CEFI 2022 – History of Medieval Philosophy Assessment Notes

Information:

Later this month we will be starting History of Medieval Philosophy. One of the assessment tasks (25%) will be a short (10 minute) presentation on a historical figure. If you would like to, you can do a second presentation on another philosopher for another 25%.

Assessment task:

Create 2-5 slides and give a 10-minute presentation on a medieval thinker, covering:

a) who the figure was

b) when they lived, wrote & taught (historical context)

c) who their sources/influences, supporters & antagonists were

d) their main philosophical ideas, theories and/or contributions to philosophy

Available philosophers are:

Augustine

Peter Abelard

Averroes (Islamic philosopher)

Avicenna (Islamic philosopher)

Maimonides (Jewish philosopher)

St Albert the Great

St Bonaventure

St Thomas Aquinas

Francis of Vitoria

Presentation 1 – St Augustine Working Notes:

Slide 1: Title

Slide 2: Who Was St Augustine? - Aurelius Augustinus

* Convert to Christianity
* Bishop of Hippo, Numidia, Africa in the late 4th and early 5th Centuries.
* Doctor of the Catholic Church
* Philosopher:
  + Augustine refers to the enkindling of his own love of wisdom after reading Cicero’s *Hortensius.* He is also educated in Aristotle and Plato, and himself understands true philosophy as the “love of wisdom”
  + His writings are extremely significant for the development of philosophy in the Medieval period and have far reaching influence on several branches of philosophy including metaphysics, anthropology, ethics and political philosophy and epistemology.
  + The *Confessions* – the first autobiography ever written

Slide 3: Historical Context (When/what he lived/wrote/taught

* The first philosopher (chronologically) of the Medieval period in the history of philosophy.
  + Augustine is often referred to as a bridge between the Ancient (Classical period) and Medieval periods of philosophy. Because while his historical context, could still be situated as Classical (though he is situated during decline of the Roman empire and therefore at the edge of the classical period – fall of Rome was 476 AD), his life and writings deal with themes and philosophical questions which dramatically influence and shape medieval philosophy.
* Life: (See the *Confessions* of St Augustine)
  + Augustine was born in Thagaste, Numidia (Proconsular Africa a province of the Roman Empire – on the coast of modern-day Algeria) in the mid 4th Century (13th Nov, 354 – 28th Aug, 430 AD). His father Patricius was a pagan (later baptized before he died), his mother Monica was a devout Christian. He had a brother, Navigius, and a sister whose name is not recorded. Augustine was brought up as a Christian by his mother but not baptized because infant baptism was not the custom at the time (he was enrolled as a catechumen).
  + Augustine tells the story of his life, including the tumultuous years of his youth and young adulthood in his most famous work, the *Confessions*. Even while he was still a youth, he drifted away from the faith taught him by his mother and was negatively influenced by the bad company of troublesome friends. As a teen, he became heavily involved in unchaste relationships.
  + Augustine was intelligent and received a good education in grammar (though he was not always an exemplary student, describing himself as lazy) and in the later years of his education, studied rhetoric in Carthage (the capital of Roman Africa). He mastered Latin but was not as successful with Greek. He eventually became a grammar teacher, and later a very successful and famous teacher of rhetoric. It was in Carthage that Augustine was first exposed to the writings of the Neo-Platonists. He read Cicero’s *Hortensius* (a work that has not survived to the present day), which awoke in him “a love for wisdom” and became the catalyst for a long and arduous search for the truth.
  + For a short period after this moment, Augustine consulted the scriptures in his search for the truth but was disillusioned by the poor grammatical style of the translation and his inability to comprehend its meaning. Augustine continued his search for the truth, eventually meeting the gnostic sect of the Manicheans, “who presented themselves as Christians and promoted a totally ‘rational’ religion. They said that the world was divided into two principles: good and evil...” (*The Fathers*, 177), that opposed each other with equal strength. The sect promoted an intense dualism, claiming that the body was the source/locus of the evil in the person, whereas the intellect and spirit were good. The sect suited young Augustine, making it convenient for him to continue living with his mistress, a woman who bore him his son Adeodatus, and facilitated his career prospects. However, Augustine distanced himself in time from the group because the leaders of the Manicheans proved incapable of dispelling his intellectual doubts.
  + Augustine moved to Rome and then to Milan where he became a teacher of rhetoric for the imperial court in Milan. In Milan Augustine began to listen frequently to the Bishop of Milan, Ambrose and was fascinated both by the quality of Ambrose’s style and more especially impressed by the content of his preaching. Ambrose was able to resolve Augustine’s difficulty with the scriptures by his typological interpretations which illuminated for Augustine, the deeper philosophical meaning to be found in the texts especially of the Old Testament as leading towards Jesus Christ. While Augustine had originally listened to Ambrose in order to be able to more robustly compose his rhetoric against the bishop, he was soon deeply drawn by Ambrose to reconsider Christianity in a new light as the answer to his search for the truth.
  + At this time, Augustine also continued his extensive reading of the Neo-Platonists, likely including the works of Cicero, Plotinus and Porphyry. He also began to read the scriptures, especially the Pauline epistles and soon after to struggle against the vices he had been indulging in. Soon after this, Augustine was told the stories of Gaius Marius Victorinus, another famous Roman teacher of rhetoric, who converted to Christianity at an advanced age after studying the bible, and the story of St Anthony of the Desert. These stories had a profound effect on Augustine who saw his own carnal enslavement which in turn initiated an intellectual and moral struggle for Augustine. The dramatic spiritual crisis climaxed with a mystical experience of prayer in a garden, wherein Augustine heard the words “Take and read, take and read,” which he understood as an instruction to read the scriptures. The page fell to Rom 13:13 “Not in revelry and drunkenness, not in debauchery and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and as for the flesh, take no thought for its lusts.” His conversion was immediate, occurring on the 15th of Aug, 386 (32 years age). He was baptized on 24th April, 387.
  + After his baptism, Augustine returned to Africa with his friends with the idea of establishing a monastery and living community life. (During the journey, his mother Monica died at Ostia). He returned to Thagaste with this intention and lived the solitary life for a few years before being ordained by popular petition in 391. After ordination he moved to Hippo and established another monastery. His life was devoted to preaching and writing against the enemies of the faith and began his extensive literary activity which had a profound influence on the Church in Africa, of the whole Church and on philosophical and theological thought. He was consecrated bishop in Hippo in 396 and remained there for the rest of his life, working with tireless pastoral zeal (including holding public debates) and intellectual rigor. He died on the 28th Aug, 430 as the Vandals were laying siege to Hippo at the height of the decline and collapse of the Roman empire (which concluded in 476).

