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INTRODUCTION

Beyond Pessimism

If St. Augustine were to appear today and enjoy as little authority as his modern defenders he would not accomplish anything.

-BLAISE PASCAL, PENSÉES, §5171

AUGUSTINE LOVED MOSAICS. A popular form of Roman art in North Africa, mosaics adorned the homes of wealthy citizens and lined the floors of many churches, including Augustine's basilica in Hippo.² In an early dialogue, Augustine adopts the mosaic as a metaphor for the universe, admonishing those whose fixation on evil blinds them to the beauty of the larger pattern. These cynics are like art critics who, "confined to surveying a single section of a mosaic floor, looked at it too closely, and then blamed the artisan for being ignorant of order and composition." "In reality," Augustine writes, "it is [the viewer] himself who, in concentrating on an apparently disordered variety of small colored cubes, failed to notice the larger mosaic work" and see how the "apparent disorder of the elements really comes together into the unity of a beautiful portrait."⁴

The same selective vision afflicts many interpretations of Augustine in political theory. Fixating on small, colorful fragments of Augustine's texts, particularly his account of evil, most political theorists neglect the larger patterns of the Augustinian mosaic and emphasize one theme: pessimism. John Rawls describes Augustine as one of "the two dark minds in Western thought." Annette Baier numbers him among the "pessimists" about human love. Bertrand Russell suggests that his "ferocious" fixation on sin "made his life stern and his philosophy inhuman." Even Reinhold Niebuhr, who considered Augustine "a more reliable guide than any known thinker," concedes his realism is "excessive."

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Undoubtedly, Augustine provides evidence to support this interpretation. At times, the *Confessions* can read like a personal indictment of sin, and the first ten books of *City of God* prosecute a scathing polemic against imperial Rome, assailing the Romans' "lust for domination" and prideful pursuit of this-worldly glory. Throughout *City of God*, Augustine laments the "miserable condition of this life," bemoaning the "darkness" and "undoubted evils" that accompany political affairs. In Book 22.22–23, he compiles a lengthy list of the "many and grave evils" that beset human affairs, going so far as to describe our condition as "a hell on earth."

If these passages were not enough to justify a "picture of a man pessimistic about politics," historical interpreters have added fuel (and sometimes brimstone) to Augustine's fire. Augustine's emphasis on sin inspired Protestant reformers such as Luther and Calvin, who insisted on the depths of depravity and necessity of grace, as well as Puritan preachers such as Jonathan Edwards, whom one scholar has described as the "American Augustine." According to prominent accounts of these interpreters, Augustine teaches followers to renounce the world and turn toward the City of God. 14

This portrait of pessimism dominates Augustine's reception in contemporary political theory. Hannah Arendt complains that Augustine makes a "desert out of the world," stripping the world of its value and politics of its significance. Following Arendt, Martha Nussbaum argues that Augustine's "perverse" view of sin and "otherworldly" longing for the heavenly city deny the reality of human goodness and discourage this-worldly striving, supplying a "politics of shame" rather than a politics of hope. David Billings concedes that "Augustine's eschatological ends do provide a kind of hope," but it is not "political hope." For Billings, Augustine's hope is not "for the world" but "against" it. 18

Standard accounts tend to affirm this interpretation, which means Augustine is "usually numbered among the pessimists." ¹⁹ If he offers any hope, most assume, it is a hope for heaven, not politics. As Eric Gregory notes, many interpreters cast Augustine as "the patron saint of a dour and otherworldly pessimism which emphasizes the radical limits of politics and virtue as compared to a heavenly city." ²⁰

Many of Augustine's most faithful interpreters have done little to challenge this consensus. Few scholars explore Augustine's account of hope or its implications for politics. ²¹ There is not even an entry for "hope" in a respected Augustinian encyclopedia. ²² One commentator begins his "history of hope" with Aquinas instead of Augustine, ²³ and those who advance an Augustinian

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account of hope rarely cite the Bishop of Hippo, relying as much on Barth, Marcel, and Moltmann as Augustine himself.²⁴

