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**UNIT 1      AUGUSTINE**


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**1.0 OBJECTIVES**


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This unit tries to give the account of the beginning of medieval scholastic thinking as it concretely established from the Augustinean philosophy onwards. Neo-platonism has the basic foundation for the medieval thought. We shall attempt to capture the fundamental teachings of Augustine from his Platonic bent of mind, although interpreted from the religious perspective of his time.

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**1.1 INTRODUCTION**


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Augustine is a fourth century philosopher who infused his Christian religious doctrine with Plato and Neo-Platonism. He is also famous for his contributions to Western philosophy along with Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas. Augustine's doctrine stood between the extremes of Pelagianism and Manichaeism. Against Pelagian doctrine, he held that human spiritual disobedience had resulted in a state of sin that human nature was powerless to change. For him, human beings are dependent on divine grace; against Manichaeism he vigorously defended the place of free will in cooperation with grace.

**Life**

Augustine, also known as Aurelius Augustine was born at Thagaste in North Africa. He was one of the key figures in the transition from classical antiquity to the middle Ages. He lived nearly eighty years of the social transformation, political upheavals, and military disasters that are often referred to as the “decline of the Roman Empire.” Augustine was a confirmed Manichaean during his early years as a student and teacher of rhetoric at Carthage and Rome. But in Milan, during his early thirties, he began to study Neo-Platonic Philosophy under the guidance of Ambrose. An account of his early life and conversion, together with a reasoned defence of his Neo-platonic principles, may be found in the *confessiones* (confessions). He was named the Bishop of Hippo (Annaba, Algeria) in 396, and devoted the remaining decades of his life to the formation of an ascetic religious community.

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## 1.2 EPISTEMOLOGY

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Augustine time and again attacks the sceptic thesis that a high degree of probability is the most that the human mind can attain. In other words man cannot attain certain knowledge. He refutes this thesis in his book *Contra Academicos* saying that a man can attain certain knowledge. In his reply to the question of scepticism “how do you know that this world (even) exists, if the senses are mistaken?” He answers, “even if he is asleep and dreaming, he can refer to the world, so understood, and say, without chance of error, that either it is one or it is not. By which he means, even if it were true that I am mistaken about nearly everything that I suppose to be true, he argued, one inescapable truth will remain: “*Si fallor, sum*” (“If I am mistaken, I exist”). His answer certainly suggests the Cartesian “*cogito, ergo sum*.” What is to be remembered here is that for Descartes it is the argument of thinking being but whereas for Augustine it is indirect refutation of the principle of scepticism that certain knowledge is not possible and not a direct demonstration of the existence of the thinking subject.

### Conditions of Intellectual Knowledge

After having established knowledge is certain and it is attainable he moves on to the conditions of intellectual knowledge. There are two ways by which man can arrive at knowledge of intelligible objects viz., 1. By rising from the data of sense to an understanding of the hidden causes of things, and, ultimately to a knowledge of Him who is the Highest Cause. 2. The truth is indwelling in us and the most excellent means of attaining higher intellectual knowledge is the contemplation and study of our own intellectual life. It is of introspection, for which purity of heart and the practice of virtue are necessary. When the heart is more pure the soul is also freer from all the defilement and by which the mind can mirror Him, who is the source of all the truth. Augustine following the Platonist tradition says knowledge is not derived from sense perception or experience, but they are some have impressed upon our minds *a priori*. Here Augustine rejects the Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis* as an explanation of the presence in the human mind of knowledge that is not derived from sense-experience. Knowledge is recollection, an exercise of the memory but in the sense that when I know I actualize what is learned in my mind, eliciting truths by a process of concentration. This sounds Platonian, but it is combined with a reluctance to believe in the pre-existence of the soul. Nor is the human mind able to realize knowledge unaided. Augustine believes that divine illumination is required to achieve this. Thus we attain knowledge by the illumination of God.

### Theory of Divine Illumination

For Augustine, it is in the light of God, by which the mind is said to be able to discern the objects of intellectual vision. Some thinkers/readers have supposed that it is only *a priori* truths that Augustine thinks, are made intellectually visible by divine illumination. But it is not correct. When he teaches that we know the essences of things in *rationibus aeternis*, he is careful to point out that we rise from the data of sense or from a study of our own intellectual life to knowledge of these essences. His meaning is that the essence of things could neither be, nor be known by us, unless they first existed and were known in the mind of God. For example in the *De Magistro* Augustine shows that ostensive learning is chronically and unavoidably plagued with ambiguity. Whether we are pointing to something to show what “blue” means, or showing someone a blue colour sample to illustrate what the word signifies, any given effort at ostensive teaching is open to misunderstanding. How can one know whether what is being pointed out is

the colour blue, a particular shade of blue, a hue, a coloured object, its shape, or something quite different? In the walking case, is what is being demonstrated walking, hurrying, running away, taking so and so many steps, or what? If we manage to grasp what it is, it must be through the inner illumination of the divine light. Augustine says we consult “not the speaker who makes a noise outside us, but the Truth that presides over the mind within”.

Perhaps Augustine’s idea of divine illumination is meant to invoke supernatural aid in dealing with the problem of ambiguity. Thus the Divine, the teacher, can, through special powers, illuminate blue without illuminating anything more general, such as colour, or anything more specific, such as powder blue. Again, the inner Teacher, can perhaps, non-naturally, point to walking without pointing to hurrying, or to taking so and so many steps. If that is right, the learner who is intelligent enough will be precisely the one who is able to profit from this ambiguity free inner ostension that only the Divine, the Teacher can perform.

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### 1.3 CONCEPT OF MAN

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Man is the calumniation of God’s creation. He says man has soul using a mortal and earthly body as one unitary entity. For him, man is “rational soul which has a body.” It does not mean that the soul which has a body has two persons. His identification of soul to human being reinforces the platonic tendency to identify the person with the mind or soul. He places human being beneath God and above bodies. In his hierarchy of being the human soul is more excellent than all things known by the sense. Among the things it is nobler than sensible things which God created. “There is something inferior and something equal; something inferior such as the soul of an animal, and something equal such as that of an angel, but there is nothing better”. There is nothing closer to God than the rational soul. The soul is not what God is, but a creature made by God, made not out of God, but out of nothing. Though the human soul is immortal because it does not cease to live, it is in some sense mortal. For in every changeable nature the change itself is a death, because it causes something which was in it to exist no more. Elsewhere he says God is absolutely unchangeable, while bodies are changeable in both space and time and souls are changeable only in time. Everything changeable is, Augustine adds, a creature, while that which is unchangeable is the creator. The soul as changeable in time, but not in place, holds the mid-rank position below the highest and above the lowest.

#### **Origin and Destiny of Soul**

From the above paragraph it is very clear that God created the soul, it would mean that the soul of Man is created by God, now the question is that what about the subsequent souls of human being. It posed the problem for Augustine. To answer he listed four hypotheses concerning the origin of souls with a view of defending the justice of God, no matter which one would be correct one. There are as follows;

- a. One soul was created and from it the souls of those who are now born are drawn.
- b. Souls are individually created in each child who is born.
- c. Souls already existing in some secret place are sent by God to animate and rule the bodies of individuals who are born.
- d. Finally, the souls existing elsewhere are not sent by God, but “come of their own accord to inhabit bodies.

To sum up this view souls come from propagation, created new in each individual; they exist elsewhere and are sent into the bodies of the newborn; or they exist elsewhere and fall of their own accord in these bodies. From this one can conclude that Augustine assumed the soul’s pre-

existence. At the same time he accepts that he does not know whether souls come to be in the body from the one soul of Adam or are individually created. It is nonetheless, quite possible that he once thought that he knew the answer to the question about the soul, namely the souls existed before their embodiment and fell through sin into bodies or at least into these mortal bodies. He accepts the immortality of the soul and it is created by God. The problem of the origin of human souls other than Adam's discussed at large in *De Genesis ad Litteram libri duodecim*. Here only three hypotheses regarding the origin of souls subsequent to Adam are present;

- a. All souls were created in the soul of Adam on the first day.
- b. All subsequent souls come from the soul of Adam by propagation.
- c. The new individual souls are created in the course of time.

The first two theories fit best with Genesis 2:2 which teaches that creation was completed on the sixth day, and with Sirach 18:1 which affirms that everything was created simultaneously. While traducianism seems most easily to explain the common inherited of original sin and the need for infant baptism, it seems to endanger the incorporeality of the soul insofar as it thinks of souls as propagated in a bodily fashion, as Tertullian had done, while creationism is thoroughly compatible with the incorporeality of the soul made to the image of God, it makes it more difficult to understand how a soul could be created by God with the guilt of Adam's sin. Hence the first hypothesis seems least problematic as representing Augustine's view at this point.

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### 1.3 CONCEPT OF GOD

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His understanding of God is influenced by Christian understanding of God, Platonism, and Manichaeism. Christian understanding: God is eternal, transcendent being, all powerful, created the world out of nothing, etc. Platonism: it provided him with important strategic and methodological principles for his thinking about the divine. They admonished him to look within his own soul rather than to the external material world and to look with the eye of the mind rather than with the bodily senses. Manichaeism: God to be a luminous mass extended infinitely through space; God is subject to attack, corruption, violation at the hands of rival power; again he believed that there were two independent divine substances in conflict with one another; his vision alone allows him to see that the true God is being itself, the one source of everything exists, and He is true God Who is incorporeal and infinite without extension.

Augustine also believes God is incorruptible, inviolable, and immutable. But the interesting is that his ground of argument i.e. the supremacy of God. God is supreme, and since incorruptibility is better than corruptibility, God must therefore be incorruptible. The same pattern of reasoning, *mutatis mutandis*, yields the divine inviolable and immutability. Thus his arguments provide the attributes of God. Regarding the nature of God, Augustine assumes a position opposed to all the errors of Platonism. For Augustine, God is immutable, eternal, all-powerful, and all-knowing, absolutely devoid of potentiality or composition, a pure spirit, a personal, intelligent being. The mystery of the Trinity of God induces Augustine to consider God as being, knowledge, and love; and since the world has been created by God, it reveals a reflection of these three attributes of God: every creature should consist essentially of being, knowledge, and volition. Thus he presents his discovery that God is that which truly is as the climax of his intellectual ascent to God, as the philosophical articulation of the scriptural divine name, and as the final remedy to the long standing ignorance that plagued his search of wisdom. For these reasons we should expect the conception of God as true being to be fundamental to Augustine's mature thinking about God.



