2004, 50 f. and 60, who argues that it was probably never delivered. If this is true, it can be read all the more as an openly pagan statement. Against Bringmann's view, see Schorn, Stefan: Legitimation und Sicherung von Herrschaft durch Kritik am Kaiser. Zum sogenannten zweiten Panegyrikos Julians auf Kaiser Constantius (or. 2 [3] Bidez), in: Baier (ed.): Die Legitimation der Einzelherrschaft im Kontext der Generationenthematik, Berlin/New York, 2008, 243 – 274. See also Perkams, Matthias: Neuplatonische politische Philosophie bei Kaiser Julian? In: Schäfer (ed.): Kaiser Julian 'Apostata' und die philosophische Reaktion gegen das Christentum, Berlin/New York, 2008, 111 – 117 and Schramm, Michael: Freundschaft im Neuplatonismus. Politisches Denken und Sozialphilosophie von Plotin bis Kaiser Julian, Berlin/Boston, 2013, 359 – 375.

**25** For the relation of both in Julian's political thought, see Perkams (cf. fn. 24) especially 123 f. But as the parallels between Augustine and Julian show, the latter deviates from traditional political thought in his strong insistence on individual ethics and rejection of earthly goods in favour of a transcendent orientation; at least in these paragraphs neoplatonic elements seem to be stronger than Perkams admits. For Julian's concentration on the ethics of the ruler, see Schramm, Michael: Platonic Ethics and Politics in Themistius and Julian. In: Fowler (ed.): Plato in the Third Sophistic, Berlin/New York, 2014.

**26** Julian., or. 2(3).79 A–C.

**27** Julian., or. 2(3).80 A–B.

**28** Julian., or. 2(3).82 A.

**29** Julian., or. 2(3).83 C–D.

**30** Julian., or. 2(3).92 D–93 A. Julian (like Augustine) draws on Stoic elements here (cf. Tornau (cf. fn. 9)) 167 (with fn. 221); cf. Sen., prov. 5.2).

ety.[31] Augustine's political thought or rather the political consequences[32] of his theology of history place him in a fight on two fronts.[33] He has to oppose traditional pagan ideology, but does not side with its Christian counterpart either. This is not to say, that Augustine in his anti-pagan apologetics did not share his contemporaries' enthusiasm for the rulership of Constantine or Theodosius, to whom he dedicated the final chapters of book five. The latter, especially, represents an exemplary union of imperial rulership and Christian faith and Augustine gives a lengthy account of his victories over enemies and usurpers. This may have personal reasons, since Augustine's generation can relate the prosperous and comparably peaceful times of their youth to the rule of Theodosius and his early dynasty.[34] But it might also have had have literary reasons, as Augustine could find a suitable model for his praise of Theodosius in the histories of Rufinus.[35]

Although the praise of Christian emperors is certainly framed by apologetic intentions,[36] it should still be taken seriously; in no way did Augustine intend to give up on Rome entirely.[37] He clearly states that a Christian emperor is no threat

**31** On the nature of these pagan circles, see the perceptive statement in Markus (cf. fn. 13) 28 f.: "The so-called 'pagan revival' of the fourth century is nothing more than the vague sense of apprehension in the minds of pagan aristocrats congealing, suddenly, into the discovery that Christianity was on the way to becoming more than a religious movement which had been favoured by a number of recent emperors; that it was becoming a threat to much of what their class had long stood for." On the limited use of distinctions like semi- or paganised Christians and their pagan counterparts, see ibid., 33.

**32** See Dougherty, Richard J.: Christian and Citizen: The Tension in St. Augustine's De ciuitate dei. In: Schnaubelt/van Fleteren (eds.): Collectanea Augustinia (Augustine: "second founder of the faith"), New York/Bern/Frankfurt am Main/Paris, 1990, 205 – 224, 205: "We do not find anywhere in the Augustinian corpus a didactic and comprehensive political treatise." And Dodaro (cf. fn. 11) 238: "Augustine offers no theory concerning the relationship between the church and the political order."

**33** According to Theodor Mommsen, Augustine's main problem is to fight against what Mommsen calls "the Christian Idea of progress," see Mommsen, Theodor: St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress: The Background of the City of God. In: Journal of the History of Ideas 12 (1951) 346 – 374, here 356.

**34** Cf. Markus, Robert: Saeculum. History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine, Cambridge, 1970, 30 f.

**35** Augustine's dependence on the Church History of Rufinus is shown by Duval, Yves-Marie: L'eloge de Théodose dans la Cité de Dieu (V, 26, 1). In: Recherches augustiniennes 4 (1966) 135 – 179, who states about the chapter (175): "Dès lors, cette page n'est d'abord, ni un panégyrique, ni un écrit apologétique, mais, avant tout, un document théologique." There are also similarities with the praise of Theodosius in the funeral oration (*de obitu Theodosii*) of Ambrose of Milan. For comparison on motives like the revenge for Gratian, the contrast of imperial power and personal humility and the allegation of bad counsel leading to the events in Thessaloniki, that are already apparent in Ambrose's oration, see Dodaro, Robert: Note sulla presenza della questione pelagiana nel De civitate Dei. In: Cavalcanti (ed.): Il De civitate Dei. L'opera, le interpretazioni, l'influsso, Rome, 1996, 245 – 270.

**36** Cf. Madec, Goulven: Tempora Christiana. In: Mayer/Eckermann (eds.): Scientia Augustiniana. Studien über Augustinus, den Augustinismus und den Augustinerorden, Würzburg, 1975, 136 und Maier (cf. fn. 19) 204.

**37** Brown (cf. fn. 7) 293.

to the Empire but rather a blessing, if he is a skillful ruler.[38] Augustine shares the belief that the triumph of Christianity in the fourth century is the fulfilment of God's prophecies given in scripture[39] and he does not hold back examples of how Christianity has brought improvements in many ways for pagans as well.[40] Besides his more general devaluation of the catastrophe, Augustine also tried to allay the fear of his parishioners – but this was just as much an argument against the pagans – by pointing out the limited damage the Visigoths had actually done to the Empire's institutions. In *De civitate Dei* he attributes the comparably humane treatment of the defeated city and its inhabitants to the *tempora christiana*[41] and in sermons delivered shortly after the event, he ranks 410 among other disasters in Roman history, nothing more and nothing less.[42] He calls into question the idea that the latest crisis should signify the end of the Empire: maybe Rome had just been beaten, but not destroyed.[43] In this way, Augustine refutes pagans who made Christians responsible for the present circumstances, and consoles all the Christian Romans who, understandably enough, clung to their traditional capital of Rome.

