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REBELS AND CHRISTIAN PRINCES: CAMUS AND AUGUSTINE ON VIOLENCE AND POLITICS

G. J. MCALEER

The world of grace and the world of rebellion.
The disappearance of one is equivalent to
the appearance of the other
- *The Rebel* [1]

In *The Rebel*,[2] Albert Camus takes it upon himself to be the coroner of modernity. No other author has displayed such awful patience and courage when examining the blood-spilling logics of modernity. *The Rebel* is a document of the crimes of nihilism and a soaring plea for a politics of rebellion so as to provide European thought with a philosophy of hope. For Camus, there is only hope if there is no submission to persons, thoughts or governments that would destroy human solidarity and rob humans of their dignity. Camus does not simply reject modernity — he aims at its transformation. Camus has absolutely no nostalgia for some glory days before modernity. Quite the opposite. He insists throughout *The Rebel* that the earlier "age of grace" was no less destructive than modern and contemporary logics that have led to nihilism. Camus has no hope that medieval thought can be transformed so as to sustain human solidarity, but he has every hope that such is possible with modern thought: thus, his theory of rebellion. This essay will argue both that Camus does not demonstrate that violence is intrinsic to Christian politics and that his own politics of rebellion is inadequate to the conditions he himself establishes for a post-nihilistic politics.

[1] A. Camus, *The Rebel*, trans., A. Bower (New York: Vintage, 1991), 21: (= R).

[2] Although not a much-discussed work, Camus said of the text, "It's the book of mine which I value the most." Cited in Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: A Life*, trans. B. Ivry (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 315.

At the heart of Augustine's *Confessions* is a philosophy of hope based upon the possibility of forgiveness. The philosophy of the *Confessions* is precisely, and I mean this in the strongest sense, the "age of grace" that Camus so vehemently rejects. *The Rebel* is a great work but one's heart sinks when the book is finished and one realizes that there is not a single mention of mercy or forgiveness — only the harsh edge of the sword of justice. And Camus does not pretend otherwise. He makes it clear in the opening pages of the work that what is of concern in rebellion is to see established "the unitarian reign of justice." (R, 24) The argument of this essay shall be that Camus cannot provide the philosophy of hope that he seeks without a place for mercy. This is not simply to argue for a moral value that Camus does not recognize as such. Mercy has no place in Camus' politics because it offends our natural sense of justice: when the murderer goes unpunished, the dignity of the victim is diminished. The logic of mercy, for Camus, perpetuates injustice. Camus' *logic* is not mistaken, and even shared by Augustine. For Augustine, forgiveness does leave injustice unpunished, and is unacceptable *unless conversion can be expected*; this is the central demonstration of the *Confessions*. Forgiveness must be the cornerstone of any Christian politics, but Camus' argument is not easily answered: is he not right that mercy perpetuates injustice?

Augustine himself has the arguments to blunt Camus' critique of Christian politics, as will be shown at the end of a three-stage argument. At the first stage, I want to contribute to scholarship on Camus by showing that *The Rebel* is structured by the themes of the *Confessions*. It is in this section that the basic principles of Camus' politics will be described. However, in rejecting the "age of grace" Camus did not reject all of Augustine's thought. The politics of rebellion will be shown to be the same as one of the political options defended by Augustine in *The City of God*. Specifically, the second stage shows that the logic of the rebel is the same as the logic of Augustine's Christian prince. Given that Camus describes himself as having thoroughly rejected Augustine, and Christianity, with his theory of the rebel, we must assume that Camus was unaware of Augustine's theory of the Christian prince. At the final stage, Augustine's thought shall be used to defend a politics of mercy. It will be seen that no place can be found for mercy in Camus' politics as his theory of rebellion is underwritten, and evidently so at the end of his book, by a Manichean metaphysics which Camus understands to impose a logic of restitution. Having adopted a Manichean metaphysics, Camus rejects the possibility of conversion to the good, and therewith mercy. It will be argued that Augustine need not concede Camus' argument: he can account for the phenomenon of violence without recourse to Manichean principles and thereby generate a philoso-

phy of hope based upon a politics of mercy, which does not lead to injustice.

