

ASSESSING THE AUGUSTINIAN DEMOCRATS

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ABSTRACT

In this essay I argue that Christian political participation as envisioned by those I term “Augustinian democrats”—a group of Protestant ethicists following a path cleared by Jeffrey Stout’s 2004 *Democracy and Tradition*—is founded upon an elegantly rendered political ontology, but leaves incomplete a description of the practical task and place of the church. My contention is that this incompletely developed practical task is not accidental to the manner in which these Augustinians complete the speculative, ontological task. The completion of the speculative task combined with the incompleteness of the practical task, I conclude, nevertheless results in a hybrid and especially interesting picture of personhood that points to an understanding of Protestantism as the attempt to recover human individuality within Christianity.

KEYWORDS: *Jeff Stout, Augustinian liberalism, Charles Mathewes, Eric Gregory, church*

I am concerned in this essay with recent conversations about Christian participation in politics, focusing specifically on the contributions of those I will call “Augustinian democrats,” a group of Protestant Christian ethicists who have come to prominence in and through the conceptual space prepared by Jeffrey Stout’s *Democracy and Tradition* (2004). In the following, I attempt to outline what I take to be their chief theoretical proposal and how it hinders and helps the conversation on Christian participation in the public sphere. While outlining the proposal, I start with its appropriated Augustinian ontology, a conceptualization of time and space that emplaces us with our neighbors and positions us to take up common pursuits for mutual goodness. This emplacement and its commonly positioned goods (including the good of being mutually emplaced) results in a profound integration of life with others and life with God, where earthly pursuits map directly onto (or, I should say, directly into) divine pursuits. This formulation issues from the ability of Augustinian democrats to imagine Christian political participation as augmenting rather

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than depleting virtue. Superimposed upon the ontology, moral growth for these Augustinians orders love to its end in God, resulting in an account of moral perfection that entails cultivation of virtue. Because enduring political life requires and produces virtue, because it is perfecting in this way, such a life is good in the deepest sense, investing political participation with ultimate meaning.

What remains to be seen is how the proposal conceptualizes the role of the Christian church. Because their ontology generalizes the sacramental conditions that make for virtue and therefore political life, the Augustinian democrats end up attributing to the church a role that is politically exemplary but not theologically exceptional. What we get from them is a picture of ecclesial habitus where the church can morally benefit democracy yet that benefit does not require for its occurrence any divine infusion of theological virtue. When Augustinian democrats combine their generalized ontology with their persistent relativization of hope, we are left with a predicament where it is markedly unclear what is at stake. Constructively I will say that this departure has the benefit of postulating an account of personhood that is both philosophically interesting and ethically important in its own right. I round out what the Augustinian democrats do with intersubjective agency, empathic acknowledgment, and moral perfectionism by introducing elements of ordinary language philosophy a bit more attentive to human separateness. My hope is that this addition results in a conception of personhood that, when located along the path cleared by Stout's own democratic pragmatism, emphasizes mutuality, endurance, and creativity—features of political life that tell the story of Christianity from a perspective somewhat neglected in recent years. The Augustinian democrats, I argue, bring us a powerful vision of political participation as Christian discipleship, a vision that has not yet specified the church's role in the moral cultivation it envisions. They offer in its stead, either as placeholder or replacement, a highly fecund picture of selfhood that portends the fate of American Protestantism.

1. *Democracy and Tradition's Path*

Recall the theoretical conditions in which Jeffrey Stout makes his case in *Democracy and Tradition*. Resentment of two sorts have combined to remove Christians from American democratic life. First, Rawlsian public reason relegates religious doctrines to the background of political life, reprising the old familiar picture of an enlightened public space surrounded by darkened background cultures (Rawls 1993).¹ The rationale is straight-

¹ John Rawls develops theories of political liberalism in several places, but I relate them here most specifically in the initial chapters of Rawls 1993. See also Rawls 1997.

forward enough: religious doctrines, those not answerable to others, are the kinds of things that make political life under the conditions of pluralism less rather than more likely. Religious citizens are welcome, so long as they are willing to check their unanswerable reasons. Christian thinkers respond in kind, arguing that public reason will strip Christians of all the reasons that matter, leaving them naked in public by eviscerating their background cultures. From their perspective, political participation looks like a deal with the devil. Instead they turn their attention to the maintenance of their culture, foregrounding what others see as background, the site of real politics anyhow (Stout 2004, 147–61). Their separation, they tell themselves, creates the distance necessary for prophetic witness (Stout 2004, 161). From these entrenched positions the rhetoric ratchets up, with democrats calling Christians “conversation stoppers” and Christians narrating democracy all the way to hell (Stout 2004, 86–91, 100–07). Pretty much everyone gets caught up, one way or another, in this ugly state of affairs.

But it rests on a confusion and hence is easily dismantled if we but examine its premises, which we had better, given the stakes of political life (Stout 2004, 24).² Democracy is no more opposed to background cultures than it is to itself, because it *is* a background culture (Stout 2004, 23; 2010, 252). If we grant that background cultures are those sites that inculcate the stuff necessary for public life, namely virtues and their instituting processes, then we discover a middle term between democracy and Christianity: they are both virtue-inculcating traditions (Stout 2004, 19–41, 204–24).³ This looks like a stroke of genius, but it is readily apparent if one looks past the ugliness.

Public reason is a product of tradition and hence comprises rather than controls the conditions of pluralism. Its doctrinal rejection of religious reasons, blinded by its false self-image, answers to no one while policing conversation. It asks others to give up their reasons yet offers no plausible reason for why they should do so. If democrats can get past their poor self-image, they might come to accept pluralism as democracy’s condition of possibility. Likewise, Christians must realize that there can be no prophetic witness without participation in public life. If they give up hope that public life is capable of bearing prophetic witness, then they will have given up the game. Rather they might see democratic reason-giving

² See also Springs et al. 2014, 419–21, 435 and Stout 2007. For other symposia on *Democracy and Tradition*, see *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 87.3/4 (2004) and *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33.4 (December 2005).

³ Stout’s 2017 Gifford Lectures exemplify and extend to extraordinary effect *Democracy and Tradition*’s central arguments about Emersonian democracy as a virtue-inculcating tradition capable of producing justice. Those lectures are forthcoming under the title *Religion in the Modern West: A Political History* by Princeton University Press.

as the perfect platform for bearing witness. No doubt exchanging reasons makes for vulnerability, but if they can resist the temptation of trying to secure their own lives then they might come to accept vulnerability as Christianity's condition of possibility.

