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Discerning the Good in the Letters and Sermons of Augustine

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DISCERNING THE GOOD
IN THE LETTERS AND SERMONS OF AUGUSTINE

Joseph Allan Clair

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores Augustine's social and political ethics as they appear in a neglected set of illuminating texts: his letters and sermons. The colorful, personal, and practical details found in these writings provide a window into Augustine's moral reasoning not available in his more theoretical treatises. The study focuses on letters and sermons that contain concrete advice on how to prioritize goods in cases of conflict – where an individual must weigh lower and higher goods and prefer the higher – and cases in which an individual's office (e.g. head of household, political magistrate, military commander) and role-specific obligations inform Augustine's advice. The study situates Augustine's classification of goods within the ancient philosophical debate over virtue, goods, and happiness. It also argues that Augustine's theory of goods is unintelligible apart from his adaptation of the Stoic and Peripatetic doctrine of social *oikeiōsis*, or “social appropriation.” This philosophical concept contains the idea that all temporal goods are ultimately necessary for the sake of friendship. The good of friendship unfolds into a series of concentric circles, extending out from the self to the household, political community, and, ultimately, all other human beings and God. Augustine's view of social *oikeiōsis* involves a conception of society as an integrated complex of roles and practices, and of correspondent virtues. Recognizing this illuminates the tight connection that he posits between one's office and one's responsibility for tending particular temporal goods. A cluster of temporal goods – marriage and family life, public office, and wealth – appears throughout Augustine's letters and sermons, and forms the topics of the central chapters of the study. The dissertation concludes

with an examination of Augustine's advice on obtaining eternal goods – the virtues and goods of friendship as they will exist in eternity. Augustine's letters and sermons reveal him bringing his moral-psychological acumen to bear on the problems and decisions faced by his correspondents, and by members of his congregation. These genres provide the right vehicle, and concrete cases provide the right occasions, for his most original and searching reflections on the moral life.

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Texts and Abbreviations

I have used the most recent editions available of the primary texts. A list of editions for all the works of Augustine, along with the standard abbreviations, is in C. Mayer, ed., *Augustinus-Lexikon*, vol. 3 (Basel: Schwabe, 2004-2010), i-lviii. In my quotations, I have usually followed existing translations when available, although I have at points altered these to make them better convey the sense of the original. Translations used are listed in the bibliography.

<i>ac.</i>	Cicero	<i>Academica</i>	<i>On Academic Skepticism</i>
<i>ben.</i>	Seneca	<i>De beneficiis</i>	<i>On Benefits</i>
<i>Acad.</i>	Augustine	<i>De Academicis</i>	<i>On Academic Skepticism</i>
<i>beata u.</i>	Augustine or Seneca (see context)	<i>De beata uita</i>	<i>On the Happy Life</i>
<i>b. coniug.</i>	Augustine	<i>De bono coniugali</i>	<i>On the Good of Marriage</i>
<i>b. uid.</i>	Augustine	<i>De bono uiduitatis</i>	<i>On the Good of Widowhood</i>
<i>ciu.</i>	Augustine	<i>De ciuitate dei</i>	<i>The City of God</i>
<i>conf.</i>	Augustine	<i>Confessiones</i>	<i>The Confessions</i>
<i>diu. qu.</i>	Augustine	<i>De diuersis quaestionibus octoginta tribus</i>	<i>Eighty-Three Different Questions</i>
<i>doct. chr.</i>	Augustine	<i>De doctrina christiana</i>	<i>On Christian Teaching</i>
<i>en. Ps.</i>	Augustine	<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i>	<i>Expositions of the Psalms</i>
<i>ep.</i>	Various authors (see context)	<i>Epistula</i>	<i>Letter</i>
<i>ep. Io. tr.</i>	Augustine	<i>In epistulam Iohannis ad Parthos</i>	<i>Homilies on the First Epistle of John</i>
<i>Euthd.</i>	Plato	<i>Euthydemus</i>	<i>Euthydemus</i>

<i>fin.</i>	Cicero	<i>De finibus</i>	<i>On Moral Ends</i>
<i>Gn. litt.</i>	Augustine	<i>De Genesi ad litteram</i>	<i>The Literal Meaning of Genesis</i>
<i>c. Iul.</i>	Augustine	<i>Contra Iulianum</i>	<i>Against Julian</i>
<i>leg.</i>	Plato	<i>De legibus</i>	<i>Laws</i>
<i>lib. arb.</i>	Augustine	<i>De libero arbitrio</i>	<i>On Free Choice</i>
<i>mor.</i>	Augustine	<i>De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manicheorum</i>	<i>On the Way of Life of the Catholic Church and on the Way of Life of the Manichees</i>
<i>NA</i>	Aulus Gellius	<i>Noctes Atticae</i>	<i>Attic Nights</i>
<i>nat. b.</i>	Augustine	<i>De natura boni</i>	<i>On the Nature of the Good</i>
<i>NE</i>	Aristotle	<i>Ethica Nicomachea</i>	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>off.</i>	Cicero	<i>De officiis</i>	<i>On Duties</i>
<i>pecc. mer.</i>	Augustine	<i>De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo paruulorum</i>	<i>On the Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins and on the Baptism of Little Ones</i>
<i>Phd.</i>	Plato	<i>Phaedo</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phdr.</i>	Plato	<i>Phaedrus</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Phlb.</i>	Plato	<i>Philebus</i>	<i>Philebus</i>
<i>reg. 2</i>	Augustine	<i>Regula: Ordo monasterii</i>	<i>Regulations for a Monastery</i>
<i>reg. 3</i>	Augustine	<i>Regula: Praeceptum</i>	<i>Rule</i>
<i>rep.</i>	Plato or Cicero (see context)	<i>De re publica</i>	<i>Republic</i>
<i>s.</i>	Augustine	<i>Sermo</i>	<i>Sermon</i>
<i>sym.</i>	Plato	<i>Symposium</i>	<i>Symposium</i>
<i>sent.</i>	Porphyry	<i>Sententiae</i>	<i>Sentences</i>
<i>sol.</i>	Augustine	<i>Soliloquiorum</i>	<i>Soliloquies</i>
<i>spec.</i>	Augustine	<i>Speculum</i>	<i>The Mirror</i>
<i>spir. et litt.</i>	Augustine	<i>De spiritu et littera</i>	<i>On the Spirit and the Letter</i>
<i>Tht.</i>	Plato	<i>Theaetetus</i>	<i>Theaetetus</i>
<i>Tim.</i>	Plato	<i>Timaeus</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>
<i>trin.</i>	Augustine	<i>De trinitate</i>	<i>On the Trinity</i>
<i>Tusc.</i>	Cicero	<i>Tusculanae disputationes</i>	<i>Tusculan Disputations</i>
<i>uirg.</i>	Augustine	<i>De sancta uirginitate</i>	<i>On Holy Virginity</i>
<i>uita Aug.</i>	Possidius	<i>uita Augustini</i>	<i>Life of Augustine</i>

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INTRODUCTION

“The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.” In his celebrated essay on Leo Tolstoy and the philosophy of history, Isaiah Berlin employs this ancient Greek aphorism to mark a distinction between thinkers who are fascinated by the infinite variety of things and those who relate everything to a central, all-embracing idea.¹ Augustine of Hippo falls decidedly among the latter group, with those who move around a powerful center of gravity. His all-embracing idea is *the good*, and the moral life is about one big thing: properly ordering one’s loves toward the good.² Interpreters of Augustine’s thought often construe properly ordered love as a mechanical correlation between desires and particular goods in a world-denying ascent that leaves the manifold goods constitutive of human life in the shadows. But this rendition of how Augustine treats the moral life turns out to be oversimplified and misguided when viewed through a neglected set of illuminating texts: his letters and sermons.³ These texts bear witness to Augustine’s keen sense of the plurality of goods that may be loved and pursued in life, and the variety of ways and lifestyles valid for pursuing them. In these pages, we find a more complete picture of properly ordered loves.

The letters and sermons, however, have historically been excluded from the study of Augustine’s thought. Modern scholars have rarely looked at them, and have often

¹ I. Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy’s View of History*, 2nd ed., ed. H. Hardy (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2013).

² See *ciu.* 15.22: “it seems to me that a brief and true definition of virtue is ‘rightly ordered love.’”

³ By “sermons” I refer to the collection known as Augustine’s “Sermons” (*Sermones*), as well as his *Expositions of the Psalms* (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*) and *Homilies on the First Epistle of John* (*In epistulam Iohannis ad Parthos*).

treated them as less serious than his treatises or polemical works.⁴ This lack of attention is surprising given the volume of surviving letters (309) and sermons (c. 1,000). It is also unfortunate given the profoundly practical, flesh-and-blood details that these writings bring to the study of Augustine's thought.⁵

My study focuses on those among Augustine's letters and sermons that contain concrete advice on how to prioritize goods.⁶ Of particular relevance are cases of

⁴ In the epilogue to the revised edition of his masterful biography of Augustine, P. Brown notes: "[o]n looking back, I think I had given undue weight to the formidable clarity of Augustine's formal theological works, and that I had not paid sufficient attention at that time to his sermons and letters." P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 446. J.J. O'Donnell echoes Brown, calling the letters and sermons: "long known but under-studied masses of texts," essential for understanding Augustine's thought as a whole. J.J. O'Donnell, "Augustine: His Time and Lives," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. E. Stump and N. Kretzman (New York: Cambridge UP, 2001), 33. B. Studer writes that scholars have begun to realize "that they must take his other writings into account, especially his sermons." B. Studer, *The Grace of Christ and the Grace of God in Augustine of Hippo: Christocentrism or Theocentrism*, trans. M.J. O'Connell (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 10. The neglect of these texts has been due, in part, to the difficult work of sifting through various collections of them that have circulated for centuries, and then trying to establish the authenticity and dates of each. See P.-P. Verbraken, *Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de saint Augustin* (Steenbrugis: Abbatia Sancti Petri, 1976); F. Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus von Hippo: Prosopographische, sozial- und ideologiegeschichtliche Untersuchungen*. Bochumer historische Studien, Alte Geschichte 11 (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1993); F. Dolbeau, *Augustin d'Hippone. Vingt-six sermons au peuple d'Afrique* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1996); H.R. Drobner, *Augustinus von Hippo, "Sermones ad populum": Überlieferung und Bestand, Bibliographie, Indices*. Supps. to *Vigiliae Christianae* 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2000); H. Chadwick, "The New Sermons of St. Augustine," *Journal of Theological Studies* 47 (1996): 69–91.

⁵ The importance of these texts for the study of Augustine's moral philosophy is coming into focus – as is evidenced by the recent work of S.C. Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2013); J.V. Ebbeler *Disciplining Christians: Correction and Community in Augustine's Letters* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012); P. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010). These works represent the beginning of a promising wave of scholarly attention to Augustine's letters and sermons in the English-speaking world. Among them, Byers study is most comparable to my own. She mines the sermons for evidence of Augustine's appropriation of the Stoic theory of perception into his theories of moral motivation and therapy of the passions. One key difference between our projects, however, is that Byers uses the sermons to enrich and elucidate arguments found in Augustine's treatises, whereas my study works in the other direction – I focus on the letters and sermons, and turn to the treatises for elucidation when necessary.

⁶ The only exception to this is chapter one, where I lay out the philosophical backdrop of Augustine's classification of goods. While the letters and sermons are my focus, I make reference to Augustine's other treatises when relevant. My approach to Augustine's letters and sermons follows the methodology that R. Rorty has labeled, "historical reconstruction." This is the task of explicating the views of an author on a given topic, using the author's own language and concepts, and following the commitments that the author held, or could have held on the basis of his or her work as a whole. I focus on Augustine's theory of goods and its practical, moral implications within his own historical context – leaving the contemporary appropriation of his advice for another occasion. See R. Rorty, "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four

conflicting goods – where an individual must weigh lower and higher goods and prefer the higher – and cases in which an individual’s office (e.g. head of household, political magistrate, military commander) and role-specific obligations inform Augustine’s advice, and contextualize his ranking of specific goods. The colorful, personal, and practical details found in these writings provide a window onto Augustine’s moral reasoning not available in his more theoretical treatments of the good, and the concrete cases often illustrate the human significance of properly discerning the good.

In chapter one (“Degrees of Good”), I provide a brief overview of Augustine’s classification of goods, demonstrating how he arranges them in a hierarchical order. The uniqueness of this classification comes to life from within the ancient philosophical debate over virtues, goods, and happiness. The parallels and distinctions that arise between Augustine and his implied philosophical interlocutors enable us to understand better how exactly Augustine conceived of the moral life within a framework of the degrees of good. This scale – more systematic than scholars have previously realized – forms the ontological basis of his advice on cases of conflicting goods.

Augustine’s letters and sermons also reveal that his theory of goods is unintelligible apart from the doctrine of social *oikeiōsis*, or “social appropriation.” Indeed, *oikeiōsis* plays a central role in Augustine’s ethical theory and serves as a leitmotif for the questions pursued throughout this dissertation. This Greek philosophical concept – which originates in Hellenistic Stoic and Peripatetic ethics and is transmitted to Augustine through Varro’s *De philosophia* and Cicero’s *De finibus* – contains the idea that all

Genres,” in *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, ed. R. Rorty et al. (New York: Cambridge UP, 1984), 49-75.

temporal goods (e.g. food, sex, children, power, office, wealth) are ultimately necessary for the sake of friendship. The good of friendship unfolds into a series of concentric circles, extending out from the self to the household, political community, and, ultimately, all other human beings and God. Friendships then result in the formation of distinct communities (e.g. families, nations) and institutions (e.g. households, commonwealths). Accordingly, Augustine's view of social *oikeiōsis* involves a conception of society as an integrated complex of roles and practices, and of correspondent virtues. Recognizing the role *oikeiōsis* plays in Augustine's theory of goods illuminates the necessarily social and political dimensions of ordered love. It also allows us to grasp the tight connection he posits between one's office and one's responsibility for tending particular temporal goods.

A cluster of temporal goods – marriage and family life, public office, and wealth – appears and reappears all throughout Augustine's letters and sermons.⁷ These goods form the topics of my central exegetical chapters – two, three, and four. In chapter two (“Household Goods”) I overview Augustine's rendition of *oikeiōsis* and highlight the way it informs his advice on the goods associated with married and family life. Analysis of Augustine's correspondence with the widows Proba and Juliana, along with the married woman, Ecdicia, reveals Augustine's take on how the goods associated with sexual intimacy (e.g. marriage, celibacy, remarriage, widowhood, chastity, continence) rank within his particular framework of *oikeiōsis*. This framework allows Augustine to hold the conflicting goods of married and celibate life together – affirming the goodness of each, and identifying their deep interconnection – and also to appreciate the diverse ways in which people may relate to these goods and develop the virtues associated with them.

⁷ *Ep.* 130.9-14.

Augustine's advice to public officials on the task of reconciling Christian ethical commitments with role-specific obligations – the topic of chapter three ("Public Goods") – demonstrates his conception of conflicting responsibilities as choices between lower and higher goods. He construes this negotiation as a process whereby wider-level *oikeiōsis* (friendship with God and all human beings) transforms the smaller-scale friendships formed in the household and political community. I consider three cases: Augustine's exchange with Marcellinus, a high-ranking imperial official, on the incompatibility of the Christian ideal of nonviolence and the ethics of citizenship; Augustine's correspondence with Boniface, a military commander, on the conflicting goods of enemy love and the security of Roman Africa; and, finally, Augustine's advice to Macedonius, the imperial vicar for Africa, on whether pardon of a criminal condemned to capital punishment can cohere with his responsibility to protect the common good.

In chapter four ("Private Goods"), I turn to Augustine's advice on using wealth to form and tend the various circles of *oikeiōsis* (e.g. familial piety, works of mercy, poverty). Implicit in the doctrine of *oikeiōsis* is an imperative to draw those from the outer circles into the nearer domain of one's properly formed self-love, and thereby to observe the demands of justice. Augustine's account of the good use of wealth to form bonds of affection on a broad level represents a distinctive fusion of the moral languages of *oikeiōsis* and biblical neighbor love. Another illustration of conflicting goods appears in Augustine's advice to heads of households, on the negotiation of their interrelated responsibilities to care for the poor as well as their own, private interests. Failure to discern the good in such cases is often highly contextual – as, for instance, when the good of familial obligation creates a false cover for material or spiritual greed. In the case of

Ecdicia, we see how the good of poverty can be pursued in such a way that it actually damages the friendship goods of family life. Augustine's rhetoric and case-by-case analysis shows the subtle responsiveness of his systematic vision.

For Augustine, eternal goods are the virtues and goods of friendship as they will exist in eternity – as the full expression of love for God and neighbor. In chapter five (“Eternal Goods”), I consider such goods in their plurality and temporality. That is, I treat them as human beings are able to comprehend and pursue them – and sometimes even obtain and experience them – in this life. To do so, I revisit Augustine's letters to Ecdicia and Macedonius to take a closer look at where each person succeeded and failed in their pursuit of the good. In brief, Augustine's vision of obtaining eternal goods involves a process in which the practice of virtues in this life begins to mirror more directly the way virtues will exist in eternity. This process – which Augustine calls the perfection of the virtues – entails a return to God, the highest good, as the dual source of all one's virtues and temporal goods.

As is evidenced in his *Confessions*, Augustine is a master of the interior life – of the subtle contours of affection and self-knowledge that shape one's pursuit of the good. The letters and sermons reveal him bringing this moral-psychological acumen to bear on the problems and decisions faced by his correspondents, and by members of his congregation. Augustine's advice in these writings displays him laboring to help individuals distinguish genuine goods from the false, to weigh the lower and higher, and to identify desires that trap and cramp the soul's growth in love.

Properly ordering one's loves, in Augustine's eyes, requires an integration of ontological, social, and psychological considerations. For this reason, he is at his

philosophical best in the letters and sermons. These genres provide the right vehicle, and concrete cases provide the right occasions, for his most original and searching reflections on the moral life.

Chapter 1

DEGREES OF GOOD

In what does happiness consist? Augustine, like many of the ancients, regarded this as the crucial question of ethical theory. Positioning his classification of goods within this wider, philosophical context clears the way to understanding how he made an advance within it.

In this chapter I will first provide a brief overview of Augustine's classification of goods, demonstrating the way he arranges them in a hierarchical order. Second, I will turn to the ancient debate over whether there are in fact goods of differing degrees and the way this question relates to happiness. Third, and finally, I will situate Augustine's doctrine of goods in the context of this debate, and establish a general theory of goods in his thought to identify its role in his ethical framework.

The historical light of this ancient debate demonstrates how central the classification of goods is for Augustine's ethical framework. And the centrality of this classification also suggests a clearer intention on his part to approach questions of social and political ethics from an organized framework than has been appreciated by scholars. This is essential, for Augustine's systematic view forms the basis of his advice to social and political leaders on cases of conflicting goods, as we will see in the chapters to follow.

I. The Classification of Goods in Augustine

Augustine's notion of the good (*bonum*) is essentially Platonist insofar as the concepts of being, truth, and goodness are closely connected. Given this, its metaphysical, epistemological, and moral-psychological applications are always deeply interwoven.¹ Augustine's ontology of the good is laid out most systematically in his early anti-Manichean work *On the Nature of the Good* (*De natura boni*). There we learn that being and existence correlate precisely with goodness, for Augustine, and that all things derive their existence directly from God, who is the supreme being and highest good. "Every natural being, so far as it is such, is good ... All are not supremely good, but they approximate to the supreme good, and even the very lowest goods, which are far distant from the supreme good, can only derive their existence from the supreme good."² Thus, for Augustine, the degrees of reality correlate with degrees of goodness: "all things are good; better in proportion as they are better measured, formed and ordered, less good where there is less of measure, form and order."³

Augustine is indebted to Plato's and Plotinus' understanding of goodness as including the connected ideas of beauty, symmetry, number, and truth.⁴ The beauty, order, and goodness of created things correspond to their rank in a hierarchy of being.⁵

The relationship between goods and *the* good is also conceived, by Augustine, in terms of

¹ See, e.g., Plato, *Republic* Books 5-7; Plotinus, *Ennead* I 7 "On the Primal Good." J. Mausbach, *Die Ethik des Heiligen Augustinus*, 2 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1909), 1:92-100, is still worth a great deal on this topic. For other useful accounts of the philosophical background of Augustine's conception of *bonum*, see A. Solignac, "Les degrés du bien," in *Bibliothèque augustinienne. Œuvres de saint Augustin* 13 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962), 664; S. Kowalczyk, "Dieu en tant que bien suprême selon l'acception de St. Augustin," *Estudio Agustiniano* 6 (1971): 199-213; S. MacDonald, "Augustine's Christian-Platonist Account of Goodness," *New Scholasticism* 63 (1989): 485-509; N. Fischer, "Bonum," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. C. Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 1986-1994), 1:671-81.

² *Nat. b.* 1.

³ *Nat. b.* 3.

⁴ Plato, *Symposium* 210a-212a; Plotinus, *Ennead* I 6 "On Beauty." See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a3; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.31; *ciu.* 22.19.

⁵ *Ciu.* 11.4, 12.1-9.

Platonic participation: particular goods are good through sharing in that “good whose partial presence makes them good.”⁶ Everything that exists is good (by degrees) according to its measure of participation in the good, and this participation occurs in one or more of three modes: existence, life, and understanding.⁷ Rocks, plants, animals, human beings, and angels each exhibit their own unique form of participation.⁸ The “idea of the Good itself,” also forms “the standard [in the human mind] by which we approve or prefer [some goods over] others.”⁹ Thus the capacity to make correct moral judgments results from the human mind’s special participation in the good.

Augustine’s conception of ethical goodness is also interwoven with his account of happiness.¹⁰ The highest good for humankind – a happy life – is achieved when one clings to the supreme good in love.¹¹ Implicit in this ontology of the good is a hierarchy of moral goods, ranging from temporal goods (such as bodily health), to the virtues, and on to happiness itself. The historical analysis in this chapter will help us recognize more clearly the uniqueness of Augustine’s conception of the differing degrees of moral goods. This, in turn, will allow us to appreciate the way that he applies this structured concept of

⁶ *Trin.* 8.5.

⁷ *Lib. arb.* 2.50.

⁸ *Lib. arb.* 2.50.

⁹ *Trin.* 8.4.

¹⁰ The Greek and Latin terms for “happiness” (Greek: *eudaimonia*; Latin: *felicitas* or *beatitudo*) are notoriously difficult to translate into English, but are usually rendered along the lines of a “happy life,” a “humanly flourishing life,” or simply a “good life.” Augustine uses both *beatitudo* and *felicitas*, and I translate them as “happiness” throughout. See H. de Noronha Galvão, “Beatitudo,” in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 1:624-38.

¹¹ Augustine uses interchangeably several words for love: *caritas*; *amor*, *amare*; *dilectio*, *diligere*. He claims that these words are not used with distinct senses in Scripture (*ciu.* 14.7). In general, therefore, I have used “love” to cover all of these. In s. 335C.2.ff, however, Augustine self-consciously defines his terms to distinguish desire for what is good from desire for what is bad. There he defines *caritas* as a “love of living virtuously,” and distinguishes it from disordered desire for what is bad (*cupiditas*), and disordered loving (*concupiscere*). Cf. *doct. chr.* 3.16. See D. Dideberg, “Amor,” in *Augustinus-Lexikon* 1:294-300; “Dilectio,” in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. C. Mayer (Basel: Schwabe 1996-2002), 2:435-53; “Caritas,” in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 1:730-43.

the good to the concrete social and political questions that form the heart of this dissertation.

Augustine's classification of goods in *De libero arbitrio* (*On Free Choice*) 2.47-54 opens the view to a threefold – rather than twofold – gradation of *bona*:

The virtues, by which we live rightly, are great goods (*magna bona*), but the bodily kind (*species autem quorumlibet corporum*), without which we can live rightly, are the least goods (*minima bona*). The powers of the soul, without which we cannot live rightly are the middle goods (*media bona*). No one uses the virtues wrongly, but anyone can use the other goods, the middle and the least, wrongly as well as rightly. No one uses virtue wrongly, because the work of virtue is the good use of those things which we are capable of using wrongly.¹²

Presented in descending order, all three of these goods are human goods, pertinent to human life: virtues (*maxima bona*), powers of the soul (*media bona*), and bodily goods (*minima bona*). Both bodily goods and goods of the soul can be used rightly or wrongly, whereas virtue can only be used well. Augustine also claims that we can live rightly (i.e. virtuously) without bodily goods but that it is impossible to live rightly without the goods of the soul. To demonstrate this point elsewhere in the passage, he asks his interlocutor, Evodius, if he would be so bold as to claim that a one-eyed man cannot live rightly. “I am not so utterly mad,” replies Evodius. Augustine affirms Evodius's answer, declaring that the goods of the soul (reason, memory, and will) are different from bodily goods insofar as they are inextricably linked to the work of virtue, unlike the least goods. Augustine sets up a reflexive concept of virtue, whereby virtue is defined as a property of the soul as it handles its own powers. The same self-regard also holds for the middle goods: “reason itself is counted among the things we know by reason.”¹³

¹² *Lib. arb.* 2.50.

¹³ *Lib. arb.* 2.51. The same goes for memory: “memory not only grasps all other things by which we remember, but it also, since we do not forget that we have a memory, in a certain way retains itself within us.”

Given the reflexive capacity of the soul to use its powers rightly or wrongly, acquiring the virtues – or living rightly – is impossible apart from the middle goods. The example of the one-eyed man does not exhaust the many ways that a lack of bodily goods (*minima bona*) could impinge on one’s capacity for right living. Yet Augustine does not assign bodily goods any role in virtue in this passage. To understand what Augustine is claiming about the relation between the least goods and living rightly, we need to see the way his threefold classification is connected to his definition of happiness.

Augustine’s formulation of the happy life in this text is as follows: the “happy life” (*uita beata*) is the “proper and principal human good” and is achieved when the will “clings” (*inhaerere*) to the “unchangeable good” (*bonum incommutabilis*).¹⁴ By clinging to the “unchangeable good” (always a reference to God, for Augustine), the will also “obtains the principal and important human goods,” the “virtues.”¹⁵ This shorthand definition of happiness encapsulates Augustine’s vision of the moral life.

The goods of the soul (preeminently the power of the will, as we see in Augustine’s definition of the happy life), stand midway between bodily goods and virtues. It is through their right-use that one clings to the unchangeable good and obtains virtues. By contrast, one errs in turning the power of the will away from the unchangeable good toward the inferior, “changeable good” (*bonum mutabilis*).¹⁶

The changeable good (*bonum mutabilis*) represents a more expansive class of goods, for Augustine, in two ways. First, it includes the powers of the soul.¹⁷ Humans err by turning inward on these powers and treating them as their own “private good” (*bonum*

¹⁴ *Lib. arb.* 2.52.

¹⁵ *Lib. arb.* 2.53.

¹⁶ *Lib. arb.* 2.53.

¹⁷ *Lib. arb.* 2.53. Cf. *ep.* 18.2.

proprium), wishing only to become independent “masters” over their own selves.¹⁸

Second, the changeable good also includes the bodily goods mentioned in the tripartition.

Yet this bodily kind involves a much broader set of mutable goods than mere health or beauty suggest, as in the case of the one-eyed man. Making sense of this requires us to look at an earlier passage in the dialogue, where Augustine introduces a class of goods that he calls temporal (*temporalia*). Through these things “peace is maintained in human society” and among them are:

the body and ... its goods, such as sound health, keen senses, strength, beauty, and so on, some of which are necessary for the useful arts, and therefore of more value, others of which are of less value. Then there is liberty (*libertas*) ... that liberty by which men think they are free, when they do not have other men as their masters, and which is desired by those who wish to be released from any human masters. Then parents, brothers, wife, children, relations, connections, friends, and all who are joined to us by some bond. Or again the political community (*ciuitas*), which is usually regarded as a parent; honors, too, and distinctions, and what is called popular glory. Lastly, at the extreme end, wealth, under which single term is included everything of which we are rightful masters, and which we are regarded as having the power to sell and give away.¹⁹

Although these temporal goods are all “changeable and insecure” (in comparison to the good itself), they are “constituted” in their own order and “attain a certain beauty of their own.”²⁰ The problem – which is the drama of the moral life, in Augustine’s eyes – is that humans are prone to cling (*inhaerere*) to these goods through disordered desire (*cupiditas*) rather than to the unchangeable good. People cling to temporal goods in different ways, distinguished by how well they use them:

One man makes good use and another bad use of these same things. The man who makes bad use, clings to them and is attached to them by his love, that is to say, is subject to things which ought to be subject to him. He makes those things of service to himself, for the control and good management of which he himself ought to be of service. On the other hand, the man who uses them rightly displays

¹⁸ *Lib. arb.* 2.53.

¹⁹ *Lib. arb.* 1.32.

²⁰ *Lib. arb.* 1.35.

their goodness (*ostendat quidem bona esse*) ... They do not make him good or better, but rather are made good by him. Therefore he is not glued (*adglutinetur*) to them by love of them, and does not make them, as it were, members of his own soul ... lest, when the time comes for their amputation, they may infect him with painful corruption.²¹

As we saw in the passage on the happy life above, Augustine claims that it is ultimately the movement, or activity, of the will (*uoluntas*) that determines the good or bad use of other goods.²² It is important to note that one does not need to abandon temporal goods in order to cling to the unchangeable good. Clinging metaphorically describes the soul's disposition and movement (activity) as it learns to appreciate the unchangeable good as the source of all good things and to properly order its desire for temporal goods. Properly ordered desire results in the good use of good things.

Two things remain puzzling about Augustine's classification of goods in relation to the happy life in *De libero arbitrio*. First, it is hard to grasp the role of the least goods (*minima bona*) in the happy life. (By "least goods," I am now referring to the broader class of temporal goods just listed in 1.32.) Augustine clearly states that a person can live rightly without the *minima bona* (as in the case of the one-eyed man). Yet he does not precisely specify the relationship between living rightly (i.e. living virtuously) and the happy life. If the least goods are real goods, which Augustine is clear about, it seems plausible to say that they have a role – even a minor one – to play in a complete picture of happiness. Augustine does not fully work out this issue in *De libero arbitrio*.

There is a second, and closely connected, issue. Although Augustine is clear that the least goods are genuine *goods*, and that "the man who uses them rightly displays their

²¹ *Lib. arb.* 1.33. Augustine continues: "This being so, surely you do not think silver or gold are to be condemned because some men are avaricious, or food because some men are greedy, or wine because some men are drunkards, or beautiful women because some men are fornicators and adulterers, and so on, especially as you see that a doctor makes good use of heat, and a poisoner a bad use of bread?"

²² *Lib. arb.* 1.34.

goodness,” it is difficult to understand what he means by the connected phrase, “[these goods] do not make [the virtuous person] good or better, but rather are made good by him.”²³ Does the goodness or badness of these temporal things (*temporalia*) depend on their use in some way? Does virtuous use simply add to these things’ inherent goodness? Or does it fundamentally alter their status - moving them from neutrality to goodness? Is it right to call these things goods, as Augustine does, before they have been put to good use?²⁴ We will return to both of these questions in section three below.

Another representative account of Augustine’s classification of goods is found in Letter 140 to Honoratus.²⁵ It provides an important complement to the picture found in *De libero arbitrio* 1-2. Augustine tells Honoratus that human beings, from birth, instinctually pursue bodily and “temporal happiness” (*felicitas temporalis*).²⁶ Yet, as “reason awakens” in them, they can “choose another life whose enjoyment lies in the mind, whose happiness is internal and eternal.”²⁷

There is present in a human being a rational soul, but it makes a difference to what one chooses to turn the use of the same reason by the will, whether to goods of an exterior and inferior nature or to goods of an interior and superior nature, that is, whether one enjoys the body and time or one enjoys divinity and eternity. The soul is situated in a certain mid-rank, having beneath it the bodily creature but having above it the creator of itself and of its body. The rational soul, therefore, can make good use of temporal and bodily happiness if it ... preserves order and, by distinguishing, choosing, and weighing [goods], subordinates lesser [ones] to greater ones, bodily ones to spiritual ones, inferior ones to superior ones, temporal ones to eternal ones.²⁸

²³ *Lib. arb.* 1.33.

²⁴ *Lib. arb.* 1.33.

²⁵ *Ep.* 140. Augustine also gives this letter the title, *On the Grace of the New Testament, to Honoratus* (*De gratia testamenti novi ad Honoratum*). On Honoratus, see A. Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, I, *Prosopographie de l’Afrique chrétienne (AD 303-533)* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1982), 564-5, s.v. Honoratus 4.

²⁶ *Ep.* 140.3.

²⁷ See Plato’s conception of the “citadel” of the mind at *Tim.* 69a-72d. There reason reigns supreme, whereas for Augustine, will is preeminent among the powers of the soul. Cf. Plato’s tripartition of the soul into a rational, a spirited, and an appetitive part in *rep.* 434d-441c.

²⁸ *Ep.* 140.3.

On this model, the soul stands “mid-rank” between the lower and higher goods and acts well insofar as it carefully “weighs” (*pondere*) and “distinguishes” (*distinguere*) inferior from superior, and “chooses” the better.²⁹ The soul “subordinates” lesser goods to greater ones by responding to the weight of each: it loves some more and others less. If the soul does this, it preserves “ordered love” (*ordinata caritas*).³⁰

As mentioned above, the tripartition of goods in *De libero arbitrio* is unique in Augustine’s writings. The twofold classification found in Letter 140 is more characteristic of his work as a whole. Augustine provides a litany of ways to think about the quality of the two classes: exterior and interior, lesser and greater, bodily and spiritual, inferior and superior, temporal and eternal.³¹ The lesser class of goods assuredly refers to the least goods (broadly conceived) found in *De libero arbitrio* 1.32-33 and 2.47-54. The virtues are not mentioned explicitly in Letter 140 but they clearly fall in the superior and interior camp insofar as the work of virtue is the good use of the lower goods through the powers of the soul.³² Just as in *De libero arbitrio*, the will takes preeminence in Letter 140 in turning the use of the other powers, such as reason, toward superior goods. In both texts Augustine refers to bodily and temporal things as genuine goods (*bona*).

Augustine tells Honoratus that the acquisition of the lesser, bodily, inferior, and exterior goods results in its own sort of temporal happiness (*felicitas temporalis*) – but

²⁹ For a parallel account in which the soul stands “mid-rank” between external goods and the virtues see, Plato, *Laws* 728d.

³⁰ *Ep.* 140.4.

³¹ See s. 21.3, where Augustine adds “small and great” and “earthly and celestial” to the list. This set of dualities, prevalent in Augustine’s thought, is broadly biblical and Platonic. The Platonic dimensions – especially in Augustine’s early thought – have been carefully studied by C.P. Mayer, *Die Zeichen in der geistigen Entwicklung und in der Theologie des jungen Augustinus*, 2 vols. (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1969).

³² *Lib. arb.* 1.50.

that this happiness itself should be put to “good use” in serving the “creator who has also given it out of the most abundant generosity of his goodness.”³³ In this way the soul may discover an “internal and eternal” happiness.³⁴ Although Augustine does not identify the two types of happiness in *De libero arbitrio*, the distinction is implicit. This distinction supports the idea that the least goods (*minima bona*) may play some constitutive role in the happy life, even if they are not necessary for living rightly, strictly speaking. The picture found in Letter 140 is that of the soul making good use of this lower happiness by subordinating temporal goods to eternal ones. Yet this text does not supply a full description of the relation between temporal goods and happiness. We will return to this question in section three below.

II. The Ancient Debate

In calling the happy life (*uita beata*) the principal (*primum*) human good (*hominis bonum*), Augustine stands in the mainstream of ancient Greek and Roman ethical theory.³⁵ And, as mentioned above, the classification of goods in ancient philosophy is inseparable from the crucial question of what human happiness actually consists in. The entry point for ancient ethical theory is consideration of one’s life as a whole, and this reflection leads one to a notion of an overarching goal, or target. Happiness enters as a vague specification of this overall goal, requiring further description. Most ancient ethical theorists refer ultimately to an individual’s happiness in providing an account of the right way to live and of the available reasons for desiring and doing anything in particular.

³³ *Ep.* 140.4.

³⁴ *Ep.* 140.3.

³⁵ The Cyrenaics are the one exception. See J.M. Cooper, *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), 427n1. Cf. J. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), 230, 235-6.

As Aristotle points out, the general consensus about happiness's special status belies an intense disagreement about what it actually consists in.³⁶ Specifying happiness as the principal human good already would provide a clue, or at least a way into the question – and a way to clarify the various descriptions of its content. To arrive at a definition of happiness, then, we must begin by thinking about the good. What is a *human* good? Are there different human goods? If the happy life is the principal good, then there must be others that come in degrees. In what follows I will provide a brief overview of the classification of goods as it appears in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle and as it goes on to form the central debate (between the Stoics and Peripatetics) in later Hellenistic and Roman ethical theory.

In two related passages in the early dialogues of Plato (*Euthydemus* 278e-282d, *Meno* 87d-89a) Socrates argues that virtue, which he identifies with knowledge, is the only thing that really deserves to be called good. The things that people usually call good – health, good looks, noble birth, power, wealth, honor in one's country – sometimes benefit and sometimes harm, depending on their "use."³⁷ Socrates' distinction between virtue (construed as knowledge) and the other so-called goods seems to be the origin of Plato's own fuller classification of goods into those of the soul, those of the body, and those which are external.³⁸ This general tripartition appears in many places throughout

³⁶ *NE* 1095a17-26.

³⁷ Plato, *Euthydemus* 280e1-7.

³⁸ This tripartition of goods appears throughout Plato's work, see also *leg.* 743e, *rep.* 357b-358a, *Phil.* 48a, 66a-67b, *Phdo.* 63e-69e. For a useful overview of Plato's classification of goods, see D.A. Rees, "The Classification of Goods in Plato and Aristotle," in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition*, ed. S.M. Stern et al. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 327-36. On the relation between Plato's tripartite account of goods and the modern distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value, see N.P. White, "The Classification of Goods in Plato's *Republic*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22 (1984): 393-421.

Plato's dialogues, but Aristotle offers its fullest formulation in relation to happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Goods have been classified into three groups: those called external goods, goods of the soul, and goods of the body. Goods of the soul are the ones we call most strictly and most especially good, and the actions and activities of the soul we may attribute to the soul. Our conception of happiness [is that] the end [*telos*] consists in certain actions and activities. For the end thus turns out to be a good of the soul and not an external good.³⁹

Happiness, in this passage, is exclusively associated with the actions and activities of the soul. It is in complete harmony with Aristotle's other definition of happiness, reached at the end of his famous argument from human function (*ergon*). There he argues that the human *ergon* ("function," although better translated as "characteristic activity," or "essential work") is living according to reason. Whatever has an *ergon* has a corresponding excellence (*aretē*), or way of doing its essential work well. Human *aretē* is virtue:

the human good turns out to be activity of the soul in accordance with virtue (and if there are several virtues, in accordance with the best and most complete) - in a complete life. For one swallow does not make a summer, nor one day. Neither does one day or a short time make someone blessed [*makarios*] and happy [*eudaimōn*].⁴⁰

In terms of the classification of goods, Aristotle seems to be claiming that it is only goods of the soul (actions and activities of the soul in accordance with virtue) that are essential constituents of happiness (*eudaimonia*) and therefore qualify, strictly speaking, to be called good. This is as far as Socrates had taken his definition.

Yet Aristotle does not leave the matter there. In the following chapter he goes on to say that happiness also requires a certain measure of "external goods" (*ta ektos*

³⁹ NE 1098b13-14.

⁴⁰ NE 1098a16-20. I am ignoring the question of whether the parenthesis in this quotation is meant to refer forward to the life of contemplation in NE 10.5-7. See Annas, *Morality of Happiness*, 366-367n7-9.

agatha). Further along in his account Aristotle asks rhetorically: “What is to prevent us, then, from concluding that the happy person is the one who, adequately furnished with external goods, engages in activities in accordance with complete virtue, not just for any period of time but over a complete life?”⁴¹ In his final and considered definition of happiness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we find this added qualification carried through: the “actions and activities of the soul in accordance with virtue” must be furnished with a sufficient supply of “external goods.”

There are *broad* and *narrow* usages of the phrase “external goods” in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the tripartite classification of goods cited above, Aristotle contrasts external goods with those of body and soul. This is the narrow usage of the term. When he introduces the “external goods” qualification to his definition of happiness, he has a broader usage in mind. Here “external” designates all those goods that are external to the soul. Indeed, in the broadest sense, “external” names every human good other than virtue. Virtue (understood as the actions and activities of the soul according to reason) and the innate endowments of the mind that are active in virtue (such as reason and memory) are the only human goods that are not external.⁴²

For Aristotle, then, certain bodily and external goods play a necessary role in a happy life. What this necessary role amounts to is, of course, a complicated matter and brings us to the heart of Aristotle’s ethical theory – and also the heart of a tremendous interpretive debate over the role of external goods in his definitions of happiness.⁴³ For

⁴¹ *NE* 1101a14-16.

⁴² Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 295.

⁴³ For the best overview of the interpretive debate and most convincing account of the role of external goods in Aristotle’s definition of happiness, see Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 292-311. Cooper argues that, for Aristotle, the “external goods are constituents of happiness in that they provide ... the context that virtuous persons as such prefer for the exercise of their virtues. External goods are constituents of

my purposes, let me simply identify the two reasons that Aristotle supplies for the necessity of external goods in happiness. First, external goods provide the means, or instruments, to be used in virtuous activity. For example, to exercise the virtue of magnanimity, one needs a handsome supply of money. The second reason is more difficult to grasp. Aristotle says this: “lacking certain things people find their blessedness disfigured - e.g. good birth, good children, good looks. For someone who is utterly repulsive in appearance or low-born or solitary and childless is certainly not a very good candidate for happiness; and presumably even less so is one whose children or friends are totally bad or were good but died.”⁴⁴

It is not immediately clear to the reader how the lack of external goods disfigures one’s blessedness. The most plausible interpretation suggests that Aristotle is highlighting the way that certain external conditions – such as good children – provide the proper context and circumstances for the exercise of virtue.⁴⁵ For example, if one is confined to a solitary life, he or she may not have the full range of opportunities to exercise the virtue of justice as it relates to the varied forms of friendship. Thus, we might say, external goods are constitutive of happiness for Aristotle insofar as they provide both the context for the exercise of the virtues and also the instruments by which to achieve the ends aimed at in virtuous activity.⁴⁶ Aristotle appears to be holding the Socratic commitment to the unique and determinative role of virtue as the core constituent of

happiness in that they are bound up in this tight way with those virtuous activities themselves that Aristotle thinks constitute the very essence of the best human life” (309).

⁴⁴ NE 1099b2-6. Translation of this passage is from Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 297.

⁴⁵ Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 297.

⁴⁶ It is important to note that, for Aristotle, the value of external goods in relation to virtuous activity (and thus to one’s own happiness) does not exhaust the value that these goods have in themselves. For instance, although it is quite appropriate to think of friends and children as providing the “necessary” context for virtuous activity, virtuous people will also value their friends and children for their own sake. See Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 309-311.

happiness, while also insisting on the essential role of external goods in virtuous action. In this – albeit more limited way – external goods are also constituents of the happy life.⁴⁷

In stressing the importance of both virtue and external goods for happiness, Aristotle is attempting, in his characteristic fashion, to do justice to our intuitions and everyday beliefs about what happiness actually consists in. Identifying the relative importance of both virtue and external goods for happiness, however, eludes Aristotle's qualified definition in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The debate that immediately ensues between his heirs and the Stoics is the best evidence of this. Aristotle's school, under his successor Theophrastus, emphasizes, even more sharply than Aristotle himself, the necessity of external goods.⁴⁸ The Stoics go the opposite direction, committing themselves to the rigorous thesis that virtue is the only good and, thus, is sufficient on its own for happiness. Narrating the details of this debate would require considerable space.⁴⁹ What is important for my purposes is for us to see the way the terms of this Hellenistic debate shape Roman moral philosophy.

