

# AUGUSTINE'S ANALYSIS OF *AMOR LAUDIS* A Case Study of the Supreme Drive in Roman Political Life

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## INTRODUCTION: AUGUSTINE'S CRITIQUE OF ROMAN POLITICAL LIFE IN THE *CITY OF GOD*<sup>2</sup>

Augustine's attitude towards Roman politics in the *City of God* is highly complicated, arguably to the point of being ambivalent. On the one hand, Augustine never tires of disclosing the dark side of Roman politics: the slaughter of Roman citizens in civil wars and of foreign peoples during the expansion of the Empire; bloody crimes committed by generals in the pursuit of supreme power; and horrific deeds perpetrated by emperors like Nero and Caligula. On the other hand, Augustine does not hesitate to praise Roman heroes like Cato and Regulus for the firmness of their character and their remarkable courage when faced with dangers and cruel death, as well as their noble spirit of self-sacrifice for the motherland. Roman heroes despised personal interests and even their own lives, in order to attain glory within and outside Rome. As Augustine puts it, "This glory they most ardently loved. For this sake

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<sup>2</sup> *Civ. Dei.* denotes *De civitate dei* and *Conf.* denotes *Confessiones*. The English translation for the former comes from Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, volumes II, trans. William M. Green (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1963), while that of the latter comes from Augustine, *Confessions*, volume I, trans. William Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Words in parentheses are supplemented by the author of this article in order to complete the meaning of whole sentences.

they chose to live and for its sake they did not hesitate to die. They suppressed all other desires in their boundless desire for this one thing" (*Civ. Dei*, 5.12). Moreover, God recognized this virtue and justly gave Rome what was their due: i.e., the greatest empire and the highest glory the human race has ever seen.

With Augustine's ambivalent attitude in mind, Rome can be reasonably suspected (unlike "Babylonia", i.e., the uncontroversial name for the earthly city) as a representative of a neutral political space, or, a representative of *saeculum* according to Robert Markus.<sup>3</sup> This *saeculum*, which includes all political communities and social institutions throughout human history, exists from Adam's fall to God's final judgment. Within this *saeculum* are good and evil, light and darkness, and most importantly, the heavenly and earthly cities being intertwined. As a whole though, *saeculum* has its own significance which is

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<sup>3</sup> For Robert Austin Markus' secularist reading of Augustine, see Robert Austin Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970) and *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). Markus's interpretation of *saeculum* is inspired by Henri-Irénée's Marrou, "Civitas Dei, civitas terrena: num tertium quid?", in *Studia Patristica: Papers Presented to the Second International Conference in Patristic Studies held at Christ Church, Oxford*, eds. K. Aland and F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957), pp. 342-50, and also influenced by John Rawls' theory of political realm as an independent sphere grounded on consensus. Since its birth, Markus' secularist interpretation has triggered controversy among scholars. For a reading of Augustine directly opposed to Markus', see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990, 2006, especially 404-40), which is one of the most influential works in the Radical Orthodoxy movement. Michael J. S. Bruno provides a detailed introduction to the long history of this controversy in Michael J. S. Bruno, *Political Augustinianism: Modern Interpretations of Augustine's Political Thought* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014, especially in chapter three 'Disputing the *Saeculum*: Robert Markus, John Milbank, and Contemporary Augustinian Interpretations', 119-170). As Bruno points out, modern study of Augustine's political thought arose among French scholars and began to thrive in Anglo-American academia since Reinhold Niebuhur's *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953) as well as his other books. Besides works of Marrou, Niebuhur, Markus, and Milbank, important contributions to this topic include (to name just a few among many others): Neville J. Figgis, *The Political Aspects of St. Augustine's City of God* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1921); Gustave Combès, *La Doctrine Politique de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Plon, 1927); Herbert Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); Ernest L. Fortin, *Political Idealism and Christianity in the Thought of St. Augustine* (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 1972); Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); R. W. Dyson, *The Pilgrim City: Social and Political Ideas in the Writing of Saint Augustine of Hippo* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005); Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Eric Gregory's *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

independent of that of the earthly city, as well as an existence that is at least partly justifiable. This secularist understanding of Rome is expressed by Markus as follows:

Taken by itself, it is neutral. It is neither to be repudiated as Satanic, nor to be endorsed as holy...Rome is here suspended...between two 'cities', that of the righteous and that of the unjust. The possibilities of Rome being assimilated to either the one or the other are both left open. This radical indeterminateness of human achievement, and especially of human achievement in society, is profoundly characteristic of Augustine's final estimate of the Roman state...<sup>4</sup>

In sharp contrast, John Milbank rejects Markus' secularist reading of the political realm in general and neutralization of Rome in particular:

While all human association is in some measure 'good' (insofar as it 'is' at all), it yet remains the case that the most predominant governing purpose of an association is not automatically justice or communality. Its most consistent desire can be for a false goal, which means a goal *denying* its own being, and its own social nature... when he explains what it is that the Romans collectively desire, this turns out to be precisely the pursuit of individual *dominium*, honour and glory. The Roman commonwealth, therefore, is actually condemned by Augustine for its individualism, and for not really fulfilling the goals of antique politics.<sup>5</sup>

I agree with Milbank's criticism of Markus. However, given the limited goal of this article, I will not comment on Augustine's political thought as a whole, but only carry out a case study of his discussion of Rome in Book V of the *City of God*. Furthermore, rather than discussing every concrete aspect of Roman politics, I will focus on its supreme drive as embodied in Roman heroes, i.e., *amor laudis*. Although *amor laudis* often occupied little space in works about Augustine's (political) thought, it has begun to receive more detailed commentary in recent decades; of which I will give a few examples. John Rist argues, "It is an aim of Augustine... if not to collapse love of glory into lust for

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<sup>4</sup> Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, 58.