As is well known, this attenuating and conciliatory tone does not prevail in Augustine. Goulven Madec has emphasised that Augustine saw no contradiction in holding to a prophetic interpretation of Christian Rome and taking into account the problems of his time extensively.[44] Pointing to biblical prophecies regarding tribulations, he was able to integrate present maladies into a Christian historical horizon, without giving up its prophetic dimension.[45] The disturbing elements of history

**38** Cf. Aug., civ. 5.19: "But if those who are endowed with true religion and live good lives know the art of ruling the nations, there is no greater blessing for mankind than for them, by the mercy of God, to have the power." (*Illi autem qui vera pietate praediti bene vivunt, si habent scientiam regendi populos, nihil est felicius rebus humanis quam si Deo miserante habeant potestatem*).

**39** Cf. Aug., civ. 18.50, where he initiates a chapter on the spread of the Church with Isaiah 2:3 and Luke 24:46 f. Cf. Markus (cf. fn. 34) 30 f.

**40** Picking up on the arguments of conservative pagans, Augustine asserts that Christianity had led to a rise in public morals, whereas the traditional cults were packed with highly questionable role models (see among many others Aug., civ. 2.29).

**41** Cf. Aug., civ. 1.7: "On the other hand, what set a new precedent, the aspect, novel in history and so gentle, that barbarian cruelty displayed, in that basilicas of the most generous capacity were selected and set apart by decree to be occupied as asylums of mercy for the people, where no one should be smitten, whence no one should be ravished, whither many should be conducted by compassionate soldiers for release from bondage, and where none should be taken captive even by ruthless foes." *(quod autem novo more factum est, quod inusitata rerum facie inmanitas barbara tam mitis apparuit, ut amplissimae basilicae implendae populo cui parceretur eligerentur et decernerentur, ubi nemo feriretur, unde nemo raperetur, quo liberandi multi a miserantibus hostibus ducerentur, unde captivandi ulli nec a crudelibus hostibus abducerentur, hoc Christi nomini, hoc Christiano tempori tribuendum*).

**42** Cf. Aug., serm. 296.7. See also the sources in Madec (cf. fn. 36).

**43** Cf. Aug., serm. 81.9: *Forte Roma non perit, forte flagellata est, non interempta, forte castigata est, non deleta.*

**44** Cf. Madec (cf. fn. 36) 123 against Markus.

**45** See for example Aug., civ. 18.51, where Augustine quotes 2 Timothy 3:12.

play an important role in the defence of a Christian perspective on history, when Augustine deals with his fellow Christians. Against the background of the intellectual landscape in the fourth century, the antagonists on his own side posed no less of a challenge.

The idea of a Christian emperor was no longer absurd when Augustine wrote his *De civitate Dei*. With the exception of Julian, all imperial rulers since Constantine had been Christians, although not all to the liking of the bishops following the canons of Nicaea and Constantinople. It was not Augustine's primary intention to argue for the possibility of a Christian emperor; he had to prevent its reality from leading Christians astray. Linking the growth of Christianity to political success, writers like Eusebius of Caesarea preserved the earthly meaning of *felix*, when they tried to integrate the rise and ultimately success of Christianity into the history of the Empire.[46] In this way, the Christian faith became a matter of imperial significance, and the emperor evolved into an equally religious and worldly leader; a role he had in fact played throughout, but was now conveyed with reference to leaders from the Old Testament. According to Eusebius, Constantine is a new Moses;[47] Constantine's successors would later use David as a model.[48] Eusebius is an exponent of the mirroring correspondence of heavenly and earthly structures mentioned at the beginning of this essay.[49] The unifying power of empire corresponds not only to the cohesion of the Christian faith (barring the dogmatic struggle within) but also to the theological core of this faith, its monotheism.[50] The marriage of Christianity and empire, according to this political theology, cannot be broken. The ideology of *Roma aeterna* is transposed into a Christian language and thereby Christianity becomes dependent on the political order. Inversely, this means that the end of the Roman Empire signals the end of the world and the second coming of Christ – a thought backed up by elements of Judeo-Christian as well as pagan traditions that forebode a fixed succession of world empires and employ an analogy of the human life-span to structure

**46** Mommsen, Theodor E.: St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress. The Background of City of God. In: Journal of the History of Ideas 12 (1951) 346 – 374, 361 f.

**47** Euseb., vita Const. 1.12.2. Cf. Rapp, Claudia: Imperial Ideology in the Making: Eusebius of Caesarea on Constantine as 'Bishop'. In: JThS 49/2 (1998) 685 – 695. See also Euseb., LC 7.12 f. For the relation of Eusebius and Constantine see also Wallraff, Martin: Eusebs Konstantin. In: Delgado/Leppin (eds.): Gott in der Geschichte, Fribourg/Stuttgart, 2013, 85 – 98.

**48** Cf. Meier, Mischa: Die Demut des Kaisers. In: Pečar (ed.): Die Bibel als politisches Argument, Munich, 2007, 135 – 158, 155.

**49** Hadot (cf. fn. 1) 614: "Der göttliche Logos verhält sich zum höchsten Gott wie der Kaiser zum Logos." See also Dvornik, Francis: Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy. Origins and Background (II), Washington, D.C., 1966, 611 f.

**50** Dvornik (cf. fn. 49) 683: "Rome believed in the Empire's role as God's chosen instrument for the spread of the faith, and therefore in its structural solidity." Peterson (cf. fn. 12) 78: "Zum Imperium Romanum, das die Nationalitäten auflöst, gehört metaphysisch Monotheismus." Ando's attempt to understand "the history of religion under the empire as, at least in part, an effect of empire" is critical of Peterson (Ando, Clifford: Subjects, Gods, and Empire, or Monarchism as a Theological Problem. In: Rüpke (ed.): The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean, Oxford, 2013, 85 – 111, 90).

the aeons of history.[51] But in the fourth century, the connection of Christianity with a thriving rulership usually led to an attitude that has sometimes been referred to as Christian triumphalism.[52] This attitude or rather its bitter disappointment forms the intellectual foundation of the disorientation and distress that Augustine encountered among many of his fellow Christians in the aftermath of 410.[53]

In the long run, Augustine's refutation of a Christian faith too intermingled with the history and fate of the Empire led to a new conception of history, one that keeps open the possibility of continuity even without Rome. In contrast to the "Christian Hellenists,"[54] not only did Augustine have a less dramatic estimation of Rome's defeat, he did not even deem it necessary for the Empire to remain Christian ever after or, at least, to do so undisputedly. As he elaborately shows in a few later chapters of *De civitate Dei*, the Church may yet undergo another persecution.[55] Augustine is not talking about the eschatological persecution by the Anti-Christ, but historical ones, like those in the centuries before, of which he lists many; yet to forestall any apocalyptic phantasies, he adds that they might as well be gone for good. Due to man's incapability to ever fully (or even in parts for that matter) comprehend the ways of God's providence, the horizon of history remains open and incalculable.[56] As Robert Markus pointed out, this has to do with a certain theory of prophecy.[57] The prophetic statements within the canonical scriptures do not allow any precise predication about the historical development between the biblical events covered in the New Tes-

**51** Cf. Kötting, Bernhard: Endzeitprognosen zwischen Lactantius und Augustinus. In: HJb 77 (1958) 125–139 and Wachtel, Alois: Beiträge zur Geschichtstheologie des Aurelius Augustinus, Bonn, 1960, 57–67.