Cicero's ethical writings make it clear that he considers the most important ethical question to be whether the Stoics or Aristotelians (Peripatetics) are right about the relation of virtue and external goods to happiness. It is through the lens of this question

⁴⁷ I am leaving to the side the "other role" that external goods might play for Aristotle as objects of pursuits or goals of action within virtuous activity. I am also leaving to the side the distinction between "necessary conditions" and "constituent parts" in Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics* (1.2) as it relates to the role of external goods in the *NE*. See Cooper, *Reason and Emotion*, 306, 306n22.

⁴⁸ For fragments of Theophrastus' no longer extant *On Happiness*, see W.W. Fortenbaugh, ed. and trans., *Theophrastus of Eresus: Sources for His Life, Writings, Thought, and Influence*, 2 vols. (New York: Brill, 1992). Based on the work of later writers we learn that Theophrastus presented the view that external goods are necessary for happiness, and that the virtuous person who suffers extensive loss of them loses his happiness.

⁴⁹ Part of this has already been accomplished admirably in Annas, *Morality of Happiness*, 385-411.

that he presents his own considerations on the highest human good in *De finibus* (*On Moral Ends*).

A large part of what we know today about Stoic ethics is found in Book 3 of Cicero's *De finibus*. He provides an account of Stoic ethics through the mouthpiece of the famous Roman Stoic spokesman, Cato. It is clear from Cicero's account that the source, or at least the primary source, of the Stoic thesis that virtue is the only good is Socrates, (as his views are expressed in Plato's early dialogues; *Euthydemus* 278e-282d, *Meno* 87d-89a). The Stoic thesis is presented as a direct rejection of Aristotle's proposal in Book 1 of *Nicomachean Ethics* – or, at least, Aristotle's proposal as it came to be interpreted, and sharpened, by Theophrastus and the Peripatetic school.

In particular, the Stoics developed Socrates' claim in the *Euthydemus* that all goods, other than virtue, are merely useful in relationship to the exercise of virtue. The Stoics were aware that their thesis (virtue is the only good), and its correlates (bodily and external goods are not really "goods" and therefore virtue is sufficient for happiness) were not only controversial but highly counter-intuitive. As a way of dealing with our intuitive preference for the so-called goods, the Stoics drew a distinction between what is good and what has value. So-called goods such as health, wealth, or friendship have value and are therefore to be preferred to their opposites, even if they are not good in the strict sense. The Stoics call these valuable bodily and external things "advantages" (Latin: *commoda*) or "preferred indifferents" (Greek: *adiaphora*). Advantages can be preferred because they are *typically* appropriate, fitting, or suitable (*oikeion*) for creatures like us.

This argument from fittingness is presented by Cicero-Cato in *De finibus* 3.16-24. It goes like this: human beings, like other animals, are born with a natural impulse (*hormē*) for self-preservation and procreation. As these creatures mature, their impulse for self-preservation extends outward to include more people and things through a developmental process called “social appropriation” (*oikeiōsis*).⁵⁰ Given that humans are rational, as they mature they also begin to rationally discern values that can trump even their preference for bodily and external things. These higher moral values are the virtues and only they deserve to be called goods (*bona*). Once humans learn to appreciate rationality itself, and the demands it makes on them, they are ready to properly appreciate what virtue is.⁵¹

In this picture, ordering one’s preferences for bodily and external advantages is made possible through the development of one’s rational nature. Desire for health over sickness, wealth over poverty, and friends over enemies is natural and therefore rational. Yet as humans mature rationally, they must subordinate these natural preferences to their increasingly rational conception of the genuine human good (virtue). Hence, for the Stoics, there ought never be any conflict between advantages and the exercise of virtue. Virtue always wins and is separable from the advantages. In contrast to virtue, the wise person views bodily and external advantages as matters of sheer indifference.

Speaking of the unique value of virtue, Cato says: “Honey is the sweetest thing; but it is perceived as sweet through its own particular kind of flavor, and not by comparison with other foods. In the same way the good we are discussing is supremely

⁵⁰ For an overview of *oikeiōsis*, and Augustine’s adaptation of it, see the first section of chapter two below.

⁵¹ On Cicero’s negotiation of the moral imperatives involved in self-preservation and rational identification with all of humankind in *De finibus*, see M.R. Wright, “Cicero on Self-Love and Love of Humanity in *De Finibus* 3,” in *Cicero the Philosopher*, ed. J.G.F. Powell (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 171-96.

valuable, but its value is a matter of kind, not quantity. Value (the Greek *axia*) is not counted amongst goods nor again amongst evils, so it will remain in its own category, however much you add to it. Hence the particular value of virtue is distinct: a matter of kind, not degree.”⁵²

In championing the distinct value of virtue, Cato specifically distances the Stoics from the “Peripatetic view” that there are “three kinds of goods and that the richer one is in bodily or external goods, the happier.”⁵³ “We Stoics could not agree less. In our opinion ... when it comes to a happy life, the amount of bodily advantages has no relevance at all.”⁵⁴ To demonstrate his thoroughgoing belief in the Stoic thesis, Cato affirms the old Stoic dictum that the virtuous person is happy even while being tortured on the rack.⁵⁵

The problem with the Peripatetic position, according to the Stoics, is that if the virtues and the bodily and external advantages are left in the same category (on a spectrum of goodness) this results in the undesirable view that the happy life is a matter of addition and subtraction. If happiness equals virtue plus some goods, as the Peripatetics claim, then “the richer one is in bodily and external goods, the happier” they will be, and so on, *ad infinitum*. But this is assuredly not the case. Not only do more so-called goods not necessarily bring more happiness, the loss of advantages often spurs the acquisition of virtue.

The value of virtue should not be compared to bodily and external advantages, according to the Stoics. The value of the advantages is “like the light of a lamp eclipsed

⁵² *Fin.* 3.34.

⁵³ *Fin.* 3.43.

⁵⁴ *Fin.* 3.43.

⁵⁵ *Fin.* 3.42.

and obliterated by the rays of the sun; like a drop of honey lost in the vastness of the Aegean sea ... [like] a single step on the road from here to India ... it is unavoidably eclipsed, overwhelmed and destroyed by the splendor and grandeur of virtue.”⁵⁶

The Stoic position on the incommensurability of the value of virtue and the advantages results in its own undesirable consequence. If it is “rational” to aim at two different kinds of value that cannot be put on the same scale, then it is rational to aim at two totally distinct goals. And given that the two sorts of values are incommensurable, there can be no rational strategy for working out our natural commitments to each goal when they come into conflict (in terms of time, effort, and attention). This model, ultimately, provides no way to adjudicate between the value of wealth accumulation and the demands of generosity to the foreigner.

Plato and Aristotle’s apparently straightforward classification of goods results in a puzzle – a puzzle that prompts the central debate of Hellenistic and Roman ethical theories. The Stoic-Peripatetic debate about the relative importance of virtue and external goods for happiness seems intractable, perhaps, because it brings our two commonly held views of happiness into stark opposition. The debate sharpens the theoretical distinctions, pushing the limits of our intuitions, forcing us to sacrifice one or the other in order to maintain a theoretically consistent view.

On the one hand, we naturally associate happiness with an array of bodily and external goods and the comfort, security, and success that comes along with them. Yet on

⁵⁶ *Fin.* 3.45. It should be noted that the two metaphors Cato offers to describe this incommensurability run in different directions: the sweetness of honey suggests that the values are different in “kind, not degree.” Whereas the lamplight obliterated by the sun, and the drop of honey lost in the sea, suggest that the values are incomparable in terms of quantity. If incommensurable means incomparable in terms of quantity, as the second metaphor seems to suggest, this fundamentally weakens the Stoic objection to the Peripatetics’ additive view of happiness.

further reflection it seems clear that comfort, security, and success pale in comparison to the value of a virtuous life. Being just is far more important than being rich. If a person is virtuous, it seems that they have all that they really need for human fulfillment, even if they lose all of their external goods. “Virtue” is what is up to us, since it is up to us to make choices, whereas it is not up to us to be tall or beautiful or well-born. This is the Socratic view in the early dialogues. And it is modeled as much in Socrates’ life and teachings as it is in his trial and death. It is a view that Greek and Roman ethical theory never forgot. Yet the question remains: can virtue alone generate happiness even in spite of pain and poverty and desolation? Aristotle is unwilling to go that far. He thinks our original intuitions about a good human life – and a sufficient supply of bodily and external goods – are too strong and credible. Dismissing these is not virtue but simple inhumanity. It is absurd, he thinks, to say the virtuous person is happy on the rack.

The Stoics, on the other hand, affirm Socrates’ view and uphold his distinction between things that always benefit and those that are beneficial or harmful depending on their use and circumstances. They attempt to solve the dilemma by demoting bodily and external “goods” to mere “advantages.” They argue that the two values are wholly incommensurable. The Aristotelian solution is to arrange the goods hierarchically in order to do justice to our intuitions about the value of external goods and the priority of virtue.

The impression that Cicero leaves on the reader of *De finibus* is that the debate is intractable. Both the Stoics and Peripatetics are committed to the value of virtue *and* the other so-called goods. Yet they each seem equally committed to cutting finer and finer distinctions in order to save their own position. Carneades, the famous skeptic and leader

of Plato's New Academy, dismisses the whole debate as a verbal dispute, more a matter of terminology than substance.⁵⁷

Cicero concludes his account of the debate in Book 5 of *De finibus* with an overview of the ethical theory of Antiochus of Ascalon. Antiochus, a leader of the Old Academy of Plato, presents his own theory as a grand synthesis of Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic elements; an attempt to bring together our intuitions about happiness and external goods (in Aristotle's broad sense), while also retaining the Socratic and Stoic insistence on the priority of virtue. The problem, of course, comes in explaining how virtue is both sufficient and not sufficient for happiness. Antiochus tries to cut the Gordian knot by distinguishing two types of happiness, while moving beyond the standard Peripatetic line that external goods add to the happy life of virtue. For Antiochus, virtue is sufficient for a happy life (*uita beata*), but it must be distinguished from the happiest life (*uita beatissima*).⁵⁸ The happiest life is a complete life and thus requires the proper combination of virtuous activity and a sufficient supply of external goods. This, at first, seems like a plausible and attractive way to split the difference between the schools: all the goods remain genuine goods, yet the steep gradation of value between virtue and the other goods is retained in the distinction between happinesses. The virtuous man on the rack is happy, but the virtuous man on his estate is happier still.⁵⁹ Antiochus makes explicit a distinction already present in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* between two types of happiness: one secured by virtuous activity alone and the other not. He then adds a novel account of degrees of happiness onto the Peripatetic theory of degrees of good.

⁵⁷ *Fin.* 3.41.

⁵⁸ *Fin.* 5.71.

⁵⁹ *Fin.* 5.71.

Yet this attractive move to two types of happiness is contrary to the whole spirit of the Stoic theory. If only the happiest life (*uita beatissima*) is complete, as Antiochus claims, then virtue can no longer be thought of as sufficient. Virtue loses its distinctive character as the highest human good. Furthermore Antiochus' two happinesses theory results in the same additive picture found in the Peripatetics. Are there degrees of happiness? How many external goods are necessary for the virtuous person to move from a happy life to the happiest? Cicero's Stoic-sounding objections to Antiochus's synthesis at the end of Book 5 are devastating.

If the two schools cannot be (or, at least, have not been) synthesized, is there a rational way to choose between them? This is the question Cicero leaves the reader of *De finibus*. He presents what strikes him as the most powerful and attractive arguments for and against each side of the debate. He even considers Antiochus' synthesis, and rejects it too. The conclusion of *De finibus* is fundamentally skeptical: neither theory stands and we are not in a position to rationally commit ourselves to either side.⁶⁰ We are left running through the arguments again, trying to discern the best way to live. It is this message – more than any positive doctrine – that Cicero hopes to leave with the reader.

III. Augustine and the Ancient Debate

In this final section I will first identify what Augustine knows of this debate. And, second, I will examine Augustine's classification of goods in relationship to it.

The relation of Augustine's writings to various ancient authors is a matter of grand philological interest, speculation, and debate. Questions surrounding his direct access to, and reliance upon, Plato, Aristotle, and the early Stoics are notoriously difficult

⁶⁰ Cicero's views on Skeptic epistemology are found in the *Academica*. On the status of the relationship between his ethical theory and Academic Skepticism, see W. Görler, "Silencing the Troublemaker: *De Legibus* I.39 and the Continuity of Cicero's Skepticism," in *Cicero the Philosopher*, 85-114.

to answer. Augustine's self-professed limitations at reading Greek and the scarcity of translations available to him add to our uncertainty. Still, we know Augustine picked up intellectual fragments from many older texts through various Latin authors, Latin translations of Neoplatonist writings, and doxographies.⁶¹ Often these were enough for him to find his way into the heart of a philosophical dispute. Whether or not Augustine read passages by Plato, Aristotle, or the early Stoics on the classification of goods, we do not know. It is clear, however, that he was aware of the issue as it was manifest in the Stoic-Peripatetic debate, most likely through his reading of the ethical works of Antiochus' two star students: Marcus Terentius Varro and Cicero.⁶²

In the context of discussing the role of emotion in the moral life in *The City of God* 9.4, Augustine cites the Stoic-Peripatetic debate over goods, aligning himself with Carneades' claim that the dispute is merely verbal. Augustine assumes that Carneades' view is also Cicero's.

Cicero, in *De finibus*, argues that the Stoics are here at odds with the ... Peripatetics in words only, and not in substance. For the Stoics refuse to call bodily and external things 'goods' [*bona*]. Rather they call them 'advantages' [*commoda*], because they consider that there is no good for man except virtue, and that this is the art of living well, which exists only in the mind ... I consider that, as far as the pith of the matter is concerned, rather than the mere sound of words, the view which the Stoics hold is no different from that of the ... Peripatetics.⁶³

As evidence that the dispute is merely verbal, Augustine provides a story from Aulus Gellius' *Attic Nights* in which a distinguished Stoic philosopher, at voyage on the sea,

⁶¹ For the most comprehensive treatments of Augustine's textual relationship to classical philosophy – in the scholarly tradition of *Quellenforschung* – see H.-I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, 4th ed. (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1958); H. Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, 2 vols. (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1967); P. Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers and their Greek Sources*, trans. H.E. Wedeck (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969); J.J. O'Donnell, "Augustine's Classical Readings," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 15 (1980): 144-75.

⁶² The standard treatment of Augustine's textual relationship to Cicero's writings remains, M. Testard, *Saint Augustin et Cicéron*, 2 vols. (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1958).

⁶³ *Ciu.* 9.4.

grows pale with fear as a great tempest rises and threatens to break his ship.⁶⁴ The philosopher's pallor testifies to his valuation of those things threatened by the storm (e.g. bodily wellbeing). It is possible that the philosopher may have grown pale while still holding fast to a mental distinction between the value of the advantages and the higher "goods which make those who have them good, as virtue does."⁶⁵ But the goods-advantages distinction makes less and less difference, Augustine thinks, the more one considers examples of loss:

But when they say that these things are not to be called goods but advantages, we are to regard this as a dispute over words, not as a genuine distinction between things. For what does it matter whether it is more appropriate to call them goods or advantages, when the Stoic and Peripatetic alike tremble and grow pale with the fear of losing them? They do not call them by the same names, but they hold them in the same esteem. For both certainly tell us that if they were urged to commit some wicked or criminal act on pain of losing these goods or advantages, they would rather lose these things which secure the safety and comfort of the body than commit acts that violate justice.⁶⁶

I leave to the side the details of Augustine's claims here - especially as they relate to his broader argument about emotions. From this passage I want only to flag Augustine's awareness of the debate.

Another piece of textual evidence for Augustine's firsthand knowledge of the Stoic-Peripatetic debate is found in *City of God* 19.1-20. Book 19 is Augustine's mini-*De finibus*, the place where he provides his own brief account of the relationship between virtue and goods in happiness. Yet it is not Cicero's *De finibus* but Varro's *De philosophia* that he uses to frame his account. Augustine tells us that Varro's position in *De philosophia* is that of Plato's Old Academy, and that Varro asserts his own view of

⁶⁴ Gellius, *NA* 19.1.

⁶⁵ *Ciu.* 9.4.

⁶⁶ *Ciu.* 9.4.

the matter on the “the authority of Antiochus, Cicero’s master and his own.”⁶⁷ The important thing to note here is that Augustine uses the intractability of the Stoic-Peripatetic debate in that text to support his own argument for the necessity of positing a conception of eternal happiness to make sense of the puzzling relationship between virtues and external goods in a temporal happy life.

I now turn from the textual to the conceptual relationship between Augustine and the ancient debate. We are now in a position to better appreciate Augustine’s classification of goods in *De libero arbitrio* and Letter 140 by identifying its similarities and differences with the views expressed by other ancient philosophers, and by highlighting the way it relates to the Stoic-Peripatetic debate.

De libero arbitrio 1-2

Perhaps the most noteworthy thing about Augustine’s threefold classification of goods in *De libero arbitrio* 2.50 (virtues-soul-body) is that it is slightly different from the standard tripartition (soul-body-external) that first appears in Plato, comes to full expression in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (1098b13-14), and continues on in the Aristotelian tradition. The difference between these classifications is that Augustine distinguishes between the goods of the soul (e.g. reason, memory, will) and the virtues (e.g. prudence, temperance, courage, justice), whereas Aristotle does not. Aristotle also distinguishes between bodily and external goods and Augustine does not. The important similarity between the two, however, is that both Aristotle and Augustine call all three classes goods (Greek: *agatha*, Latin: *bona*). Neither author shows any interest in making a terminological distinction to express the difference in value between the classes –

⁶⁷ Ciu, 19.3. On the relationship of Varro’s *De philosophia* to Antiochus see J. Barnes, “Antiochus of Ascalon,” in *Philosophia Togata I: Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*. ed. M. Griffin and J. Barnes (New York: Oxford UP, 1989), 51-96.

especially as that difference exists between the virtues and the other goods. All three levels are deemed genuine goods.

Furthermore each author also reduces at times the threefold classification into a simpler distinction between the interior excellences of the soul (i.e. virtues) and all of the other goods external to them. Aristotle speaks of the two classes as the activities of the soul according to virtue and the external goods (*ta ekta agatha*, broadly construed). Augustine, as we saw in Letter 140, makes a distinction between interior and exterior goods. Interior goods are those goods acquired when one turns the use of the powers of the soul toward the creator, the good itself.

When Augustine presents his more expansive list of temporal goods in *De libero arbitrio* 1.32-33 (e.g. health, keen sense, strength, beauty, liberty, family, friendship, political power, wealth) he claims that the person who “uses [them] rightly displays their goodness ... [these goods] do not make him good or better, but rather are made good by him.”⁶⁸ As was mentioned above, this passage brings up the question of whether the least goods’ goodness *depends* in some way on the use to which they are put.⁶⁹ In this passage Augustine is clearly not following the Stoic terminological distinction between goods (*bona*) and advantages (*commoda*). He claims that the virtuous person displays the goodness (*bonum esse*) of these temporal things. Yet his further claim that these temporal things (*temporalia*) “do not make [the virtuous person] good or better, but are made good by him” clearly emphasizes the lower value of temporal goods in comparison to the

⁶⁸ *Lib. arb.* 1.33.

⁶⁹ The view that the *goodness* of external goods contingently depends on the *use* to which they are put is known as the “dependency thesis.” For an argument that Plato endorses this thesis in his later dialogues, especially in the *Laws*, see C. Bobonich, *Plato’s Utopia Recast: His Later Ethics and Politics* (New York: Oxford, 2002), chapter two: “Virtue, Goods, and Happiness in the *Laws*,” 89-215.

virtues.⁷⁰ This point has strong parallels with Socrates' argument in Plato's *Euthydemus*, and thus also with the Stoics. There is a structural parallel between Augustine's claim and the Stoic view expressed by Cato in *De finibus* 2.54. There, Cato presents virtue as the skill of putting all the advantages to good use. This does not necessarily align Augustine's view with that of the Stoics in any strict sense, for Peripatetic authors also developed this Socratic value distinction between classes of things while retaining their overall classification as *goods*. Arius Didymus provides a Peripatetic version of the same Socratic distinction:

Some [goods] are good for everyone, others are not good for everyone. Virtue and practical wisdom are good for everyone, for they benefit whoever possesses them; but wealth and rule and power are not good for everyone without any qualification, inasmuch as their being is defined by the use the good man makes of them. For it is clear that good men both seek out these things and benefit others by using them, but the things that the good man uses well the bad man uses badly, just as the things that the musical man uses well, the unmusical man uses badly. And in using such things badly the bad man is harmed, just as a horse which is a good horse benefits the man skilled in horsemanship, it does no little harm to the man who is not skilled.⁷¹

Both the Stoics and Peripatetics (or at least Peripatetics like Arius) hold the Socratic view of the relative value of temporal goods in comparison with the virtues.

As we saw in the passage from *City of God* above, Augustine is not interested in adopting a terminological distinction between goods and advantages in order to express their difference in degree of value. Nevertheless, the conceptual distinction between goods that make one good and goods that should be put to good use is common in Augustine's writings. He is particularly fond of using it in his sermons as a way of focusing his audience's attention on the superiority of interior goods:

⁷⁰ *Lib. arb.* 1.33.

⁷¹ Arius Didymus, 136.1-9, found in Book 2 of Stobaeus' *Eclogae*. See W.W. Fortenbaugh, ed., *On Stoic and Peripatetic Ethics: The Work of Arius Didymus* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1983), 139-59.

So there is a good that can make good, and there's a good with which you can do good. ... This is a good, and this is the good you are good with ... If you have the good you can be good with, do good with the good you are not good with. You've got some money, disburse it. By disbursing your money you increase your justice.⁷²

Do you mean to tell me you are not ashamed, if you want to have good things and to be bad yourself? You've got many good things: gold, silver, jewels, farms, household staffs, flocks of cattle and sheep. Be ashamed in the presence of your good things. Be good yourself as well. After all, what could be more unfortunate than you are, if your country seat is good, your clothes are good, your sheep good, finally your galoshes are good, and your soul is bad? So learn, friends, to ask for a good that is, if I may so put it, good-making; that is, a good that makes people good. A good will makes you good.⁷³

Augustine clearly endorses the Socratic point that the lesser goods are made good by the use to which the virtuous person puts them, while he also claims (in *De libero arbitrio* 1.33) that good use merely displays their inherent goodness (*bonum esse*).⁷⁴ Apparently the two approaches – making and displaying goodness – need not be understood as standing in conflict, in Augustine's view.

Letter 140 to Honoratus

As we noted above, in Letter 140 Augustine reduces the tripartite classification of goods to two (interior/exterior, etc.), and the middle goods (*media bona*) of the soul (reason, memory, and will) are positioned between the two. Among these powers of the soul, the will (*uoluntas*) is preeminent in the work of “distinguishing, weighing, and choosing” the superior goods. Just as in *De libero arbitrio*, in Letter 140 we find that the will is “mid-rank” and is uniquely involved in the work of clinging to the unchangeable good. It is also constantly tempted to “abandon” the unchangeable good by “turning away” and “fastening” itself to lower goods. The language of the metaphor speaks to the

⁷² S. 61.3.

⁷³ S. 105A.2.

⁷⁴ *Lib. arb.* 1.33.

important role of desire in the life of virtue (in both biblical and Platonic registers). The movement from a threefold to twofold classification of goods in Augustine's thought is terminological rather than structural, and it parallels the twofold distinction of virtues and external goods found in the Aristotelian tradition.

The movement of the soul, as it turns away from lower goods to the good itself, need not be interpreted as a refusal of exterior goods. Augustine presents clinging as a disposition and movement of the soul that is interwoven with the use and appreciation of exterior goods.⁷⁵ In Aristotelian parlance, we might say that, for Augustine, clinging is both a disposition and an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue. Exterior goods are a constituent part of the happy life, for Augustine, insofar as one learns to recognize and cling to the source of these goods through well-ordered desire and appropriate use of them. Clinging to the unchangeable good, in turn, strengthens one's ability to discern the different degrees of goodness among the goods that make one's life possible.

Yet, on Augustine's view, a much deeper problem lies underneath the question of the relative value of virtue and external goods for happiness: our tendency to subordinate interior goods (virtues) to our passionate pursuit of exterior ones. Solving this problem requires overcoming disordered desire (*cupiditas*).⁷⁶ The goal of this treatment is to match the intensity of one's desires according to the degree of each good – reserving the most intense love for the good itself. This is a common trope in Augustine's writings as well, especially his sermons:

God made you as something good under him, and he made something lower on the scale, under you as well. You are under one, you are over another. Don't give up the higher good and bow yourself down to the lower good. Be upright, and so be praised, because "all the upright of heart shall be praised" (Psalm 64:10). How

⁷⁵ *Lib. arb.* 1.33, *ep.* 140.3.

⁷⁶ *Lib. arb.* 1.33.

is it that you sin, after all, but by treating the things you have received for your use in a disordered way, or out of turn? Be a good user of lower things, and you will be an upright enjoyer of the higher good ... Why do you love silver? Because it's valuable, because it's worth a lot, because it is dear. Why do you love gold more? Because it is dearer. Silver is dear, gold dearer – God is dearness (that is, love) itself (*Argentum carum, aurum carius, Deus ipsa caritas est*).⁷⁷

Here, Augustine offers the primary definition of *caritas* (dearness, or value) as a divine attribute, supplementing his usual formulation of God as the good.

In Letter 140, Augustine uses the basic developmental structure of the argument from *oikeiōsis* as a way of describing the relation between our desire for lesser and greater goods. We begin as infants, he says, instinctually pursuing physical pleasure and avoiding physical injury. This is the life of temporal happiness. Yet as we “come to the age at which reason awakens” in us, we can “choose another life whose enjoyment lies in the mind and whose happiness is internal and eternal.”⁷⁸ Although this developmental argument may at first ring a Stoic bell, the doctrine of *oikeiōsis* can be found in Peripatetic and eclectic authors such as Arius Didymus and Antiochus as well.

In fact, Augustine's appeal to two types of happiness – as a way of understanding the movement of *oikeiōsis* – is structurally akin to the Stoic-Aristotelian synthesis of Antiochus.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, while structurally similar – as we will see in the next chapter – Augustine's conception of temporal and eternal happiness differs from Antiochus' in important ways. The Stoics firmly reject the twofold happiness view. Augustine's emphasis on desire and love (rather than mere reason) in the work of ordering one's preferences is more broadly Platonic (and biblical) compared with Seneca or Epictetus –

⁷⁷ S. 21.3-4.

⁷⁸ *Ep.* 140, 3.

⁷⁹ Antiochus also employs the developmental argument from *oikeiōsis* in *fin.* 5.65-69. I leave to the side the question of whether Antiochus received this doctrine directly from the Stoics or if it had an antecedent in Aristotle's school.

and also more comparable to Antiochus's doctrine of *oikeiōsis*.⁸⁰ The primacy of the will in transforming how one uses the other powers of the soul (such as reason) is a hallmark of Augustine's work.⁸¹

This will-driven, twofold-happiness model provides the basic lineaments of Augustine's ethical framework. Through the good use of our soul (especially our will) we turn the use of the lesser goods toward greater ones. The rational soul orders its loves by weighing and subordinating inferior goods to superior ones. This twofold classification of goods, and the general picture of the moral life that ensues, forms the basis of Augustine's ethical framework. He returns to it countless times in his letters and sermons and it fundamentally shapes his practical advice on prioritizing goods.

Letter 130 (411AD) – written to Proba, whom Augustine calls “a noble and wealthy governess of a large household” – provides a sparkling example of this framework. Proba was the widow of the Roman senator Sextus Petronius Probus and she took refuge in Africa just after the fall of Rome.⁸² She wrote to Augustine asking for advice on the spiritual life, particularly on prayer. In response, Augustine spends the bulk of his letter treating the question of what we ought to pray for, rather than how we ought to pray. His first piece of advice to Proba is to “pray for the happy life, for all human

⁸⁰ *Fin.* 5.65-69.

⁸¹ See A. Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 123-144. Cf. J. Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1992), 1-16, 86-111.

⁸² Proba was a member of the very distinguished *Anicii* family. Her husband, Sextus Petronius Probus, was dead by 395 AD and she remained a widow thereafter. She was in Rome during the sack of 410, but soon afterward fled to her estate in north Africa. She inherited large estates throughout Roman Asia, and used their revenues to support the poor, members of the clergy, and monasteries. She received *ep.* 130, 131, and 150 from Augustine, and *ep.* 169 from John Chrysostom. On Proba in general, see A.H.M. Jones et al., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, I: AD 260-395* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1971), 732-3, s.v. Anicia Faltonia Proba 3; Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 921, s.v. Proba. On her husband, Probus, in general, see J.R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, II: AD 395-527* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1980), 736-40, s.v. Sex. Claudius Petronius Probus 5.

beings want to have this.”⁸³ He then provides her with a brief definition of happiness drawn from Cicero’s *Hortensius*: “the happy life consists in having everything that one desires, and in not desiring anything that is improper.”⁸⁴ In response to the rhetorical question, “What is it that humans do not improperly desire?” Augustine provides Proba with a conventional list of external goods: bodily health, soundness of mind, marriage and family, political power, and wealth.⁸⁵ There is a right way to desire these things both for oneself and also for those one loves – a particularly salient fact for Proba to recognize, given that she is the governess (*matrona*) of such a large household. Finally, creating his characteristic spectrum of goods, Augustine then boils the whole list of bodily and external goods down to “health and friendship.”⁸⁶ “Health and friendship are sought for their own sake, but a sufficient amount of necessary goods is generally sought not for their own sake, but for the sake of these two.”⁸⁷

Once again, Augustine uses the developmental argument from *oikeiōsis* in this letter, exhorting Proba to extend her sphere of concern beyond the natural sphere of the household:

Friendship should not be bounded by narrow limits, for it embraces all to whom we owe affection and love, though it is inclined more eagerly toward some and more hesitantly toward others. It, however, extends even to enemies ... Thus there is no one in the human race to whom we do not owe love, even if not out of mutual love, at least on account of sharing in a common nature.⁸⁸

Again, this affection-oriented version of *oikeiōsis* (with its biblical emphasis on “owing” love to universal humanity) has deep resonances with Antiochus’ rendition.

⁸³ *Ep.* 130.9.

⁸⁴ *Ep.* 130.10.

⁸⁵ *Ep.* 130.11-12.

⁸⁶ *Ep.* 130.13. Cf. *ciu.* 19.13-14.

⁸⁷ *Ep.* 130.13. “Necessary” is an additional term that Augustine uses to describe the lower class of goods in this passage. Note that Augustine is making a distinction here between instrumental (“for the sake of”) and non-instrumental (“for their own sake”) goods within the broader class of lower (i.e. temporal) goods.

⁸⁸ *Ep.* 130.13.

Still, even if one obtains the whole array of “properly desired” bodily and external goods, both for oneself and for one’s friends, one should not be considered happy.

“Although the body may be thought healthy,” Augustine says, “the soul should in no way be thought healthy if it does not *prefer* eternal to temporal things” and “*refer* ... those things that are usefully and properly desired” toward God, the highest good.⁸⁹

The fundamentally practical ethical questions broached in this letter – such as the use of wealth, the use of political position, the use of marriage and family life – cannot be understood apart from these two principles: “preferring eternal goods to temporal ones” and “referring temporal ones toward God, the good.” These principles provide, in a nutshell, the heart of Augustine’s ethical advice. They capture the essence of how he views the appropriate human response to the two classes of goods: the higher are to be *preferred* and the lower are to be *referred*. “After all,” Augustine tells Proba, “one does not profitably live in time except by earning the merit by which he may live in eternity.”⁹⁰

Yet this pair of principles (to prefer and to refer), and this broad twofold classification of goods (temporal and eternal), leaves the reader with many unanswered questions. One wonders, for instance, what it means in particular cases to prefer eternal goods and to refer temporal ones. Are there eternal goods that can only be obtained by properly referring temporal ones? Do goods ever conflict on this model? If so, which

⁸⁹ *Ep.* 130.14. My own emphasis. Although there are important parallels between Augustine’s account of *preferring* and *referring* in Letter 130 and his distinction between proper use (*usus*) of temporal goods and enjoyment (*fruitio*) of eternal ones in *doct. chr.* 1.39-40, the accent mark in each passage is different. *Preferring* and *referring* in Letter 130 fundamentally relate to one’s capacity to distinguish between lower and higher goods, and to choose the better, whereas use and enjoyment in *On Christian Teaching* relate to one’s experience of those goods as sources of satisfaction. For the best account of Augustine’s distinction between use and enjoyment, see O. O’Donovan, “*Usus* and *Fruitio* in Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* I,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 33 (1982): 361-97.

⁹⁰ *Ep.* 130.14.

among them? Temporal and eternal? Temporal and temporal? Eternal and eternal? Do *preferring* and *referring* ever conflict? Given that all goods come by degree, can conflicts between them always be resolved by ranking them according to the twofold classification? Does a conflict between a temporal and an eternal good always amount to a conflict between an external good and a virtue? Are there grades within the two classes (i.e. grades of external goods and grades of virtues)? Furthermore, how do considerations of one's office (e.g. head of household, political official), role-specific obligations, context, and place within the providential unfolding of history complicate the principles of preferring and referring in Augustine's view (e.g. Proba's responsibility for the physical wellbeing of her household versus her responsibility to the poor)? How do such considerations affect how one ranks the relevant goods? Might different individuals necessarily (and justifiably) rank goods differently? It is to these questions of conflict, context, office, and history as they relate to the classification of goods that I turn in the chapters to follow.

For Augustine, good comes in degrees – temporal and eternal, exterior and interior, etc. And the rightly ordered will – perceiving and responding to this scale – desires in consistent measure. Augustine sides with the Peripatetics by appealing to this scale of goods, and he also agrees with their picture of a happy life that requires both interior and exterior goods. And, yet, as we will see throughout this dissertation, Augustine's theory of the degrees of good is uniquely his own.

In the next chapter I will provide an overview of Augustine's detailed rendition of the doctrine of *oikeiōsis* and consider the way it informs his advice on the right use of the goods associated with marriage and family life. In chapter three I turn to the proper use of

political goods (such as public office, power, and authority), and in chapter four I turn to the use of wealth. Recognizing the centrality of *oikeiōsis* in Augustine's theory of goods allows us to better grasp the connection that he posits between one's office and one's responsibility for tending particular temporal goods.

The uniqueness of Augustine's classification of goods is best understood when situated in the landscape of the ancient debate over virtue, goods, and happiness. The parallels and distinctions enable us to better understand how Augustine conceived of the moral life within a framework of the degrees of good. This implies a clearer intention on his part to approach questions of social and political ethics within a systematic framework than has hitherto been recognized by interpreters of his work.

Chapter 2

HOUSEHOLD GOODS

This chapter situates Augustine's teaching on the goods of marriage and celibacy – especially as that teaching is applied in his letters and sermons – within the broader framework of his classification of goods. In the first section, I will discuss Augustine's adaptation of the Stoic and Peripatetic doctrine of *oikeiōsis* ("social appropriation") as it relates to the goods of marriage and family life.¹ In section two, I will highlight the way Augustine ranks the goods of marriage and celibacy within the framework provided by

¹ Direct translation of the ancient Greek philosophical concept *oikeiōsis* is notoriously difficult, yet there is general consensus among scholars that it can be rendered along the lines of "appropriation," "recognition and appreciation of something as belonging to one's own," or "identifying with." There is also general consensus that this doctrine originated with the Stoics. For the minority view that *oikeiōsis* was not originally a Stoic doctrine, but rather one that came first from the Peripatetics (from Arius Didymus in particular) see H. von Arnim, *Arius Didymus' Abriss der peripatetischen Ethik* (Vienna-Leipzig: Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, 1926), 137, 157-61. M. Pohlenz, *Grundfragen der stoischen Philosophie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1940), 1-81, maintains that the presentation of *oikeiōsis* by Arius Didymus represents an integration of the original Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis* combined with the Peripatetic version given by the Academic "eclectic," Antiochus of Ascalon. For an account of the difference between Stoic and Peripatetic approaches to *oikeiōsis* see B. Inwood, "The Two Forms of *Oikeiōsis* in Arius and the Stoa," in *On Stoic and Peripatetic Ethics: The Work of Arius Didymus*, ed. W.W. Fortenbaugh (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1983), 190-201. Cf. Annas, *Morality of Happiness*, 180-187. There are debates about the importance of this concept for Hellenistic and Roman Stoic ethics in general. On this issue see Pohlenz, *Grundfragen*; C.O. Brink "Oikeiōsis and oikeiōtes: Theophrastus and Zeno on Nature in moral theory," *Phronesis* 1 (1956): 123-45; S.G. Pembroke, "Oikeiōsis," in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. A.A. Long (London: Continuum, 1996), 114-49; G. Striker, "The Role of *oikeiōsis* in Stoic Ethics," in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), 281-97; T. Engberg-Pedersen, *The Stoic Theory of Oikeiōsis* (Aarhus: Aarhus UP, 1990); R. Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993), 122-33; For Cicero's account of *oikeiōsis* see M. Schofield, "Two Stoic approaches to justice," in *Justice and Generosity: Studies in Hellenistic Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. A. Laks and M. Schofield (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995), 191-212; for the best general account of *oikeiōsis* as it appears in the writings of prominent Roman Stoics, see G. Reydam-Schils, *The Roman Stoics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 53-82.

his adaptation of *oikeiōsis*, which has not yet been recognized by interpreters of his teaching on marriage and sexuality. I will argue that it is precisely this framework that allows Augustine to hold the conflicting goods of marriage and celibacy together, affirming the goodness of each and identifying their deep interconnection. In the final section of the chapter, I will argue that Augustine's understanding of marriage and celibacy as *goods* in the framework of *oikeiōsis* allows him to affirm the superiority of celibacy over marriage (a ranking that he inherits from other Christian writers), while also appreciating the diverse ways people may relate to these goods and develop the virtues associated with them.

I. Oikeiōsis: Two Approaches to Friendship

The doctrine of social *oikeiōsis* plays a central role in Augustine's ethical writings and serves as a leitmotif in the philosophical vision that emerges from this dissertation. It provides a way of understanding the relationship between virtue and temporal goods in the formation of a moral life by merging a developmental account of human nature with decorum theory – thus allowing individuals to discern the goods that can be *fittingly*, or *appropriately*, desired in their own particular pursuit of a happy life. It is “fitting” (*decere*) for human beings, Augustine writes to Proba in Letter 130, to desire goods such as bodily wellbeing, marriage, children, sufficient wealth, and public office for oneself and for those whom one loves. Furthermore, the wide array of goods that can be fittingly desired in a happy human life, all, ultimately, boil down to two: health and friendship.² “Health (*incolumitas*) and friendship (*amicitia*) are sought for their own sake,” Augustine

² *Ep.* 130.11.

writes, “but a sufficient amount of necessary goods is generally sought not for their own sake, but for the sake of these two.”³

According to the doctrine of social *oikeiōsis*, health itself names the most fundamental friendship of all – that found between the body and soul.⁴ In a more expansive treatment of *oikeiōsis* in Book 19 of *The City of God*, Augustine notes:

For they [the Peripatetics] say – and they speak truly – that the first and greatest requirement of nature ... is that a man should cherish himself, and should for that reason naturally flee from death: that he should be a friend to himself, in that he should vehemently wish and desire to continue as a living creature and to remain alive in this conjunction of body and soul.⁵

In a parallel argument in Letter 140 to Honoratus, Augustine calls the conjunction of body and soul a “sweet companionship,” and he marvels at the instinctual power it holds in the preservation of human life: “All of us know that the day of death will certainly come, and almost all of us, nonetheless, try to put it off, even those who believe that they will live on happily after death. So great a power does the sweet companionship of the flesh and soul have! ‘For no one ever hates his own flesh’ (Ephesians 5:29).”⁶

Friendship, according to Augustine, is a bond of affection that unites two or more persons – or entities, as in the case of body and soul – in mutual sympathy.⁷ On the model of *oikeiōsis*, Augustine claims that the original friendship with oneself (expressed in our desire for self-preservation) can extend outward through procreation to form a wider bond of friendship with one’s mate and offspring. In *On the Good of Marriage (De bono coniugali)*, he notes that this outward movement is present in other animals as well:

³ *Ep.* 130.11.

⁴ Augustine endorses this view. See *ciu.* 19.4, *ep.* 140.16.

⁵ *Ciu.* 19.4.

⁶ *Ep.* 140.16. On Augustine’s view of natural self-love see the pertinent observations of T.J. van Bavel, “‘No one ever hated his own flesh.’ Eph 5:29 in Augustine,” *Augustiniana* 45 (1995): 45-93.

⁷ *Acad.* 3.13, *ep.* 258.1. Augustine’s views in these two texts are shaped through his encounter with Cicero’s *De amicitia* and *Laelius*. See I. Hadot, “Amicitia,” in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 1:287-93.

“This instinct for procreation is not entirely absent in animals, especially in the case of birds, which have an obvious concern for building nests and a similarity to married people in working together to have young and to provide food for them. That natural inclination of a mortal being has its own kind of chastity.”⁸

Yet procreation, and the nurture of offspring that ensues, is not the only – or even the primary – explanation of the marriage bond, for Augustine. There is a good in marriage rooted in “the natural sociability that exists between the sexes.”⁹ It is this sociability, or *friendship*, rooted in specifically *human* nature, that forms the primary good in marriage:

Every human being is part of the human race, and human nature is a social entity, and has naturally the great good and power of friendship. For this reason God wished to produce all persons out of one, so that they would be held together in their social relationships not only by similarity of race, but by the bond of kinship. The first natural bond of human society, therefore, is that of husband and wife ... The result is the bonding of society in its children.¹⁰

The good of marriage, as Augustine views it, is ultimately composed of three interdependent goods: the virtue of faithfulness (*fides*), offspring (*proles*), and sacred symbol (*sacramentum*).¹¹ The virtue of faithfulness is essential to marriage insofar as it forms the basis of the friendship. Without *fides* the marriage bond cannot exist, whereas without offspring – as in the cases of infertility or marital continence – the friendship

⁸ *B. coniug.* 22.

⁹ *B. coniug.* 3.

¹⁰ *B. coniug.* 1. There is debate among Stoic and Peripatetic authors on whether it is one’s spouse or offspring that initiates the bond of friendship in the household. For Augustine, it is desire for the friendship good of marriage, and not the impulse for procreation that moves one out into the second circle of *oikeiōsis*. This distances Augustine from the Stoic view expressed by Cato in *De finibus* 3 and aligns him more closely with the Antiochian picture found in *De finibus* 5, and, presumably, Varro’s *De philosophia*. It also coheres tightly with later Roman Stoic thinkers such as Hierocles and Musonius Rufus. For Musonius Rufus, marriage both includes procreation and goes well beyond it. Indeed, the marital friendship has profound value in and of itself, for him. For an excellent account of the later Roman Stoics on marriage, see Reydam-Schils, *Roman Stoics*, 143-59.

¹¹ *B. coniug.* 3-22.

good in marriage may flourish. This is most readily apparent in Augustine's encouragement of married couples to pursue marital continence.¹² The goods of faithfulness and offspring are inherently interwoven in the dynamism of creation and the needs of human society, in Augustine's view. Thus the pursuit of the higher virtue of marital continence should result from a shared commitment to and awareness of the ascetic and symbolic value entailed in renouncing such a profound temporal good. We will return to this below.

