Landas 29:1 (2015) 51–85

THE ORDER OF LOVE IN SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO AND SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

Rosa Maria Alonso i Terme

This article will compare the treatment of the order of charity to neighbor in Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Thomas Aquinas. In particular, it will relate the similarities and the differences in their treatment of the subject, and will attempt to explain their differences in terms of their family environment and life experience, geographical and historical context, intellectual education and philosophical affiliation, and personality.

The Order of Charity to Neighbor

Saint Augustine deals with the order of charity to neighbor in a great variety of his works. The most important references can be found in *De Doctrina Christiana*, his sermons, the *City of God*, his commentaries on the Psalms and *De Trinitate*. Saint Augustine puts forth three main criteria according to which the order of charity needs to be exercised: a) family, b) need and c) chance. The first criterion is common with Saint Thomas while the second and the third are largely not. He does not provide a detailed and systematic treatment of each criterion.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Saint Thomas addresses the order of charity to neighbor especially in the *Summa Theologiae* IIa, IIae, q. 26, in *De Caritate*[1] and in his commentary on the Sentences. His criteria are: a) family, b) virtue, c) closeness to first principle and d) utility to the common good. Unlike Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas provides a detailed and systematic ordering of charity. This includes a ranking of preference for charity within the family, with, for instance, the love of parents taking precedence over the love of one's children[2] and the love of one's father taking precedence over the love of one's mother, other things like their holiness and goodness being equal. According to Saint Thomas, we are also to love more those who are "better" and closer to God—as he argues that God Himself does—as well as those who are more useful to the common good, particularly as regards matters of action (as opposed to in meeting needs).

Family

The different treatment of family in Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas can be explained by their drawing on different parts of the Bible. The more generic, non-rule-bound treatment of Saint Augustine is consistent with the gist and flavor of the Bible as a whole and the Gospels in particular, where there is no strict ordering of charity across family members. The ordering of charity across family members espoused by Saint Thomas, on the other hand, seems to follow more

[1]Because *De Caritate* is thought to have been written late in Saint Thomas' life (circa 1269–1272), toward the end of his writing the *Summa*, it will be assumed that the principles included in both works are complementary.

[2]As regards the provision of necessities, however, Saint Thomas does indicate that one is bound more to the child than to the parent based on 2 Cor. 12:14: "Children ought not to save for their parents but parents for their children." Cf. also Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, II.II, q. 26, a. 9 (hereafter cited as ST). The edition used in this article is the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (1920), made available at http://newadvent.org/summa/ by Kevin Knight (2008) (accessed August 3, 2015).

https://publications.lst.edu/

closely the wisdom literature and, in particular, the Book of Sirach, especially as it refers to the preference of parents over children and fathers over mothers.[3]

In their actual lives, it seems that Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas may have exercised charity to family in a somewhat different manner. Both saints were very close to their families and exercised charity—monetary and otherwise—on their behalf throughout their lives. However, it seems that Saint Thomas was more exclusively linked to his family in his exercise of charity[4] while Saint Augustine—largely due to his public position as a bishop—exercised charity with a great variety of people and favored the poor.[5] On the other hand, and probably due to his lifestyle as a scholastic friar, the only mention of financial aid provision by Saint Thomas in Torrell is as follows: "'Thomas knew how to find ecclesiastical funds, with the permission of Clement IV, in order to come to his family's aid.'"[6]

---

[3]The section of chapter 3 devoted to "duties to parents" seems to favor fathers over mothers, e.g., "My son, take care of your father when he is old; grieve him not as long as he lives" (Sir. 3:12). Similarly, the exclusion of a section on duties towards children can possibly be interpreted as favoring parents over children.

[4]*De Caritate* IX. Taken from Thomas Aquinas, *On Charity* [*De Caritate*], trans. Lottie H. Kendzierski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1960), as found at http://dhspriory.org/thomas/QDdeVirtutibus2.htm (accessed August 3, 2015). Hereafter cited as DC.

[5]"Augustine would attempt to canalize this tradition of lavish giving, in favour of alms to the Christian poor; and he would himself show *humanitas*, an open-handed courtesy, by giving a banquet to the poor on the anniversary of his ordination, and in entertaining his many visitors … compared with traditional occasions for showing generosity, alms-giving seemed too indiscriminate [to the well-heeled in his society]" (Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new ed. [Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 2000], 193).

[6]Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas Vol. 1: The Person and His Work*, rev. ed. & trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 12.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Need and Chance in Saint Augustine

The principle of need is fundamental in Saint Augustine. As he states in *De Doctrina Christiana*:

> If you came across two people of whom neither was *more obviously in need*, or more closely related to you than the other, there is nothing more just that you could do than to toss for it, to decide which of them should be given what could not be given to both.[7]

Namely, in addition to family, the other main criterion to use in allocating charity is need as we are presumed to be bound to offer help to the person who is "more obviously in need." Charity based on need is a fundamental biblical principle, present from the hospitality of Abraham to the admonitions of the prophets, the mass feedings of Jesus and the lives of the primitive Christian communities who had "no one needy amongst them."[8] Saint Augustine's is a natural application of this principle. It will also provide a neat link to his view of the multiplication of relationships of love as the basis of the good society and the city of God.

The criterion of need in the distribution of charity is to be used not just for monetary or physical assistance but also for moral support. In DDC, Saint Augustine states:

> … we are given to understand that anyone is our neighbor to whom the duty of compassion is to be extended *when needed*. From which it now follows that anyone by whom such kindness in turn should be shown to us is also our neighbor. But anybody can see that no exception is made of any to whom the duty of compassion can be denied, when

[7]Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, in *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1996), 1.28.29 (italics added). Hereafter referred to as DDC, with citations referring to book, chapter and paragraph numbers of *De Doctrina Christiana* itself.

[8]The possible references to the need principle in the Bible are almost endless, including also the obligation to leave the sides of the fields un-harvested for the poor, the forgiveness of debt at the jubilee, the prohibition of taking basic collateral from the poor and the obligation to pay a worker's wages before sunset.

https://publications.lst.edu/

> the command is extended even to enemies, with the Lord also telling us: "Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you (Mt. 5:44)."[9]

Not only are we summoned to extend help "when needed," but we are also encouraged to focus our moral assistance and loving friendship on those human beings who need it most. Indeed, "charity, like a nurse caring for her children, gives the weak preference over the strong, not that they are more worthy of love, but more needy of help."[10] Love, in God, ought to be distributed equally and charitable assistance—whether financial or moral—according to need.

Finally, Saint Augustine includes chance as his third principle for the ordering of charity to neighbor:

> … as you are unable to take care of all your fellow men, *treat it as the luck of the draw* when time and circumstance brings some into closer contact with you than others.[11]

The principle of chance is also a natural distillation of the actual practice of charity to neighbor at the individual level which we find practiced in the Bible. Whereas there are a number of rules for the practice of charity at the societal level (such as tithing or the equitable distribution of the land of Israel among the tribes), giving at the individual level follows the "luck of the draw" of Saint Augustine. The Jewish patriarchs as well as Jesus and his apostles do charity to the needy they happen to encounter. It is the only way to not "close your hand to the poor" (Deut. 15:7)[12] and to apply the injunction "delay not

---

[9]DDC 1.30.31 (italics added).

[10]Augustine of Hippo, "Letter of Saint Augustine to Marcellinus," in *Fathers of the Church: Saint Augustine Letters* Vol. 3, trans. Wilfrid Parsons (Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 57.

