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Peter Rožič

Self-Sacrifice in Politics and the Corrective Power of Humility

Abstract: Self-sacrifice is a fundamental political phenomenon, not only deserving a renewed philosophical discussion but also bearing the question of the extent to which self-sacrifice can be conducive to the common good. Often driven by crises, scarcity or social change, self-sacrifice takes place in political, economic, environmental, international and religious arenas, where it tends to operate as a double-edged sword. While potentially contributing to the common good, self-sacrifice can be manipulated and abused. Finding a solution in the cross-textual analysis in Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, this essay claims that in order to contribute to the common good, self-sacrifice has to operate in concert with the virtue of humility through specific conditions, which provide the possibility of correction of potential political manipulation and abuse.

Key words: self-sacrifice, politics, common good, humility, Augustine

Povzetek: Samožrtvovanje v politiki in korektivna moč ponižnosti

Samožrtvovanje je osnovni politični fenomen, ki si zasluži ne le prenovljeno filozofsko diskusijo, ampak tudi odgovor na vprašanje glede mere, do katere lahko samožrtvovanje vodi k skupnemu dobremu. Samožrtvovanje, h kateremu pogosto usmerjajo krize, pomanjkanje ali družbene spremembe, zavzema mesto v političnih, ekonomskih, okoljskih, mednarodnih in v verskih arenah, v katerih teži k funkciji dvoreznega meča. Medtem ko more v principu služiti skupnemu dobremu, je samožrtvovanje odprto manipulaciji in zlorabi. Rešitev ponuja analiza Avguštinove Božje države. Esej trdi, da samožrtvovanje vodi k skupnemu dobremu, če deluje na način vrline ponižnosti prek posebnih pogojev, ki ponujajo možnost korekcije politični manipulaciji in zlorabi.

Ključne besede: samožrtvovanje, politika, skupno dobro, ponižnost, Avguštin

1. Introduction

Self-sacrifice is a fundamental political phenomenon. As a form of self-denial, altruism, concessions or losing one's life, self-sacrifice not only has theoretical and practical implications for politics. Self-sacrifice also represents an implicit and

ubiquitous reality that remains an unacknowledged and understudied subject with much contemporary interest. While the seemingly less-noted matter of self-sacrifice through, for example, self-imposed economic austerity measures, has been highly debated and controversial, the mere existence of self-sacrifice not only provokes a philosophical discussion but also bears the question of the extent to which self-sacrifice can be conducive to common good.

The political philosophy of self-sacrifice as conducive to common good has been unintentionally but aptly articulated by Felkins and Tanner (1992):

»Does working for the common good give a person greater benefits than working for one's own selfish behavior? If the answer is yes, then we should be able to demonstrate that an individual sacrifice has a real effect on the common good. If my single, personal sacrifice can alter the final result, then I can say that my sacrifice produces more in rewards than my personal costs. But if my sacrifice makes no difference to the final result, why should I make it, especially if I receive the benefits of the sacrifice of others even if I make no personal sacrifice?«

A phenomenon often driven by crises, scarcity, upheaval or social change, self-sacrifice takes place in political, economic, environmental, international and religious arenas. Let us mention a four contemporary political examples to heuristically introduce the topic of self-sacrifice.

Recession and Austerity. With the recent economic recession, European countries have often imposed an almost self-sacrificial economic austerity on themselves. In the area of government spending, these countries have targeted areas such as pensions for government workers or government-sponsored healthcare. This form of self-sacrifice has intensified the already conflictual debate over austerity versus growth. (Midgley 2014; Parguez 2012) Austerity's self-sacrifice may have resulted in a number of economic, political and social effects, such as either savings and/or deflation, political unrest and/or partisan gains, as well as lower family income, and even higher suicide levels. (Branas et al. 2015)

