

# REASON AND WILL: REMARKS ON AUGUSTINE'S IDEA OF POWER

*Jadwiga Guerrero van der Meijden / Karol Wilczyński*

Jagiellonian University in Krakow

jaga.zechenter@googlemail.com / grzymianin@gmail.com

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Contemporary discussions on the idea of power are directed toward its political dimension. Power is understood usually as a feature of governing, premiership, ruling *et cetera*. Pop-cultural visions build upon the idea of endless and unlimited political power, as do the popular series: *Game of Thrones* or *House of Cards*. Despite that, it seems that nowadays we are somehow witnessing the unprecedented impoverishment of the discourse of power. A description of a different dimension of the idea of power will be presented in this paper. The writings of Augustine of Hippo, an ancient Christian philosopher and a Church Father, are treated here as an example of one of the most extensive and fruitful representations of that alternative idea of power (Latin: *potestas*, verb: *possum, posse*), which is rich in political, as well as theological and anthropological aspects.

Without fail, Augustine most frequently employed the Latin idea of *potestas* in the theological context. The aim of his outstanding work – *De civitate Dei*<sup>1</sup> – is to argue that the infirmity (lat. *impotestas*, i.e. the state of being powerless) of the the Roman Empire is not caused by the new Christian religion, but rather by the unreasonable actions of Romans and their emperors. In particular, in Book IV Augustine describes the as irrational because it has lost justice (*remota iustitia*).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, he diagnoses the real origin of any political action as well as of any real power: reason and its submission to the Christian God as He is depicted in the Bible. Therefore, the theological dimension of the idea of power, which builds upon anthropological and political aspects, is central in his argumentation.

Nonetheless, the anthropological considerations are inevitable for his theology: without a vision of man, theology would be limited to sheer speculation about the divine and would remain empty of analysis concerning human beings and – in consequence – their political and social world. It is this anthropological

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1 *On the City of God*, trans. and ed. by P. Schaff, see: on-line: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.toc.html> [11.05.2015].

2 See: *De civitate Dei*, IV. 9-10. See also *De re publica*, 2.70.

reflection, with its theological, political and social aspects, that we will focus on in this paper. We will present an anthropology in which the core of any human power is the intellect. Power understood in such a way is the main concept used in Augustine's writings to describe the process of human motivation. Our analysis will be synthesized with and compared to Augustine's theological usage of the idea of power. The paper will be completed by a short description of the relevancy of Augustine's account of power to subsequent intellectual debates.

The aim of this paper is therefore twofold. On the one hand the anthropological aspect of the idea of power in Augustine's theory is investigated, which allows us to formulate a number of theses concerning the Augustinian use of the concept of power. Among these, one – regarding the structure of the act of volition – is of importance to the discussion of Augustine's voluntarism.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, we would like to present the anthropological approach to power, which could be considered unconventional within contemporary intellectual discourse, that involves the social or political context of power.<sup>4</sup>

According to Augustine a human person is a coexistence of three different elements. Augustine developed his theory of the powers in the human soul in line with the legacy of Plato's *Republic*, in particular, Plato's idea of the tripartition.<sup>5</sup> The Bishop of Hippo claimed the existence of the three parts of the human soul responsible for the three types of desires that often conflict each other. Where there is a struggle, power comes into play. As will be argued in this paper, Augustine described reason as the proper and guiding power of the human mind. Therefore, he considered reason a necessary condition of every act of will and motivation: those two could not be understood without an appeal to the concept of reason.

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3 For a discussion of voluntarism and intellectualism, see: Josef Lössl: Intellect with a (Divine) Purpose. Augustine on the Will. In: *The Will and Human Action. From Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. by Th. Pink / M. W. F. Stone, London / New York: Routledge 2004, pp. 53–77.

4 See for example: D. Béland: The Idea of Power and the Role of Ideas. In: *Political Studies Review* 8 (2010), pp. 145–154; R. A. Dahl: The Concept of Power. In: *Behavioral Science* 2–3 (1957), pp. 201–215; W. H. Riker: Ambiguities in the Notion of Power. In: *The American Political Science Review* 58-2 (1964), pp. 341–349; M. Foucault: The Subject and Power. In: *Critical Inquiry* 8–4 (1982), pp. 777–795. The article by E. H. Harris (The Power of Reason. In: *The Review of Metaphysics* 22–4, pp. 621–639) adopts a different approach and argues against merely political or social understanding of the idea of power.

5 Augustine, in some of his works, presents a different systematization of the structure of the human being (though not one conflicting with the Platonic tripartition). In *De Trinitate* the fundamental distinction based on which that structure is further developed is 's distinction between an external and an internal man. In *De quantitate animae* Augustine presents a seven-leveled developmental schema of a soul, each time specifying the characteristics of a soul representative of a given level. In *De libero arbitrio* the scheme of human cognitive faculties includes the five external senses, an internal sense (*sensus interior*) and an intellectual faculty. None of the above mentioned systematizations conflicts with the Platonic tripartition, which Augustine referred to frequently.

We summarise Augustinian consideration of the idea of *potestas* in its anthropological dimension (in respect to a man *in statu viae*)<sup>6</sup> into two dominant understandings. The first is the capacity to influence one's surroundings and manifest one's will in the external world and it is not directly connected to reason. We argue that this concept of human power is prone to variable limitations, prominent of which is its dependence on God's grace. The second use of the idea of power refers to the deliberative, judgmental, argumentative, estimative and questioning force of reason (*intellectus*). However implicit in Augustine's works, this understanding of power is a *sine qua non* of a coherent theory of human action and his philosophy. Reason is both a driving force of motivation and of will (*voluntas*). *Voluntas* is an intellectual desire that follows the judgement of the intellect. Moreover, the writings of Augustine, bereft of this anthropological usage of the idea of power, become very close to determinist or occasionalist standpoints, which conflict with Christian and Augustinian doctrine. The power of human intellect constitutes a significant topic of such works as *Confessions*, *On the City of God*, *On Free Will*, *On Grace and Free Will*, *On Nature and Grace*, *On Reprimand and Grace*, *On a Happy Life* and *On the Holy Trinity*.<sup>7</sup> We analyse them below in the presented, non-chronological order. The key to such a sequence lies in the correlation of the problems discussed in these works.

### CONFESSIONES<sup>8</sup>

Passages of *Confessiones* will serve as a detailed illustration of the Augustinian account of the activity of the will.<sup>9</sup> The powerful example of Augustine's conversion

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- 6 Augustine, as a Catholic theologian, differentiates between stages of human nature, in particular between the so-called prelapsarian, postlapsarian and terminal state of human nature. The first of the three refers to the condition of Adam and Eve before original sin. The second one refers to the condition of humanity after original sin and before final judgment, while the third refers to the state of salvation or condemnation after the final judgment. The Latin phrase *in statu viae* is an expression naming the postlapsarian perspective, the perspective to which we primarily refer to in this article. Our general remarks about the anthropological condition pertain to *status viae*. Only marginally will we consider the terminal state of glory or condemnation, each time stressing that we do so. For more on these distinctions see: K. Timpe / A. Jenson: *Free Will and Stages of Human Anthropology*. In: *Ashgate Companion to Theological Anthropology*, ed. by J. Farris / Ch. Taliaferro, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Company 2010, and E. Stein: *Was is der Mensch? Theologische Anthropologie*, Freiburg: Herder 2005, section I, point D.
- 7 All works discussed in the article are available in a Latin on the following website: <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/index.htm> [11.05.2015]. This source uses the classical edition: Augustinus Aurelius, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 23-47, Paris: J. P. Migne 1844-1855. For a critical edition of Augustine's works see: Augustinus Aurelius, *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, Turnhout: Brepolis, 1953-.
- 8 When quoting full sentences of *Confessiones* in English we will present the translation by E. B. Pusey, sometimes slightly adjusted. Online source: <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/Englishconessions>.

validates the thesis that it is the power of the intellect that accompanies and shapes volition. Although the understanding of the intellect as a human power appears only implicitly in *Confessiones*, it is still implied by this text. We will analyse Augustine's linguistic choices present in his narration, pleading his use of language supports our thesis of the prevolitional role of the intellect. Our exploration will first discuss the example and character of Augustine's conversion and consider the distinction between acts combining both mental and external activity and purely mental acts. In particular, we will argue that in the case of purely mental acts, the rational activity is the power that perfects volition and shapes it into its complete form.

It is the famous moment of Augustine's conversion that offers an in-depth and up-close insight into how the act of the will is exactly shaped. In the passage of book VIII of *Confessions* Augustine elaborates on what must have been merely minutes or an hour at most in real life. Yet through the magnifying glass of narration it becomes a complex act which description reveals with utmost scrutiny the life of thoughts, passions and calls of conscience – all of them combined in one arduous struggle. Since the thematisation of that moment presents one of the most detailed accounts of how the act of willing exactly happens, this passage plays an illustrative role to the more theory-laden writings of Augustine. Whereas the philosophical or theological analysis merely describes an act of the will with a short yet adequate word (e.g. *voluntas*), *Confessiones* lay out the internal mechanisms of that act step by step.