<sup>5</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 404-5.

domination, at least to band them together."<sup>6</sup> For John von Heyking, Augustine pinpoints the failure to provide a reliable judge in endowing praise as the main reason why Romans necessarily loved praise more than virtues and why their love of glory necessarily degenerates into vice.<sup>7</sup> Thomas Smith offers an analysis of why ancient politics, which is centered around love of glory, is intrinsically tragic.<sup>8</sup> Brian Harding, by comparing relevant texts of Latin writers, proves that Augustine follows Sallust's criticism of Roman history and sees *libido dominandi* as its driving force, with *amor laudis* being a refined expression of this dark energy under the mask of civic virtue.<sup>9</sup>

The conclusion of my article generally coheres with these scholars, however my methodology does not. Inspired by William Desmond's discussions of different ethical ways,<sup>10</sup> I will offer a more systematic analysis of Augustine's judgments of *amor laudis* scattered throughout Book V of the *City of God* than previous research has done, re-organize these judgments, explore their interconnections, and disclose an inner logic of *amor laudis* through which it degenerates into *libido dominandi*. My argument will take the following steps. First, I will discuss the positive side of *amor laudis*, which helps sustain virtues and a proper political order. Afterwards, I will illustrate how this positive side of *amor laudis* turns negative, i.e., threatening virtues and corrupting politics, as well as how a lesser evil deepens itself and develops into a larger evil. In particular, I

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<sup>6</sup> Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, 221.

<sup>7</sup> Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, 156-7, also 165. As Heyking shows, Augustine uses Cicero's understanding of glory to develop his own criticism of love of glory. Cicero defines glory as "praise accorded to right actions and the good reputation that is attested not only by the multitude but by all the best people." In this sense, both virtue and receiving praise from reliable judges are necessary constituents for true glory. However, the latter of these two is regarded by Augustine as impossible for pagans, because the only reliable judge is God.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Smith, "The Tragedy and Glory of Politics," in *Augustine and Politics*, eds. John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 187-213. According to Smith, the reason why love of glory is tragic can be summarized into two points: first, love of glory, which seeks Rome's eternity, was also the cause of its disintegration; second, the majority of Romans passed away into oblivion and the dead could not enjoy the glory of Rome.

<sup>9</sup> Brian Harding, *Augustine and Roman Virtue* (London: Continuum, 2008), 35-102.

<sup>10</sup> William Desmond, *Ethics and the Between* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), especially Part II: Ethical Ways, which offers the most important inspiration to my article.

will pinpoint the core of this dramatic turn by reconstructing a dialectical movement based on Augustine's texts. This movement arises from the inner tension of *amor laudis* itself and transforms it (which at the beginning seems good) into *libido dominandi*, i.e., the evil principle of the earthly city.

In conclusion, through reconstructing the inner logic of *amor laudis*, i.e., the supreme drive in Roman political life, I will see through its dazzling phenomena, examine its essence as wrapped in *amor laudis*, and determine *libido dominandi* as its secret truth and grounding principle. In this way, I will confirm that Augustine's overall judgment of Rome is essentially negative, and this judgment also indicates his profound insight into the intrinsic evil within all pagan virtues and earthly politics.

### I. THE *PRIMA FACIE* POSITIVE SIDE OF *AMOR LAUDIS*

According to Augustine, "since they (Romans) held it shameful (*inglorium*) for their native land to be in servitude (*servire*), and glorious for it to rule (*dominari*) and command (*imperare*), their first passion to which they devoted all their energy was to maintain their independence (*liberam*); the second (passion) was to win dominion (*dominam*)" (*Civ. Dei* 5.12). So, "In this way their love of liberty (*amore...libertatis*) at first, and later their love of dominion as well, as well as their passion for praise and glory (*cupiditate laudis et gloriae*), led to many great deeds" (*ibid.* 5.12). These citations tell us two distinct aspects of *amor laudis*, i.e., desire for freedom from slavery and desire for dominion of others, which in fact revealed themselves one after the other in Roman history: first, Romans hated servitude and liberated themselves from kings within Rome and invaders outside Rome; then, after gaining political freedom, they were not satisfied with peacefully settling down, but managed to expand their political power all over the world.

Moreover, these two aspects of *amor laudis*, as expressed in Roman history, are more than mere historical facts: on the one hand, they concretized a logical development I will discuss in more details later; on the other hand, they contain one and the same essence, i.e., superiority over others in interpersonal

relationships. In this sense, it is easy to understand why Romans were not satisfied with independence already won, but strived with all their efforts for dominion over other peoples. After all, shame is only the depressed form of *amor laudis* under political oppression. Once permitted, *amor laudis* will reveal itself more fully in the pleasure won by dominating others.<sup>11</sup>

Of the two aspects of *amor laudis*, political freedom seems morally justified, but ruthless dominion is not morally acceptable at all. From this inherent tension between the two aspects of *amor laudis*, we can have a glimpse of Augustine's complicated judgment of Rome. According to Augustine, *amor laudis* is a vice in itself, so a man who has a saner view recognizes that even the love of praise is a vice (*vitium*) (ibid., 5.13). However, *amor laudis* is also a vice that comes close to being a virtue (*propius virtutem*) (ibid., 5.12), so "the one true and just God gave his aid to the Romans that they might win the glory of so great an empire, for they were good men by the particular standard of the earthly city (*secundum quandam formam terrenae civitatis bonos*)" (ibid., 5.19).