[11]DDC 1.28.29 (italics added).

[12]The injunction in the Book of Deuteronomy refers to "one of your kinsmen in any community" who is "in need" (cf. Deut. 15:7). Saint Augustine interprets your brother or kinsman to be any human being and stresses that we are to love all human beings equally as they are all made in God's image, and that we love Christ in them regardless of kinship or virtue. In DDC, interpreting

https://publications.lst.edu/

to give to the needy; a beggar in distress do not reject" (Sir. 4:3–4). It is also a practical principle as an individual would be hard-pressed to run either a fully "needs-based" or fully "virtue-based" system of charitable allocations.

Virtue, First Principle and Utility to the Common Good in Saint Thomas

After family, the other central principle for ordering charity in the system of Saint Thomas is virtue understood as the virtue of the one receiving charity. Saint Thomas bases this principle on the fact that a) charity is an actualization of love, b) love needs to be ordered as God Himself does and c) God loves those who are more virtuous more than those who are less so. It is also related to Saint Thomas' understanding of friendship, which is deeply influenced by Aristotle and, arguably, the wisdom literature.

In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, the basis of friendship is love-worthiness, the highest form of which is virtue, with lower forms being based on "pleasure or utility." The "perfect friendship" only occurs between the virtuous: "good men will be friends for their own sake, i.e., in virtue of their goodness."[13] These friends (the virtuous) ideally live together and have everything in common—the ultimate form of charity. These principles are mirrored in Saint Thomas' view that "it is necessary that what is more similar to the one loving be loved more."[14]

Saint Thomas' principle of virtue also mirrors closely the Book of Sirach where the preferences in love and friendship for the virtuous are many. Perhaps most prominently, the book states God's lesser love for sinners—"The Most High Himself hates sinners and upon the wicked

---

Rom. 13:9, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" he states: "every single human being is to be counted as a neighbor, because wrong is not to be done to anybody" (DDC 1.32).

[13]Jonathan Barnes, ed., *Complete Works of Aristotle* Vol. 2: The Revised Oxford Translation (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1829.

[14]*De Caritate* IX, ad. 5.

https://publications.lst.edu/

He takes vengeance" (Sir. 12: 7)—and seems to espouse the need to emulate God's preference as it encourages virtuous humans to "have just men for your table companions" (Sir. 9:10). Overall, the book contains an idea of friendship favoring the virtuous and shunning the sinful (especially Chapters 11–13) which is very akin to that portrayed in the *Nichomachean Ethics*.

Similarly, both in the *Summa*[15] and in *De Caritate*, Saint Thomas argues that, since the ultimate good to be loved in charity is God, people who are "more one with God ought to be loved more out of charity."[16] As expressed in the *Summa*, "[o]ur neighbors are not all equally related to God; some are nearer to Him, by reason of their greater goodness, and those we ought, out of charity, to love more than those who are not so near to Him."[17] It would also seem that, for Saint Thomas, the criterion of virtue trumps that of need as the virtuous should not be denied their desert on account of the needy: "we are not giving to a person that love which we ought to give if we love more one whom we ought to love less. For, it can happen that *in the moment of necessity* we give more to the latter, to the neglect of the former whom we ought to love more."[18]

The Aristotelian idea of first principle is also used by Saint Thomas as a guide to dispensing charity. Perhaps the most obvious example of the use of this criterion is in his ranking the due charity to father above that of mother because of his physical understanding of fathers as "active" first principles in procreation as opposed to the "passivity" of mothers.[19] He also argues that those who are more useful to the common good are to be favored in our love, including even above

[15]ST II.II, q. 26.

[16]DC IX, ad. 5.

[17]ST II.II, q. 26, a. 6, ad. 2.

[18]DC IX, ad. 11 (italics added).

[19]ST II.II, q. 26, a. 10, co.

https://publications.lst.edu/

our family members, albeit not in the "provision of necessaries" but in "matters of action"[20]:

> … he ought to show more of the effects of love towards his parents than toward someone who is not a member of his family; except if by chance, when the common good which each one ought also to desire for himself would depend on the good of someone who is not a member of one's family, as when one would expose himself to the danger of death in order to save the general of the army in war time, or to save the leader of a state insofar as the welfare of the entire community depends on these men.[21]

The Multiplication of Loving Friendships as the Foundation of a Global Society in Saint Augustine

In Saint Augustine, love, as God's most essential feature, should be the guiding principle of humanity. His section in DDC devoted to "love of God and neighbor is the sum of what scripture teaches" opens with the quote "the fulfillment and the end of the law and of all the divine scripture is love" (Rom. 13:8 and 1 Tim 1:5).[22] According to Saint Augustine, we are to love all human beings equally in the sense of "benevolence," namely that we are to desire that they grow closer to God, including our enemies.

Because friendship is rooted in Christian love, it cannot, unlike in the classical world, be limited to a small circle of like individuals. Saint Augustine does recognize that "it must include all those to whom love and affection are due, although it goes out more readily to some, more slowly to others, but it reaches even our enemies for whom we are commanded to pray."[23] In Hanna Arendt's words, this is a self-denying

[20]ST II.II, q. 26, a. 8, ad 1.

[21]DC IX, ad. 15.

[22]DDC 1.35.39.

[23]*The Fathers of the Church: Saint Augustine Letters*, Vol. 2 (83-130), trans. Wilfrid Parsons (The Catholic University of America, 1953), 386.

https://publications.lst.edu/

(rather than utilitarian) friendship in which the basic equality of the friend is in his or her being conceived simply as God's creature:

> In this way the neighbor loses the meaning of his concrete worldly existence, for example, as a friend or enemy. For the lover who loves as God loves, the neighbor ceases to be anything but a creature of God. The lover meets a man defined by God's love simply as God's creation. All meet in this love, denying themselves and their mutual ties.[24]

Saint Augustine sees the multiplication of loving relationships as the foundation and the engine for the construction of the city of God. For him, these relationships should flourish among all human beings of any condition or character. This is because of a number of reasons. First, because we are unable to properly assess a person's virtue, we should not avoid people of apparently lesser virtue and remember that they are likely to have some hidden qualities that we personally lack.[25] Second, because human beings have great hidden potential, by refusing our love and friendship to those who appear (or may be) less virtuous, we are not only harming them but are also depriving ourselves of a great potential good. Thus, by refusing our love and friendship to those

[24]Arendt also states that "In this meeting all people have an equal, though very minor, relevance to their own being. … Love of neighbor leaves the lover himself in absolute isolation and the world remains a desert for man's isolated existence" (Hannah Arendt, Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott, & Judith Chelius Stark, *Love and Saint Augustine* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], 94). I would disagree with this assessment. On the contrary, and with Saint Augustine, I see this egalitarian universal friendship in Christ as the ultimate uniting force of humankind. It is not impersonal but, on the contrary, profoundly personal, albeit with differing degrees of intensity depending on the degree of actual closeness that each friendship is able to attain. It reverses a pre-existing alienation rather than creating it.

[25]It is particularly important not to equate the city of God with those inside the Church and the earthly city with those outside it as the two cities are mixed together and will be so until the end of times: "many who seem outside are really inside and many who seem inside are really outside" (*Commentary/Exposition on Psalm* 106.14; a translation is available at http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1801.htm).

https://publications.lst.edu/

who appear (or may be) less virtuous, we are not only harming them but are also depriving ourselves of a great potential good.