Drought and Water Management. In 2015, in response to an intensifying four-year drought, Californians began to sacrifice the givens of modern life such as long showers, frequent laundering, toilet-flushing, gardening, and golf – in order not only to save the state water supplies from depletion but also to avoid state-imposed water fines – looking for sustainable solutions and avoiding symbolic or real water wars. (Chellaney 2013) In fact, researchers and policy makers are increasingly aware of the intertwined nature of technologies, institutions and the social systems that control change with regard to water crisis. (Kiparsky et al. 2013)

The Altar of the Homeland. In times of international war or violent domestic disunity, political and civic leaders have often justified and even compelled the citizenry to make the ultimate sacrifice: death on the altar of the homeland. As shown in the case of Israel, the cult of the fallen has been a consistent part of the strategy for inventing the new Israeli community and was, in particular, related to the War of Independence. The commemoration of the Israel's fallen has »played an important part of the myth of heroic sacrifice« (Peri 2000, 352) as the Israeli's

»altar of 1948 was the establishment of the state«. (353) Outside of combat or war, examples of the ultimate self-sacrifice can be seen in political self-immolation, most frequently acted out by religious monks and often valorized by Tibetans as an ultimate resistance to Chinese rule. (Barnett 2012; Shakya 2012)

Religion. Self-sacrifice is widely and perhaps most strongly present in faith-based and religious communities. It is praised as one of the highest virtues, as the highest imaginable exemplification of the good, deserving both temporal and eternal rewards. As in the above example of Israelis dying for their homeland, understood as a sacrifice that mediates between the individual and the nation (Mosse 1990, 84-85), religious sacrifice has been often seen as mediating between man and God. For a variety of faith-based principles, self-sacrifice leads to atonement and reconciliation, enables authority, brings about unity and allows for personal and community growth. In this sense, the sacrifice (and the offered victim) can be seen as a blameless innocent mediatory means towards achieving a particular goal. In the Christian Bible, St Paul often calls his »brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship« (Romans 12:1), following the Christ who exclaimed that »Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends« (John 15:13) as well as »Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life« (John 12:25).

2. Understanding Self-Sacrifice and its Socio-Political Consequences

While the benefits of sacrificing may be rewarding and eternal, the risks of self-sacrifice can be consequential as well. During times of deflation in a recession, self-sacrifice understood as austerity can lead to a depression, resulting in lost output, potentially causing more unemployment, and leading to a downward spiral. To counter such a possibility, Keynesian economists see budget deficits as appropriate when an economy is in recession in order to reduce unemployment and help spur GDP growth. (Krugman 2011, A23) Another common consequence in political life is social unrest as austerity often targets developmental and social spending. Greece, for example, showed that while at the beginning austerity may have led to increased and non-violent participation in protests, extremist parties and instability may rise as well. (Ponticelli and Voth 2011) Some have linked austerity to the disintegrative tendencies within the European Union. (Krastev 2012) In the starkest of terms, the consequence of self-sacrifice can lead to a death of a person or of a community for the greater good of society, such as survival in a time of war or (justified) defense.

The ubiquity of socio-political self-sacrifice as well as its philosophical and political implications raise a number of questions. Can people in both principle and practice receive greater benefit when working for the common good than when working for their own selfish desire? In other words, does self-sacrifice with the

aim of benefitting the common good benefit both the individual and the socio-political community? What are possible side-effects of self-sacrifice in politics? Is not a politics of self-sacrifice open to manipulation and abuse for personal or political gain? Moreover, as specific understandings of self-sacrifice and their practical implementation yield a range of consequences on a variety of socio-political issues, is self-sacrifice (always) an appropriate (socio-political) policy? For example, do austerity measures yield greater benefits to the common good than the (initial) willed scarcity? To what extent does dying for the homeland benefit society at large? And, finally, is self-sacrifice an exclusively a religious phenomenon devoid of political consequences?

