



The editors are pleased to devote this entire issue of the *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies* to a single discussion that crosses the disciplines of theology, ethics, philosophy, and social and political theory. In "Rawlsian Liberalism, Moral Truth, and Augustinian Politics," Edmund N. Santurri proposes that "an Augustinian vision of political life supports, at least in modern contexts, the kind of philosophically and religiously neutral political arrangements typically commended by liberal political theory." Carefully assessing the political liberalism of John Rawls, Santurri emphasizes how neutral political arrangements can and ought to be justified in terms of the promotion and preservation of temporal peace, which is "served best by political institutions assuming allegiance to no particular all-encompassing world view." This important essay is both praised and seriously challenged in responses by David Dawson, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Timothy P. Jackson, Gilbert Meilaender, and Michael J. White.



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## RAWLSIAN LIBERALISM, MORAL TRUTH AND AUGUSTINIAN POLITICS

Edmund N. Santurri

In what follows I assess certain elements of Rawlsian political liberalism from a normative perspective reasonably identified as Augustinian. Generally, I am persuaded by the line of argument that an Augustinian vision of political life supports, at least in modern contexts, the kind of philosophically and religiously neutral political arrangements typically commended by liberal political theory. That support comes by way of the following theological, moral and practical considerations:<sup>1</sup> Since the ultimate success of God's redemptive economy does not depend on the character or course of particular political regimes, Christianity's political establishment is unnecessary for all eschatological intents and purposes. Thus the state may be neutral religiously without detriment to salvation history. Indeed, for the Augustinian political goals *qua* political are provisional and worldly, only indirectly eschatological; that is, the central function of political arrangements is to promote and preserve temporal peace and not to advance salvation, even if such peace might play an instrumental role in God's eschatological economy, e.g., by contributing to the temporal welfare of the church, whose mission is essentially salvific. As long as political institutions serve peace, then, they are doing all they are required to do, and they need not privilege Christianity in any way that violates general religious freedom or anti-establishment principles. What is more, this understanding of the central purpose of political institutions, combined with certain empirical observations, yields a compelling argument for modern political arrangements that are generally neutral with respect to competing visions of the good life. More specifically, given the radically diverse views of the good life held by citizens of modern complex societies and given the regrettable yet pervasive human desire to dominate others both physically and spiritually (what Augustine called the *libido dominandi*<sup>2</sup>), temporal peace is served best by political institutions assuming allegiance to no particular all-encompassing world view, though, of course, such institutions by their very nature must impose practical restrictions on certain world views, namely, those that reject political neutrality because they subordinate the value of temporal peace to the value of

social uniformity. In sum, for the Augustinian politics can afford to be liberally neutral given the independence of salvation history from the character and course of particular political regimes. At the same time, politics for the Augustinian can afford to be nothing but liberally neutral given its concern to preserve temporal peace in the face of a pluralistic society's radically diverse conceptions of the good and ultimate reality.

This reading of Augustinian politics as supportive of liberal neutrality is not uncontroversial, and I shall attend to some objections later on.<sup>3</sup> But the principal task here is to evaluate Rawlsian proposals from the vantage point of a liberalism having this Augustinian cast, a vantage point I assume and occasionally argue for throughout the essay. Further details of the Augustinian view commended will emerge incrementally and indirectly by way of commentary on the Rawlsian account and by way of subsequent discussion of anticipated objections to my central theses. In general, I propose that an Augustinian liberalism inclines toward a Rawlsian conception of liberally neutral arrangements as *politically* or *pragmatically* grounded in the sense that their normative justification abstracts from "comprehensive" visions of the good as well as from *certain* "metaphysical" commitments. At the same time, I distinguish an Augustinian pragmatism from the "pragmatic" justifications of liberalism associated principally with the philosopher Richard Rorty but at times suggested even by Rawls himself. More particularly, I propose that an appeal to temporal peace in the justification of neutral political arrangements is a moral appeal and that moral appeals require, *pace* Rorty and Rawls, certain metaphysical commitments affirming the existence of a transcendent moral order. Thus the much-discussed Rawlsian characterization of liberalism as "political, not metaphysical" is misleading even if it does contain an element of truth. In the Augustinian view presented here liberalism is "political" or "pragmatic" because its justification assumes commitment to no particular all-encompassing world view. At the same time, liberalism is in some measure "metaphysical" since its moral foundations require certain ontological commitments affirming the existence of a transhistorical moral reality. For the Augustinian this moral reality will be cast in theistic terms though such terms are not entailments of the liberal commitments, themselves.

### *Rawlsian Liberalism*

Rawlsian liberalism takes as its point of departure certain "general facts" about modern democratic societies. First, these societies are pluralistic in the sense that their various members hold to radically diverse and ultimately incompatible world views. Because reason is limited in its capacity to resolve

disagreements among the world views in question, pluralism must be taken as “a permanent feature of the public culture of democracy.”<sup>4</sup> Second, given the permanence of pluralism, uniform allegiance to one world view could be achieved only at the expense of substantial political coercion. Third, the stability of a modern democratic polity depends on the voluntary support of its institutions “by at least a substantial majority of its politically active citizens.” Given pluralistic conditions, this means that the normative justification for a modern democratic political regime will have to employ reasons compatible with a wide variety of competing world views if stability is to be achieved. Fourth, a democracy’s “public culture” typically affords a range of “intuitive ideas” that can fund precisely the sort of general normative justification required by political institutions in modern pluralistic circumstances. This public culture, that is, can provide the basis of a civic understanding shared by citizens holding radically diverse and irreconcilable world views.<sup>5</sup>

For the Rawlsian these general facts about modern democratic societies buttress the case for a liberalism that is “political not metaphysical.” A *political* conception of liberalism is said to have three defining characteristics: (1) Its applicability is restricted to a particular domain of human life, namely, “the basic structure of a constitutional democratic regime.” Liberalism in this sense “consists in a conception of politics not the whole of life.” Accordingly, (2) a political conception of liberalism requires commitment to no “particular comprehensive religious, philosophical or moral doctrine,” where “comprehensive” signifies any world view commending values, virtues or truths above and beyond those relevant to the political domain. Finally, (3) the articulation of a liberalism that is exclusively political utilizes only concepts native to the public culture. Such articulation eschews, in other words, terms and principles peculiar to any comprehensive world view.<sup>6</sup> All in all, the characterizations specified in (1)-(3) convey the sense of *neutrality* affirmed by liberalism as a *political* conception. Political liberalism’s neutrality consists precisely in its restricted application to the political realm and in its principled abstraction from comprehensive visions of the good life and ultimate reality. Neutrality thus understood is required by any political arrangements that hope to secure widespread acceptance under modern pluralistic conditions.

As noted already, *political* liberalism in the Rawlsian account is to be distinguished from a liberalism that is *metaphysical* in character, i.e., one tied conceptually to some comprehensive religious, moral or philosophical doctrine. Examples of metaphysical liberalism abound, but Rawls typically presents the political theories of Kant and Mill as paradigm instances.<sup>7</sup> For both Kant and Mill liberal political institutions (e.g., legal guarantees of freedom of expression) are grounded decisively in larger normative visions of

human existence. For Kant such institutions are linked with the Enlightenment ideal of "autonomy." For Mill they are rooted in the modern ideal of "individuality." In consequence, "these two liberalisms both comprehend far more than the political. Their doctrines of free institutions rest in large part on ideals and values that are not generally, or perhaps even widely, shared in a democratic society," and, thus, "they are not a practicable public basis of a political conception of justice."<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, a liberalism fashioned in the manner of Kant's or Mill's is just "another sectarian doctrine," as unsuitable for public consensus as would be, say, the theologically informed political theory of the seventeenth century Puritan Roger Williams, whose advocacy of liberal political arrangements (religious liberty and separation of church and state) was motivated by the undeniably sectarian concern to preserve the spiritual and moral purity of the Christian church.<sup>9</sup> Requiring allegiance to Kantian or Millian anthropology as a condition of political consensus is in the Rawlsian account no more reasonable than requiring assent to Williams's ecclesiology as a basis for public agreement. No comprehensive world view, whether ecclesiological or anthropological, whether theological or philosophical, can serve as a reasonable basis for a liberalism that is political in nature.

At its deepest level, the Rawlsian rejection of metaphysical foundations involves a distancing of political theory from philosophy in the classical sense. Liberalism as a political doctrine has no aspirations to philosophical truth. Indeed, it disavows pretensions to truth in any sense. It "is practical, and not metaphysical or epistemological . . . . It presents itself not as a conception . . . that is true, but one that can serve as a basis of informed and willing political agreement between citizens viewed as free and equal persons." In particular, it dissociates itself from "philosophy as the search for truth about an independent metaphysical and moral order."<sup>10</sup> It stays clear of metaethical controversies about the nature of that order. It is neither realist, nor conventionalist, nor subjectivist in its conception of morality. On the contrary, it assumes a neutral posture toward all such theories. Neither does it advance a metaphysical view of the self or personhood. While political liberalism does assume a view of persons as beings who possess, among other abilities, the capacity to reason impartially about political arrangements and while it also assumes that such impartiality requires deliberation in abstraction from an individual's particular circumstances, characteristics, life-plans, loyalties or ideals, these assumptions do not imply that persons are *really* Kantian-like noumenal selves, pure wills or agents ontologically independent of their empirical attributes and characteristics. Rather the assumptions do no more than give partial expression to "the fundamental intuitive idea of society as a fair system of cooperation between citizens as free and equal persons," an idea

that is widely shared in modern democratic societies and thus serves as a practicable basis for political consensus.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the associated concept of personhood should be understood as a concept of *citizenship*, a *political* rather than a *metaphysical* construct, one, that is, whose application is restricted to the political domain. As such, it is compatible presumably with a wide range of metaphysical accounts of personhood, including those that regard empirical attributes and characteristics as constitutive features of the real self.<sup>12</sup> To repeat, liberal neutrality in the Rawlsian scheme involves abstraction from all metaphysical views, including metaphysical views of the person.