### **Proof for God's Existence**

Augustine proves God's existence from *a priori* and *a posteriori* and point of view basing on the existence of reason. Because the essentially true character of the concepts of reason is the chief of the many witness to the existence of God. It is also attested by the necessity of a first cause, the rational character of the universe and the universal belief in his existence.

#### **A priori Argument**

Augustine began by proving that human reason exists, something with which no one could argue. He begins to prove that God exists by proving that there is something higher than reason—appears to rely on the assumption that what is higher than reason must be God. Here Augustine proves not merely that there is something higher than reason but that there is something than which nothing is higher (*quo est nullus superior*)

#### **A Posteriori Argument**

In order to prove anything, we must first start with a foundation that is accepted as truth. Augustine begins with the platform that we exist. We cannot argue this because if we do, it is proving ourselves wrong. The mere fact that we can argue is a proof of our existence. Next he asks us if we are alive. We must also agree to this because in order to agree or to not agree we must be alive. Now he asks us if we understand these two steps to be true. If we do, then he has proven his next step, we have reason. For without reason, we could not understand these two basic concepts.

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### **1.5 THE PROBLEM OF EVIL**

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In order to maintain God's omnipotence, benevolent, omniscient and his goodness to man Augustine is driven to the position that is God is the cause of everything at the same time either he has to exclude the evil or explain it away. Evil is a fact of life, physical and moral. Physical evil can be allowed under the seminal good but what about the moral evil? As a metaphysician how can one explain it. The whole of creation is out of god's goodness and his love. He was not bound and compelled but rather his love inclined him to create. In other words creation is free act of God. Therefore existence if of every kind is good; one should judge its value in relation to the divine will, not from the point of view of human utility. He has willed everything for the best interest of His creature, and so even the evil must be good in its way. In other words evil is necessary for the enhancement of the greater good, in the same manner in which the shadow in the moon enhances the beauty of the full moon. Though Augustine was largely a Platonist, yet he could not have accepted matter as the reason of evil, which was suggested by Plato. The reason is that for Augustine even matter was created by God. Hence if matter be the cause of evil, then God will directly become the cause of evil. Secondly, God is omnipotent and so he could not be imagined to be limited by pre-existing matter. Evil is not good, but it is good that evil is. Firstly, what appears as evil is not really evil. It is only to enhance the excellence of good. For example, in explaining the birth of a man born blind, Jesus said that this man was born blind so that the glory of God may be made manifest. Secondly evil is conceived as a defect, as a privation of essence (*privatio substantiae*), as an omission of the good; for example, there is the evil of blindness; it is simply an absence of the power of vision; in due course this vision (or good) can be restored. According to the privation theory of evil, evil is the negation or the privation of good., good is possible without evil, but evil is not possible without the good; for everything is good, at least in so far as it has any being at all. Privation of good is evil because it means an

absence of something nature ought to have. All kinds of evil including moral evil, are brought under the concept of privation. Moral evil cannot mar the beauty of universal creation, since it springs from the will of man or the fallen angels; it is the result of an evil or defective will, which is nothing positive, but merely represents a privation of good (*privatio boni*). The worst evil is privation *Dei*, the turning away from God, or the highest good to the perishable world.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Give the account of Augustine on question of God.

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2) How does Augustine understand human nature?

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## 1.6 COSMOLOGY

In his account of the origin of the universe, Augustine maintains a doctrine which was not developed by the pagan thinkers that is God created the world out of nothing by his free act/will. This concept has to be distinguished from Neo-Platonist theory of emanation. According to Neo-Platonist theory, the world emanates from God as the overflow from His abundance without becoming in any way diminished or altered in Him which means to say that God did not act freely (since such activity would, he thought, postulate have in God) but rather necessitate *naturae*, the Good necessarily diffusing itself. Again creator God is different from an architect God. An architect God creates the world out of pre-existing matter or chaos or an architect God creates the world out of pre-existing matter or chaos or any such material. A creator God creates everything from His own self. So there is no matter independent of God even in attenuation form, as in Plato and Aristotle.

If there is matter, then Augustine holds that either it is absolutely formless or matter which is formless only in comparison with completely formed. If the former, then you are speaking of what is equivalent to nothingness, "That out of which God has created all things is what possesses neither species nor form; and this is nothing other than nothing." If, however, you are speaking of the latter, of matter which has no completed form, but which has inchoate form, in the sense of possessing the capacity to receive form, Then such matter is not altogether nothing in deed, but, as something, it has what being it has only from some formless matter, this very matter was created from something which was wholly nothing. So God is the creator of matter with the potentiality of having form or germinal potentiality. Thus God is the absolute creator of all things, even of matter.

The world as the creation of God depends on God, but the world and God are not one and the same, as is held in pantheism. God transcends the world, and from the world as the effect, one cannot fully know God. All that one can say that he apprehends god, but cannot comprehend Him. Together with matter all things else were created at the beginning. Creation was the act of an instant and so it is senseless to say that god created the world at any point of time since time

and space were two among many other creation of the world. The Mosaic account of the six days of creation being merely a description of the six orders or grades of perfection in which things were created. Not all things, however, were created in the full possession of what came to be called their specific perfection. Augustine distinctly admits a process of development, as when in the treatise entitled *De Genesi ad Litteram*, he says: “*in semine, ergo, illa omnia fuerunt permitus, non mole corporeae magnitudinis sed vi potentiaque causali*” here he is alluding to the *seminariae rationes*. Seminal or germinal potentiality is not absolutely passive, but tends to self-development when the requisite conditions ripen in due course. St Augustine’s theory of germinal potentiality was brought forward to reconcile the exegetic problem concerning the two contrasted statements in the Biblical books of Genesis and Ecclesiastes. This doctrine of germinal potentiality is more Aristotelian than platonic.

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## 1.7 ETHICS

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Augustine describes ethics as an enquiry into the supreme good and how one can attain it. He appropriates the eudemonist ethics of ancient philosophy. Happiness is a universal human desire, the goal of human endeavour. It is the supreme good. He does not equate happiness with pleasure or enjoyment, any more than Aristotle or the stoics do, but with the eternal contemplation and love of god, by this he was thinking, not of a purely philosophic and theoretic contemplation of God, but of a loving union with a possession of God, and indeed of the supernatural union with God held up to the Christian as the term of his grace-aided endeavour: one cannot well separate out in Augustine’s thought a natural and a supernatural ethic, since he deals with man in the concrete, and man in the concrete has a supernatural vocation: he regarded the Neo-Platonists as discerning something of that which was revealed by Christ, Neo-Platonism as an inadequate and partial realisation of the truth. The ethic of Augustine primarily is an ethic of love. It is common in Augustine that what I do depends upon what I love, not merely in the sense of what I value, but above all in the sense that I act in accordance with a settled inclination. Acting in accordance with a settled inclination is, for him, acting voluntarily in the strict sense. Loving something is a necessary condition of willing it: sometimes Augustine suggests that it is tantamount to willing it. Loving the right things for the right reasons is a pre-condition of acting well. Loving the wrong things, or the right things for the wrong reasons, leads to evil actions.

If love determines action and is a symptom of character, self-love is the source of sin: more specifically, the source is pride, understood as a refusal to accept subordination to God, to acquiesce in one’s place in the hierarchy of beings. In Platonist terms, this is a ‘turning away’ from god to self-absorption, a failure to understand the relationship between God and humans. Adam’s fall results from the delusion that he is an autonomous being. His sin is a ‘perverse imitation of God’. Therefore man should love God above all things; he should love himself with a rational love, seeking what is best and doing what is best for himself in the light of his eternal destiny; he should love his fellow man, desiring what is best for him and aiding him to attain it.

Virtue is defined in terms of order, in the early *de beata viat*, Augustine understands the virtues to possess a kind of measure that is without either excess or defect. In that work he suggests that the attainment of wisdom by the sage entails possession of the virtues, in his later writings he is less sanguine about the perfectibility of human nature in this life, life is a continuing struggle with vices; virtue is not a stable, attainable state, the virtues control but do not extirpate emotions. Augustine recognizes the traditional four cardinal virtues. Virtue is a form of love, primarily of God, but also of other humans. Justice is ‘giving God His due’ as well as loving

one's neighbour. The practice of the virtues expresses the inherently social nature of humans: we are naturally members of societies. Augustine subscribes to the natural law theory; our awareness of the natural law derives from self love, or the instinct for self preservation and it extends to a realization of the need for justly regulated relations with others. Primarily, this realization is a form of the Golden Rule in its negative version 'Do not do to others what you would not have others do to you'. Augustine gives the natural, or, as he often calls it, eternal law the status of a Platonic Form inasmuch as he says of it, as he says of the forms, that it is 'stamped on our minds'. Strictly speaking, the laws of human societies should be framed in accordance with divine eternal law, but it is political authority, rather than strict conformity to natural law, that gives validity to positive law. Only those human laws that are explicit contraventions of divine commands may be disobeyed, and Augustine's understanding of what constitute divine commands is specific: they are commands directly revealed in scripture, such as the prohibition of idolatry. Augustine is otherwise reluctant to assert as a principle that individuals may decide for themselves whether an individual temporal law is just or unjust, even if promulgated by an unjust ruler or without reference to the natural law.

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## 1.8 POLITICAL THOUGHT

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In the theology of Augustine, God becomes the creator of the saved and the sinner at least because of His decree. They belong to either of two cities. The elect, the saved belong to the kingdom of God and the sinner and the damned belong to the kingdom of Satan or Devil. The elect are the chosen people for living in communion with Him, and, the sinner is left to be condemned to the hell-torment forever. On this earth there is nothing to distinguish the one from the other, but internally in their inner spiritual constitution. They are two kinds of people far apart, the community of the elect does not belong to this earth. Thus the kingdom of god and that of devil are sharply divided. To the kingdom of god belong the faithful angels and the elect chosen to be so by His Grace. To the kingdom of Devil belong the devils and the damned, not predestined to redemption. The community of the elect has no home on this earth, but they remain united through his Grace, giving fight against the kingdom of the devil. In contrast, the damned people keep on fighting amongst themselves. For Augustine, the human world belongs to this worldly history is born the saviour of the world called Jesus. Again, on this earth stands the church, which may be called the semblance of the heavenly kingdom on this earth.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Give the account of Aristotle on question of God.

