

An Augustinian Response to the Thomist View of Mortimer
Adler and Walter Farrell, O.P. on the State and Virtue

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In their "The Theory of Democracy," in a section entitled "The End of the State: Happiness," Mortimer J. Adler and Walter Farrell, O.P. attempt to show that happiness is the final end of the state. Further, they claim that man's activity within the temporal realm can be ordered to virtuous activity by man's own accord, i.e. without the aid of Divine Grace. In this thesis, I will discuss the Thomist view of Adler and Farrell, then I will look at their point of view from an Augustinian perspective.

In Adler's and Farrell's theory, natural happiness, distinct from supernatural beatitude, is activity in accordance with perfect virtue in a complete life attended by a sufficiency of the goods of fortune. One reaches this natural happiness with the possession of the "whole of earthly goods, which leaves nothing to be desired" (Adler and Farrell, 286). Thus, the state functions as means to man's natural end which is happiness. The state originates as a "natural response to a natural need" (Adler and Farrell, 286). That is not simply to provide order within society, but to lead society to the good life, a life of virtue. Happiness therefore, is the final end of the state.

Adler and Farrell take into account the Thomistic traditions of original sin. St. Thomas in the *Summa Theologiae* states, "The good of nature that is diminished

by sin is the natural inclination to virtue, which is befitting to man from the very fact that he is a rational being; for it is due to this that he performs actions in accord with reason, which is to act virtuously. Now sin cannot entirely take away from man the fact that he is a rational being, for then he would no longer be capable of sin" (Aquinas, I-II q.85, a.2). That is, if man was void of all reason, then he would not be held accountable for his sin, the same way we cannot hold an animal accountable for sin, because an animal has no rational nature to direct its actions. Thus, since human nature is not corrupted and void of all natural good inclining him to virtue, man through his own volition, can work some particular good.

It is then Divine Grace which elevates the fallen nature of man to the level from which it declined through sin (Adler and Farrell, 301). The precise disorder in man resulting from original sin, according to St. Thomas, is as follows: Man beginning with Adam, possessing a sinless nature, had only to use his reason in accordance with the will of God in order to control his lower, appetitive power, his passions. What was lacking in man to control his lower powers was supplied by God through Grace. When Adam turned and sinned against God, his lower powers began to suffer. It is with original sin that man lost original justice, which was the perfect subordination of the lower

powers to reason (Adler and Farrell, 292). Man is therefore corrupted in that his nature is now inclined to evil as well as the good.

If we accept this view of human nature after original sin, admitting that the fall did not destroy human nature, then it remains within the power of fallen man to achieve some good. Adler and Farrell ask if man can acquire the cardinal or natural virtues without the aid of Divine Grace. Here Adler and Farrell introduce the notion of a hierarchy of virtues, for it is true that virtues cannot be treated univocally. Adler and Farrell distinguish between perfect and imperfect virtues, according to the ends to which they are directed, and their status as habits. First are the perfect or Theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. Second are the imperfect, Natural virtues which are the Cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance. The difference between the ends are easy to see; the perfect virtues are directed to supernatural beatitude as man's final end, the Cardinal virtues are directed to a temporal happiness as their final end (Adler and Farrell, 296).

One may possess the Theological or the Cardinal virtues either perfectly or imperfectly. This is because the virtues depend on each other. For example, a Cardinal virtue that is possessed without another is possessed imperfectly and will not by itself enable the individual to

reach his final end. To illustrate this let us imagine a man possesses the Cardinal virtue of fortitude, which is the habit by which he can manage and take effective action under prolonged pain. Let us say, however, that this same man does not possess the Cardinal virtue of temperance, that is rational governance of sensory appetite. It is easy to see that this man will not be able to achieve his natural end perfectly. Plato would say that the team of this man's chariot is out of balance and will end up in a ditch. Think, if you will, of a man who is very strong and coordinated, but is blind. He may be able to make a long drive, but because he lacks his sight, he will never reach the green. Thus, one must possess all the Cardinal virtues perfectly in order to come to natural happiness (Adler and Farrell, 297).

This however still does not answer the question, is it possible to acquire these Cardinal virtues perfectly without the aid of Divine Grace? St. Thomas states that human nature, both the sinless Adam and corrupted human nature, need God, the *first mover* in order to do any good whatsoever. Yet although human nature is corrupted, it is not void of all natural good. Thus, St. Thomas says that man can perform some "particular" goods such as building dwellings or planting vineyards (Aquinas, I-II, Q.109, a 2).