Meanwhile, many of Augustine's defenders appropriate his pessimism to chasten political hope and emphasize the limits of politics. Reinhold Niebuhr draws on Augustine to highlight the realities of evil and resist utopian forms of political idealism.²⁵ Herbert Deane describes Augustine's "grim" pessimism as his most enduring contribution to political theory,²⁶ and Judith Shklar praises Augustine as one of the intellectual "giants" who gave "injustice its due."²⁷ More recently, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Patrick Deneen, and William Galston have cited Augustinian authority to emphasize the limits of politics over its possibilities, while Peter Iver Kaufman has defended "a politically pessimistic Augustine" against more hopeful alternatives.²⁸

While realists parlay Augustine's pessimism to chasten political hope, communitarians summon Augustine to advance an even more radical critique of contemporary politics. Alasdair MacIntyre draws on an Augustinian strand of Thomism to indict contemporary liberalism, arguing that the "Augustinian alternative" eclipses liberal accounts of justice. John Milbank appropriates Augustine's notion of the "two cities" to impugn secularism's "ontology of violence" and encourage Christians to retreat from the diseased body politic into the purifying body of Christ. And Stanley Hauerwas recruits the bishop to cast the church as the "only true political society," a "contrast" society that exposes secular politics as dominating and destructive. Rather than engaging fully in practical politics, Hauerwas counsels Christians to first "be the church," assuming a status as "resident aliens" as they sojourn toward their home in heaven. In the hands of defenders as well as detractors, Augustine is presented as a pessimist about this-worldly politics.

I. Why Pessimism?

Accounts of Augustine's pessimism are often fueled by the assumption that, for Augustine, earthly goods, and hence political goods, have little or no value. A central aim of this book is to challenge this assumption about the value of political goods and the pessimism it underwrites. Advancing this alternative account requires analyzing subtler assumptions that inform the prevailing view. Recognizing various methodological temptations can alert us to the interpretative ruts that can seduce all of us who read Augustine in the wake of this tradition.

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Historical Context

The historical context of Augustine's most influential political interpreters may help to explain their emphasis on his pessimism. Following World Wars I and II, the Holocaust, and the Gulag, in the midst of what Isaiah Berlin describes as the "most terrible century in Western history," it is no surprise that twentieth-century political theorists find Augustine most useful for thinking about sin, evil, and domination.³³

John Rawls, who finished his senior thesis in December 1942—just months before he enlisted as a soldier in World War II—makes use of Augustine to highlight the evils of the age. Noting that Augustine is "always acute in his analysis of pride," Rawls draws on Augustinian insights to diagnose the "egotism" of Nazism, which he describes as "pride in its most demonic form." ³⁴

Augustinian interpreters with Jewish and European roots were particularly influenced by the horrors of concentration camps, genocide, and war. As a Jewish scholar who escaped Nazi Germany while threatened with arrest, Arendt was deeply affected by both world wars and the Holocaust, ³⁵ as was Judith Shklar, a refugee of the Holocaust. ³⁶ Given their personal experiences and intellectual context, it is easy to see why Arendt and Shklar draw on Augustinian ideas to highlight the depth of evil and injustice. ³⁷ As Arendt wrote in 1954, Augustine is "the one great thinker who lived in a period in which, in some respects, resembled our own more than any other in recorded history, and who in addition wrote under the full impact of a catastrophic end which perhaps resembles the end to which we have come." ³⁸

A year earlier in 1953, Reinhold Niebuhr published his famous essay "Augustine's Political Realism," which is still one of the most influential sources for understanding Augustine's political theory. ³⁹ Describing Augustine as "the first great 'realist' in Western history," Niebuhr argues that Augustine's vision of the earthly city and "biblical" view of "human selfhood" highlight the distorting influence of "pride" and the "social factions, tensions, and competitions which we know to be well-nigh universal on every level of community." ⁴⁰ Ultimately, Niebuhr concludes that "[a] generation which finds its communities imperiled and in decay . . . might well take counsel of Augustine in solving its perplexities."

