# PEACE, HOPE, AND THE ORDER OF LOVE: AN AUGUSTINIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICAL LIFE

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## Introduction

Wars, political polarization, and social divisions are not just background noise. They define our current moment. Violence has become entrenched in daily life and has eroded the state's capacity to maintain basic order. Augustine of Hippo confronted the same chaotic worldly issues in his time. He recognized that limited political circumstances are characteristics of an imperfect world. In *The City of God*, Augustine wrote about two realities: the earthly city and the heavenly city. The earthly city is built on love of self and marked by pride, violence, and division, while the heavenly city finds its foundation in the love of God.[1] The earthly city is always unstable by its very nature. Augustine observed in detail how the "lust for domination" ignites violence even within families. While modern theorists sometimes view Augustine as a pessimist, his political philosophy offers a deeper realism that shapes the argument of this paper. Augustine's political theology begins with a stark insight: earthly peace is always partial because human loves are disordered.[2] This insight guards against the belief that political structures alone can secure perfect order. It also shows why peace is the measure of ordered love in

1 Augustine Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* trans. Henry Betterson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), XIV. 28.

2 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XV. 4.

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earthly life, and why its fragility exposes the need for charity and hope.

This essay argues that while Michael Lamb rightly recovers hope as a "functionally necessary"[3] virtue for Augustinian political engagement, his account remains incomplete unless hope is governed by Augustine's theology of rightly ordered love. Lamb shows that hope sustains political endurance between presumption and despair. It counters interpretations of Augustine that encourage withdrawal from public life. Yet when hope's functional role is emphasized apart from *ordo amoris*, it risks encouraging a form of political self-reliance that Augustine consistently resists. By situating hope within the framework of charity, this paper demonstrates how rightly ordered love acts as a moral guardrail that preserves humility, limits political expectations, and ensures that political action remains oriented toward God rather than toward its own endurance or success. The paper contends that Augustine's *ordo amoris* functions as a moral guardrail that preserves hope from collapsing into political self-reliance by reordering political desire toward God.

## Augustine's Account of Peace (*Pax* and *Ordo Amoris*)

### Metaphysical and theological peace

Augustine views peace as more than a social condition. It is a reality shaped by rightly ordered love (*ordo amoris*). This love establishes a single moral order that connects the individual, the political community, and the divine cosmos. For Augustine, peace is not simply the absence of conflict but the 'tranquility of order.'[4] While perfect peace is eschatological,

3 Michael Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022), 41.

4 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 13.

the earthly city still seeks a temporal version of this peace (the peace of Babylon) which Christians must make us of. It is the harmony that arises when things remain in their proper relation to God. All creatures naturally desire this peace even when their choices turn them away from it. The peace of the soul, the home, the city, and ultimately the City of God share this pattern of order. For Augustine, the highest, the "peace of the Heavenly City," is not temporal but spiritual and everlasting. This perfect peace is not a goal to be achieved by human effort; rather, it is the resulting fruit of "ordered obedience, in faith," [5] living under God's perfect law. When the soul turns to God as their source and end, it finds a quiet that does not depend on the world, a "mutual fellowship in the enjoyment of God." Augustine makes this ordering plain in City of God, where he calls peace the harmony of all things "ordered and disposed" under God.[6]

This divine order does not remain abstract. It extends into the social and political life of humanity. Human beings, Augustine notes, are social creatures who seek the consolation and fellowship of others. Society itself is a kind of friendship where people strive for a shared good. Temporal peace (*pax terrena*) is thus a genuine, though imperfect, good. It demonstrates our natural desire for order and fellowship, even though it contains fragile and temporal elements if separated from God. This limited peace is driven by *caritas*, which Augustine defines as the love that extends beyond toward the wider community.[7] It is this force that directs us to *pax caelestis*, the eternal peace of the City of God.[8]

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 13.