When Augustine speaks to Proba about the fittingness of desire for marriage and children, he affirms the role of friendship in the happy life implicit in social *oikeiōsis*. Indeed, the extending rings of concern for oneself and others in *oikeiōsis* do not stop with marriage and procreation. "Friendship should not be bounded by narrow limits,"

Augustine tells Proba:

for it embraces all to whom we owe affection, though it is inclined more eagerly toward some and more hesitantly toward others. It, however, extends even to enemies ... Thus there is no one in the human race to whom we do not owe love, even if not out of mutual love, at least on account of our sharing in a common nature ... we ought to pray that when we have these goods [health and friendship], we may retain them and that, when we do not have them, we may acquire them.¹³

According to *oikeiōsis*, friendship can extend, ultimately, all the way from oneself to the entire human race (and, for Augustine, this includes enemies, given Jesus' injunction in Matthew 5:44).¹⁴

¹² See Letter 127 to the married couple, Armentarius and Paulina.

¹³ *Ep.* 130.13.

¹⁴ For Augustine's view of enemy love, see R. Dodaro, "Inimicitia, inimicus," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. C. Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 2004-2010), 3:601-5. The impartial regard for humankind involved in widest-level *oikeiōsis* is also construed as "neighbor love" by certain Roman Stoics. See Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 11.1: "A property, too, of the rational soul, is love of one's neighbor." The question of whether this impartial regard extends, or remains extended, to enemies finds different answers in different Stoic authors. The most vigorous account of enemy love appears in Seneca, *De otio* 1.4, *De beneficiis* 7.2-5,

In Book 19 of *The City of God*, Augustine provides a précis of Antiochus' eclectic rendition of *oikeiōsis* (a fusion of Stoic and Peripatetic elements) and the extending borders of friendship:¹⁵

The philosophers [Antiochus and Plato's Old Academy] say also that [the] happy life is a social one: that it loves the good of friends as much as its own, and for their sake wishes for them what it wishes for itself. Such 'friends' may be those who dwell in the same household, such as a man's wife and children and whatever servants he has. Or they may be those who dwell in the place where he has his home: in a city, for example, so that a man's fellow citizens are also his friends. Or the term may extend to the whole world, so that the nations with which a man is united by his membership of human society are his 'friends'; or even to the universe itself, which we call heaven and earth, and to those whom the philosophers call gods, whom they hold to be a wise man's friends. We, however, are more accustomed to call them 'angels.'¹⁶

Augustine "readily approves" of the relation between sociability and the happy life presented in this picture of *oikeiōsis*.¹⁷ It helpfully highlights the way that the extending spheres of friendship (in marriage, family, society) are always embedded in institutions (household, city, nation).

Throughout his writings, Augustine repeatedly endorses the structural account of extending self-love found in *oikeiōsis*. Yet he is also deeply aware of how naïve and cheerful this approach to universal friendship sounds, and how difficult it is to achieve.

4.26, *De ira* 2.32. Seneca's emphasis in promoting enemy love is primarily on the cultivation of the interior disposition of the soul, rather than the wellbeing of the enemy.

¹⁵ One of the difficulties in detailing the specifics of Augustine's own understanding of *oikeiōsis* in Book 19 of *The City of God* results from his reliance on Marcus Varro's (no longer extant) *De philosophia*. Augustine mentions multiple times that Varro's presentation of philosophical ethics in *De philosophia* is presented on the authority of Antiochus (*auctore Antiocho*) (19.1, 3). This gives the reader an insight into the version of *oikeiōsis* to which Augustine is responding in Book 19. In *De philosophia*, Varro follows Antiochus' use of Carneades' division of ethical theories. See Cicero, *De finibus* 5.15. Antiochus was a member of Plato's Old Academy in the first century BC. The key feature of Antiochus' methodology (found in both Augustine's and Cicero's texts) is his insistence on lumping Academic, Peripatetic, and Stoic ethical theories together in a variety of, if not always consistent, ways. See Cicero, *De finibus* 5.22; 5.88-92. J. Barnes, "Antiochus of Ascalon," 51-96, notes, "It is thus not wholly plain what the [Antiochian] system purports to be: an Academic-Peripatetic construction later stolen and renamed by the Stoics? Or an Academic construction later renamed by the Stoics and pillaged by the Peripatetics?" Cf. Annas, *Morality of Happiness*, 180-187, 419-425.

¹⁶ *Ciu.* 19.3.

¹⁷ *Ciu.* 19.5.

Augustine often emphasizes the way that the limitations of human virtue, and the contingent circumstances governing bodily and social wellbeing, hinder the movement outward from oneself to others. For example, in *City of God* 19.5-9, he provides a detailed account of the manifold miseries that thwart human friendship at every level of *oikeiōsis*: infirmity, anxiety, jealousy, broken marriages, rebellious children, criminal behavior, domination, civil wars, conflict among nations – the list goes on.

This brings up one central puzzle in the doctrine of *oikeiōsis*: how does one get from the narrower rings of appropriation (in self-preservation and instinctual care for offspring) to the loftier heights of impartial regard for gods and humankind in general? In most cases, the instinctual impulses for self-preservation and procreation are self-evident, but what about friendship with the entire human race? Stoic and Peripatetic authors offer a variety of solutions to this puzzle, yet they all fundamentally share the same assumption: there are two approaches to friendship.¹⁸ The first, lower-level *oikeiōsis*, is inherent in the nature and impulse we share with other animals; it is rooted in self-preservation and care for offspring. The second, higher-level *oikeiōsis*, is inherent in specifically *human* nature and is anchored in the duty that we owe to the human race on account of our common nature.¹⁹ This brings up a debate between Stoic and Peripatetic authors on whether the duty of universal other-regard is rooted primarily in human

¹⁸ For an interpretation of these two approaches to friendship as “lower and higher-level *oikeiōsis*,” see M. Schofield, “Two Approaches to Justice,” 191-212; Reydams-Schils, *Roman Stoics*, chapter two: “From Self-Sufficiency to Human Bonding,” 53-82. Here “lower” denotes the bonds of friendship that originate in the instinctual drive for self-preservation and procreation, whereas “higher” marks the distinctively human bonds of friendship rooted in our shared affection or rationality (or both). It is important here to distinguish between “lower and higher-level *oikeiōsis*” as the two distinct approaches toward friendship (rooted in our lower and higher *nature*), and the “narrower and wider” circles of association to which these approaches lead. This is a point of potential confusion because, in Augustine’s view, the circles of friendship extend in both horizontal and vertical directions – that is, the transformative expansion of properly formed self-love that occurs in *oikeiōsis* is construed both in terms of height (lower/higher) and breadth (narrower/wider). We can summarize his view this way: higher-level *oikeiōsis* leads one to both higher- and wider-level forms of association. On the “widest” extension of love for all of humankind, see chapter four.

¹⁹ *Ep.* 130.14, 153.3, 155.14.

rationality or affection. For Stoics like Cicero's character, Cato (see *De finibus* 3), our duty to humanity results from our common *rational* nature. For Antiochus, concern for the human race is rooted primarily in love, or shared affection.²⁰ It is important to note that for all of the Stoics and Peripatetics, higher-level *oikeiōsis* does not necessarily cancel out the lower levels. Nor do the two types merely coexist in virtuous adults. Rather, as one matures, higher-level *oikeiōsis* subsumes and transforms the earlier mode. As we will see throughout this dissertation, an active social or political life does not necessarily need to be superseded or overcome by a philosophical or contemplative one in order to pursue the highest good. In Augustine's vision of the happy life there is a distinct revaluing of the active life akin to that of certain Roman Stoic thinkers and later Neoplatonists.²¹

For Augustine, the double commandment of love (Matthew 22:37-39) is the foundation of higher-level *oikeiōsis*. He presents obedience to these commands as the culmination of *oikeiōsis*: love for and friendship with God and neighbor.²² On his account, self-love (the first ring of friendship) and neighbor-love (the outermost human circle) must ultimately be redrawn and transformed by love for God, who is, as we have

²⁰ See Cicero, *De finibus* 5. On this point Augustine is much closer to the eclectic view of Antiochus. On the Stoic and Peripatetic debate on this question, see Reydam-Schils, *Roman Stoics*, 56-60.

²¹ At *ciu.* 19.19 (cf. *ciu.* 19.1) Augustine considers the social practices of Christians (*mores populi christiani*) in conjunction with the three kinds of life (*genera uitae*), contemplative, active and mixed, which Varro presents in *De philosophia*. He adapts the content of Varro's categories so that the contemplative life is associated with the study of philosophical truth (*ueritas*), the active life is portrayed as loving service on behalf of one's neighbor (*caritas*), and the mixed life represents the attempts of contemplatives to pass on the fruit of their philosophical inquiry to others through teaching. See F.-J. Thonnard, "Les trois états de vie," in *Bibliothèque augustinienne. Œuvres de saint Augustin. La Cité de Dieu. Livres XIX-XXII: Triomphe de la cité céleste* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1960), 752-3. On the revaluation of the active life in later Neoplatonists such as Marinus of Neapolis, see D. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003), 46-9. Cf. On this revaluation as it appears in certain Roman Stoics, see Reydam-Schils, *Roman Stoics*, 1-13.

²² Cf. *ep.* 130.14; *ciu.* 19.13-17.

seen, the good itself. Only in this way can self- and neighbor-love be healed and elevated to the level of genuine friendship.

This brings up the question – for the Stoics, Peripatetics, and Augustine – of whether or not higher-level *oikeiōsis* might, in certain cases, make the narrower rings (e.g. marriage, children) unnecessary. Although the achievement of higher-level *oikeiōsis* does not necessarily cancel them out, might the rational and affective pursuit of higher-level *oikeiōsis* alter the necessity or desirability of the narrower forms of friendship that result from the instinctual impulse for procreation? Virtue must be present at every level of *oikeiōsis* in order for each relationship and corresponding institution to become a site of genuine friendship. Does the acquisition of the virtues that result from higher-level *oikeiōsis* entail the abandonment of the virtues necessary for the narrower-forms of friendship? Furthermore, are there new models of friendship (and corresponding communities and institutions) generated through higher-level *oikeiōsis*? That is, are there relationships and institutions that are not accounted for on the Roman Stoic and Peripatetic models of extending friendship? It is to these questions that I now turn through an examination of Augustine’s correspondence with the household of Proba.²³

²³ See *ep.* 130, 131, 150, 188, *b. uid.* Augustine’s correspondence with the household of Proba includes his letters to Proba’s daughter-in-law, Juliana (*ep.* 150) and granddaughter, Demetrias (*ep.* 188). Both the style and content of Augustine’s advice in this correspondence reveal an intimacy and warmth suited to the subject matter. See C. Conybeare, “The Spaces between Letters: Augustine’s Correspondence with Women,” in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. L. Olson and K. Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 57-72. See also M. Vessey’s reply in the same volume, “Response to Catherine Conybeare: Women of Letters?,” 73-96. Conybeare rightly points out that Augustine’s letters to the household of Proba, “bespeak a cordiality and closeness of involvement not normally attributed to him” (60). She presents her reading against the views of E. Clark, “‘Adam’s Only Companion’: Augustine and the Early Christian Debate on Marriage,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 21 (1986): 139-62; and K. Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine’s Writing on Women* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1995), who both suggest that Augustine’s life in Hippo was lived entirely in a man’s world. Power concludes that, “[f]rom the evidence, one might say he [Augustine] has male friends and female correspondents” (110). Conybeare also presents her reading of Augustine’s correspondence with the household of Proba against the views of K. Cooper, “Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992): 150-64, who argues that

II. The Goods of Marriage and Celibacy

In Letter 130, Augustine tells Proba – who is the “noble and wealthy *matrona* of a very large household” – that a happy life consists in having everything that she wants and in not wanting “anything which is not proper (*deceat*).”²⁴ The first things that are properly desired, beyond one’s own physical wellbeing, are marriage and children.²⁵ Yet wanting and having these goods – and all of the other goods necessary for their maintenance, e.g. wealth and power – is still not sufficient for the happy life.

One man wants to marry; another who has been widowed chooses to live from now on in continence. Another wants to experience no intercourse, even in marriage. Even if here one thing is found to be better than another, we cannot, nonetheless say that anyone of them wants something improperly ... For they have something that it is not improper to want. But if they do not have other greater and better things and ones richer in usefulness [*utilitas*] and moral beauty [*decor*], they are still far distant from the happy life.²⁶

The first set of goods that are “greater” than the properly desired external goods are the virtues. For without virtue, the temporal goods of health and friendship no longer deserve to be called goods insofar as they are put to bad use. “Human beings do not become good because of such goods,” Augustine tells Proba, “but having been made good by other means they make these things good by using them well.”²⁷

For Augustine, marriage and offspring are “temporal goods necessary for the sake of other goods” – the goods of friendship.²⁸ It is not the case, however, that, a spouse or a child (as a human person) is a temporal, instrumental good necessary for the sake of

“women” appear in Augustine’s writings merely as a trope in a power struggle with other male authors. Cf. P. Laurence, “Proba, Juliana, et Démetrias. Le Christianisme des femmes de la gens Anicia dans la première du Ve siècle,” *Revue des études augustinienes* 48 (2002): 131-63.

²⁴ *Ep.* 130.10-11. Augustine draws this definition of the happy life from Cicero’s *Hortensius*. Cf. *beata u.* 10, *conf.* 3.8, *trin.* 13.8.

²⁵ *Ep.* 130.11.

²⁶ *Ep.* 130.11.

²⁷ *Ep.* 130.3.

²⁸ *B. coniug.* 9.

something else. When Augustine speaks of marriage and procreation as temporal goods necessary for the sake of friendship he is thinking of these relationship-goods as they relate instrumentally to one's pursuit of the happy life. The ontological goodness of human persons, in themselves, is a different category of goodness (as they are each made in the image of God), and is an entirely different question from that of the goodness of one's relationship to those persons in the pursuit of the highest good. Failure to recognize this distinction between the good of friendship and the goodness of human persons accounts for much of the confusion regarding Augustine's distinction of *usus* and *fruitio* in regard to neighbor-love in Book 1 of *De doctrina Christiana*.

To acquire the greater goods, Augustine tells Proba, the temporal goods necessary for health and friendship "must be cast aside, as long as they are temporal."²⁹ Furthermore, all of the temporal goods that are "usefully and properly desired [e.g. health, marriage, children, power, and wealth] must undoubtedly be *referred* to that one life by which one lives for God and from God. In him we, of course, love ourselves if we love God, and by the other commandment we truly in that way love our neighbors as ourselves if we bring them, to the extent that we can, to a similar love of God."³⁰ By loving God, one learns what it means to love oneself and one's neighbor as oneself.³¹ Augustine presents the double commandment of love to Proba as higher-level *oikeiōsis*. In obeying the commands, one's impulse for self-preservation – extending into family life – and one's duty to God and neighbor merge into affective harmony.

Implicit in Augustine's advice on the happy life to Proba, however, is a tension, or perhaps even an irresolvable conflict, between two ways of acquiring virtue and

²⁹ *Ep.* 130.14.

³⁰ *Ep.* 130.14.

³¹ *Ep.* 130.14.

transforming lower-level *oikeiōsis*. Does *preferring* the better goods require permanently casting temporal ones aside?³² Or does it simply mean *referring* one's use of them toward God?³³ Both ways of relating to temporal goods – and of pursuing higher-level *oikeiōsis* – seem plausible, yet they also seem to run in opposite directions, requiring incompatible actions and lifestyles. The first method of transforming lower-level *oikeiōsis* requires a literal rejection of some, or all, of the temporal goods necessary for friendship (e.g. marriage and family life). The second method demands reference – not rejection – of the *use* of these goods toward their end in God. So the question arises: are marriage and children the sort of temporal goods that must be cast aside in the work of transforming lower-level *oikeiōsis*, or are they to be referred toward eternal goods through the proper orientation of affection inscribed in the double commandment of love? Alternatively, are both methods of transformation valid, depending on one's gifts and circumstances? To get at these questions, we must read Letter 130 in the context of Augustine's wider correspondence with the women in Proba's household on the goods of marriage and celibacy.

At various points in these letters, Augustine signals that his correspondence with each individual woman in Proba's household is an open conversation. He expects that the women will be familiar with what he has said in his other letters and in the various treatises he sends along.³⁴ In fact, Augustine's treatise, *On the Good of Widowhood* (*De bono uiduitate*) is composed in the form of a letter, written to Proba's daughter-in-law,

³² *Ep.* 130.14.

³³ *Ep.* 130.14.

³⁴ See especially *b. uid.* 29.

Juliana.³⁵ It is a meditation on the *good* of celibacy as it relates to the good of marriage and it must be read in relation to his other treatises on the subject, *Holy Virginitate* (*De sancta uirginitate*) and *On the Good of Marriage* (*De bono coniugali*).³⁶

“On every question relating to the moral life,” Augustine writes to Juliana, “there is need not only for instruction (*doctrina*) but also encouragement (*exhortatio*). With the instruction we will know what we ought to do, and with the encouragement we will be motivated to do what we know we ought to.”³⁷ This couplet recalls Augustine’s conception of the twin consequences of original sin in the human soul – ignorance (*ignorantia*) and weakness (*infirmitas*) – and establishes the necessary role of instruction and encouragement in overcoming the soul’s defects.³⁸ Letters treating moral questions should provide both. Augustine begins his letter to Juliana with instruction (which consists primarily of an extended commentary on Paul’s discussion of marriage and celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7) and then proceeds to exhort her to choose the life of a celibate widow. “It was very appropriate that I composed this treatise about celibacy in

³⁵ On Juliana in general, see Jones et al., *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, I: AD 260-395*, 468, s.v. Anicia Juliana 2. Some of Augustine’s longer letters are treatises in themselves and, accordingly, are given the title “book” by him. Nine such letters are listed in *Retractiones* (*ep.* 54, 55, 102, 140, 147, 166, 167, 185, 187). *De bono uiduitate* and these nine letters highlight the continuity between Augustine’s letters and treatises and, what is more, they testify to his sense of the substance of the ideas expressed in the letters.

³⁶ *B. uid.* 19. 29.

³⁷ *B. uid.* 1.

³⁸ When Augustine uses the terms “ignorance” in the context of original sin, he refers to an incapacity to know oneself, others, and God with utter moral clarity. Ignorance therefore prevents the soul from seeing itself in relation to the highest good, or understanding completely the motivations behind its own moral choices. On *ignorantia* in general, see *diu. qu.* 64.7, *lib. arb.* 3.51-3, *pecc. mer.* 1.65, 2.26, 2.48; as an obstacle to self-knowledge, see *ep.* 140.52, *en. Ps.* 30(2).13, 61.21, 106.6., 118.5, s. *Guelf.* 32.8; as an obstacle to knowledge of others: *en. Ps.* 30(2).13, s. *Guelf.* 12.3, *spec.* 23; as an obstacle to knowledge of God: *ep.* 140.81, 186.16, *spec.* 34, *en. Ps.* 41.2, 118.1, *ciu.* 11.1; on the loss of recognition of the highest good as a result of the Fall, see *en. Ps.* 70.6-8, *pecc. mer.* 2.27. At *spir. et litt.* 64, Augustine illustrates his understanding of *ignorantia* through the paradox of not knowing what justice requires even though Christ has given the double commandment of love (Matthew 22:37-39) as an instruction. Moral “weakness” explains the soul’s overall inability or unwillingness to act virtuously. For Augustine, *infirmitas* pertains to the disordered desires and fears that stand in competition with the divine will. See *pecc. mer.* 2.3. Ignorance and weakness, like the intellect and will to which they correspond, are conditions that interact with one another within the soul, and should not be considered as separate disorders.

widowhood for you [Juliana] rather than her [Proba], since you have still to overcome what her age has already overcome for her.”³⁹

Augustine favors the intimacy and particularity of the letter when providing instruction and encouragement on the non-obligatory “counsels of perfection” – such as poverty and celibacy.⁴⁰ The counsels of perfection involve voluntary commitment to a way of life for which only an individual herself can discern if she is fit. Furthermore, it requires sensitivity to one’s interior life and circumstances in order for the greater goods to be recognized as *gifts* one has been given (Cf. Letters 157 and 188). Augustine often tailors his instruction (*doctrina*) on a moral question to the encouragement (*exhortatio*) he offers, and he fits both to the particular details of his correspondent’s life. For example, in Letter 130 to Proba, he does not rank the goods associated with marriage and celibacy. Does he omit the ranking in this case because, as he mentions to Juliana, the good of celibate widowhood has already been obtained for Proba by her old age? In the letter to Juliana, the ranking is clear, and his exhortation to celibacy is vigorous – presumably because obtaining the superior good requires a higher level of resolve on her part in order to reject the good of remarrying. Augustine’s instruction on the goods of celibacy and marital continence in his letters contain warm and sympathetic exhortations to pursue these higher goods.⁴¹

³⁹ *B. uid.* 29.

⁴⁰ For the “counsels of perfection,” see *ep.* 157.29, 157.33, s. 85.1. Augustine’s “revolutionary tactics as a letter writer,” and his improvisation in the history of epistolary practice has been carefully studied in Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians*, chapter one: “Rebuke, Friendship, and Community,” 27-62. Ebbeler’s focus in her book is different from mine: she is interested in letters that contain Augustine’s correction of fellow Christians, whereas I highlight the moral advice (“instruction” and “encouragement”) Augustine offers laypeople on how to use the temporal goods of sexual intimacy, public office, and wealth.

⁴¹ For one sparkling example, see Augustine’s exhortation to the married couple, Armentarius and Paulina in Letter 127. It appears that they were having difficulty fulfilling their shared commitment to the virtue of continence. Augustine encourages them to press on, and to let their souls be healed and expanded together by giving themselves to God: “In order that one’s will may be perfect, it is necessary that it be in good

Augustine ranks the goods of marriage and celibacy in this order: first, there is the good of marriage, above this is the good of widowhood, and above both of these is lifelong virginity.⁴² The good of celibacy (in both widowhood and virginity) ranks above the good of marriage for three different kinds of reason: eschatological, ontological, and those related to higher-level *oikeiōsis*.⁴³

First, although the goods of marriage and celibacy both have an important eschatological dimension, for Augustine, the eschatological status of celibacy is higher than the good of marriage, which has only a symbolic significance. He argues, following Paul's teaching in Ephesians 5:25-33, that a chaste Christian marriage is a sacred symbol (*magnum sacramentum*) of the relationship between Christ and the church. *Magnum sacramentum* is the Latin translation of Paul's claim in Ephesians 5 that the union of husband and wife is a *great mystery* and that it refers to Christ and the church. Celibate Christian women, on the other hand, forego physical marriage in order to marry themselves to Christ in this life. Augustine exhorts both Juliana (and her daughter Demetrias, who has recently taken a vow of lifelong virginity), to cling to Christ and: "By means of him run to him; with his gift be pleasing to him; live in him, with him, and by him. With sincere feelings and in sacred chastity, love to be loved by a spouse like that ... Rejecting marriage ... you, mother and daughter, both have found the one you

health, but it will be in good health if it does not flee from the doctor by whose grace alone it can be healed of the disease of harmful desires ... Give to God what you have vowed because that is you yourselves, and you should give yourselves to him from whom you have your being. Give this to God, I beg you. After all, what you give to him will not be lessened by giving it but it will rather be preserved and increased ... For human beings owe themselves to God, and in order to be happy they must give themselves to him from whom they have received their being" (*ep.* 127.5-6).

⁴² *B. coniug.* 3-22, 32.

⁴³ I will not explore all of Augustine's distinctions between the goods of celibacy (e.g. widowhood and virginity) and the goods of marriage (e.g. chastity and offspring). I want to compare the broader contours of Augustine's distinction between the goods of marriage and celibacy.

must please with the beauty [of your virtues].”⁴⁴ In another letter to Proba, Augustine praises her granddaughter, Demetrias, saying: “Though her human marriage was already arranged [she] preferred the spiritual embrace of that husband, more handsome than the sons of men.”⁴⁵

The eschatological dimension of the good of marriage is primarily found in its symbolic representation of a relationship between Christ and the church that will be found in eternity. Celibate women marry themselves to Christ on earth, in the here and now, foregoing the temporal good of marriage out of a longing for Christ’s spiritual embrace. Celibacy is a visceral witness to the priority of the first and greatest commandment. The first step of *oikeiōsis* for the celibate person, then, is a giant step toward the end; it is marriage and procreation of a completely different order.⁴⁶

Second, the good of celibacy has a higher ontological status than the good of marriage, in Augustine’s view, insofar as it is an imitation of angelic life. Writing to congratulate Proba and Juliana on the news of Demetrias’s vow of virginity, Augustine praises the celibate women of the household for their “union with God” and the happiness this brings to the whole household:

For the children of Anicius have chosen more generously to bring happiness to so illustrious a family by forgoing marriage than to increase in numbers by bearing children, and by imitating the life of the angels now in the flesh than by increasing the number of mortals in the flesh. It is a richer and more fecund happiness [to cling] to a marriage that has no end.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *B. uid.* 23-24.

⁴⁵ *Ep.* 188.1. Jerome described Demetrias as among “the noblest and richest” persons in the world (*ep.* 130.1). In 414 AD Demetrias abandoned her plan of marriage and decided to remain a virgin – devoting her life to prayer and works of mercy instead. She received letters from Jerome (*ep.* 130) and Pelagius (*ep. ad Demetriadem*) in praise of her decision. Augustine also wrote in approval to her mother and grandmother (*ep.* 150, 188). On Demetrias in general, see Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, II: AD 395-527*, 351-2, s.v. Demetrias.

⁴⁶ See *ep.* 150 on the celibate person’s procreation of “spiritual children” through prayer and good works. Cf. Plato, *Symposium* 206b1-e7.

⁴⁷ *Ep.* 150.

The theme of celibacy as an earthly imitation of angelic life is a common trope in Augustine's teaching and results from his interpretation of Jesus' claim in Matthew 22:30: "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."⁴⁸ This verse intertwines both the eschatological and ontological dimensions of the good of celibacy. Insofar as self-preservation and procreation are instincts that we share with animals of a lower ontological order (e.g. birds), the desire to forego marriage is an imitation of creatures above us on the scale of being.⁴⁹

Third, the good of celibacy potentially allows one to achieve a higher level of *oikeiōsis* (friendship with God and neighbors outside one's household) than is available to those who begin *oikeiōsis* in the good of marriage. By *preferring* spiritual marriage to Christ and foregoing the first step of friendship in physical marriage and procreation (or foregoing it on the second round, as in the case of widowhood), the celibate person has the opportunity to advance further into the outer rings of *oikeiōsis*: both in love for God and love of neighbors in the form of the stranger, foreigner, needy, sick, and enemy.⁵⁰ Augustine exhorts Proba to balance the duties of her large household with the widow's vocation of prayer and the wide-angle view of friendship that embraces the entire "human race" and "extends even to enemies."⁵¹ The good of celibacy also provides access to a new form of "holy friendship" that anticipates the friendship that will be experienced in the heavenly city.⁵²

⁴⁸ *B. coniug.* 8. All biblical quotations in this dissertation that stand outside of Augustine's texts are from the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise noted.

⁴⁹ *B. coniug.* 22. Cf. *ciu.* 11.16.

⁵⁰ Note the two movements in Augustine's account of *oikeiōsis* – horizontal and vertical.

⁵¹ *Ep.* 130.13.

⁵² *B. coniug.* 9. At the end, in the community of the "city of God," Augustine claims that the two movements of *oikeiōsis* – horizontal and vertical – will culminate and find a hidden harmony. See *ciu.* 19.17.

Augustine encourages Juliana to “reclaim” whatever “attention” she would have otherwise devoted to a husband and “redirect” it toward God. He exhorts her to trade carnal pleasures for spiritual ones, devoting herself to “reading, prayer, the psalms, good thoughts, being occupied with good works, looking forward to the next life, having one’s heart on high, and giving thanks for all these things to the Father of lights, from whom undoubtedly, as the scripture attests, ‘every excellent thing we receive and every perfect gift’ (James 1:17) comes to us.”⁵³ Augustine presents this exhortation to Juliana as an interpretation of Paul’s admonition to widows found in 1 Corinthians: “A woman who is not married is concerned about what has to do with the Lord, in order to be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the affairs of the world and how to please her husband” (1 Corinthians 7:34).

We see in Augustine’s instruction on, and exhortation to, the good of celibacy the movement of the double commandment of love as the way toward higher-level *oikeiōsis*. The celibate is called to take whatever time, attention, and resources he or she would have devoted to marriage and family life and to redirect this toward God and toward the neighbors who fall outside the smaller friendship-circle of the household.⁵⁴ In this way the household becomes a site of prayer and hospitality that can be transformed into a new sort of institution, different from the traditional *domus*. In his letter on widowhood to Juliana, Augustine refers to her household as a domestic church (*domestica ... ecclesia*).⁵⁵ In Letter 188, he tells Juliana that he regards her “home as no small church of

⁵³ *B. uid.* 26.

⁵⁴ See *b. uid.* 26. Augustine tells Juliana to beware of turning her desire for marriage into a desire for riches. He encourages her to counter this tendency by devoting her extra time and resources to the poor and needy.

⁵⁵ *B. uid.* 29.

Christ.”⁵⁶ This brings up an important connection between the good of celibacy as a lifestyle and the new circles of friendship, communities, and institutions (e.g. church and monastery) that it generates – institutions not present in traditional Stoic and Peripatetic accounts of *oikeiōsis*. Understanding the way these communities fit into Augustine’s Christian vision of *oikeiōsis* is central to understanding his framework of goods.

Sometime during his episcopacy, Augustine wrote to Laetus, a Christian layman from Africa who had entered a monastery but left after his father’s death because of his attachment to his mother and family.⁵⁷ Augustine encourages Laetus to remain attentive to the needs of his mother and family in the wake of his father’s death. Yet he also warns him of a love for temporal goods that can “tie [him] down and prevent [him] from obtaining not the personal goods [of the household] that pass away in time, but the common goods that last for eternity.”⁵⁸ Augustine encourages Laetus to come out of the cramped confines of his merely temporal, “private love” for those in his mother’s household and to grow into the open air of “a public love in the house of God.”⁵⁹

The gist of Augustine’s letter to Laetus is found in a contrast between the temporal, personal goods and private love of the human household, and the eternal, common goods and public love of God’s household. It raises a complex tangle of issues

⁵⁶ *Ep.* 188.3. This expression, “domestic church” was used of monastic communities centered in the homes of aristocratic Christians. See Jerome, *ep.* 30.14, who speaks of the household of Paula as a *domestica ecclesia*. For general discussion of this hybrid institution as it appears in ancient Christianity, see D.G. Hunter, “The Domestic Church and the Early Church: The Household as Context for Christianization in Late Antiquity,” in *The Household of God and Local Households*, ed. T. Knieps-Port le Roi, et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 221-34. On the profound continuity between monastic and marital spirituality in Augustine’s thought, see C. Harrison, “Marriage and Monasticism,” in *Studia Patristica* 33, ed. E.A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 94-9. For an excellent overview of the changing context of the Roman Christian household in late-fourth and early-fifth century north Africa, see B.D. Shaw, “The Family in Late Antiquity: The Experience of Augustine,” *Past and Present* 115 (1987): 3-51.

⁵⁷ See Letter 243 to Laetus. On Laetus in general, see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 623-4, s.v. Laetus 1; Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, II: AD 395-527*, 654, s.v. Laetus 1.

⁵⁸ *Ep.* 243.3.

⁵⁹ *Ep.* 243.3.

regarding Laetus's relationship to his mother and the inherent relationship between the good of celibacy and the monastic life. It also raises a question about the relationship between the goods of voluntary poverty and wealth, which I treat in chapter four. What is important here is taking note of Augustine's reference to both the church and the monastery as the household (*domus*) of God. Augustine claims that the church and monastery are institutions involving a type of friendship that can transform our temporal, private love for personal goods into a public love for common goods that will last for eternity.⁶⁰ In this letter, Augustine introduces a new circle into the movement of *oikeiōsis*: a divine household where God is father and church is mother, both "giving birth to spiritual children by the blood of the martyrs" and the water of baptism.⁶¹ Augustine is also careful to insist that the divine household does not entirely supersede the temporal one. Nor are the two households in competition. Laetus still owes the duty of affection to his mother and family. Nevertheless, the new household promises to transform Laetus' understanding of both temporal and eternal goods and private and public love. Augustine urges Laetus not to ignore his mother's voice any longer.⁶²

⁶⁰ The expression "the common good" can be used to render a number of different Latin terms used by Augustine, including: *bonum commune*, *res communis*, and *res publica*. It stands in contradistinction to one's "private" (*proprius* and/or *priuatus*) good. The prime enemy of the common good is a pride-filled self-love (*amor sui*) aimed at domination and privatization. See *Gn. litt.* 11.15. The idea of a good shared in common by a number of different individuals, without diminishment, and without causing envy among its lovers, is a constant theme from Augustine's earliest writings (*sol.* 1.22, dating from 386-7 AD) to the end (s. 355.2, c. 425-6 AD). Goods such as happiness and wisdom are "common," in Augustine's view. In *Soliloquies* 1.22, Augustine employs the image of wisdom in her naked beauty showing herself, chastely, to a privileged few who seek to embrace her for her own sake. By loving a common beauty together these seekers become friends. God, the highest good, for Augustine, is the quintessential common good. See s. 355.2. Cf. G. Madec, "Le communisme spirituel," in *Homo Spiritualis*. Festgabe für Luc Verheijen OSA, ed. C. Mayer and K.H. Chelius (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1987), 225-39; R.A. Markus, "De Ciuitate Dei: Pride and the Common Good," *Augustiniana* 1990: 245-59; R. Canning, "St. Augustine's Vocabulary of the Common Good and the Place of the Love of Neighbour," in *Studia Patristica* vol. 33, ed. E.A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 48-54.

⁶¹ *Ep.* 243.8. "Mother Church is also the mother of your mother."

⁶² *Ep.* 243.6-8.

That the new friendships and “public love” made possible by practicing the good of celibacy should not wipe out familial affection or household friendships is vividly depicted in Augustine’s letter to a virgin called Sapida.⁶³ In that letter, we find a stirring affirmation of the ongoing significance of the friendship that exists between siblings in the context of a celibate life. Augustine writes to console Sapida after the death of her brother Timothy, a deacon in the church at Hippo. Sapida had woven a special tunic for her brother that he, unfortunately, never had a chance to wear. She sends the tunic on to Augustine, thinking that his wearing it might provide some consolation for her.⁶⁴ Augustine writes back thanking her and sympathizing with her grief. He encourages her, saying that Timothy’s love for her has not ceased but, rather, that it continues in eternity:

For the love by which Timothy loved and loves [you] has not perished because those things, which you mourn as having been removed from you, have passed away over time. That love remains preserved in its repository, and is “hidden with Christ in the Lord” (Colossians 3:3).⁶⁵

Augustine also notes that he has accepted the tunic and says, “when I wrote this, I had already begun to wear it.”⁶⁶ Augustine’s notion of the preservation of familial love in eternity and the image of him wearing Timothy’s tunic highlight just how interwoven the different manifestations of love and friendship are in his view.

As we have seen, the good of celibacy involves casting aside the “properly desired” goods of marriage and procreation.⁶⁷ As a way of life, it entails a reconfiguration of the traditional institution of the Roman household.⁶⁸ Although pursuing the eternal good of friendship with God and neighbor in the celibate way requires abandoning the

⁶³ Letter 263 to Sapida. On Sapida in general, see Mandouze, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, I, *Prosopographie de l’Afrique chrétienne (AD 303-533)*, 1032, s.v. Sapida.

⁶⁴ *Ep.* 263.1.

⁶⁵ *Ep.* 263.2.

⁶⁶ *Ep.* 263.1.

⁶⁷ *Ep.* 130.11-14.

⁶⁸ See note 56 on the “domestic church” at the household of Proba, Juliana, and Demetrias.

good of marriage, Augustine is adamant, even in his most forceful exhortations to widowhood in the letter to Juliana, that “the essential good of marriage is always a good.”⁶⁹ No matter one’s role, or one’s place in the unfolding of salvation history, marriage remains a good. It requires no further explanation or justification.⁷⁰ Although one may feel personally called to heed the counsel of perfection and pursue the loftier good of celibacy, this should never come at the expense of denigrating marriage.

In a letter to Hilary – written in opposition to the Pelagian doctrine of perfection – Augustine says, “Let these people [Pelagians] stop speaking contrary to the scriptures, and in their exhortations let them rouse people to greater goods without condemning lesser ones. Is it true, after all, that with their exhortations they can only lead people to holy virginity by condemning the bonds of marriage, since as the apostle teaches, ‘Each has his own gift from God, one this gift, another that’ (1 Corinthians 7:7)?”

Furthermore, the good of marriage provides a valid way of obtaining the greater goods, “the ones richer in usefulness and moral beauty” that Augustine tells Proba about.⁷¹ The married person can *refer* the goods of marriage and family life toward God through love. In this way they make *good use* of these goods in order to obtain greater ones (i.e. the eternal goods). Augustine’s mind never changes on the goodness of marriage and the validity of the married life for acquiring virtue and obtaining eternal goods. Here is a representative passage from Book 19 of *The City of God* on this subject:

God, therefore, is the most wise Creator and just Ordainer of all natures ... and has given to men certain good things appropriate to this life. These are: temporal

⁶⁹ *B. uid.* 11.

⁷⁰ But see *b. uid.* 11. Augustine does, at times, come close to recommending universal celibacy, given the unfolding of salvation history and the demands of the “present times.” In this he is following Paul’s advice in 1 Corinthians 7. Yet, even in his most forceful exhortations to celibacy, Augustine is careful to uphold the inherent dignity and goodness of marriage.

⁷¹ *Ep.* 130.11.

peace [i.e. temporal happiness], in proportion to the short span of a mortal life, consisting in bodily health and soundness of mind, and the society of one's own kind; and all things necessary for the preservation and recovery of this peace ... And these things are given under a most fair condition: that every mortal who makes right use of these goods suited to the peace of mortal men shall receive ampler and better goods, namely, the peace of immortality and the glory and honor appropriate to it, in an eternal life made fit for the enjoyment of God and of one's neighbor in God ... Now God teaches two chief precepts: that is, love of God and love of neighbor. In these precepts a man finds three things which he is to love: God, himself, and his neighbor; for a man who loves God does not err in loving himself. It follows, therefore, that he will care to ensure that his neighbor also loves God, since he is commanded to love his neighbor as himself. Also, as far as he can, he will do the same for his wife and his children ... Therefore [a man] must care for his own household; for the order of nature and human society itself gives him readier access to them, and greater opportunity of caring for them. Hence, the apostle says, 'But if anyone provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel' (1 Timothy 5:8).⁷²

To achieve the highest and widest levels of *oikeiōsis*, one does not necessarily need to omit the second ring of friendship (the good of marriage). Augustine consistently implores married people to love God with their whole being and, in so doing, to learn to love themselves, their spouses, and their children.⁷³ Mere familial affection will not cut it, Augustine often tells his congregation in Hippo, for even “tigers love their cubs.”⁷⁴ He repeatedly exhorts his audience to recognize their spouses and children as those “neighbors” whom God has commanded them to love.⁷⁵

Augustine freely applies the double commandment of love to the affections that form the bond of friendship in marriage and household. He exhorts married people to extend the boundary of their more animal-like, private loves upward and outward through a rich understanding of the common good that is eternal. God, Augustine preaches, is “the good which is not diminished by any number of shareholders – the good which

⁷² *Ciu.* 19.13-14.

⁷³ On Augustine's explanation of the debt of one's “being” that is owed to God, see *ep.* 127.5-6.

⁷⁴ *S.* 90A.6.

⁷⁵ *S.* 90A.7.

belongs in its entirety to each and every one, however many more come to possess it. Unless you love such a good as that, how will you ever love your neighbor like yourself?”⁷⁶ Thus, loving God – and oneself and one’s neighbor in God – can help one to overcome the conflict between self-love and altruism implicit in the structure of *oikeiōsis*. From the language of Augustine’s sermons, it is clear that one can grow to love God as the eternal common good in a traditional household, just as in a monastery.

Augustine’s most profound reflections on the way that love for God should transform household friendships appear in Letter 262 to Ecdicia – a wealthy Christian laywoman, mother, and wife.⁷⁷ The letter presents a case in which the pursuit of higher ascetic virtues leads one away from genuine neighbor love – and thus away from the good. We learn from the letter that Ecdicia has begun practicing the virtue of continence without her husband’s consent and, although her husband later joins her in pursuit of this “good which surpasses marital chastity,” Augustine thinks Ecdicia’s action has damaged the friendship good of her marriage.⁷⁸ What is more, Ecdicia’s unilateral pursuit of this higher virtue has revealed, in Augustine’s eyes, her own deep confusion about the good.⁷⁹ If love for the highest good is to transform one’s relationship to the temporal goods of sexual intimacy and procreation, it should also strengthen the virtue of faithfulness and bond of affection constitutive of the friendship good found in marriage. In pursuing the higher ascetic virtues of renunciation there is always a threat, in Augustine’s view, that one will end up pursuing a chimera rather than a genuine good. How can one discern

⁷⁶ S. 90A.8.

⁷⁷ On this text, see now C. Koch, “Augustine’s Letter to Ecdicia: A New Reading,” *Augustinian Studies* 31 (2000): 173-80; R. Krawiec, “‘From the Womb of the Church’: Monastic Families,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003): 283-307; Cooper, “Insinuations of Womanly Influence,” 159-60. On Ecdicia in general, see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 333-4, s.v. Ecdicia.

⁷⁸ *Ep.* 262.2.

⁷⁹ *Ep.* 262.2.

between them? One must consider how pursuing a virtue will affect the friendships goods one is accountable for tending. Augustine's analysis of Ecdicia's failure to love her husband provides a photographic negative of how the double commandment of love *should* transform the use of the goods of marriage and sexual union. We will revisit Ecdicia in chapters four and five below.

Through his adaptation of the doctrine of *oikeiōsis*, Augustine is able to describe how the goods of marriage and celibacy may be used in the ascent to loving God and neighbor; each presents a valid method of transforming lower-level *oikeiōsis*. Through the framework of goods envisioned in *oikeiōsis*, Augustine also demonstrates the interrelationship of the two lifestyles connected to these goods and their unintelligibility apart from one another. The relationship of marriage and celibacy ultimately witnesses, Augustine says, to the unity of creation and redemption and the harmony of the Old and New Testament.⁸⁰ Each in their own distinct way, and in different degrees of symbolic representation and ontological intensity, the goods of marriage and celibacy anticipate the eternal society of the city of God. Through the goods of children and fidelity, *proles* and *fides*, God provides the foundation of a community that brings order and stability to the human race – even as it suffers the consequences of original sin. The good of celibacy, on the other hand, makes possible a new devotion to God and neighbor that helps one imagine forms of communal life that not only anticipate but also proleptically participate in the holy friendship of the heavenly city.⁸¹

⁸⁰ *Ep.* 140.5.

⁸¹ *B. coniug.* 9. See the excellent discussion in D.G. Hunter, "Augustinian Pessimism: A New Look at Augustine's Teaching On Sex, Marriage and Celibacy," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 153-77.

III. Ranking the Goods of Marriage and Celibacy

In this third and final section of the chapter, I will highlight how Augustine's understanding of marriage and celibacy as *goods* – following the model of *oikeiōsis* – allows him to affirm the superiority of celibacy over marriage, while also leaving him sufficient conceptual leverage to problematize this ranking within his broader framework of goods.

