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ARTICLES

WHY AUGUSTINE? WHY NOW?

Jean Bethke Elshtain[+]

The fate of Saint Augustine in the world of academic political theory has been, at best, mixed. First, he was enveloped in that blanket of suspicion cast over all "religious" or "theological" thinkers: do such thinkers *really* belong with the likes of Plato and Aristotle, Machiavelli and Hobbes, or Marx and Mill? Were their eyes not cast heavenward rather than fixed resolutely on human political and social affairs? In addition, there are particular features of Saint Augustine's writing that make the importance of his works difficult to decipher. He was an ambitiously discursive and narrative thinker. From the time of his conversion to Catholic Christianity in 386 to his death as Bishop of Hippo in 430, Augustine wrote some 117 books.[1] During his life, Augustine wrote on the central themes of Christian life and theology: the nature of God and the human person; the problem of evil; free will and determinism; war and human aggression; the bases of social life and political order; church doctrine; and Christian vocations, to name a few.[2]

Although several of his works follow an argumentative line in a manner most often favored by political theorists, especially given the distinctly juridical or legalistic cast of so much modern political theory, Augustine most often paints bold strokes on an expansive canvas. His enterprise is at once theological, philosophical, historical, cultural, and rhetorical. His works are characterized by an extraordinarily rich surface and by vast depth; thus, these works can be difficult to manage if one's own purposes are not so ambitious. Augustine's writings concern what

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1. P.R.L. Brown, *Political Society*, *in* AUGUSTINE: A COLLECTION OF CRITICAL ESSAYS 311 (Richard Markus ed., 1972).

2. *See generally* PETER BROWN, AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (2d ed. 1967).

are generally known as "universals," but yet, he writes at times with the skill of a nuanced "particularist" and historicist.[3]

Given this towering enterprise, perhaps it is unsurprising that some attempts have been made to reduce Augustine to a manageable size. Augustine has been labeled a political realist and canonized as the theological grandfather of a tradition that includes Machiavelli and Hobbes.[4] Then, too, Augustine is read primarily in and through excerpts from his great works that most favorably comport with this political realism. To this end, his *Confessions*[5] are ignored; instead, portions of Book XIX of his 1091-page masterwork, *The City of God*, have been reproduced with certain highlights flagged.[6] Also notable is a selection from Book I, Chapter 1 on "the city of this world, a city which aims at dominion, which holds nations in enslavement, but is itself dominated by that very lust of domination."[7] Book II, Chapter 21 expounds upon Augustine's alternative to Cicero's judgment, according to Scipio, on the Roman commonwealth.[8] Book XV, Chapter 1 traces lines of descent of the "two cities, speaking allegorically."[9] As previously noted, Book XIX, Chapter 14 displays value through its precepts about the interests that government should serve.[10] Book XIX, Chapter 15 makes an argument against slavery "by the order of nature."[11] Book XIX, Chapter 21, in which Scipio's definition of a commonwealth as advanced by Cicero makes a second appearance, is likewise pertinent.[12] Chapter 7 of Book XIX forwards the justification of war argument.[13] Perhaps the excerpts

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3. *See generally* AUGUSTINE, THE CONFESSIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE (1909) (providing a brilliant example of Augustine's ability to move to the universal through the concrete or particular) [hereinafter CONFESSIONS].

4. GEORGE ARMSTRONG KELLY, POLITICS AND RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS IN AMERICA 175 (1984) (providing an understanding of this characterization, especially in an American context).

5. AUGUSTINE, CONFESSIONS, *supra* note 3.

6. AUGUSTINE, CONCERNING THE CITY OF GOD AGAINST THE PAGANS 893-95 (Henry Bettenson trans., 1972) [hereinafter CITY OF GOD].

7. *Id.* at 5. Prose has been borrowed for this characterization from JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN, AUGUSTINE AND THE LIMITS OF POLITICS (1995).

8. *See* AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 72-74 (describing and defining the commonwealth).

9. *See id.* at 595-96 (delineating these two cities and indicating that one shall forevermore reside with God and one with the Devil).

10. *See id.* at 872-74 (speaking to the law of both heaven and earth, which government interests serve).

11. *See id.* at 874-75 (explaining that man should not hold dominion over his fellow man, but over the beasts of the earth).

12. *See id.* at 881-83 (reiterating Scipio's impression of the commonwealth).

13. *See id.* at 861-62 (noting that "the wise man . . . will wage just wars").

from Chapters 14, 15, and 16 are highlighted in order to demonstrate Augustine's insistence that there is a connection between the peace and good of the household and that of the city.[14] Lastly, one should consider Augustine's scathing comment that what pirates do with one boat, Romans do with a navy, but one is called brigandage while the other is named Empire. What results from these readings is a shriven Augustine, numbered among the pessimists and charged with being among those who stress human cruelty and violence with a concomitant need for order, coercion, punishment, and occasional war.

