UNIT 1   AUGUSTINE

Contents

1.0   OBJECTIVES

This unit tries to give the account of the beginning of medieval scholastic thinking as it concretely established from the Augustinean philosophy onwards. Neo-platonism has the basic foundation for the medieval thought. We shall attempt to capture the fundamental teachings of Augustine from his Platonic bent of mind, although interpreted from the religious perspective of his time.

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Augustine is a fourth century philosopher who infused his Christian religious doctrine with Plato and Neo-Platonism. He is also famous for his contributions to Western philosophy along with Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas. Augustine's doctrine stood between the extremes of Pelagianism and Manichaeism. Against Pelagian doctrine, he held that human spiritual disobedience had resulted in a state of sin that human nature was powerless to change. For him, human beings are dependent on divine grace; against Manichaeism he vigorously defended the place of free will in cooperation with grace.

Life

Augustine, also known as Aurelius Augustine was born at Thagaste in North Africa. He was one of the key figures in the transition from classical antiquity to the middle Ages. He lived nearly eighty years of the social transformation, political upheavals, and military disasters that are often referred to as the "decline of the Roman Empire." Augustine was a confirmed Manichaean during his early years as a student and teacher of rhetoric at Carthage and Rome. But in Milan, during his early thirties, he began to study Neo- Platonic Philosophy under the guidance of Ambrose. An account of his early life and conversion, together with

a reasoned defence of his Neo-platonic principles, may be found in the *confessiones* (confessions). He was named the Bishop of Hippo (Annaba, Algeria) in 396, and devoted the remaining decades of his life to the formation of an ascetic religious community.

1.2   EPISTEMOLOGY

Augustine time and again attacks the sceptic thesis that a high degree of probability is the most that the human mind can attain. In other words man cannot attain certain knowledge. He refutes this thesis in his book *Contra Academicos* saying that a man can attain certain knowledge. In his reply to the question of scepticism "how do you know that this world (even) exists, if the senses are mistaken?" He answers, "even if he is asleep and dreaming, he can refer to the world, so understood, and say, without chance of error, that either it is one or it is not. By which he means, even if it were true that I am mistaken about nearly everything that I suppose to be true, he argued, one inescapable truth will remain: "*Si fallor, sum*" ("If I am mistaken, I exist"). His answer certainly suggests the Cartesian "*cogito, ergo sum.*" What is to be remembered here is that for Descartes it is the argument of thinking being but whereas for Augustine it is indirect refutation of the principle of scepticism that certain knowledge is not possible and not a direct demonstration of the existence of the thinking subject.

Conditions of Intellectual Knowledge

After having established knowledge is certain and it is attainable he moves on to the conditions of intellectual knowledge. There are two ways by which man can arrive at knowledge of intelligible objects viz., 1. By rising from the data of sense to an understanding of the hidden causes of things, and, ultimately to a knowledge of Him who is the Highest Cause. 2. The truth is indwelling in us and the most excellent means of attaining higher intellectual knowledge is the contemplation and study of our own intellectual life. It is of introspection, for which purity of heart and the practice of virtue are necessary. When the heart is more pure the soul is also freer from all the defilement and by which the mind can mirror Him, who is the source of all the truth. Augustine following the Platonist tradition says knowledge is not derived from sense perception or experience, but they are some have impressed upon our minds *a priori*. Here Augustine rejects the Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis* as an explanation of the presence in the human mind of knowledge that is not derived from sense-experience. Knowledge is recollection, an exercise of the memory but in the sense that when I know I actualize what is learned in my mind, eliciting truths by a process of concentration. This sounds Platonian, but it is combined with a reluctance to believe in the pre-existence of the soul. Nor is the human mind able to realize knowledge unaided. Augustine believes that divine illumination is required to achieve this. Thus we attain knowledge by the illumination of God.

Theory of Divine Illumination

For Augustine, it is in the light of God, by which the mind is said to be able to discern the objects of intellectual vision. Some thinkers/readers have supposed that it is only a *priori* truths that Augustine thinks, are made intellectually visible by divine illumination. But it is not correct. When he teaches that we know

the essences of things in *rationibus aeternis*, he is careful to point out that we rise from the data of sense or from a study of our own intellectual life to knowledge of these essences. His meaning is that the essence of things could neither be, nor be known by us, unless they first existed and were known in the mind of God. For example in the *De Magistro* Augustine shows that ostensive learning is chronically and unavoidably plagued with ambiguity. Whether we are pointing to something to show what "blue" means, or showing someone a blue colour sample to illustrate what the word signifies, any given effort at ostensive teaching is open to misunderstanding. How can one know whether what is being pointed out is the colour blue, a particular shade of blue, a hue, a coloured object, its shape, or something quite different? In the walking case, is what is being demonstrated walking, hurrying, running away, taking so and so many steps, or what? If we manage to grasp what it is, it must be through the inner illumination of the divine light. Augustine says we consult "not the speaker who makes a noise outside us, but the Truth that presides over the mind within".