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2) What are the Political ideologies of Augustine?

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## 1.9 LET US SUM UP

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According to Augustine knowledge is certain and attainable. One should believe in order that one may understand. God is the source of all truth. It is he who illumines our mind to attain knowledge. God created the world out of nothing by His free will. His existence is essential condition of the moral and intellect life. Speaking of evil he says God is not the author of evil but he permits in order that good may take place. The goal of man should be supreme good/ God. It is lasting and the rest are temporary.

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### 1.10 KEY WORDS

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**Divine Illumination:** For Augustine, it is in the light of God, by which the mind is said to be able to discern the objects of intellectual vision.

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### 1.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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**UNIT 2      THOMAS AQUINAS**


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**2.0. OBJECTIVES**


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The main objective of this Unit is to analyse the philosophical thoughts of Thomas Aquinas. As true to his scholastic medieval tendency of being influenced by Divine revelation, Thomas Aquinas brought reason and faith in dialogue. As Augustine followed the Platonic thinking Aquinas was the medieval voice of Aristotle. His rational attempt to prove God's existence has been very influential in Western tradition. His voluminous writing deserves appreciation. It is said "what is written is the poem but what is not written is the poem" – in the way what he has written is not what exactly he owns or knows but what he realized and felt and is what expresses his intelligence. That's why it is said that it's not that the death that took the pen from his hand but the realization that what he wrote is nothing before the wisdom of God.

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**2.1. INTRODUCTION**


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Thomistic Philosophy is inspired by the philosophical methods and principles used by Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274). Aquinas, who is most renowned for his Five Ways of proving the existence of God, believed that both faith and reason discover truth, a conflict between them being impossible since they both originate in God. Believing that reason can, in principle, lead the mind to God, Aquinas defended reason's legitimacy, especially in the works of Aristotle. The philosophy of Aquinas continues to offer insights into many lingering problems in Epistemology, Cosmology and Ethics. He was a masterfully skilled philosopher. Much of his work bears upon philosophical topics. Thomas' philosophical thought has exerted enormous influence on subsequent medieval scholastic period of Western culture and thought. Thomas stands as a vehicle and modifier of Aristotelianism, Augustinian Neoplatonism.

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**2.2 THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE**


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Knowledge, when we reflect upon it as a fact of psychic life, presents itself to us as an extension of the knower. The knower possesses both his own nature and the nature of the thing he knows.

Knowledge liberates and extends the self, so that it possesses the other. Knowledge in its very actuality is liberation from the confines of matter. Knowledge is a spiritual act uniting the knower with the thing known.

Thomas Aquinas holds the Aristotelian doctrine that knowing entails some similarities between knower and the known; a human's corporeal nature therefore requires that knowledge starts with sense perception. The same limitation does not apply to beings further up the chain of being, such as angels. Though he laid the proofs of God's existence he recognises that there are doctrines such as that of the incarnation and the nature of the trinity known only through revelation. God's essence is identified with his existence as pure actuality. God is simple containing no potentiality.

The Thomistic theory of knowledge is realistic. Men obtain their knowledge of reality from the initial data of sense experience, apart from supernatural experiences that some mystics may have. Agreeing with Aristotle, Thomas limited human cognition to "sense perception" and "intellectual understanding" of it, which are intimately related to one another. He distinguishes the sources of knowledge; the first one is the sense experiences or empiricism, the second one is the intellectual or the rational knowledge. The two cognitive faculties, sense and intellect, are naturally capable of acquiring knowledge of their proper object, since both are in potency - the sense, toward the individual form; and the intellect, toward the form of the universal.

- Sense experience is acquired through the sense organs. Sense organs are stimulated by the coloured, audible, odours, gustatory and tactile qualities of extra mental bodies; and sensation is the vital response through man's five external sense powers to such stimulation.
- Aquinas assumed that man's cognitive is aware of red flowers, noisy animals, and cold air and so on. Internal sensation works to perceive, retain, associate, and judge the various impressions (the phantasm) through which things are directly known. Man's higher cognitive functions, those of understanding, judging and reasoning have as their objects the universal meanings that arise out of sense experience.

According to Thomas Aquinas, this is just what happens through the action of a special power of the intellect, i.e., the power by which the phantasm (sense image) is illuminated. Under the influence of this illumination, the form loses its materiality; that is, it becomes the essence or intelligible species. Thomas calls this faculty the *intellectus agens* (agent intellect), and it is to be noted that for Thomas the "*intellectus agens*" is not, as the Averroists held, a separate intellect which is common to all men.

For Aquinas all the data of sense knowledge and all intelligible things are essentially true. Truth consists in the equality of the intellect with its object, and such concordance is always found, both in sensitive cognition and in the idea. Error may exist in the judgment, since it can happen that a predicate may be attributed to a subject to which it does not really belong.

Besides the faculty of judgment, Aquinas also admits the faculty of discursive reasoning, which consists in the derivation of the knowledge of particulars from the universal. Deductive, syllogistic demonstration must be carried out according to the logical relationships which exist between two judgments. This process consists the science which the human intellect can

construct by itself, without recourse either to innate ideas or to any particular illumination. Even then Thomas believed "for the knowledge of any truth whatsoever, man needs divine help, that the intellect may be moved by God to its act." However, he believed that human beings have the natural capacity to know many things without special Divine Revelation, even though such revelation occurs from time to time, "especially in regard to [topics of] a faith."

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the difference between Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle with regard to the theory of knowledge?

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2) Reflect on the importance of the study of Knowledge.

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## 2.3 PHILOSOPHY OF THE WORLD

In determining or defining the relationship of God with the world, Aquinas departs not only from the doctrine of the Averroist Aristotelians, but also from the teaching of Aristotle himself. For Aristotle matter was uncreated and co-eternal with God, limiting the divinity itself (Greek dualism). Aquinas denies this dualism. According to Aquinas "The world was produced by God through His creative act, i.e., the world was produced from nothing." Besides, all becoming in matter is connected with God, since He is the uncaused Cause and the immovable Mover of all that takes place in created nature, God has created the world from nothingness through a free act of His will; hence any necessity in the nature of God is excluded.

Again, we know that Aristotle did not admit providence: "the world was in motion toward God, as toward a point of attraction; but God did not know of this process of change, nor was He its ordinator." For Aquinas, on the contrary, "God is providence: creation was a knowing act of His will; God, the cause and mover of all the perfections of beings, is also the intelligent ordinator of them all that happens in the world finds its counterpart in the wisdom of God." Now, how the providence and the wisdom of God are to be reconciled with the liberty of man is a problem which surpasses our understanding. It is not an absurdity, however, if we keep in mind that the action of Divine Providence is absolutely distinct and can be reconciled with the liberty of man without diminishing or minimizing this latter.

## 2.4 ETHICS



The ethics of Aquinas is a fusion of Aristotelian and Christian elements. Their underlying assumption is that God made everything for a purpose – for the purpose of revealing his goodness in creation – that the nature of everything points in the direction of this purpose, and that every creature will realize the divine idea and reveal the goodness of God by realizing its true being. Objectively considered, the highest good, therefore is God; subjectively considered, the good for creatures is their greatest possible perfection, or likeness to God. Aquinas dealt with the theoretical analysis of ethical activities in a long series of works. Most of his works take the approach of moral theology, viewing moral good and in terms of accord or discord with divine law, which is revealed in scriptures and developed and interpreted in Christian tradition. Thomas Aquinas follows Aristotle in asserting, “Man is by his nature a social animal,” and “Human society is the flowering of human nature.” He accepted Aristotle’s position that human’s ethical behaviour is based upon the nature of human as a social animal.

Thomas' ethics are based on the concept of "first principles of action." In his *Summa Theologica*, he wrote: “Virtue denotes a certain perfection of a power. Now a thing's perfection is considered chiefly in regard to its end. But the end of power is act. Therefore power is said to be perfect, according as it is determinate to its act.” According to Aquinas “man always perceives to be good.” The ultimate good that makes man happy is contemplation of truth. And the ultimate truth, for Aquinas, is God himself. Thus, man’s ultimate end, which brings him total happiness, lies in the contemplation, in the vision of God.

Thomas defined the four cardinal virtues as prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude. The cardinal virtues are natural and revealed in nature, and they are binding on everyone. There are, however, three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. These are supernatural and are distinct from other virtues in their object, namely, God. In his *Summa Theologica*, he wrote: “Now the object of the theological virtues is God Himself, Who is the last end of all, as surpassing the knowledge of our reason. On the other hand, the object of the intellectual and moral virtues is something comprehensible to human reason. Therefore the theological virtues are specifically distinct from the moral and intellectual virtues.” He says that no virtue is inborn; all virtues may be acquired by the performance of virtuous acts. Such acquired virtues lead to imperfect or incomplete happiness, which is possible in this life. To have a life of blessedness, we need to have the virtues implanted by God; as mere acquired virtues they are of no avail in this regard. According to Aquinas love is the highest of the infused virtues, the perfect form of all the virtues

Furthermore, Thomas distinguished four kinds of law: eternal, natural, human, and divine. Eternal law is the decree of God that governs all creation. Human law is positive Law; the natural law applied by governments to societies. Divine law is the specially revealed law in the scriptures. Natural Law is the human "participation" in the eternal law and is discovered by reason. Natural law, of course, is based on "first principles" “... This is the first precept of the law that good is to be done and promoted, and evil is to be avoided. All other precepts of the natural law are based on this . . .” he further says “The morality of an act depends upon its conformity to the law of conscience and hence to the eternal law; nonconformity brings about moral evil, sin.”

