

TOWARD AN AUGUSTINIAN LIBERALISM

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Concern with the vice of pride is often thought contrary to the spirit of liberalism. Among the virtues often ascribed to liberal political institutions is their encouragement of self-assertion and a sense of self-esteem. Moreover Judith Shklar has argued, in *Ordinary Vices*, that liberalism requires neglect of pride and of the other deadly sins of medieval Christianity. Instead, she argues, liberals properly concern themselves with restraining the vices that she, following Montaigne, dubs ordinary—cruelty, treachery, snobbery, and hypocrisy.

In this paper I argue, on the contrary, that the vice of pride poses political problems in a liberal democracy. A properly Christian concern with checking the vice of pride, I argue, gives Christians reason to embrace political liberalism. More specifically, I argue that observing liberal constraints on political advocacy ameliorates some of the political problems to which pride gives rise. The liberalism that results has some claim to be called “Augustinian,” for Augustine thought pride the worst of the vices and thought its restraint the primary function of political authority.

The title of this paper no doubt elicits some measure of surprise and confusion, for Augustine’s name and his doctrines are no longer the common coin in political philosophy that they once were.¹ Moreover, the term “Augustinian liberalism” will strike those familiar with Augustine’s politics—as he developed them during the Donatist controversy,² for example—as oxymoronic. The political theories historically associated with Augustine and Augustinianism have not, after all, been notably tolerant. Finally, the qualities of character liberalism fosters—among them tolerance and self-assertion—might be thought antithetical to Augustinian Christianity. There are, however, arguments to support political liberalism that can appropriately be described as Augustinian and the aim of this paper is to lay them out. Before turning to them, it will prove helpful to state what I mean by the term “political liberalism” and to say to whom I am offering these Augustinian arguments.

I

“Liberalism” has been and continues to be used to denote a widely extended family of political and philosophical positions that differ in significant respects. The element common to this family is often said to be an overriding concern for the rule of law and for the personal and political liberties of



conscience, speech, assembly and of the press. The common element is sometimes said to be a commitment to rights that guarantee freedom to exercise these liberties.³ Still others characterize liberalism by the political agenda that these philosophical positions are deemed to entail. My own working characterization, however, takes as central to political liberalism⁴ neither rights, liberties nor agenda, but a criterion of the legitimate exercise of public power.⁵

Of course it is not peculiar to liberalism to argue that power ought only to be exercised legitimately. But there are distinctively liberal principles of political legitimacy, principles that restrict the reasons and values that can be appealed to when justifying the exercise of public power if that exercise is to be legitimate. Political liberalism as I shall understand it is a position characterized by fidelity to one or another of the members of this family of liberal principles of political legitimacy. An adequate characterization of political liberalism as I understand it therefore requires adequate characterization of what is common to the restrictions various liberal principles of legitimacy impose.

Jeremy Waldron has located at the foundations of liberalism the “demand that the social order should in principle be capable of explaining itself at the tribunal of each person’s understanding.”⁶ This demand suggests that liberal principles of political legitimacy have in common their insistence that exercises of public power are legitimate only if they can be justified in terms that “explain [themselves]” to every citizen. David Lyons makes a similar suggestion, saying that the justification of public policy must be “accessible” to everyone.⁷

These broad characterizations leave ample scope for disagreement among liberals about which values and principles do and which do not legitimate the exercise of public power; the literature of recent liberalism reflects this disagreement. John Rawls inclines to the view that public power is legitimately exercised only when it can be justified by appeal to a range of values on which all could agree and which are peculiar to what he calls “the domain of the political.”⁸ Robert Audi’s arguments suggest that he thinks exercises of power legitimate only when they can be justified by what he calls “secular reasons”; to appeal to religious values or principles is to offer reasons that not all citizens do or could accept. But Audi seems not to insist, as Rawls does, that legitimating reasons appeal only to values that are distinctively political.⁹ The great Catholic liberal John Courtney Murray, on the other hand, seems to have held that *some* religious propositions and values can legitimate the use of public power in the United States because he thought that there are some religious values or propositions all Americans, at least, could come to accept.¹⁰

Ample room also remains for disagreement about those to whom the exer-

cise of power must be justified or justifiable. Rawls suggests that such exercise need be judged legitimate only by those who are or are trying to be reasonable.¹¹ Bruce Ackerman seems to think that agreement must be reached among all contending parties whether or not they regard one another as reasonable. Still others who are liberal by Waldron's criterion—Seyla Benhabib, for example—worry that any standards of reasonableness framed prior to the process of justification tend uncritically to legitimate the *status quo* and so do not really legitimate at all.¹²

Fortunately, I need not adjudicate among competing liberal principles of political legitimacy. For my purposes, it suffices to note that political liberalism addresses those who live in a society of moral, religious or philosophical pluralism and attempts to narrow their disagreement about the use of public power. It attempts to do so by defending restrictions on the invocation of moral, philosophical or religious beliefs and values to legitimate the exercise of public power. The restrictions on beliefs and values are to be restrictions on which all, or all reasonable, citizens could come to agree because liberalism is premised on the view that at least the most significant exercises of public power must be justifiable to all or to the reasonable.

In what follows, I shall be concerned with the implications of political liberalism for *political advocacy*, for citizens' advocacy and defense of the use of public power. For a citizen to be a liberal requires that her political advocacy conform to one or another liberal principle of political legitimacy. The liberal citizen therefore adduces no reasons for the exercise of public power that would render that exercise illegitimate by the standards of one or another liberal principle of political legitimacy. A Rawlsian liberal would appeal only to political values in her political advocacy, an Audian liberal would not appeal to religious reasons and a Murrayan liberal, while permitted appeal to some religious beliefs, would not appeal to narrowly sectarian propositions or to those that depend upon revelation. I shall argue that there are Augustinian reasons for imposing some liberal restrictions on one's political advocacy and defense and so to be a political liberal, provided others do likewise. Before proceeding, however, some qualifications and explanations are in order.

