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Human Freedom, Habits and Justice

Wolność, zwyczaje i sprawiedliwość człowieka

Abstract. This paper aims to examine human freedom and habits based on justice. The main issue guiding this research is how justice can direct human freedom and habits to create equality in the state, and the authors use a historical-factual approach to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas to sketch out how this can be achieved. The main result of this research shows that justice is a moral virtue which perfects the will and directs human acts for good. Justice is also called a habit because it perfects the will and inclines the will to give each man what is his, equality. It implies equality because it relates to others and indicates a significant relationship with others. Justice is principally in rulers because of their primary authority and competency, while it is secondary and administrative in the people. Power exists among the people through the law to bring the common good, whereas the people are indirectly present in the state community through obedience to the law. However, the law can be unjust because power prioritizes the interests of capital owners over those of the vulnerable. This practice is common because power benefits from their existence. Furthermore, when power moves away from the common good in favor of itself, the classical notion of justice suggests depriving those in power of their rights of appointment and leaving the offices of state to the best. Therefore, the people have to strive diligently to provide good leaders and keep them from falling under tyranny.

Streszczenie. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu zbadanie kwestii wolności człowieka i jego przyzwyczajzeń w kontekście pojęcia sprawiedliwości. Głównym zagadnieniem przyświecającym temu badaniu jest odpowiedź na pytanie o to, w jaki sposób sprawiedliwość może kierować ludzką wolnością i nawykami tak, aby umożliwić budowanie równości w państwie. Aby nakreślić, w jaki sposób można osiągnąć powyższy cel, autorzy

stosują historyczno-faktograficzne podejście do myśli św. Tomasza z Akwinu. Główny wynik badań wskazuje, że sprawiedliwość jest cnotą moralną, która doskonali wolę i kieruje ludzkie czyny ku dobru. Sprawiedliwość nazywana jest również nawykiem, ponieważ doskonali wolę i skłania ją do oddania każdemu człowiekowi tego, co jest mu należne, czyli równości. Sprawiedliwość zakłada równość, ponieważ odnosi się do innych i wskazuje na ważny związek z innymi. Sprawiedliwość jest zasadniczo domeną rządzących ze względu na ich pierwotną władzę i kompetencje, natomiast w społeczeństwie ma charakter wtórny i administracyjny. Władza jest obecna w społeczeństwie poprzez prawo i służy budowaniu dobra wspólnego, natomiast obywatele są pośrednio obecni we wspólnocie państwowej przez posłuszeństwo prawu. Prawo może być jednak niesprawiedliwe, ponieważ władza przedkłada interesy właścicieli kapitału nad interesy słabszych. Praktyka ta jest powszechna, ponieważ władza czerpie korzyści z ich istnienia. Ponadto, gdy władza oddala się od dobra wspólnego na rzecz egoizmu, klasyczne pojęcie sprawiedliwości sugeruje cofnięcie nominacji rządzących na urzędy państwowe i pozostawienie sprawowania tych urzędów najlepszym. Społeczeństwo musi zatem dbać o wyłanianie dobrych przywódców i chronić ich przed popadnięciem w tyranie.

Keywords: equality, human act, human virtues, the vulnerable, authority.

Słowa kluczowe: równość, ludzkie działanie, cnoty ludzkie, najsłabsi, władza.

Introduction

The vulnerable should be taken more seriously—both by the people in their communities and by the political powers that be. The vulnerable experience barriers to expression and have trouble voicing their demands and filing claims for the things that they experience (Ivanovich 2014). They are powerless in a place where hope is supposed to grow for them. They are a group of people who have been marginalized and have no access to policy-making. This inability to resist deprives them of the opportunities and rights to which they are entitled. They are resigned to what they have experienced and often consider their circumstances as fate. As a result of political power's neglect of the vulnerable, state policies frequently negate their existence. The vulnerable do not enjoy the benefits of the progress of civilization because modernization only creates them in a new style. Thus, through the classical notion of justice derived from divine providence, we will offer a critique of the contemporary concept of justice that overrides the rights of the vulnerable. We encourage all to re-think the organization of human freedom and habits for virtues so that everything works according to the intentions of divine providence. Because the order of things should follow the purpose

of their creation (Torrell 1996, 15), the aim is the perfection and existence of creation for the good of others (Roszak 2022, 3). According to Scripture, doing what is righteous and just to others is more pleasing to the Lord than sacrifice (Proverbs 21:3).