**52** Cf. Madec (cf. fn. 36) 114.

**53** For the reflection of the events in Augustine's preaching, see De Bruyn, Theodore S.: Ambivalence Within a 'Totalizing Discourse': Augustine's Sermons on the Sack of Rome. In: JECS 4 (1993) 405–421. See also Momigliano, Arnaldo: The Disadvantages of Monotheism for a Universal State. In: CPh 81/4 (1986) 285–297, 291f., who sees a dissolution of Christianity from the Empire already in the late forth century.

**54** Dvornik (cf. fn. 49) chapter 10.

**55** Cf. Aug., civ. 18.52: "When I reflect on these and similar things, it seems to me that we ought not to set any limit to the number of persecutions by which the Church is destined to be tried." (*haec atque huius modi mihi cogitanti non videtur esse definiendus numerus persecutionum, quibus exerceri oportet ecclesiam*).

**56** Cf. Aug., civ. 18.52: "On the other hand, to assert that there are in store other persecutions by kings besides that final one, about which no Christian is in doubt, is just as rash. So we leave the matter undetermined, contributing nothing for or against either side, but merely sounding a call to abandon the audacious presumption of taking any stand at all on this question." (*sed rursus adfirmare aliquas futuras a regibus praeter illam novissimam, de qua nullus ambigit christianus, non minoris est temeritatis. itaque hoc in medio relinquimus neutram partem quaestionis huius astruentes sive destruentes, sed tantummodo ab adfirmandi quodlibet horum audaci praesumptione revocantes*). With the historical future being unforeseeable, all one can do is interpret what has happened so far in a Christian way (see above fn. 19). This is, basically, what Augustine does in the second part of *De civitate Dei*.

**57** Cf. Markus (cf. fn. 34) 43f.

tament and the eschatological vision of the Apocalypse.[58] From Augustine's perspective, this historical agnosticism, as we could call it, serves the purpose of freeing the Church "from dependence on any secular framework."[59]

For political entities sharing the historical time with the Church, this means a loss of metaphysical distinction. Beyond doubt, Augustine sees the Empire of the past, as well as the Empire of the future, steered by God's providential will; but it is not for us to say in what way.[60] With the Empire, its political structure could begin to totter as well. Augustine might not be interested in political theory and questions of political institutions, but he demonstrates that he can at least imagine a political structure very different from the one with which he is acquainted.[61] This is not to be taken as revolutionary sentiment. Following a long tradition of exegesis, Augustine regards loyalty to political powers as obligatory, as long as open contradiction to Christian commandments is avoided.[62] His attitude will not subvert the legitimacy of any existing state, but it will not provide legitimacy through a metaphysical framework either.[63]

From this perspective, it comes as no surprise that Augustine's interest in political institutions is never an end in itself. The heart of classical political philosophy – a consideration of various constitutions in pursuit of the best[64] – is absent and where traces are graspable, they are overshadowed by questions of a different kind. When Augustine opposes monarchy and (a rather radical form of) democracy in his *De libero arbitrio*, he does so firstly, to state that the constitution is dependent on the people's morals and secondly, to point out the finiteness of human law (as opposed to God's law).[65] Far from being a God-given certainty, the constitution is as much a mutational creation as the people living under it. Augustine does not deduce from this

**58** Cf. Markus (cf. fn. 34) 158 f. But note Madec's objection (Madec (cf. fn. 36) 135), that Augustine accepts prophetic predications about the Church and its triumph, especially, as we have seen above, about its tribulations; this is not to say that it will make a coherent reading of Augustine any easier: "C'est peut-être au détriment de la cohérence de sa théologie de l'histoire; c'est peut-être dommage pur la modernité ou l'actualité de sa doctrine; mais c'est ainsi." See Markus' reply to Madec: Markus, Robert: Tempora christiana revisited, in: Dodaro/Lawless (eds.): Augustine and His Critics. Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner, Routledge, 2000, 199 – 211.

**59** Markus (cf. fn. 34) 158 and Appendix A.

**60** Cf. Brown, Peter: Sozialpolitische Anschauungen Augustins. In: Andresen (ed.): Zum Augustin-Gespräch der Gegenwart II, Darmstadt, 1981, 179 – 204, 189 f.

**61** Cf. Aug., civ. 4.15. No matter how serious Augustine's vision of a world filled with peaceful small states is to be taken, it betrays a counterfactual political fantasy, cf. Maier (cf. fn. 19) 121.

**62** Cf. Horn (cf. fn. 17) 132 f. See Aug., civ. 19.17: "[Customs and laws are to be obeyed,] provided that there is no hindrance to the religion that teaches the obligation to worship one most high and true God." (*si religionem, qua unus summus et verus deus colendus docetur, non impedit*).

**63** See Flasch, Kurt: Augustin. Einführung in sein Denken, Stuttgart, 1980, 379: "Der antike Begriff von Weisheit, Kosmos und Ordnung ist [...] auf die Zeitenfolge der Geschichte nicht mehr anwendbar."

**64** See one of the oldest examples in Herodotus' Histories 3, 80 – 82.

**65** Cf. Aug., lib. arb. I, 14, 45 f. See also Horn (cf. fn. 19) 130.

that human laws were unnecessary or harmful. Quite the opposite, the depravity of men after the fall made the restriction of sin by force necessary, even physical force if need be.[66] The state and its positive law are accorded some importance, but Augustine gives the specific institutional arrangement short shrift. Despite men's corrupted nature, a temporal peace on earth (*pax terrena*) can and should be obtained not least by political means.[67] The peace of public order and absence of war is a desirable good; in contrast to God's eternal peace, however, it betrays its dependence on humans. Firstly, it is humans who break it, when they wage war against each other.[68]

**66** One of the most impressive depictions of the maladies of power under the conditions of sin is given in Aug., civ. 19.6 concerning the role of the judge, to whom it is impossible to avoid harming innocents while trying to be just. The problem goes deep and Augustine's didactics, too, are shaped by the problem of humanity's sinful nature, see Aug., mus. 6.13.41.