Third, Saint Augustine's thought is based on a profound egalitarianism. As regards friendship and charity, this egalitarianism is based on a Biblical view of humanity as a single family with a common descent from Adam. It is also founded on the belief that, in most cases, friendship has the potential of bringing out qualities that are not evident, eventually revealing a basic equality among human beings. And fourth, because Saint Augustine's view of friendship is, as Arendt phrases it, a "self-denying love [that] means loving by renouncing oneself; and this in turn means to love all people so completely without distinctions …."[26] With such a perspective, love can be had with everyone, not just with the "like-minded."

The multiplication of relationships, however, increases suffering due to longing as well as the risk of loss and betrayal. Saint Augustine recognizes that the more numerous the relationships and the more widely scattered they are across the world, the greater are our fears that any ill may befall our friends. The greater the number of friends—and the more diverse these friends are—the greater the danger that "they may fail us in faithfulness, turn to hate us and work us harm."[27] However, this is a risk that we must take while we also remember that the greater the number of our friends, the greater our joy will be.[28]

---

[26]Arendt, et al., *Love and Saint Augustine*, 95.

[27]Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh, et al., intro. Étienne Gilson (New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1958), 447 [*City of God* Book 19, Chapter 8]. Hereafter referred to as CG.

[28]Even for Saint Augustine, however, the only real, full-fledged friendship is the one cemented on a common love of God: "But he was not then my friend, nor, indeed, afterwards, as true friendship is; for true it is not but in such as You bind together, cleaving unto You by that love which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us" (Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* IV.4.7, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 1., trans. J. G. Pilkington [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing

https://publications.lst.edu/

The ideal for Saint Augustine is to have a society in which all human beings are bound in friendly relationships of love. This web of relationships would restore the loss of unity of fallen humanity; in Saint Augustine's words, "he who loves his brother endures all things for the sake of unity."[29] Devoting oneself to building such webs will entail foregoing the joy of more intimate friendships for the sake of building as wide as possible a net of service-oriented friendships, including with weaker and needier brothers and sisters. As argued in CG, these relationships can and should be developed inside as well as outside formal institutions.[30]

The multiplication of loving relationships would thus form the basis of individual holiness as well as social harmony. Saint Augustine believed that the path to holiness was through unity with God, which could only be achieved through unity with one's fellow human beings. The Fall created division and alienation from ourselves, from each other and from God. The multiplication of relationships of love is the path to the restoration of that lost loving unity. That perfect unity and love can no longer be attained in this world, but approximating it to the extent possible depends solely on love through grace.

The multiplication of loving relationships would bind the individual (micro) to the societal (meso) and upwards to universal (macro) human interaction, ultimately reaching out to the divine (supernal). In Saint Augustine, societal interaction will approximate the city of God to the extent that individuals are able to build loving relationships. This, however, is not innate or necessary. We are fallen humanity torn in diverging directions and we will only be able to build the city of God

---

Co., 1887], rev. & ed. Kevin Knight (2009) for New Advent, made available at http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110104.htm).

[29]Saint Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 112-124 (Tractates on the First Epistle of John), trans. John W. Rettig (The Catholic University of America Press: 1995), 138.

[30]Cf. CG Book XIX, especially Chapters 7, 8 and 13.

https://publications.lst.edu/

partially. The earthly city will always exist and encompass those unable to build loving relationships. It all then begins with the individual:

> We must be friends with ourselves and with our families before we can have any hope of being friends with fellow human beings. When there is peace at the center (in the individual human), there are ripples of love that flow out in ever widening circles embracing more and more in the bond of friendship.[31]

And it is this construction of ever-widening circles of love that helps us reach unity with God Himself: "[t]he peace-makers of this world will finally enjoy the perfect peace of union with God. Then there will no longer be alienation. There will be only love."[32] Saint Augustine's theology is thus rooted simultaneously in psychology, sociology and, to a lesser extent, politics, linking together all levels of human interaction. It is not "institutions" or "rules" that truly bind humanity; rather, it is an ever-widening multiplication of individual relationships of love grounded in and striving to reach God. Unlike formal institutions which, like the Roman Empire, come and go, these relationships are the eternal good reaching out to unity with the eternal God.

This concept of friendship seems modeled on the actual relationships reflected in the Bible and especially in the primitive Christian communities both within themselves as well as in the linkages that they established with each other and the world around them. They were diverse, dynamic and apostolic ever-widening networks of loving friendship expanding across the world.[33]

---

[31]Donald X. Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 8. Cf. CG XIX.16.

[32]Burt, *Friendship and Society: An Introduction to Augustine's Practical Philosophy*, 8.

[33]Saint Augustine also builds on the concept of friendship found in the classical world, in particular Cicero's *De Amicitia*, but he thoroughly transforms it by imbuing it with Christian equality and universality.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Friendship and Love in Saint Thomas: Knowledge, Affinity and Society

The concept of friendship in Saint Thomas is highly reminiscent of the classical ideal of friendship, in particular that of Aristotle's. It is friendship among the like-minded and focused on a small circle of friends. It is also a friendship that is firmly based on knowledge.[34] This close relationship of knowledge and love is also at the core of the Bible at the most intimate level possible—that between lover and beloved. The Hebrew word "da'at" means both to know as well as to love (e.g., *Vayeda adam od et ishto*: "And Adam knew his wife again" [Gen. 4:25]). It is such an intimate connection that it even entails that "the lover is transformed into the inner identity of the beloved."[35] In Father Kauth's paraphrase of Saint Thomas: "love is first ontological congruity in the good, consequent on the apprehensive power's discovery."[36]

Such an intimate connection as exists within couples or among close friends cannot possibly be had with many. It is based on close

[34]In Saint Augustine, knowledge also plays a role as we cannot love what we do not know (Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* X.1, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 3, trans. Arthur West Haddan (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), rev. & ed. Kevin Knight (2009) for New Advent, made available at http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130110.htm [accessed Aug. 6, 2015]). However, what we love is the good which we get to know in the other and this good (or some of it) is present in all human beings since, as we are created in God's image, "there can be no evil where there is no good" (Augustine of Hippo, *The Handbook on Faith, Hope and Love [The Enchiridion]* XIII, taken from http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1302.htm [accessed Aug. 3, 2015]).

[35]Thomas Aquinas, *On Love and Charity: Readings from the Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, trans. Peter Kwasniewski, Thomas Bolin & Joseph Bolin (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 125.

[36]"Complacentia is the word which best describes the subjective effect as a kind of pleasing affinity which is discharged by the proportion of subject and object" (Matthew Kauth, *Charity as Divine and Human Friendship: A Metaphysical and Scriptural Explanation According to the Thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Romae: Saint Benedict Press, 2014).

https://publications.lst.edu/

affinity and affection: "This affective affinity causes the lover to seek deeper union with the beloved and to act for the beloved's good as if it were his own good."[37] Because this unity is affective and based on commonality, it is exclusive as it "draws the mind from other things."[38] It is therefore distinct from Saint Augustine's ever-widening circles of love among diverse individuals. Arguably, of the dictum in Sirach 6:6 to "[l]et your acquaintances be many but one in a thousand your confidant," Saint Augustine emphasized the first part while Saint Thomas the second.