## The Moral Quality of the State

To understand a society, we must ask what it loves. Augustine argues that society's strength comes from the loves that unite its members rather than its laws. That is, the moral quality of any political order depends on the loves that activate it. A community that loves justice, virtue, and God will be healthy and well-ordered. But one that loves power and pleasures will fall into disordered, no matter how strong its institutions. Therefore, political analysis is never merely structural or rational; it is fundamentally moral and spiritual.[9] The state's purpose is not salvation, that is the role of the Church, but an "anthropological truth."[10] That is, the state creates a peaceful and just order in which human beings can live according to natural reason and virtue. Peace belongs to trust and love, not merely to structures. Every fragile form of peace we achieve is a witness to the eternal tranquility of order, where all things rest in their proper place under God's love.

Peace, grounded in ordered love, takes form in relationships. Augustine often anchors his thoughts in how we learn, communicate, and live in a community. He shows that peace is conditional: it requires trust and the active decision to seek understanding rather than withdraw into isolation. Augustine grounds this relational peace in the principles: love of God and love of neighbor. From these, he says that a person loves three objects rightly: God, himself, and his neighbor. Because of this, Augustine writes that the believer "will be at peace, as far as lies in him, with all men, in that peace among men,

9 John von Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 13.

10 Augustine regards "anthropological truth" as a transcendent truth of politics instead of soteriological to preserve the dignity of political society and the church. It signifies human beings' proper relation to God as comprehended by natural reason. Cf. Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World,* 79.

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that ordered harmony."[11] A city held together by such neighborliness and by the simple measure of the Golden Rule will be more stable than one ruled by suspicion or domination.[12] Civic peace, for Augustine, stands closest to ethical love when it fosters this common life. This moral grounding is also what will shape Augustine's understanding of hope, since hope directs the citizen to pursue peace without mistaking temporal concord for the final good.

## The Fragility of Earthly Order

In *The City of God,* Augustine outlines the various forms of peace. He describes "the peace of the body" as the ordered proportion of its parts, "the peace of the irrational soul" as the ordered repose of desire, and "the peace of the rational soul" as the agreement of thought and action. He continues this pattern through the home, society, and finally the Heavenly City, which he calls "a perfectly ordered and harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God."[13] The harmony of body and soul forms the ordered life of a living being. Peace between human beings is an ordered concord of mind with mind. The household has its own order in giving and receiving direction. The peace of the Heavenly City is the perfect fellowship in God's enjoyment, and the peace of the universe is the tranquility of order itself. By setting these levels side by side, Augustine demonstrates how peace pervades creation as a unified pattern, albeit to varying degrees.

Yet the earthly city carries this order only in a fragile way. Human sin disturbs both inward harmony and outward fellowship. Augustine illustrates this fragility by recalling how

11 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 14.

12 John Neville Figgis, *The Political Aspects of St. Augustine's City of God* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 2015), 67.

13 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 13.

wrongs, suspicions, hostility, and even conflict appear again and again in ordinary human life, including friendship and families. He remarks that even peace within the household can be uncertain, because we do not fully know the hearts of those we live with, nor how they may change in time.[14]

Augustine, therefore, speaks plainly about war and the many pressures that break civic life. His reflections on the limits of ownership and the strain that private claims place on communal peace show how easily societies lose their balance. Still, even imperfect peace bears witness to something greater. It gathers moral effort and divine gift together. Human beings seek to align their loves with God, while God sustains the order in which they live. These traces of peace, however incomplete, point toward the fullness of the City of God. In this way, Augustine holds together the theological, the relational, and the civic, all rooted in the order of love. However, because the earthly city carries this order only in a fragile way, constantly threatened by the disordered love of self and the lust for domination (*libido dominandi*), Augustine's realism compels a necessary, though tragic, consideration of political coercion and war as means to restrain sin and preserve minimal civic order.

## The Hope for Heavenly Peace – Lamb's Reading

This section considers Lamb's reading of hope while keeping Augustine's order of love in view, since this order shapes how hope can sustain action in the *saeculum*. While charity directs the will toward the love of God and neighbor, it is the virtue of hope that sustains this love within the fragilities of the *saeculum*. Against interpretations that view Augustine as a pessimist who counsels withdrawal from the world, Michael Lamb argues that Augustine offers a robust "virtue of hope"

14 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 5.

