

剑桥政治思想史原著系列（影印本）

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

# 奥古斯丁政治著作选

Augustine

Political

Writings

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Edited by

E. M. ATKINS

and

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R. J. DODARO

中国政法大学出版社

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**AUGUSTINE**  
**POLITICAL WRITINGS**

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## 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

奥古斯丁政治著作选/(古罗马)奥古斯丁(Augustinus, A.)著. —北京:中国政法大学出版社, 2003. 5

剑桥政治思想史原著系列(影印本)

ISBN 7-5620-2347-6

I. 奥... II. 奥... III. 奥古斯丁, A. (354~430)—政治—著作—英文 IV. D091.2

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2003)第034794号

\* \* \* \* \*

书 名	《奥古斯丁政治著作选》
出 版 人	李传政
经 销	全国各地新华书店
出版发行	中国政法大学出版社
承 印	清华大学印刷厂
开 本	880 × 1230mm 1/32
印 张	11.375
版 本	2003年5月第1版 2003年5月第1次印刷
书 号	ISBN 7-5620-2347-6/D·2307
印 数	0 001 - 2 000
定 价	26.00元
社 址	北京市海淀区西土城路25号 邮政编码 100088
电 话	(010)62229563 (010)62229278 (010)62229803
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网 址	http://www.cup1.edu.cn/cbs/index.htm

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原书由剑桥大学出版社于 2001 年出版,此影印本的出版获得剑桥大学出版社财团(英国剑桥)的许可。

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CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE  
HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

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AUGUSTINE: POLITICAL WRITINGS

This collection brings together thirty-five letters and sermons of Augustine, bishop of Hippo from AD 396 to 430, that deal with political matters. The letters and sermons are both practical and principled and treat many essential themes in Augustine's thought, including the responsibilities of citizenship, the relationship between the church and secular authority, religious coercion, and war and peace. These texts complement Augustine's classic *The City of God against the Pagans* (also available in the Cambridge Texts series), and give students direct insight into the political and social world of late antiquity with which Augustine was immediately involved. The slave trade, tax collection, clerical harassment, and murder are amongst the topics with which he deals. The volume contains clear, accurate modern translations, together with a concise introduction and informative notes designed to aid the student encountering Augustine's life and thought for the first time.

E. M. ATKINS is Lecturer in Theology at Trinity and All Saints College, Leeds. She co-edited (with M. T. Griffin) and translated *Cicero, On Duties* for the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (1991).

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# 剑桥政治思想史原著系列

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在政治理论领域，“剑桥政治思想史原著系列”作为主要的学生教科丛书，如今已牢固确立了其地位。本丛书旨在使学生能够获得从古希腊到 20 世纪初期西方政治思想史方面所有最为重要的原著。它囊括了所有著名的经典原著，但与此同时，它又扩展了传统的评价尺度，以便能够纳入范围广泛、不那么出名的作品。而在此之前，这些作品中有许多从未有过现代英文版本可资利用。只要可能，所选原著都会以完整而不删节的形式出版，其中的译作则是专门为本丛书的目的而安排。每一本书都有一个评论性的导言，加上历史年表、生平梗概、进一步阅读指南，以及必要的词汇表和原文注解。本丛书的最终目的是，为西方政治思想的整个发展脉络提供一个清晰的轮廓。

本丛书已出版著作的书目，请查阅书末。

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE  
HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

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## Editors' note

There has been consultation and collaboration between us on every aspect and at every stage. The primary division of responsibility, however, is as follows. The Introduction was the joint responsibility of Robert Dodaro and Margaret Atkins. Robert Dodaro furnished the list of Principal dates, the Bibliography, the Biographical notes, and most of the annotations on the text. The translation was the work of Margaret Atkins, who also prepared the Translator's notes and the map. She also contributed to the annotations.

Three scholars deserve our particular thanks: Peter Garnsey read the whole manuscript and gave invaluable advice at each stage; George Lawless also commented helpfully on the entire manuscript; Peter Glare read a draft of the translation and suggested numerous improvements. In addition, we are grateful to Caroline Humfress for advice on Roman law, Claire Sotinel for help with the Biographical notes, and Aldo Bazan and Allan Fitzgerald for technical assistance and advice.

This volume is dedicated with gratitude to our respective parents.