Recognizing the inadequacy of this normalized Augustine does not automatically clarify or sort through Augustine's complexity with the enterprise of political theory in mind. Even more pertinent, though, is the theorist's sense of the task of political theory. If one construes that task as a way of putting together anthropological presuppositions — or what used to be called "theories of human nature" — about the political and social order in light of those presuppositions or the perils inherent to any political activity or order, then Augustine's expansiveness is a welcome thing indeed. This Article begins from the point of view that Augustine's expansiveness is welcome, rather than frustrating. The Article then highlights key points of theoretical demarcation in Augustine's work that are rich with implications for political theory.

I. AUGUSTINE ON THE SELF

In his classic biography of Saint Augustine, Peter Brown, the noted historian of the late antique world, claims that Augustine has "come as near to us . . . as the vast gulf that separates a modern man from the culture and religion of the Later Empire can allow . . . ."[15] One reason for such an opinion surely lies in Augustine's complex ruminations on the nature of selfhood. Augustine, in fact, anticipates postmodern strategies in dethroning the Cartesian subject even before it was erected. For Augustine, the mind can never be transparent to itself, as we are never wholly in control of our thoughts. For Augustine, though, our bodies are essential, not contingent, to who we are and how we think. We know that we exist not because we think, but because we doubt.[16] Only a subject that can reflect on itself can doubt. Augustine's

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14. *See id.* at 872-77 (determining that domestic peace begins in the home and extends to the city community as well).

15. BROWN, AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *supra* note 2, at 181.

16. AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 460. Augustine's proposition, "I doubt, therefore I know I exist," leaves no room for Descartes' later proposition, "I think, therefore, I am."

Confessions is a story of a human being who has become a question to himself.[17]

The story begins with an infant;[18] here, too, Augustine is radical within the context of political theory, which often seems to assume that human beings spring full blown from the head of John Locke! Augustine starts with natality and intimates a developmental account featuring a fragile, dependent creature who is by no means a *tabula rasa*, but rather is social and "quarrelsome."[19] The human being is driven by hunger, desire, and frustration at his inability to express himself and to get others to respond.[20] Growing up is not about eradicating childish emotions — these feelings are key ingredients of our natures and our ability to understand. Rather, human growth is about forming and shaping our passions in light of certain presuppositions about human beings, human will, and humankind's faltering attempts to act rightly. Augustine's appreciation for the chaotic nature of human existence lies at the heart of his withering fire directed at Stoic *apatheia*. For the mind to be in a state "in which the mind cannot be touched by any emotion whatsoever, who would not judge this insensitivity to be the worst of all moral defects?"[21] We begin as, and we remain, beings who love, yearn, grieve, and experience frustration. The most important point here is Augustine's insistence that thought can never be purged of emotions and that the thinking self expresses complex emotion through thought and a language that is hopefully up to the task.

Epistemologically, philosophical examinations do not yield a conclusion that a distinct separation between emotion and reason can exist; rather, the two are interlaced and mutually function to define one another. Augustine argues that certain philosophies offer unreal assessments of the human condition by taking insufficient account of embodiment and should therefore be rejected.[22] Through his theories on

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17. *See, e.g.*, AUGUSTINE, CONFESSIONS, *supra* note 3, at 6 (questioning Augustine's own birth and bodily origins).

18. *See id.* at 5 (describing Augustine's first sensory perceptions in the world).

19. *Id.* at 2-4.

20. *See id.* at 5-6 (relating a wish to express his emotions in infancy and a subsequent frustration in failing to elicit reactions from others).

21. AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 564-65. Whether Augustine offers an adequate account of Stoic philosophy is, of course, a separate question. Whatever one's position on that issue, the most important point here is Augustine's insistence that thought can never be purged of emotion. *Id.*

22. *See* JAMES WETZEL, AUGUSTINE AND THE LIMITS OF VIRTUE 20 (1992) (stating that Augustine disregards standards set by human minds and that these minds are immaterial such that their judgments cannot be relied upon for guidance).

human perception, Augustine connotes that the body is epistemologically significant and functions as a source of delight, travail, and knowledge of good and evil.[23] Augustine implies that the body is the mode through which humans can connect to the world and, in turn, through which the world discloses itself to humans.[24] Augustine also disputes Pelagian ideology regarding human control of the will, or *voluntas*, through maintaining that Pelagians overestimates human control of the will.[25] In the words of the philosopher James Wetzel:

> Pelagius seemed in the end to deny that there were ever significant obstacles to living the good life, once reason had illuminated its nature, [and thus] he stood in more obvious continuity with the philosophical tradition than Augustine, who came to disparage the worldly wisdom of pagan philosophy for its overconfidence.[26]

Although Augustine is an epistemological skeptic, he nevertheless believes that we can come to know certain truths.[27] Such beliefs in the true nature of things are viewed through complex indirection and love, or *caritas*, which is a formed desire and a selfless goodness that spills over the boundaries of the self and reaches out to others and to God, who is the source of love.[28] Thus, humans may be unable to verify most beliefs that they hold because humans cannot be everywhere, see everything, or experience everything. However, human beliefs are still not completely without substance.

