

FROM PLATO TO AUGUSTINE VIA PLOTINUS AND ABRAHAM

- Thinkers in monotheistic societies : interaction of three main visions :
“*Abrahamic*” monotheism , “*Homeric*” Graeco-Roman , and *Mysticism* .

AUGUSTINE : *Abrahamic and Homeric*

A. *The Divine and the Cosmos:*

1. dualism *vs* monism : created *vs* eternal : transcendent *vs* immanent.
2. *God* (faithful love, mercy, compassion) *vs* **ultimate structural principle** (moira, *Idea of the Good, the ONE*, thought , world-reason, atoms and the void...) .
3. cosmological, *impersonal* principle : **necessity** (automatic operation): **detachment** *vs* **free**, spontaneous action, *personal* concern : commitment, **involvement** (*covenant*, revelation, prophets, history...).
4. **primacy** of the *personal* over the merely *structural* :
Divine Law vs Nomos : two types of *prophets*- remind man of *covenant-responsibility vs* reveal the **hidden truth** (Teiresias) .

B. *Man (the Human Race):*

1. **in the image and likeness of God: family-relationship**: unique representative to rule over creation on behalf of God *vs* shared rationality (structural, *impersonal* relationship).
2. human dignity **intrinsic** (relation to God) *vs* special (*elite*) qualities (power, beauty, intelligence...).
3. no **fixed** nature: possibility of **radical change in character** through **grace** and **repentance** : **conversion** (or the opposite).

C. *Society: (polis,cosmopolis,church,umma,social contract,classless society...)*

1. **brothers: beyond** mutual need and complementarity of natures.
2. **communion**: full human fellowship, solidarity, mutual care;
organic vs merely **functional** relationship.

D. *Knowledge: beyond* abstract , *theoretical* definition (natures) to *existential* concrete, personal-historical *encounter*.

E. *Virtue*: LOVE God, neighbour, self **beyond** Know Thyself, Balance is Best ; FAITH, HOPE, LOVE **beyond** Justice, Wisdom, Courage, Self-Mastery .

F. *Vice* : SIN : betrayal of covenant-partner **beyond** HUBRIS: breaching the Order of the Cosmos .

G. *Evil* : conscious , personal , radical ---**avoidable** *vs* blindness, ignorance, immaturity---**inevitable** .

H. *Love* : **agape (caritas) different from eros (amor)** and other meanings...

AUGUSTINE: FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

- ❖ **Varieties of 'faith'** : uninformed belief, legalism, vibrant way of life and experience; *spectrum* from *rigid*, fanatical to *enlightened*, dynamic.

- ❖ **Theology / philosophy of religion** : main approaches
 - **Natural (Reason alone)**: Aristotle, Ibn-Tufayl, Aquinas...
 - **Revealed (Reason tied to Revelation)**: systematic, doctrinal): Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, Aquinas, Calvin, Karl Barth...
 - **Existential**: Augustine, Kierkegaard...
 - **Mystical** : Orthodox theologians (John, Gregory Nazienzen, Symeon the New Theologian)

- ❖ **Elements of an existential (phenomenological) approach**
 - **Descriptive, non-dogmatic**, open, flexible (quote F, p 4/4)
 - "to the things themselves"; "preconceived ideas" are the 'devil' in this methodology (Husserl, Heidegger)
 - "Inward Empiricism": William James
 - **Facilitates 'dialogue'** : the subject-matter is *human experience* and not *doctrinal positions*
 - **Enhances empathy** : not *agreement* or *adoption* of the *position*, but rather an attempt at *sympathetic understanding* of the *basis in experience* that underlies *the doctrinal formulation*
 - **Result** : areas of *commonality* more likely to be discovered than when the discussion is purely doctrinal / theoretical
 - **Examples (Augustine)** : knowledge of God, God's love, original sin, the problem of evil, foreknowledge and free will, trinity, incarnation...

THE CONTEXT (353-430 CE)

A. **The journey of a soul** : Manichaeans, Astrology, Skepticism, Platonists (Plotinus), **conversion** : bishop of Hippo (Algeria) : **tremendous literary output** -*Confessions* and *City of God* : **on-going influence**- theology, philosophy, philosophy of history , **philosophy of man - inner life-world of man as subject** ; Descartes, phenomenology and existential philosophy. . .

B. Intellectual ferment : socio-political impact

1. **Manichaeans** : sex and marriage- sources of evil ; no free-will
2. **Donatists** : sectarianism vs. universalism - the elite, separateness of church and world, good and evil
3. **Pelagians** : divine grace not necessary for human fulfillment
4. **(later, Calvinists and Jansenists)** : no room for human merit

(*Augustine attempts to avoid these and other extremes of his day .*)