The influence of historical context is even more explicit in Herbert Deane's *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, published in 1963, which is perhaps the most influential interpretation of Augustine within political theory. ⁴² "In our own century," Deane writes, "when, once more, men have been

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compelled to recognize the almost incredible brutalities of which human beings are capable, especially when they struggle for political power and military domination, it is no accident that Augustinian pessimism and realism have enjoyed a considerable revival among both theologians and secular thinkers."⁴³ For Deane, an awareness of how "pride" and the "more obvious vices of avarice, lust for domination, and hatred, can lead men and nations to perpetrate enormous crimes" explains "why pessimistic analysts of human nature and of society and politics have received increasing attention during the last two decades, and why Augustine's views are entitled to our serious consideration."⁴⁴

Selective Interpretations

This historical context informed interpreters' selective focus on passages that emphasize evil, sin, and self-interest. In Augustine's case, textual selectivity is understandable, even inevitable. ⁴⁵ After all, Augustine composed 113 books, hundreds of letters, and thousands of sermons, leaving a total of five million words that, as one scholar calculated, equals "a three-hundred page printed book every year for almost forty years." ⁴⁶ Even Augustine's first biographer, Possidius, notes his friend's prodigious output: "As for all that he dictated and published, and all the debates in the cathedral that were taken down and revised . . . there are so many that there is hardly a student who has been able to read and get acquainted with them all." ⁴⁷ Almost two hundred years later, Isidore of Seville insisted that anyone claiming to have read all of Augustine's works was lying. ⁴⁸

Given the volume of Augustine's corpus, political theorists tend to focus on *City of God*, which many assume, with Arendt, to be Augustine's "only political treatise." Yet *City of God* is almost 1,200 pages, and it is not simply "political." The vast majority of Augustine's magnum opus is focused on historical and theological topics that may seem irrelevant to modern political interpreters. As a result, political theorists typically focus on selected passages, what Jean Bethke Elshtain describes as "Augustine Lite." Most concentrate on Book 19, the "locus classicus of political Augustinianism." Here, Augustine describes the "great evils" of the earthly city, laments the realities of war and limits of peace, and offers his alternative definition of a commonwealth. Book 19 provides a useful "microcosm of Augustine's social thought," and, at just over fifty pages, it is ideal reading for an introductory course in political theory. While Book 19 includes some of Augustine's most constructive

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theorizing about politics, however, a narrow focus on the darker and more cautionary passages can license an exaggerated emphasis on Augustine's pessimism and ignore how his more theological texts shape, qualify, and amplify his political ideas. ⁵⁵ This neglect is particularly relevant for his account of hope, which is scattered throughout sermons, commentaries, and treatises rarely read or analyzed in political theory. If interpreters focus on Book 19 of *City of God* and neglect these more theological texts, it is easy to see why they think Augustine is a pessimist.

Recently, a handful of scholars in theology and religious studies have high-lighted the moral and political importance of Augustine's sermons and letters, uncovering a more complex, subtle, and interesting portrait than the one associated with more systematic treatises. The sermons and letters provide a glimpse of the bishop addressing diverse audiences with different modes of argument and authority, applying his ideas discriminately to concrete cases, and advising audiences in ways that are attuned to their specific roles, needs, and circumstances. These texts reveal how Augustine's historical, social, and theological contexts shape his moral and political vision and illuminate the conceptual, interpretative, and political resources that more holistic readings make available, particularly for his account of hope.

Disciplinary Specialization

Unfortunately, recent work on Augustine's sermons, letters, and theological treatises by scholars in theology and religious studies has not yet been taken up in political theory, which points to another feature of modern academic life that feeds selective interpretations: disciplinary specialization. Many political theorists look only to Book 19 because they assume that Augustine's "political theory" can be isolated from his larger theological purposes and that any consideration of his theology belongs properly to the disciplines of theology and religious studies rather than political science. But Augustine lived in an age before academic specialization. His views on politics cannot be easily excised from his reflections on religion, ethics, and theology. Contemporary accounts that ignore this intersection tend to furnish distorted and decontextualized interpretations that obscure how Augustine's more "theological" texts inform his "political" thought. 59

Disciplinary boundaries also lead political theorists to overlook relevant secondary scholarship. Over the last twenty years, scholars in theology and religious studies have inaugurated a renaissance in Augustinian studies,

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producing a spate of new books analyzing Augustine's moral and political thought. But the Augustinian moment is only beginning in political theory. With some notable exceptions, ⁶⁰ there have been few book-length treatments of Augustine within political theory in the last three decades. Recommended reading lists at top PhD programs and introductory chapters in textbooks still draw heavily from the work of Niebuhr and Deane in the 1950s and 1960s, leaving many interpretations outdated and devoid of recent contributions from other disciplines. ⁶¹ As a result, pessimistic interpretations continue to dominate the field.