First, I have in mind only political advocacy that is recognizably argumentative. Verbal but non-argumentative political advocacy, as is found in drama, poetry, music and graffiti,¹³ to take but four examples, would have to be considered in a full theory of legitimacy and political advocacy. So too would the non-verbal political expression of the visual arts, dance, flagburning and vigils of silent prayer. But having noted their importance, I shall prove myself no exception to the unfortunate philosophical trend of ignoring non-argumentative political expression.

Second, I am concerned only with political advocacy by ordinary citizens.

The role of judges whose opinions have the force of precedent, for example, no doubt imposes special requirements on those who happen to be judges, especially on religious jurists. Judicial advocacy and defense of the exercise of public power therefore requires special treatment and would exceed the scope of this paper.¹⁴

Third, I am not going to argue that citizens need in fact be moved by the reasons they adduce for the exercise of political power. A citizen counts as a liberal, in my view, if the argument in which her advocacy consists is liberal; this is compatible with her being moved even by highly idiosyncratic religious, philosophical or moral views.¹⁵

Finally, I am not going to argue that there are *overriding* Augustinian reasons to be a political liberal, just that there are *good* Augustinian reasons. I therefore leave aside the very difficult question of whether someone whose political advocacy is illiberal thereby violates a moral obligation or fails to be a good citizen.

My arguments are intended to show that Christians have reason to accept some form of political liberalism. The arguments are premised on an Augustinian analysis of pride. I shall argue that Christians, because they have religious reasons to curb their pride, have reason to be concerned with the political manifestations of that vice and that Christians therefore have reasons to value the humility and restraint fostered by conforming their political advocacy to a liberal principle of political legitimacy if others do the same. Further, if pride is understood according to this Augustinian analysis, all and not just Christians have reasons to check their pride. All, therefore, have reasons to value the humbling and restraining effects of political liberalism.

My arguments linking liberalism and concern with pride are not intended to move those in all times and places. They are directed at those who live in what might be called *maturely pluralistic* democratic societies. These are societies with a democratic political culture and democratic institutions and traditions. They are characterized by what Rawls has called "the fact of pluralism": they are societies composed of those who adhere to diverse philosophical, religious and moral conceptions of the good life. They are, finally, societies without institutional barriers that prevent adherents of minority views from learning enough about their own or the democratic tradition to engage in reasoned political argument. Augustinians in societies with histories of minority repression or without democratic institutions may have good reason to be liberals, but they do not have the reasons to which I shall appeal.

II

Augustine's views on the origin and purposes of political society and on the legitimate uses of political authority are extremely complex. I cannot do them justice here; surely the political liberalism for which I will argue departs

significantly from Augustine's political thought in some respects.¹⁶ Even so, labelling this liberalism Augustinian is not without fidelity to Augustine's own views or to the tradition of their interpretation.

First, Augustine himself numbered the human tendency to pride among the legacies of original sin. He believed that political authority was instituted as a consequence of and a remedy for original sin and he numbered among the primary functions of political authority the humbling of its subjects.¹⁷ Indeed it is in part because Augustinian politics ascribes this function to political authority that liberals—most notably Judith Shklar¹⁸—have tried to distance themselves from it and to supplant an Augustinian moral psychology stressing pride with an alternative psychology thought more congenial to liberalism. I want to suggest, on the contrary, that a concern with the vice of pride and with the consequent need for humility provide reasons for accepting political liberalism as it is discussed in the previous section. This stress on the humbling function of political liberalism qualifies the liberalism defended as Augustinian.

Moreover, that liberalism is Augustinian insofar as the account of pride on which it is premised is of Augustinian provenance: the essentials of that account are laid out in Augustine's works. Unfortunately, Augustine's own account is somewhat unsystematic. Its central elements were later masterfully combined and harmonized by Aquinas¹⁹ and it is therefore on Aquinas's developed account of Augustinian ideas about pride that I rely.

The pride that Christianity has traditionally considered the deadliest of the deadly sins is often thought of as contempt of God or as a desire to cast God down and to put oneself in His place. The paradigms of pride so conceived are Adam and Eve in their commission of original sin and Milton's Lucifer in his rebellion against Divine sovereignty. Aquinas thinks that human beings do sometimes act from intentional contempt of God and His law. He is, however, committed to the view that pride is a pervasive moral phenomenon, found in a wide variety of faulty human acts.²⁰

Pride, Aquinas says, is a failure to subject oneself to God and to the rules He has ordained.²¹ Aquinas thinks that a failure to observe God's commands and a turning away from God toward what Aquinas calls "commutable goods" is the very nature of sin. He therefore thinks that every sin is, in effect, a failure properly to subject oneself to God; he concludes that *every* sin however motivated and whatever its object is, in effect, a sin of pride.

But this account is insufficient for Aquinas's purposes. While it does explain a rather weak way in which pride is present in every sinful act, Aquinas wants an account of pride that has explanatory power, one in which pride explains sinful acts and is not merely shown by them. Some of this explanatory power is provided by Aquinas's account of how pride removes impediments to immoral action. Aquinas thinks that intentional violation of moral

rules requires some explanation. Here, he thinks, pride can have an explanatory role, for among the manifestations of pride is thinking oneself above such rules. Pride can thus remove the impediment to sin posed by a *prima facie* inclination to observe moral rules.

