

Philosophy 302

Mediaeval Philosophy

Lecture 11



Saint Augustine (354-430 AD)

Augustine's Moral Theory

1. From *The Way of Life of the Catholic Church* (~388 AD)

Chapter 3

Project: A Rational Investigation Into How Humans Ought To Live.

We all wish to be happy — So what is happiness for humans?

- 1. To desire what cannot be attained = to be tormented**
- 2. To attain what should not be desired = to be deceived**
- 3. Not to desire what should be desired = to be diseased**
- 4. The happy life for a human being is one in which
that which is best for a human being is desired and possessed**

(5) So we have to discover what the highest good for humans is.

(a) Something inferior to humans? — See Aristotle on vulgar, ‘animal’, goods.

(a) can’t be the highest good since there is something higher

(b) Something similar to humans — Aristotle’s solution? - a particular form of human life.

If there is something higher than humans (b) cannot be the highest good.

The highest good must guarantee happiness

The only thing which can guarantee our happiness is something which cannot be taken from us against our will.

Chapter 4

(6) What is higher than humans?

What is a human being? — Compare Aristotle's discussion

A composite of body and soul.

Which is most properly said to be human — body, soul, or composite?

Augustine doesn't settle the question here.

Insists that highest good for humans is the good of the soul
or the good of the composite.

[Compare Aristotle — highest good is that of animated human body.]

Chapter 5.

(7) Highest good of body = what makes it most excellent = soul.

So if there is something superior to the soul this will be the highest good for humans.

(8) If humans are bodies, highest good is the soul.

But morals do not have to do with the body but rather the soul.

A body is better when ruled by a virtuous soul [see Aristotle.]

So the highest good for humans will be whatever perfects the soul.

So what makes the soul perfect?

Chapter 6.

(9) Virtue perfects the soul.

The soul seeks to attain virtue.

Virtue is not the soul itself.

So either in the soul as a disposition of the soul or something outside the soul.

Either way something must be pursued.

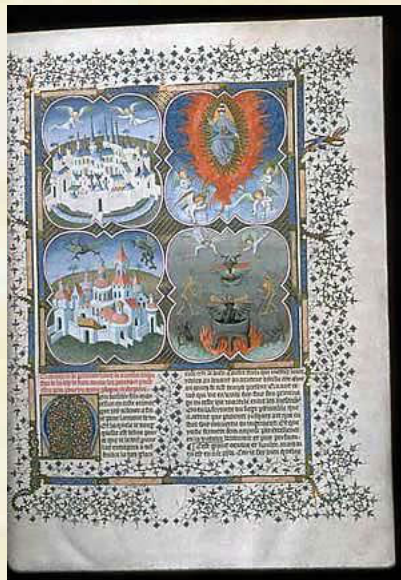
(10) So what we seek to guarantee virtue is either a wise man or God.

But only God is cannot be taken from us against our will.

‘If we follow after him we live well;
if we reach him we not only live well but happily.’

Augustine's Moral Theory

2. From *The City of God* (~413-427AD)



The City of God and The City of Man

The ultimate good is eternal life and the ultimate evil eternal death.

To attain the ultimate good we must live correctly - by faith.

The ultimate good is attainable only with divine aid — GRACE

Philosophers have wrongly sought happiness in this life and wrongly thought that they could attain it for themselves.

This is nonsense — life is miserable.

Goods of the body in this life are entirely contingent and unreliable.

Goods of the mind:

— sensation - contingent — deafness, blindness ...

— intelligence - again contingent - madness may set in.

Virtue:

Virtue is not one of primary needs. It is the result of training.

Even virtue is not the highest good

Virtue is perpetually at war with vices.

Virtue is present only where vice is a possibility,

So only when we are not secure in the highest good.

Particular Virtues:

Highest good is not **TEMPERANCE** — the best we can attain in this life.

Nor **PRUDENCE** - which doesn't do away with the evils it opposes.

Nor **JUSTICE** - assigns everyone their due.

Nor **FORTITUDE** - endurance with patience.

The fact that fortitude is a virtue shows that the highest good does not lie merely in being virtuous.

Against the Stoics:

They argue that all these ills are not harms.

Think that corporeal ills do not affect happiness.

Peripatetics (Aristotle) and old Academy (Platonists) - admitted that these were harms.

But even these philosophers hold that a life subject to these evils may be happy

But they also allow suicide.

But death is an evil so if it can be self-inflicted in the face of evils, these must be intolerable.

How can such a life be happy.

So it should not be claimed that true happiness can be achieved in mortal life.

The existence of virtue bears witness to this — with virtue we oppose adversity.

Contrary to Philosophers human life is happy in the expectation of future life and salvation.

Saint Paul — we are saved by hope.

Augustine — we are made happy by hope.

We are among evils which we must endure until we arrive at salvation in another life.



Saint Augustine

Augustine on Evil

On Free Choice, Book I

1 What is the cause of evil?

There are two kinds of evil:

(A) Evil done

(B) Evil suffered

(ad A) Evil suffered is punishment

(ad B) Evil done is done voluntarily

We do not learn to sin

Since sin is evil and all learning is good

So there is no one to blame for teaching us to sin

We can blame no one other than ourselves for our sins

Examples of Evil Actions:

Adultery, Homicide, Sacrilege

Compare Aristotle's list:

Adultery, Theft, Homicide

Why is adultery evil?

1. It is forbidden by law

Objection: It is forbidden by law because it is evil

2. It is evil because we should not do to others what we would want them to do to us.

The Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Matthew 7:12:

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Objection: The rule fails in the case of perversity

— suppose I'm happy for you to commit adultery with my wife.

3. It is generally condemned

Objection: Good deeds have often been generally condemned

Augustine's Theory

- consider the intention / motivation rather than the act
- what is evil is a disordered desire for something / willing = cupidity
- whether that desire / willing is realised in practice or not it is still evil

The nature of disordered desire / willing

Fear and cupidity are distinct

In a killing committed out of a desire to live without fear there seems to be no cupidity present

But all killing is evil

Therefore evil cannot lie in cupidity

There are kinds of killing which are not condemned as evil

Augustine's thought experiment:

Consider a slave who kills his master because he fears that he will be tortured and killed by him

This kind of killing is evil

What disordered desire motivates the killing?

The desire to preserve life as a living body

A desire to preserve something which can be taken from him against his will

The only thing that cannot be taken from us against our will is our will

Augustine on Sexual Desire

God created man 'in his image' - placed man above all other animals.

God placed man in paradise - provided all the goods that he might need.

God created man free to act - to obey or disobey His command.

God imposed a simple, easy to obey command.

Man freely disobeyed the Gods command.

God punished man for his disobedience by limiting his power over himself.

Man's body would no longer be subject to his will.

The punishment for disobedience is to suffer disobedience.

The varieties of lust (*libido*)

- anger
- greed
- obstinacy
- vainglory

Lust (*libido*) properly speaking = sexual desire / sexual arousal.

Lust produces a pleasure unsurpassed by any other physical pleasure.

Pleasure which almost totally overwhelms awareness and reason.

But we would prefer to procreate without the presence of lust.

We have no control over sexual desire and arousal.

This is the punishment for original sin.

We are ashamed of our lack of control over ourselves.

We are ashamed of and conceal sexual intercourse.

The rational part of the soul is not able to control the body or the non-rational parts of the soul.

Procreation is required by God who commanded:

Go forth and multiply (Genesis 1:28)

and provided us with organs for procreation.

So procreation does not require lust.

Procreation would have occurred in Paradise.

But the sexual organs would have been entirely under the control of the will.