A Lutheran Lens

Finally, and perhaps most subtly, most political theorists tend to interpret Augustine directly or indirectly through a Lutheran lens. Luther drew heavily upon Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings regarding the depth of human sin and necessity of God's grace, central themes in the Reformer's critique of worksrighteousness and doctrine of salvation by grace alone. Because of Luther's extensive influence, this selective interpretation informed many accounts of Augustine in the early modern period and beyond, especially within the Protestant tradition. Whether or not these later interpretations accurately reflect Luther's, they had the effect of hardening a picture of Augustine as a pessimist about human sin, agency, and politics. Salvation in the salvation in the effect of hardening a picture of Augustine as a pessimist about human sin, agency, and politics.

Scholars have traced the influence of this "lopsided Augustinianism"⁶⁴ or "hyper-Augustinianism"⁶⁵ in modern theology, philosophy, and political thought, highlighting how a Lutheran skepticism toward pagan virtue and emphasis on human depravity informed later thinkers. The legacy of "hyper-Augustinianism" also extends into contemporary political theory. It is striking to consider how many of Augustine's most influential political interpreters are shaped by Lutheran sources. ⁶⁶

Arendt wrote her dissertation on Augustine in Germany in the early twentieth century when Lutheran influences were pervasive. While she mentions Luther only in passing in her dissertation, she makes the connection more explicit in a short essay on the 1,500th anniversary of Augustine's death in 1930, a year after she submitted her dissertation. ⁶⁷ There, she reclaims Augustine for a Protestant tradition in which he remains "largely forgotten." Noting how Luther "appealed to Augustine's authority and felt himself to be following in Augustine's footsteps," Arendt highlights how Luther's Augustinianism shaped Protestantism. ⁶⁹

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Nussbaum's Lutheran reading of Augustine emerges more indirectly through the secondary sources she cites. In addition to relying on Arendt, Nussbaum derives several criticisms from Nietzsche's scathing attack on Christianity, which, notably, targeted a Lutheran strand of Augustinian Christianity that emphasized human sin and divine grace. Nietzsche repeatedly associates Augustine with Luther and describes Augustine as the archetype of a "vulgarized Platonism" that devalues the world in pursuit of otherworldly aims. In similar fashion, Nussbaum cites Nietzsche's critique of Platonism just before criticizing Augustine's form of Christian Platonism. Elsewhere, she quotes Nietzsche to argue that an Augustinian "[1] onging for the other world puts people to sleep in this world." Nussbaum's Augustine is refracted through Nietzsche's Lutheran lens.

Niebuhr inherits his Lutheran commitments more directly. He grew up in the German Evangelical Synod of North America, a Christian denomination that combined Lutheran and Reformed theology. 74 Raised by a father who was a prominent Synod pastor and a mother who was the daughter of a Synod missionary, Niebuhr attended a Synod elementary school and a Synod boarding school for part of high school, graduated from the denomination's seminary, and later served as the pastor of Synod congregations. 75 Once he began teaching at Union Theological Seminary in 1928, Luther's influence became more pronounced in his theological vision and textual interpretation, including of Augustine.⁷⁶ Niebuhr was especially drawn to Lutheran understandings of sin and grace but not the Reformer's approach to politics.⁷⁷ In several works, he notes similarities between Augustine's and Luther's Christian realism, observing that both were "too consistent to give a true picture of either human nature or the human community" and thus generated a sense of "defeatism" and "despair" about the world. 78 Niebuhr criticizes Augustine and Luther for their overemphasis on sin and dualistic accounts of love, which, in Augustine's case, Niebuhr attributes to Neoplatonic influences. 79 Notably, Niebuhr's critique of Augustine's Neoplatonism is influenced heavily by Anders Nygren, a Lutheran theologian and bishop whose influential book *Agape and Eros* targets Augustine's account of love. 80 Both Niebuhr's religious background and theological sources shaped his desire to resist what Robin Lovin describes as the "consistent pessimism of Augustinian-Lutheran theology."81