Thomas denied that human beings have any duty of charity to animals because they are not persons. Otherwise, it would be unlawful to use them for food. But this does not give us license

to be cruel to them, for "cruel habits might carry over into our treatment of human beings." The desires to live and to procreate are counted by Thomas among those basic (natural) human values on which all human values are based. However, Thomas was vehemently opposed to non-procreative sexual activity. This led him to view masturbation, oral sex and even coitus interruptus, as being worse than incest and rape when the act itself is considered (apart from the abuse suffered by the violated party). He also objected to sexual positions other than the missionary position, on the assumption that they made conception more difficult.

Thomas contributed to the economic thought as an aspect of ethics and justice. He dealt with the concept of a just price, normally its market price or a regulated price sufficient to cover seller costs of production. He argued it was immoral for sellers to raise their prices simply because buyers were in pressing need for a product.

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## 2.5 PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN SOUL AND GOAL OF HUMAN LIFE

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Besides God, the spiritual substances are the angels and human souls. Angels are not destined to inform any matter; the human soul, on the contrary, is ordered to be the form of the body. Hence the question arises as to the nature of the soul and its relations with the body. A human being is an animated body in which the psychic principle (*anima*) is distinctive of the species and determines that the material is known. In other words, man's soul is his substantial form. Some of man's activities are obviously very like to those of brutes, but the intellectual and volitional functions transcend materiality by virtue of their universal and abstracted character.

The soul is a real part of man and, it is spiritual. The intellect and the will are the faculties of the soul, the means through which it operates. The intellect has for its object the knowledge of the universe, and operates by judging and reasoning. The will is free; that is, it is not determined by any particular good, but it determines itself.

From an analysis of the intellect and the will, Aquinas proves the spirituality, the simplicity, and the immortality of the soul. The intellect has, in fact, for its proportionate object the universal, the understanding of which is a simple and spiritual act. Hence the soul from which the act of understanding proceeds is itself simple and spiritual. Since it is simple and spiritual, it is by nature also immortal. The will also is free, i.e., not determined by any cause outside itself. In the physical world everything is determined by causal necessity, and hence there is no liberty. The faculty which is not determined by causal motives declares its independence of these causes and hence is an immaterial faculty. The soul upon which such a faculty depends must be of the same nature as the faculty; that is, the soul must be immaterial.

The human soul since it is immaterial and performs acts which are not absolutely dependent upon the bodily organs, does not perish with the body -- although, as Aquinas says, the soul separated from the body is not entirely complete but has an inclination to the body as the necessary instrument for its complete and full activity.

The doctrine of Aquinas concerning the soul in general and the human soul in particular, may be summed as follows: When the form in matter is the origin of immanent actions, it gives origin to life and as such is more particularly called the "soul." There is a vegetative soul, such as the

principle of plants, whose activity is fulfilled in nutrition, growth, and reproduction. Superior to the vegetative is the sensitive soul, which is present in animals; besides the processes of nutrition, growth and reproduction the sensitive soul is capable of sensitive knowledge and appetite. Superior still to the sensitive soul is the rational soul.

The rational soul is created directly by God; it is distinct for each man; it is the true form of the body. The human soul performs the functions of the vegetative and sensitive life, but besides these functions it has activities which do not depend upon the body, i.e., understanding and volition.

### Goal of human life

In Thomas's thought, the goal of human existence is union and eternal fellowship with God. Specifically, this goal is achieved through the beatific vision, an event in which a person experiences perfect, unending happiness by seeing the very essence of God. This vision, which occurs after death, is a gift from God given to those who have experienced salvation and redemption through Christ while living on earth.

This ultimate goal carries implications for one's present life on earth. Thomas stated that an individual's will must be ordered toward right things, such as charity, peace, and holiness. He sees this as the way to happiness. Thomas orders his treatment of the moral life around the idea of happiness. The relationship between will and goal is antecedent in nature "because rectitude of the will consists in being duly ordered to the last end [that is, the beatific vision]." Those who truly seek to understand and see God will necessarily love what God loves. Such love requires morality and bears fruit in everyday human choices.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Do you accept the immortality of soul? Why?

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2) Reflect on the ethics and goal of your life.

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## 2.6 PHILOSOPHY OF GOD

The proofs for the existence of God are also means of knowing something of God's essence. This knowledge, however, remains always essentially inadequate and incomplete. One way of knowing God is the way of negative theology, that is, by removing from the concept of God all that implies imperfection, potentiality, and materiality. In other words, by this method we arrive at the knowledge of God through considering what He is not.

A second method is that of analogy. God is the cause of the world. Now every object reflects some perfection of the cause from which it proceeds. Hence it is possible for the human mind to rise to the perfections of God from the consideration of the perfection it finds in creatures. This it does, naturally, by removing all imperfection and potentiality from the creatures considered. The resultant idea of the nature of God is thus had through analogy with the perfections of the created universe.

But, according to Aquinas, any natural intuitive knowledge of God is precluded to man. For us, only the visible world, which is capable of impressing our senses, is the object of natural intuitive knowledge. Thus any argument a priori for the existence of God is devoid of validity. For him, the existence of God needs to be demonstrated, and demonstration must start from the sensible world without any prejudice. Such demonstrations are possible and are accommodated to anyone who is simply capable of reflecting.

There are five ways in which the human intellect can prove the existence of God. All have a common point of resemblance. The starting point is a consideration of the sensible world known by immediate experience. Such a consideration of the sensible world would remain incomprehensible unless it was related to God as author of the world. All his proofs for the existence of God bring two distinct elements into play:

1. The existence of a sensible reality whose existence requires a cause;
2. The demonstration of the fact that its existence requires a finite series of causes and consequently a prime cause, which is what we call God.

### The Five Ways to prove the Existence of God

- **Movement:** Movement is any transit, any change from one state of being to another. According to Aristotle “Movement is a passage from potency to act.” According to Aquinas “whatever is moved is moved by another (*quidquid movetur ab alio movetur*)”. Thus, if there is a movement ultimately there should be a mover; as we know there is a movement. Therefore, there is an ultimate mover whom we call God.
- **Causality:** A cause is anything that contributes to the producing of a thing. That which is produced by cause is effect. God alone can be attributed as creator because He creates everything out of nothing. Thus, if there is an effect, there should be a cause and ultimately the First Cause; as we know already, the creation of the world itself is an effect. Therefore, there is a cause, ultimately the First Cause whom we call God.
- **Contingency:** Contingency means dependency. Our existence is not of our own. We have received it from the one who has existence on his own; He is God alone. So we are contingent (dependent) beings. But God is self sufficient; such self sufficient being is necessary. If there are contingent beings, there should be a necessary being; as we know there are contingent beings. Therefore, there should be a necessary being whom we call God.
- **Grades of perfection:** We see in the life on the world some things are more perfect, better; at the same time some are not like that; thus the grades of perfection (e.g. stone, vegetation, animal kingdom, human kingdom, and god). If there are grades of perfection,



there should be a higher perfection; as we know there exists grades of perfection. Therefore, there exists the higher perfection whom we call God.

- **Teleological (order and purpose):** This is an argument from the design. William Paley (1743-1805) in his “*Natural Theology: or Evidence of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearance of the Nature*” (1802) talks about the order and purpose of the created world. Paley argues that the natural world is as complex a mechanism, and as manifestly designed as any watch. The rotation of the planets in the solar system and, on earth, the regular procession of the seasons and the complex structure and mutual adaptation of the parts of a living organism, all suggest design. In a human brain, for example, thousands of millions of cells functions together in a coordinated system. The eye is a superb movie camera, with self-adjusting lenses, a high degree of accuracy, colour sensitivity, and the capacity to operate continuously for many hours at a time. Thus according to him nothing is created by chance but well planned and with a purpose.

Is there an order in the created universe? Yes. If there is an order, there is an intelligent/wise organiser; as we know through the words of Paley, there is an order. Therefore, there is an intelligent organiser who is called God.

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## 2.7 FAITH AND REASON

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From the beginning Thomistic philosophy we can notice a steady exploration of the relation between faith and reason, with systematic and complete analysis of this relation. He filled his writings with reason, especially in his *Summa Theologica*. He had no fear about appealing to Greek and Arab philosophers, despite the resistance of so many of his contemporaries. His vision about the relation between faith and reason can be summarized under three points.

Faith and reason are two different modes of knowing. Reason accepts a truth as known by the light of reason. Faith accepts a truth as known by the light of divine revelation. Therefore, there are two types of wisdom, philosophical and theological distinction between philosophical wisdom and theological wisdom and with the implicit affirmation of the autonomy of philosophy with respect to theology, Thomas Aquinas paved the way for the secularization of human wisdom.

The distinction between theology and philosophy does not consist in the fact that theology treats of God, for philosophy also treats of God and divine truths. The distinction consists rather in this, that theology views truth in the light of divine revelation, while philosophy views truth in the light of human reason. Thus faith (*fides*) and scientific knowledge (*scientia*) are sharply distinguished nor by object but by method.

Faith and reason do not contradict. They have their respective juridical boundaries. Truths of faith and truths of reason derive from the same origin, god who is the Truth. They are related like the gifts of nature and grace. Grace does not do away with the light of reason, but it reveals truth beyond the reach of reason itself.

God is the source of all truth. He communicates it to us directly by revelation and indirectly by



giving us the power by which we acquire it. Science acquired in the former manner would be divine and it is through experience and reason is human. It is impossible that there should exist a contradiction between truths of natural order and truths of the supernatural order.

Faith and reason are complementary. Faith renders valuable service to reason by elevating the mind on its natural functioning. Reason, in turn renders a valuable service to faith by the role it plays in theology. Reason can come to the aid of faith in various ways. For example, it can establish certain preambles of faith, such as the existence and unity of God, and it can prove many truths about creatures which faith presupposes. Reason can also use philosophy to refute doctrines contrary to the faith.

For Aquinas, philosophy helps theology in as much as it enables the theologian to deduce scientific conclusions from articles of faith. Theology serves philosophy in as much as it acts as a guide or as a light upon that of the philosopher showing him fields of research and making him convinced of the limitations of his powers. He insisted that reason and faith are not contrary but are two distinct sources of knowledge, both ultimately from God. Some Truth comes through man's reason, some through God's revelation.