For Rawls liberal neutrality is embodied not only in the ametaphysical character of the concept of personhood but also in the way persons are depicted and situated for political-theoretical purposes. Once again, given such purposes, persons are characterized as “free and equal,” and their equal standing is captured theoretically in the specification of hypothetical constraints on collective deliberation about just political arrangements. More specifically, just political arrangements, in the Rawlsian view, are precisely those warranted by principles that would be chosen by rational agents presumed for theoretical purposes to be ignorant of their own interests, social circumstances, natural talents, psychological makeups, life plans, loyalties and ideals. Imposing this “veil of ignorance” on persons in the “original position” of deliberation gives normative effect to their equal worth by insuring that the principles chosen will not be influenced by particular advantages or idiosyncratic perspectives. Such neutrality in deliberations about political justice will be recognized as fair in the public culture of democracy, and will be required, at all events, for any feasible political settlement under modern pluralistic conditions. Finally, these neutral conditions of deliberation will be reflected presumably in the products of deliberation, i.e., the chosen principles of justice, which Rawls specifies as follows in the order of lexical priority:

- a. Each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties which is compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for all.
- b. Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions. First, they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they must be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society.<sup>13</sup>

Rational persons deliberating under neutral conditions would, according to Rawls, settle on principles with neutral content, principles, that is, emphasizing equal and impartial consideration in the distribution of political liberties and other social goods.<sup>14</sup>

As is well known, the Rawlsian claim that persons so situated would choose principles so conceived has occasioned considerable controversy. Yet at this juncture I am concerned not with evaluating Rawls's argument for the principles but rather with ascertaining their precise theoretical status given his concern to advance a political liberalism that abstracts from all moral and metaphysical doctrines. Now in Rawlsian liberalism the principles of justice are said to be "constructed" by rational agents deliberating under the constraints of the original position. As constructed, these principles are to be understood as the products of practical reason; they are not to be understood, that is, in the way a moral realist might understand them, namely, as objects of an independent moral order whose features are available for discovery by theoretical reason.<sup>15</sup> To appeal to such an independent moral order is to engage in metaphysical argument of a sort not permitted by a liberalism that is "political" rather than "metaphysical." At the same time, Rawlsian liberalism claims to resist interpretation in radically constructivist directions. Saying that the principles of justice are constructed is presumably neither to say nor to imply that the moral order as such "is constructed by the activity, actual or ideal of practical (human) reason itself."<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, like moral realism, moral constructivism is a *metaphysical* view from which *political* liberalism appropriately prescinds in its efforts to maintain a neutral posture toward all such philosophical accounts.

This last observation is especially significant in light of Richard Rorty's attempts to link Rawlsian liberalism with his own distinctive brand of historicist constructivism, and it might appear that Rawls puts this Rortyan interpretation to rest with his most recent remarks about the theoretical status of the principles of justice.<sup>17</sup> Yet the matter of just how deep Rawlsian constructivism is cannot be settled simply by determining the theoretical character of the Rawlsian principles of justice. We must also ask about the status of values and normative principles embodied elsewhere in the theory, e.g., the value of fairness as evidenced in the veil of ignorance imposed as a condition of deliberation, the conception of persons as free and equal, the value of peace, which (so I shall argue) lies behind the Rawlsian concern to forge political settlements under pluralistic conditions. Some of these values, Rawls proposes, are not constructed; they are, as he says, "simply laid out" in theoretical devices like the original position.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, he suggests that the fundamental values of political liberalism *originate* in "the special nature of democratic political culture" and "not . . . in philosophy,"<sup>19</sup> that they are artifacts arising from historical conditions distinguishing modern from ancient political society. Do such assessments commit Rawls, as Rorty proposes, to an historicism that is constructivist in some far-reaching way?



Resolving this question is especially important in any Augustinian evaluation of Rawlsian liberalism since, as I shall propose shortly, an Augustinian rightly insists that a radical moral constructivism will not suffice to ground the moral values of political liberalism.

### *Constructivism, Realism and Rawlsian Liberalism*

In considering the depth of Rawlsian historicism, it is useful to begin with a more detailed examination of the Rortyan interpretation than I have given thus far. According to Rorty, Rawlsian liberalism is “thoroughly historicist and antiuniversalist” in the sense that it seeks no grounding of liberal values in metaphysical accounts of the self or moral reality but rests comfortably with an understanding of those values as the historical products of a particular culture.<sup>20</sup> In this view, *our* liberal values are simply expressions of *our* cultural identity as late twentieth century, western, constitutional democrats. *We* prize liberal equality, freedom, peace and their institutional embodiments in neutral political arrangements because of who we are and not because the values prized refer to something above and beyond history or point to some culturally transcendent moral reality that serves to justify our liberal moral convictions. Given this state of affairs, “the enemies of liberal democracy” are appropriately met, not with metaphysical counter argument, but with simple dismissal. Antiliberals are rightly regarded as *insane*, where “the limits of sanity are set by what *we* can take seriously” and where the canons of seriousness are “determined by our upbringing, our historical situation.”<sup>21</sup> On Rorty’s interpretation of Rawls, then, the standard for judging what is politically reasonable “can only be something relatively local and ethnocentric—the tradition of a particular community, the consensus of a particular culture.”<sup>22</sup> In this sense Rawlsian liberalism is presumably “historicist and antiuniversalist.”

At various points Rorty suggests that Rawls’s sensitivity to the historically conditioned character of political justification signals a thoroughgoing moral constructivism, according to which liberal values are, like all moral values, no more than the contingent products of particular historical circumstances and human innovation.<sup>23</sup> In this account moral values are fully embedded in and constituted by moral languages, and, since the development of any language is tied both to the accidents of history and to the dynamics of human creativity, the values we hold are shaped decisively by such contingencies. If we seek some ultimate or socially transcendent *justification* for speaking our particular language with *its* distinctive constituent values, we engage in a misconceived project that, simply begs the principal question since the very practice of

justification already presupposes the normative conventions of a specific discourse with its own peculiar history and circumstances. About our speaking the particular language we speak we can say only that this is the way things have turned out given the peculiar determinations of history and human resourcefulness. Yet things could have turned out otherwise; we might have come to speak a different language with different normative conventions given different historical directions, social exigencies and discursive innovations. And this "might have" refers to the *moral* language we speak, including the language of political liberalism. If we value freedom, equality, social peace and the political neutrality these require, this is so, again, just given the way things have happened, but things might have happened differently, and they might change yet with various shifts in empirical circumstance and discursive imagination. Liberal language, liberal value, liberal truth are, like all language, value and truth, "made rather than found," and if they are "made" or constructed, they might be unmade or deconstructed too, in which case there would be no liberal language, no liberal value, no liberal truth.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, Rorty insists, our realization that liberal values are "made" or "constructed" by our culture ought not to undermine our commitment to them. On the contrary, the citizen of an ideal liberal culture, in this view, would be one precisely who recognized the "contingency" and fabricated character of all our values but remained committed to them nonetheless. Such a recognition bespeaks presumably of political maturity and serves precisely as a *warrant* for liberal freedom since acknowledging the contingency and constructedness of all linguistic forms and values provides an incentive to create and sustain the political space necessary for citizens to fashion new languages articulating new aspirations, purposes, and truths. Indeed, for Rorty the ideal liberal society is one that rejects the notion of truth (moral or otherwise) as correspondence to an independent reality and "is content to call 'true' (or 'right' or 'just') . . . whatever view wins in a free and open encounter."<sup>25</sup> Thus an appreciation of the contingent and constructed nature of moral truth putatively goes hand in hand with an affirmation of the "bourgeois freedoms" and the neutrality of political arrangements such freedoms require.<sup>26</sup> Once again, Rorty suggests a connection between this constructivist view of liberal culture and the Rawlsian account of liberalism as "political, not metaphysical."<sup>27</sup>

In my judgment this is an overreading of Rawls, but for the moment I set that issue aside and consider in its own right Rorty's constructivist account of liberalism. As noted already, the Augustinian view advocated here holds that a radical constructivism will not suffice to ground the moral values of political

liberalism. In this account the normative concern for peace that undergirds liberal political arrangements is not simply a cultural artifact, a contingent product of human construction. Rather the concern reflects a moral order that transcends the social conventions of particular epochs and cultures.<sup>28</sup> Appeals to this transcendent order are necessary precisely to render intelligible claims that liberally neutral political institutions, because they foster social peace, are *morally* preferable to political domination and social strife. If we judge that the “enemies of liberal democracy” are morally misguided because they are willing to sacrifice freedom, equality, political neutrality and social peace to advance some other normative goal, we mean to say more than simply, “This “is the sort of thing *we* don’t do”” given the way things have just happened to turn out—though things might have turned out differently, in which case there would be nothing wrong with political domination, hierarchy and social strife.” On the contrary, in taking *moral* issue with liberalism’s adversaries, we imply that a society which *has* turned out to value neutral, peaceable political arrangements under pluralistic conditions has turned out *better*, morally speaking, than one which has not turned out this way, and this claim makes sense only if one assumes the existence of an independent moral standard or reality that can be tracked, more or less, by a society’s conventions and practices, a reality transcending and judging the “contingent,” linguistic-moral constructions of particular historical communities.

In Rorty’s view, however, appeals to a transcendent moral reality as backings for our moral convictions are nothing more than “empty metaphysical compliments” we pay to moral sentences accepted as true—“empty” because no adequate philosophical account has ever been given of that reality or of the way our language might refer to it.<sup>29</sup> Such appeals, he proposes, add nothing substantive to the normative conversation about political institutions; they neither explain nor justify the moral claims at the heart of liberalism and are best left behind. Indeed, in Rorty’s account an ideally liberal society would be “postphilosophical,” one whose citizens had cured themselves of the need for metaphysical postulations, which would be taken simply as historical curiosities, quaint artifacts reflective of a bygone era. But certainly Rorty’s argument moves too quickly here. While it may be true that philosophers have yet to explain satisfactorily either the existence of a socially transcendent moral reality or a culture’s epistemic access to it, that fact alone does not show that the reality’s conception is dispensable in rendering intelligible *moral* commendations of liberal political arrangements. And, to repeat, little sense can be made of the claim that under pluralistic conditions a liberal society is morally preferable to alternatives unless one presumes the existence of something like a socially transcendent moral

standard by which one judges competing social configurations under the conditions in question.