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that is "functionally necessary" for political engagement.[15] Lamb interprets Augustine's hope not merely as an emotion, but as a disciplined habit that navigates between two opposing vices: presumption and despair.[16] Lamb argues that Augustine views the fallen human condition as a constant source of tension. People are tempted in two opposing directions. They may either presume they can achieve perfection on their own, or they may despair that no good can be achieved at all.[17] This tension is the key lens through which Augustine's political thought is best understood. I believe the virtue of hope provides the necessary resolve to endure the difficulties of the earthly city. This hope prevents individuals from falling into the traps of the illusion of utopian perfection or the paralysis of cynical resignation.

## Hope as Functionally Necessary Endurance

Lamb argues that hope is "functionally necessary" in Augustine's thought because it bridges the gap between cognitive belief and active pursuit. While faith provides the conviction that a good is possible, Lamb notes that faith alone can be intellectually static; it is hope that "supplements faith with motivation" and provides the "resolve to endure time's difficulties and delays."[18] Augustine supports this by explaining that even genuine virtues cannot free a person from the miseries of this life, and that happiness belongs only to the life to come. He says that the present life is sustained by hope, because "we are saved in hope," and what is already seen can

15 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 29.

16 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 307.

17 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 71.

18 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 29.

no longer be hoped for.[19] Lamb highlights that for the pilgrim city, which does not yet possess the beatific vision, this movement is essential. Because perfect love is not fully possible in this life, Lamb contends that hope functions as the "middle term" between faith and love, mobilizing the citizen to act despite the "many and grave evils" of the age.[20] Without this functional virtue, the Christian citizen would be unable to bear the "heavy yoke" of the earthly city without collapsing into the inactivity of despair.

Lamb interprets these themes as evidence that Augustine treats hope as a stabilizing moral force within political life. Augustine warns against pride and the desire for domination. Yet he refuses to fall into despair. Hope frees the believers from despair in politics and from utopian illusion. Grounded in humanity, hope acknowledges that peace on earth will always be fragile, but it continues to labor for it as a sign of love's fidelity. Hope provides the resolve necessary to endure the difficulties and delays. Augustine admits the limits of politics, but he also points out that real possibilities remain. Virtue, he teaches, makes good use of both blessings and hardships only by directing them toward the final peace that admits no

19 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 4.

20 In *City of God* books 22.22-23, Augustine lists these many and grave evils: "gnawing cares, disturbances, griefs, fears, insane joys, discords, litigation, wars, treasons, angers, hatreds, falsehood, flattery, fraud, theft, rapine, perfidy, pride, ambition, envy, homicides, parricides, cruelty, ferocity, wickedness, luxury, insolence, immodesty, unchastity, fornications, adulteries, incests, and so many other impure and unnatural acts of both sexes of which it is shameful even to speak: sacrileges, heresies, blasphemies, perjuries, oppression of the innocent, slanders, plots, prevarications, false witness, unrighteous judgments, acts of violence, robberies, and other such evils which do not immediately come to mind, but which are never far away from men in this life." Cf. Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 179; Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XX. 22-23.

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further improvement. This perfect peace is the fulfillment of all goods and belongs to the Heavenly City, the true "vision of peace."[21]

Augustine rejects the binary of simple optimism–pessimism. Instead, he offers a hope that acknowledges the "many and grave evils" of this life while refusing to withdraw from the task of seeking peace. It requires awareness of political limits and responsibility. Without this realism, hope would collapse into presumption rather than express rightly ordered desire.[22] Hope finds the good, desirable, and possible things, but not yet fully possessed. The Supreme Good, everlasting and perfect peace in the heavenly city, is the final fulfillment of all goods.[23]