Even this account, however, is not enough. Aquinas thinks that pride is not only present in or explains many sinful acts, but also motivates them. Aquinas's commitment to pride's pervasiveness as a motive therefore requires a more nuanced account, one that will accommodate the Miltonian view of pride but also one which shows how wide a variety of acts pride can lead agents to perform. The key to this account is Aquinas's specification of pride's characteristic motive.

Aquinas argues that the characteristic motive of acts of pride is an undue desire for what he calls "one's own excellence." He does not have in mind an undue desire for one's own perfection or for the fulfillment of one's potential. Rather acts of pride are primarily motivated by an undue desire for *preeminence* or *superiority*. This undue desire for preeminence or superiority can, Aquinas concedes, be accompanied by a contempt for those over whom superiority is sought. This contempt can be for God and His commands; but, Aquinas insists, pride can also engender contempt for other human beings.²² It is, however, crucial to Aquinas's account of pride that contempt, whether for God or man, is not the motive primarily associated with pride. The primary motive remains undue desire for preeminence. To appreciate the variety of acts pride can engender, it is necessary to appreciate the variety of acts one could be led to perform by such a desire. This undue desire can show itself in two ways.

An undue desire for superiority, Aquinas would say, is sometimes a desire for undue superiority, a desire for moral, spiritual or intellectual goods that human beings cannot attain. It is to this undue desire for superiority or preeminence that Aquinas would appeal to explain how acts of pride can be attempts to attain equality with God or to usurp His place: the goods desired are goods that properly belong only to God and it is an essay in usurpation for a human being to desire them for herself. Most often, Aquinas believes, the usurpation of God's place is unintentional and acts attributable to pride are *not* chosen under descriptions that refer to usurpation. They are instead chosen from a desire for the moral, spiritual or intellectual good in question. What makes the consequent acts of pride is that the goods desired are desired as a means to superiority.

Adam and Eve's original sin therefore exemplified extraordinary pride. Adam and Eve, Aquinas says, wanted to be like God inasmuch as they wanted the undue spiritual good of being able to prescribe moral rules for themselves.²³ The extremity of their pride, he thinks, consisted in their *knowingly* trying to be like God. Thus does Aquinas's account enable him to accommo-

date the Miltonian view; thus also does it make of the Miltonian view an extreme and not a typical case of pride.

Pride of this first sort may be accompanied by a contempt for God, since the proud person implicitly denigrates Him in the attempt to make herself in some respect His equal. Just as it is rare for someone knowingly to try to usurp God's place, so it is rare, Aquinas thinks, for someone consciously to hold God in contempt. Indeed his interpretation of the Fall, according to which Adam and Eve wanted to make moral rules for themselves, suggests as much. If they were contemptuous at all, Aquinas's interpretation suggests, their contempt was primarily for God's commands and only secondarily for the God who commanded. And even in Adam and Eve's case, their original sin was motivated not by their contempt, but by desire for their own superiority.

Aquinas also argues that there is a second sort of undue desire for superiority or preeminence, an undue desire to be superior to other human beings in some respect or for the power over others that superiority often confers.²⁴ A vice closely related to pride so understood, Aquinas says, is that of vainglory; the vainglorious person is moved by a desire that others praise and acknowledge her preeminence and power. Aquinas does not, however, think that the objects of vainglory and of this second sort of pride—superiority and power, praise and acknowledgement—are the intended objects of many of the acts properly described as acts of pride or vainglory. Few acts of these vices, Aquinas would say, are chosen from a desire for these objects that the agent herself recognizes. Often acts of pride and vainglory masquerade as acts of other vices—acts of seizing more money than one needs or is one's due, or foolhardy acts on the battlefield. What makes the act in question one of pride or vainglory rather than of injustice, intemperance or rashness is that an undue desire for superiority, power or praise is the appropriate explanation for seeking too much money or taking too many risks in battle. Because people can excel or gain the advantage over others in so many ways and by the use of so many objects from possessions to battlefield victories, pride of the second sort can, like pride of the first sort, lead the proud person to perform any of a variety of sinful acts.

Pride of the second sort, like pride of the first, can be accompanied by contempt. Attempts to secure preeminence over others can be accompanied by contempt for them, contempt for God or contempt for moral rules. But Aquinas thinks that what makes an act one of pride is the role that desire for one's own superiority plays in that act's explanation.

In summary, then, Aquinas therefore argues that in one sense, every sin regardless of agent or motive, is a sin of pride. He further argues that pride is needed to explain someone's knowing violation of a moral rule. And Aquinas argues that, because so many wrong acts can be means to attaining superiority, an undue desire for one's own superiority can motivate an agent

to perform any or many of a wide variety of wrong acts. Indeed Aquinas says that pride can motivate someone to a wrong act of *any* kind.

Despite the fact that pride can explain so wide a variety of human failure, there are classes or “species” into which Aquinas thinks acts of pride can be sorted: imputing to oneself some good one really does not have, reputing oneself to have attained some good on one’s own merits, failing to acknowledge the excellence or help of another in the attainment of some good and seeking to excel others in some material, moral, intellectual or spiritual good that one should have in the same way they do. Aquinas describes these classes of acts rather abstractly, but it is plausible that acts that fall into them are acts one would perform to usurp God’s place, to gain preeminence over others or to assure oneself of one’s own superiority. His description of the classes of acts associated with vainglory is more concrete; he numbers among what he calls the “daughters” of vainglory hypocrisy, discord, contention and pertinacity.

