



Intellect in Love:

The Unifying Ground of Augustine's Doctrine of God

Teng HE  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8350-3655>

Fudan University

tenghex@outlook.com

Abstract: This paper challenges the two dominant interpretive models in Augustinian scholarship—Gilson's progressive model and Flasch's rupture model—arguing instead that Augustine's doctrine of God is governed from the outset by a dual structure of intellect and love that is mutually constitutive and irreducible to either term alone. Through an examination of Augustine's theory of Ideas, his understanding of God as *caritas*, and the psychological analogy of the Trinity in *De Trinitate* VIII–IX, the paper shows that intellect already contains love within its own self-relation, while love, though primary as the unifying principle of the divine being, remains intrinsically ordered toward knowledge. This structure extends beyond the doctrine of God itself: in creation, love and intellect cooperate as efficient and formal causes respectively; in election, the same structure governs the order of salvation. Augustine's vision is ultimately a unified theological vision in which knowing God is inseparable from loving participation in divine life—one that resists both the subordination of love to intellect and the reduction of the divine will to arbitrariness.

Keywords: Augustine, God, love, intellect, Trinity

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Introduction

Augustine's doctrine of God is marked by a fundamental tension. Under the influence of the Platonic tradition, he emphasizes God's intelligibility: God is Truth, the Good, and Being itself, in principle graspable by the intellect (Cary 2000, pp. 55–57). Yet, shaped equally by the Christian tradition of revelation, he insists that "the excellence of the Trinity" (*excellentia Trinitatis*) cannot be grasped through cognition (*De Trinitate* VIII.5.8)—God is, in this sense, irreducibly incomprehensible (Cary 2000, pp. 57–58). How these two dimensions—intelligibility and incomprehensibility—relate to one another constitutes a central and contested problem in Augustinian scholarship.

Two interpretive models currently dominate the field. The first may be called the progressive model, represented by Étienne Gilson. In Gilson's classic account, Augustine's path to God unfolds in a linear sequence: faith (*fides*), reason (*ratio*), and charity (*caritas*). Reason apprehends God as immutable truth, yielding only detached intellectual knowledge; it is love—as an act of the will—that grasps God as the supreme Good, enabling the soul's participatory and blessed union with him (Gilson 1960, pp. 8–10). Gilson's account is hierarchical: reason functions as a merely preliminary stage that love perfects and surpasses, without situating the intellect-love relation within God's own immanent being.

The second may be called the *rupture model*, represented by Kurt Flasch. Flasch argues that Augustine's doctrine of God underwent a decisive transformation: from an early (c. 386) rationally intelligible, Platonist God governed by the principle of goodness—a God who must be good rather than arbitrary, which is why troubling scriptural passages required allegorization—to a later (397, *Ad Simplicianum*) God of absolute will, capable of loving Jacob and hating Esau before birth for no assignable reason (Flasch 1990, pp. 31–32). On this account, God's incomprehensibility becomes the ground of Augustine's doctrine of grace, which was crystallized around 396/397 in *Ad Simplicianum* I.2.

In my view, both readings gesture toward the dynamic structure within God without fully articulating it. Gilson's progressive model subordinates intellect to love as its completion, treating the two as successive stages rather than co-present dimensions of the divine being; Flasch's rupture model treats them as mutually exclusive moments in Augustine's intellectual development, with the early intellectual God effectively displaced by a later God of sheer will. Neither model affirms the dynamic unity this paper defends, and the present argument therefore addresses a genuine disagreement in the scholarship rather than a settled consensus.

This paper proposes an alternative to both Gilson's progressive model

(intellect precedes and love completes) and Flasch's rupture model (intellectual God displaced by an arbitrary will). Against both, I argue that Augustine's God is best understood as a dual structure of intellect and love—whose source of unity is not intellect but love itself, and in which the two are mutually interior and condition one another from his early works to his mature ones.

The argument unfolds in four parts. Part I argues that Augustine's understanding of God as intellect already contains love within itself. Part II establishes the primacy of love as the dynamic source of unity—both within the Trinity and between God and humanity. Part III, through the Trinitarian analogy of the mind, demonstrates that knowledge and love are mutually determining and that love is never blind. Part IV reinterprets Augustine's doctrines of creation and election through this mutually determining structure. The conclusion then returns to the conversion narratives of *Confessions* VII and VIII, showing how they confirm the framework.

God as Intellect and Its Implication for Love

Under the influence of Platonic texts (*libri Platoniorum*), Augustine envisions God as an unchangeable, incorporeal, intelligible reality. Scholarly discussions have largely concentrated on this intellectual and Platonic dimension, with particular attention to how concepts such as Being and Goodness serve to articulate the divine nature (MacDonald 2001, pp. 81–83; Zhou 2005, pp. 169–173). Yet this concentration on God as the object of intellectual ascent leaves a prior question unexamined: what is the inner cognitive structure of God himself? By examining *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, this section argues that Augustine's understanding of God does not entirely exhibit a Neoplatonic character but already contains, within the intellectualist framework itself, the seeds of an intrinsic relation between intellect and love.

