

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...

THE CONTEXT (353-430 CE)

- A. **The journey of a soul:** Manichaeans, Astrology, Scepticism, 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. **Reason and Revelation** : (two sources of truth and knowledge)
1. **Two views of man** - vitalist and rationalist: “man of faith” (**love, trust, history**) and “man of reason” (**philosophical development**)
 - **two ways of life - covenant** and **cosmos**.
 2. **Tertullian** (cf. Al-Ghazali, Luther) : **Revelation (faith alone)**
Origen (cf. Ibn-Rushd) : **Reason (philosophy necessary)**
Augustine : harmonious **complementarity** , but Revelation is **beyond** Reason.
 3. **Faith seeking Understanding** : “believe in order to understand” and “understand in order to believe”:
(not **blind faith** but the dynamic of **experience and reason**)
 - **a way of life** must **be lived** , experienced (belief)
 - this provides **concrete** material for **thought** (understanding)
 - thus **true understanding** can only come **after** belief
 - **however**, true understanding is **superior** to **simple** belief
 - also, belief must be **reasonable** in the first place.
 4. **A description of his own life-experience** with various **ways of life**.
- C. The **development** of Augustine's writings: “**A man who progresses as he writes and writes as he progresses.**”

(SOURCE TEXTS)

Faith and Understanding

- a. “... Unless he understand somewhat, no man can believe in God; nevertheless **by the very faith** whereby he **believes**, he is helped to the **understanding of greater things**. For there are some things which we do not believe unless we understand them, and there are other things which we do not understand unless we believe them.” (In Ps. CXVIII)
- b. “It is seen as **reasonable** that faith should **precede** reason.” (Ep. CXX)
- c. “Faith gives the understanding **access** to these things, unbelief **closes** the door to them.” (Ep. CXXXVII)
- d. “He who **by true reason arrives** at an understanding of what he had only believed is in a **better state** of advancement than he who still **only desires** to understand what he believes.” (Ep. CXX)