

augustine and the limits of politics

Augustine and the Limits of Politics: Exploring the Boundaries of Power and Morality

augustine and the limits of politics is a fascinating theme that invites us to reflect on the nature of political authority, human imperfection, and the ultimate goals of governance. St. Augustine of Hippo, one of the greatest Christian thinkers of late antiquity, left an indelible mark on political philosophy through his profound insights into the relationship between the earthly city and the heavenly city. His views on the limitations of political power reveal a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by rulers and citizens alike, and they continue to resonate in contemporary discussions about the role of politics in society.

Understanding Augustine's perspective requires delving into his seminal work, *The City of God*, where he contrasts the "City of Man" with the "City of God." This distinction underpins his reflections on politics, ethics, and human nature, illuminating why political authority, while necessary, is inherently limited.

Augustine's Political Thought: A Foundation

Augustine lived during a period of great turmoil—the decline of the Roman Empire and the rise of new political structures. His writings responded to the anxieties of his time, particularly the sack of Rome in 410 CE, which raised questions about the security and legitimacy of political power. Unlike some of his contemporaries who saw political stability as an end in itself, Augustine viewed political order as a transient and imperfect arrangement within a fallen world.

The City of Man vs. The City of God

Central to Augustine's thought is the distinction between two "cities." The City of Man represents earthly political entities—kingdoms, empires, and states—characterized by self-love, ambition, and temporal concerns. In contrast, the City of God embodies the community of the faithful, united by love of God and eternal truth.

This duality is crucial for understanding the limits of politics. The City of Man, while necessary for maintaining order and justice, is ultimately flawed because it is composed of imperfect humans who are guided by self-interest and prone to sin. Politics, therefore, cannot achieve perfect justice or peace; it can only mitigate disorder and provide a framework for coexistence.

Human Nature and Political Authority

Augustine's view of human nature is deeply intertwined with his political theory. He

believed that humans are inherently sinful and that this original sin affects all aspects of life, including political behavior. This pessimistic anthropology implies that no political system can be flawless because its participants are limited by moral weakness.

Political authority, according to Augustine, is a necessary response to human sinfulness. The state's role is to curb violence and promote a degree of order, but it must never be mistaken for a source of ultimate good. Political leaders are fallible, and their power is contingent upon a higher moral law.

The Limits of Politics in Augustine's Thought

When we talk about the limits of politics through Augustine's lens, we are addressing the boundaries that political power cannot—and should not—cross. For Augustine, political authority is circumscribed by moral and spiritual realities that transcend any earthly regime.

Politics as a Means, Not an End

One of Augustine's key insights is that politics is instrumental. It serves the purpose of maintaining peace and justice in a fallen world but is not an end in itself. Political regimes are temporary and imperfect structures designed to manage human affairs until the ultimate fulfillment of justice in the divine realm.

This perspective encourages humility among political actors. Leaders should recognize that their authority is limited and subordinate to divine law. The temptation to claim absolute power or to pursue political ends detached from moral considerations is a dangerous overreach.

The Problem of Justice in Politics

Augustine acknowledged that political systems could promote justice, but he was skeptical about achieving perfect justice on earth. Because humans are flawed, laws and political institutions can only approximate justice, often falling short due to corruption, competing interests, and human error.

This skepticism about political justice leads to a recognition of the necessity of a higher form of justice—the justice of God—which ultimately transcends human legal systems. Augustine's thought thus places political justice within a broader moral framework, warning against idolatry of the state.

Peace and Order vs. Ultimate Good

While politics aims to establish peace and order, Augustine reminds us that these goals

are provisional. The peace that politics can offer is fragile and contingent. It is a “peace of the sword” rather than the “peace of the spirit.”

This distinction challenges modern political thinkers to consider what kind of peace political institutions can realistically deliver and to avoid conflating political stability with ultimate human flourishing.