The reason for this approach lies in the text itself: in *De diversis quaestionibus*, Augustine directly explores the relationship between the intelligible objects—the Ideas—and the divine intellect, which makes it an ideal entry point for examining the intellectual activity of God. His definition of the Ideas reads as follows:

“Ideas are in fact certain principal forms or fixed, immovable reasons (*rationes*) of things, which are themselves not formed and therefore eternal and always constituted in the same mode, and which are contained in the divine intellect (*divina intelligentia*).”¹

1 *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 46.2 “Sunt namque ideae principales quaedam formae vel rationes rerum stabiles atque incommutabiles, quae ipsae

The Ideas discussed here are unchangeable and eternal, the principal forms of things, abiding within the divine intellect rather than outside it. The relationship between the intelligible objects and the divine intellect does not mean that God merely receives his cognitive content from without, or that such content is added to him accidentally. Rather, God's essence is his activity of thinking: he necessarily and eternally thinks all things in himself. This means that God is not only the object of his own thought, but also the subject who thinks. In this sense, for Augustine, God is intellect—not merely in the sense of possessing intellect, but in the stronger sense that his very essence is intellectual activity.

This reflects a decisive Middle Platonic advance over Plato himself: where Plato's Demiurge looks to a realm of Forms external to it (*Timaeus* 28b), Middle Platonism relocates the Forms inside the divine mind, making them the eternal thoughts of God. Scholars have accordingly identified this doctrine as reflecting the influence of Middle Platonism (Solignac 1954, pp. 312–314; O'Daly 1987, pp. 193–195; Pépin 2005, pp. 144–152).

Yet one must still ask: why does Augustine prefer the Middle Platonic understanding? And what exactly is the relationship between this preference and Christian thought? These two questions are interrelated, but the second is the prerequisite for answering the first.

Augustine's Platonism is often read as a philosophical resource that helped him articulate his Christian faith. I argue that the priority runs in the opposite direction: it is Augustine's prior understanding of Christianity that determined how he appropriated Platonism. This is already visible in how he frames the doctrine of Ideas. At the opening of *De ideis*, Augustine states that Plato did not invent the Ideas but merely gave them a name (*nomen*)—a formulation that is itself already a judgment: Plato is the discoverer of an existing truth, not its creator. If the Ideas existed before Plato and do not depend on his authority for their truth, then Platonism cannot be the source from which Augustine derived his understanding of them. The truth that Plato named is one that Augustine, from within his Christian framework, recognizes, retrieves, and reinterprets. Augustine thus does not approach Platonism as a teacher from whom he learns but as a repository of what he already knows—a resource to be transformed rather than a doctrine to be assimilated.

This is further confirmed by his choice of translations for εἶδος. Alongside *forma* and *species*, which follow Cicero, Augustine adds *ratio*—a word that

formatae non sunt ac per hoc aeternae ac semper eodem modo sese habentes, quae diuina intellegentia continentur." All translations are provided by the author, with thanks to Paul Hosle for his valuable suggestions and assistance in checking the Latin.

corresponds not to εἶδος but to λόγος, whose Latin equivalent *Verbum* directly evokes the doctrine of the Son as the eternal Word through whom God creates all things. In interpreting the Ideas, Augustine thus already—whether consciously or not—presupposes the Christian doctrine of creation, in which the Son functions as the eternal exemplar of creatures.

On this basis, one can return to the first question: why does Augustine prefer Middle Platonism? We have just seen that Augustine identifies God with intellect—his essence is his activity of thinking. But this identification is not Plotinian in character. Although he had read Plotinus, he did not use the latter's three-hypostasis structure to explain the triune God, and the reason lies in its incompatibility with Christian doctrine. In Plotinus's system, the One is the highest reality; were Augustine to accept this framework, he would find no proper place for the triune structure of God. Were he instead to identify God with Plotinus's *nous*, then *nous* could no longer occupy the position of the highest reality. Either way, Plotinus's hierarchical ontology is incompatible with the Christian doctrine of three coequal and consubstantial persons. The Middle Platonic approach, by contrast, locates the Ideas within the divine intellect in a way that is structurally analogous to the Christian teaching that God creates all things in the Son as their eternal exemplars—and it does so without introducing a hierarchy in which intellect is ranked below a higher principle. This is why Augustine finds Middle Platonism theologically usable in a way Plotinus is not.

In sum, within the Middle Platonic framework, God is simultaneously the knowing subject and the object of his own cognitive activity—which means that God does not receive his cognitive content from without or contingently, but simply is his own cognitive activity. This constitutes a strongly intellectualist structure. Yet the question immediately arises whether Augustine understands God solely in these terms. A crucial passage from *De diversis quaestionibus* 15 bears directly on this:

"Everything that understands itself comprehends itself; but what comprehends itself is bounded for itself; and intellect understands itself, therefore it is bounded for itself. Nor does it wish to be unbounded, although it could be, because it wishes to be known to itself; for it loves itself."²

Augustine here reveals that the self-constitution of intellectus already contains an amor-structure at its foundation. His argument proceeds as follows. The intellect is finite to itself (*finitum sibi*)—by which Augustine means not that God is a finite being, but that the intellect, in its act of self-