Of course, epistemic access to that transcendent reality is linguistic; there is no comprehension of the moral law unmediated by language, and this fact gives rise to the difficult question of how disagreements over the law's proper interpretation are to be settled given the gap between moral language and moral reality. Yet to resolve or "dissolve" that problem by jettisoning the notion of a transcendent reality altogether and construing moral truths, à la Rorty, as nothing more than contingent linguistic constructions is to trade some unsettled epistemological difficulties for a settled nihilism that deprives moral language of genuine normative force. Rorty might insist that it is a mark of political maturity for a culture to rest comfortably with an understanding of its moral values as thoroughly constructed, but for an Augustinian it is difficult to see how those values could be taken seriously at all if they were regarded simply as "contingent human artifact[s]" delivered randomly by the vicissitudes of nature or history and subject to disposal given the right changes in socio-cultural conditions. Indeed, given Rortyan premises, the normative debate between liberals and antiliberals could amount to little more than an evolutionary struggle between two natural languages, neither of which could ever claim relative proximity to an independent moral truth of the matter, since there could be in this account no independent truth of the matter for any natural language to approximate.<sup>30</sup> As Rorty puts the point, the most a liberal could say to an antiliberal on these terms is, "You are not 'one of us'," but to say *just* this is, in the Augustinian view, to say nothing yet of genuine *moral* significance.<sup>31</sup>

In sum, a full-fledged constructivism of the Rortyan variety will not suffice to sustain the *moral* values of political liberalism. But does the Rawlsian account incline toward constructivism in the way Rorty suggests? I have noted already Rawls's sensitivity to the peculiar historical conditions that gave rise to the principles and values of liberalism. He proposes reasonably enough that the explicit concern for neutral political arrangements does not begin to appear in the west until after the Reformation, when the culture was faced with the problem of creating and maintaining a peaceable social order given the radically diverse conceptions of the good held within the culture. And this concern for political neutrality comes to full fruition only with the substantial development of democratic sensibilities in the modern period. Accordingly, Rawls claims that the liberal idea of a neutral political realm, with its implied distinction between public and private domains, "originates in the special nature of democratic political culture" and "not . . . in philosophy."<sup>32</sup> This means, among other things, that appeals to political neutrality as normative

points of departure for public deliberation about justice are in fact appeals to concepts of a shared historical-cultural tradition. Deliberations about justice begin with neutrality and related notions simply as “settled convictions” of this particular tradition.<sup>33</sup> There is no attempt to provide a time-place invariant philosophical justification of liberal neutrality, a justification, for example, rooted in reason as such.<sup>34</sup> Rather we begin with the value of neutrality because its widespread acceptance in democratic culture makes it a fruitful point of departure *for us* here and now in deliberations about social justice. The consequence, of course, is that settlements deriving from this normative convergence on neutrality will be accepted as binding only by those sharing the basic convictions of this particular culture. “What justifies a conception of justice is not its being true to an order antecedent and given to us, but its congruence with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our aspirations, and our realization that given our history and the traditions embedded in our public life, it is the most reasonable doctrine for us.”<sup>35</sup>

Yet none of this commits Rawls to the kind of moral constructivism Rorty commends. It is one thing to say that a conception of justice in modern democratic society is justified by appealing to values like peace, neutrality, equality or freedom, and that these values are available to us for normative justification as a consequence of our history and tradition. It is another thing entirely to say that these values represent no more than constructions of that history and tradition. There is nothing in Rawls’s view that prohibits in principle an interpretation of those values in realist rather than constructivist terms, as values, that is, reflective of a moral order transcending social construction. What Rawls does say is that in its *political* deliberations about justice, a democratic culture need repair to its fundamental values only as shared bases for the deliberations, thus leaving open questions about the proper metaphilosophical construal of those values. There would appear to be no necessary connection, then, between Rawlsian liberalism and a full-blooded moral constructivism of the Rortyan variety, and this feature of Rawls’s theory is a virtue given the truth of Augustinian claims about the inadequacy of constructivism as a basis for liberal values.

### *Peace, Truth and Rawlsian Liberalism*

But how are we to assess the pretension of Rawlsian liberalism to abstraction from *all* metaphilosophical accounts of morality, realism as well as constructivism? I have proposed already that a commitment to some kind of realism is necessary to account fully for any *moral* commendation of liberal values. Judging that a liberal society is morally preferable to alternatives

under certain conditions presupposes a socially transcendent moral standard by which one assesses historical social arrangements. In contrast, Rawls maintains that his version of liberalism requires no such commitment to realism, indeed, that such a requirement would compromise the neutrality of any liberalism that is "political, not metaphysical." As he puts the point most generally, "political liberalism applies the principle of toleration to philosophy itself,"<sup>36</sup> and this means, among other things, that since a philosophical position like moral realism does not command the assent of all citizens, it is inappropriately conceived as part of the *shared* rationale for liberal arrangements. Of course, within their own comprehensive visions of life individual citizens of a liberal society are free, in the Rawlsian account, to construe liberal values in realistic terms. A Roman Catholic with Thomistic leanings, for example, might appropriately regard liberal convictions as reflective of a transcendent moral order or natural law legitimating those convictions. Indeed, for Rawls it is essential that in a liberal society citizens who hold comprehensive world views will be able to find within those views reasons for affirming liberal political arrangements. Such reasons contribute to what he calls an "overlapping consensus," in which adherents of varying world views affirm liberal neutrality for reasons specific to the world views held. Achieving an overlapping consensus is, according to Rawls, crucial to maintaining the stability of a liberal regime in a pluralistic society, and adherents of moral realism may turn out to be important participants in that consensus. But to allow moral realism as one possible element in an overlapping consensus is not to admit realism as a necessary ingredient in the larger social understanding of liberal political arrangements. In this respect moral realism is no different from any other philosophical or religious doctrine in a liberal society. Citizens are free to embrace such doctrines and are encouraged to find reasons within the doctrines for affirming political neutrality, but the doctrines themselves cannot form the basis of the larger social agreement about basic political structures.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, as I have suggested already, Rawls goes so far as to propose that political liberalism must remain neutral not only regarding the debate between realist and constructivist accounts of moral truth but also with respect to the question whether truth values are appropriately assigned to moral propositions at all. Political liberalism, he says, "does not . . . use (or deny) the concept of truth; nor does it question that concept, nor could it say that the concept of truth and its idea of the reasonable are the same." On the contrary, political liberalism "does without the concept of truth" altogether.<sup>38</sup> To present any element of the theory as true presumably would limit the extent of social agreement about the theory's normative proposals since not all citizens accept

moral views that assign truth values to moral sentences.<sup>39</sup> Thus political liberalism is content to cast its proposals simply as “reasonable,” all the while prescinding from the question whether reasonably held moral judgments are rightfully regarded as bearers of truth.

Yet it is difficult to see how this account of neutrality can be sustained given the character of the normative concerns that seem to motivate Rawlsian liberalism to begin with. More particularly, I propose that given the social predicament his political liberalism is designed to address, Rawls is inevitably committed (a) to some notion of moral truth and (b) to a realistic construal of that truth. Whatever neutrality means in political liberalism, it cannot mean neutrality with respect to these matters.

As for the Augustinian liberal, for Rawls the principal normative concern that launches political liberalism is the concern for peace, the aversion to large-scale communal conflict and strife, the project of enlisting social cooperation in spite of fundamental disagreements about ultimate matters. The specific problem addressed here arises as a consequence of the fact that adherents of the competing world views characteristic of modern society are typically committed to defending those views at great cost to themselves and others:

This element forces either mortal conflict moderated only by circumstance and exhaustion, or equal liberty of conscience and freedom of thought. Except on the basis of these last, firmly founded and publicly recognized, no reasonable political conception is possible. Political liberalism starts by taking to heart the absolute depth of that irreconcilable latent conflict.<sup>40</sup>

In Rawls’s account there is no real possibility of resolving this conflict through rational argument, i.e., by establishing on rational grounds the comparative adequacies of competing visions of the good, since humans deliberating on such matters labor under what he calls the “burdens of judgment.” More particularly, arguments about the good are difficult to assess with confidence given the complexity of empirical evidence bearing on normative questions, the partial indeterminacy of moral concepts, the incommensurability of values, the dependence of normative evaluation on an individual’s “total experience” and uncertainty about the relative weights of competing considerations.<sup>41</sup> Recognizing these burdens of judgment, one should expect that different rational deliberators will arrive at different conclusions about the good life even under optimal conditions of reflection. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that pluralism will be a permanent feature of the culture and attempts to establish uniformity of comprehensive vision

could only issue in widespread suppression, perpetual instability and chronic social conflict. Under such conditions, reasonable persons will see that the only way of securing a just and stable order, the only way of avoiding "mortal conflict moderated . . . by exhaustion or circumstance," is to settle on neutral political structures, that is, political institutions requiring commitment to no comprehensive vision of the good life or ultimate reality.

It has been suggested that this fundamental concern for social order and peace deprives Rawls's normative proposals of genuinely moral force since it reduces political motivation to sheer expediency. In this analysis, rational contractors accept neutral political structures, agree to regard fellow citizens as free and equal, not out of any real recognition that all persons *are* free and equal, but because the concession is necessary to secure social cooperation.<sup>42</sup> Yet such a concession is prudent rather than moral, and any political agreement founded on it will be unreliable since some individuals and groups, given natural inequities in the distribution of power, will not need the cooperation of others, at least to the extent that would require assent to full political equality and neutral political structures. In response to this sort of criticism Rawls has insisted that his theory does not advocate a mere *modus vivendi* or political compromise reached by egocentric parties seeking security for their various interests.<sup>43</sup> On the contrary, political liberalism, he claims, is a *moral* proposal since (a) the conception of justice it affirms is moral and (b) the parties in an overlapping consensus assent to the proposal for moral reasons, albeit reasons peculiar to the various comprehensive world views held by the different parties. By "moral" Rawls seems to mean, among other things, "principled"; that is, the normative elements of political liberalism are affirmed "for [their] own sake" and not simply for the sake of expediency or self-interest. Thus, if Rawls is correct, the resulting political agreement is not vulnerable to shifts in the distribution of power as some criticisms of his view might suggest.<sup>44</sup>

But how, it might be asked, can such a *principled* commitment to liberal political structures follow from an initial normative concern that appears to be *expedient* in character. If the essential motivation behind political liberalism is to avoid conflict and enlist cooperation, what incentives remain for affirming liberal institutions when some parties are powerful enough to do without cooperation and profit from conflict? In response to these questions Rawls seems to answer that various moral or principled reasons for affirming liberalism are made available to the different parties by their particular comprehensive visions. Presumably these reasons provide the moral foundation necessary for stable political structures without compromising the neutrality of political arrangements, i.e., without requiring the assent of all



parties to any particular one of the comprehensive visions held. But in all of this Rawls admits that *some* principled or moral commitment to equality and neutrality is necessary for the stability of liberal arrangements *whatever the comprehensive views of the parties involved*, that such a commitment is a condition of the possibility of liberal stability as such. The question then becomes how does this shared, principled commitment to liberal equality and neutrality square with what appears to be an expedient concern for peace and cooperation, a concern that in his own account gives rise to liberal proposals in the first place?