Adler and Farrell state that "the healing power of

grace is needed only by fallen man and that grace performs two functions; enabling him to reach an end absolutely beyond his power, and to restore the vigor he needs to pursue natural happiness" (Adler and Farrell, 302).

Therefore, natural happiness cannot be perfectly achieved by fallen man unless the efficacy of his powers is restored by grace (Adler and Farrell, 302). Adler and Farrell conclude that the restorative aid of Divine Grace is needed to possess perfectly the Cardinal virtues needed to reach natural happiness. However, while conceding this, Adler and Farrell say that without grace, natural happiness is achievable in some degree short of perfection, based on the degree one possesses the Cardinal virtues imperfectly. The man who is more virtuous will lead a happier life than his less virtuous neighbor. Again Adler and Farrell base this conclusion on St. Thomas' claim that "human nature is not all together corrupted by sin, so as to be shorn of every natural good" (Adler and Farrell, 304).

Adler and Farrell propose that with the aid of Grace the Christian man is directed toward two distinct ends. First, man is directed to a natural happiness, which is the possession and retention of all natural goods, especially Natural virtue. Second, man is directed toward eternal beatitude, for which he needs the virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, which will lead him to the contemplation of the eternal, God. Adler and Farrell make it clear that

natural happiness is not an intermediate end; that is, it is not a means to supernatural happiness (Adler and Farrell, 306).

The above view, however, provokes some questions. If man, without the aid of Divine Grace, is truly *naturally* directed to possession of the Cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, however imperfectly habituated, and temporal government is an instrument by which man acquired these virtues, then should not the evidence of virtue be more abundant? Is human nature, left alone, capable of directing it's action to good? Is man directed to two distinct ends: natural happiness and eternal beatitude? In what follows I will respond to these questions within an Augustinian perspective, upon which my discussion of the nature of fallen man and the function of the state will center. With this foundation, I will argue that man on his own accord, without the aid of Divine Grace, cannot possess virtuous habits, even in an imperfect mode.

Preliminarily, I want first to consider the notion that human government, rare instances excepted, can nurture or act as an instrument by which man acts with natural virtue. "At best, civil society can by its repressive action maintain relative peace among men and in this fashion insure the minimal conditions under which the Church is able to exercise its teaching and saving

ministry. Of itself it is incapable of leading to virtue" (Strauss, 159). Therefore, the temporal law of government provides incentive or punishment which may work as a first step to virtue, will restrain the non-virtuous man, and provide peace in which it is easier for a virtuous man to exist and participate in the practice of perfect virtues and supernatural contemplation, man's highest human activity. St. Augustine wrote, "It is to our advantage that there be peace in this life...in order that 'we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all piety and worthy behavior'" (*City of God*, XIX, 26). However, it seems that the state is certainly not a *means* to virtuous activity in that it will instill virtue in its citizens; perhaps it can act as a *facilitator*.

The state can *facilitate* virtue by the fact that virtuous men do hold positions within governments. These men show the excellence that is possible in human behavior. The virtuous man becomes an example to men of what can and ought to be done 'in similar circumstances' of life (Sokolowski, 64).

However, the statement that government is an instrumental means to natural happiness or virtue, is based on the premise that a government may be organized by men of virtue, and that the acts of government may reflect this virtue, which is justice. Governments are made of many men, and thus the activity of government seems to

often succumb to man's base human nature, which is a nature without virtue. "For it is easier for people to fall into vice than to rise to virtue" (Sokolowski, 65). The Augustinian tradition emphasized the *de facto* corruption and degradation that history records in states as a proof of the need of Grace (Schall, 82). Even philosophers admit that actual cities are characterized by injustice rather than by justice (Strauss, 156).

This brings us to my first question. If virtue is proper to man, then justice would be proper to government. However, do we see justice in this World? Do we see justice in the classic sense, that reward will be given to the good and punishment to the evil (Schall, 95)? Does this justice exist? Why does this justice not exist? Because even though men of virtue may be in government, government consists of men and will reflect the corrupt nature of man.

We can use as an example the government of the United States. Our form of government is considered a model for *just* government in this world. In fact, Adler and Farrell consider democracy the best form of government, the one which leads most effectively to our natural happiness. Am I able to reflect on the United States Government and pronounce that it is just? The answer is clearly no. It is said that a sign of the justice in a society is how the *powerful* treat the *powerless*. I cannot think of a segment

of our American society more powerless than our children. How does our government treat children?

Let us look to the state of our inner cities in America. Does the American government do all it can for the children growing up in these warzones? This is a moot point; however, we can see that the fact still remains that children go without homes, without food, become victims of drugs, alcohol and prostitution, and are often killed in the streets that they play in. Indeed, it seems as if we are losing a generation to the ills of our society, and the government does little or nothing about it. Does our government possess justice?