The main problem is that today's panorama shows us false rights created by the poor exercise of power. The leading cause of poverty is often the malpractice of power due to the formulation of wrong social and political policies. Social and political policies made by the authorities often prioritize the interests of capital owners over those of the vulnerable, which seems burdensome (Ivanovich 2014). Policies towards the vulnerable are only made for the sake of political populism; they are never aligned with or owned by the vulnerable, let alone included in civilization. Strategies to approach the vulnerable are only made as an attempt to control and tame them, and those in positions of authority consider the vulnerable as a threat to the continuation of political power. Although the vulnerable may seem troublesome, we must recognize that without them, democracy stops developing. Democracy becomes a mere utopia, a formality; it loses representation and goes nowhere because it leaves the people struggling for dignity (Fransiscus 2021, 105).

The significance of this research is to encourage benevolence toward others by preventing evil, based on respect and fear of God (Matthew 22:37–38; ScG III, 116), and by restoring original justice as a good or gift of nature (*bonum vel donum naturae*) (Vijgen 2018, 132). Therefore, all people, whether private individuals or rulers, should give to the vulnerable what belongs to them because no individual or group of people can consider themselves omnipotent, entitled to violate other individuals' or social groups' dignity and rights. Hence, this essay focuses on the main argument for regulating human freedom and habits based on the virtue of justice in order to create equality. Thus, justice-based human actions will lead to respect for the rights of the vulnerable.

1. Viewing Free Will from the Perspective of Action

According to Scripture, God created man as a free entity: when God created man, He left man free to make his own decisions (Sirach 15:14–18; Deuteronomy 30:15–19; ScG I, 88). In his explanation of the First Cause and Secondary Causes, Roszak elaborates on Thomas' thought by saying that divine action does not deprive secondary causes of freedom that does not compete with divine

freedom. God is like a coach present at the game but with a different role than the players. The wisdom and tactics of the coach are seen in the free action and cooperation of the players with each other (Roszak 2022, 283). For Aquinas, free will does not include necessity, so the ability to act differently from what one would otherwise do is an essential feature of free will (Echavarria 2020, 269). God guides events in ways we cannot understand because He does so without violating our freedom to choose; in fact, He helps our free will to be free (Torrijos-Castrillejo 2022, 3).

By way of free choice, the different counsels, exhortations, commands, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments will become reasonable (*frustra essent*) (ST I, q. 83, a. 1). If there is no free will as a component that constitutes human existence, however, the things mentioned above will become irrelevant because free will presuppose human judgment. So, from this assessment, we postulate the human ability to respond to reality. The faculty to respond to reality is undoubtedly rooted in human reason (Aquinas 1955, 270). As rational beings, humans have natural judgment and can identify and judge through reason, showing the various paths open to free choice (Baumann 1999, 148). Man can judge that something should be pursued or avoided by considering reason and will. Thus, humans can take the desired alternative path (*potens in diversa ferri*).

In contingents, the *ratio* has an openness concerning opposites (*ratio habet viam ad opposita*). This is because the *ratio* confronts different alternatives, which, in turn, give it various choices. For Kenny, the condition for the fulfillment of free choice is the ability to perform opposite actions, that is, the capacity and the opportunity (1988, 30). A person can perform a free action if the opposite or another option is available. So, when it comes to a particular choice, it is not the only choice for him or her. However, sometimes there is only one means available to achieve our ends, so inevitably, free will takes that only means. Nonetheless, such an action is not rooted in compulsion but in free will (*libera voluntas, libertas voluntatis*), except that free will accepts the necessity of a means to its end. The necessity of a means to an end is consistent with the will, even if only one means is available to achieve the end (ST I, q. 82, a. 1).

How do humans organize their freedom? For Thomas, human action in what he calls its highest form is thoughtful (ST I-II, q. 1, a. 1). The action must be deliberate and purposeful (Dauphinais et al. 2002, 46) because human action is not something random and arbitrary but always has a purpose (DeYoung et al. 2009, 71). According to Aquinas, there is no neutral being; power is goal-directed, and ultimately, it is the creator, that is, God, who attracts and defines the goals

(Levering 2008, 140–141). Even if there are actions in which the ultimate end does not occupy the agent's intentions, the action is not a typical human action. Such actions are called *actus hominis*, characterizing the agent as part of a living being that has existence, has a physique, and moves, but not an action born of the distinctiveness of humans with consciousness.

Nonetheless, humans often act while thinking about other things, such as when someone cooks *mustardsoep* while planning a vacation to Bali. Thomas is also aware that man sometimes acts in ways that are contrary to what typically attracts him. Because reason regulates desire through political rules, as a wise ruler of free citizens, virtue must insert itself into a passion for enabling one to act spontaneously so that human action follows the direction of reason and will (Levering et al. 2020, 321).

