

2015

Augustinianisms and Thomisms (Chapter Nine of the Cambridge Companion to Political Theology)

Eric Gregory

Joseph Clair

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

9 Augustinianisms and Thomisms

ERIC GREGORY AND JOSEPH CLAIR

INTRODUCTION

The standard image of Augustine and Aquinas that emerges in twentieth-century textbooks of political philosophy is that of two fundamentally opposed theological approaches to the political. Augustine, in one corner, is the clear-eyed realist, convinced that political society is *fallen*, mired in the consequences of original sin and the contingent necessity to restrain evil, vice, and sin. Aquinas, in the other corner, is the more cheerful Aristotelian, who emphasizes the inherent goodness and naturalness of political society and its beneficial purposes for human flourishing.¹ These contrasting visions continue to animate diverse Christian understandings of the limits and possibilities of politics.

One extraordinary feature of these two interpretive pictures is the way that each was able to achieve rapprochement with the ideals of political liberalism and their institutional expression in twentieth-century liberal democracies. By "political liberalism" we mean to refer, in a general way, to modern ideals of equality, liberty, and freedom that can take a variety of institutional forms, but are essentially ordered by limited government, individual rights, the consent of the governed, constitutionalism, and the rule of law. Crucially, most versions of political liberalism presume to be indifferent to the ultimate goals and purposes of citizens, provided that they respect the laws and tasks necessary for the operation of responsible government. Theological rapprochement with political liberalism can also take a variety of forms – ranging from a more rigorous attempt to narrate the achievements of liberal democracy as being indebted to specific Christian theological concepts, movements, or practices, to a less ambitious program of describing the ways in which Christian commitments can be reconciled with the ideals and institutions constitutive of liberal democratic life.

By the end of the century, the opposed interpretive pictures of Augustine and Aquinas were also able to inspire an opposite, shadow

argument for Augustinian and Thomistic antiliberalism. The story of this reconciliation and its reversal in the last decades of the twentieth century epitomizes the story of political Augustinianisms and Thomisms, and in some ways tells the story of political theology in Europe and America in the twentieth century in miniature.

The Augustinian side of this story has received renewed attention in recent work in both political theology and discussions of religion in public life. While it is difficult to overstate the significance of various retrievals of Aquinas for contemporary moral theology (especially in terms of natural law, virtue, and the structure of human action) and important forms of modernity criticism, their relation to *political* theology has been largely implicit. Notwithstanding the influence of Alasdair MacIntyre and John Finnis, it is striking that few recent proposals in *political* theology adopt an explicitly Thomist perspective.

Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is time to reassess this narrative and hopefully begin a new chapter. Telling a new, more accurate story will require reexamination of the standard interpretive pictures and a reconstruction of each thinker's political thought in light of the demands of the present day. In this chapter, therefore, we argue for a revision of the standard interpretive pictures that brings Augustine and Aquinas closer together. Our argument creates a new vantage from which to imagine the application of their thought to the political challenges of the twenty-first century.

Road Map

In the first section of this chapter, we tell the story of the standard interpretive pictures and their early to mid-century harmonization with political liberalism, and conclude with the reversals these conciliations suffer in the closing decades of the twentieth century. In the second section we argue for a revision of these textbook interpretations that moves Augustine's and Aquinas's political thought closer together – specifically focusing on each thinker's understanding of the naturalness of political society and their compatible conceptions of political life and its role in human flourishing. *Naturalness* is a highly contested term in Augustine and Aquinas studies, especially given the thinkers' shared eschatological perspective that can be obscured by strong contrastive interpretations of the "natural" and "supernatural." Henri de Lubac's influential challenge to certain Neo-Thomist understandings of the opposition of the natural and supernatural remains central to contemporary theological debates, though strangely neglected in political theology. De Lubac's Augustinian Thomism, itself part of a longer tradition of mediation between our two

figures, strikes us as a plausible and neglected voice for reflection on the naturalness of politics. In a final section we take these points of congruence just established and sketch a way toward an Augustinian-Thomist political theology, arguing that one can be both Augustinian and Thomist in one's political attitudes and activities.

Our argument, in short, is that Augustine has a stronger sense of the naturalness of political life than interpreters have seen, and that it is much more akin to Aquinas's than interpreters have suggested. The two thinkers fundamentally and primarily view political life as *temporal*: the relationship between the goods constitutive of temporal political life and the *eternal* goods of ultimate human happiness form both the primary distinction and primary bridge between church and political society. Augustine and Aquinas's shared eschatological eudaimonism provides the lens through which to examine political liberalism and liberal democracy as a contingent political arrangement susceptible to affirmation and critique.

