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How The Journeys of Aeneas, Arjuna, and Augustine Portray the Need for Sacrifice

The journeys that people undergo can take a variety of forms. Yet, despite the seemingly unrelated nature of these different types of journeys, one can see that they share key commonalities. To explore these commonalities, one can observe the journeys that Aeneas, Arjuna, and Augustine take. Aeneas’ journey has Aeneas face the task of carrying out the fated responsibility of establishing a new home for his people and family in Italy, which forces Aeneas to give up both a relationship with Dido and a more immediate home for his people in Carthage. Arjuna’s journey manifests itself in accepting the necessity of killing his kinsmen in order to assist himself in the process of achieving enlightenment and ultimately escaping the cycle of reincarnation, which forces Arjuna to relinquish attachment to the products of actions. Augustine’s journey presents itself as a battle of internal wills in which Augustine must fully possess the will to develop a lasting relationship with God, which requires Augustine to leave behind his base appetitive desires. Therefore, the challenges that each of these journeys presents indicate that personal sacrifice is necessary in order for the person who must sacrifice to achieve a place of belonging.

First, Aeneas demonstrates that personal sacrifice is necessary in order to achieve a place of belonging through his decision to leave Carthage for Italy. In deciding to leave Carthage for Italy in accordance with the will of the gods and that of Fate, Aeneas sacrifices both a relationship with Dido and the immediate establishment of home for his Trojans. The fact that Aeneas sacrifices a relationship with Dido is evident in his apparent reluctance to obey the will of the gods. Virgil describes how, after a painful conversation with Dido, “moaning deeply, heart shattered by his great love, in spite of all [Aeneas] obeys the gods’ commands and back he goes to his ships” (V, 4: 498-500). The passage demonstrates that Aeneas truly possesses an affection towards Dido, one that he must give up because of his love for Troy and its people. However, even in his love for Troy must Aeneas make compromises in order to truly fulfill this love. Earlier in the heated conversation with Dido, Aeneas expresses his intense desire to build a new Troy. He says, “The grand palace of Priam would stand once more, with my own hands I would fortify a second Troy to house my Trojans in defeat. But not now. Grynean Apollo’s oracle says that I must seize on Italy’s noble land, his Lycian lots say ‘Italy!’” (V, 4: 427-432). This passage both expresses Aeneas’ desire to immediately provide a safe haven for his Trojans, which he does receive through Dido in Carthage. Yet, he must renounce this haven and any possibility of establishing a kingdom with Dido in Carthage in order to follow the will of Fate, which will ensure that a secure home for his Trojans and his son is established. However, the fact that protection for the Trojans is already granted and the fact that Aeneas does posses a sort of sub-love for Dido makes Aeneas declare that he “set[s] sail for Italy – all against my will” (V, 4: 451-452). Thus, the fact that Aeneas sets aside his personal desires for the sake of providing a home for his family and people demonstrates that personal sacrifice is required in order to achieve a place of belonging, even if that place of belonging is not reserved for the person sacrificing, but for whom the person is sacrificing.

