

# The Dilemma of *Agape* in Augustine: An Ethic of Political Passivity or The Foundation of Solidarity?

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**Abstract:** In the history of philosophy, Augustine is a foundational figure marking the transition from the rational-cosmological paradigm of Antiquity to the faith-based interiority of Christianity. This epistemological rupture situates cognition within belief (*credo ut intelligam*), re-grounding philosophical disciplines around the love of God. In Augustine's thought, love is not merely a virtue but a central principle synonymous with the will, directing the individual toward liberation from earthly constraints. Augustine's approach radically diverges from *philia* or utility-oriented *eros*, prioritizing the unconditional nature of *agape*. The divine commandment to love God and neighbor provides an ethical framework for transcending earthly evils. However, presenting love as a "command" creates a tension: is it fulfilled through duty or a free-willed orientation supported by grace? Drawing on Hannah Arendt's critique, this article explores whether directing love toward salvation entails a passive detachment from the world or if Augustinian neighborly love offers an ethics of solidarity for fragmented social structures. The study first examines the forms of love and the liberating role of the will, then reposition's Augustine's concept of *agape* in light of Arendtian perspectives to evaluate its implications for political philosophy.

**Keywords:** Augustine, Arendt, *Agape*, *Amicitia*, Will, Love of Neighbor

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## Introduction

In the history of philosophical thought, Augustine marks a decisive transition from the rational-cosmological paradigm of the Ancient world to an approach centered on Christian interiority based on faith. This profound epistemological shift, while placing the foundation of the act of knowing truth upon belief (*credo ut intelligam*), necessitated a re-foundation of all philosophical disciplines. Augustine achieved this constitutive and unifying starting point by centering the love of God, which he regarded as the path to eternal salvation and truth. This positions Augustine as a critical heir to the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions; although he adopts faith rather than reason as his starting point, he preserves the orientation toward God as the individual's internal transformation and true happiness. In Augustinian thought, love is not merely a theological virtue but a central principle synonymous with the will (*voluntas*), directing the individual to strive to transcend worldly constraints. By establishing an inseparable bond between the human will and love, Augustine places moral responsibility and free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) at the heart of his philosophy. In this context, the approach to love that Augustine assigns a fundamental role in the transition from the earthly city (*Civitas Terrena*) to the city of God (*Civitas Dei*) radically diverges from limited forms of friendship such as *philia* or utility-based *eros*. By centering *agape*, which is unconditional, spiritual, and selfless, he constructs a universal love for humanity aimed at a transcendent purpose. The love of God, expressed as a divine commandment, followed by the love of neighbor (*dilectio proximi*), prepares the ground for a conceptual framework in which the individual possesses the possibility of shedding worldly evils through their choices. However, the presentation of love as a commandment creates a significant tension in the ethical sphere: Can a human being properly fulfill this mandate through a mere sense of duty, as emphasized in Kantian moral philosophy, or through a free-willed orientation supported by divine grace (*gratia*)? Augustine's response emphasizes that love is not just an obligation but a constitutive power that directs the soul toward God. Focusing on the interiority of the self, this power enables the individual to distance themselves from pride and the delusions arising from the external world.

This study aims to address Augustine's conception of love through this ethical challenge while moving the discussion toward a more contemporary and complex ground in terms of political philosophy. What kind of ethical foundation does the Augustinian concept of love offer in the face of today's hyper-individualistic, utilitarian, and politically fragmented social dynamics? As Hannah Arendt emphasized in her reading of *Love and Saint Augustine*, does Augustine's direction of love toward internal and individual salvation necessarily lead to a passive withdrawal from worldly action and the political sphere? The ultimate goal of *Civitas Dei* is to transcend worldly problems rather than resolve them. In this context, the fundamental problem of this study is as follows: Is the commandment of love of neighbor, structured through Augustine's love of God, capable of providing a root for a practical ethics of solidarity and togetherness in the contemporary social sphere, or does this ethical orientation inevitably lead to political passivity? To seek an answer to this core question, the article will proceed under three main headings. In the first part, the distinction between *eros* and *agape* in Augustine will be examined within a theological and volitional framework. The central role played by the will (*voluntas*) in purifying itself from the darkness of sin and turning toward God, and how this role distinguishes the commandment of Love of Neighbor from a mere ethics of duty, will be emphasized. In the second part, Augustine's skepticism toward the concept of friendship (*amicitia*) will be analyzed in detail, and it will be discussed how this skepticism defines the radical position of *agape* against today's utilitarian and interest-based social relations. The final section will focus on the dilemma between internal transformation and action. Augustine's understanding of love of neighbor and equality will be evaluated in light of Hannah Arendt's

critique that Augustinian love constitutes an escape from the political realm. The study will assess whether Augustinian love provides an ethical basis for solidarity against the accusation of political passivity. Accordingly, this work aims to reveal the potential of the Augustinian conception of love within modern ethical and political philosophy debates by repositioning its guiding role.

## 1 Different Forms of Love and The Liberating Role of The Will

Throughout the history of philosophical thought, the concept of love, particularly in Ancient Greece has been addressed across a broad spectrum ranging from the origin of being to cosmic harmony. To understand the central and constitutive role Augustine assigns to love within his theological framework, one must first focus on his terminological distinction regarding love. This distinction serves as a fundamental point of departure that determines his philosophical and ethical orientation. Among the four basic terms for love commonly used in Ancient Greece (*philia*, *storge*, *eros*, *agape*), Augustine primarily centers on the tension between *eros* and *agape*. *Eros* generally denotes a wide range of meanings, from a sexually driven force involving the desire to obtain, possess, and encompass something perceived as a deficiency, to the soul's orientation toward beauty and truth.<sup>2</sup> In Augustine's pre-conversion life, *eros* was the carrier of worldly passions and disordered desires directed toward transitory objects. On the other hand, *agape* is a form of love that is unconditional, selfless, divinely sourced, and highly spiritual.<sup>3</sup> Augustine clarifies that the love regulating the relationship between humanity and God is the latter: *agape*.<sup>4</sup>

This Augustinian distinction is more than a mere classification of types of love; it marks an ontological divide that regulates the entirety of ethical life. Love based on *eros* is disordered (*cupiditas*) and aims to "idolatrously" enjoy (*frui*) the object of love rather than use (*uti*) it. Conversely, *agape* (*caritas*) ensures that these objects of love are loved within a correct hierarchy (*ordo amoris*) directed toward God. At this point, the distinction between *frui* and *uti* determines the moral quality of the individual's relationship with the world. According to Augustine, sin is the act of making the world, which should be used (*uti*), the ultimate end to be enjoyed (*frui*). For Augustine, the path to eternal salvation requires a transition from a life driven by *eros* and *cupiditas*, filled with disordered desires, to a life guided by *agape*, structured by the love of God. This transition is not a simple emotional shift; it signifies a radical redirection of the individual's decision-making mechanism. Therefore, the essential constitutive power that changes the direction of love is the will (*voluntas*), which lies at the center of Augustine's philosophy. The will functions almost like a center of gravity (*pondus*) for the soul, either directing the self toward the temporary satisfaction of the worldly or pulling it toward the permanent peace of the transcendent. Consequently, ethical transformation is possible only when the will liberates its center of gravity from worldly ambitions and directs it toward the correct object of love.