2 *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 15 "Omne quod se intellegit, comprehendit se; quod autem se comprehendit, finitum est sibi; et intellectus intellegit se, ergo finitus est sibi. Nec infinitus esse vult, quamvis possit, quia notus sibi esse vult; amat enim se."

knowledge, draws a boundary for itself. Crucially, this boundary is not imposed from without: the intellect could be infinite (*quamvis possit*), yet it does not will (*nec vult*) to be so. It does not will this, because it wills to be known to itself (*vult sibi notus esse*); and it wills to be known to itself because, at the most fundamental level, it loves itself (*amat enim se*). To love oneself, on this account, means that the intellect wills to enter into a cognitive relation with itself—but to know itself, it must be able to comprehend itself, and any act of comprehension entails drawing a boundary and determining a limit. What has no boundary cannot be comprehended and therefore cannot be known. The intellect thus, on the basis of self-love, actively draws a limit for itself (*finitum sibi*). The decisive point follows: the intellect does not love itself because it knows itself; rather, it wills to know itself *because* it already loves itself. Self-love is the condition of self-knowledge, not its consequence.

This has two consequences. First, from an ontological perspective, Augustine does not need to trace the unity of the intellect back to a higher One, as Plotinus does. For Plotinus, a plurality cannot unify itself: *nous* achieves the unity of the one and the many only by turning back toward the One, deriving its coherence from that higher, simpler source (*Enneades* VI.9.5). Augustine, however, has no need for such an external source: though the divine intellect encompasses a plurality of Ideas, it does not require a higher principle of unity outside itself. The source of unity is relocated from outside the intellect to within it—to understand itself is already to unify itself, and this self-understanding is, at bottom, an act of self-love. Love is therefore not a higher principle borrowed from beyond the intellect, as the One is for *nous*, but the very operation by which intellect achieves its unity immanently. This also makes God intelligible in a way the Plotinian One is not: because God's unity is achieved through holding a plurality of nameable contents together, rather than through transcending all content, God remains approachable through intellect.

Second, this structure has direct implications for human beatitude. Augustine writes that the rational soul, to the extent that it clings to God through love (*caritas*), is suffused and illuminated by the intelligible light, and thereby sees—through its own principal part—the eternal reasons (*rationes*) by whose vision it becomes most blessed (*De div. qu.* 46.2). Love is not an aid to intellectual vision but its condition of possibility: without clinging to God through love, the illumination that makes seeing possible does not occur, just as love is already the condition of the intellect's self-constitution in the first place.

All of this suggests that even within what appears to be a purely intellectualist framework, love already functions as a unifying power in Augustine's early doctrine of God. This claim, however, can only be fully

substantiated by turning to Augustine's detailed working-out of the cooperative operation of intellect and love in *De Trinitate*.

Love as Unifying Force

The preceding section has shown that the early texts already contain an intellect-love structure in which love provides the source of unity. This structure finds its most concentrated expression in *De Trinitate*, where it represents not a rupture with the early works but a further development—a development through which Augustine articulates a doctrine of God centered on love. This section demonstrates the central role of love in understanding God by turning to Book VIII of *De Trinitate*.

To frame this discussion, it is helpful to begin with two scholarly readings of Book VIII that focus on the relation between truth and love. Brachtendorf reads Book VIII as a progressive sequence: Augustine successively identifies God with *bonum*, *veritas*, and *iustitia*, and turns to *caritas* only once this intellectual approach has proven insufficient (Brachtendorf 2000, pp. 81–107). Yam, by contrast, argues that *caritas* does not appear only after the intellectual approach has failed, but accompanies the truth-motif throughout the entire process (Yam 2019, pp. 75–78). Both readings approach the question from the perspective of the soul's ascent toward knowledge of God. I side with Yam's position—that the model is not one of "intellect first, love second"—for Augustine's own account of beatitude in the early works already shows that the highest state of human happiness requires both intellect and love together. Yet one must press further: within the very structure of God himself, what role does love play, and what is it about love that makes it indispensable to any adequate understanding of God?

Augustine's central task in *De Trinitate* is to seek the Trinitarian image of God. In Book VIII.10.14, this search reaches a climax: he discovers the Trinitarian structure of "the lover, the beloved, and love" (*amans, et quod amatur, et amor*), and declares: "If you see love, you see the Trinity." This is not an isolated pronouncement; two features of Augustine's argument in Book VIII explain why love becomes the locus in which the Trinitarian structure is made visible, and together they reveal love's unifying power.

