AUGUSTINE'S PEDAGOGY: RELIGIO-HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Augustine's philosophy of education is based on the nature of the human person and for the advancement of the human person. His strong humanistic principles are based on the Christian Scripture that presents the human person as being created in the image and likeness of God. It is from this theological background that Augustine strongly believes that the student created in the image and likeness of God must be treated with respect and love. This perspective has also shaped the structure of Augustine's objectives of education. It is these anthropological and humanistic sides to Augustine's philosophy of education that this piece studied. The hermeneutic approach would be employed in this study.

Keywords: Augustine, Pedagogy, Anthropology, Humanistic, Education, Considerations.

Introduction

Augustine understands the human person as a composite of mind and body, however, with clear distinctions. As a Neoplatonist[26], he believed that the soul, which is a spiritual entity, is superior to the body, and it is the province of the

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[26] **Neoplatonism** is a term used to designate a strand of Platonic philosophy that began with Plotinus in the third century AD against the background of Hellenistic philosophy and religion. The term does not encapsulate a set of ideas as much as it encapsulates a chain of thinkers which began with Ammonious Saccas and his student Plotinus (c. 204/5 – 270 AD) and which stretches to the sixth century AD. Even though Neoplatonism primarily circumscribes the thinkers who are now labeled Neoplatonists and not their ideas, there are some ideas that are common to Neoplatonic systems, for example, the monistic idea that all of reality can be derived from a single principle, "the One". The term is a modern historiographical term, and the thinkers to whom it is now applied did not use it to describe themselves. Neoplatonism had an enduring influence on the subsequent history of philosophy. In the Middle Ages, Neoplatonic ideas were studied and discussed by Islamic, Christian, and Jewish thinkers. In the Islamic cultural sphere, Neoplatonic texts were available in Arabic translations, and notable thinkers such as al-Farabi, Solomon ibn Gabirol (*Avicebron*).

soul to rule the body[27]. With this position on the nature of the human person, Augustine was responding to the Manicheaen perspective that saw the soul as being entrapped in the human body. He, however, believes that both the body and soul were created by God, contrary to Plato's uncreated soul. As a created being, he insists that the soul is mutable, a feature that not only serves to distinguish it from its creator but one that he views as necessary to explain the possibility of moral change, be it for better or worse[28].

In *De Civitate Dei*[29] Augustine asserts that God created only one soul, that of Adam, and subsequent human souls are not merely genealogical offshoots of that original soul, but they are actually identical to Adam's soul prior to assuming their own individual, particularized lives[30]. Not only does this avoid the mediation of the traducianist hypothesis, but it also manages to provide a theologically satisfying account of the universality of original sin without falling into the difficulties of God's placing an innocent soul into a sin-laden body, as would be the case in a general creationism. Augustine's Neoplatonic framework commits him to the view that the physical/sensible realm is an arena of temptation and moral danger, one wherein the human soul needs to be wary about becoming too attached to lower goods[31]. From the foregoing, there is a strong connection between Augustine's anthropology and theology. His is in

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[27] Augustone *De Animae Quantitate* 13.22; *De Genesi contra Manicheos* II.11

[28] Augustine, St. *Confessiones* are translated in *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick, Oxford University Press, 1991. IV.xv.26

[29] De Civitate Dei is a book of Christian philosophy written in Latin by Augustine of Hippo in the early 5th century AD. The book was in response to allegations that Christianity brought about the decline of Rome and is considered one of Augustine's most important works, standing alongside The Confessions, The Enchiridion, On Christian Doctrine, and On the Trinity. As a work of one of the most influential Church Fathers, *The City of God* is a cornerstone of Western thought, expounding on many profound questions of theology, such as the suffering of the righteous, the existence of evil, the conflict between free will and divine omniscience, and the doctrine of original sin.

[30] Augustine, St. *De Civitate Dei* is translated in *The City of God Against the Pagans*, translated by R.W. Dyson, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, Cambridge University Press 1998. 13.14

[31] Mendelson, M. (2010). *Saint Augustine.* Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/augustine

fact, a theological anthropology. And his philosophy of education is based on his Christian anthropology.