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<sup>2</sup> Sema Özdal, "Aziz Augustinus'ta Tanrıya Duyulan Aşk ile Mutluluk İlişkisi," *Felsefe Dünyası Dergisi* 75 (2022): 465.

<sup>3</sup> James Kellenberger, *The Asymptote of Love: From Mundane to Religious to God's Love* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *City of God (De Civitate Dei)*, trans. M. Dods (Idaho: Roman Roads Media, LLC, 2015), 14.7.

## 1.1 The Centrality Of Will (*Voluntas*) And Love

Augustine's philosophy is foundational due to its unprecedented emphasis on the concept of the will (*voluntas*) in the Western intellectual tradition. According to Augustine, love is not a mere emotional or rational orientation but is the will itself. The correct use of the will is the fundamental mechanism that directs the self from disordered love (*cupiditas*) toward ordered love (*caritas*).<sup>5</sup> This centering of the will distinctly separates Augustine's thought from Ancient Greek moral philosophy, which tied virtue to rational comprehension. In Augustine's philosophy, free will (*liberum arbitrium*) is not only a capacity for choice but also the source of moral responsibility and sin. The fact that the will, which possesses the capacity to choose the good, also has the capacity to choose evil constitutes its central tragedy. For Augustine, right action does not stem solely from correct knowledge in the Socratic sense. On the contrary, the will (*voluntas*) arises from the choice to orient toward the good in conjunction with love. Augustine does not merely separate the will from rational reasoning; he establishes it as a new source and authority within the Christian theological tradition.<sup>6</sup> The will is no longer evaluated as a mechanism of purely rational choice. With Augustine, the will has become the carrier of love, encompassing emotional depth and ethical orientation. The will is not just a neutral capacity for choice; it is essentially a capacity for loving or hating.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, a moral crisis lies not in the individual's ignorance but in the arduous redirection that the will must perform from the darkness of hatred toward the light of love. When the will chooses its object incorrectly, it does not merely make an error; it damages its own ontological integrity. In this regard, the correct use of the will is accepted as the primary mechanism guiding the self from *cupiditas* to *caritas*.

The nature of this volitional orientation fundamentally distinguishes Augustinian ethics from the ethics of duty prominent in Kant's philosophy. For Kant, moral value lies not in the consequence of the action but in the "good will" or the volition arising from a sense of duty. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant argues that an action possesses true ethical value only if it stems from obligation, that is, from mere respect for the law. Emotions, inclinations, or self-interest corrupt the moral worth of an action.<sup>8</sup> As Wood, a scholar of Kantian ethics, notes, Kantian morality focuses on rational autonomy and adherence to the law. Here, the will is obligated to choose compliance with the law of practical reason.<sup>9</sup> This emphasis on rational obligation is based on conformity to universal laws independent of emotional or personal inclinations, reflecting a rigorous rationalism that pushes emotional motivations, such as love, outside the realm of moral action.<sup>10</sup>

Augustinian love transcends this rational and emotionless conception of obligation. While Augustine accepts love as a commandment, he argues that the correct response to this mandate

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<sup>5</sup> To love God above all things and to love one's neighbor for the sake of God. Augustine defines the concept of *caritas* based on the premise that God should be loved for the purpose of *frui* (enjoyment), while the neighbor should be loved for the purpose of *uti* (using as a means toward God): Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 1.22.21 - 1.27.28.

<sup>6</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 182-183.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Hughes, "Augustine on Will, Freedom, and Foreknowledge: 'De Libero Arbitrio', III, 1-3," *Religious Studies* 52, no. 3 (2016): 316-317.

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Ioanna Kuçuradi (Ankara: Türkiye Felsefe Kurumu, 1995), 397-400.

<sup>9</sup> Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 171-174.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Guyer, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 137-140.

is realized not through a mere sense of duty, but through a voluntary orientation and internal joy (*delectatio*). In Augustine, the love of God is not a necessity but the highest expression of freedom. The will realizes its potential by joyfully loving the highest good.<sup>11</sup> This implies that Augustinian love is an internal volitional acceptance and a constitutive orientation coming from the heart, supported by divine grace, rather than a mere duty. However, this position of the will in the face of grace brings a serious moral and philosophical paradox. Although the will appears endowed with absolute freedom as the source of moral responsibility, its ability to "equip" itself with the "right love" (*caritas*) that ensures salvation is made entirely dependent on the intervention of divine grace. In Augustine's moral philosophy, the individual is paradoxically both "free" and "not free" because they cannot choose the good without grace.<sup>12</sup> This situation makes it difficult for Augustinian volitional guidance to offer an autonomous political or social prescription in the modern sense. Love is not a rational faculty that the individual can activate at any moment through their own effort; it is a divine gift whose source is external. Augustine attempts to transcend the paradox created by love being commanded. Even if love is commanded, the fulfillment of this command is possible through the individual's free opening to grace and the joy felt toward the object of love, rather than a rational obligation. This centralizing of the will enabled Augustine to place moral responsibility and free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) at the foundation of his philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

In this context, the will is the necessary condition for love to transform into action. Love requires preferring one thing over another, and this preference stems not from necessity but from an entirely free volitional act. According to Augustine, love is not independent of the will; one loves only by willing, and love necessitates establishing a relationship of order and preference among loved things.<sup>14</sup> In Augustine, the key role for salvation belongs to this power of choice, namely, the faculty of free choice. Error and sin do not arise because the will is inherently evil, but because it is directed toward the wrong object. Therefore, obeying the commandments of love of God and love of neighbor requires a radical transformation of the will from a wrong orientation (*cupiditas*) to a right orientation (*caritas*).