Saint Thomas argues openly that he disagrees with Saint Augustine's view that one should love all equally. He objects that it is an "unreasonable position" that is neither possible nor desirable.[39] It is not possible because one will always have a greater affinity or intensity of feeling towards some people rather than others: "It is also clear that, according to natural love, our relatives are more loved in affection; according to a social love, those who are closely united to us are loved more …."[40] In Saint Thomas' view, one also loves more those who are more similar to us.[41] It is not desirable to love all equally because God Himself loves the more virtuous more than the less virtuous.

For Saint Thomas, limiting friendship to a close circle does not endanger the building of a God-oriented society. To the contrary, it can be argued that his more optimistic view of human nature almost assumes that this society already exists. The view of the social nature of human beings in Saint Thomas seems grounded in Sirach's principle

[37]Michael S. Sherwin, *By Knowledge & By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 77.

[38]ST I.II, q. 28, a. 3, co.

[39]DC IX, co.

[40]DC IX, co.

[41]DC IX, ad. 5.

https://publications.lst.edu/

that "every living thing loves its own kind, every man a man like himself. Every being is drawn to its own kind; with its own kind every man associates" (Sir. 13:14–15). Moreover, according to Saint Thomas' *Weltanschauung*, which has strong Aristotelian echoes, "each creature has more of an inclination to the universal good than to its own species."[42]

The ultimate inclination toward the universal good is perfectly compatible with the individual inclination towards self-conservation. This is so because a) "the love of charity is a certain inclination infused in rational nature for the purpose of tending toward God"[43] and b) "… the more perfect something is in its power, and the higher it is in the scale of goodness, the more does it have an appetite for a broader common good, and the more does it seek and become involved in the doing of good for beings far removed from itself."[44] Along the lines of Aristotle's naturalist politics, therefore, it is as if an "invisible hand" was ordering the instincts of individuals towards the common good and, through it, to God. Therefore, in the Holy Roman Empire of Saint Thomas' time, as in the Aristotelian city-state, harmony emerges "naturally" without depending on the voluntarist interpersonal

[42]Thomas M. Osborne, *Love of Self and Love of God in Thirteenth-Century Ethics* (Notre Dame, IND: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 103. In this, Saint Thomas argues against the 13th century *natura curva* doctrine, attributed to Saint Bernard, that nature desires primarily its own good. That view, he argues, erroneously views creatures as isolated individuals rather than as part of a species and the universe as a whole. In the *Secundum Librum* of the *Summa*, Saint Thomas uses his understanding of Aristotelian teleology to reinterpret *natura curva* to mean that nature has an inclination not only for its own perfection, but even more for the perfection of the whole. Cf. ST 1, q. 60, a. 5, ad. 3. Namely, if individuals acted for their short-sighted own benefit while ignoring the whole, they would not truly be seeking their own good as they would be ignoring universal interconnectedness.

[43]DC IX, co.

[44]Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3:24:8, trans. Vernon J. Bourke, available at http://dhspriory.org/thomas/ContraGentiles3a.htm#24 (accessed Dec. 23, 2015).

https://publications.lst.edu/

friendship networks advocated by Saint Augustine. It is seen as enacted by the monarchy or the aristocracy in power.[45]

Even Saint Thomas acknowledges that not all will work together for the formation of such a society. On the contrary, three conditions are needed: a) divine help, b) self-help and c) cooperation with fellow men.[46] Not all cooperation will be equally profound: "… in this we see a gradation, for some cooperate only in a general way, while others who are more closely united cooperate in a special way. Not all are able to cooperate in a special way."[47] Cooperation thus takes place in a world in which individual and social interest are assumed to be compatible and eventually reflected in the pursuit of the common good by those in positions of authority in formal institutions.

Potential Influences on the Different Views of the Order of Charity in Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas

Family Environment and Life Experience

Although both Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas were men of the Mediterranean, they came from different geographical and family environments and had rather different life experiences. Saint Augustine was a North African, a Mediterranean through-and-through. He was born of a wayward pagan father and a devout Christian mother (Saint Monica). His father was a lower-middle ranking bureaucrat of the Roman Empire in Thagaste (Tunisia), but he also lived in Carthage

[45]Saint Thomas "usually recommends a mixed government, where the king collaborates with an aristocracy chosen by the whole people; here [in *De Regno ad Regem Cypri*] he recommends an absolute monarchy. We perhaps must see the reason for this in that he knew the special situation in Cyprus during the time he was writing" (Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas Vol. 1: The Person and His Work*, 170).

[46]DC, IX, co.

[47]DC IX, co.

https://publications.lst.edu/

and Milan. He was born into a family in which not all members were well-educated, and grew up comfortable with, and learning from, all of them. He became a man of varied worlds.

It is likely that his family experience had a profound influence on his views on love and friendship. After all, he was the product of the union of a pagan father who had led a rather unfaithful and in many ways non-exemplary life and a woman saint. This family experience—together with his life as a bishop—must have convinced him that, "like the old 'people of Israel,' the congregation was a mixed body."[48] His father, despite all his faults, was not an entirely bad man and was capable of final conversion. This conversion—as well as his own—was catalyzed by the use that the Lord made of Saint Monica with her holy patience, her wisdom and her love. His own young adulthood was also steeped in sin and error, yet nevertheless, he was able to become the man he grew up to be.

This life experience must have imprinted in him the importance of recognizing the good and the bad inside everyone, the importance of the association, friendship and love between the more and the less virtuous, and the vast horizon of hope through the infinite possibilities of grace: "For you do not love in him what he is but what you wish him to be."[49] Moreover, his life experience brought him into contact with needy people of varied religions and combinations of vice and virtue. In the process, he became deeply convinced that people of apparently less virtue possess many virtues which those who appear as outwardly pious often lack, and that, if one gives them a chance, a basic equality emerges.

This formative experience was compounded by his years in the Manichean movement and was later reflected in his pastoral work as

[48]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 246.

[49]St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 112–124, 240. "He loves this equality in the other whether or not the beloved understands it. In self-denying love I deny the other person as well as myself, but I do not forget him. … I deny the other person so as to break through to his real being, just as in searching for myself I deny myself" (Arendt, et al., *Love and Saint Augustine*, 96).

https://publications.lst.edu/

a Christian bishop. In the Manichean community, he was exposed to the contributions of its less formally educated members, who were particularly austere as well as the most effective missionaries: "These men, 'unpolished and primitive', were the most dedicated of all; and, not surprisingly in such a movement, they were particularly admired by sophisticated intellectuals."[50]

Subsequently, in the monastery at Hippo, Saint Augustine created an environment in which "uneducated men were the equals of the sophisticated."[51] Moreover, as a bishop, he was drawn into tending to the needs of a flock of necessarily varying degrees of education and virtue. This was an important pastoral experience that also shaped his life view as one in which both need and chance rather than hard-and-fast rules necessarily play a crucial role in the distribution of charity:

> … his position as bishop of fourth century Africa was very different from the ecclesiastical magnates of medieval times, with their precise jurisdictions. In intervening to protect members of his flock, he was acting as any Late Roman patron might be expected to act …. [52]

It would be difficult indeed to imagine how someone with the life experience of Saint Augustine could have embraced a different position regarding friendship and love. He was the result of the good that can come from the associations between the "virtuous" and "the less virtuous," and so was his father. He must have been keenly aware of how "bottled up" the potential of Saint Monica would have been had she associated only with the "virtuous." He experienced the actual impossibility to assess other people's virtue. He was a prime witness of the vast potential of humanity and the immense good that comes from association among the diverse. He was also marked by the practical impossibility of the loving heart to ignore need, regardless of virtue, in charity. It seems only natural that he saw ever-multiplying relationships of love across humanity, in all

[50]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 45.