One of the first steps in the struggle of conversion is the recognition of what are the means of arriving at a conclusive decision.<sup>10</sup> The first mean towards this aim named by Augustine is wanting hard and earnestly (lat. *velle fortiter et integre*), which he himself lacks. His state of mind is an internal struggle of a will fighting itself and thus parted and hurt. The limping will (lat. *semisaucia voluntas*) is in part rising to make the decision of becoming a devoted disciple of Christ, and in a yet another part – is falling down (lat. *parte assurgente cum alia parte cadente luctans*). The saint-to-be is thereby far from even the first step on the way to decide. To partly want and to partly not (lat. *partim velle partim nolle*) is a sickness of a torn soul (lat. *aegritudo animi*) manifesting itself through the appearance of two, alternative partial volitions, instead of one, complete will (lat. *ideo sunt duae voluntates, quia una earum tota non est*). The lack of a complete and full will (lat. *voluntas plena et tota*) prevents the soul from action and whatever it partially wishes, cannot happen.

The next step, following wanting hard and earnestly would be to exercise power to act accordingly to one's wishes, i.e. put will into action. Augustine is aware of

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html [11.05.2015]. All English translations interwoven in the main body of the article are by the author [JGM].

9 *Confessiones*, VIII, 8.

10 *Confessiones*, VIII, 8.

the fact that willing is not always the same as being capable of acting accordingly to your will. The external conditions, e.g. the weakness of the body, might dismantle the actualization of an idea. In the case of the soul's activities, which do not include the activity of the body, this is not the case however. The limitations that apply to changing one's own mind are merely one's reason. No power to influence one's surrounding is required. The only power needed is that of thinking.

It is because the act of conversion is – especially in Augustine's case – an intellectual act, as the passage just mentioned already suggests: Augustine's first step was to draw a distinction between means to an end (wanting hard and earnestly) and an end itself (conversion). Other phases of the conversion described in *Confessions*, that cannot be extensively discussed here, allow for the formation of a conclusive judgment that his conversion is particularly intellectual.<sup>11</sup> In other words, for Augustine, converting means a change of one's thinking, an intellectual act concerning one's conceptual scheme, for instance the eradication of false assumptions or learning the true ones. It had already started when a nineteen-year-old Augustine first read Cicero's *Hortensius*. Christ's biblical call "convert!" – "μετανοεῖτε"<sup>12</sup> – stemming from the Greek noun *μετάνοια* means literally to change one's thoughts or to turn one's thoughts, since it is a combination of the prefix *μετα* – after, beyond or over with the noun *νόημα* translating into a thought or an idea. Augustine's conversion is a literal *μετάνοια*: getting over one's ideas. So will be his faith later on,<sup>13</sup> as the following clear formulation shows: 'Because if faith is not a matter of thought, it is of no account.'<sup>14</sup>

Let us return to the distinction between purely mental and partially mental and partially practical acts. As a purely mental act that does not require external engagement with the world, conversion requires no more than willing. While in other acts a will needs to be followed up by the power to manifest one's will in the external world, the purely mental act requires only volition. Once there is a will strong enough, there already is a conversion. Strong volition, therefore, equals having power (lat. *potestas*) to realize the act in the case of a purely mental activity of conversion. To put it in short: in faith willing is an action.

11 Many commentators judge Augustine's conversion as such. See e.g. J. A. Weisman: *Spirituality and Mysticism. A Global View*, Meryknoll / New York: Orbis Book 2006, pp. 99-104.

12 Mark 1:15 'τοῦ θεοῦ μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε'. English translation: "Repent and believe the good news." Matthew 4:17 "Ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς κηρῦσσειν καὶ λέγειν, Μετανοεῖτε, ἥγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν." English translation: "From that time on Jesus began to preach and to say, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.*"

13 For a general exposition of Augustine's account of the intellectual approach to faith (*intellectus fidei*), i.e. intellectual consideration of the teachings of faith, explaining them etc. see: M. Fiedrowicz: *Theologie der Kirchenväter. Grundlagen frühchristlicher Glaubensreflexion*, Freiburg / Basel / Wien: Herder 2007, section A II d, pp. 35-38.

14 *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*, 5. English translation: *On the Predestination of the Saints*, trans. by P. Holmes / R. E. Wallis, online source: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1512.htm> [11.05.2015].

Since in this case willing is a complete act and an act of conversion is an intellectual one, the intellectual character of willing becomes evident. This does not mean that there is no volition and it is taken over by intellectual activities. Will does happen, as a *grand finale* of thinking about why to convert, of overstepping one's fears or other emotional restraints, of listening to calls of conscience, etc. The example of Augustine's internal struggle of changing his own will shows, perhaps most explicitly, that it is a power of the intellect that guides a torn will and perfects a will into an undivided and decisive power. Let us regard the depiction of this guidance.

The narration mixes verbs describing purely volitional activities, such as to be attracted to, to be pushed towards, to be torn by or to be repelled from with verbs naming purely intellectual activity: to consider (lat. *deliberare*),<sup>15</sup> to say to yourself (lat. *dicere*),<sup>16</sup> to accuse oneself (lat. *accusare*),<sup>17</sup> to think (lat. *considerare*)<sup>18</sup> or to complain or mutter (lat. *mussare*).<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, at a point of narration the term 'will' (lat. *voluntas*) is used interchangeably by Augustine with the term 'mind' (lat. *animus*, not *anima* – soul).<sup>20</sup> The term *animus* undoubtedly brings about the meaning of a rational rather than volitional power. This suggests that the act of will, when properly and carefully examined, is accompanied and assisted by the power of intellect. Eventually, the will overcomes the sickness of partialisation and reaches the healthy full state through the internal struggle that involves deliberation as its crucial element. Other accompanying elements are of course feelings or movements of the heart, imagination and an incomplete wanting. Yet the closer Augustine gets to the point of turning, the more his narration takes on a form of thoughts, questions and advice. It is these thoughts, questions and advice that bring him to the verge of decision, as he himself says: "For I said to myself: Be it done now, be it done now. And as I spoke, I all but enacted it: I all but did it, and

15 *Confessiones*, liber VIII, 10. p. 769: "Nonne diversae voluntates distendunt cor hominis, cum *deliberatur* quid potissimum arriamur." English translation: 'Do not diverse wills distract the mind, while he deliberates which he should rather choose?'

16 *Confessiones*, liber VIII, 11: "[...] *dicebam* enim apud me intus: *ecce modo fiat, modo fiat*.' English translation (adjusted by JGM): 'For I said to myself, *Be it done now, be it done now*.'

17 *Ibid.*: "Sic aegrotabam et excruciar, *accusans* memet ipsum solito acerbius nimis, ac volvens et versans me in vinculo meo[...]. English translation: 'Thus soul-sick was I, and tormented, accusing myself much more severely than my wont, rolling and turning me in my chain [...].'

18 *Ibid.*: "Ubi vero a fundo arcano alta *consideratio* traxit et congescit totam miseriam meam in conspectu cordis mei [...]. English translation: 'But when a deep consideration had from the secret bottom of my soul drawn together and heaped up all my misery in the sight of my heart.'

19 *Ibid.*: "et audiebam eas iam longe minus quam dimidius, non tamquam libere contradicentes eundo in obviam, sed velut a dorso *mussitantes* et discedentem quasi furtim vellicantes, ut respicerem." English translation: "And now I much less than half heard them, and not openly showing themselves and contradicting me, but muttering as it were behind my back, and privily plucking me, as I was departing, but to look back on them."

20 *Confessiones*, liber VIII, 9.

did it not [...]”<sup>21</sup> It is therefore the power of reason that equips a will with what it needs in order to reach a more complete state.

The last moments before the Church Father converts consist of acts of intellect *par excellence*, that is the calls addressed to God formed as arguments: how long am I to wait, has it not been enough?<sup>22</sup> Those arguments bring him to the point of full and complete volition, the true wanting that is will and power – that of reason – at the same time.

The abovementioned example in which Augustine describes with detailed scrutiny how the act of the will comes about has clearly a reasonable foundation. The human person experiencing this act of will is of course a unity, torn perhaps by passions, imagination, calls of conscience and conflicting wishes, yet a unity in which reason plays a kingly role. The deliberative power of intellect cures the sickness of a torn will turning it towards the good that reason has found. As many years later Augustine will put it: “[...] everybody who believes, thinks – both thinks in believing and believes in thinking.”<sup>23</sup> The inevitable role of intellect is thus a *sine qua non* of will and reason may be called the power of willing.