With this proposal Stout clears a theoretical path for Christian political participation. Christian theorists seeking to follow this path will have to develop two significant steps. First, there will need to be more explicitly Christian formulations of Stout's proposal. It is one thing for a non-theist to make such an argument, especially one who admits of needing good Christian participation at minimum to counteract bad Christian participation. It is another thing for a true believer to cast political participation as Christian discipleship. Stout's proposal, baptized in the liniments of confessional theology, will have the effect of relocating the proposal to the province of Christian faith. Let us understand this as the speculative task. Second, someone will need to show how political participation is continuous with church life. If participation is something Christians take up away from church, even if political motivation originates in church, it will look like public reason redux, which is to say, it pictures individual Christians inspired by virtue and ready with religious reasons which are only vaguely and tenuously connected to their background cultures. It will look like someone is trying to save faith by denying church. If Christians want their political participation understood as having something to do with God, they will have to find ways of connecting the respective descriptions between politics and church. What is needed is a route that will make good on what scripture promises and demands of the church, the *locus classicus* of Christian ethical concern. We will understand this as the practical task. To advance the path Stout cleared for Christian political participation, Christians must engage both of these conceptual tasks. Initially, I argue that those I call "Augustinian democrats" take up the first task and leave incomplete the second. Completion of the first task results in an elegant political ontology; incompleteness of the second creates several significant problems, and the two combined, I conclude, results in a hybrid and especially compelling picture of personhood.

Before turning there, let me quickly highlight an issue raised by Stout's interlocutors so that we can trace its trajectory through the course of my argument. In a much-celebrated American Academy of Religion symposium marking the arrival of *Democracy and Tradition*, Richard Rorty, Stanley Hauerwas, and Cornel West each raised the issue of hope. For Rorty, the substance of Christian hope, by which he meant God, undercuts democracy's ethos of pragmatic self-reliance; just as citizens are accountable to no one else but other citizens, so they should not hope in anyone else for the well-being of the nation (Springs et al. 2010, 419–21).⁴ Hauerwas

⁴ See also Rorty 1990.

intimated hope under similar terms, though conversely, as the substance which he suspected democratic theory still precluded (Springs et al. 2010, 429). West understood himself standing in the middle, between the self-reliance of his adopted pragmatism and the grace-inflected Gospel of his native Christianity (Springs et al. 2010, 417).⁵ Stout tried to explain how democratic hope could answer all three concerns. As we will come to see, hope as an issue, and maybe as *the* issue, remains, and it will be good for us to track it as the miner's canary of the Augustinian democrats.

1.1 *The Augustinian democrats*

Princeton University Press published *Democracy and Tradition* in 2004. Cambridge University Press published Charles Mathewes's *A Theology of Public Life* in 2007. Jennifer Herdt's *Putting on Virtue* and Eric Gregory's *Politics and the Order of Love*, both by University of Chicago Press, came out a year later. Cambridge reissued John Bowlin's *Contingency and Fortune in Aquinas's Ethics* in 2010, the same year Eerdmans published Mathewes's *The Republic of Grace* (2010b). The years immediately following *Democracy and Tradition* would be marked by these excellent studies and the ascension of their respective authors, each a Protestant theologian teaching at storied theological and religious studies programs (that is, the University of Virginia, Yale Divinity School, Princeton University, and Princeton Theological Seminary, respectively). The ingenuity of their specific arguments makes it clear that none required Stout's *Democracy and Tradition* for its contribution, and while each has close ties to Stout (and often one another), none could be described as "Stoutian" in any straightforward manner. Still, it is noteworthy that these works all focus on themes related to public life, virtue, and Christianity. Further, all inhabit the conceptual space cleared by *Democracy and Tradition* such that while their innovations do not depend on *Democracy and Tradition*, their collective reception does. Much of what these books and their authors achieve is the fulfillment of the first of two tasks inspired by *Democracy and Tradition*, making their combined efforts a landmark development in contemporary American theology.

In the following I will treat this group through a composite sketch I call the Augustinian democrats. In doing so, I have neither interest nor expertise in figuring out whether they exegete Augustine correctly, and, anyhow, that question will not matter much for what I am up to here.⁶ What is

⁵ For background on West's question, see West 1989, 233 and West 1999, 87–118. Stout mentions the latter in Springs et al. 2014, 432. See also Stout 2004, 55–60.

⁶ Mathewes writes, "By using the phrase 'the Augustinian tradition,' I mean to draw guidance from Augustine's thought, without being trapped in the historical cul-de-sac of debates about what Augustine 'really meant'" (2007, 19).

important is how these thinkers fill out a history *Democracy and Tradition* reinvigorated, that of Augustinian liberalism, a group of theories about Christian participation in political life. Comprising that group is different readings of Augustine's *City of God* that together share a basic set of convictions:

- (A) The economy of creation can be divided between the eternal city of God and the temporal city of man.
- (B) The temporal city can achieve goods proportionate to its constitution as the temporal city.
- (C) The upshot of (A) and (B) is that Christian residents of the temporal city should strive for no more and no less than those goods.

Granted (B)'s dispensation Augustinian liberals go about the theoretical work of delineating the entailments of (C). The specific projects that comprise Augustinian liberalism as a group are important in their own right but not for my aims here. Relevant is the history of how a once dominant Augustinian liberalism came to occupy a minority position within political theology and from that position came to sound a minority report within the already mentioned echo chamber of mutual resentment between (Christian) religionists and (Rawlsian) anti-religionists.

Some background will be helpful. For a long time, Augustinian liberalism as outlined above (and as fleshed out in the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr) set the stage for how Christians in the US thought about political participation. Only after those Stout deems the new traditionalists (that is, Alasdair MacIntyre, John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, John Milbank, and their ilk) *reset* the stage did Augustinian liberalism get relegated to minority status (Stout 2004, 118–39). Given the monopoly Augustinian liberals once held on political theology, it is a wonder that these thinkers were able to change the script from (C)'s entailments to the religionists versus anti-religionists impasse. By depicting democratic life as anti-Christian, the new traditionalists eventually precluded even the need for the Augustinian liberal dispensation. Once they were seen as successfully showing that Christians were at best resident aliens for whom commitments to the earthly city, even of the kind chastened by Augustinian liberalism, were dangerous temptations, Augustinian liberalism was written out of political theology's main plotline.