THE STANDARD STORY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY INTERPRETATIONS

Thomist and Augustinian Reconciliation with Liberal Democracy

Thomism

The task of reconciling Aquinas's political thought with liberal democracy gained new urgency after World War I. Neo-Thomist philosophers and Christian democratic parties in Europe and Latin America began developing and reformulating aspects of Thomist social thought in support of liberal theories of democracy and human rights. At the same moment in the United States, Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins interested a new generation of students in Neo-Thomism and Thomist political thought at the University of Chicago – as evidenced in the list of publications in the University of Chicago Press's Walgreen Foundation Series. Preeminent among these Neo-Thomist thinkers was Jacques Maritain (1891–1965), along with Yves Simon, Heinrich Rommen, Josef Fuchs, and others.

Maritain's work in this period focuses largely on Aquinas's understanding of the naturalness of political society.² Like others in this generation, he is responding to Pierre Rousselot's influential early-twentieth-century effort to find a place for Thomism in modern discussions of freedom and individual right.³ For Aquinas, the natural common good achieved in political community stands apart from the

supernatural, eternal good found only in God, by grace, and is partially glimpsed in the ecclesial community. Aquinas's strong sense of the naturalness of political life for human flourishing then becomes central to Maritain's approach in reformulating a Thomist endorsement of modern liberal democratic institutions.⁴ For it is this conception of a natural common good that provides a positive view of political society and its role in human flourishing, without also assigning it an ultimate role. That crucial limit provided protection from the excesses of a theocratic European past and the threat of a totalitarian present. To assuage liberal anxieties about the perfectionist or communist tone of a privileged common good in the wake of World War II, Maritain increasingly emphasizes Aquinas's thick conception of personhood and agency as he constructs a corresponding theory of rights to protect individuals from the excesses of state authority.

Augustinianism

There was an initial effort in the interwar period by Gustave Combès and others to identify the consonance between Augustine and Aquinas on the naturalness of political life and its natural common good.⁵ Henri de Lubac, for example, cites himself in fundamental agreement with Combes's reading.⁶ But this program quickly came under fire and gave way to a Neo-Thomist rejection of Augustine's political thought on the grounds that it lacked a clear distinction between the natural and supernatural common good, applicable to religious and political life. This criticism is crystallized in the thesis of Henri-Xavier Arquillière's 1934 work: *L'augustinisme politique: Essai sur la formation des théories politiques du moyen-âge*. Arquillière's argument is twofold: first, Augustine's political thought lacks a careful distinction between the natural and supernatural good (as that distinction can be applied to realms of social existence). And, second, Augustine's medieval inheritors – especially Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, Gregory VII, and Giles of Rome – all pursued the subordination and subsequent absorption of the civic order by the supernatural order of the church, citing Augustine's political thought as their model and authority in doing so. Thus “political Augustinianism” comes to designate, for Arquillière, the essence of Christendom's hierarchical organization of religious authority over temporal authority.

Although Arquillière's understanding of political Augustinianism is more about the historical reception of Augustine's ideas than interpretation of texts, it stands as an important chapter in our argument. For Arquillière's thesis is thoroughly shaped by, and represents,

Neo-Thomist views of Augustine's political thought prevalent in his time, especially those of Pierre Mandonnet and Étienne Gilson. The case of Gilson's Neo-Thomist criticism of Augustine's political thought is more nuanced than Mandonnet's. Yet both ultimately agree that Augustine is missing the appropriate distinction between natural and supernatural realms necessary to protect the political community from being subordinated to, or absorbed by, the ecclesial community and its authority. Perhaps this kerfuffle was partially a case of inter-Catholic theological rivalry or scapegoating in the wake of World War I. Nevertheless, Arquillière's line of thought signals the divergence between political Augustinianism and Thomism in the twentieth century, a divergence that has since sedimented.

Strikingly, no immediate inheritors of the debate made a concerted effort to revive Combès's harmonization of Augustine and Aquinas on the natural common good after Arquillière's critique. In the wake of World War II, Augustinians sought an alternative route for reconciling with liberal democracy and political liberalism – one that emphasized the inherent limits and follies of political life as a foundation for human flourishing. Rather than naturalness, Augustinians began emphasizing the genuine contingency of politics in Augustine's thought.

The first major response to Arquillière came from Henri Irénée Marrou who, in his 1957 Warburg Lectures, "*Civitas Dei, civitas terrena: num tertium quid?*," claims that it is not the naturalness of political society that secures its value, or guarantees its intelligibility, in Augustine's theology, but rather its *temporality*. Between the coming of Christ and the end of history, Marrou claims, there is the time and space of the present age (*saeculum*) wherein the two cities – earthly and heavenly – are intermingled on their way toward their final eschatological destinations. Directly against Arquillière's thesis, Marrou argues that it is the "mixed nature" of the political sphere – necessarily a mixture of ultimate religious identities – that makes the political sphere a *tertium quid*, namely the reality of a *saeculum* where the two cities overlap.⁷ This third thing, Marrou suggests, is the heart of Augustine's ambivalent affirmation of the *temporal* common good found in political society. The "natural" does not name an autonomous category of value, for Augustine, but rather the primary description of the temporal, created goods constitutive of political society. Thus the meaning of these goods is subject to the vicissitudes of salvation history, apart from which their goodness is not ultimately intelligible. Marrou's argument is intended to correct Arquillière's thesis as it also highlights the misinterpretations of Augustine by his medieval political inheritors.