#### *DE CIVITATE DEI*<sup>24</sup>

The aim of Augustine’s *Opus Magnum* is to refute pagan argumentation against Christianity, i.e. to present Christian religion not as a cause of the fall of the Roman Empire, but rather as its last defense. In this outstanding work Augustine describes how *potestas* is not connected with what pagan Romans believed it was: gods and goddesses, demons, unchangeable fate or heavenly bodies. It is the human intellect, supported by one true Christian God, which gives the real *potestas*. As Augustine explicitly states: “real and secure felicity is the peculiar possession of those who worship that God by whom alone it can be conferred.”<sup>25</sup> God is the beholder of the ultimate power and the ultimate good. Thus, those who successfully aspire to

21 *Ibid.* English trans. has been adjusted. Latin text: “[...] dicebam enim apud me intus: ecce modo fiat, et cum verbo iam ibam in placitum, iam paene faciebam, et non faciebam.”

22 *Confessiones*, liber VIII, 12: “[...] in hac sententia multa dixi tibi: et tu, Domine, usquequo? Usquequo, domine, irasceris in finem? Ne memor fueris iniquitatum nostrarum antiquarum. Sentiebam enim eis me teneri. Iactabam voces miserabiles: quamdiu, quamdiu cras et cras? Quare non modo? Quare non hac hora finis turpitudinis meae?” English translation: “spake I much unto Thee: and Thou, O Lord, how long? How long, Lord, wilt Thou be angry for ever? Remember not our former iniquities, for I felt that I was held by them. I sent up these sorrowful words: How long, how long, tomorrow, and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not is there this hour an end to my uncleanness?”

23 *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*, 5.

24 *On the City of God*.

25 *De civitate Dei*, II.23.1. See also *ibid.*, IV.33.

follow God, understood as the highest good possible, attain happiness and authentic power:

For, as He is the creator of all natures, so also is He the bestower of all powers, not of all wills; for wicked wills are not from Him, being contrary to nature, which is from Him. As to bodies, they are more subject to wills: some to our wills, by which I mean the wills of all living mortal creatures, but more to the wills of men than of beasts. But all of them are most of all subject to the will of God, to whom all wills also are subject, since they have no power except what He has bestowed upon them.<sup>26</sup>

What exactly is a human power that we receive from God? As mentioned above, Augustine accepted Plato's view of a human soul and his theory of the good. In some of Plato's dialogues (see: *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*) human actions are described as always directed towards some good. That is why human *potestas* is strictly tied to the process of motivation. Similarly to Plato, Augustine discerns three types of goods corresponding to the three parts of the human soul and those parts may be interpreted as the three kinds of motivation (lat. *appetitus*<sup>27</sup>): appetitive (lat. *concupiscibilis*), irascible (lat. *irascibilis*) and rational (lat. *rationalis*). The last one, the rational part, is responsible for knowing the general and ultimate good of a human life.<sup>28</sup> As an effect of original sin, the human soul lost its power over other parts of the soul and its desires.<sup>29</sup> That is why Augustine considers intellect to be the only human power *par excellence*. The intellect specifies a proper object of the will, which is the ultimate goal in life and, depending on the power of a man, directs the will towards either good or evil.

In *De civitate Dei* Augustine presents how ill-motivated people lose their power and begin to err. He argues that the false judgement of an intellect, which he terms the sin of pride, is the root of original sin.<sup>30</sup> False judgements are the result of improper or bad desire, i.e. a desire formed according to appetitive or irascible part of the human soul. Such desires disturb the recognition of the ultimate good and make people turn towards lesser goods. That is why Augustine considered a conversion to be an intellectual act that changes one's judgement about what is good:

For this all do who follow not God's will but their own, who live not with an upright but a crooked heart, and yet offer to God such gifts as they suppose

26 *Ibid.* V.9.4.

27 See: M. F. Burnyeat: The Truth of Tripartition. In: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006), pp. 1-23 for the further discussion.

28 See: *De civitate Dei*, XII.6 and XIV.13.

29 See: *ibidem*, XIV.21 and XIX.15. See also *De correptione et gratia* section.

30 See: *De civitate Dei* XIV.13 and XV.7.

will procure from Him that He aid them not by healing but by gratifying their evil passions. And this is the characteristic of the earthly city, that it worships God or gods who may aid it in reigning victoriously and peacefully on earth not through love of doing good, but through lust of rule. The good use the world that they may enjoy God: the wicked, on the contrary, that they may enjoy the world would fain use God.<sup>31</sup>

Augustine argues that desires of lesser goods are the source of *impotentia* and he gives two reasons justifying that. Firstly, such desires are opposite to God (considered as a specific good, the ultimate one): pursuing political power or sensual pleasures, one may not abide with God. Secondly, they deform one's cognition and prevent him from achieving good deeds; moreover, they do not allow him to love other people, create a *City of God*, but they rather make him use friendly relations to attain lesser goods.<sup>32</sup> That is why according to Augustine the real human *potestas* may be found only in the intellect, since intellect is the only source of a true judgment concerning what is good and the only faculty of the human soul that functions autonomously. The latter characteristic of the intellect as a human power will be described in sections below.

### *DE LIBERO ARBITRIO*<sup>33</sup>

This early dialogue presents an explicit use of a concept of power, a use that narrows it down to its more frequent use in common language.<sup>34</sup> It refers mostly to the human capacity to influence one's surroundings and manifest one's will in the external world. We will consider this understanding and discuss the scope of human power, in particular, the two dominant limitations of human *potestas*. This understanding of power is representative of all works of Augustine in which the concept of power appears contextually to the history of salvation.

In particular, the Latin *potestas* is always present in the discussion of two consequences of original sin: ignorance and difficulties (lat. *ignorantia et difficultatates*), the latter often referred to as a limitation of a power to act. This

31 *De civitate Dei*, XV.7.1. See also *Confessiones* XIII.9.10 and *De Trinitate* XV.20.38.

32 See: *De civitate Dei* XIX.15 and XII.24.3.

33 When quoting this work in English we use the following translation: *On the free choice of the will, On Grace and Free Choice and Other writings*, trans. by P. King, New York: Cambridge University Press 2010.

34 For an innovative translation of the Latin title of that dialogue into English and a commentary to Augustine's concept of will, see John Rist, *Augustine Deformed*, p. 80: "the most accurate, though not the most concise, translation of the title of Augustine's *De libero arbitrio*, his three-volume book on the 'free decision' of the 'will', would be *On the externally uninhibited power to choose which we have as moral agents*: thus seeing our *voluntas* as the moral character displayed in what we choose (will) to do and itself formed by what we habitually love and hate."

context of original sin's consequences appears in *Confessiones* when Augustine struggling with the limping will asks if that is not the result of Adam's trespass.<sup>35</sup> It is also present in *De Trinitate*<sup>36</sup> as well as in *De correptione et gratia*<sup>37</sup> and *De libero arbitrio*.<sup>38</sup> In the last remarked dialogue those considerations are preceded by a reflection on a good will.

In Book I of *De libero arbitrio* good will is defined as that which desires right and an honest life.<sup>39</sup> This definition of good will has to be complemented by the definition of happiness, which remains consistent in many of Augustine's works, such as *De beata vita liber*<sup>40</sup> or *De Trinitate*.<sup>41</sup> Happiness is shown as a combination of two elements – a will towards good and a power to exercise one's wishes – the first of which contains the above mentioned account of good will. Those two conditions – not entirely equal to each other as the formulation placed in *De Trinitate* suggests – involve the term *potestas* and accompany the topic of original sin. Let us therefore consider Augustine's formulation of the consequences of the first trespass.

Since Adam, whom Augustine treats not as an individual but rather as a representation of the whole of humanity, failed to act well when he had the power to do so and knowledge of what he ought to do, the consequences of his choice are twofold: ignorance and powerlessness.

First, not knowing what we should do, we fall into error – and then, once the precepts of justice begin to be revealed to us, we will to do these things but we cannot, held back by some sort of necessity belonging to carnal lust!<sup>42</sup>

The power of a human *in statu viae*, is thus limited and never exactly fitted to our wishes, even if they are righteous and desire an honest life, as a good will ought to

35 *Confessiones*, liber VIII: 9.

36 *De Trinitate*, liber VIII: XII, 16.

37 *De correptione et gratia*, liber I: XII, 33–34.

38 *De libero arbitrio*, liber III: XIX 51–55.

39 *De libero arbitrio*, liber I, XIV.29: "Nam credo te memoria tenere quam dixerimus esse bonam voluntatem: opinor enim, ea dicta est qua recte atque honeste vivere appetimus." English translation: "I think you recall how we described the good will, namely as that by which we seek to live rightly and honorably."

40 See section concerning this work below.

41 *De Trinitate*, liber XIII, XII.17–XIV.18.