If we pay attention to Augustine's wording, it is easy to see that his double judgments of *amor laudis*, i.e., as both "vice" and "virtue", are not contradictory in the strict sense, but merely show an opposition between two levels, that is, between "in itself" and "by the standard of the earthly city." Given Augustine's theology, which grounds all his ethical claims, we can find a hint that his overall attitude towards *amor laudis* might be negative, for the principle of the earthly city, according to which *amor laudis* is a virtue, is our fallen freedom corrupted by original sin. However, in order to determine whether this hint is correct, let us embark on a systematic investigation into Augustine's positive and negative judgments of *amor laudis*. Now, let us examine the positive side of *amor laudis* in his texts, which seems beneficial for both morality and politics, and can be summarized into five points as follows.

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<sup>11</sup> At this point, Heyking's view is slightly different from (but not opposite to) mine, as he claims, "Augustine indicates that the love of liberty is a necessary but insufficient element of the love of glory, which was the goal of the Romans...The political passion for liberty necessarily precedes the more substantial love of glory because it eliminates their condition of shame or ingloriousness (*ingloriam*). In other words, liberty from external threats does not constitute sufficient glory but is only the negation of shame. True political glory consists in something more." See Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, 162.

First, Augustine mentions many times that *amor laudis* can check other more disgusting vices, such as greed for riches and indulgence in sensuous pleasure. Roman heroes were willing to sacrifice pleasures from these vices, so as to win good judgments from their fellow citizens. In seeking glory through dominion,

The Romans practised these arts (i.e., reigning, commanding, subjugating, beating down nations in war) with the more perfection, the less they devoted themselves to pleasure (*voluptatibus*), the less they weakened mind and body by the love and pursuit of wealth, for wealth undermined morals and led to the plundering of poor citizens, while bounty was lavished on vile actors (*ibid.*, 5.12).

Therefore, it seems that preferring glory to other vices is like choosing the lesser of two evils, and *amor laudis* is instrumental in preventing more severe immorality. As John von Heyking points out, *amor laudis* creates an order of political loves, in which lesser and private loves such as that of wealth are suppressed, because glory can be better shared with others and have the power to inspire deeds for the common good.<sup>12</sup>

The second positive point of *amor laudis* is that it can promote the four cardinal virtues in the ancient world (fortitude, justice, temperance, and prudence), i.e., a more active use than merely preventing vices. According to many classical writers, Roman heroes pursued glory through the honest path, i.e., virtues. The relation between virtues as the path and glory as the ultimate end calls to mind that familiar relation between virtues and happiness in eudemonistic ethics, with both Aristotle and Augustine as its representatives. Yet, the similarity is only apparent. For Aristotle and Augustine, virtues are not only *paths to* but also *constitutive elements* for happiness. All paths, as mere instruments, can be abandoned for more convenient and manageable ones. The link between paths and goals are unstable, and in most cases contingent. But constitutive parts cannot be given up without destroying the constituted whole. The link between elements and the whole is stable and necessary. In this sense, there is a clear-cut boundary between eudemonism and hedonism.

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<sup>12</sup> Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, 64.

According to Augustine, the Roman view of the relation between virtue and glory is closer to that in hedonistic ethics. Or, we could say that the significance of virtue for glory is at best ambiguous, if not overtly instrumental.<sup>13</sup> As we will see later, instrumentalizing virtue directly led to perverting the order of values. Also, since it is only possible for a few heroes with a firm character to pursue glory through true virtues, most glory-seekers developed a tendency to cheat praise from their fellow citizens by pretending to be virtuous. In short, moral elitism resulted in widespread hypocrisy.

*The third positive point* in *amor laudis* issues naturally from the first two: *amor laudis made Rome great*. On the one hand, it prevented more disgusting vices and promoted virtues; and on the other hand, it drove Romans to establish the greatest empire in the world. Moreover, the glory won by Rome was not brought about by any self-rewarding mechanism, but ordained by God. According to Augustine, we can discern two levels of significance with regard to the status of Rome in God's providence.

*First level:* Rome is a useful instrument for God to overcome grievous vices of many other nations:

Hence, when splendid empires had long been known in the East, God willed that an empire of the West should arise, later in time, but more splendid for its extent and greatness. To overcome the grievous vices of many nations (*gravia mala multarum gentium*) he granted supremacy to men who for the sake of honour, praise and glory (*causa honoris laudis et gloriae*) served the country in which they were seeking their own glory, and did not hesitate to prefer her safety to their own (*salutemque eius saluti suae praeponere*) (ibid., 5. 13).

Clearly, Augustine's claim is in line with his theodicy, which justifies God using evil for the sake of a greater good.

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<sup>13</sup> According to Penelope D. Johnson's, the oldest meaning of *virtus* in Latin is miraculous power possessed by warriors, the earth, or merchants. Later, *virtus* began to indicate many characteristics of soldiers. Cicero applied *virtus* to political realm, using it to describe excellent features of ideal statesmen. Hence, *virtus* is the natural path to personal and national glory. In the *City of God*, Augustine in a certain sense revived the original meaning of *virtus*, contrasting *virtus* of the heavenly city, which aims at beatitude, with *virtus* of the earthly city, which aims at glory. See Penelope D. Johnson, 'Virtus: Transition from Classical Latin to the "De Civitate Dei"', *Augustinian Studies*, 6 (1975): 117-24.

*Second level:* something more than instrumental good and really noble, i.e., quasi-intrinsic value, lies in Rome's achievements, so God, out of divine justice, could not deny Romans the reward that is their due:

If he were not to grant them even this earthly glory of pre-eminent rule, he would not be granting a proper reward for their good arts, that is, the virtues by which they pursued the hard road that brought them at last to such glory. For it is such men, men who give the appearance of doing something good in order to gain human glory, of whom the Lord himself says: 'Truly I say unto you, they have received their reward'. It was the same with the great Romans. They disregarded private wealth for the sake of commonwealth, that is, for the republic and for its treasury. They stood firm against avarice, gave advice to their country with an unshackled mind and were not guilty of any crime against its laws, nor of any unlawful desire (*neque delicto secundum suas leges neque libidini obnoxii*). By all these arts, as by a proper path, they strove to reach honor, power and glory (*ibid.*, 5.15).