## Introduction

### Why letters and sermons?

'I beg you as a Christian to a judge and I warn you as a bishop to a Christian', wrote Augustine in a letter to Apringius, proconsul of Africa. In the *City of God* Augustine lays out on a vast canvas the themes of Christianity and paganism, providence and power, empire and church, and divine and human justice, writing as a learned Christian apologist, an intellectual addressing his peers. It is easy to forget that he was also, and before all else, a Christian pastor. As a bishop, he struggled with the daily reality of political life in a society in which 'church' and 'state' had never been, and could not conceivably be, disentangled. In this context, 'justice' referred not to the rise and fall of empires, but to the decision whether to punish or to pardon a Donatist thug who had beaten up one of his priests. 'War' was not merely a theological construct: an instrument of divine wrath or divine education. It was happening in the next province, where one of Augustine's old acquaintances was responsible for warding off the barbarian raiders. 'Civic power' may have been embodied symbolically in the emperor in distant Rome, but here in north Africa it was men like Augustine's correspondent Apringius who made the decisions that mattered.

The exigencies of daily life raised large political questions: how can punishment be justified at all? Is the gentleness of Christ compatible with responsible government? Ought the force of law to be used to deter those tempted by heresy? Augustine wrote about such matters, but not in the *City of God*. To discover the everyday political thinking that constituted both the background to and the outworking of the large-scale ideas of his

*magnum opus*, we need to turn to the occasional writings of the busy bishop. In other words, we need to read his letters and his sermons. Here we find Augustine reflecting on practical issues as they arise, as he answers a request, intercedes with an authority, debates with an opponent, or advises a friend. We also hear him encouraging, teaching and chastising his congregation from the pulpit in reaction to current events. The bishop is thinking on his feet, and his answers are often *ad hoc* and *ad hominem*. He does not articulate grand theory in these documents. Yet to read through them is to become aware of the way in which fundamental ideas about God and humanity, filtered through Augustine's pastoral experience, shaped a distinctive and challenging intellectual response to the problems of his society.

### Between the two cities

The consequences of the conversion in 312 of the emperor Constantine upon relations between Christians and the secular powers were complex, and took time to develop. First, the laws, which had always favoured the official religion, now protected the property of Christian churches and privileged Christian priests; by the late fourth century they also forbade pagan practices and rendered heresy illegal. Secondly, as public careers were opened to Christians, the successful were faced with the problem of how to exercise civic power in a manner compatible with their faith. Thirdly, the bishops who led the Christian congregations, which came to constitute a majority in many towns of the empire, wielded great influence, individually and collectively, both as moral guides and as public figures. Fourthly, it had begun to matter how the mass of ordinary people lived their lives, and not only for reasons of public order. For the virtues of the ordinary man and woman were both a sign and an integral element of their faith; moreover, both bishops and emperor believed themselves responsible for the souls of their people. Bishops, therefore, had no choice but to involve themselves in political matters, as intercessors, advocates, advisers, teachers, preachers and leaders. Fortunately, Augustine's early life had prepared him well for the more worldly aspects of his eventual career as a bishop.

Augustine was born in 354 in Thagaste, then in the Roman province of Numidia, today the town of Souk Ahras in Algeria. His father, a modest landowner and town councillor, was ambitious for his clever son, and his ambition fuelled Augustine's own. The boy was clearly gifted with words,

and one route to social and economic advance was the art of public speaking; for oratory in Augustine's world was a means to impress the powerful, to persuade the masses and to exert influence on legal and political decisions. Augustine's parents encouraged his further schooling, and sent him at the age of seventeen to the city of Carthage to study rhetoric. By 376 he was himself teaching rhetoric in Carthage, and soon he wrote the first of his many books, on this very subject.

At the age of twenty-eight, dissatisfied with the students in Carthage, and eager to further his career, he crossed the sea to Rome. Before long he had caught the eye of Symmachus, the prefect of the city, and when Symmachus was asked to find a professor of rhetoric for the city of Milan, where the Western emperor had his court, he recommended Augustine for the job. The political and religious tensions in the imperial city at the time would have given Augustine a taste of the complexities of power in the Christianised empire. The young emperor, Valentinian II, was under the sway of his mother, a so-called Arian rather than orthodox Christian, while further west in the empire the usurper Magnus Maximus, who presented himself as a staunch Catholic, had taken control. Augustine also witnessed direct conflict in Milan when Arian imperial troops attempted to seize a Catholic basilica, with Ambrose, the Catholic bishop, inside.

