

## THE ROLE OF THE CONCEPT OF AGAPE IN IMPROVING ARISTOTLE'S ETHICS

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### **Abstrak**

*Penelitian ini mencoba memecahkan problematika filosofis mendasar dalam etika Aristoteles yang dianggap tidak cukup memberikan penjelasan tentang prinsip apa saja yang harus dipatuhi oleh agen kebajikan untuk menentukan tindakan yang benar secara moral. Oleh karena itu, tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis peranan konsep agape dalam pengembangan etika Aristoteles, serta relevansinya dengan kesejahteraan (well-being). Jenis penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif berbasis kepustakaan. Model penelitian yang digunakan adalah model penelitian deskriptif dari pemikiran tokoh. Konsep agape dalam penelitian ini tidak bergantung pada orientasi metafisik dan teologis. Konsep agape dalam diskusi ini tidak mengacu pada Tuhan, melainkan diarahkan pada ranah kebajikan. Nilai moral tertinggi yang menjadi dasar untuk agape adalah rasionalitas. Tindakan yang benar secara moral adalah tindakan yang didasari oleh kebajikan yang dibentuk oleh tujuan cinta dan dilakukan dengan bijaksana dalam konteks relasional dengan menggunakan akal budi praktis yang melibatkan pertimbangan situasional dan konsekuensi. Adapun peran agape yang esensial dalam kebajikan selaras dengan well-being. Segala bentuk apapun yang seseorang bawa untuk kehidupan berkontribusi untuk kehidupannya sendiri. Senada dengan gagasan klasik Aristoteles bahwa kebajikan berkontribusi pada eudaimonia.*

**Kata kunci:** Aristoteles, Etika Kebajikan, Agape, Well-Being

### **Abstract**

*This research attempted to solve a fundamental philosophical problem in Aristotle's ethics, which was considered insufficient to provide an explanation of what principles must be obeyed by agents of virtue to determine morally right actions. Therefore, this research was conducted to*

*analyze the role of the concept agape in improving Aristotle's ethics, and its relevance to well-being. This research method was literature-based qualitative research. The research type applied was descriptive of the expert's thoughts. The agape concept in this study was independent of metaphysical and theological orientations. The concept of agape in this discussion did not refer to God but was directed to the realm of virtue. The high moral value on which agape is based is rationality. Morally right action is an action that emanates from virtue, which is shaped by the purpose of love and wisely carried out in a relational context using practical reason involving situational and consequence considerations. The essential role of agape in virtue is as a constituent of well-being. What one brings to life becomes one's own life, in line with Aristotle's classical notion that virtue contributes to eudaimonia.*

**Keywords:** Aristotle, Virtue Ethics, Agape, Well-Being

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## INTRODUCTION

Love historically has a special position in the Western tradition, which began with Plato's Symposium. The discussion of love has been a mainstay of philosophy since the time of the Ancient Greeks. Love has such broad and enduring shows that testify not only to its importance to the human condition but also to its complexity as the subject matter under scrutiny (Reis & Aron, 2008: 80). Regarding the nature of love, there are various kinds of love theories, from love as a purely biological phenomenon (animalism urges) to the concept of love that transcends the realm of divinity. However, the dimension of love does not include only material and spiritual concepts. Love is also closely related to ethics. In the era of modern philosophy, ethics tends to be dominated by deontological and consequentialist approaches. Virtue ethics is considered problematic because, in its theory, there are significant differences about what virtue is. Within the virtue ethics theory there is no consensus about what kind of character constitutes virtue. In

addition, the concept of virtue ethics is also claimed to be too abstract and ineffective to be applied to the real world.

Alasdair MacIntyre in his work entitled *After Virtue* helps turn virtue ethics from a marginalized approach to being a major opponent of deontological and consequentialism ethics. After more than forty years of *After Virtue* being published, many works have emerged that use virtue ethics as the center of their approach. Nonetheless, there remains no consensus among virtue ethicists on who provides the most plausible and interesting agent-centered alternative. Against this backdrop of the philosophical revival of virtue, Eric J. Silverman (2019: 1) advocates an account of virtue ethics that construes love as a central moral virtue.

Agape, as the center of virtue ethics, seeks to improve Aristotle's ethical system. In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle said that there are three types of dispositions: two of them are bad (excess and deficiency), and one is good (the mean as a mediator of the two extremes, namely excess and deficiency) (Aristotle, 2009: 34). For example, courageous virtues can be used. The excess of courageous acts obtains a reckless disposition, whereas the deficiency of courageous acts obtains cowardice. As for the disposition of the mean, it is nameless—the intermediate person has no name. (Aristotle, 2009: 33). Regardless of the character of the mean's action having no name, seeking intermediaries is also very relative and cannot be based on the object (Aristotle, 2009: 30). Aristotle realized that even virtues can be used for evil, but Aristotle still does not provide a clear way out. The Golden Mean ought not to be viewed as suggesting that a virtuous disposition always rise to “middling” action (Dimmock & Fisher, 2017: 53).