### Check Your Progress III

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the difference between faith and reason?

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2) How do you feel the presence of God in your life?

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## 2.8 LET US SUM UP

The two cognitive faculties, sense and intellect, are naturally capable of acquiring knowledge of their proper object. Sense experience is acquired through the sense organs. Man's cognitive is aware of red flowers, noisy animals, and cold air and so on. Internal sensation works to perceive, retain, associate, and judge the various impressions (the phantasm) through which things are directly known. God has created the world from nothingness through a free act of His will. God is providence to the world and all creation was a knowing act of God's will. God made everything for a purpose – for the purpose of revealing his goodness in creation. According to Aquinas “man always perceives to be good.” The ultimate good that makes man happy is contemplation of truth. He further speaks about eternal law, human law, natural law, and divine law. The soul is a real part of man and, it is spiritual. The *intellect* and the *will* are the faculties of

the soul, the means through which it operates. The rational soul is created directly by God. The goal of human existence is union and eternal fellowship with God.

Aquinas derives five ways to affirm the existence of God from statements of facts about ordinary experiences.

1. From the fact of motion to Prime Mover
2. From efficient cause to a First Cause
3. From contingent beings to a Necessary Being
4. From degrees of value to an Absolute Value
5. From evidences of purposiveness in nature to a Divine Designer.

Philosophy, according to Thomas Aquinas, passes from facts to God; theology from God to facts. Dogmas, which are not the objects of philosophy, but matters of faith, revealed truths, are beyond reason, but not contrary to reason. Reason and faith are not contrary but are two distinct sources of knowledge, both ultimately from God. Some Truth comes through man's reason, some through God's revelation.

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## 2.9 KEY WORDS

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**Potentiality** - a power or a quality that exists and is capable of being developed.

**Revelation** – something that is considered to be sign or message from God.

**Determinate** - fixed and definite.

**Teleology** – the theory that events and developments are meant to achieve a purpose and happen because of that.

**Cognition** – the process by which knowledge and understanding is developed in the mind.

**Concordance** – the state of being similar to something or consistent with it.

**Preambles** – an introduction to something.

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**UNIT 3      DUNS SCOTUS**


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**Contents**

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Life History
- 3.3 His Main Works
- 3.4 Proofs for the Existence of God
- 3.5 The Unicity of God
- 3.6 Scotus on Simplicity
- 3.7 Significance of Metaphysics
- 3.8 Relation Between Philosophy and Theology
- 3.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.10 Key Words
- 3.11 Further Readings and References

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**3.0 OBJECTIVES**


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- To introduce the students to the life and work of John Duns Scotus in general.
- To enable the students appreciate some of the nuances of this great philosopher and theologian.
- To focus on the metaphysical orientation of Scotus.

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**3.1 INTRODUCTION**


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John Duns Scotus (1265/66-1308) was one of the most important and influential philosopher-theologians of the High Middle Ages. His brilliantly complex and nuanced thought, which earned him the nickname "the Subtle Doctor," left a mark on discussions of such disparate topics as the semantics of religious language, the problem of universals, divine illumination, and the nature of human freedom. This unit first lays out what is known about Scotus' life and the dating of his works. It then offers an overview of some of his key positions in four main areas of philosophy: natural theology, metaphysics, the theory of knowledge, and ethics and moral psychology (Williams 2009).

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**3.2 LIFE HISTORY**


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We do not know precisely when John Duns was born, but we are fairly certain he came from the eponymous town of Duns near the Scottish border with England. He, like many other of his compatriots, was called "Scotus," or "the Scot," from the country of his birth. He was ordained a priest on 17 March 1291. Because his bishop had just ordained another group at the end of 1290, we can place Scotus' birth in the first quarter of 1266, if he was ordained as early as canon law permitted. When he was a boy he joined the Franciscans, who sent him to study at Oxford, probably in 1288. He was still at Oxford in 1300, for he took part in a disputation there at some

point in 1300 or 1301, once he had finished lecturing on the *Sentences*. Moreover, when the English provincial presented 22 names to Bishop Dalderby on 26 July 1300 for licenses to hear confessions at Oxford, Scotus' was among them. He probably completed his Oxford studies in 1301. He was not, however, appointed as a master at Oxford, for his provincial sent him to the more prestigious University of Paris, where he would lecture on the *Sentences* a second time.

The longstanding rift between Pope Boniface VIII and King Philip the Fair of France would soon shake the University of Paris and interrupt Scotus' studies. In June of 1301, Philip's emissaries examined each Franciscan at the Parisian convent, separating the royalists from the papists. Supporters of the Pope, a slight majority that included Scotus, were given three days to leave France. Scotus returned to Paris by the fall of 1304, after Boniface had died and the new Pope, Benedict XI, had made his peace with Philip. We are not sure where Scotus spent his exile, but it seems probable that he returned to work at Oxford. Scotus also lectured at Cambridge sometime after he completed his studies at Oxford, but scholars are uncertain about exactly when.

Scotus completed his Parisian studies and was incepted as a master, probably in early 1305. As regent master, he held a set of *quodlibetal* questions (his only set) within two years of his inception. His Order transferred him to the Franciscan house of studies at Cologne, where we know he served as lector in 1307. He died the next year; the date traditionally given is 8 November. Pope John Paul II proclaimed his beatification in 1993 (Hause 2007).

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### 3.3 HIS MAIN WORKS

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Scholars have made considerable progress in determining which of the works attributed to Scotus are genuine. Moreover, many key texts now exist in critical editions: the philosophical works in the St. Bonaventure edition, and the theological works in the Vatican edition. However, others have not yet been edited critically. The Wadding *Opera omnia* is not a critical edition, and the reliability of the texts varies considerably. Despite its title, Wadding's *Opera omnia* does not contain quite all of Scotus' works. Most importantly, what Wadding includes as the Paris *Reportatio* on Book 1 of the *Sentences* is actually Book 1 of the *Additiones magnae*, William of Alnwick's compilation of Scotus' thought based largely but not exclusively on his Parisian teaching. The Parisian *Reportatio* exists in several versions, but most of it only in manuscript. Scholars are still uncertain about the exact chronology of the works.

Early in his career, Scotus wrote a number of logical works: questions on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and on Aristotle's *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, and *Sophistical Refutations*. His Oxford lectures on the *Sentences* are recorded in his *Lectura*, and his disputations at Oxford are recorded in the first set of his *Collations*. Scotus probably began his *Questions on the Metaphysics* in the early stages of his career as well, but recent scholarship suggests that Scotus composed parts of this work, in particular on Books VII-IX, after he left England for Paris, and perhaps late in his career. Scotus also wrote an *Expositio* on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and a set of questions on Aristotle's *On the Soul*, but more study is needed to determine their relationship with the rest of Scotus' corpus (Hause 2007).

While still at Oxford, Scotus began reworking the *Lectura* into his *Ordinatio*, a fuller, more sophisticated commentary on the *Sentences*. Then he departed for Paris, where he continued his



work on the *Ordinatio*, incorporating into later sections material from his Parisian lectures on the *Sentences*. These Parisian lectures exist only in various versions of student reports. Scotus' early disputations at Paris are recorded in the second set of his *Collations*.

Scotus died just a few years later, leaving behind a mass of works he had intended to complete or polish for publication. Nevertheless, he soon exercised as great an influence as any other thinker from the High Scholastic Period, including Bonaventure and Aquinas. Despite fierce opposition from many quarters, and in particular from Scotus' admiring confrere William Ockham, the Scotist school flourished well into the seventeenth century, where his influence can be seen in such writers as Descartes and Bramhall. Interest in Scotus' philosophy dwindled in the eighteenth century, and when nineteenth century philosophers and theologians again grew interested in scholastic thought, they generally turned to Aquinas and his followers, not to Scotus. However, the Franciscans continuously attested to Scotus' importance, and in the twentieth century their efforts sparked a revival of interest in Scotus, which has engendered many studies of high quality as well as a critical edition of Scotus' writing, eleven volumes of which are now in print. It remains to be seen whether Scotus' thought will have as great an impact on contemporary philosophy as Aquinas's or Anselm's (Hause 2007).

In the following section, we will only take up some of the main themes of this subtle doctor, in rather simplified style. We first deal with his idea on God, including his proof for God's existence. Then we take up his notion of simplicity, metaphysics and relation between philosophy and theology.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are some of the main works of Duns Scotus?

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2) Why is Scotus called the "subtle doctor"?

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### 3.4 PROOF FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Scotus' argument for the existence of God is rightly regarded as one of the most outstanding contributions ever made to natural theology. The argument is enormously complex, with several sub-arguments for almost every important conclusion which we can only briefly sketch here as shown in *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Williams 2009).

Scotus begins by arguing that there is a first agent (a being that is first in efficient causality). Consider first the distinction between essentially ordered causes and accidentally ordered causes. In an accidentally ordered series, the fact that a given member of that series is itself caused is accidental to that member's own causal activity. For example, Grandpa A generates a son, Dad B, who in turn generates a son of his own, Grandson C. B's generating C in no way depends on A

— A could be long dead by the time B starts having children. The fact that B was caused by A is irrelevant to B's own causal activity. That's how an accidentally ordered series of causes works.

In an essentially ordered series, by contrast, the causal activity of later members of the series depends essentially on the causal activity of earlier members. For example, my shoulders move my arms, which in turn move my golf club. My arms are capable of moving the golf club only because they are being moved by my shoulders.