Camus' counter-theology [3]

The reader is left in no doubt that Camus is violently opposed to a philosophy founded on grace. Yet Camus' book is not without a strange theology of its own, and at moments even employs a sacramental language. Camus speaks of the rebel refusing to be deprived of "the personal sacrament" (R, 15); *The Rebel* is announced as a history of "European pride" (R, 11); Camus aims to give us "hope for a new creation" (R, 11); what the rebel contests is "the ends of man and of creation" (R. 23); the rebel "is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of the common good"; and will remain "faithful" to humanity which modernity has not (R, 22). The examples could be multiplied — these are only taken from the first few pages of the book — and nor is the theological character of *The Rebel* superficial. The counter-theology of Camus is dominated by the same themes found in Augustine's *Confessions*.

This is not necessarily surprising. Camus' thesis for his teaching degree, written when he was 22, had the title: "Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism: Plotinus and Saint Augustine." Although Camus even at this relatively early date had rejected Christianity, his biographer notes, "to prepare his thesis, Camus carefully read and scribbled in the margins of the two volumes of Augustine's *Confessions* in the Gamier Classics edition." [4] This early reading of Augustine appears to have led to a life-long appreciation of Augustine. In his *Carnets*, Camus writes, "the only great Christian mind who looked the problem of evil in the face was Saint Augustine. He wound up with the terrible 'No man is good'..." [5] The presence of Catholicism in *La Peste* is the Jesuit Paneloux whose speciality is Augustine and the Catholic writer Julien Green reports Camus' comment at a public lecture hosted by the Dominicans, "I am your Augustine before his conversion. I am debating the problem of evil. And I am not getting past it." [6]

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[3] *The Rebel* is famously a countering text. Camus' targets in the text are many: surrealism; communism; liberalism; fascism; the then and still fashion for de Sade; amazingly, even the French Revolution; and also, his own previous absurdism. The catastrophe the text brought to Camus' inclusion in the intellectual circles of France is well-documented in Todd's discussion of the Sartre-Camus debate: see Todd, 397-310.

[4] *Ibid.*, 44.

[5] *Ibid.*, 229.

[6] *Ibid.*, 230.

Had Camus been as familiar with *The City of God* (had he ever read it?) as with the *Confessions*, he would have appreciated that the logic that structures *The Rebel* – and which is quoted in the epigraph to this essay – is shattered by the concept of the Christian prince.

Just as the *Confessions* is a description of Augustine's (and by extension, our) lost unity (C, 249) so rebellion issues from a "blind impulse to demand order in the midst of chaos, and unity in the very heart of the ephemeral." (R, 10) The central focus of Camus' work concerns a lost innocence that begins a search for a "reasonable culpability." (R. 11) As shall be seen, the Christian prince bears just such a guilt. Augustine is especially concerned by the loss of innocence. The entire *Confessions* might be said to be propelled both by this loss and Augustine's fascination with why we so avidly seek to lose our innocence (C, 43, 46 & 122). From the example of the pear tree to his analysis of concupiscence, our seduction and loss of innocence is the topic of Augustine's thought.

And the parallels continue. Rebellion is an experience of a new identity (R, 14-5), a moment when the rebel discerns within herself an eternal nature, a "living virtue," says Camus (R, 277). This nature graces us all with a shared objective identity. The community established through this common identity is marked by a "borderline" (R, 13), a limit internal to all, functioning as a law that must not be transgressed. Nihilism has broken humanity; in Camus' analysis, it has crossed the "forbidden frontier." (R, 284) Rebellion turns to nihilism, argues Camus, when the rebel forgets her special origin in the natural community of human solidarity. It is forgetting this shared identity that makes murder possible: "Rebellious thought, therefore, cannot dispense with memory... In studying its actions and its results, we shall have to say, each time whether it remains faithful to its first noble promise or if, through indolence or folly, it forgets its original purpose and plunges into a mire of tyranny or servitude." (R, 22) Rebellion — "the essence of love" (R, 19) -- when an assertion of a primordial memory has it in its power to move the person from solitude to a new solidarity that ought never to have been lost.