Writing at the same moment as Marrou – in the aftermath of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War – Augustinians in the United States such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Herbert Deane also highlighted Augustine's sense of the contingency of politics, except this time with darker hues. Not merely *temporal*, political life for Niebuhr's and Deane's Augustine was a contingent intervention of God's providential judgment *after sin* aimed to help restrain chaos and maintain order. Thus the *unnaturalness* of politics – for Marrou and realists such as Niebuhr and Deane – is ultimately rooted in Augustine's sense of its historical provisionality. This provisionality, such interpreters argue, also secures political society's immunity from the ultimate aims of human fulfillment.

These two avenues of thought – Marrou's sense of historical temporality and the realists' sense of postlapsarian contingency – are synthesized in what stands as the culminating point of the rapprochement between Augustine and political liberalism: Robert Markus's *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, published in 1970.⁸ Markus makes an intuitive leap from the interpretive work of Marrou and Deane, presenting Augustine's political thought as the harbinger of secular political liberalism. Markus transitions from the time-bound sense of political temporality espoused by Marrou to a stronger thesis of neutrality. With Markus's Augustine, political society becomes a religion-free zone, given its limited ambitions for practical political arrangement without theoretical agreement on matters of comprehensive doctrine. Markus's precise understanding of *neutrality* and the limited role of religious argument in the public square finds further nuance in his later work, where he adopts a Rawlsian vision of "overlapping consensus" joined with Maritain's "democratic secular faith."⁹

For Markus, it is not merely the case that Augustine happens not to have espoused a view of the naturalness of politics like that found in Thomas Aquinas. Rather, the absence of a natural antecedent for political society brings us to the core of Augustine's political thought; for if political society is natural it is always open to – indeed it is waiting for – its fulfillment in the supernatural common good. But for Markus's Augustine, the political is an antiperfectionist institutional arrangement set up merely to secure physical survival. The temporal domain of the political remains neutral to religion and autonomous until the very end, in anticipation of an eschatological closure that is beyond human agency.

In Markus, we find the reversal of Arquillière's thesis. Augustine's political thought no longer threatens to absorb the temporal into the

eternal (without an adequate distinction between the natural and supernatural). For Markus, there is simply too much eschatological deferral and historical ambiguity in Augustine's conception of the two cities to legitimate an interpretation like Arquillière's. Markus argues that the Neo-Thomist distinction between the natural and supernatural common good, applied to the institutions of church and political society, threatens to make politics a halfway house for human flourishing, tending toward religious authority, constantly in need of a grace that can perfect it.

Reversals

By the end of the twentieth century these reconciliations with political liberalism came under fire from within both Augustinian and Thomist camps. Critics declared that such mid-century harmonization with political liberalism had gone too far, overstretching and reifying the central political concepts of the natural (Aquinas) and temporal (Augustine) into a pristine, secular space, disconnected from the ultimate supernatural or eternal good. This line of criticism suggests that such rapprochements exhibit conceptual failures that promote accommodation to the practices of secular political life – practices that are immune to the sacred and inimical to the smaller forms of community necessary to pursue the common good. Indeed such practices are beleaguered by the demons of excessive individualism and technocratic capitalism that ultimately consume liberal democracies and must be resisted. Thus the alliance went too far, critics suggested, and dulled the critical edges of Augustine's and Aquinas's theology – the very edges that made them so helpful for reflecting on modern politics. Indeed, far from restraining the excesses of the nation-state or the market, such reconciliation is now thought to blind Christians to the ways these arrangements constitute a new (false) sacrality. The most strident critic of Markus's secular Augustinian liberalism and its corresponding account of the *saeculum* remains John Milbank. The most forceful challenge to the Neo-Thomist reconciliation with political liberalism is Alasdair MacIntyre.

Although there are immense debates in each camp about how precisely to render the natural and temporal in each thinker, it is taken for granted that Augustine and Aquinas are fundamentally opposed on the question of the naturalness of the political. For this reason the liberalism and antiliberalism divide in Thomism and Augustinianism has reached an impasse. Rather than rehearse the terms of the debate or choose sides it will be more useful to reexamine the standard interpretive pictures.

CORRECTING THE STANDARD INTERPRETATIONS:
BRINGING AUGUSTINE AND AQUINAS CLOSER
TOGETHER

Mid-century Augustinian liberals doubled down on the apparently *unnatural* aspects of politics – a merely historical excursion through the consequences of sin – rather than searching for the missing *natural* antecedent to political life in Augustine's thought and thus responding to Neo-Thomists on their own terms. Part of what made Augustine's political thought so attractive to mid-century interpreters was his strong sense of the *tragic* dimension of human existence: the fact that all are tainted by original sin and experience some measure of fated powerlessness in the face of evil.