## 1.2 The Guiding Role Of Love Of Neighbor (*Dilectio Proximī*)

In Augustine's ethical system, the love of neighbor (*dilectio proximī*) is a necessary complement and the practical expression of the vertical commandment of the love of God (*agape-caritas*) as it is transferred to the horizontal plane of human relations. This love is not merely a superficial benevolence, a basic instrument preparing the soul for the divine, or a preliminary stage; rather, it possesses an essential quality as an inseparable part of the whole.<sup>15</sup> This essentiality indicates that love is an indivisible unity. The prevailing thought is that loving the neighbor is a constitutive part inherent within the very act of loving God. In determining the scope of the mandate to love the neighbor, Augustine does not limit its purpose to worldly

<sup>11</sup> Robert Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 205-207.

<sup>12</sup> James Bissett Pratt, "The Ethics of St. Augustine," *International Journal of Ethics* 13, no. 2 (1903): 235.

<sup>13</sup> Jesse Couenhoven takes this situation to a more radical level, suggesting that the late Augustine effectively abandoned the defense of free will. According to Couenhoven, Augustine realized that human volitional capacity was weakened by the effects of sin and now ties salvation entirely to God's gracious will rather than a choice of the human will. See: Jesse Couenhoven, "Augustine's Rejection of the Free-Will Defence: An Overview of the Late Augustine's Theodicy," *Religious Studies* 43, no. 3 (2007): 280-283.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine, *City of God (De Civitate Dei)*, 15.22.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond Canning, "Love of Neighbour in St. Augustine: A Preparation for or the Essential Moment of Love for God?," *Augustiniana* 33, no. 1-2 (1983): 25.

happiness or utility. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, he states that one who rightly loves their neighbor must act in such a way that the neighbor may also love God with all their heart.<sup>16</sup> This formulation elevates the guiding role of neighborly love to a level of theological instrumentalization. Beyond meeting the neighbor's personal needs, love of neighbor aims to serve their ultimate salvation. This situation demonstrates that love cannot be reduced to a mere external action. On the contrary, love is a universal and high moral act that must spring from the heart through the utmost effort of the soul. According to Augustine, correct self-love (desiring one's own salvation), as a reflection of the love of God, is the model that must be transferred to the neighbor. In this way, love of neighbor functions as a transformative force in purifying the individual's will (*voluntas*) from disordered desires (*cupiditas*) and directing it toward ordered love (*caritas*).<sup>17</sup>

The transcendent and salvation-oriented nature of Augustine's doctrine of love is the primary element triggering the debate on political passivity at the center of this study. From this perspective, while love of neighbor provides a moral anchor that gives the individual the strength to endure the tragedies of worldly life, it does not promise an active political program to structurally transform the earthly city.<sup>18</sup> In Augustinian politics, the ultimate goal is not to establish absolute justice on earth, but merely to provide a temporary and limited environment of peace (*pax terrena*) with theological prudence. Although civil society is seen as too flawed to repair the ontological disorder created by original sin, it serves as a kind of indispensable intermediate station for managing the material means that serve the eternal salvation of the soul. This does not mean that the ideal of *Civitas Dei* completely rejects civil society. On the contrary, the worldly benefits provided by civil society are accepted as an instrumental ground that will carry the human being toward a higher goal.<sup>19</sup> However, the primary intellectual and spiritual energy here is dedicated to an internal turn toward *Civitas Dei* rather than public reforms. Consequently, instead of exhibiting a radical will for the improvement of worldly institutions, Augustine's ethical system presents a structure that reconciles the individual with the inadequacy of these institutions and directs their energy toward the transcendent. In Augustinian thought, everything worldly must be a tool to be used (*uti*) to reach God. These are not ends to be enjoyed (*frui*) as goals in themselves. Political action and worldly peace are also included in this category of "use." This distinction causes the power of *agape* to withdraw from worldly action.

While traditional political philosophy sees establishing justice, ensuring equality, or increasing social happiness as the ultimate goal, the main objective of Augustinian love of neighbor is not to save the neighbor from temporary injustices in this world, but to help them progress on the path to eternal salvation. This transcendent goal inevitably renders political action secondary and conditional. Robert Markus notes that in defining the church's position in the world,

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<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 1-22.21.

<sup>17</sup> Oliver M.T. O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 140-143.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine does not develop a programmatic theory or an applicable political plan regarding the political sphere. His approach to political activity is directly based on a theological framework. However, this approach does not mean remaining entirely outside the political realm. On the contrary, in his relationships with public officials, Augustine attaches special importance to legal expertise, institutional functioning, and basing representation on competence, attempting to make concrete interventions aimed at reducing violence and injustice. In this context, political activity manifests itself not as a predetermined program but as a factual practice of politics conducted with critical judgment and a sense of public responsibility. See: John Doody, *Augustine in Conversation: Tradition and Innovation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2025), 111.

<sup>19</sup> Ernest L. Fortin, *Classical Christianity and the Political Order: Reflections on the Theologico-Political Problem* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996), 20-21.

Augustine emphasizes spiritual duty over political responsibility. The purpose of the church is not to sanctify or transform the world, but to protect its members from the world's contamination.<sup>20</sup> This orientation suggests that Augustinian ethics, rather than directing the individual toward active political organization or a search for radical social change, is structured as a call for prudence and internal purification against a sinful world. This framework, in a sense, prepares the ground for the accusation of political passivity and forms the focus of Hannah Arendt's critique, which will be discussed later. Does love of neighbor lead the individual to escape from worldly responsibility and the political sphere, or does it offer a foundation for a practical ethics of solidarity within the sinful earthly city? The answer to this question requires a deeper inquiry into whether love is not only a means for individual salvation but also a moral motivation for political action.