Agape, as the center of all forms of virtues, seeks to fill the gaps in Aristotle's ethical system. As a center of virtue ethics, Agape can live well in various cultural situations and relational contexts that make it possible to love all. In everyday life, ethical situations that require a person to choose one of two conflicting things are sometimes encountered. For instance, revealing the painful truth to the father that his mother is cheating on him or keeping quiet to

prevent a wrangle? When various virtues seem to offer conflicting guides for action, such a conflict can be resolved by which action best embodies the goals of love applied with practical wisdom, which is the most virtuous and praiseworthy action (Silverman, 2019: 69).

Love desires kindness toward others, meaning that virtue cannot be used badly. Agape, as the center of virtue ethics, requires good ways and goals in carrying out morally right actions. Agape, as the center of virtue ethics, has the ability to offer action guidance. The common thread is that love forms the telos of all true virtues, as Thomas Aquinas claims. However, he avoided his theological and metaphysical aspects from being considered by non-Thomists, in line with secular contemporary intuitions.

Love provides practical benefits, such as strengthening relationships, increasing unity with others, and motivating self-improvement (Fowers et al., 2021: 141). Apart from practical benefits, love is also a constituent of well-being, in line with what eudaimonist says that virtue contributes to eudaimonia. Creating good habits by practicing virtue is key to achieving eudaimonia. Through the practice of virtue, a person can achieve internal and external harmony. By having a good character and acting according to virtue, individuals can achieve sustainable happiness. Thus, virtue becomes an important contributor to eudaimonia, which in turn has a positive impact on well-being and happiness (Aristotle, 2009: xiii).

Contrary to Eric J. Silverman holds that proper-bondedness explains virtues as opposed to well-being (Rodriguez, 2022: 691). Silverman (2019: 35) used gratitude as an example of a virtue that does not increase the well-being of those thanked, but rather encourages more unity when grateful expresses a good given to him by the thanked. Regardless of proper bondedness, love increases satisfaction with the human soul. What we bring to life becomes our life. Loving is like giving. When someone shares happiness with others (for example, by helping others in facing difficulties), then the happiness returns to them (get feeling of satisfaction and happiness

after lightening the burden of others). Same as Aristotle said that virtues necessarily benefit the person who possesses them (Aristotle, 2009: xx).

Improving Aristotle's ethics through the concept of agape as the central of virtue ethics is interesting. The concept of agape fills a gap in Aristotle's ethical thought, which does not offer an explanation of what principles need to be used as a reference for agents of virtue in determining morally right actions (Silverman, 2019: 6). Agape as a center in virtue ethics is interesting because it discusses the main concern in life, namely, how to interact well with oneself and with others in general. As the central to all forms of virtues, agape offers an action guide for agents of virtue and promotes well-being. The advantages of defining love with agape are that it offers broader relational flexibility for various human relationships than other types of love, such as eros and philia.

This study was conducted based on a qualitative method using a literature review. The data sources come from various sources such as books, journals, and articles on the Internet with themes related to the object of research, namely Aristotle's ethics and the concept of agape. The data that has been obtained is then analyzed using methodical elements referring to the book "Metodologi Penelitian Filsafat" by Anton Bakker and Achmad Charis Zubair (1990: 94-96), namely description (by explaining the influence of Thomas Aquinas's concept of agape) and interpretation (further interpret the researcher's understanding regarding improving Aristotle's ethics through the concept of agape as the central of virtue ethics and the relevance of agape to well-being).

## DISCUSSION

### 1. The Relationship Between Love and Morality

In general, love and morality are considered to conflict with one another. While morality is committed to neutrality, the idea of love cannot be separated from partiality. Just as a fully dutiful person who obeys moral standards can be an unloving person, a

loving person is sometimes reckless in carrying out his moral duties (Velleman, 1999: 339).

Historically, love played a massive part in how a person understood his duty to treat others well. There are a lot of moral systems that hold the view that love is the basis for doing good. As an example of the concept of agape, which instructs humans to love one another—not limited to the command to respect others, as taught in Kant's deontological ethics, but also to love broadly. Iris Murdoch (2001: 45) places love as the central of morality. Murdoch adopted love as a virtue—the ideal of perfection. Love is a central idea in morality as well as a fundamental moral activity. According to Murdoch, love and morality have an interrelated relationship. Murdoch said that love can be a powerful factor in motivating a person to act morally (Mason: 2021: 39).

It's not easy work to harmonize ideas of love and morality. Love has even been accused of obscuring neutrality because of its partiality. For example, in the example of an analogy that positions X as a survivor of a ship that is about to sink. Meanwhile, in the water are X's wife and several strangers who are struggling to survive. This situation creates an ethical question, was X justified in throwing the only lifebuoy at his wife? Love demands that X save his wife, whereas morality (if it is neutral) does not provide a fundamental reason for why X should save his wife.

