



PHILOSOPHY
& THEOLOGY
IN THE MIDDLE AGES

ROUTLEDGE



G. R. EVANS

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PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

In the first Christian centuries being a philosopher was still a practical alternative to being a Christian. Philosophical systems offered intellectual, practical and moral codes for living. Yet by the Middle Ages in the West and the Orthodox East philosophy was largely incorporated into Christian belief. From the end of the Roman Empire to the Reformation and Renaissance of the sixteenth century Christian theologians had a virtual monopoly on higher education. The complex interaction between theology and philosophy, which was the result of the efforts of Christian leaders and thinkers to assimilate the most sophisticated ideas of science and secular learning into their own system of thought, is the subject of this book.

Augustine, as the most widely read author in the Middle Ages is the starting-point. Dr Evans then discusses the definitions of philosophy and theology and the classical sources to which the medieval scholar would have had access when studying philosophy and its theological implications. Part I ends with an analysis of the problems of logic, language and rhetoric. In Part II the sequence of topics – God, cosmos, man – follows the outline of the *summa*, or systematic course in theology, which developed from the twelfth century as a textbook framework.

Does God exist? What is he like? What are human beings? Is there a purpose to their lives? These are the great questions of philosophy and religion and the issues to which the medieval theologian addressed himself. From ‘divine simplicity’ to ethics and politics, this book is a lively introduction to the debates and ideas of the Middle Ages.

G. R. Evans is University Lecturer in History at the University of Cambridge. Her publications include *Anselm* (1989), *The Thought of Gregory the Great* (1986), *Augustine on Evil* (1983) and *Alan of Lille* (1983).

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PREFACE

This is a book mostly about the Western tradition of study of philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages. That is partly for reasons of space. It is necessary to be heavily selective even in giving an account of this geographically limited area of growth in the relationship between philosophy and theology. But we should need to concentrate on the West in any case, because that was where the main stream of philosophical development now flowed. After the centuries which immediately followed the fall of the Roman Empire, Byzantine Christianity developed its own branch of the tradition in terms of theological scholarship. The two were not easily able to keep in touch, because few scholars knew both Greek and Latin after the sixth century; and after 1054 the Greek and Latin Churches were divided and ceased to be in communion with one another. The Byzantine style of Christian scholarship placed an emphasis on mysticism. It drew more heavily and more directly on late Platonism than the West was able to do, while the West made substantial use of Aristotle. Without diverging doctrinally except over the question of the Procession of the Holy Spirit and some lesser matters such as the use of leavened or unleavened bread in the Eucharist and whether purgatory purged by fire, the two Churches came to have subtly but undeniably different intellectual flavours. At the Council of Florence (1438–45), when a serious attempt was made to reunite the two Churches, it was dramatically evident that they spoke not only two languages, but also two languages of thought.

If we must limit ourselves to only a few glances at the Greek East, we can take in the much broader range of themes in which philosophy interested itself in our period than was the case even in the late antique world. In the twelfth century, the Canon Hugh of St Victor (c.1096– 1141), who taught at

PREFACE

Paris, made a distinction between those aspects of theology which are concerned with the being and nature of God, his unity and Trinity and the creation of the world; and those branches of the subject which depend for our knowledge of them on the revelation of Holy Scripture. The first group contains the bulk of the lively issues of philosophy-theology in the late antique and early Christian world – what Boethius in the sixth century understood by *theologia*. These issues were still very much alive in the Middle Ages, with fresh slants derived from mediaeval understanding of Aristotelian notions of ‘end’ and ‘purpose’, ‘power’ and ‘act’, ‘causation’, ‘origin’ and ‘source’, and of epistemology. In the middle and later thirteenth century we find theologians and those who specialised in philosophy in the universities alike busy with questions about man’s knowledge of God-in-himself; the divine simplicity; ideas in the divine mind; being and essence; the eternity of the world; the nature of matter; the elements; beatitude; and such scientific practicalities as the motion of the heart. But they were also dealing, and sometimes in the same works, with grace, the Church, sacraments and so on, using philosophical categories and methods. It was chiefly out of the work done in the late mediaeval centuries on these topics that there sprang the debates of the Reformation.