Since the soul was originally created by God, Augustine believes that the human person carries with him or her eternal values with which God had equipped him or her with. This goes contrary to the perspective that the human person at birth is *tabula rasa*[32]. Augustine makes a distinction between the "inner man" with reference to the human soul and the "outer man" with reference to the human body. While such a statement might be true of the outer man, Augustine asserts that it cannot be true of the inner man that has already been inundated with values according to the Trinitarian mould. While the outer man might arrive this world as a vacuum, the inner man arrives as a potential fullness, "A living and dynamic potential of energies, and values ready to be dynamized"[33]. This brings to the fore the need to make a distinction between two types of memories: the memory of the outer man and the memory of the inner man. The memory of the inner man is an inner kind of memory, a spiritual memory. The memory of the outer man is an outer memory, or an acquired memory that began to build itself from a vacuum and thus completely shaped by experience. Speaking of the inner memory, Augustine writes:

> From where, from what part have they entered into my memory? I don't know. Because when I learned them, it was not by giving credit to others, but when I recognized them in my soul, and approved them as true and commended them to it, as in deposit, in order to draw on them whenever I should wish… Where, then, or why, on hearing them named, did I recognize them and say: 'That is it!', 'It is true!' except because they were already in my MEMORY, albeit withdrawn and buried as if they were in caves well hidden, so much so that, if no one should resuscitate them to come out, perhaps they would not even have thought of them[34].

The objectives of education in Augustine

[32] *Tabula rasa* refers to the epistemological idea that individuals are born without built-in mental content and that therefore all knowledge comes from experience or perception. Proponents of tabula rasa generally disagree with the doctrine of innatism which holds that the mind is born already in possession of certain knowledge. Generally, proponents of the *tabula rasa* theory also favour the "nurture" side of the nature versus nurture debate when it comes to aspects of one's personality, social and emotional behaviour, knowledge and sapience.

[33] Fincias, F. G. (2006). The Augustinian educational model. In Eusebio B. Berdon (Ed.). *Basic elements of Augustinian pedagogy* (pp. 33-42). Augustinian publications, Rome

[34] Augustine, St. *Confessiones* are translated in *Confessions*, translated by Henry Chadwick, Oxford University Press, 1991. X. 10. 17

A couple of objectives of education can be gotten from the works of Saint Augustine. These objectives are, therefore, outlined as follows:

a. Education serves for the nourishment of the soul, that the human person might be more human- "to be worthy of man among men"[35].

b. It is not so much to introduce contents to the human soul, but to dynamize and help what is latent in the pupil to emerge.

c. To achieve maturity, a human being needs a certain balance among these three things: talent, education and experience[36].

d. Make use of knowledge like scaffolding that is used to help build the building of love; that building will last forever, even when knowledge has been dismantled[37]. Augustine sees love as the key of true humanity. "Love and do what you will"[38].

e. Take this love, therefore, as the end that is set before you, to which you are to refer in all that you say, and whatever you narrate, narrate it in such a manner that he to whom you are discoursing on hearing may believe, on believing may hope and on hoping may love[39].

f. The teacher's function is to develop a gradual approach for the student to the truth, especially for those who, while they may have a love of learning, have yet to develop a sharpness of mind. Without a careful and progressive plan, success cannot be achieved[40].

g. One can rightly say, in a metaphorical way, that a person grows with learning and shrinks with forgetting[41].

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[35]Augustine, St., Disc. Chr. XI, 12

[36] Augustine, St. *De Civitate Dei* is translated in *The City of God Against the Pagans*, translated by R.W. Dyson, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, Cambridge University Press 1998. 11, 25

[37] . Augustine, St. *Epistulae* are translated by W. Parsons in the *Fathers of the Church* series: Letters, 55, 21, 39.

[38] Augustine, St. *Epistulae* are translated by W. Parsons in the *Fathers of the Church* series: Letters VII. 8.

[39] Augustine, St. 1952. *The First Catechetical Instruction* (400), trans. Joseph P. Christopher. Westminster, MD: Newman Press. 4, 8

[40] Augustine, St. *Soliloquia* is translated in *Soliloquies*, Library of Christian Classics, volume 6, 1953.1, 23.

[41]Augustine, St., Dimensions of the Soul, 33

h. It is not the teacher who illuminates with light the student's soul. Just as someone brings light to a house by opening the windows, so it is with the teacher[42].

i. As a mother feeds a small child, not so that it remains small but so that the baby grows, good teachers give their pupils the appropriate food so that the day comes when, haven grown, the same pupils now know how to offer food themselves[43]. Thus he says to teachers, "In the same way that you choose what you eat, choose carefully what you teach. What you say is food for those who listen"[44].