Yet hope is not only about the life to come. It also empowers citizens to seek real, shared goods, like civic peace and justice, which can be enjoyed with non-believers. By anchoring the soul in God's certainty, to Augustine, hope allows Christians to work for the "peace of Babylon" without believing that the earthly city can ever be fully perfected. It is both a realistic and faithful endurance. It directs our action while keeping our eyes fixed on the ultimate fulfillment of all things in God.[24]

## The Twofold Hope

Lamb challenges the prevailing view that Augustinian hope is exclusively otherworldly. Augustine himself allows for this wider field of hope. In *City of God* XIX.4, he calls the temporal peace of this life a real good shared by all. These texts show that Augustine does not confine hope to the life to come but regards

21 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 10-11.

22 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 258.

23 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX, 10.

24 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 26.

temporal goods as fitting objects of desire when subordinated to the eternal good. Lamb interprets Augustine as proposing a "twofold object of hope," directed toward both eternal beatitude and temporal goods. In Lamb's reading, Augustine's treatment of the Lord's, particularly in the *Enchiridion*, petitions for "daily bread" and deliverance from evil indicates that temporal goods, such as health, friendship, and civic peace, are legitimate objects of hope. Lamb argues that Augustine encourages citizens to love and hope for these temporal goods, provided they are not viewed as the Supreme Good.[25] According to Lamb, this ordering prevents citizens from falling into either of two vices. Presumption happens when temporal goods are treated as sources of ultimate salvation, while despair arises when temporal goods are seen as wholly without value. By keeping hope in temporal goods as subordinate to God, citizens can act faithfully in the world without overestimating their power of significance.[26]

Lamb also interprets twofold hope as central to Augustine's understanding of political life. Citizens who hope for civic peace, yet recognize that perfect peace is impossible on earth, accept the "stern necessity" of political coercion with a spirit of mourning rather than triumphalism. This virtue allows for "lament" and "groaning" regarding the misery of the world without leading to withdrawal because the citizen is "saved in hope" and thus can "rejoice in hope" while sighing in the present condition.[27] Lamb calls this a form of "tragic hope:" it is neither naive optimism nor despairing passivity.

25 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 67–69.

26 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 55.

27 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 161.

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Hope motivates active endurance and encourages citizens to work for the peace of Babylon, while it helps us understand that perfect fulfillment belongs only to the Heavenly City. Lamb highlights Augustine's use of Jeremiah 29 to encourage citizens to "seek the welfare of the city" (the peace of Babylon) where they are exiled. Augustine explains this as an approval to build a common life with diverse citizens, not as a command to withdraw. It forms a "tense communion" where citizens are united by their common objects of love, like civic peace.[28] Therefore, Lamb asserts that Augustine's realism is not an obstacle to political engagement. Instead, it stands as a positive framework for responsible action. We can seek and value temporal goods, yet always in the context of the higher ordering of desire toward God. Lamb suggests that hope inspires the citizen to act with prudence, humility, and perseverance, which keeps moral responsibility grounded in reality. While these themes clearly hope's motivating power, I worry that extending this idea of "twofold hope" too far risks ignoring Augustine's own cautions about disordered desire, thereby distorting the proper hierarchy of loves. Yet this twofold account of hope raises a further question that Augustine's theology of rightly ordered love presses sharply: whether hope's sustaining function can remain theologically secure apart from charity as its governing form.

## Tragic Hope: Realism without Withdrawal

*Caritas* is the moral discipline required to act justly in a fallen world. Yet, it is hope (*spes*) that provides the theological virtue necessary to sustain such demanding charity. Augustine's hope avoids the twin dangers of withdrawal and worship. Looking to the City of God is no excuse for inaction.

28 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 261.

Instead, it acts as the true horizon that reorders our loves. This paper takes Augustine's tragic hope to mean a steady desire for the final peace that strengthens the pilgrim without erasing sorrow over the wounds of history.