Bernard Williams, a British philosopher, provides a way out of this situation. Williams stated that moral principles could legitimize preferences and justify one's actions in that situation so that such actions are morally permissible (Williams, 1981: 18). Williams said that anyone who is in that situation (standing on a ship) and starts to think about what morality requires is called Williams as a "one thought too many." One should not think, "My wife is drowning; what does morality require me to do?" instead of spontaneously thinking only, "My wife is drowning; I must save her." The essence of Williams' view is that something that goes beyond morality basically involves the idea that moral principles can legitimize one's

preferences so that it can be concluded that taking such an action in that situation is morally permissible (Mason, 1999: 249).

This view of human nature has implications for which activities are important to human life. Activities that are central to human life are the most relevant fields of application for implementing ethical concepts. Many ethical approaches address artificial scenarios that rarely occur, such as trolley dilemmas and maniac killers looking for innocent people. There are quite a few ethical approaches that address problems in everyday life. Those artificial analogies do present an interesting ethical discussion. However, ethics also needs to address real human life to be lived well. Ethics should deal with something that certainly happens in the midst of human life and relationships, rather than abstract ethical conundrums. People need ethical guidelines on how to live a sixty-hour workweek while properly caring for relationships with others. Ethics needs to guide humans in how to balance personal concerns with broad moral concerns for the good of all (Silverman, 2019: 137).

An action that is into the category of moral virtue is not limited to dramatic large events. Morally relevant actions are also embodied in routine activities—such as interactions with other people. Virtue commands a person to take active interest in humanity. Agape plays a large role in how a person understands the duty of treating others well as well as treating themselves. Love is the central in morality that directs that virtue cannot be used badly. Love, guided by intellectual virtue (phronesis or practical wisdom), is the basis for acting properly and correctly to achieve mutual prosperity.

## **2. The Influence of Thomas Aquinas's Concept of Agape: Love Shapes the Telos of All Genuine Virtue**

Thomas Aquinas is a philosopher and theologian who lived in the age of scholastic philosophy (medieval period). Aquinas is referred to as the foundational figure of modern thought who systematically reworked Aristotelian thought to rebuild Western

philosophical thought, which sparked elaboration and disputes among philosophers of the later medieval and later modern periods (Pasnau, 2023: 1). Regarding the concept of agape in Aquinas's thought, it is closely related to his system of virtues. The basis of Aquinas's concept of virtue was built by taking Aristotle's ethical thoughts. Despite Aquinas was an Aristotelian, his concept of virtue ethics was unlike Aristotle and all of the ancient Greek philosophers. Aristotle's ethical thought Aquinas synthesized with the New Testament. Aquinas's concept of virtue is closely related to medieval Christian theology. Therefore, Aquinas's virtue orientation is based on theology. The object of Aquinas's virtue was God Himself. God becomes the ultimate goal of virtue (Aquinas, 1947: 1959).

Aquinas stated that there are several God-oriented characteristics which can only be obtained through the supernatural way, namely faith, hope, and charity or agape—in “*Summa Theologica*” Aquinas does not mention the term agape explicitly. Aquinas termed agape love with charity, which means love for fellow human beings. Charity is identified as essential to all virtues, whereas faith and hope are necessary prerequisites for charity (Silverman, 2019: 52).

Aquinas claimed that love for fellow human beings is good because love is the act most like God. Aquinas describes charity as something that does not depend on natural virtue capacities but depends on the grace of the Holy Spirit. Aquinas claimed that divine action has a significant role, but Aquinas also realized that it did not mean that it was beyond human control. Humans' role in life is not as passive receivers but as active participants in their salvation. Hence, charity is a virtue that is instilled. Charity does not come automatically. Charity involves will (Kanary, 2020: 380). Therefore, the focus of Aquinas's virtue was set on the agent. Aquinas gives attention to the concept of virtue as a moral principle that is in the agent of virtue. Aquinas stated that the basic problem of morality correlates with the sustainable excellence of human character.

In addition to focusing on theological virtues, Aquinas's ethical thought also included intellectual virtues and moral virtues,



just as conceptualized by his predecessor, Aristotle. Aquinas saw intellectual virtues as rational potentials perfected in humanity. Meanwhile, moral virtue is a non-rational aspect perfected by the soul. According to Aquinas, the object of intellectual virtue and moral virtue is not different, that is, everything that can be understood by human rationality. For Aquinas, the two categories of virtue are the same. Moral virtue is a habit of choosing, which involves reason, as is done by a virtuous agent, so moral virtue is no different from intellectual virtue (Aquinas, 1947: 1898).