The simple answer is that the normative concern for peace and cooperation expressed at the outset need not be interpreted merely as expedient in the way certain critics of Rawls have assumed. Of course, individuals and groups can and do profit from peace but they can also value peaceable conditions for the sake of other individuals and groups. If an agent's assent to neutral political arrangements, then, is motivated by the concern to avoid large-scale communal conflict and enlist cooperation, this motivation can be read as moral rather than expedient in nature, involving a concern for everyone who profits from peace and not just a concern to protect self-interest. Indeed, it is precisely this *moral* concern for peace that best explains the Rawlsian affirmation of *principled* commitments to liberal structures and institutions. For if the normative concern at the outset is to create and sustain peaceable conditions *for all* and if that concern motivates the development of neutral political arrangements, then individual contractors will have reason to resist the temptation to abandon those arrangements even when they might profit in so doing. One can put the point by saying that the vision of equality inherent in an affirmation of neutral political structures is already ingredient in the initial appeal to social peace as a *moral* appeal. Thus the criticism that Rawls's concern for social order necessarily reduces political motivation to egocentric expediency is simply off the mark.

In my view the real issue is whether this *moral* appeal to social peace makes sense given Rawls's refusal to cast his normative claims in terms of truth. Once again, in Rawlsian liberalism all normative proposals are presented as *reasonable* without characterizing them as true. According to this view, the specified principles of justice are reasonable for parties deliberating under neutral conditions and the acceptance of neutral conditions of deliberation is reasonable given pluralism, the burdens of judgment and the concern for peace. Yet, *pace* Rawls, these determinations of reasonableness must rely ultimately on some determination of moral truth. They rely, more particularly, on the truthful proposition that peace under neutral structures is *morally preferable* to the conflict, suppression and instability that would accompany

attempts to establish uniformity of comprehensive vision in a pluralistic society. Unless this proposition is believed to be *true*, none of the other determinations of reasonableness follows. To say that the proposition itself need be taken by the parties simply as *reasonable* is implausible since determinations of reasonableness make sense only against a background of specified true beliefs or desires. Moreover, it is insufficient to say simply that the parties desire peace under the specified conditions since some parties in fact might desire social uniformity even at the expense of peace, and Rawlsian liberalism is presented in part as a *moral* argument against allowing that sort of desire to dictate the character of political arrangements. But if Rawlsian liberalism is at bottom a moral argument privileging certain desires over others, its normative foundations cannot be specified without remainder in terms of the desires themselves. Those foundations must include a moral *belief* that *evaluates* the competing desires, in particular the belief that a desire for peace under neutral political structures is morally preferable to a desire for uniformity of comprehensive vision at the expense of peace. Unless that belief is held to be *true*, none of the Rawlsian judgments of reasonableness follows.

So Rawls's claim that political liberalism abstracts from truth altogether is finally implausible. Yet I propose that Rawls is committed, not only to some expression of moral truth, but also to a particular construal of that truth—moral realism. And the same sort of considerations apply here as did in the argument against Rortyan constructivism. If Rawlsian liberalism advances as true the proposition that peace under neutral structures is *morally* preferable to attempted social uniformity at the expense of peace, it must be saying more than: "This is a truth which just happens to have been constructed by western culture, though an alternative truth might have been constructed, in which case attempted uniformity of comprehensive vision at the expense of peace would now be morally preferable to peace under neutral structures." On the contrary, Rawls's *moral* commendation of peaceable neutrality must also involve, at least implicitly, a second-order commendation of western culture precisely to the degree the culture itself advocates peaceable neutrality in its conventional patterns of justification, and this second-order commendation, as it were, avoids triviality only if the normative conventions and practices of western culture can be said to conform to a moral standard transcending the conventions and practices themselves. All of this holds, moreover, even if we admit with Rawls that values like peace and equality are available to us for political justification as a consequence of our history and tradition. Again, it one thing to admit as much. It is something else to say that these values are nothing more than constructions of that history and tradition.<sup>45</sup> In sum, the moral commendation of peace that undergirds Rawlsian liberalism requires a

commitment to some version of moral realism, and this judgment is perfectly compatible with Rawlsian acknowledgments of the historically conditioned character of political justification.<sup>46</sup>

But what are we to make of Rawls's claim that tying political liberalism to moral realism compromises liberal neutrality since not all citizens share this view of moral judgment and moral truth? In response to this question we must state the obvious first, namely, that short of embracing an unqualified political, philosophical or moral skepticism, there is no such thing as *absolute* neutrality in these matters, and liberalism, whatever particular form it takes, must privilege certain normative and/or philosophical views over others. Indeed, if neutrality has any normative warrant at all, this warrant naturally will exclude countervailing normative views, whether they are held by citizens or not. Thus we have noted already the normative assumption of Rawlsian liberalism that peace under neutral political structures is morally preferable to attempted uniformity of comprehensive vision at the expense of peace, an assumption that undoubtedly will be disputed by certain antiliberal citizens even in liberal societies. So the fact that a version of liberalism advocates certain normative or philosophical views to the exclusion of others held by some citizens does not demonstrate that liberal neutrality has been compromised in any significant sense of the term.<sup>47</sup> The real issue is whether the views advocated are required to render intelligible a moral commitment to liberal neutrality in the first place, and as I have proposed, some version of moral realism is required for just this reason.

Now it might be argued in response that even if moral realism is required for certain *philosophical* purposes it is not required for *political* purposes, and the whole point of Rawlsian liberalism is to fashion a political theory abstracted from traditional philosophical controversies. This argument might be advanced with either of two considerations in mind. First, the point might be that in ordinary political life liberal citizens can do perfectly well without anything like a full philosophical comprehension of their political values and institutions. Citizens, that is, can participate in liberal democratic practices, exercise the virtues of liberal citizenry, without comprehending the deep philosophical rationales informing those practices and virtues. One can be a good liberal citizen, in this account, even if one had never heard of moral realism or of any other metaphysical position. All of this seems true enough. But here it is crucial to distinguish the question of the rudimentary wisdom requisite to participation in a social practice from the question of the knowledge necessarily ingredient in a full theoretical explanation of that practice. A physician, for example, may be a perfectly adequate medical practitioner without mastering all the nuances of the philosophy of biological

science. An engineer or applied mathematician may practice her craft without a firm grasp of issues related to the philosophical foundations of mathematics. But in either case it seems right to say that certain larger questions are left unexplored, questions that would need to be settled in any full theoretical account of the practice under consideration. Similarly liberal citizens may engage in liberal politics without a clear sense of the metaphilosophical commitments such engagement entails or for that matter without a clear understanding of any political philosophy, including the arguments by which Rawls, himself, distinguishes his political version of liberalism from certain alternative versions (e.g., Kant's or Mill's). All this shows, however, is that liberal politics may be practiced while leaving certain *theoretical* questions unexamined, questions that would have to be treated, nonetheless, in any full theoretical account of liberal politics. Political philosophy provides such an account, which includes explaining metaphilosophically the normative values lying behind commitments to liberal political arrangements. And in my view moral realism affords a better metaphilosophical explanation of those values and commitments than does constructivism.

But, second, the argument might be that moral realism and other metaphilosophical positions have no place in the theory of political liberalism given what Rawls has called the "independence of moral theory" from moral philosophy.<sup>48</sup> Here the point would be not that the reasonable practice of liberal politics is independent of full comprehension of the *theory* of liberal politics but rather that the theory of liberal politics is independent of certain classical investigations in moral *philosophy*, e.g., the traditional explorations of the question whether there are objective moral truths. Rawls has argued that such classical philosophical investigations of the foundations of moral discourse seem beyond resolution at the present time and "can often contribute very little," in any event, to moral *theory*, whose principal task is to explicate the content of and interrelations among "substantive moral conceptions" like the right, the good, justice, and so forth.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, normative *theory* of the sort evidenced in the arguments of Rawlsian liberalism can proceed, in his view, apart from moral *philosophy* with its foundational preoccupations, i.e., we can systematically explicate the content and interrelations of normative conceptions like peace, equality, freedom, political neutrality and justice without, say, determining whether there do exist objective moral truths. Indeed, Rawls goes so far as to suggest that progress in settling the metaquestions of moral philosophy is likely to depend on progress made first in settling the normative questions of moral theory. In the Rawlsian account, then, there are good reasons apparently to proceed with the task of fashioning a normative theory of political liberalism in abstraction from traditional

philosophical concerns about the metaphysics of normative commitments, including concerns about the existence and nature of moral truth.

There is, admittedly, some merit in this distinction between theory and philosophy and some wisdom in the suggestion that theory can often proceed independently of philosophy as Rawls conceives both, but none of this implies that political theory can or must abstract entirely from philosophy in the sense described. To be sure, Rawls originally argued for the “independence of moral theory” at the tail end of a period when moral philosophers were preoccupied almost exclusively with questions of metaethics (moral semantics, logic, and epistemology), and his argument served as an important corrective to the apparent assumption that serious work in normative theory had to await completion of the tasks of metaethics. Yet it is one thing to assert that substantial progress in normative theory can be achieved before such completion and that resolution of the problems of metaethics or moral philosophy might even require such progress in normative ethical theory. It is another thing, and false in my view, to propose that a normative theory such as Rawls’s political liberalism carries no metaphysical implications that would need to be unearthed in any comprehensive theoretical treatment of liberal institutions and arrangements. For various purposes, of course, one may set those implications aside or avoid articulating them explicitly, but the implications are there, and any finished explanatory account of political liberalism will bring them to light. In the Rawlsian case, I have argued, the principal normative appeals make sense only on the assumption that some version of moral realism holds.