These questions bring us back to the initial questions posed by Felkins and Tanner and reformulated here as: Does personal self-sacrifice bring about (an increase in) common good? If so, why not avoid personal sacrifice, rely on the self-sacrifice of others and benefit from the process? To these questions we add the economic theory and dilemma of Garrett Hardin in *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968). Implicitly connected to the above question of the politics of self-sacrifice, Hardin pointed to several inter-related issues, arising in the case of unregulated grazing on common land. He argued that acting independently and rationally according to one's self-interest may be behaving contrary to the common good. In other words, people's short term interests may be at odds with the common good without some form of sacrifice (such as giving up the profits from the commons' overuse, i.e., hurting the immediate (and selfish) private interest). These forms include government regulation, self-imposed rules, voluntary associations and institutions in order to serve the common good and prevent corruption of a society.¹ Moreover, even if the common good is accepted by the community as superior to the immediate personal good or interest, specific issues remain unresolved: personal conscience, the free-riders problem (selfish individuals vs. self-sacrificial individuals), and the issue of collective action where authority is needed in order to preserve the common good against the potentially destructive actions of selfish individuals.

In short, socio-political self-sacrifice in the view of the common good is under threat from at least two directions. The first is manipulation – from those (e.g., the state, political or economic leaders) expecting self-sacrifice from others. The second is abuse – and the question of preventing free-riders from benefiting from the self-sacrifice of others. This brings us to the main thesis of this study.

3. Thesis, Methodology and Definitions

Thesis. Self-sacrifice can operate as a double-edged sword. While self-sacrifice can contribute to common good it can also lead to the development of a vice,

¹ For the long discussion on the need of exiting one's selfish natural state for the benefit of the common good, see classics spanning from Hobbes ([1651] 2010) to Ostrom (1990). See also Hacek et al. (2013, 256).

where self-sacrifice operates as hypocrisy, as a fairytale, and as a form of manipulation and abuse. In order to address the possible shortcomings and abuse of self-sacrifice in politics, this essay finds a solution in the virtue of humility. The hypothesis is that without the virtue of humility, self-sacrifice continues to work as a double-edged sword, often leading to selfish exclusionary interest. In order to benefit the common good, self-sacrifice has to operate in concert with the virtue of humility. In this regard, humility provides the possibility of correcting potential political abuses of self-sacrifice.

Methodology. In order to defend this thesis, the texts of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* and other texts on sacrifice, humility and virtue will be used. A comparative textual analysis of Augustine's and related texts will aim at pointing to the possibility of the corrective power of humility in the political realm of self-sacrifice. This will be particularly apparent, first, through the conditions required for self-sacrifice to operate as the virtue of humility (Rožič 2014), and second, through four main points developed from Augustine's understanding of virtue and his implicit contribution to the political philosophy of self-sacrifice. In order to use such a methodology and results, we will first define the basic concepts of sacrifice and humility.

Defining the Terms. For the purposes of this essay, we will use generally accepted definitions of sacrifice² to the extent that it is possible. Margot Brazier points out that concerning sacrifice, »words have multiple meanings. Normally, we applaud altruism. We laud sacrifice. The soldier who sacrifices his life to save his comrade is a hero. In the context of medicine, society is ambivalent about sacrifice«. (2006, 201) David Price (2003) notes this ambivalence in relation to living organ donors. He quotes Elliot's account of »our divided institutions« making »self-sacrifice /.../ a double-edged sword« (Elliott 1995, 91–92) – which is nonetheless such by definition, according to our study. As regards humility, we use Worthington's three-fold definition (2014): »(1) accurate self-assessment and modest, situationally sensitive self-portrayal; (2) practice of self-sacrificially laying one's life and agenda down for others; and (3) subject to frequent testing by life or by the person attempting to build the virtue of humility through placing the ego under some degree of strain.« The definition becomes more complex through the ensuing study of Augustine's approach to humility.