With that distinction in mind, we can examine Scotus' argument for the existence of a first efficient cause (Williams 2009):

- (1) No effect can produce itself.
- (2) No effect can be produced by just nothing at all.
- (3) A circle of causes is impossible.
- (4) Therefore, an effect must be produced by something else. (from 1, 2, and 3)
- (5) There is no infinite regress in an essentially ordered series of causes.
  - (5a) It is not necessarily the case that a being possessing a causal power C possesses C in an imperfect way.
  - (5b) Therefore, it is possible that C is possessed without imperfection by some item.
  - (5c) If it is not possible for any item to possess C without dependence on some prior item, then it is not possible that there is any item that possesses C without imperfection (since dependence is a kind of imperfection).
  - (5d) Therefore, it is possible that some item possesses C without dependence on some prior item. (from 5b and 5c by *modus tollens*)
  - (5e) Any item possessing C without dependence on some prior item is a first agent (i.e., an agent that is not subsequent to any prior causes in an essentially ordered series).
  - (5f) Therefore, it is possible that something is a first agent. (from 5d and 5e)
  - (5g) If it is possible that something is a first agent, something is a first agent. (For, by definition, if there were no first agent, there would be no cause that could bring it about, so it would not in fact be possible for there to be a first agent.)
  - (5h) Therefore, something is a first agent (i.e., an agent that is not subsequent to any prior causes in an essentially ordered series — Scotus still has to prove that there is an agent that is not subsequent to any prior causes in an accidentally ordered series either. That's what he does in step (6) below). (from 5f and 5g)

(6) It is not possible for there to be an accidentally ordered series of causes unless there is an essentially ordered series.

(6a) In an accidentally ordered series, each member of the series (except the first, if there is a first) comes into existence as a result of the causal activity of a prior member of the series.

(6b) That causal activity is exercised in virtue of a certain form.

(6c) Therefore, each member of the series depends on that form for its causal activity.

(6d) The form is not itself a member of the series.

(6e) Therefore, the accidentally ordered series is essentially dependent on a higher-order cause.

(7) Therefore, there is a first agent. (from 4, 5, and 6)

Scotus then goes on to argue that there is an ultimate goal of activity (a being that is first in final causality), and a maximally excellent being (a being that is first in what Scotus calls "pre-eminence").

Thus he has proved what he calls the "triple primacy": there is a being that is first in efficient causality, in final causality, and in pre-eminence. Scotus next proves that the three primacies are coextensive: that is, any being that is first in one of these three ways will also be first in the other two ways. Scotus then argues that a being enjoying the triple primacy is endowed with intellect and will, and that any such being is infinite. Finally, he argues that there can be only one such being (Williams 2009).

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### 3.5 THE UNICITY OF GOD

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Don Scotus further elaborates on the unicity or oneness of God. God is, if you will, a kind of "highest good", not just for humans but for everything; yet we assert that there is but one God. Why? Can there not be multiple Gods, all of whom serve as "highest goods" in some theological scheme? In short, why is polytheism impossible? I say "impossible" because, according to Scotus, it is not merely a matter of faith or dogma that there is only one God: it is a matter of logical necessity (Carson 2007).

Scotus begins with the assumption that any will that is infinite wills things in the way that they should be willed. This he takes to imply a principle that we may call the principle of natural will: a correct will loves what is lovable to the extent that it is lovable and to the extent that the will is capable of loving, hence an infinite will will love whatever is lovable to the extent that it is lovable without exception. Suppose, then, that we posit two such infinite wills, that is, two Gods, calling one A and the other B. Both A and B, then, will love whatever is lovable to the extent that it is lovable and without exception; since both A and B are infinitely lovable, then each will love the other infinitely. Here Scotus introduces an assumption that must be unpacked. He says that everything loves its own being more than any other, just so long as it is neither a part nor an

effect of this other. We may call this the principle of natural love: fundamentally it means that, given a particular nature (e.g., human, dog, divine), the conscious awareness and will of any being with that nature will be most intimately familiar with its own being rather than that of any other particular nature and, hence, most naturally able to will and to do what is best for that particular nature (here "to love" means something along the lines of "having what is best for X at heart and in one's will").

In the case of our two Gods, A and B, we find that each of them is infinitely lovable, hence B is to be infinitely loved by A. And yet A must naturally love itself more than anything else, including B. But if A loves itself more than it loves B, then it does not love B infinitely, even though B is deserving of infinite love from A. If A does not love B infinitely, A is not acting in accordance with its own nature and, hence, cannot be infinite. So either A loves B as much as it loves itself and, hence, violates the principle of nature love; or A loves B less than A loves itself and violates the principle of the natural will. Both are conceptual impossibilities, hence the actual existence of more than one God is conceptually impossible.

The principle of the natural will and of natural love are, I think, unfamiliar to us and yet perfectly acceptable. If they seem strange, though, Scotus offers an ancillary argument based on this one. He remarks that there are two ways in which A may love B. Either A may love B for its own sake, or it may simply use B. If it merely uses B, the love is inordinate. If it loves B for its own sake because of B's nature, then, having the same nature as B, A will love itself for its own sake as well. But this means that A is beatified by two distinct objects, both A and B, neither of which depends upon the other, for A is made happy by itself just as much as it is by B. But it is conceptually impossible to find perfect beatitude in two distinct objects, because either one may be destroyed without any loss of beatitude, hence complete beatitude is not dependent upon either object.

It seems to be something like this latter argument that Aristotle must have in mind in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: humans have only one final good because the very notion of a "final good" seems to entail that there could only be one such thing. Scotus' arguments, in other words, have that logical flavour that so characterizes Scholastic argument generally (Carson 2007).

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Briefly give the proof for God's existence, according to Scotus.

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2) How does Scotus show the unicity of God?

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## 3.6 SCOTUS ON SIMPLICITY

In *De primo principio*, Scotus proposes one very simple argument for [God's lack of essential properties]: if God were composed of essential parts, each one would either be finite or infinite. If finite, then God would be finite. According to Scotus' definition of infinite the infinite exceeds the finite by a non-finite measure. Thus, no matter how many the parts, they do not add up to

infinite. If infinite, then – absurdly – the parts would not be less than the (infinite) whole. Further, Scotus appeals to the fact that composition of matter and form requires a causal explanation (an efficient cause), and the causal interrelation of the parts themselves, are considered as potency and act (PF).

As taken from Richard Cross (2005) the argument can be simplified as thus:

1. If God is composed of parts, then each part must be finite or infinite
2. If any given part is finite, then God is finite, which is absurd
3. If any given part is infinite, then it is equal to the whole, which is absurd
4. Therefore, no parts in God are finite or infinite
5. Therefore, there are no parts in God.

Now, given this, (2) would need to be defended. Scotus, does it by arguing that any finite part of God would be necessarily exceeded by Him infinitely; but that would imply an infinite number of parts would be required to exceed the finite part, and since you can never add up to infinite, the entire notion is absurd. Thus Scotus concludes that God is not composed of parts and so is simple.

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### 3.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF METAPHYSICS

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Metaphysics, according to Scotus, is the "real theoretical science": it is real in that it treats things rather than concepts, theoretical in that it is pursued for its own sake rather than as a guide for doing or making things, and a science in that it proceeds from self-evident principles to conclusions that follow deductively from them. The various real theoretical sciences are distinguished by their subject matter, and Scotus devotes considerable attention to determining what the distinctive subject matter of metaphysics is. His conclusion is that metaphysics concerns "being *qua* being". That is, the metaphysician studies being simply as such, rather than studying, say, material being as material (Williams 2009).

The study of being *qua* being includes, first of all, the study of the transcendentals, so called because they transcend the division of being into finite and infinite, and the further division of finite being into the ten Aristotelian categories. Being itself is a transcendental, and so are the "proper attributes" of being — one, true, and good — which are coextensive with being. Scotus also identifies an indefinite number of disjunctions that are coextensive with being and therefore count as transcendentals, such as infinite-or-finite and necessary-or-contingent. Finally, all the pure perfections (see above) are transcendentals, since they transcend the division of being into finite and infinite. Unlike the proper attributes of being and the disjunctive transcendentals, however, they are not coextensive with being. For God is wise and Socrates is wise, but earthworms — though they are certainly beings — are not wise.

The study of the Aristotelian categories also belongs to metaphysics insofar as the categories, or the things falling under them, are studied as beings. (If they are studied as concepts, they belong instead to the logician.) There are exactly ten categories, Scotus argues. The first and most important is the category of substance. Substances are beings in the most robust sense, since they have an independent existence: that is, they do not exist *in* something else. Beings in any of the



other nine categories, called accidents, exist in substances. The nine categories of accidents are quantity, quality, relation, action, passion, place, time, position, and state.

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### **3.8 RELATION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY**

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Scotus does not hold that science and faith can contradict each other, or that a proposition may be true in philosophy and false in theology and vice versa. Incorrect, also, is the statement that he attaches little importance to showing the harmony between scientific knowledge and faith and that he has no regard for speculative theology. Quite the contrary, he proves the dogmas of faith not only from authority but, as far as possible, from reason also. Theology presupposes philosophy as its basis. Facts which have God for their author and yet can be known by our natural powers especially miracles and prophecies, are criteria of the truth of Revelation, religion, and the Church. Scotus strives to gain as thorough an insight as possible into the truths of faith, to disclose them to the human mind, to establish truth upon truth, and from dogma to prove or to reject many a philosophical proposition. There is just as little warrant for the statement that his chief concern is humble subjection to the authority of God and of the Church, or that his tendency a priori is to depreciate scientific knowledge and to resolve speculative theology into doubts. Scotus simply believes that many philosophical and theological proofs of other scholars are not conclusive; in their stead he adduces other arguments (Minges 1909).

He also thinks that many philosophical and theological propositions can be proved which other Scholastics consider incapable of demonstration. He indeed lays great stress on the authority of Scripture, the Fathers, and the Church but he also attaches much importance to natural knowledge and the intellectual capacity of the mind of angels and of men, both in this world and in the other. He is inclined to widen rather than narrow the range of attainable knowledge. He sets great value upon mathematics and the natural sciences and especially upon metaphysics. He rejects every unnecessary recourse to Divine or angelic intervention or to miracles, and demands that the supernatural and miraculous be limited as far as possible even in matters of faith. Dogmas he holds are to be explained in a somewhat softened and more easily intelligible sense, so far as this may be done without diminution of their substantial meaning, dignity, and depth.

In Scripture the literal sense is to be taken, and freedom of opinion is to be granted so far as it is not opposed to Christian Faith or the authority of the Church. Scotus was much given to the study of mathematics, and for this reason he insists on demonstrative proofs in philosophy and theology; but he is no real sceptic. He grants that our senses, our internal and external experience, and authority together with reason, can furnish us with absolute certainty and evidence. The difficulty which many truths present lies not so much in ourselves as in the objects. In itself everything knowable is the object of our knowledge. Reason can of its own powers recognize the existence of God and many of His attributes, the creation of the world out of nothing, the conservation of the world by God, the spirituality, individuality, substantiality, and unity of the soul, as well as its free will. In many of his writings he asserts that mere reason can come to know the immortality and the creation of the soul; in others he asserts the direct opposite; but he never denies the so-called moral evidence for these truths (Minges 1909).