There is perhaps no other book which insists on so central a role for memory as the *Confessions* and the role that memory plays is the same as in Camus' thought. The *Confessions* demonstrate that confession is an act of love generating precisely the same movement as rebellion: one's brokenness is healed through a new intimacy that ought never to have been lost (C, 43, 164). Memory recalls Augustine to a solidarity and community he shares with God.[7] Memory is one of three aspects of the *imago dei*

[7] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans., R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), 210 & 250: (= C).

which gifts the soul with an objective identity (C, 231) whose preservation will also be the preservation of human solidarity itself (C, 81-2). Forgetting plays an identical role for each thinker. The nihilist forgets her common identity with her victims and falls into brokenness in terms identical to Augustine's fall into brokenness and his inability not to hurt others through forgetting that he is *imago dei*.

Despite Camus' analysis of modernity as a series of violent, murderous logics, it is evident that Camus does not reject modernity wholesale for his primary charge against the "reign of grace" is its demand to accept mystery (R, 55), the "secret mercy" of God (C, 250). *The Rebel* has a constant logic of the reasonable opposed to the mysterious, and this despite the fact that the origin of the "borderline" is left unspoken. Camus never addresses how fortuitous it is that human nature has an objective structure that works for our salvation. Indeed, unresolved is the presence at the heart of Camus' conception of the human of a philosophy of grace. Just as in Augustine salvation is a gift, so in Camus our salvation is the gift of our nature, should, as is again the case in Augustine, we choose it. Admittedly, Camus would insist that the difference between the two theologies of grace lies in the universality of the gift.

The logic of the rebel and Christian prince

The counter-theology of Camus becomes explicit when he describes the advent of the rebel and the reign of justice as simultaneously the disappearance of the world of grace. He writes:

> The rebel is a man who is on the point of accepting or rejecting the sacred and determined on laying claim to a human situation in which all the answers are human... From this moment every question, every word, is an act of rebellion while in the sacred world every word is an act of grace. It would be possible to demonstrate in this manner that only two possible worlds can exist for the human mind: the sacred (or, to speak in Christian terms, the world of grace) and the world of rebellion. The disappearance of one is equivalent to the appearance of the other... (R, 21).

Camus sees this exclusionary logic at the root of the French Revolution. Danton wants the death of the King because there can be no accommodation between justice and grace: "Justice has this in common with grace, and this alone, that it wants to be total and to rule absolutely. From the moment they conflict, they fight to the death." (R, 114) If one were only to read the *Confessions*, one might come to think that Augustine would not disagree with this statement. He appears quite explicit that rebellion and

grace cannot compromise the one with the other. Book X of the *Confessions* has its dramatic center in Augustine's promise to God that his soul shall rebel no more. "More and more, 0 Lord, you will increase your gifts in me, so that my soul may follow me to you, freed from the concupiscence which binds it, and rebel no more against itself." (C, 234) Camus understands Augustine's experience completely, only coming to a different conclusion.[8]

Nevertheless, Augustine acknowledges in his theory of the Christian prince that grace and rebellion are not mutually exclusive. It is with this concept that Augustine can defy Camus' claim that Christianity puts "the responsibility for justice into God's hands, thus consecrating injustice." (R, 287) The fundamental structure of Augustine's *City of God* is justly famous. The city of man is characterized by a lust for domination and government as such cannot separate itself from violence and coercion.[9] Members of the City of God have offered the most complete sacrifice to God: they are broken and humble spirits having forsaken their lust for domination (CG, 377-9). As such, when attacked they cannot return violence for violence for should they do so they would revert to being members of the city of man (CG, 1031). This politics repeats the basic structure of the *Confessions*: humility or rebellion. This is the politics to which Camus strenuously objects. However, another politics is possible. Book IV, chapter 16 of *The City of God* has a question as its title: *Can good men consistently desire to extend their dominion?* This question reveals that Camus has not understood Christian politics when he writes: "The world of grace and the world of rebellion. The disappearance of one is equivalent to he appearance of the other." Certainly, Camus might be excused for his misunderstanding as Augustine's formulation is seemingly a contradiction in the terms of his own politics. The good are supposed to be strangers to dominion (CG, 596). Camus thinks that in his theory of the rebel he has refuted Christian logic by understanding that the good cannot be strangers to dominion if they are also to be just. The Christian prince is no stranger to violence, indeed, violence is itself the form of her sacrifice. The Christian prince does not sacrifice her lust for domination but sacrifices *for the sake of justice* her place in the City of God, and does so, as a response to "great gifts of God." (CG, 138) Good, but damned... a logic found in Camus' chapter — The Rejection of Salvation.