Augustine's new position enabled him to make influential friends. His duties included delivering panegyrics on ceremonial occasions in honour of important citizens, and he made at least one speech in praise of the emperor and another for his commander-in-chief. The lad from the provinces was rising to fame, and his hope that one day he would secure a provincial governorship was not unreasonable. Yet his success did not satisfy him. He became increasingly disenchanted with the intrigues and infighting inseparable from public life, and he found the orator's need to compromise the truth through flattery increasingly burdensome.

Augustine's restless intelligence had always been seeking more than worldly success. He had looked to philosophy, and to the Manichaean religion, to satisfy his spiritual longing, and neither had proved adequate. At last, in Milan itself, he found what he was looking for, in the sermons of Ambrose, which finally eased his way back to Christianity, the religion of his mother and of his childhood. Two years after arriving in Milan he decided to resign his post, seek baptism and abandon Italy for a religious and philosophical retirement with a group of like-minded friends in Thagaste.

Augustine, as he himself later put it, had left the service of the emperor

for the service of God. He thought that in doing so he had exchanged the anxieties of political ambition for philosophical calm. However, the church was as eager as the empire to exploit the talents of its citizens, and few men possessed Augustine's combination of intellectual penetration, political acumen and skill to persuade. The church needed him, though, as a pastor: within a decade of his conversion, he reluctantly accepted the positions of first priest, and then bishop of the port of Hippo, near to his birthplace. His new responsibilities, contrasting so sharply with those he would have had either as a public servant or as a private philosopher, were to dominate his thinking and writing for the rest of his life.

Scripture was the basis of the Christian's life and thought; as a new priest Augustine had requested time from his bishop to study the Bible in order to equip himself to meet his congregation's needs. Now, as a bishop, one of his main functions was to mediate to his people his understanding of the word of God. Many of his extant sermons and numerous commentaries on scripture reflect this role.

Augustine also became involved in combating both paganism and heretical or sectarian movements within the church, in particular Donatism, which was local to north Africa, where it commanded strong support (for the origins of this movement see pp. 127–8). Again, Augustine's extant writings include a number of pieces of polemic directed against such non-Catholic groups. His role in tackling such problems extended beyond his own diocese: the bishops of north Africa met in annual councils which decided matters of ecclesiastical discipline, which included promoting common strategies for dealing with groups like the Donatists. On occasion, the councils petitioned the emperor himself for legislation to assist in this work.

International affairs also impinged upon life in Hippo. In 410 an army led by Alaric the Visigoth sacked the city of Rome, an event which was in fact more of a symbolic than a material blow to the Romans. However, Roman refugees fleeing the barbarian forces poured into Hippo, and exaggerated reports of the attack frightened the Africans. Augustine's *Sermon on the sacking of the city of Rome*, included in this volume, provides a formal theological explanation of God's decision to allow such events to take place. Thus, it foreshadows one of the major themes of the *City of God*. The consistent pressure from the movement of barbarian tribes through Europe and north Africa meant that warfare was never far from Augustine's mind; indeed, as he lay dying in 430 Hippo itself was under siege from the Vandals.

Augustine transferred his allegiance when he converted, but he did not abandon his weapons. He employed his oratory in the pulpit, his legal knowledge in judging disputes and opposing heretics, his political experience and contacts in negotiating with statesmen and winning their support. He added to these skills regular meditation upon scripture, which constantly shaped his use of them. Moreover, as a Christian he returned to his African roots. He never rejected the imperial machine with which he had worked so closely, but as a provincial on the margins of the empire he could view it with a degree of detachment. Milan, like any other human authority, was there to serve the purposes of God.

### Humanity and Christ

A couple of years before Augustine began to write the *City of God*, he exchanged letters with a pagan called Nectarius, who was pleading with him to intercede on behalf of the population of his native town, Calama, not far from Hippo. Nectarius tried to flatter Augustine by comparing him with the Roman statesman and political thinker Cicero. Augustine, however, saw clearly that Christianity required the transformation of the classical Roman understanding of civic virtues. Nectarius' earthly patriotism was certainly commendable, but unless he came also to accept that his true homeland was 'the heavenly city', it would remain misdirected and fruitless, for he could not help his fellow citizens to flourish in the fullest way while still encouraging them in false religious belief (Letters 90, 91, 103 and 104).