Aquinas’s analysis indicates how pride motivates offenses against God and other human beings. The links he sees among contempt for rules, contempt for God and man, and desire for superiority over either or both suggest the corrosive effects of pride on the passions of the proud person. Certainly contempt for moral rules and a belief that one is above them can lead, not only to their violation, but also to the habit of excusing oneself for the violations. This, in turn, inhibits proper function of the moral sentiments of guilt and shame. Contempt for moral rules can also prevent proper responses to the good works of others that are worthy of admiration; and the habit of excusing oneself for having acted badly makes it more difficult properly to appreciate forgiveness granted by others. Contempt for others distorts the moral sentiments so that sympathy, pity and remorse are not properly felt on the occasions that call for them. Insofar as the proper operation of the moral passions is part of a well-lived human life and contempt born of pride impedes them, pride is a fault both the religious and the non-religious have reason to avoid.

There are several features of Aquinas’s account that are especially worthy of mention.

First, Aquinas thinks that appeal to pride is often required to complete the explanation of wrong action; in the vast majority of such cases, however, the agent believes herself motivated by interests or desires other than those associated with pride and vainglory. Indeed Aquinas might say that pride has so pernicious an effect on human character precisely because it flourishes in the dark, artfully playing a background and supporting role in the performance of wrong actions.

Second, while Aquinas recognizes that acts of pride can be acts directly against God, he also thinks that pride and vainglory engender wrongs done to other human beings—taking too much or credit for too much, slighting

others to seem superior oneself, fighting, cleaving obstinately to one's own opinion from a desire to win an argument. This is as true of pride that contemns God as it is of pride that contemns man.

Third, this rich account of pride suggests ample reason for reckoning pride a vice. Those who do not believe in God will abhor pride because it hurts the proud and carries in its train contempt for one's fellow man. They will see pride as a vice of ambition and domination that impoverishes the emotional life and fathers a number of offenses against other human beings. Those who do believe in God will share these sentiments, but have distinctively religious reasons for wanting pride checked. They will believe that God takes offense at all the wrongs pride engenders and will want to avoid the contempt for God and for His commands that pride sometimes entails. The religious and the non-religious can overlap in their condemnation of pride as Aquinas explicates it, though the religious have additional reasons for curbing that vice.

What I earlier alluded to as the Miltonian picture of pride as willful attempts to usurp God's place has important implications for political theory. That pride so understood is the worst of wrongs is a claim that might seem, and has seemed to many, to stand in no need of justification. And, it might be thought, it is this claim and the Miltonian view of pride that together support Augustine's view that a primary function of political authority is the humbling of those subject to it.

Judith Shklar has argued that political liberalism must reject this Augustinian view of political authority and the claims about pride that support it.²⁵ It is essential to liberalism, she argues, to ignore the deadly sins identified by Patristic and medieval Christianity and to deplore instead the vices she, following Montaigne, dubs "ordinary." Cruelty, treachery, snobbery and betrayal are, she intimates, more ordinary than the deadly sins in three senses. First, they are ubiquitous vices. Everyone can lapse into them because they do not demand the great strength of character that Satan's rebellion required, the knowing defiance of God. Second, they are vices the acts of which are directed against other creatures rather than against the creator. Finally, the claim that the acts these vices engender are wrong requires no justification beyond pointing out that they visit harm on other creatures.

Of the ordinary vices, Shklar argues, cruelty must be reckoned the worst because pain and the fear of pain are the worst harms humans can inflict on each other. Since to be a liberal is to be concerned with the ordinary and not the deadly vices, liberals "put cruelty first," hate it most of all and deny that political authority should be concerned with pride's restraint. Indeed the hatred of cruelty, Shklar argues, provides the most compelling reason to be a liberal for it is definitive of liberal regimes to shun state-sponsored cruelty. On the other hand, she argues, the Christian hatred of pride gives little reason

to endorse a liberal politics: history testifies that those who hate pride and not cruelty most of all often resort to "pious cruelty" to restrain offenses to God.²⁶

Perhaps a novel or film in which characters exemplify pride and vainglory would better bring these vices to life than does Aquinas's discussion of them. Philip Quinn has argued that readers of Albert Camus's *The Fall*, for example, gain direct and vivid acquaintance with pride through the self-revelation of the novel's protagonist, the judge-penitent.²⁷ But if Aquinas's analysis lacks the vividness and impact of a great novel, his discussion of pride, vainglory and their offspring can still do much to refine our moral categories and sharpen our moral perceptions. Certainly his discussion provides a picture of pride that is far more subtly shaded and finely grained than is the Miltonian portrait of that vice that Shklar's argument takes for granted. Indeed the picture of pride Aquinas sketches is of a subject quite "ordinary" in its potential for motivating wrongs done to others.

Pride as Augustine and Aquinas understand it is first of all ordinary in its commonness. It is a vice, they would maintain, that motivates a wide variety of human acts in a wide variety of human beings. The knowing rebellion of Satan may have required extraordinary strength, but the ordinary pride and vainglory of everyday life do not. It is also an ordinary vice in that many acts of pride are acts directed in the first instance against other human beings and not against God. They are often motivated by contempt for other creatures or by a desire for superiority over them. Those who regard harm done to other creatures as *ipso facto* wrong therefore have reason to think pride a vice.

Pride's ordinariness thus far understood does not, however, imply that concern with pride supplements the reasons those who put cruelty first have to be liberals. More important, it does not imply that those who put pride first have, in their abhorrence of pride, some reason to be political liberals. I want now to argue, therefore, that embracing political liberalism in what I have called "maturely pluralistic" societies helps contain or ameliorate the vice of pride. Those who are concerned with pride, whether for religious or secular reasons, have reason to accept liberal constraints on their political argument.