Perhaps Augustine's idea of divine illumination is meant to invoke supernatural aid in dealing with the problem of ambiguity. Thus the Divine, the teacher, can, through special powers, illuminate blue without illuminating anything more general, such as colour, or anything more specific, such as powder blue. Again, the inner Teacher, can perhaps, non-naturally, point to walking without pointing to hurrying, or to taking so and so many steps. If that is right, the learner who is intelligent enough will be precisely the one who is able to profit from this ambiguity free inner ostension that only the Divine, the Teacher can perform.

1.3   CONCEPT OF MAN

Man is the calumniation of God's creation. He says man has soul using a mortal and earthly body as one unitary entity. For him, man is "rational soul which has a body." It does not mean that the soul which has a body has two persons. His identification of soul to human being reinforces the platonic tendency to identify the person with the mind or soul. He places human being beneath God and above bodies. In his hierarchy of being the human soul is more excellent than all things known by the sense. Among the things it is nobler than sensible things which God created. "There is something inferior and something equal; something inferior such as the soul of an animal, and something equal such as that of an angel, but there is nothing better". There is nothing closer to God than the rational soul. The soul is not what God is, but a creature made by God, made not out of God, but out of nothing. Though the human soul is immortal because it does not cease to live, it is in some sense mortal. For in every changeable nature the change itself is a death, because it causes something which was in it to exist no more. Elsewhere he says God is absolutely unchangeable, while bodies are changeable in both space and time and souls are changeable only in time. Everything changeable is, Augustine adds, a creature, while that which is unchangeable is the creator. The soul as changeable in time, but not in place, holds the mid-rank position below the highest and above the lowest.

Origin and Destiny of Soul

From the above paragraph it is very clear that God created the soul, it would mean that the soul of Man is created by God, now the question is that what about the subsequent souls of human being. It posed the problem for Augustine.

To answer he listed four hypotheses concerning the origin of souls with a view of defending the justice of God, no matter which one would be correct one. There are as follows;

a. One soul was created and from it the souls of those who are now born are drawn.

b. Souls are individually created in each child who is born.

c. Souls already existing in some secret place are sent by God to animate and rule the bodies of individuals who are born.

d. Finally, the souls existing elsewhere are not sent by God, but "come of their own accord to inhabit bodies.

To sum up this view souls come from propagation, created new in each individual; they exist elsewhere and are sent into the bodies of the newborn; or they exist elsewhere and fall of their own accord in these bodies. From this one can conclude that Augustine assumed the soul's pre-existence. At the same time he accepts that he does not know whether souls come to be in the body from the one soul of Adam or are individually created. It is nonetheless, quite possible that he once thought that he knew the answer to the question about the soul, namely the souls existed before their embodiment and fell through sin into bodies or at least into these mortal bodies. He accepts the immortality of the soul and it is created by God. The problem of the origin of human souls other than Adam's discussed at large in *De Genesis ad Litteram libri duodecim.* Here only three hypotheses regarding the origin of souls subsequent to Adam are present;

a. All souls were created in the soul of Adam on the first day.

b. All subsequent souls come from the soul of Adam by propagation.

c. The new individual souls are created in the course of time.

The first two theories fit best with Genesis 2:2 which teaches that creation was completed on the sixth day, and with Sirach 18:1 which affirms that everything was created simultaneously. While traducianism seems most easily to explain the common inherited of original sin and the need for infant baptism, it seems to endanger the incorporeality of the soul insofar as it thinks of souls as propagated in a bodily fashion, as Tertullian had done, whole creationism is thoroughly compatible with the incorporeality of the soul made to the image of God, it makes it more difficult to understand how a soul could be created by god with the guilt of Adam's sine. Hence the first hypothesis seems least problematic as representing Augustine's view at this point.