No author, Christian or secular, was more widely read in the West throughout the Middle Ages than Augustine, or more influential in forming the minds of Western scholars as they sought to make sense in Latin of concepts first framed and developed in Greek. So Augustine must be our starting-point. The story begins in the present volume with the issue of the relationship between philosophy and theology which won partisans of various opinions throughout the Middle Ages. Then we come to the question of the classical sources the mediaeval scholar may have been able to use when we wanted to study philosophy in its theological implications. Part I ends with a sketch of the problems of logic and language and their epistemological roots, which arose out of the study of the grammar, logic and rhetoric of the *trivium*. These were a foundation study for all mediaeval scholars and perhaps the area in which the most penetrating new work of the Middle Ages was done. In Part II the sequence of topics broadly follows the outline of the *summa*, or systematic encyclopaedia of theology, which developed from the twelfth century as a textbook framework. The aim of this arrangement of the material is to introduce the modern reader to the mediaeval world of thought in something of the way in which the mediaeval student came to it.

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This book was first written as the second volume of a series to be published in German. I am grateful to Professor Christopher Stead and Professor A. Ritter for suggesting that I write it, and to its publishers, Kohlhammer. But it has seemed that it might fill a gap in the available literature in English, too, and so, with some minor changes, it is offered here in the language in which it was first drafted.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AHDLMA</i>	<i>Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge</i>
<i>CCCM</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis</i>
<i>CHLGEMP</i>	<i>Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Mediaeval Philosophy</i> , ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, 1970)
<i>CHLMP</i>	<i>Cambridge History of Later Mediaeval Philosophy</i> , ed. N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny and A. Pinborg (Cambridge, 1982)
<i>C. Jul.</i>	Augustine, <i>Against Julian</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>De Civ. Dei</i>	Augustine, <i>The City of God</i>
<i>De Doct. Chr.</i>	—, <i>On Christian Doctrine</i>
<i>De Trinitate</i>	—, <i>On the Trinity</i>
<i>De Vera Religione</i>	—, <i>On True Religion</i>
GP	Gilbert of Poitiers, <i>Commentaries on Boethius</i> , ed. N. M. Häring (Toronto, 1966)
Huygens	T. Huygens, <i>Accessus ad Auctores</i> (Leiden, 1970)
'I divieti'	M. Grabmann, 'I divieti ecclesiastici di Aristotele sotto Innocenzio III e Gregorio IX', <i>Miscellanea Historiae Pontificiae</i> , 7 (Rome, 1941)
K	<i>Grammatici Latini</i> , ed. H. Keil (8 vols, Leipzig, 1855–80)
Lafleur	C. Lafleur, ed., <i>Quatre introductions à la philosophie au xiiiè siècle</i> (Montreal/Paris, 1988)
Lottin	O. Lottin, <i>Psychologie et morale aux xiiiè et xiiiè siècles</i> , V (Gembloux, 1959)
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
S	Anselm of Canterbury, <i>Opera Omnia</i> , ed. F. S. Schmitt (Rome/Edinburgh, 1938–69)
TC	Thierry of Chartres, <i>Commentaries on Boethius</i> , ed. N. M. Häring (Toronto, 1971)

Part I

PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

THE IDEA OF PHILOSOPHY

Christians who spoke of ‘philosophy’ did not mean the same thing in the fifth century as they were to do a thousand years later. Mediaeval readers were drawing upon much the same body of textbooks as were already regarded as the classics of the subject in Augustine’s time. But they no longer lived in a world where ‘being a philosopher’ was a practical alternative to being a Christian, and where one might meet and talk with men who had made that choice. Philosophy in the Middle Ages was largely an academic study, and chiefly confined in its scope to those themes and topics on which the surviving ancient textbooks provided some teaching. It was a live and growing discipline, but no longer in quite the same way as it had been in the first Christian centuries, when rival schools and factions sprang up and died away, and the enterprising were constantly trying out new permutations of Platonist, Aristotelian and Stoic ideas. That is not to say that the mediaevals did not do significant new work in philosophy. But they did so, as it were, piecemeal, pushing forward frontiers at particular points, and not as a rule in ways creative of new systems of life and thought.