In general, Augustine's ethical thought can be situated between the poles of Stoic natural law and his theory of grace; the former is still valid after the fall, but de facto suspended by original sin. Cf. Flasch (cf. fn. 63) 394. While there is no doubt that it is the sinful nature that makes coercion necessary, it is quite disputed to what extent natural law constitutes social structures. See already Schilling, Otto: Die Staatslehre des hl. Augustinus nach De civitate Dei. In: Grabmann/Mausbach (eds.): Aurelius Augustinus. Festschrift der Görresgesellschaft zum 1500. Todestage des heiligen Augustinus, Cologne, 1930, 301–313, 303–305 and Troeltsch, Ernst: Augustin, die christliche Antike und das Mittelalter. Im Anschluß an die Schrift "De Civitate Dei", Munich/Berlin, 1915 (reprint Aalen 1963) 130–134. See Flasch (cf. fn. 63) 135 f. and 200 f. for an emphasis on the difficulties of Augustine's theory of grace for his ethics. See also Markus (cf. fn. 34) Appendix B.

**67** On Augustine's thought on peace, see Weissenberg, Timo J.: Die Friedenslehre des Augustinus. Theologische Grundlagen und ethische Entfaltung, Stuttgart, 2005 with more literature. See also Brown (cf. fn. 60) 197 f. For Augustine, peace is a predominantly metaphysical concept (note the association of *pax* and *ordo*), the breadth of which can be seen in Aug., civ. 19.13: "The peace of the body, therefore, is an ordered proportionment of its components; the peace of the irrational soul is an ordered repose of the appetites; the peace of the rational soul is the ordered agreement of knowledge and action. The peace of body and soul is the ordered life and health of a living creature; peace between mortal man and God is an ordered obedience in the faith under an everlasting law; peace between men is an ordered agreement of mind; domestic peace is an ordered agreement among those who dwell together concerning command and obedience; the peace of the heavenly city is a perfectly ordered and fully concordant fellowship in the enjoyment of God and in mutual enjoyment by union with God; the peace of all things is a tranquillity of order. Order is the classification of things equal and unequal that assigns to each its proper position." (*Pax itaque corporis est ordinata temperatura partium, pax animae inrationalis ordinata requies adpetitionum, pax animae rationalis ordinata cognitionis actionisque consensio, pax corporis et animae ordinata vita et salus animantis, pax hominis mortalis et dei ordinata in fide sub aeterna lege oboedientia, pax hominum ordinata concordia, pax domus ordinata imperandi oboediendique concordia cohabitantium, pax ciuitatis ordinata imperandi atque oboediendi concordia civium, pax caelestis civitatis ordinatissima et concordissima societas fruendi deo et invicem in deo, pax omnium rerum tranquillitas ordinis. ordo est parium dispariumque rerum sua cuique loca tribuens dispositio*).

**68** Augustine's emphasis here is on the powerlessness of the old gods, but the appreciation of human responsibility is remarkable. Aug., civ. 3.10: "She [Rome] therefore enjoyed peace, not at the pleasure of the gods, but at the pleasure of her neighbours on every side and only so long as they did not attack – unless your gods are to be so bold as to put up for sale to one man the decision to do or not to do of another man." (*non ergo Roma pacem habuit, quamdiu dii eorum, sed quamdiu*

Secondly, although this peace is not upheld by force alone, it is based on the suppression of conflict by power and therefore precarious.[69] From a Christian perspective, human peace is earthly, because it can be kept, even though the parties involved are not benevolent but citizens of the *terrena civitas* without a transcendent outlook.[70]

From a modern, post-metaphysical perspective, the notion of *pax terrena* might elicit some sympathy; on this view, the qualities rejected in the introductory lines of our very mirror come into their own. What was given there was no image of a bad Christian ruler; it was the image of a secular ruler. With victory over enemies and an orderly succession, he can establish *pax terrena* for his subjects, regardless of their confession. The eschatological contingency of all human politics allows for a concept of peace without a religious foundation.[71] Without question, there is a certain autonomy to the political sphere here;[72] but we should not overemphasise this thought in Augustine. He was not interested in elaborating it, but, as his paragraphs on the emperor show, assigned it little importance in Christian thought. Constantine and Theodosius can enjoy the advantages of the political sphere and this may add to their *felicitas*, but it is not why they are called *felix*. What is more, we shall see that the very basis of Augustine's metaphysical devaluation of politics – his pastorally shaped focus on individual ethics – will make for the collapse of any autonomy of the political.

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*homines finitimi circumquaque voluerunt, qui eam nullo bello provocaverunt; nisi forte dii tales etiam id homini vendere audebunt, quod alius homo voluit sive nolvit*). Of course, human action is not independent from God's providential will; the passage quoted is nevertheless a fine example of how the epistemical limits as to God's will make way for the acknowledgment of (historical) contingency. Cf. Maier (cf. fn. 19) 135 (with fn. 68).

**69** Cf. Markus (cf. fn. 34) 95 f. Maier (cf. fn. 19) 186 f. stresses the violent genesis of earthly peace. Thereto cf. Aug., civ. 19.7.

**70** Cf. Griffiths, Paul J.: Secularity and the saeculum. In: Wetzel (ed.): Augustine's City of God. A Critical Guide, New York, 2012, 33 – 54, 53.

**71** It is not religious in the sense that it follows from the natural desire for peace in every human being (in fact in everything existing; see fn. 67). That this desire is, in the end, related to God is a different issue.

**72** For a remarkable passage hereto (admittedly by a rather early Augustine), see Aug., vera rel., 26(48).132, where Augustine admits that someone living in pursuit of temporal goods might attain the wordly happiness of the 'old man,' including a life in a well-ordered state, reigned by princes or law, because even when it is just about earthly goods, a people cannot be constituted properly without such rule. Having been realistic up to this point, Augustine adds: "even so there is a certain [stage of] beauty to it [viz. the well-ordered people]" (*habet quippe et ipse modum quendam pulchritudinis suae*). See also Aug., civ. 5.15: "They [viz. the Romans] stood firm against avarice, gave advice to their country with an unshackled mind and were not guilty of any crime against its laws, nor of any unlawful desire. By all these arts, as by a proper path, they strove to reach honour, power and glory." (*avaritiae restiterunt, consuluerunt patriae consilio libero, neque delicto secundum suas leges neque libidini obnoxii; his omnibus artibus tamquam vera via nisi sunt ad honores imperium gloriam*).