Augustine’s Influence on Modern Political Thought

The theme of *augustine and the limits of politics* has had a lasting impact on Western political philosophy. His ideas have shaped debates about the role of the state, the nature of justice, and the relationship between religion and politics.

Realism and Political Prudence

Augustine’s acknowledgment of human sinfulness and political imperfection resonates with the tradition of political realism, which emphasizes the limits of idealism in governance. His thought encourages political leaders and citizens to adopt a prudent approach—recognizing the constraints of power and the necessity of compromise.

Separation of Church and State

While Augustine did not advocate for a strict separation of church and state as understood today, his distinction between the City of Man and the City of God laid early groundwork for thinking about the autonomy of political and religious spheres. His work invites ongoing reflection on how political authority should relate to spiritual authority without overstepping its bounds.

Ethics in Governance

In a time when political corruption and moral relativism often challenge governance, Augustine’s insistence on the subordination of political power to higher ethical standards remains relevant. His ideas suggest that politics without a moral compass risks devolving into tyranny or chaos.

Practical Lessons from Augustine on Politics Today

Reflecting on Augustine and the limits of politics offers valuable insights for contemporary society. Here are some takeaways that can guide modern political discourse and practice:

- **Embrace humility:** Political leaders should remember the limitations of their power and the provisional nature of political success.
- **Prioritize justice with caution:** Striving for justice is essential, but recognizing the imperfect nature of human institutions helps avoid unrealistic expectations.
- **Maintain ethical standards:** Politics divorced from morality risks corruption and social unrest.
- **Recognize the role of religion and spirituality:** These spheres provide a vital framework for understanding ultimate ends beyond political expediency.
- **Understand peace as multifaceted:** Political peace is necessary but insufficient without inner and societal flourishing that transcends mere order.

These lessons highlight the enduring relevance of Augustine's insights in navigating the complexities of governance and public life.

Augustine's reflections on the limits of politics remind us that political power, while necessary, is always contingent and imperfect. His work challenges us to balance pragmatic governance with a deeper awareness of human nature and moral responsibility. In an age of political polarization and uncertainty, revisiting Augustine's thought offers a meaningful perspective on the potentials and pitfalls of political life.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who was Augustine and why is he significant in political philosophy?

Augustine of Hippo was an early Christian theologian and philosopher whose writings profoundly influenced Western political thought. He is significant for his reflections on the nature of the state, the limits of political authority, and the relationship between the earthly city and the City of God.

What is Augustine's view on the purpose of politics?

Augustine believed that the primary purpose of politics is to maintain order and peace in a fallen world. He saw political authority as a necessary means to restrain human sinfulness and promote justice, but he also emphasized that political power is limited and imperfect.

How does Augustine distinguish between the City of God and the earthly city?

Augustine distinguishes the City of God as the spiritual, eternal community of believers oriented towards divine truth and salvation, whereas the earthly city is a temporal, imperfect society driven by self-love and political power. This distinction highlights the limits of political authority in achieving ultimate human fulfillment.

What are the limits of politics according to Augustine?

According to Augustine, politics is limited because it deals with a fallen world marked by sin and imperfection. Political authorities can enforce order and justice but cannot achieve perfect peace or moral goodness. True ultimate peace and justice come from God and the City of God, not from political institutions.

How does Augustine's political thought influence modern concepts of political authority?

Augustine's recognition of the imperfect and limited nature of political authority has influenced modern political thought by underscoring the need for humility in governance, the importance of moral and spiritual dimensions in politics, and the understanding that political power should be exercised with restraint and for the common good.

Can Augustine's ideas help address contemporary political challenges?

Yes, Augustine's ideas can help address contemporary political challenges by reminding policymakers and citizens of the inherent limitations of political power, the importance of ethical leadership, and the need to balance temporal governance with spiritual and moral considerations to foster justice and peace.