First, love is established as the highest principle in Augustine's doctrine of God. Taking as his point of departure the scriptural affirmation that "God is love" (1 John 4:8), Augustine identifies love not as one divine attribute among others but as constitutive of God's very essence: God's essence is itself the triad of lover (*amans*), beloved (*quod amatur*), and love (*amor*) itself. God is simultaneously lover, beloved, and the love that unites the two. This constitutes a fundamental contrast with the Plotinian framework. For Plotinus, love is always the upward movement of the needy: creatures strive toward the

One on account of their lack, while the One itself remains unmoved and untouched by their striving (*Enneades* VI.9.11). Love is the means by which creatures draw near to the highest reality, but never the mode of being of that reality itself. As Burnaby rightly observes, Augustine transforms the Plotinian Eros—a striving born of deficiency, always reaching upward—into Agape: a love that not only creates but cares for and redeems its creatures, rooted not in lack but in the self-giving of abundant goodness (Burnaby 1938, p. 159). Augustine thereby effects a fundamental reversal: since God is love, love is no longer a force that approaches God from without but a reality that proceeds from God and constitutes his very essence. God is not only the object of love but its subject and source—love does not ascend toward God from outside but proceeds from God himself as the very structure of his being.

Second, love inherently contains an orientation toward the other, and it is in the twofold movement of intending the other and returning to itself that the Trinitarian relation becomes possible. Augustine offers a remarkably subtle exposition of this:

“For when we love love, then we love that which loves something, precisely because it loves something. What, therefore, does love love, that love itself may also be loved? For that which loves nothing is not love. But if it loves itself, it must love something in order that it may love itself as love. For, just as a word both indicates something and also indicates itself, but it does not indicate itself as a word unless it indicates that it is indicating something, so too does love indeed love itself; but unless it loves itself as loving something, then it does not love itself as love. What, therefore, does love love, except that which we love with love?”

This passage discloses the ontological structure of love: love can realize its own meaning only by being directed toward another. Augustine illustrates this through the analogy of language: just as the word “table” acquires its existence as a sign only by referring to an actual table, so too does love complete its self-realization only by being directed toward another. Love thus already presupposes the coexistence of lover and beloved, constituting a complete circuit of directedness-toward-the-other and return-to-itself. This twofold structure—love as the essence of God and love as inherently directed toward the other—reveals love's unifying power: love achieves unity not by excluding difference but by holding lover, beloved, and love together as a single, dynamic relation. Consequently, God as love must contain within his inner life the Trinitarian dynamic of lover, beloved, and love: the Father directs himself toward the Son (the lover toward the beloved), the Son knows himself in the Father (the return to self), and the Holy Spirit is what binds them together as love itself. This is precisely why Augustine's God can be a Trinity while the Plotinian One cannot: the One achieves unity by being nothing other

than itself, excluding all relation; Augustine's God achieves unity through a relation of love that is itself the source of all unity.

From these two characteristics—love as the highest principle and love as inherently relational—love's unifying function follows directly. In *De Trinitate* VI.5.7, Augustine explicitly traces this function to its ultimate source in the Trinitarian life: the Holy Spirit is the common bond of the Father and the Son, the love that unites them as one—not a participated or externally given love, but one that is essential and internally constitutive of the divine being. It is on the basis of this ontological structure that the Holy Spirit, as the gift given to humanity, makes believers “one among ourselves” (*inter nos unum*) and enables them to be “one spirit with Him” (*cum illo autem unus spiritus*). The loving union internal to the Trinity thus becomes the bridge between God and humanity, enabling created persons to participate by grace in the divine unity.

This unity extends not only among believers but between believers and God. Augustine accordingly exhorts: “Embrace the love that is God, and embrace God with love.” It is this love that “unites all the good angels and all the servants of God with the bond of holiness, and joins us to one another and to them, and binds us to himself.” Human love for God, accordingly, does not originate in deficiency and longing alone but in an active response to divine love and a dwelling within it. The relationship between God and humanity is thereby genuinely bidirectional: it encompasses both God's gracious love descending to humanity and humanity's responsive love ascending to God.

The preceding analysis has established love as the unifying principle of the Trinitarian structure. Yet this does not entail that love alone constitutes the Trinity. In *De Trinitate* IX.2.2, Augustine collapses the threefold structure of *amans—amor—quod amatur* (VIII.8.12) into a twofold one (*amans—amor*), because in self-love the lover and the beloved are identical. Love alone, therefore, cannot generate a genuinely Trinitarian relation. Augustine restores the triad in *De Trinitate* XV.6.10 by adding self-knowledge (*notitia sui*) to self-love (*dilectio sui*) within divine Wisdom (*sapientia*): “Behold, therefore, the Trinity: namely, Wisdom, and its self-knowledge, and its self-love.” Love remains the source of unity, but it requires intellect to supply the content and distinction that make Trinitarian personhood possible. The full structure emerges only when love and intellect are understood together—a correlation to which Section III now turns.

Correlation Between Love and Intellect

Having established that love requires intellect to supply the content and distinction that make Trinitarian personhood possible, we must now address a potential misunderstanding: does love's primacy entail the subordination or

rejection of reason? Does Augustine's God, unified through love, thereby become irrational or arbitrary? This section argues that it does not.

In *De Trinitate* IX.3.3, Augustine turns to the human mind as an image of the Trinity, restoring its triadic structure (*amans—quod amatur—amor*, VIII.8.12) through mind (*mens*), self-knowledge (*notitia sui*), and self-love (*amor sui*). This restoration from a collapsed twofold structure to a full triad is decisive: love alone cannot sustain a Trinitarian relation; knowledge is needed to provide the distinction that the self requires in order to love itself as love. Through this analogy of the mind's self-knowledge and self-love, Augustine illuminates the relationship between intellect and love within God himself. The mind's own structure provides a model for understanding how love and intellect are not opposed but mutually determining.