## The Emperor and His Soul

The ruler's political, secular virtues, therefore, are not the same as the Christian's, the consequence being, that the ideal Christian and the ideal politician – in terms of successful rule – are not identical. If we now pick up the so-called mirror where we left it and turn to the paragraph where Augustine sets out to describe the emperors that are rightly called *felix*, we shall find it wanting as a political text:

> But we call them happy if they rule justly; if, amid the voices of those who praise them to the skies, and the abject submission of those who grovel when they greet them, they are not exalted with pride, but remember that they are men; if they make their power a servant to the divine Majesty, to spread the worship of God far and wide; if they fear and love and worship God; if they feel a deeper love for that kingdom where they do not have to fear partners; if they are slower to punish, and prompt to pardon; if they inflict punishments as required by considerations of ruling and protecting the state, not in order to satisfy their hatred of private enemies; if they grant pardons, not that wrong-doing may go unpunished, but in the hope of reform; if, as they are often compelled to make harsh decrees, they balance this with merciful kindness and generous deeds; if they practice all the more self-restraint as they gain the means for self-indulgence; if they esteem it more important to rule over their base desires than to rule over any nations, and if they do all this not because of a passion for empty glory, but because they yearn for eternal happiness; if for their sins they do not neglect to offer to their God the sacrifice of humility and mercy and prayer. Christian emperors of this sort we declare happy – happy now in hope, and destined to be happy hereafter in its realization, when that which we hope for has arrived.[73]

What we find here is quite traditional.[74] Justice, mercy, clemency, munificence, the taming of personal desires and rejection of flatterers – all of these can be found in respective portrayals of rulers, pagan and Christian alike. Humility is a specifically

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**73** Aug., civ. 5.24: *sed felices eos dicimus, si iuste imperant, si inter linguas sublimiter honorantium et obsequia nimis humiliter salutantium non extolluntur, et se homines esse meminerunt; si suam potestatem ad dei cultum maxime dilatandum maiestati eius famulam faciunt; si deum timent diligunt colunt; si plus amant illud regnum, ubi non timent habere consortes; si tardius vindicant, facile ignoscunt; si eandem vindictam pro necessitate regendae tuendaeque rei publicae, non pro saturandis inimicitiarum odiis exerunt; si eandem veniam non ad inpunitatem iniquitatis, sed ad spem correctionis indulgent; si, quod aspere coguntur plerumque decernere, misericordiae lenitate et beneficiorum largitate compensant; si luxuria tanto eis est castigatior, quanto posset esse liberior; si malunt cupiditatibus pravis quam quibuslibet gentibus imperare et si haec omnia faciunt non propter ardorem inanis gloriae, sed propter caritatem felicitatis aeternae; si pro suis peccatis humilitatis et miserationis et orationis sacrificium deo suo vero immolare non neglegunt. tales christianos imperatores dicimus esse felices interim spe, postea re ipsa futuros, cum id quod expectamus advenerit.*

**74** Apart from the generic virtues like justice or mercy, comparable motives can be found in Ambrose's funeral oration (12–34) or in the passages from Julian noted above, see Hadot (cf. fn. 1) 617 f. See also Maier (cf. fn. 19) 137 f. with fn. 81, who sees a return to pre-Constantinian thought in Augustine's portraits of emperors.

Christian virtue,[75] but, in contrast to his account of Theodosius in a later chapter, Augustine here conceives of humility as a thoroughly personal virtue.[76] That he did not use *iustitia* as a starting point for his portrait of ideal rule comes as no surprise. Like most patristic writers, Augustine does not primarily regard justice as the necessary foundation of a well-designed commonwealth, as Plato or Aristotle did.[77] The meaning of justice had shifted from a civic virtue, assigning each to his own place in society, to a personal relationship between the sinful man and his God.[78] Starting with Paul, this relationship moved from a forensic balancing to an asymmetrical gift of grace. Justice, therefore, is part of a pious way of life and will find its reward not in a powerful empire but in eternal salvation. The transcendent nature of this justice makes it impossible to be adequately embodied in the *civitas terrena*.[79] Although the emperor ruling justly enacts a virtue with a social dimension, he is strictly orientated towards his own *felicity*, the justice of God and the citizenship in the *civitas Dei*.

The same holds true for merciful kindness and generous deeds: Augustine takes no pains to display the way in which they would benefit the people. The good of the virtues enlisted here does not lie in their consequences. Clearly, Augustine shows little to no interest in the concrete ramifications of politics and he never develops a po-

**75** Straub, Johannes A.: Vom Herrscherideal in der Spätantike, Stuttgart, 1939 (reprint Darmstadt, 1964) 141 spots a reinterpretation of humility here, from a negative connotation when practised before humans (*obsequia nimis humiliter salutantium*) to the virtuous humility before God, in which he sees an "Erniedrigung der kaiserlichen Majestät" (140) against the classical ideal of the ruler's *humanitas*.

**76** When referring to Theodosius' gesture of humility in Milan in Aug., civ. 5.26, Augustine speaks about the intercession of the bishops and the *ecclesiastica disciplina* the emperor has submitted himself to. The political dimension of the act and its controversial nature concerning the hierarchy of Church and emperor are much more graspable here, although the pastoral element still prevails. For the pastoral element in Ambrose see Leppin, Hartmut: Zum politischen Denken des Ambrosius – Das Kaisertum als pastorales Problem. In: Fuhrer (ed.) (cf. fn. 19) 33–50. While Paulinus of Milan (*v. Ambr.* 24) follows Augustine, compare the account of Theodoret in hist. eccl. 5.18, where the conflict is one between emperor and bishop.

**77** Cf. Pl., resp. 433a–434c or Aristot., eth. Nic. 1129b (12)–1130a (14). In book five of *De civitate Dei* alone, *iustitia* can be the justice of God (5.18), a characteristic of the heavenly city (5.16 or 18) or a personal attitude, e. g., the love for enemies (5.19); in any case it is not a political virtue in terms of classical philosophy. Where it comes close to this, justice is the servant of pleasure. See 5.20: "She [viz. pleasure] orders Justice to bestow such benefits as she can, in order to gain the friendships necessary for physical satisfaction, and to wrong no one, lest, if laws are broken, pleasure be not able to live untroubled." *([voluptas] iustitiae iubeat, ut praestet beneficia quae potest ad comparandas amicitias corporalibus commodis necessarias, nulli faciat iniuriam, ne offensis legibus voluptas vivere secura non possitis*).