Additional Resources

Augustine and the Limits of Politics: A Critical Examination

augustine and the limits of politics represent a profound intersection of theology, philosophy, and political theory that continues to influence contemporary discourse on governance and society. St. Augustine of Hippo, a fourth-century philosopher and theologian, provided a nuanced understanding of political authority and its inherent constraints, emphasizing the moral and spiritual dimensions that politics alone cannot fully address. This article explores Augustine's insights into the boundaries of political power, the role of the state, and the ethical challenges that arise when human governance attempts to regulate the complexities of human nature.

Understanding Augustine's Political Thought

Augustine's political philosophy is deeply rooted in his theological vision, particularly articulated in his seminal work, **The City of God**. He contrasts the "City of Man" with the "City of God," delineating two distinct realms: one governed by earthly concerns and temporal power, and the other by divine will and eternal truth. This duality forms the foundation for his reflections on the limits of politics.

Unlike modern secular political theories that often assert the sovereignty of the state, Augustine maintains that political authority is inherently provisional and subordinate to a higher moral order. For Augustine, human governments serve as instruments to maintain order and justice in a fallen world but cannot achieve ultimate peace or righteousness. This perspective introduces critical limitations on the ambitions of political power, suggesting that politics cannot fully resolve the deeper problems of human sinfulness and moral corruption.

The City of Man vs. The City of God: Political Implications

Augustine's distinction between the City of Man and the City of God encapsulates his skepticism toward the capacity of politics to establish a perfect society. The City of Man, characterized by self-love and the pursuit of temporal power, inevitably encounters conflict, injustice, and decay. Political institutions within this city are necessary but inherently flawed due to the imperfection of human nature.

In contrast, the City of God represents the community of those who live according to divine law and seek eternal salvation. Augustine argues that true peace and justice reside ultimately beyond political structures, in the spiritual realm. Therefore, while politics can promote order and mitigate violence, it cannot create the perfect society or fully eradicate evil.

This dichotomy has profound implications for how political authority should be conceived. Augustine's thought cautions against political absolutism and utopian ideologies that claim to perfect society through human institutions alone.

The Limits of Political Power in Augustine's View

Augustine's reflections highlight several intrinsic limits to political power that remain relevant in contemporary political analysis:

1. The Moral Limits of Laws and Governance

Augustine emphasizes that laws and political systems are necessary to curb human vice

and maintain social order. However, he recognizes that laws cannot transform human hearts or eliminate sin. This acknowledgment sets a clear boundary on what politics can achieve: while governance can regulate external behavior, it cannot ensure internal virtue.

This insight challenges any political framework that assumes legislation alone can solve deep social and ethical problems. Augustine's perspective encourages a more integrated approach that considers moral education and spiritual formation alongside political reform.

2. The Temporality and Fallibility of Political Institutions

Political regimes, according to Augustine, are transient and subject to corruption. The state's legitimacy depends on its ability to uphold justice, but no earthly power can guarantee permanent justice. History offers numerous examples of political systems that have devolved into tyranny or chaos, reinforcing Augustine's view of political fragility.

This recognition tempers expectations about the permanence and infallibility of political authority, underscoring the need for humility and vigilance in political leadership.

3. The Role of the Church and the Spiritual Realm

Augustine assigns a vital role to the Church as the spiritual counterpart to political authority. While the state governs the external order, the Church guides the moral and spiritual formation of individuals. This division of roles suggests that politics alone cannot fulfill humanity's ultimate needs.

The interplay between church and state in Augustine's thought remains a subject of debate, particularly in pluralistic societies. Nonetheless, his insistence on spiritual dimensions beyond political reach highlights the inherent limits of secular governance.

Augustine's Relevance to Modern Political Challenges

In today's complex political landscape, Augustine's insights into the limits of politics offer valuable perspectives on governance, power, and ethics. Contemporary issues such as political polarization, the rise of authoritarianism, and the quest for social justice resonate with Augustine's caution about the ambitions of political power.

Political Authority and Ethical Responsibility

Augustine's view encourages political leaders to recognize the moral limits of their

authority and to govern with a sense of humility. This contrasts with modern tendencies toward political absolutism or populist movements that claim to embody the singular will of the people.