42 *De libero arbitrio*, liber III, XIX.53: "[...] et primo erraremus nescientes quid nobis esset faciendum; deinde ubi nobis inciperent aperiri praecepta iustitiae, vellemus ea facere, et retinente carnalis concupiscentiae nescio qua necessitate non valeremus?" Augustine judges that as a just punishment. See *De libero arbitrio*, liber III, XIX.52: "This penalty for sin is completely just: Someone loses what he was unwilling to use well, although he could have used it well without trouble had he been willing. That is, anyone who knowingly does not act rightly thereby loses the knowledge of what is right; and anyone who was unwilling to act rightly when he could thereby loses the ability when he is willing."

wish. For the mark of the original sin wounds our nature and binds us to the powerlessness that is befitting a creature that ought to learn responsibility over its free choice. The power of such a creature is lessened in two dimensions: intellectually, namely in the capacity to recognize the good, and practically, namely in the capacity to act as we wish.

Another passage of *De libero arbitrio* is interesting for our investigation. Augustine wonders together with his prolocutor, Evodius, about beings in this world that could have some power over a man. In comparison between natural and voluntary activities Augustine states that when a man turns towards evil nothing has power over him to force him into evil. Beings greater than a man would not tempt a man into evil since they are just by their very definition (being greater than a man), and beings lesser than a man do not have enough power to force him. As the Bishop of Hippo puts it:

I believe you recall that in Book I we were in full agreement that the mind becomes a slave to lust only through its own will: it cannot be forced to this ugliness by what is higher or by what is equal, since it is unjust; nor by what is lower, since it is unable.<sup>43</sup>

A man is thus responsible for his voluntary ill-willed action and no one else is to be blamed for it. Augustine does however address the issue of man's responsibility over things, which do not remain within his powers and he does not hesitate to admit that one cannot be held responsible for those.

It is in this early dialogue that Augustine hints at an interrelation between the concept of power and the concept of will. According to him, we experience power when we do what we wish to do and for this reason nothing is as much in our power as our own will.<sup>44</sup> This reasoning, when laid out against Christian doctrine of God's foreknowledge poses a problem which The Doctor of Grace needs to face. For how can something remain in our power, being our free choice, if God knew already beforehand that we will do so? Augustine's answer rests on the distinction between causing something and knowing something. To know of somebody's future action is not equal to forcing him into performing it, as our everyday experience might well prove. Otherwise, we would meet a contradiction: since our willing was forced upon us, how can there be willing at all? Our will would not be a will at all, if it was not within our power:

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<sup>43</sup> *De libero arbitrio*, liber III, I.2: "Credo ergo meminisse te, in prima disputatione satis esse compertum, nulla re fieri mentem servam libidinis, nisi propria voluntate: nam neque a superiore, neque ab aequali eam posse ad hoc dedecus cogi, quia iniustum est; neque ab inferiore, quia non potest."

<sup>44</sup> *De libero arbitrio*, liber III, III.7: "Non enim posses aliud sentire esse in potestate nostra, nisi quod cum volumus facimus. Quapropter nihil tam in nostra potestate, quam ipsa voluntas est." English translation: 'You could not perceive anything to be in our power except what we do when we will. Accordingly, nothing is so much in our power as the will itself.'

But if it can happen that we do not will when we will, surely the will is present in those who will; nor is there anything in our power other than what is present to those who will. Hence our will would not be a will if it were not in our power.<sup>45</sup>

The latter passage argues further:

Quite the contrary: Since it is in our power, it is free in us. What we do not have in our power, or what can not be what we have, is not free in us.<sup>46</sup>

Augustine's response to the problem of foreknowledge involves more arguments, yet for our investigation the most interesting one is the above presented.<sup>47</sup> The quoted formulation ties the concept *potestas* with the concept of freedom (*libertas*): whatever is within our power, is free in us and whatever we do not have power over, ceases to be within the scope of our freedom. This thesis implies an understanding of power as that which brings freedom. We should however remember the close ties between freedom and responsibility as well. The prior brings the latter – once we are free to choose, we become responsible over the choice. Thus, *potestas* brings about responsibility as well.

The angles with which Augustine approaches the concept of power in his most famous early dialogue *De libero arbitrio* are therefore various. Firstly, power appears as the capacity to influence our surroundings when manifesting our will in the external world. Such power, shows Augustine, is not limitless. The history of humanity with its grim beginnings creeps up on us *in statu viae* and our power to realize both good and bad wishes is constrained by ignorance and the lack of the capacity to act. True, in the Bishop of Hippo's teachings, limitations can be overcome through cooperation with God's gratuitous gift – grace.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Augustine differentiates between the inherited guilt for the original sin, for which individuals are not hold responsible and the individual choices concerning the consequences of the original sin (e.g. whether one tries to overcome the lack of knowledge or remains ignorant or whether one fights the difficulties and seeks the help of grace or he surrenders), for which we are responsible individually.<sup>49</sup> Yet the constrains just mentioned influence our search for happiness, which needs to meet

45 *De libero arbitrio*, liber III, III.8: "Quod si fieri non potest ut dum volumus non velimus, adest utique voluntas volentibus; nec aliud quidquam est in potestate, nisi quod volentibus adest. Voluntas igitur nostra nec voluntas esset, nisi esset in nostra potestate."

46 *De libero arbitrio*, liber III, III.8: "Porro, quia est in potestate, libera est nobis. Non enim est nobis liberum, quod in potestate non habemus, aut potest non esse quod habemus."

47 For example, Augustine reasons in the following way. If God's foreknowledge is adequate, God foreknows human choices adequately. An adequate knowledge about human choices is that they are free choices (*De libero arbitrio*, liber III, III.8).

48 See the section concerning *De natura et gratia*.

49 *De libero arbitrio*, liber III, XIX. 53 and liber III, XX.56–58.

the two criteria in order to be realized: good will and the power to live accordingly. The accent Augustine places on the first factor is nevertheless greater, and if we only discipline our hearts to wishing the right things, the power should just follow as an award sent from above. What does that disciplining of the volitional faculty mean? Assuming we are free subjects, the discipline has to come from within. The only internal faculty capable of playing that role is reason. In cooperation with grace, intellect has to first discipline itself to properly recognize the hierarchy of goods. Then, with arguments, it has to adhere to will in order to prevent it from choosing lesser goods above the higher ones. The limited power we have is real since we are held responsible for our free choices. We are authentically free and we authentically exercise our power to act, even if we face restraining limitations that make our power look small or insignificant at times.

What is important is that the idea of power is tied to the idea of will. It is will and its use that gives us the experience of power; a will that, as we argue, takes its driving force from the power of the intellect.

#### *DE GRATIA ET LIBERO ARBITRIO*<sup>50</sup>

This response towards the pelagian heresy offers us with a better understanding of the scope of human powers. The significant aim of this text is the exposition of the doctrine of grace, the perplexities of which Augustine wished to unravel for the members of monastic communities. We will consider passages in which Augustine investigates the influence of God's grace and confronts it with the already discussed priority of one condition of happiness over another.<sup>51</sup> Those arguments are relevant to our investigation into the concept of power since they shed new light on the problem of the limitations of human *potestas*. The reasoning will involve two distinctively different uses of the concept of *potestas*, which should be contrasted here against each other.

One – the primary use, as we believe – is that which refers to the power of man's intellect, a power that shapes the will of man. Such power is deliberative, argumentative, questioning, judgmental, estimative, etc. Another understanding of power appears as the second condition of happiness. As already mentioned, it names the capacity to influence one's surroundings.<sup>52</sup> Subsequent discussion of the limitations of power concerns the latter understanding of power and – in a narrower scope – a faculty of will.

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50 When quoting this work in English we use the following translation: *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice and Other Writings*, trans. by P. King, New York: Cambridge University Press 2010.

51 That is the priority of the criterion of good will over the criterion of the power to act (not intellect). For more see the section concerning *De libero arbitrio*.

52 It has been presented in the section concerning *De libero arbitrio*.

Some passages of *De gratia et libero arbitrio* give raise to an over-interpretation of the influence of grace upon men and consequently an over-interpretation of the limitations of human power. It will therefore be our aim to present a more balanced and accurate view on that matter.

The human power to act is not a product of man's own decision or even reason, rather, it is maintained by God's grace; the only source of power to act for good. Man is powerless, and powerless he remains unless he is supported by grace. He can never produce the power to influence his surroundings *ex nihilo* – for as we know, the Babel tower fell and was never to be seen again. By himself a man can only execute the power to act wrongfully. How does grace exactly maintain and influence us? Augustine writes: "In order that we will, then, God works without us; but when we will, and we will in such a way that we act, He works along with us."<sup>53</sup>

Firstly, God's grace makes the limping, weak will reach its complete form of wanting the good. Secondly, God's grace assists men when they start acting for the good. Grace is therefore a factor pointing out the significant limitations of a purely human power *in statu viae*. The human power to act according to good will is basically a power shared by man and by God.