While John Rawls grew up in the Episcopal Church and even considered attending seminary, 82 his account of Augustine is shaped significantly by Lutheran sources. 83 Among the "chief sources" of his senior thesis, Rawls lists Luther just under the Bible, followed by Emil Brunner, a neoorthodox

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Reformed theologian with strong Lutheran tendencies; the philosopher Philip Leon; Niebuhr; and Nygren.⁸⁴ It is no surprise that Rawls emphasizes the aspects of Augustine most attractive to Lutherans, including a conception of sin as a form of "pride," a "more pessimistic view of human nature," an anti-Pelagian emphasis on grace, and a conception of justification by faith alone.⁸⁵ Rawls's Lutheran inheritance informs also his criticisms of Augustine, which draw heavily on the work of Brunner, the theologian he "learned the most from," and Nygren's *Agape and Eros*, to which is he "very much indebted."⁸⁶

Similarly, Herbert Deane compares Augustine's "somber and pessimistic portrait" of "fallen man" to the "views of human nature expressed by his followers at the time of the Reformation, Luther and Calvin, and by Machiavelli and Hobbes." Deane emphasizes how Luther and other modern thinkers revived an Augustinian "tradition of political realism" that attends to the "darker aspects of political life." For Deane, the imprint is unmistakable: "The Lutheran and Calvinist views of human nature and of political authority carry clear marks of their Augustinian origin." Given Deane's influence in contemporary political theory, his Luther-informed view of Augustine's "grim realism" has become a filter through which much of Augustine's thought is read. On the political stread of the political stread.

If this Lutheran reading affects the content of prevailing interpretations, it may also shape their underlying interpretative method.⁹¹ A Lutheran view of justification by faith alone prioritizes the intellectual content of belief: having faith becomes less about practicing certain liturgies and rituals and more about possessing the proper set of beliefs about God, Christ, and salvation. Thus, when Luther and his followers draw on Augustine to support their Protestant view, they focus primarily on Augustine's theological doctrines and utterances and downplay his implicit rhetorical and philosophical practices, which often owe as much to pagan philosophers as to Christian theologians. This Lutheran emphasis on orthodoxy (right belief) rather than orthopraxy (right practice) may inform methods of textual interpretation. Eschewing the idea that ordinary believers need priests to interpret scripture authoritatively, many Protestant Reformers held that the truths of sacred texts are accessible to any person who can read or hear them. In some cases, this view may fuel a methodological assumption that texts have a literal meaning that can be discerned through a direct and straightforward reading, which can cause a text's rhetorical, pedagogical, or contextual features to fall out of view.

This way of reading is especially problematic for understanding Augustine's "pessimistic" passages, which, I will argue in chapters 6 and 7, should not

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be taken simply as literal utterances of Augustine's doctrinal views but as rhetorical exercises intended to shape the character of his audiences. There, I attribute the tendency to reduce texts to their propositional content primarily to dominant modes of interpretation in modern philosophy, but a Lutheran framework of interpretation may reinforce this approach, particularly when combined with early modern skepticism toward rhetoric and an Enlightenment focus on the propositional content of authors' intended meanings. 92

II. Toward an Augustinian Account of Hope

In what follows, I develop an alternative interpretation that unsettles these common ways of reading—or misreading—Augustine as a pessimist. Situating Augustine's thought within his historical, rhetorical, and religious contexts and gleaning insights from treatises, sermons, and letters often neglected in political theory, I recover Augustine's conception of hope as a virtue that finds a way between vices of presumption and despair and trouble the simplistic dichotomy between optimism and pessimism often imposed on his thought. By offering a nuanced account of this virtue, I seek to make a novel contribution to Augustinian studies while illuminating how interdisciplinary engagement across the humanities can inform our understanding of Augustine. In particular, I lift new research from religious studies, theology, philosophy, rhetoric, and classics into political theory to highlight its relevance for contemporary politics. 93 I also amplify and extend these interpretations in new and politically relevant ways by integrating resources from political theory to advance original accounts of Augustinian concepts that have long been misconstrued, obscured, or ignored.