However, Augustine's wording betrays how far his recognition of the intrinsic value of *amor laudis* goes, and what his true attitude towards *amor laudis* might be: "Truly I say unto you, they have received their reward." This is Christ's comment on the Pharisees, i.e., the most notorious representatives of all hypocrites. But Augustine applies this comment to Romans: "it was the same with the great Romans."

*The fourth positive point* of *amor laudis* goes beyond the moral field and reveals a religious significance, for it *provided good examples for Christians*. Touched by what Roman heroes were willing to sacrifice for their earthly motherland and rewards, the greatest of which is only glory among mortals, Christians should beat down their own pride, devote a firmer and deeper love to their heavenly homeland, and gain more strength and courage to strive for their heavenly rewards in contrast to which the earthly glory is nothing, as I quote,

Let them (Christians) give careful and sober attention to those examples, and see how much love is due to the heavenly city for the sake of eternal life (*propter vitam aeternam*), if the earthly city was so much loved by its citizens for its gift of human glory (*propter hominum gloriam*) (*ibid.*, 5.16).

The *fifth positive point* of *amor laudis* goes further than Christians' self-education, and *owns a dazzling halo of divinity*. Although Augustine does not make this point very clearly, he would probably agree that glory among later generations can create a sense of immortality:

Since there was no eternal life for them (Romans), but merely the passing away of the dying, who were succeeded by others soon to die, what else were they to love apart from glory, whereby they chose to find even after death a sort of life on the lips of those who sang their praises? (*qua volebant etiam post mortem tamquam vivere in ore laudantium*) (ibid., 5.14).

They (Romans) were honored among almost all nations; they imposed the laws of their empire upon many nations, and today they enjoy the glory conferred by literature and historical writing among almost all nations (*litteris et historia gloriosi sunt paene in omnibus gentibus*) (ibid., 5.15).

In fact, before the idea of immortality was Christianized, one of the most attractive imaginations about immortality for pagans is only a life on the lips of later generations. Mortals are always mortals, but immortality is born through the memory of mortals one generation after another. As long as later generations glorify my deeds and praise my achievements, my name will live on forever. And as long as my name lives, I live along with it.

Therefore, love for glory among humans, who are only mortal and finite beings, reveals an *eros* deep within their hearts. This *eros* struggles to break down the ultimate limit set by death, seeking immortality within mortality and pursuing infinity through finitude. Given this quasi-divine aspect of *amor laudis*, although it is always a vice in itself, it still deserves our compassion and limited justification. After all, before the true God revealed himself, the erotic energy within human nature could be nothing but a blind power that sought dim illusions of true immortality among mortal beings.

## 2. THE DIALECTIC TURN FROM THE POSITIVE SIDE OF *AMOR LAUDIS* TO ITS NEGATIVE SIDE

After analyzing the five positive points of *amor laudis*, let us turn to its negative side. As already implied, potential dangers lurk in these positive points. In this section, I will show a dialectic development of *amor laudis*, through which (1) its positive points become negative, and (2) *libido dominandi* arises within *amor laudis* as both its logical consequence and secret truth.

*First: moral elitism.* Virtues, as the single path to glory, were available for only a few heroes who possessed a firm character. According to Sallust, in Roman history, "...important affairs were managed by a few, who were good citizens according to their own standards...it was the unusual character of a few citizens (*paucorum civium egregiam virtutem*) that had accomplished everything..." (ibid., 5.12). This witness indicates the tendency of moral elitism in Rome, which limited the possibilities of virtues only to a small group, normally to aristocrats, while excluding the majority of the people from pursuing virtue.

*Second: widespread hypocrisy.* On the one hand, moral elitism excluded the majority of glory-seeking Romans from the single honest path to their goal; but on the other hand, their burning desire for glory was inextinguishable. Two facts, combined together, opened up a downward road towards hypocrisy: since the judgment given by other people is the only standard for evaluating one's character, what really counts is not how one's character truly is but how he behaves in the eyes of others. As evidenced by many classical writers, except for a few heroes who could pursue glory through that single honest path, a great many glory-seekers cheated good reputation from their fellow citizens by pretending to be good. Quoting Sallust again, Augustine describes this situation as follows: the heroes pursued glory by good arts (i.e., *virtues*), but the cowards sought the same goal by treachery and deceit (ibid., 5.12).

In fact, the historical development in Rome concretized a logically necessary degeneration from moral elitism to widespread hypocrisy. After all, both heroes and cowards desired glory, but only the former group, which was only a small minority in Rome (or, perhaps always remains a small minority in any society), was able to acquire the true instrument. Therefore, it is natural for cowards, who were the great majority, to use the false instrument that could produce the same

effect. However, instruments possess no intrinsic value in themselves, and their only worth lies in their usefulness for certain purposes. So, as long as pretending to be virtuous can bring about similar (or even better) influences upon observers' judgments as true virtues can, genuine virtues and their counterfeits have equal worth with regard to the pursuit of glory. People are justified in their indifference towards the essential moral distinction between the two (i.e., with or without moral worth), and are also justified in choosing an instrument that is more available and convenient. In other words, cowards are justified in pursuing glory through fake virtues, just as heroes are justified in seeking this same goal by means of true virtues.