Augustine ranks the good of marriage and celibacy in terms of the virtues associated with each way of life. Virtues, for Augustine, involve both a habitual disposition (*habitus*) and – although not necessarily always – a corresponding action (*opus*) associated with either the *good use* or *renunciation* of the goods necessary for the sake of temporal health and friendship.⁸² Through the acquisition of virtues, one may obtain eternal goods: the health of bodily immortality and the friendship with God and neighbor available in the heavenly city.⁸³

The central virtue associated with the good of marriage, as mentioned above, is *fides* (faithfulness).⁸⁴ *Fides*, and the mutual trust it generates, is a “spiritual good,” according to Augustine, standing above temporal bodily wellbeing and more fundamental to the good of marriage even than offspring.⁸⁵ It is obtained through the good use of the goods associated with marriage: sexual union, offspring, and the marital relationship itself.⁸⁶ The central virtue associated with celibacy is continence (*continentia*).⁸⁷ In the case of celibate widowhood and lifelong virginity, continence refers to abstinence from

⁸² *B. coniug.* 25.

⁸³ *Ciu.* 19.13.

⁸⁴ *B. uid.* 4, *b. coniug.* 4.

⁸⁵ *B. coniug.* 4.

⁸⁶ Chastity, for Augustine, is a sub-virtue of *fides*, referring, in a more restricted sense to self-control, modesty, and the good use of sexual union.

⁸⁷ *B. uid.*, 25, *b. coniug.*, 25.

both sexual intercourse and the marriage bond. There is also the special case of the virtue of marital continence, as glimpsed in the letter to Ecdicia above. The virtue of marital continence is superior to chastity, Augustine tells Ecdicia, because it involves a renunciation of the temporal goods of sexual union and procreation and, furthermore, because this renunciation can significantly aid one's pursuit of, and longing for, the highest good.⁸⁸

Augustine also supplies two other reasons for the superiority of marital continence. First, it helps married persons avoid the "venial sin" (*uenialis culpa*) of incontinent sex within marriage.⁸⁹ It is *incontinentia*, Augustine claims, that leads married persons to have sexual relations that exceed what is necessary to produce children.

The fact that married people, when overcome by desire, make use of one another beyond what is necessary for producing children, is something that should be placed among those things for which we say each day: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).⁹⁰

This passage highlights Augustine's sense of the pettiness of the "venial sin" involved in sexual incontinence within marriage. As David Hunter helpfully summarizes:

By thus linking the problem of incontinent sexuality in marriage to the daily recitation of the Lord's prayer, Augustine [provides] an important indication of how seriously (or non-seriously) he regarded such sins. By invoking the Lord's prayer, I would argue, Augustine set the "venial sin" or *uenialis culpa* of such acts within a framework that reduced it almost to triviality ... the virtual inevitability of these "daily sins" suggests that Augustine regarded them as symptomatic of a human weakness that was unlikely to be transcended in this life ... As Augustine had argued at length in *De bono coniugali*, it was the good of marriage that served to excuse the evil of marital continence.⁹¹

⁸⁸ *Ep.* 262.2.

⁸⁹ Augustine discusses the *uenialis culpa* in many places. See, e.g., *b. coniug.* 4.4-6.6, s. 9.18, and s. 354A.7-9. The term "venial," for Augustine, denotes something along the lines of "forgivable," "easily pardonable," and, in certain cases, "trivial."

⁹⁰ s. 354A.12. My own emphasis.

⁹¹ D.G. Hunter, "Augustine, Sermon 354A*: Its Place in His Thought on Marriage and Sexuality," *Augustinian Studies* 33 (2002): 39-60. The quotation is from pages 46-7. See also Hunter's helpful

By claiming that all conjugal acts not aimed toward the goal of offspring, and openness to new life, are venially sinful, Augustine intends to highlight how difficult it is to achieve sexual intimacy in marriage without fleeting moments of selfishness – whether in the form of self-satisfaction or domination.⁹² Thus the virtue of marital continence provides a direct, ascetic safeguard against this variety of venial sin, and, potentially, a cure for this particular expression of human weakness.

The second reason that marital continence is a higher virtue than chastity is that it affords one the time and energy necessary to cultivate new friendships and communities outside of the household – such as the *domestica ecclesia* found in the household of Proba. This point can be inferred from Augustine’s explanation of the benefits of widowhood in his letter to Juliana.

The virtue of continence is not solely associated with sexuality. In Augustine’s view, one can also practice continence by abstaining from many of the goods *necessary* for the promotion of temporal health and friendship (e.g. food, drink, sleep, marriage itself).⁹³ All manifestations of the virtue of continence (e.g. fasting, vigils, celibacy) rank higher than their counterpart virtues associated with the good use of the relevant temporal good. It is important to note the symbolic dimension of the ascetic practices Augustine has in mind – fasting, marital continence, and celibacy. Human society, for example, needs marital procreation to survive; but it also needs the celibacy of some as a symbolic

discussion of Augustine’s theology of marriage in the context of Christian marriage rites in north Africa: D.G. Hunter, “Augustine and the Making of Marriage in Roman North Africa,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003): 63-85.

⁹² See *ciu.* 14.22-26.

⁹³ *B. coniug.* 9.

reminder of the importance of singular love for the highest good and the forms of community that can result from such a love.

The virtue of continence trains one to live not only without certain temporal goods – for various lengths of time, depending on the goods – but, what is more, it trains one to live without *need* of these goods. Through continence one learns – slowly – to view these goods as *unnecessary* for happiness:

Whoever makes use of them [marriage and sleeping together] for the purpose for which they were bestowed does well [e.g. *proles* and *fides*]. Hence we do well to want good things when we have need of them; but we do better not wanting them than wanting them, because we are better off when we do not find them necessary. So too marriage is good, because it is good to bear children and to be the mother of a family; but not marrying is better because to have no need of this task is better even for human society.⁹⁴

Not having any need of the tasks of marriage and family life is better even for human society, Augustine claims, insofar as it allows one to devote oneself to God and non-household neighbors in a new way (as we saw in section two above).

Augustine also claims that continence is a virtue of the mind and, as such, it sometimes manifests itself in deeds (*opera*), while, at other times, it remains hidden as a habitual disposition of the soul (*habitus*).

By means of abstinence [*continentia*] in disposition [*habitus*] perfect souls have used the earthly goods needed as a means to other things without becoming attached to them, remaining able to refrain from using them when there is not that need. No one uses them well except the one who is able not to use them. Many indeed find it easier to abstain from making use of them than to control their use and use them properly. No one can use them wisely, unless he or she also is able to refrain from using them. It was because of this habitual disposition that Paul was able to say, ‘I know how to be well off and how to suffer want’ (Philippians 4:12). Anyone indeed can suffer want, but knowing how to suffer want is a quality of the great.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ *B. coniug.* 9.

⁹⁵ *B. coniug.* 25.

This passage suggests that continence is a higher virtue (or class of virtues), but, in some cases, it is actually easier to obtain than the virtues associated with the good use of a relevant temporal good (e.g. wine, sex). Knowing how to use temporal goods well requires a virtue related to *good use*. But knowing how to suffer want of those goods involves virtue of a higher order, for Augustine. Given the woundedness of the human will, and its propensity to cling harmfully to temporal goods through lust (*concupiscentia*) and disordered desire (*cupiditas*), it is an integral part of the reshaping and retraining of human desire for one to learn to be in need of these goods and, ultimately, to not be in need of them.⁹⁶ In the passage above, Augustine also signals the important interrelationship of the virtues associated with abstinence and renunciation and the virtues associated with the good use of earthly goods. In many cases, one must learn to use goods well by first learning to live without them for a time.

Augustine's claim that a virtue can be acquired while remaining hidden inwardly as a habitual disposition allows him to complicate the simple ranking of the goods of marriage and celibacy and to problematize the celibate person's claim to superiority over the married person. Although the virtue of continence associated with the higher good of celibacy ranks above the virtue of faithfulness in marriage, the good of martyrdom (and the virtue of *patientia* associated with the suffering of martyrs) ranks far above celibacy, for Augustine. Given Augustine's conception of virtues that can exist in disposition without being expressed in action, married people can acquire the virtue of *patientia* in disposition (*habitus*) even without undergoing the trial through which this virtue can

⁹⁶ See *ciu.* 19.17. Augustine claims that our resurrected bodies will not have any needs.

manifest itself in action.⁹⁷ Indeed many married people do have this virtue *in disposition*, on Augustine's view, while many celibate people lack it.⁹⁸

Augustine repeatedly points out that when we speak of the lower and higher goods of marriage and celibacy we are speaking of goods in abstraction, and not the people who have obtained the virtues relating to them. When we compare persons, he says, we do not compare them on the basis of a single virtue, but rather on the basis of them all: "A further consideration is that individuals are not compared with respect to just one virtue (*bonum*). It can happen that someone does not have some virtue (*bonum*) that someone else does have, but has another of greater worth."⁹⁹ Augustine further complicates the comparison of goods and persons by making the claim that each virtue can be acquired to a greater or lesser degree. For example, the virtue of obedience ranks above the good of celibacy and it can be acquired to a greater or lesser degree.¹⁰⁰ Therefore: "although [married chastity] is inferior to virginal chastity ... [nevertheless] a more obedient married woman should be more highly regarded than a less obedient virgin."¹⁰¹ These passages provide a sense of how complicated the ranking of goods can be when applied to persons and conceived of in terms of the virtues associated with each good.

Augustine firmly rejects the Stoic, and originally Socratic, thesis of the unity of the virtues.¹⁰² That is, Augustine teaches that one can acquire one virtue and yet lack other important ones. He also claims that one can achieve a virtue while still struggling

⁹⁷ *Uirg.* 47.

⁹⁸ *Uirg.* 47.

⁹⁹ *B. coniug.* 29.

¹⁰⁰ *B. coniug.* 29.

¹⁰¹ *B. coniug.* 30.

¹⁰² *Ep.* 167.11-12; Cf. Cicero, *De finibus* 3.48.

with its opposite, vice (e.g. the virtues of fidelity and marital chastity can remain intact in the presence of an ongoing struggle with sexual incontinence within a marriage).¹⁰³

Augustine teaches both that individual virtues come in varying degrees (i.e. virtues can be acquired to varying degrees by individuals) and that the virtues themselves come in varying degrees of goodness (i.e. there is a scale of virtues, as in the case of marital continence ranking above chastity).

Augustine's distinction between virtues that exist in disposition only, and those that exist in disposition and are manifest in action, further complicates the degrees to which a virtue can be acquired. Virtues that exist both in disposition and are manifest in action are better, in Augustine's mind. Yet, as in the case of martyrdom, the circumstances under which a virtue can manifest itself in action are not always up to us. This is true also with regard to the goods of marriage and celibacy. The highest manifestation of the virtue of continence is associated with the good of holy virginity. Yet this lifestyle requires a very particular set of circumstances, from early in one's life, in order for the virtue to be achieved. Furthermore, although the preeminent virtues associated with the goods of marriage and celibacy (*fides* and *continentia*) are mutually exclusive as ways of life, Augustine claims that Old Testament saints – such as the patriarchs – acquired the virtue of continence in disposition (*habitus*), even though not in action, as is evidenced by Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his offspring (*proles*).¹⁰⁴ This gives us a sense of the contingency and limitations that are placed on the acquisition of virtue, on Augustine's view. He thinks that all of these factors are relevant and should be taken into consideration when one moves from ranking the goods of marriage and

¹⁰³ S. 354A, *b. coniug.* 3-5.

¹⁰⁴ *B. coniug.* 27. Augustine is ambivalent on the possibility of married Christians obtaining the virtue of celibacy *merely* in disposition after the New Testament era.

celibacy, in abstraction, to an evaluation of the people who embody these goods and obtain the virtues relating to them.

In his correspondence with Juliana and Demetrias, Augustine is keen to remind them that celibacy, along with the virtues associated with it, is not merely a good (*bonum*) but also a gift (*munus*).¹⁰⁵ It must be received and gratefully acknowledged as such if it is to be practiced with appropriate humility and love. Those practicing the virtue of continence in celibacy are particularly susceptible, Augustine thinks, to the self-satisfied pride that extinguishes love and damages the expansive friendship that is the goal of celibacy. Augustine presents his case for the primacy of love and the importance of humility in practicing the virtue of celibacy by placing it as a *good* in the context of higher-level *oikeiōsis*. Letter 188 (418 AD) should be read in close relationship to *On Holy Virginity* (401 AD). These texts present identical treatments of the good of celibacy as a gift and the essential role that humility plays in recognizing it as such. This highlights the continuity of Augustine's teaching on grace, gifts, and the virtue of humility in the Pelagian controversy and in his earlier writings.¹⁰⁶

Saying that celibacy is a higher good than marriage is akin to the claim that hunger is better than satiety or, as in the case of martyrdom, that death is better than life. Augustine is aware that these claims verge on paradox. These goods witness to a type of higher-order desire that is free from necessity – a form of desirelessness or emptiness.¹⁰⁷ For Augustine, these claims can only be held in proper balance through endorsing the

¹⁰⁵ *Ep.* 188, 8; *b. uid.* 20; *uirg.* 41.

¹⁰⁶ See R. Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004), 189-191. Cf. D. Ogliari, "An anti-Pelagian Caveat. Augustine's *Ep.* 188 to Juliana," *Augustiniana* 54 (2004): 203-22.

¹⁰⁷ See *ciu.* 19.17. Augustine claims that resurrected, spiritual bodies are entirely free from necessity insofar as they stand, "subject in every part to the will."

doctrine of *oikeiōsis* and by reinterpreting it within the eschatological horizon of Scripture.

Celibacy is to friendship as martyrdom is to health, for Augustine. It is neither a refusal, nor a denigration of the goodness of health and friendship. It is, rather, an affirmation of these goods' intrinsic value – a value that stands apart from the use to which they are put. To remain celibate is to witness to humankind's destiny for friendship with God and to opt for a form of community found in the church, monastery, or even one's own household (as in Juliana's case) that transcends the usual progression of friendship outward from oneself in marriage and family life. Yet Augustine is also keenly aware that celibacy is a form of desolation. It is a small death to a desire for a genuine good. It is a type of loneliness that cleans and sharpens one's desire for friendship with God and expands one's soul for holy friendships in this life. Or, at least, it could be this sort of loneliness if used appropriately.

Augustine worries that the pride of Pelagian perfection and the conception of spiritual riches taught by Jerome and other early Christian ascetics may, in the end, be one more illusion about the good: a projection of acquisitive desire, and not yet the movement of "love for love itself" that characterizes true virtue.¹⁰⁸ Celibacy, for Augustine, is a reminder that one cannot acquire every temporal good in this life. Nor should one try to. Celibacy is a witness to soul-joy; it is a participation in an eschatological joy that is to come. It is a preparation of oneself for the eternal goods of bodily immortality and friendship found in the city of God. As Augustine tells Proba in

¹⁰⁸ *Ep.* 155.1. For a complete account of Augustine's view of the good of marriage as it relates to Jerome's conception of spiritual riches in *Adversus Iovinianum*, see R.A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990), chapter four: "A defence of Christian mediocrity," 45-62; D.G. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 243-84.

Letter 130, a human being must be made sensitive to and ready for such eternal goods.

One must develop a taste for them. One's appetite must be whetted for these goods through spiritual exercise.

One such exercise is prayer. Far from being a pious practice reserved for professional contemplatives or members of the clergy, prayer is for everyone. Indeed, Augustine thinks that prayer relates instinctually to one's longing for happiness. What do we often pray for, Augustine asks Proba, other than all the ingredients of a happy life – health and wellbeing for ourselves and for those whom we love, and all the temporal goods (e.g. marriage, family, public office, and wealth) necessary to promote the wellbeing of the various communities of which we are a part?¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, many of us desire temporal goods in such a way that they do not contribute to genuine happiness. To remedy this dissonance, one must bring one's desire for goods before God in prayer.¹¹⁰ By asking God for a particular good, and for the virtue necessary to use or renounce it, one's desire for the good is “exercised” (*exercere*) and moved toward the highest good itself.¹¹¹

Prayer also involves an emptying out of one's desires for particular goods. No matter how many temporal goods one has, or any “consolation” one derives from them, in prayer one can imagine oneself as emptied of these goods, as “desolate.”¹¹² Augustine offers Proba this condensed version of the exercise for desire-emptying: “If you have children, pray as though you are barren; if you are married, pray as though you are

¹⁰⁹ *Ep.* 130.17.

¹¹⁰ *Ep.* 130.27.

¹¹¹ *Ep.* 130.27.

¹¹² *Ep.* 130.30.

celibate; and if you are wealthy, pray as though you are poor.”¹¹³ Even if one has not pursued or obtained the higher virtues of renunciation, in prayer one can bring oneself into imaginative awareness of being without these goods. This then conditions one’s appreciation and use of them. What is more, in Augustine’s view, this exercise of *desolation* can help to produce the non-possessive interior disposition necessary to love the good for its own sake.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *Ep.* 130.30.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *en. Ps.* 62.14, 76.2, 83.3, *ep. Io. tr.* 4.6. See chapter five for more on Augustine’s therapeutic approach to desire, and the goal of non-possessive love for the good itself.

Chapter 3

PUBLIC GOODS

The most fundamental question concerning Augustine's political thought involves the manner and extent to which he believes that a Christian ethics ought to influence, and potentially transform, the political structures of the Roman Empire. Scholars in the past century remain divided between those who find evidence for such a program and those who claim that Augustine does little or nothing to promote a specifically Christian political ethics.¹ Although scholars agree that Augustine did not think Christians should

¹ Among those scholars who dismiss the possibility of finding in Augustine a workable Christian political ethics is T. Mommsen, "St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress: The Background of the *City of God*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 346-74 (370), who advances the view that "Augustine regarded the purely secular aspects of the drama of mankind as relatively insignificant" in comparison with the theological; E. Fortin, *Political Idealism and Christianity in the Thought of St. Augustine* (Villanova: Villanova UP, 1972) = ibidem, in *Classical Christianity and the Political Order. Reflections on the Theologico-Political Problem*, ed. J.B. Benestad (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 31-63 (47), concludes, "there is strictly speaking, for Augustine, no such thing as a Christian polity. Christianity was never intended as a substitute for the political life. It transcends all regimes and is of necessity limited in its practical applications by the modalities of its existence in this world." These and similar views have been rehearsed by M. Ruokanen, *Theology of Social Life in Augustine's De ciuitate Dei* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 102, 108, 117, 158. Among those who regard Augustine's political ethics positively, G. Combès, *La doctrine politique de saint Augustin* (Paris: Plon, 1927), 112, concludes that, for Augustine, the Christian state exists where Christ rules interiorly in the souls of the head of state, the magistrates, and all the citizens; R.A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge UP, 1989), finds a balance in Augustine through a concept of "eschatological hope" that does not allow for a politically sterile withdrawal from society. Markus insists that Augustine's notion of hope produces a critical and subversive attitude on the part of the Christian toward political society, yet this attitude should also be realistically "constructive" (170). This attitude, for Markus, should draw the believer into political participation and full membership in her own society without tethering her to any ideology or "final political vision" (173). Markus reads *City of God* Book 19 as Augustine's "realistic" and "constructive" theory of "secular" political order in which a provisional, relative amount of justice can be achieved in ordering society toward the "common good" (173). Markus focuses especially on *City of God* 19.24; J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), criticizes Markus's pro-secular and pro-liberal rendering of

avoid public office, they disagree over the extent to which he urged public officials to follow a Christian ethic for governing the Empire.² As a contribution to this discussion, I suggest a fresh examination of Augustine's letters to public officials, specifically looking at his advice on the task of reconciling Christian ethical commitments with role-specific obligations. For many public officials in Augustine's age, both pagan and Christian, there seemed to be an insuperable conflict between these two sets of responsibilities.

The letters to public officials reveal that, for Augustine, public office is a *temporal good*, located within the broader framework of goods that we have been examining (temporal goods, virtues, and eternal goods).³ Viewing public office in this

political order in *City of God* 19, 24. Milbank argues that the autonomy and intelligibility of a secular political order is far beyond the scope of Augustine's own thinking and is a particularly modern misinterpretation of Augustine that attempts reconciliation with secular liberalism. Milbank instead argues that "Augustine's philosophy of history appears more viable than that of either Hegel or Marx," and that Augustine's political ethics are really to be found in his "deconstruction of antique political society," wherein "the code of a peaceful mode of existence has historically arisen as 'something else,' an *altera civitas*, having no logical or causal connection with the city of violence" (389). For Milbank the great achievement of Augustine's *City*, particularly Book 19, is that it narrates the arrival of the "heavenly city" in time, found in the *ecclesia*, a community of people who are called to embody an "alternative ontology" of peace which deconstructs and demythologizes a Western ontology of violence (running from the Stoics to secular liberalism, for Milbank) (389). Milbank mistakenly suggests that Augustine is interested in erasing the institutional boundaries between church (*ecclesia*) and political society. For a critique of Milbank's view on this point see M. Hollerich, "John Milbank, Augustine, and the 'Secular,'" *Augustinian Studies* 30 (1999): 1-17. Three recent books on Augustine's political thought represent the staying power of Markus's and Milbank's contrary theses. All three position themselves in relationship to these two rival visions: K.D. Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007); C. Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007); E. Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). For two recent assessments of the general landscape of this debate in Augustinian political thought see R. Dodaro, "Ecclesia and res publica: How Augustinian are Neo-Augustinian Politics?" in *Augustine and Postmodern Thought. A New Alliance Against Modernity*, ed. L. Boeve et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 237-72; P.I. Kaufman, "Christian Realism and Augustinian (?) Liberalism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 38 (2010): 699-724. It is my goal in this chapter to reorient this conversation through a fresh examination of Augustine's advice to public officials found in his letters.

² See, for example, C. Lepellet, "Civis, ciuitas," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 1:942-47 (1946), citing *ep.* 138.15, *ciu.* 2.19. See also, *ciu.* 19.19. On the contrary, P.I. Kaufman, *Incorrectly Political: Augustine and Thomas More* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), argues that although it is clear that Augustine did not prohibit Christians from public office, he sees Augustine's thought tending in this way. As we will see in this chapter, many of Augustine's letters to public officials do not support Kaufman's assessment.

³ See chapter one ("Degrees of Good") for Augustine's classification of goods and its connection to the ancient philosophical debate about the proper relationship of virtue and external goods in a happy life. Augustine makes a commonplace distinction between external goods (e.g. bodily health, wealth, power, friendship) and internal goods (virtues). What is unique, however, in Augustine's classification is his

way enables Augustine to approach the question of conflicting responsibilities in two systematic and interrelated ways. First, it allows him to think about role-specific obligations in terms of the virtues correlated with the various roles and practices of each public office. Second, it allows Augustine to think about the negotiation of role-specific obligations and Christian ideals along the lines of higher-level *oikeiōsis* subsuming and transforming lower-level *oikeiōsis* that we saw in the last chapter.

This chapter proceeds as follows: First, I will provide an overview of Augustine's conception of public office as a temporal good and the way that it fits into his larger framework of goods. I will also examine Augustine's correspondence with Marcellinus, a friend and high-ranking imperial official (military tribune and notary), in order to introduce the problem of conflicting obligations.⁴ In sections two and three I will turn from the general question of conflicting obligations to Augustine's application of the framework in his correspondence with Boniface, a military official, and Macedonius, the imperial vicar of Africa (*uicarius Africae*), who was entrusted with the administration of justice in all of Roman Africa.⁵ Understanding that Augustine views public office as a temporal good enables us, in turn, to recognize that he approaches questions of

conception of external goods as "temporal goods" and their relationship to "eternal goods." Eternal goods are obtained, on his view, through the practice of "true virtue" (the good use of temporal goods), and they represent an imperishable form of the temporal goods that we now experience (e.g. health and friendship). Cf. *ciu.* 19, 13. We will return to this general framework in chapter five where I will make explicit the way that Augustine's framework of goods represents his own proposed solution to the ancient ethical puzzle about happiness (the proper relation of virtue and external goods). This is something that has not yet been recognized by scholars of Augustine's thought.

⁴ On Marcellinus in general, see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 671-88, s.v. Marcellinus. For background to the correspondence, see the pertinent observations by M. Moreau, "Le Dossier Marcellinus dans la correspondance d'Augustin," *Recherches augustiniennes* 9 (1973): 5-181.

⁵ On Boniface in general, see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 152-155, s.v. Bonifatius; R. Markus, "Bonifatius comes Africae," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 1:653-5. On Macedonius in general, see Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, II: AD 395-527*, 697, s.v. Macedonius 3; Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 659-661, s.v. Macedonius 2. See also Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus von Hippo*, 107-108.

conflicting obligations, and the larger question of structural transformation, in a more systematic way than has hitherto been supposed by scholars.

I. Public Office as a Temporal Good

As we saw in Augustine's advice to Proba in chapter two, public office is one of the goods – like marriage, children, and a sufficient amount of wealth – that can be fittingly (*decere*) desired in the pursuit of a happy life.⁶ Yet like all other temporal goods it must either be put to good use or renounced in order to obtain the interior goods (virtues). To acquire the type of virtue that makes one worthy of eternal goods, the good use of these goods must ultimately be *referred* toward the highest ethical task of loving God (allowing these goods to bring you back to their source) and loving the neighbor into loving God, the good.⁷

Within the triad of temporal goods that repeatedly appears in Augustine's thought (marriage/family, public office, and wealth), public office represents its own smaller cluster of temporal goods: "honors (*honores*) and positions of power (*potestates*);"⁸ "distinction (*laus*) and popular glory (*gloria popularis*);"⁹ "secular power (*potestas saeculi*) and office (*administratio*)."¹⁰ Thus the singular good of public office signifies, for Augustine, a nexus of roles, duties, legitimate power, and the honor or glory associated with each office. As we will see, the good use of this cluster of temporal goods requires the acquisition of virtues relevant to each of the various roles and practices.

⁶ *Ep.* 130.12.

⁷ *Ep.* 130.14; *ep.* 140.4.

⁸ *Ep.* 130.12.

⁹ *Lib. arb.* 1.32.

¹⁰ *S.* 311.11.

As we saw in chapter two, Augustine's view of temporal goods follows the lines of the Stoic and Peripatetic doctrine of social *oikeiōsis*.¹¹ According to this doctrine, the wide array of temporal goods that can be *fittingly* desired in the pursuit of a happy life all boil down to health and friendship.¹² It is through the temporal good of friendship that one's natural, instinctual desire for self-preservation and bodily wellbeing can extend outward – first to one's household and political community, and ultimately to the whole human race.

Augustine affirms the centrality of friendship as an appropriate motivation for selecting temporal goods and he endorses the view of extending friendship circles implicit in the doctrine of social *oikeiōsis*. "Friendship should not be bounded by narrow limits," Augustine writes to Proba, "for it embraces all to whom we owe affection, though it is inclined more eagerly toward some and more hesitantly toward others. It, however, extends even to enemies ... Thus there is no one in the human race to whom we do not owe love, even if not out of mutual love, at least on account of our sharing in a common nature."¹³ "Like fire," Augustine preaches, "[love] seizes upon the things that are nearby and in that way stretches out to what is more distant."¹⁴

Extend your love to those who are closest, but you should not really call that an extension. For you who love those who are near to you love yourself closely. Extend your love to those who are unknown to you – the ones who have not done anything bad to you. Go even beyond them; go as far as loving your enemies. This is certainly what the Lord commands.¹⁵

¹¹ See chapter two for the history of the concept of *oikeiōsis* in ancient Stoic and Peripatetic ethics and its variety of possible meanings.

¹² *Ep.* 130.11-13.

¹³ *Ep.* 130.13.

¹⁴ *Ep. Io. tr.* 8.4.

¹⁵ *Ep. Io. tr.* 8.4.

Augustine, the reader will recall from chapter two, presents the twofold commandment of love (Matthew 22:37-39) as the culmination of social *oikeiōsis*: love for and friendship with God and neighbor.¹⁶ Self-love (the first ring of friendship) and neighbor-love (the outermost human circle) must ultimately be redrawn and transformed by love for God, who is, as we have seen, the good itself.

Augustine's endorsement of social *oikeiōsis* also involves a conception of society as an integrated complex of roles and practices, and of virtues correlated with those roles and practices. Thus the decorous goods of marriage, offspring, wealth, and public office about which Augustine advises Proba, result in the formation of distinct communities (families, nations) and institutions (households, commonwealths/empires). A leader's role holds him or her accountable for tending some aspect of the overall wellbeing and friendship of each sort of community and institution. For the household leader, as we saw in chapter two, conflicting goods present a choice between two different ways of fulfilling role-specific obligations (e.g. chastity and continence, generosity and prudence). As we also saw, Augustine repeatedly employs the language of the double commandment of love in his advice to household leaders on the fulfillment of these obligations. In the case of Ecdicia (Letter 262), obedience to the double commandment of love, and the responsibilities entailed, generated conflict (both real and perceived) with her role-specific obligations to care for her household. This dissertation considers potential conflicts between one's role-specific obligations for tending smaller-scale friendships (in the communities formed through lower-level *oikeiōsis*) and the fulfillment of the double commandment of love (in higher-level *oikeiōsis*).

¹⁶ See *ep.* 130.14, *ciu.* 19.13-17.

Just as the temporal goods of marriage and offspring are *necessary for the sake of* a specific type of friendship found in the family community and in the institution of the household, so too the temporal good of public office (and its cognate goods: power, authority, honor, and glory) is necessary for the sake of the special form of health and friendship found in political society. As we will see in our examination of the letters below, for Augustine, the influence of Christian ethics on a public official happens primarily through the practice of the virtues associated with higher-level *oikeiōsis* (love of God and neighbor) and the way that these virtues affect the performance of his or her role in tending the wellbeing of the political community.

The Health of the Commonwealth: Augustine's Correspondence with Marcellinus

Pagan public officials sensed the potential friction between civic responsibilities and Christian ideals and exploited it in debate. About a year after the sacking of Rome by Alaric and the Visigoths (410 AD), Augustine received a letter from his friend, Marcellinus, detailing the complaints against Christianity expressed by a group of pagan public officials in Carthage.¹⁷ Chief among these was an objection about the compatibility of Christian teaching and the practices necessary to sustain the commonwealth (*res publica*).¹⁸ Marcellinus relays the objection to Augustine in Letter 136:

¹⁷ This dossier of letters includes exchanges between Augustine and the pagan public official, Volusianus (*ep.* 132, 135, 137) and Augustine and his friend, Marcellinus (*ep.* 136, 138), a Christian public official. The entire correspondence was composed between September 411 and the end of February 412 AD. It was at this time that Augustine began writing *The City of God* (412-426 AD), a work that he dedicated to Marcellinus.

¹⁸ *Res publica* means literally “public thing.” In *ep.* 138.10 Augustine refers to Cicero’s well-known definition, which he says may be literally translated: “the ‘public thing’ ... a thing of (belonging to) the people.” I translate *res publica* freely as “commonwealth,” a term which, for moderns, unfortunately suggests “state.” M. Schofield, “Cicero’s Definition of *res publica*,” in *Cicero the Philosopher*, ed. J.G.F. Powell (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 63-83 (66-69), argues persuasively that despite the expression’s “notoriously elastic range of uses” in Latin authors before and after Cicero, it will not bear the connotation

Christ's teaching and preaching must be incompatible with the practices of the commonwealth [*rei publicae moribus*]. For he [Jesus] told us – it is agreed – to “return to no one evil for evil” (Rom 12:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:15), to “offer the other cheek to an assailant, to give our cloak to someone demanding a tunic,” and to “go twice the required distance with someone who wants to requisition us” (Matthew 5:39-41). They [the pagan officials] allege that all these commands are contrary to the practices of the commonwealth [*rei publicae moribus*]. ‘Who would allow an enemy to steal something from him?’ they say. ‘Who would be unwilling to inflict evil, in the form of a just war, as recompense for the ravaging of a Roman province?’¹⁹

In short, the complaint is that Christian public officials committed to the gentle ideals of the New Testament will not be able to do their jobs. Augustine writes two letters back to Marcellinus to pass on to these officials (Letters 137 and 138), each providing a different sort of response. His first response in Letter 137 asks:

What arguments, what writings of any philosophers, what laws of any cities are in any way to be compared with the two commandments upon which Christ says that the whole law and the prophets depend? “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and your whole soul and your whole mind, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39) ... In these you find moral philosophy, because the good and moral life receives its character from nothing else than when those things that are to be loved are loved as they ought to be, that is, God and the neighbor ... In these commandments there is also found the praiseworthy health of the commonwealth [*rei publicae salus*], for the best city is established and protected only by the foundation and bond of trust [*fides*] and solid harmony [*concordia*] when the common good is loved, namely, God, who is the highest and truest good, and when human beings love one another in complete sincerity in him by loving one another on account of him [the highest good] from whom they cannot hide the disposition with which they love.²⁰

of “state.” Translating *res publica* as “republic” is also problematic because in Cicero’s thought it does not necessarily refer to a republican form of government. Schofield suggests as possibilities, depending upon the context, “public [-spirited] activity,” “public affairs/business,” “the public interest,” and “the country.” Augustine uses the term *res publica* even when speaking about the Roman Empire contemporary with his times. See, for example, Augustine’s response in *ep.* 138.10, where he argues that the pagan public officials have wrongly characterized the Christian religion as “...*inimica reipublicae*...”

¹⁹ *Ep.* 136.2. There is very little scholarly discussion of the philosophical influence of Cicero’s *De re publica* during the fifth century. E.M. Atkins, “Old Philosophy and New Power: Cicero in Fifth-Century North Africa,” in *Philosophy and Power in the Graeco-Roman World: Essays in Honor of Miriam Griffin*, ed. G. Clark and T. Rajak (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 251-69, argues that “by the early fifth century, the *De Republica* has long ceased to be popular as a political text.” The references to Cicero’s text and use of republican language throughout this correspondence between Augustine and Marcellinus (and the pagan public officials in Carthage) suggests otherwise.

²⁰ *Ep.* 137.17.

A few things are worth noting here. Rather than responding to the specific New Testament injunctions singled out by the pagan public officials (e.g. to turn the other cheek), Augustine instead offers his interlocutors the double commandment of love (higher-level *oikeiōsis*). For Augustine, the double commandment of love works as a summary both of the “law and the prophets” of the Old Testament and the gamut of moral precepts found in the New Testament. He also claims that in these two commands is found the most praiseworthy “health of the commonwealth [*rei publicae salus*], for the best city is established and protected only by the foundation and bond of faith [*fides*] and solid harmony [*concordia*]” when the highest good is loved and when human beings love one another on account of this good.²¹ Here Augustine claims that the health (*rei publicae salus*) and friendship (*concordia*) unique to the political community is best secured through obedience to the double commandment of love. Indeed, Augustine claims that the practices (*mores*) necessary to sustain the commonwealth are located within the double commandment of love. This first response in Letter 137 is a very compressed description of higher-level *oikeiōsis* reorienting lower-level *oikeiōsis* at the level of political practices. Augustine seems to sense that this response is not enough, for it neither treats the specific form of neighbor- and enemy-love that the pagan complaint singles out, nor does it provide an account of the transformation of any role-specific obligations. In his next letter we find Augustine taking another, more detailed, approach to the problem of conflict.

²¹ *Salus* means health, security, and wellbeing. I have chosen the term “health” in this case to emphasize that Augustine conceives of the “health of the commonwealth” (*rei publicae salus*) along the lines of the doctrine of *oikeiōsis*, i.e. all temporal goods are necessary for the sake of some form of health and friendship (in this case, political health and friendship). In Christian Latin the term *salus* also covers what we describe as “salvation”: the ultimate security and wellbeing of eternal life with God. In his correspondence with public officials Augustine likes to compare heavenly and earthly *salus*, playing off the connection between the temporal health and friendship found in political society and the eternal wellbeing that will exist only in the city of God.

In his second treatment of the problem in Letter 138, Augustine begins by arguing that the nonviolent precepts of the New Testament do encourage practices that secure health and friendship of the political sort. If, for example, when an individual is wronged by an enemy, he or she is able to accept patiently the loss of “temporal goods [*commoda temporalis*],”²² rather than to pursue their goods and the punishment of the criminal, the enemy is provided with an opportunity to reflect on the value of the goods that drove him or her to commit the crime. One’s patient response has the potential to demonstrate to the enemy the higher value of the interior goods (e.g. trust, union) that make political community possible. It is not often the case that these sorts of interior goods can be restored by force or violence:

In overcoming an evil person through goodness, then, we patiently accept the loss of temporal goods [*commoda temporalis*] in order to show him how worthless we should consider them by comparison with trust [*fides*] and justice; after all, excessive love of such goods makes him evil. In this way the wrongdoer might learn from the very person he has wronged what the things are really like that tempted him to do wrong. Then too he might repent and be won back to peace [*concordia*] – the most beneficial thing there is for a city – not defeated by force and violence, but by patient goodwill. If something is done with the aim of helping someone to mend his ways and to embrace peace [*concordia*], then it is right to do it so long as it seems as if it will benefit him. And that must certainly be the intention, even if the result turns out differently, that is to say, if the patient, having medicine prescribed that ought to reform him and pacify him, to cure and to heal him, as it were, is in fact unwilling to be reformed and pacified.²³

Augustine provides a distinctly political interpretation of New Testament teaching on nonviolence. Obedience to these precepts is a way of preserving not merely the physical security of the commonwealth but also its moral health. By affirming the value of the interior goods of *fides* (trust) and *concordia* (peace or union) through the extension of

²² As we saw in chapter one, *commoda* is the technical Stoic term for “external goods” or “advantages.” The phrase *commoda temporalis* (“temporal goods/advantages”) found in this passage is unique to Augustine.

²³ *Ep.* 138.11.

forgiveness, mercy, and pardon, one can make the moral and spiritual wellbeing of the political community – including the criminal – one’s goal. “If we gave ear to the [gentle] precept as it deserves, it would establish, consecrate, strengthen and increase the commonwealth far better than Romulus, Numa, Brutus and other famous heroes of the Roman nation.”²⁴

In this passage, Augustine is also suggesting that the goods of health (*salus*) and friendship (*concordia*) that form political society are supported equally by the virtues of justice (*iustitia*) and trust (*fides*). As we saw in chapter two, Augustine has a robust conception of the virtue of trust (*fides*) that is distinct from its theological counterpart, the virtue of faith (also *fides*). For Augustine, social *fides* (trust, trustworthiness, faithfulness) forms the foundation of all social relationships, and the institutions correlated to them, through the practices of promise making and keeping. In a representative passage from Sermon 21, Augustine tells his congregation how great of a virtue social *fides* is:

For the moment I am not talking about that higher faith [*fides*], because of which you are called “the faithful” ... This I leave aside for the time being; I shall speak of that kind of faith which is also called faith [*fides*] in ordinary matters ... About this kind, of course I say too that your Lord enjoins it on you: not to cheat anyone, to keep faith in your business dealings, to keep faith with your wife in your bed ... Now what is this faith? You certainly don't see it; if you don't see it, why do you make such a fuss when it's broken with you? By the very fuss you make I prove that you do see it ... So here, you can see gold, you can't see faith, or, truth to tell, you do see faith. When you require it of someone else you see it all right: when it is required of you, you are not so keen on seeing it, eh? The eyes of your mind wide open, you shout, “Keep faith as you promised.” The eyes of your mind tight shut, you shout, “I didn't promise you anything.” In each case, open your eyes. You fraud, eliminate your crookedness, not your faith. Render yourself what you demand from others.²⁵

²⁴ *Ep.* 138.10.

²⁵ *S.* 21.5. As we saw in chapter two on the goods of marriage and celibacy, *fides*, and the mutual trust that it generates, is one of the three constitutive goods of marriage. Augustine calls it a “spiritual good” at *b. coniug.* 4.

Thus if one's goal is to protect the moral wellbeing of the political community, then it must also be the goal to invite alienated members of that community back into its union (*concordia*). Augustine insists, against his pagan opponents, that patient forgiveness, mercy, and pardon are viable strategies for restoring the *fides* necessary to support *concordia*. The species of political friendship designated by *concordia*, Augustine says, is “the most beneficial thing there is for a city.”²⁶

What about those with specific obligations to protect not only the moral wellbeing but also some aspect of the physical security of the community (e.g. soldier or judge)? It is one thing to accept patiently the loss of goods in order to teach an enemy a lesson, it is something else to accept patiently the loss of these goods on behalf of another individual, or on behalf of the community. In the second half of his response in Letter 138, Augustine takes up the problem of conflicting obligations as it relates to the specific political practices of punishment and warfare. In this section of the response Augustine makes two important, and interrelated, moves. First, he translates all the “teachings and preaching of Christ” and “Christian precepts” mentioned by his pagan interlocutors into *virtues*.²⁷ Augustine claims that all of the various commands mentioned by his opponents ultimately aim at the inculcation of two virtues: forbearance (*patientia*) and benevolence (*benevolentia*). Whereas in his first response in Letter 137 Augustine synthesized all of the gentle commands into the double commandment of love, in Letter 138 he translates the precepts of nonviolence into virtues essential for promoting trust (*fides*) and union (*concordia*). Practicing the virtue of forbearance enables public officials to overcome an immediate passion for revenge, providing them with the time necessary to consider what

²⁶ *Ep.* 138.11.

²⁷ *Ep.* 136.2. My own emphasis. Cf. *ep.* 138.14.

it means to will the good (*benevolentia*), rather than the harm, of an enemy in a given situation.

By translating the precepts into virtues, Augustine is able to make another important move: he distinguishes between virtues that exist in disposition only (*habitus*; *praeparatio cordis*) and those that exist in disposition and manifest themselves in activity (*opus*). Augustine tells Marcellinus:

These [Christian precepts] are more relevant to the training of the heart within [*praeparatio cordis*] than to our external activity [*opus*]. Consequently forbearance and benevolence should be kept secretly in one's own mind, while publicly we should do whatever seems likely to benefit those we should wish well.²⁸

This translation of the Christian precepts into virtues, and the related distinction between virtue in action and disposition, is a central part of Augustine's approach to the problem of conflicting obligations. Through it, Augustine argues that Christian public officials can fulfill their role-specific obligations to tend political society's wellbeing – even when this involves the legitimate use of force and violence – while still retaining the virtues associated with neighbor-love (e.g. forbearance, benevolence) inwardly:

In short, we should always hold fast to the precepts of forbearance “in the disposition of our hearts” (Psalm 10:17); and in our will we should always have perfect benevolence in case we “return evil for evil” (Rom 12:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:15). For people are often to be helped, against their will, by being punished with a sort of kind harshness [*seueritas benigna*]. It is right to consult their interests rather than their preferences; indeed, in their [pagan] literature we find lavish praise of a leading citizen for just this²⁹ ... If the earthly commonwealth observes Christian precepts in this way, then even wars will be waged in a spirit of benevolence; their aim will be to serve the defeated more easily by securing a peaceful society that is pious and just.³⁰

²⁸ *Ep.* 138.13. As we saw in chapter two, Augustine's key terms for virtues that exist in the disposition of the soul are *habitus* and *praeparatio cordis*. In *ep.* 138.14, Augustine draws the phrase *praeparatio cordis* directly from the Latin translation of Psalm 10:17.

²⁹ Cicero, *Pro Sulla* 8.25.

³⁰ *Ep.* 138.14.

From these two very general presentations of the compatibility of Christian precepts with role-specific obligations (the double-commandment of love in Letter 137 and the translation of precepts into virtues in Letter 138), I will now turn to two examples of Augustine's application of this framework to cases of conflicting obligations, one involving the practice of war and the other the practice of punishment.

II. The Goods of War and Peace: Augustine's Correspondence with Boniface

A prime example of the application of this framework to a case of perceived conflict can be found in Augustine's correspondence with Boniface, a high-ranking public official (military tribune and later *comes*), responsible for the security of Roman north Africa during the years 417-427 AD. Boniface was a Christian and friend of Augustine's, someone Augustine calls a dear son.³¹ Augustine's correspondence with Boniface takes us inside the moral dilemma faced by a military commander who aspires both to the Christian ideal of enemy-love and dutiful protection of the political community.