Yet the political often must be carefully teased out of Augustine's theology, and the mid-century affinity for tragedy led to a fixation on those notoriously dark passages in *The City of God* that seem most like political theory and most helpful in diagnosing the horrors of the twentieth century. Take, for example, Augustine's response to Cicero's *De re publica* and his claims about the impossibility of true justice in this life (2.21; 19.21, 24); Augustine's comparison of emperors and superpirates (4.4); his claims about the similarity between the authority exercised by kings and slave owners (19.14–15); the vignette of a mournful judge lamenting his duty to access truth by torture (19.6); and so on. Note that the majority of these passages appear in Book 19 of *The City of God* – the *locus classicus* of political Augustinianism. And there are good reasons for the authority of this particular text. In many ways it is, as Oliver O'Donovan has called it, "a microcosm of Augustine's social thought."¹⁰ It also provides the perfect length of assigned reading for Augustine's political theology in a survey course.

The problem, however, is that the narrow concentration on this text – and its few tenebrous images – led to a distorted perception of the character of Augustine's political theology as a whole and its interpretive and practical possibilities. If Book 19 was the ur-text for the shadowy postwar Augustine, its fourteenth and fifteenth chapters form the interpretive center of it all. It is important to note that these chapters – more than any other – are used to validate the claim that, for Augustine, political society is ultimately rooted in the consequences of original sin. What is more, this text is ground zero for those intent on trumpeting the difference between Augustine's and Aquinas's political thought. Let us briefly turn to a closer examination of Book 19 and the widely

divergent conclusions Augustinians drew from it in the second half of the twentieth century.

Part of the reason *City of God* 19.14–15 is seen to provide such conclusive evidence that, for Augustine, political society is rooted in the consequences of original sin is that it provides his only account of political society as it would have existed in a state of innocence, before the fall. The passage appears in the context of Augustine's broader reflection on the *contingent* (in the negative sense of *contingent* denoting something unnatural and expressive of temporal or provisional evil) origins of the institution of slavery.

[God] did not intend that a rational creature, made in his own image, should have lordship (*dominor*) over any but irrational creatures: not man over man, but man over beasts. Hence, the first just (*iustus*) men were established as shepherds of flocks, rather than as kings of men (*reges hominum*). This was done so that in this way also God might indicate what the order of nature requires, and what the desert of sinners demands. By nature, then, in the condition in which God first created man, no man is the slave either of another man or of sin. (*City of God* 19.15)

Augustinian liberals and antiliberals alike read this passage as a blanket statement about the origins of political *authority*, and further evidence of Augustine's view of political society as essentially coercive, aimed primarily to help restrain evil, vice, and sin. What is striking are the very different conclusions drawn from it for thinking about the application of Augustine's political thought to modern political life.

Robert Markus concludes from this passage that the authority that would have been exercised in a state of innocence would have been akin to the paternal authority of Old Testament patriarchs or of a Roman *paterfamilias* over his wife and children, rather than the political authority that a king exercises over his subjects. Markus argues further that, in this passage, Augustine is identifying political authority in general with the authority of masters over slaves, thus fundamentally casting the institutions and relationships necessary for political society into contingent darkness. The key here, for Markus, is that the family – and therefore the corresponding institution of the household – is in some sense *natural* in a way that political society cannot be, for Augustine. Whereas the family can be, hypothetically, ruled without domination, this cannot be true of political society. Its contingent origins in human sinfulness and providential judgment exclude it

from both naturalness and the possibilities of nondomination. Markus claims that, for Augustine:

Coercive power is part of the essence of political authority, without it the state is not a state. . . . Political authority, coercive power, and its [institutional] apparatus are what transform society into a state. Society, so we may summarize Augustine's view, has its origins in the order of nature; the state is a dispensation rooted in sin. . . . The terms in which Augustine came to formulate his views on politically organized society . . . were those which he thought appropriate to the treatment of the institution of slavery, rather than those which he applied to the family.¹¹

For Markus, the postlapsarian contingency of political authority, and thus political society more generally, serves to strengthen his overall rendering of Augustine as godfather of a low-flying minimalist liberal politics, committed to the relative autonomy, neutrality, and secularity of the political sphere.

Strikingly, John Milbank, Markus's opponent in all things pertaining to Augustine, shares precisely Markus's view of Augustine on politics and original sin. For Milbank, just as for Markus, *City of God* 19.14–15 reveals, "that Augustine regards the institution of slavery after the fall, and the institution of political power, as virtually one and the same event."¹² Both authors read Augustine's comments about kingship in 19.15 as evidence that he identifies political authority with the authority of masters over slaves. Both conclude that this type of authority is contingently rooted in the consequences of original sin. They then read backward, as it were, and lump political community and institutions into the same category as authority. The equation is complete. Thus, for Markus's and Milbank's Augustine, political society is entirely unnatural in comparison with the family and the institution of the household. It is unnatural in the sense that it is not part of the order of human sociability inherent in the grain of creation.