Given the fact that all human beings are creatures attempting to express either ordered or disordered desire and that they manifest this desire through language, human words are vulnerable to misunderstanding and can be subject to multiple, ambiguous interpretations by other creatures with similar desires.[29] What captures

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23. *See id.* at 17 (stating that Augustine believed that human beings could perceive the physical world for its good or evil because of human intelligence and rationality).

24. *See infra* note 36 and accompanying text.

25. *See* WETZEL, *supra* note 22, at 10 (stating that the Pelagian fiction of *voluntas* is too ambitious for Augustine, who disregards the idea that human rational abilities could transcend human ethics in general).

26. *Id.* at 15.

27. *See id.* at 2 (referring to Augustine's "perceptual breakthrough" of understanding good and evil through placing them in his own will).

28. *See id.* at 1 (stating that the conception of God is not related to questions regarding the nature of will and stating that Augustine recognizes that God is the antithesis of evil).

29. AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 694 (recognizing apparent ambiguities in the language through which God communicated with Abraham regarding the latter's eventual ability to have a child).

the interest of such desiring creatures? Our own selves, for one thing. Humans are driven by *delectio*, or desire and yearning, and thus, we search for enjoyment, including pleasures of the intellect.[30] Indeed, we acquire knowledge of ourselves by trying our "strength in answering, not in word but in deed, what may be called the interrogation of temptation."[31] We come to know ourselves through our interactions with the world.[32] We make mistakes — proving that we exist — and we continue on with the knowledge gained through the very clumsiness of our actions.

It is difficult, though, for the mind to unlock things. As beings circumscribed by the boundaries of time and space, humans require certain fundamental categories in order to see the world at all; otherwise all would be flux.[33] In addition to time and space, humans require a form that incorporates reason and will that is congruent with our level of complexity. Augustine finds this form in the Trinity, a principle that works through complex relational analogies involving similarities and dissimilarities, things seen and unseen, at one and the same time.[34] Humans are capable of forming concepts about things, regardless of whether they have seen them or not, and conjure images gained through sensory perceptions.[35] Humans may believe that many things exist that are not personally known to us. Augustine writes:

> And in fact when I wish to speak of Carthage, I seek for what to say within myself, and find an image of Carthage within myself; but I received this through the body, that is, through the sense of the body, since I was present there in the body, and have seen and perceived it with my senses, and have retained it in my memory, that I might find the word about it within myself whenever I might wish to utter it. For its image in my mind is its word, not the sound of the three syllabes when Carthage [*Car-tha-go* in Latin] is named, or even when that name is silently thought of during some period of time, but the word that I see in my mind when I utter this word of three syllables with my voice, or even before I utter it . . . . So too, when I wish

30. *See* WETZEL, *supra* note 22, at 12 (stating that Augustine greatly values the supreme good and that human attempts to achieve this supreme good and to "live the good life" are rational).

31. AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 693-94.

32. *See infra* note 36 and accompanying text.

33. *See* WETZEL, *supra* note 22, at 12 (stating that Augustine envisions the alignment of human desires with the good to produce virtue, which leads to vision).

34. *See generally* AUGUSTINE, THE TRINITY (1992).

35. *See infra* note 36 and accompanying text.

> to speak of Alexandria which I have neer seen, an image of it is also present within me.[36]

Similarly, Augustine uses the metaphor of fabrication to further emphasize the importance of "skill-knowledge." Augustine writes:

> A worker makes a chest. At first he has the chest in his skill-knowledge: [f]or if he did not have it in his skill-knowledge, how could it be brought forth by making? But the chest as it is in his skill-knowledge is not the chest as it appears to our eyes. In skill-knowledge it exists invisibly, in the work it will exist visibly.[37]

When we gaze upon things in our minds, through a complex nexus of words, names, and images, we do not become untrammeled in this imagining. The available repertoire is linguistic, historic, contingent, and time-bound; such an overall ability to conjure images and names is constrained within the confines and limits of our embodiment.[38] As Wittgenstein writes, if a lion could speak and we could not understand him, we can say that if a giraffe could imagine, we could not recognize the imagining.[39]