In sum, Augustinian political theory of the sort I am advocating is prepared to affirm Rawlsian liberalism, albeit with some qualification. More particularly, this Augustinian view inclines toward a Rawlsian conception of liberal institutions as “political” or “pragmatic” in the sense that their normative justification is rooted in the concern to preserve peace and in the sense that such justification abstracts from “comprehensive” visions of the good and from *certain* metaphysical commitments. At the same time, the metaphysical modesty of Augustinian and Rawlsian liberalisms is to be distinguished from a radically antimetaphysical constructivism of the Rortyan variety. Despite Rorty’s suggestions to the contrary, there is no necessary connection between Rawlsian liberalism and a moral constructivism that goes “all the way down.” Anything Rawls says about the historically conditioned character of political justification is entirely compatible with a construal of liberal values in realistic terms. Moreover, despite Rawls’s own apparent theoretical aspirations to an unadulterated metaphilosophical neutrality, some version of moral realism is *required* to explain satisfactorily

the full range of normative claims advanced in his version of liberalism. Thus, Rawls's characterization of his theory as "political, not metaphysical" is misleading even if it does contain an important element of truth. Liberalism is "political, not metaphysical" in the sense that it requires commitment to no particular all-encompassing world view. At the same time, liberalism is "metaphysical" to some degree since its moral foundations require for their full explanation certain ontological commitments affirming the existence of a transhistorical moral reality. The Augustinian will construe this transcendent reality in theistic terms (e.g., as a moral order reflective of God's nature or God's will) though these terms are not entailments of liberal commitments, which require only some version of realism. In other words, while the Augustinian appropriation of Rawls is qualified by an insistence on moral realism as a condition of liberal convictions, the precise character of the realism is left open to diverse interpretations by the various comprehensive views constitutive of an overlapping consensus in a liberal society. The remainder of this essay will consider a range of possible objections to the qualified Augustinian affirmation of Rawlsian liberalism presented here.

#### *Augustinian and Rawlsian Liberalisms: Objections and Replies*

(1) First, it might be argued that I have overdrawn the parallels between Augustinian and Rawlsian liberalism on the matter of peace as the principal value undergirding liberal political arrangements. While Rawls does regard the problem of peace as an important subject for political reflection, it might be proposed, his principal moral rationale for neutral political arrangements lies elsewhere. In this argument, Rawls affirms political neutrality not essentially because he desires peace and social order under pluralistic conditions but because he harbors the deep moral conviction that "a good political society is one which all of its citizens can reasonably be expected to endorse."<sup>50</sup> Since political power is coercive, its employment among free and equal persons will be justifiable only if it is in accord with rules and principles acceptable to all such persons. It is this deep moral, liberal conception of political authority and not the concern to avoid conflict that best explains, in this view, Rawls's advocacy of neutral political structures. To be sure, Rawls does worry about the stability of these structures over time, and this is why he underscores the need for developing an "overlapping consensus," in which adherents of varying comprehensive world views affirm political neutrality for reasons specific to the world views held. But this concern for stability and social order, according to the present argument, is introduced by Rawls only *after* he has justified neutral political structures on independent grounds.

Again, what warrants the establishment of those structures at the outset is not the desire for peace but the deep liberal conviction that a morally acceptable political order is one that all reasonable persons might affirm.<sup>51</sup> Since reasonable persons may, in principle, hold different comprehensive world views, political structures and arguments must, in principle, abstract from commitment to such views. So whatever agreement there might be between an Augustinian and a Rawlsian on neutral political structures, the precise normative warrants for those structures differ in each case, and the differences have important practical consequences. For the Augustinian, mainly concerned with peace, the commitment to liberal neutrality is contingent on the determination that peace is served best by neutral political structures. For the Rawlsian, mainly concerned (on this reading) with affirming what all reasonable persons could accept in principle, the commitment to liberal neutrality is contingent on no empirical state of affairs but is rather the necessary political expression of a deep vision of moral community, a vision more akin perhaps to Kantian than to Augustinian normative proposals.

In my view this line of argument exaggerates the contrasts between Augustinian and Rawlsian liberalisms on the matter of peace. For one thing, while Rawls may not always be crystal clear in discussing the normative foundations of liberal neutrality, he does make it quite clear in *Political Liberalism* that his concern for peace is not restricted to the stability of political structures only after their neutrality has been justified on independent normative grounds.<sup>52</sup> On the contrary, this concern is also an integral feature of the rationale for neutrality *ab initio* and forms an important element in Rawls's distinctive political account of liberal arrangements. Liberal neutrality, he insists, is founded neither on some comprehensive vision of moral community nor on some skeptical rejection of all such visions but rather on the pragmatic determination that certain political goals can be accommodated in pluralistic societies only under the umbrella of neutral political structures:

Political liberalism does not question that many political and moral judgments of certain specified kinds are correct and it views many of them as reasonable. Nor does it question the possible truth of affirmations of faith. Above all, it does not argue that we should be hesitant and uncertain, much less skeptical, about our own beliefs. Rather we are to recognize the practical impossibility of reaching reasonable and workable political agreement in judgment on the truth of comprehensive doctrines, especially an agreement that might serve the political purpose, say, of achieving peace and concord in a society characterized by religious and philosophical differences. The limited scope of this conclusion is of

special importance. A constitutional regime does not require an agreement on a comprehensive doctrine: the basis of social unity lies elsewhere.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, in Rawlsian liberalism neutrality commends itself because it advances a limited political objective, namely, it affords the only reasonable hope of securing “peace and concord” in a society marked by radical divergences in comprehensive vision.

Of course, as I have stressed, this concern for peace must be moral in character if it is to sustain neutral political arrangements over the long haul. Again, the desire for peace cannot be rooted exclusively in self-interest but must incorporate a concern for the peace of all social members. But to admit that the case for neutrality is moral because egalitarian in some important sense is not to admit that the case is grounded in a deep liberal egalitarian vision of moral community such as the one described. It is one thing to defend neutral political structures on the basis of an egalitarian appeal to peace conjoined with a recognition of society’s pluralism. It is another thing to defend such structures with the view that the only morally acceptable political arrangements are those any reasonable person in principle could accept, no matter what her or his comprehensive vision. In the first instance, the case for political neutrality is rooted in moral principle (an egalitarian concern for peace) but is also contingent on the fact that neutral political structures serve peace under pluralistic conditions. In the second instance, the commitment to political neutrality is unqualified.

It may be argued, of course, that this last distinction weighs in favor of the second rationale, which makes the stronger case for liberal neutrality, and that Rawls should be read as gravitating toward the stronger of the two cases. Yet, in my reading, Rawls adopts the first rationale for neutrality based on peace and resists the second rationale precisely because he has adopted the first. For Rawls to ground political neutrality in the liberal vision of moral community would almost certainly propel his arguments in the direction of Kantian or Millian appeals to values like respect for autonomy and individuality, values that he explicitly rejects as suitable bases for public consensus precisely because they are not widely shared in the society. An austere appeal to peace, on the other hand, even in its moral construal, admits of varied interpretation by diverse comprehensive visions and is likely, therefore, to garner support from a comparatively wide range of constituencies.

It might be argued that this last remark begs the normative question why the Augustinian/Rawlsian values of peace, order and consensus ought to have priority in political discussions over the Kantian and Millian values of autonomy and individuality, and it might be proposed instead that peace ought



to give way to autonomy when there is conflict or that neutral political structures should be in place whether or not they contribute to peace. Yet in response I would argue that a sufficiently rich conception of peace ought to account for most moral intuitions regarding autonomy since infringements on human freedom, after all, typically disturb the peace of individuals and groups.<sup>54</sup> Given this fact, it is reasonable to expect that the normative concerns of peace and autonomy will converge in a commendation of neutral political structures under pluralistic conditions at least. At any rate, the view that neutral political structures are morally in place whatever the empirical conditions is implausible on any number of normative grounds, including those which value either peace *or* autonomy. For example, a traditional society with a settled way of life and relatively uniform culture might be disposed to privilege politically one particular comprehensive vision of the good and to cast political institutions in terms deriving from that vision. Assuming for the sake of argument that the political arrangements have widespread popular support, initiatives in the direction of political neutrality would likely disrupt peace *and* impede the society's self-determination. To propose that neutral political arrangements are morally preferred even under such conditions because the alternative traditional arrangement would not be acceptable to all reasonable persons in principle (even if it is acceptable to all in this culture as a matter of fact) is to operate with a notion of respect for autonomy that abstracts so thoroughly from historical circumstance that it loses all normative credibility. As Rawls proclaims time and time again and as the Augustinian would agree, liberal neutrality is morally preferred when certain historical conditions are in place, e.g., the conditions of pluralism. Under such conditions, peace and consensus are best served by political arrangements untied to comprehensive visions of the good life, but none of this precludes the possibility that different political arrangements will be preferred morally under different historical conditions given the very same normative concern for peace and consensus.

(2) Another objection to the Augustinian commendation of Rawlsian liberalism runs as follows: While Rawlsian liberalism might ground the commitment to liberal neutrality in a *moral* or *principled* concern for peace, Augustinian politics lacks the normative resources necessary to sustain any such moral or principled concern. The reason is that Augustinian politics lacks finally any conception of a temporal good (in this case, worldly peace) that might be shared by believer and nonbeliever alike and that might serve as a common normative reference point in the public justification of neutral political arrangements. In this interpretation, the only real value temporal peace could have in an Augustinian account is the instrumental value it carries

for Christian believers. That is, temporal peace is a genuine good for the Augustinian only to the extent it serves the ultimate, eternal or eschatological interests of Christians. Indeed, in this understanding, the Augustinian must judge that temporal peace is an unqualified *evil* if put to any other use at all.