## 2 From Amicitia to Agape: The Rejection of Utilitarian Relationships

The politico-ethical orientation of Augustine's understanding of love, while emphasizing the transcendence of the love of God, also harbors a profound skepticism toward the concept of friendship (*amicitia*), which held a significant place in Ancient and early Christian traditions. In Antiquity, *amicitia* was regarded by thinkers such as Aristotle and Cicero as the pillar of a virtuous life and civic ethics. However, Augustine re-evaluates it within the context of his theses on original sin and alienation from God. Augustine views *amicitia* as inherently limited, fragile, and even a dangerous anchor. He interprets an excessive devotion to friendship as overvaluing the transitory and, consequently, turning away from God. In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine clearly demonstrates that human relations forming the foundations of the earthly city, no matter how noble they may appear, are fueled by the impulse of self-love (*amor sui*) and restlessness.<sup>21</sup> The ontological and ethical basis of this radical rejection in Augustine is the principle of the order of love (*ordo amoris*), which prescribes that every being should be loved according to its rank in the universe. According to Augustine, virtue is, in its simplest definition, the order of love (*ordo est amoris*).<sup>22</sup> This principle requires that love possess a quality appropriate not only in quantity but also in its orientation toward the object's place in the hierarchy of creation. If an object is loved more than its inherent value warrants, this results in a deviation of love and its transformation into worldly passion. In this context, *amicitia* is seen by Augustine as inherently fragile and even a spiritual risk; for love felt for a human being, if not positioned beneath the love of God, carries the danger of turning into a disordered love that disrupts the order and alienates the individual from the Creator. This skepticism is of critical importance, as the radicality of *agape* lies precisely in its claim to transcend the utilitarian boundaries of these worldly relationship forms and guarantee the individual's ultimate salvation. *Agape* is the radical antithesis of this fragile and error-prone conception of *amicitia*.

### 2.1 The Fragility of Friendship and the Critique of Utility-Based Relations

In Ancient thought, especially in Aristotle and Cicero, *amicitia* was accepted as a fundamental institution for the individual's virtuous life and civic practice. However, Augustine limits this

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<sup>20</sup> Robert A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 146.

<sup>21</sup> Augustine, *City of God (De Civitate Dei)*, 14.28.

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, *City of God (De Civitate Dei)*, 15.22.

optimistic perspective with the state of original sin and the inevitable misery brought by the earthly city. According to Augustine, the greatest risk at the root of worldly friendships is the uncertainty of character and will. While people can perceive the actions of their friends, they can never fully know the character or the ultimate orientation of their will, for instance, whether it is directed toward God or toward cupiditas.<sup>23</sup> This epistemological and metaphysical uncertainty exposes worldly friendships to two major dangers. The first of these is the state of emotional dependence and idolatry. Worldly friendships can encourage the individual to substitute the object of love with a transitory human or utility, thereby allowing it to take the place of God. This form of disordered love, cupiditas, entails loving a friend merely for their own sake and placing the happiness of the bond established with them ahead of the eternal happiness offered by God. In his *Confessions* (*Confessiones*), while describing the pain he experienced upon the loss of a friend, Augustine interprets the state of deep mourning resulting from such a loss as a kind of self-delusion arising from directing love toward the wrong object, namely, the mortal. At this point, Hannah Arendt emphasizes that Augustine views friendship as a relationship incapable of securing the future and stuck in the past; therefore, the love of God, which provides absolute security, is substituted in its place.<sup>24</sup> However, considering Augustine's theory of time, Arendt's critique of being "stuck in the past" becomes open to debate. For Augustine, time is entirely a spiritual extension (*distentio animi*). In this context, *agape* is not merely a remembrance directed toward the past. It can also be conceived as a hope and expectation for the future.<sup>25</sup> Augustinian love is firmly tied to the future through gratitude and anticipation established over the fear of death. This future-orientation allows love to overcome the risk of freezing in worldly time by directing itself toward the eternal and infinite in the face of the limitations of worldly friendships. The guidance of Augustinian love preserves an active orientation through the promise of future salvation while rejecting the transitory dependence of friendship.

The second danger is the implicit dominance of utilitarianism. The Augustinian perspective asserts that beneath many social bonds that appear superficially as mutual love, there lies a hidden expectation of utility or common interest. In such cases, friendship transforms into a tool for common goals, personal comfort, or worldly security. Augustine's critique also offers a radical challenge to the interest-oriented "network" understanding commonly seen in today's social networks and political alliances. This critique establishes a philosophical bridge to the problems created by modern rational choice theories and utilitarianism in the ethical sphere. Today, utilitarianism evaluates all relationships through criteria of efficiency, cost-benefit analysis, and providing the greatest happiness. For Augustine, such a relationship is fundamentally ontologically inadequate. Any relationship whose end is not God is bound to be transitory and fragile by its nature. Establishing relationships upon rational interest strengthens the tendency to see the other person as an extension of self-interest. This also constitutes a serious problematic for modern contractarian ethical approaches. These approaches tend to ignore the dimension of unconditional responsibility and mercy emphasized by Augustine by basing moral obligations between individuals on arbitrary or rational agreements. Consequently, Augustine's stance against utilitarianism clarifies that *agape* is not just an ethical duty but an anti-utilitarian spiritual principle that fundamentally rejects rational interest calculation. This sharp break ensures that within Augustine's theological framework, *agape* is

<sup>23</sup> Tamer Nawar, "Augustine On The Dangers Of Friendship," *The Classical Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (2015): 839-840.

<sup>24</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, eds. J. V. Scott & J. C. Stark (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 105.

<sup>25</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* (*Confessiones*), trans. Çiğdem Dürüşken (İstanbul: Kabalcı Yayınevi, 2010), 11.26.33-27.34.

positioned not only as an ethical preference but also as an existential necessity. While the transitory, worldly, and self-contained nature of *amicitia* and *eros* inevitably imprisons the individual in a cycle of worldly misery and loneliness, *agape* offers an infinite and universal orientation against this chain of restricted relationships.

## 2.2 The Radical Disinterestedness and Universalizing Role of *Agape*

In Augustine, *agape* (*caritas*) is, in a sense, the antithesis of the fragile, utilitarian, and potentially sinful understanding of *amicitia*. By centering *agape*, Augustine emphasizes that love is not a search for satisfaction from worldly objects, but rather an enthusiasm directed toward the absolute Good, which is infinite and unchanging, as an internal orientation. This situation is reinforced by the thesis that love is a divinely sourced gift rather than a value-based act. Therefore, *agape* transcends the limitations of all worldly relationship forms without regard for any reciprocation, interest, emotional dependence, or sexual impulse. Indeed, the submission of the moral and ethical sphere to the sovereignty of the love of God in Augustine stems from the universal power of this love that encompasses the entire self. This expansion aims to establish a spiritual bond of unity that transcends the fragmentation of the earthly city and ultimately orients toward *Civitas Dei* by directing the individual to love the neighbor not for themselves, but for God. In this context, the role of *agape* in Augustine's philosophical project goes beyond simple moral advice. *Agape* is a constitutive principle that forms the foundation of internal transformation and ethical action. It constitutes a radical response to the superficial and transitory nature of worldly friendships and utilitarian relationships. In this respect, it draws the fundamental line of demarcation for the Augustinian ethico-political orientation. This type of love is not merely a feeling but a necessary condition that enables the will, supported by divine grace, to be directed toward the correct object. This radical condition distinguishes *agape* from traditional forms of love and relationship, endowing it with two fundamental characteristics.