**78** For example, in Aug., epist. 155 (4.13) he calls justice "not being proud" (*nulla superbia*).

**79** Cf. Dvornik (cf. fn. 49) 845: "The second definition – the state based on justice – is, therefore, in some ways hypothetical; but it is characteristic of Augustine to have presented it. In it natural law, which is the basis on which a state is built, is absorbed by divine law, and the notion of justice somehow becomes spiritualized."

litical agenda based on his theology.[80] The advice goes to the ruler, not his rule. That is why this text is best regarded as pastoral rather than political.[81] Though it lacks a concrete imperial addressee, Augustine turns to the emperor as a person. Neither success nor glory nor the relation of the ruler to his subjects are his concern, but only the emperor's felicity, that is, in Christian terms, his salvation; and in this regard the most important rule is the one over oneself. The expectation to tame one's own desires might be particularly hard for the ruler of a world empire, yet in itself, the virtue is not exclusive to the ruler, but pertains to everybody. On the other hand, Augustine implies (and proves with his depictions of Constantine and Theodosius), that it is perfectly possible for a Christian to be an emperor. That answers in part the question why Augustine mentioned the emperor after all, if his behaviour is not to be confronted with normative claims specific to the ruler. The emperor stands for freedom itself, and so the contrast between his various options of worldly commitment and the inner renunciation of them is particularly sharp. And of course, the picture of an emperor caring more for his celestial home than his dominion on earth is a strong refutation of every elevation of politics to the rank of religious significance. From a Christian perspective the Roman Empire is, no less than anything else in the world, a mere object of utility, not of veneration. What we praise in the good emperor, the bishop of Hippo seems to say, is the one thing we all possess or should try to: a soul dedicated to God and nothing else. The bishop's view on the world carries out an immense neutralisation.

Later centuries would have to answer the difficult question of whether the bishop, by this pastoral supervision over the emperor, might gain authority that leads to a politically relevant subordination of the emperor.[82] We have, however, omitted one element that seems pertain exclusively to emperors. Augustine calls them *felices*, "if they make their power a servant to the divine Majesty, to spread the worship of God

**80** Cf. Dodaro, Robert: Between the Two Cities. In: Doody/Hughes/Paffenroth (eds.): Augustine and Politics. Lanham/Boulder/New York/ Toronto/ Oxford, 2005, 99 – 115, 111: "Augustine is not programmatic where political activism is concerned. Although his approach to this activity is theologically principled, he does not seek to implement a particular political plan." By way of contrast, see the comparably lengthy outpouring on magistrates in Julian., or. 2(3).90C–91D; Julian is much more interested in the business of politics than the African bishop. We catch a hint of concrete political reasoning when Augustine mentions the fear of political partners; then again, it serves as an example of the maladies of power and the emperor is said to evade it by faith.

**81** Martin, Thomas F.: Augustine and the Politics of Monasticism. In: Doody/Hughes/Paffenroth (eds.) (cf. fn. 80) 165 – 186, 166: "'Augustinian Politics' are pastoral-ascetical-spiritual in their scope and intention."

**82** Regarding Augustine, the question of spiritual authority over politicians regardless their rank, is to be answered with the help of his letters. Aug., epist. 220 to Bonifatius, for example, provides us with a case of Augustine trying to exert his pastoral authority over a magistrate and thereby take a hand in his decisionmaking, not only in personal questions but in imperial politics. See Diesner, Hans-Joachim: Die Laufbahn des *comes Africae* Bonifatius und seine Beziehungen zu Augustin. In: idem: Kirche und Staat im spätrömischen Reich, Berlin, 1964, 100 – 126.

far and wide."[83] We can assume that Augustine has his own catholic faith in mind here, and this claim also entails a political dimension – and not an unproblematic one at that. As we can see from his praise of emperors in the neighbouring chapters, an emperor like Theodosius, with his laws against pagans and dissenting Christians, is very much the ideal Augustine has in mind for a good Christian ruler. But we have no reason to agree with Kurt Flasch that Augustine "forgot"[84] his critical distance towards the state, when it came to religious coercion. We cannot treat the problem of Augustine's attitude towards religious coercion in full here; we can argue, though, from the way it is embedded into Augustine's thought, that the expectation of spreading the catholic faith does not exceed the interpretation of the so-called mirror as a predominantly pastoral one. Just as before, Augustine targets the person of the ruler and it is a personal task he reminds him of.[85] As a good Christian, the ruler should engage in spreading his faith to those around him;[86] and as an emperor, his means to do so are incomparably greater than those of an ordinary Christian. This expectation applies to everyone including the emperor,[87] and even more so in

**83** Aug., civ. 5.24: *si suam potestatem ad dei cultum maxime dilatandum maiestati eius famulam faciunt*.

**84** Flasch (cf. fn. 63) 391.

**85** Cf. Maier (cf. fn. 19) 137, who sums up, "daß das Wirken der Kaiser einen rein personalen Eingriff eines Christen in die Lenkung des Reiches bedeutet, aber keine grundsätzliche Christianisierung des Imperiums."

**86** The exhortation to pass on what has been learned about faith is an essential element of Augustine's teaching; he even considers it a part of the proper understanding of the Holy Scriptures. That is why after three books on hermeneutics, he concludes his *De doctrina christiana* with a book on the Christian art of conveying the content of the scriptures. See Pollmann (cf. fn. 19) 226 – 235. It is crucial that the obligation to spread the faith is not limited to people in power. See Aug., vera rel. 28(51): "For this is the law of divine providence, that no one may be helped to acknowledge and accept the grace of God by superiors, who would not help those beneath him to the same with pure affection." (*haec enim lex est divinae providentiae, ut nemo a superioribus adiuvetur ad cognoscendam et percipiendam gratiam dei, qui non ad eandem puro affectu inferiores adiuverit*.) See Aug., doctr. christ. 1.30: "Nevertheless, we ought to desire that they all love God with us, and all the assistance which we either give them or receive from them must be directed toward that one purpose." (*velle tamen debemus ut omnes nobiscum diligant deum, et totum quod eos vel adiuuamus vel adiuuamur ab eis, ad unum illum finem referendum est*.) See also Aug., doctr. christ. 4.63, where Augustine asks the reader of the Bible to teach, what has been understood (for the universality of the teaching, see also Io. ev. tr. 6.10). And as there are limits to these teachings (e. g., to take into account the listener's mental capacities or to spare the common people things scarcely intelligible), the emperor might face certain difficulties of his own, religious coercion being one of them.