This hope defines the "pilgrimage" of the heavenly city's citizens.[29] It requires an "accurate assessment of reality,"[30] which is why Augustine's hope is compatible with groaning or lamenting over present reality. Rooted in the tension of the two loves, the tragic character of the pilgrim's situation sharpens moral responsibility. Tragic hope is therefore the interior disposition required for action in a world defined by tragic necessity. This hope itself remains anchored in God's fidelity. However, the pilgrim is compelled to commit to imperfect but necessary acts of mercy because perfect justice remains impossible.

Hope transforms laments into endurance. Political commitment becomes "the operation of this hope in present society," and avoids the twin errors of retreat and worship.[31] To live in hope is to act within the tension of the two cities. Hope joins realism to love. It makes politics humble while teaching that peace on earth is never complete but never futile. Ultimately, the hope for eternal peace (*pax caelestis*) is the engine for action. It instills the pilgrim with "eschatological restlessness" to pursue the "stern necessity" of just war with *caritas* rather than with the very "lust for domination" it seeks to restrain.

It is not incompatible with sorrow but deepened by it, for the soul that groans for God's peace loves the good so intensely

29 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* 18.

30 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 162.

31 Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago and London: The Universitiy of Chicago Press, 2008), 93.

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that its absence is a form of prayer. Augustine notes that "complete exemption from pain" in this life is purchased at the "price of inhumanity." [32] Augustine's work models engagement in public life. Eric Gregory in *Politics and the Order of Love* observes that, for Augustine, political discernment is always "fragmentary, ad hoc, piecemeal," a realism that makes hope indispensable. This framework demands patient, humble labor for a provisional peace.[33]

## Augustine on War, Coercion and Charity – The Tragic Necessity

To Augustine, war, though tragic, becomes at times a sorrowful necessity, the sign of a heart wounded by sin. It reveals the brokenness of human love, where communion was meant to unite, but domination now divides. Our world is fragile and restless. It turns easily to violence because it is infected by *libido dominandi*, the lust for domination.[34] This lust corrupts both individuals and nations.

### The Root of Disorder: Pride and Self-Love

Augustine argues that the lust for domination is from pride, which is a wrong self-love that rejects equality under God. This pride then grows into the desire to rule others. The enduring tragedy of political action stems directly from this unrest of pride. The difficulty is that every remedy for disorder remains marked by the same wound it seeks to restrain. Pride rejects the humble equality of creatures before their Creator. This disordered craving seeks mastery rather than fellowship and drives human beings to grasp temporal goods purely

32 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIV. 9.

33 Ibid.

34 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XV. 7.

for their own purposes.[35] This is the impulse traced back to Adam and Eve's fall when they desired independence rather than communion. Wanting to delight in themselves, they fell away from God. That same impulse lives in us still. Augustine says, pride hates fellowship based on "equality under God and instead seeks to impose its own dominion upon fellow men."[36] Because pride distorts love, earthly peace is always unstable. The earthly city is thus built upon a false peace, rooted in the love of self that extends even to contempt of God.[37]

It is precisely because this *libido dominandi* breaks the bond of peace that political coercion becomes a necessity, albeit a tragic instrument. The state cannot purify the heart, but it must restrain the "unruly and unjust" to preserve a "temporal peace" that even the wicked desire.[38] To preserve the minimal peace, coercion becomes a tragic form of charity, even when true love cannot yet reign. This necessity, though sorrowful, is the political action that tragic hope must sustain. It is done for correction and restraint rather than domination. Augustine recognizes that political restraint can shape conduct but cannot change hearts. He reminds his audience, "Citizenship in the City of God is determined at the individual and not the institutional level."[39] The state can punish outward acts but cannot purify the will. However, Augustine sees in the political order a mysterious participation in God's providence. Coercive political action, rightly intended, curbs the "unruly and unjust men" and compels them toward a semblance of good. Through this discipline, the fragile fabric of earthly life is preserved.

35 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 57.

36 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIV. 13.

37 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIV. 28.

38 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 13.