Augustine states this correlation directly: "The mind cannot love itself unless it also knows itself, for how can it love what it does not know?"³ This statement already presents a Trinitarian structure: mind (*mens*), knowledge (*notitia*), and love (*amor*). Without the mind's knowledge of itself, love would have no determinate object toward which to direct itself.

Augustine draws here on Platonic epistemology—as in the *Meno*, where knowledge is understood as the soul's innate recollection, involving a movement from potentiality to actuality—but transposes it into a distinctly Christian key. True knowledge is not innate recollection but the teaching of the "inner teacher"—Christ himself—working within the mind. External words serve only as reminders that turn the mind inward, where it is taught by the inner truth itself.

This line of thought is developed further in Augustine's account of the inner word (*verbum interius*). In *De Trinitate* IX.7.12, he indicates that we obtain "true knowledge conceived from within" (*conceptam rerum veracem notitiam*) in eternal truth—an inner word (*verbum apud nos*) that, once generated, abides permanently with the mind. The term *conceptam*, as the perfect passive participle of *concipere*, is significant: it simultaneously conveys the senses of conceiving, grasping, and understanding, signifying the dynamic process through which knowledge passes from potentiality to actuality and is, as it were, produced within the mind. From this perspective, knowledge appears to possess a certain priority: love requires the determinate content that knowledge alone can supply.

Yet this does not entail that love is merely a byproduct of knowledge, or that their relationship is one of unilateral dependence. Augustine's point emerges with precision in the following assertion: "No one willingly does

³ *De Trinitate* IX.3.3 "Nec seipsam mens amare potest, nisi etiam noverit se; quomodo enim amat quod nescit?"

anything which he has not first spoken in his heart.”⁴ The term *volens* (“willingly”), derived from *velle*, indicates that the generation of the inner word contains a volitional dimension from the outset, rather than being a purely cognitive product. Augustine further specifies that the birth of this word depends on a form of affective assent: “The word is born when what has been thought pleases—whether for sinning or for doing what is right.”⁵ The term *placet* (pleases) here denotes not a cognitive judgment but an affective approval of what has been thought—a form of loving assent. This love may take the form of either *caritas* or *cupiditas*: the former is directed toward the Creator, the latter clings to the creature for its own sake.⁶

And it is precisely in this sense that the word “is conceived in love” (in *amore concipitur*) (*De Trinitate* 9.7.12): the very conception of knowledge already contains love’s participation, and it is this participation that enables the inner word to take shape as intentional, action-oriented cognition. Whether love is directed toward the Creator as *caritas* or toward the creature as *cupiditas*, love’s assent is the necessary condition for the word to be born and for knowledge to be transformed into action.

Augustine draws the consequence explicitly: “Love, therefore, as a kind of medium, joins our word to the mind from which it is generated, and as a third term binds itself with them in an incorporeal embrace, without any confusion.”⁷ Love is therefore not an accessory to the intellect but the mediating condition through which intellectual activity is brought to completion—not a supplement that arrives after the intellect has finished its work, but the inner dynamic through which knowledge passes from potentiality to actuality, from inner word to action.

However, the mutual determination of love and knowledge is not merely a neutral structural description; it carries a crucial normative dimension: love must remain correlated with knowledge in order to realize itself. When this correlation breaks down, love degenerates from *caritas* into *cupiditas*.

Augustine reveals this distinction in *De Trinitate* IX.9.14 by distinguishing two modes of love’s generative process. When love is directed toward eternal realities, the will rests in knowledge, and the conceived word is simultaneously fully born in love—knowledge itself is satisfaction (*conceptum*

⁴ *De Trinitate* IX.7.12 “Nemo aliquid volens facit, quod non ante in corde suo dixerit.”

⁵ *De Trinitate* IX.8.13 “Nascitur autem verbum, cum excogitatum placet, aut ad peccandum, aut ad recte faciendum.”

⁶ *De Trinitate* IX.8.13 “Ergo aut cupiditate aut caritate; non quo non sit amanda creatura, sed si ad creatorem refertur ille amor, non iam cupiditas, sed caritas erit.”

⁷ *De Trinitate* IX.8.13 “Verbum ergo nostrum et mentem de qua gignitur, quasi medius amor coniungit, seque cum eis tertium complexu incorporeo, sine ulla confusione constringit.”

verbum et natum idipsum est, cum voluntas in ipsa notitia conquiescit). But when love is directed toward mutable things, conception (*conceptus*) and giving birth (*partus*) are distinct, with the former taking place through desire and the latter through obtaining: knowing and desiring gold is not enough; one must also possess it (*non sufficit avaritiae nosse et amare aurum, nisi et habeat*). In *caritas*, knowledge and love strictly correspond; in *cupiditas*, they are separated. This separation is the decisive evidence against reading love as arbitrary will—for Augustine judges *cupiditas* precisely as a failure: it leaves the soul thirsting in deprivation, never able to rest. If love were arbitrary, every exercise of love would be equally valid, with no internal standard of success or failure. But Augustine's entire analysis shows that love has an intrinsic normative measure: it must remain correlated with intelligible truth; otherwise, it collapses into self-defeating desire. It is precisely this "success or failure" that proves love is not arbitrary will.