Such recognition of human constraints on imagination leads to Augustine's examination of language's restraints on humans. As language users among God's creatures, we frequently experience a clash between opacity and constraint. In Book XIX, Chapter 7, Augustine muses about the ways in which all humans are divided by linguistic differences.[40] These differences make it very difficult for us to understand one another:

> The diversity of languages separates man from man. For if two men meet, and are forced by some compelling reason not to pass on but to stay in company, then if neither knows the other's language, it is easier for dumb animals, even of different kinds, to associate together than these men, although both are human beings. For when men cannot communicate their thoughts to each other, simply because of difference of language, all the similarity of their common human nature is of no avail to unite them in fellowship. So true is this that a man

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36. AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 257.

37. AUGUSTINE, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, *in* AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO: SELECT WRITINGS 278 (1984).

38. *See id.* at 279-80 (declaring that some humans' abilities to perceive certain images are hampered because "the weight of the sins prevents them from seeing").

39. *See* LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS (G.E.M. Anscombe trans., 1968).

40. *See* AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 861 (stating that human societies are divided by differences in language).

> would be more cheerful with his dog for company than with a foreigner. I shall be told that the Imperial City has been at pains to impose on conquered peoples not only her yoke but her language also, as a bond of peace and fellowship, so that there should be no lack of interpreters but even a profusion of them. True; but think of the cost of this achievement! Consider the scale of those wars, with all the slaughter of human beings, all the human blood that was shed![41]

Here, Augustine migrates from the murkiness and inconsistency of language, and how it divides humans despite our common nature, to the imposition of a language on diverse people that would arrive at a truly terrible price. Notions of human nature and language contribute to our constitution as living creatures; in addition, the complexity of a search for fellowship and a pithy critique of the enforced homogeneity of empire are also brought together, but not without a price.[42]

The upshot of the force of linguistic convention is that human beings can only achieve what Augustine calls "creature's knowledge." Full knowledge is not available to a human, no matter how brilliant and learned that human might be. We are thus both limited and enabled by the conventions of language.[43] No one can jump out of his linguistic skin. We are obliged to bow to so-called normal usage if we hope to communicate at all; we are driven to communicate by our sociality, which lies at the basis of what Augustine proposes to be the nature of human societies.

II. AUGUSTINE ON SOCIAL LIFE

As noted above, human beings are inherently social. While created in the image of God, humans are defined by human relationships. The self cannot be free-standing. Social life, however full of ills, must be cherished. Among those social forms, civil life is not simply what sin has brought into the world, but what emerges from our capacity for love, our use of reason, as well as a pervasive lust for domination attendant upon human affairs. Augustine stated, "The philosophers hold the view that the life of the wise man should be social; and in this we support them much more heartily."[44] Indeed, the City of God, Augustine's way of

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41. *Id.*

42. *See id.* (cautioning that the overall diversity of humans in varying societies has "given rise to wars of a worse kind, namely, social and civil wars").

43. *See supra* note 40 and accompanying text (suggesting that the power of linguistic diversity can function to divide societies).

44. AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 858.

characterizing that pilgrim band of Christians during their earthly sojourn in and through a community of reconciliation and fellowship that presaged the heavenly kingdom, could never have had "its first start . . . if the life of the saints were not social."[45] All human beings are citizens of the earthly kingdom, the City of Man, and even in this fallen condition there is a kind of "natural likeness" that forges a bond between humankind.[46] This bond of peace does not suffice to prevent wars, dissensions, cruelty, and misery of all kinds, but we are nonetheless called to membership based on a naturalistic sociality and basic morality available to all rational creatures.[47] A unity in plurality pushes towards harmony; but the sin of division, with its origins in pride and willfulness, drives us apart.[48]

Yet, it is love of friendship that lies at the root of what might be called Augustine's "practical philosophy," which involves his history, ethics, and social and political theories.[49] Pinioned between alienation and affection, human beings — those "cracked pot[s]"—are caught in the tragedy of alienation but glued by love.[50] Human sociality is innate, and for Augustine, the question is not whether humans should be social or whether they should trust enough to love. Instead, the question is: "What shall I love and how shall I love it?"[51] Augustine's complex ethical theory understands that political life is one form that human social and ethical life assumes. Humans are frequently contained within society and are continually seeking the consolation of others. For Augustine, society is a species of friendship, and friendship is a moral union in and through which human beings strive for a shared good. Augustine's central categories, including the categories of war and peace, are in the form of a relation of one sort or another.[52] And the more humans are united at all levels in a bond of peace, the closer they come to achieving the good at which they aim and at which God intends.[53]

For Augustine, neighborliness and reciprocity emerge from ties that bind, beginning with familial bonds and extending from these particular

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45. *Id.* at 860.