There is a yet another, more problematic, implication one could draw based on the above quoted fragment of *De gratia et libero arbitrio* in respect to human *potestas*.<sup>54</sup> In some passages the Doctor of Grace seems to suggest it is not just God's assistance that points out our limits, but rather that the very beginning of every good will is God himself. Let us consider such passage: "It is certain that we will, when we will. But God brings it about that we will something good."<sup>55</sup>

This sentence suggests that God makes us want the good in the first place, pretty much without our cooperation.<sup>56</sup> Some other passages also support this interpretation: "For He begins by working that we will, which He perfects by working along with our willing."<sup>57</sup>

Once again, these passages imply God as a cause of human good will. It therefore also implies limitations of human power to act: since it is a will that gives impulse to execute one's power to act, and good will originates from God, therefore also power executed for a good cause requires God as its first cause. Such a

53 *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, XV.33: "Ut ergo velimus, sine nobis operatur; cum autem volumus, et sic volumus, ut faciamus, nobiscum cooperatur."

54 See footnote 53.

55 *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, XVI.32: "certum est nos velle, cum volumus; sed ille facit ut velimus bonum."

56 The implication that lead Augustine to write *De gratia et libero arbitrio* and *De correptione et gratia* in the first place. For more on the motives that lead to the writing of these works and their similarity to the reasons for writing *Retractationes* see: M. Vessey: 'Opus Imperfectum' Augustine and His Readers. In: *Vigiliae Christianae* 52–3 (1998), pp. 269–270.

57 *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, XVII.33: "Quoniam ipse ut velimus operatur incipiens, qui volentibus cooperatur perficiens."

limitation of both will and acting power seems so restraining one might be tempted to think there is little to do for a good man himself, if not nothing. This significant limitation should be disputed however.<sup>58</sup> For if we assume that God works in us *not only* when we wish to do good yet cannot due to the powerlessness of our nature, *but also* before we even start wanting the good, human freedom appears to be severely limited. Given the interconnection between power, freedom and responsibility, not only human freedom but also human responsibility and human rationality appear to be severely limited. A creature deprived of self-constituency cannot be justly held responsible for the good or evil it was made to want. Such a creature cannot also be called rational, if it does not desire the good based on its own intellectual insight into it. All in all, given such an assumption, Christianity becomes a doctrine of a powerful deity and a creature deprived of the freedom of will. However, Augustine himself refutes this over-interpretation in the following passage:

Now one should not think that free choice has been taken away because the Apostle said: "God is the one Who works in you both willing and doing works in conformity with good will" [Phl. 2:13]. If this were so, he would not have said immediately before that: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" [Phl. 2:12]. When He bids them to work, this is addressed to their free choice – but then "with fear and trembling," so that they not become filled with pride over their good works, attributing their working well to themselves, as if their good works were their own.<sup>59</sup>

Men, we learn, are free and their will is theirs. It is because human will is a faculty that can be directed by a man towards the good, that a man is obliged by commandments to do so. He can also be reprimanded, by God or other man, when he does not do so, in order to be brought back on the right track. Once

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58 Indeed, the Augustinian doctrine of grace was at first misunderstood. The misinterpretation consisted in a reading that proclaimed an absolute power of grace and at the same time minimalised the role of human free will. Due to such an understanding some monks considered grace to be so influential over a man that they saw no reason to reprimand their brothers over their sinful behavior and they instantly prayed to God instead. *De gratia et libero arbitrio* and *De correptione et gratia* were Augustine's answer to such misinterpretations (For more on the historical background of the misunderstanding see: P. King: Introduction. In: *On the Free Choice of the Free Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, p. xvii).

59 *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, IXf: "Sed quia ipsa bona opera ille in bonis operatur, de quo dictum est: Deus est enim qui operatur in vobis et velle et operari, pro bona voluntate [Phl. 2:13], ideo dixit Psalmus: Coronat te in miseratione et misericordia: quia eius miseratione bona operamur, quibus corona redditur. Non enim, quia dixit: Deus est enim qui operatur in vobis et velle et operari, pro bona voluntate, ideo liberum arbitrium abstulisse putandus est. Quod si ita esset, non superius dixisset: Cum timore et tremore vestram ipsorum salutem operamini [Phl. 2:12]. Quando enim iubetur ut operentur, liberum eorum convenitur arbitrium: sed ideo cum timore et tremore, ne sibi tribuendo quod bene operantur, de bonis tamquam suis extollantur operibus."

equipped with good will, a man should not be boastful however when he achieves a good deed, since all good actions are achieved in cooperation with God. Men remain free even if they surpass God's law, as Augustine reaffirms in the following passage of *De gratia et libero arbitrio*:

The will is always free in us, but it is not always good. For it is either (a) free from justice, when it is the servant of sin, and then it is evil; or (b) free from sin, when it is the servant of justice, and then it is good.<sup>60</sup>

The above regarded passages discard a deterministic interpretation assuming that God is the efficient cause of a good will. It is rather the human intellect that grasps the appearance of the good and prompted by the beauty of it and gives rise to a will towards the good. True, God is responsible for the fact that there is the good we can intellectually recognise. He is therefore the final cause<sup>61</sup> of our aspirations after good. Yet if anything, it is the intellect and its power that could be called an efficient cause of the good will. Such initial good will, caused by the intellectual recognition of the good, is of course man-made and hence weak and humble. God's grace is inevitable in order to assist it and perfect it into a form that can be powerful enough in order to prompt a man to put good wishes into an action and not fall victim to pride at the same time.

In conclusion let us recall the Doctor of Grace's theory of grace in his own words from *De libero arbitrio*: "nothing is so much in our power as the will itself."<sup>62</sup>

### *DE NATURA ET GRATIA*<sup>63</sup>

In *De natura et gratia* Augustine's main objective is to refute Pelagius and his doctrine of free will that stressed human autonomy and its capability to avoid sin, which was based only on the knowledge of the Law of Moses or the doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth. Pelagius, according to Augustine, perceived will as an autonomous power enabling the human person to attain salvation on his or her own. Moreover, he accused Augustine of claiming a too extensive role of God's grace upon human actions and therefore, determinism.<sup>64</sup> That is why, in his

60 *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, XV.31: "[...] semper est autem in nobis voluntas libera, sed non semper est bona. Aut enim a justitia libera est, quando servit peccato, et tunc est mala; aut a peccato libera est quando servit justitiae, et tunc est bona."

61 A final cause in Aristotelian terms i.e. the end, Greek τέλος, distinct from formal, material and efficient causes.

62 *De libero arbitrio*, liber III, III.7.

63 English translation by P. Holmes and R. E. Wallis: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1503.htm> [11.05.2015].

64 See: R. E. Evans: *Pelagius: Inquiries and Reappraisals*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers 2010, pp. 66–89.

treatise, the bishop of Hippo had to develop a strategy of presenting human will and God's grace as independent sources of human motivation. He shows therefore two powers – that of God and that of man – and their specific roles in determining human action. As described above, Augustine considers human intellect to be the power presenting objects as good and directing the will to pursue it.

Why, according to Augustine, do people need God's grace? First of all, *in statu viae*, every human is equipped with a sinful body, which makes our condition “left half dead on the road, [...] being disabled and pierced through with heavy wounds, which is not able to mount up to the heights of righteousness.”<sup>65</sup> People are also prone to pride, a false self-perception, which causes ‘carnal’ and ‘earthly’ desires. It means that – as victims of pride – we do not direct our actions according to the ultimate good, but rather we decide to reject it in favour of such desires as the thirst for political power, loftiness or even sexual longings, the latter considered by Augustine to be “animal.” All these non-intellectual desires are the source and often the cause of false beliefs. All of that leads Augustine to an in-depth analysis of the role of grace understood as the force involved in motivating human persons towards the truth and the good:

there is, however, no method whereby any persons arrive at absolute perfection, or whereby any man makes the slightest progress to true and godly righteousness, but the assisting grace of our crucified Saviour Christ, and the gift of His Spirit.<sup>66</sup>

Even if one's intellect would recognize the proper good – God or His ten commandments – it would not be able to perform the action on its own, unless with the assistance of God's grace. God's grace is, firstly, a source of humility, a virtue, which does not lead anyone to be “full of pride,” i.e. full of thinking that one may choose good by “the self-same power.”<sup>67</sup> Secondly, God's grace supports the practical initiation of the intellectually empowered decision of will. Was, then, Pelagius right in his critique of Augustine as a determinist?