Essentially what *Democracy and Tradition* has done is reintroduce Augustinian liberalism. This is its signal *theological* accomplishment. How was Stout able to do this? Mainly by flipping the script on the new traditionalists just as the new traditionalists had previously flipped the script on the Augustinian liberals. By fashioning democracy as a virtue-cultivating tradition and hence as beneficial rather than detrimental for Christian

discipleship, he was able to put Augustinian liberalism center stage once again, though with a crucial addition:

(D) Christian commitments to the temporal city's no-more-and-no-less proportionate goods has the effect of preparing Christians for the eternal city.

By making participation in the earthly city about participation in the divine city Stout closed Augustinian liberalism's conceptual loop.⁷

What makes an Augustinian democrat then is her resumption of the history I've just now related and her reliance on (D) to complete that history.⁸ Construing the Augustinian democrats as *only* the newest iteration of Augustinian liberalism misses Augustinian liberalism's recent history and *Democracy and Tradition's* critical role in that history. None of this is to downplay the role "democrat" plays in the description "Augustinian democrat" but it is to say two things about that role. First, what is theologically interesting about democracy for the Augustinian democrat is that it is a form of political participation that uniquely activates the virtues of faith, hope, and love, and hence makes (C) and (D) interdependent. Second, this conception of democracy is wide enough to accommodate any number of practical models, from grassroots to republican politics. This definition brings us back to the figures mentioned at the start of this section: Mathewes, Herdt, Gregory, and Bowlin. Much of what these scholars do is fill out the interdependence of (C) and (D), tightly relating democracy to Christianity.

For the sake of argument, going forward I focus on those parts of the composite that most obviously represent the spirit I have in mind, Mathewes's *A Theology of Public Life* and Gregory's *Politics and the Order of Love*.⁹ I start by outlining the ontology that arises out of Mathewes's and Gregory's shared vision of political life. Mindful of the many other important things these books say and do and the significant differences between them, I read them together as adroitly completing the speculative task, and then raise questions about their remaining prospects for the practical

⁷ See Stout's remark, "There are Augustinians and Augustinians" (Stout, 2004, 26). On the question of whether the Augustinian democrats successfully transition to democratic versus liberal politics, see Michael Lamb's "Augustine and Republican Liberty: Contextualizing Coercion" (forthcoming in *Augustinian Studies*) and his forthcoming book, *A Commonwealth of Hope: Reimagining Augustine's Political Thought*.

⁸ Stout himself uses "Augustinian democrats," though not to the effect that I am using it here (2004, 20).

⁹ See also Gregory 2015. For helpful engagements, otherwise not taken up in the following, with Mathewes and Gregory along the lines of Augustinian democracy, see Bailey 2010; Barter Moulaison 2010; Bruno 1983; and Markus 2000.

task of portraying the church as more than ancillary to politics.¹⁰ I conclude by drawing more broadly from the Augustinian democrats and offer a picture of personhood that arises between completion of the speculative task and incompleteness of the practical task.

1.2 *Completing the speculative task*

One will remember that *Democracy and Tradition*, primarily through George Hunsinger's reading of Karl Barth, had already charted a theological path from Christianity to politics (Stout 2004, 108–17). But Stout's Barth, especially as read through Hunsinger, comes prepackaged to deliver precisely that theological path and no other; relying solely on Stout's invocation of Barth in order to theologially justify his argument simply begs the question. What is needed is a broader representation of the theological tradition, one whose influence spanned the range of possibilities and survived intact in order to offer something of benefit. By enlisting Augustine to play this role, Mathewes and Gregory resume the legacy of Augustinian liberalism, the previously noted strategy of reading Augustine in the midst of liberal political orders. Inhabiting the space cleared by Stout's signal accomplishment involves Mathewes and Gregory in the project of envisaging Augustinian liberal theory as crucially democratic, an important development insofar as Augustinian liberalism had hitherto not taken the force of its Augustinianism to necessitate this direction. The Augustinian democrats try to accomplish this by employing Augustine's theurgic ontology in order to give democratic form and content to political life, and thereby fulfill what I am calling the speculative task. And while these democrats do not all take Augustine as their inspiration, or do so only with handles

¹⁰ I have intentionally not included Duke University's Luke Bretherton among the Augustinian democrats. Since Bretherton fits the profile in some ways, my decision might strike some as curious; explaining it will make clearer my composite. Like them, the reception of Bretherton's work follows the publication of *Democracy and Tradition* and even draws from Mathewes and Gregory. Also like them, he finds much inspiration in Augustine's thought, especially his *City of God*. Indeed, these factors together eventuate more so for Bretherton than for the others in an explicit championing of democratic organizing of the kind Stout himself endorses in *Democracy and Tradition's* sequel, *Blessed Are the Organized* (Stout 2010). So, why not include Bretherton among those I call Augustinian democrats? Only later in my argument will the answer be fully understood. I can anticipate that by saying that Bretherton, unlike the others, stakes the virtue-cultivating work of democratic participation as necessary but not sufficient for Christian political life. What is also necessary, most straightforwardly, is hope and even expectation that God will deliver the determinate goods to which Christian political efforts are aimed. To this end, Bretherton speaks of "the transformative actions of the Spirit who is the only one with the agency to irrupt a transfigured spatiotemporal register (a new heaven and a new earth) within the bounds of the old" (Bretherton 2015, 107). See also Bretherton 2015, 86 and 95.

supplied by Thomas Aquinas's theology, each is intent on seeing human flourishing continuous with Augustine's strong emphasis on love of God.

A certain spatial image of political life has held us captive. We are given a picture of political life taking place in "political space," revolving around "the public square." This picture comes with notions of borders, doors, entering/exiting, trespassing, so on and so forth. Closely related is a moral psychology that harbors a Kantian division between faith and practice that in turn presumes an outside/inside and public/private concept of mind. Arguing about Christian political participation while captive to this picture conscripts one to banging one's head continuously against its limits. The picture is simply too narrow for the complexities addressed by political theology. And what it pictures—a zero-sum analysis of persons in space and time—is too flat-footed to capture the richness of human life. The principal way Mathewes and Gregory together answer the speculative task is by offering an account of space and time that is able to situate political theology beyond the zero-sum confines of this picture.

Augustinian democrats picture persons as inhabiting shared space, the creaturely locale of immanence (Mathewes 2007, 16–17; Gregory 2008, 261). Creation situates people together; it makes no more sense to ask whether one should engage others than to ask whether one is a creature (Mathewes 2007, 160).¹¹ We are each given into this shared mutuality, which is what it means to be a creature, to be given by and to others (Gregory 2008, 208). In this moment of shared life,

We must all learn to live together as brothers and sisters or we will all perish together as fools. We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the way God's universe is made; this is the way it is structured. (King 1991, 169, as quoted in Gregory 2008, 193)

Our being created like this morally warrants political life, making it the most natural thing in the world (Gregory 2008, 271, 287). We deny what is most human about us when we remove ourselves, when we go private, the *privatio boni* which Augustine described as sin (Gregory 2008, 41, 85, 190; Mathewes 2007, 151, 283, 313–14). Imagining one another in terms of zero-sum spatial analyses is what we tend to do when we have already succumbed to bewitched language, which Wittgenstein described as the fantasy of private language.