46. *See id.* at 547 (relating how God made all humans from the "natural likeness" of a single individual).

47. *See id.*

48. *See id.*

49. *See, e.g.*, DONALD X. BURT, FRIENDSHIP AND SOCIETY: AN INTRODUCTION TO AUGUSTINE'S PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY 5 (1999).

50. *See id.* at 2-4 (explaining that alienation can be remedied through love).

51. *Id.* at 5.

52. *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 8 (explaining the relation of peace to love and friendship).

53. *Id.*

relations outward; the filaments of affection must not stop at the portal to the *domus*.[54] Augustine writes:

> The aim was that one man should not combine many relationships in his one self, but that those connections should be separated and spread among individuals, and that in this way they should help to bind social life more effectively by involving in their plurality a plurality of persons.[55]

The social tie is not "confined to a small group" but extends "more widely to . . . a large number with the multiplying links of kinship."[56] The importance of plurality, of the many emerging from a unique one — for God began as a singular form — cannot be underestimated in Augustine's work. Augustine notably fuses together into a single frame human uniqueness and individuality with sociality and plurality. Bonds of affection tied human beings from the start; bonds of kinship and affection bound them further. These relationships became dispersed, eventually encompassing the entire globe.[57]

In light of the confusion between human languages, it is sometimes difficult to repair to this fundamental sociality. Yet we seek it in and through the social forms we create: hence, civic order, a primary requisite for human existence.[58] This civic order is a normative good even though it does not fulfill or complete our natures; rather, it expresses them, perhaps in ways deadly or ways less cruel. Here, it is important to note again that, for Augustine, no human being has natural dominion over any other; there is no slavery by nature.[59] Humans, by nature, are social, but that does not dictate any particular form of social order. Nor does Augustine analogize the authority of fathers in households to political rule. Classical patriarchal theory holds that rule by fathers is at once natural and political and that such a natural rule translates into political authority and legitimacy.[60] For Augustine, on the other hand, political authority is different from familial authority; for Augustine, to the extent

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54. *See id.* (explaining that family occupies the inner component of concentric circles and that if a human cannot interact with himself and his family, he cannot interact with other human beings).

55. *See* AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 623.

56. *See id.* at 624.

57. *See id.* at 623-25 (illustrating human growth throughout the generations from Adam and Eve).

58. *See id.* at 861 (explaining the language barriers between humans in their attempts to relate to one another).

59. *See supra* note 11 and accompanying text.

60. *See generally* ROBERT FILMER, PATRIARCHA AND OTHER POLITICAL WORKS (Peter Laslett ed., 1949).

that one is subject to a ruler, one is subject to him in status only and not by nature.[61]

There are temporal goods that are worthy, peace being first and foremost. Human civic life is not simply a remedy for sin — with order and coercion needed to constrain our wickedness — but an expression of our sociality, our desire for fellowship, our capacity for a diffuse *caritas*.[62] It follows that Cicero's definition of a *respublica*, as refracted through the writings of Scipio, is wanting. For Cicero, civic order is an association based on common agreement concerning shared interests.[63] Augustine argues that his assertion is insufficient and counters that a people gathered together in a civic order is a multitude of rational beings united by sharing a common love of the same things.[64] Using this definition, we not only define what a society is, but we can also assess what it is people hold dear. It is worth noting that a debate in current Augustinian scholarship concerns precisely how one should rank Augustine's impression of the good of political society; thus, the traditional claim that Augustine viewed civic order simply as a remedy for sin has been effectively challenged. Now the questions seem to be how important to Augustine's overall thought is the good of civic life and how much can it be achieved through the exercise of human voluntary activity. Within earthly political life, inherent dangers, such as the fruits of pride and self-glory or glory in the "empire," are manifest. The goods to be attained through civic life are vague, but they begin with Augustine's basic guideline for human earthly life, namely, that humans should do no harm and provide help where possible, a requisite of neighborly love.[65]

It is the interplay of *caritas* and *cupiditas* that is critical whether within the very being of a single person or within the life of a civic order. Augustine would tame the occasions for the reign of *cupiditas* and the activation of the *libido dominandi*, or lust to dominate, and maximize the

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61. *See* AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 874-76 (relating fatherly authority to political authority within the city).

62. *See supra* note 28 and accompanying text (explaining the role of *caritas* in our society).

63. *See* AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 881 (explaining that the commonwealth is "united in association by a common sense of right and a community of interest").

64. *See id.* at 890 (expounding upon a community of people united by a community of love, rather than of interests).