By acknowledging the imperfect nature of political institutions, policymakers are reminded of the need to balance power with justice and to respect individual dignity beyond mere political expediency.

The Challenge of Creating Just Societies

Modern political theories often aim at creating just societies through laws and policies. Augustine's skepticism about the possibility of perfect justice through politics alone challenges these ambitions. It suggests that political efforts must be complemented by cultural, moral, and spiritual renewal to address the root causes of social problems.

This holistic approach has implications for how societies design education, legal frameworks, and community engagement, promoting a broader understanding of justice that transcends legislation.

Comparative Perspectives: Augustine and Modern Political Thinkers

When compared to thinkers like Machiavelli or Hobbes, Augustine's emphasis on moral and spiritual limits sets him apart. Machiavelli's pragmatic approach focuses on power and statecraft without moral constraints, while Hobbes advocates for a strong sovereign to prevent chaos.

Augustine, by contrast, integrates ethical considerations deeply into political thought, warning against the dangers of unchecked power and emphasizing the role of divine law. This contrast enriches contemporary debates on governance, ethics, and the scope of political authority.

Practical Implications of Augustine's Political Limits

Understanding Augustine and the limits of politics has practical implications for modern governance:

- **Checks and Balances:** Recognizing the fallibility of political institutions supports the implementation of checks and balances to prevent abuse of power.
- **Respect for Pluralism:** Augustine's distinction between spiritual and political realms encourages respect for religious diversity and the separation of church and

state.

- **Focus on Moral Education:** Political systems should promote ethical education alongside legal frameworks to cultivate virtuous citizenship.
- **Humility in Policy Making:** Policymakers are urged to approach governance with humility, acknowledging the limits of political solutions to social issues.

Such principles derived from Augustine's thought contribute to more resilient and ethically grounded political systems.

The continued relevance of Augustine and the limits of politics underscores the enduring challenge of balancing power, justice, and morality in human societies. As political systems evolve, reflecting on Augustine's insights encourages a more nuanced and realistic approach to governance that respects both the possibilities and limitations inherent in political authority.

[Augustine And The Limits Of Politics](#)

augustine and the limits of politics: *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* Jean Bethke Elshtain, 2018-04-30 Now with a new foreword by Patrick J. Deneen. Jean Bethke Elshtain brings Augustine's thought into the contemporary political arena and presents an Augustine who created a complex moral map that offers space for loyalty, love, and care, as well as a chastened form of civic virtue. The result is a controversial book about one of the world's greatest and most complex thinkers whose thought continues to haunt all of Western political philosophy. What is our business within this common mortal life? Augustine asks and bids us to ask ourselves. What can Augustine possibly have to say about the conditions that characterize our contemporary society and appear to put democracy in crisis? Who is Augustine for us now and what do his words have to do with political theory? These are the underlying questions that animate Jean Bethke Elshtain's fascinating engagement with the thought and work of Augustine, the ancient thinker who gave no political theory per se and refused to offer up a positive utopia. In exploring the questions, Why Augustine, why now? Elshtain argues that Augustine's great works display a canny and scrupulous attunement to the here and now and the very real limits therein. She discusses other aspects of Augustine's thought as well, including his insistence that no human city can be modeled on the heavenly city, and further elaborates on Hannah Arendt's deep indebtedness to Augustine's understanding of evil. Elshtain also presents Augustine's arguments against the pridefulness of philosophy, thereby linking him to later currents in modern thought, including Wittgenstein and Freud.