III

Aquinas's Augustinian account of pride, vainglory and the vices associated with each provides a helpful guide to the temptations posed by engagement in any kind of argument. Arguments can, after all, be highly competitive affairs and the winners often enjoy a sense of their own superiority. Sometimes too they enjoy the acknowledgement of their intellectual superiority by the vanquished or their auditors. Undue attachment to these spoils of victory can lead one to argue for the wrong reasons, to endorse bad arguments, to refuse to listen to the interlocutor. This is no doubt why Aquinas numbered

the argumentative vices of contention, discord and pertinacity among the daughters of vainglory.

Temptation can be especially strong in political argument, for the winners of political argument can enjoy rewards that are especially attractive. Among the spoils that go to the victor are political power and acknowledgement of power exercised by oneself or by a group to which one gives allegiance. By moving one to intransigence and pertinacity, undue attachment to these goods can severely hinder the sort of consensus-building that subsequent social cooperation requires.

The restraint demanded by political liberalism is one effective check on these manifestations of pride. Liberal principles of political legitimacy impose restrictions on the reasons that can be offered to justify or advocate the use of public power and do so precisely to foster the civility of argument threatened by unrestrained pride, contentiousness and discord.²⁸ To the extent that simply barring certain reasons from political argument makes that argument more civil, consensus-building is advanced and intransigence and pertinacity are curbed.

An interest in civil political argument motivated by attachment to social goods rather than individual domination provides a reason for restraining pride and endorsing liberalism that anyone can accept, whether Christian or not. It is, however, a reason that should have special purchase on Christians, at least on Christians sympathetic to Augustine's discussions of original sin and its effects. These Christians should, as a result of their sympathy with Augustine, already be sensitive to their own undue attraction to the prospect of dominating others and aware of their need to curb it. Aquinas's treatment of pride brings home the facts that this attraction can subvert any argument and that the goods available in political argument pose a special temptation. Liberalism, insofar as it fosters habitually restrained pursuit of victory in argument, fosters habitual restraints on the desire to dominate others. It should therefore seem especially attractive to Christians Augustinian in their view of original sin.

Moreover, recall that Aquinas's analysis warns us of hypocrisy by including it among the likely consequences of vainglory. That hypocrisy could ultimately be rooted in pride seems a plausible piece of moral psychology. The proud person, Aquinas says, is inclined to attribute to herself goods, including moral goods, that she does not have; the vainglorious person seeks a reputation for goodness of one sort or another. The hypocrite ties pride to vainglory by trying to secure a reputation for qualities pride leads her to affect or exaggerate. The religious hypocrite wants to be known for religious goods—for a sanctity, a closeness to God or a religious uprightness—that she does not possess. Argument, including political argument, provides an occasion for religious hypocrisy by providing the opportunity for seeming to argue

from religious motives that one really does not have or that are not as strong as one would like others to believe. Robert Audi's especially strong form of liberalism forbids political argument from religious motives. Adherence to Audi's liberalism therefore has in its favor that it removes the near occasion of religious hypocrisy. Adherence even to a weaker form of liberalism, one that forbade appeal to religious reasons in political argument, would also remove the occasion of religious hypocrisy since political argument would not afford the opportunity to show allegiance to a religious position.

The disruption of political argument may seem an obvious way in which pride poses political problems; at least it is obvious once Aquinas's association of pride with vainglory and the argumentative vices is before us. There are other areas in which Aquinas's Augustinian account of pride is a more valuable guide because it points out dangers we might have been prone to overlook. It is here that Christians and non-Christians part company, for in what follows I shall be especially concerned with temptations to pride that politics poses for Christians and with the helpfulness of Aquinas's discussion in indicating where those temptations lie.

These dangers arise when Christians engaged in political argument appeal to the whole truth as they see it. They arise, for example, when Christians argue from religious reasons for public policy that they think is required by their Christian commitments, that they think is necessary to make their society a Christian one or one in which they think themselves best able to lead a Christian life. The danger pride poses to such arguments is not only, as in the cases discussed earlier, that it can lead one to continue the argument for the wrong reasons or that argument will break down because of the pride of those involved. Adopting and adducing religious reasons for religiously-inspired political positions can themselves be acts of pride. The Christian and the non-Christian can overlap in or concur on the need to hold pride in check because of its adverse political consequences; the Christian, however, has further religious motivations to restrain her pride since she knows that it offends God.

The first of the species of pride Aquinas distinguishes is that of imputing to oneself goods, especially moral or spiritual goods, that one does not really possess. This species includes, presumably, imputing to oneself moral or spiritual goods that one *cannot* or *ought not* have, but which belong only to God. Such arrogance is clear in the advocacy of perfectionist political projects, projects in which political power would be employed to eradicate sin or to impose on human beings political institutions that their fallen nature makes it impossible to sustain.²⁹ Only God could make the fundamental changes in fallen human nature necessary for the maintenance of these institutions, and it would be an act of pride for human beings to suppose they could do so. Moreover, many defenders of religious liberty have argued that

religious faith is a gift from God and that it cannot be compelled even by political coercion or the threat of repression. It seems to follow from these claims that advocating attempts to coerce belief is an act of pride because it is an attempt—often unwitting—to do what only God can do.

But the advocacy of less radical political programs can also be an act of pride. Those who believe themselves chosen by God as His instruments to purify society or to rid it of features that seem contrary to the demands of Christianity, for example, are sometimes moved to advocate the use of public power to eliminate what they find objectionable. The belief that one has been chosen as a Divine instrument tempts one to think that God has done so because of one's own spiritual worthiness for the purpose, to think that one enjoys special favor with Him or a special proximity to Him. It tempts, that is, to attribute to oneself a spiritual or moral good that one cannot be sure one has and, sometimes, a good that one does not have. Insofar as beliefs and desires connected with these mistaken attributions motivate political advocacy, that advocacy is an act of pride.