Agreeing with Aristotle, Aquinas said that intellectual virtues and moral virtues are capacities that can be obtained through habitual actions. According to Aquinas, virtue is a habitual disposition that is carried out continuously so that it describes ideal human quality. Virtue fulfills human potential in achieving happiness. Like most pre-modern philosophers, including Aristotle, Aquinas focused his attention on the fundamental moral question of happiness (*eudaimonia*). For Aquinas, as Aristotelian, happiness is the *telos* of human nature, which is manifested in fulfilling the best human potential. When discussing whether the human body is necessary for happiness, Aquinas distinguished two types of happiness, namely, earthly happiness (the imperfect kind of happiness that can be attained in this life) and heavenly happiness (the perfect kind of happiness that is created from the vision of God).

The perfect kind of happiness (heavenly happiness) is attained through theological virtues in contemplating divine essence. Aquinas believed that the beatific vision—direct contemplation of God's essence—leads to eternal happiness (Stenberg, 2016: 103-104). The divine essence is timeless and unchanging, and the happiness derived from contemplating it is not subject to the limitations of time or decay. In this sense, the happiness attained through the beatific vision is considered eternal, transcending the temporal nature of earthly experiences. Meanwhile, according to Aquinas in Stenberg (2016: 154), earthly happiness can be achieved by engaging in and enjoying truly good activities, including contributing to the common good. For Aquinas, both kinds of

happiness can be achieved by developing human potential through virtues that embody goodwill and are in harmony with genuine human telos. Aquinas said that true happiness can only be had by virtuous people who enjoy good things and live well with others. Thus, it can be concluded that ideal happiness can be achieved through harmonization between vertical and horizontal relationships.

Aquinas claimed that while theological virtues prepare a person for genuine happiness, ultimate moral virtues make a person an ideal citizen of the world. The ultimate moral virtue is correlated with human contribution to the common good. Aquinas (1947: 1929) adopted Cicero's thought in summarizing the ultimate moral virtues, which are called cardinal virtues: (1) prudence, that is, every virtue that is based on kindness in reasoning to achieve wisdom; (2) temperance, that is, every virtue that controls and reduces passions; (3) fortitude, that is, every virtue that strengthens the mind against lust; and (4) justice, that is, every virtue that involves rights. These four virtues are the axis of moral life in Aquinas's ethical concept.

Aquinas's account adequately complements Aristotle's system of virtues to a more fundamental level. According to Aquinas, even cardinal virtues must be directed with love (charity or agape) so that they can become virtues in their truest form (Silverman, 2019: 53). Love shapes the telos of all genuine, that: (1) virtues cannot be used badly; (2) genuine virtues benefit their possessors (agents of virtue) in numerous ways; (3) that there is a degree of unity to the virtues through love and practical wisdom; and (4) ethical concept that is centered on love offer improve action guidance (Silverman: 2019, 55). Love plays a central role in guiding and directing the goals of all forms of virtue. Love is a more central pre-eminence and unites the category of virtues (Silverman, 2019: 56).

In general, the concept of agape in Aquinas's thought is very strong, with metaphysical and theological aspects. According to Aquinas, the highest object of agape is God. Humans are proper agape objects in a derivative sense since humans endure God's image. Since humans were created in God's image, the

commandment to love God requires loving all humans. While agape in Aquinas's thought is related to a theological background, agape as the center of virtue ethics—which is an attempt to improve Aristotle's ethical system—is independent from metaphysical and theological orientation. To explain the question of why one should be kind to others without adopting the metaphysical and theological orientation of Aquinas's Caritas, one only needs to believe that humanity—or personhood more generally—has the kind of value that morally requires a loving response (agape). Therefore, as emphasized by Aristotle, the high moral value held is rationality. Reason is a fundamental property for humans to solve problems. For this reason, humans are able to distinguish things. The personal rational nature is the basis of agape. Actualizing the virtue shaped by agape is the most reliable way to live a flourishing life (Silverman, 2019: 22).

### **3. The Influence of the Concept of Agape in Aristotle's Ethics: Agape as the Central of Virtue Ethics**

The idea of agape as central to virtue ethics started from Aquinas's claim that “love shapes the telos of all genuine virtues” (Silverman, 2019: 53). In order for the agape-centered of virtue ethic to be considered by non-Thomists (and those who did not fit into Aquinas's thought), the centrality of love was modified into a secular set of assumptions about virtue ethics. Agape, as central to virtue ethics in this discussion, is not tied to the wider Thomistic system. The concept of agape in this discussion does not use God as a reference. The concept of agape in the discussion is directed at the realm of virtue. Agape (loving fellow human beings) means desiring good for all people. Love desires good for others. Love shapes telos, meaning love directs all forms of virtue so that they cannot be used badly.