In particular, the fundamental role played by Christ sets Augustine's political thought apart from the classical tradition. Augustine believed with orthodox Christianity that Christ was fully human; therefore he was able to exemplify a just human life, which consisted in love of God and neighbour. Yet the incarnation meant that Christ was also the unique instrument of grace by which God assisted human beings in living justly. They needed such grace because they had inherited the effects of the sin of Adam, and, consequently, left to themselves were unable to know completely, or to want whole-heartedly, what justice required. Christ, though, was free from original sin, and thus able to offer to the rest of humanity the cure, a life in full communion with God, which was established through baptism. However, baptism did not entirely eradicate the effects of original sin before death; even the saints had continually to struggle against these effects during their lives.

Only in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, therefore, can civic virtues such as piety and courage be seen perfectly fulfilled. Consequently, it is natural for Christians to use Christ as a model to imitate, as Augustine suggests when he repeatedly commends gentleness by referring to the story of the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8; cf. Commentary on the gospel of John, 33, Sermon 13 and Letter 153).

On the other hand, because Christ in Augustine's view was both divine and sinlessly human, we cannot simply imitate him. In the first place, we can never possess the virtues as fully as he does. Secondly, we can do so at all only by a process of conversion and continuous acknowledgement of our failures and dependence upon his justifying grace. Augustine, therefore, uses the apostles and martyrs as role-models for the Christian. In this, they function as the Christian equivalent of the ancient Roman civic heroes, whose acts of selfless courage inspired other citizens. Yet they are not, and no human except Christ could be, flawless heroes. So, for example, where the Romans represented a man like Regulus as perfectly brave, Augustine argued that the Christian martyrs could not completely overcome their fear of death. Even the great saints, then, must confess their weaknesses; thus Augustine proclaimed Daniel, for example, as virtuous precisely because despite his heroism he was prepared to do just that (*Sermon on the sacking of the city of Rome*).

The theme of the Christian's need to confess both his own sin and his dependence on grace appears regularly in Augustine's correspondence with those in authority. For example, he writes to Macedonius, the current vicar of Africa, responsible for the legal administration of the region, to whom he has just sent the first three books of the *City of God*. An important theme of the letter is the contrast between Christian teaching on grace and the pagan philosopher's belief in the self-sufficiency of the wise man (Letter 155).

This letter also sets the traditional Roman virtues in the context of the 'heavenly commonwealth', the communion of the angels and saints who live in blessedness with God. Faithful Christians on earth are journeying towards this commonwealth, moved by a desire to share its happiness. In this eschatological perspective, the civic virtues are transformed into aspects of the love of God and neighbour. Furthermore, in heaven they will no longer be needed, or, rather, they will dissolve into the simple act of loving and enjoying the presence of God.

At the same time, Augustine does not deny the value of civic virtues for purely earthly purposes: Christian and pagans alike benefit from just,

peaceful and orderly societies. Indeed, he both defends Christianity against its detractors and criticises paganism by arguing that only true religion can in fact protect even the narrowly civic functions of the virtues. Similarly, he argues to Nectarius that the paganism of his protégés encourages vices which damage the very town that Nectarius claims to love. Civic virtues are as necessary for well-being as Cicero himself thought; they are best secured, however, in Augustine's view, by the Christian churches, in which public exhortations to peace can regularly be heard (Letters 91 and 104; cf. Letter 138).

### The responsibilities of power

Augustine's belief in the fallenness of human nature was not based purely on abstract theology; the evidence for it could be seen all around him. In many modern societies the violence that underpins social harmony is implicit or unacknowledged: it hides in inaccessible military bases, in prisons and law-courts, in slums and in streets that we avoid. Our long-distance wars are mediated to us through the softening lens of television. Augustine, however, could not afford to neglect the question of violence, in practice or in theory. For him, it constituted the most urgent and the most basic problem of politics.

Violence was a problem for two reasons. First, it destroyed the fragile 'earthly peace' which was the condition for the flourishing of any society, religious or secular; the need for physical security, sustenance and freedom to cooperate was recognised by everyone. Secondly, to engage in violent behaviour was to disobey the Christian summons to live in gentleness, to return good for evil, and to forgive. It harmed the perpetrators as much as the victims, or, rather, it harmed them more, for it drew them away from the path to eternal life.