### Check Your Progress III

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How is simplicity applied to God?

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2) What is the significance of metaphysics for Dun Scotus?

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### 3.9 LET US SUM UP

Through his sharp intellect and rigorous reasoning, Scotus has been able to give a new understanding of philosophy. Moving slightly away from the Thomistic tradition, he has given new proofs for God's existence and speaks of the unicity of God. He is primarily a metaphysician, who does not think that his rational exercise (philosophy) does not contradict his spiritual quest (theology).

### 3.10 KEY WORDS

**Modus tollens:** The rule of logic stating that if a conditional statement ("if p then q") is accepted, and the consequent does not hold (not-q), then the negation of the antecedent (not-p) can be inferred (See Logic Notes).

**Simplicity:** the state, quality, or an instance of being simple. It is freedom from complexity, intricacy, or division into parts:

**Transcendentals:** Proper attributes of being that goes beyond the division of being into finite and infinite. The scholastic transcendentals are "one", "truth," "beauty," etc (See Metaphysics Notes).

**Unicity:** The condition of being united; quality of the unique.

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**UNIT 4      JEWISH AND ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHERS**


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**4.1 INTRODUCTION**


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The origins of Jewish philosophy are considered to be in Alexandria by the introduction of Hellenistic culture during the reign of Ptolemy Philometor. The attempt to apply Greek philosophical concepts to Jewish doctrines was made by Philo of Alexandria, also called Philo Judaeus (20 BCE - 40 CE), a prominent member of the Jewish community at Alexandria, and a figure that spans two cultures, the Greek and the Hebrew. Jewish philosophy sprung up due to the encounter between Hebrew religious thought and Greek philosophical thought in the first century B.C.E. Philo developed speculative and philosophical justification for Judaism in terms of Greek philosophy and thus he produced a synthesis of both traditions developing concepts for future Hellenistic interpretation of messianic Hebrew thought, especially by Clement of Alexandria, Christian Apologists like Athenagoras, Theophilus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and by Origen.

Jewish philosophical growth and contribution were considerably regressed during the early centuries of the Christian era. This was because the Jews became absorbed in their political struggles that followed the destruction of Jerusalem; this situation continued until the second caliphate of the Abbassides who began their reign in 754. Even though, there were no outstanding philosophers between Philo (first century) and ninth century, during the reign of the second caliphate of the Abbassides, one of the main Jewish thinkers in the Academy of Babylon founded a school that denied the authority of Talmud and the traditional Jewish laws, and instead proclaimed the right of reason to freely interpret scriptural texts. The followers of that school were called Karaitas; the oldest writings available from the first Karaitas date back to the tenth-century. The Karaitas had an adversary, Rabbi SAADIA ben Joseph (891-942), one of the last and most famous Gaonim, a great Talmudic scholar, Jewish philosopher and inspiring leader, who was born in a small village near Fayyum, in Egypt. He fought against the beliefs and customs of the Karaites with his scholarly and logical arguments. Soon after Saadia's death, the works of Arab philosophers were introduced into the Iberian Peninsula; it was also the period when Jewish philosophy reached the Caliphate of Cordoba.

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## 4.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF MEDIEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

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In the middle ages, the two sources of knowledge or truth were religious opinions as embodied in revealed documents on the one hand, and philosophical and scientific judgments and arguments, the results of independent rational reflection, on the other hand. Thus, Revelation and Reason, Religion and Philosophy, Faith and Knowledge are the various expressions for the dualism in medieval thought. For the medieval Jewish thinkers, reason and philosophy were represented by Plato, Aristotle and the neo-Platonists, while faith was represented by the Old Testament and the Talmud.

Beyond that of establishing a harmonic relation between philosophy and Revelation, there were also other motivations for a medieval Jewish philosopher to take recourse to philosophy. They are the necessity to integrate Bible discourse wherever it was vague or incomplete and the need to elaborate a systematic framework for all the truths contained in the Bible and the Talmud. In order to make clear the relations between Revelation and Reason or Religion and Philosophy, the medieval Jewish philosophers were recourse not only to the teachings of Christian philosophers from the Patristic period and the Islamic philosophers, but also to the thoughts of their own philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, who had given at the beginning of Patristic period a positive solution to reconcile Revelation and philosophy.

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## 4.3 MEDIEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHERS

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Medieval Jewish philosophers receive their knowledge on Greek philosophy not directly from Greek sources, but through the work of the Arab philosophers. Their religious philosophy was different from that of Philo, because, if Philo used mostly Plato and the Stoics in his attempt to synthesize Hellenism and Judaism, the Jewish medieval philosophers made the most use of the neo-Platonists and Aristotle. Among the highly competent and qualified medieval Jewish thinkers, we limit ourselves to studying two philosophers such as IBN GABIROL, known by the Latin scholastics as AVICEBRON, and MAIMONIDES.

### IBN GABRIOL or AVICEBRON (1022-1058)

Salmon Ibn Gabriol or Avicebron was born in Malaga around 1022, educated in Saragossa, and died in Valencia in 1058. He possessed extraordinary intellectual gifts and excelled as a poet and philosopher. He wrote a grammar book on Hebrew in verse, several poems, and the *Fons Vitae* (The Fountain of Life, or *yanbû' al-hayâh* in Arabic), a work that provoked great reaction from his Jewish compatriots. *Fons Vitae* is of great importance for the History of Philosophy. It was originally written in Arabic, and was known in the western Latin world through a translation done by John of Spain (Johannes Hispanus) and Dominicus Gundissalinus in the first half of the twelfth-century.

The original Arabic text is lost to us, though we do have some extant fragments in the form of citations of the original Arabic version in the Arabic language texts of other Jewish medieval philosophers. Because the Arabic fragments are sparse, the main version of the text is the Latin 12th century translation—it is considered more true to the original than the later 13th century Hebrew translation both because it is an earlier translation, but also because unlike the Hebrew



summary translation, the Latin edition is (ostensibly) a complete translation, maintaining the original dialogue format of Ibn Gabirol's original text.

Fons Vitae is a fictitious dialogue between a teacher and his pupil. It is considered as a book on neo-Platonism, containing the most special characteristics of this philosophy. The book is a philosophical study of matter and form, and it is devoid of any direct reference to biblical or rabbinic texts or doctrines. The main thesis of the work is that everything in God's universe has matter as well as form. Fons Vitae is divided into five treatises. The first is a general introduction of the topic of matter and form and their relation to physical substances. The second deals with the substance or matter that underlies the corporeality of the sublunar world. The third is a proof of the existence of simple substances, which function in Ibn Gabirol's ontology as intermediaries between God and the physical world. The fourth is a proof that these simple or spiritual substances are composed of form and matter, and the fifth treatise is an account of the universal form and universal matter that underlie everything in the universe except God.

Ibn Gabirol's most celebrated doctrine was that on universal hylomorphism. According to him, all beings, angels and human souls included, are gifted with (incorporeal) matter. In his opinion, matter is the prime substance which sustains the nine fundamental accidents, and matter is the first creature of God. Fundamentally the same in all creatures, it nevertheless presents very different grades of perfection according to a well defined hierarchy, which extends from a maximum of imperfection in the heaviest bodies to a maximum of perfection in the lightest Intelligences. Next to universal matter he places a universal soul or universal form, which is the soul of the entire created cosmos. The universal soul sustains the entire corporeal world, represents and knows everything that is in this world, just as our individual souls sustain our bodies, as they sustain and see everything that is in our bodies.

His teachings became influential in thirteenth-century University of Paris. They were considered seriously and criticized by St. Albert the Great and, above all, by St. Thomas Aquinas who dedicated four long chapters of his *opusculum De Substantiis Separatis*. The mark left by Avicenna in medieval Augustinism gave rise to a new philosophical trend which can be called Augustinian-Avicennian, that easily shows itself in great thinkers like St. Bonaventure.

### **MAIMONIDES (1135-1204)**

Moses ben Maimon, commonly known as Maimonides, a Spanish-Jewish philosopher, was born in Cordoba in 1135 and died in Cairo in 1204. His family had sought refuge in Morocco and later in Cairo when Cordoba was conquered by the Almohads, who were strictly religious Muslims intolerant of other religions. He was one of the authorities most cited by the Scholastic authors, among them St. Thomas Aquinas; he was known to them as "Rabbi Moses". He wrote various exegetical books, including the monumental Comment of the Talmud. In 1190 he completed in Arabic his principal work, the *Moreh Nebukim* (The Guide for the Perplexed), a sort of theological treatise that prefigured the glory of the Christian Summas of the thirteenth-century.

The Guide for the Perplexed has three parts. The first part is a discussion on God, His attributes and His essence, according to Scriptures, '*Kalam*' (Islamic theology) and philosophers (especially Aristotle and Avicenna). In the second part, after a long prologue on God's existence

and the proofs used in favour of this agreement, the author confronts the problem of the creation of the world “*ex nihilo*”, according to the opinions of philosophers (Aristotle) and the teaching of Scripture. The third part is on the study of man, his nature (soul and body), faculties, virtues and duties. He also examines the question of Providence, the Law, miracles, rewards and punishments.

In contrast to Avicenna's doctrine, Maimonides taught that the purely intellectual substances are totally devoid of matter. From Arab philosophy he received the thesis on the single agent intellect. He proved the existence of God as the Prime Mover, First Cause, and Necessary Being. He resolved the question on the hypothetical created eternity of the world by arguing that the rational proofs in its favour – following the explanation of Aristotle – are not conclusive, although neither could it be demonstrated that they are erroneous. Lastly, he flatly denied the possibility of assigning positive attributes to God, of whom only negative ones could be validly said: “God is one from all aspects, there is neither multiplicity in Him nor anything attached to his essence, such that the various attributes with their own meanings that are used in Sacred Scriptures to designate God refer to the variety of his actions, not to the multiplicity of his essence” (The Guide for the Perplexed, Ch. 52).