The claim of love as a virtue was criticized by Irish Murdoch, who said that if virtue is love, then there are various kinds of love (Murdoch, 2001: 100). According to Murdoch, it is necessary to find

the basics that distinguish love. While Murdoch saw it as possible to distinguish between different kinds of love, Silverman recognized the possibility that there is only one kind of love with different kinds of expressions shaped by different relational bonds. For Silverman, the relationship that everyone has with others—including oneself—is the most essential thing in building the right expression of love. Relational bond describes the bonds that individuals play in each other's lives. Thus bring in an understanding that loving well means fulfilling its relational role correctly (Silverman, 2019: 26).

A relationship in relational roles is a label that describes the bonds between two or more individuals shaped by the roles that each individual plays in each other's lives. In short, relational predicates describe the normative bonds that people play in one another's lives. The relational roles are categorized into two, namely large relational roles (for example, relations with partners, children, and parents) and small relational roles (such as relations with strangers). The minimum relational role is as a fellow human being. All people are the same, which is an object of valuable moral attention. Thus, the minimum relational bond is based on co-existence as individuals who have equal moral status as human beings.

The practice of agape, which is based on relational bond types, raises problems in the conundrum of personal-impersonal relations. This raises questions such as "How can moral theory harmonize between personal obligations and broader moral commitments?" Agape, as the center of virtue ethics, discusses the tension of moral imperatives between close personal relationships and distant impersonal relationships with the emphasis that the virtuous agent of agape has two kinds of desires, responses, and attitudes of love that are common to all people. However, it is expressed in a way that is shaped by the agent's relationship with each person. In addition, the nature of impartiality, which demands self-devotion, is considered incompatible with self-love. The limitations of time

and attention that humans have made it impossible for someone to be close to everyone in the same way.

Agape-centered virtue ethics is founded on a broad desire to promote kindness to all people—not just certain people—but inappropriate relationships. Appropriate desire includes the appropriate response required by various types of relational bonds. Too much desire for the good of a particular person cannot be called love. In spite of having good a wish for certain person, not being adequate (not in a position) with a relational bond actually leads to a bad preference for the good and to the detriment of others. Not all personal relationships are bad; on the other hand, not all impersonal relationships are good. To love well is to fulfill the role properly.

Relational flexibility is necessary for love to be properly expressed so as to create the right desires for each type of relational bond. For example, X is a doctor who forbids Y (a patient with obesity) from eating junk food. X's action as a doctor who forbids Y from eating junk food is the right act of love. However, if, say, X's position as a cashier at a junk food restaurant forbids Y from buying junk food at his workplace, of course, X's actions as a cashier cannot be said to be an act of proper love. Even though X has good intentions towards Y (reminding him not to worsen Y's health condition), X acting as a cashier is not the right action—in fact, it tends to be rude and can hurt Y's feelings).

Silverman (2019: 40-42) provides an example of a love paradigm based on relational overbond through Shakespeare's masterpiece "King Lear". The drama opens with an announcement made by the king who wants to divide his kingdom based on the attestations of the love of his three daughters. The two eldest daughters flattered their father (the king) with exaggerated flattery. Saying that loving their father is more than life, beauty, sight, and so on. Meanwhile, Cordelia (the youngest daughter) only responded simply. Cordelia said, "I love Your Majesty according to my bond, no less or no more." (Shakespeare, 1992: 292-295). Cordelia did not try to exaggerate her love by using eloquence to get her father's attention. Through Cordelia's response, there is a normative

ideal understanding of love that to love well is to love properly according to relational bonds. Loving in a way that is inconsistent with relational bonds is a mistake. Loving too much is actually problematic because it does not provide sufficient space for the agent to love others. Vice versa, over-loving can actually damage the ability of the person who is loved to love others. Relational bonds that exceed reasonable limits narrow the space for loving others.

In living life, there are three qualities that must be carried out simultaneously—shouldn't be done separately—namely logic (right-wrong), ethics (good-bad), and aesthetics (beautiful-not beautiful or appropriate-inappropriate). For instance, right but not good can undermine righteousness itself. Logic without ethics cannot be justified. Likewise, good but not beautiful, such as offering a drink, is a good act, but offering it with a used glass (not beautiful or inappropriate) can also ruin the goodness itself. Virtuous actions need to be shaped with the motivation of love, as in the example of honest disposition. Honest people should not be honest for the sake of truth itself but for love. Honesty can be misused if the truth is brutally disclosed—even if what is conveyed is the truth, if the aim is to cause emotional pain or potentially damage relational bonds (interactions) it cannot be called a virtue. In spite of honest action being a virtue, virtue can still be misused—directed to evil. Honesty can be called evil if it is not based on love. Therefore, honest actions need to be expressed in a way shaped by love.