39 John Mark Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006), 30.

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Though imperfection, this temporal well-being and civic peace remain a relative good, a mercy that holds chaos at bay. Therefore, the political order stands as both mercy and judgment. Mercy because it restrains sin; judgment because it reveals our incapacity to love without grace. In the temporal stage, peace remains a wound we must tend but cannot heal.

Augustine shifted the problem of war from politics to the human heart. He argues that the moral weight of any conflict rests on the interior motive that guides it, not on external acts. The real evils, he says, are "love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, and the lust for power."[40] War is always a sorrow in a world wounded by sin. Thus, Augustine's just-war sense is never an approval of violence but a moral appeal to limit it through charity and humility. War must be governed by love and restraint, not passion or pride.

## Charity as the Measure of Justice and Restraint

Charity or *caritas* is the very form of all virtues. Augustine states that virtue itself is "rightly ordered love," noting in *City of God* XV.22 that created goods become harmful only when they are loved without regard to their proper order. When the soul clings to temporal goods above God, its loves fall out of place, and its actions follow the same disorder. This ordered love, rather than any outward act, becomes the first measure of moral judgment.[41] It directs every human act toward God and neighbors. From this perspective, the just-war means only action rooted in rightly ordered love can be considered right and just. Augustine redefines the morality of war by shifting the focus from external action to the interior motive of charity. Since the "order of this concord" requires that a man should

40 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX, 7.

41 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XV. 22.

"harm no one" but also "do good to all," the use of force must be governed by a benevolent intention to correct rather than destroy.[42] War is thus reframed as a stern necessity undertaken to protect the innocent and restrain the wicked from sinking further into sin.

Augustine does not allow any moral neutrality. Love defends the innocents when they are attacked. Yet that same love forbids cruelty even toward the aggressor.[43] Between apathy and wrath is the presence of restraint and charity. Augustine's just-war holds together justice and mercy, punishment and compassion, power and humility. His vision makes war bearable only as a reluctant necessity undertaken as an act of obedience to the law of love.[44]

In this way, Augustine reframes the ancient thinking of justice into a spiritual discipline. Christians who work for justice must act humbly under divine judgment and must be aware that only love can purify violence. Restraint is not weakness but the highest aspect of charity. In such a manner, the sword is used to serve peace rather than as an instrument of domination. For Augustine, the true victory lies merely in the conversion of the will when love overcomes pride. Only then is the world restored to its true order under God.[45]

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42 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 14.

43 James Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry,* Princeton University Press (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 197.

44 Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Augustine," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology,* 2nd ed., ed. William T. Cavanaugh and Peter Manley Scott (John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2019), 50.

45 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 12.

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## The Goal of Correction, not Destruction

The goal of conflict, when it is a necessity, is not to destroy the enemy but to correct and to restore order without abandoning compassion. Augustine sees God's providence at work even in the painful discipline of nations. God uses war to chasten wrongdoing so that humanity may learn a more righteous way of life. For Augustine, charity shapes the entire moral logic of restraint. And war now becomes a tragic teacher.

Charity shapes the entire moral logic of restraint. This principle transforms the traditional thought of duty. For Augustine, those who defend the weak do not abandon love for the enemy. Charity must embrace both the victim and the aggressor. Even in restraining the violent, one must do so with pity for the one who errs. Here, charity transforms justice from mere duty into moral service. It is a greater evil to allow harm to one's friend when one could prevent it than to inflict harm out of a just defense.[46] Thus, Augustine reframes justice as a work of love rather than domination.