*Third: the self-defeating nature of seeking glory through virtues.* Yet, it is a sad truth for both groups, heroes and cowards alike, that seeking glory through virtues is essentially self-defeating. Human beings possess a morally justifiable tendency to give more glory to those who behave well but disregard good reputation. The more intensely one disregards glory, the more eagerly goddess Gloria flatters him, just as what happened to Cato (ibid., 5.12). On the contrary, once it is suspected that somebody who behaves well is only driven by the motive of winning a good reputation, the evaluation of his deeds will be considerably lowered. A particular moral judgment could be either right or wrong, but the universal standard behind it remains reasonable. The self-defeating feature of seeking glory by virtues lies here: one approaches glory through virtues, but when his virtues are found to be merely a path to glory, the aimed glory will never be reached (ibid., 5.19). Now a deeper question presents itself: why is seeking glory through virtues self-defeating? Our tendency to endow a lower worth upon overt glory-seekers offers a clue. This tendency reveals a deeper moral intuition that devaluating virtues to the status of instruments is wrong. This leads to the fourth negative point in *amor laudis*.

*Fourth: perversion of the order of values.* As a Neoplatonist, Augustine believes there is an order among different levels of beings, and this order of being is also the order of good. Ontology grounds ethics and value theory. A higher being or a higher good should be loved more than lower ones, and evil arises from perverting this order by giving more love to the lower good than to the higher one. To describe the perversion of the order of value in Rome, Augustine borrows the comic-picture of Epicurean ethical teachings: bodily pleasure

(*corporis sanitas*), which is imagined as a vulgar and domineering woman, is enthroned as the queen, and the four cardinal virtues are made slaves or handmaids who take care of the queen's needs:

She (the queen) orders Prudence (*prudentiae*) to inquire carefully how Pleasure (*voluptas*) may reign and be safe. She orders Justice (*iustitiae*) to bestow such benefits as she can, in order to gain the friendships necessary for physical satisfaction, and to wrong no one, lest, if laws are broken, Pleasure be not able to live untroubled. If there should be some bodily pain that does not drive the victim to suicide, she orders Fortitude (*fortitudini*) to keep her mistress (that is, Pleasure) steadfastly in view, and to soften the pangs of present pain by the recollection of former delights. She orders Temperance (*temperantiae*) to take just so much food, even if some kinds are tempting, for fear that some harmful result of excess should interfere with health, and Pleasure—which the Epicureans think is also largely a matter of physical health—should be seriously hindered (*ibid.*, 5.20).

Then, Augustine points this out:

...if another picture also were painted, where the virtues are in the service of human glory (*ubi virtutes humanae gloriae serviunt*), I do not think that it would have the beauty that it should. For though Glory herself is not a dainty (*delicata*) woman, she is puffed up (*inflata*) and swollen with vanity (*multum inanitatis*). Hence it is not appropriate for her to be served by any firm and solid virtues (*non ei digne servit soliditas quaedam firmitasque virtutum*), so that Prudence should foresee nothing, Justice bestow nothing, Fortitude endure nothing, Temperance regulate nothing, except with the aim of pleasing men and serving a glory that is inflated with wind (*nisi unde placeatur hominibus et ventosae gloriae serviatur*) (*ibid.*, 5.20).

*Fifth: libido dominandi.* We have explained how the positive side of *amor laudis* becomes dialectically negative. Now I will push this dialectic development to the extreme and shows its logical consequence, i.e., *amor laudis*, which seems to be a friend of virtues at the very beginning, ends up as *libido dominandi*, which is the arch-enemy of all virtues.

Let us first examine what Augustine himself says about the *difference* and *continuity* between these two concepts. On the one hand, Augustine affirms the obvious difference between them:

Although it is an easy step for one who finds excessive delight in human glory to conceive also an ardent eagerness to rule, still those who covet true glory, though it be the praise of men, take pains not to give offence to good judges (*dant operam bene iudicantibus non displicere*). There are many good traits of character of which there are many good judges, even though but few possess them. It is by means of these good traits that men climb to glory and power and rule (*ibid.*, 5.19).

But,

...whenever anyone desires to rule and command without the desire for glory (*sine cupiditate gloriae*) that will deter him from offending good judges, he commonly seeks to obtain the thing that he loves even by the most unconcealed deeds of crime (*per apertissima scelera*) (*ibid.*, 5.19).

On the other hand, Augustine also confirms there is only a tiny distance from *amor laudis* to *libido dominandi*: "it is an easy step for one who finds excessive delight in human glory to conceive also an ardent eagerness to rule" (*ibid.*, 5.19). So, how can we make sense of both the *difference* between these two concepts and their *continuity*?

To answer this question, I will refer to a higher unity of the *otherness* and *sameness* between *amor laudis* and *libido dominandi*. The difference between *amor laudis* and *libido dominandi* can be explained by whether they depend upon the judgments of other people. *Amor laudis* is bound by others' opinions, so morality can impose a constraint on it. However, this moral constraint is only apparent and provides no true guarantee for virtues. If the entire moral tradition of a society is corrupted, as what actually happened in Rome, and if one can gain a good reputation by merely appearing to be virtuous, morality will only receive a lip service. Nevertheless, we must admit that a lip service is still a way of paying reverence to morality, although in fact they are only insincere flatteries. On the contrary, *libido dominandi* takes no consideration of assessments by other people at all. It is an unbridled, shameless, and unconcealed self-assertion. Lip service to morality is totally lacking in *libido dominandi*. A full-fledged power-seeker feels no hesitation nor guilt when committing the most horrible crimes.

However, this difference between *only apparent constraint* and *no constraint at all* cannot cancel a deeper continuity between *amor laudis* and *libido dominandi*.

As I have pointed out, both of them seek superiority in inter-personal relationships, i.e., a higher status above others. In other words, glory and dominion are only distinct expressions of this superiority. Furthermore, dominion can be regarded as the most direct approach to superiority and the highest form of glory, just as the second side of *amor laudis* shows: Romans strived to conquer other nations after they had won political independence, for they considered this political superiority as the supreme glory mortals can enjoy. So, *with regard to their final goal*, *amor laudis* and *libido dominandi* are essentially the same, with the latter being the most straightforward self-realization of the former.