In Letter 189 (Augustine to Boniface), we discover that Boniface is a man who senses the potential conflict between the love commands and his role-specific obligations as a military commander. We even learn that Boniface had met with Augustine to discuss the possibility of leaving the military in order to join a monastery and to pursue a peaceful, contemplative life. The choice between public office and Christian monastic life is construed by Augustine and Boniface in terms of the ancient philosophical debate about the priority of the active and contemplative life in the pursuit of wisdom; one way

³¹ *Ep.* 189.1, 8.

of life is better, while the other is more *necessary*.³² Augustine's advice to Boniface on this score also mirrors the presentation of marriage and celibacy that we saw in chapter two; one good (celibacy) ranks higher than the other insofar as it provides the foundation for a new form of community that more closely resembles the friendship found in higher-level *oikeiōsis*. As we also saw in chapter two, Augustine is keen to emphasize to Boniface that the goods of marriage, celibacy, public office, and monastic life are goods that entail *roles* and require discernment of one's own gifts and sensitivity to the needs of one's context.³³

Augustine encourages Boniface not to abandon "secular affairs" (*actio saecularis*), given the need in Africa for protection against the Vandals.³⁴ "We ought not therefore before the time is right to wish to live only with the holy and just," Augustine tells Boniface, "then we might deserve to be granted that in its proper time."³⁵ Augustine begins the letter by reminding Boniface that his chief responsibility is to love God and neighbor, and he encourages Boniface that this responsibility is not incompatible with the duties associated with his role as military commander.³⁶ Nevertheless, these commands, and the ethical attitude they inculcate, must profoundly influence him – both in character and conduct – in the performance of his role. The soldier must keep political society's health and friendship as the goal of all his actions, even in warfare. And he must

³² Augustine treats the "three ways of life" (contemplative, active, and mixed) in *City of God* 19.19. Cf. Cicero, *De re publica* 1.13. For a helpful analysis of the relation between Augustine's view of active and contemplative ways of life and classical philosophy, see Thonnard, "Les trois états de vie, in œuvres de saint Augustin," 752-3.

³³ *Ep.* 189.5. Augustine cites 1 Corinthians 7:7, "Each one has his own gift from God, one in this way, another in that." As we saw in chapter two, this text is central to Augustine's conception of the goods of particular roles and vocations.

³⁴ *Ep.* 189.5.

³⁵ *Ep.* 189.5.

³⁶ *Ep.* 189.2-4.

challenge himself to think not only of his own community's wellbeing, but also that of his enemy's.

When arming yourself for battle, then, consider this first of all, that your courage, even your physical courage is a gift from God. Then you won't think of using a gift from God to act against God. When one makes a promise, one must keep faith [*fides*], even with an enemy with whom one is waging a war³⁷ ... For you do not seek peace in order to stir up war; no – war is waged in order to obtain peace. Be a peacemaker, therefore, even in war, so that by conquering you bring the benefit of peace even to those you defeat ... And just as you use force against the rebel or opponent, so you ought now to use mercy towards the defeated or the captive, and particularly so when there is no fear that peace will be disturbed.³⁸

Augustine also tells Boniface that the wellbeing (health and friendship) of the political community entrusted to his care has both a temporal and an eternal dimension.³⁹ A military official must practice the relevant virtues in fulfilling his duties in order to promote the physical, as well as moral and spiritual, wellbeing of the community. This is the same argument that Augustine offers Marcellinus in Letter 138. Yet what about the duties of making war and destroying the enemy? These are cases where the perceived conflict between ideal and obligation seem most apparent. What does Augustine tell Boniface about these particular duties?

To deal with such duties, Augustine invokes his distinction between virtue in disposition and action and introduces an extreme form of its application:

Peace ought to be what you want, war only what necessity [*necessitas*] demands. Then God may free you from necessity and preserve you in peace ... [And] it

³⁷ This reference to keeping faith with the enemy is an allusion to Marcus Attilius Regulus, a Roman military commander who was captured by the Carthaginians during the First Punic War, and was sent back to Rome to negotiate an exchange of prisoners, having vowed to return if he failed. He recommended to the Romans that they reject the terms offered and returned to Carthage, as he had promised, to face his death. In *City of God* 1.24, Augustine remarks about Regulus that, "among all their [the Romans'] heroes, men worthy of honor and renowned for courage, the Romans have none greater to produce." Regulus was a stock *exemplum* of the virtue of courage used by many Roman authors. See, for example, Cicero, *De officiis* 3.99-115.

³⁸ *Ep.* 189.6. Cf. *ciu.* 15.4, 19.12.

³⁹ *Ep.* 189.6.

ought to be necessity, and not your will, that destroys an enemy who is fighting you.⁴⁰

There are military responsibilities, Augustine suggests to Boniface, where the soldier's intention to bring about *peace* in the broadest sense (both for his own community and the enemy's, at all the relevant levels) cannot be expressed in action. Certain circumstances in war do not allow for the external expression of the virtues that one has obtained in disposition. In such circumstances, the virtues associated with the ideal of enemy-love must be separated from the action, that is, left unrealized in disposition. At this moment the will (*uoluntas*; the preeminent power of the soul, and seat of the virtues, as we have seen) must be disengaged from the performance of dutiful action. The final explanation of the soldier's motivation for action is no longer located in his own will. His motivation is necessity: that which is necessary for the sake of maintaining the security of the political community.

In destroying the enemy, *beneuolentia* (willing the good of another) can neither be said to be the will's disposition, nor the intention of that particular action insofar as the enemy cannot benefit from it, no matter what benefits the enemy's death may bring to others on both sides (e.g. restored peace, restoration of just rule, being deprived of the freedom to act unjustly).⁴¹ Although actions may be motivated by love in battle, and in some forms of punishment, one cannot destroy an enemy in love (the same is true, for Augustine, in cases of torture, and of punishment that threatens the basic standards of health).⁴² When the conflict between enemy-love and security appears insuperable,

⁴⁰ *Ep.* 189.6.

⁴¹ *Ep.* 153.17; *Ep.* 189.6; *Ep.* 138.14.

⁴² Augustine abhorred the conventional use of torture to extract and certify confessions (*ep.* 104.17; cf. *ep.* 133.2, 91.9, 104.1, *ciu.* 19.6. In general, Augustine opposed harsher physical penalties that threatened the

Augustine tells Boniface, the military official must fulfill his obligation, appealing to necessity as the motivation of the action. The will is preserved inwardly in virtuous disposition, but externally the soldier acts from cold duty, constrained by his role and its practices.⁴³

Necessity is a vague, and potentially dangerous, concept. Augustine recognizes that it must be soberly employed and its particular requirements must be carefully discerned. Its legitimate use places tremendous pressure on the public official to consider every alternative course of action before claiming that he or she is trapped by it. For Augustine, an appeal to necessity must always be accompanied by a desire to be delivered from it.⁴⁴

wholeness of body and mind (*ep.* 140.4), including floggings administered with whips tipped with lead (*ep.* 133.1, 134, 10*.3-4).

⁴³ This is often taken to be Augustine's only perspective on the role-specific obligation to use lethal force. See, for example, H.A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia UP, 1963), 138-9. In section three below I will complicate Deane's perspective by reading Letter 153 to Macedonius in relationship to Letter 189.

⁴⁴ *Ep.* 189.6. Cf. *ciu.* 19.6. The term necessity (*necessitas*) has a broad range of meanings in Augustine's thought, including the necessity of coercion, the necessity of humankind's moral condition, and the necessity of temporal goods. It is this third sense of necessity that is most relevant here. Augustine claims that, after original sin, we experience temporal goods (e.g. bodily health, wealth, public office, friendship) under the aspect of *necessity*, that is, as *necessary* for temporal self-preservation. Necessity is not the only explanation of our desire for these things – as we saw in chapter one, temporal goods are *goods*, and, as such, they participate in the original order of goodness found in creation – yet it is an inescapable feature of our experience of these goods (*ciu.* 19.12, 22.24, *conf.* 13.17, 20-21). Furthermore, for Augustine, part of the providential ordering of human life, after the interruption and disordering of sin, is the necessary use of legal force and violence (e.g. just punishment and warfare). These aspects of the providential ordering of human society constitute their own set of necessities, for Augustine, and are deeply intertwined with the preservation of self and society (*ep.* 189.6, *ciu.* 19.6). Only individuals with specific roles and obligations for preserving some aspect of the temporal wellbeing of society are justified in performing (and discerning when to perform) actions motivated by such necessity. Indeed, for Augustine, performing an action considered to be a necessity is often a "lamentable" and "miserable" experience. (Certain necessary political actions imply a "tragic" experience on Augustine's account – in a qualified, Augustinian sense of the tragic.) The question remains open in Augustine's thought as to which specific forms of force and violence can be considered necessary for preserving social order and harmony. A necessary action need not be motivated by benevolence (as we have seen in Letter 189), yet it also cannot be an *unjust* action (*ciu.* 19.6). A necessary action can be "lamentable," on Augustine's account, but it can never be an evil action (i.e. the justification of the action, for Augustine, cannot be that it is the lesser of two evils). Cf. M. Djuth, "Augustine on Necessity," *Augustinian Studies* 31.2 (2000): 195-210.

Boniface's military career advanced in the years following Letter 189. In 425 AD he was named *comes domesticorum et Africae*, a post which gave him command of a special regiment of the army, the *domestici*, or Household Guard. He held this post until 427 AD when he fell into a conspiracy centered on rival generals Flavius Aetius and Flavius Constantius Felix, and upon the empress Galla Placidia. For two years (427-429 AD) Boniface fought Roman troops sent from Italy to destroy him. In the middle of this rebellion, Augustine wrote to him, imploring him to get back to his job of protecting Africans from the Vandal invaders:

The barbarians of Africa are succeeding here without meeting any resistance so long as you are in your present state, preoccupied with your own needs, and are organizing nothing to prevent this disaster.⁴⁵

The subject matter of Letter 220 is no longer cast in the exalted language of caring for the enemy's temporal and eternal wellbeing. Here we find Augustine chastising Boniface for evading his military obligations and for submerging himself in the pursuit of temporal goods. The letter reflects Augustine's awareness of the potential danger of appealing to necessity as the explanation of military action. After reprimanding Boniface for neglecting his duties, Augustine anticipates Boniface's response: "Perhaps you [Boniface] will reply to me [Augustine]: 'What do you want me to do when pressed by such necessity?'"⁴⁶ To which Augustine says that he doubts whether the preservation of Boniface's "power and wealth" amounts to a situation of military necessity.⁴⁷

Here is my advice. Seize it and act upon it. This will reveal whether you are a brave man. Conquer the passions that lead you to love the world ... make use of this world as if you were not using it; to do good with its good things [physical health, strength, victory over enemies, honor, temporal power], rather than to become bad with them ... [Seek the higher goods]: the security of the soul,

⁴⁵ *Ep.* 220.7.

⁴⁶ *Ep.* 220.9.

⁴⁷ *Ep.* 220.9.

together with the immortality of the body, the strength of justice, victory over the hostile passions, glory, honor and peace for eternity ... It is these then that you must love, these you must desire, these you must seek by any means you can.⁴⁸

Boniface's failure to fulfill his role-specific obligations, Augustine implies, is actually rooted in the deeper problem of Boniface's soul. His preoccupation with his own needs has distracted him from his responsibility to care for both the physical and moral security of north Africa. Boniface has completely misinterpreted what *necessity* entails. Augustine closes the letter by amending his earlier advice on Boniface's desire to abandon secular affairs:

I should add something that [I] forbade you to do then: that now, insofar as you might without jeopardizing peace in human affairs, you should withdraw from the affairs of war and give yourself leisure for a life in the fellowship of the holy.⁴⁹

Boniface's rebellion and failure to fulfill his obligations to the political community, Augustine concludes, are rooted in Boniface's disordered love for his own power. One immediate remedy would be the renunciation of the temporal good of public office.

Interpreters often consider the extreme application of the action/disposition distinction in his letter to Boniface (189) – and its result in the dichotomy of motivation between necessity and will – to be Augustine's only approach to the problem of conflicting obligations in the practices of punishment and war. Yet is this appeal to necessity the only example? Are there any cases where Augustine encourages the public official to bring the two aspects of virtue (action and disposition) closer together in such a way that the higher-level virtues of love actually alter the performance of one's role, enabling the official to avoid necessity? Augustine's advice to Boniface in Letter 189 is more detailed than Letter 138 (to Marcellinus) insofar as Augustine tackles the problem

⁴⁸ *Ep.* 220.9-10.

⁴⁹ *Ep.* 220.12.

of conflict in relationship to a distinct role and set of obligations. Yet Letter 189 still approaches the problem as a hypothetical situation (although a situation that was a real possibility for Boniface). In the next section of this chapter we move down from generalities to a particular decision about the use of lethal force. Augustine's correspondence with Macedonius takes us inside the moral dilemma faced by a high-ranking imperial official who desires to observe both justice and mercy in capital cases.

III. The Belt of an Earthly Judge: Augustine's Correspondence with Macedonius

As the imperial vicar for Africa (*uicarius Africae*), Macedonius was responsible for the administration of justice in Roman Africa (e.g. by deciding criminal cases involving the death penalty). He was a Christian and refers to Augustine as a spiritual father. At some time during Macedonius's two-year term at this post (413-414 AD), Augustine wrote to him, in order to request clemency toward someone facing the death penalty. Unfortunately we do not know any of the specifics of the convicted criminal's case.⁵⁰ In his original appeal, Augustine offers to send Macedonius the first three books of *The City of God*. Macedonius responds by expressing an eagerness to read the three books, but with regard to the clemency appeal, he is "extremely doubtful" that such intercession is a duty properly associated with the role of a bishop, and also that this duty derives from religion.⁵¹

In his response to Macedonius in Letter 153, Augustine acknowledges that the death penalty and other forms of discipline "have their limits, causes [*causae*],

⁵⁰ Augustine's letter is not extant, but cf. *ep.* 152.1 (Macedonius to Augustine). In a later letter, Macedonius again refers to the desired clemency, cf. *ep.* 154.1. See also Possidius, *uita Aug.* 20. The case may have involved stolen property, among other crimes, given Augustine's lengthy treatment of the relation of criminal reform and restored property at *ep.* 153.20.

⁵¹ *Ep.* 152.2. The duty of intercession was traditionally associated with the role of pagan priests. See the letter to Augustine from the pagan public official, Nectarius (*ep.* 90).

explanations [*rationes*], and uses,” and that they “inspire fear and thus put a check on the bad, so that the good may live peacefully among the bad.”⁵² He also admits that scripture provides justification for recourse to capital punishment by civil authorities, citing the well-known passage from Romans 13:1-8.⁵³ This invocation of Romans 13 in Letter 153 is interpreted by some scholars as Augustine’s unconditional endorsement of the necessity for the death penalty, on the basis that it helps to deter serious crime. These scholars conclude that although Augustine affirms the legitimacy of appeals for clemency, he clearly prefers the death penalty in certain cases.⁵⁴ Yet this view fails to recognize the details of Augustine’s argument in Letter 153 and the nuance of his interpretation of Romans 13. Augustine assures Macedonius that the duty to appeal for clemency in capital cases does derive from religion. To make his case Augustine picks up on Macedonius’s use of the language of roles and duties and asks Macedonius to reimagine the fulfillment of his own obligation to promote public order within the framework of higher-level *oikeiōsis*, as that is presented in the double commandment of love.

In this section of the chapter I will first examine Augustine’s defense of his appeal for clemency in Letter 153. Then I will briefly consider Augustine’s letter congratulating Macedonius (Letter 155) on the occasion of learning that the imperial vicar has granted his request. These letters, read together, reveal the way Augustine envisions the twin loves (directed toward God and neighbor) subsuming and transforming the public official’s role-specific obligation to tend and promote the political community’s wellbeing through the practice of punishment.

⁵² *Ep.* 153.16.

⁵³ *Ep.* 153.19.

⁵⁴ Typical of this view is Deane, *Political and Social Ideas*, 138-9.

The Duty of Love: Letter 153 to Macedonius

When considering whether to pardon the criminal, Augustine encourages Macedonius to reflect on the question in light of his higher “duty to love” all human beings, even his enemies, and to approach the decision of leniency or severity on the basis of his “gentleness and humanity.”⁵⁵ “Good man, spare the wicked. The better you are, the gentler may you be. The more exalted in your power, the lower may you become in your piety [*pietas*].”⁵⁶ Augustine also presents this duty of love to Macedonius as a matter of piety:

It comes easily and effortlessly to hate the bad because they are bad. It is an uncommon mark of piety [*pietas*] to love the same people because they are human beings, so that at one and the same time you disapprove of their guilt while approving of their nature. Indeed, you have more right to hate their guilt precisely because it mars their nature, which you love. Therefore if you take action against their crime in order to liberate the human being, you bind yourself to him in a fellowship of humanity [*humanitas*].⁵⁷

What is most striking in Letter 153 is Augustine’s continuous appeal to Macedonius’s humanity, the humanity of the criminal, the “fellowship of humanity” that exists between them, and the role that Augustine assumes this shared sense of humanity will play in Macedonius’s decision.⁵⁸

Augustine’s correspondence with Macedonius demonstrates the affinity in Augustine’s thought between commanded neighbor-love and the Stoic account of higher-

⁵⁵ *Ep.* 153.19. Cf. *ep.* 153.2, 153.5.

⁵⁶ *Ep.* 153.11. *Pius* can be translated “loyal” or “devoted,” and Augustine often uses the term to describe familial affection or loyalty to the church. At Letter 153.3, however, we find Augustine employing it to refer to the widest level of affection for all humankind. He claims that it is a mode of *pietas* to love a sinner *qua* human being. Along these same lines, in Letter 10*.3, Augustine describes the practice of slave-trading as *impietas*.

⁵⁷ *Ep.* 153.3.

⁵⁸ A. Coccia, “L’umanità di sant’Agostino. La pena di morte e la tortura,” *La città di vita* 17 (1962): 586-597 (586), rightly points out that Augustine’s appeal to Macedonius’s gentleness and humanity in this passage provides a counterpoint to Augustine’s emphasis on the magistrate’s obligation to enforce order at *ep.* 153.16.

level *oikeiōsis*. Augustine's presentation of the double commandment of love to Macedonius in a follow-up letter (Letter 155), sent the same year as Letter 153 (413/414 AD), is another striking example of this affinity and fusion of moral languages:

Surely we must count as our neighbor here not only our blood relatives, but our fellow sharer in reason; and all men are fellows in this respect. For if by reason of money we can be 'fellows,' how much more so, then, by reason of nature – by the law, that is, of our shared birth, not our shared business. For this reason the comic poet [Terence], whose shining wit contains rays of truth, wrote this line for one old man to address to another: 'Do you have so much time off from your own affairs, that you concern yourself with someone else's, which have nothing to do with you?' The other [old man] replied: 'I am human, and I consider nothing human alien to me.' They say that whole theaters, packed with ignorant and uneducated audiences, have burst into applause at this sentence. Indeed, the fellowship of all human spirits naturally touched the hearts of everyone, so much that everyone there thought of himself precisely as the neighbor of every other human being.⁵⁹

The quotation from Terence's play *Heautontimoroumenos* (75-77) that Augustine cites in this passage also plays an important role in Roman philosophical ethics. It was invoked both by Cicero and Seneca to describe the human race as a rational, universal community of shared concern.⁶⁰ As he so frequently does, Augustine presents the double commandment of love to Macedonius (in both letters) as the ethical principle by which to understand this obligation to humankind in general.⁶¹

The difficult work, however, is not that of trying to imagine the human race as a community, Augustine tells Macedonius, but rather that of trying to see an individual enemy or criminal in his humanity, and in treating him humanely, in the fulfillment of one's duties. In order to see a criminal and enemy in his humanity the official must first

⁵⁹ *Ep.* 155.14. Fellowship based on money is a reference to the debate in ancient political philosophy about whether or not political society exists solely to secure one's own needs. Here Augustine presents a Stoic-sounding version of the doctrine of *oikeiōsis* (along with Cicero at *De officiis* 1.158), claiming that political society does not merely exist to help satisfy one's own needs, but rather for the mutual benefit found in human relationships of the political sort.

⁶⁰ Cicero alludes to these lines from Terence in his presentation of the Stoic version of *oikeiōsis* in *De finibus* 3.63. See also Seneca, *ep.* 95.52-53.

⁶¹ Cf. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 1.11: "A property, too, of the rational soul is love of one's neighbor."

undergo the work of deep self-examination and reflection on “our common weakness.”⁶²

In Sermon 13, presumably preached to a congregation that included judges, Augustine offers a parallel exhortation to self-examination to those whose duties involved deciding on capital cases:

Do not, therefore, when you are attacking the sin, put the human being to death. Avoid the death penalty, so that there’s someone left to repent. Don’t allow the human being to be killed; then someone will be left to learn the lesson. You are a man judging other men; foster love of them in your heart, and judge the earth. Love to instill fear in them, but do so out of love. If you must be arrogant, be arrogant towards the sin, not towards the person. Vent your rage on the failing, which you dislike as much in yourself, and not on the person, who is created just as you are. You both came from the same workshop, you both had the same craftsman, the stuff you are both made of is the same clay. Why are you destroying the person you judge by failing to love him? For you’re destroying justice, by failing to love the person you’re judging. Punishments should be imposed; I don’t deny it; I don’t forbid it. But this must be done in the spirit of love, in the spirit of concern, in the spirit of reform.⁶³

Augustine also picks up Macedonius’s use of the language of roles and restricted spheres of obligation in his reply to Macedonius in Letter 153. First, he assures Macedonius that the duty of intercession (*intercessionis officium*) does derive from religion (*ex religione*), citing various scriptural texts in support of the practice, culminating in a reprise of the story of the woman caught in adultery found in John 8: “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.”⁶⁴ In this text, Augustine argues, Christ “advocated the duty of intercession to us.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, Augustine argues that, although the duty of intercession is specific to the role of the bishop, the duty of love is

⁶² *Ep.* 153.10.

⁶³ *S.* 13, 8.

⁶⁴ *Ep.* 153.9. Cf. John 8:3-11. It should, perhaps, be acknowledged that John 7:53-8:11 does not appear in the oldest or best Greek manuscripts and is not today accepted by most scholars as genuinely Johannine. However, it was found in many of the Latin codices available to Augustine, as well as in Jerome’s *Vulgate*, and Augustine accepted without question its authenticity and canonicity. See M.-F. Berrouard, “Augustin et la péricope de la femme adultère,” in *Œuvres de saint Augustin. Homélies sur l’évangile de saint Jean XVII–XXXIII* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1969), 857-60.

⁶⁵ *Ep.* 153.11. Deane and other commentators neglect consideration of Augustine’s use of John 8:3-11 in his argument about the death penalty in Letter 153.

not restricted to the role of bishop or judge, and that it is a Christian and human responsibility. Augustine is also quick to acknowledge the difference between their roles as bishop and judge and their respective duties to intercede and to protect public order.⁶⁶

It is true that the roles [*personae*] of accuser, of defender, of intercessor, and judge are distinct, and it would take unnecessary time to treat their respective duties [*officia*] in this discussion.⁶⁷

Augustine tells Macedonius that the role of bishop, and the practice of intercession, is not an affront to the public order that Macedonius must protect:

The bishop's practice of intercession does not contradict the ordering of human affairs. Far from it. In fact, if the latter did not exist, there would be no cause or opportunity to intercede.⁶⁸

Augustine's point is that the role of bishop and magistrate are complementary insofar as mercy can be performed (as a grant of pardon, in this case) without abolishing the whole system of law and order through which merciful action becomes intelligible to the criminal and to the community.

Augustine readily admits that a successful intercession may lead to regrettable consequences (e.g. criminal recidivism, lack of deterrence). Nevertheless:

I do not believe that such evil consequences ought to be taken into consideration by us when we intercede with you, but only the good effects which are the aim and object of our action [e.g. exemplifying self-sacrificial mercy and helping reshape the criminal's way of life].⁶⁹

Augustine freely admits this because he assumes that Macedonius will already have these sorts of unintended consequences ready to mind; it is part of Macedonius's job description. Augustine claims further that his role as bishop allows him to see the case from a different point of view – that of the intercessor. Augustine presents Macedonius

⁶⁶ *Ep.* 153.8, 11.

⁶⁷ *Ep.* 153.8.

⁶⁸ *Ep.* 153.16.

⁶⁹ *Ep.* 153.18, 26.

with a case for the interdependence of the roles of judge and bishop in the practice of justice:

Your strictness is, therefore, beneficial. Its exercise assists even our peace. But our intercession is beneficial as well. Its exercise modifies even your strictness ... In this way, the judge's punishment will be feared without the intercessor's religion being scorned. For both chastisement and pardon have a place in the successful reform of a human life. Even if someone is so corrupt or impious that neither punishment nor mercy can help to reform him, still good men are to fulfill the duty of love, in their motives and in their consciences, which God can see, whether through strictness or through leniency.⁷⁰

It is at this point in the letter, deep into his argument, that Augustine finally offers Macedonius Paul's well-known justification of recourse to capital punishment by civil authorities found in Romans 13:1-8. Augustine cites the passage at length, including the following verses:

Rulers do not inspire fear in those who do good, but in those who do evil. Do you want not to fear the authorities? Do good, and you will have praise from them; for the minister of God is there for your good. If you do evil, then fear him; for he does not wield a sword pointlessly. He is a minister of God, and avenger of his anger on the evildoer. Therefore you must be subject to this *necessity* not only because of their anger, but because of your conscience (Romans 13:3-5). (my own emphasis)

Augustine then casts Paul's justification of the *necessity* of capital punishment into the light of his argument about the interdependence of roles and the duty of love that he has been developing throughout his letter:

These words of the apostle show the value of your strictness. Accordingly, just as those who are in fear are ordered to show love to those who inspire fear, so those who inspire fear are ordered to show love to those who are in fear. None of this should be done out of a desire to inflict harm, but everything out of love of serving others. Nothing appalling, nothing inhuman, should be done.⁷¹

Here we find all the strings of Augustine's appeal to Macedonius coming together. Macedonius's obligation to public order must be reimagined within the context

⁷⁰ *Ep.* 153.19.

⁷¹ *Ep.* 153.19.

of his duty to love. The appeal to universal neighbor-love (even for enemies) is an appeal to Macedonius to act on the basis of his *humanity*. “Nothing should be done out of a desire to inflict harm, but everything out of love of serving others ... nothing inhuman should be done.”⁷² And it is on this basis, within this framework, that Augustine appeals to Macedonius for clemency: “[This] is why punishment should not be taken as far as death; if that happens, there is no one to benefit.”⁷³ Augustine is implicitly asking Macedonius to discern whether or not capital punishment is really a *necessity* in the present case, or in any case.⁷⁴

Augustine’s defense of his request for clemency in Letter 153 represents a fusion of three distinct moral languages. The first two are the languages of Stoic *oikeiōsis* and the double commandment of love. The third language is that of Cicero’s theory of roles (*personae*) found in the first book of *De officiis* (a language also inherited from the Stoics).⁷⁵ According to Cicero, there can be a conflict between one’s primary role as a *human being* (and the higher-level identification with the human race that this *persona* supports) and one’s particular, conventional role and its practices (e.g. husband, mother, child, slave, public official).⁷⁶ The language of roles is distinctly theatrical; *personae* can

⁷² *Ep.* 153.19.

⁷³ *Ep.* 153.17.

⁷⁴ In their conclusion that Letter 153 constitutes an absolute rejection by Augustine of the morality of the death penalty, G. Combès, *La doctrine politique de saint Augustin*, 188-192, especially 191-192; N. Blazquez, “Pena de muerte y humanism agustiniano,” *Augustinus* 21 (1976): 135-151; and A. Coccia, “L’umanità,” 586, do not take adequate account of the nuance of Augustine’s interpretation of Romans 13, and his corresponding arguments about *necessity* and role-interdependence at *ep.* 153.16-19.

⁷⁵ Cicero, *De officiis* 1.107-115. See C. Gill, “Personhood and Personality: The Four-*personae* Theory in Cicero, *de Officiis* I,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 6 (1988): 169-99.

⁷⁶ Cicero, *De officiis* 1.107-108. Gill, “Personhood and Personality,” argues convincingly that the tension between these two *personae* is much less pronounced in Cicero than it is in the Roman Stoic Epictetus (187-192). Gill finds fault with Cicero’s *De officiis* for its “failure to explore, in a critical and constructive way, the problems involved in reconciling the different types of *persona* ... [*De officiis*] ... is pervaded ... by the assumption that conventional social values and attitudes in Greco-Roman aristocratic society are fully in accordance with human nature in its most ideal and universal form” (197). Augustine’s presentation

also be translated as “masks” or “characters.” The apparent tension between one’s roles (e.g. as human being and judge), and the role-specific obligations associated with each role, was a stock problem in Hellenistic and Roman philosophical ethics that Cicero inherited. Augustine adopts this language in Letter 153 and explores its potential for thinking about the compatibility of Christian ideals and judicial obligations.

The perceived conflict between Macedonius’s role as a human being and his conventional role as magistrate forms the central tension of Letter 153. This letter is perhaps the clearest example of the way Augustine imagines the virtues of love influencing the way a public official might fulfill his role-specific obligation to tend the wellbeing of the political community at the level of the practice of punishment. Augustine challenges Macedonius to cultivate an interior disposition of gentleness and urges him to express it in action and to avoid an action that might, in other circumstances, be justified as necessary. The more that a public official can reconcile their two *personae* and allow higher-level *oikeiōsis* to subsume and transform lower-level *oikeiōsis*, the greater their virtue. By avoiding the dichotomy of necessity and will, and by obtaining the virtue of love in both disposition and action (e.g. leniency), the public official achieves not only virtue, but also eternal goods (e.g. eternal *gloria*).⁷⁷

Perhaps a judge has an easier time than a soldier in uniting the two aspects of virtue and avoiding necessity because of the legal and institutional order that structures political society (unlike Boniface’s situation with the Vandals). One example that suggests that military officials are also expected to avoid the *necessity* of war and killing

of the tension between Macedonius’s role as a human being and as a judge is much closer to Gill’s interpretation of Epictetus.

⁷⁷ *Ep.* 229.2. In 427/428 AD Darius was dispatched to north Africa to end the fighting between Boniface and imperial troops. In this effort he was apparently successful. He and Augustine also exchanged *ep.* 230-231.

can be found in Letter 229 (429/430 AD) to Darius, a high-ranking imperial official (*uir illustris*).⁷⁸ Augustine praises Darius for escaping necessity and achieving peace through peace itself:

Greater glory is merited by killing not men with swords, but war with words, and by acquiring or achieving peace not through war but through peace itself. For those who fight, if they are good men, are certainly aiming at peace, but still through bloodshed. By contrast, you were sent to avoid any blood being shed. For others, then, one is a necessity; for you, the other is a joy ... rejoice that so great and true a good is yours and enjoy it in God, who has enabled you to be such a person and to undertake such an enterprise.⁷⁹

This letter suggests that virtuous military officials have a responsibility to try to avoid the necessities of war and bloodshed that is not altogether unlike the call to avoid capital punishment that Augustine urges upon Macedonius.

Letter 155 to Macedonius

In Letter 154 we learn that Macedonius granted Augustine's appeal and pardoned the criminal. Augustine writes back (Letter 155) to congratulate Macedonius on his decision, and he takes the opportunity to finish the argument about higher-level *oikeiōsis* that he began in Letter 153. In Letter 155 Augustine takes Macedonius further out and farther up the extending rings of *oikeiōsis*, encouraging him to view his responsibility for the peace of north Africa in the light of his primary responsibility to love God, the highest good. Although the Neoplatonic elements of Augustine's presentation of the political and theological virtues in Letter 155 have been documented, scholars have yet to recognize Augustine's presentation of the double commandment of love on the model of higher-level *oikeiōsis*, and the framework for thinking about transformation of roles and

⁷⁸ On Darius in general see Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, II: AD 395-527*, 347-348, s.v. Darius 2; Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 264-265, s.v. Darius.

⁷⁹ *Ep.* 229.2.

practices that this provides him.⁸⁰ Letter 155 provides us with an opportunity to consider both the possibilities, and potential dangers, of Augustine's model of the transformation of role-specific obligations (i.e. the fusion of the double commandment of love and Stoic higher-level *oikeiōsis*).

At its highest level, *oikeiōsis* entails not only universal neighbor-love and love for God, but also the task of transforming loving the neighbor (even the enemy) into loving God, the good. At this stage, the role-specific obligations necessary for tending the temporal health and friendship of the communities formed in lower-level *oikeiōsis* (household, commonwealth) are subsumed by the higher task of tending the moral and spiritual wellbeing of the relevant community.⁸¹ Augustine tells Macedonius that we:

should seek virtue from the Lord our God who made us, so that we can overcome the evils of this life; we should also seek the life of happiness, so that we may enjoy it after this life in eternity ... That is what we want for ourselves and for the city of which we are citizens. The source of happiness is not one thing for a human being and another for a city: a city is indeed nothing other than a like-minded mass of human beings.⁸²

This work of caring for the spiritual wellbeing of the political community requires a public official to consider the purpose to which the temporal health and friendship of the political society are being directed. Augustine exhorts Macedonius on this point:

[I]f your governing, however informed by the virtues, is directed only to the final aim of allowing human beings to suffer no unjust hardships in the flesh; and if you think that it is no concern of yours to what purpose they put the peace that you struggle to provide for them (that is, to speak directly, how they worship the true God, with whom the fruit of all peaceful life is found), then all that effort towards the life of true happiness will not benefit you at all. I appear to be rather shameless in saying this.⁸³

⁸⁰ On the Neoplatonic elements in the letter, see R. Dodaro, "Political and Theological Virtues in Augustine, Letter 155 to Macedonius," *Augustiniana* 54 (2004): 431-74.

⁸¹ *Ep.* 155.8.

⁸² *Ep.* 155.9.

⁸³ *Ep.* 155.10-11.

Augustine goes on to explain to Macedonius what this sort of concern for the people's spiritual interests might amount to in terms of his role as magistrate. He urges him to "use the virtues" correlated with his "secular position of honor" to promote true piety "by living an exemplary religious life and through the devotion you show to their interests, whether by support or deterrence."⁸⁴ The primary way a public official can tend the spiritual wellbeing of the people, on this account, is through the practice of the virtues associated with his specific role as public official: through "the devotion" he shows to the people's "interests," and "by living an exemplary religious life."⁸⁵ These are all things that fall within the boundaries of the role and role-specific obligations of the judge that Augustine set forth in Letter 153. Augustine concludes his advice on Macedonius's obligation to care for the spiritual wellbeing of the people with this:

We ought therefore "to love God and our neighbor as ourselves," so that we will lead anyone we can to worship God by comforting them with kindness, or educating them through teaching, or restraining them through discipline, in the knowledge that "all of the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-39).⁸⁶

If Augustine's argument in Letter 153, and Macedonius's ensuing decision to spare the criminal, exhibits one form of higher-level *oikeiōsis* transforming lower-level *oikeiōsis*, we find another aspect of it in Letter 155 when Augustine thanks Macedonius for his help in suppressing the Donatists. In the final paragraph of Letter 155, Augustine congratulates Macedonius for his admirable ability to negotiate concern for both public and spiritual affairs, offering him a striking image of his dual-*persona*: "though you wore the belt of an earthly judge you appeared to have your mind largely fixed on the heavenly

⁸⁴ *Ep.* 155.11.

⁸⁵ *Ep.* 155.12.

⁸⁶ *Ep.* 155.15.

commonwealth.”⁸⁷ This image of the heavenly-minded judge must refer to Macedonius’s involvement in pardoning the criminal and also to his role in suppressing the Donatists. It is an image that should stick with us, therefore, because it reminds us of the possibilities, and potential dangers, of influence and so-called transformation.

If a public official were to follow the logic of Augustine’s argument about the transformation of role-specific obligations in the double commandment of love (i.e. loving the neighbor into loving God, the good), one wonders who gets to determine the content of the concept of the highest good at the level of political practice; and also whether there is a moral conception of the good that is intelligible apart from its devotional culmination in true piety or civil religion. On these questions there is a vast chasm between Augustine’s age and our own.

Throughout these letters, Augustine exhibits great “respectfulness” toward Macedonius and toward his role’s primary obligation to tend the *temporal* health and friendship of the political community.⁸⁸ This is why, when urging Macedonius to consider the “purpose to which [the people] put the peace that you struggle to provide them (that is, to speak directly, how they worship the true God),” Augustine worries that he must “appear to be rather shameless in saying this” to Macedonius.⁸⁹ Augustine’s respectfulness clearly does not mean that he thinks that a public official’s role is entirely neutral or devoid of responsibility for the moral and spiritual wellbeing of the people. Yet Augustine also recognizes the different priorities and emphases of social and political roles, and he accepts that the transformation of political structures by religious ideals in the later Roman Empire will happen primarily at the individual level, on a case by case

⁸⁷ *Ep.* 155.17

⁸⁸ *Ep.* 155.11.

⁸⁹ *Ep.* 155.10-11.

basis, as officials seek to perform their roles and fulfill their duties to tend the *true interests* of the people under their care. This approach puts a tremendous amount of pressure on a public official's ability to discern the good in difficult situations. It is this *respectfulness* for the variety of roles and duties necessary to sustain human society – at every level – that most elegantly captures Augustine's view of the distinction between the secular and religious spheres. And, as we saw in Letter 153, this transformation of role performance can also happen through role interdependence, including the complementary roles of bishop and judge. Augustine accepts that his own role in transformation will happen at the level of duty – e.g. his role-specific obligation to intercede on behalf of criminals (*intercessionis officium*).

In this chapter we have discovered that public office, for Augustine, is a temporal good necessary for the sake of the health and friendship of political society. Like all temporal goods, it can either be used well or ill, and its good or bad use is contingent upon the condition of the user's soul. The good use of public office involves the practice of the virtues relevant to the performance of a specific role. The cases of conflicting goods that we have examined in this chapter (e.g. the good of public order versus the wellbeing of an individual criminal), all manifest in an apparent tension between the performance of one's role-specific obligations (e.g. to enforce the law, to deter crime) and the practice of the higher virtues associated with enemy- and neighbor-love (e.g. benevolence, mercifulness, gentleness).

We are now in a position to say something more precisely about what the transformation of political society might look like, on Augustine's view. First, transformation requires a public official to reimagine the fulfillment of his or her role-

specific obligations to promote the wellbeing of political society within the horizon of the double commandment of love (higher-level *oikeiōsis*). As we saw in Letter 153, this work of reimagining and recontextualizing requires intense self-examination and inward cultivation of virtuous dispositions (e.g. benevolence, forbearance). The second step of transformation involves a willingness on the part of the public official to perform his or her role through the practice of these higher virtues. Through this movement from internal disposition to external activity, the public official may be able to avoid performing actions that might otherwise be seen as *necessary* (e.g. Macedonius's decision to pardon the criminal, Darius's ability to end the war without bloodshed). These letters to public officials, therefore, provide us with a series of colorful insights into Augustine's own understanding of the role Christian ethics might play in the transformation of political society.

Chapter 4

PRIVATE GOODS

We now turn to wealth, the third temporal good in Augustine's repeated cluster – marriage and family life, public office, and wealth.¹ Wealth (*diuites*) denotes, for Augustine, both what we today call money (e.g. gold and silver coins in the later Roman Empire) and, more expansively, the whole of one's property and possessions.² Our focus on Augustine's letters and sermons is essential in this case, for his ideas about wealth appear exclusively in them. Not only does he not devote a treatise to the topic, the theme scarcely appears in those texts.³

As we have seen in previous chapters, the heart of Augustine's practical ethics is found in his adaptation of the Stoic and Peripatetic doctrine of *oikeiōsis* ("social appropriation"). It forms the basis of his advice on goods. According to *oikeiōsis*, desire

¹ *Ep.* 130.10-12. See the beginning of chapter two.

² *En. Ps.* 101(1).1, *lib. arb.* 1.32.

³ For the appearance of wealth in his treatises see *trin.* 4.17, 12.11, 13.6, 13.18. Augustine's omission is not unique. We have very few treatments of the topic in antiquity, especially from the Roman empire. As P. Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2012), 55, notes: "There is a brutal reason for this lacuna. The Roman empire was not a free world. Wealth and its inseparable shadow, power, were topics that had to be approached circumspectly. For many centuries, educated persons had been the subjects of an authoritarian regime, which claimed to be the protector of the Roman social order." Wealth was also a taboo subject for critical treatment given Roman intellectuals' dependence on the powerful system of patronage. Yet this makes the forceful preaching of an Ambrose, or Augustine, on the subject of wealth and poverty that much more compelling. For more on this point, see Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 54-7.

for temporal goods is fitting for humans insofar as these goods are necessary for the sake of the two intrinsic temporal goods of health and friendship.⁴ Furthermore, friendship represents an unfolding series of concentric circles, starting from the point of one's soul and extending out to one's body (in health), household, commonwealth, world, and cosmos. According to *oikeiōsis* it is both natural and rational to prefer health to sickness, wealth to poverty, and so on; and the desirability of these goods is grounded in a premise about human nature and self-love.⁵ The process of *oikeiōsis* has three distinct elements:

- * Self-awareness (a cognitive element)
- * Self-love (a psychological element)
- * An injunction: to draw those from the outer circles into the domain of one's proper self-love and thereby to observe the demands of justice (obligations that are inscribed in the command to love one's neighbor as oneself, on Augustine's account)

The first two elements are common to human beings and animals – at least in a very basic way – and provide an account of the inextricable link between self-perception and self-regard. The third element is unique to adult human moral development, and represents a type of amplification and extension of the first two elements in one's attitude toward others.⁶

⁴ Remember that for Augustine temporal and external goods are the same thing. "Temporal" is Augustine's favored qualification insofar as it better captures his psychological and eschatological account of them.

⁵ S. 399.4.

⁶ My account of the three elements of *oikeiōsis* is indebted to the excellent analysis of M.M. McCabe, "The Stoic Sage in the Original Position," in *Politeia in Greek and Roman Philosophy*, ed. V. Harte and M. Lane (New York: Cambridge UP, 2013), 216-35.

In a work entitled, “How one should treat one’s relatives,” the second century (AD) Stoic, Hierocles, provides a fascinating model for this expanding appropriation of others:

Each of us is, as it were, entirely encompassed by many circles, some smaller, others larger, the latter enclosing the former on the basis of their different and unequal dispositions relative to each other. The first and closest circle is the one which a person has drawn as though around a center, his own mind. This circle encloses the body and anything taken for the sake of the body; for it is a circle of virtually minimal radius, and almost touches the center itself. Next, the second one further removed from the center but enclosing the first circle; this one contains parents, siblings, wife and children ... The outermost and largest circle, which encompasses all the rest, is that of the whole human race ... It is the task of the well-tempered person, in his proper treatment of each group, to draw the circles together somehow towards the center, and to keep zealously transferring those from the enclosing circles into the enclosed ones ... Thus a clear proposal has been set out, about how we should treat our relations, since we have already been taught how one should use oneself and one’s parents and siblings, and then one’s wife and one’s children: for it is laid down that one should treat those from the third circle in the same way as these [from the second], and again our other relations in the same way as these ... for it would arrive at what is reasonable if, through our own initiative towards them, we cut down the distance of our relation to each person.⁷

This image of “zealously transferring those from the enclosing circles into the enclosed” and “cut[ting] down the distance of our relation to each person” nicely illustrates the goal of *oikeiōsis*.