The first of these characteristics is the function of object-independence. The object of *agape* does not center on the needs of the one who gives love or the virtue of the one who receives it. On the contrary, since love originates from God Himself, it is independent of the object of love. The neighbor is loved not because they are good, but because they are created by God and are a candidate for salvation. This unconditional acceptance assigns a universalizing role to Augustinian love. Another function is the ordering of disorder. *Agape* orders the disorder (*cupiditas*) within the individual's will. The will no longer clings passionately to transitory worldly objects; instead, it learns to see worldly objects only as tools (*uti*) to be used by directing itself toward God.<sup>26</sup> This transformation enables the individual to distance themselves from worldly anxiety and pride, preparing the ground for the emergence of the love of neighbor as a sincere and genuine act. The principle of loving the neighbor provides an ethical framework for human relations on the horizontal plane, continuously orienting people's thoughts and behaviors toward choosing what is better and offering a reliable foundation for the individual in the attempt to comprehend truth. Awareness of the limitations of worldly life makes the proud desires that restrict our daily actions manageable.<sup>27</sup> In this context, Augustinian *agape* can also be read as a theologically-based challenge against today's series of social relations built upon individual interests and cost-benefit analyses. *Agape* aims to establish a spiritual bond of unity that transcends the fragmentation of the earthly city and ultimately orients toward *Civitas Dei*. However, this radical internal and transcendent orientation sharpens the ultimate

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<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 22.20-21.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Dennis Bathory, "Augustine Through a Modern Prism," *Society* 34 (1997): 75.

question of our study: Can such a transcendent and disinterested love form a practical ethics of solidarity in the face of the concrete political problems and conflicts of the earthly city? Or does it inevitably lead to an escape from the political sphere and to passivity? This vital question will be addressed in the light of Hannah Arendt's critique of Augustine and will form the focus of our next section.

### 3 The Dilemma of Internal Transformation and Action

While Augustine's philosophy, centered on the love of God and the will, ties the individual's salvation to an internal transformation, the greatest challenge it poses for political philosophy lies in the rigid dualism between this world and the hereafter. Augustine constructs human history as a conflict between two cities (*Civitas Dei* and *Civitas Terrena*) governed by two opposing loves.<sup>28</sup> The earthly city (*Civitas Terrena*) is characterized by self-love (*amor sui*) and pride (*superbia*), whereas the heavenly city (*Civitas Dei*) is established through the love of God (*amor Dei*) and humility (*humilitas*).<sup>29</sup> This dualistic structure creates a significant dilemma regarding the function of Augustine's conception of love in the political and social spheres: Does *agape* offer a foundation for active ethical action within the *Civitas Terrena*, or does it necessitate a transcendent escape toward the *Civitas Dei*, and consequently, political passivity? This dilemma is more than a matter of individual ethical choice; it is directly related to which object of love history and social institutions are structured around. Augustine's conception of the two cities as intermingled and intertwined (*permixtae*) on the earthly plane involves a tension and constant negotiation arising from the individual's simultaneous belonging to both realms. The turning point of Hannah Arendt's critique of Augustine appears precisely in this "in-between" zone. Does Augustinian love create a space of withdrawal from worldly responsibility by targeting the world (*mundus*) not as an entity in itself, but only as humans within it who are candidates for salvation? For Arendt, the fuel of political action is a love of the world (*amor mundi*) that nourishes the will to preserve it, while Augustine's coding of the world not as the ultimate destination but merely as a journey or pilgrimage (*peregrinatio*) ontologically weakens the constitutive and permanent will of the political. This section aims to illuminate this deep abyss between Augustine's transcendent theological priorities and the worldly action expectations of modern political philosophy, as well as the ethical possibilities created by this abyss.

#### 3.1 The Limits of Love of Neighbor

Augustine's skepticism toward *amicitia* stems, in one sense, from his view of all human relationships within the earthly city through the shadow of original sin and disordered love (*cupiditas*). The radical disinterestedness and transcendent goal of *agape* are the necessary consequences of a search for an ethical foundation beyond fragile friendships and utilitarian alliances. However, this foundation places the individual within a world where all seemingly external social structures are ultimately transitory and flawed. Augustine defines the position of human beings in social life in a pessimistic and somber manner. One cannot speak of a social life without disappointments, destructions, uncertainties that disturb the soul, and suffering. The long list of evils he enumerates in *De Civitate Dei* is an indicator of the common misery of

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<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that these two cities are not identified with the state and the church; rather, they are two modes of life that must coexist on earth. Societies and individuals living in every age turn toward one of these two alternatives, and the tension continues under different conditions. See: Umberto Eco & Riccardo Fedrina, *Felsefe Tarihi 2: Hellenizmden Augustinus'a*, trans. Leyla Tonguç Basmacı (İstanbul: Alfa Basım Yayım, 2020), 286.

<sup>29</sup> Augustine, *City of God (De Civitate Dei)*, 14.28.

humanity.<sup>30</sup> This common misery creates a historical and necessary equality arising from the common origin of all humans in Adam.<sup>31</sup>

As Hannah Arendt emphasizes, this state of equality derived from a common root creates a bond of kinship among humanity, not in terms of talents, but in terms of the human condition and shared vulnerability in the face of sin.<sup>32</sup> This kinship provides a theological ground for the Augustinian mandate of love of neighbor. This love requires a volitional effort that directs the individual's actions away from temporary worldly pleasures toward continuously choosing what is better. However, the constitutive role of neighborly love brings with it a critical limitation: the ultimate goal of love is not to politically liberate the neighbor in this world, but to desire their salvation, that is, to direct them toward God. This demonstrates that love of neighbor functions more as a theological tool than an ethical duty, drawing the boundaries of political action within the earthly city. Furthermore, it shows that Augustinian ethics, rather than directing the individual toward active political organization or a search for radical social change, issues a call for prudence and internal purification against a sinful world. Indeed, in Augustine, even the highest form of ethical action is based on the principle of using (*uti*) the worldly for the sake of a transcendent goal, salvation, rather than correcting the worldly. In this context, efforts for political and social justice do not promise a final and permanent solution. A temporary order is maintained until God's final judgment. This Augustinian perspective, while emphasizing individual freedom and moral responsibility, also involves finding the value of worldly success and collective political action insufficient in the face of God's transcendent will. According to William Connolly, who defines Augustine's metaphysics of morals as the "construction of an internal moral order," this perspective frames the individual's social roles as an extension of their internal relationship with God. What is essential here is a "politics of transformation" rather than projects of worldly power.<sup>33</sup> Instead of radically changing the world through political institutions, Augustine focuses on changing the ontological and ethical orientation of the individual and society. The real sphere of political struggle is not public squares, but the individual's will and conscience. In this context, collective political action is destined to remain secondary and insufficient in the face of the historical manifestation of the transcendent will and the absolute nature of divine justice. The character of neighborly love as a theological tool rather than an ethical duty, and its role in delimiting political action within the earthly city, lies at the heart of Arendt's critique. This politics of transformation, which directs the human being toward their own internal truth and, connectedly, toward divine providence rather than building the world, is evaluated by Arendt as an erosion of politics operating through the loss of the public sphere. The claim that this internal depth created by Augustinian guidance of love turns political participation into a kind of inertia is the main pillar of Arendt's accusation of passivity.