1.4 CONCEPT OF GOD

His understanding of God is influenced by Christian understanding of God, Platonism, and Manichaeism. Christian understanding: God is eternal, transcendent being, all powerful, created the world out of nothing, etc. Platonism: it provided him with important strategic and methodological principles for his thinking about the divine. They admonished him to look within his own soul rather than to the external material world and to look with the eye of the mind rather than which the bodily senses. Manichaeism: God to be a luminous amass extended infinitely through space; God is subject to attack, corruption, violation at the

hands of rival power; again he believed that there were two independent divine substances in conflict with one another; his vision own allows him to see that the true God is being itself, the one source of everything exists, and He is true God Who is incorporeal and infinite without extension.

Augustine also believes God is incorruptible, inviolable, and immutable. But the interesting is that his ground of argument i.e. the supremacy of God. God is supreme, and since incorruptibility is better than corruptibility, God must therefore be incorruptible. The same pattern of reasoning, *mutatis mutandis*, yields the divine inviolable and immutability. Thus his arguments provide the attributes of God. Regarding the nature of God, Augustine assumes a position opposed to all the errors of Platonism. For Augustine, God is immutable, eternal, all-powerful, and all-knowing, absolutely devoid of potentiality or composition, a pure spirit, a personal, intelligent being. The mystery of the Trinity of God induces Augustine to consider God as being, knowledge, and love; and since the world has been created by God, it reveals a reflection of these three attributes of God: every creature should consist essentially of being, knowledge, and volition. Thus he presents his discovery that God is that which truly *is* as the climax of his intellectual ascent to God, as the philosophical articulation of the scriptural divine name, and as the final remedy to the long standing ignorance that plagued his search of wisdom. For these reasons we should expect the conception of God as true being to be fundamental to Augustine's mature thinking about God.

Proof for God's Existence

Augustine proves God's existence from *a priori* and *a posteriori* and point of view basing on the existence of reason. Because the essentially true character of the concepts of reason is the chief of the many witness to the existence of God. It is also attested by the necessity of a first cause, the rational character of the universe and the universal belief in his existence.

A Priori **Argument**

Augustine began by proving that human reason exists, something with which no one could argue. He begins to prove that God exists by proving that there is something higher than reason- appears to rely on the assumption that what is higher than reason must be God. Here Augustine proves not merely that there is something higher than reason but that there is something than which nothing is higher (*quo est nullus superior*)

A Posteriori **Argument**

In order to prove anything, we must first start with a foundation that is accepted as truth. Augustine begins with the platform that we exist. We cannot argue this because if we do, it is proving ourselves wrong. The mere fact that we can argue is a proof of our existence. Next he asks us if we are alive. We must also agree to this because in order to agree or to not agree we must be alive. Now he asks us if we understand these two steps to be true. If we do, then he has proven his next step, we have reason. For without reason, we could not understand these two basic concepts.

1.5   THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

In order to maintain God's omnipotence, benevolent, omniscient and his goodness to man Augustine is driven to the position that is God is the cause of everything

at the same time either he has to exclude the evil or explain it away. Evil is a fact of life, physical and moral. Physical evil can be allowed under the seminal good but what about the moral evil? As a metaphysician how can one explain it. The whole of creation is out of god's goodness and his love. He was not bound and compelled but rather his love inclined him to create. In other words creation is free act of God. Therefore existence if of every kind is good; one should judge its value in relation to the divine will, not from the point of view of human utility. He has willed everything for the best interest of His creature, and so even the evil must be good in its way. In other words evil is necessary for the enhancement of the greater good, in the same manner in which the shadow in the moon enhances the beauty of the full moon. Though Augustine was largely a Platonist, yet he could not have accepted matter as the reason of evil, which was suggested by Plato. The reason is that for Augustine even matter was created by God. Hence if matter be the cause of evil, then God will directly become the cause of evil. Secondly, God is omnipotent and so he could not be imagined to be limited by pre-existing matter. Evil is not good, but it is good that evil is. Firstly, what appears as evil is not really evil. It is only to enhance the excellence of good. For example, in explaining the birth of a man born blind, Jesus said that this man was born blind so that the glory of God may be made manifest. Secondly evil is conceived as a defect, as a privation of essence (*privatio substantiae*), as an omission of the good; for example, there is the evil of blindness; it is simply an absence of the power of vision; in due course this vision (or good) can be restored. According to the privation theory of evil, evil is the negation or the privation of good., good is possible without evil, but evil is not possible without the good; for everything is good, at least in so far as it has any being at all. Privation of good is evil because it means an absence of something nature ought to have. All kinds of evil including moral evil, are brought under the concept of privation. Moral evil cannot mar the beauty of universal creation, since it springs from the will of man or the fallen angels; it is the result of an evil or defective will, which is nothing positive, but merely represents a privation of good (*privatio boni*). The worst evil is privation *Dei*, the turning away from God, or the highest good to the perishable world.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Give the account of Augustine on the question of God.