Augustine’s writings are full of appeals to extend the borders of friendship. Here is a representative passage from Sermon 299D:

The necessary goods in this world amount to these two things: health [*salus*] and a friend. These are the things that we should value highly and not despise. Health and a friend are goods of nature. God made man to be and to live; that’s health; but so that he shouldn’t be alone, a system of friendship was worked out. So friendship begins with married partner and children, and there moves on to strangers. But if we consider that we all have one father and one mother [Adam

⁷ Hierocles, *ap.* Stobaeus 4.671.7; 4.84.23 [with omissions]. For a helpful examination of Hierocles’ account of *oikeiōsis* within the broader context of Stoic theories about wealth and property, see A.A. Long, “Stoic Philosophers on Persons, Property-Ownership, and Community,” in *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy* (New York: Oxford UP, 2006), 335-59.

and Eve], who will be a stranger? Every human being is neighbor to every other human being. Ask nature, is he unknown? He's human. Is she an enemy? She's human. Is he a foe? He's human. Is she a friend? Let her stay a friend. Is he an enemy? Let him become a friend ... So what is health for you must also be health for your friend. As regards the friend's clothing, "Whoever has two shirts, should share with the one who has none;" as regards the friend's food, "and whoever has food should do likewise" (Luke 3:11). You're fed, you feed; you're clothed, you clothe.⁸

Augustine reinterprets the Sermon on the Mount through the lens of *oikeiōsis* in this passage – enjoining his congregation to use their possessions to tend one another's *health* as if it were their own.

As we might expect, in *oikeiōsis* the temporal good of wealth, and the resources it designates, is primarily associated with the first, second, and third rings of friendship (health, household, and commonwealth). Failure to use one's wealth to provide for these friends is a major omission. Toward the end of *De officiis* Cicero cites the Stoic philosopher, Hecaton, on this point:

It is the function of a wise man, while doing nothing contrary to conventions, laws, and institutions, to be concerned with his private affairs. For we want to be wealthy not only for ourselves, but also for our children, relatives, friends, and above all, for our country. For the resources and supplies of individuals are the wealth of the republic.⁹

Augustine fully endorses this view. It is one that he inherits as much from Cicero as from Paul.¹⁰

One's use of wealth is a natural part of one's self-love extending through the lower rings of *oikeiōsis*. Yet the question becomes: as one redefines the borders of those who count as friends, how does this reconfigure one's obligations in terms of the use of wealth? The answer from Augustine, as we sense in the sermon above, is that wealth

⁸ S. 299D.1-3. Cf. *doct. chr.* 1.31, *ep. Io. tr.* 8.4.

⁹ *Off.* 3.63.

¹⁰ *Ep.* 262.7. Cf. 1 Timothy 5:8.

represents a tangible opportunity for extending one's self-regard beyond the lower rings of friendship – encompassing the welfare of more distant neighbors. Distance here is a relational, rather than spatial, concept that signifies someone's proximity to the natural and conventional rings of familial and civic friendship. Augustine preaches over and over to the congregation at Hippo that they must use their wealth to fulfill the command of neighbor-love in the widest sense available to them.¹¹

Augustine's account of using wealth to identify with those outside the second and third rings of friendship represents a fusion of the moral languages of *oikeiōsis* and biblical neighbor-love (a fusion that we have witnessed elsewhere in his letters and sermons). His account of wealth as a direct and tangible route for achieving wider-level friendship is an innovation in the history of the concept of *oikeiōsis*, and a *novum* in Western ethical discourse. This has yet to be appreciated. Part of my purpose in this chapter is also to respond to the criticism that Augustine's teaching on wealth entails a crass sense of spiritual self-interest, resulting in a dehumanization of the poor.¹² On this reading, Augustine's view of wealth is seen as further evidence that his exclusive focus on the individual's longing for happiness distorts his account of neighbor-love – thus leaving no room for genuine recognition or love of another.¹³ Certainly Augustine's

¹¹ S. 399.7.

¹² Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 193, notes that the rationale Augustine presents to his congregation for almsgiving appears as “impersonal as stockbroking – as a judicious transfer of wealth from this unsafe world to the next.” For the clearest expression of the criticism that Augustine's account of giving to the poor amounts to both spiritual self-interest and a depersonalization of the poor, see B. Ramsey, “Almsgiving in the Latin Church: The Late Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries,” *Theological Studies* 43 (1982): 226-59. For a parallel account, see P. V. Chiappa, *Il tema della povertà nella predicazione di Sant'Agostino* (Milan: Università de Trieste, 1975), 165. For an overview of Augustine's preaching on wealth with extensive bibliography, see P. Allen and E. Morgan, “Augustine on Poverty,” in *Preaching Poverty in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Realities*, ed. P. Allen et al. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2009), 119-70. See also, A. Kessler and J.-U. Krause, “Eleemosyna,” in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 2:752-67.

¹³ This is a general criticism of the erosiac structure of Augustine's eudaimonistic ethics and it has been articulated many times, perhaps most famously by A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros, Part I – A Study of the Christian Idea of Love* (1930); *Part II – The History of the Christian Idea of Love* (1936), rev. ed., trans.

account of transferring wealth from this world to the next through generosity to the poor leaves him open to such a charge. Yet I will argue that such an interpretation misses the subtlety of the metaphors involved in the motivational content he offers for giving.

In the first section of this chapter I demonstrate that Augustine's advice on wealth is best understood within the framework of the expanding circles of *oikeiōsis*. I focus on Augustine's account of the "works of mercy" (Latin: *opera misericordiae*; Greek: *eleemosyna*; both terms can also be translated as "almsgiving") as a method for achieving wider-level *oikeiōsis*.¹⁴ In the second section I take a closer look at the motivational content embedded in his exhortations to giving. By demonstrating how these appeals make the most complete sense within the framework of *oikeiōsis*, I offer a response to the criticism that Augustine's account of wealth amounts to a calculating spiritual self-interest and a dehumanizing instrumentalization of the poor.

I. Uncertain Riches: Augustine's Advice on Wealth

As was the case with marriage, family life, and public office, over each of the temporal goods stand the higher, interior goods of the virtues. For Augustine, each virtue involves a habitual disposition (*habitus*) and a corresponding set of external actions or activities (*opera*). Each virtue is associated with the good use or renunciation of a

P.S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953); and H. Arendt, *Der Libesbegriff bei Augustin* (Berlin: Springer, 1929). The most complete response to Nygren's criticism remains J. Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), 15-21. Other authors have sought to demonstrate the significance of neighbor love in Augustine's eudaimonistic ethics, most notably G. Hultgren, *Le commandement d'amour chez Augustin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1939); O. O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980); R. Williams, "Language, Reality, and Desire in Augustine's *De Doctrina*," *Journal of Literature and Theology* 3 (1989): 138-50; R. Canning, *Unity of Love for God and Neighbour in St. Augustine* (Heverlee-Leuven: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993); P. Burnell, *The Augustinian Person* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), chapter four: "Humanitas," 97-135; Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, chapter six: "Love as a Political Virtue: 'Platonists' and the Problem of God," 319-62.

¹⁴ For the best overview of Augustine on almsgiving, see A.D. Fitzgerald, "Almsgiving in the Works of St. Augustine," in *Signum Pietatis. Festgabe für Cornelius Petrus Mayer OSA*, ed. A. Zumkeller (Würzburg: Augustinus Verlag, 1989), 445-59. See also, V.H. Drecol, "Misericordia," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. C. Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 2012-2013), 4:34-40.

temporal good. The virtues necessary for extending wealth beyond the familiar patterns of health, household, and commonwealth are those associated with the practices of *poverty* and *works of mercy*. These two practices represent different ways of using wealth to achieve friendship at the widest level. As is always the case in Augustine's moral advice, it is a matter of distinguishing the higher goods and pursuing them within the context of one's role, and in light of the priorities imposed by one's obligations. Given this, certain goods can conflict. Beyond the basic priority of the virtues over wealth, in Augustine's advice, we also find a competition between the virtues associated with wealth use: often poverty over almsgiving and almsgiving over piety, but, in some cases, startling reversals of these priorities, depending on an individual's circumstances.¹⁵

For Augustine, the flow of wealth to household and city is part of the virtue of piety (*pietas*), and it moves in both generational directions – specifying what we owe those we depend on and those who depend on us. This includes the web of familial, civic, and patron-client relations that played such an important role in late Roman life – as is evident in Augustine's own career.¹⁶ Yet, for Augustine, the scriptural injunctions to use one's resources to help those in need, construed along the lines of *oikeiōsis*, also require Christians to think about wealth outside these conventional networks of support.

The renunciation of one's wealth and possessions, as practiced in Augustine's monasteries, is understood as a practice entailing the highest virtues related to wealth. It is construed by Augustine as voluntary obedience to the "counsel of perfection"

¹⁵ *Ep.* 157, 243, 262, *en. Ps.* 72.26.

¹⁶ See Augustine's advice on the use of wealth in promoting philosophical leisure in Letter 1 to his early patron, Romanianus. On Augustine's relationship to Romanianus, and the importance of patronage in Augustine's career, see A. Gabillon, "Romanianus alias Cornelius: Du nouveau sur le bienfaiteur et l'ami de saint Augustin," *Revue des études augustiniennes* 24 (1978): 58-70. See also Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 148-57.

presented to the rich young man in the gospels: “Jesus said to him, ‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’ When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Matthew 19:16-30).¹⁷

In Letter 157 to Hilary (a letter written in response to the Pelagian view that total renunciation of wealth is necessary for salvation; a view expressed most clearly in the Pelagian tract *On Riches (De diuitiis)*), Augustine strikes a mediating view between the practices of poverty and almsgiving.¹⁸ As we saw with celibacy in chapter two, Augustine’s letters reveal his real anger with the Pelagian prioritization of renunciation at the expense of the more mellow virtues associated with marriage and wealth use: “let them [the Pelagians] rouse people to greater goods without condemning lesser ones.”¹⁹ While Augustine agrees with the Pelagian view that walking in the “path of perfection” entails a higher virtue than the slow doling out of one’s resources in works of mercy, he insists that the practice is simply not for everyone (this is true both spiritually and practically, in Augustine’s mind).²⁰ As we have seen before, when Augustine speaks of the higher virtues of renunciation he always includes this citation from Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians: “each has his own gift from God, one this gift, another that” (1

¹⁷ *Ep.* 157.33. Here Augustine speaks of the call to renounce one’s wealth as a “counsel of perfection” rather than a “commandment” on the basis of this scriptural citation. Cf. Mark 10:17-31.

¹⁸ For the best accounts of the Pelagian origins of this anonymous treatise from Southern Italy, see A. Kessler, *Reichtumskritik und Pelagianismus: Die pelagianische Diatribe De diuitiis. Situierung, Lesetext, Übertsetzung, Kommentar*, Paradosis 43 (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1999), 36-55; P. Garsey, “The Originality and Origins of the Anonymous, *De Diuitiis*,” in *From Rome to Constantinople. Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron*, ed. H. Amirav et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 29-45. On the aristocratic and philosophical elements of the treatise, and the changing social and economic environment of its readers, see Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, chapter 19: “*Tolle diuitem* (Take away the rich): The Pelagian Criticism of Wealth,” 308-21.

¹⁹ *Ep.* 157.17.

²⁰ *Ep.* 157.37.

Corinthians 7:7).²¹ Augustine concludes his letter to Hilary rather wryly: “I suspect that some of those [Pelagians] who spread about these ideas impudently and imprudently are supported by rich and pious Christians in their needs.”²² As ever, we find Augustine attempting to maintain the superiority of the virtues of renunciation (e.g. the virtues associated with poverty), while retaining a sense of the dignity involved in the virtues of good use. Letter 157 reveals Augustine’s suspicion of heroic poverty standing in isolation from a corollary commitment to living in community with shared property.

Given his forceful defense of retaining wealth for good use, it is easy to forget that Augustine himself spent his whole life in Hippo in a small monastic community with shared property – the details of which he speaks about openly before his congregation.²³ Augustine’s own emphasis on poverty within a life of shared property reminds us that, for him, the virtues associated with wealth must always be aimed at widening the borders of friendship. He refers to these communities of shared property as “little commonwealths,” or new households, speaking of the monastery as a community in which the self-other relation necessarily expands beyond the natural progression of offspring and civic loyalty.²⁴ As Peter Brown has pointed out, Augustine’s advice on

²¹ *Ep.* 157.37.

²² *Ep.* 137.17.

²³ S. 355.2, 356.1. On more than one occasion Augustine addresses what happens to an individual’s property once they join a monastery in his sermons. On these two sermons see G. Lawless, “A Breach of Monastic Poverty in the Fifth Century: Augustine’s Sermon 356,” in *Studia abbati Carolo Egger a confratribus oblata*, ed. C. Egger (Rome: Abbazia Maria Reginas, 1984), 47-60. Cf. Augustine, *Regulations for a Monastery, Rule*, and Letter 211. For the most complete account of the Greek and Roman philosophical influences on Augustine’s monastic ideals, see G. Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1990); L. Verheijen, *La Règle de saint Augustin*, 2 vols. (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1967); C. Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), chapter one: “Augustine and the Problem of Authority,” 3-32.

²⁴ *Op. mon.* 25.32; cf. *ciu.* 5.15, *b. coniug.* 18.21 makes this point explicit, though in condensed form. On the monastic ideal of common property in Augustine, see the helpful discussions of Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 78-83; P. Garnsey, *Thinking about Property: From Antiquity to the Age of Revolution* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), 72-6; Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, chapter 11, “‘The Life in Common of a Kind of Divine and Heavenly Republic’: Augustine on Public and Private in a Monastic

poverty and monastic life (for both men and women) represents the most thorough “experiment in creating a community without private property yet to be imagined in the Christian west.”²⁵ As was the case with the higher good of celibacy (ranking above marriage), poverty is unintelligible apart from the new forms of friendship and neighbor-love achieved in these sorts of communities.

Augustine primarily construes poverty and common property as a widening of the financial and moral bonds of piety (*pietas*).²⁶ In Letter 243 to Laetus (the man we met in chapter two who had abandoned monastic life after his father’s death due to his attachment to his mother and household), Augustine exhorts Laetus to return to the monastery, presenting the case as a matter of piety. There we learn that Laetus’s “private love” for the “personal goods” of his household are hindering his progress toward the “public love” and “common goods” found in monastic community.²⁷ This public love foreshadows the way goods will be experienced in eternity, according to Augustine.²⁸ The transition from private to public love will be experienced as a death, Augustine assures Laetus, that will eventually give birth to new, wider bonds of piety:

[We must] put to death this physical affection both in ourselves and in our dear ones, yet not so that anyone is ungrateful to his parents and mocks those very same benefits ... by which we were born into this life, raised, and nourished. Let him rather observe piety [*pietas*] everywhere.²⁹

Community,” 173-84. Note that Augustine does not view private property as inherently sinful, or inextricably tied to the Fall. Indeed he rejects this view as it is expressed in *De diuitiis*. Ownership of temporal goods, beginning with one’s own body, is “natural,” for Augustine, insofar as it is understood along the lines of “appropriation” (*oikeiōsis*), and identification with those goods as belonging within one’s sphere of self-regard and care.

²⁵ Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 175.

²⁶ On Augustine’s conception of piety, see chapter three above.

²⁷ *Ep.* 243.3.

²⁸ *Ep.* 243.3. The idea here is that life lived in shared property prepares the Christian soul for what awaits it in eternity – where all goods will be held in common. This provides one of the deepest insights into Augustine’s idea of God – who is the highest and most perfect common good (*bonum commune*). See *ep.* 137.17.

²⁹ *Ep.* 243.7.

Laetus's natural obligation to his mother and family remains, yet he must be careful, Augustine warns, not to let this little ring of piety form a cell that keeps him from wider obligations.

Although there is much more to be said about Augustine's understanding of poverty and its relation to *oikeiōsis*, it is the second route for reaching the widest circle that I want to focus on: the practice of almsgiving. In Letter 157 to Hilary (Augustine's response to the Pelagian teaching on wealth expressed in *De diuitiis*), he argues that both poverty and almsgiving are viable ways of adhering to the scriptural mandates about wealth and giving. Augustine provides Hilary a little vignette of the practice:

[R]ich Christians ... though they possess riches, they are not, nonetheless, possessed by them so that they prefer them to Christ. For they have renounced the world with a sincere heart so that they place no hope in such things ... They break their bread with the needy; they clothe the naked, redeem the captive, and store up for themselves "a good foundation for the future in order that they might attain true life" (1 Timothy 6:19).³⁰

This letter echoes a repeated refrain from Augustine's sermons: "Gold and silver are to be used by the good for their practice of the works of mercy."³¹ As we also see in the letter to Hilary, Augustine's conception of almsgiving (*opera misericordiae*; "works of mercy") is much more expansive than an occasional handout to the poor.³² Almsgiving

³⁰ *Ep.* 157.35.

³¹ S. 50.4. This conception of the good use of wealth in almsgiving is commonplace among early Christian authors. See, for example, Cyprian, *De opere et eleemosyna* 22. For a helpful overview of almsgiving as it appears in a range of authors, see J. Budde, "Christian Charity, Now and Always: The Fathers of the Church on Alms," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 85 (1931): 561-79.

³² It is important to keep in mind that there were different sorts of "poor" (*pauperes*) in Augustine's day. If we do not, we will end up with a very polarized picture of life in late Roman Africa. Most frequently in Augustine's writings, the poor refer to the outright poor or destitute. Yet the category can also refer to a large middle class of artisans who made up the bulk of the *populus* in Roman African cities. These stood between the destitute and the truly rich. The needs, and self-perception, of these two groups were quite different, and depending on the context we can often sense which "poor" Augustine has in mind. See R. Finn, "Portraying the Poor: Descriptions of Poverty in Christian Texts from the Late Roman Empire," in *Poverty in the Roman World*, ed. M. Atkins and R. Osborne (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), 130-44. See also R. Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice 313-450* (New York: Oxford UP, 2006).

always involves a little litany of things to do with one's wealth for the sake of the vulnerable: "feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, welcoming strangers, and redeeming captives."³³ Redeeming captives refers to the practice of manumission: buying slaves for the purpose of freeing them – an official ceremony that took place in both churches and courts.³⁴ Almsgiving also represents a way of life like poverty, for Augustine: a set of practices and actions rooted in an inward, habitual disposition that he calls mercifulness (*misericordia*), love (*caritas*), justice (*iustitia*), or piety (*pietas*) on different occasions.³⁵

Augustine's sermons include a colorful and forceful collage of images aimed at helping his audience to reconceive the boundaries of piety and to imagine their obligations to those outside of household and civic institutions. Although aid to those in need ought never to come at the expense of those under one's care, each Christian must experiment with giving in order to distinguish between what is necessary for health [*salus*] and what is mere luxury.³⁶ Augustine's preaching on this shift between the

³³ S. 105A.1. The practice of giving alms to beggars, and showing sympathy to the weak was, of course, not the exclusive province of Christians in late Roman Africa. For evidence that Augustine recognized and endorsed these practices among Jews and pagans, see *en. Ps.* 83.7. The Hebrew Bible, and its various portrayals of the poor and connected conceptions of justice, exerts a massive influence on Augustine's moral imagination of wealth use. Consider Augustine's comments on Isaiah 1:11 – "What use to me, the multitude of your sacrifices?," – in Sermon 42.1: "God seeks us, not what's ours, [and] our sacrifice is alms ... [that is,] kindness to the poor." The extent to which the pagan Roman practice of "civic euergetism" – the tradition of giving and performing good deeds for one's city – included care for the city's poor remains an open question. (*Euergetiai* can be translated as "good deeds.") See R. Osborne, "Introduction: Roman Poverty in Context," in *Poverty in the Roman World*, 1-20. On civic euergetism in general, see P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque: Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1976), trans. B. Pearce, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* (New York: Penguin, 1990).

³⁴ Augustine refers to this political and ecclesial practice on multiple occasions in his letters and sermons, see especially s. 21.3-4, *ep.* 10*.3. For the best account of Augustine's attitude toward this practice, see P. Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1996), chapter thirteen: "Augustine," 206-19. On the practice in general, see J.A. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995).

³⁵ S. 38.8, 106.4, 207.1, 211.2. By performing the generous actions associated with this habitual disposition, one actually shows mercy both to the poor and to oneself. On Augustine's view of the interconnection of physical and psychological needs in almsgiving, see s. 106.4.

³⁶ S. 299D.1. Augustine did not think that those responsible for households and cities should abandon the traditional forms of giving and provision. Augustine's advice on giving to the poor is always bounded by a common sense commitment to the wellbeing of these smaller circles. In caring for the needs of those

traditional forms of wealth use in piety and the new obligation to the poor represents, perhaps, his greatest innovation in social ethics.

Augustine is concerned that the ordinary obligations of piety are being used by members in his congregation as an excuse for not giving alms, and as a cover for tightfisted greed. Let us listen in on two representative moments from the sermons:

Don't be sparing of transitory treasures, of vain wealth. Don't increase your money under the guise of piety [*pietas*]. "I'm saving it for my children"; a marvelous excuse! He's saving it for his children. Let's see, shall we? Your father saves it for you, you save it for your children, your children for their children, and so on through all generations, and not one of them is going to carry out the commandments of God [to care for the poor] ... And anyhow, people are just lying. Greed is evil. They want to cover up and whitewash themselves with a name for piety, so that they may appear to be saving up for their children what in fact they are saving up for greed.³⁷

You will say, "I am keeping [my wealth] for my children." This sounds like piety, but it is an excuse for injustice.³⁸

This obligation to secure one's family inheritance must have been a fairly common excuse. And it was a particularly effective one, in Augustine's mind, because it poses as piety and plays on the natural goodness of parental affection inscribed in the lower circles of *oikeiōsis*.

outside these rings, one is obligated to take account of the needs of one's household and not to give "to the extent of going broke" (s. 39.6). See also s. 42.2, 90.10, *en. Ps.* 146.17. Even in the most forceful exhortation to almsgiving, Augustine is keen to cite Paul's admonition: "if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). On this point, see especially Letter 262 to Ecdicia.

³⁷ S. 9.20.

³⁸ *En. Ps.* 38.11-12. Augustine often complains to his audience that the so-called demands of "civic piety" – in this case, entertaining one's city with new games, actors, and beast-fighters – serve as an excuse for dodging the weightier debt they owe to the downtrodden. See, e.g., s. 301A.7, 21.10, 32.20. On the contest between care for the poor and the older system of civic euergetism in the preaching of Christian bishops such as Augustine, see Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 74-5. "[In his preaching] Augustine deliberately engineered the imaginative collision of two worlds. He juxtaposed the city and the church in terms of two distinctive and seemingly incompatible styles of giving. In doing this, he ... created what can best be called a 'representation' of the relation between church and city in late Roman society, in which there was a constant competition between the one and the other" (74).

Once one redraws the boundaries of self-regard to include the wellbeing of spouse and children, it is easy to deceive oneself into thinking that the excessive self-interest exhibited in the vice of greed is actually motivated by concern for the beloved's wellbeing:

So extend your love, and not only as far as your husbands, wives and children. That degree of love is to be found even among cattle and sparrows. You know how these sparrows and swallows love their mates; they share the task of sitting on the eggs, together they feed their chicks, out of a charming and natural goodness, without a thought for any reward. I mean the sparrow husband doesn't say, "I will feed my children, so that when I grow old they may feed me." No such thoughts as that; he loves them freely, feeds them freely for nothing; he shows the affection of a parent, he doesn't expect any reward. You too, I know, I'm sure, love your children in the same way. "For children ought not to save up for their parents, but parents for their children" (2 Corinthians 12:14). It's on these grounds many of you justify your greed, because it's for your children that you are amassing fortunes, for them you are hoarding.³⁹

In this passage Augustine signals that it is easy for the head of household to be blinded to greed even as familial affection and the duty of piety exhibit the right motivational content: giving without thought of future reward or repayment. Throughout the sermons Augustine draws attention to the way that "piety" can become an excuse for not tending to more distant neighbors.

In a sharper homiletic moment, Augustine tells the congregation that their unjust hoarding of wealth under the guise of familial piety will end up turning their own children into "strangers" – that is, the bonds of familial affection will be broken apart by their injustice toward the poor.⁴⁰ And, conversely, citing the parable of the good

³⁹ S. 90.10. See also s. 90A.6.

⁴⁰ *En. Ps.* 48(1).14.

Samaritan, Augustine preaches that generosity can turn distant strangers into neighbors:

“The person to whom you show mercy [becomes] your neighbor [*proximus*].”⁴¹

A common trope in these sermons on the conflict of piety and generosity is an exhortation to store a more secure *heavenly* family inheritance. In constructing this argument Augustine conjoins two New Testament texts: the passage about treasure in heaven from the Sermon on the Mount and the final judgment scene in Matthew 25. The importance of these two passages for Augustine’s thinking about wealth cannot be overestimated, and it may be helpful to have them both in view:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison,

⁴¹ *En. Ps.* 48(1).14 (Luke 10:25-37). For the best overall treatment of Augustine’s interpretation of this passage, see R. Teske, “St. Augustine on the Good Samaritan,” in *Augustine of Hippo: Philosopher, Exegete, and Theologian: A Second Collection of Essays* (Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 2009), 167-92. Cf. T.J. van Bavel, “The Double Face of Love in St. Augustine: The Daring Inversion ‘Love is God,’” in *Atti del Congresso internazionale su S. Agostino nel XVI centenario della conversione*, ed. V. Grossi, vol. 3 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1987), 69-80.

and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (Matthew 25:31-46)

Augustine combines these scriptural passages in constructing the metaphor of heavenly inheritance that he uses as an incentive for heads of households to fulfill their obligation to the poor. Here is the way he does it in the two sermons cited above:

Anyhow, people are just lying ... They want to cover up and whitewash themselves with a name for piety, so that they may appear to be saving up for their children what in fact they are saving up for greed. Just to show that that is what very often happens: they say about somebody, “Why doesn’t he give alms? Because he is saving for his children.” It so happens he loses one of them. If we he was saving for his children, let him send that one’s after him. Why should he keep it in his money-bags and drop him from his mind? Give him what is due to him, pay him what you were saving for him. “But he’s dead,” he says. In fact he has gone ahead to God; his share is now owed to the poor. It’s owed to the one he has gone to stay with. It’s owed to Christ, since he has gone to stay with him. And he said, “Whoever did it to one of the least of these did it to me, and whoever failed to do it to one of the least of these failed to do it to me” (Matthew 25:40) ... How will you have the nerve to face your son who has passed on ahead, if as he passes ahead you don’t send his share on to him in heaven? Or can’t it be sent on to heaven? It most certainly can. Listen to the Lord himself telling you, “Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven” (Matthew 6:20).⁴²

I have given you good advice; put your wealth where I tell you. I do not want you to know how it gets to heaven. Put it in the hands of the poor, give it to the needy. What does it matter to you how it gets there? ... Have you forgotten the promise, “When you did it for even the least of those who are mine, you did it for me” (Matthew 25:40)? ... You have children? Very well, then, increase their number by one, and give Christ something.⁴³

The first metaphor depicts the case of a dead child, and the process of sending the child’s inheritance on to them through the vehicle of the poor. The second metaphor proposes that one be ready to adopt Christ into one’s family and to send Christ his inheritance through the destitute. These texts reveal Augustine’s detailed attempts to redraw the circle and reimagine piety within the horizon of the smaller duty of family inheritance.

⁴² S. 9.20.

⁴³ *En. Ps.* 38.12.

For heads of households in his congregation this aspect of piety loomed large in an age of fiscal and economic crisis after the sack of Rome (410 AD).⁴⁴ And in a major port city like Hippo, the image of entrusting one's goods for transport to distant shores would have been particularly vivid.⁴⁵

Yet the calculus between temporal and eternal goods is not so cut-and-dried, for Augustine. There are cases in which his advice works in the other direction. Letter 262 is an example of this.⁴⁶ There we learn that Ecdicia's eagerness to practice the virtues associated with poverty has made her neglectful of her responsibility to her household. She has donated all of her and husband's possessions to two wandering monks on the assumption that the monks will distribute these goods to the poor.⁴⁷ Her virtuous action is problematic in two ways, in Augustine's eyes. First, Ecdicia fails to consider her responsibility to care for the "temporal wellbeing" of her husband and son. Augustine reminds her that, "the relation of strangers is not the same as that of persons bound together in a society ... the relation of parents to their children is not the same as that of children to their parents. Finally, still other is the relation of husband and wife."⁴⁸ The second problem is that – just as in the case of marital continence seen in chapter two – Ecdicia decides to pursue the good of poverty without consulting her husband.⁴⁹ Thus the virtues obtained through the good of her self-willed poverty have been cancelled out by

⁴⁴ See Brown's treatment of this point in *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 291-307

⁴⁵ S. 21.8. On the maritime imagery in Augustine's sermons, see O. Perler, *Les voyages de saint Augustin* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1969), 88. Cf. C. Lepelley, *Les Cités de l'Afrique romaine au Bas-Empire*, 2 vols. (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1979), 2:113-25.

⁴⁶ As K. Cooper has convincingly shown, letters to leading laypersons – men and women alike – were a regular feature of the literature of the Latin West, and by the fifth century these letters were increasingly written in favor of the correct use of wealth, rather than its renunciation. On the social and economic aspects of this genre, and the reasons for this change in emphasis, see K. Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2007), 93-107.

⁴⁷ *Ep.* 262.2.

⁴⁸ *Ep.* 262.7.

⁴⁹ *Ep.* 262.11.

the damage caused to the friendship good of her marriage.⁵⁰ This letter presents a startling reversal of the more characteristic exhortations to give beyond the boundaries of the household found in Augustine's preaching on wealth. It presents a rare case in which the framework of *oikeiōsis* – and its network of associated roles and virtues – is used by him to reinforce an obligation to the narrower circle of the household, over and against a wider obligation to the poor.

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, the conflation of the two biblical texts – treasure in heaven and the presence of Christ in the destitute – has struck many modern interpreters as crass spiritual self-interest, compounded by a dehumanizing instrumentalization of the poor. As Boniface Ramsey has it: “The very concept of the identification of Christ and the poor [in Augustine's thought] tended to work against the poor by swallowing them up in [Christ].”⁵¹ On Ramsey's reading of Augustine, which is an authoritative and representative one, the needy become merely useful as a prop in the donor's accumulation of heavenly riches and ascent toward God. In the next section of the chapter I argue that this interpretation fails to recognize that the motivational content in Augustine's exhortations to almsgiving always works on two levels. It is only by recognizing that wealth is a temporal good in the order of *oikeiōsis*, for Augustine, that we are able to see both levels and grasp their connection.

II. Heavenly Inheritance: Levels of Motivation

The appeal to transfer wealth to an eternal family savings account through the conduit of the poor represents the ground floor of motivation in Augustine's sermons. Here he is still working within the confines of the calculating self-interest and narrow

⁵⁰ *Ep.* 262.5.

⁵¹ Ramsey, “Almsgiving in the Latin Church,” 253.

self-regard he criticizes in certain members of the congregation.⁵² This is clear in his indictment of those for whom family savings is a superficial cover for greed or luxury – a nest of vice beneath the noble garment of piety.⁵³ These heads of households have not yet extended their love of wealth beyond their smaller selves. For this sort of listener – the one who has trouble distinguishing between pious family obligation and raw self-interest – the first way, and perhaps the only way, to motivate generous use of wealth is on the murky grounds of self-interest projected heavenward.

Two important things should be noted about this lower-level motivational content. First, Augustine's willingness to begin here reveals his pragmatic commitment to the goal of giving itself. Contrary to those who claim that Augustine's only stake in the practice of almsgiving is the health of the donor's soul, this lower mode of motivating his hearers reminds us that Augustine's goal is always spiritual *and* practical.⁵⁴ Certainly Augustine wants to goad his audience toward personal transformation, but we also see that he wants to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, and to redeem the captive.

The second thing that should be noted is that the lower-level motivational content provides an insight into Augustine's theory of virtue that we have not yet explored. In a reversal of the progress from inward disposition to external action that we examined in chapter three (e.g. the virtues of *benevolentia* and *patientia*), here we find Augustine committed to the importance of external actions for shaping inward dispositions (and thus indicating a dialectic between activity and disposition in the refinement of one's motivations).⁵⁵ If a basic, lower-level desire for imperishable wealth provides impetus for

⁵² S. 90.10.

⁵³ S. 9.20.

⁵⁴ S. 36.8.

⁵⁵ *En. Ps.* 126.14.

action, then, in the process of giving one's wealth away – both in the effects of giving on the will and in the exchange with a stranger – the motivational content is already in the process of being revised to include desire for higher and wider goods.

We must remember that, for Augustine, the effects of original sin on the human will involve a privatization of desire for goods. The renunciation of wealth, a life of shared property, and almsgiving are all, in a sense, remedial acts, aimed at healing the will and reshaping human desire. All of these practices are equally susceptible to pride – e.g. ostentatious displays of giving, ascetic elitism, omission of smaller obligations – and thus a failure to achieve the wider and higher friendships implicit in the double commandment of love. There is danger on all sides.

Furthermore, material wealth, on Augustine's account, provides the opportunity for unhealthy multiplications of want, need, and desire. Embedded within his appeal to treasure in heaven are parallel exhortations to simplicity: "we should seek only so much of temporal wealth as will keep [us] free from want."⁵⁶ Such a claim is presented to his hearers as an invitation to reflect on the mysterious and insatiable quality of their own desire. At many points in the sermons Augustine seems to echo the Stoicism of Seneca ("The one who has enough has acquired what no rich person has attained, his goal") and to prefigure the Stoicism of Thoreau ("A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone").⁵⁷ Meditation on death is another common theme in the sermons – images of time flowing like a river through a graveyard: "See if you can tell the difference between a rich man's and a poor man's bones."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *En. Ps.* 68(2).18.

⁵⁷ Seneca, Letter 119.6. See also *ep.* 87. H.D. Thoreau, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*, 2nd ed., ed. W. Rossi (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 55.

⁵⁸ S. 33A.3. Cf. Seneca, *ep.* 87, *beata u.* 24.5.

These two features – the internal shaping of desire and external relation to others – are always in tandem in Augustine’s account of giving; they simultaneously move upward and outward together. Augustine’s entry-level images aim at motivating the listener to make two important first steps: an upward step toward imagining a good that is not merely material or temporal and inculcating desire for that good, and an outward step – discerning one’s obligation to those who fall outside the more familiar rings of wealth dispersal. Perhaps the notion of an eternal patrimony, sent on to Christ through the hands of the poor, is an oversimplification. Nevertheless Augustine is unafraid to start there.

The second level of motivational content that Augustine provides for almsgiving in his sermons is subtle and is easier to miss – especially if we fail to grasp his view of wealth as a temporal good in the order of *oikeiōsis*. On this upper level of motivational content, Augustine tells the congregation that the good use of wealth in caring for those in need is a manifestation of the virtue of justice – a fulfillment of the requirement to treat every other human being on the basis of their humanity. In this account, *humanitas* functions as the basis of the relational obligation to another – as parent or child does in the case of familial piety. Augustine describes almsgiving as the work of “showing humanity,” “acting on the basis of common humanity,” and acting with respect to “the right of humanity” present in the stranger.⁵⁹ The failure of greed and insensitivity to need is a failure to recognize “common humanity.”⁶⁰ Although we may be more apt to assist a neighbor if we ourselves have suffered similar circumstances, it is “humanity” and not shared “calamity” that must form the basis of our obligation to perform the works of

⁵⁹ S. 259.3, 113A.3, 164A.4.

⁶⁰ S. 113A.3.

mercy.⁶¹ Given that the practice of almsgiving can result in an asymmetrical power relationship, Augustine is keen to emphasize that the merciful person must recognize the needy person's humanity and treat him or her as an *equal*: "He was needy, you bestowed something. You seem greater, because you made the offering, than him to whom the offering was made. Choose to be equal, so that both of you may be under the one to whom nothing can be offered."⁶²

These passages make clear that Augustine construes *opera misericordiae* as a direct route for achieving widest-level *oikeiōsis*. Giving to the poor, the stranger, or destitute, is an act of identification prompted by the recognition of another's shared humanity, for no other claim of relational status can be posited as a description of one's motivation. The goal of *oikeiōsis* on the human level, as we noted in the introduction, is not merely the extension of self-love in assimilation of another, but rather it entails a perception of another's likeness to oneself – i.e. recognition of another as an individual starting point of *oikeiōsis* and center of physical and psychological need. Loving one's neighbor as oneself, for Augustine, entails both cognitive and psychological recognition. Although it is impossible to treat every other human's wellbeing as if it were one's own, it is not impossible to recognize every other person's humanity. For Augustine, as for the Stoics, recognizing humanity is the foundation of universal justice – the cognitive and psychological framework for thinking about the due that we owe every other human being.

In his appeal to the upper-level motivational content of humanity and the virtue of justice as incentive for almsgiving, the acquisitive metaphors do not drop out entirely. Up

⁶¹ S. 259.5.

⁶² *Ep. Io. tr.* 8.5.

on this level, justice is presented to his audience as the “soul’s gold” and an “inner treasure” that can survive any “shipwreck” (another maritime image that would have been poignant for inhabitants of Hippo).⁶³ Given that no political community can exist without some measure of justice – especially in its economic institutions – it is ironic that the lower good of temporal wealth is pursued much more intensely than, and often to the exclusion of, this preeminent social virtue: “Opt for those wonderful treasures which everyone can possess without stint ... You desire gold – desire justice instead. You can’t have gold unless someone else loses it. Embrace justice, both of you, and you will both expand.”⁶⁴

Given Augustine’s Platonic conception of virtue as Godlikeness (both in terms of divine resemblance and participation), he often takes the metaphor all the way to the top, speaking of the virtues as filling one with God, “who is the true wealth of the soul.”⁶⁵

The wealth of the soul is not superfluous. However much God has given you, however much piety he has granted you, however much love, however much justice ... whatever he has granted you of himself, cannot possibly be superfluous. Your inner riches are enormous. What are they called? God.⁶⁶

The path from desire for material wealth, to treasure in heaven, to inner treasure, and all the way up to a vision of God as the wealth of the soul, is a long arduous journey.

Yet even this is not the last step, in Augustine’s view. There is one more – beyond the metaphor of reward altogether:

Don’t you go drawing back from God; love your God. You’re always saying to him, “Give me this and give me that”; say to him sometimes, “Give me yourself.” If you love him, love him for nothing, don’t be a shameless soul. You wouldn’t be pleased with your wife, if she loved your gold, if the reason she loved you was that you had given her gold, given her a fine dress, given her a splendid villa ...

⁶³ S. 36.7-8, 21.8, *en. Ps.* 66.3.

⁶⁴ S. 32.21.

⁶⁵ S. 107A.1-9, 105A.3-7, 48.8.

⁶⁶ S. 107A.3.

because if these things were the things she loved about you, she wouldn't be loving *you* ... Love him, and love him freely, for nothing.⁶⁷

Most will never achieve this level of simplicity and desirelessness – that is, love of God for God's own sake. Augustine knows this. Hence his appeals to pursue virtue (or God) as an “inner treasure” play to self-interest in different ways. The metaphor of inner wealth stands halfway between the pursuit of virtue for reward (in the afterlife) and the pursuit of virtue for its own sake. Who does not want to wake up on the other side of death with their coffers full of whatever is considered most valuable in the hereafter? For those who need the goading of a commercial interest to motivate them to treat others justly – on the basis of their humanity – Augustine is more than willing to continue using such images. For those who can sense the intrinsic value of human decency and the justice of generosity, the metaphor can be seen for what it is: a motivational ladder to be cast away as one's valuation of the good and perception of the neighbor are refined.

The range of motivational content that Augustine employs to promote almsgiving reminds us also that there is a hidden continuity between altruism and self-interest implicit in his conception of the human good. Given the existence of an eternal good, in the end there will be no competition between the pursuit of one's own good and that of the other – even if the two appear locked in zero-sum competition in this temporal sojourn. It is no stain to have one's own good in mind while looking out for another's. For Augustine, the Stoic purgation of temporal goods (“preferred indifferents,” for the Stoics) from one's motivation in virtuous action represents a denial of the genuine goodness of these goods (e.g. body, family, possessions).⁶⁸ Why should it not be to my

⁶⁷ S. 72.17.

⁶⁸ On the Stoic terminological distinction between “goods” and “preferred indifferents” (or “temporary advantages”) see chapter one above.

benefit to love and to take care of the stranger – even if, as I ascend the motivational ladder I move closer and closer to genuine recognition of their humanity and a disinterested appreciation of justice apart from any thought of reward? Augustine is unafraid to stand where his audience stands and to spur them to giving with fairly acquisitive descriptions of the benefits that will accrue in the long run for the one who loves the neighbor now.⁶⁹

Christ in the Poor

We are now in a position to return to the claim that Augustine's conception of giving to Christ in the poor instrumentalizes and, potentially, dehumanizes them. In the work of recognizing another's humanity, Augustine stresses the importance of an embodied encounter in almsgiving.

I don't know how it is, my brothers and sisters, but the spirit of the person who actually hands something to a poor man experiences a kind of sympathy with common humanity and infirmity, when the hand of the one who has is actually placed in the hand of the one who is in need. Although the one is giving, the other receiving, the one being attended to and the one attending are being joined in a real relationship. You see, it isn't calamity that really unites us but humanity.⁷⁰

The paradigmatic example of this visceral form of recognition is, for Augustine, the incarnation of God in Christ.

People are said in particular to be human who show some hospitality to human persons. So if human beings are called human because they receive human beings into their homes, how human must that one be who received humanity into himself by becoming human?⁷¹

In Christ, divinity has appropriated the concerns of humankind (both physical and psychological) into the sphere of his own self-regard – identifying himself fully with

⁶⁹ Augustine always begins with the universal desire for happiness and sensitivity to what his audience thinks happiness consists in. Judging by the content of his sermons, wealth is number one on the list of temporal goods that people perceive as conducive to happiness. See *en. Ps.* 51.15.

⁷⁰ S. 259.5. See also s. 344.1.

⁷¹ S. 174.1.

humanity in the most intimate way. The incarnation, Augustine says, ultimately reveals “God’s respect for humanity.”⁷² Given God’s identification with humanity in Christ, a new form of participation in divinity is also made available: “If you refuse to show humanity to a human being, though human yourself, God will refuse you divinity; that is to say, the imperishable immortality by which he makes us gods.”⁷³ The Platonic goal of Godlikeness is achieved, on Augustine’s account, only through deeper identification with another human being.⁷⁴ Christ’s identification with the poor thus reinforces the duties that human beings already owe one another on the basis of shared humanity.

The good use of wealth in performing the works of mercy presents, perhaps, the clearest instance of the outward *and* upward expansion of *oikeiōsis* toward world and cosmos. Through the incarnation one’s obligations to divinity and humanity have been fused – revealing the hidden unity of the love commandments, and the culmination of *oikeiōsis* itself.

We’ve all got neighbors; reach out now to the neighbor, in order to love God with whole heart, whole soul, whole mind. O man, “if you do not love the brother whom you can see, how will you be able to love God whom you cannot see” (1 John 4:20)? Yes, you recognize the words borrowed from the talk of the apostle John. So it gives us a rule to follow: let us start from our neighbor, in order to arrive at God.⁷⁵

Through the mystery of the Incarnation, one learns to transfer the enclosing circles – the highest and widest circles – of *oikeiōsis* in toward the center of self-regard, and to draw the smaller circles out toward the circumference: by loving one’s family as neighbors, loving distant strangers as family, and loving each neighbor into loving God, the highest good.

⁷² S. 371.4.

⁷³ S. 259.3.

⁷⁴ Plato, *Theaetetus* 172a-177c.

⁷⁵ S. 90A.5. See also s. 91.9, 90.10.