A second example is the law of our state which allows parents to murder their unborn children. The unborn are truly the most powerless. An intrinsically evil act is an act which is always evil in and of itself in all situations, and the taking of innocent human life is such an act. Therefore, the law of our government which allows abortion permits intrinsic evil. A truly just government would not legislate such a law. St. Augustine remarks, "As a law, it is edicted for the common good and is necessarily a just law, for a law that is not just is not a law" (St. Augustine, *The Problem of Free Choice*, I.5,11).

As St. Augustine observed, Rome, one of the most powerful governments in Western Civilization, was not a republic at all, for there could be no justice found in

Rome (St. Augustine, *City of God*, II,21). Is this not because government is a device of men, and so will always fail to be just due to the failings of the corrupt nature of the men who govern?

Second, I would like to respond to the premise that man, unaided by Divine Grace, can act for our natural end of happiness. Adler and Farrell appeal St. Thomas' dictum that human nature is not completely deprived of all inclination to good for "even in a state of corrupted nature it (man) can, by virtue of its natural endowments, work for some particular good, as to build dwellings, plant vineyards and the like" (Adler and Farrell, 300). Indeed, man can perform the good of building a dwelling which may house and protect his spouse and children, and equally it is good that man can plant a vineyard to provide for himself and his family. But this does nothing to show that man, without divine assistance, can live a virtuous life without Grace. Surely Aristotle's vicious man, who is directed to evil and vice, is able to perform such tasks. Is this a sign of goodness in the vicious man or simply a matter of calculating what serves for animal survival? We can observe such industrious activity in a common prairie vole. This is not evidence of virtuous activity. As Aristotle says, "we do not use the terms temperate or profligate of the lower animals" (Aristotle, VII, vi 6). Indeed, humans have the power of reason, yet this alone

will not achieve virtue nor a natural happiness.

It seems rather that we should hold with St. Augustine that our virtue depends on God who by his free gift of Divine Grace lifts up the corrupt nature of man. For there is no middle ground, we are either lifting our nature up to God through the practice of theological virtue or bringing our natures down through the practice of vice. St. Augustine states, "sin is seeking good in anything but the creator." Thus, our seeking the good life, in the absence of God, is sin. We, ourselves, cannot live *rightly* unless he who gives us faith helps us to believe and pray, for it takes faith to believe that we need his help (St. Augustine, *City of God*, XIX, 4). Thus, according to St. Augustine, the only right life, is one lived with faith and prayer, a life habituated to the perfect virtues of faith, hope and charity. The only good is God, and all other goods and good acts, such as justice, are intermediate goods to the final good, which is possession of God. In order to possess these intermediate goods, which are participation in the divine, man must possess Divine Grace, otherwise man is indeed relegated to the goods they can possess without Grace, i.e. building dwellings and planting vineyards, goods proper to even vicious nature or the instinctual nature of beasts.

Adler and Farrell base their theory of happiness on two distinct ends of man: a natural end, happiness, and a

supernatural end, eternal beatitude. But arguably, there is no such distinction of ends for man; there is one single end, eternal beatitude. Happiness for St. Augustine is, "The possession of what is more than itself, in the possession of an immutable object (God)." Therefore, happiness is only "found in God." It is clear that we cannot reach the fulfillment of this happiness on earth, and fully possess God. Thus, our happiness on earth is an intermediate end, not a final end of human conduct (Copleston, volume 2, 81). We can reach our final end if we subordinate our will to the will of God. It is through the Theological virtues, then, that we perfect ourselves to possess the will of God and to not bend the will of God to suit our own will (St. Augustine, *On the Psalms*, 36).

Adler and Farrell admit that it is only through possession of the perfect (Theological) virtues that one can be truly happy. However, they believe that man works not only toward supernatural ends, but toward natural end, i.e. earthly happiness. For St. Augustine, it is true that we do act for happiness. But happiness does not come to fruition here on earth, and earthly happiness is not a final end of our temporal lives, as Adler and Farrell propose. To hold that it is is as great a confusion as locating our happiness in material possessions. In either case, it is our human will which wants to possess mutable goods, rather than the immutable good of God. But if our

ultimate happiness is truly God, then we will live lives of faith, hope and charity to realize this eternal beatitude.

