

Wrapping Up:

Abelard on Happiness and Morality

Two main questions:

- 1. What is our goal/ultimate end?**
- 2. How do we get there?**

The view of the ultimate human goal the Philosopher is made to accept

1. There is a strong connection between virtues and the ultimate human good (human blessedness/happiness).
2. The more virtuous activity the better the ultimate human good.
3. There is an afterlife (i.e. the soul does not perish with the body).
4. The ultimate human good lies in the afterlife. (follows from 1-3; virtuous activity can be better in the afterlife)
5. But the ultimate human good cannot consist in the afterlife in such a way that each of the blessed has a different degree of blessedness (as they should have according to the model). For then not everyone has reached the ultimate human good. (In fact, no one seems to have, which is impossible, for then human beings would not be capable of their ultimate good.)
6. So the ultimate good for humans must both be absolute and relative: "The ultimate love in the enjoyment of the ultimate good which is our true blessedness should rightly be called the ultimate human good" (n. 316).

How do we get there: Abelard on Virtues

1. Strictly speaking, virtues are a acquired character traits (like other character traits they are stable and difficult to change) (n. 254).
2. They are 'excellent' character traits, i.e. those who lead us to good intentions and acts.
3. Virtues are acquired through exercise and learning (n. 186).
4. There are four main virtues (the cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, courage and moderation) and a variety of subspecies (n. 273ff.): reverence, truthfulness, beneficence and vengeance are, for instance, all subspecies of justice.
5. There is a certain connection between the virtues (n. 270): "Through it [i.e. prudence] justice, which distributes merits, knows what is due to whom, courage possesses discernment in taking on dangers or tolerating hardships, and moderation, as was just said, possess restraint in holding back our craving."
Is that all? What about other virtues such as charity?

The Semantics of 'Good' (and 'Evil')

The term 'good' seems to mean a variety of things (n. 396). Is it thus impossible to give a definition of what good means?

Abelard's proposal:

•'Good' simply ('good thing') = "which, while it's fit for some use, mustn't impede the advantage or worthiness of anything" (n. 397) as he says in n. 420, this amounts to the same as saying "... that no worthiness or advantage is necessarily hampered by [it]". On this account we call all (real) things in the world 'good'.

•'A good X' = an exemplary member or version of the X-Kind (n. 396). For example: a good blacksmith, a good hammer, a good thief.

•it is good that p' = it is necessary for filling out some optimal arrangement in the world/for God (n. 421ff.).

The Final Exam!!

The Format

1. Two groups of questions: A (topics up to Nov. 8) B (topics since Nov. 15)
2. You have to answer 7 questions: 3 (out of 6) questions from group A and 4 (out of 6) questions from group B.
3. All questions are of equal value.
4. Please write brief and legible answers, including only *relevant* material.
5. A good answer is not one which mentions as much material as possible, it is one which arranges and presents the relevant material in a convincing way.

"Explain Abelard's understanding of xyz."

"Augustine calls xyz abc. Explain what he means. Do you agree with him?"

The 'Top' Arguments

1. Augustine's argument for why time is a 'distention' of the soul (*Confessions*, book 11).
2. Boethius's argument for the compatibility of free will and divine foreknowledge (*Consolation*, book 5).
3. Anselm's argument for the existence of God (*Proslogion*).
4. Abelard's argument for why only our 'intentions' are morally significant (*Ethics*).

The Main Theme

Human action is the key topic in early medieval philosophy. In particular they discuss the following questions:

1. The ultimate source of human action.
2. What exactly is a human action? What are its constituents?
3. In what sense are human beings free or what does freedom amount to? (Also, in virtue of what are we free?)
4. What is our ultimate goal?