Slide 4: Sources/Influences and Supporters/Antagonists

* Sources/Influences/Supporters
  + Neo-Platonists
    - He sees in Platonism the compatibility of faith and reason and the soul’s ascent to God. (However, he sees their limitations also in that he doesn’t agree that they could have conceived of the Trinity.)
    - The goal of philosophy is happiness, - this occurs through the contemplation of the Truth, and experience of that “which is the end and purpose of human life.”
    - Platonic ideas = God’s creative knowledge. Man can participate in this knowledge because of the inner/intelligible eye of the rational soul. Participation increases according to the purity of the soul. Requires theological virtue of charity and illumination.
    - Unity in ideas (objective truths e.g. mathematics) which we learn, or recall in a way (Platonic *anamnesis*)
    - The limitations of the body/flesh and of the passions (the strength of concupiscence – early tendency to prefer the soul to the body (dualism). Preeminence of the soul.
      * Note: Plotinus’ metaphysics focuses on the three basic principles of: the One/Good, Intellect and Soul. These principles are both ultimate ontological realities and explanatory principles. (Plotinus attributes these to Platonic tradition). The One is the absolute, simple first principle of all. It is both ‘self-caused’ and the cause of all being for everything else in the universe. (Plotinus notes Plato’s Republic concept of “the idea of the good.”)
      * Marcus Tullius Cicero – 106 – 43 BC (Roman)
      * Plotinus – 204 – 270 AD (Greek/Roman Egypt)
      * Porphyry – 234 – 305 AD (Greek/Tyre, Roman Syria), student of Plotinus
  + Ambrose & Monica
  + His conversion to Catholicism after an intense personal experience of sin – Influential for development of work on anthropology, sin, evil, concupiscence, grace, freedom, virtue.
* Antagonists
  + Manicheans – gnostic sect, dualist, good/evil, body/soul
  + Donatists – African schism, Issue of readmission of Christians (traditors) to the faith after they renounced the faith in fear. Donatists believed they should be baptized/receive the sacraments again – the main issue is the validity of God’s grace and power in the Sacrament over the faith/power of sinful men.
  + Pelagians – Original sin does not affect us. Jesus is just a moral guide, but we don’t need grace to get into heaven only good works. Augustine develops the theology of original sin/Concupiscence. Man’s need for redemption and grace.
  + Arians – Jesus is not God but is subordinate to God.

Slide 5: Main Philosophical Ideas Theories &/or contributions to Philosophy

* Key Works:
  + *Confessions*
  + *City of God*
    - City of God (Man seeking/loving God) vs City of Man (Man seeking/loving self)
* Key Ideas:
  + Faith and Reason (A new key question for the dawn of medieval philosophy) - faith and reason should not be separated but go hand in hand... “two forces that lead us to knowledge.” “I believe in order to understand, I understand, the better to believe.”
  + Who/what is God/Trinity
  + Who is man?
  + Nature vs Grace
  + Sin and Evil (concupiscence and original sin)
  + Free will
  + Virtue
  + Justice, political and divine