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[8] "But before man accepts the sacred world and in order that he should be able to accept it — or before he escapes from it and in order that he should be able to escape from it — there is always a period of soul-searching and rebellion" (R. 21).

[9] Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. H. Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1972), 600-1 & 875-6: (= CG).

This chapter is dedicated to Ivan Karamazov. Camus makes it clear that he sympathizes completely with Ivan's reasons for rejecting the life of grace. Ivan, claims Camus, "launches the essential undertaking of rebellion, which is that of replacing the reign of grace by the reign of justice." (R, 56) In Camus' interpretation, Ivan rejects grace because it is unevenly distributed and while some are saved others are damned. Ivan is fully conscious that he is amongst the saved, but it is intolerable to him. Ivan will not be party to "the crucifixion of innocence" (R, 304) and so refuses his own salvation in a moment of "insane generosity" (R, 304). Better to have a community with the masses of the damned than to live in communion with the few who are saved, reasons Ivan (R, 56), and so does not oppose the murder of his father. Camus leaves us in no doubt as to the significance of this murder. Having described in detail in the previous chapter the attack made by de Sade on the natural law, Camus notes that the significance of the parricide lies in its being an attack on procreation (R, 59, n. 3). It is de Sade, of course, with "his passion for sacrilege" (R, 37) who most thoroughly eradicates procreation through a glorification of sodomy. But both Ivan and de Sade have a single aim: to destroy the presence of God on earth. God is to be dis-incarnated, rejected in favour of justice. Camus explains Ivan: "Thus he does not absolutely deny the existence of God. He refutes Him in the name of a moral value" (R, 55).

As with all the thinkers treated in *The Rebel*, Camus has a strained relationship with Ivan. He supports Ivan in his rejection of a theology of grace and is impressed by the effort it takes to reject salvation for the sake of a moral value nevertheless, Camus rejects Ivan's criminal excesses. Ivan is driven (however reluctantly) to acknowledge that with God rejected there is no law and "everything is permitted." Ivan who so wanted to see a world of innocence, free from all crime, including divine crime, becomes the bearer of a logic with which "the history of contemporary nihilism really begins." (R. 57) Of course, the Christian prince does not reject God, or refute Him "in the name of a moral value." She does, however, exhibit the same "insane generosity" as Ivan: committed to justice, she forsakes her salvation by embracing a politics founded upon violence. Like Ivan, she is good but a killer.[10]

[10] I want to insist upon the parellel between Ivan and the Christian prince despite Augustine saying that the good who exercise dominion shall receive eternal life (CG, 139). This position does not sit well with his exclusionary logic vessels of wrath/vessels of mercy (CG, 598) nor with his description of the City of God when "she refrained from fighting back, to ensure her eternal salvation." (CG, 1031).

Manichean or Merciful?

Camus sets himself the task to articulate a logic of rebellion which nevertheless does not issue in mass criminality. For Camus, the age of rebellion is "our historic reality." (R, 21) Living in an "unsacrosanct moment" (R, 21) he seeks to answer this question: "Is it possible to find a rule of conduct outside the realm of religion and its absolute values?" (R, 21) What is so fascinating about Camus' answer is that he does not presume, and here is yet another dimension of his theology, that innocence is possible in rebellion. As he explains: "The problem is to know whether this refusal can only lead to the destruction of himself and of others, whether all rebellion must end in the justification of universal murder, or whether, on the contrary, without laying claim to an innocence that is impossible, it can discover the principle of reasonable culpability." (R, 11) Rebellion must necessarily rob the rebel of her innocence, a certain sin is inescapable. The culpability might be thought to have its origin in a rejection of God, and maybe this is a part of Camus' thought, but more assuredly, it points to a culpability in respect to other humans. It is here that we approach Camus' manichean presuppositions. Camus' text bears out the claim that his metaphysics is manichean: but beyond the text, such a presupposition must be in place otherwise there is no good explanation for why Camus would insist that rebellion can offer no more than a "relative justice." (R, 290) What supposition is it that forces Camus to claim that without submission to God, humans will be forced to defend justice at all costs and this will mean killing other humans? "For twenty centuries the sum total of evil has not diminished in the world." (R, 303) This sentence announces Camus' manichean predilection. He tells us, "rebellion indefatigably confronts evil, from which it can only derive a new impetus." (R, 303) If rebellion indefatigably confronts evil, it is also true for Camus, that evil indefatigably confronts the rebel. The culpability or criminality which the rebel cannot escape presupposes a metaphysics of permanent struggle.