65. *See supra* note 64 and accompanying text (alluding to community formed among persons who share a commonality of the "objects of their love").

space within which *caritas* operates.[66] According to Augustine, a lust to dominate taints and perverts all human relations from family to city.[67] Similarly, a decent love, a concern for the well-being of all in the household or in the city, strengthens the delicate filaments of peace.[68] The sin that mars the earthly city is the story of arbitrary power or the ever-present possibility of such. By contrast, the basis for a more just order is fueled by love. The theme of the two cities is the metaphor that enables Augustine to trace the choreography of human relations. Augustine expresses that every human community is plagued by a "poverty-stricken kind of power . . . a kind of scramble . . . for their lost dominions and . . . honours," but there is simultaneously present the forgiving and gentler aspects of loving concern, mutuality, and domestic and civic peace.[69] There are two fundamentally different attitudes evinced within human social life and enacted by human beings. One attitude is a powerful feeling of the fullness of life. A human being will not be denuded if he gives, or makes a gift of, the self to others. One's dependence on others is not a diminution but an enrichment of the self. The other attitude springs from cramped and cribbed selfishness, resentment, and penury of spirit. The way one reaches out to others from these different attitudes is strikingly distinct. Should one harbor a spirit of resentment and contempt, one will condescend toward others and be hostile to life itself. However, by feeling for the misery of others, a person can help his neighbor through forming a community around the other. Authentic compassion, *caritas*, manifest through one's sharing misery sympathetically with others, eradicates contempt and distance. This sympathetic commiseration, however, can never approach anything like perfection in the realm of earthly time and history, the *saeculum*.[70]

In Robert Markus's book, *Saeculum*, which is widely acknowledged as one of the most important attempts to establish Augustine as a civic and political theorist, Markus argues that Augustine aimed for a number of complex things with his characterization of the two cities.[71] One goal was

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66. *See* AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 556-58 (distinguishing love with a "directed will," or good love, from love with a "perverted will," or bad love).

67. *See id.* at 557.

68. *See id.* at 557-58.

69. AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 429.

70. *See* ROBERT A. MARKUS, SAECULUM: HISTORY AND SOCIETY IN THE THEOLOGY OF ST. AUGUSTINE 10-11 (1970) (describing the origins and theory of *saeculum*).

71. *See id.* at 45-46 (describing the two cities as "one of the impious, the other of the saints").

to sort out the story of all earthly cities.[72] Augustine, Markus argues, provides an account of the earthly city, *civitas terrene*, from Assyria through Rome and shows the ways in which even the cherished goal of peace often ends in conquest, and hence no real peace is achieved at all.[73] The fullness of peace is reserved for the heavenly city, *civitas dei*, and its eternal peace.[74] In this way, Augustine creates barriers to the absolutizing of any political arrangement. His repudiation of the theology underwriting the notion of an *imperium Christianum* lies in part through his worry that any identification of the City of God with an earthly order invites sacralization of human arrangements and a dangerous idolatry. At the same time, earthly institutions have a claim on humanity, and human membership in a polity is not reducible to misery and punishment. Augustine begins with a presumption of the priority of peace over war and repudiates all stories of mythical human beginnings that presume disorder and war as our primordial condition. The concept of the earthly city derives from human turning away from love and its source, God, toward willfullness and a "poverty-stricken kind of power."[75] The upshot is division — within the self, between the self and others, between nations and cultures. This division is destructive and differs from the plurality and contrast that Augustine cherished.

Temporal peace is good. Amidst the shadows that hover over humankind, there are two rules that should be followed: "first, to do no harm to anyone, and, [second], to help everyone whenever possible."[76] The most just civic arrangements are those that afford the widest scope to fellowship and mutuality. If mutuality, even of the earthly imperfect sort, is to be attained, there must be a compromise between human wills, and the earthly city must find a way to forge bonds of peace.[77] This task proves to be very difficult given the distortions of the lust to dominate.[78]

By contrast, the heavenly city on earthly pilgrimage is better able to forge peace by calling out "citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages."[79] The *civitas dei* does this not

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72. *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 18 (delineating how over six periods of history, Christians reflected on appropriate dualities such as those between the two cities described above).

73. *See* AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 599-600.

74. *See id.* at 600.

75. *See id.* at 429 (explaining that, in turning away from God, humans desperately cling to their domains and subjects in their wretched condition of experiencing the absence of God).

76. *Id.* at 873.

77. *See id.* at 877.

78. *See id.* at 877-78.