augustine and the limits of politics: Augustine and Politics John Doody, Kevin L. Hughes, Kim Paffenroth, 2005-01-01 The study of Augustine's political teachings has suffered from a history of misreadings, both ancient and modern. It is only in recent years that the traditional lines of 'Augustinian pessimism' have been opened to question. Scholars have begun to explore the broader lines of Augustine's political thought in his letters and sermons, and thus have been able to place his classic text, *The City of God*, in its proper context. The essays in this volume take stock of these recent developments and revisit old assumptions about the significance of Augustine of Hippo for political thought. They do so from many different perspectives, examining the anthropological and theological underpinnings of Augustine's thought, his critique of politics, his development of his own

political thought, and some of the later manifestations or uses of his thought in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and today. This new vision is at once more bracing, more hopeful, and more diverse than earlier readings could have allowed.

augustine and the limits of politics: Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World John von Heyking, 2001 Saint Augustine's political thought has usually been interpreted by modern readers as suggesting that politics is based on sin. In *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, John von Heyking shows that Augustine actually considered political life a substantive good that fulfills a human longing for a kind of wholeness. Rather than showing Augustine as supporting the Christian church's domination of politics, von Heyking argues that he held a subtler view of the relationship between religion and politics, one that preserves the independence of political life. And while many see his politics as based on a natural-law ethic or on one in which authority is conferred by direct revelation, von Heyking shows how Augustine held to an understanding of political ethics that emphasizes practical wisdom and judgment in a mode that resembles Aristotle rather than Machiavelli.

augustine and the limits of politics: Politics and the Earthly City in Augustine's City of God Veronica Eileen Roberts, Veronica Ogle, 2021 A new reading of Augustine's *City of God* which considers the status of politics within Augustine's sacramental worldview.

augustine and the limits of politics: The Limits of Politics Kyle Scott, 2016-09-21 As political units grow it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a shared sense of humanity and to recognize people as individuals rather than anonymous beings. To overcome our most pressing political issues we need to develop a moral imagination so that we may renew our sense of connectedness and responsibility to one another. Bringing together politics and art is one way this can be accomplished. This book draws upon political sources as well as works in literature, film and theater to show the limits of politics and the need for a moral imagination.

augustine and the limits of politics: *Augustine and Modern Law* Richard O. Brooks, 2017-07-05 St. Augustine and Roman law are the two bridges from Athens and Jerusalem to the world of modern law. Augustine's almost eerily modern political realism was based upon his deep appreciation of human evil, arising from his insights into the human personality, the product of his reflections on his own life and the history of his times. These insights have traveled well through the ages and are mirrored in the pages of Aquinas, Luther and Calvin, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Hannah Arendt. The articles in this volume describe the life and world of Augustine and the ways in which he conceived both justice and law. They also discuss the little recognized Augustinian contributions to the field of modern hermeneutics - the discipline which informs the art of legal interpretation. Finally, they include Augustine's valuable discussion of church/state relations, the law of just wars, and proper role and limits of coercion, and the procreative dimensions of marriage. The volume also includes an extremely useful, definitive bibliography of Augustine and the law, and will leave readers with an increased appreciation of the contributions which Augustine has made to the history of jurisprudence. No one can read Augustine and these articles on his view of the law without taking away a new view of the law itself.

augustine and the limits of politics: *Imperial Pilgrims* Shawn A. Aghajan, 2022-03-29 This book is an Augustinian interrogation of contemporary Christian accounts of empire, just war, and terrorism. Though Augustine's voice has guided much of the Christian discourse in these conjoined arenas, it has not shielded his work from being misappropriated to serve ends that are inimical to his own. The US "war on terror" is the most recent and egregious example of violence that many theologians have unjustly baptized as "Augustinian." By reading Augustine pastorally rather than merely polemically, this work offers a counter-narrative and an alternative praxis for the American Christian trying to reconcile her baptism with her citizenship.