Confronted by murder and its injustice, the rebel, the "man [who] from the very depths of his soul cries out for justice" (R, 303) is propelled to lose his innocence. Camus explains the origin of this culpability: "'there is an evil, undoubtedly, which men accumulate in their frantic desire for unity." (R, 303) The "unitarian reign of justice" is the hallmark of Camus' politics of rebellion but it is also a rejection of another Augustinian political principle. When Camus objects to "historical Christianity" (R, 303) that its "cure of evil and murder" (R, 303) is an eternal life beyond history, he is really disputing a principle of Christian jurisprudence. Augustine (and

Aquinas) [11] acknowledged that the human desire for utter innocence would create its own evil: arguing that where this desire is actively sought human community will be destroyed. Camus draws exactly the same conclusion but refuses to acknowledge the divine law which allows Augustine (and Aquinas) to restrain the human desire for justice. Camus is, in the face of metaphysical impossibility, intent upon a politics which seeks to re-sanctify history. The Christian prince is driven by the same urge, knowing all the time, that her exercise of domination both defends and destroys the moral value of innocence. All the same, her political action is restrained in her refusal to leave Babel. Of course, as is to be seen, her action is also restrained by mercy. The rebellion which leads her away from humility to domination stops well before the engine of nihilism: Augustine's Christian prince does not seek unity.

In seeking a total unity and by assuming the permanence of struggle against evil, the origin of Camus' conviction that the rebel must murder is seen not to be cynicism but his particular vision of human finitude. Left within history, humanity must strive for justice in order to do what it can to eradicate evil and murder. However, "even by his greatest effort man can only propose to diminish arithmetically the sufferings of the world." (R, 303) Camus says that the rebel "out of a strange form of love" (R, 304) is "condemned to live for those who... cannot live." (R, 304) Such love propels the rebel — who "without a moment's delay refuses injustice" (R, 304) — towards murder. There will always be the affront of injustice, ensuring that the rebel's "only virtue will lie in never yielding to the impulse to allow himself to be engulfed in the shadows that surround him and in obstinately dragging the chains of evil, with which he is bound, toward the light of good." (R, 286) The manichean presupposition of Camus' theory could not be clearer. We are bound by the chains of evil and this is why the rebel is condemned to live for those who cannot live and why it is impossible to live in innocence — injustice will be ever present demanding that we kill. Camus is explicit: "the rebel can never find peace." (R. 285)

The bitter (hopeless) consequence of this manichean metaphysics is announced in the following passage. In it, Camus restates his manichean supposition and draws the consequence: "If rebellion exists, it is because falsehood, injustice, and violence are part of the rebel's condition. He can-

[11] "Fourthly, Augustine says (De Lib. Arb. I. 5, 6), human law cannot punish or forbid all evil deeds, for while it aims at repressing all evils, it would follow that many good things would be lost and the service of the common good, which is necessary for human association, would be impeded. Therefore, that no evil would remain unprohibited and unpunished, it was necessary that there be a Divine Law which would prohibit all sins." (Saint Thomas Aquinas, *The Treatise on Law*, ed. R. Henle, S. J. [South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993], q. 91, a. 4, corpus, p. 171).

not, therefore, absolutely claim not to kill or lie, without renouncing his rebellion and accepting, once and for all, evil and murder." (R. 285) Rebellion exists because violence is metaphysical. This metaphysical violence constantly generates injustice and thus rebellion cannot abolish injustice, but must confront it again and again. Should the rebel stand passively and watch injustice, she is no better than the Christian whose forgiveness only amounts to an acceptance of an unjust order in the world. The rebel has no choice but to act. As Camus explains when discussing slavery: "the very moment the slave refuses to obey the humiliating orders of his master, he simultaneously rejects the condition of slavery." (R. 14) Should the rebel stand by as a witness to violence and murder, she has accepted this violence and murder: "If the rebel makes no choice, he chooses the silence and slavery of others." (R. 287)