As presented above, the bishop of Hippo considered actions directed toward something bad as actions realised without God's intervention and, in fact, as manifestations of infirmity or blindness.<sup>68</sup> They are the result of a corruption in the power of the intellect: the corruption of deliberation and judgement. Only acts considered by Augustine as good are accompanied by God's grace: for instance the act of conversion depicted in *Confessiones* or the act of repentance of a sinner. That is why “man must pray to be forgiven [...], our will alone is not enough to

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<sup>65</sup> *De natura et gratia* 50.43.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem* 70.60.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, 38.32.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*.

secure its being done.” Augustine clearly sums up: “for what is more foolish than to pray that you may do that which you have it in your own power to do?”<sup>69</sup> Human persons are *empowered* only to form the right judgement, but the power of intellect stands unarmed against what is called by Augustine bodily desires. It is the role of God’s grace to lift us above them: even if the human intellect forms a proper judgement and a proper will, it still needs help to make it happen:

We pray for help, saying, ‘Lead us not into temptation,’ (Mt 6: 13) and we should not ask for help if we supposed that the resistance were quite impossible. It is possible to guard against sin, but by the help of Him who cannot be deceived. For this very circumstance has much to do with guarding against sin that we can unfeignedly say, ‘Forgive us our debt, as we forgive our debtors.’ (Mt 6:12) Now there are two ways whereby, even in bodily maladies, the evil is guarded against—to prevent its occurrence, and, if it happens, to secure a speedy cure. To prevent its occurrence, we may find precaution in the prayer, ‘Lead us not into temptation;’ to secure the prompt remedy, we have the resource in the prayer, ‘Forgive us our debts.’ Whether then the danger only threaten or be inherent, it may be guarded against.<sup>70</sup>

Augustine was not a determinist if he remained conceived that a human person is equipped with the power of intellect. Nevertheless, he could not agree with Pelagius due to, among others, the following reason. This thinker did not accept the crucial role of God’s grace in overcoming bodily desires and in supporting one’s humility.<sup>71</sup>

#### *DE CORREPTIONE ET GRATIA*<sup>72</sup>

There is however, according to Augustine, a perspective for a man to be set free from the limitations of the pilgrim’s condition. For *status viae* is *status naturae lapsae sed reparandae*,<sup>73</sup> and the reparation is that for which we all should strive. Once the creeping shadow of original sin is finally overcome, a man lives a life of complete happiness, filled with both good will and the power to do as he wishes.

69 *Nam quid stultius quam orare ut facias quod in potestate habeas? Ibidem*, 20.18.

70 *De Nat. et Gratia* 81.67. See: G. Bonner: *Freedom and Necessity. St. Augustine’s Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom*, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 2007, pp. 82–4. See: also Ph. S. Cary: *Inner Grace. Augustine in the Traditions of Plato and Paul*, New York: Oxford University Press 2008.

71 As it is described in the section of *De Trinitate*.

72 When quoting this work in English we use the following translation: *On the free choice of the will, On Grace and Free Choice and Other writings*, trans. by P. King, New York: Cambridge University Press 2010.

73 A state of a harmed, yet reparable nature.

In the text entitled *De correptione et gratia* Augustine offers us a peak into this heavenly perspective, a peak that discloses how human power will look *in statu naturae glorificatae*.<sup>74</sup> This consideration will serve two purposes. The first one is to complete our investigation into the scope of human powers to act by presenting both its fullest scope and a possible demise of human capacity to influence the external world. Our excursion towards *status naturae glorificatae* involves both uses of the concept of *potestas* and thus our second purpose is to show the primary use of the concept of *potestas* (as a power of reason) in the context of salvation. The deliberation of the eschatological perspective of human nature includes this use and our analysis aims at showing it has a solely positive semantic field.

The almost dogmatic current Augustinian description of our contemporary situation confronted with the eternal nature of man is as follows: “to be able not to sin, and not to be able to sin, to be able not to die, and not to be able to die, to be able not to abandon the good, and not to be able to abandon good.”<sup>75</sup>

This clear formulation shows how the scope of human powers is enlarged in the foreseen eternal perspective. Human *potestas* is to be capable to not sin and, apparently, equipped to do so, it is also to be greater than death and, finally, human *potestas* is to be capable of not abandoning the good ever again. Surely, it is to be supported by grace, yet in an unconditional and persistent way – we will not face the possibility characteristic to *status viae* of losing God’s help. Where our first freedom of will was to be able not to sin, the last freedom of will is to not be able to sin. Where our first immortality was to be able not to die, the last immortality is to not be able to die. Where our first persistence was to be able to not part from the good, the last persistence is to not be able to part from the good. Such scope of powers is by far the greatest in Augustine’s vision of a man. However glorious, it is not meant for all people.

Those who will not be brought to the glory of eternal salvation, will never overcome the limitations of power of the *status viae*. On the contrary, they will face the more restraining, as we might suspect, limitations of the *status naturae damnatorum*.<sup>76</sup> The limitations will be varied accordingly to the sins of mortals, suggests Augustine.<sup>77</sup> What this exactly means is open for speculation. We may take on a course of reasoning present in *De beata vita liber*<sup>78</sup> and speculate that to be powerless when one wishes the wrong things is an advantage, thus the greatest limitation of man’s nature is to be allowed to perform evil. We can also regard Augustine’s concept of *libido* and wonder if evil constraining man’s power does

74 A state of glorified nature.

75 *De correptione et gratia*, XII.33: “[...] posse non peccare, et non posse peccare, posse non mori, et non posse mori, bonum posse non deserere, et bonum non posse deserere.” (P. King’s translation was appropriated by authors here).

76 A forsaken nature.

77 See: *De libero arbitrio*, liber III, XXIII.66–68.

78 See the section concerning that work.

not consist in desiring that, which we can lose.<sup>79</sup> The perplexities of such speculations exceed Augustine's reflection however.

Finally, let us stress that, according to Augustine, to follow the righteous way and receive salvation is not just an achievement of our own choice and persistence. *De correptione et gratia* puts it more clear than elsewhere: free will is sufficient for evil, yet only partially sufficient for good.<sup>80</sup> To enlarge the scope of our powers is not solely within our own powers. Nevertheless, the eschatological vision of human *potestas* is unlimited by temporary limitations of *status viae*. This eternal perspective includes the primary understanding of *potestas* referring to the intellectual power. In a yet another eschatologically orientated text Augustine points out that Jesus:

[...] when speaking about the gift He was going to give to those who believe, He did not say 'This is life eternal, that they might *believe*...' but rather: 'This is life eternal, that they might *know* you, the true God, and Jesus Christ, the one whom You have sent' [Jn. 17:3].<sup>81</sup>

It is therefore the intellectual activity that awaits members of the heavenly Jerusalem. Such correlation of the intellectual activity with the state of salvation points out the most positive evaluation of that activity in Augustine's thought. It is by far not the only one. The opening passages of *De libero arbitrio*, for instance, discard the possibility of evil being taught to us by somebody else, for learning is always something good, as is all intellectual activity.<sup>82</sup> Thus, evil can only be going astray from learning. Reason has an unconditionally positive value for Augustine, a value unblemished even by heretical arguments it might consider. Without doubt, the semantic field of all intellectual activity and its power is therefore positive.

### *DE BEATA VITA LIBER*<sup>83</sup>

This orderly dialogue broadens our investigation into the Augustinian account of happiness, its conditions and, thereby, of power. Apart from naming the two already mentioned conditions of happiness, the dialogue elaborates on the levels of happiness that respond to lives that do not meet one of the two conditions. For

<sup>79</sup> *De libero arbitrio*, liber I, III.6–IV.10.

<sup>80</sup> *De correptione et gratia*, XI.34: "liberum arbitrium ad malum sufficit, ad bonum autem parum est, nisi adjuvetur ab omnipotenti bono." See also *De libero arbitrio* and *De natura et gratia* sections.

<sup>81</sup> *De libero arbitrio*, liber II, II.6: "Sed postea cum de ipso dono loqueretur, quod erat daturus credentibus, non ait, Haec est autem vita aeterna ut *credant*; sed, *Haec est*, inquit, *vita aeterna, ut cognoscant te verum Deum, et quem misisti Iesum Christum.*"

<sup>82</sup> *De libero arbitrio*, liber I, I-II.5.

<sup>83</sup> In this section we refer to Latin text only. For the source, see footnote 7.

Augustine's account in *De beata vita liber* is optimistic: a human is able to reach happiness.<sup>84</sup> The exposition of the passage concerning the stratification of happiness is relevant for our investigation since it presents us with the so far unobserved pejorative meaning of the concept of power. Subsequently, it allows us to imply a positive meaning of the concept of powerlessness.

Reflecting on many differently lived lives Augustine wonders how happy they are. Firstly, he draws a comparison between the two lives which both meet only one criterion of happiness. Perhaps counter intuitively, the Church Father judges the life that meets the second condition of happiness – the power to act as one wishes – and does not meet the first criterion – the good will – to be less happy than the life that meets the criterion of a good will but fails to meet the condition of possessing the power to act. We might here be tempted to think that the life that is least happy and thus most miserable is that which fails to meet both criteria of happiness. Yet, the life already mentioned – one full of the power to act and empty of a good will – is in fair competition with the life that does not meet any criteria of happiness. When laid out against an example of a totally miserable life, as we suspect, a life with no good will and no power to do the evil it desires, the ill-willed life with a power to do evil is actually even less happy, concludes Augustine. It is a lesser misery, he argues, to not achieve what one should not wish for in the first place, rather than to achieve what should never be an object of good wishes.<sup>85</sup> The questionable honor of the most miserable life belongs therefore to the life that meets the condition of a power and does not meet the condition of a good will.