Yet this shared conclusion leads Milbank to a very different appropriation of Augustine's political thought. For Milbank, the origins of political society in sin supports an ambitious claim that, for Augustine, the church, the *ecclesia*, is the only truly *political* society, and that its arrival in history spells the undoing of pagan political thought and practice. At the climax of his argument, Milbank states very baldly that "[a]ll political theory in the antique sense is relocated by Christianity [beginning with Augustine], as thought about the Church."¹³ And, what

is more, "the Church itself, as the realized heavenly city, is the *telos* of the salvific process. And as a *civitas*, the church is, for Augustine, itself a 'political' reality."¹⁴ For Milbank's Augustine, the goods constitutive of political society do not have their own natural integrity or intelligibility, nor do they have their own provisional secular (or time-bound) integrity, as they do for Markus. The realm of politics – that is, the "realm of the merely practical" – when "cut off from the ecclesial," Milbank concludes, "is quite simply a realm of sin."¹⁵

It is Augustinian liberals and antiliberals' shared sense of the *temporality* of politics – as fundamentally rooted in the murky origins of sin – that eliminates any *natural* antecedent for political society. We believe this connection between politics and the contingency of sin breeds confusion, either hardening the temporality of the political sphere into the rigid secularity of Markus or deflating it into Milbank's realm of the merely practical to be subordinated to the ecclesial. For without a presupposed *natural* antecedent in Augustine's thought, political society is doomed to swing between these interpretive poles of the purely secular space or the fragile temporal realm waiting to be swallowed by the *ecclesia*.

Markus and others present such a rendering of politics and sin in *City of God* 19.14–15 in direct opposition to Aquinas's understanding of the naturalness of politics. Aquinas treats the origins of political authority twice, first in his *Commentary on the Sentences* (44.q.2.a.2) and then again in *Summa Theologiae* (1a.96.3, 4). In both instances Aquinas is in direct conversation with Augustine's *City of God* 19.14–15. In Thomas's treatment of the question in *Summa Theologiae*, he argues that free political rule (as opposed to slave keeping) would have been necessary even in humankind's state of created innocence. To make this argument, Aquinas draws a simple distinction between two types of dominion: the authority of a master over a slave and the authority associated with "the office of governing free men" (96.4). The second type has membership in an original, prelapsarian goodness – with all its practical structures for the cause of ruling subordinated to the common good. The first type, by contrast, expresses merely a contingent, postlapsarian form of domination – the suppression of XX by YY. Aquinas is clear that both the household and political society can and should be governed by the first type of authority. In making this distinction, Aquinas thinks he is closely following Augustine's *City of God* 19.14–15, and is distancing himself from Aristotle's view of natural slavery in the *Politics*. In *Summa Theologiae* 1a.96.4, Aquinas says:

The control of one over another who remains free, can take place when the former directs the latter to his own good or to the common good. And such dominion would have been found between man and man in the state of innocence for two reasons. First, because man is naturally a social animal; and in consequence would have lived in society, even in the state of innocence. Now there could be no social life for many persons living together unless one of their number were set in authority to care for the common good. Many individuals are, as individuals, interested in a variety of ends.... Secondly, if there were one man more wise and righteous than the rest, it would have been wrong if such gifts were not exercised on behalf of the rest.... So Augustine says, "The just rule not through desire of domination, but because it is their duty to give counsel"; and "This is ordained by the natural order, for thus did God create man." (*City of God* 19.14–15)

Markus, in a revealing appendix to his book, argues that Aquinas's insistence on the naturalness of political authority commits him to a view of freedom akin to what Isaiah Berlin calls "positive freedom" – that is, the notion "that one remains free, even in being coerced, provided that it is for his own or the common good."¹⁶ Augustine, however, Markus claims, espouses an entirely negative conception of freedom in the sense that any coercion in the political sphere implies a diminution of liberty.¹⁷

On Markus's reading, political authority, for Augustine, remains entirely (and perhaps tragically) tethered to the judicial and penal operations of coercion. Aquinas is therefore merely mistaken, on Markus's account, insofar as he sees any positive role for political authority in the work of virtue cultivation or overall human flourishing. Aquinas's distinction of two kinds of rule is a pregnant one for understanding the *possibility* of noncoercive political relations bound by law. Note, however, that Markus's insistence on Augustine's protoliberalism (of a distinctive kind) is inflected in his interpretive debate around these texts. We believe he is mistaken. In particular, Markus's borrowed modern notion of freedom as noninterference distorts more than it reveals with respect to relevant differences between Augustine and Aquinas. Their accounts of freedom, and subsequent debates about whether politics is *essentially* coercive, simply do not map onto these distinctions. A more productive reading of these texts would emphasize Augustine and Aquinas's shared indebtedness to the republican tradition of political thinking on liberty and domination, as can be found in the work of Peter J. Burnell.