But how is the violence and murder to be stopped? It will demand that the rebel kill. Camus puts it trenchantly, the rebel "knows what is good and, despite himself, does evil." (R, 285) The rebel, and the Christian prince, must accept perversity as a condition of her life. Camus, true to his lucidity of thought, is almost casual in accepting the logic of this metaphysics and politics combined: "In any case, if he is not always able not to kill, either directly or indirectly, he can put his conviction and passion to work at diminishing the chances of murder around him... If he finally kills himself, he will accept death." (R, 286) We recognize here the centrality of a logic of restitution. If the rebel kills, she must immediately offer herself up as a sacrifice and accept death. It is the only way to make evident once more that crime and murder are to have moved beyond the "forbidden frontier." Camus writes: "If he finally kills himself he will accept death. Faithful to his origins, the rebel demonstrates by sacrifice that his real freedom is not freedom from murder but freedom from his own death." (R, 286)

There is no freedom from murder available to the rebel, because Camus is convinced of the manichean dimension of existence. In the following passage, Camus is quite explicit about this: "If, for example, he is not a Christian, he should go to the bitter end. But to the bitter end means to choose history absolutely and with it murder, if murder is essential to history: to accept the justification of murder is again to deny his origins." (R. 287) The conditional clause – if murder is essential to history — should not be taken as provisional: the rebel's condition is bitter precisely because murder is essential to history.[12] Not only does Camus not presume to for-

[12] Camus, who, as will be seen, is very critical of the nihilism inherent in any philosophy based upon Plato is thoroughly Platonic in accepting a metaphysics of violence. See the latter's *The Phaedo, The Last Days of Socrates*, trans., H. Tredennick (London: Penguin, 1988), 164-5.

give the person who commits an injustice but he does not presume that should he kill, even in defense of those suffering injustice, that he could thereby hope to be excused from the severity of his logic: Camus does not seek forgiveness. Here is a theology of sacrifice without mercy. It is an ascetic's theology: "The choice will remain open between grace and history. God or the sword." (R, 287) Though the sword is not that of nihilism, but of rebellion, it is nevertheless a sword. Rebellion rooted in the "natural community" is opposed to "the evil of history" (R, 289) without adopting a criminal transcendence: rebellion is "a conciliatory value" (R, 288) ready to acknowledge the necessity of a loss of innocence.

The transcendence offered by Camus is one stained by history and its inevitable criminality. It is a transcendence in which sin though accepted can still be acknowledged as problematic, something "purely historical thought" cannot do: to the contrary, purely historical thought "wholeheartedly accepts the evil of history." (R, 289) This manichean theory of history is the foundation of Camus' critique of mercy. To forgive murder rather than to literally fight it is simply to participate more completely in the criminality of history. Thus, he writes of Christian love, understood by Camus as a love that can forgive, "only love can make us consent to the injustice done to Martha, to the exploitation of workers, and, finally, to the death of innocent children." (R, 56) Saint-Just, Camus tells us, demands the execution of the King because "the crime of royalty is permanent." (R, 119) The permanence of the crime precludes the possibility of forgiveness. "If the people forgive today," glosses Camus, "they will find the crime intact tomorrow, even though the criminal sleeps peacefully in prison." (R, 119) Forgiveness is not permitted where the state of criminality is unchanging, and Camus' manichean metaphysics, in which finitude and history is an unchanging evil, cements the life of the sword as the life of the rebel. Camus' argument founders as soon as one denies this theory of history.