The philosophical systems known to Augustine were not only intellectual but also practical and moral. They were in general designed to lead the adherent through the course of his life in virtue, towards a goal of happiness (Aristotle making the *telos*, or purpose, happiness, the Stoics tending to see virtue as an end in itself). Augustine had read Varro’s (now lost) book of 288 possible philosophies (*De Civ. Dei* XIX.i.2). They all, he observes, set the *beata vita* or ‘blessed life’ before mankind as the end to be attained, in one form or another. Augustine himself did not think it inappropriate to write a book *De Beata Vita* in the first months after his conversion to Christianity, in which he felt free to make use of whatever in the philosophers he found

helpful, and consistent with his Christian belief. It was also not uncongenial to the philosophically minded Christian to go along, at least in part, with the conception of the divine which philosophers had come to find satisfactory: emptied, as it were, of any character but those of goodness, beauty, truth, justice; sometimes of everything but pure being; sometimes even of that. It was therefore neither difficult nor intrinsically objectionable to identify such a Supreme Being with the God of the Christians. No syncretism was involved. One simply took the view that Plato, for example, had come by natural reason to that real but limited understanding of the nature of God which St Paul tells us is to be had by contemplation of his creation (Romans 1.19–20). If philosophers argued that the happy life was attained by those who aspired to rise as high as possible above their lower natures, and to imitate God in a tranquillity which turned its back on worldly lusts and worldly ambitions, Christians need have no quarrel with that. They will wish to go further. But they can take such philosophical endeavours as the companionable efforts of fellow-travellers on the same road. For those philosophers who accepted the immortality of the soul, the happy life was not confined to the present but extended, and indeed had its full realisation, beyond this life. Here again they were not necessarily at cross-purposes with Christians (although, as we shall see, there were important differences). Christianity was, in this sense, itself a philosophy.

We must move to Boethius (c.480–c.524) to pursue the theme of philosophy as the guide of life, at least in the West.¹ *The Consolation of Philosophy* remained a challenge to Christian scholars because it appears to show a Boethius, presumably Christian when he wrote the theological tractates, returning to philosophy under the pressures of political imprisonment and despair at the end of his life. In his dialogue with a Philosophia who has to be much altered before she can be identified with the Sapientia or Holy Wisdom of the Old Testament or with the Christ of the New,² Boethius is first led to see that he need not lose faith in the ultimate benevolent purpose and continuing power of Providence just because his own life now seems to be at the mercy of fickle Fortune. Then he is taken through a discussion of the manner in which the details of human fate may be seen to depend ultimately upon a divine and unchanging simplicity, and through an exploration of the problem of divine foreknowledge in its relation to human freedom. There is nothing in what is said which is incompatible with Boethius' remaining a Christian. But it is Philosophia who is his guide and who brings him a consolation which depends ultimately upon resignation and an intellectual grasp of the essential orderliness of what had before seemed a random and disorderly sequence of catastrophes.

Boethius' *Consolation* was read and commented upon by Carolingian authors, among them Remigius of Auxerre (c.841–c.908), who sought out what philosophy he could find in ancient texts. The *Consolation* was translated into several vernaculars in the same period. Nevertheless, it remained true that one could no longer meet a philosopher in the way that Augustine or Boethius could. There were no individuals in Western Europe after Bede's day (c.673–735) who would call themselves philosophers not Christians, who were choosing a philosophical system as a basis for a way of life in preference to Christianity (though, as we shall see, some thought it might be a guide in addition to Christianity).

This was in part the result of the major changes in cultural patterns brought about by the fall of the Roman Empire. It was no longer the case that those who ruled Europe were educated in rhetoric and philosophy. Many were illiterate, and most were more concerned with the practicalities of war and government than with patronage of learning. It fell largely to the monasteries and the cathedral schools (where clergy who were to serve the cathedral were trained) to sustain what level of scholarship they could. Bede's mentor, Benedict Biscop (c.628–89), travelled on the continent, spent some time as a monk at Lérins, and brought back from Rome, and Monte Cassino in South Italy, the manuscripts which were to lay the foundation of the libraries of the monasteries he founded at Wearmouth and Jarrow in the north of England. Bede was given into his care as a child oblate at the age of 7. He spent a productive life making the heritage of books a working part of the tradition of Western monastic life. He wrote on spelling and other *grammaticalia*; the procedure for calculating the date of Easter; the natural world (using Isidore, Suetonius and Pliny); history and biography designed to show the hand of God in human affairs; and a vast body of Scriptural commentary derived from Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose and Gregory the Great, with some reflections of his own. The character of all this was practical. Bede sought to meet the needs of his monks, to create a Christian scholarship which was useful and edifying rather than speculative, and in this he was spectacularly successful.

But the success and popularity of his works underlines the nature of the change which had taken place. One would not now meet individuals in the West who were living their lives according to a philosophical and moral system which was, although not Christian, to all intents and purposes a religion as well as a set of intellectually apprehended opinions about the universe. One could ask whether Boethius may have been as much a philosopher as a Christian in this sense. But it is not a question which could be asked of a contemporary of Bede two hundred years later. From