We are each of us separate from one another, but within this ontological picture separateness is predicated temporally rather than spatially (Mathewes 2007, 11–12, 16, 17, 343). One can imagine the slow time of

¹¹ See also Mathewes 2010a,b.

attending to others or the rapidity of transformative engagement—we might speak of temporally distended relationships (those who go too fast, or too slow, pausing relationships and jumpstarting them) (Gregory 2008, 20, 79, 156). The protracted conflicts of political life threaten frenetic confrontations and desperate measures, and the violence of temporal rupture remains a temptation for all (Mathewes 2007, 14). Being in time, the creature lives into the temporal structure of her existence, receiving treasures old and new from the past, remaining vigilantly present in the present, and approaching our future together in faith, hope, and love. Maturation of self and mutuality involves finding one another in the stillness of the moment and opening ourselves to the change that time is. Valences of time within the communion of shared space offer a way of thinking about one another's differences without giving up mutuality.¹²

Our relationship with God works differently. While we share immanent space with other creatures, we share life with God only insofar as God's eternity makes space within God's very own life. The doctrine of eternity has God encompassing all reality; to exist is to be given a share in God's existence. This means that creatures always live within the time of God, God's eternity. While we share space with other creatures, we share in God's time (Mathewes 2007, 32–33). The Augustinian democrats cleverly exploit the conceptual difference Augustine posits between divine eternity and creaturely temporality in order to locate creaturely life within divine life, maximally affirming the goodness of creation by emphasizing divine transcendence. They make much of the distinction between apocalyptic time and eschatological time, and what they are after is a conception of life where creaturely existence unfolds in the overlap of the already but not yet eschatological fulfillment of creation.¹³ Conversely to how differences between creatures are marked by time, so spatial imagery can be used to mark one's deepening relationship with God, life with God is indexed to the creature's journey into God. This ontology paints a picture of creaturely life as infinitely important, as laden with meaning, and as fated to goodness.

The Augustinian democrats' key conceptual advancement comes by way of correlating the ontology of creaturely mutuality to the ontology of creaturely participation in God (Gregory 2008, 40–41). Our life with one another directly relates to our life with God; every pursuit we undertake with and for one another takes place with and for God; one's pursuit of earthly goods maps onto one's pursuit of God (Mathewes 2007, 26–27, 167; Gregory 2008, 288–89). We will finally let go of our tortured decisions over investing our time in temporal things or investing in things of God once we

¹² See also Lee 2005, 54, 60.

¹³ Stout refers to this as a “more proximate future” in Springs et al. 2014, 434.

discover that all things are invested with the things of God (Gregory 2008, 328–29). What we took to be a competitive relationship between temporal use and eternal enjoyment turns out to be harmonically equivalent, temporal use is coterminous with eternal enjoyment; joy here becomes inescapable (Mathewes 2007, 224).

Creation is structured so that the goods necessary for enjoyment are built right into creaturely life.¹⁴ Walking with one another into the divine life requires and produces the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Life at close quarters means we cannot avoid one another, nor should we want to because the more we give ourselves to one another in the rough and tumble exigencies of life together, the more we enjoy creation as God created it to be (Mathewes 2007, 288–93). We can call this partaking of the divine “political” if we like, but more basically we might think of it as holiness or sanctification or flourishing or perfection. In calling it “political participation” we should not think we have lent it any greater significance than it already has by function of it being participation in God (Mathewes 2007, 164). Nor can the ends of politics be reduced to the goods promised but often frustrated by that life. Politics should be oriented to specific determinate ends (for instance, just economic arrangements), but because those ends are not the end of politics—which has its end in the unending life of God—they are to be pursued endlessly but not desperately (Gregory 2008, 293).

1.3 *Stranding the practical task*

So much for the benefits of how the Augustinian democrats complete the speculative task. What about the church? In asking this question, I am not seeking to return to the old formulations of the church being the church so the world would know it is the world. Rather, the question is posed on the far side of *Democracy and Tradition*, placed on the path cleared by Stout. I see the second practical task of asking this question anew as necessary if Christians are to travel further down that road. We are not now raising the question of church as a rebuttal to political liberalism’s disqualification of religious reasons. Rather, *Democracy and Tradition* wants all the religious reasons citizens are willing to give. Christians should participate as Christians as much as they like. In completing the first task by speculatively overlaying political life and divine life, Augustinian democrats give Christians all the reasons they need to feel good about this participation. Given the centrality church plays in the lives of Christians, figuring out where it fits in the Augustinian democratic vision is simply a practical consideration that follows. If it turns out that the church is given short

¹⁴ Regarding the continuity between Augustinian and Thomistic thought, see Gregory and Clair 2009.

shrift, then Christians who felt *Democracy and Tradition* had promised them something better will feel either confused, hoodwinked, or both.¹⁵

So what role do the Augustinian democrats ascribe to the church; where does it sit in their locus of concern? *A Theology of Public Life and Politics and the Order of Love*, conspicuously, do not mention church much. For books that focus on public life, virtue, and Christianity, it feels odd that church plays no obvious role.¹⁶ But we need not read this suspiciously. One can imagine good reasons for it.¹⁷ Recall the ugly state of affairs for which *Democracy and Tradition* proved such a welcome intervention. Rawls's political liberalism put the church on the defensive, eventuating in an identity-driven church versus world dichotomy. The virtual war that ensued—now drawn along rhetorical battle lines like “virtue” and “violence”—had real world effects as thoughtful Christians left a dangerous political vacuum behind (Mathewes 2007, 24). *Democracy and Tradition* provides a truce and it is now up to each side to do the work of furnishing the means (things like speculative and practical tasks) to a lasting peace. In the first moments after the truce is declared, where collaborative steps are gingerly taken, it makes good sense to avoid using language that threatens the fragile state of things. Part of what made the state of affairs so ugly was that church language had become a threat. Under these delicate conditions one might figure out how to talk about church less, or at least a bit more indirectly, with the hope that speaking about the church differently might begin to shift the sense it had for Christians.