Although Augustine's formal argument against Manichean doctrine is found in the *Confessions*, the more brilliant critique, and one that challenges the doctrine *as a theory of history* is found in *The City of God*. Augustine and Camus are agreed about the phenomenology of history, its criminality and murder, but its nihilism is not a product of a metaphysical violence as in Camus, but the historical emergence of a lust for domination. The lust for domination enslaves all of us who exercise it; leaving us, as Augustine puts it, "dominated by that very lust of domination." (CG, 5) Augustine is able to provide evidence that some have been able to break free of this domination to dominate as in the case of the martyrs (CG, 1031), the symbol of the City of God, but also the invading hordes who amidst their slaughtering in Rome respected the sanctuaries of the Chris-

tians (CG, 6). As stated at the outset of this essay, the argument is only meant to show that Camus' argument against a Christian politics of mercy does not succeed. Augustine robs *The Rebel* of its power to convince both by advocating a rebel of his own, the Christian prince, but also by providing a theory of history that is as realistic as Camus' in facing up to the horror of history but refusing to make the horror metaphysical. The chains that we have forged for ourselves contrast significantly with Camus' metaphysical chains from which there is no escape. Having recast violence and domination as an historical phenomenon, Augustine can extend his politics from the Christian prince to include the martyrs of the City of God who, broken and humbled by the sacrifice of their lust to dominate, forgive in the hope that their sacrifice might convert others. Augustine's philosophy of history allows him to show that *pace* Camus, the martyrs' forgiveness is not to accept injustice: they can rightly hope to transform the unjust into the just. This demonstration is also a fundamental drive of the *Confessions*. At the core of Augustine's *Confessions* is his coming to recognize against Plato (and Camus) that history is a site in which salvation can be realized. Indeed, Augustine's position is that history is always redeemed (C, 210, 231). As he says in the opening pages, God is "the most present amongst us." (C, 23 and also 82-3, 231) The text is so structured as to allow the reader to recognize that time and again Augustine made his own history, and that of his friends, a history of evil precisely because he missed the transfigured character of history accomplished by the Incarnation. The text is designed to make clear that if Augustine will only submit to his objective identity as a creature bound by an identity shared with God, his history would likewise be transfigured from evil to salvation, from brokenness to unity. Ultimately, and notwithstanding continuing difficulties, Augustine's historical existence is transfigured with his conversion:

> The power of your hand, 0 God Almighty, is indeed great enough to cure all the diseases of my soul. By granting me more abundant grace you can even quench the fire of sensuality which provokes me in my sleep. More and more, 0 Lord, you will increase your gifts in me, so that my soul may follow me to you, freed from the concupiscence which binds it, and rebel no more against itself (C, 234)

Camus has not appreciated the complexity of Augustine's thought, and this causes his argument to fail. It is important that the Christian value of mercy and forgiveness cannot merely be asserted. To point out that Camus' argument leaves no room for mercy is merely to state the obvious: Camus knows this, and hates mercy as a seal of injustice. It is because Augustine can account for the phenomenology of history without recourse to Manichaen theory that he is able to provide a philosophical legitimacy for

the practice of mercy. Having stopped Camus' argument, he could go on to critique Camus with respect to a value which they do both embrace: solidarity. The injustice that is history must be both accepted and rejected at the same time.[13] The rebel cannot escape history, and would not seek to, as this would merely be to leave history to God. The rebel will forever be unreconciled to it, however: "Even though he can participate, by the force of events, in the crime of history, he cannot necessarily legitimate it." (R, 290) The "crime of history" betrays Camus' manichean presupposition, of course, but also points to a Platonic dimension in Camus' thought. Camus stresses throughout *The Rebel* that Plato's transcendence, typified by Saint-Just, is one of the great sources of nihilism, and to this extent, Camus is willing to accept Nietzsche. In turn, however, Camus appears to have left his own thought open to a similar charge. Just as Saint-Just is horrified by the finitude of the French people — that they cannot attain the moral heights that Saint-Just has identified as the Form of the citizen — so Camus cannot accept human finitude. For Camus, finitude, that the human is historical, is identified as an evil. Moreover, there is the fear that Camus has also failed to escape the isolation that he sees as characteristic of the Platonic nihilism of Saint-Just. Saint-Just is characterized as a figure of solitude, as a man who has detached himself from the community through such a profound love of virtue. Saint-Just's speech seeking the death of the King has, comments Camus, "all the earmarks of a theological treatise." (R, 11 8) Saint-Just denounces Louis as "the stranger in our midst" emphasizing that Louis is a solitary because his rule is necessarily criminal as a rule by divine appointment. As Camus points out, when Saint-Just declares that "no one can rule innocently" he announces his forthcoming criminality and his own solitude. "The condemnation of the King is at the crux of our contemporary history. It symbolizes the secularization of our history and the disincarnation of the Christian God... Therefore there is nothing but a semblance of God, relegated to the heaven of principles." (R, 120) These "eternal principles" are Truth, Justice and Reason. The Republic establishes principles that are "immortal, impassive, sheltered from the temerity of man." (R, 122)