Unlike, for example, St. Thomas Aquinas, Augustine does not possess a clear, positive conception of the natural good that is enjoyable, in principle, by all persons irrespective of their supernatural destiny. In the words of J. van Oort, 'Augustine did not see temporal goods separately as neutral goods, but according to the use man makes of them. That use is either good or evil, and in this way temporal goods belong to one of the two cities, either that of God or that of the devil.' The upshot is that, for Augustine, there is very little room for the commonality of interests that is the *raison d'être* of the political order. It is in this sense that Augustine does not have much by way of political *theory*: he does not have a 'thick' conception of legitimate temporal good or goods of human beings, irrespective of their final destiny, which it is the particular function of the political order to advance.<sup>55</sup>

If this reading is correct, then an Augustinian commitment to liberal neutrality is unprincipled and unreliable since the temporal peace served by neutral arrangements can be valued only to the degree it supports Christian eschatological aspirations (e.g., by creating space for the church in the temporal world). It is thus not surprising that Augustine in practice departed from a neutral conception of political power in calling for the use of coercion by the state to discipline the religiously wayward Donatists. If the point of political neutrality is to serve particular religious interests, then no theoretical inconsistencies are created by departures from neutrality motivated by a consideration of those same interests. Thus attributions of correspondence between Augustinian and Rawlsian liberalism are misleading. For the Rawlsian allegiance to liberal neutrality is a matter of moral principle; for the Augustinian such allegiance is a matter of religious expedience.

Augustine's involvement in the Donatist controversy and the bearing of that involvement on any assessment of Augustinian liberalism is a complex matter, which I will address later on. Yet, whatever the resolution of that issue, the claim that Augustinian politics lacks the concept of a neutral temporal good shared by believer and nonbeliever alike collides both with Augustine's explicit pronouncements on the matter and with his larger theological account of the relation between good and evil. While Augustine does emphasize consistently the *instrumental* value of temporal peace for Christians on their way to eternal life, nothing he says in this regard denies what he says

explicitly—that such peace is also a good in its own right, an *intrinsic* good that informs the created order and can be possessed *qua* good by unbeliever (citizen of the *earthly city*) and believer (citizen of the *heavenly city*) alike.<sup>56</sup> Of course, temporal peace for Augustine can only be an unfinished and relatively impoverished peace. Ultimate or perfect peace is a condition reserved in this world as an object of eschatological hope, and unbelievers sin to the degree they treat temporal peace as though it were a final or eternal good. Yet in sinning this way unbelievers do not transform the temporal good of peace into an unmitigated evil. Rather they put an intrinsically good thing to bad use. Indeed, in the Augustinian account an unmitigated evil is metaphysically impossible since any evil is a corruption or deprivation of some good (a *privatio boni*) constitutive of the divinely created order brought into existence *ex nihilo*. Because evil is parasitic on the good in this way, it cannot exist apart from the continued existence of the good that it corrupts. Thus an unbeliever's misuse of temporal peace *could not possibly* annihilate its objective status as a good intrinsic to the well-being of every human being.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, given the command to love the neighbor as well as the determinations of natural law, Augustinian Christians will have decisive *moral* reasons to *seek* this good of temporal peace for all human beings, whether Christian or not.<sup>58</sup> And if neutral politics is judged to serve peace, then Augustinian Christians will have good moral reasons, not just religiously expedient ones, to make common cause with unbelievers and support neutral political arrangements. In this respect there is no significant theoretical difference between Augustinian and Rawlsian liberalism.

(3) A third objection challenges the Augustinian/Rawlsian correlation by distinguishing sharply between an Augustinian vision of peace and the sort of peace commended implicitly by Rawlsian liberal neutrality. In this account liberal neutrality of any kind serves at best an inauthentic peace that reflects no more than a compromise of wills otherwise inclined to mutual conflict. Such "peace," on the present understanding, differs radically from the authentic peace enjoined by Augustinian Christianity, i.e., the peace understood as a genuine social harmony eschatologically envisioned by the church, which is itself conceived as a radical alternative community posed in normative opposition to the ersatz "community" of political life. That the compromise of wills reflected in liberally neutral arrangements makes for an inauthentic peace is signified presumably by the fact that liberal society is held together by coercion—the threats and sanctions of a system of institutionalized violence expressed in the police power and penal institutions of the state. But the eschatological peace envisioned by the church and approximated intermittently in its prophetic moments is an utterly nonviolent peace and harmony.

Between this eschatological peace and the compromised peace of liberalism there can be no “dialectical” relation. Accordingly, the essential task of the church is to witness against this false peace of liberalism and to express publicly in proclamation and practice the ideal of nonviolent peace at the center of the distinctively Christian narrative. If this interpretation is sound, then the Augustinian Christian naturally would lack good reasons for affirming Rawlsian liberal political institutions and structures. On the contrary, the principal task of the Augustinian Christian would be to offer a radical critique of neutral liberal arrangements, a critique focussing particularly on the deficient peace such arrangements are intended to secure.<sup>59</sup>

The essential problem with this line of argument is that it flies in the face of the larger Augustinian theoretical account, which refuses to cast the normative relation between earthly and eternal peace in terms of unambiguous opposition:

But a household of human beings whose life is not based on faith is in pursuit of any earthly peace based on the things belonging to this temporal life, and on its advantages, whereas a household of human beings whose life is based on faith looks forward to the blessings which are promised as eternal in the future, making use of earthly and temporal things like a pilgrim in a foreign land, who does not let himself be taken in by them or distracted from his course towards God, but rather treats them as supports which help him more easily to bear the burdens of ‘the corruptible body which weighs heavy on the soul’; they must on no account be allowed to increase the load. Thus both kinds of men and both kinds of households alike make use of the things essential for this mortal life; but each has its own very different end in making use of them. So also the earthly city, whose life is not based on faith, aims at an earthly peace, and it limits the harmonious agreement of citizens concerning the giving and obeying of orders to the establishment of a kind of compromise between human wills about the things relevant to mortal life. In contrast, the Heavenly City—or rather that part of it which is on pilgrimage in this condition of mortality, and which lives on the basis of faith—must needs make use of this peace also, until this mortal state, for which this kind of peace is essential, passes away. And therefore, it leads what we may call a life of captivity in this earthly city as in a foreign land, although it has already received the promise of redemption, and the gift of the Spirit as a kind of pledge of it; and yet it does not hesitate to obey the laws of the earthly city by which those things which are designed for the support of this mortal life are regulated; and the purpose of this obedience is that, since this mortal condition is shared by both cities, a harmony may be preserved between them in things that are relevant to this condition . . . .

While this Heavenly City, therefore, is on pilgrimage in this world, she calls out citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages. She takes no account of any difference in customs, laws, and institutions, by which earthly peace is achieved and preserved—not that she annuls or abolishes any of those, rather, she maintains them and follows them (for whatever divergences there are among the diverse nations those institutions have one single aim—earthly peace), provided that no hindrance is presented thereby to the religion which teaches that the one supreme and true God is to be worshipped. Thus even the Heavenly City in her pilgrimage here on earth makes use of the earthly peace and defends and seeks the compromise between human wills in respect of the provisions relevant to the mortal nature of man, so far as may be permitted without detriment to true religion and piety. In fact, that City relates the earthly peace to the heavenly peace, which is so truly peaceful that it should be regarded as the only peace deserving the name, at least in respect of the rational creation; for this peace is the perfectly ordered and completely harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and of each other in God.<sup>60</sup>

These texts make clear that the essential disposition of the Augustinian Christian toward the peaceable political order is one of critical appreciation rather than critical opposition. While the Augustinian Christian, as a “pilgrim in a foreign land,” holds fast to the distinction between temporal and eternal peace, she also “makes use of the earthly peace and defends and seeks the compromise between human wills in respect of the provisions relevant to the mortal nature of man.” Thus to the degree that liberally neutral political arrangements maintain temporal peace, they are to be affirmed by the Augustinian Christian, albeit in a way that recognizes the provisional character of the goods such arrangements are designed to secure. That liberally neutral institutions are backed by coercion, moreover, is not itself sufficient reason for opposition to them. While the necessity of political coercion reflects the fallen character of the world, such coercion for the Augustinian is morally justified when utilized by duly constituted authorities to protect peaceable citizens. Of course, an Augustinian *political* realism recognizes that some political coercion, even when tied publicly to liberal justifications, may be little more than an expression of the lust for domination, and Augustinian political assessments are ever ready to expose liberal ideological pretensions masking the *libido dominandi*. But to recognize the danger posed by political coercion is not to reject political coercion as a matter of principle. Indeed, for the Augustinian political coercion marshalled

genuinely in defense of peaceable citizens is an expression of love for neighbor rather than lust for domination.<sup>61</sup>

(4) A final objection argues that similarities between Augustinian politics and Rawlsian liberalism are superficial at best since Augustinian theology is deeply authoritarian and thus antiliberal in character. This argument might be advanced with either of two justifications: (a) While Augustine may appear to gesture theoretically in the direction of political neutrality, his political theology is driven decisively by a "sociolatry" that affirms an intimate connection between political arrangements and God's redemption of history.<sup>62</sup> That sociolatry inevitably undermines commitments to liberal neutrality. (b) However hospitable to liberal arrangements Augustinian politics may appear to be at certain junctures, Augustinian anthropology, which denies human freedom after the fall, is inimical to liberal theory, which assumes in some sense the human capacity for autonomy and grounds the justification of neutral political arrangements in a recognition of this capacity.<sup>63</sup> Either of these arguments is likely to cite Augustine's involvement in the Donatist controversy as important evidence of his antiliberalism. In this way of thinking, Augustine called for political coercion of the Donatists on matters of religious belief precisely because he saw a deep connection between salvation and political history or precisely because he regarded fallen human nature as utterly incapable of self-governance. Thus the Donatist controversy might be said to demonstrate the deeply antiliberal character of Augustinian theology and therefore the unreliability of Augustinian commitments to political neutrality even under pluralistic conditions.

