

The Story of Andras, the Hero, and Grapto, the Convict

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Prologue:

Narrator: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to my philosophical theatre. Today I have three stories for you. One is about a hero who was willing to act for others, but was still regarded as a selfish man. One is about a convict who was given a chance to choose again, but was told that he couldn't make a change. And one is about an audience who comes to my theatre by accident, wondering what happens in the story, and shall leave with a new perspective on their previously held assumptions. Why should I keep on talking if the stories are ready? So now, let the music start, let the stage lights shine, and let the show begin.

Scenario 1:

The selfless and selfish hero Andras

Why sacrifice also, tragically, can be regarded as a selfish act.

Carrying his sword, wearing his armor, with bravery in his heart, the hero Andras walked into the palace of the devil. "Show yourself, devil!" shouted the hero Andras. As if answering him, the devil emerged from the darkness inside. First its claws as sharp as the thinnest crescent, then its teeth as hard as the oldest diamond, then its mouth as big as the top of a volcano.

Devil: How dare thee! Thou shalt not be here, mortal. If thou still want to keep thy life, leave before my wrath is poured on thee!

Andras: I am not afraid of you, devil! Because I'm the one described in the prophecy. I'm the most selfless man walking the earth, and I shall see you die right in front of my eyes!

Devil: Interesting... you know the prophecy saying that only the most selfless man can kill me. However, it won't hurt me even a bit to tell you that this is true, because there is **no one selfless** in this

world, not even you.

Andras: You are wrong.

Devil: How foolish thou are! Can any one of you mortals deny that there is time when you act only for your own? And do you still believe that **sometimes** acting selfishly doesn't mean being selfish? Fool! It is just because you are not in a **conflict situation** that you must choose between your or another's interest. Given that situation, all of you will act only in your own interests. Thy "selfless" shell is merely an illusion as your selfishness is not shown!

Andras: You are wrong. Even in the conflict situation you describe, man can still act altruistically. And I'm going to prove it. I am going to perform the most selfless act, which shall prove that I am a selfless man.

Devil: Really? What doth thou plan to do?

The hero Andras pulled out his sword and raised the blade before his throat.

Andras: I am going to **sacrifice** myself, in order to kill you.

The devil laughed. It laughed so violently that the whole palace was shaking. Dust clouds rained from the ceiling, yet the hero Andras was not afraid, and the blade did not even move a centimetre.

Devil: Funny. Why would you think that sacrifice is not a selfish act?

Andras: Because it is an act done in the pursuit of others' welfare. I sacrifice myself in order to kill you, to save others. I sacrifice myself because it is **right** to do so.

The devil laughed again. But this time, more in pity.

Devil: Interesting. Layeth down your sword, for this cannot hurt me even a little bit.

Andras: Why?

Devil: Let me tell you why. You think that because the **motivation** for you to help others is based on “righteousness” then your act is not a selfish act?

Andras: Of course it is not. It is a selfless act.

Devil: Then let me ask you a question: Why would you consider helping others as righteous behaviour?

Andras: This is not a difficult question at all. Because this kind of act benefits the whole world. It elevates mankind; it makes the civilisation we build better. If everyone is willing to act so, the world would be a wonderful place without lies, crime, sorrow, and pain.

Devil: So you want to make the point that, whether an act is right or wrong depends on the **characteristic** of that behaviour. Is that correct?

Andras: You can say so.

Devil: Good. Then let me ask you another question: would a criminal, an evil person, or a man who seldom thinks about others, consider this behaviour we talked about as righteous behaviour?

Andras: I don't think so, but I don't understand what you are trying...

Devil: (Interrupted) That's enough. You are already contradicting yourself! You're wrong, the behaviour itself is never “right” or “wrong”. It is just a behaviour. Only the **judgement** of a man makes this behaviour “right” or not. It is based solely on the man who thinks about it, don't thou see it?! Just as Shakespeare, a great writer among you humans, noted: “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”

The hero Andras laid down his sword.