² Here, we will forgo the details of two important distinctions. (1) Willing self-sacrifice and imposed sacrifice. Here, John Meyer's citation is useful: »A democratic conception of sacrifice is possible and can promote connections between familiar environmentalist concerns and many people's everyday lives, values, and experiences. Doing so cultivates sensitivity to the plurality of contexts and audiences in which sacrifice is invoked. It also enables us to recognize sacrifice in places where we otherwise might not. Only then can we begin to differentiate sacrifice by willing citizens, acting on behalf of higher concerns, from sacrifice imposed on unwilling victims, in violation of their interests. This provides a richer appreciation for the conditions of human flourishing.« (2010, 14)

² Disproportionate and proportionate sacrifice. For example, Pope John Paul II understood that »Family communion can only be preserved and perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. /.../ There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion.« (1981, 106). To these lines, however, Pope Francis added, that such strategies should »not involve a disproportionate sacrifice, and demanding only a degree of effort that will not lead to resentment or coercion. Ordinarily this is done by proposing small steps that can be understood, accepted and appreciated, while including a proportionate sacrifice.« (2016, 204)

4. Humility as Corrective of Self-Sacrifice

To operate in concert with virtue, particularly as regards the virtue of humility, self-sacrifice would, according to St Augustine, require specific conditions. Despite his unsystematic approach to virtue, Augustine proves to have a consistent understanding of what virtue is and what it does. For a moral quality to merit the label of virtue, Augustine implicitly requires the presence of the following conditions.

Virtue is Consonant with Nature. Augustine states that virtue »is a good habit consonant with our nature«. Virtue is a habit that is formed by, and corresponds to, nature. For Augustine, »the nature is good«. (XI. 17) The natural, created state is faultless and all evil is contrary to nature. Nature is the image of the Creator and participates in God's beauty. God »is good in his creation and fashioning of all substances«. (XII. 1) Accordingly, as a part of creation, human nature is good.³

While understanding virtue as being consonant with nature, Augustine defines custom (habit) as »second nature«. Augustine is aware of the classical philosophers describing moral value as the product of habituation, i.e. as a second nature that is produced by the activities of the moral agent. The philosophers of Antiquity claimed that behavioral habits are neither easily acquired nor easily lost and that good habits require much practice. However, while not denying such an understanding, Augustine insists that only God can give true virtues. He avoids defining virtues as mere positive moral achievements. In order to keep away from the Pelagian understanding of moral agency, often in terms of self-sacrifice, Augustine does not presuppose the necessity of moral heroism. For Augustine, the classic language of virtue suffers from a heroic and antagonistic connotation. Such a language would mirror the Pelagian temptation to imagine that a moral agent is able to do good on his own. Self-sacrifice would thus echo the possibility for a person to make himself good.

All Virtue Coexists with Humility. Augustine proposes a transformation of the language of virtue and introduces a crucial virtue, humility. Achievement should give way to suffering, opening the door to a corrected understanding of self-sacrifice. A moral agent is not a sovereign self. A moral agent should be willing to be reshaped by the medicine of a gracious God. Moreover, this transformation concerns not only a particular individual but also the whole community. Virtue brings happiness to a community, since »the source of a community's felicity is no different from that of a man«. (I. 15) The transformation of the language of virtue implies an ecclesiology. Such an ascetic self-denial involves the working of a whole community on all of its members, singly and collectively.

The acquired moral quality is not primarily the fruit of human achievement and effort but God's answer to humble petitions. From the very beginnings of the *City of God*, Augustine does not cease to emphasize the power and excellence of humility. The *virtus humilitatis* appears in the *Preface* of Book I. It is therefore not virtues that deserve praise but God who grants such qualities to the humble.

³ Since the qualities such as virtues have their origin in nature, they are fundamentally good. One could infer that Augustine highly esteems human qualities because he calls them the »admirable and excellent qualities which nature has bestowed on you«. (II, 29)

Compared to the Greek and Roman philosophers, Augustine's account of virtues is turned upside down. For the Ancients, governance required the most virtuous of the community members. For Augustine, without faith such virtues count little, compared to the eminence granted to the humble by divine grace. Humility »is the foundation of all the other virtues hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance«. Humility is not only the supreme virtue but also a necessary condition for all other virtues. If the heart of a moral agent is not humble, all his other moral qualities lose their weight. Without humility, self-sacrifice is worthless.