## Restraint and Right Intention

The discipline of charity finds its clearest test in Augustine's teaching on right intention. To him, right intention purifies action from the delight in violence and the vanity of revenge. The righteous person never rejoices in the evils of war. Instead, a soldier's virtue is measured not by victory but by sorrow. War must remain a "stern necessity," a burden accepted with mourning. In this way, right intention becomes the inner measure of justice. It guards the heart from the lust for domination, the root of all disorder. Augustine makes this clear when he says that the wise person will grieve the necessity of just war, for its very necessity arises from another's injustice. He notes that

46 Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War,* 19.

anyone who reflects on such evils "must acknowledge their misery," and that the one who faces them without sorrow "is in a far more pitiable condition."[47] To act justly in war is to act in penitence with the awareness that sin stains both the aggressor and the defender.[48]

Augustine insists that moral restraint must accompany every act of power. He said, "Both the political authorities who declare the war and the individual soldiers who fight in it should do so in a spirit of benevolence, no matter how severe the action might be required to be."[49] When right intention governs, force becomes disciplined by love. The true victory lies in the conversion of the will, when love overcomes pride. This frames the ancient thinking of justice into a spiritual discipline.

## Political Limits: Remedy, not Redemption

Because human loves are disordered, the empire, law, and treaty are provisional and vulnerable. For Augustine, politics belongs to the temporal order, where peace is always partial and passing. Since the earthly city is built upon the loves of fallen creatures, it remains in the disorder of sin. Pride spoils the best intentions, meaning every human effort for peace apart from God bears within it the seed of ruin.

### Politics as Remedy for Sin

For Augustine, politics exists because of sin.[50] It heals the disorder but does not redeem the heart. Political authority serves as a medicine that restrains disorder and preserves a

47 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 7.

48 Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War,* 54.

49 Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War,* 135.

50 Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World,* 5.

fragile civic peace.[51] A clearer line runs through Augustine's thought that political authority belongs to the order of temporal goods, which assist human weakness but cannot reorient desire toward God. Such measures seem to limit harm and cultivate conditions for moral life, but they cannot bring the inward conversion that only grace can effect. Thus, the state's vocation is to prevent evil and sustain space for moral life. It makes public service a necessary labor of love while denying the pretensions of ultimate redemption.

A community that loves justice and God will be ordered toward virtue; one that loves power and pleasure will fall into disorder, no matter how strong its institutions. The health of the society depends not on its strength but on its love. Augustine's critique is clear: political orders collapse when their deepest love is power rather than justice. Pride distorts even strong institutions; that is why earthly peace remains inherently fragile.

## History as Divine Pedagogy

Although earthly peace is imperfect and temporary, its fragility does not imply despair. For Augustine, history is not a simple story of human progress. It is rather God's approach to teaching. He holds that all temporal affairs, from wars and empires to the rulers, are governed by the one God, who directs them *sicut ei placet*, as He wills.[52] Rome's greatness is less a triumph and more a lesson, because Providence uses its glory and downfall as moral instruction. We see in the history of empires that the rise and fall demonstrate the limits of human virtue and show how temporary earthly peace is.

51 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought,* 11.

52 Heyking, *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World,* 136.

History acts as a discipline through disorder.[53] Politics, therefore, reflects the human condition while continuously forcing us to confront its deep flaws. This is where we see the tension between *caritas* (charity) and *cupiditas* (lust to dominate). *When these two forces conflict, we understand* that only love can sustain the fragile peace of the earthly city.

This moral fragility makes political life necessary and humble. It is necessary because it restrains harm and is humble because it acknowledges its inability to heal the heart. Hence, Augustine's tragic hope refuses political arrogance while energizing faithful love. Within this fragility, he discovers the birth of hope, a hope both tragic and transcendent, that teaches the soul to seek its true peace beyond history without abandoning love within it. These limits of history set the stage for Augustine's account of hope, since hope steadies the pilgrim within a world where providence instructs through both order and disorder.

## Critical Evaluation of Michael Lamb's Reading of Augustine

Lamb's emphasis on hope as a functionally necessary virtue is a valuable corrective to readings of Augustine that incline toward political withdrawal.[54] This evaluation proceeds in continuity with Lamb's constructive project of recovering Augustine as a thinker of political hope and resisting interpretations that collapse his realism into pessimism or withdrawal. By framing hope as a resolve that sustains action amid the limits and delays of the *saeculum*, Lamb shows how Augustine's hope guards against both presumption and despair. Yet this emphasis remains insufficient unless hope is governed by Augustine's theology of rightly ordered love. Augustine

53 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* III. 19.