If we accept that he who does not possess the natural goods that he wants is not happy, then the Christian who wishes to possess God will never be completely happy in this life (St. Augustine, *Happy Life*, 57). The Christian does not live to possess natural goods but the spiritual goods. Happiness in our human existence is not a requisite for the Christian reaching his final end. It is better to live a life of perfect virtue seeking God, which may not be the happy life that society prescribes, than to live a happy life in full possession of earthly goods and be damned. Our eternal salvation is more important than earthly prosperity or possession of the earthly goods. As St. Bonaventure said, "Our bodies make us the kin of beasts, our souls give us kinship with Angels." Thus, our happiness on earth, will only be found by living our lives in order to reach eternal beatitude.

The last topic I wish to take up is that, through grace, our human nature is *elevated and restored* (Adler and Farrell, 290). Adler and Farrell espouse the Thomistic tradition of the effect of original sin upon the nature of man according to which our natural inclination to virtue is diminished. This is simply a nature *weakened and disordered* by original sin (Adler and Farrell, 292). Thus, in effect, with the aid of Divine Grace, we are put on

level ground, and our nature restored. So to speak, original sin leaves our nature basically intact but, it may be urged, the fall is worse than Adler and Farrell take it to be. Fallen man seeks material items, power, and glory for himself. Man, through original sin, is ordered naturally to self-gratification. Thus, I think it is highly questionable if man can act with virtue without grace considering his fallen nature.

According to St. Augustine, man exists in only two moral states. He can be oriented to self, or to God, a type of social dualism. He belongs either to the crowd of the impious who bear the image of the earthly man, or to the collection of men dedicated to the one God (Markus, 45). Thus, St. Augustine conceived of the two cities; the City of Man and the City of God. This dual possibility for man can be further understood by the two laws he can live under: Temporal or human positive law, a law for the envious man within the City of Man; and the Eternal law, the law of God. It is within the framework of the two cities that we come to understand virtue, both natural, acquired virtue and supernatural virtue.

St. Augustine distinguishes the two Cities in that they are informed by "two kinds of love." It is the object of love which makes it temporal love, or love of the supernatural, of God. Those who live by earthly love focus on achieving their highest good with their temporal lives,

and seek to perfect their human nature within the State. The second society, found commingled with the City of Man, is the City of God. The citizens of the City of God are humans, Angels and God (Schall, 83). It is within the City of God that man finds his ultimate good, the final end, in virtuous activity through the aid of Divine Grace guided by the Holy Spirit.

Beginning with the City of Man, the empirical evidence of the fall of man can be clearly seen in the fact that we have governments and laws at all. The first man did not need such utilities as all was provided him by God. Thus, as a result of original sin, fallen man as a rational and social animal needs governance. St. Augustine's image of the heavenly city, which was his ideal for human governance, consists of a concord and peace of righteous men living in union among themselves under God and in God's presence (Markus, 64). Indeed an ideal, however we can easily see how human frailty, retarded by original sin, can make this an unachievable ideal. Thus, St. Augustine gives us instances of what the heavenly city is not, in the framework of the City of Man.

The paradigm instance of the City of Man which St. Augustine designates as the *Civitas Terrena* or another Babylon, is the Roman State (Markus, 59). Rome, one of the greatest western empires, received ambiguous treatment by St. Augustine, who at times rails indictments against the

empire for its pagan idolatry, corruption and moral decline (Markus, 56-57). In the first books of the *City of God*, he states that the Roman Republic "was not only 'very wicked and corrupt', but it was no republic at all" (St. Augustine, *City of God*, II, 21). For the Roman Republic possessed no justice within its walls because it was governed by non-virtuous rulers. Indeed, as James Schall states, "At first sight, for St. Augustine, the state was an evil, solely the result of sin" (Schall, 81). Thus, government exists because of the sinfulness of men. St. Augustine goes on further to equate governments with "great robberies" (St. Augustine, *City of God*, IV, 4). It appears as if Rome stands for the archetype of the City of Man, another Babylon.

However, the fact remains that there was virtue in the Roman state embodied in its people. In Book five of the *City of God*, St. Augustine speaks of the civic virtues of some of the pagan Romans who "subordinated their private property to the common welfare" and "resisted the temptation of avarice" (St. Augustine, *City of God*, V, 15). Thus, there was good found within the Roman Empire, the City of Man and no need to withdraw completely to a contemplative existence. Later, in St. Augustine's writings, Rome assumes a "neutral" status between the two cities; thus the Christian will be found serving within the Roman State, and will have a two fold citizenship (Markus,

58).