Plato consistently identifies forms in a state of solitude and the lover who rightly loves as likewise being in solitude.[14] Camus rightly identifies this detachment from community as a form of nihilism and finds this struc-

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[13] The rebel, says Camus, "refuses his condition, and his condition to a large extent is historical. Injustice, the transcience of time, death — all are manifest in history. In spurning them, history itself is spurned." (R, 289-90)

[14] See *The Symposium* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1994), 54-5; cf. *The Phaedo*, 131.

ture repeated in a figure like de Sade for whom "solitude is power" (R, 248) as well as in the Romantics.[15] Does Camus' rebel truly escape solitude, however? Camus does not want power over other humans, nevertheless, if power were not exercised one would accept "iniquity." (R, 248) Thus violence is sometimes necessary (and once more the logic of the Christian prince is clearly visible), as a "rupture in communication" which must always retain the "provisional character of effraction" and carry a "personal responsibility." (R, 292) Given his vision of history, Camus is surely forced to accept that the rebel is condemned to a life of solitude. The effraction of community necessary to preserve the rebellion is not a contingent value: it is necessitated by history. Camus declares that history alone can offer no hope to humanity (R, 249) and thus rebellion based on the transcendent value of the "natural community" is necessary. However, does not the metaphysical character of history as evil make the rebel suffer a metaphysical solitude that robs her of hope? Surely, only a genuine reconciliation between immanence and transcendence can give hope to the human person and this requires a very different description of history: and Augustine would surely push this point. Just as Saint-Just finds human finitude intolerable and therefore kills in order to overcome finitude, does not Camus theorize the rebel as someone forced to be solitary and for the same reason, because finitude is intolerable? And just as the logics of nihilism do not lead to provisional effractions of the natural community nor does Camus' logic of rebellion: does not the permanent character of the effraction rob Camus of his ambition to develop a post-nihilistic politics?

Conclusion: Augustinian Politics

The principles of Augustine's politics are equal to the not insignificant challenge Camus' own politics pose to a Christian political vision centered on mercy. The two principles which most successfully blunt Camus' critique are Augustine's concept of the Christian prince and his theory of history. The first preserves justice in the world, the second gives us hope that those of us victim to the lust for domination can be converted to the good. It is this hope that is the great support of the practice of mercy. A political theory developed in the Middle Ages is especially illuminating at this point. Although well known to scholars of the Middle Ages, Giles of Rome' thought is generally unknown. His political theory in particular deserves

[15] The Romantic hero is "'beautiful, with a beauty unknown on this earth' (Lermontov), solitary and powerful, unhappy and scornful, he is offhand even in oppression." (R, 49)

to be better known: it includes many fine interpretations of Augustine, and in this he is stronger than Camus. Though typically regarded as an ultramontanist on account of his position that State power should be subservient to Church power, this position can be seen as an extension of Augustine's politics of the Christian prince. Giles of Rome reasons that if the Church is to protect the poor the Church must needs have a coercive power if it is to be an organ of justice in the world. In this reasoning, he observes a logic in Augustine which Camus has missed. In his *De Ecclesiastica Potestate*, Giles makes this position clear in a powerful image drawn from the Book of Numbers. God orders the forty-eight fortified cities of the Jewish kingdom to be given to the priests for them to rule. Six of these cities are to be set apart as asylums, Giles tells us, "so that those who had shed blood might flee to them."[16] Justice and mercy: a formula for a softened sword of justice that eluded Camus.

Loyola College in Maryland

[16] Giles of Rome, O. S. A., *On Ecclesiastical Power*, *Medieval Political Philosophy*, ed. R. Lerner & M. Mahdi (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 397.