54 Lamb, *A Commonwealth of Hope - Augustine's Political Thought*, 41.

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repeatedly warns that virtues severed from charity become distorted, and political goods pursued without rightly ordered desire easily slide into self-reliance.[55]

By "political self-reliance," this critique does not mean Pelagian activism or naïve confidence in political progress. Rather, it names a subtler displacement in which the sustaining function of hope is tacitly trusted to secure moral stability apart from the ordering of desire toward God. In this sense, endurance itself risks being treated as a substitute for rightly ordered love rather than as an expression formed by it. Hope sustains political labor precisely by directing it beyond itself. Without the moral primacy of charity, the endurance hope provides can subtly shift into confidence in political effort rather than patient trust in divine grace. As Eric Gregory observes, Augustinian political judgment is always "fragmentary, ad hoc, and piecemeal," a realism that confirms that hope can sustain political action only when it remains disciplined by *charity* and ordered toward God rather than invested in the coherence or success of political effort itself.[56] Likewise, John Burnaby emphasizes in *Amor Dei*, for Augustine, the order of love is the very condition of moral freedom, without which even theological virtues risk distortion.[57]

In Augustinian terms, the "guardrail" for hope is not an external limit imposed on political action but the *ordo amoris* that orders desire toward God. Formed by *caritas* as the shape of all virtue, this ordering preserves humility by situating political goods within their proper place rather than allowing them to claim ultimate significance. Hope may sustain endurance

55 Aurelius, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans,* XIX. 20.

56 Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship,* 23–24.

57 John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 233.

amid the limits of the *saeculum*, but it remains theologically secure only when governed by rightly ordered love. In this way, charity disciplines political desire without negating political responsibility and ensures that action remains receptive to grace rather than invested in its own success.

The interdependence of charity and hope is the true safeguard against the over-politicization of hope. While hope provides the resolve to endure the limitations of political life, charity supplies the moral measure that guides this endurance toward God and the good of one's neighbor. By referring love to God, charity also protects the neighbor from becoming a means to the self's moral or political projects. It releases political action from the temptation of self-righteous possession of the good.[58] Without hope, charity would falter under the weight of the *saeculum*'s persistent disorder. Augustine's theology of rightly ordered love thus ensures that hope remains humble, patient, and receptive to grace, sustaining political action without allowing it to become self-justifying or self-reliant.

## Conclusion

Augustine's vision addresses our contemporary crises through what this paper has described as a "tragic hope," a hope that sustains action within the limits of the *saeculum* without surrendering to despair or illusion. This hope is tragic not in its object, which remains the eternal peace of the City of God, but in its field of operation, where coercion, conflict, and restraint persist as sorrowful necessities. Augustine's realism thus rejects the notion that political structures can guarantee lasting peace, while affirming that temporal peace remains a genuine good when pursued with humility and rightly ordered love.

58 Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship,* 46–47.

This study has argued that hope is indispensable to Augustine's political vision, a point rightly emphasized by Michael Lamb in his account of hope as functionally necessary for political endurance. Yet it has also shown that hope, when emphasized apart from Augustine's theology of rightly ordered love, becomes vulnerable to a subtle form of political self-reliance. Augustine consistently resists such confidence by insisting that political action must remain measured by charity, which orders desire, disciplines power, and preserves humility before God. Charity does not weaken hope; it safeguards its theological depth by keeping its object fixed on God rather than on the coherence or success of political effort itself.

Thus, charity and hope are a practical way to sustain political engagement without being naïve or withdrawn. Hope bears the weight of history, while charity orders desire and restrains presumption. Through this lens, Augustine reframes political life as a field of patient labor marked by restraint, lament, and perseverance. Though earthly peace remains fragile, it still matters. It is worth our effort because it is oriented toward the final peace that God alone gives. To hope in this Augustinian sense is to work faithfully within history, with humility of action and confidence not in politics, but in grace.