With the practical consideration of both having to speak about church and having to do so in an unthreatening manner, the Augustinian democrats, from what I can tell, do themselves a favor by presuming church without much talking about it. Specifically, they presume the church as forming the virtues that motivate and sustain political life, which begins with the church but, given the mutuality of all creatures, does not end there. In this vein, the most daring thing one might say about the church is that it is a school of civility, a foretaste of things to come. The Augustinian democrats presume something like Stanley Hauerwas's account of the virtues and so therefore the church as social process. The church gets Christians going on a process of self-perfection that travels through political life. The problem with Hauerwas's church/world account of ethics—and why it needs to be reworked for this new moment—is that it forecloses the very processes that Christians most need. Hauerwas's own ontology is exposed here. For

¹⁵ For an account of proper reasons for and modes of political withdrawal, see Griffiths 1981, 18–22.

¹⁶ Mathewes's fullest articulation can be found in 2007, 316. See also Mathewes 2010a; 2010b, 143.

¹⁷ Discussing Malesic 2011, Jennifer Herdt suggests Christendom-like contexts as another good reason. See Herdt 2015, 727–40; 2015, 34.

him, tying virtue to the grace the sacraments bestow binds the goods of God to a covenantal history in which the sacraments become things to be desired. Beginning with Israel, the covenant is outward looking, from the Jews, to the gentiles, to the nations. Strangers can find God in the Jewish-Gentile church in the same way that the Jewish-Gentile church found God in Israel. The missional claim that God is available anywhere rests on the prior Christological claim that God can be found at least here in the sacramental church. It is that presence that enables the virtues. On this account, social process is narrated as moral formation. For Hauerwas, the church/world distinction is the outworking of this covenantal ontology whereby the presence of God produces moral character and the sacraments dispense this presence. Hence virtue is found wherever the sacraments are found. Insofar as politics involves things of the world, it depletes moral character and hence is to be avoided. Living distinctively through its moral character, the church invites the world to join the church where joining the church begins with recognizing and then leaving the world (Hauerwas 1981; 1991; 2000; Hauerwas and Wells 2011; Hauerwas and Willimon 2014).

An Augustinian democratic ontology is meant to replace this picture. Earlier I said that their decisive move comes in correlating the ontology of creaturely mutuality with the ontology of creaturely participation in God. This correlation is not fixed to a dispensing mechanism, but is rather everywhere present and available as a function of createdness. The Augustinian democrats retain the correspondence between virtue and morality, but their ontology allows them to broaden its availability. If political life requires virtue's motivation and enabling power, then there is great reason to expect that political life will be everywhere motivated and enabled (Gregory 2008, 68). Notice there is still a sacramental theology present, but it is not one ordered to the church's life (baptism, Eucharist, and so on) but to all of creation. Life lived together avails God to us. We do not so much give sacraments to one another as much as our mutuality proves a sacrament of the world (Gregory 2008, 349). This ontology supersedes the church/world ontology drawn out by Hauerwas. Hence Augustinian democrats offer a vision of political life as sacramental in form. This is the benefit of completing the speculative task. Yet they do so, as should be coming into view, in ways that minimize the role of the church. If *Democracy and Tradition* left them responsible for both identifying the place of the church while also making sure that place did not crowd out the world, they have completed half the task. My contention is that the incompleteness is not accidental to the manner in which they complete the speculative task. The development of the ontology leaves little prospect for saying much about the church. Wanting to avoid crowding out the world, the Augustinian democrats overcompensate and crowd out the church. It is not that church does not have a place, but it is no longer uniquely the place of sacrament, virtue, and God.

None of this is necessarily a problem for the Augustinian democrats. It may be a problem for purveyors of the church/world dichotomy, but that ugly state of affairs is what provoked the democrats in the first place. In other words, the lacuna and its provocations demonstrate we have gotten somewhere. If we can still talk about church but without offense, then we have achieved something of benefit.

But there is a way the completion of the first task and the incompleteness of the second creates a serious problem for the Augustinian democrats, but on their own terms. In conclusion, I will show how despite this problem, we still have good reason to consider what the Augustinian democrats are proposing, namely a provocative account of the self. Before getting there, let me unpack the problem.

Augustinian democrats think there is something important at stake in Christian political participation. I have been saying that their speculative ontology stakes the import in terms of investing political life with ultimate meaning. But something else matters to them—namely, the determinate ends of our political pursuits. For example, an economic arrangement that treats people justly matters to them. Now it should not matter in a way that the frustration of those ends frustrates enjoyment of God. Enjoyment, within their ontology, always remains at hand for those who order their political loves to love of God (Mathewes 2007, 290). Indeed, the frustrations—by further requiring and producing faith, hope, and love—only deepen one's life in God, and they will not be so frustrating that one cannot experience joy. Yet, our mutuality makes us want more. Namely, we want for politics to be good not only for us by perfecting us, but for our neighbors by providing conditions that allow for their self-perfection. Wanting our neighbor's good—what Gregory calls “the importance of justice for a society of free and equal citizens” (Gregory 2008, 80)—is what faith, hope, and love look like when displayed immanently. Part of what motivates *Democracy and Tradition* is its concern that political and religious resentment have caused some to throw out the baby with the bathwater, where the baby is precisely these self-perfecting conditions: peace, security, sustenance, and others (Mathewes 2007, 284; Gregory 2008, 306, 317). Without these in place, our fellow citizens will be in no condition to pursue perfection in whatever manner they pursue it (Mathewes 2007, 20–21). As I have tried to show, fulfillment of the speculative task recasts citizens as neighbors whom Christians are called to love insofar as they love God. But none of this makes the results of political pursuits matter. It only matters that Christians undertake these pursuits, and this poses a problem for the Augustinian democrats. Their ontology makes it so that there is nothing about God at stake in how things turn out for their neighbors. This is because for them there is nothing about God at stake in how anything turns out (Gregory, 2008, 79). God is not conceptualized as bound to political happenings in how the Augustinian democrats go about completing the two

tasks. Nothing about God, say God's faithfulness, depends on things turning out well. That does not mean things cannot turn out well, but only that their doing so has nothing conceivably to do with God. One could even go so far as saying that Augustinian democrats have given up the conceptual tools necessary to discern how things have turned out; without the mediational criteria now obfuscated by the generalized ontology, no judgment can be rendered. Given the terms they set, that may not matter to them.