What then is the function of the City of Man, the function of the state? Unlike the Greeks who sought perfection of human life and virtue within the state and its polis, Christians cannot look to leaders to bring about a just, rightly ordered society. Only God's perfect saving act can bring about perfect order. So, Christians are often considered as aliens within the City of Man (Markus, 74). However, it is clear that a society must contain some order so that it may be somewhat well governed. Therefore, the City of Man is ruled by human positive law, temporal law.

Through temporal law, St. Augustine holds that while "government cannot make men good, it can secure public order, security, and the rights of property. Generally, the purpose of government is to help avoid conflict and to maintain an earthly peace" (Markus, 89). It is on account of man's fallen nature that human positive law exists at all. The man who does not strive to behold God, will not act virtuously other than the time in which he is compelled to do so by the temporal law. Usually, the man without Divine Grace will act with external virtue if it serves him well. Thus, the pagan ruler may practice courage in order to lead his troops into battles to win territory for his empire, or he could enact a just law so that his countrymen do not rise in rebellion against him. Therefore, temporal

law serves the interests of the ruler or ruling class well in that temporal law establishes some sort of order, without which it would be impossible to lord over any society.

In the final analysis, a society will receive some benefits from this order, in accordance to the variance of degree that order and law is able to be established. Governments thus serve to eradicate conflict, disorder and tension in societies. In this situation, men can raise families, educate their children, own private property and secure their possessions. St. Augustine recognized the sinful nature of man, "a race condemned," and the benefit of government and temporal law when he said "while they are feared, the wicked are held in check, and the good are enabled to live less disturbed among the wicked" (Markus, 95). The end of governments therefore exist *propter securitatem et sufficientiam vitae* (Markus, 95). In St. Augustine's later thought, there is no trace of a theory of the state being concerned with man's self-fulfillment, perfection, the good life or with educating man toward such purposes (Markus, 94).

Thus, because of the fundamentally defective character of human justice, it is a myth that temporal governments may achieve a high degree of justice (Strauss, 159). For temporal law is an imperfect law which is always and everywhere subordinate to the Eternal law, which is the

immutable, supreme norm of justice which God has imprinted on the human mind (Strauss, 159). The same can be said about the state instilling virtue into its citizens. Aristotle commented about the need of temporal law to manage men because men "naturally obey fear, not shame. They avoid what is base because of the penalties, not because it is disgraceful" (Aristotle, X, 9, 1179b 12-14). Temporal law makes the morally or virtuously inferior man act within the prescription of the law, which will prohibit his miscreant acts. The efficacy of temporal law hinges on power; men, because of their human, sinful nature, are slaves to their attachment to earthly goods. By threatening to deprive unjust men of their possessions as a punishment for their transgressions against their fellow man, it in effect acts as a deterrent to further injustices and malfeasance. Thus, the citizen within the City of Man, with its Temporal law, will not come to know virtue without the revelation of God and the gift of His Divine Grace. "From this all but hell of unhappiness here on earth, nothing can save us but the grace of Jesus Christ" (St. Augustine, *City of God*, XXII, 22). Governments only forbid external acts, and do not concern themselves with the interior motives or disposition of a man. Especially, government does not concern itself with man's passions, such as desire to commit murder. This means that the egoist who follows the conventions of society, not breaking

laws because it serves his best interest, is a good citizen in the eyes of the state. But this does not make him a virtuous man. Therefore, government cannot be said to instill virtue in its people. To act with virtue does not imply that one acts simply by the laws of the state, but rather that one lives and acts virtuously for the right motive, for the sake of virtue (Strauss, 161). "Only by faith in Christ Jesus is a man made holy in God's sight. No observance of the law can achieve this" (Gal, 2:16). Thus, the virtuous man does not murder because to murder could send him to jail, but rather because it is a grievous and mortal sin in the eyes of God and is opposed to the Eternal law. "The just man lives by faith" (Gal, 3:11).

Therefore, the temporal law must be fulfilled by the "higher law", which is the eternal law. It is when man is directed by the Eternal law of God that one may act with virtue. "It is Christianity which makes us virtuous men without need for the temporal law" (Markus, 89).

In review, Adler and Farrell posit that happiness is the final end of the state and that man, on his own accord, may be ordered to virtue. Adler and Farrell base their views in light of man's fallen nature according to St. Thomas Aquinas, that is a *merely weakened* human nature.

It seems reasonable to conclude that St. Augustine did not see the state as the final end of man's happiness. This can be seen by the fact that St. Augustine deemed

man's fallen nature as considerably more disordered than did St. Thomas. Thus, for men, unaided by Grace, it is rare that virtuous lives are lived within the City of God. It is clear that man has only one final end, which is God. All other ends are illusory. "Whomever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God" (John, 3:21).

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