[51]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 264.

[52]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 189.

https://publications.lst.edu/

the frailty and all the complexity of its fallen nature, driven by need and the seeming chance of God's providence, as the foundation for building the city of God.

Saint Thomas, on the other hand, came from a noble Italian family of Northern European origin. His relatives were a closely-knit family of well-educated, well-off and devout Catholics. It does not seem that he had much contact with people who were either entirely non-educated or "non-virtuous." On the contrary, he was the product of a pious, educated and loving family. It was this background that helped him become the saint and the genius he was to be. It is also possible that the near-death experience of seeing his little sister struck down by lightning at a young age as she was sleeping next to him impressed upon him the frailty of our life and the need to remain virtuous at all times lest we inadvertently die in sin.

From the time he entered the Benedictine monastery of Monte Cassino as a boy, and aside from stays with his family, he spent the rest of his days in religious community. This experience, which sheltered him from the vice of the world, allowed him to lead a life of holiness from beginning to end. After the (possibly legendary) incident with the tempting prostitute, it is said he never witnessed carnal temptation again. His friends and personal associations were his family and the members of his religious communities. Therefore, he must not have been directly exposed to many situations of material need or experienced the redeeming power of loving relationships among those "unequal" in virtue.

At the same time, he had extensive experience with inequality in the distribution of intellectual gifts and with the need for intellectual charity. Although this was not part of his theology, it was a central part of his life experience and he was enormously giving in reacting to it. In fact, Saint Thomas does not include need and chance among his criteria in the order of charity, but he did practice it in his intellectual charity. He was generous to the extreme in the way in which he responded to any query posed to him, even if imposing on him and taxing his time, distracting him from his main treatises on systematic theology.

https://publications.lst.edu/

This is why he wrote so many responses to queries on such a great diversity of topics.[53]

In addition to this refusal to turn down intellectual charity requests thrown at him by the "luck of the draw," he also used the criterion of "need" for the good of the Church, devoting much greater time to the tasks that were more important. Similarly, although he does not include "chance" as a criterion for charity, he does admit that "among the fellow-men, he ought to give mutual help to those who are *more closely united to him* or who are more closely related to him."[54] And those who "are more closely united to him," though partly by affinity, can also be interpreted to be so partly by chance.

Saint Thomas was thus arguably compelled by need and chance in the choice of his intellectual output—the greatest work of charity of his life. Every task he undertook, whether in studying or in producing, was driven by what was needed to support the mystical body of Christ. He devoted himself to his students and his teaching tasks wholeheartedly, whether it was with the "Dominican intellectual elite" at Paris or with the *fratres communes* at Orvieto. In fact, he dedicated the greatest work of his life to the less knowledgeable students. As he states in the *Summa*: "the teacher of Catholic truth should not only teach the most advanced but also instruct the beginners … our intention is therefore to explain what concerns the Christian religion according to the mode that is necessary for the formation of beginners."[55] It is quite possible that, had he "by chance" only taught advanced students in

[53]Torrell calls him "a theologian much in demand" and notes: "we immediately get the impression of intense literary activity. … quite often these are works *of circumstance*, undertakings meant to respond to a question that is more or less official, or from a friend. Such requests are a flattering echo of confidence in his competence" (Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas Vol. 1: The Person and His Work*, 122 [italics added]). They are also a reflection of his deep intellectual charity and refusal to deny this charity even when drawn to him by "chance" and arguably, to a good extent, regardless of "virtue."

[54]DC IX, co. (italics added).

[55]Torrell, 145, citing the introduction to Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Paris, he may not have realized the need for such a "manual." He was also driven to write a "beginners' work" by the need he observed due to the fact that existing manuals like Raymond of Penyafort's *Summa de Casibus* were excessively repetitive and did not sufficiently ground moral theology in systematic theology. On the other hand, his life did not bring him into contact with varying degrees of virtue in situations in which he had to exercise the order of charity. Had he experienced such circumstances, he may have reacted as he did in the distribution of his intellectual charity—allowing need and chance to also play a role in practice if not in theory.

Family and life experience are thus likely to have deeply influenced the order of charity in Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas in both theory and practice. Saint Augustine lived surrounded by many people of dubious virtue and "utility to the common good" while Saint Thomas lived surrounded by the "virtuous and socially useful." Moreover, Saint Augustine could, for much of his life, have considered himself as forming part of the first group while Saint Thomas was, throughout his life, part of the second. Therefore, in Saint Augustine, a life experience of the centrality of need and chance in effecting conversion may have shaped his order of charity. In the case of Saint Thomas, although the principles of virtue, friendship among equals and utility to the common good are strong in his moral theology, they are arguably less so in practice. When the "luck of the draw" put before him the need for (intellectual) charity, he responded to it with the same passionate dedication that Saint Augustine articulated in his writings.[56]

Geography and History

Both Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas were men of the Roman Catholic tradition of the Mediterranean world. Nevertheless, they lived in very different regions, time periods and cultures. Saint Augustine

[56]Nevertheless, Saint Thomas would probably have viewed his exercise of intellectual charity as being drawn not as much by "random" individual need as by a desire to serve the "common good."

https://publications.lst.edu/

was a North African from a rural area, a backwater of the late Roman Empire. He lived during the last years and after the fall of the Empire. His world was one in which paganism and heresy—from Manicheism to Donatism and Pelagianism—were thriving and Christianity was not yet well-established. The Roman, and more broadly the classical, intellectual traditions were still a living reality. Its proponents were presenting Christianity as an upstart and dangerous cult with a highly questionable philosophical foundation. The institutions of the Roman world were crumbling and the Church was struggling while remaining resilient. Society consisted of small communities— arguably Popperian closed societies based on family, kinship and patronage—where people sought refuge from a crumbling world. Formal political institutions and impersonal rules could not be taken for granted while the Church, community and friendship offered a potentially safe haven from the vagaries of the outside world.

The attacks of the pagan world on the Christian community continued, both intellectually as well as, on occasion, physically. The world of higher learning was still largely dominated by pagan philosophy, particularly in North Africa. Christians and their supposed weak citizenship were being blamed for the collapse of the Roman Empire. It was against this background that Saint Augustine's social, political and theological thinking developed. In the world he experienced, the idealized city-state of Plato and Aristotle as well as the sturdy Holy Roman Empire of Saint Thomas' 13th century would have appeared as a mirage—if the Roman Empire had crumbled, any earthly city could. No rules were solid. No human institutions were infallible. Moreover, Saint Augustine had witnessed the deterioration of the Roman Empire to an extent of corruption and injustice that it could no longer qualify as a "society." Only a city of God, built on the values of Christ, through the ever-widening circles of love initiated by Christ and his disciples and continued by the Christian communities and the Church as a whole, could ever approximate the peace and unity which the human heart seeks.