augustine and the limits of politics: *Augustine and Social Justice* Teresa Delgado, John Doody, Kim Paffenroth, 2015-01-14 This volume brings into dialogue the ancient wisdom of Augustine of Hippo, a bishop of the early Christian Church of the fourth and fifth centuries, with contemporary theologians and ethicists on the topic of social justice. Each essay mines the major

themes present in Augustine's extensive corpus of writings—from his Confessions to the City of God— with an eye to the following question: how can this early church father so foundational to Christian doctrine and teaching inform our twenty-first century context on how to create and sustain a more just and equitable society? In his own day, Augustine spoke to conditions of slavery, conflict and war, violence and poverty, among many others. These conditions, while reflecting the characteristics of our technological age, continue to obstruct our collective efforts to bring about the common good for the global human community. The contributors of this volume have taken great care to read Augustine through the lens of his own time and place; at the same time, they provide keen insights and reflections which advance the conversation of social justice in the present.

augustine and the limits of politics: T&T Clark Handbook of Political Theology Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, 2019-10-03 The T&T Clark Handbook of Political Theology is a comprehensive reference resource informed by serious theological scholarship in the three Abrahamic traditions. The engaging and original contributions within this collection represent the epitome of contemporary scholarship in theology, religion, philosophy, history, law, and political science, from leading scholars in their area of specialization. Comprised of five sections that illuminate the rise and relevance of political theology, this handbook begins with the birth of contemporary “political theology,” and is followed by discussions of historical resources and past examples of interaction between theology and politics from all three Abrahamic traditions. The third section surveys the leading figures and movements that have had an impact on the discipline of political theology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; and the contributors then build on previously discussed historical resources and methods to engage with contemporary issues and challenges, emphasizing interreligious dialogue, even while addressing concerns of relevance to a particular faith tradition. The volume concludes with three essays that look at the future of political theology from the perspective of each Abrahamic religion. Complete with select bibliographies for each topic, this companion features the most current overview of political theology that will reach a broader, global audience of students and scholars

augustine and the limits of politics: Augustine's Political Thought Richard J. Dougherty, 2019 This important collection reveals that Augustine's political thought drew on and diverged from the classical tradition, contributing to the study of questions at the center of all Western political thought.

augustine and the limits of politics: Augustine in a Time of Crisis Boleslaw Z. Kabala, Ashleen Menchaca-Bagnulo, Nathan Pinkoski, 2021-03-01 This volume addresses our global crisis by turning to Augustine, a master at integrating disciplines, philosophies, and human experiences in times of upheaval. It covers themes of selfhood, church and state, education, liberalism, realism, and 20th-century thinkers. The contributors enhance our understanding of Augustine's thought by heightening awareness of his relevance to diverse political, ethical, and sociological questions. Bringing together Augustine and Gallicanism, civil religion, and Martin Luther King, Jr., this volume expands the boundaries of Augustine scholarship through a consideration of subjects at the heart of contemporary political theory.

augustine and the limits of politics: A Commonwealth of Hope Michael Lamb, 2024-11-26 A bold new interpretation of Augustine's virtue of hope and its place in political life When it comes to politics, Augustine of Hippo is renowned as one of history's great pessimists, with his sights set firmly on the heavenly city rather than the public square. Many have enlisted him to chasten political hopes, highlighting the realities of evil and encouraging citizens instead to cast their hopes on heaven. A Commonwealth of Hope challenges prevailing interpretations of Augustinian pessimism, offering a new vision of his political thought that can also help today's citizens sustain hope in the face of despair. Amid rising inequality, injustice, and political division, many citizens wonder what to hope for in politics and whether it is possible to forge common hopes in a deeply polarized society. Michael Lamb takes up this challenge, offering the first in-depth analysis of Augustine's virtue of hope and its profound implications for political life. He draws on a wide range of Augustine's writings—including neglected sermons, letters, and treatises—and integrates insights from political

theory, religious studies, theology, and philosophy. Lamb shows how diverse citizens, both religious and secular, can unite around common hopes for the commonwealth. Recovering this understudied virtue and situating Augustine within his political, rhetorical, and religious contexts, *A Commonwealth of Hope* reveals how Augustine's virtue of hope can help us resist the politics of presumption and despair and confront the challenges of our time.