2. Viewing Habits from the Perspective of Action

Good habits are the discipline of a disciple, a sign of one's commitment to Christ and His Church. Paul reminds us of the importance of this discipline when he talks about how athletes prepare for competition (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). Conversely, bad habits will not produce positive things (Sirach 7:13; 23:15), which is why Paul asked Timothy to avoid the bad habits of the people (1 Timothy 5:13). This is because the primary source of evil behavior is, indeed, bad habits (Sullivan 2021, 265). Habits arise from immutable causes and involve tendencies of the soul forces (Knobel 2023, 3). They imply a disposition concerning the nature of things and their operation or purpose (Hovey 2006, 162). Habits are an action insofar as there is a predisposition for good or bad behavior, either about the thing itself or with something else in the species (Gilson 1957, 256).

The word "habit" (*habitus*) comes from *habere*, which means "to possess." Habit derives from this word in two ways. The first is when a person or other entity possesses something. The second is insofar as a particular thing has a relationship to itself or something else (ST I–II, q. 49, a. 1). Thomas builds this understanding based on Aristotle's categories which hold that whatever makes something clear is part of the whole. Thus, habit implies an order with certain parts (Aristotle 2016, 93). In the first sense, the word relates to what is possessed. In Aristotle's terms, the word is placed after the category because it is derived or generated from some category. Then, there must be a bridge between possessing and being possessed, between the subject and the object. That bridge is a habit analogous

to the bridge between clothing and someone who wears clothes. Hence, from the first definition, a habit is the bridge that connects the action and the person who acts.

On the other hand, if the verb “to possess” is associated with the second sense as something that has a relationship to itself or something else, then a habit is a quality. Since this way of having is related to quality, habit disposes of something (Porter 2013, 113). Therefore, a habit is a stable quality that is not easily changed (ST I–II, q. 49, a. 1). This quality puts its possessor in touch with a state of good or bad concerning things other than himself (ST I–II, q. 49, a. 3). Another consideration is that man has a capacity for virtue. However, since his fall into sin, man has also had a strong tendency towards overindulgence (ST I–II, q. 95, a. 1): human hearts contrived nothing but wicked schemes all day long (Genesis 6:5). The function of habit, then, is the avoidance of evil, for it involves constant training to control evil (Sullivan 2021, 214). Such training aims at the restraint of specific details of the action. Habituation is presented as a strengthening of the will to achieve its chosen goals (Sullivan 2021, 243).

Good and bad habits directly affect the subject of the action and can become operating principles that extend to action. Habits imply a disposition concerning nature, operation and purpose, and from dispositions arises what is good or evil (Knobel 2023). For Thomas, habits are necessary for human beings; he bases his thoughts on the fact that whatever refers to an operation has a reference and an end towards which the operation tends. Therefore, good habits are helpful and necessary for man to achieve the ends of his normal operations (ST I–II, q. 49, a. 4; Porter 2013, 114). Human nature, that is, the essence at work in man, can form certain habits insofar as it is intended for them and requires them for smooth and speedy operation. Similarly, a person’s temperament or disposition may develop habits in him, called natural habits (ST I–II, q. 51, a. 1). In contrast, certain operative habits come to exist through repeated action. In this way, one develops virtues or, conversely, certain vices (ST I–II, q. 51, a. 2).

Although certain operative habits may increase or decrease, or even disappear, as long as a human person retains consciousness, natural habits derived from the first principle (synderesis) cannot be eradicated (ST I–II, q. 53, a. 1; Holdsworth 2016, 40). Consciousness is the ability of man to complete certain operations based on his nature and perform specific actions freely due to the ability to think. Because evil actions that result from human freedom cause evil to exist (Levering et al. 2020, 327), it is necessary for man to develop good habits in the faculties that freely give rise to actions controlled by his reason

(Renard 1948, 90). Thus, when human actions include something contrary to the order of reason, they inherently fall into the category of evil actions. Thus, to develop good habits, man needs to organize his habits in the light of his intellect.

3. Directing Human Freedom and Habits through Justice

When justice is done, the upright rejoice, but evildoers are filled with terror (Proverbs 21:15). Since justice is a moral virtue derived from the natural disposition of man, it perfects the human will and directs man to the good (ST II-II, q. 57, a. 1; Farrell 2018, 521). The virtue of justice is therefore a habit, that is, a stable disposition of the will to give to everyone what belongs to them (ST II-II, q. 58, a. 1). The act of giving to someone should be grounded in truth as the objective interest of justice (Beauregard 2019, 140). Thomas understood the righteousness of this primitive state as original justice in which there was no room for any deficiency (Roszak 2023, 1). Original justice was a gift in which God established Adam and Eve's intellect to be subject to God, their passions to be subject to their intellect, and their bodies to be subject to their souls. Thomas uses this relationship of power within each hierarchy to illustrate justice by giving the superiors what is rightfully theirs (Vijgen 2018, 132).