The full exegetical details of this interpretive debate are manifold and would require a lengthier treatment of their discussions of mastery and servitude, and their different accounts of the nature of law, east of Eden. Let it be sufficient to note that Aquinas saw his presentation of human sociality and the naturalness of political authority in *ST* 1a.96.3–4 as standing in fundamental agreement with Augustine's *City of God* 19.14–15. Consider the similarities of their approaches to political authority in these two texts.

First, the *natural*, for Augustine and Aquinas, signifies the order of creation as it existed in a state of innocence before the fall. Second, the question of the naturalness of political society for each thinker is not a question of the raw aggregate of individuals who form a civil community, but rather of the naturalness of the forms of rule or authority that govern such a community. Third, implied in each author's account of authority is a picture of the profound fabric of political authority, civil community, and the common good unique to political community. Both Augustine and Aquinas endorse a conception of political society as a mesh of roles, institutions, and obligations in which the accent mark in the formation of political community falls on the authority of political officials. Their analysis of political society centers on the virtues necessary to fulfill the role-specific obligations associated with political office and the direction and formation of citizens. Finally, Augustine and Aquinas both fundamentally agree that humankind's natural sociality expresses itself in a series of concentric "moral circles" extending outward from the individual to the family, civil society, ecclesial community, and ultimately to all human beings and God. Contra Markus, we believe this is the most plausible way to read *City of God* 19. Each of these spheres of community, in turn, is embedded in an institution (e.g., household, commonwealth, church) and plays a role in human flourishing. For both authors, then, the temporal common good of political society provides a genuine, albeit incomplete, form of happiness.

The clearest evidence of Augustine's understanding of the "naturalness" (in the sense of original created goodness) of political authority is found not in *City of God* 19.14–15 but in his advice to public officials in his letters. There we find an Augustinian account of political leadership. There we get glimpses of public officials fulfilling their role-specific obligations in a distinctively Christian way – a way that supports the public good and also openly directs it toward the eternal good. Indeed, the letters in Augustine's correspondence with public officials such as Marcellinus and Macedonius are now being recognized by many as the center, not the periphery, of Augustine's political thought (see

especially Letters 138 to Marcellinus and Letter 155 to Macedonius). For it is in these texts that we find Augustine at his most practical, offering detailed descriptions of the ways Christian faith should influence the performance of one's public responsibilities. Robert Dodaro's work on Augustine has brought these neglected texts into the mainstream of dialogue about Augustine's political ethics, against scholars in the more "realist" tradition of Reinhold Niebuhr and Herbert Deane.

Augustine's focus in these texts is the public official's soul, not political regimes. His political language is that of virtuous rule, not church and state. The transformation of political society by Christian faith begins at the level of the political official's role-specific obligations – specifically as the virtues necessary to carry out these obligations in the governance of political society are reinterpreted in light of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.

Illustrative of this approach is Letter 155 to Macedonius, who was imperial vicar of Africa during the years 413–414 AD, in which he oversaw the administration of justice in all of Roman Africa. At some point during Macedonius's tenure at this post, Augustine appealed to him for clemency on behalf of a criminal condemned to capital punishment. Through their exchange of letters (152, 153, 155) we learn that Macedonius grants the appeal, and Augustine writes to thank him and congratulate him on his decision. The climax of Augustine's argument to Macedonius in Letter 155 is that Macedonius must now learn to practice the political virtues required by his office with the twofold goal of tending the people's temporal and eternal well-being:

The source of happiness is not one thing for a human being and another for a city: a city is indeed nothing other than a like-minded mass of human beings. Take all your virtues: all the prudence with which you try to serve human affairs, all the courage with which you allow no enemy's wickedness to frighten you, all the moderation through which you keep yourself from corruption when surrounded by the rottenness of contemptible human habits, all the justice which you use to judge correctly in assigning to each his due. Suppose that you employ all these virtues in toiling and struggling merely for the physical security of those you want to do well. . . . Then neither your virtues nor the happiness that comes from them will be real. . . . If any of your governing, however informed by the virtues, is directed only to the final aim of allowing human beings to suffer no unjust hardships in the flesh; and if you think that it is no concern of yours to what purpose they put the peace that you struggle to provide for

them (that is, to speak directly, how they worship the true God, with whom the fruit of peaceful life is found), then all that effort towards the life of true happiness will not benefit you at all.¹⁸

Letter 155 to Macedonius turns out to be an extended discussion of the relationship between virtue and happiness as it is practiced and experienced in the life of a political ruler. It provides an insight into Augustine's understanding of the good use of political authority that goes well beyond *City of God* 19.14–15. It also reveals that political society is "natural," for Augustine, insofar as it is a constitutive element of the social well-being that human beings were created to pursue.