The above-presented formulation offers us with an understanding of power that has a clear pejorative meaning. Our commentary has focused so far mostly on the concept of power in the context of good will. The concepts of good will and of power to do good deeds have a positive character. Once we broaden our investigation to consider the context of an ill-willed man, we face an understanding of an idea of power that meets an evident negative evaluation. Subsequently, it is the powerlessness of an ill-willed man that turns out to be an advantage, unlike a powerlessness of a good-willed man, whose happiness is less complete without the power to act. We thereby see that the powerlessness can have both a positive character – in the case of a life empty of good will, and a negative one – in the case of a life filled with good will. Human *potestas*, understood as the capacity to influence the surroundings, does not have, we can therefore argue, any clear value in itself. It is the context of human will that can award it with a positive or negative character.

84 *De civitate dei* poses it as a problem if a man can reach felicity (9.14). For more on Augustine's changing optimism towards human happiness see R. Avramenko: The Wound and Salve of Time: Augustine's Politics of Human Happiness. In: *The Review of Metaphysics*, 60–4 (2007), pp. 779–811.

85 *De beata vita liber*, II.10: "Nec tam miserum est non adipisci quod velis, quam adipisci velle, quod non oporteat." English translation: 'Since it is a lesser misery to not achieve what one wills, rather

*DE TRINITATE*<sup>86</sup>

In one of his last and most important treatises Augustine tries to present and defend the vision of the Trinity as a key idea of Christian doctrine. For this reason he establishes a theory of knowing God within the Trinitarian view. To answer the question of how deep human knowledge of the Trinity can be, he develops a specific usage of the idea of human power, which is the intellect – the only part of the human soul capable to know the mysteries of the Divine:

But that of our own which thus has to do with the handling of corporeal and temporal things, is indeed rational, in that it is not common to us with the beasts; but it is drawn, as it were, out of that rational substance of our mind, by which we depend upon and cleave to the intelligible and unchangeable truth, and which is deputed to handle and direct (lat. *tractandis gubernandisque*) the inferior things.<sup>87</sup>

The ultimate good for Augustine is of course God, the Creator and the source of all good in the world.<sup>88</sup> In *De Trinitate* the bishop of Hippo shares not only this Platonic view of the good, but also introduces the Christian idea of a human as God's image (lat. *imago Dei*). Thereby, he states that every human person is directed towards God by the rational part, the best and the most unique feature of man as a created entity. That is why the intellect determines the possibilities of attaining the ultimate good. According to Augustine it is the proper power guiding other motivational forces of the human soul, which are not able to discern the good themselves.<sup>89</sup> Human reason is empowered to do so, and capable of doing so, as long as it reflects the nature of its Creator.

In *De Trinitate* Augustine confronts a perplexing question: why do people resign from the proper guidance if they possess such a great tool as the intellect? Augustine's answer is told through a reference to an old story about an actor written by Plautus.<sup>90</sup> The actor bets with his audience that he will guess a feature, which is common to every person listening to him. He eventually wins by saying *you will to buy cheap and sell dear*. Augustine's commentary to this joke is significant:

If the actor had said: *You all will to be blessed, you do not will to be wretched*; he would have said something which there is no one that would not recognize in his own will. For whatever else a man may will secretly, he does not withdraw

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than achieve what one should not will.”

86 English translation by A. W. Haddan available at: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1301.htm> [11.05.2015].

87 *De Trinitate* XII.3.3

88 See *De civitate Dei* and *De beata vita liber* sections.

89 *Ibid.* XII.7.11.

90 Plautus: *Epiducus*, 51, ed. by H. T. Riley.

from that will, which is well known to all men, and well known to be in all men.<sup>91</sup>

This passage resembles the old Socratic idea that no one wills to do evil.<sup>92</sup> Augustine needs such thought in order to introduce the argument of the good (i.e. the Trinity) as a source of power (*potestas*) and evil as a source of weakness (*impotentia*). It is because unhappy people either do not attain what they try to get or they do attain it, but in an unruly way. For this reason “he only is a blessed man, who both has all things, which he wills, and wills nothing ill.”<sup>93</sup> If God is the highest good, then it is the knowledge of Him that makes people happy.<sup>94</sup>

However, as long as the knowledge of God is not possible in a strict sense, Augustine tries to present faith (lat. *fides*) as a proper level of recognition of the highest good. The presence of desires conflicting with the intellect – a part of human condition *in statu viae* – is the reason for human cognitive weakness:<sup>95</sup>

For by turning itself from the chief good, the mind loses the being a good mind; but it does not lose the being a mind. And this, too, is a good already, and one better than the body. The will, therefore, loses that which the will obtains. For the mind already was, that could wish to be turned to that from which it was: but that as yet was not, that could wish to be before it was. And herein is our [supreme] good, when we see whether the thing ought to be or to have been, respecting which we comprehend that it ought to be or to have been, and when we see that the thing could not have been unless it ought to have been, of which we also do not comprehend in what manner it ought to have been. This good then is not far from every one of us: for in it we live, and move, and have our being.<sup>96</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact of the incompleteness of faith, the human intellect is a source of, and the power to attain, faith by forming proper judgement.<sup>97</sup> Faith in the Trinity, as described by Augustine, is the only way to direct human life towards

91 *De Trinitate* XIII.3.6: “At si dixisset: *Omnes beati esse vultis, miseri esse non vultis*; dixisset aliquid quod nullus in sua non agnosceret voluntate. Quidquid enim aliud quisquam latenter velit, ab hac voluntate quae omnibus et in omnibus hominibus satis nota est, non recedit.” See: Cicero: *Hortensius* and Augustine’s *De beata vita liber* and *De libero arbitrio*.

92 See J. M. Rist, *Augustine Deformed. Love, Sin and Freedom in the Western Moral Tradition*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2014, pp. 64–68. See also *De civitate Dei* and *Confessiones* sections.

93 *De Trinitate*, XII.5.8. See the section concerning *De beata vita liber*.

94 See: *ibid.*, XII.7.10.

95 See: *ibid.*, VIII.2.3.

96 *Ibid.*, VIII.3.5.

97 For further discussion see: A. Ployd: *Augustine, The Trinity, and the Church*, New York, N. Y.: Oxford University Press 2015, pp. 27–29; R. Williams: Sapientia and the Trinity: Reflections on *De Trinitate*. In: *Augustiniana* 40 (1990), pp. 317–332.

the supreme good that is possible due to the power of the intellect, the faculty forming specific judgements.

One's will and decisions are then made according to the judgment of the intellect, letting him or her attain the highest good.<sup>98</sup> What is important is that one may not attain it, if he or she does not love it, and one may not love it, if he does not know it.<sup>99</sup> Human intellect is sensitive to losing beliefs or commitments and Augustine explains this with the concept of pride.

For the soul loving its own power, slips onwards from the whole which is common, to a part, which belongs especially to itself. And that apostatizing pride, which is called "the beginning of sin," (1 Tim 6, 10) whereas it might have been most excellently governed by the laws of God, if it had followed Him as its ruler in the universal creature, by seeking something more than the whole, and struggling to govern this by a law of its own, is thrust on, since nothing is more than the whole, into caring for a part; and thus by lusting after something more, is made less.<sup>100</sup>

Pride is then an overacted love of power. Augustine is certain which faculty in a human soul is responsible for this: it is reason, which forms a false judgement about being powerful enough in order to make oneself happy.<sup>101</sup> It is therefore within human power to make true or false judgements, but it is still beyond human power to make oneself happy.<sup>102</sup> It is so because of the reliance of the will in the decision making process on reason and other factors, such as God's grace.

In book XIII of *De Trinitate*, where Augustine compares God's, devil's and human capabilities to act he unavoidably refers to the idea of power. Obviously, God is omnipotent and his powers are limitless. But, the problem of power is therefore more apparent in the context of devil's and human's choice to leave God's rule and renounce allegiance to the perfect law. Once again, Augustine turns to the language of pride, used to explain the reason of ignorance of Satan's or Eve's and Adam's decision in paradise. According to the Church Father the reason for bad action is the love of power, because it is based on a false judgments concerning one's capabilities and forming unordered desire (*cupiditas*).<sup>103</sup> Augustine points

98 If supported by God's grace. See: the section concerning *De natura et gratia*.

99 See: *De Trinitate*, X.1.3.

100 *Ibid.*, XII.9.14: "*Potestatem* quippe suam diligens anima, a communi universo ad privatam partem prolabitur, et apostatica illa *superbia*, quod *initium peccati* dicitur, cum in universitate creaturae Deum rectorem secuta, legibus eius optime gubernari potuisset, plus aliquid universo appetens, atque id sua lege gubernare molita, quia nihil est amplius universitate, in curam partilem truditur, et sic aliquid amplius concupiscendo minuitur, unde et *avaritia* dicitur *radix omnium malorum*; totumque illud ubi aliquid proprium contra leges, quibus universitas administratur, agere nititur, per corpus proprium gerit, quod partiliter possidet."