This interdisciplinary integration offers several advantages. First, it furnishes a more faithful and holistic account of Augustine's political thought, which he never considered to be separate from his reflections on religion, ethics, and theology. A central claim of this book is that decontextualized interpretations are partly responsible for the distorted portraits that prevail in political theory. Situating Augustine within his historical, political, rhetorical, and religious contexts chastens temptations toward reductionism. 94

Second, careful attention to Augustine's more theological texts and contexts reveals how he develops, refines, and extends key political concepts in texts rarely read in political theory. Expanding the range of relevant texts is especially important for recovering Augustine's account of hope, which is developed in less familiar sermons, letters, and treatises. An interdisciplinary

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engagement with these texts can both broaden our understanding of Augustinian hope and uncover resources that can enrich the theory and practice of political hope in our time.

Finally, attending to Augustine's religious commitments can enable critical engagement with Augustinians on their own terms. In particular, adducing distinctively Augustinian reasons for citizens to engage in public life and seek common objects of hope with diverse citizens can deflate critiques from communitarians such as Milbank and Hauerwas who claim Augustinian authority to indict contemporary democracy. Whether intentionally or not, these influential thinkers may have fueled much of the withdrawal and resentment common among some religious citizens with Augustinian sympathies. ⁹⁵ An alternative interpretation can show these citizens that they need not forfeit their religious commitments to participate in public life. Rather, engagement in public life can provide opportunities for citizens to develop and exercise virtues in ways that can express and even deepen their faith. ⁹⁶

From the opposite angle, attending carefully to Augustine's moral and theological commitments can help secular political theorists see that Augustinianism need not license otherworldly escape or political passivity. A rich engagement with Augustine's political thought can instead highlight important points of convergence among diverse scholars and citizens, both religious and secular. Such convergence is particularly important in a context where much of the resentment toward secular political theory has emerged from critics claiming Augustinian authority. An account that highlights sources of common ground has the potential to reduce resentment and unite citizens around common hopes.

Augustine's political thought, of course, does not map neatly onto contemporary categories. ⁹⁷ Augustine was not a democrat, much less a liberal or radical one. ⁹⁸ He never explicitly advocated a democratic regime, and as a citizen of the Roman Empire, he might have doubted that the large-scale transformation of political institutions was possible. ⁹⁹ Although he had views on which kinds of laws and institutions were just or unjust and sometimes made efforts to change the laws or moderate their enforcement, ¹⁰⁰ he focused his efforts more on transforming the character of leaders and citizens than on reforming the institutions of government. ¹⁰¹ He saw reordering the loves and hopes of citizens as fundamental for the work of forming and reforming institutions. ¹⁰²

Augustine also held beliefs and accepted practices that I find deeply disturbing. He held patriarchal views about women.¹⁰³ He defended the use of coercion to compel religious dissenters to return to orthodoxy as understood

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by the Catholic Church. ¹⁰⁴ He not only accepted the institution of slavery but also used it as a metaphor to describe human beings' relation to God. ¹⁰⁵ In recent and ongoing work, scholars are interrogating, contextualizing, and evaluating Augustine's positions and legacy on these and related issues. ¹⁰⁶ This important work will generate critical debates about how we understand Augustine in his historical context and how contemporary thinkers might appropriate, criticize, or resist his ideas in our modern context. As this work continues to emerge, it will be vital to consider how it shapes our understanding of Augustine's political thought and its relevance for contemporary politics.

This book is concerned with somewhat different problems in the ideological appropriation of Augustine, problems that have less to do with his complicity in structural injustice than with his alleged pessimism regarding politics. "Augustinian pessimism" is a major ideological option in recent political thought. Its defenders have largely neglected the issue of complicity, but many of them have projected their own assumptions and concerns onto his writings anachronistically and then drawn dubious conclusions about the use of force and the limits of politics. 107 Meanwhile, assuming that the pessimists have Augustine right, his detractors have, understandably, dismissed him as a resource for contemporary political theory. I claim that Augustine did not actually encourage political pessimism or passivity. In his work as bishop, theologian, and citizen, he advocated and modeled engagement in public life, frequently collaborating with other citizens, pastors, and political leaders to reduce poverty, fight injustice, and resist domination by wealthy and powerful elites. 108 Of course, his efforts to preserve freedom, equality, and community fall short of contemporary civic ideals and modern assumptions about the possibility of systematic change. But understanding his political ideas and example in his historical context makes it harder for contemporary interpreters to parlay his "pessimism" in ours. Attending to some of the conceptual and contextual complexities of Augustine's political thought illuminates a more hopeful, this-worldly Augustine who encourages diverse citizens to share common objects of hope, even as they cast their ultimate hopes on different horizons.