**87** For Augustine, all interpersonal relations are assessed whether they are orientated towards the aim of true (individual) beatitude transcending the social relations of the visible world. Cf. Flasch (cf. fn. 63) 135 f. See Augustine's rejection of all familiar love as temporal and inferior in Aug., vera rel. 46(88): "For it is more inhuman not to love in a man that he is a man, but to love that he is a son." (*magis enim est inhumanum non amare in homine quod homo est, sed amare quod filius est*.) See also Aug., mus. 6. 14.45 for love understood as being useful to the neighbour (*omnes eas actiones ad utilitatem proximi revocat*), which means orientation towards God, not achievement of personal goals. Social life is not an end in itself, see Aug., serm. 336.2: "He truly loves his friend who loves

his case since he has been appointed to his exalted position by divine providence. The same holds true with the problematic nature of governing. Despite his unsurpassable legitimacy within the political realm, the emperor is a sinner ruling sinful men and more often than not bound to violence; a Christian emperor is, considering the alternative of a pagan on the throne, the least of all evils, but that does not make him a saint.[88] The *necessitas regendae tuendaeque rei publicae*, however, he shares *mutatis mutandis* with every father and every teacher and every judge.[89]

## The Pastoral Limits of Secular Politics

From the figure of the Christian emperor, political by title as it may be, not much of a political concept is left. Augustine employs characteristics traditionally used for the image of a good ruler, but neglects their effects, namely good rule (in a worldly sense). As we have seen, the Christian ruler is the better ruler indeed, but the beneficial effects of his rule are not the reason for his distinction. He is a good ruler in the Christian sense if he adheres to God and hopingly gazes beyond his mortal existence into the eschatological future, where his earthly rule is of no concern.[90] Augustine's pastoral image of the ruler largely disregards his imperial identity, or, in Augustine's words, his temporal habitation in the *terrena civitas*. He addresses the good Christian ruler as a citizen of the *civitas Dei* and aligns all his virtues with this very end. Within the eschatological perspective, social relations are eclipsed by the individual pursuit of salvation; ethics prevail over politics. To put it bluntly, all elements of the practice of ruling are to be seen as parts of the emperor's *Lebenswelt* as a Christian who is a

God in his friend, either because God is in his friend, or that he may be so." (*ille enim ueraciter amat amicum, qui deum amat in amico, aut quia est in illo, aut ut sit in illo*). An extreme example, regarding love of the neighbour as a mere means may be Aug., doctr. christ. 1.20: "We have been commanded to love one another, but the question is: whether man is to be loved by man for his own sake or for another reason. If he is loved for his own sake, we are enjoying him; if he is loved for another reason, we are using him. But, it seems to me that he should be loved for another reason [namely God]." (*praeceptum est enim nobis ut diligamus invicem; sed quaeritur utrum propter se homo ab homine diligendus sit an propter aliud. si enim propter se, fruimur eo; si propter aliud, utimur eo. uidetur autem mihi propter aliud diligendus*). According to O'Donovan, The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine, New Haven/London, 1980, 28 f., this is a problematic statement, later overcome by Augustine; but the duty to love the neighbour is always derived from and dependant on the duty to love God (cf. O'Donavan, 115 f.).

**88** Maier (cf. fn. 19) 205, with fn. 37. Augustine stands in stark contrast to contemporaries like Ambrosiaster, for whom the God-given power of the ruler comes with an ethical quality irrespective of the ruler's character. This quality, termed *ordo*, marks a sacralisation of the office alien to Augustine. See Affeldt, Werner: Die weltliche Gewalt in der Paulus-Exegese. Röm. 13,1–7 in den Römerbriefkommentaren der lateinischen Kirche bis zum Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts (Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte Band 22), Göttingen, 1969, 109.

**89** See above fn. 61 and below fn. 97.

**90** Theodosius deserves praise exactly because he does not want to rule but yields to ruling as a necessity. Cf. Dougherty (cf. fn. 32) 212 f. and Maier (cf. fn. 19) 137 f. with fn. 81.

ruler, and whose peregrine status will never tolerate a perfect identification of Christian and political identity. The ruler is no longer the object of a political discourse, but rather a special case within individual ethics. The essential humanity of the Roman emperor could scarcely be made clearer.

While the catalogue of virtues, thus interpreted, betrays no political philosophy, Augustine's view on history remains equally silent about institutions and political systems. With the opening of the historical horizon for the possibility of a world without Rome, political structures enter the realm of contingency, at least for human eyes. There is no need for a Christian interpretation of political institutions;[91] which is not to say, that there cannot be any debates about the best constitution anymore. That Augustine did not offer any such speculations about the politics of his nearer future might indicate that, in the end, his confidence in the continuity of the Empire was not so shaken. But most of all, it shows that the emperor as such is no longer a theological problem. The theologically relevant ruler is the king of the heavenly city, not the monarch in Ravenna; his kingship's form must be determined without referring to heavenly archetypes. It is quite conspicuous that Augustine composed his image of the ruler without mentioning the most prominent metaphors in ancient political philosophy: the shepherd and the father.[92] While the shepherd is mentioned, for example, by Julian[93] to characterise the ruler's duties towards his subjects, Augustine uses the image only with respect to the role of the bishop.[94] The designation of the ruler as a father would seem much more likely, since Augustine frequently draws on the father as an example of natural superiority and leadership.[95] In contrast to the purely coercive powers of politics, the father's rule per se is in accordance with natural law; it is only the coercive elements of actual paternal rule, accidental to it and caused by sin, that will be gone in God's kingdom.[96] It is noticeable, that Augustine's image of the father stresses his pedagogical

**91** Leppin (cf. fn. 76) 46; cf. Maier (cf. fn. 19) 137.

**92** Schulte (cf. fn. 2) 254 f. For the shepherd in Augustine, see Dodaro, Robert: Augustinus Lexikon 4 (2012) 506 – 510, s.v. "pastor". For a short overview of the motive of the shepherd, see Porter, Lawrence B.: Sheep and shepherd: an ancient image of the church and a contemporary challenge. In: Gregorianum 82 (2001) 51 – 85. See also Engemann, Josef: RAC 15 (1991) 577 – 607, s.v. "Hirte", with a focus on the shepherd's representation in arts. For the father in Augustine see Bruning, Bernard: Augustinus Lexikon 4 (2012) 510 – 515, s.v. "pater".

**93** Julian., or. 2.86D.

**94** Cf. Dodaro (cf. fn. 92) 509.

**95** Cf. Martin (cf. fn. 81) 182.

**96** See. Aug., civ. 19.16: "But those who are true fathers of their households take thought for all in their households just as for their children, to see that they worship and win God's favour, desiring and praying that they may reach the heavenly home where the duty of commanding men will not be necessary" (*Qui autem veri patres familias sunt, omnibus in familia sua tamquam filiis ad colendum et promerendum Deum consulunt, desiderantes atque optantes venire ad caelestem domum ubi necessarium non sit officium imperandi mortalibus*).

responsibility, with the most important teaching being the true faith.[97] Augustine counted the spread of the faith among the Christian ruler's good deeds, which makes it all the more surprising that he did not call him a fatherly teacher.[98] A possible explanation might be that Augustine deliberately left aside all allusions to the natural order of society to stress the unnatural state of political power.[99] The emperor's rule – in contrast to the family – did not exist in paradise and will be gone in heaven and therefore the only thing of importance is the emperor's soul, his personal adherence to God. In this way, the absence of both images – the shepherd and the father – confirms our perception of the text as a mirror of ethics and not of politics.