   ....

   ....

   ....

   ....

2) How does Augustine understand human nature?

   ....

   ....

   ....

   ....

1.6 COSMOLOGY

In his account of the origin of the universe, Augustine maintains a doctrine which was not developed by the pagan thinkers that is God created the world out of nothing by his free act/will. This concept has to be distinguished from Neo-Platonist theory of emanation. According to Neo-Platonist theory, the world emanates from God as the overflow from His abundance without becoming in any way diminished or altered in Him which means to say that God did not act freely(since such activity would, he thought, postulate have in God) but rather necessitate *naturae*, the Good necessarily diffusing itself. Again creator God is different from an architect God. An architect God creates the world out of pre-existing matter or chaos or an architect God creates the world out of pre-existing matter or chaos or any such material. A creator God creates everything from His own self. So there is no matter independent of God even in attenuation form, as in Plato and Aristotle.

If there is matter, then Augustine holds that either it is absolutely formless or matter which is formless only in comparison with completely formed. If the former, then you are speaking of what is equivalent to nothingness, "That out of which God has created all things is what possesses neither species nor form; and this is nothing other than nothing." If, however, you are speaking of the latter, of matter which has no completed form, but which has inchoate form, in the sense of possessing the capacity to receive form, Then such matter is not altogether nothing in deed, but, as something, it has what being it has only from some formless matter, this very mater was created from something which was wholly nothing. So God is the creator of matter with the potentiality of having form or germinal potentiality. Thus God is the absolute creator of all things, even of matter.

The world as the creation of God depends on God, but the world and God are not one and the same, as is held in pantheism. God transcends the world, and from the world as the effect, one cannot fully know God. All that one can say that he apprehends god, but cannot comprehend Him. Together with matter all things else were created at the beginning. Creation was the act of an instant and so it is senseless to say that god created the world at any point of time since time and space were two among many other creation of the world. The Mosaic account of the six days of creation being merely a description of the six orders or grades of perfection in which things were created. Not all things, however, were created in the full possession of what came to be called their specific perfection. Augustine distinctly admits a process of development, as when in the treaties entitled *De Genesi ad Litteram*, he says: *"in semine, ergo, illa omnia fuerunt permitus, non mole corporeae magnitudinis sed vi potentiaque causali"* here he is alluding to the *seminariae rationes*. Seminal or germinal potentiality is not absolutely passive, but tends to self-development when the requisite conditions ripen in due course. St Augustine's theory of germinal potentiality was brought forward to reconcile the exegetic problem concerning the two contrasted statements in the Biblical books of Genesis and Ecclesiastes. This doctrine of germinal potentiality is more Aristotelian than platonic.

1.7   ETHICS

Augustine describes ethics as an enquiry into the supreme good and how one can attain it. He appropriates the eudemonist ethics of ancient philosophy. Happiness is a universal human desire, the goal of human endeavour. It is the supreme good. He does not equate happiness with pleasure or enjoyment, any more than Aristotle or the stoics do, but with the eternal contemplation and love of god, by this he was thinking , not of a purely philosophic and theoretic contemplation of God, but of a loving union with a possession of God, and indeed of the supernatural union with God held up to the Christian as the term of his grace-aided endeavour: one cannot well separate out in Augustine's thought a natural and a supernatural ethic, since he deals with man in the concrete, and man in the concrete has a supernatural vocation: he regarded the Neo-Platonists as discerning something of that which was revealed by Christ, Neo-Platonism as an inadequate and partial realisation of the truth. The ethic of Augustine primarily is an ethic of love. It is common in Augustine that what I do depends upon what I love, not merely in the sense of what I value, but above all in the sense that I act in accordance with a settled inclination. Acting in accordance with a settled inclination is, for him, acting voluntarily in the strict sense. Loving something is a necessary condition of willing it: sometimes Augustine suggests that it is tantamount to willing it. Loving the right things for the right reasons is a pre-condition of acting well. Loving the wrong things, or the right things for the wrong reasons, leads to evil actions.

If love determines action and is a symptom of character, self-love is the source of sin: more specifically, the source is pride, understood as a refusal to accept subordination to God, to acquiesce in one's place in the hierarchy of beings. In Platonist terms, this is a 'turning away' from god to self-absorption, a failure to understand the relationship between God and humans. Adam's fall results from the delusion that he is an autonomous being. His sin is a 'perverse imitation of God'. Therefore man should love God above all things; he should love himself with a rational love, seeking what is best and doing what is best for himself in the light of his eternal destiny; he should love his fellow man, desiring what is best for him and aiding him to attain it.