To advance this account, part I, "The Virtue of Hope," specifies Augustine's understanding of hope's proper objects and grounds. In his most systematic discussion in the *Enchiridion*, a "handbook" on faith, hope, and love, Augustine examines the relations among these concepts before offering a more detailed exposition of each. ¹⁰⁹ In chapter 1, I follow his lead, reconstructing his grammar of hope by considering its relations to faith and love. By explicating Augustine's implicit distinctions and supplementing the *Enchiridion*'s analysis

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with insights from sermons and commentaries, I show how faith supplies hope with grounds for belief, while love confers the motivating power that propels hope's pursuit. Against critics who reduce hope to either faith or love, I highlight why hope remains conceptually distinct and functionally necessary: hope supplements faith with motivation and provides love with the resolve needed to endure time's difficulties and delays.

Chapters 2 and 3 consider the relationship between hope and love to illuminate the proper objects of hope and challenge political interpreters who dismiss Augustinian hope as otherworldly. Since many of these criticisms emerge from anxieties about Augustine's "order of love," chapter 2 draws on research in theology and religious studies to offer a more subtle interpretation that encourages love for temporal goods as long as it is "rightly ordered." Chapter 3 applies this order of love to reconstruct Augustine's implicit "order of hope." Gleaning insights from neglected texts, I argue that Augustine allows a robust hope for temporal goods as long as it is rightly ordered and avoids opposing forms of disorder—the vices of presumption and despair. Since the order of hope has gone unnoticed by contemporary interpreters, this account seeks to make a novel contribution to Augustinian studies while providing a useful way to conceptualize the relationship between proximate and ultimate objects of hope. I also highlight the moral, spiritual, and social practices that Augustine deems necessary to cultivate this virtue and resist its corresponding vices.

If chapters 2 and 3 analyze hope's objects, the next two chapters consider its grounds. For Augustine, as for Paul, faith supplies the "substance of things hoped for, the conviction of things that are not seen." In chapter 4, I survey various meanings of faith in Augustine's works and examine his account of reason and authority as the dual bases of faith. Drawing on contemporary epistemology and philosophy of religion, I show that Augustine's reasoning is often characterized by a "default and challenge" structure that allows belief or trust in an authority unless or until there are sufficient reasons to abandon or adapt it. This underappreciated aspect of Augustine's account provides a helpful conceptual framework for understanding the grounds of faith and, by extension, the grounds of hope, which are the subject of chapter 5. There, I draw on Augustine's account of faith to reconstruct the grounds of hope and show how he affirms the legitimacy of hoping in both God and neighbor to achieve future goods. For Augustine, hope typically involves hoping *in* another to attain what we hope *for*. 111

Part II, "The Rhetoric of Hope," extends this analysis by elevating an undervalued aspect of Augustine's life and work: his training as a rhetorician.

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Situating his work within an ancient tradition of philosophy as a "way of life," 112 chapter 6 illuminates how he employs rhetoric both to "instruct" and "encourage" audiences, an aspect of his texts often missed by political interpreters. To illustrate, I focus on the pedagogical purposes of Augustine's most rhetorical texts, his sermons to the people. Applying research in classics, theology, philosophy, rhetoric, and religious studies to his homilies on hope, I explore how his sermons make moral and civic education accessible to those who had been denied access to elite institutions in the Roman Empire. Situating Augustine's sermons within his rhetorical, political, and pedagogical contexts not only deflates concerns about his otherworldly rhetoric but also reveals his homilies as strikingly egalitarian pedagogies of hope.