The analogue to Augustine's account of virtue and happiness in these letters to public officials is Aquinas's account of the way the infused theological virtues of faith, hope, and love orient human beings to the eternal common good and thereby help direct their use and experience of temporal goods.¹⁹ Although we must pay attention to the relationship and differences between Augustine's and Aquinas's understanding of the limited natural and temporal qualities of the common good achieved in political life (especially through law), they are in agreement in their description of how the gifts of the theological virtues are necessary to orient human beings toward eternal happiness. A common link between Augustine's and Aquinas's political thought is their shared Neoplatonic framework in thinking about how the theological virtues reorient the practice of the cardinal virtues in temporal political life. Although scholars have begun tracing the Neoplatonic elements in Augustine's thinking about the theological and political virtues, more work needs to be done on these same elements in Aquinas's thought relative to more familiar accounts of Aristotelianism and natural law (especially Aquinas's account of whether or not cardinal virtues remain in heaven).

On Kingship: To the King of Cyprus (De regno) can also be read as Aquinas's (or at least a very early Thomistic) presentation of the ways that the infused virtues fundamentally reorient one's responsibilities for tending the temporal, political common good. The text, admittedly of disputed authorship, applies a Thomistic conception of the theological and political virtues in the instruction of an actual public official.

TOWARD A CONTEMPORARY AUGUSTINIAN-THOMIST POLITICAL POLITICAL THEOLOGY

In many ways, Augustine's age is closer to our own than Aquinas's, for the institutional relationship between church and political society,

bishop and magistrate, was still very much in flux. For Augustine, the relationship of political life and Christian faith is a matter of virtue, worked out on the battlefield of the public official's soul. Although Augustine's statesmanship approach to politics can strike the contemporary mind as elitist and underdeveloped in terms of structural analysis, it holds principles that are transferable for a more popular, democratic Christian virtue ethics of citizenship. This democratic translation has been the trend in contemporary political Augustinianism since the work of Dodaro, Gregory, and Mathewes.

Twentieth-century attempts to construct institutional renderings of Aquinas's natural and supernatural common good, or Augustine's temporal and eternal good, that can be neatly applied to church and political society have run their course and climaxed in the stalemate of a liberal and antiliberal debate over secularity. These distinctions primarily apply, for each thinker, to the virtues and corresponding goods associated with them. Both Augustine and Aquinas think of political theology more in terms of virtue ethics than institutional analysis. Ultimately, political questions are questions about the transformation of the political (cardinal) virtues by faith, hope, and love. And these questions are, in turn, questions about what it means *to refer* the common good achieved in political life toward its ultimate end in God, who is eternal happiness.

Thus the genuinely constructive work that lies before political Thomists and Augustinians falls into three categories. First we must identify the political virtues – especially those most relevant to contemporary *democratic* life – and describe what their reorientation by faith, hope, and love might look like. Part of this description brings about the second constructive task of identifying exemplars – both past and present, statesmen and citizens – who embody these virtues and their transformation through faith, hope, and love. Once such virtues and embodied transformations can be identified, we will be in a better position to describe what the *referral* of the natural or temporal common good toward eternal happiness might amount to at the level of political practice.

Referral brings us to the grand question in Augustine's and Aquinas's political thought: what is the relationship between earthly happiness and the ultimate form of happiness found only with God in eternity? That is, what is the relationship between political and eschatological eudaimonism? And, how do we avoid the previous errors of absorption (Christendom) and separation (secularism) in answering such a question? Note that both the natural and supernatural distinction, and

temporal and eternal one, can lead to these errors if broadly applied at the institutional level. The way to avoid the twin errors of absorption or separation is to focus not simply on institutions but on individuals; not on raw individuals, but socially coded individuals in their distinctive roles, as members of all levels of society and as tenders of particular common goods who are in need of specific virtues. Such virtues are always threatened by unjust social and political practices. Getting a grip on these questions is more fundamental to the political thought of Augustine and Aquinas than institutional questions of church and political society, and yet the two sorts of question are never ultimately disconnected. For both thinkers the church is the locus of virtue formation and of the relationships necessary for discernment, and political society is the place where political virtue must be transformed by faith, hope, and love.