Virtue is defined in terms of order, in the early *de beata viat*, Augustine understands the virtues to possess a kind of measure that is without either excess or defect. In that work he suggests that the attainment of wisdom by the sage entails possession of the virtues, in his later writings he is less sanguine about the perfectibility of human nature in this life, life is a continuing struggle with vices; virtue is not a stable, attainable state, the virtues control but do not extirpate emotions. Augustine recognizes the traditional four cardinal virtues. Virtue is a form of love, primarily of God, but also of other humans. Justice is 'giving God His due' as well as loving one's neighbour. The practice of the virtues expresses the inherently social nature of humans: we are naturally members of societies. Augustine subscribes to the natural law theory; our awareness of the natural law derives from self love, or the instinct for self preservation and it extends to a realization of the need for justly regulated relations with others. Primarily, this realization is a form of the Golden Rule in its negative version 'Do not do to others what you would not have others do to you'. Augustine gives the natural, or, as he often calls it, eternal law the status of a Platonic Form inasmuch as he says of it, as he says of the forms, that it is 'stamped

on our minds'. Strictly speaking, the laws of human societies should be framed in accordance with divine eternal law, but it is political authority, rather than strict conformity to natural law, that gives validity to positive law. Only those human laws that are explicit contraventions of divine commands may be disobeyed, and Augustine's understanding of what constitute divine commands is specific: they are commands directly revealed in scripture, such as the prohibition of idolatry. Augustine is otherwise reluctant to assert as a principle that individuals may decide for themselves whether an individual temporal law is just or unjust, even if promulgated by an unjust ruler or without reference to the natural law.

1.8 POLITICAL THOUGHT

In the theology of Augustine, God becomes the creator of the saved and the sinner at least because of His decree. They belong to either of two cities. The elect, the saved belong to the kingdom of God and the sinner and the damned belong to the kingdom of Satan or Devil. The elect are the chosen people for living in communion with Him, and, the sinner is left to be condemned to the hell-torment forever. On this earth there is nothing to distinguish the one from the other, but internally in their inner spiritual constitution. They are two kinds of people far apart, the community of the elect does not belong to this earth. Thus the kingdom of god and that of devil are sharply divided. To the kingdom of god belong the faithful angels and the elect chosen to be so by His Grace. To the kingdom of Devil belong the devils and the damned, not predestined to redemption. The community of the elect has no home on this earth, but they remain united through his Grace, giving fight against the kingdom of the devil. In contrast, the damned people keep on fighting amongst themselves. For Augustine, the human world belongs to this worldly history is born the saviour of the world called Jesus. Again, on this earth stands the church, which may be called the semblance of the heavenly kingdom on this earth.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1)   What are the Political ideologies of Augustine?

....

....

....

....

1.9 LET US SUM UP

According to Augustine knowledge is certain and attainable. One should believe in order that one may understand. God is the source of all truth. It is he who illumines our mind to attain knowledge. God created the world out of nothing by His free will. His existence is essential condition of the moral and intellect life. Speaking of evil he says God is not the author of evil bur he permits in order that good may take place. The goal of man should be supreme good/ God. It is lasting and the rest are temporary.

1.10   KEY WORDS

Divine Illumination: For Augustine, it is in the light of God, by which the mind is said to be able to discern the objects of intellectual vision.

1.11   FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

Fuller, B.A.G. *A History of Philosophy.* Bombay: Oxford &IBH Publishing Co., 1955.

Macdonald, Scott. *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine.* Eleononore Stump and Norman Kretzmann. Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Edi, J. O. Urmson. *Western Philosophy and Philosophers.* London: Hutchinson & Co., 1960.

Masih, Y. *A Critical History of Western Philosophy.* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994.

Turner, William. *History of Philosophy.* New York: Ginn & Company, 1929.

Furley. *Routledge History of Philosophy.* Vol II. *From Aristotle to Augustine.* London: Routledge, 1999.

Sharma, Ram Nath. *History of Philosophy.* Delhi: Kedar Nath Ram Nath, 1950.

Shields, Christopher. *Aristotle*, London: Routledge, 2007.

D. J. O' Connor, Edi. *A Critical History of Western Philosophy.* New York: The Free Press, 1964.

Online: *http://wiki.answers.com/Q/ What_is_Augustine%27s_proof_of_God%27s_existence.*