Good Will Develops Nature into Virtue. One of the main reasons to emphasize the indispensable importance of God, and the humility of a moral agent before God, is Augustine's understanding of human will. Augustine knows from his own experience that neither the knowledge of good nor human habit provide sufficient help against the relapse into sin. While Augustine acquired much knowledge about God during the process of conversion, he still lacks the ability to amend his habitual appetites in accord to his new knowledge. (*Confessions*, VII. 17) This experience led him to formulate the concept of will.

By discussing human will, Augustine brings to light the flaws of the Ancients and his contemporaries. He disagrees with the overconfidence of both the Ancients and the Pelagians regarding the power of knowledge in moral behavior. While the Ancients were oblivious to the notion of sin, Pelagians optimistically disregarded the destructive power of sin. Once reason had illuminated its nature, they all believed there would be no substantial obstacles to living the good life. For this reason, Augustine claims that the philosophers will never be able to secure human happiness in the embrace of wisdom. While he is not rejecting philosophy as such – in *De Beata Vita*, he portrays philosophy as compelling only because of philosophy's capacity to arrive at true happiness (I. 1) –, Augustine offers a new conception of moral philosophy. He not only incorporates the Stoic tradition of transcendent good and understands this good as the incorporeal God but also introduces the notion of will. Human will counterbalances both pure rationality and irrational appetites, motivating the moral agent to lead a virtuous life. Augustine discovers a mediating human faculty, the will, which determines itself in accord with rational or irrational desires while retaining its independence.

Augustine's scheme of habituation is complicated by the fact that the human will is free. »Free will,« says Augustine, »was given first, with the ability not to sin /.../ and was designed for acquiring merit.« (XXII. 30) Because of human freedom, the acts of choice can be either good or evil. If the will falters, then wickedness, which has become habitual, develops and hardens into second nature. But if the will does not falter,⁴ then the acts of a moral agent develop into a good habit, i.e. virtue. If this is true, then virtues are both an acquired moral quality and a gift of

⁴ Augustine does not mention explicitly what happens during habituation if choices are good. Relying on his definition of good will as »a will by which we seek to live a good and upright life and to attain unto perfect wisdom«, we may presume that the consequence of good choices is a good habit.

God. Since good will and good choices naturally cling to God, an obedient moral agent conforms his will to God's will in order to achieve happiness. Virtue is thus a good habit, acquired by good will. Such a virtue, in turn, deserves eternal happiness: »The reward of virtue will be God himself, who gave the virtue, together with the promise of himself.« (XXII. 30)

Virtue as Ordo Amoris Achieves Good Use of Things. Despite his insistence on the radical dependency of the moral agent on God, Augustine allows a certain gradation in virtues. It is true that according to Augustine God is the principal agent and that virtue should serve God only. For virtue to serve the end of human glory is as shameful for virtue to serve the end of sensual pleasure. (V. 20) Nevertheless, God allows »to his creatures the freedom to initiate and accomplish activities which are their own, for although their being completely depends on him, they have a certain independence«. (VII. 30) Humans have the freedom to develop different kinds of virtues, as long as they lead to the supreme good. For example, in order to avoid the sin of the body, a moral agent is invited to strengthen the virtues of purity and courage. Or, to resemble more fully the citizens of the eternal city, one is invited to live the virtue of abstinence. However, abstinence is only good when it is connected with faith in God. Likewise, the virtue of justice is only to be found in a commonwealth whose founder and ruler is Christ.