The mind's structure thus offers a direct model for how love can be both primary and unifying—as established in Part II—without becoming arbitrary in the way Flasch's "arbitrary God" requires, and without lapsing into Gilson's sequence of reason-then-love. Love's primacy is neither independence from reason (Flasch) nor the later completion of reason's prior, separate work (Gilson), but a structure in which knowledge is actual only as conceived in love, and love is genuinely itself—rather than degenerating into *cupiditas*—only when correlated with what is known. If this is the structure operative in the mind made in God's image, it offers warrant for resisting both readings of God's own being: a love that secures unity by including intellect within itself is neither a love freed from reason's claims nor a love that arrives only once reason has already finished its work; rather, its very identity, at every point, is constitutively bound up with the intellect it includes.

The Extension of Love's Unifying Power: Creation and Election

Based on the structure established in the preceding sections, we may now turn to Augustine's doctrines of creation and election. Love has been established as the mode of being proper to God's essence, and the mutual determination of intellect and love within the divine mind has been shown to be operative from the earliest articulation of Augustine's doctrine of God. This structure, however, is not confined to God's inner life; it extends equally to his creative action and his plan of salvation. Love is the efficient cause of creation, while intellect provides its formal cause—together they constitute the twofold foundation of Augustine's doctrine of creation. As will become clear, the same structure—with love at its core and intellect as its ordering principle—equally governs Augustine's doctrine of election.

(1) Creation

In his doctrine of creation, Augustine draws upon the theory of Ideas established in Section I. In *De libero arbitrio* II.16.43, he compares God to an artisan (*artifex*), and this image already contains the intelligible dimension of creation. The artisan “signifies” (*innuit*) through the beauty of his work: the beauty of the work is not an end in itself but an intelligible guide, directing the viewer toward the intention of the artisan. By analogy, God signifies to the human intellect through the forms (*species*) of creatures, enabling the intellect to ascend to the eternal reasons (*rationes*) that transcend the created order. Augustine further explains the generation of all things through the doctrine of participation (*participatio*): all things obtain their essence and reality by participating in the eternal forms contained within the divine intellect—the Ideas as archetypes. God does not create arbitrarily but gives form and order to all things according to the *rationes* contained within his intellect. Intellect thus provides the source of form for creation, and the intelligibility of the created world is the mark of its participation in the divine mind.

Having established intellect as the formal cause of creation, we may now turn to love as its efficient cause—that which determines the motive, manner, and end of the creative act. Within Augustine's theological framework, God's creation is essentially the free manifestation of divine love, a love that does not arise from any deficiency or need in the divine nature but proceeds from God's pure goodness (*bonitas*) and grace (*gratia*). Augustine writes:

“Because love arising from poverty and lack loves in such a way that it becomes subject to what it loves, therefore, when the Spirit of God is mentioned—by which we understand His divine goodwill and charity—He is said to ‘move over’ lest it be thought that God loves His works to be created out of the necessity of need rather than out of the abundance of beneficence? Mindful of this matter, the Apostle Paul, about to speak of love, said that he would show the surpassing way; and in another place he spoke of ‘the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge’. Therefore, since the Spirit of God was to be indicated as moving over, it was more fitting that something unformed should first be indicated, over which he could be said to move—not in respect of place, but in respect of the power that surpasses and excels all things.”

God's creative act is not born of deficiency but of what Augustine calls “the abundant overflow of beneficence” (*abundantia beneficentiae*). The image of the Spirit “moving over the waters” in Genesis embodies precisely this transcendence and initiative: God's love is not drawn downward by the world's needs but actively condescends from his own perfect abundance to bring the still-forming created world into being. Augustine further draws significance from the order in which “moving over” is mentioned prior to the

formation of the creature: the Spirit moves over what is not yet formed in order to show that love is not awakened after the creature has already become worthy of it, but is actively present even before any worthiness exists. The condescension of love thus precedes the giving of form, and the giving of form is itself the result of love's prior initiative. The Spirit's movement over the unformed prepares the ground for the subsequent act of formation—"Let there be light"—not through violent impulse but through a prior call that draws what is not yet formed out of nothing and grants it the capacity to turn toward the Creator. It is in this sense that Augustine conceives of creation (*creatio*), turning (*conversio*), and formation (*formatio*) as a unified and dynamic threefold structure:

"Imperfection does not imitate, when it is dissimilar from the highest and first being, but on account of a certain lack of form tends toward nothingness; but then it imitates the form of the Word which is always and unchangeably united with the Father when it itself, by virtue of its conversion proper to itself toward that which truly and always is, i.e., toward the Creator of its substance, receives its proper form and becomes a perfect creature."