79. *See id.* at 878.

by annulling or abolishing earthly differences but through maintaining them so long as "God is to be worshipped."[80] Whatever Augustine's acquiescence in the received social arrangements of his time, he left as a legacy a condemnation of that lust for dominion that distorts the human personality, marriage, the family, and all other human social relations, including civic life and membership.[81] Augustine is scathing in his denunciation of arrogant pride and unstinting in his praise of the works of service, neighborliness, and a love that simultaneously judges and succors.[82] Love and justice are intertwined both on earth and in heaven; yet the world is filled with horrors, including war. Augustine, however, justifies a certain sort of war with this call to love and peace.

III. AUGUSTINE ON WAR AND PEACE

A full treatment of the theme of war and peace would require an assessment of Augustine's complex theodicy, which is beyond the scope of this Article. A brief discussion, however, is needed in order to grasp Augustine's theology of war and peace. Augustine acknowledges the seductive allure of evil, famously telling the story of a youthful prank: stealing pears not because of hunger but because of pleasure in the deed itself and in the fellowship with others who took part in the deed. It took Augustine many years, including a sustained detour through Manicheanism, before he decisively rejected metaphysical dualism and repudiated any claim that evil is a self-sustaining principle in opposition to good.[83] The Manicheans located evil in creation itself as the work of a demonic demiurge; thus, the body was tainted by definition.[84] But, for Augustine, creation is good; the body is good. It is what a person does with the body, what a person does to creation, that either marks a person with the stain of sin, wickedness, and cruelty or not.[85] Augustine has been credited with an original articulation on human free will: humans can choose to do wrong, and we often do. Humankind is marked from the beginning with the trace of original disobedience.[86] The "choice of

80. *Id.*

81. *See id.* at 577 (exploring the depravity of lust and how it takes over the human body in a destructive fashion).

82. *See, e.g.*, *id.* at 574 (denouncing one's pride in search of excuses for sinning).

83. *See id.* at xi-xii (delineating Augustine's experience in following Manicheanism).

84. *See id.* at xii (describing how both good and evil occupy the human soul).

85. *See id.* at 571 (describing how humans defile their bodies by committing sin).

86. *See id.* (relating that when humans began to sin, they "slipped into open disobedience").

evil," as Augustine remarks, is in and of itself "an impressive proof that the *nature* is good."[87]

Evil reflects falling away from good. Humans are the agents of this falling away, not because the body is corrupt, but because individuals can defile it. There is no such thing as evil "by nature." Evil is the turning of a limited creature from God to himself and, hence, to an absolutizing of his own flawed will. This turning may become habitual, a kind of second nature.[88] Evil is the name given to a class of putative acts and motives. The fruits of this turning away include a hatred of finitude and a fateful thirst for what might be called a kind of anti-creation or a lust to destroy. War is a species of that destruction; hence, war is always a tragedy even when considered just. But, if war is *primus inter pares* an example of human sinfullness and a turning from the good, how can it be justified under any circumstances?

Augustine begins by deconstructing the Roman peace as a false claim to peace. Augustine emphasizes that Rome was conquered by her own lust to dominate others.[89] Augustine writes, "Think of all the battles fought, all the blood poured out, so that almost all the nations of Italy, by whose help the Roman Empire wielded that overwhelming power, should be subjugated as if they were barbarous savages."[90] Rome was driven by a lust for vengeance and cruelty, even though these triumphed under the cherished name of peace.[91] As a result, the Empire became "a kingdom without justice . . . a criminal gang on a large scale."[92] Here, Augustine famously recounts

> the story of the rejoinder given by a captured pirate to Alexander the Great when Alexander queried him about his idea in infesting the sea. "And the pirate answered, with uninhibited insolence, 'The same as yours, in infesting the earth! But because I do it with a tiny craft, I'm called a pirate: because you have a mighty navy, you're called an emperor.'"[93]

Augustine even suggests that the Romans should have erected a monument to the foreign "other" and called her "Aliena" because they proclaimed consistently that all their wars were defensive. For Rome,

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87. *Id.* at 448.

88. *See id.* at 571-72.

89. *See* JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN, WOMEN AND WAR 130 (1987).

90. *See id.* (citing AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6).

91. *See id.*

92. *Id.* (reflecting that this degeneration was characteristic of "most kingdoms most of the time").