To get a sense of what I mean by things being at stake, let me offer a political theology where God's faithfulness is clearly at stake in how history turns out. Oliver O'Donovan's theological project develops its argument over the course of three principal texts: *Resurrection and Moral Order* (1994), *The Desire of the Nations* (1996), and *The Ways of Judgement* (2005). He first argues that regardless of the skepticism raised by philosophical historicism, there is an undeniable moral realism to which people are accountable, an ethical goodness to which they aspire (O'Donovan 1994, 26, 57–75). For O'Donovan, God in Christ incarnates this moral order (the content of which has to do with God's redemption of the world), and the church vocationally carries forth Christ by evangelistically instilling human affairs with this moral order (1994, 57, 147; 1996, 181, 195, 210–11). Political life then is largely about living out this order by way of normative judgment based on a moral order basic to creation, incarnated in Christ, and instituted by the church (1996, 146–51, 174; 2005, 9, 53, 62).¹⁸ If God is as O'Donovan supposes, then God will show up in human affairs in these visible ways. If not, then God is not as O'Donovan supposes. For O'Donovan the evidence that God is as he supposes is God's showing up in the theocratically ordered societies of Israel, the church, and modern political life as theorized by its early Christian progenitors (1996, 23–29, 131). We can attribute O'Donovan's faith that things should work out this way to the Biblical realism he inherits from Barth. Barth's realism presumes without argument or apology the reality of the world scripture portrays.¹⁹ If the world turns out differently than how one would expect given scripture's depiction of it, then one has either read scripture or the world incorrectly. If one has checked and confirmed one's reading, then the dissonance would be cause to abandon the picture one's interpretation anticipates. This is what allows O'Donovan to presume moral realism even when skeptical

¹⁸ Also consider Ward 2016, 73 where he speaks of "countering Hegel's story of the *deus revelatus* [by overcompensating] with a story of the *deus absconditus*." Later I describe "a deficiency in Stout's democratic pragmatism," and what I mean there is the converse of the Hegelian problematic I attempt to uncover here.

¹⁹ See Stout 1981, 170. Returning to Bretherton on this point: "Framing political action in terms of Scripture inserts an important reminder that such action is not self-generated or self-subsisting but derived from the prior, originating power of God" (Bretherton 2010, 86, 95, and 99).

doubt might otherwise give him pause: the Bible portrays the world as normatively real, and Christ confirms that picture. From there, he reads off the surface of human history God's continual reality just as the scriptures prognosticate (equivalents to this realism can be found in forms of liberation theology) (2005, 163). O'Donovan's belief in moral realism is not of the kind that argues from freestanding first principles to their logical conclusions; rather, he accepts a picture and infers what metaphysically must be the case for the picture to hold. As such, the absence of God in ways he would expect (say, God's inability to produce just economic arrangements) will not be shielded by these postulated first principles. Now this may lead to so much interpretive finagling as one tries to read history into one's expectations, but that very compulsion stems from the stakes having been set in a certain way. When I say that God's faithfulness is at stake for O'Donovan in how history turns out, this is what I mean. Things are risky in this way (1994, 23).

Conceptualizing things as being historically at stake is what seems to be missing for the Augustinian democrats. There is no place in the story they tell where God is more than generally involved in human history. Covenant is the usual way scripture stakes matters historically. When the landless and childless Abraham beseeches God, "What will you give me ... how am I to know," God responds by risking the divine name on the fulfillment of the covenant (*berit ben ha-betarim*), making the stakes of the matter real ones: "To your descendants I will give this land" (Genesis 15:2, 8, 18). The covenant, now made "new" through the church's institution, organizes Christian belief around the reality that God has committed the divine name to the place and people of the church:

In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath, so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:17–20)

The Augustinian democrats' departure from scripture and church, which finally is what is most "liberal" about their brand of Augustinian liberalism, is licensed by the other part of the organizing description, namely the "Augustinianism" which allows the project to proceed as Christian by other

means.²⁰ In lieu of something like scriptural realism, Augustinian liberalism is caught in a double bind between the duty of hope required by love and faith and the relativizing of hope due to sin (Gregory 2008, 124, 360). What is unclear is the relationship between the double bind and the low stakes. Perhaps the double bind makes for a predicament where much can be hoped for but nothing can be expected, so one cannot afford to stake much of anything on anything. Or perhaps the sense that nothing can be counted on leads to hope being disconnected from expectation.²¹ We see here the fate of our miner's canary, which was the question raised variously by Rorty, Hauerwas, and West, about whether Christian hope is substantively different than the hope to which their neighbors subscribe.²² The Augustinian democrats' double bind dictates, rather instructively, that they both endorse O'Donovan's hopeful efforts of seeking God in contemporary political life and also reject his findings as too sanguine given the conditions of sin (Mathewes 2007, 180–86, 256; Gregory 2008, 142–47).²³ Their proposal's formulation of political life, ontology, and virtue unfolds as if considerations of church and scripture (specifically what scripture promises and demands of church) do not matter or do not matter in the usual Christian ways. This departure eventuates in a predicament where it is strikingly unclear what is at stake for the proposal.²⁴

To be clear my point here is not to endorse O'Donovan's qualified theocratic vision and its hermeneutical strategy (about which I think we have plenty of things to worry), but simply to offer an example of what it looks like to read history as if it matters. My own way of doing so is to say that everything about God is at stake in the church's historical faithfulness. If God is not faithful to the church as God was to Israel, where God's faithfulness materially enables human faithfulness, those who follow God in obedience are, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, the most pitiful of the earth (15:19). That is, if the church does not love its neighbors by feeding them eucharistically, if God's given body does not enliven God's gathered body, then perhaps the God so promised does not exist, or that existence

²⁰ If as I suggest here the Augustinian democrats get their scripture through Augustine, then at this point their exegesis of Augustine factors in. On this question, see Lee 2016, 574. See O'Donovan's contrary reading of Augustine on these matters in O'Donovan 2004, 48–72 and O'Donovan 1982. See also the argument of Smith 2017 that the lack of pneumatology and ecclesiology in Gregory 2010 renders the work less than Augustinian.

²¹ This is most clearly expressed in Mathewes 2010b, 41, 74, 133, and 241–58.

²² Russell Hittinger (2014) gets at a difference by contrasting hope as a passion and hope as a virtue.

²³ Compare O'Donovan 1996, 23. Also telling is O'Donovan's review (2011) of Mathewes and Bretherton 2010. For an astute attempt to align O'Donovan and Hauerwas, see Smith 2011.