Saint Thomas, on the other hand, was born in Southern Italy, a hub of the Holy Roman Empire of the 13th century. In his family

https://publications.lst.edu/

and despite their struggles, the Pope and the Emperor were relatively solid twin pillars of life. Uncertainties regarded how to rein so much institutional power and how to make both instances compatible. It was a world of firmly-established rules and well-developed "open" Popperian institutions. Christianity was well established economically, politically, socially and religiously, and paganism had long ago receded into history. The world of great European universities of which Saint Thomas was a part was thriving and dominated by the Church. It was a time in which Europe felt secure enough in its Christianity to look back to its classical roots with confidence. It had been long enough after the demise of the Greco-Roman world that it even looked back to this distant past with longing. The *corpus classicus* was being rescued from the oblivion of the Dark Ages and the ancient Greeks were being translated into Latin as the Western Empire had long lost its knowledge of Greek.

Saint Thomas, therefore, could believe in an orderly world of rules for the allocation of charity in a way that would have been difficult, if not impossible, for Saint Augustine to conceive. He could also leave the building of the foundation for a stable society to the role of formal institutions. Saint Augustine, on the contrary, would be led by his historical experience to be more of a believer in informal social relationships as the basis of society and the "luck of the draw" as guiding opportunities for charity as human beings waded through an uncertain life. Saint Thomas, steeped as he was in Aristotle's teleology and the solid institutions of the 13th century, would be more inclined towards the utility of the common good as the most rational guide to charity aside from family ties, first principles and virtue.

Finally, Saint Augustine seemed to rely on need and chance and Saint Thomas on the utility of the common good. Arguably, however, they used twin principles of "need" adapted to their historical time—Saint Augustine's being more Platonic, intention-based, personal and fluid, and Saint Thomas' being more Aristotelian, finality-oriented and institutionalized as the "common good."

https://publications.lst.edu/

Intellectual Education and Philosophical Affiliation

Saint Augustine's education was not particularly deeply rooted in the classics, especially the Greek. He was mainly educated in Latin literature (particularly Virgil, Cicero, Sallust and Terence) without a deep grounding in philosophy, history, or science.[57] Unlike Saint Thomas, Saint Augustine would not have been considered an expert philosopher in "an era oppressed by reverence for the 'expert' [and where] everything outside the *corpus classicus* was considered non-scientific."[58]/[59]

Moreover, Saint Augustine was not by disposition a "*type croyant*,"[60] but rather a natural, even systematic, questioner. He pursued truth wherever he could find it. This he had in common with Saint Thomas. In addition, however, Saint Augustine had an anti-hierarchical and arguably even antinomian personality which was not at home within any single school of thought and did not have particular reverence for any single thinker. In this, he followed those intellectuals that Brown calls the "Latin amateurs" who "never committed themselves entirely to the ideas they handled. They felt, however obscurely, that there was more to life than metaphysical systems …."[61] At the same time, he was following in the footsteps of one of his greatest intellectual influences, Cicero, who had "urged Augustine to seek Wisdom: 'I should not chase after this or that philosophical sect, but should love Wisdom, of whatever kind it should be …."[62] In not espousing

[57]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 24.

[58]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 41.

[59]Brown argues for "Augustine's religious 'emancipation' … from his elders and betters in the university of Carthage, from the pretentious professors, whom he secretly despised" (*Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 38).

[60]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 105 (italics in original).

[61]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 85.

[62]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 30. In this, Brown sees Saint Augustine like a Latin *rhetor*, "caught between Christianity and paganism … glad, as

https://publications.lst.edu/

any specific school of thought and questioning not only conclusions but assumptions as well, he was arguably also following the ultimate questioning philosopher in perpetual search of the truth—Plato.

Saint Augustine's focus on the "ideal" society and on normative principles is also Platonic. The city of God is the ultimate Christian "Platonic" or ideal society as is the principle that the earthly society is to attempt to "participate" in it so as to resemble it to the extent possible. The idea of a "society of friends" or "the state as a large family" based on love as the ideal one is also both Platonic and Biblical.[63] Similarly, Saint Augustine's belief that justice consists in the right ordering of things both within souls and within societies also finds its roots in Plato. Saint Augustine's non-inclusion of the principle of virtue as criteria in his order of charity can also be seen as a combination of Socratic philosophical agnosticism about the limits of human knowledge with the oft-repeated Biblical injunction not to judge other human beings' virtue, as the Lord is the only judge.

At the same time, however, Saint Augustine firmly broke ranks with Plato's elitism in the radical essential egalitarianism which shines through in his writings, but which in turn does not negate the need for simply functional subordination in a well-ordered society. This view of the human being and the world explains the absence of the

---

Augustine had once been glad, to have Cicero to shelter behind, against the cold winds of philosophical dogmatism and clerical orthodoxy" (Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 94). I would argue Saint Augustine never fully lost the desire for intellectual and spiritual freedom, aspiring only to fully expound Christianity (as distinct from "clerical orthodoxy").

[63]Aristotle criticized this Platonic ideal:

> As to organizing the political community, Aristotle explains that the end of political communities differs from the end of other kinds of associations, such as the family, of which the political community is an outgrowth. … Criticizing Plato, as well as the innovative suggestions of many other theorists, for wanting to turn the state into a large family, Aristotle contends there are no important discoveries to be made in the realm of political organization. (Richard Popkin, *The Columbia History of Western Philosophy* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2013], 69)

https://publications.lst.edu/

principle of virtue in his order of charity. Finally, the Platonic idea that the natural world reflects a predetermined intelligible order and that the best possible world imitates the ultimate good is "Christianized" in Saint Augustine's view of the exchange of love in human society as imitating the exchange of love between the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

This education—and lack of it—jointly with his disposition freed his outstanding intellect, his ebullient imagination and his restless heart from any single framework aside from that provided by the Bible, and yielded some of the most brilliant and profound writing of Christianity and the history of humankind. That is why the worldview of Saint Augustine does not fit into any philosophical stream except, if such is not an oxymoron, that of the Bible.

To the extent that Saint Augustine had a "philosophical home," that would have been Neo-Platonism and the Christian Neo-Platonists of the Milan of his time.[64] In particular, the influence of Plotinus and Porphyry, whom Augustine always calls "*doctissimus*" and "the most notable pagan philosopher," can be perceived throughout his writings. As Brown explains, however, they had been thoroughly "absorbed," "digested" and "transformed."[65]

One of the ideas of the Neo-Platonist philosophical universe that most profoundly influenced him was the conception of evil as "a turning away into separateness: its very existence assumed the existence of an order, which was flouted while remaining no less real and meaningful."[66] This idea of evil as separation from a natural order that is good provided a philosophical construct for a view that was

[64]Arguably, he mainly retained, from Manicheism, a "counter-reaction." Namely, it is possible that his emphasis on the limitations of rationality as a guide to true knowledge and the passionate defense of the body as opposed to the strong Gnostic dualism between body and soul may be reactions to his Manichean past.

[65]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 83 and 86.

[66]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 91.

https://publications.lst.edu/

deeply Biblical. Indeed, Saint Augustine saw the essence of the fall of humanity as loss of unity and alienation within the individual, across individuals and from God. This can be traced from original sin to the episode of the Tower of Babel and the scattering and division it produced and which continue to this day. Repairing this alienated world of the earthly city through the recreation of unity using ever-widening circles of loving friendships is at the core of the Augustinian order of charity and the key to building the city of God. Aside from family and need, no specific man-made order is necessary in carrying out this task; rather, only a loving response to the "chance" encounter with the other is needed.