A similar invitation to pride lies in the belief that America is a country especially favored by God or one in which the Biblical prophecies concerning Israel are to be fulfilled. These beliefs enjoy some contemporary currency and have a long history in popular American political thought and culture.³⁰ They are beliefs that can and have in the past motivated political advocacy for they can lead and have in the past led some to suppose that they should function as God's instruments to help America fulfill the purposes He has for it. I have already discussed how advocacy motivated by belief that one is God's instrument can be an act of pride.

Finally, determining what policies a well-functioning political society requires is obviously extremely complicated. Drawing from a religiously-based conception of a well-lived human life political values, principles of justice or specific public policies for a society composed in part of those who do not share that religious view is extremely difficult. That difficulty results in part from the fact that drawing such implications requires a significant amount of political theory. Even if one's religious view straightforwardly implies the immorality of acts of a certain kind, for example, a great deal of argument is required to support the conclusion that such acts should be legally prohibited. This argument must take up some of the thorniest questions of political theory: those concerning the nature and functions of law and of political authority.

Political advocacy based solely on one's religious view can be an act of pride if accompanied by failure to acknowledge both one's own fallibility in very difficult matters of political theory and practical politics. Christians who accept a doctrine of the Fall ought to be especially worried about pride of this sort. That doctrine is often taken to imply that human capacity to delib-

erate about moral truth is hindered or impaired, and that self-interest and the desire for power often impede moral reasoning. The more difficult forms of reasoning, about practical politics and other matters far removed from the substance of revelation, might seem to be especially imperiled. In these areas, Christians ought to be most sensitive to their readiness to believe that, far from being corrupted by original sin, they have special facility in political reasoning that absolves them of the need to take seriously the arguments of others. They ought, that is, to be especially sensitive to their propensity to pride in these cases.

I have adduced a number of reasons for thinking that resort to religious grounds in political argument can be an act of pride. I have thereby adduced a number of reasons Christians might have for being political liberals. How compelling those reasons are depends, of course, on whether the political benefits of religiously-based argument outweigh the risk of pride such argument poses. Many Christians, perhaps, believe that the potential results of such political arguments *do* outweigh the attendant dangers. They deem their reliance on religious argument necessary to outlaw abortion and pornography, and to achieve racial and economic justice. These results, they may think, would be so great that they will or should run the risk of pride in order to secure them.

This line of anti-liberal reasoning depends on the supposition that the only arguments available to support the policies Christians favor are religious arguments. It is worth recalling, however, that the political theory of liberal democracy is over three centuries old and has been articulated in an atmosphere of intellectual and political freedom. Indeed this long history of development under reasonably favorable intellectual conditions accounts for the maturity of the pluralism I discussed earlier.

As a result, liberal democratic theory is by now extremely well-developed and contains ample resources for the criticism of extant regimes that purport to realize liberal and democratic ideals. Certainly the theory of liberal democracy has sufficient conceptual resources to criticize institutions and practices of racial injustice. It therefore has sufficient resources on which to base arguments for policies to implement racial equality. Perhaps Rawls's greatest contribution to the political philosophy of liberal democracy is that of drawing out its implications for the just distribution of income and wealth.³¹ Rawls's work thus testifies to the availability of arguments for economic justice that are "internal" to liberal democratic theory. Susan Moller Okin argues that a commitment to liberal democracy has profound implications for the division of labor within the family.³² John Courtney Murray argued that it required public funding of parochial schools.³³

The diverse implications that ideals of liberal democracy have been taken to have holds out the possibility that Christians can mine those ideals for

arguments supporting the public policies they favor. There may be limits to what arguments Christians can find in liberal democratic theory; perhaps arguments for the illegality of all abortions, for example, will not be forthcoming. But given Christian abhorrence of pride, Christians would do better to look for and employ such arguments than to run the risk of pride that religiously-based political argument poses.

IV

I have argued that acts of religiously inspired political advocacy—of the use of political power to coerce belief, to purify society or make it more Christian—are often acts of pride. Liberalism requires limiting the range of values and principles to which political advocacy appeals; compliance with at least some liberal principles of political advocacy would preclude political arguments premised on the purposes God has for America or on His use of some people as instruments in doing His will. Political liberalism therefore prevents acts of pride that take the form of religiously inspired advocacy appealing to such premises.

But can liberalism do more than preclude *acts* of pride? Can it develop habits of mind and sentiment that mollify the vice of pride itself? Liberal democracy fosters citizens' self-assertion and sense of self-worth; that it does so is often thought one of its strengths. The self-assertion and -respect that liberal democracy fosters are sometimes believed to be at odds with the quality of humility. It might therefore seem that humility, the opposite of pride, is a quality of character incompatible with the habits elicited by liberal democracy.

Certainly liberalism is incompatible with habits of servility or excessive acquiescence toward other human beings.³⁴ Countering the pride I located in religiously inspired political advocacy does not, however, require a humility so abject. Rather, such pride could be effectively contained by coming to respect other citizens as *reasonable*: as capable of deliberating well about what conception of a good life to pursue and as capable of participating in political argument and honoring the demands of justice.³⁵ This respect for others as reasonable suffices to contain the pride discussed earlier because the various forms of political advocacy I discussed were all, insofar as they were acts of pride, motivated by the belief in or desire for superiority to citizens who do not share one's religious views. Advocacy of paternalistic policies is motivated in part by the conviction that other citizens cannot determine what is for their own good; other forms of advocacy are motivated by the presumptuous supposition of nearer proximity to God than one's fellow. But there is no reason to think curbing these beliefs and desires requires abject humility before other human beings; their replacement by beliefs and desires associated with respect for other citizens as reasonable would suffice.