Responding to such questions, no doubt, will be informed by the sort of philosophical and theological reflection characteristic of contemporary political theology, often at odds with much of political theory resistant to such questions (including the work of many self-identified Augustinian and Thomist political thinkers). Concepts like naturalness, necessity, coercion, domination, and the common good remain high on the agenda for any theological interpretation of politics. In fact, we have highlighted areas where the political implications of major developments in theological scholarship on these thinkers remain undertheorized. But, as the best critics of our actual politics rightly have noted, theory alone cannot support the type of social change required to transcend the distinctive challenges of modern political communities and their economic arrangements. Here, with MacIntyre, we share many of the concerns about abstraction and philosophical exclusion noted by critics of liberalism and its characteristic bureaucratic and procedural expressions. Further theorizing of theory's relation to practice, or even Augustine's relation to Aquinas on supernatural grace, also will not meet these challenges. Prophetic critique, moreover, risks its own moral and political hazards.

Despite many valid theological criticisms of their work, Augustinians and Thomists in the mid-twentieth century like Reinhold Niebuhr and John Courtney Murray sought to provide a genuinely *political* Christian political theory, attentive to the details of political structures and processes without sacrificing normative reflection on the demands of political leadership and citizenship.²⁰ Contemporary Augustinian-Thomists can, and should, still learn from these forebears and be grateful for their concerns about the political institutions of a free society. Their concerns,

attentive to political theory and political science, stand in stark contrast with the ecclesial focus of more recent work in political theology. Our rejection of the "institutional level" opposition of Augustine and Aquinas serves a different purpose. It may be that the debate over political liberalism has truncated our receptions of their political theologies. In fact, in addition to emphasis on the distinctive liturgical practices for training Christian virtue, further work in political theology might best be served by attending in more focused ways to how Augustinian and Thomist perspectives can inform debates about issues like mass incarceration, immigration, and international law.

Caricatures have their pedagogical value, even in the formation of holiness. We do not deny differences between Augustine's more consistent Platonism, and Aquinas's debts to Aristotle. Their rhetorical style and their visions of politics took shape in radically different historical contexts. But the demands of contemporary politics require something more than sweaty Augustinian "pessimism" and serene Thomist "optimism," let alone Augustinian "grace" and Thomist "nature." Our effort to historicize and interrupt conventional pictures by bringing Augustine and Aquinas closer together is one attempt to open new ways of addressing such challenges without default recourse to familiar tropes. Dislodging their opposition, without collapsing their different construals of human agency confronted by proximate and final ends, might liberate and generate new imaginations for both political engagement and practical reasoning. Such a politics remains a human enterprise, adequate to our creatureliness in time, but no less divine.

Notes

- 1 This approach can be found in the essays by Ernest Fortin on Augustine and Aquinas in L. Strauss and J. Cropsey, eds., *The History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 176–205 and 248–75. More recently, Alan Ryan helpfully identifies the salience of their different historical contexts, but he still maintains that Aquinas "successfully erased Augustine's relentlessly negative view of earthly existence from ethical and political debate." Alan Ryan, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012), p. 225.
- 2 The key texts in Aquinas on the naturalness of politics are to be found in *Summa Theologiae* 1a.92.1; 96.3, 4.
- 3 Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution*, trans. and with an introduction by Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1998).
- 4 Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics* (New York: MacMillan, 1940), pp. 179–97.

- 5 Gustave Combès, *La Doctrine Politique de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Plon, 1927), pp. 105–6.
- 6 Henri de Lubac, *Theological Fragments*, trans. Rebecca Howell Balinski (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 245.
- 7 Henri Irénée 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*, Vol. 2, ed. K. Aland and F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957), p. 348.
- 8 Robert Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- 9 Robert Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 13 and pp. 67–8.
- 10 Oliver O'Donovan, "The Political Thought of *City of God* 19," in *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present*, ed. Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 72.
- 11 Markus, *Saeculum*, pp. 205, 209.
- 12 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 406.
- 13 Ibid., p. 403.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid., p. 406.
- 16 Markus, *Saeculum*, p. 230.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Letter 155.9–10, E. M. Atkins and R. J. Dodaro, eds., *Augustine: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 94–5.
- 19 Aquinas, *On the Virtues in General*, Article 9: "Do We Acquire Virtue through Acts?" and Article 10: "Do We Receive Any Virtues by Infusion?," in *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, trans. Jeffrey Hause and Claudia Eisen Murphy (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2010).
- 20 Note Jeremy Waldron's recent call for *political* political theory in Jeremy Waldron, "Political Political Theory: An Inaugural Lecture," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 21.1 (March 2013): 1–23.

Further Reading

- Burnell, P., *The Augustinian Person*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005.
- Deane, H., *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1963.
- Dodaro, R., *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Finnis, J., *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Gregory, E., *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- MacIntyre, A., *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990.

- Maritain, J., *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. J. J. Fitzgerald. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947.
- Markus, R. A., *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, rev. ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Mathewes, C., *The Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.
- Milbank, J., *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
- Murray, J. C., *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960.
- Niebuhr, R., *Christian Realism and Political Problems*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953.
- Simon, Y. R., *Philosophy of Democratic Government*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993.
- Weithman, P. J., "Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin and the Function of Political Authority," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30.3 (1992): 353–76.