Loving Christ in the face of the poor is thus not dehumanizing insofar as it is grounded in the duties that human beings owe one another on the basis of their shared humanity. Any such formulation of universal human worth – such as *humanity* – brings up a question about the particularity, or mineness, of the general category of worth and invites a description of an individual’s participation in it. This is not my focus here, but it should be noted that humanity is Augustine’s term for the general category of worth that we today associate with dignity.⁷⁶

Augustine’s image of transferring wealth to heaven climaxes when we discover that the trope about loving Christ in the poor entails both learning to love God as the highest good (for his own sake) and recognizing a neighbor’s humanity. Indeed the stronger point is that the ascent toward loving higher goods (from wealth to virtue to God) is barren apart from a widening of relations with humankind through the good use of resources. As Raymond Canning puts it: “Human endeavor to reach God which seeks to bypass compassion for others will never be anything but barren. For it is precisely in others that God is touched.”⁷⁷ We can also respond, in part, to the criticism that there is no real place for the love of neighbor in Augustine’s scheme of love. There should be no worry that somehow the magnitude of the first command will eclipse the second. For God has taken the neighbor into himself in Christ and eternally bound the fulfilling of our two obligations, for Augustine. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his advice on the proper use of wealth.

Given that the double commandment of love is the hermeneutical key to interpreting the whole of scripture, in Augustine’s view, the sole objective of a Christian

⁷⁶ This is something to be explored in another study.

⁷⁷ Canning, *Unity of Love for God and Neighbour*, 401.

preacher (a Christian *rhetor*) is to motivate the audience to fulfill these commands.⁷⁸ The way that the refined, higher-level motivational content reveals the inadequacy of, and subtly replaces, lower-level images in his preaching on wealth provides a striking example of Augustine putting his own hermeneutical and rhetorical theories to work.⁷⁹

My goal in this chapter has been twofold. First, I have highlighted how, for Augustine, wealth is a temporal good within the order of *oikeiōsis*, and also how his advice on its use makes the most sense within this horizon. Second, I have argued that the vexed concept of “treasure in heaven” found in Augustine’s thought – specifically as it is presented as a motivation for giving to the poor in his sermons – is more nuanced than interpreters have previously realized, and that it is also best understood within the framework of *oikeiōsis*.

⁷⁸ Augustine describes this in his account of rhetoric in Book 1 of *De doctrina christiana*.

⁷⁹ Further examination of the literary genre and rhetorical technique of Augustine’s sermons on moral topics, such as wealth, is now needed. For an excellent analysis of the audience’s experience of Augustine’s preaching on death, see É. Rebillard, “Interaction Between the Preacher and His Audience: The Case Study of Augustine’s Preaching on Death,” in *Studia Patristica* 31, ed. E.A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters 1997), 86-96. For an imaginative account of Augustine’s hermeneutical and rhetorical theories, that also takes into view the response of his various audiences, see S. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 21-42.

Chapter 5

ETERNAL GOODS

We now reach the summit of our study of the hierarchy of goods found in Augustine's letters and sermons. After chapter-long consideration of the three representative temporal goods – marriage/family, public office, and wealth – we now turn to their counterpart, the eternal goods. Three questions will guide our examination of them in this chapter: what are eternal goods? How do they relate to the classification of goods we saw in chapter one? And, finally, how does one obtain them? The majority of the chapter will be devoted to this third question.

I. Letter 220 to Boniface

Augustine's correspondence with the military commander Boniface – whom we met in chapter three – provides a compressed definition of eternal goods that will serve as our starting point. Boniface was a Christian friend of Augustine, serving as military commander, overseeing the protection of Roman Africa during the volatile early decades of the fifth century. His career was cut short when he fell into a conspiracy centered on rival generals Flavius Aetius, Flavius Constantius Felix, and the empress Galla Placidia.¹

¹ On Boniface in general, see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 152-155, s.v. Bonifatius; R. Markus, "Bonifatius comes Africae," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, 1:653-5. For more on Boniface, see chapter three.

Boniface formed his own army and for two years fought against Roman troops sent from Italy to defeat him. In the middle of this rebellion (c. 428 AD), Augustine wrote to him, imploring him to return to his role and fulfill his obligation to protect Africa from the Vandals (Letter 220). Augustine identifies the cause of Boniface's rebellion as rooted, ultimately, in the condition of his soul: it is disordered love for the temporal goods of wealth and public office (and of the power associated with these goods) that has led Boniface to make bad use of them and to fail to fulfill his obligation to love and protect his neighbors. Augustine advises Boniface to reorient his desires and motivations for action toward higher goods. Rather than being motivated solely by desire for "the wellbeing [*salus*] of [his] mortal body ... victory over human enemies, honor, temporal power, and the rest," Boniface must attend to:

the wellbeing of the soul, together with the immortality of the body, the strength of justice, victory over the hostile passions, glory, honor, and peace for eternity ... It is these that you must love, these you must desire, these you must seek by any means you can. Give to the poor for the sake of winning and keeping these [eternal] goods; pour out your prayers, practice fasting as you are able without impairing your physical health. Do not love the goods of this earth, however plentifully you may possess them. Make use of them in this way: do much good with them, but no evil for their sake. All such goods will perish, but good works will not perish, even those achieved with goods that are perishable.²

In the final sentences of the letter, we find Augustine's familiar distinction between virtues of good use and renunciation. Boniface, as we learned in chapter three, was a man who understood this distinction and was eager to pursue the so-called higher virtues of renunciation by abandoning "secular affairs" in order to pursue a contemplative life, far away from military service.³ Augustine advises him to remain in the military for the sake of the community's safety, but to practice the virtues of celibacy and poverty while in

² *Ep.* 220.11.

³ *Ep.* 189.5.

public office. Boniface, Augustine says, should remain there and fight visible enemies while monks battle invisible ones through prayer – teaming up to promote both the temporal and eternal wellbeing of the people.

Yet, in the excerpt from Letter 220 above, we find a different Boniface, a man who has relinquished his previous desires for a life of pecuniary simplicity and continence, and has instead plunged himself into an inordinate love affair with temporal goods without regard to the social or spiritual needs of himself or the community he is responsible to protect. The language of Augustine’s advice in Letter 220 suggests that Boniface needs a firm reminder of the superiority of the interior goods (virtues) over exterior ones. Thus, in this exhortation we find a compressed answer to all three of our guiding questions: what are eternal goods? How do they fit into the classification of goods? And how does one obtain them?

Augustine tells Boniface that eternal goods are imperishable: goods not subject to the physical limits of bodily health or decay. With Augustine’s relationship to the ancient philosophical distinction between external goods and virtues already established in chapter one, it seems plausible to read the distinction here between temporal and eternal goods as one more expression of the distinction between external goods and virtues – and its corresponding picture of happiness. Yet, Letter 220 does not bear this all the way out. The list of eternal goods Augustine offers Boniface in this passage does include virtues, such as justice; yet it also includes eternal forms of temporal goods, such as the immortality of the body, and perhaps more surprisingly, of some of the temporal goods relevant to Boniface’s role and obligations such as eternal honor, glory, and peace. So we find that, for Augustine, among the eternal goods are the virtues and also the replenished,

imperishable forms of many of the temporal goods – namely, the intrinsic temporal goods of health and friendship. (Remember that health names the first form of friendship between body and soul, on Augustine’s account. Thus, immortality denotes a variety of spiritual health that is both embodied and eternal.) The notion that virtues have everlasting value is commonplace among ancient philosophers, especially the Stoics and Platonists with whom Augustine was most familiar.⁴ Yet the notion of an eternal version of external goods, and their relationship to one’s virtues, is rarer among ancient philosophers, and is extremely complicated conceptual terrain. Augustine’s own unique view is that eternal happiness consists of both virtue and an eternal form of the two preeminent external goods of health and friendship.⁵ We will return to this below.

In this compressed presentation of eternal goods in Letter 220 we also find that the virtues are both the way toward obtaining eternal goods and are themselves eternal goods. Augustine exhorts Boniface to “win and keep” eternal goods by cultivating particular virtues – almsgiving, fasting, making good use of temporal goods. These are the means to desire, seek, and possess eternal goods. This formulation parallels Augustine’s account of virtues and eternal goods in Book 19 of *The City of God* (written at the same time):

[God] has given to men certain goods appropriate to this life. These are: temporal peace, in proportion to the short span of a mortal life, consisting in bodily health and soundness, and the society of one’s own kind; and all things necessary for the

⁴ On Plotinus’ conception of the grades of virtue, and virtue’s relation to the immortality of the soul, see *Enneads* I.2. Cicero’s vivid description of the afterlife of the political virtues can be found in the “Dream of Scipio” at *rep.* 6.9-29. For Seneca, see *ep.* 71.16, 76.25. Seneca’s view of the afterlife of virtue is ambiguous. At *ep.* 71.16 he presents two possibilities for a virtuous person after death: the achievement of absolute tranquility, without the dispreferred elements of embodied life, or, dissolution into the cosmos as mere matter. For a comparison of Seneca’s and Cicero’s view of the afterlife, see I. Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969), 91. For a comparison with Plato, see D. Russell, “Virtue as ‘Likeness to God’ in Plato and Seneca,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42 (2004): 241-60.

⁵ See *ciu.* 19.13-17, *ep.* 130.13-14, 155.12-17.

preservation and recovery of this peace. These latter include those things which are appropriate and accessible to our senses, such as light, speech, breathable air, drinkable water, and whatever the body requires to feed, clothe, shelter, heal, or adorn it. And these things are given [by God] under a most fair condition: that every mortal who makes good use of these goods suited to the peace of mortal men shall receive ampler and better goods, namely the peace of immortality and the glory and honor appropriate to it, in an eternal life made fit for the enjoyment of God and of one's neighbor in God. He who uses temporal goods ill, however, shall lose them, and shall not receive eternal goods either.⁶

This passage reveals that, at the most rudimentary level, eternal goods are obtained when temporal goods are put to good use in the maintenance of temporal wellbeing both for oneself and one's community. In this way, eternal goods are both the virtues of good use and some replenished version of temporal goods offered to human beings as a reward for virtue in the afterlife.

Still these shorthand formulations of the way to obtain eternal goods through the life of virtue in Letter 220 and *City of God* 19 require more explanation. What precisely does the good use of temporal goods entail, for Augustine? How does the distinction between virtues of renunciation and virtues of good use fit in? We do not find much in these texts regarding Augustine's distinction between the virtues from good use of temporal goods in the formation of lower rings of *oikeiōsis* (e.g. marriage/family, public office, wealth) and the virtues from renunciation of these same goods in the formation of alternative forms of community (e.g. monastery, church). Perhaps this lack is rooted in what Augustine knows implicitly about his direct audiences and the virtues most relevant to their lives. Or perhaps we should not drive a major wedge between these two classes of virtues, for, on Augustine's account, even the renunciation of a temporal good is its own sort of higher use of that good. Either way, Augustine ranks these virtue classes hierarchically, and one would expect to find some correspondence of their ranking in

⁶ *Ciu.* 19.13.

their relationship to eternal goods. And, as we have seen again and again, in Augustine's eyes, good use of temporal goods requires something more than maintenance of physical security: good use also entails recourse to a spiritual conception of wellbeing. The primary feature of the good use of temporal goods is a return to the very source of these goods in God, both for oneself and those in one's community. Neither of these texts spells out the details of this crucial aspect of good use.

Usually discussion of Augustine's view of eternal goods turns into discussion of eternal *good* – that distinctively Platonic ontological simplification of humankind's highest good, happiness, found in absolute unification with the good itself.⁷ While this view of eternal good is undoubtedly present in Augustine's writings – notably in Letter 155 that we will turn to later in this chapter – I want here to focus on eternal goods in their plurality and temporality. That is, taking my cue from Letter 220, I will consider eternal goods as human beings are able to comprehend and pursue them – and sometimes even obtain and experience them – in this life.⁸

To paint a fuller picture of Augustine's conception of eternal goods we must examine his responses to the lives of people who pursue, and sometimes obtain, them. In the next two sections of this chapter, I will revisit two individuals (Ecdicia and

⁷ For the best discussion of Augustine's ontological unification of happiness and God, the highest good, see R. Holte, *Béatitude et sagesse: Saint Augustin et le problème de la fin de l'homme dans la philosophie ancienne* (Paris: Études augustinienes, 1962), 207-20.

⁸ For an important and compatible account to my own that traces the development of Augustine's thinking about the singular eternal good – the virtue of love – and its relation to the plurality of virtues necessary for social and political life, see J. Bowlin, "Augustine Counting Virtues," *Augustinian Studies* 41 (2010): 277-300. My only hesitation with Bowlin's argument has to do with his invocation of "temporal and eternal virtues" (300). Augustine never uses the phrase, and it does not quite cohere with Augustine's favored distinction of temporal and eternal goods. Virtues are not temporal goods, but rather those actions and dispositions that enable one to use temporal goods well. In this sense, as we will see in Letter 155 to Macedonius, the political virtues, in a certain sense, hang between temporal and eternal goods, standing in need of the "perfecting" work of the singular virtue of love for God (*ep.* 155.12). Furthermore, by focusing on the Neoplatonic background of Letter 155, we are able to recognize more clearly the ways that all the virtues are, for Augustine, halfway houses between temporal and eternal happiness.

Macedonius) from previous chapters and take a closer look at their successes and failures in pursuing and obtaining these goods. In the final section I will offer a general, moral-psychological picture of Augustine's account of the way one obtains eternal goods through the good use of temporal goods and virtues. In brief, Augustine's picture of obtaining eternal goods entails a process in which the practice of the virtues in this life begins to mirror more directly the way the virtues will exist in eternity. This process – which Augustine calls the perfection of the virtues – entails a return to God as the dual source of all virtues and temporal goods. Returning to God as the source perfects the virtues and creates a path to eternal goods.

II. A Failed Pursuit: Letter 262 to Ecdicia

The life of Ecdicia is a representative case of how truly difficult it is to comprehend, pursue, and obtain eternal goods on Augustine's account.⁹ Her life is a perfect foil for Boniface's superficial attachment to temporal goods. Augustine identifies Ecdicia's error not as desire for a soft, comfortable life, but rather in her idealization of the spiritual life. In Letter 262, Augustine recognizes and affirms her desire to pursue eternal goods through her practice of the so-called higher virtues of renunciation. What he warns against are the hidden forms of self-praise that lie at the core of her motivation and spoil her pursuit of eternal goods. Augustine criticizes her motives because of how their corollary actions affect those closest to her – those whose temporal and eternal wellbeing she is responsible for tending.

If the essence of obtaining eternal goods consists in clinging to God, as Augustine clearly thinks it does, then it makes sense to think of the virtues of renunciation as

⁹ See chapter two and four. On Ecdicia in general, see Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 333-4, s.v. Ecdicia.

providing a more direct and unadorned route toward this goal.¹⁰ Yet, as we have seen in previous chapters, there are no short-cuts to the highest good. And the straightforward path of renunciation does not always lead one toward God, and thus not toward eternal goods.

Augustine identifies three issues in Ecdicia's pursuit of eternal goods.¹¹ First, Ecdicia decides to practice the virtue of marital continence before her husband agrees to join her. In the letter, Augustine affirms that marital continence is "a good which surpasses marital chastity."¹² For chastity, the reader will remember, is the virtue associated with the good use of sex in marriage for the promotion of the two primary marital goals of faithfulness (*fides*) between the spouses and offspring (*proles*).¹³ Augustine also notes that Ecdicia's husband has joined her in the practice of this higher-level marital virtue and he congratulates them for their shared commitment. Nevertheless, Augustine chides Ecdicia for initially depriving her husband of the "marital debt of her body" well before he had joined her in the vow, citing Paul's admonition in 1 Corinthians 7 to: "[l]et the husband pay to his wife the debt he owes her; likewise let the wife pay to her husband the debt she owes him. A wife does not have authority over her body, but her husband does; likewise a husband does not have authority over his body, but his wife does" (1 Corinthians 7:3-4). Rightly ordered love for the good of marriage, Augustine insists, must involve both care for physical needs and in a yielding of bodily authority in mutual love.

¹⁰ *Lib. arb.* 2.52-3, *ep.* 140.3-4, 155.12-13, s. 335C.13.

¹¹ *Ep.* 262.2.

¹² *Ep.* 262.2.

¹³ For more on Augustine's account of the relationship between the virtues of marital chastity and continence see chapter two.

The second issue raised in Letter 262 relates to Ecdicia's decision to pursue the virtue of poverty by donating all of her and her husband's possessions to the poor without consulting her husband. This issue is more problematic than the first, in Augustine's mind, because the explanation for her action is not that she moved toward a virtue more quickly than her husband, but that she made a rash and unilateral decision without her husband's consent – which is at odds with the demands of a virtuous marriage. The good obtained through her self-willed poverty has been, in this case, cancelled out by the damage caused to her friendship and union with her husband.¹⁴ “You need not repent over having given your property to the poor,” Augustine tells her, “but over not having wanted to have him [your husband] as a partner and guide in your good work.”¹⁵ For even if her husband was “moving rather sluggishly through distributing goods more generously,” Ecdicia's role as wife and mother required that she should have tried first to coax her husband respectfully toward works of mercy.¹⁶ Then, “the two of you would have done in harmonious love much more wisely and much more fittingly and decently what you thoughtlessly did alone.”¹⁷

The third issue centers not on a specific virtue, but rather on an aspect of the lifestyle associated with these higher virtues of renunciation. Ecdicia, after making the vow of marital continence, has abandoned the traditional attire of a married woman in favor of wearing a widow's dress (presumably the garb worn by those who had taken the vow of Christian widowhood, such as Juliana and Proba). It appears that it was this, more than the lack of sex or lost possessions, that upset Ecdicia's husband – perhaps because it

¹⁴ *Ep.* 262.5.

¹⁵ *Ep.* 262.11.

¹⁶ *Ep.* 262.5.

¹⁷ *Ep.* 262.5.

caused him public embarrassment. In Augustine's letter, this third issue is identified as the central reason that her husband has taken up with another woman. Indeed, Ecdicia's choice of attire represents, on Augustine's analysis, her general confusion about how to obtain eternal goods. Her failure in the practice of the higher virtues, claims Augustine, results from a failure to love her husband. In the language of the letter, Ecdicia has failed to care for her husband's "temporal [and] eternal wellbeing."¹⁸

To understand Augustine's claims about eternal goods in this letter, we must keep in view his understanding of how one should pursue eternal goods within the context of social and political responsibility. Leaders, he claims, should use temporal goods in order to tend the temporal and eternal wellbeing of those within the orbit of their care and friendship. This is the avenue for obtaining the greater, imperishable goods. Ironically, in Ecdicia's fervent attempt to minister to the temporal wellbeing of the poor by giving away their possessions, she has neglected both the "temporal wellbeing" of her son and the "eternal wellbeing" of her husband. "Both of you [you and your husband,]" Augustine writes to Ecdicia, "should have regulated together what you should store up in heaven and what you should leave for the needs of this life for yourselves and your son, so that others are not fed while you are suffering."¹⁹ Augustine closes the letter by exhorting Ecdicia to think more carefully about the essential connection between her fragile marriage and her son's eternal wellbeing, "Your son needs oneness of heart between you and your husband."²⁰

Augustine's exhortation to Ecdicia in Letter 262 is not intended as a browbeating. He is not saying: no, Ecdicia, you cannot really pursue the highest good, you are stuck in

¹⁸ *Ep.* 262.6.

¹⁹ *Ep.* 262.8.

²⁰ *Ep.* 262.11.

married life, stop trying so hard. Augustine is simply clarifying for Ecdicia that her roles as wife and mother – along with the correspondent duties and virtues of these roles – amount to a normative context for her pursuit of eternal goods. In cases of conflicting goods, the duties of love owed to her husband and son must trump the pursuit of ascetic virtue. Furthermore, when a virtue fractures household goods, it is no longer really a good at all for the one who practices it (even if it provides goods for others, as in the case of Ecdicia's poverty). Ecdicia's error was to so misconceive the higher virtues that she created a false conflict between them and the temporal goods of the household. Much like a photographic negative, this picture of how to obtain eternal goods reminds us of Augustine's claims about the unity of the love commandments (to love God and neighbor) and the obligation of social and political leaders to obey these commands in the context of their roles and the virtues associated with the excellent performance of their role-specific obligations.

The litmus test of one's love for the highest good, Augustine insists, is the quality of one's relationship to the neighbors whom God has placed in one's life. Preaching on one of his favorite texts, 1 John 4:20 ("If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen"), Augustine sounds a familiar note of the unity of the two love commands:

One wing is, "You shall love the Lord" ... But don't stick to one wing; because if you think you've got one wing, you haven't even got that. "You shall love your neighbor" ... I mean, if you don't love the brother you can see, how can you love the God you can't see? Add the other wing; in this way you will fly, in this way you will remove your cravings from earthly things, and fix your love [*caritas*] on heavenly goods.²¹

²¹ S. 68.13. Cf. *ep. Io. tr.* 9.10. The "wings of the soul" trope in the Platonist tradition originates in Plato's *Phaedrus*. See *Phdr.* 246d6-e4: "By their nature [the soul's] wings have the power to lift up heavy things

Ecdicia's failure, we can then conclude, is found on the horizontal axis of the return to the highest good: a failure to love rightly the neighbors that God has placed within her circle of care and friendship. This account of Ecdicia's failure echoes Augustine's conception of God as highest common good (*bonum commune*), observed in chapter three, and the connection between the upward and outward axes of ascent to God that we focused on in chapter four.

Augustine's advice to Ecdicia highlights the responsibility of Christian leaders to use temporal goods (even in the renunciation of those goods) to promote both the temporal and eternal wellbeing of oneself and those under one's care, on the model of the extending rings of *oikeiōsis*. He reminds her that, "the relation of strangers is not the same as that of persons bound together in a society ... the relation of parents to their children is not the same as that of children to their parents. Finally, still other is the relation of husband and wife."²²

It is clear from this letter who Augustine thinks wears the spiritual mantle in Ecdicia's household: Ecdicia, the ascetic overachiever. Augustine tactfully employs the language of Roman decorum throughout the letter urging Ecdicia to play her domestic role in showing respect for her husband's authority and, even more importantly, to try to repair their fragile marital friendship.²³ Lest Augustine's appeals to her husband's authority be construed as uncritical patriarchalism, Augustine also clearly acknowledges

and raise them aloft where the gods dwell, and so, more than anything that pertains to the body, they are akin to the divine, which has beauty, wisdom, goodness, and everything of that sort. These nourish the soul's wings, which grow best in their presence; but foulness and ugliness make the wings shrink and disappear." Cf. *Phdr.* 250e ff; Plotinus, *Ennead* I 6 "On Beauty."

²² *Ep.* 262.7.

²³ *Ep.* 262.9. Roman household decorum was as real for Paul as it was for Augustine. Like Paul in Ephesians and elsewhere Augustine moves between appeals to the husband's authority and headship and egalitarian appeals to partnership, mutual submission and respectfulness.

the spiritual authority Ecdicia exercises in the family, and he urges her to be accountable for this role.²⁴ His appeal to Ecdicia's spiritual authority should not be interpreted as a type of enforced quietism, for it is clear how interwoven the social and spiritual forms of wellbeing are for Augustine in the letter:

But was your action of refreshing the bodies of the poor by more generous alms as great a good as the harm you caused by tearing the mind of your husband away from so good a commitment [to marital continence and also to Christianity]? Or should anyone's temporal wellbeing have been more precious to you than his eternal wellbeing? If, while thinking of more ample works of mercy, you postponed giving your possessions to the poor in order that your husband might not be scandalized and be lost to God, would God not credit you with giving more abundant alms? ... For, if bread shared with a poor person has great weight in heaven [i.e. it is an eternal good], how much weight ought we to think mercy has there, by which a human being is snatched from the devil, who is like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.²⁵

Ecdicia's lofty pursuit of eternal goods has put her husband's eternal wellbeing in jeopardy. Ecdicia's unilateral ascent toward the highest good has left her husband's relationship with God fractured. Still, the blame in this passage has no air of disrespect for Ecdicia's spiritual ambition. It is rather a warning shot – a call for Ecdicia to take responsibility for her own power of spiritual authority. Not knowing the full details of either side of the case, we are unable to identify Ecdicia's husband's role in the failed relationship. We can assume that he is responsible for his sin of adultery and has a share in the blame for their separation. Nevertheless the lessons and insights about virtue offered to Ecdicia stand on their own, in isolation from her husband's failures and any absolution that his guilt might provide for her faults.

²⁴ See Koch, "Augustine's Letter to Ecdicia: A New Reading," 173-80. Koch argues that Augustine's use of the verb *moderare* in the first section of the letter indicates that he is turning the traditional patriarchal relationship of the *domus* on its head. By assigning the virtue of *moderatio* to Ecdicia – a virtue that only a governor could properly exercise – Augustine is signaling to her that he recognizes who has the authority in her family, and who has been playing the role of moral leader in the household. Cf. Krawiec, "'From the Womb of the Church': Monastic Families," 283-307; Cooper, "Insinuations of Womanly Influence," 159-60.

²⁵ *Ep.* 262.6.

Ecdicia's failure to obtain genuine eternal goods is rooted in multiple failures. And since her disorderedly *virtuous* action reveals disordered motivation, Augustine exhorts her to change her disposition and action:

Put on humility of mind ... and write to him [your husband] a letter of apology, asking pardon for having sinned against him because you did what you thought you should do concerning your property without his advice and consent. You need not repent over having given your property to the poor but over not having wanted to have him as a partner and guide (*participem et moderatorem*) in your good work.²⁶

We see here Augustine playing with the language of submission and equality ("as a partner and guide") in his exhortation. We also find Augustine's trademark emphasis on the virtue of humility as the necessary groundwork for the practice of the other virtues. As we saw in chapter two, the virtue of humility (*humilitas*) ranks higher than all of the highest ascetic virtues (e.g. celibacy, continence) and is necessary for the perfection of the other virtues.²⁷ (We will return to this later.) We also see an emphasis on confession of sin and forgiveness as preconditions for acquiring humility. In Ecdicia's case confession takes on the concrete practice of writing a letter of apology to her husband.²⁸ Putting on humility requires self-examination, confession of sin, and, perhaps most importantly, the externalization of her inward process through the writing of an apology letter to her husband whereby she would also seek forgiveness.²⁹

Greater goods or higher virtues are no longer such if they do not upbuild the friends and communities for whom one is responsible. Ecdicia's choice of wardrobe reveals the content of her motivations more clearly than any of her other actions – not to

²⁶ *Ep.* 262.11.

²⁷ For the best account of Augustine's conception of humility as the necessary groundwork for acquiring true virtues, see N. Baumann, *Die Demut als Grundlage aller Tugenden bei Augustinus* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), chapter three: "A *fundamento humilitatis*," 133-92.

²⁸ *Ep.* 262.11.

²⁹ *Ep.* 262.11

mention a certain neglect for the spouse within her circle of *oikeiōsis*. She dons the appearance of ascetic virtue without achieving the interior disposition necessary to perform her role as mother and wife in a way that helps her obtain eternal goods.

As we noted in chapter two, the root of Ecdicia's dilemma, in Augustine's view, is that she cannot discern between the highest good and her own idea of the good. Or, to put the point more precisely, Ecdicia cannot discern between loving the good (a life of true virtue) and her own idea of what loving the good looks like. For Augustine, this conflation is a form of spiritual self-deception that everyone succumbs to on some level. So, in many ways, Ecdicia's problem is the opposite of Boniface's. Boniface needs to lift his mind from the pursuit of temporal goods as a mere means toward pleasure and power, and to cultivate desire for the imperishable goods of the virtues directed toward God. Only by detaching his desire from temporal goods can he return toward God and begin the process of purification and healing for his desires. Ecdicia, on the other hand, has progressed to the point where she is quite ready to abandon temporal goods with fervor. And yet she seems no closer to the goal of the highest good than does Boniface. Ecdicia is more in love with her own idea of virtuousness than she is with practicing genuine virtue – which is inherently performative, always culminating in demonstrative love of God and neighbor. Just as Boniface needs to be detached, for a time, or perhaps permanently, from his unhealthy love of certain temporal goods, so too Ecdicia's love for her own virtuousness must be detached, cleansed, purified, and healed.³⁰

³⁰ For a complementary account of the dangers involved in pursuing ascetic virtue, see G. Lawless, "Augustine's Decentering of Asceticism," in *Augustine and His Critics*, ed. R. Dodaro and G. Lawless (New York: Routledge, 2000), 142-63. Although not focused on the letter to Ecdicia, Lawless strikes the same note regarding the interconnection of love for God and neighbor: "For Augustine, Christian asceticism consisted in the cultivation of ways and means, appropriate to one's standing before God, of fostering relationships and rendering them firm" (157).

In Letter 262 we recognize for the first time that, for Augustine, the return to the highest good is always a twofold return – the perfection both of one’s love for temporal goods and one’s own virtues. Each requires a process of dispossession and reorientation of goods toward their final end in God so that they may be seen clearly, appreciated fully, and used properly in temporal life. Only through this process of double return can one learn to use temporal goods and virtues “as if [he] were not using them,” as Augustine tells Boniface in Letter 220.³¹ This attitude of non-possessive desire for one’s own goods is the telltale sign of a mature love for them. It reckons every good as a gift and follows each one toward its source in the highest good. Thus love for the highest good entails a perfection of one’s love for both temporal goods and virtues. Ecdicia gets the first part right – as evidenced by her prowess in renunciation – yet she misses the second return completely.

The pursuit of eternal goods, on Augustine’s account, is difficult to theorize because it always refracts through the particular goods that make one’s roles, obligations, and relationships possible. For Ecdicia, this pursuit centers on her marriage, motherhood, household, wealth, and the many virtues associated with the use or abandonment of these goods. Unlike Plotinus’s Neoplatonic picture of ascent to union with the absolute good and then the descent back into social and political life, for Augustine, the soul’s movement is never so cut-and-dried. The soul is always partially clinging to the highest good in the midst of one’s life and practice of the virtues. As mentioned at the outset of this section, although it seems that the virtues of renunciation (e.g. marital continence, poverty) might be a more direct route toward the good, given the intrinsically social nature of happiness, on Augustine’s view, and its organization in the circles of *oikeiōsis*,

³¹ *Ep.* 220.10.

it is all too possible to aim for an eternal good in ascetic abandonment of a temporal good, and to end up missing the good entirely. It is now time to consider a successful case: a political official who obtains eternal goods through the practice of the virtues associated with his office.

III. The Perfection of the Political Virtues: Letter 155 to Macedonius

Macedonius, the reader will recall from chapter three, was imperial vicar of Africa during the years 413-414 AD, in which he oversaw the administration of justice in all of Roman Africa.³² During his tenure at this post Augustine appealed to him for clemency on behalf of a criminal condemned to capital punishment. Through their exchange of letters we learn that Macedonius grants the appeal, and Augustine writes to thank him and to congratulate him on his decision in Letter 155. The letter turns into an extended discussion of the relationship between virtue and happiness – specifically as it is practiced and experienced in the life of a political ruler. In that letter we also learn that Macedonius has read the first three books of *The City of God*, which Augustine sent to him, and that he is both eager and capable of receiving the text's philosophical meditation on happiness.

Letter 155 is Augustine's most detailed account of the way eternal goods are obtained through the practice of the virtues.³³ Augustine recognizes that Macedonius is hungry for such higher-level philosophical advice and suggests that he is right on the threshold of obtaining the imperishable goods constitutive of eternal happiness.

Augustine declares that Macedonius' life exhibits true longing for the heavenly

³² On Macedonius in general, see Martindale, *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire II: AD 395-527*, 697, s.v. Macedonius 3; Mandouze, *Prosopographie*, 659-661, s.v. Macedonius 2. See also Morgenstern, *Die Briefpartner des Augustinus von Hippo*, 107-108.

³³ *Ep.* 155.12.

commonwealth – the highest level of *oikeiōsis* – and the true friendship with God and neighbor that flow from there:

I can tell that your spirit is panting for God's heavenly commonwealth, inspired by a love of eternity and of truth and of love itself ... I see you approaching near to it, and I embrace you as you burn to possess it. True friendship also flows from there; and this ought not to be weighed by temporal goods, but drunk with freely given love.³⁴

Elsewhere in the letter, Augustine also praises Macedonius for practicing the political virtues (prudence, temperance, courage, and justice) in his work as a public official – tending to the wellbeing of the political community.³⁵ Nevertheless, he tells Macedonius that these political virtues – and the temporal wellbeing they are aimed at preserving – must be informed by the double commandment of love in order to be “perfected” and made “real.”³⁶ Or in other words, they require the double commandment of love to be efficacious for obtaining eternal goods.

Augustine urges Macedonius to continue pursuing God as the source of all goods: both as the source of all temporal goods and as the source of his own virtues.³⁷ It appears Macedonius has been at least partially successful in making the double return to God. And it is only by continuing this double return, Augustine claims, that the political official's conception of wellbeing will be expanded from the merely temporal to the eternal horizon, even as he begins to envision what it might look like for him to use his office and its associated obligations to tend the temporal and eternal wellbeing of those under his care. Throughout Letter 155, Augustine challenges Macedonius to be attentive to and responsible for the end to which the people put the political wellbeing he struggles

³⁴ *Ep.* 155.1.

³⁵ *Ep.* 155.10.

³⁶ *Ep.* 155.12.

³⁷ *Ep.* 155.2, 12.

to provide them.³⁸ And while the goal of tending the people's temporal wellbeing is good, it does not go far enough – it is too indeterminate. Practicing the political virtues entails more than the physical health or security of the political community, on Augustine's view. Properly ordered political virtues necessarily orient one toward higher goods. Yet what are these higher goods? Is there a highest good? Augustine thinks the political official cannot avoid these questions if he is to practice the virtues necessary for doing his job well.

A key reason that the temporal wellbeing promoted through the political virtues is inherently indeterminate and unstable, Augustine tells Macedonius, is that human beings often mistake the source of happiness for something that consists entirely in either temporal goods or virtues:

You can see, then, where you should look for the object of everyone's desire, whether they are learned or not. Many fail, through error or pride, to learn where to look for it, and where to receive it. Both types are criticized together in one of the divine psalms: "those who trust in their own virtue and who boast in the abundance of their riches" (Psalm 49(48):6). This refers both to the philosophers of the present age and also to those who shun even such philosophy as that, saying that a people is happy if they have sufficient earthly wealth. Therefore we should seek virtue from the Lord our God who made us, so that we can overcome the evils of this life; we should also seek the life of happiness, so that we may enjoy it after this life for eternity. Thus both in virtue and in the reward of virtue "whoever boasts," to quote the apostle, "should boast in the Lord (2 Corinthians 10:17). That is what we want for ourselves and for the city of which we are citizens. The source of happiness is not one thing for a human being and another for a city: a city is indeed nothing other than a like-minded mass of human beings.³⁹

This passage highlights why Augustine thinks a view of God as the highest good is necessary for a genuine conception of both individual and civic happiness. As it adapts Cicero's presentation of the Epicurean and Stoic views of happiness in *Tusculan Disputations*, the passage also briefly illustrates Augustine's view of the limitations of a

³⁸ *Ep.* 155.10.

³⁹ *Ep.* 155.9.

conception of happiness wholly exhausted by either temporal goods or virtue, or some combination of the two. The imperfection of virtue, fragility of temporal goods, and magnitude of human misery – considered cumulatively – challenge and destabilize all conceptions of happiness that do not make reference to eternal goods. The Stoic view that happiness consists solely in virtue exhibits insensitivity to the limits that suffering places on flourishing, as well as a prideful unwillingness to seek happiness from a source outside of one’s own control. For Augustine, only some conception of eternal happiness, received directly from its source in the highest good, can do justice to the combined force of our natural longing for happiness, our intuition that it consists in both virtue *and* temporal goods, and the magnitude of misery that human beings can experience in this life.⁴⁰

If civic happiness merely consists in the accumulation of temporal goods, then Augustine’s claims about its inherent indeterminacy and instability seem straightforward and require little substantiation. This sort of political wellbeing would be entirely subject to fortune. Yet Augustine recognizes that the philosophically astute, and perhaps Stoic, political readers among the intended audience of Letter 155 will not be satisfied with such a quick argument for the necessity of a guiding conception of God as the highest good and source of true happiness. Such readers would assuredly respond that civic happiness is not merely equivalent to the accumulation of temporal goods (or, “temporary advantages,” for the Stoics, as we saw in chapter one), but rather is these goods organized by virtuous political officials for the cultivation of a virtuous political community. This is undoubtedly a step up from a materialist conception of civic happiness on Augustine’s view, yet it still fails to perceive the true source of happiness.

⁴⁰ *Ep.* 155.9, *ciu.* 14.25.

For Augustine, if the political virtues do not recognize their source in God they cannot be used in the right way to direct people toward true happiness. Without this upward reference, on Augustine's account, civic happiness, and the political official's virtues, remain imperfect and insubstantial. Reference (*referre*) here can be understood as a continuously renewed recognition that this life's goods are contingent gifts, and signals of something more than themselves.⁴¹ This helps clarify what Augustine means when he tells social and political leaders such as Boniface, Ecdicia, and Macedonius to tend both the temporal and eternal wellbeing of those under their care. There is an ambiguous middle ground between temporal and eternal happiness that virtuous Christian public officials, such as Macedonius, must inhabit.

Augustine offers Macedonius the following exhortation, and memorable snapshot, of what the twofold return to God will require:

If you recognize the source of the [political] virtues you have been given and give God thanks; if you use them even in your secular position of honor to contribute to his praise [worship], if you inspire and lead those people under your power to praise him both by living an exemplary religious life and through the devotion you show to their interests, whether by support or deterrence; if the only reason that you want them, with your help, to live more securely is so that they might win God, in whose presence they will live happily; then, all of your virtues will be *real* ones. They will develop and be *perfected* in this way through the assistance of God, whose generous gift they were. Then, without any doubt, they will bring you to the truly happy life, which can only be eternal.⁴² (my own emphasis)

⁴¹ For a compatible account of what Augustine means by "referring" (*referre*) all of one's virtues and temporal goods toward their source in the highest good, see the discussion in Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine*, 170-1. Byers notes that "when he [Augustine] says that the virtuous 'refer' their virtues and the things that virtue uses to the end of the highest good, this means both choosing with the right goal in mind, and *awareness* of the metaphysical hierarchy, with God at the top. Those people who 'keep God in their thoughts' (*ciu.* 19.4) will think of temporal goods as means to union with God, which is the primary good of the happiest life; this does not mean that they treat them as if they had less intrinsic value than they do, but rather that they know they are not to be enjoyed without *also at the same time* being used as conduits to God" (emphasis in Byers).

⁴² *Ep.* 155.12.

Notice that it is only by making the second return that Ecdicia missed – i.e. recognizing the source of one’s virtues and exhibiting appropriate gratitude for them – that Macedonius is able to “perfect” and “make real” his political virtues. Recognition and gratitude enable Macedonius to “use” his virtues appropriately – that is, to help both himself and others to return to God. Also notice the new motivational end involved in recognizing God as the source of one’s virtue: the goal of contributing to God’s praise. In this way Augustine is reclaiming piety as the fifth political virtue, or, more precisely, as the virtue that perfects the other political virtues. In Letter 155 true piety is both true worship of God and also obedience to the double commandment of love.

It should also be noted that Augustine’s exhortation to true piety is not a call to proselytization on Macedonius’s part. Augustine tells Macedonius to help inspire and lead those people under his power “to worship God both by living an exemplary religious life and through the devotion you show to their interests.”⁴³ Augustine is careful to express his respect for the distinctive obligations associated with Macedonius’s role as political ruler.⁴⁴

Augustine continues his presentation of the perfection of the political virtues through true piety in a further description of the political virtues as they will exist in eternity – that is, as eternal goods:

One virtue alone will exist there [in eternal happiness]: both virtue and the reward of virtue. As the man who loves this says in the sacred discourse: “For me it is good to cling to God” (Psalm 73:28). Both complete and eternal wisdom, and also a life now fully happy will consist in this. Now we will have reached the eternal and supreme good; and it is the completion of our good to cling to this forever. We might also call this practical wisdom, because it will cling very prudently to the good that it will never lose; and courage, because it will cling very tenaciously to the good and will not be torn from it; and moderation, because it will cling in

⁴³ *Ep.* 155.12.

⁴⁴ *Ep.* 155.11.

purity to the good, as it cannot now be corrupted; and justice, because it will cling very rightly to the good, which it deserves to serve.⁴⁵

In this passage we find the ontological reduction of eternal goods to a single eternal good, a topic of frequent focus concerning Augustine's view of eternal happiness.⁴⁶ The eternal good, on Augustine's account, is the union of God as highest good, eternal happiness, and the virtues as they will exist in eternity – as the singular virtue of clinging to the highest good through love. As has been pointed out by Robert Dodaro, this description of the political virtues as they will exist in eternity mirrors Plotinus' account of the "purificatory virtues" found in *Enneads* I 2. There, in his treatise on virtue, Plotinus provides a parallel description of the four political virtues as they exist in the soul of the one who ascends to a vision of the good itself.⁴⁷

Like Plotinus' account, Augustine emphasizes the fecundity of the absolute good (its overflowing in creation) and the way this fecundity relates to the inherently social nature of a genuine encounter with the good. The soul that ascends toward the true good wants others to share in this good with it.⁴⁸ On this view, there is genuine continuity between the political virtues as they exist and are practiced now in temporal life and as they exist in their perfected, eternal form. Macedonius's work in tending the political

⁴⁵ *Ep.* 155.12.

⁴⁶ See Holte, *Béatitude et sagesse*, 207-20.

⁴⁷ The parallel between Plotinus' twofold distinction of the political and purificatory virtues in *Ennead* I 2 and Augustine's account of the perfection of the political virtues in Letter 155 to Macedonius has been carefully examined in Dodaro, "Political and Theological Virtues in Augustine," 464-8. On the variation amongst Neoplatonist authors regarding the scale of virtues, see O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, chapter four: "The Scale of Virtues," 40-9. Porphyry formalizes Plotinus' scale of virtues as a scale on four levels: political, purificatory, theoretical, and paradigmatic virtues (see *sent.* 32). It appears that Iamblichus extends the fourfold scale even further to include a level of theurgic virtues that directly unite the soul to the highest level of reality (see O'Meara, 48n33). The scale of virtues finds different expressions in other Platonists, such as Macrobius, Marinus, and Olympiodorus. In each case the idea is the same: in moving from the practice of the political virtues to higher levels of virtue, the soul begins to attain assimilation to the divine – Godlikeness.

⁴⁸ See Plotinus, *Ennead*, VI 9 "On the Good, or the One"; Cf. *ciu.* 10.3, 19.17. See O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 76.

community's temporal wellbeing and practicing the political virtues has, therefore, in Augustine's eyes, prepared him to obtain eternal goods.

Augustine also offers Macedonius a description of the political virtues as they exist in transition – on their way toward perfection – as plural manifestations in time of the single virtue that constitutes the eternal good:

Moreover, even in this life there is no virtue except that of loving what ought to be loved. Prudence consists in choosing that, courage in allowing no hardships, moderation in allowing no temptations, justice in allowing no pride, to divert one from it. What should we choose to love particularly, if not the one thing we can find that is unsurpassed? This is God; and if in loving anything else we make it preferable or equal to him, we have forgotten how to love ourselves. The nearer we approach to him, the better it is for us; for nothing is better than him. We approach him, however, not by moving but by loving. We will have him nearer to us the more we can keep pure the love that carries us to him: he is not spread out or enclosed in physical space. He is present everywhere, and entirely everywhere; we can reach him then not by foot, but by character. However, our character is usually judged not from what we know, but from what we love. It is good and bad loves that make good and bad characters ... Let us do everything we can, then, to bring to him also those whom we love as ourselves; if, that is, we can realize that loving ourselves means loving him.⁴⁹

This translation of the political virtues into the idiom of the one true virtue – a society of lovers clinging to the highest good in eternity – is perhaps Augustine's most exalted presentation of the transformation of political virtues into eternal goods. He offers it to a man mired in public affairs and the daily legal administration of Roman Africa.