Of course, any reasonable observer must concede that the Donatist controversy represents a substantially illiberal moment in Augustine's career and that his polemical writings dealing with the controversy project a theoretical vision of political authority at odds with ideals of liberal neutrality. But the principal issue before us is whether Augustine's thought or action in the Donatist episode should be taken as a marker of the deeply antiliberal character of his political theology writ large or alternatively as an indication of a strain in his thinking that collided with principles he articulated elsewhere. And though I cannot argue the case at length here, I am convinced by the interpretive line of R. A. Markus, who proposes that Augustine's justifications for political coercion in religious matters stand in "unresolved tension" with his religiously neutral account of political institutions as well as with his affirmation of salvation history operating independently of the character and course of particular political regimes.<sup>64</sup> Given this interpretive line, appealing to the Donatist controversy will not suffice to cement the kind of systematic connection between "sociolatry" and Augustinian theology necessary to

establish the deeply antiliberal character of the latter. On the contrary, Augustinian political theology would afford principles of neutrality that might be cited in criticism of Augustine's own comportment in the Donatist episode. In this account, Augustine failed by his own best measure since his justification for political coercion of the Donatists assigned a salvific role to political institutions above and beyond the indirect and instrumental function of promoting temporal peace.<sup>65</sup>

Issued in the present context, the charge that Augustinianism is deeply illiberal because its anthropology is deeply illiberal simply misunderstands the sort of *political* liberalism connected with Augustinian theology here.<sup>66</sup> As we have seen, political liberalism of the Rawlsian variety aspires to distance itself theoretically from *any* single comprehensive philosophical or theological anthropology precisely in order to elicit agreement on fundamental political principles from citizens holding any number of competing anthropological views. In this account, one assents to liberal neutrality not because that assent follows from, say, a Kantian respect for persons as free or autonomous in some thoroughgoing metaphysical sense. Rather one accepts liberal neutrality because it makes for peace under pluralistic conditions, and peace can be valued for all sorts of reasons consistent with a wide range of competing anthropological views—Augustinian, Kantian, Millian, Buddhist, what have you. Of course, commitment to liberally neutral institutions and arrangements does entail a commitment to some notion of *political* freedom, and Augustinians will have their own metaphysical stories to tell about that freedom—as will Kantians, Millians, Buddhists and other contributors to an “overlapping consensus” in a pluralistic society.<sup>67</sup> But none of those stories will command universal assent in the liberal society envisaged here. On *this* matter and others, the Augustinian will say with the Rawlsian: Liberalism is political, not metaphysical.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The liberal reading of Augustine's politics has been advanced in varying degrees by the following commentators: R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Graham Walker, *Moral Foundations of Constitutional Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Paul J. Weithman, “Toward an Augustinian Liberalism,” *Faith and Philosophy* VIII, 4 (October, 1991): 461-480; Gilbert Meilaender, *The Limits of Love: Some Theological Explorations* (University Park: Pennsylvania State

University Press, 1987), pp. 130-143; Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). My own reading is influenced especially by Markus's. *Loci classici* for the liberal reading include Books V and XIX of the *City of God*.

<sup>2</sup>On *libido dominandi* see, e.g., *City of God* Book I, Preface; Book XIV, Chapter 15; Book XIX, Chapter 14. These and subsequent references to the *City of God* rely on the Henry Bettenson translation edited by David Knowles (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1972).

<sup>3</sup>The following commentators explicitly or implicitly challenge the "liberal" reading of Augustinian politics: John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 380-438; Peter Iver Kaufman, *Redeeming Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 130-148; Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage, 1988), pp. 98-154; Michael J. White, "Pluralism and Secularism in the Political Order: St. Augustine and Theoretical Liberalism," *The University of Dayton Review* XXII/III (Summer, 1994): 137-153.

<sup>4</sup>*Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 36. See also "The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus," *New York University Law Review* 64 (May, 1989):234-35. On the limitations of reason to resolve disagreements, see Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp. 54-58. See also "The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus," pp. 235-239.

<sup>5</sup>"The Domain of the Political and Overlapping Consensus," pp. 234-38. See also *Political Liberalism*, pp. 36-38.

<sup>6</sup>"The Priority of Right and Ideas of the Good," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 17, 4 (1988): 252-53. Cf. *Political Liberalism*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp. 78, 98-101, 125, 199, 211 and elsewhere. Also "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14, 3 (1985): 245-46; "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 7, 1 (1987): 5-6.

<sup>8</sup>Rawls, "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus," p. 6.

<sup>9</sup>Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," p. 246. The example of Roger Williams is my own.

<sup>10</sup>Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," p. 230. See also *Political Liberalism*, pp. ix-x, 94, 126-29, 153.

<sup>11</sup>"Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," p. 238.

<sup>12</sup>Rawls's view of political liberalism and its relation to the metaphysics of personhood is elaborated partially in response to criticisms of the contractarian political philosophy he develops in *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). In that work Rawls argues that the principles of political and economic justice normative for a society are precisely those that would be chosen by hypothetical self-interested, rational contractors choosing under conditions of impartial deliberation. The impartial conditions are secured by assuming that the contractors in this hypothetical "original position" would be covered by a "veil of ignorance," which ensured fairness in the proceedings. Specifically, the contractors are presumed to know nothing about their places in society, their natural abilities, their



conceptions of the good, their locations in history or their society's idiosyncratic economic, political and cultural circumstances. Thus the contractors are deprived of information that would make possible a certain kind of special pleading in decisions about fundamental principles. As Rawls sees it, rational, self-interested contractors choosing under these conditions would settle on distinctive principles of justice connected with political liberty and economic distribution, and so it is these very same principles that ought to govern the basic institutions of society (see *A Theory of Justice*, p. 37).

Michael Sandel has criticized the Rawlsian "original position" because it allegedly presupposes a metaphysical view of the self that is highly controversial and implausible. In Sandel's reading, the "original position" device projects a "self, shorn of all contingently-given attributes," one that takes on "a kind of supraempirical status, essentially unencumbered, bounded in advance and given prior to its ends, a pure subject of agency and possession, ultimately thin." (Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982], p.94; cited by Rawls in "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," p. 239, note 21) This metaphysical account must be rejected, according to Sandel, because it depicts persons as beings deprived of those very characteristics that make for genuine personhood and because it "fails plausibly to account for certain indispensable aspects of our moral experience" (Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 179).

In response Rawls proposes that Sandel's criticism and others like it betray a failure to appreciate "the original position as a device of representation. The veil of ignorance . . . has no metaphysical implications concerning the nature of the self; it does not imply that the self is ontologically prior to the facts about persons that the parties are excluded from knowing. We can, as it were, enter this position any time simply by reasoning for principles of justice in accordance with the enumerated restrictions. When, in this way, we simulate being in this position, our reasoning no more commits us to a metaphysical doctrine about the nature of the self than our playing a game like Monopoly commits us to thinking that we are landlords engaged in a desperate rivalry, winner take all" ("Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," pp. 238-39. See also *Political Liberalism*, p. 27).

<sup>13</sup> *Political Liberalism*, p. 291.

<sup>14</sup> While Rawls does allow in principle for some inequality in the distribution of goods, the presumption is in favor of equality. Departures from equality are justified only on it can be shown that inequality favors the least-advantaged members of the society. Thus the spirit of the Rawlsian "difference principle" is egalitarian.

<sup>15</sup> *Political Liberalism*, p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> *Political Liberalism*, p. 99.

<sup>17</sup> See Rorty's *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 175-196, and his *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 57-58.

<sup>18</sup> *Political Liberalism*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>19</sup> *Political Liberalism*, p. xxi.

<sup>20</sup> *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, p. 180.

<sup>21</sup> *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, pp. 187-188.

<sup>22</sup> Rorty continues: "According to this view, what counts as rational or fanatical is relative to the group to which we think it necessary to justify ourselves—to the body of shared belief that determines the reference of the word 'we'." *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, pp. 57-61.

<sup>24</sup> *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p. 84.

<sup>27</sup> In moments, Rorty seems to qualify his reading of Rawls on this matter. For instance, in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* Rorty suggests at one point that Rawls does not need to align his position with any philosophical view, constructivist or otherwise—though if "one has a taste for philosophy" a constructivist view would be most appropriate (p. 192). In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, on the other hand, Rorty suggests a deeper connection between Rawlsian liberalism and constructivist accounts (pp. 57-58).

<sup>28</sup> On the connection between the morality and the metaphysics of peace in Augustine, see especially the *City of God*, Book XIX, Chapters 11-17. For a general account of Augustinian moral realism see Graham Walker, *Moral Foundations of Constitutional Thought*, especially Chapter 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. xvii.

<sup>30</sup> At points Rorty seems to concede as much:

This means that when the secret police come, when the torturers violate the innocent, there is nothing to be said to them of the form "There is something within you which you are betraying. Though you embody the practices of a totalitarian society which will endure forever, there is something beyond those practices which condemns you." This thought is hard to live with, as is Sartre's remark:

Tomorrow, after my death, certain people may decide to establish fascism, and the others may be cowardly or miserable enough to let them get away with it. At that moment, fascism will be the truth of man, and so much the worse for us. In reality, things will be as much as man has decided they are.

This hard saying brings out what ties Dewey and Foucault, James and Nietzsche, together—the sense that there is nothing deep down inside us except what we have put there ourselves, no criterion that we have not created in the course of creating a practice, no standard of rationality that is not an appeal to such a criterion, no rigorous argumentation that is not obedience to our own conventions." (*Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. xlii)

For further discussion of these and related matters see my, "Nihilism Revisited," *Journal of Religion* 71 (January, 1991): 67-78.

<sup>31</sup> *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> *Political Liberalism*, p. xxi.

<sup>33</sup> See *Political Liberalism*, pp. 8, 14.

<sup>34</sup> "Sometimes one hears reference made to the so-called Enlightenment project of finding a philosophical secular doctrine, one founded on reason and yet comprehensive. It would then be suitable to the modern world, so it was thought, now that the religious authority and faith of Christian ages was alleged to be no longer dominant.

Whether there is or ever was such an Enlightenment project we need not consider; for in any case political liberalism, as I think of it, and justice as fairness as a form thereof, has no such ambitions" (*Political Liberalism*, p. xviii).

<sup>35</sup> "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," *Journal of Philosophy* 77, 9 (1980): 519.

