

Book Reviews

Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship, by Eric Gregory. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008. xv + 417 pp. Cloth, \$45.00. ISBN 0-226-30751-4.

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Eric Gregory's goal in this volume is, as indicated in the book's subtitle, to "propose an Augustinian ethic of citizenship for the morally ambivalent conditions of liberal democracy" (p. 13, emphases orig.). How does he intend to accomplish this objective? The key is in the book's main title: to re-introduce the central role that love can play in the formation of virtuous citizens who are agents and actors in the *polis*. The challenge of course, is manifold, not the least of which is the longstanding assumption during the modern period that love is a private affection that does not belong in the public (political) square. Gregory's response is to bring Augustine's theology of love of God and of neighbor back into the discussion of political philosophy and political theology, and do so in dialogue with feminist philosophers who have argued that an ethic of care belongs in any philosophic conversation about liberal democracy.

Chiefly, Gregory draws into the discussion feminist philosophers Joan Tronto, Eva Kittay, and Martha Nussbaum, precisely in order to argue that contemporary political philosophy needs to be informed by the emerging feminist ethic of care so that a virtue ethic focused on the proper motivations for citizenship can be articulated. Such an ethic of care is sensitive to the fact that human life is more adequately characterized by interdependence rather than the self-made individualism promoted by modernity. Thus, rather than focusing on statecraft, the goal is to consider what virtuous citizens look like and how such might be formed. The role of love is argued as being central to such an account, one that seeks a *via media* between the privatization of love and being concerned only with justice in the abstract—both modernist strategies. Instead, love of neighbor produces virtuous citizens by avoiding either a hyper-individualism on the one side (hence self-absorption is replaced by mutual care) or a hyper-communitarianism on the other (since the particularity of the neighbor is guarded against being absorbed into any larger whole). In this way, abstract modernist political philosophies are corrected by the feminist critique so that there is now space for alternative conceptions of

rationality that include the emotions, affections, and interrelationality and intersubjectivity—each of which are elements of love, considered in its most robust philosophical sense.

Along the way, Gregory intervenes in a number of dense discussions and debates about Augustine, his texts, and the reception of his corpus. For example, three Augustinian versions of liberalism are presented: i) Augustinian realism, in the wake of Reinhold Niebuhr and others; ii) Augustinian proceduralism, as handled by John Rawls and his followers; and iii) Augustinian civic liberalism, in the tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr., and others. Gregory deftly shows the shortcomings of the first two types, even while then adapting their most important contributions into a more inclusive and expanded notion of the third. What he seeks to establish is how Augustinian notions of love, informed by a feminist ethic of care, interfaces with Augustinian civic liberalism in order to produce a more viable ethic of liberal democratic citizenship.

Second, Gregory also anticipates and counters Augustinian illiberalism or anti-liberalism, especially that represented by (in his reading) Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder, and, especially, the Radical Orthodoxy theologians. Gregory's substantial critical engagement with Radical Orthodoxy (pp. 125-48), particularly the work of John Milbank, is as impressive as any existing critique—certainly as hard-hitting as Milbank himself gives. What is intriguing about this encounter is that in many respects, both Gregory and Milbank can be said to be headed in similar directions, toward an Augustinian form of post-secular political theology. The difference, however, is that Gregory still values a rehabilitated democratic liberalism and thinks it worth salvaging from such an explicitly theological angle, while Milbank considers liberalism a failed and anti-theological project. Readers of Milbank and this volume will have to weigh in who has gotten the better side of this argument in light of Gregory's contribution.

Finally, and most importantly in the overall structure of this book, is Gregory's engagement with and response to critics of Augustine's theology of love, especially Hannah Arendt and, in previous eras, Stoic and Platonist interpretations of Augustinian love. In her 1929 dissertation on the topic, Arendt argued that for Augustine, the love of neighbor is finally subsumed under love for God, and that in the end the notion of love was too sentimentally construed. The Stoicist and Platonist legacies that have long influenced interpretations of Augustine's theology of love have contributed to the modern view of love as a political liability and better left out of the public domain. The combination of these factors, then, has resulted in the neglect of Augustinian love in considerations regarding Christian political theology (to use our contemporary idiom). Gregory, however, wants to read

these loves as a unity, but recognizes with Augustine that human beings are capable of loving too much in the wrong ways because of sin (hence sin also now becomes a political category). This is corrected by our emulating and participating in divine loving which frees others to be different and hence allows a true politics or *polis* to emerge. Gregory's proposal is said to avoid both an arrogant perfectionism on the one hand, and a false communitarianism on the other, and also to protect the other/neighbor from simply being used for the self (which is sinful and fallen), even as the incarnational hypostatic union so central to Augustine's theology of love points to the possibility of the unity of love of God and of neighbor.

Augustinian scholars—of which I am not—will need to weigh in on the validity of Gregory's retrieval of the Bishop of Hippo for purposes of formulating a contemporary ethic of democratic citizenship. My one critical question has to do with whether or not Gregory has been sufficiently critical with the anemic theology of care in Augustine, particularly when read through contemporary theories (and theologies) of disability. This question about Gregory's treatment of Augustine applies also to Gregory himself. Although Gregory draws from the work of feminist philosopher, Eva Kittay, he does not make much of the heart of Kittay's argument, which is based on care for people with severe and profound disabilities. Thus part III of Kittay's *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (Routledge, 199)—discussed by Gregory—is not at all registered in *Politics and the Order of Love*. The difference made, however, is substantial since in this case care becomes only one dimension of many others needed to be addressed in order to secure the rights, roles, and recognition of people with disabilities in a liberal democracy. By failing to specifically interact with Kittay's ethic of care as informed by her philosophical anthropology and critique of ableism (theories of normalism), Gregory misses a golden opportunity to not only interrogate and challenge Augustine's thinking about disability in general but also to be even more inclusive (of people with disabilities) in his own constructive political theology of love.

Still, *Politics and the Order of Love* is an already long book, shaped first as a PhD dissertation at Yale University under the advisement of moral philosopher and theologian Gene Outka. The book demonstrates Gregory's erudition and command of both primary and secondary literature. He now teaches at Princeton University, and there is every expectation that the theological academy will be hearing much more from Eric Gregory in the years and perhaps decades to come.