However, *with regard to their means, instruments or paths to this goal*, *amor laudis* and *libido dominandi* are indeed different at least *prima facie*. But since no instrument has any intrinsic value in itself, it can be abandoned for other better instruments without scruple, so the difference raised above is only apparent. When the desire for inter-personal superiority is pushed to the extreme, a glory-seeker will be desperate to use whatever means to reach his goal. This burning desire will sharpen his insight and make him realize sooner or later the following truth: virtues as the path to glory are too hard to manage properly, so he should find a better path. Finally, after carefully investigating all the available paths, our glory-seeker will come to the ultimate conclusion that the most straightforward, effective, and secure path to glory is through sheer power. Now let us put ourselves in the shoes of this imagined glory-seeker, and reconstruct how he reasons along the aforesaid path, step by step.

*Step One:* Only a few heroes have a firm character to acquire virtues, so strictly speaking, the sole honest path to glory is only available to this exclusive group.

*Step Two:* Now there are two possibilities. Either I am a hero, or I am a coward. This means I can seek glory either through true virtues (small chance) or through their counterfeits (big chance).

*Step Three:* However, for heroes and cowards alike, the danger of being misjudged and wronged by others always exists. I cannot always control the opinions of my fellow citizens. This dependence upon others' opinions makes my endeavor highly vulnerable.

*Step Four:* Even if all dangers of misjudgment were eliminated, seeking glory through virtues is still essentially self-defeating. If observers discover that my virtues are devalued to the mere status of instruments, the glory I eagerly seek will be denied to me. Nevertheless, in that case, I will have no right to protest, for this denial is justified by a widely shared moral intuition.

*Step Five:* On the contrary, since almost everybody, out of self-love, fears violent force and threat of death, and since almost everybody, for the sake of his own safety, bows down to overwhelming power, it would seem that unconcealed dominion is the most straightforward, convenient, effective, and secure way of guaranteeing my superiority over others. In this way, my *amor laudis* completely degenerates into *libido dominandi*.

Now, after reconstructing the entire reasoning of our imagined glory-seeker, we can conclude that *libido dominandi* is the full-fledged form of *amor laudis*, or, *libido dominandi* is the logical consequence of a dialectical development that arises within *amor laudis*.

At first sight, *amor laudis* does relate itself to moral standards, which function as its constraint. In order to win glory, one needs positive judgments from his fellow citizens. In this way, *amor laudis* not only prevents moral evil but also promotes moral good. However, this relation between *amor laudis* and morality is only apparent, because in order for morality to function as a true constraint, two preconditions must be satisfied: (1) the overall order of values, under which the glory-seeker lives, is not perverted, so virtues can keep their essence and do not degenerate into their counterfeits;<sup>14</sup> (2) the glory-seeker regards good reputation as the indispensable path to glory.

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<sup>14</sup> Christian Tornau argues that in Augustine we can find two perspectives to evaluate virtues. First, from the *teleological* perspective, virtues are evaluated with regard to their *telos*, which is either God or human glory. In this sense, pagan virtues, which are not directed at God but centered around human glory, are merely hidden vices. Actually, only Christians can be truly virtuous. Second, in book five of the *City of God*, Augustine also admits a relatively independent realm for virtues which, independent of God, can help fight evil and keep the natural order. My stance is not opposite to that of Tornau, but more nuanced than his. According to my analysis, Augustine's two perspectives to evaluate virtues, i.e., *with regard to their telos* and *in themselves*, are not juxtaposed to each other at the same level, but ordered in a hierarchy. On the one hand, the *in themselves* perspective, according to which virtues have relative independence from God and can help keep the natural order, only shows how they appear to us *prima facie*. On the other hand, the *teleological* perspective, according to which

Nevertheless, the first precondition is never satisfied in seeking glory through virtues. And that is because glory is made the domineering queen and virtues are degraded to the status of her handmaids; in other words, the order of values is completely perverted. With the breakdown of the first precondition, the asserted constraint of morality upon *amor laudis* stumbles. Hypocrisy becomes widespread and morality only receives lip service.

Hypocrisy is only the first fruit of perverting the order of values and the initial step towards the overall moral collapse of the whole society. The breakdown of this first precondition holds more dangerous seeds, which will sooner or later lead to the breakdown of the second precondition. The most ominous seed is a cold-blooded logic within instrumentalizing virtues: just because virtues are only instruments for reaching glory and nothing more, the link between glory and virtues (even fake virtues) is extremely vulnerable. For this link can be cut off without any scruple whenever we can find more convenient instruments.

Widespread hypocrisy prepares a social environment that seduces people into gradually dissolving the vulnerable link between virtues and glory. In this hypocritical environment, virtues, more and more, are judged only in accordance with their instrumental value. To make matters worse, the more sharp-eyed a glory-seeker is and the more desperately he desires his final goal, the less he will feel satisfied with these instrumentalized virtues due to all the disadvantages of virtues as mere instruments (disadvantages we have discussed before). As we have pointed out, morality never imposes any real constraint upon our glory-seeker. When his desire for superiority and impatience towards hard-to-manage virtues are both pushed to the extreme, he will sooner or later decide to turn to a better path, no matter what the moral nature of this new path is. On this point, his previous pretense to be virtuous is overtly abandoned.

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virtues absolutely depend on God, reveals their ultimate ground hidden beneath this appearance. Once abandoning their ground, virtues cannot keep their goodness anymore and will be doomed to self-corruption. This is just the inner logic of *amor laudis* I have disclosed in this article. See Christian Tornau, "Does Augustine Accept Pagan Virtues? The Place of Book 5 in the Argument of the *City of God*," in *Studia Patristica: Papers presented at the Fourteenth International Conference of Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2003* (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 2006), vol. XLIII, pp. 263-75. For his more detailed treatment of this issue, see Christian Tornau, *Zwischen Rhetorik und Philosophie: Augustins Argumentationstechnik in De civitate Dei und ihr bildungsgeschichtlicher Hintergrund* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 295-339.