Another influence from Plotinus consisted in turning inward, into the human soul, the great struggle which Late Antiquity—whether pagan or Christian—thought existed between good and evil.[67] In fact, the Augustinian centrality of this Plotinus-influenced (yet profoundly Biblical) view that the global struggle between good and evil takes place inside each human being would have made a virtue-based idea of the order of charity difficult to sustain. Instead, it fits perfectly with Saint Augustine's view of the Church—and, arguably, the individual—as a *corpus permixtum* in a never-ending struggle for improvement through non-virtue-based and deeply evangelical circles of love.

The theme of love is at the center of both the Bible and Plato. Saint Augustine's diverse societies also parallel both Christian communities as well as the participants in Plato's dialogues, each contributing their unique bit to the pursuit of the truth and the good. Like in Plato's Symposium, even the rowdy guests intruding drunk at the last moment in the banquet end up not only being won over by the philosophers, but prove to have "a philosopher" inside them. Plato's influence may also have helped Saint Augustine conceptualize the Bible's relationships as the foundation for building the city of God.

---

[67]Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 240–241. Of course, the engine driving the "latent principle within the inner world" that drives the ascent of the soul is different in each case. For Plotinus, it is "the divine within the soul itself"; for Saint Augustine, it is Christ (Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 241).

https://publications.lst.edu/

Saint Thomas, on the other hand, was fundamentally a Christian Aristotelian in whose writings the influence of "the Philosopher" is most pervasive.[68] Five key Aristotelian ideas seem to have been infused into the ordering of charity in Saint Thomas: teleology, virtue, first principle, utility and the common good. Aristotle shares Plato's idea of both the reality of the existence and the desirability of order in nature and society. At the same time, he has a more pronounced teleological view of the human act and human interaction than Plato. In fact, finality is so important in Aristotle that, in his philosophical system, "randomness … is the miscarriage of natural teleology."[69] In such a system, the end is what matters most and randomness is abhorred.

This priming of the end in Aristotle's ethics can also help explain the difference between Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas in the ordering of charity. While for Saint Augustine need as a guiding principle of charity is viewed as applying to the individual for his own sake, in Saint Thomas it becomes transformed into the utility of the individual for the common good. Thus, Saint Thomas argues that it is more desirable for us to show charity in our actions to the individuals who have the greatest potential to bring about good to the community as a whole (such as the general of an army or the leader of a society).

Relatedly, Saint Thomas' inclusion of the principle of virtue as a critical guiding criterion for the exercise of charity also seems profoundly Aristotelian. In Aristotle's concept of justice, everyone receives "their due." In fact, his distributive justice consists in allotting goods in a manner proportional to each person's virtue. The same

[68]This did not prevent him from disagreeing with Aristotle wherever he saw a contradiction with the Bible, such as in the philosopher's belief in the eternity of the world. Moreover, Saint Thomas also had areas of Platonic and neo-Platonic influence, particularly as regards the doctrine of ideas and the conception of the Creation as following prototypes living within the divine Logos (Josef Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991], 43–44) and the idea of participation, e.g., "the intellectual light itself which is in us, is nothing else than a participated likeness of the uncreated light" (ST I, q. 84, a. 5, co).

[69]Popkin, *The Columbia History of Western Philosophy*, 59.

https://publications.lst.edu/

applies to charity. In ST II, II, q. 26, a. 9, Saint Thomas answers that "the better a thing is and the more like to God, the more is it to be loved." This idea is consistent with Aristotle's idea of perfect friendship as one among the virtuous as well as with his overall view of the need for equality, or at least equality of exchange, among individuals in relationships of friendship. Virtue as a guiding principle for the exercise of charity in Saint Thomas thus seems modeled indeed on this Aristotelian vision.

The naturalistic search for the first principle in action and the attribution of ethical primacy to that principle is also an important determinant in Saint Thomas' order of charity. Most prominently, the primacy of father over mother in the order of charity in ST II-II, q. 26, a. 10 is explained in that "the father is principle in a more excellent way than the mother, because he is the active principle, while the mother is a passive and material principle. Consequently, strictly speaking, the father is to be loved more."[70]

Utility is another fundamental principle of the Aristotelian system. Friendship among individuals is based on utility, with lower levels of it being pleasant and profitable and the higher level being that of virtue. Concord among states is similarly based on utility; it is essentially a relationship of cooperation based on self-interest. Some of this Aristotelian view of utility can be found in Saint Thomas' view of friendship and in his ordering of charity, especially as it relates to the common good.

The fact that friendship is only with a few and of the virtuous with the virtuous seems influenced by a utilitarian conception of relationships. Of course, in Saint Thomas the ultimate end is to grow closer to God in knowledge and love. It would seem that this Christian objective combined with an Aristotelian utilitarian conception of friendship resulted in Saint Thomas' understanding of friendship. It is also a combination of the Christian (including Augustinian) desire for

[70]ST II-II, q. 26, a. 10, co. Saint Thomas also quotes St. Jerome who, writing on Ezekiel 44:25, mentions fathers before mothers as support for this order (cf. ST II-II, q. 26, a. 10, s. c.).

https://publications.lst.edu/

promoting the common good with Aristotelian utilitarianism that helps explain Saint Thomas' setting the utility of a person to the common good as trumping other principles of charity in action. In Saint Thomas, like in Aristotle and unlike in Saint Augustine, friendship is not the basis of the well-functioning state; rather, institutions and individuals assumed to act for the common good are.[71]

In Aristotle, the ultimate good of the state resides not in the system of government it adopts but in the government's ability to act for the interests of its subjects rather than its own interest. This idea of the common good is essential in Saint Thomas, including in his idea of the order of charity. The ability of the state to act for the common good, according to Aristotle, depends mainly on the education of all its citizens. The centrality of education is a principle which does not explicitly feature in Saint Thomas' ideal order of charity. However, as described above, a focus on promoting a thorough education going well beyond the elites is certainly a principle which Saint Thomas applied throughout his life in his writing, his disputing and his teaching as well as through his role in Dominican General Chapter Meetings.[72] In Orvieto, he was to devote himself "to regular teaching of those who … had not been able to study in the *studia generalia* or even the *provincialia*—which was the case for nine out of ten friars"—and, as

[71]"For Aristotle, perfect friendship is of no service to the state because it is not a political means to an end, as it tended to be for Plato" (Popkin, *The Columbia History of Western Philosophy*, 69).

[72]I am not aware of the specific role Saint Thomas played at the 1259 Dominican Chapter in Valenciennes. However, we do know that he was one of the five masters who formed part of the commission established to promote studies.

> The commission sketched out a series of recommendations that were inserted into the chapter's acts. All these acts asserted the priority of study over other tasks …. As to the young, superiors should select those most adept at study to be sent to a *studium generale*; the older brothers should be reminded that even the priors are supposed to follow courses …. If a province is too poor in personnel to provide a lecturer in each priory … they should instead be sent wherever they can to be formed. (Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas Vol. 1: The Person and His Work*, 97).

https://publications.lst.edu/

mentioned above, the *Summa* was dedicated to beginners such as his former students.[73]

Finally, there is a further influence in the order of love as viewed by Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas that is rooted in their respective Platonic versus Aristotelian perspectives. Saint Augustine drew his theology and political theory from a psychological-sociological view of the world with a strong normative and metaphysical bent and certain skepticism about method. Saint Thomas, on the other hand, drew his theology from a positivist and strongly worldly naturalist philosophy aiming at approximating science.[74] The Augustinian focus on need, chance and "a society of friends" fits neatly within the former. The Thomist emphasis on a set of fully specified criteria based on virtue, first principle and utility to the common good fits well within the latter.