Since the definition of justice first mentions the will (Farrell 2018, 525), an act of justice must be voluntary, steadfast and eternal to show the constancy of it. Hence, we can frame justice as a constant and persistent will to give everyone their due. This view is Thomas' reception of the Roman jurist Justinian's ultimate definition of justice (Bushlack 2011, 147). Fairness implies equality as it relates to others (ST II-II, q. 57, a. 1); it denotes an essential relation to others, for something is said to be equal not to itself but from its relation to others (Dyson 2004, 160). Since justice aims to improve human action, what it requires must be among people who are capable of acting. Since actions belong to subjects, justice demands otherness (ST II-II, q. 58, a. 2). We must understand justice from a Thomistic perspective regarding human relationships and interaction with others, which demands several virtues of justice.

Justice itself directs man with regard to other human beings in two ways: first, with regard to individuals, and second, with regard to others generally in a community (ST II-II, q. 58, a. 5). Since virtue directs people to themselves or to particular people, the virtue of justice is essential for the common good. Thus, all

acts of virtue can be related to justice insofar as virtue directs human beings to the common good (*bonum commune*). For Thomas, justice is principally in rulers because of their primary authority and expertise, while secondarily and administratively in the people (ST II-II, q. 58, a. 6). Law is the attempt of those in power to create justice and stability so that people live in peace. Hence, power is present among the people through law to bring about the common good. Conversely, the people are indirectly present in the state community through obedience to the law.

However, laws can be unjust. Such injustice can arise when laws contradict the goal of justice, which is the common good, such as when the ruler imposes laws by ignoring the vulnerable through prioritizing the interests of the owners of capital. Furthermore, laws may be unjust in terms of the maker when the ruler makes laws that exceed the power given to him by the people, or in terms of the form, where a law is unfairly imposed on specific groups of society (ST I-II, q. 96, a. 4). Although such law governs real people, it is not a just law. Such laws are not binding on the conscience even though they have coercive power over the people. Laws are said to be just if a person gives each his due with a constant and perpetual will, in harmony with the divine and natural law (Sullivan 2021, 244). Citizens and lawmakers must therefore have access to critical perspectives on legal products (Bushlack 2011, 168).

Thus, if those who rule the people become so corrupt that they sell out the people's vote by entrusting the government to rogues and criminals, then the right to appoint public officials should be taken away from such people and the choice left to a few good men (ST I-II, q. 97, a. 1). Those who rule over the people should exercise their power based on righteousness and justice (Isaiah 32:1; Ezekiel 45:9-10; Psalm 99:4), for such power will be righteous and just. However, if the ruler plans for his self-interest, he becomes unjust and perverse (Ptolemy 1997, 63). We interpret this aspect of the common good in the sense that no individual can seek his good without seeking the common good. Conversely, in the common good, it is not permissible to exclude the good of the individual (Bushlack 2011, 175).

Thomas' view of his political system focuses on the common good. The government becomes unjust when it rejects the common good as the basis for structuring the state. The more those in power move away from the common good, the more unjust the government becomes (Ptolemy 1997, 68). A good ruler must prioritize the people above his private interests (Ptolemy 1997, 69). The law must therefore uphold the virtues necessary to protect citizens from harm by ensuring justice and peace (Bushlack 2011, 184). Nonetheless, every

form of power has the potential to become tyrannical. It is, therefore, the duty of the people to strive diligently to provide good leaders and prevent them from falling under tyranny.

Conclusion

Justice is a moral virtue that directs the human will and perfects it toward goodness. It is also known as a habit because it perfects the will and inclines the human will to give to each person what belongs to them. Justice is the political virtue that organizes citizens to live in order and peace. It implies equality as it relates to others. It shows an essential relation to others, for something is said to be equal not to itself but from its relation to others. Justice is principally in rulers because of their authority and primary expertise, while administratively, it is in the people. Power is present among the people through the law to bring about the common good, whereas the people are indirectly present in the state community through obedience to the law. However, the law can be unjust because power prioritizes the interests of the capital owners over the vulnerable. When power has moved away from the common good, the people must take back their rights and hand them over to the best.

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Biography

Ubat Pahala Charles Silalahi studied philosophy at Gadjah Mada University. He is interested, in particular, in the history of ancient to medieval philosophy. His previous work has been published in *Lumen Veritatis*.

Gloria Matatula is a researcher in the religious, social and political fields who is active in highlighting the problems of the vulnerable in Indonesia. She currently teaches at Pattimura University as part of her research project.