Andras: You are making a persuasive argument, I have to agree. But if that's the case, then what truly makes us consider helping others is "right".

Devil: Let me repeat what you have said. You consider helping others as righteous, because it benefits the society, it benefits the world.

Andras: Right.

Devil: Then let me remind you: You shall also **benefit**, immediately or eventually, for you also live in the society that shall benefit! You wish that you could be helped like that by others, or you wish that society would be better so that you could be away from pain and sorrow. You will never consider a behaviour "right" if it hurts you, in one way or another! As long as the behaviour is beneficial, all yee mortals, shall consider it as "right" behaviour!

Andras: That may be true for some people, but not for me. I never think about what I shall get in return when I help others.

Devil: Oh you don't need to be conscious about this. How do you feel after you help others?

Andras: I feel satisfied.

Devil: That is the very evidence showing that you actually know how you shall benefit, just **unconsciously**. You don't need to be thinking of the benefits consciously to act, just like you don't need to be thinking about the road consciously to go home.

Andras: What exactly do you want to do by illustrating this?

Devil: Not much. We are done here.

Andras: What?! Why?

Devil: You say it yourself. The motivation for you to help others is

because you regard helping others as “right”. Yet I have proved the reason that you think it right is because you can benefit from it. So in a word, the motivation for you to help others is still a **self-regarding reason**. Even should you help others when there is a conflict, you are still acting for yourself. Can you deny that this is a selfish act?

Andras: I...

Devil: How lamentable. I value thy courage, but thou are merely another failure here, in my place.

Andras: No... No! We are not finished here.

Devil: Oh? Why not?

Andras: Maybe acting in the “right” way is not a selfless act, but sacrifice is obviously an **exception!** I shall die after I sacrifice myself, so clearly I get **nothing in return**. Yet I am still willing to sacrifice myself for a better world. Isn't that the most selfless act?

Devil: No, no, thou fool. You still benefit. Isn't it in your heart that you shall die a hero? You don't want to be forgotten, be nobody, because that causes you pain! You want to be famous, you want to be remembered as a hero, not as a normal person that I can pick randomly on the street! Or your conscience is motivating you. Knowing you have the ability, you feel uncomfortable if you do not come here to sacrifice yourself. You are still benefitting yourself indirectly, by **avoiding pain**.

Andras: I...I...never...considered that...

Devil: But deep down in your heart, you know it. Why do you think I can exist for so long? This is your human nature. This is the trap that none of you can escape. Fool, I feel pity for you.

The hero Andras was speechless for a while. Then suddenly, he raised his sword and cut out his throat. The gem-like blood sprayed out from his neck.

The sword fell on the ground; so did the hero Andras.

Devil: Thou fool! What are you doing?!

Andras: What... you have... spoken... is meaningless...

Devil: What?!

The hero Andras spat some blood.

Andras: You... may be right. But it's **meaningless**... to say so. If... sacrifice is... also a selfish act, then the world... is dark... dismal... horrible. You can't... gain... power... from vanity. You can't... gain power... from a meaningless statement!

The devil roared. It pulled out its hand and grabbed the neck of the hero Andras. The palace was shaking much more violently, as if the strongest earthquake was underground, and the earth was about to split and swallow all creation.

Devil: It's meaningless?! Thou fool! I shall tell thee what its **meaning** is! Because your human nature has a dark side! Inevitable dark side! Yet the building of your civilisation **needs people to sacrifice**! So ye mankind transformed it. Helping others is a praised act. The long-term benefit is valued, and the hero shall be remembered forever. Only then can your greedy heart still be satisfied when ye have to help others! Only then can there be heroes who are willing to sacrifice! Only then can the civilisation be built! Without this, it is merely toy bricks played with by ignorant kids, as fragile as the bones of a new-born baby!

The devil loosened its hand. The hero Andras was struggling. Then suddenly, he stopped. His blood quietly flowed and formed a little pond.