augustine and the limits of politics: Political Augustinianism Michael J.S. Bruno, 2014-09-01 The thought of Saint Augustine stands as one of the central fountainheads of not only theology but Western social and political theory. Political Augustinianism examines modern political readings of Augustine, providing an extensive account of the pivotal French, British, and American strands of interpretation. Bruno guides readers through these modern strands of interpretation, examines their historical, theological, and socio-political context, and discusses the hermeneutical underpinnings of the modern discussion of Augustine's social and political thought.

augustine and the limits of politics: Global Justice, Christology and Christian Ethics Lisa Sowle Cahill, 2013-01-17 Global realities of human inequality, poverty, violence and ecological destruction call for a twenty-first-century Christian response which links cross-cultural and interreligious cooperation for change to the Gospel. This book demonstrates why just action is necessarily a criterion of authentic Christian theology, and gives grounds for Christian hope that change in violent structures is really possible. Lisa Sowle Cahill argues that theology and biblical interpretation are already embedded in and indebted to ethical-political practices and choices. Within this ecumenical study, she explores the use of the historical Jesus in constructive theology; the merits of Word and Spirit Christologies; the importance of liberation and feminist theologies as well as theologies from the global south; and also the possibility of qualified moral universalism. The book will be of great interest to all students of theology, religious ethics and politics, and biblical studies.

augustine and the limits of politics: Augustinian and Ecclesial Christian Ethics D. Stephen Long, 2018-08-15 What is the relationship between the command to love one's enemies and the use of violence and/or other coercive political means? This work examines this question by comparing and contrasting two important contemporary approaches to Christian ethics, neoAugustinian and the ecclesial or neoAnabaptist. It traces the complicated conversation that has taken place since John Howard Yoder took on Reinhold Niebuhr's interpretation of the Anabaptists in the 1940's. It consists of three parts. The first part traces the development of the Augustinian-Niebuhr approach to ethics from Niebuhr through those who have advanced his work including Paul Ramsey, Timothy Jackson, Charles Mathewes, Eric Gregory, and Jennifer Herdt. It also examines the Augustinian ethics of Oliver O'Donovan, John Milbank and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Along with tracing the Augustinian approach and its trajectories through agapism, theology and the interpretation of Augustine, it identifies fifteen criticisms that this approach brings against the neoAnabaptists. The second part traces the origin of the ecclesial or neoAnabaptist approach, and then examines its relationship to, and criticism of, agapism, what theological doctrines are central and its interpretation of Augustine. Its purpose is primarily constructive by explaining the role that ecclesiology, Christology and eschatology have among the neoAnabaptists. The third part addresses the criticisms levied by Augustinians against the neoAnabaptists by drawing on the constructive theology in the second part. It intends to show where the Augustinian critics are correct, where they have missed key theological teachings, and where they misrepresent. It also assesses the summons to the nationalist project the Augustinians put to the neoAnabaptists. If this work is successful, this third part will not be defensive. It will instead illumine the reasons for the criticisms and suggest means by which the conversation that began between Yoder and Niebuhr can continue and possibly bear fruit for theological ethics in both its ecclesial and nationalist projects for generations to come.

augustine and the limits of politics: The Pilgrim City Miles Hollingworth, 2010-06-25 In this book Miles Hollingworth investigates how Augustine's understanding of discipleship causes him to resist the normal tendencies of Western political thinkers. On the one hand, he does not attempt to delineate an ideal state in the classical fashion: to his mind, the Garden of Eden can be an

archetype for nothing on earth. And on the other hand, he does not seek to achieve an ideological perspective on the proper relations between Church and State. In fact his Pilgrim City is shown to lie beyond utopianism, realism and the normal terms of political discourse. It stands, instead, as a singular challenge to the aspirations of politics in the West; and so standing it calls for a reassessment of his position in the history of political thought. This book will be of interest to theologians as well as historians of political thought. It will also appeal to anyone with an interest in the history of ideas.