<sup>36</sup> *Political Liberalism*, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> For Rawls on moral realism's possible role in an "overlapping consensus" see *Political Liberalism*, p. 95. For Rawls on the notion of "overlapping consensus" generally see *Political Liberalism*, pp. 133-172.

<sup>38</sup> *Political Liberalism*, p. 94. See also p. 113.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. For example, a "prescriptivist" sees moral sentences as analogous to imperatives, which may be more or less adequate but are not the bearers of truth values.

<sup>40</sup> *Political Liberalism*, p. xxvi.

<sup>41</sup> *Political Liberalism*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>42</sup> Timothy Jackson, "To Bedlam and Part Way Back: John Rawls and Christian Justice," *Faith and Philosophy* VIII, 4 (October, 1991): 423-447.

<sup>43</sup> "No one accepts the political conception driven by political compromise" (*Political Liberalism*, p. 171).

<sup>44</sup> *Political Liberalism*, p. 148. See also p. 147.

<sup>45</sup> An analogy with natural science might be helpful here. It may be true that historical conditions are propitious for the discovery and rational justification of some truths, e.g., the theory of relativity. It is another thing to say that the scientific truths are no more than historical-constructions, that they do not describe a world independent of the constructions themselves.

<sup>46</sup> The proposal here abstracts from the question of the precise sort of moral realism required by Rawlsian liberalism. The main point is to insist simply that Rawlsian liberalism is incompatible with the kind of thoroughgoing constructivism espoused by Rorty. Whether, for example, something like Putnam's *internal realism* is sufficient to preserve the full force of liberalism's moral commendations is a matter I leave open—though I am inclined to suspect, with David Brink, that nothing short of a full-blown *metaphysical realism* will serve the purpose. In part, the issue turns on whether Putnam's notion of justification under ideal conditions is an adequate interpretation of the transcendent moral reality necessary to render intelligible the moral commendation of liberal culture over alternatives. See Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), especially pp. 49-74. For Brink's counterargument see his *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 1-80 but especially pp. 31-36.

<sup>47</sup> Thus Rawls argues consistently that his own theory is neutral only with respect to "reasonable" comprehensive views. The theory rules out, on the other hand, *unreasonable* views, e.g., those that advocate sacrificing peace for the sake of creating a monolithic society. See *Political Liberalism*, pp. 47-66.

<sup>48</sup> "The Independence of Moral Theory," *Proceedings of the APA* (48): 5-22.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1992), p. 190.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 189-193.

<sup>52</sup> In fairness to Mulhall and Swift, it should be noted that their interpretation cited in note 51 was constructed before the publication of Rawls's *Political Liberalism*.

<sup>53</sup> *Political Liberalism*, p. 63.

<sup>54</sup> This is especially true if the relevant notion of peace comprehends, as Augustine's does, the maintenance of internal harmony within individuals as well as external harmony among individuals. In such an account, typical violations of autonomy will disturb the internal peace of individuals. On peace as harmony internal to the individual see *City of God*, Book XIX, Chapter 13.

<sup>55</sup> Michael J. White, "Pluralism and Secularism in the Political Order: St. Augustine and Theoretical Liberalism," p. 145.

<sup>56</sup> Thus Augustine says: "The earthly city will not be everlasting; for when it is condemned to the final punishment it will no longer be a city. It has its good in this world, and rejoices to participate in it with such gladness as can be derived from things of such a kind . . . . However, it would be incorrect to say that the goods which this city desires are not goods, since even that city is better, in its own human way by their possession. For example, that city desires an earthly peace, for the sake of the lowest goods; and it is this peace which it longs to attain by making war . . . . Now when the victory goes to those who were fighting for the juster cause, can anyone doubt that the victory is a matter for rejoicing and the resulting peace is something to be desired? These things are goods and undoubtedly they are gifts from God" (*City of God*, Book XV, Chapter 4). And later: "God then, created all things in supreme wisdom and ordered them in perfect justice; and in establishing the mortal race of mankind as the greatest ornament of earthly things, he has given to mankind certain good things suitable to this life. These are: temporal peace, in proportion to the short span of a mortal life—the peace that consists in bodily health and soundness, and in fellowship with one's kind; and everything necessary to safeguard or recover this peace" (*City of God*, Book XIX, Chapter 13).

<sup>57</sup> I should emphasize that the principal point here is not to defend the Augustinian doctrine of evil as a *privatio boni* but only to present the doctrine as evidence against the view that Augustine lacked a conception of temporal peace as an intrinsic good enjoyable in principle by believer and nonbeliever alike.

<sup>58</sup> "Now God, our master, teaches two chief precepts, love of God and love of neighbor . . . . For this reason he will be at peace, as far as lies in him, with all men, in that peace among men, that ordered harmony" (*City of God*, Book XIX, Chapter 14). On the overlap between scriptural morality and natural law see Augustine's *Expositions on the Psalms LVII*, excerpted in Henry Paolucci, ed., *The Political Writings of St. Augustine* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1962), pp. 153-158. For a useful discussion of this issue in Augustine, see Gene Outka, "Augustinianism and Common Morality," in Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr., eds., *Prospects for a Common Morality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 114-148.

<sup>59</sup> In the main, this is the line of argument taken by John Milbank. See his *Theology and Social Theory*, especially pp. 389-418.

<sup>60</sup> *City of God*, Book XIX, Chapter 17.

<sup>61</sup> For Augustine Jesus's injunction to "turn the other cheek" in response to physical assault commends an inward disposition rather than an external act. Thus peaceably motivated political coercion is compatible with that injunction in the Augustinian account. See *The Letter to Marcellinus* and *Against Faustus the Manichaeon*, both excerpted in Augustine, *Political Writings*, Michael W. Tkacz and Douglas Kries, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1994), pp. 208 and 221-223. Milbank acknowledges Augustine's explicit concessions to political coercion but argues that these concessions are in fact out of keeping with Augustine's larger vision, which denies "any ontological purchase to *dominium*, or power for its own sake." Presumably Augustine's "account of a legitimate, non-sinful, 'pedagogic' coercion violates this ontology, because it makes some punishment positive, and ascribes it to the action of the divine will. This is inconsistent, because in any coercion, however mild and benignly motivated, there is still present a moment of 'pure' violence, externally and arbitrarily related to the end one has in mind, just as the schoolmaster's beating with canes has no intrinsic connection with the lesson he seeks to teach . . . . Thus although a punishment may be subordinate to essentially persuasive purposes which are at variance with worldly *dominium*, Augustine fails to see that the duration of punishment has to be an interval of such *dominium*, for the lesson *immediately* and intrinsically taught here must be the power of one over another, and it is always possible that the victim will learn only this lesson, and build up a resentment which prevents him from seeing what the punishment was really trying to point out. Punishment is always a tragic risk" (Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, pp. 419-420). Yet Milbank's observations here seem to assume mistakenly that the only possible Augustinian justification for coercion is punishment whose purpose is the reformation of a perpetrator. That view ignores another normative justification central to the Augustinian account, namely, that coercion utilized by officials charged to keep the peace is justified when necessary to protect the well-being of peaceable citizens. Such use of coercion is hardly the exercise of "power for its own sake."

<sup>62</sup> Peter Iver Kaufman, *Redeeming Politics*, pp. 3-9, 130-148.

<sup>63</sup> Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, pp. 98-126.

<sup>64</sup> Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, p. 145. In Markus's account, Augustine's desacralization of politics is essential to his argument that the collapse of the Christian Roman Empire could not impede the Christian God's providential ordering of history: "The working out of God's purposes—so the argument runs—does not stand or fall with the fate of Rome or, indeed, with the fate of any particular society . . . . The christianization of the Roman Empire is as accidental to the history of salvation as it is reversible . . . . In Augustine's hands the Roman Empire has lost its religious significance. Rome has been removed from the *Heilsgeschichte*, the Empire is no longer seen as God's chosen instrument for the salvation of men. It is no longer indispensable for the unfolding of his providential plan in history. Nor is it, on the other hand, a Satanic obstacle to its realization . . . . The Empire has become no more than a historical, empirical society with a chequered career, whose vicissitudes are not to be directly correlated with the favor of the gods,

pagan or Christian, given in return for services rendered. It is theologically neutral” (*Saeculum*, pp. 53-55). In support of this reading, Markus draws persuasively on the *City of God*, Books V and XIX, where Augustine characterizes the divine bestowal of political power as a dispensation to “good and evil alike” (V, 26) and where he casts the role of political institutions in salvifically neutral terms identifying the purpose of political arrangements as the sustenance of “earthly peace,” a goal shared equally by believer and nonbeliever (XIX, 17, 24): “The earthly peace is of common concern to all, whether citizens of the heavenly or of the earthly cities; it is valued and loved by both . . . . The *res publica* will inevitably embrace among its members people with a variety of different ultimate allegiances. But these allegiances fall outside of the *res publica*. So far as these are concerned, within its restricted sphere the state is inherently ‘pluralistic’, being the sphere in which the concerns of individuals with divergent ultimate loyalties coincide. The worlds of their personal valuations may be differently structured, their personal orientations in respect of what is ultimately desirable may conflict; but this does not preclude agreement on valuing in some manner which need not—indeed must not—be specified, all that Augustine includes within the scope of ‘temporal peace’” (*Saeculum*, p. 69).

<sup>65</sup> Augustine defended the use of political coercion against the Donatists on the grounds that such measures stimulated conversions to Catholic Christianity. See his *Letter to Vincentius*, excerpted in Augustine, *Political Writings*, Tkacz and Kries, trans., pp. 232-245.

<sup>66</sup> I should point out that issuing this charge in the present context would go beyond Elaine Pagels’s historical argument, which suggests no more than that an Augustinian anthropology of human bondage to sin is incompatible with the kind of anthropology of human freedom undergirding full-blown metaphysical defenses of liberal political arrangements. See *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, pp. 98-126.

<sup>67</sup> It goes without saying that an Augustinian may deny that human beings (apart from grace) are *metaphysically* free since they are driven by desires beyond their full control and still affirm that human beings should be *politically* free in the sense that political arrangements ought not to dictate adherence to any comprehensive vision of the good life. The *metaphysical* story an Augustinian might tell about *political* freedom would make reference to the peace such freedom secures and to the role that peace plays in God’s providential ordering of the universe.