Being and non-being alike depend on this act of turning: to turn toward God in love is to enter into being; to turn away is to slide toward formlessness and non-being. The order of creation is therefore not a fixed structure but a dynamic order centered on the orientation of love—a movement in which every creature, guided by its own weight (*pondus*), turns either toward its source or away from it. The world thus appears as an ongoing process of becoming, in which the transition between being and non-being is a movement driven by love. Augustine's cosmology ultimately reveals that love is not merely the dynamism and direction of all things but the ontological principle by which being itself is realized and sustained: only in turning toward God does the creature receive its true form (*formatio*).

This dynamic structure bears a macroscopic resemblance to the Plotinian scheme of emanation and return, but Augustine fundamentally transforms it. Creation is no longer a necessary emanation from the One but the free self-gift of God's love; return is no longer the natural longing of all things for the One but the creature's response to the God who first loved it. God's creative act originates in love, and the created world is correspondingly a totality constituted by love and pervaded by dynamic relations. To know the world is to discern simultaneously the imprint of love inscribed upon all things and the intellectual trace that gives those things their form and order—for all things are at once the overflow of God's love and the manifestation of God's intellect.

(2) Election

The cooperative operation of love and intellect in creation finds its

deepest confirmation in Augustine's doctrine of election. If creation is the cooperation of love and intellect in the order of being, election is their cooperation in the order of salvation.

Augustine's discussion of Jacob and Esau in *Ad Simplicianum* displays this soteriological dimension with particular clarity:

"For if Jacob was chosen without any merit, not yet born and having done nothing, he could not have been chosen at all, since there was no difference by which he could be chosen. Likewise, if Esau was rejected without any merit—because he too was not yet born and had done nothing—when it was said, 'The greater shall serve the lesser,' how can his rejection be called just?"⁸

The question Augustine raises here crystallizes into a tension: if election is not grounded in human merit, justice seems to be suspended; if election is entirely arbitrary, love degenerates into caprice. It is precisely this dilemma that has made Augustine's doctrine of election a focal point of interpretive controversy.

In contemporary scholarship, Kurt Flasch, on the basis of election's apparent indeterminacy, tends to read the divine will as an "arbitrary will" that transcends the order of reason, arguing that the later Augustine replaced the early intellectualist God with a God of absolute sovereignty (Flasch 1990, pp. 31–32). In Chinese scholarship, Hua Wei has further inferred that Augustine's doctrine of grace ultimately issues in a form of agnosticism—that human reason can only fall silent before divine election, leaving room for faith (Hua 2022, pp. 315, 323).

Both readings capture only part of the truth. While they rightly identify that the criterion of election does not lie in human merit and acknowledge the limitation of human intellect when confronted with the divine will, they infer from this that Augustine tends toward agnosticism or an arbitrary doctrine of God. This inference is misguided, for it overlooks the intrinsic structure of intellect and love operative in Augustine's doctrine of God—a structure that, in the context of election, manifests concretely as the relation between grace and justice. Grace does not destroy justice; it fulfills it.

Yet if grace fulfills justice, how is the inscrutability of God's judgments to be understood? Two clarifications are necessary. First, although God's judgments are inscrutable to human cognition, Augustine explicitly states in the same passage that God "disposes all things in number, weight, and measure."⁹ The criterion of election is hidden from human intellect, but God's

8 *Ad Simplicianum* I.2.4 "Si enim nullo merito electus est Iacob nondum natus et nihil operatus, nec omnino eligi potuit nulla existente differentia qua eligeretur. Item si nullo merito improbatus est Esau, quia et ipse nondum natus et nihil operatus erat, cum diceretur: Et maior serviet minori, quomodo eius improbatio iusta dici potest?"

9 *Ad Simplicianum* I.2.22 "omnia in numero et pondere et mensura disponit."

judgment is not without ground—this ground lies not in human merit but in God's own will and the order of justice. This is particularly evident in the fact that election does not violate justice but embodies it: all of humanity, as a mass of sin, deserved condemnation; Jacob was freely granted grace, while Esau was left under just judgment. Punishment itself, moreover, serves a purpose: when the condemned receive just punishment, this very punishment is turned to the benefit of those who receive mercy.

Second, human intellect tends to measure divine justice by its own standards. Accustomed to operating within the order of merit—the causal chain of reward and punishment—it attempts to apply this logic to election. When confronted with grace as a free gift not grounded in merit, human intellect becomes perplexed and inclined to judge it as “irrational” or “arbitrary.” This, however, is an illusion produced when human intellect exceeds its proper scope: the difficulty lies not in any absence of ground in God's action, but in the incapacity of human intellect to measure an order that does not follow the logic of merit. The order of election, though hidden, is not unintelligible—it is intelligible within the order of grace; but to grasp it, one must relinquish the attempt to measure it by one's own standards of justice.

The foregoing clarifies, from the perspective of human cognition, that the inscrutability of election does not signify an absence of order. At a deeper level, however, this clarification is possible only because Augustine's doctrine of election rests upon a more fundamental structure—namely, the intrinsic relation between intellect and love within God himself. This structure reveals the precise relationship between the two: God's love manifests itself in “exacting from whom He wills, and giving to whom He wills”—love ensures that election is not a cold, mechanical determination unrelated to the persons involved, but an active, self-giving relational act. The ground of election is hidden but not nonexistent: it is hidden from human intellect not because God withholds his ways, but because human intellect is habituated to tracing causality by the measure of merit, and the order of grace does not follow this logic. When one attempts to grasp grace through one's own cognitive framework, what one encounters is not grace itself but the projection of that framework onto it.