Arjuna also demonstrates the attainment of a place of belonging through the sacrifice of the fruits of action. One can see that Arjuna is initially concerned with the fruits of action based on Arjuna’s reluctance to face his kinsmen in battle. Arjuna explains that he refuses to fight his kinsmen because the attainment of pleasures is not worth the destruction of his kinsmen. Arjuna says, “I lament the great sin we commit when our greed for kingship and pleasures drives us to kill our kinsmen” (B-G, 1: 45). However, Arjuna’s focus on kingship and pleasures reveals Arjuna’s delusion of regarding the fruits of action. Krishna reveals that one must be “intent on action, not on the fruits of action; avoid attraction to the fruits and attachment to inaction!” (B-G, 2: 47). In later teachings, Krishna reveals several reasons why one must be detached from the results of actions. Krishna says, “Always perform with detachment any action you must do; performing action with detachment, one achieves supreme good” (B-G, 3: 19). This supreme good that Arjuna achieves through detachment manifests itself in part through the establishment of cosmic order (B-G, 3: 24-25) and in part through the escape of rebirth (B-G, 8: 26-28). It is this ascension out of the cycle of rebirth and into the entity that creates total order that marks the place of belonging that Arjuna seeks through the sacrifice of attachment to the fruits of action, which in turn allows Arjuna to commit to sacrifices that are founded in action, such as limiting their breaths and practicing penance and discipline (B-G, 4: 23). While this place of belonging is different from that of Aeneas’ in the sense that Arjuna’s “home” is one that cannot be contained in physical walls, Aeneas’ and Arjuna’s homes are similar in the sense that they both serve as the final destination that follows a long journey rife with sacrifices both spiritual and physical. Therefore, Arjuna’s detachment from the fruits of action demonstrates sacrifice’s role in the attainment of Arjuna’s ultimate place in the order of the cosmos, which is where he ultimately belongs.

Finally, Augustine demonstrates the need for sacrifice in attaining a place of belonging through his toils in fully committing to a relationship with God. Augustine’s primary sacrifice manifests itself in relinquishing the desire for petty material pleasures for the sake of pursuing eternal happiness in the embrace of God. Augustine describes the struggle to pursue such an eternal happiness as a battle of wills. Augustine says, “The same is true when the higher part of our nature aspires after eternal bliss while our lower self is held back by the love of temporal pleasure. It is the same soul that wills both, but it wills neither of them with the full force of the will” (A, 8: 175). Therefore, in order for Augustine to completely will to follow God, he must sacrifice the will to pursue lustful actions. The nature of this sacrifice proves to be quite similar to the natures of the sacrifices of Aeneas and Arjuna. Just as Aeneas and Arjuna appear to lack capability to make their respective sacrifices, as evidenced by them receiving assistance or enlightenment from divine entities, Augustine vehemently asserts his inability to break free from the chains of habit that he forged. Augustine explains that “the rule of sin is the force of habit, by which the mind is swept along and held fast even against its will, yet deservedly, because it fell into the habit of its own accord. *Pitiable creature that I was, who was to set me free from a nature thus doomed to death? Nothing else than the grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (A, 8: 165). This passage demonstrates that his ability to will is compromised due to the habit that he himself created and enslaved himself with. This reasoning portrays a bleak outcome for Augustine since he possesses no means of escaping the chains of habit on his own and sacrificing his perverse desire. In order for Augustine to make such a sacrifice, God must grant Augustine the grace to do so. In other words, Augustine needs help from God in order to sacrifice his perverse desires to achieve happiness in God’s embrace, which Augustine would argue acts as a place of belonging since it is a place of eternal happiness. Thus, Augustine’s battle between wills of higher and lower natures demonstrates that sacrifice is required in order to achieve a true place of belonging.

In conclusion, the journeys of Aeneas, Arjuna, and Augustine demonstrate that sacrifice is a necessary action in order to attain some place of belonging, whether that sacrifice be physical, spiritual, or both. Aeneas pursues a place of belonging in his quest to establish a new and lasting kingdom for his people. The sacrifice he makes in order to achieve this goal presents itself in his decision to set aside his sub-love for Dido and in setting aside his desires to establish a second Troy sooner, without regard to the requirement that the new kingdom be in Italy. Arjuna’s place of belonging presents itself in the escape of rebirth and complete immersion in cosmic order. Arjuna’s sacrifice to this end comes in sacrificing attachment to the material fruits of action, thereby allowing him to make further sacrifices for the sake of discipline, which in turn will assist in attaining Arjuna’s goal. Finally, Augustine’s place of belonging manifests itself in arriving at a relationship with God, which acts as a place of belonging due to its nature of being a place of eternal happiness. Augustine must sacrifice his perverse will for base pleasures in order to achieve such a relationship.