²⁴ Gregory's explicit thinking along these lines has since developed. See Gregory 2017 where, in relation to Gilbert Meilaender, he discusses "how Augustinian pilgrims might characterize the positive relation of political history to saving history and the ways in which political action in time might teach us something about the nature of salvation that comes to us from beyond history" (199).

does not matter. When Paul goes on to ask, “Why are we putting ourselves in danger everyday?” (15:30), he is indicating rhetorically the heavy stakes of God being alive and what that life entails for others. Perhaps only those who see themselves as putting themselves in danger daily are prone to this kind of rhetorical vulnerability, or at least it appears that expectation and vulnerability go hand and hand. Again, this may lead to so much finagling as one attempts to trace out the work of the Spirit in the world, but such efforts, desperate as they can be and rife with despair as they are, presumes the Spirit at work in the world. Contrariwise, by abandoning both the traditionally imagined sacramental church as well as O’Donovan’s theocratic offering in favor of a generalized sacramental ontology and committing to the double bind of requiring hope but relativizing expectation, history looks, when seen from the vantage of the Augustinian democrats, like a vanishing horizon.

2. The Separate Self

So far I have assessed some proposals that are important for questions related to Christian participation in public life. I now offer a set of reflections that are more mediative in form, transitioning from the space of argument to one of discovery. I do so in order to follow the train of thought put forth by the Augustinian democratic vision and to make good on my earlier reference to their developing account of personhood, one where a person’s life is tied to its own realization, a self whose project is the self. In conclusion I will characterize this realization as the destiny of American Protestantism.

While the Augustinian democrats never quite got around to telling us much about the role of the church, they did manage to suggest a pretty interesting and I would say philosophically serious account of the person. This person emerges precisely at the point where the practical task, the one about church, is left unfinished. Earlier I said that the lacuna was not accidental given the expansiveness of Augustinian democratic ontology. Similarly we might say that it is no accident that a new concept of personhood appears at the moment when speech about church is muted. I ended my initial critique of the Augustinian democrats with a dim note about a vanishing horizon. Here I want to search this horizon for available lights.

For the Augustinian democrats, virtue language that imagines grace passing through ecclesially ordered sacraments imposes too heavy a burden, something like a ton of bricks. The Augustinian democrats worry about church-heavy virtue ethics for many reasons, but for my purposes here let me state two. First, those ethics seem overly concerned with preserving identity.²⁵ In this frame of mind, virtue formation becomes a rear-

²⁵ See, for example, Mathewes 2007. For an astute critique of Stout on these matters, see Pinches 2007, 2008.

guard action that protects political identity from internal and external challenges. What should be outward-looking becomes fixated on orthodoxy as if orthodoxy is something to be protected rather than discovered in human intercourse. This picture of virtue presumes a mythical past and sees the future departing from a prior golden age and hence is fixated on stability. Part of what one is supposed to learn from John Bowlin's *Contingency and Fortune* is that while it is indeed true that virtue enables character through life's contingencies, it is also true that the processes that make for virtue depend on those contingencies. These factors play an important role in social formation and cannot be so easily presumed as procuring desired ends. Bowlin hopes to both convince us of these realities and to help us see why acknowledging as much is a good thing (Bowlin 2010).²⁶ Second, and connected, Augustinian democrats worry that church-heavy virtue overestimates its own goodness by underestimating the goodness of others. The mythic nature of the church's assumed identity means that it is rhetorically dependent on disparaging those it takes to be rivals. The rest of the world lives "after virtue" where their moral projects have to fail; accordingly, they have nothing to offer us other than a foil for our rhetoric. Interpreted in this light, their moral projects always fail; they must in order for the story we tell about ourselves to gain traction. In contrast, Stout students Jennifer Herdt, in *Putting on Virtue* (2008), and David Decosimo, in *Ethics as a Work of Charity* (2014), show just how common, even universal, virtue formation is, and how ignorant "after virtue" language remains in light of the mixed reality of all persons, Christian or pagan, *in via*.²⁷

Augustinian democrats think virtue and character are the best ways to talk about Christian ethics, but none of them seems especially keen about the manner in which virtue and character are being talked about among Christian ethicists. They want something more. What they seem to be after is an account of persons where human action finds its meaning in the end for and in which the action is taken, even if that end is not often known ahead of time. Inasmuch as that end is socially instituted so then is the action's meaning. A key aspect to this conception of human agency is expressive possibility, where agency is something to be worked out, something to be expressed. This is different than a view where action enacts potentiality, where the former mainly activates the latter, especially given

²⁶ Bowlin's exchange with Andrew Latham extends the positive line of this lesson, namely, that notions of the common good have *not* been rendered obsolete by the fractured and contingent nature of present contexts. See Latham and Bowlin 2016; in addition, see Bowlin 2016 for an elaboration on the virtue of tolerance.

²⁷ Herdt traces a historical ambiguity over the acquired virtues, an ambiguity that begins to valorize them in contradistinction to the infused virtues, as if postulating a moral psychology where the process of divine infusion cannot also entail the natural processes of acquisition.

the point about the opacity of desired ends. Rather, what is expressed expresses something having newly come into being. From a first and a second a third emerges.²⁸ Many factors act on persons, from the past to social relations to emotions and their reasoned determinations to a biological constellation that comprises embodiedness. From the expressivist perspective a person's action is not simply the aggregate sum of these factors, not simply potentiality emptying out its content. Rather, we can speak of a moreness that surpasses the sum of its parts. The self expressed in this way will be realized precisely when little is at stake, when the orientation of its life is not tethered to a predetermined telos by which it has meaning. The open-endedness of the vanishing horizon, to be sure, makes it difficult to get one's bearings, as I have said, but it can also look like freedom.

Earlier I called hope the miner's canary of the proposals offered by the Augustinian democrats. I was taking a point I derived from Stout's interlocutors about its role in the political life it imagined. In critiquing these democrats, I said that hope for them is not linked in any obvious way to God, for example God's fulfillment of certain covenantal promises. But this is not to say that hope is not present. Indeed it is present in a formal sense, as the hope of things to come, those kinds of things that move in history.

I wonder (admitting that this wonderment surpasses what is explicitly developed in their texts) if what the Augustinian democrats are up to and the reason it does not occur to them to say much about the church is that they want to recoup virtue talk in a way that pays attention to persons. This would most fully situate these Augustinians within the ambit of *Democracy and Tradition*, which is finally about, it seems to me, the value of and therefore the conditions for self-expression (Stout 2004, 162–79, 270–86). Perhaps what Augustinian democrats are ultimately after is a picture of persons that arises between America's two most enduring sensibilities, philosophical pragmatism and Christian perfectionism, something we might understand as a democratic cultivation of selfhood.