Augustine closes the letter to Macedonius with the highest compliment paid to an individual to be found in all of his writings: "Though you wore the belt of an earthly judge you appeared to have your mind fixed on the heavenly commonwealth."⁵⁰ This depiction of Macedonius's mind elevating his duties, virtues, and even his official uniform, stands in profound contrast to Augustine's admonishment of Ecdicia for her

⁴⁹ *Ep.* 155.13.

⁵⁰ *Ep.* 155.17.

choice of dress: “Even if your husband forced you to wear the attire of a married woman and not that of a widow ... you could have had a humble heart in your proud attire.”⁵¹

The perfection of the political virtues that Augustine describes to Macedonius in Letter 155 can be summarized in this way: the highest virtue is love of God, the highest good. Practice of this virtue requires two different returns: a return to God as the source of all temporal goods and as the source of one’s virtues. By making this double return, the political leader learns what true wellbeing consists in and is thus able to promote the wellbeing of those under his care. The double return also provides the political leader new motivational goals for virtuous activity beyond the pursuit of his own wellbeing (and that of the political community): love of God, as the highest good, for his own sake; and the practice of the political virtues for the sake of bringing praise and glory to God who is the source of all excellence (virtue). In this way, God is both praised as the source of one’s virtues and loved as the source of all temporal goods.

Conversely, Augustine warns Macedonius that his virtues and the temporal happiness they provide for the political community will turn out to be illusory if he does not allow the double return to God to perfect his virtues:

Take all your virtues: all the prudence with which you try to serve human affairs, all the courage with which you allow no enemy’s wickedness to frighten you, all the moderation through which you keep yourself from corruption when surrounded by the rottenness of contemptible human habits, all the justice which you use to judge correctly in assigning to each his own. Suppose that you employ all these virtues in toiling and struggling [merely] for the physical security of those you want to do well ... If so, neither your virtues nor the happiness that comes from them will be *real* ... I want to say this: if any of your governing, however informed by the virtues I listed, is directed only to the final aim of allowing human beings to suffer no unjust hardships in the flesh; and if you think that it is no concern of yours to what end they put the peace that you struggle to provide for them (that is, to speak directly, how they worship the true God, with whom the fruit of all peaceful life is found), then all that effort towards the life of

⁵¹ *Ep.* 262.10.

true happiness will not benefit you at all. I appear to be rather shameless in saying this.⁵²

The language of this appeal is strong. In what sense is Macedonius responsible for practicing true piety (true worship of the true God) and cultivating it among the people? If this were merely a matter of establishing Christianity as the imperial cult, it seems peculiar that Augustine makes his appeal in the complicated language of the perfection of the political virtues. Rather, Augustine is employing a complex theological and philosophical conception of virtue and detailing the role piety plays in orienting a public official's practice of the political virtues toward their true end in God.

True Piety

Augustine's correspondence with Macedonius presents his most detailed account of true piety as the perfecting virtue and as the fulfillment of the commands to love God and neighbor. Read together, the letters (Letters 152-155) present a picture of true piety as an integrated complex of the just praise that human beings owe to God as the source of all goods and virtues, properly formed self-love, and just treatment of the neighbor on the basis of his or her humanity (see Letter 153 on capital punishment). Augustine concludes his reflection on the perfection of the political virtues through true piety by saying:

We ought therefore "to love God and our neighbor as ourselves," so that we will lead anyone we can to worship God by comforting them with kindness, or educating them through teaching, or restraining them through discipline, in the knowledge that "all of the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments" ... Here we have the practice of the virtues, there [in eternal happiness] their result; here their labors, there their reward; here their duties, there their goal ... Piety, therefore, that is the true worship of the true God, is beneficial in every way. It protects against hardships in this life, or else softens them; and it brings us to that life and that security where we will suffer no more evil and enjoy the supreme and eternal good. I urge you to pursue it more perfectly and hold on to it with great tenacity; I urge this on myself also.⁵³

⁵² *Ep.* 155.10.

⁵³ *Ep.* 155.15-17.

Here, at the end of Letter 155, Augustine pulls all the threads of piety together in the double commandment of love and offers an account of the way that *love* perfects and actualizes the political virtues associated with tending the wellbeing of the political community. True piety is fulfillment of the double commandment of love, and functions like a Plotinian purificatory virtue in reorienting the political ruler's soul and perfecting his virtues – turning them into eternal goods.

What does true piety consist in? Given Augustine's claims in Letter 155, it cannot involve the mere installation of Christianity as imperial cult. True worship of the true God is not liturgical practice in this case but, rather, the archetypal virtue of love that orients everything that the political ruler does in his office. The political official's role holds him accountable to a special aspect of this project of contributing to God's praise: *referring* the people under his care toward the highest good through the *example* of his life and the *devotion* he shows to their interests.⁵⁴ This devotion, Augustine writes, entails educating, disciplining, and protecting the people in such a way that they are drawn toward the highest good.⁵⁵ Augustine is keen to show "respect" for Macedonius' office and its particular demands – which are all aimed at the political community's welfare.⁵⁶ As we saw in chapter three, there is a distinct difference between the roles of judge and bishop, in Augustine's mind, and the religious transformation of the political sphere happens, if it happens at all, at the level of a political ruler's practice of the virtues associated with the excellent performance of his office.

⁵⁴ *Ep.* 155.12.

⁵⁵ *Ep.* 155.15.

⁵⁶ *Ep.* 155.11.

True piety also provides the political official with a new motivation for virtuous action. Augustine offers Macedonius a shorthand formulation of the idea in Letter 155:

Therefore we should seek virtue from the Lord our God who made us, so that we can overcome the evils of this life; we should also seek the life of happiness [from him], so that we may enjoy it after this life for eternity. Thus both in virtue and in the reward of virtue “whoever boasts,” to quote the apostle, “should boast in the Lord” (2 Corinthians 10:17).⁵⁷

Augustine’s presentation of God’s praise as the motivational goal necessary for an account of true virtue (the perfection of the political virtues) and of a complete definition of happiness has yet to be understood, or fully appreciated, by interpreters of his thought. Reorienting one’s motivation toward God’s praise is an essential step in the return to God as the source of one’s virtues. Indeed, it functions as the motivational counterpart of the grateful recognition of God as the source of one’s virtues. Many interpreters have puzzled over Augustine’s remarks about the necessity of true piety for true virtue. Is the connection between piety and virtue mere conceptual polemics, or genuine philosophical analysis of virtue?⁵⁸ In the next section of this chapter, I propose a fresh answer to this

⁵⁷ *Ep.* 155.9.

⁵⁸ *Ciu.* 19.4: “True virtues can exist only in those in whom there is true piety [*pietas*]”; 19.25: “virtues [that] only have reference to themselves and are sought for no other end are ... to be judged vices rather than virtues”. Cf. *ciu.* 5.19, *ep.* 138.17. For the best account of Augustine on the necessary relationship between piety and true virtue – that takes into consideration his correspondence with public officials such as Macedonius – see Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 202-12. The question of the relationship between piety and virtue is often construed as a question about Augustine’s view of pagan virtue. The notion that all pagan virtues are really “splendid vices” (*splendida uitia*), often attributed to him, is not to be found in his thought. See Mausbach, *Die Ethik des Heiligen Augustinus*, 2:259. Mausbach suggests that the tag is constructed from Augustine’s comments about virtue in the context of the Pelagian controversy found at *c. Iul.* 4.20 and *retr.* 1.2. For an interesting overview of Augustine on pagan virtue within the scope of a broader history of the question, see J. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), chapter 2: “Augustine: Disordered Loves and the Problem of Pride,” 45-71. For a helpful introduction to the question and account of the motivational structure of virtuous action as it appears in *The City of God*, see T.H. Irwin, “Splendid Vices? Augustine For and Against Pagan Virtues,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999): 105-27. Cf. Wetzel, *Augustine the Limits of Virtue*, 107-11, 119-22; R.A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 43-4; C. Tornau, “Does Augustine Accept Pagan Virtue? The Place of Book 5 in the Argument of *The City of God*,” in *Studia Patristica* 43, ed. F. Young et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 263-75. For a compelling rejection of Markus’s optimistic account of Augustine’s view of the status of pagan virtue in *The City of God*, see Dodaro, “Ecclesia and res publica,” 237-72.

question by considering the details of Augustine's account of motivation for virtuous action. The practice of true piety, for Augustine, entails the completion of the practice of all the other virtues through a double return to God as both source of temporal goods and virtues.

IV. The Twofold Return to God: Praise and Love

To understand Augustine's advice on obtaining eternal goods in Letter 155 to Macedonius, we now need to take a closer look at both movements of the return. First, we will look at the return to God as source of virtue. This is the movement with which Ecdicia had the most trouble. Judging by the details of Augustine's advice in Letter 155, Macedonius has made significant progress on this leg. Second, we will consider what it means to return to God as the source of all temporal goods.

The twofold return to God, in Augustine's eyes, is a movement of praise and love. Praise is the consummation of one's return to God as the source of one's virtues. Love is the culmination of desire, found in continually renewed awareness that life's goods are contingent gifts, and signals of something more than themselves.

For as one's praise [of God, the highest good] improves and extends, so one's love and affection increases in fervor. And when this is the case, humankind cannot but advance with sure and firm step to a life of perfection and happiness. This, I suppose, is all we wish to find when we speak of the highest good for humankind, to which all must be referred [*referre*] in life and conduct. For the good plainly exists; and we have shown by reasoning, as far as we were able, and by the divine authority which goes beyond our reasoning, that it is nothing else but God Himself. For how can any thing be the highest good for a human being but that in cleaving to which he or she is happy? Now this is nothing but God, to whom we can cleave only by affection, desire, and love.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ *Mor.* 1.24.

This passage highlights the symmetrical movement of praise and love in one's return to God. Indeed, for Augustine, praise and love are the twin motivations necessary for the perfection of virtue.

God as the Source of Virtue

Based on Augustine's advice in Letter 155, we can say, in shorthand, that eternal goods are obtained when one clings to God as the highest good in the midst of using temporal goods (and the virtues associated with their use or renunciation). Yet how, precisely, does one so cling to God?

As the quotation above makes plain, it takes place at the level of "affection, desire, and love." In chapter two we considered Augustine's distinction between virtues that characterize both disposition (*habitus*) and action (*opus*), and those that characterize disposition only. And to understand the moral psychology behind Augustine's account of obtaining eternal goods, we must have his distinction between virtuous action and motivation for virtuous action in view. After all, the goal for virtuous activity is love of God and neighbor – and as we saw in Letter 155, neighbor love and healthy self-love find ultimate harmony in love for God as the highest good. Eternal happiness, according to *The City of God*, consists in "perfectly harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and of one another in God."⁶⁰ Love of God is thus the highest virtue on Augustine's account and also the singular eternal good. Our goal in this section is to unpack what it means for one to cling to God as the highest good in the midst of moving about and using so many goods in this life, including the virtues. In what ways can God be the ultimate end of each of one's virtuous actions?

⁶⁰ *Ciu.* 19.17.

Loving God, the highest good, provides a twofold motivational goal. It simultaneously represents loving the highest good for oneself (i.e. eternal happiness) and also loving God, the good, for his own sake. The two goals come together at the highest level of motivation for virtuous action. Given that happiness is inherently social on Augustine's view, as is the practice of all the virtues and use of all temporal goods, actions are always to be judged (admired or condemned) by the community in which they are performed. In this way, virtue is inherently tied to social practice and systems of praise and blame.

This connection is beneficial insofar as it promotes identification with the group's morals and social accountability. Yet it can result in two related problems, given our keen ability to distinguish between an action and the motivation for that action. In a penetrating analysis of Psalm 118(119):37 – “Turn my eyes away that they may not see vanity; give me life in your way” – Augustine brings this distinction to the foreground:

When we do something good, what we have in view matters a great deal. Any service we render is to be evaluated not in itself but according to the end [*finis*] on which we have our eye; we must consider not only if what we do is good but also whether we are doing it for a good purpose. The psalmist is asking that the eyes with which we envisage the end of our virtuous actions may be averted from vanity [*uanitas*], or, in other words, that when he does something good, he may not fix his gaze on vanity as the motive of his action.⁶¹

Social admiration and praise for virtuous action is not a bad thing, on Augustine's view, “for what can be more salutary for people than to admire what they ought to imitate?”⁶² But, on the other hand, what is “blameworthy is to make the attracting of admiration the motive for one's action, for this is to set one's sights on vanity.”⁶³ And, what is more:

⁶¹ *En. Ps.* 118(12).2.

⁶² *En. Ps.* 118(12).2.

⁶³ *En. Ps.* 118(12).2.

Among all vain human objectives, the vainest is winning the praise of others. Many people reputed great in this world have achieved their manifold great deeds with a view to winning praise. They have been highly extolled in pagan civilizations, these heroes who sought glory not with God but in human estimation. For the sake of fame and glory they have lived prudently, bravely, temperately, and justly; they won praise indeed, but in attaining it they received their reward: vain men won a vain prize.⁶⁴

This passage resonates with Augustine's arguments about the pride of Roman glory and the limits of pagan civic virtue in Book 5 of *The City of God*. Yet something significant appears in this passage that is not present in *The City of God*. The vanity of making human admiration one's sole motive for virtuous action results in a social consequence harmful to the wellbeing of the political community.

First, in Augustine's exposition of Psalm 118(119), we find that because glory is determined solely by the standards of praise and blame within the community, it is subject to communal recognition. This can be socially beneficial, as we noted, but it also means that it is continually threatened by other community members' achievements, and memories of those achievements, and thus becomes a competitive good. Because of the lower-level motivation involved in the pursuit of human glory, and because we can distinguish between motivation and virtuous action, systems of competing glories engender a social attitude of suspicion toward the hidden motivations that might lie underneath another person's virtuous action.

No one's motives for virtuous action are entirely pure, in Augustine's view. And in the competition for glory, most people instinctively project this moral-psychological gap – along with the correspondent shame – on to other members in the community. This is especially true when one is intent on acquiring virtue for social praise. Glory requires comparing oneself to, and measuring one's own deeds by, the standard of others' conduct.

⁶⁴ *En. Ps.* 118(12).2.

Thus, virtuous actions motivated solely by the reward of human glory quickly fall prey to a cycle of comparison, conformity, interior shame, and external suspicion.⁶⁵

[A]s long as a person does not turn his eyes away to prevent them from seeing vanity [i.e. making one's sole motive for virtuous action socially-conferred glory], he will suspect that what goes on in himself goes on in others too. So, for instance, he thinks that his own motives for worshipping God are theirs also, or he thinks that another person does virtuous actions for the same reason as he does. This happens because although other people can see our actions, the end we envisage is hidden. Hence the possibility of suspicion arises, and someone may take it upon himself to judge the hidden motives of others. Such conclusions are generally mistaken; and even if they are correct, the self-appointed judge has no right to suspect something of which he is ignorant. The Lord warns us against a suspicious attitude ... He tells us not to perform virtuous actions for the sake of winning human praise from others ... lest we suspect people whom we see to live good lives, but whose purposes [*finis*] we do not see, of being motivated in their well-doing by some [bad] motive ... God commands us "Do not judge, lest you be judged" (Matthew 7:1).⁶⁶

Augustine's claims in this exposition of Psalm 118(119) and the cycle of comparison, conformity, shame, and suspicion cast new light on his more well-known criticism of systems of civic virtue oriented toward a conception of socially-conferred glory (as was especially the case in the Roman literature and popular culture most familiar to him). Political glory and its relationship to eternal goods appears as a prominent theme in Augustine's letters to the public officials Boniface, Darius, Marcellinus, Volusianus, and Macedonius.

The passage above clarifies Augustine's appeal to Macedonius to make God's praise the motivation of his practice of the political virtues. This motivational reorientation is central to the work of obtaining eternal goods and in returning to God as

⁶⁵ It is important to keep in mind that Augustine's critical comments about the vicious effects of human glory on virtuous action pertain as much to his criticism of other Christian groups, such as the Donatists and Pelagians, as they do to his criticism of pagan philosophical ethics or popular Roman heroism. See Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 104, 200-2.

⁶⁶ *En. Ps.* 118(12).4. For an excellent treatment of the indebtedness of Augustine's understanding of motivation to Stoic cognitive psychology and perception theory, see Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine*, chapter two: "Motivation," 23-54.

the source of one's virtues. Making one's motive for virtuous action God's praise is an essential part of being released from vanity (i.e. making social praise the overarching motive for action) and suspicion of others' motives. Seeking God's praise does not engender competition, as does humanly-conferred glory. God is the good itself, so there is no comparative edge that one could possibly attain.

If it happens that a just person does attract human praise in some degree, such praise must not be made into the object of his or her actions. Praise must be redirected to the glory of God, for whose sake truly good people perform their good actions, because such people become good not by their own powers but by God's gifts ... The praise given by other people must not be the purpose of our virtuous actions; let us rather correct such praise and refer everything to the praise of God, since whatever in us rightly deserves praise comes from him.⁶⁷

The motivational goal of praising God remedies the damaging effects of glory on civic virtue in two ways, for Augustine.

First, by making one's goal the love and praise of God, one distinguishes between civic virtue and mere social conformity and acknowledges God as the transcendent standard of goodness to whom one is accountable (revealed by the dictates of both conscience and Scripture). In the same exposition of Psalm 118(119) Augustine details how a desire to act in "conformity" with God as transcendent standard tempers the dangers of social conformity.⁶⁸

Appealing to God as transcendent standard of goodness entails an assessment of one's conduct in the light of one's conception of God as the highest good. This appeal highlights an important aspect of the perfection of virtue, beyond seeing God as source of one's virtues and making God's praise one's goal for the practice of virtue. The truly

⁶⁷ *En. Ps.* 118(12).2.

⁶⁸ *En. Ps.* 118(12).3, 5.

virtuous, Augustine claims, think at least as much of their virtues' imperfections and outright vices as they do about their more stable virtues.⁶⁹

The man of true virtue, who loves, believes and hopes in God, attends more to those things in himself which displease him than to those, if there are any, which are pleasing to him or, rather, to the Truth [God]. Nor does he attribute what is now pleasing in him to anything other than the mercy of Him Whom he fears to displease. To God he gives thanks for what is healed in him, and pours out his prayers for those things which are as yet unhealed.⁷⁰

Holding oneself accountable to God as the standard of goodness thus entails practices of self-assessment, confession of one's shortcomings, and resolve to change one's motivations and actions. These practices are an integral component of the perfection of virtue, obtaining eternal goods, and the return to God as the source of virtue. Such practices continuously renew one with a sense of fallibility and dependence on the good. Recall the essential role of self-examination and confession of sin in Augustine's advice to Macedonius on whether to pardon the criminal. For a judge in Macedonius's position, practicing prudence, justice, and mercifulness require constant self-examination in light of God as transcendent standard of goodness.

This leads to the second way that making God's glory one's goal for virtuous action remedies (or begins to remedy) the cycle of glory that Augustine thinks is so corrosive of genuine civic virtue. In the final paragraph of his exposition of Psalm 118(119), Augustine presents a complete definition of true piety's relation to love of God and neighbor that parallels what we found in Letter 155. He claims that the practices of self-examination, confession, and repentance are all necessary for cultivating genuine love of neighbor. Suspicion of base motives, on Augustine's account, is merely a way of lifting one's virtuous actions above another's in the pursuit of a limited supply of

⁶⁹ *En. Ps.* 118(12).3. Cf. *ciu.* 5.20, 24.

⁷⁰ *Ciu.* 5.20.

socially-conferred glory. This form of suspicion is a soul disease that can only be healed through the remedy of genuine love (*caritas*) for the neighbor: “To enjoy suspecting evil [motives] that one cannot see is a disease, but there is a remedy, and that is love [*caritas*], which is never jealous.”⁷¹

As we noted in Letter 155 to Macedonius, Augustine does not think it possible to love the neighbor appropriately without first loving God as one’s highest good. Augustine closes the above exposition of Psalm 118(119) with a parallel claim about the inherent unity between the love commands: “Look at me: I have longed to love you [God] with all my heart, all my soul, and all my mind, and my neighbor as myself.”⁷² We can now see more clearly why this is the case, for Augustine. Loving God as the highest good entails a recognition of God as the source of one’s virtues, a reorientation of one’s motivation for virtuous action toward the goal of God’s praise, and a critical assessment of one’s shortcomings in the light of God’s perfection. Thus, the two remedies for the pitfalls of social glory (confession of sin and genuine neighbor love) work in tandem.

By making God’s praise one’s motive for virtuous action, one is freed from the cycle of comparison, conformity, shame, and suspicion. To practice virtue for the sake of God’s glory is to bring praise to the very source in which one’s excellence participates. This is the appointed consummation of virtue, on Augustine’s view, because virtue represents the very measure of one’s participation in God. The culmination of virtue has salutary effects on the whole network of social practices and civic virtues that make up political life insofar as praise remedies the deficiencies of the cycle of glory as a competitive social good.

⁷¹ *En. Ps.* 118(12).5.

⁷² *En. Ps.* 118(12).5.

It is important to note that, for Augustine, recognizing God as the source of one's virtues is a claim about the ontology of one's participation in the good – and not a claim about a one-directional divine gift that wipes out human agency. In the perfection of the political virtues there is no competition between divine and human agency. Augustine's conceptual language for this leg of the return is that of intimacy. The nearer one approximates to the source and ground of one's virtues, the nearer one approximates to oneself. Fully realized agency is not autarkic, for Augustine.

Notice also that Augustine's description of the perfection of the virtues to Macedonius is erotic, in the Platonic and Plotinian sense: a picture of one clinging to the good rather than being annihilated by it.⁷³ It is a dispossession that leads to consummation. This vision of clinging, Augustine tells Macedonius, must inform the practice of the virtues in time. Thus, recognition of one's virtues as divine gifts is central to the way piety perfects the other virtues. Furthermore, this is one of the reasons that true piety is necessary, on Augustine's account, for the other virtues to be used rightly in promoting the community's wellbeing. Only in this way can virtues be perfected, made real, and motivated by freely given love for God and neighbor without a privatization of love for one's own goods and virtues.

Augustine's account of perfected political virtues and true happiness in Book 5 of *The City of God* mirrors the final paragraphs of Letter 155 to Macedonius. Although the political official described in Book 5 of *The City of God* is ostensibly an emperor, the analysis given there applies more broadly to all godly public officials. Given that

⁷³ *Ep.* 155.12-13. For Augustine, just as for Plato and Plotinus, the attractiveness of the highest good can be conceptualized in terms of beauty. Cf. *conf.* 7.16, 10.27; Plato, *sym.* 210a-212a; Plotinus *Ennead* I 6.7.2: "one who has seen the good, the desire of every soul, knows what I mean when I say it is beautiful"; Cf. *Ennead* VI 9.9.46.

Augustine was writing Book 5 and Letter 155 at the same time, and given the details of the virtues and practices recommended here (e.g. gentleness, pardon, punishment), one cannot help but wonder if this passage refers to the concrete figure of Macedonius:⁷⁴

[Political officials] are happy if they rule justly; if they are not lifted up by the talk of those who accord them sublime honors or pay their respects with an excessive humility, but remember that they are only men; if they make their power the handmaid of His majesty by using it to spread His worship to the greatest possible extent; if they fear, love and worship God; if they love that Kingdom which they are not afraid to share with others more than their own; if they are slow to punish and swift to pardon; if they resort to punishment only when it is necessary to the government and defense of the commonwealth, and never to gratify their own enmity; if they grant pardon, not so that unjust men may enjoy impunity, but in the hope of bringing about their correction; if they compensate for whatever severe measures they may be forced to decree with the gentleness of mercy and the generosity of benevolence; if their own self-indulgence is as much restrained as it might have been unchecked; if they prefer to govern wicked desires more than any people whatsoever; if they do all these things not out of craving for empty glory, but from love of eternal happiness; and if, for their sins, they do not neglect to offer to their true God the sacrifice of humility and contrition and prayer. We say that, for the time being, such Christian emperors are happy in hope and that, in time to come, when that to which we now look forward has arrived they will be so in possession.⁷⁵

Just as in Letter 155, here too we see all the steps of the return to God as the source of one's virtues coming together in a single passage: first, we see recognition of God as the source of one's virtues; second, a reorientation of motivation from human to divine glory; and third, the corresponding practices of self-examination, confession, and repentance. All three of these movements are necessary for the perfection of the political virtues and the reception of the eternal goods constitutive of eternal happiness. Furthermore, in this passage we also find that it is through the work of perfecting the political virtues that one avoids the pitfalls of imperfect virtue – that is, the cycle of comparison, conformity,

⁷⁴ The passage also refers to the figure of Emperor Theodosius I whose repentance after the massacre at Thessalonika is described in *City of God* 5.26. See Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society*, 189, 192-3, 212-3.

⁷⁵ *Ciu.* 5.24.

shame, and suspicion associated with “empty glory.” We now turn to the second aspect of the double return: love for God as the source of all temporal goods.

God, the Object of Everyone’s Desire

Augustine’s exposition of Psalm 118(119) provides an important parallel to his comments in Letter 155 to Macedonius about God being the true “object of everyone’s desire”:

Not even for the sake of temporal health or wellbeing must we do good, but for the eternal wellbeing which is our hope. In that eternal wellbeing unchangeable good will be ours to enjoy, the good that will come to us from God, the good which will be God himself.⁷⁶

The goal, on this leg of the double return, is to follow the many temporal goods we use back to their source in the good itself. It is all too easy, Augustine preaches, to want goods without ever advancing toward a desire for the good itself:

[M]any people cry to the Lord about riches they hope to gain or losses they want to avoid, or for the wellbeing of their nearest and dearest, or for the security of their household, or temporal happiness, or worldly advancement; or even perhaps just for bodily fitness ... Many people pray for these and similar things to the Lord, but hardly anyone prays for the Lord himself. Indeed, it seems quite easy for a person to want something from the Lord without wanting the Lord himself, as though anything he gives could be more delightful than the giver.⁷⁷

By ascending to a desire for the giver himself, one begins to love God as the good in a “disinterested” way, Augustine says, even as one begins to taste and obtain eternal goods in this life.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ *En. Ps.* 118(12).2.

⁷⁷ *En. Ps.* 76.2.

⁷⁸ *En. Ps.* 76.2. For a useful discussion of the paradoxical role of “disinterested” love for the good in Augustine’s eudaimonism, see E. Boularand, “Désintéressement,” in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité. Ascétique et mystique*, Tome 3 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1957), 566-71.

Augustine describes this “disinterested” and non-possessive love as an enlarging, stretching, and maturing of one’s affection for temporal goods. Good use of temporal goods requires this growth. For those who have reached this stage of love:

Only God remains to them as the [true] object of their desires, for they no longer love the earth. They love him who made heaven and earth; they love him, and they are not yet with him. Their desire is kept waiting so that it may grow, and it grows that it may lay hold on its object. It is no paltry thing that God will give to one who longs, but Himself, who made all that exists; and no small effort must a lover make to be capable of receiving so great a good. Train yourself until you have a capacity for God; long and long for what you will possess forever.⁷⁹

Augustine picks up this exhortation in his *Homilies on the First Letter of John* and uses the striking image of a stretched-out purse:

The entire life of a good Christian is a holy desire. What you desire, however, you don’t yet see. But by desiring you are made large enough, so that, when there comes what you should see, you may be filled. For, if you wish to fill a purse, and you know how big what will be given you is, you stretch the purse, whether it is made of cloth or leather or anything else. You know how much you are going to obtain, and you see that your purse is small; by stretching it you make it that much larger. This is how God stretches our desire through delay, stretches our soul through desire, and makes it large enough by stretching it ... This is our life – to be exercised [*exercere*] through desire.⁸⁰

The exercise of desire, for Augustine, entails many exercises for assessing, refining, and reordering one’s desires toward God. These practices result, Augustine preaches in this passage, in an overall *stretching out* of one’s soul toward the good. One’s soul must be made capacious in order to receive such a supremely desirable end.

Just as we found in the return to God as the source of one’s virtue, this return to God as source of all temporal goods is difficult work, on Augustine’s account. Anyone undergoing this exercise of desire understands that the good cannot be, or cannot remain, a mere projection of one’s acquisitive self-interest. Sometimes this training involves

⁷⁹ *En. Ps.* 83.3.

⁸⁰ *Ep. Io. tr.* 4.6.

taking pleasure in goods and following them up to their source through gratitude. Other times the training requires periods of deprivation (through abstinence or renunciation) in order to sharpen or stretch one's desire to make room for "so great a good." Still at other times the training requires patient endurance of the loss of temporal goods. Loss provides an opportunity to assess the quality of one's love for the good itself.

Death represents the ultimate loss of temporal goods. Meditation on it, in Augustine's view, provides a useful exercise for shaping one's relationship to the good, and for motivating the twofold return. Recall this characteristic passage from Augustine's preaching on wealth:

Why are you so obsessed with these things [temporal goods] as the only means of pleasure and satisfaction? That's not wellbeing. "His spirit will go out, and he will return to this earth" (Psalm 146:4). There, that's what his wellbeing amounts to, "a mist that appears for a little while" (James 4:14). "His spirit will go out, and he will return to earth." Let a few years pass. Let the river flow on as usual, hurrying past the graves of the dead. Tell the difference if you can between the bones of the rich and the bones of the poor. "When his spirit goes out he returns to his earth."⁸¹

Meditating on the inevitable fact of death is an opportunity to recognize that one's goods are not entirely one's own. They are, in an important sense, merely tokens of the highest good to be used in the mysterious journey back to God. At the end of one's life, in Augustine's eyes, one is implicitly being asked to accept God as one's only good.

If one clings tenaciously to God as the source of all goods in this life, one's manifold desires will eventually come to an end in satiety:

Yet however richly endowed such a soul may be here on earth, what will it be in the world to come, where God feeds us? As long as we are still on pilgrimage here, what we shall be cannot be told. And perhaps even here, when we lift up our hands, we long for that ultimate satiety; we long for that state where we shall be totally satisfied with God's lavish gifts so that all our needs will vanish utterly,

⁸¹ S. 33A.3.

and we shall desire nothing; because whatever we desire here, whatever seems most worthy of our love here, will be available in its entirety.⁸²

Augustine repeatedly emphasizes that this singular return of love for God is not meant to obliterate love for other goods. Indeed, love of God, in Augustine's view, is an overarching goal that can unify and order one's smaller loves for lower goods.

I am not saying that you should have no loves; I simply want your loves to be properly ordered. Put heavenly things before earthly, immortal things before mortal, eternal things before transitory ones. And put the Lord before everything, and not just by praising him, but also by loving him. It is easy enough to give him preference when it comes to praise. But ... do you show different priorities in your love from the preferences you showed in your praise?⁸³

It is important to note that one's singular love for God should not block out neighbor love – as was discussed in chapter four. Augustine is keen to emphasize that the stretching of desire for the good always moves upward and outward:

Hence love itself is now practiced in good works of charity, by which it stretches itself out to help the neighbor in whatever way it can, and this is its breadth ... Hence love, which looks out for that which is common rather than for what is private, is said not to seek the things that are its own.⁸⁴

On Augustine's view the soul has suffered a primordial contraction in original sin and part of the remedy for it requires this stretching out toward God and neighbor. This passage reminds us of Augustine's claim in Letter 155 that there is ultimately a hidden unity between love of God, neighbor, and self that one can glimpse in this life.⁸⁵ The journey toward non-possessive love of the good entails this horizontal extension. This stretching prepares us for the experience of God as the highest common good who will be enjoyed in eternity not in solitude but in that "perfectly ordered and perfectly harmonious

⁸² *En. Ps.* 62.14.

⁸³ *S.* 335C.13.

⁸⁴ *Ep.* 140.62.

⁸⁵ *Ep.* 155.15. For an account of this unity as it appears in the treatises *doct. chr.*, *trin.*, *ciu.*, that also responds to the criticisms of Arendt, Nygren, and, more recently, Martha Nussbaum, see K. Corrigan, "Love of God, Love of Self, and Love of Neighbor: Augustine's Critical Dialogue with Platonism," *Augustinian Studies* 34 (2003): 97-106.

fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and of one another in God.”⁸⁶ This fellowship represents the culmination of the enclosing circles of *oikeiōsis* and the consummation of all temporal goods and virtues in eternal happiness. Augustine declares that Macedonius’ life exhibits a true longing for this “heavenly commonwealth,” and the true friendship with God and neighbor that flow from there: “I can tell that your spirit is panting for God’s heavenly commonwealth, inspired by a love of ... love itself.”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Ciu.* 19.17. Cf. *ep.* 137.17.

⁸⁷ *Ep.* 155.1.

CONCLUSION

Discerning the good is, in the end, for Augustine, perhaps not as straightforward an enterprise as one would like it to be. His own metaphor of a scale of goods, and of ordering one's loves, belies how messy and complex this process is. Determination of the good is not so much about matching one's desire to the relative weights of particular goods in their relation to the highest good, nor is it a cold calculation of pleasure or duty. It is a way of discernment.

The good is ultimately shrouded in unknowing. Our primary approach to it is through love.¹ The will is, for Augustine, the preeminent power of the soul (*potentia animi*), responsible for guiding one's affections and the other powers of the soul – such as the intellect – toward the good.² As Augustine tells Honoratus in Letter 140, it is by the movement of the will – acting under grace – that the mind can “distinguish” (*distinguere*) genuine goods from false ones,³ and among the genuine ones, “weigh” (*pondere*) lower and higher ones.⁴ Out of this process the soul can achieve properly “ordered love” (*ordinata caritas*)⁵ by “referring” (*referre*)⁶ its virtues and the things that virtue uses to

¹ *Mor.* 1.24.

² *Lib. arb.* 2.52.

³ *En. Ps.* 48(2).11. “... *gaudens falsis bonis, et non amans bona vera.*”

⁴ *Ep.* 140.3-4.

⁵ *Ep.* 140.4, s. 335C.13. Cf. *ciu.* 14.7: “A rightly ordered will [*uoluntas recta*] is good love [*amor bonus*], but a misdirected will [*uoluntas peruersa*] is bad love.”

⁶ *Ep.* 130.14, *ciu.* 19.17. Cf. *trin.* 11.10: “Now all acts of the will are rightly ordered (*rectae ... uoluntates*), and all the ones linked with them too, if the one to which they are all referred [*referre*] is the good. And

the end of the highest good, and by “clinging” (*inhaerere*) to the good in love.⁷ These five activities – distinguishing, weighing, ordering, referring, and clinging – form the heart of an Augustinian account of discerning the good.

Because the good cannot be known by a mere empirical method or rational procedure, one must proceed by some other form of knowing. Augustine describes the “learned ignorance” required in fully wrought desire in Letter 130 to Proba:

For we, of course, do not know what we cannot think of as it is; rather whatever comes to mind as we think [of the good], we cast aside, reject, disapprove, and know that this is not what we seek, although we do not know what sort of thing that it is. There is in us, a certain *learned ignorance* [*docta ignorantia*], so to speak, but an ignorance learned from the Spirit of God ... the Spirit ... inspires [us] with the desire for so great a still *unknown reality* [*res incognita*] ... How, after all, do we express, how do we desire what we do not know? For, if we were completely ignorant of it, we would certainly not desire it, and again, if we see it, we would not be desiring it or seeking it.⁸

Through the spiritual exercise of desire, wherein one proceeds by “learned ignorance,” one moves closer to an uncontainable object: “so great a still *unknown reality*.” One begins Augustine’s progress of thought from the simple human experience of goodness. From goodness, one postulates the existence of the highest good – the source from which all other goods flow, encountered as gifts in human experience. As one’s mind proceeds toward the good, however, there is a danger of mistaking the true good for one’s own limited projection. Consider Ecdicia’s idealization of ascetic self-mastery or Boniface’s lust for honor and power to see how such projection can have harmful consequences for the moral life. The result is love of a false good, pursuit of a highly immanent end

thus a sequence of rightly ordered acts of willing is like a ladder for those who would climb to happiness [*beatitudo*], to be negotiated by definite steps; but a skein of disordered acts of willing (*distortarum uoluntatum*) is like a rope to bind anyone who acts so, and have him ‘cast into outer darkness’ (Matthew 8:12).”

⁷ *Ep.* 155.12, *lib. arb.* 2.52-53.

⁸ *Ep.* 130.27-28. My own emphasis. On Augustine as spiritual guide in this letter, see the helpful comments of A.-M. La Bonnardière, “Lettre à Proba sur la prière,” *Offertoire* (1958): 13-29.

masquerading as a transcendent end. Arriving at a conception of the highest good from the human experience of particular goods is precarious – the threat of illusion, and idolatry, is always lurking. One must “cast aside, reject, [and] disapprove” of one’s imagined idea of the good as it enters the mind. Yet, even in the midst of such darkness, one is never “completely ignorant of [the good].” By exercising one’s desire for goods – that is, through assessing, refining, and reordering one’s desires before God – love finds a way to proceed toward the good by “learned ignorance.”⁹

Augustine thinks this type of negative knowledge is characteristic of our relationship to goods in general, and of our capacity to discern the lower from the higher. Recall a few of the difficult cases we have considered: Juliana’s decision to pursue the good of widowhood over remarriage after the death of her husband; Macedonius’ decision to promote the public good by pardoning the condemned criminal; Ecdicia’s failure to acquire the greater good of poverty by neglecting the wellbeing of her own household.

As in these cases, moral decision-making – weighing the good – is itself a spiritual exercise. Getting the moral life *right* – that is, choosing the appropriate good in the appropriate way at the appropriate time – requires ongoing questioning of one’s own motives and apprehension of the good. The moral life is a challenge due to the combined limits of human rationality, the disordered shape of human desire, and the opacity of human self-understanding.

Time, discipline, and community – three constitutive elements of desire – help one overcome these limits. The *exercise* of desire is twofold, on Augustine’s account: it

⁹ For an excellent discussion of love as a moment of negative knowledge in Augustine’s *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, see P. van Geest, *The Incomprehensibility of God: Augustine as a Negative Theologian* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 101-8.

refers both to the assessment and examination of one's desires, as well as their enlargement as the soul stretches toward the highest good.¹⁰ Augustine's vision of this exercise is different from Hellenistic and Roman therapies aimed at desire's extirpation.¹¹ Although there will be an eternal obviation of desire in the satisfaction that accompanies one's full embrace of the good, exercising desire in this life entails movement between the intensification and purification of love. Proper ordering does not require abandoning all other loves: "I am not saying that you should have no loves," says Augustine.¹²

A focal point in this vision is the movement between virtues of good use and renunciation, along with the tension they create in the formation of different sorts of communities and friendships. This tension bears witness to Augustine's keen sense of the inherent goodness of all temporal goods and also of our need for purification and healing in relationship to them. It is this complex view of human desire – and its correspondent conception of the good – that enables Augustine to uphold the seemingly incompatible goods of marriage and celibacy, wealth and poverty, and political action and contemplation – all as equally valid ways to pursue the highest good. As we have seen, the twofold return to God can be performed in a wide variety of roles and lifestyles. It is as relevant to the ascetic wife and mother, Ecdicia, as it is to the busy public servant, Macedonius. Indeed, the life of Macedonius highlights that the twofold return to God is as much about immersion in the goods and virtues associated with social and political life as it is about renunciation.

¹⁰ *En. Ps.* 83.3, *ep. Io. tr.* 4.6, *ep.* 140.62. See the discussion above in chapter five.

¹¹ Cf. Seneca, *ep.* 9; Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.12; *ciu.* 14.9. For an excellent analysis of the cognitive elements in Augustine's therapeutic model – that also contrasts his views with those of Seneca – see Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine*, 155-61. For a helpful overview of the variety of Stoic approaches, see M. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), chapter ten: "The Stoics on the Extirpation of the Passions," 359-401.

¹² *S.* 335C.13.

Discerning the good is more akin to relational intimacy than it is to rational certainty, for Augustine. This is true in two ways. First, one's striving toward the good is a matter of love – of one's will clinging to the good in love.¹³ As we saw in chapter five, Augustine's conception of *referring* goods back to their source denotes a continually renewed recognition that life's goods are contingent gifts, and signals of something more than themselves. *Recognition* thus constitutes a relational awareness of the God who "is not spread out or enclosed in physical space ... [but] is present everywhere; we reach him not by foot, but by [love]."¹⁴ Proximity to God, thus, turns on ordered affection. And given God's mysterious presence in all goods, in Augustine's eyes, one's life is a manifold opportunity to celebrate, thank, praise, and rejoice in the "fountain of all goodness."¹⁵

Discernment of the good is akin to relational intimacy in a second way. All temporal goods are ultimately necessary for the sake of friendship, and moral life is about tending the wellbeing of the relevant communities inscribed in one's circles of *oikeiōsis*. Discerning the good, then, requires sensitivity to one's role and obligations. As we read in the letter to Ecdicia, having a strong will and desire for the highest good without regard for all else is not enough. Indeed, by aiming so high that she failed to love the neighbors nearest her, she missed the good altogether. In Letter 155 to Macedonius, Augustine writes that love of the good is ultimately about "the love of ... love itself."¹⁶ Clinging to the good requires self-emptying and self-giving love, two virtues constitutive of genuine friendship. The "love of ... love itself" sets the pursuit of the good in its

¹³ *Ep.* 155.12, *lib. arb.* 2.52.

¹⁴ *Ep.* 155.13.

¹⁵ *Ciu.* 10.3, 22.24.

¹⁶ *Ep.* 155.1.

proper context – that is, the concrete, lived context of the beloved, who may be a husband, son, impoverished stranger, or condemned criminal. One’s role carries such prescriptive implications for how one pursues the good.

The importance of *roles* also highlights the essentially performative dimension of pursuing the good. For Augustine, a virtuous action can be spoiled if carried off in the wrong spirit, by the wrong person, at the wrong time. The “greater goods” of generosity to the poor and marital continence that eclipsed Ecdicia’s love for her husband and son are examples of this.¹⁷ Properly ordering one’s love for the good is thus not merely a calculative task. Just like discrete acts of love, the goodness of fully ordered love is determined not only by a checklist of required movements but by how and when those moves are made.

Augustine’s vision of discerning the good thus involves both objective and subjective considerations. Moral decision-making requires awareness of a hierarchy of goods that exists in reality. This scale sets out the general measurements – e.g. the virtue of generosity ranks above wealth – that constitute one’s primary consideration. Other objective considerations include one’s role, obligations, and circumstances. Genuine discernment of the good, however, is not complete without careful examination of one’s motives, dispositions, and desires. On Augustine’s account, these subjective considerations also factor in significantly – both in the process of discernment and in the overall evaluation of the goodness of specific acts. Self-knowledge and knowledge of the good are always refracted, for Augustine, through the twin consequences of original sin

¹⁷ *Ep.* 262.2.

in the human soul – ignorance (*ignorantia*) and weakness (*infirmetas*).¹⁸ Because of these intellectual and volitional limits, continual questioning of one’s understanding and motivation – along with a corollary commitment to the exercises of confession, repentance, and beginning afresh – is necessary to pursue the good.

Because discernment of the good requires multiple angles of reflection, Augustine’s advice on specific goods in his letters and sermons present his most sophisticated reflections on the moral life. And because the problems of the moral life are always, for Augustine, deeply psychological, his advice to others on how to disentangle coils of desire, and to identify hidden forms of self-deception blocking the pursuit of the good, present him at his philosophical best.

¹⁸ Cf. *Lib. arb.* 3.51-3, *ep.* 140.52, *pecc. mer.* 2.3. See my discussion of *ignorantia* and *infirmetas* in chapter two – and the notes there for a more extensive list of references to Augustine’s texts.

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