However, this desperately-sought-for new path will not show itself until our glory-seeker turns to his own heart, reflects on the essence of his goal, and discerns what he truly strives for. As the double-side of *amor laudis* clearly shows, the essence of glory is a special inter-personal relationship, i.e., superiority over others. Once this essence of *amor laudis* is revealed to our glory-seeker, a new path to glory will be revealed to him automatically, i.e., through unconcealed dominion. In this manner, the last trace of moral scruple is lost in the heart of our glory-seeker, and *amor laudis* fully realizes itself in *libido dominandi*, which is its truth, full-fledged self-expression, and logical consequence after a long dialectical development. Although arguing along a slightly different line, Rist reaches the same conclusion with mine:

... the lust for power is seen not just as a perversion of the search for fame, but, in politics at least, as its natural last stage... It is important to recognize that Augustine is not just saying (in the Stoic manner) that lust for power is a virtuous thing, namely love of glory, which has got out of hand. He is identifying it as the ultimate 'natural' product of the love of glory itself.<sup>15</sup>

Now we have demonstrated the complete dialectic development from *amor laudis* to *libido dominandi*. However, in order for this inner logic of *amor laudis* to be actualized in real history, crucial catalysts are required. As many scholars notice, Augustine follows Sallust and pinpoints peace and luxury as main triggers for *amor laudis*' degeneration in real history. Among these two, luxury is an undisputable trigger for moral corruption, but how could peace play the same role with luxury? With the light shed by our analysis of *amor laudis*, this *prima facie* ironical truth of Roman history can be properly explained. If, as I have argued, *libido dominandi* is the secret truth of *amor laudis*, then this truth will disguise itself under the mask of *amor laudis* only when Rome is threatened by enemies and only when virtues (the highest expression of which is heroic patriotism) are required for the survival of Rome and her citizens. In other words, fear of enemies is the indispensable glue that binds all Romans together and directs their *libido dominandi* outward against their common enemies. In this situation, *amor laudis*, i.e., the noble mask for *libido dominandi*, realizes itself both

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<sup>15</sup> Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, 222.

through conquering enemies *outside* Rome and through promoting patriotically-orientated virtues *inside* Rome.

However, once Rome's enemies are destroyed and fear of them disappears, her ever-present *libido dominandi* cannot help but turn inward against herself and divide her own citizens. After all, one man's desire for superiority is necessarily incompatible with that of others. So, if this desire cannot be constrained by fear of enemies, and if it cannot be satisfied by patriotic conquests of enemies as well as virtuous deeds orientated to patriotism, then it can only be satisfied by oppressing one's fellow citizens. In this situation, the noble mask of *libido dominandi* (i.e., *amor laudis*) will be unavoidably torn apart, and this brutal power will reveal its dark essence without any disguise. This is exactly what the inner logic of *amor laudis* entails: lacking fear of enemies and tempted by luxury brought with peace, *amor laudis* is doomed to degenerate into *libido dominandi*, which is both the necessary consequence of its inner dialectic and its deepest truth.

Admittedly, one might suspect that peace, which is a necessary trigger for the degeneration of *amor laudis*, cannot be truly acquired by Rome. In *Beyond Secular Order*, John Milbank argues that Augustine admits the 'stern necessity' of just wars in the face of injustice: good people are sometimes required 'to make war and to extend the realm by crushing other peoples', so as to avoid being ruled by the unjust.<sup>16</sup> Strictly speaking, no peoples of the earthly city are truly good. However, each can still assert themselves as good in relation to their enemies. Moreover, given the fallenness of the human condition, this stern necessity of just wars will never come to an end, nor will the threats from enemies be totally dissolved. So, thanks to this stern necessity, Romans can always find 'bad peoples' and wage 'just wars' against them. In this sense, *amor laudis*, which binds all Romans together against her enemies, seems to be able to perpetuate itself and prevent its inner degeneration from taking place.

My response to this objection is double-sided. On the one side, I agree that it is an unrealizable idea for the earthly city to absolutely exclude the necessity of wars and the threat from enemies. This means *perpetual peace* and *perpetual absence of enemies* are impossible on earth. On the other side, however, the

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<sup>16</sup> John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 230.

degeneration of *amor laudis* into *libido dominandi* does not require such an unrealistic catalyst. Rather, *temporary peace* and *temporary absence of enemies* are enough to trigger the inner logic of *amor laudis*. The term 'temporary' can indicate a very short time: even shorter than one generation. Furthermore, temporary peace and temporary absence of enemies are not necessarily *objective realities*, but can be *subjective illusions*, or, *self-deceptions* as well. This explains why, during the last decades of some empires, their citizens who lived in the capital city (especially the aristocratic class) could still indulge in sensuous pleasure and fiercely struggle for power, even when the borders of their empires were already torn down by invaders: after all, the dangers were still too far away to be truly felt.

A crucial piece of evidence for my argument comes from Augustine's account of the early history of Rome when the changing predominance of *amor laudis* (which promotes virtues and keeps political order) and *libido dominandi* (which arouses vices and disrupts politics) correspond to the rhythm of war and peace:

After the kings were expelled, men acted with justice and moderation only so long as there was fear of Tarquin, that is, until the end of the serious war with Etruria that the Romans engaged in on his account. After that, however, the patricians treated the plebeians as if they were slaves, scourged them tyrannically, drove them from their land and exercised power alone, excluding all others. The one class were bent on being masters, the other refused to be slaves, and the end of these dissensions came only with the Second Punic War. For then once more they felt the pressure of a great terror: a new and greater anxiety restrained their restless spirits from those disturbances and recalled them to domestic harmony (*Civ. Dei*, 5. 12).