There are ways to reveal the truth that do not destroy bonds and nurture interactions with others. There is also a difference between an honest person molded by love and a brutally honest person. An honest, loving person will feel remorse when hard truths have to be told, so he will definitely think about how to express the truth carefully to minimize hurtful effects. Al-Ghazali once said that if the way to reveal the truth is bad is like washing with urine. For example, speaking the truth in a way that puts others down or advising by cursing. The basis is still the truth. However, the truth must be revealed with kindness—expressed with love. Honesty and

other virtues require love in order not to be misused. Any action that is inherently unloving is not a virtue—regardless of whatever other positive attributes it may have. If other candidates for virtues are incompatible with the ends of love, then those traits are not virtues at all (Silverman, 2019: 58).

Agape guides (directs) all forms of virtue, meaning that virtue cannot be used badly. Agape requires good motivation based on love. However, good motivation only is not enough. Michael Slote (2003: 36) said that good motivation is the only condition for virtuous action. Slote's view is flawed in the analogy of the case of a virtuous person who wanted to cure an epileptic one with rukyah (refers to the practice of treating illness through the recitation of the Quran). Good motivation or intention to cure epilepsy sufferers can be justified, but not enough to be called wise. A wise person should know that there is a proper method to help the epileptic. Therefore, to further explain how to be a virtuous, loving person does not only involve good motives. Moral virtues must be accompanied by intellectual virtues, namely phronesis (practical wisdom) or the ability to act wisely. Moral virtues must be carried out in tandem with phronesis—there must be coherence between theory and practice. Good motivation must be directed by phronesis. Thus, agape, as central to virtue ethics, involves phronesis to examine situational complexities and consider appropriate moral actions.

To answer the mainstream question in virtue theories as to what qualities a virtuous person needs to have in order to manifest moral virtue, it ultimately refers to the traits that enable a virtuous person to react or respond in a certain situation. Phronesis, or the ability to take a wise stance in everyday life, is the basis for manifesting agape. For example, in everyday life, we sometimes encounter simple ethical problems that require us to choose one virtue among other virtues at one time; such as X has made an appointment with a friend, but on the way, X finds a strange driver whose car has broken down. Which virtues should be done first? Keeping appointments or helping that driver? What is the standard

for an agent to be able to choose between two candidate virtues so that it can be called a virtuous action?

Agape, as the center of virtue ethics, provides guidance for action based on situational circumstances. Suppose one is in an ethical dilemma between helping a stranger driver and keeping an appointment at the same time, a wise one knows how to help the driver and keep the appointment together. There are smartphones that can be used to tell friends of delays to help the driver. Telling someone who is going to be met is needed as an effort to honor the appointment, prevent others from facing unnecessary anxiety, and maintain a bond in the relationship so as to take the time to offer kindness (practical assistance) to the driver. Meanwhile, if punctuality is important or if a virtuous agent does not have expertise in repairing car engines, calling a mechanic is the right way to offer help to drivers so that appointments can be made on time (Silverman, 2019: 70-71). Therefore, there are a variety of ways to perform the act of agape that depend in part on situational context. Hence, if there is one action that clearly embodies the priorities of agape, then that action must be taken. If, indeed, there is no single action that clearly embodies the agape priority, then it is necessary to take action that very well embodies the agape priority. These basics are improvements from the formulation of virtuous actions in Aristotle's thought. This improvement does not seem to solve problems related to the guide to virtuous behavior. However, it at least clarifies and narrows the scope of practical debate (Silverman, 2019: 71).

Virtuous agents can fail in manifesting agape. This such thing can happen because of two possibilities, namely, the agent does not really have a loving disposition or because of a lack of practical wisdom. The agent's actions with the intention of promoting goodness to others can be a failure because they do not sufficiently understand what good really is. For example, parents who love their children by obeying all the wishes of the child. Helping a loved one by fulfilling a loved one's self-destructive desires cannot be called an act of love. Indeed, in general, helping others fulfill their wishes



is an act of love. However, the virtuous agent needs to understand which wish-fulfillment patterns are prosperous and which are destructive. Long-term consequence is a reference in considering. Therefore, the right action for parents is not to comply with all their child's wishes, but to help their child learn to develop self-control. Hence, in addition to the relational and situational context, considering the consequences is an important aspect of acting wisely in manifesting love.

Agape has a characteristic, which is to give space to love the enemy. Life is a very complex thing and certainly does not only present positive or neutral circumstances of conflict. In everybody's life, there must be a situation that is the opposite of a positive thing. Everyone certainly encounters situations in which other people's bad characters, such as an abusive spouse, arrogant neighbors, co-workers who like to pit one against the other, and so on. Such situations clearly disrupt one's interactions and create confusion as to the proper way to express love. Agape, as the center of virtue ethics, forbids having a relationship status as an enemy of another — or regarding others as an enemy. Despite having a tense relationship, hatred is not highly encouraged. Agape is the center of virtue ethics, advocating treating enemies as fellow human beings with the same basic moral status as everyone else.