To show that liberalism fosters the requisite respect, I borrow arguments from John Rawls.³⁶

The discipline liberalism imposes on political argument requires that someone advocating the use of public power, from whatever motive religious or otherwise, try to cast her arguments in terms that others could accept even without accepting her religious views. This requires an exercise of the moral imagination, an attempt to imagine what it would be like to lack our own religious reasons to accept the position in question. Regular exercise of the moral imagination to ascertain the reasons and motives of another, regularly putting ourselves in another's place, as it were, should over time lead us to an appreciation of others' ability to grasp and act on moral reasons and political convictions. This appreciation, in turn, engenders our respect for other citizens as moral agents capable of moral reasoning; it engenders, that is, our respect for citizens as reasonable.³⁷

More important in the development of respect for other citizens is the reciprocity of liberal political argument. First, if we repeatedly observe that others too observe the strictures of political liberalism, we come to appreciate how others are restraining *themselves* and trying to meet us halfway. When political liberalism is long and generally adhered to, the recognition that others restrain themselves and regard us as reasonable elicits reciprocity on our part; it elicits, that is, our regard for them as reasonable. Second, that others' adherence to political liberalism makes available goods we could not otherwise realize reinforces our respect and good will toward them. Civility of argument and the cooperation civility makes possible are important elements of the common good that would be very difficult to attain without the adherence of all to the restraints liberalism imposes on political advocacy. Seeing that others work to maintain the conditions of cooperation heightens our regard for them as capable of reasonable participation in political argument. Seeing that they make possible some goods of which we avail ourselves elicits or heightens our good will.

I have argued that dispositions associated with and motivating some acts of pride can be ameliorated by the cultivation of respect for one's fellow citizens as reasonable. I have further argued that the habit of respect for others develops with continued and general adherence to political liberalism. But while this respect may restrain pride, is it fittingly described as part of the humility to which Christians aspire?

Christians must conclude that Augustinian liberalism is a politics with limited ambitions. It does not claim that a liberal political regime can replace pride with truly Christian humility before God. Nor does it claim that the mutual respect liberalism engenders comes to fruition in a Christian love of neighbor. It aims only at inculcating habits that hold pride and contempt in check. Christians who want more humility than this must seek it in the

revelation of Divine greatness and in the practices of their churches. Thus Augustinian liberalism at best reinforces or prepares the way for the humility Christians must learn elsewhere. Its limited ambitions should not, however, be held against it, for in this Augustinian liberalism is consonant with Augustine's own views. No one was more pessimistic than Augustine about reliance on political authority to do more than hold pride in check or to foster genuine moral improvement.³⁸

Non-Christians and the non-religious too will find Augustinian liberalism limited in its ambitions. I have employed Rawlsian arguments to claim that liberalism checks pride by fostering mutual respect. I have not, however, argued for Rawlsian liberalism nor have I claimed that curbing pride requires the high level of mutual respect that would characterize Rawls's well-ordered society or Kant's realm of ends.

I have expressed disagreement with Judith Shklar on a number of points. It might now be helpful to indicate a point on which we concur. Shklar's defense of liberalism rests on her argument that the habits of liberalism best discipline our indulgence in the ordinary vices, especially cruelty. Hers is a liberalism of limited moral aspirations that focuses on the evils restrained rather than on the virtues elicited. In this I have followed her lead, arguing that political liberalism can hold pride in check even if it cannot foster true humility. It is a liberalism that should appeal to all who reckon pride a vice, but should have special appeal to Christians, who follow Augustine in abhorring it most of all.

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NOTES

1. I am twice grateful to Phil Quinn for illuminating comments on two very different drafts. Thanks also to the Center for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Notre Dame for the opportunity to work on the paper in so stimulating and congenial an environment.

2. On this see Peter Brown, "St. Augustine's Attitude to Religious Coercion," *Journal of Roman Studies* liv (1964), pp. 107-16.

3. For the primary of these liberties, see John Rawls, "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 7 (1987): pp. 1-25, p. 18, note 27; for liberalism as a more general commitment to the broadest scope of personal liberty, see Judith Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), ed. Nancy Rosenblum, pp. 21-38.

4. The adjective "political" is employed in deference to John Rawls's distinction between political and comprehensive liberalism. Briefly put, political liberalism specifies ideals, values and obligations that apply to the political domain: it specifies, for example, ideals, values and obligations associated with good citizenship, political advocacy and

distributive justice in a liberal society. Comprehensive liberalism, by contrast, attempts to found these ideals, values and obligations in a liberal moral theory that is more comprehensive in scope: a theory of moral obligation generally, for example. Rawls's is a theory of political liberalism; Kant's and Mill's are theories of comprehensive liberalism. See Rawls, "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus," p. 9. From now on I will use "liberalism" and "political liberalism," "liberal" and "political liberal," interchangeably.

5. The notion of "public power" is no doubt difficult to specify precisely, as the arguments of John Stuart Mill *On Liberty*, chapter 3 make amply clear. For present purposes, I take the notion of an exercise of public power to be exhausted by the action of the state, and by its functionaries and office-holders in their official capacities.

6. Jeremy Waldron, "Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 37 (1987), pp. 127-50, p. 149. The family analogy I employ also appears in Waldron's piece.

7. David Lyons, *Ethics and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 190.

8. See John Rawls, "The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus," *New York University Law Review* 64 (1989) pp. 233-55, especially pp. 242ff. Rawls is concerned primarily with exercises of power that impinge on what he calls "constitutional essentials."

9. Robert Audi, "The Separation of Church and State and the Obligations of Citizenship," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 18 (1989), pp. 259-96; "secular reason" is defined at p. 278.