That the non-political ideal can nevertheless result in political consequences – from laws concerning the true faith to religious coercion – is the most illiberal element in Augustine's image of the Christian ruler; it is, however, not theocratic.[100] As Markus has shown, the dichotomy of the heavenly and earthly city relegates the realm of politics to a sphere of ambiguity, not in itself good or bad, but waiting to be used either way by individuals making ethical decisions.[101] The *civitas Dei* and the *terrena civitas* stand for either utilizing the world or loving it for its own sake. As is every true Christian, the good Christian ruler is a citizen of heaven, condemned for now to live on earth, but always prioritising his celestial identity;[102] and here is what fundamentally separates Augustine's thought from a modern notion of secularisation. Augustine had seen that religion and politics are not to be confused and that, in addition to his institutional role, a Christian politician has a different, tran-

**97** As he regards educational punishment as their principal duty, Augustine can use the father and the teacher interchangeably, e. g., in Aug., epist. 104.2.7. The examples in Bruning (cf. fn. 92) show that the paradigm of paternal leadership is the educational situation, but Bruning does not mention its transference to magistrates.

**98** We should not withhold that Augustine does in fact draw on the father in correspondence with magistrates. In Aug., epist. 133.2 Augustine reminds Marcellinus of his *pii patris officium*, when acting as judge; since the emperor's juridical office is mentioned in Aug., civ. 5.24 this could very well be said about him, too.

**99** Markus (cf. fn. 34) 204. For a dissenting opinion, see Burnell, Peter: The Status of Politics in St. Augustine's City of God. In: History of Political Thought XIII (1992) 13 – 29, who is notably silent about Aug., civ. 5.24.

**100** For a very helpful summary of the recent trends of so-called neo-Augustinian politics, see Dodaro (cf. fn. 11). To develop "an Augustinian ethic of citizenship for the morally ambivalent conditions of liberal democracy" is the intention of Gregory, Eric: Politics and the Order of Love. An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship, Chicago/London, 2008, here 13, who tries to avoid the totalitarian consequences, always ready to be drawn from Augustinian politics (ibid., 15).

**101** Cf. Markus (cf. fn. 34) 55 and Markus (cf. fn. 13) 85. See also Dodaro (cf. fn. 80).

**102** Rébillard's description of the quarrel between bishops and average Christians as a conflict of identities is most helpful to understand Augustine's pastoral actions towards his congregation (see Rébillard, Éric: Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity. North Africa, 200 – 450 CE, Ithaca, N.Y./London, 2012). But I am not sure if this needs to conflict with Markus' concept of the secular, as far as it is applied to Augustine as a theological thinker, which is what Markus did. Cf. Rébillard, 96.

scendent identity; but he surely did not stop – or wish to prevent – the two identities from converging.[103] The modern idea of secular politics not only draws on the separation from religion, but on the protection of this separation, generally by law and basic rights.[104] From that perspective, it is not the emperor being Christian that brings about coercion, but that nothing keeps him from thoroughly subduing the apparatus of the state to his very own belief. Since Augustine's image of the good ruler is entirely based on crossing the border between the emperor's two cities, his heavenly and his earthly identity, it is, for all its seemingly modern focus on the individual, something deeply ancient.[105] It is not until the overcoming of the confessional conflicts in the Early Modern Age that the earthly city will have the means to effectively defend its identity against the heavenly usurpation, only to find itself conquered by economics and new ideology.

**103** Cf. Roth, Klaus: Genealogie des Staates. Prämissen des neuzeitlichen Politikdenkens, Berlin, 2011, 369–371. See also Dodaro, Robert: Augustine's Secular City. In: Dodaro/Lawless (eds.) (cf. fn. 58) 231–260. Augustine's letters provide us with rich examples of the bishop's usage of an office bearer's confessional loyalty. Just as with the emperor, I would argue that this is not theocratic hubris, but an expansion of pastoral intervention into the realm of politics. In lieu of many, see Aug., epist. 134, where Augustine addresses the proconsul Apringius as a fellow Christian (Aug., epist. 134.3: *sed etiam filium christianae pietatis agnoscimus*) to justify his intercession into juridical proceedings. Tornau speaks of "eine Art gnadentheologisch gemilderten (kirchen-)politischen Paternalismus" (Tornau, Christian: Augustinus und die neuplatonischen Tugendgrade. Versuch einer Interpretation von Augustins Brief 155 an Macedonius. In: Karfik/Song (eds.): Plato Revived. Essays on Ancient Platonism in Honour of Dominic J. O'Meara, Berlin/Boston, Mass., 2013, 215–240, 228). For the 'dissolving' of the spheres in general, see Gotter, Ulrich: Überblendungen. Kaiser, Kirche und das Problem der zivilen Gewalt in der Spätantike. In: Trampedach/Pečar (eds.): Theokratie und theokratischer Diskurs: die Rede von der Gottesherrschaft und ihre politisch-sozialen Auswirkungen im interkulturellen Vergleich, Tübingen, 2013, 165–195, who, however, assumes a pre-Christian "Neutralität der Institutionen" (184).

**104** For an excellent sociological examination of the "Selbstunterscheidung der Kirche von ihrer innergesellschaftlichen Umwelt," see Tyrell, Hartmann: Katholische Weltkirche und Religionsfreiheit. In: Gabriel/Speß/Winkler (eds.): Religionsfreiheit und Pluralismus, Paderborn, 2010, 197–260, here 235 (original emphasis).

**105** Although the political sphere originated in the distance from non-political interests, the lack of an institutionalised distinction between the political and the social put it in constant jeopardy (cf. Meier, Christian: Die Entstehung des Politischen bei den Griechen, 1983, Frankfurt/M, 40 f.); we could tentatively say that this infiltration of politics with extra-political norms and interests dates back as far as Socrates' preaching his idealistic ethics to the youth of the polis, against the pragmatic advice of the sophists (exemplarily Plato, Alcibiades I). The modern development of an autonomous sphere of the political is intimately connected to the discovery of the *raison d'état*, cf. Foucault, Michel: Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France 1977–1978, New York, 2009, esp. Lectures nine and ten. For the differences between Augustine and the modern conception of state (Hobbes) see Schweidler, Manfred: Die politische Philosophie Augustins. In: Böhm (ed.): Aurelius Augustinus und die Bedeutung seines Denkens für die Gegenwart, Würzburg, 2005, 21–36.