Since Augustine places such an emphasis on the desired end, even a vice can become a virtue. For example, the Romans' love of praise, though a vice, counts as a virtue because it checks greater vices. (V. 13) Augustine recognizes that some vices could, in fact, have the effect of virtues. While being aware that love of praise was the greatest threat to his post-baptismal happiness (*Confessions*, X) because it inspires pride and the *libido dominandi*, he notes that the bounded passion for glory checked the appetites of the Romans. This greed for praise gave rise to their many marvelous achievements, including patriotic self-sacrifice. Perfection in virtues can therefore take place by the introduction of passions. Passions, Augustine believes, offer training in virtue. While the mind is subjected to God for his direction and assistance and while the passions are subject to the mind for their restraint and control, the passions themselves can be turned into instruments of justice. For example, the emotion of compassion that compels one to come to the aid of a person in need is the servant of reason, and if compassion is shown without detriment to justice, then such an emotion becomes a virtue. (IX. 5)

Virtue refers to a particular end, both the good things of which it makes good use, and the achievements in making good use of good things and evil things. (XIX. 10) It is only when it achieves the good use of either good or evil things that a virtue becomes virtue. In other words, for Augustine a »brief and true definition of virtue is ›rightly ordered love‹«. (XV. 22) Virtue becomes the ordinate condition of the moral agents' affections and attachments in which every object is accorded that kind of degree of love that is appropriate to it. Virtue as *ordo amoris* points to the *telos* of moral and civic education, which makes a moral agent desire according to what he ought. What is more, in characterizing pagan virtues Augustine shows that the earthly city resembles the eternal city since even the earthly

virtues can sometimes educate passions. It is true that love of human praise is to be checked, because all the glory of the righteous is in God, but the Roman virtues offer useful examples to the citizens of the eternal city.

Virtue, finally, brings happiness to a community; »the source of a community's felicity is no different from that of a man, since a community is simply a united multitude of individuals«. (I. 15) Virtue has a strong effect not only on a particular moral agent exercising virtues but also the whole community. Happiness, brought about by a virtuous life, is social since the human race is social by nature. (XII. 28) A happy life for its own sake values the good of friends as its own. (XIX. 3 and 5) Virtue creates community bonds. Virtue brings people into a happy relation with God and one another.

Against this insistence on the social nature of human life, there is Augustine's strong stress on original sin. He sees tension, conflict and insecurity woven into the texture of human existence in its sinful state. However, while it is true that Augustine highly praised this »earthly peace« against the »hell on earth« (XXII. 22), political authority and enforcement are not a necessary consequence of sin. They do not exist merely to hold the wicked back and to enable the virtuous to live untroubled among them. To combat the »darkness that attends the life of human society« (XIX. 6), earthly institutions can only emerge with the virtuous self-denying endeavors of both the earthly and heavenly citizens.

5. Conclusion and Four Extensions

The most salient and contemporary political implications of self-sacrifice refer to a range of highly debated issues. This essay has enumerated a few in order to show the functioning of self-sacrifice in politics as a double-edged sword. While the effectiveness of some of these issues remains a matter of sharp debate (e.g., reducing government debt or dying for one's country), others are more acceptable. In all instances, the »use« of self-sacrifice gains from the corrective power of the virtue of humility, as understood by Augustine.

Augustine's contribution to the discussion consists of four main points. First, Augustine informs the under-researched debate on self-sacrifice about the faulty overconfidence in the power of knowledge. He views moral action as a more complex reality than did the Ancients. For instance, he does not embrace the Socratic assumptions that people do wrong because they do not know the truth. Augustine shows that the human mind is weakened by long-standing faults, which darken it. Because of sin and the complexity of the self, Augustine denies the possibility of full knowledge about oneself, the world, or God, and thus of the clear role and consequences of self-sacrifice. Despite being aware of man's fallibility, the virtuous moral agent does not fail to do what he intended to do merely through lack of knowledge, even if this lack is not culpable ignorance. Practical wisdom as knowledge cannot fully enable the moral agent to do good in any given situation.