The Humanistic Dimension of Augustine's Pedagogy

Man is at the centre of Augustine's pedagogy since it is meant for the advancement of the deepest dimensions of the human person. Augustine does not see teaching as a career, but as a vocation that must be guided by love. For many years, he had worked as a teacher simply to boost his own personal interests of fame and making money, but at the end he was still not satisfied. It was only later that he discovered that only through love freely given that one can educate. Contrary to the spirit of a vocation in the teaching profession, Augustine observes insincerity among many teachers whose interests are not their students. He observes that: "Many teach the truth without honesty because they sell it for the recompense of the commodities of this world"[45]. He is not in any way saying that the teacher does not require wages for his just labours; he is only saying that the education of the pupil is itself a wage. The primary motivation should not be money but the interest of the pupils.

The success of a teacher is not determined by the professional qualities that he or she possesses but by the human qualities of love, closeness, cordiality, accompaniment, affection that the teacher comes into the classroom with. To be effective, the teacher must understand himself first as a human being who is dealing with a fellow human being. The following, in the perspective of Augustine, are the basic humanistic pedagogy that the teacher must be cognizant of as he teaches:

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[42] Augustine, St. *Exposition of the Psalms*, 11. 7 118, 18, 4

[43] Augustine, St. Sermons. Retrieved from http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1603.htm 23, 3, 3

[44] Augustine, St. *Exposition of the Psalms*, 51, 10

[45] Augustine, St. *Exposition of the Psalms*. USA. New City Press. 2001. 11. 7

a. They must always start from the perceived needs of the students[46]. This is to avoid a situation where the teacher operates from an ivory tower, far away from the students who are supposed to be his pupils.

b. The teacher needs to learn how to connect to the deepest aspirations of the human heart[47]. This is very necessary as the students are human beings.

c. The teacher needs to adapt himself to the language, content and rhythms of the evolution of his students[48].

d. The teacher needs to be attentive to what is going on within the student rather than just externals[49]. This is very important as the eternals are only manifestations of the internal.

e. The teacher must respect and stimulate each of the student's individuality, that is, each student's unique and original unrepeatable character[50].

f. The teacher must lead the students in the path of virtue by urging them to overcome what is evil[51].

g. The teacher must not see himself as the most important element in the teaching and learning process. He teaches in a relationship, and thus must delegate the foremost role in education to his students[52]. Thus, as the teacher speaks, he must also learn to listen and question.

h. The teacher must educate joyfully[53]. The level of joy that radiates in the teacher and the quality of love he shows the students that he teaches affects the student's disposition towards learning, and thus the impact of the education.

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[46] Augustine, St. 1952. *The First Catechetical Instruction* (400), trans. Joseph P. Christopher. Westminster, MD: Newman Press. V. 9

[47] Augustine, St. 1952. *The First Catechetical Instruction* (400), trans. Joseph P. Christopher. Westminster, MD: Newman Press. IV. 7

[48] Augustine, St. 1952. *The First Catechetical Instruction* (400), trans. Joseph P. Christopher. Westminster, MD: Newman Press. XV. 23

[49] Augustine, St. 1952. *The First Catechetical Instruction* (400), trans. Joseph P. Christopher. Westminster, MD: Newman Press. IX. 13

[50] Augustine, St. 1952. *The First Catechetical Instruction* (400), trans. Joseph P. Christopher. Westminster, MD: Newman Press. XV. 23

[51] Augustine, St. 1952. *The First Catechetical Instruction* (400), trans. Joseph P. Christopher. Westminster, MD: Newman Press. XVI. 24

[52] Augustine, St., Ord. II. 26

[53] Augustine, St. 1952. *The First Catechetical Instruction* (400), trans. Joseph P. Christopher. Westminster, MD: Newman Press. X. 14

i. Students have come from societies where they go through a lot of experiences and scandals, which affect their disposition towards learning and also what they know. It is the duty of the teacher to neutralize these negative impacts that his pupils inherit from society[54].

Conclusion

A cursory glance at Saint Augustine's philosophy of education reveals that it is a humanistic philosophy. It is based on the nature of the human person and for the advancement of the human person. His strong humanistic principles are based on the Christian Scripture that presents the human person as being created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). This scriptural passage does not mean that God is in human form, but rather, that humans are in the image of God in their moral, spiritual, and intellectual nature. Thus, humans mirror God's divinity in their ability to actualize the unique qualities with which they have been endowed, and which make them different than all other creatures: rational structure, complete centeredness, creative freedom, a possibility for self-actualization, and the ability for self-transcendence. It is from this theological background that Augustine strongly believes that the student created in the image and likeness of God must be treated with respect and love. This perspective has also shaped the structure of Augustine's objectives of education.

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[54] Augustine, St. 1952. *The First Catechetical Instruction* (400), trans. Joseph P. Christopher. Westminster, MD: Newman Press. XIV. 21

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