Lest interpreters assume that Augustine confines his use of rhetoric to his sermons, chapter 7 shows how he employs similar pedagogical strategies in his most overtly political work, *City of God*. Taking up a passage from Book 22 frequently cited as evidence of Augustine's pessimism, I argue that this passage should instead be interpreted as a moral and spiritual exercise of hope, one that uses intentional rhetoric and a default and challenge structure of reasoning to help readers resist presumption and despair. Reading Augustine rhetorically affords a more nuanced vision of the *City of God*, including its infamous account of evil in Book 19.

Part III, "The Politics of Hope," considers whether and how distinctly political goods can be proper objects of Augustinian hope. Against those who assume that hope for the heavenly city is otherworldly and antipolitical, chapter 8 shows how Augustine encourages diverse citizens to share common objects of hope in the "secular age." Against Augustinian realists who defer the eschaton to an indefinite future and Augustinian communitarians who confine the heavenly city to the institutional church, I argue that Augustine counsels diverse citizens to seek the shared goods of the commonwealth, especially civic peace. I conclude by examining how Augustine's emphasis on common objects of hope offers resources for political deliberation in the face of disagreement and alerts citizens to the temptations that accompany the pursuit of common goods.

Chapter 9 explores how Augustine exemplifies political hope in his own life. Drawing on his correspondence with Roman officials, Christian bishops, and personal acquaintances, I argue that Augustine's letters reveal a bishop committed to active citizenship in the Roman Empire, one who often uses his persuasive skills, political influence, and ecclesial connections to advise political leaders and advocate on behalf of society's most vulnerable people,

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including those who were poor, imprisoned, and enslaved. Considering Augustine's example of citizenship casts new light on his political thought and challenges those who summon his authority to recommend worldly withdrawal or ecclesial isolationism.

Finally, chapter 10 considers whether an Augustinian virtue of hope can also be cultivated by non-Christian citizens or whether a purely civic virtue is doomed to remain at best a "splendid vice." Analyzing Augustine's vexed discussion of "pagan virtue," 113 I explore multiple ways of interpreting key texts and propose a new interpretation that recognizes the possibility of genuine civic virtues in non-Christians. Attending to Augustine's concerns about pride and domination, I argue that genuine civic virtue depends on the interconnected virtues of piety and humility, both of which chasten the vices of presumption and despair. Recovering these interconnected virtues moves us beyond entrenched disputes about the splendid vices and highlights how piety and humility can help both Christians and non-Christians develop the virtue of hope.

Throughout the book, I mostly attempt to interpret and analyze Augustine's commitments in ways he could acknowledge and accept as his own. 114 Occasionally, I also interpret Augustine's commitments in relation to views and distinctions that he could not have used or imagined in his own time—for example, when drawing on contemporary epistemology and philosophy of religion to make explicit his "default and challenge" structure of reasoning in chapter 4 or when applying Cass Sunstein's idea of "incompletely theorized agreement" to illuminate his view of the commonwealth in chapter 8. These latter interpretations still aim to describe the conceptual content of Augustine's commitments but in ways that can be understood and evaluated by contemporary audiences. 115

While the primary aim of this book is to offer a more contextualized interpretation of Augustine's thought on its own terms to resist mischaracterizations of his "pessimism," this detailed historical work does not thereby reduce Augustine to a historical artifact. Instead, it makes his thought *more* relevant to contemporary politics and political theory than accounts that strip him from his contexts. ¹¹⁶ In the conclusion, I gesture toward several ways the alternative account of Augustine offered here might inform efforts to nurture a commonwealth of hope in our own time.

While Augustine's account of hope offers useful conceptual and normative resources for contemporary politics, he also gives us plenty to dispute, resist, and reject. My aim is neither to lionize the saint nor sanitize the sinner.

16 INTRODUCTION

Fortunately, Augustine recognizes that fidelity does not require uncritical allegiance: "I would not want anyone to embrace all my views in order to be my follower, but only those points on which he sees that I am not mistaken." ¹¹⁷ Throughout his vast corpus, Augustine consistently invites conversation and correction, ¹¹⁸ and he celebrates the fact that there is more than one valid way to interpret texts: "I would hope to have written in such a way that if anyone else had in the light of truth seen some other valid meaning, that too should not be excluded, but present itself as a possible way of understanding in what I had said." ¹¹⁹ As we explore the neglected patterns of Augustine's mosaic, may we remain attentive to that Augustinian hope.

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