### 3.2 Arendt's Critique: From *Agape* to Political Passivity

Hannah Arendt formulated one of the sharpest critiques in the literature regarding Augustine's conception of love. According to Arendt, by placing interiority and orientation toward God at the center of his philosophy, Augustine performs a conscious break from plurality and the public sphere, which are the foundations of political action and worldly responsibility. Arendt's

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<sup>30</sup> Augustine, *City of God (De Civitate Dei)*, 22.22-23.

<sup>31</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 101.

<sup>33</sup> William E. Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative: A Reflection on the Politics of Morality* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 74-75.

core argument can be summarized as follows: True political action requires a plural relationship where individuals reveal their unique identities and recognize each other through speech and action in the public sphere. However, *agape*, with its mandate to "love your neighbor as yourself," emphasizes a state of sameness or the equality of common origin in Adam. *Agape* targets the potential for salvation rather than the neighbor's uniqueness. Consequently, *agape* hinders worldly action. Since the transcendent and ultimate goal of *agape* emphasizes the limitations and misery of worldly life, it directs the individual toward escaping the world rather than active action aimed at transforming it. Additionally, Arendt draws attention to the element of secrecy inherent in the nature of love. She claims that Augustinian love is inherently hidden and invisible in the public sphere. True love targets people, not the world, and this goal is experienced in the individual's inner depths. This secrecy contradicts the political sphere, which requires visibility and plurality.<sup>34</sup> Augustine's focus on interiority is unacceptable for Arendt, who views politics as a place of creation and sharing. According to this approach, Augustinian love undermines the love of the world (*amor mundi*) based on citizenship by escaping common responsibility toward the world; furthermore, it reduces action to an internal transformation, leaving it outside of political power and worldly constitution. When the freedom of Augustinian love is defined essentially as the ability to turn toward God, it clashes with political freedom, or the capacity to make new beginnings, in the sense understood by Arendt. As Gregory emphasizes, at the core of Arendt's thought lies the defense of the freedom of political action against the de-politicizing dependencies of both the ancient and modern worlds.<sup>35</sup> Arendt's fundamental argument rests on the assumption that true political action requires a plural relationship in which individuals reveal their uniqueness and recognize one another through speech and action in the public sphere. The capacity for making new beginnings (*natality*), which Arendt sees as the constitutive power of politics, is pushed to the background by Augustinian *agape*. For Augustine's love focuses on awaiting salvation rather than establishing something new in the world. This fundamental critique of Augustine's conception of love becomes even sharper with the concept of action at the center of Arendt's *vita activa*. Arendt defines action through a space of appearance occurring on the ground of plurality, where individuals can reveal their unique identities. Action is related to the capacity to make new beginnings among different individuals interacting in this space. According to Arendt, *agape*, as a hidden form of love connected to individual salvation, consciously withdraws from action and plurality in the existing space that requires building a common world. Augustine utilizes the concept to hold together people who have lost interest in the common world, and this form of love is inherently "worldless".<sup>36</sup>

Augustine's guidance of love faces the accusation of passivity from the perspective of political philosophy. Instead of providing a foundation for a political program to improve the earthly city, love of neighbor becomes an ethical framework for enduring evil individually and awaiting salvation. This shows that *agape* transforms its ethical power into an internal resistance against worldly destructions and political despair. Augustine finds the highest expression of neighborly love in the individual's showing mercy toward a suffering or wronged neighbor. This mercy prioritizes the individual's act of sharing and enduring the neighbor's pain together, rather than organizing a collective political movement to eliminate the suffering. Thus, love of neighbor functions as a form of internal solidarity developing on the ground of shared ontological misery,

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<sup>34</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 100.

<sup>35</sup> Erin L. Gregory, "Augustine and Arendt on Love: New Dimensions in the Religion and Liberalism Debates," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 21 (2001): 161.

<sup>36</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 53.

rather than a common political project.<sup>37</sup> This approach is in deep conflict with Ancient Greek or modern political philosophies. In Aristotle's *philia*-centered or Habermas's communicative action-centered philosophies, the political sphere is where individuals establish their worlds through action and speech, actively defining and building the common good (*bonum commune*). However, in Augustinian guidance, the public sphere is treated not as a place of action and creation, but as a place of exile where God's justice is awaited. This theological position strengthens the critique that in the face of today's urgent political problems, such as social justice, economic inequalities, and democratic foundations, Augustinian ethics functions more as a kind of consoling "ethical refuge" rather than an effective guide for action. The fact that Augustine's philosophy does not provide desired answers to the expectations of progressive and restorative social models keeps these critiques alive. Substituting eternal hope for worldly hope for social change transforms the individual's critical energy toward the existing system into a kind of internal resignation. Since Augustine promises salvation rather than improvement or reformation, his ethics is built upon accepting the world as it is and transcending it spiritually. This approach has also been criticized by Elshtain. Elshtain argues that Augustine's distinction between *Civitas Dei* and *Civitas Terrena* significantly weakens the moral meaning of political action; for on a ground where true virtue and justice are impossible in the *Civitas Terrena*, politics is reduced merely to the function of maintaining order.<sup>38</sup> This ontological limitation directs the power of *agape* toward focusing on internal salvation by withdrawing from worldly responsibility. Augustine's seemingly pessimistic dualism also nourishes the motivation for internal ethical refuge and transformation against the certainty of worldly futility. Augustine's view of the *Civitas Terrena* is not limited to the function of maintaining order. Influenced by the Stoic tradition, he also expects the individual to develop moral resistance against fate and worldly difficulties. When examining Augustine's moral philosophy, Marcia Colish notes that this ethics, developed through the correct use of the will (*caritas*), views the effort to provide earthly peace as a dignified act of "use" (*uti*).<sup>39</sup> Therefore, despite the risk of political passivity, Augustinian ethics can still function as a powerful source of motivation for the unconditional responsibility and individual mercy needed in the contemporary social sphere. This potential will be examined in the following section.