The order of election therefore transcends human cognition without thereby being without order—it simply does not submit to the self-referential logic of merit. Augustine's description of God's judgments as “inscrutable” is not intended to lead to agnosticism. In what sense, then, is the divine act of election intelligible? It is not intelligible in the sense of the order of merit—that is, in a way that permits the tracing of causal necessity—but in the sense of the order of grace: love gives freely from its abundance without requiring the merit of the beloved as a precondition. Augustine's emphasis is that one

should neither be proud nor measure God by one's own standards of justice. The "inscrutability" of election is accordingly not a failure of intellect but intellect's recognition of its own limit before the order of love—and this limit itself discloses the complementary and mutually conditioning relationship between intellect and love in the divine act.

Creation and election thus exhibit a consistent structure throughout Augustine's thought. In the order of being, creation is the cooperative work of love and intellect: love is the efficient cause that drives the creative act, while intellect supplies the formal cause that gives what is created its form and order. In the order of salvation, election enacts the same cooperation: love bestows grace freely and without regard to merit, while intellect ensures that this bestowal constitutes an ordered disposition rather than a caprice. To know the world is to discern simultaneously the imprint of love inscribed upon all things and the intellectual trace that gives those things their determinate form and order; to return to God is to be reunited in love with the One who is at once the source of love, the ground of intellect, and the principle of justice. It is in this unity of knowing and returning—spanning the whole order of creation and redemption—that the dual structure of intellect and love receives its final and most comprehensive confirmation.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that Augustine's God is neither the opposition of intellect and love nor their mere conjunction, but a unity achieved through love—a love that is never opposed to reason and never independent of it. Examined on its own terms, intellect proves unable to secure its own unity: the self-relation of *intellectus*, its capacity to remain one bounded thing rather than dissolving into undifferentiated infinity, presupposes an act of self-love for which it cannot itself supply an account. Love provides precisely what intellect requires—not as a rival to intellect, nor as a later stage that perfects an antecedently complete reason, but as the structure through which plurality is held together as one: the Ideas within the divine intellect, the Persons within the Trinity, and God with creatures within the order of grace. Intellect is therefore not an independent structure that exists prior to love and is subsequently integrated by it from without; on the contrary, intellect's very capacity for self-unification already presupposes love. To say that intellect is taken up into love is not to say that intellect loses its distinctive character, but that its mode of being is itself an operation of love. And this love, throughout, remains directed toward knowledge rather than toward an unconstrained arbitrary will. The God who unifies all things through love is, for precisely this reason, never the "arbitrary God" that Flasch's opposition between intellect and will would predict.

The dynamic structure centered on love equally provides a unifying framework for Augustine's doctrines of creation and redemption. Creation is God's free, loving self-gift—and the world that issues from it is a rational order, not a contingent overflow. Human love is a response to and participation in divine love: what was brought into being through love is drawn back toward its source through love. Being itself, on this account, is oriented toward love—to turn toward God is to receive form and to enter more fully into being; to turn away is to slide toward formlessness and non-being. The process of conversion, likewise, is not a sequence in which intellect precedes love but the unified operation of both together.

The conversion narratives of *Confessions* VII and VIII confirm this structure at the level of individual experience. In Book VII.10.16, Augustine's intellectual ascent culminates in the declaration *caritas novit eam*—"love knows it." Intellect can see (*vidi*) the unchangeable light, but it is love that truly knows (*novit*) it—and this knowing is not an additional cognitive achievement but the personal encounter through which seeing becomes living. In Book VIII, the garden conversion turns on the act of reading (*tolle, lege*), which supplies the intellectual content without which the will's turning would lack direction; yet it is love that transforms that content from inert knowledge into the "light of certainty" (*lux securitatis*) that unifies the divided will. In both scenes, intellect and love operate together: love does not replace intellect, nor does intellect complete itself before love arrives. The intellectual ascent of Book VII and the volitional conversion of Book VIII are not two successive stages but two manifestations of the same dual structure—one in which intellect requires love to complete its operation, and love requires intellect for its content and direction.

This paper has accordingly proposed a new interpretive framework for Augustine's doctrine of God—one that differs fundamentally from both Gilson's progressive model, which treats love as a later stage that perfects an antecedently complete reason, and Flasch's rupture model, which sees the early intellectual God displaced by a later God of sheer will. The contribution of this paper lies in opening a third path: Augustine's God is neither a God of successive stages nor a God of ruptured displacement, but a God whose being is from the outset constituted by a dual structure of intellect and love—mutually interior, mutually conditioning, and mutually constituting. To know God is inseparable from loving God, and to love God is to return to the source of one's own being. This not only dissolves the apparent opposition between intellect and will in Augustine's thought but carries a broader implication: genuine knowledge is never a purely intellectual exercise, because the love through which all things are unified was never, in Augustine's God, anything other than reason's own deepest ground.

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