Clearly, temporary peace and temporary absence of enemies are already enough to awaken *libido dominandi*. In contrast, if only the absolute exclusion of wars and enemies (an impossible task on earth) could do this job, then we would not be able to explain the real Roman history, and even the decline of every empire as well.

Indeed, this citation also confirms a reversal from *libido dominandi* back to *amor laudis* in times of crises: the patriotic pursuit of honor was re-ignited among Romans by new wars and new enemies, while their divisive passion for power

was suspended. However, according to the Roman history, this kind of reversal was both short-lived and far from complete, so could not counteract *amor laudis*' degeneration into *libido dominandi*. It seems the inner logic of *amor laudis*, once triggered, will become irreversible in the long run. Perhaps this is the reason why every pagan *polis* (either a small city-state or a great empire), whose rise and fall hinges on the unifying power of *amor laudis*, is doomed without exception to a limited lifespan and deprived of true immortality: insofar as the people's commitment to the glorious tradition of this *polis* weakened and they gradually lost interest in adding their own names to this tradition, the *polis* itself would die away.

At the end of our discussion, it must be mentioned that in my reading of Augustine, he is aware of the ambivalence of *amor laudis*, its inner tension with morality, and its dialectical transformation into *libido dominandi*, although his reasoning is scattered throughout Book V of the *City of God* and far from clear. The most convincing evidence to his awareness is that Augustine himself provides all the essential elements for reconstructing a dialectical development through which the positive side of *amor laudis* becomes negative and *amor laudis* ends up as *libido dominandi*. So, I am confident that this reconstruction is in line with Augustine's complicated attitude towards Rome.

### CONCLUSION: THE LIMIT OF PAGAN ETHICS AND EARTHLY POLITICS

Augustine's analysis of *amor laudis* can be regarded as a case study of the supreme drive of Roman political life. Through this analysis, he not only unveils the positive and negative sides of *amor laudis* in relation to morality and politics, but also shows how *amor laudis*, which is *prima facie* good, dialectically develops into *libido dominandi*, i.e., the greatest evil confronting morality and politics. Moreover, Augustine's case study of *amor laudis* has a more profound significance than establishing an overall judgment about Rome. If, as indicated by Augustine, *amor laudis* is the underlying motivation for pagan ethics, which had no knowledge of the true God, and, if the glory of Rome represents the highest achievement the earthly city can reach, then no pagan virtues nor earthly politics

can escape Augustine's criticism. So, if we place Augustine's analysis of *amor laudis* into the grand framework of his theology of history, then we must acknowledge that neither morality nor politics constitutes an autonomous sphere for Augustine that can escape critical reflection from a theological perspective.

Moreover, in book two of *Confessions*, Augustine gives a vivid description of how various vices pretend to be virtues, as well as how these virtues find their full completion only in God. When reflecting on his own adolescent theft of pears at a deeper level, Augustine argues that even in this most unproblematic example of *gratis malus* (i.e., gratuitously evil), he is still imitating God secretly (*Conf.* 2.6). From this important witness of Augustine, we can reach a two-fold conclusion. First, all creatures, even in their deepest corruption, are unable to get rid of the presence of their creator. Second, just due to this absolute dependence of creatures upon their creator, creatures will experience an inevitable corruption (more accurately speaking, self-corruption), when they turn away from Him. This explains why Augustine must deny autonomy to human morality and politics, and also indicates the doomed degeneration of virtues into vices when the former are not directed at God. In this sense, we might even regard Augustine's analysis of *amor laudis* in the *City of God* as a further explication and substantiation for his analysis of vices and virtues in book two of *Confessions*.

However, this does not mean Augustine's analysis of *amor laudis*, if separated from his grand theological framework and examined merely on its own, only makes sense for those who have been convinced by Augustine's conclusion *a priori*, i.e., for Christians. In other words, at least after our reconstruction, this analysis is valid for Christians and pagans alike, and the force of Augustine's argument lies in the methodology he depends on.

In the first place, Augustine does not base his analysis of *amor laudis* upon any Christian presupposition. He only gives a fair report to its pros and cons, just as a neutral observer who calmly focuses on pagan virtues and earthly politics, without allowing any prejudice to interfere with his thinking. In this way, Augustine places himself in an equal dialogue with pagans, and establishes his argument upon a ground agreeable to both sides. However, in observing moral corruption in Roman history, Augustine digs through the phenomena, probes into the ambivalence of *amor laudis*, and explores its potential threats to virtues. From his calm observation, a dialectical transformation from *amor laudis* to *libido*

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*dominandi* naturally reveals itself. Pagans might be shocked at this dramatic turn, but they cannot charge Augustine of making unjustified claims, because this turn is not any artificial framework imposed from outside upon *amor laudis* by Augustine as a defender of Christianity, but a natural change arising within *amor laudis* itself and faithfully recorded by Augustine as a fair observer.

By admitting the goodness in pagan virtues and earthly politics at first and then revealing how their supreme drive (*amor laudis*) dialectically turns into evil, Augustine successfully pins down *libido dominandi* at its center. This dark power breaks down all self-established boundaries of pagan ethics and earthly politics, and raises the ultimate question with regard to their deepest ground, or, their groundlessness. In this sense, although I use a different methodology from that of Harding, I agree with his conclusion about Augustine's discussion of Roman virtue, at least in the case of *amor laudis*: Augustine, following Sallust and placing himself "in the Roman tradition of historian as cultural critic," carries out "his critique of pagan virtue as an immanent critique rather than mere anti-pagan prejudice and counter-narrative".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Harding, *Augustine and Roman Virtue*, 51.