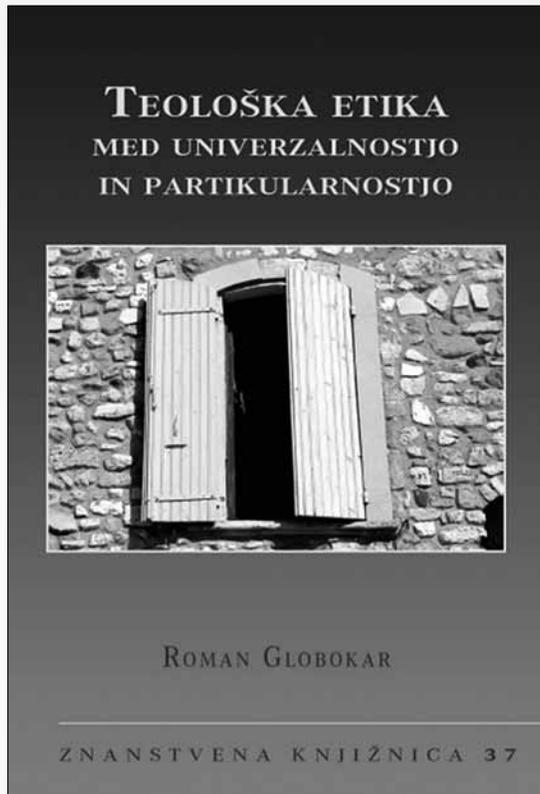
Second, Augustine warns against overconfidence in the power of virtue. The exercise of virtues, even the practice of self-sacrifice, can be only partially constitutive of *eudaimonia*. Augustine is well aware of the many instances of the misery of this world. Participating in happiness in such miserable conditions would reflect corruption of the moral agent (e.g. absence of compassion). Moreover, true happiness can only be fully achieved in the afterlife. While virtues and self-denial or self-sacrifice remain important for Augustine's moral philosophy, they are not the guarantee of human happiness but rather a fruit of human reliance on the promise of that happiness.

Wariness about overconfidence in either knowledge or virtue points to Augustine's third contribution to the debate: the imperfection of any moral agent or community. »Augustine is clear on this score,« writes Elshtain while relying on his Letters, that »we cannot sustain a sinless condition; we cannot, *pace* Pelagius, by our own unaided efforts, even with the grace of God, 'live without sin, and the fact of having sinned does not prevent a man from turning from it at a future date'«. (1995, 55) By transforming the language of virtue, Augustine repudiates the tradition of requiring the presence of a heroic character in order for a moral agent to perform good actions. What is crucial in moral action, and essential in self-sacrifice, is the attitude of humility with respect to the other, be that other man or God. Individual or communal awareness of imperfection combats pride, which is both the beginning of all personal sin and the cessation of a fellowship of equality under God. Furthermore, awareness of imperfection is crucial to the understanding of the role of the weak human will in a virtuous life. Besides the incapacity of virtue to entirely reflect human knowledge and achieve happiness in this life, the will that forms the virtue can be tempted to embrace the vice instead. Due to the weakness of will, habitual behavior can refrain from acting based on knowledge. The problem of acting incorrectly comes not from the insufficient knowledge but from lack of motivation.

Finally, by weakening the definition of virtue – and thus self-sacrifice through humility – Augustine brings into the debate what Vaclav Havel calls a »transcendental anchor«. Such an anchor proves to be particularly important in the times when the modern individual grasps at the self and not God as the principle of being. Self-sacrifice as a moral act cannot depend on the acts of an individual or community alone. Without receiving strength from God and orienting a moral agent's actions toward the supreme good, which is God, a man is incapable of avoiding the power of pride, sin, violence and death. Augustine's demotion and limitation of virtuous moral and political life has »the paradoxical effect of purifying it, liberating it from its tragic and biased pride, rather than denigrating or abandoning it«. (Foley 2003, 179)

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