93. *See id.*

peace became just another name for *dominium*. If war's ravages are partly a punishment for sin, human beings sin, often savagely, in enacting that punishment. Primarily, however, Augustine emphasizes the freely chosen nature of war and assigns responsibility to those who engage in it.[94]

Augustine argues that should one reflect on the terrible slaughter of war carried out for wicked motives and to unworthy ends, one would determine to wage only limited, justifiable wars.[95] There are occasional real wars of defense; the wise polity takes up arms only with great reluctance and penitence.[96] Given Augustine's account of limited justifiability for wars fought only for certain motives, he is frequently lodged as the father of just-war thinking.[97] Others, of course, rank him as a forebear of political realism; there is no reason he cannot be both, depending on what one understands by realism and just war, respectively. Augustine appreciates what modern international relations theorists call the "security dilemma." According to Augustine, people never possess a kingdom

> so securely as not to fear subjugation by their enemies; in fact, such is the instability of human affairs that no people has ever been allowed such a degree of tranquillity as to remove all dread of hostile attacks on their life in this world. That place, then, which is promised as a dwelling of such peace and security is eternal, and is reserved for eternal beings, in "the mother, the Jerusalem which is free."[98]

One must simply live with this penumbra of fear and worry on this earth; however, one must not be overtaken with fear and worry without justification. This fear results in horrible wars of destruction, including social and civil wars.[99] Each war invites another, given the mimetic quality of instantiations of destruction. Each war breeds discontents and resentments that invite a tendency to even the score.

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94. *See* AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 861-62 (describing the misery and lack of justification for entering wars thought to be "just").

95. *See* ELSHTAIN, *supra* note 89, at 131 (referring to the "injustice of the opposing side").

96. *See* AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 862 (reflecting that a wise man would prefer to have no war at all).

97. ELSHTAIN, *supra* note 89, at 128 (reporting that, in this respect, Augustine shares renown with Machiavelli and Hobbes).

98. AUGUSTINE, CITY OF GOD, *supra* note 6, at 743-44.

99. *See id.* at 861 (relating the futility of fighting wars in order to quiet future hostilities).

By contrast, the just ruler wages a justifiable war of necessity either to respond to unwarranted aggression and attack or to rescue the innocent from certain destruction.[100] The motivation must be neighborly love and a desire for a more authentic peace. This is a grudging endorsement of a lesser evil, and war is never named as a normative good, only a tragic necessity. Rescuing the self alone is not a justification for violence; it is better to suffer wrong than to commit it.[101] Our sociality embeds certain requirements of neighborly love, most powerfully and poignantly in the case of the ruler who bears the responsibility for the well-being of a people. In our intrinsic sociality and the dogma to do no harm, but to help others, war is occasionally justifiable. Augustine's reasoning here falls within the domain of accounts of comparative justice, and his argument, which is not a fully fleshed out systematic theory of war so much as a theological account of war, involves the occasional violation of a fundamental principle — do not kill unjustly – in the name of an overriding good. Augustine urges that one must reflect on even justifiable wars, not with vainglory, but with great sorrow.[102] There are no victory parades in Augustine's world. However just the cause, war stirs up temptations to ravish and devour often in order to ensure peace.[103] For Augustine, just war is a cautionary tale, not an incautious and reckless call to arms. Peace is a great good — so good that "no word ever falls more gratefully upon the ear, nothing is desired with greater longing, in fact, nothing better can be found."[104] Peace, for Augustine, is delightful and "dear to the heart of all mankind."[105]

IV. AUGUSTINE CONCLUDED

The vast mountain of scholarship on Augustine's work keeps growing. Peter Brown claims that "Isidore of Seville once wrote that if anyone told you he had read all the works of Augustine, he was a liar."[106] One always has the sense after delving thoroughly into Augustine's works that one just scratches the surface. Indeed, Augustine's works have not yet entirely been translated into English. That project is now underway, and

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100. *Id.*

101. *See id.* at 862-63 (stressing that, although one's death may be lamentable, it is joyous to realize that the person deceased has been spared the evils of the living world).

102. *See id.* at 861-62 (reflecting that to lament war is natural to humanity and whoever does not lament war "has lost all human feeling").

103. *See id.* at 866 (reflecting on how peace is often the ultimate goal of waging war).

104. *Id.*

105. *Id.*

106. Brown, *supra* note 1, at 311.

there are seventeen volumes of his homilies alone that have made their way into translation. Much of the new scholarship on Augustine remarks, often with a sense of critical wonderment, on just how "contemporary" his works can be given the collapse of political utopianism.

The teleology of historic progress is no longer believable although a version of it is still touted by votaries of techno-progress or genetic engineering that may yet "perfect" the human race. The presumably solid underpinnings of the self gave way in the twentieth century under the onslaught of Nietzsche and Freud. Cultural anthropology has taught lessons of cultural contingencies. Contemporary students have rediscovered the importance and vitality of rhetoric and the ways in which political and social life and thought must be cast in available rhetorical forms.

None of this would have surprised Augustine. What would sadden him is the human propensity to substitute one extreme for another. Importantly, Augustine's significance must not lie within a version of political limits or "realism" that downplays his insistence on the great virtue of hope and the call to enact projects of *caritas*. This does not mean he should be called to service on behalf of "markets and democracy." It does mean he can never be enlisted on behalf of the depredators of humankind.