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Augustine on Rhetoric and Flourishing - handout.pdf

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Lust and Love at Work: Rhetoric and Human Flourishing according to Augustine

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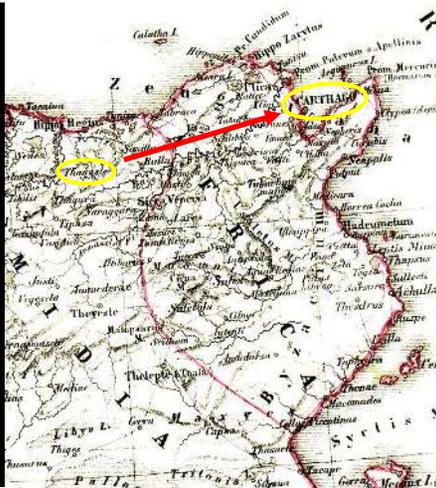
Augustine's Work (354-430 CE)

- Late Roman Empire – Temporal, not Eternal
 - Republic (509 BCE) → Empire (27 BCE) → Goths (410 CE)
 - Decline & Rhetoric, Christianity (313 CE) & Rome's Fall
- “Vert” = turn life as dance or journey
 - Pervert (Lust turns from) vs. Convert (Love turns with)
 - Self and Creation vs. God and Neighbor
- Augustine's Two Turns – Lust and Love
 - Academic (354-386 CE) – Student → Professor
 - Ecclesial (387-430 CE) – Monk → Priest → Bishop
- *Confessions* (400 CE) – 1st Autobiography
 - Self – personal journey as object of inquiry
 - Passion, intelligence, curiosity, anxiety, talent = human
 - Embodied participation in culture = work
 - Offered as sustained public prayer, gratitude
 - “And why? So that whoever reads them may reflect with me on the depths from which we must cry to you.” – Strategic?



Student Work as Lust

- Why study?
 - Career aspirations – lawyer, governor
 - Power – “wealth, honors, and marriage”
- Study what? Sophistry.
 - Liberal Arts – Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric
 - Persuasion, Oratory – Courts, Social Hierarchy
- How? – Family invests in schooling
 - Corporal Punishment, Competitive Speech, Pagan Lit.
 - “destined to excel and where I would earn a reputation all the higher in the measure that my performance was the more unscrupulous”
- Where? Thagaste → Carthage
 - “My swollen pride recoiled from [the Bible’s] style and my intelligence failed to penetrate its inner meaning.”
 - Sex, Shows, Eloquence, Victory, Society, Astrology, Philosophy, Manichean



Professor Work as Lust

- Thagaste → Carthage → Rome → Milan
- Shady Law Professor slowly learns moral Truths
 - “I was teaching the art of rhetoric, selling talkative skills apt to sway others because greed swayed me. Yet I preferred to have good pupils, or such as passed for good... and without any trickery on my part I taught them the tricks of the trade, never such as would secure the condemnation of the innocent, though sometimes such as were calculated to get the guilty acquitted.” (54)
 - “does any thief tolerate being robbed by another thief, even if he is rich and the other is driven by want?” (30)
- Lust = Love misdirected to Self; Pride, Dominance
 - “The truth is that disordered lust springs from a perverted will; when lust is pandered to a habit is formed when habit is not checked, it hardens into compulsion.”



Catechumen Work as Turning

- Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, as **genuine rhetor**
 - "As I opened my heart to appreciate how skillfully he spoke, the recognition that he was speaking **truth** crept in at the same time, though only by slow degrees" (94).
- Work is climbing corporate ladders? Why?
 - "Tell me: where do we hope all of our efforts are going to get us? What are we looking for? In whose cause are we striving? Does life at court promise us anything better than promotion to being Friends of the Emperor? And once we are, will that not be a precarious position, fraught with perils? Will it not mean negotiating a hazard, only to end in greater danger still? And how long would it take us to get there? Whereas I can become a **friend of God here and now if I want to**" (159-160)
- Garden Crisis -> **Conversion**
 - "Not in dissipation and drunkenness, nor in debauchery and lewdness, nor in arguing and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make no provision for the flesh or the gratification of your desires**" (168).
- Quitting the Chair of Lies
 - It may be that someone among your servants, my brethren in the faith, will judge that I sinned in the matter by allowing myself to remain even for an hour in a professional chair of lying once my heart was fully intent on your service. **I will not argue.** But have you not pardoned this sin, most merciful Lord, along with all the rest of my hideous, dismal sins, in the water of baptism and **forgiven me?** (172-173)



Ecclesiastical Work as Loving

- Monk - Christian *diu cum dignitate* turns to God
- Priest - Immediate ordination turns to neighbors
- Bishop
 - Liturgical -> God, Pastoral -> Neighbor, **Rhetorical** -> Heretics
 - Christian Teaching vs. Manichees, Donatists, Pelagians
 - "both to **teach what is right and to refute what is wrong**, and in the performance of this task to **conciliate the hostile, to rouse the careless, and to tell the ignorant** both what is occurring at present and what is probable in the future."
 - Scriptural **Truth** vs. Superstitious Contradictions
 - "it seems to me not only that nothing can be **wiser**, but also that nothing can be more **eloquent**. And I venture to affirm that all who truly understand what these writers say, perceive at the same time that **it could not have been properly said in any other way.**"



Conclusion: Two Rhetorics, Two Turns

- **Lust** - Sophistry - Work turned to self and creation self-defeats
 - Business is often a frivolous, jealous, and ugly game of competitive one-upmanship and public spectacle.
 - A depraved crowd will only praise depravity. Pleasing them is a road to ruin. Victory and fame are temporary, but **wisdom and truth** are divine and eternal.
 - Ideologies that deny moral agency are self-deceptions.
 - Sinning is its own punishment. Lust leads to habit and then compulsion, enslaving us.
 - The hypocrisy built into sin proves that **virtue is valid**. Liars do not want to be lied to.
 - Succeeding as a friend of the Emperor is perilous work. Becoming a **friend of God** only requires an act of will.



Conclusion: Two Rhetorics, Two Turns

- **Love** - Work turned to God & Neighbor Flourishes
 - "bride anger and lust by the restraining influence of **wisdom**"
 - Work, fulfillment, communication, truth, love, and religion are **inter-dependent**.
 - Understanding scripture requires **humility**. Interpret it figuratively and spiritually, not literally. It is simultaneously simple and profound.
 - **God is truth**. Genuine religion is coherent and consistent; superstitions are convoluted lies. Eternal truths are revealed and discovered, not made. Sharing them is powerful communication bringing all closer to God.
 - Crises happen, and God will offer help. Listen for God's grace.
 - Persuasiveness and truth are dimensions of discourse that are not always aligned. When they are aligned they can yield **inspiration and conversion**.
 - True leaders are servants, devoting their talents to God and community. Turning from self and devoting work to God can enlighten the world.