101 See: *Ibidem*, XII.12.17.

102 See the section concerning *De natura et gratia*.

103 See: T. Nisula: *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence*, Leiden / Boston: Brill 2012, pp. 35–57.

here to a paradox of human power which can control one's judgement through the activity of the intellect, yet it is the activity of the intellect that forms the proper will and orders desires:

It is to be wished, then, that power may now be given, but power against vices, to conquer which men do not wish to be powerful, while they wish to be so in order to conquer men; and why is this, unless that, being in truth conquered, they feignedly conquer, and are conquerors not in truth, but in opinion? Let a man will to be prudent, will to be courageous, will to be temperate, will to be just; and that he may be able to have these things truly, *let him certainly desire power, and seek to be powerful in himself, and (strange though it be) against himself for himself.* But all the other things which he wills rightly, and yet is not able to have, as, for instance, immortality and true and full felicity, let him not cease to long for, and let him patiently expect.<sup>104</sup>

Despite employing many different metaphors, Augustine's anthropological vision offers a consistent theory of human power, proclaiming that to be powerful is to know and long for the highest good. In *De Trinitate* he presents three different dimensions of *potestas*, which become key ideas in his Trinitarian argumentation and his vision of the integrity of human motivation, all quite different from the contemporary vision of human capabilities.<sup>105</sup> Augustine's view of human motivation is rich and complex, which is why he inspired future debates on the human soul.<sup>106</sup>

## LEGACY

Indeed, future Christian writers grappled with much of the analysis of power that Augustine presented. Firstly, Boethius follows in Augustine's footsteps in his *Consolatio philosophiae*<sup>107</sup> stating that the result of every action depends on two factors: will and power. He strengthened the meaning of the power to act – Augustine's second factor contributing to happiness – when he defined the capacity

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and 150–190. See also *De civitate Dei* section.

104 *Ibid.*, XIII.13.17: "Optandum est itaque ut potestas nunc detur, sed contra vitia, propter quae vincenda potentes nolunt esse homines, et volunt propter vincendos homines; utquid hoc, nisi ut vere victi falso vincant, nec sint veritate, sed opinione victores? Velit homo prudens esse, velit fortis, velit temperans, velit iustus, atque ut haec veraciter possit, potentiam plane optet, atque appetat ut potens sit in seipso, et miro modo adversus se ipsum pro se ipso. Cetera vero quae bene vult, et tamen non potest, sicut est immortalitas, et vera ac plena felicitas, desiderare non cesset, et patienter exspectet."

105 See: J. Rist: *op. cit.*, p. 61.

106 See: *ibid.*, pp. 82f.

107 Boethius: *Consolatio philosophiae*, liber IV, prose 2.

to do evil as a lack of power. He therefore concluded that a good man is powerful enough to achieve everything, and a wretched man is powerless. Peter Damian in his extensive letter on God's power, *De Divina Omnipotentia*,<sup>108</sup> considered an interrelation of the concepts of power and will, regarded in Augustine's thinking already six centuries earlier. Anselm of Canterbury entitled his study of the free will with a phrase inspired by the Doctor of Grace's early dialogue<sup>109</sup> and included problems raised by Augustine in his own philosophy.<sup>110</sup> Peter Abelard did not ignore issues stemming from the Bishop of Hippo's writings,<sup>111</sup> nor did the author of a work primarily ascribed to Abelard, the so-called Pseudo-Abelard.<sup>112</sup> Finally, Hugo and Richard of Saint Victor recognized the relevance of Augustine's legacy for their own thinking about *potestas*.<sup>113</sup> Augustine's original and extensive research concerning different dimensions of the idea of power: anthropological, theological and political, remained influential in the Catholic culture of the subsequent ten centuries.<sup>114</sup> Yet – the history of thought has demonstrated to be selective in the long run and our contemporary debates remain bereft of some of the riches of the idea of power that Augustine first brought to light.

Contemporary intellectual debate is focused mostly on the political aspect of the idea of power: “power exists only when it is put into action, even if, of course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures”<sup>115</sup> – we read for example in Foucault's *The Subject and Power*. His diagnosis is that there is no power not applied into or not connected with the social structure. Even Morris' distinction<sup>116</sup> between a “power over” and a “power to” is restricted to a political meaning. As we tried to show, Augustine, on the other hand, followed the classical philosophical idea of finding the social within the individual. Thanks to such an approach he was able to describe not only the social relations, but also the God-man relation, as well as that of the inner

108 Petrus Damiani: *De Divina Omnipotentia*, chapters 2–4.

109 Anselm of Canterbury: *De libertate arbitrii*, for the concept of power see in particular: chapters If., V–VII, IX–XIV.

110 For example God's omnipotence versus the lack of the capacity to sin: *Proslogion*, chapter VII; for power in an eschatological dimension: *De casu diaboli*, chapters VIII, XII–XIV, XV–XXVIII; *Cur Deus homo*, cap. XVII.

111 Petrus Abaelardus: *Sic et non*, 29–38; *Theologia Summi Boni*, liber V.

112 Pseudo-Abelard: *Epitome christianae philosophiae*, also refer to as *Sententiae Hermanni*, cap. VIII, XIX–XXII, XXVf.

113 Hugh of Saint Victor: *De sacramentis christianae fidei*, liber I, pars 2, cap. 5–10, liber I, pars 4, cap. 1–25; Richard of Saint Victor: *De tribus appropriatis personis in Trinitate*.

114 That is, during the so-called middle ages, as the somewhat unfavorable later-coined term phrases it. Augustine's influence on Jansenists, J. B. Bossuet or N. Malebranche shows his legacy remained significant even longer.

115 M. Foucault: *op. cit.*, p. 788.

116 P. Morris: *Power: A Philosophical Analysis*, Manchester: Manchester University Press<sup>2</sup> 2002; see also D. Béland, *op. cit.*

soul, and to analyse them in terms of *potestas*. The idea of the power of the intellect was crucial in his philosophy and for that reason his followers created an important philosophical tradition known nowadays as intellectualism. Augustine's achievement is reflected in many ancient and medieval intellectual debates, yet it seems nevertheless to be largely lost in the contemporary discussion of today.

## CONCLUSION

The manifold understandings of the Augustinian idea of power discussed above, took account of its theological, political and – particularly – its anthropological dimensions. The idea of power in Augustine's anthropological thinking points in two major directions. Firstly, we have argued that the in-depth consideration of the illustrative example of his conversion, presented in the *Confessiones*, brings to light the intellectual, assistive power of reason that shapes volition and guides it into a complete and decisive form. Our confrontation with the theory of grace and its deterministic misinterpretation allows us to form a thesis that it is the power of the intellect with its insights concerning the good that gives rise to the initial form of the will. Both of those points are relevant in the discussion over Augustine's voluntarism, for they pose the question whether it is the will that arises first and plays first and final role in the decision-making process. Certainly, Augustinian voluntarism does not consist in valuing will above intellect, as commentators have frequently observed.<sup>117</sup> In the axiological order, the higher rank is that of the intellect, as the bishop of Hippo clearly stated himself.<sup>118</sup> It is the capability of volition to disregard the intellectual power of a man that discloses the core of voluntarism. Our considerations aim at showing that the intellect is the only power that can bring a toddling volition to its mature and thus decisive form and it is also the only power, which awakens the appetitive drive of the will towards the good. Whether volition can be still regarded as the only righteous candidate to the throne in the powerful kingdom of the human soul, remains disputable then.

The second understanding of the idea of power, which refers to the capacity to shape the surroundings according to one's will, has been analysed in respect to the scope of human *potestas* and its axiological character. Limitations of the human power to act are frequently correlated by Augustine to the postlapsarian nature of man and can be overcome through the support of God's grace. When the distinctively human limitations are surpassed in cooperation with grace, the power to act becomes less limited, but at the same time it also becomes a human and

117 For instance, in the Polish debate: J. Domański: O wolnej woli. In: Augustyn, *Dialogi filozoficzne*, ed. by J. Domański, Warszawa: Pax 1953, vol. 3, pp. 71–76.

118 For instance, *De libero arbitrio*, liber I, l.3.

Godly power at the same time. The elaborations regarding the axiological character of human power lead to a conclusion that it is neutral. Undoubtedly, the power to act can contribute both to human misery as well as to happiness, as can human powerlessness. This axiological ambiguousness of the power to act points to the primary understanding of the concept of *potestas*, namely, reason understood as that which can contribute to the valuable usage of any power. It is reason that guides human power to a good cause, and without reason power can only lead into the wretchedness of an irrationally driven existence. The interrelation of human freedom, power and responsibility confronts us thus with the ancient, yet still relevant call: never abandon that which empowers you most.<sup>119</sup>

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