### 3.3 The Potential for an Ethics of Solidarity in the Contemporary Social Sphere

While Arendt's critique accurately identifies Augustine's theological priorities, the radical ethical possibilities his conception of *agape* offers to the modern ethical and social sphere cannot be ignored. Today's atomized social environment, driven by globalization, digitalization, and hyper-individualism, necessitates a re-evaluation of Augustine's concept of love of neighbor. In contemporary societies, where utilitarian rationality and the ethics of performance form the basis of social relations, the concept of neighborly love is losing its meaning through digital distances, social media polarizations, and anonymization. In this environment brought about by modern production relations and globalization, the value of a

<sup>37</sup> According to Arendt, the hostility of the early Christians toward the public sphere is essentially a spontaneous result of their devotion to good works. If the work is known and made public, it will lose its quality of being done for the sake of goodness. While the visibility of the action might be useful, it is no longer "goodness." See: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 74.

<sup>38</sup> Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Augustine and the Limits of Politics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 26-27.

<sup>39</sup> "One must learn to face the transitory nature of worldly life and regulate one's ethical response to these things so that they appear neither greater nor smaller than they truly are." Marcia L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages II* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 211.

relationship has become dependent on cost-benefit analysis, individual success, or the ethics of performance. This situation erodes not only personal relationships but also solidarity mechanisms in political and economic fields. For instance, contractarian approaches dominant in political moralism tend to push emotions and unconditional obligations out of the ethical system by placing the principle of justice on a ground of rational agreement. In this setting, Augustine's understanding of love presents a radical stance against modern utilitarianism. Augustinian *agape* is built upon a conscious rejection of the logic of rational interest and gain. As previously shown, *agape* expresses a form of unconditional orientation purified from the utility-based imperfections of *amicitia* and worldly relations. This unconditionality envelops Augustinian ethics with a sense of humanism that necessitates loving every human being, even if flawed or sinful as a candidate for salvation, rather than only those who are successful or provide utility.

Augustinian *agape* necessitates an unconditional love for humanity by rejecting the utilitarian limits of *amicitia*. This ethical potential offered by Augustine is not merely an internal refuge; it is also the ground for purposeful action in the worldly sphere. However, according to Augustine, political actions do not always promise linear success. Actions have unexpected effects that are sometimes the exact opposite of the intention. Even the most virtuous efforts can result in the flow of events evolving in a direction independent of human will. At this point, Augustine argues that politics is ultimately guided by divine providence (*providentia*). In the Augustinian perspective, any political victory gains meaning only as a limited reflection of God's greater and absolute victory. Instead of absolutizing worldly success, this viewpoint preserves the search for truth at the root of victory by making it part of a divine whole.<sup>40</sup> With this approach, contrary to utilitarian and contractarian systems, Augustine brings the inevitable fragility within the political and the human being's unconditional responsibility toward the transcendent back to the center. While Arendt argues that evil in the modern world manifests as a kind of thoughtlessness and loss of the faculty of judgment rather than radical monstrosity, she establishes an indirect dialogue with Augustine's ontological definition of evil as the privation of good (*privatio boni*).<sup>41</sup> However, for Arendt, this deficiency is not an ontological void that exempts the individual from worldly responsibility. On the contrary, it is a tragic loss of the ability to act in the public sphere and build a common world with others. According to Arendt, the interior-oriented character of Augustinian *agape* cannot sufficiently nourish the sphere of worldly action and pluralistic deliberation, which are the antidotes to modern evil.

Against Arendt's reading of withdrawal from this world, it is possible to offer a more optimistic and naturalistic interpretation of Augustinian politics. According to Burnell, Augustine does not see political life as an inevitable disease of original sin, but as a requirement of human social nature and a natural ground upon which Christian virtue can be built.<sup>42</sup> Burnell draws attention to the terminological distinction Augustine makes between domination (*dominari*) and ruling through genuine service (*consulere*). Accordingly, *agape* does not reject political action itself, but rather the desire for domination that seeps into that action and instrumentalizes the "other." This distinction softens Arendt's accusation of passivity. Augustinian guidance of love aims not to abolish worldly authority, but to purify it from domination and transform it into an act of care and counsel. Love is not the result of conformity to an abstract ethical law or a mere product

<sup>40</sup> John von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 152.

<sup>41</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 294-295.

<sup>42</sup> Peter J. Burnell, "The Status of Politics in St. Augustine's 'City of God'," *History of Political Thought* 13, no. 1 (1992): 28-29.

of faith; rather, it manifests as a respect for the inherent internal perfection of being.<sup>43</sup> In this respect, politics is repositioned not as a field destroyed by Christianity, but as one where virtue is purified and perfected. Ultimately, Augustinian love can transform from a passive acceptance into a dynamic orientation. Eugene TeSelle follows a similar line, re-evaluating the meaning of action in Augustine's philosophy through the concept of "willing of ends." According to TeSelle, by willing individual happiness and social peace as values on both earthly and heavenly scales, Augustine found the opportunity to more consistently affirm worldly values and approach them with responsibility.<sup>44</sup> This suggests that the Augustinian understanding of politics can possess a progressive vein that transforms the social conditions in which people interact by preserving an awareness of human kinship and mutual interdependence. Therefore, *agape* can function as a volitional motor that does not merely passively accept the "peace of Babylon" but acts around common values to improve the quality of that peace.<sup>45</sup> This perspective reinforces the argument against Arendt's accusation of passivity, suggesting that love offers a transformative moral motivation and a framework of meaning for the world.