Devil: Don't blame me. It's not a horrible fact. Your civilisation needs to understand it. I, the devil, by the name of **Egoism**, shall keep on existing. And I shall wait here, for another to be aware.

The devil disappeared in the darkness. The palace was quiet, as if nothing had

ever happened.

Scenario 2:

Before the bullet hit his head

Why a criminal cannot choose not to sin, yet he still needs to be punished.

Time had come. Grapto, the convict, was sent for execution. He was in handcuffs, forced to kneel on the ground. The executioner tied a black cloth over his eyes. His thighs were shaking. There were tears in his eyes. Incomplete sentences were spat from his lips. Suddenly the cloth was taken away. He looked around. The executioner was silent like a stone. Then he saw a man in front of him, dressed in pure white, with golden irises.

Grapto: Who are you?! Are you an angel? Are you going to take me? Where am I going? Heaven? Hell? Oh, it must be hell... Oh, Lord...

Man: No. I'm not an angel.

Grapto: What?! Then who are you?!

Man: That's an insignificant question. I'm here because you have something to ask for.

Grapto: Yes! Yes, I do! Please give me a second chance! I feel so guilty for what I have done. The claws of guilt have cut my heart a thousand times. Please give me a chance to right my wrong! Please give me a chance to **choose** again!

Man: That's what you want to ask for?

Grapto: Yes! PLEASE!

Man: If that's what you want, I can do so. I can wind back the hands of time. I can let everything be just the same as the minute before you pull the trigger. But my question is, will you choose **another path** this time?

Grpto: Of course I will! I...

Man: (Interrupted) No. Listen to me carefully. Everything will be just the **same** as before. You won't remember anything about now. You won't remember the image of his body. You won't feel the guilt you are feeling now. No memory shall remain. So, let me ask you again, are you completely sure that you will act differently this time?

Grpto: I...

Man: Think about it by yourself. Answer me later.

Grpto was silent for a while.

Grpto: I... I'm not sure. There was indeed a time for me to choose, to pull the trigger or not. There was no one forcing me, influencing my judgement. So I should have been **free to choose**, right? I had the choice not to pull the trigger, right?

Man: No, you did not.

Grpto: What?!

Man: That's the thing I'm going to tell you. I'm sorry, you cannot choose not to sin. Everything is already **predetermined**. Your fate, your destiny, your sin, have been written in your name, your blood, and every elementary particle inside. Nothing is ever able to be changed.

Grpto: What! Why? How can my fate be predetermined? Don't I act via my own thought? Don't I have the ability to choose? If my fate is predetermined, then... WHY?!

Man: There is a stone in your hand.

Grpto looked down at his hand. Indeed, there was a stone, a small grey rough pebble, in his hand, out of nowhere.

Man: Let me ask you a question: If you throw the stone up towards the sky, what will happen to the stone?

Grpto: The answer is obvious, isn't it? It shall go up, and then fall back to my hand.

Man: Try it.

Grpto: Is this a game? What's the meaning of...

Man: (Interrupted) Try it.

Grpto did so. The stone did go up, and then fell back to his hand.

Man: Tell me, why is it that you can **predict** the action of the stone?

Grpto: Fine... I throw it, so it will rise. There is gravity, so it will descend.

Man: In other words, your throwing action **caused** the uprising of the stone, and gravity **caused** the fall. That's how your world runs: one event causes another, and causes another, and another. Everything is governed by the **causal connection**. There is no exception, which you humans clearly know. Otherwise, you would not be able to make predictions, nor walk on this land.

Grpto: Wait, everything...?

Man: Yes, everything, even you human beings. The Lord created you using just the same elements of the plants, of the land, of the very stone in your hand. If you jump, you will fall. The rule that governs nature also governs you, for you are also a part of it.

Grpto: Even my mind? But my mind is not like a **physical object**. It is not governed by the physical laws that describe the motion of things. Why are people's minds not an exception?