Personality

All of the above-discussed factors are certainly enough to explain the differences in the order of charity in Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas. And yet, I would argue that their vastly different personalities also shed light on their personal perspectives on the subject. Below are some thoughts on these differences and how they may have affected each saint.

Saint Augustine was a handsome, charming man with an ardent personality, passionate, sensual and gregarious. He was also a man with what has been diversely called a gift of "instant and moving sympathy"[75] for others and a "gift for universal sympathy."[76] Arguably,

[73]Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas Vol. 1: The Person and His Work*, 118–119.

[74]"[T]heology and philosophy here encountered one another—philosophy in the sense that Thomas defined it … as a mode of seeing things as they are *in themselves* …" (Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, 47 [italics in original]).

[75]J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine: An Introduction to the* Confessions *of St. Augustine* (London & NY: Longman, 1980), 87.

[76]Abbé Bardy, *The Christian Latin Literature of the First Six Centuries*, trans. Mother Marie Reginald (Rockville, Maryland: Wildside Press, 2010), 134.

https://publications.lst.edu/

"the dominant characteristic of Saint Augustine's genius and the true secret to his action must be sought in his heart which animated the highest speculations of a profound mind with a most intense passion."[77] This expansive personality and his gift and need for friendship and sociability help explain how he could conceive of an ideal world based on ever-widening circles of love. Moreover, his long struggle with his sensuality and lust could be seen as having been tamed, sublimated and transformed into non-concupiscent loving social expansiveness.

As discussed, Saint Augustine's life-long experience of friendships with people of broadly diverse educational and social backgrounds as well as his own and his father's conversions must have fostered this personal penchant for understanding all and befriending all. But his personality must have helped as well. Someone with a natural gift and inclination for sociability can easily establish a personal connection with a great variety of peoples whereas shyer personalities tend to feel more comfortable with the like-minded. In addition, Saint Augustine's idea of friendship is based on trust and entails serious risk. And Saint Augustine was certainly a risk-taker. His restless heart and adventuresome personality must not only have not recoiled at the risk entailed by his propounded ever-widening circles of love, but almost relished it or, at least, did not shun it.[78]

The intensely personal tone revealed in most of Saint Augustine's writings reflects someone comfortable with having his personality shining through his work. He did not see subjectivity as an evil, but rather as unavoidable and even as essentially good, as it is this subjectivity that allows him to connect with the other and inject the

[77]See Eugène Portalié, "Teaching of St. Augustine of Hippo," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 2 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), as made available at the New Advent website (http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02091a.htm).

[78]The one aspect in which he abhorred risk, given his own personal experience, was theological error. This, jointly with the historical time he lived in, which was marked by the Donatist and later Pelagian controversies, helps explain his harsh stance toward heresy.

https://publications.lst.edu/

emotion that helps the preacher put a message through into the heart of the listener. In fact, and despite his protestations to the contrary, Saint Augustine is essentially the ideal preacher he portrays in *De Doctrina Christiana*. In that work as in his sermons and most notably in the *Confessions*, he uses the personal tone, makes the personal connections and uses the emotions that he knows will help him in swaying his listeners. Someone with such a preaching *persona* would also be more inclined by personality and function to prime the establishment of personal relationships in building society as well as to leave judgment, including on the order of charity, to an individual's necessarily subjective assessment of the order of charity, which is to be engaged in through "chance."

Finally, Saint Augustine's independent personality, with its anti-hierarchical, anti-establishment bent, could have influenced his preference for a fluid order where an individual can exercise his own judgment on the order of charity based on the broad principles of family, need and chance. It may also have made him skeptical of a purely "top-down" assessment of the common good and of the desirability of dispensing charity with preference to individuals who are expected, by their position, to contribute to it. Even his own personal experience, as someone who would have been judged for much of his life to be "less virtuous or socially useful to the common good," could have left a legacy of personal empathy with those in need, regardless of their perceived virtue or "social utility."

Saint Thomas was a man of the mind: contemplative, self-restrained, with a preference for either deep conversation or solitude. Within his family and with his small circles of confreres and friends, he was profoundly appreciated and admired for his dedication, wisdom and his virtue. He was hard-working and methodical, with a clearly set routine to his days. He abhorred travel. In many ways, he embodied the Aristotelian mean, neither given to unbridled sensuality nor to ascetical excesses.[79] As regards his writing style, Josef Pieper points out:

[79]"Sensuality is good (so much so that Thomas calls 'unsensuality' not merely a defect, but a *vitium*, a moral deficiency); anger is good; sexuality is good"

https://publications.lst.edu/

> Thomas does not have that [Saint Augustine's] brilliance of style, that verbal grace, that musk; neither does he have that personal tone. … at bottom Thomas wishes to communicate something else entirely, and that alone; he wishes to make plain, not his own inner state, but his insight into a given subject.[80]

It seems logical that such a more purely reason- and method-driven personality, jointly with a focus on teaching rather than preaching, favored objectivity over subjectivity and was more drawn to formal institutions and well-established rules and less comfortable using "chance" as a criterion for ordering charity. Instead, Saint Thomas would be more drawn to as fully specified a set of criteria as possible.[81]

Contrary to Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas, having been surrounded his whole life with relative "virtue," may have been more personally inclined to prime it. Even his family's antics in trying to prevent him from entering the Dominican order, or their preference for the money and power that Saint Thomas' remaining in Monte Cassino may have brought them, were likely so common at the time as not to be considered "non-virtuous." Regardless, a family with the standing of Saint Thomas' would have been considered as highly useful to the common good. This experience may also have affected his priority for the "socially useful" in his ordering of charity.

Like Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas was an independent thinker and a systematic questioner in search of the truth. Contrary to Saint Augustine, however, he had a much deeper reverence for the knowledge of the leading philosophers of the time, regardless of religion. He respectfully quotes and uses Aristotle, Avicenna, Averroes, Dionysius and Maimonides, among others. He was a University Master, a part of

---

(Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, 122).

[80]Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, 109.

[81]Pieper stresses: "An outstanding trait of Saint Thomas' style is, it seems to me, its sobriety. … I mean the firm rejection and avoidance of everything that might conceal, obscure, or distort reality. I mean extreme receptivity to reality, unencumbered by any sort of subjectivity …" (Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas*, 115).

https://publications.lst.edu/

the "society of the elect" of the time by birth, and by education and by expertise one of the most respected philosophers of his time. As a 13th century Dominican Master, he could be seen as having lived in a Christian version of the small societies of "virtuous philosopher friends" espoused by Aristotle.

Therefore, given Saint Thomas' personality and experience, the idea that the common good would be delivered by a world of ever-widening circles of love among the diverse, infusing and surpassing formal institutions, must have been difficult to conceive. On the contrary, the striving of those in positions of authority to ascertain and enact the common good must have seemed feasible while favoring them as well as the virtuous in the order of charity must have appeared as desirable.

Conclusion

Both Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas include family as a criterion for the distribution of charity. The remaining criteria they use, however, differ. Saint Augustine relies on need and chance. Saint Thomas primes virtue, first principles and utility to the achievement of the common good. Their varying family and life experiences, geographical and historical contexts, intellectual education and philosophical affiliation and their personalities help explain these differences. At the same time, in the practice of their lives, the gap was arguably narrower than in their writings.

https://publications.lst.edu/