The disinterested character of love provides a foundation for an ethics of unconditional solidarity against modern conditional relationships and merit-based social ethics. This can be considered a powerful source of motivation, especially in the face of global ethical crises that require unconditional action, such as social exclusion, collective narcissism, the issue of refugees and migrants, or climate crises. *Agape* has the potential to transfer the idea that the legitimacy of an action should stem from the pure intention of the will, rather than its consequence, into contemporary ethical debates. The equality established by the thesis of common origin in Adam, unlike the modern discourse of individual rights, centers on the common fragility and state of misery of all human beings. In the face of today's political polarizations and practices of marginalization, this foundation of equality reminds us of the fundamental unity in the human condition and shared suffering. Augustine's path for the human being involves a mode of movement that leads from the outside to the inside, and from the inside to the superior.<sup>46</sup> This approach brings to the agenda a new possibility of ethical responsibility based not only on legal rights but also on an ontological fragility. In this context, it can be stated that the Augustinian conception of love has the potential to build a philosophical bridge with a modern "ethics of vulnerability" that deepens discussions of justice through the foundations of emotion and disinterestedness. This ontological ground, emphasizing the commonality of all humans in sin and mortality, bears a radical similarity to the concept of "precarity" conceptualized in modern political philosophy. It is a prominent claim that ethical responsibility begins with individuals recognizing the mutual and inevitable fragility over each other's lives.<sup>47</sup> Augustinian *agape* accepts this fragility as a fellowship in misery, commanding one to see the neighbor not merely as a citizen or a contract partner, but as part of a shared vulnerability. Contrary to Arendt's claim, this can be seen not as an escape from the world, but as a radical ethical bonding established within worldly pain and limitation, transcending rational interest calculations.

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<sup>43</sup> Siyuan Tian, "The Augustinian Concept of Love: From Hannah Arendt's Interpretation to Impartial Love of Mozi," *Religions* 15, no. 7 (2024): 782, 14.

<sup>44</sup> Eugene TeSelle, "Toward an Augustinian Politics," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 16, no. 1 (1988): 99.

<sup>45</sup> Eugene TeSelle, "Toward an Augustinian Politics," 100-101.

<sup>46</sup> Regarding Augustine's argument on the soul's remembrance of God, see: Charles Taylor, *Sources of The Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 136.

<sup>47</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 30-31.

Although Augustinian love does not offer a direct political action program, it provides a foundation for the moral motivation underlying the political actions of the earthly city. A will ordered by *agape* can give the individual the strength to act in a way that is purified from proud desires and truly focused on the neighbor's good. This internal purification can radically change the quality of the public action to be performed externally. Although the source of goodness is divine, the correct orientation of the will, the tool used to reach this source, is reflected in worldly actions, such as charitable activities or struggles for justice. As Marc Lamb states, Augustine's aim is to go beyond pessimism and offer an encouraging structure in the *Civitas Dei*.<sup>48</sup> This encouragement does not push the individual toward passivity, but toward responsible action to provide worldly peace (*pax terrena*), however limited and flawed it may be.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, although Augustinian love may result in a kind of political passivity as Arendt criticized, it is not silent regarding the moral foundation and motivation necessary for today's divided and utilitarian world.

## Conclusion

In this study, the guiding function of Augustine's conception of love has been examined within the ethico-theological framework he constructed around the axes of the will (*voluntas*) and the love of God (*agape-caritas*). This framework has been re-evaluated and repositioned in the face of modern critiques of political passivity and contemporary debates on social utilitarianism. The study demonstrates that Augustine's philosophy positions *agape* as a radical antithesis to the sequence of worldly relationships based on *eros* and *amicitia* inherited from Antiquity. For Augustine, love cannot be reduced to a mere ethics of duty; it is a constitutive power supported by divine grace (*gratia*) that enables the individual's transition from disordered love (*cupiditas*) to ordered love (*caritas*) through the will. This guidance is manifested on the horizontal plane through the commandment of love of neighbor (*dilectio proximi*). This mandate commands loving the neighbor not for utility or emotional bonds, but because they are created by God and are a candidate for salvation. This state of radical disinterestedness forms the foundation of Augustinian ethics and determines its goal of establishing a bond of spiritual unity against utilitarian social relations.

The problematic at the center of the study focused on the impact of this transcendent understanding of love on the potential for political action within the earthly city (*Civitas Terrena*). Hannah Arendt's critique encompasses the claim that by centering interiority and orientation toward God, Augustine directs the individual's energy toward escaping the world rather than transforming it, thereby leading to political passivity. According to Arendt, *agape* emphasizes not the plurality and uniqueness that are the foundations of political action, but the sameness derived from a common origin in Adam and equality in sinfulness. This situation carries the risk of reducing Augustinian guidance of love to an ethical framework of merely enduring evil and awaiting divine justice within worldly peace (*pax terrena*). However, this study has attempted to show that these theological priorities do not entirely disable the potential of Augustinian love in the face of contemporary social and ethical problems. Instead of a concrete political program, Augustine's conception of *agape* offers a comprehensive moral alternative to today's utilitarian and atomized social structure. The principle of radical

<sup>48</sup> Marc Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope: Augustine's Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 51.

<sup>49</sup> Marc Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope*, 190.

disinterestedness inherent in *agape* provides an ontological ground for an ethics of unconditional acceptance and solidarity centered on the human being, standing against the interest-based networks of conditional relationships and the mechanized ethics of performance that envelop the modern world. The emphasis on shared fragility established through the thesis of equality in Adam, moving beyond the modern discourse of individual rights, underscores the fundamental unity in the human condition. It preserves the possibility of instilling a sense of universal responsibility in an age of increasing political polarization and marginalization. This consciousness of responsibility, by purifying the individual from pride and directing them toward action focused on the neighbor's good, can enhance the moral quality and stability of political action. Consequently, while the guiding role of love in Augustine is not an "action program" in terms of modern political philosophy, it continues to exist as a necessary theological-ethical source for just and humane action.

However, the fundamental philosophical difficulty we encounter is the tension inherent in Augustinian thought that is difficult to overcome: the delicate balance between the demands of the transcendent and the necessities of the worldly. As seen throughout this study, Augustine's guidance of love does not leave us with a comfortable and easy solution. On the contrary, it invites an ethical restlessness. This restlessness is knotted in the question of how to carry absolute responsibility toward the neighbor within the acknowledged transience and deficiency of the earthly city. The "purposeful will" objection to Arendt's critique of passivity actually reflects the open-ended character of the Augustinian problematic. Philosophically, this difficulty is the riddle of how *agape* can transform the world without turning into a worldly ideology. If love becomes entirely secularized, it risks losing its essential character and turning into a utilitarian tool. If it remains entirely transcendent, it may drift toward the political indifference Arendt feared. This open-endedness is not a weakness of Augustinian ethics, but perhaps its greatest strength. For it forces the individual in every age and every political crisis to re-determine the direction of their love and to build their own ethical action in that uncanny but fertile void between the "two cities." Therefore, the parenthesis opened by Augustine has not been closed. It continues to wait for the modern subject at that threshold of radical responsibility that begins where interest-oriented rationality ends.

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