10. Thus Murray thought that religious diversity could be significantly narrowed and that Americans, at least, could achieve consensus on some propositions of natural theology. See John Courtney Murray, S.J. *We Hold These Truths* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), p. 30 for approval of Supreme Court decisions in which God's existence is affirmed, pp. 125ff. for the prospects of narrowing religious pluralism and p. 328 for a brief discussion of natural theology.

11. Rawls, *ibid.*

12. Seyla Benhabib, "Liberal Dialogue Versus a Critical Theory of Discursive Legitimacy," in Rosenblum, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-56, especially pp. 146-49. I rely on Benhabib's very interesting essay for my characterization of Ackerman's position.

13. Michael Walzer's perceptive remark that social criticism is naught but the educated cousin of common complaint should suffice to answer those who doubt that graffiti can be a form of political advocacy.

14. See, for example, Sanford Levinson, "The Confrontation of Religious Faith and Civil Religion: Catholics Becoming Justices," *DePaul Law Review* 39 (1990), pp. 1047-82; also Lawrence B. Solum, "Faith and Justice," *ibid.*, pp. 1083-1106.

15. See Paul J. Weithman, "The Separation of Church and State: Some Questions for Prof. Audi," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20 (1991).

16. See Eugene TeSelle, "Toward an Augustinian Politics," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* (1986), pp. 87-108 for a helpful but concise introduction to Augustine's political theory.

17. See Augustine *City of God*, Book 19, chapters 14 and 15; also *Ennarationes in Psalmos*, p. 124, paragraphs 7-8. Also Peter Brown, "St. Augustine" in *Trends in Medieval Political Thought* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), ed. Smalley, p. 5.

18. Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).
19. Augustine's views on pride are well laid out and documented in Oliver O'Donovan *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), chapter 4.
20. Both Aquinas and Augustine are committed to pride's ubiquity and explanatory power by their fidelity to a Biblical text "The beginning of all sin is pride," *Ecclesiasticus* 10:15; see O'Donovan, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
21. The following discussion of Aquinas on pride relies most heavily on his *Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo*, question 8, especially articles 2 and 3. His discussion of pride in the *Summa Theologiae*, at II-II, p. 162, is also very instructive.
22. "Ad quantum dicendum quod superbia secundum quod importat Dei contemptum secundum affectum, non potest esse peccatum generale; immo etiam est specialius quam superbia secundum quod significat appetitum perversae excellentiae: potest enim esse appetitus perversae excellentiae non solum si contemnatur Deus, sed etiam si contemnatur homo" *de Malo* 8, 2 ad 4.
23. "Sed primus homo peccavit principaliter appetendo similitudinem Dei quantum ad scientiam boni et mali, sicut serpens ei suggestit: ut scilicet per virtutem propriae naturae determinaret sibi quid esset bonum et quid malum ad agendum[.]" *Summa Theologiae* II-II, p. 163, 2.
24. Thus does Aquinas accommodate the *libido dominandi* that Augustine associates with pride; see Herbert Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 48-49.
25. My characterization of Shklar's views draws on her "Liberalism of Fear" and on her *Ordinary Vices*, pp. 1-15 and 226-49.
26. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, p. 240.
27. Philip Quinn, "Hell in Amsterdam: Reflections on Camus's *The Fall*," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, volume 16 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), ed. French, Uehling and Wettstein.
28. For the importance of civility, see Audi, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-83; Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 297.
29. Aquinas seems to think that commonality of property would be such a political institution, though he thinks it can be sustained as an institution of ecclesiastical communities; see *Summa Theologiae* II-II, p. 66, 2 for its impossibility as a political institution.
30. For a contemporary example, see the passage quoted at Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 27; for historical examples and discussion, see Mark Noll, *One Nation Under God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), pp. 7-8, also his "The United States as a Biblical Nation" in *The Bible in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), ed. Hatch and Noll, pp. 39-58.
31. For discussion of Rawls's difference principle as a natural extension of democratic ideals, see Joshua Cohen, "Democratic Equality," *Ethics* 99 (1989), pp. 727-51, pp. 728-31.
32. Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).
33. John Courtney Murray "Is It Justice? The School Question Today," *op. cit.*, pp. 143-54.

34. See Michael Walzer, *Radical Principles* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), pp. 14-15 for a brief but eloquent statement.

35. That is, such pride could be effectively contained by coming to respect other citizens as capable of exercising the two moral powers Rawls specifies; see his *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 12. I use "reasonable" to include both moral powers while for Rawls it names only the latter.

36. The arguments of the next paragraphs draw heavily on Rawls, "Idea of an Overlapping Consensus," pp. 20-21 as well as on unpublished writings that Prof. Rawls has graciously made available. My discussion also presupposes the principles of reasonable moral psychology at "Idea of an Overlapping Consensus," p. 22.

37. In this argument and that of the next paragraph, the reasons for addressing my arguments to societies I called "maturely pluralistic" should be clear. Without the rights and liberties entailed by *mature* pluralism, those who do not share the dominant religious view may not have the opportunity to develop their capacity sufficiently to warrant the appreciation on which my arguments rely.

38. See, for example, the arguments of *City of God*, Book 19, chapter 17. There Augustine says that political authority aims only at what he calls "earthly peace" and that Christians can expect authority to do no more; these claims are repeated near the end of chapter 26 of the same book. Suggestive but not conclusive in this connection are Augustine's remark in chapter 25 that true virtue is available only where the true God is worshipped and his claim in chapter 27 that true peace, to which true justice "is related" cannot be had in this life. Also important is Augustine's sustained attack on Cicero's claim that republican Rome depended upon and elicited the virtues from her citizens; the attack culminates in Book 2, chapter 21.