

## **Vulnerability as the secret of self-determination in Gregory of Nyssa**

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This paper explores the relationship between vulnerability, or weakness, and self-determination Gregory's anthropology. In both *On the Soul and the Resurrection* and *On the Making of Humankind*, Gregory envisages human vulnerability as allowing us to ascend further than we otherwise would have, and gain strength and power we otherwise would not have had. This corresponds to an emphasis on self-direction in his political thought: we are created self-directing, so slavery is unnatural. These ideas initially imply that vulnerability is ultimately to be jettisoned in favour of strength. However, it is more complicated than that. Vulnerability can be jettisoned in the wrong way, and human ascent and realisation of self-direction can occur in the wrong way; slavery represents not only the slave's vulnerability, but the master's improper power. Gregory implies that vulnerability and self-direction need to be mutually informing, held in a fruitful tension. This has useful implications for how we ought to think about self-determination in political thought – it need not, and ought not, to be grounded in an individualistic and voluntaristic philosophical anthropology.