The Christian, however, seemed caught in a dilemma. Those who disturbed the peace could be restrained only by the use of force. Was it possible for officials committed to mercy to protect their society either from enemies without or from criminals within? In particular, therefore, Augustine was forced to ponder the justification for and the role of the two types of violence normally seen as legitimate: warfare and institutional punishment.

Augustine's response to the dilemma was to distinguish sharply between authorised and unauthorised use of force. He appealed to the well-known thirteenth chapter of St Paul's letter to the Romans, where

Paul argued that 'higher authority' is ordained by God, and urged the Romans to respect it. From this Augustine deduced that those who had specific responsibilities – as governors, judges, soldiers – were justified in employing or authorising the use of force for the purposes of their office. It was important for others, therefore, to respect their right to do this: Christians should obey the laws. However, the point of distinguishing the legitimate use of force was not to encourage rulers to employ harsh measures without fear of acting unjustly. The function of law was to restrain violence and secure peace: its use should be impersonal and never vengeful, and limited to the minimum necessary. Augustine interprets Romans 13 in the context of Psalm 2.10, 'Be instructed, all you who judge the earth', which he took as a warning to earthly judges against corruption (Sermon 13). Moreover, it was the legitimisation of specific uses of force that made it possible for Augustine to insist firmly that unauthorised violence could have no justification.

When Augustine reminds rulers of their own obligation to justice, he is not mouthing empty pieties. For he believed that on the day of judgement, each of us would be called to render an account of our lives. Those in positions of responsibility over others, whether governors or bishops or fathers, would have to account for any injustices they committed in exercising them. Moreover, they were accountable to God for the well-being of those in their care. Consequently, Augustine took the responsibilities of power with enormous seriousness. For the same reason, he also argued that those subject to specific authorities should not try to usurp their role: each will have to render his own account to God.

At this point, it is important to recognise the practical context of Augustine's comments about law. In his society, laws were not proposed and passed by a centralised government, then automatically applied and enforced by an impersonal police force and separate judiciary. First, while there also existed a body of inherited law, much of the law was made by the emperor in response to appeals from the provinces, from officials, or from influential groups or individuals. Secondly, the extent to which a law was promulgated and followed was partly up to the local governor and partly up to the initiative of local communities. Moreover, the same officials who were responsible for governing provinces presided over legal trials. Finally, although much of the late Roman penal system seems by our standards grimly barbaric, there was no requirement on judges to impose a set minimum penalty: they were free to respond to appeals for leniency.

There was, then, room for discretion and for initiative. This flexibility



increased the seriousness of the burden (as Augustine termed it) of responsibility: one would be judged not by the simple criteria of obedience or efficiency, but on one's judgement in employing or applying law fairly and mercifully, with consideration for the well-being of all those involved, both individuals and groups.

What, however, counted as 'well-being'? For Augustine, of course, this included not only basic physical welfare and communal peace, but also moral and religious flourishing. All of these should be taken into account. Augustine does not, in principle, exclude any of these considerations from the responsibilities of any particular office, by, for example, limiting the churchman's concern to religious issues, or the statesman's to social. The emperor makes the laws, and that includes laws relating to religion; the bishop may seek to enforce or mitigate the laws, and that includes laws relating to secular peace.

However, each office had its own specific duties and its own emphases. What, then, was the primary responsibility of a Christian who held secular office? He must, of course, protect the peace and requite injustice by means of the established laws. He could, and should, use force where authorised and where necessary. He should do so to protect his community both materially and also religiously. In all of this, Augustine shares the general assumptions of his society, even if the clarity of his rejection of unauthorised force is unusual. What is distinctive, however, is his repeated reminder to the powerful of their own flawed nature. Those who judge will themselves be judged, and they should recognise with fear and trembling their own injustice. Without self-examination, confession and repentance, no earthly judge can hope for the God-given wisdom to make sound decisions (see e.g. Sermon 13). Such repentance, however, will encourage the judge to exercise his office with a justice that is properly imbued with humility and mercy.

In all this, Augustine speaks as a Christian to Christians. In the letter to Apringius, he is interceding for a criminal to ask for a merciful verdict. He makes it clear that he would have interceded also with a non-Christian official, but that his arguments would have been different. The Christian ruler is under the obligation to exercise mercy, and also, although Augustine presses the point only gently, under an obligation to listen to the bishop's advice (Letter 134).

The primary responsibility of the bishop himself, was, of course, religious. Yet at least two of his pastoral duties had clear political implications. The first was education in the virtues, exercised on his congregation