Situating them between pragmatism and perfectionism, one might infer and advance three and then four features emerging from the expressive selfhood envisioned by the Augustinian democrats: intersubjective agency, empathic acknowledgment, moral perfectionism, and separateness. Their Augustinian ontology envisions creaturely agency as always already intersubjective. To be created is to be created by and for others. While the strong emphasis on agency would seem to press against the boundaries of political community, given the basic architecture of their conception of creatureliness, there are no limits to one's life with others. It goes on and on. Yet the temporal demarcation of difference, cleverly postulated on a prior difference between God and creatures, also avails temporally marked

²⁸ Gregory (2010, 191) draws from Lewis 2005. Regarding my elaboration here, see specifically Lewis 2005, 540, 543, 545, and 559.

distinctions. Agency on this score unfolds as action from the past, in the present, and toward the future, where past, present, and future denote interactions with others.

Empathic acknowledgment speaks to an ability to recognize the sources of one's existence and spans the range of human intercourse best captured in our life in words, the inhabitation of the natural conventions that populate the human form of life.²⁹ Empathic acknowledgment situates agency at the interstices between the inventiveness of human convention and a locality from which any convention comes to bear life. Thoreau's *Walden* provides a model in its reception of America through its literary tradition and the vocation to write again. The text imagines a literary and literal landscape where one's natural debts, say one's being alive to the world, are everywhere obvious. The application of received concepts into new contexts, their projection into the future, rely on everything that stands between the world and me. Learning to acknowledge these conditions is part of what Thoreau learned at Walden Pond, an acknowledgment he passed on as the legacy of America.³⁰

Moral perfectionism connotes one's growth in virtue and virtue's ability to inspire that growth. Perfection indicates both the goal of one's self-cultivating efforts and the circularity of its form. Remember that American transcendentalism imagined a setting reserved for the leisure class. Further imagining this growth upon a horizon of God's eternity enables the Augustinian democrats to broaden this stage, democratizing the very possibility of goodness. Intersubjective agency, empathic acknowledgment, and moral perfectionism each have respective sin equivalents: privation, denial, and sloth.

Through these features, democratic expressivism celebrates the emergence of persons, passing through a tradition, where passing through entails inhabiting its conceptual landscape and tending its storied fields, and then transcending that tradition, where transcending entails receiving one's inheritance while not being determined by it. Democratic reason giving involves one in the task of making visible that which has gone unnoticed, not simply in order to justify a position but to show one. What can a person show? Or better yet, what shows a person? Perhaps something like, "It matters to me that economic systems are justly arranged" or maybe "This matters more to me than it does to you" or even "I feel torn between contributing to a just economy and purchasing a home in a 'safe' neighborhood." Democratic reason giving is not only an occasion to show previously inculcated virtues of faith, hope, and love (Mathewes 2007, 25; Gregory 2008, 191). Public reason giving is also itself a social process where the

²⁹ On "natural conventions" see Tran 2017.

³⁰ On 291, Gregory 2010 references Walker 2001. Related to this reading of Stanley Cavell 1999, see specifically Walker 2001, 157, 158, 160, and 181.

constraints and entailments of having to give an account of oneself produces faith, hope, and love anew. The democratic moment births political dialogue, judgments, and policies, and also persons now self-shown into the world, in turn realizing Rawlsian public reason's greatest fears: the release of characters too wild even for their own background cultures.

If there is a deficiency in Stout's democratic pragmatism it lies in its inability or unwillingness to acknowledge a certain condition of selfhood, something Stanley Cavell calls separateness. If one's exceptionalism comes by differentiation, then there will be at the moment of creation a separateness from others. This separateness is not a function of something separating us, but as Cavell says, just a fact of us being separate persons, a fact of which we may be unaware until the creative act makes it explicit. Stout does offer an account of personhood emerging "between example and doctrine" but his Brandomian-inflected Hegelianism is importantly different than the tragic sensibility worked out in Cavell's attention to acknowledgment and avoidance in characters like Lear and Othello (Stout 2004, 162–79; Cavell 1999, 481–96; 2002, 267–353).³¹ Yes, separateness synthesizes freedom toward human possibility. And yet, as such, the moment of emergence can, relative to the consolations of community, come to feel unbearable, not only as a function of the intrusiveness of community, akin to what Bernard Williams lamented as the inescapability of obligation (Williams 1993, 177), but also as a function of the weight of individuality (Cavell 1983, 97–105), akin to what Marilynne Robinson portrays as the unsettlements of human personality (Robinson 1980, 2008).³² Inattention to this marks Stout's specific brand of pragmatism.³³ Attention to separateness would in turn yield a fourth feature of Augustinian democratic life.

Mathewes's emphasis on endurance in the world can be read in terms of this fourth feature (2007, 10–23). We all are together in creatureliness; we share this space of mutuality. Still, we inhabit this communion at different moments and in different ways; "we are" as Cavell writes, "endlessly separate, for *no* reason" (Cavell 1999, 369). The language of endurance gets at both the difficulty of separateness (our separateness from one another is something we have to endure) and the human capacity to endure even under the conditions of separateness, which Rawls reduced to a thin conception of pluralism. This separateness will mean that no matter how much political life bespeaks communion, there will always be between us a natural difference, one that can under the exasperations of sin or otherwise become unnatural.

³¹ On this matter, see Herdt's engagement with Stout and Charles Taylor on imitation and grace in Herdt 2013, 6–10.

³² See also Dula 2007.

³³ The pragmatism present in Glaude 2008 and Winters 2016 approaches the voice of the tragic that I have in mind.

Concluding, we might think of Augustinian democracy—what makes its conceptualization such a landmark development in contemporary American theology—as the coming-of-age of American Protestantism. This would be to understand Protestantism as the attempt to recover within Christianity something about human separateness. It would be to claim separateness as the kind of thing that cannot be expressed, will not realize itself, outside community and the claims to “the church” that tend to deny it. The recovery of separateness will only occur through an acknowledgement of community, and a reinvigoration of Protestantism through Christianity’s recovered capacities for tarrying with separateness and its difficulties. This recovery of separateness, for all the reasons we seek to deny it, will not come easily. But if we can cultivate capacities for endurance, then self-expression in this world might avail something more.³⁴

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³⁴ Brandon Morgan, Nicholas Krause, Tyler Davis, Natalie Carnes, Paul Martens, Matthew Whelan, Stanley Hauerwas, and two anonymous reviewers contributed to the development of this essay, which was initially presented as the keynote address for the inaugural meeting of the Fellowship for Protestant Ethics, and I thank Adam Eitel and other organizers for the opportunity to share the essay’s ideas.

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