PHILOSOPHY 151: Moral Philosophy

AUGUSTINE: The Love of God

Summary

1. Context
   1. Saint Augustine lived in a crucial period in history
      1. He was a powerful influence in the attempt to put down heresies
      2. He was born in Tagaste, North Africa
      3. His life followed the pattern typical of the young Roman provincial of the times
   2. Augustine was a highly successful teacher of rhetoric
      1. His philosophical position shifted several times in his search for a satisfactory set of beliefs.
         1. He joined the sect of Manichaeans
         2. He turned to Greek philosophy and in particular Neo-Platonism
         3. He came at last under the influence of Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan
      2. He entered priesthood
      3. He produced numerous works on Christian doctrine
      4. His teachings dominated Christian belief almost exclusively for more than nine centuries
   3. Augustine is the first Christian philosopher to formulate the doctrines of his religion in a comprehensive and enduring world view
2. Loving God is loving truth
   1. One must make an effort of will to prepare the mind to receive truth
   2. Faith, knowledge, and mystical vision may be conceived as progressive steps on the way to the transcendental understanding of God
   3. Only when God by His grace illuminates the mind can it grasp the truth
3. God and the Existence of Evil
   1. Existence of evil with the omnipotence and benevolence of God
      1. What is called evil in the universe is but the absence of good
         1. Disease and wounds mean nothing but the absence of health
         2. Wound or disease is not a substance for when a cure is affected, they simply cease to exist and not go away from the body and dwell elsewhere
         3. Similar to wounds and diseases, evil is not a substance for when it ceases to exist in the healthy soul, it cannot exist elsewhere
      2. All beings were made good, but not being perfectly good, are liable to corruption
         1. Seeing that the Creator of them all is supremely good, then they themselves are good
         2. However, unlike their supremely and unchangeably good Creator, their good may be diminished or increased
         3. If every being exists because it is good, then some good should remain to constitute the being for the being to continue
         4. Corruption of evil deprives the being of some sort of good
         5. If every being cannot exist without some sort of good, then it cannot be thoroughly and completely consumed by evil
         6. If corruption of evil deprives all the good of a being, then the being ceases to exist, and so shall the corruption of evil itself
   2. God does not will evil
      1. The omnipotent God does well even in the permission of evil
         1. God permits evil only in the justice of His judgment
         2. The fact that evil exists as well as good exists is a good
      2. The will of God is never defeated, though much is done that is contrary to His will
      3. The will of God, which is always good, is sometimes fulfilled through the evil will of man.
4. Freedom to Choose Good and Evil
   1. Divine foreknowledge and our freedom to choose good and evil
      1. There is a difference between God knowing in advance that an event will necessarily occur and His causing it to occur.
      2. God cannot do some things for the very reason that He is omnipotent.
   2. An evil will is one that fails to choose the good.
      1. To seek for an efficient cause of the evil will, is as if to seek darkness or silence.
      2. The will could not become evil, were it unwilling to become so
   3. City of God and the City of Man.
      1. Those who choose good he calls the citizens of the City of God
      2. Those who choose evil are called citizens of the City of Man
   4. Supreme good and evil refer to eternity
5. Account of True Religion
   1. Appreciation of the feebleness of unaided human reason
      1. The virtues of prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude that the realistic Greek philosophers value so highly are nothing more than prideful vices unless they are used in the service of the true religion
      2. That where there is no true religion there are no true virtues
   2. Peace is achieved not by war but by love
      1. Everyone desires peace, but the misdirected methods of the City of Man fail to achieve it
      2. Everyone should obey and teach the precepts of Jesus, “Love God” and “Love thy neighbor as thyself”
   3. It is impossible to judge from our earthly history whether we are blessed or not, we must accept without complaint the knowledge that the good may suffer earthly misfortunes and that the wicked may enjoy life
   4. The Last Judgment will be a day of reckoning when virtue and vice will be clearly seen and just reward and punishment meted out
      1. The City of Man will be dissolved and its citizens condemned to eternal punishment
      2. Although eternal punishment is a harsh judgment, the enormity of our sin merits it
      3. God in His goodness is not only just but also merciful, for He sent to us His only Son through whom the citizens of the City of God are saved
   5. The final vision of God, permitted to those who have lived in righteousness and been blessed with God’s grace, is the “reward of our faith”
   6. His vast description of the cities of God and Man completed, Augustine expresses the hope that he has communicated the meaning of the love of God through giving a true account of the true religion