To manifest love towards the enemy does not mean that the agent has to be willing to take any risks. Any risk motivated by love for enemies must be considered carefully. Phronesis is needed to consider the possible consequences. Self-love, however, is still a good reason to act. Loving the enemy properly requires a careful calculation of oneself. The closest example if there is a family member is an alcoholic or drug addict. If the alcoholic or the drug addict has violent tendencies, it is necessary for the agent to distance himself as much as possible. It is intended not only for one's own good but also to protect the third parties (other family members).

Meanwhile, if the alcoholic or addict does not have a tendency to harm others, the appropriate loving action is to continue living together while helping to facilitate recovery from addiction.

Therefore, self-love is an important consideration in loving enemies. Any action that has the potential to damage one's own and third parties is not an act of love. Agape requires love for everyone. So, if the enemy lives in a way that harms others, it is important for the agents to protect themselves and the third parties from the dangers (Silverman, 2019: 109-110).

#### **4. The Importance of Agape as a Goal in Achieving Well-Being**

In general, no one would disagree that virtues shape excellent and sustainable patterns of external action. Agape-centered virtue ethics produces practical benefits, namely building better social interactions so as to strengthen relationships with other people. In addition, the concept of agape also motivates self-improvement. How love can motivate self-improvement is exemplified in the paradigm of parental love for their newborn children. Good parents must wish for their children to grow up in a good environment. Reflective parents will understand that children will greatly benefit from having virtuous parents. When the desire for the goodness of the child is combined with a loving desire that strengthens the relationship between parents and children, this desire encourages parents to become a better person. Such parents have the motivation to make changes in lifestyle and character for the better. Good parents can change their eating habits for long-term health, reject addictive substances, develop character, and extensively make changes to benefit their child in the future. Thus, love motivates a person to develop himself (Silverman, 2019: 62-63).

Furthermore, the practical benefits obtained from agape, agape are also closely related to well-being. Well-being is generally defined as a condition in individuals characterized by happiness and satisfaction in life accompanied by maintaining a good quality of life. In well-being, maintaining a good quality of life is a tool to gain happiness. Meanwhile, quality of life is produced through physical and mental awareness. A good quality of life is obtained by

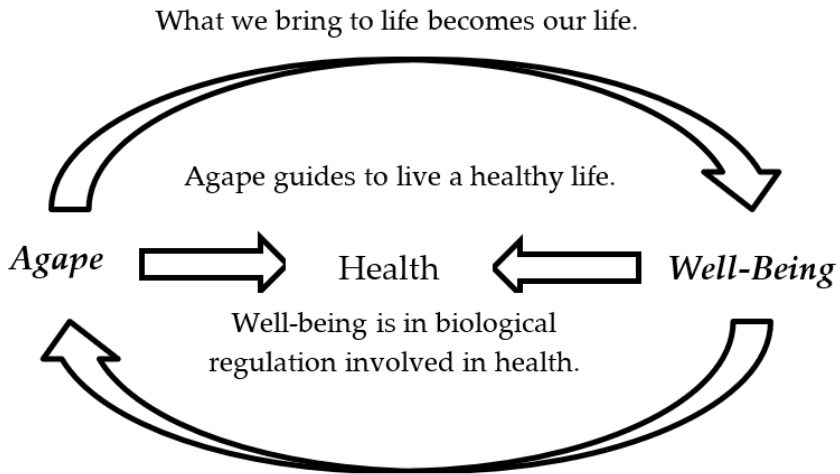
a commitment to maintain positive relationships with oneself (aware of oneself, including health) and others (concerned about social life).

The essential concept of agape in virtue has an important role in achieving well-being. Agape guides virtuous agents to maintain good relations with themselves and others. Carol D. Ryff (1995: 101) stated that a positive relationship is indicated by the characteristics of having a warm relationship, being able to empathize and showing affection, being concerned about the welfare of others, as well as understanding the concept of giving and receiving—in relation to other people as fellow human beings. Even the kind of love that is correlated with altruism (agape) is claimed to have the highest emotion that pushes individuals to be the most alive and humane. Agape has been recognized as the most important emotional experience for human health and the development of life (Fredrickson, 2013: 10).

Discussion of happiness has long been conceptualized by ancient Greek philosophers in *eudaimonia*, which by Aristotle specifically correlated with virtue. The correlation between agape and well-being has been discussed theoretically, although not explicitly. In general, no one disagrees that loving fellow human beings and doing good on the basis of humanity has a positive relationship with inner satisfaction. Several empirical studies reported that altruistic love has the potential to increase psychological well-being (Kahana et al., 2021: 391). Quoting from Bell Hooks, the research article opens with the sentence "Love empowers us to live fully and die well." The kind of love where the other person is the center of their love has an important role in achieving psychological well-being. Sharing positive energy with others has a role in maintaining mental health and a good quality of life (Kahana et al., 2021: 393).