augustine and the limits of politics: *Christianity and Politics* C. C. Pecknold, 2010-08-06 It is not simply for rhetorical flourish that politicians so regularly invoke God's blessings on the country. It is because the relatively new form of power we call the nation-state arose out of a Western political imagination steeped in Christianity. In this brief guide to the history of Christianity and politics, Pecknold shows how early Christianity reshaped the Western political imagination with its new theological claims about eschatological time, participation, and communion with God and neighbor. The ancient view of the Church as the mystical body of Christ is singled out in particular as the author traces shifts in its use and meaning throughout the early, medieval, and modern periods—shifts in how we understand the nature of the person, community and the moral conscience that would give birth to a new relationship between Christianity and politics. While we have many accounts of this narrative from either political or ecclesiastical history, we have few that avoid the artificial separation of the two. This book fills that gap and presents a readable, concise, and thought-provoking introduction to what is at stake in the contentious relationship between Christianity and politics.

augustine and the limits of politics: *Politics and the Order of Love* Eric Gregory, 2008-08-15 Augustine—for all of his influence on Western culture and politics—was hardly a liberal. Drawing from theology, feminist theory, and political philosophy, Eric Gregory offers here a liberal ethics of citizenship, one less susceptible to anti-liberal critics because it is informed by the Augustinian tradition. The result is a book that expands Augustinian imaginations for liberalism and liberal imaginations for Augustinianism. Gregory examines a broad range of Augustine's texts and their reception in different disciplines and identifies two classical themes which have analogues in secular political theory: love—and related notions of care, solidarity, and sympathy—and sin—as well as related notions of cruelty, evil, and narrow self-interest. From an Augustinian point of view, Gregory argues, love and sin constrain each other in ways that yield a distinctive vision of the limits and possibilities of politics. In providing a constructive argument for Christian participation in liberal democratic societies, Gregory advances efforts to revive a political theology in which love's relation to justice is prominent. *Politics and the Order of Love* will provoke new conversations for those interested in Christian ethics, moral psychology, and the role of religion in a liberal society.

augustine and the limits of politics: *Jean Bethke Elshtain* Debra Erickson, Michael Le Chevallier, 2018-04-30 Jean Bethke Elshtain (1941–2013) was a noted ethicist, political philosopher, and public intellectual. Her four decades of scholarship defy easy categorization: she wrote both seminal works of theory and occasional pieces for the popular press, and she was variously viewed as radical and conservative, feminist and traditionalist, anti-war and pro-interventionist. *Jean Bethke Elshtain: Politics, Ethics, and Society* is the first attempt to evaluate Elshtain's entire published body of work and to give shape to a wide-ranging scholarly career, with an eye to her work's ongoing relevance. This collection of essays brings together scholars and public intellectuals from across the spectrum of disciplines in which Elshtain wrote. The volume is organized around four themes, which identify the central concerns that shaped Elshtain's thought: (1) the nature of politics; (2) politics and religion; (3) international relations and just war; and (4) the end(s) of political life. The essays have been chosen not only for the expertise of each contributor as it bears on Elshtain's work but also for their interpretive and analytic scope. This volume introduces readers to the work of a key contemporary thinker, using Elshtain's writing as a lens through which to reflect on central political and scholarly debates of the last few decades. *Jean Bethke Elshtain* will be of great interest to specialists researching Elshtain and to scholars of multiple disciplines, particularly political theory,

international relations, and religion. Contributors: Debra Erickson Sulai, Michael Le Chevallier, Robin W. Lovin, William A. Galston, Arlene W. Saxonhouse, Don Browning, Peter Berkowitz, Nancy J. Hirschmann, Michael Kessler, Lisa Sowle Cahill, Nigel Biggar, Gilbert Meilaender, Eric Gregory, Daniel Philpott, Marc LiVecche, Nicholas Rengger, John D. Carlson, Chris Brown, Michael Walzer, James Turner Johnson, Erik Owens, Francis Fukuyama, Carl Gershman, and Patrick J. Deneen.

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