Man: Because your mind, or your will, can also be described in terms

of causal connections. You had the idea of pulling the trigger because your old memories came through your mind, and his face aroused emotion in you. You, therefore, felt shame, hatred, and anger, which **generated** your thought of pulling the trigger. Your old memories were caused by an older event, obviously.

Grpto: But I also had the thought of not doing so back there!

Man: Yes. You also had the idea of not doing so, because you knew that you would be punished by the law and moral rules, which were told to you before, many times. But it was not powerful enough at that time. Your conscience could not defeat your anger, which was **determined** by the situation given - nothing can change it. No matter how many times you try, you will choose to pull the trigger, given exactly the same situation.

Grpto: That's... Then why do I still have the feeling that I can choose? The feeling is so real!

Man: Your sense of freedom to choose is merely an illusion, because you are still ignorant of your **subconscious**. You are doing what you will, but your will is generated and processed by your subconscious. You cannot be fully aware of what is taking place inside your brain, so you wrongly feel that you are free to choose. Every decision you have made has causes, you just don't know it.

Grpto: So everything is fixed? Everyone's destiny is settled from the very beginning?

Man: Yes.

Grpto: And I must wilfully sin? I cannot choose anything **other than what I have chosen?** Oh, Lord...

Man: Yes. The Lord knew everything right after he created the world. He knows all the movements and positions of all particles, from the beginning of the universe to the vanishing point of all creation.

Every one of you is just like a train on a single gauge track.

Grpto: So I'm bound to kill him... God... I'm bound to be punished. I'm bound to face the fate of a death sentence...

Man: I'm sorry. But I can't help you. That's how your world works, how it exists. Any attempt at making an exception shall shatter your world.

Grpto looked down at the ground silently for a long while. The sky was grey, and the execution ground was windless, like the most remote grave yard. Then Grpto opened his mouth.

Grpto: This is unfair.

Man: What is unfair?

Grpto: **Punishment!** The reason why we will be punished is that we are expected to be able to fully control our behaviour. But if everything is predetermined, then we are actually "forced" by the world outside! Why do we still need to be responsible for what we have chosen?

Man: You are right. Viewed from the perspective of the truth, you should not be responsible for your behaviour. But punishment is still needed, except it is not for the sake of you.

Grpto: What?

Man: It is for others.

Grpto: I don't understand...

Man: The punishment is needed because it is **meaningful** to be a part of the cause-effect chain which predetermines others. There shall be people who change their mind and choose not to sin after hearing your fate. It is true that the feeling of free will is merely an illusion, but tragically, it is an illusion that needs to be maintained

for the sake of your civilisation. Without punishment or moral rules, although they are “meaningless”, there is no cause to change the evil thinking in some people’s mind; then no human society can stand on the ground. Actually, all rules set by humans are irrelevant from the perspective of the existence of the world. They are just meaningful for humans to survive.

Grpto: So I am just a cog, spinning in the gears of a societal machine, without any true meaning myself...

Man: That depends on how you define “meaning of oneself”.

Grpto: But that’s the fact.

Man: Yes. But it’s not a horrible fact, it is for the sake of your civilisation. I’m sorry, truly. I feel pity that both you and Andras have to understand this in the hardest way.

Grpto: What? Who’s Andras?

The man stopped talking. He bent down and grabbed the black cloth fallen on the ground.

Grpto: Who’s Andras? Then, what does God think about punishment? Is there hell? Come on! Answer me!

The man walked towards Grpto.

Grpto: Wait! What are you doing?! Who is Andras?! Where am I going?!

The man tied the black cloth over Grpto’s eyes. Grpto struggled violently and tried to escape. Then the executioner behind suddenly came to life, and with great strength forced Grpto to kneel once more.

Grpto: You said punishment is only meaningful in the human world, so the Lord won’t condemn me to hell for my unchangeable sin, right?! Then where am I going?! Tell me! PLEASE TELL ME!

Then, a gunshot rang out. The bullet hit Grapto's head. Everything went back to silent, as if nothing had ever happened.

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