It's not only agape that has an essential role in well-being. Based on biological explanations, well-being also contributes to the practice of agape. Thus, agape and well-being have an interrelationship. The schema below describes the interrelationship

between agape and well-being, which is processed by the researcher based on "The Supremacy of Love" by Eric J. Silverman and several empirical studies related to the positive relationship between love and well-being.



People with high level of well-being tend to be healthier. To live with agape, it is necessary to be healthy in order to serve others.

**Fig 1.** The schema illustrates the interrelationship between agape and well-being.

Sharing love with the closest person does provide benefits. However, sharing love with foreigners is also beneficial for each loving agent. Most literature emphasizes the benefits for the recipient of love—such as having a feeling of how beautiful being loved by others can extend life. On the other hand, the love expressed by the giver (loving agent) is also related to inner satisfaction. Whatever one's brought to life contributes to one's own life. For instance, if someone makes other people happy, that happiness will undoubtedly return to them. Therefore, agape is relevant to the concept of well-being. This is in line with the classical idea of Aristotle that virtues necessarily benefit the person who possesses them (Aristotle, 2009: xx).

Ethan A. McMahan and David Estes (2011: 93), in a research journal entitled *Hedonic Versus Eudaimonic Conceptions of Well-being: Evidence of Differential Associations With Self-reported Well-being*, provides a correlational analysis that states that the eudaimonic approach is closely related to well-being. The result of that study reported that the eudaimonic approach to psychological well-being is positively related, compared to the hedonic approach. Actions that represent eudaimonic rather than hedonic dimensions are more likely to facilitate the development of personal resources that promote well-being. For instance, in choosing to release stress by physical exercising (as a representation of the eudaimonic approach) or to release stress by getting drunk (as a representation of the hedonic approach). The eudaimonic approach is certainly closer to well-being. Actions that maintain health are constituents of well-being. Long-term orientation is the main focus in developing well-being rather than short-term satisfaction.

Another empirical research also reported that well-being (in the eudaimonia approach) is involved in health and good biological regulation and brain-based processes (Ryff, 2014: 21). Well-being (in the eudaimonic approach) and physical health are connected. Related to agape, agape requires self-love, including being aware of one's own health. Agape-centered virtue ethics affirms that there are several expressions of love that can only be done by oneself, such as eating, sleeping, exercising, studying, developing relationships with others, and so on. A person cannot replace another person's position to do those things. Without proper self-love, those things can hinder the loving agent from serving others. People who are not concerned about their health, are not disciplined, are not smart enough, will find it difficult to serve others. Thus, proper self-love is a good thing because it enhances the ability of loving agents to serve others (Silverman, 2019: 100-101).

Agape, which is an essential aspect of all virtues, benefits the agent in many ways. In life, there are a lot of people who desire goodness, but it is not enough to say they really have desire because of a lack of will. For instance, almost everyone desires a healthy

physique, but not a few are willing to change their lifestyle to get better health. That such people cannot be called loving themselves well. Such people are not concerned enough about what they desire even though, in their minds, they really desire it. Silverman (2019: 39) stated that an agent who has a sincere, loving desire but does not have enough determination to achieve it should not be labeled as a loving one. According to Silverman, a person who has a loving desire but does not integrate it into action does not meet the qualifications to be described as a loving person. That such people do not possess the virtue of love despite having a loving desire. Desiring good for others is not enough to qualify as love. A loving person has to actually seek, pursue, and carry out the desire for love in external actions to actually form love.

## CONCLUSION

Agape, as the central principle of virtue ethics, is constituted by the desire to promote goodness to all people but is expressed based on the right kind of relational bond. The agape-centered virtue ethic emphasizes the important role that relationships play in shaping proper expression. In order for love not to injure others, the virtuous agent must understand his place in relation to others. Because to love well is to fulfill his role properly. The virtuous agent of love needs to have the ability to position himself and be aware of his relational role.

Moral virtues require phronesis or practical wisdom (the ability to act wisely) so that virtues can be manifested correctly and morally. Phronesis is a component needed by all forms of virtues so that virtues can be consistently applied in the real world. There are two aspects of phronesis, namely situational appreciation (the ability to understand a certain situation) and consideration of consequences (considering the long-term consequences caused by a certain action). Morally right actions are actions that emanate from virtue, which is shaped by the purpose of love and carried out wisely in a relational context using practical reason involving situational considerations and consequences. Agape, as the center of

virtue ethics, emphasizes good motivations, ways, and purposes in carrying out morally right actions.

Meanwhile, the essential role of agape in guiding virtuous actions is also a constituent of well-being. This is in line with Aristotle's classical idea that virtue contributes to eudaimonia. The practice of virtue has a deep benefit for individuals because it forms a positive moral behavior foundation. By developing good habits with practicing virtue, individuals tend to experience inner satisfaction, emotional balance, and increased interpersonal relationships. What we bring to live becomes our life. Loving fellow human beings extensively is an emotional experience that is important for the sustainable development of human life.

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