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#### 4.4 THE ORIGINS OF ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

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Prophet Mohammed, born in Mecca around 570, is the founder of Islam and the author of Quran. The main essence of the Quranic revelation can be summed up in five basic beliefs: in God, in angels, in revealed books, in God's messengers (Mohammed as the last and greatest of the prophets) and in the Last Day when human beings will be judged. Along with the beliefs, Islam has also religious practices that can be summed up in the so-called Five Pillars. There is no god but God and Mohammed is his messenger; in praying five times daily; in paying the alms tax, in fasting during the holy month of Ramadan; and if financially possible, in going on the great pilgrimage to Mecca. After the death of the Prophet (632), the Arab followers spread Islam through military conquests to the entire Middle East as far as Turkey to the north, India to the east, and northern Africa and Spain to the west. The conquests paved the way for Islam to profit of all pagan and Christian culture, thus coming in contact with the sources of Greek thought. With their contact with Christianity and Greek philosophy, the Arab philosophers began to apply the philosophical method to the exposition of their sacred texts and were making a rational reflection on various questions. Hence, the so-called “Arab scholastic theology” was born, generally known as the *halam* or *kalam* (i.e., method of reasoning or art of discourse). It was initiated in Damascus and developed later on in Baghdad and Basra.

#### HALAM (ARAB SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY)

In early Islamic thought (dated between 8th and 12th centuries), two main currents could be distinguished. The first is *halam* or *kalam* and the other is *falsafa*. While *halam* dealt mainly with Islamic theological questions, *falsafa* with interpretations of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism. In a later period, the important Islamic philosopher-theologians who attempted to harmonize these two currents were Ibn Sina (Avicenna) who founded the school of Avicennism, Ibn Rushd (Averroes) who founded the school of Averroism, and others such as Ibn al-Haytham (Alhacen) and Abu Rayhan al-Biruni. Two periods of development can be traced back in *halam*: during the

first period the theologians were almost exclusively engaged in interpretative casuistry. This doctrinal movement was called the *mutazilite* and its founder was Wasil bn 'Ata' (700-749). This movement evolved and the mutazilites looked for support in philosophy and were one of the first to pursue a rational theology called *Ilm-al-Kalam* (Scholastic theology). The thinkers of this second period were regarded as the architects of *halam* from which the name of this period, *mutakallimoun*, is derived. The subsequent generations who were critical to Mutazilism paved the way for another trend called Asharism, which made use of the dialectical method for the defence of the authority of divine revelation.

## MUTAZILISM

Mutazilism, originated from Basra in the beginning of the eighth-century, was a moderate reaction against the literal interpretation of the Quran. The Mutazilites focused their speculation on four main topics:

- i) On the unity of the Divine Being (God) and that of His attributes. In order to safeguard both God's unity and his transcendence they held that the attributes of God are indissolubly part of His essence.
- ii) On divine justice and human freedom, which they tried to reconcile by denying God's intervention in the affairs of the world.
- iii) On the sin of infidelity, saying that in order to be saved, believing in the Quran is not enough: it is necessary to avoid mortal sins;
- iv) On the attitudes one must have towards his enemies and to infidels, who need to be converted by kind methods, but without discounting the use of force if they persevere in their errors.

According to Mutazilites God is a Being who is strictly One and absolutely Necessary, while everything else is strictly possible being. God willed Creation, but properly speaking, what he created was only the universal primordial act from which all other created things necessarily flow.

## MUTAKALLIMOUNS

The Mutakallimouns considered the Quran as the prime source for their knowledge about the world, and therefore they intended to set-up to understand the world according to the stipulations of the Quran. They brought forth a theological reaction to the unorthodox activity of the Mutazilites. They searched for answers to the speculative problems posed by the Mutazilites: how can the divine will be explained if God merely created the universal primordial act, and that he does not interfere in all that happens in Creation? They wanted to preserve the immutability of the divine essence within the context of the continual interventions of the divine will. The solution offered by the Mutakallimouns can be summarized as follows: The divine will cannot cease its activity because that would imply that in God there is discontinuity and accidental changes in his essence. Therefore, it is necessary that he be creating continuously some atoms, which do not have any special properties nor special laws in themselves; the divine will unites and separates them in a vacuum.

## ASHARISM

Al- Ash'ari (874-936), the founder of Asharism, belonged to the school of the Mutazilites and he continued to support its doctrines up to the age of forty. But later he abandoned it because of a disagreement with his teacher, the head and scholar of the School of Basra. He abandoned the rationalism of Mutazilites and became their most vehement and severe critic. He spent the rest of his life in combating 'Mutazilite heresy' and proposing orthodox interpretation of the Quran. The Ashirites held the view that God's will rules all creation and governs the deliberations of the human will. Things happen because God so wills, and if they occur, it is because God wants it that way. Nothing escapes the scope of divine will because God alone is absolutely necessary in himself. God is not only the Necessary Being, He is absolute possibility as well. Without God, created things are not necessary nor are they possible; they do not simply exist.

### Check Your Progress I

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What were the motivations of a medieval Jewish philosopher to take recourse to philosophy?

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2) Explain the doctrine of universal hylomorphism of Ibn Gabriol.

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3) Explain Maimonides' doctrine on God.

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## 4.5 MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHERS

### AL-KINDI (796–ca. 866)

Chronologically, the first important Aristotelian Arab philosopher was Al-Kindi (796–ca. 866). Most probably he lived in Baghdad and Basra, under the aegis of the 'Abbasid Caliphs. Al-Kindi's philosophic thought is directly connected with Greek philosophical doctrines transmitted to him through translations and with the rationalist theological movement of the Mutazilites. The central point of Al-Kindi's theodicy is the denial of the positive attributes of God, and the negative attributes are given prominence; his purpose was to emphasize the absolute transcendence of God in relation to the world. In order to prove God's existence, he preferred the



demonstration based on creation, which shows God as the necessary Being, supreme Creator who is the source of order and government in the universe.

In his philosophy, Al-Kindi was more of Neoplatonist than an Aristotelian. He adopted the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation in his metaphysics and cosmology. In his theory of intellectual knowledge, he adopted the doctrine of the active intellect and the passive intellect (formulated by Aristotle and later elaborated by Alexander of Aphrodisias and subsequently reworked and modified by Neoplatonists). After his study in detail, Al-Kindi differentiates four kinds of intellect: i) the intellect that is actual; ii) the intellect that is passive or potential; iii) the intellect that passes from potency to act, that is the possible intellect (actualized by intelligible forms); iv) the demonstrative intellect (that is, it retains acquired knowledge and transmits it via demonstration). The intellect that is always actual is the intellect of the last celestial sphere and it governs the sublunar world. The potential or possible intellect forms part of the individual soul of every human being.

#### 4.5.2 AL-FARABI (ca. 870-950)

Al-Farabi, a great Islamic peripatetic, was a native of Persian Turkestan, studied in Baghdad and lived in Aleppo and Damascus. He attempted to elevate philosophy to the place of highest value and to subordinate the revelation and the *sharia* (the religious law) to it. His importance lies in his attempt to establish the concordance between Plato and Aristotle. During his time, the main disputed topics springing from discrepancies between Plato and Aristotle were the following: whether the world is eternal or created in time; how to prove the existence of the first maker of the universe, as well as how to affirm the existence of things emanating from him; the problem about the soul and the separated intellect; how good works and evil ones are remunerated; the so-called “problem on the substance” (what is the first and most noble substance: whether it is the substance closest to the intellect and to the soul, that is, the substance farthest from the senses, or is it the individual substance or the person).

An important contribution of Al-Farabi was his concept of the necessary being, which influenced Avicenna’s philosophy. The factor that distinguishes God from things is that God is uncaused while everything else is caused, and therefore God is a necessary being but creatures are all contingent. From the necessary Being or God at the top emanates a first intelligence, which is the beginning of unity-in-multiplicity, since though it is in itself one, by its knowledge it knows another. Out of it in successive emanations come the intelligences, each associated with one of the nine heavens, down to the moon. In the sublunary world, ruled by the tenth and last intelligence, exist the four elements (earth, air, water, fire) and human souls.

### AVICENNA (980-1037)

#### Life and Works

Abu Ali ibn Sina, known to the West as Avicenna was responsible for systematizing eastern Islamic philosophy. The central thesis of his metaphysics is the division of reality into contingent being and Necessary Being, a doctrine that he formulated basing the theory of the distinction between essence and existence. He was born in Bukhara (Turkestan) in central Asia in 980 A.D. He was an extraordinarily precocious child. He studied the Humanities, the Quran, Mathematics,



and philosophy. He was well known for his skills in Medicine. At the age of eighteen he could consider himself an accomplished physician and had acquired all the immense philosophical knowledge displayed in his large philosophical encyclopedias and in his numerous treatises. After the collapse of the Samanid empire in 999, he left Bukhara, and the later decades of his life are marked by some vicissitudes. About 1020 he was Vizier in Hamdan. The last fourteen years of his life were spent in the company of Ala ad-Daula, the ruler of Isfahan, whom he followed on all his journeys and on all his military ventures. In 1037, during a military campaign, he died in Hamadan. His philosophical vocation was confirmed by his contact with Aristotle's Metaphysics, which he read forty times in order to understand it, so much so that he was able to memorize it. Al-Farabi gave him the key to understand Aristotle's thought. His contribution to Christian Scholasticism is very important. St. Thomas Aquinas would quote him almost three hundred times, and Duns Scotus set the framework of his system in view of Avicenna's intuitions.

Around two hundred works were attributed to him. The best known of his large philosophical encyclopedia is *Ae-Sifa* ("Healing" or "Recovery"; i.e. of the soul from error), known in the Middle Ages as the *Liber Sufficientiae*. It was an encyclopedia of all knowledge during his time, a work that includes treatises on logic, physics, mathematics, psychology, metaphysics, etc. His most famous medical work is *Al-Qanun fi'l-Tibb* ("The Canon of Medicine" or Canone), a systematic encyclopedia in five books based on the achievements of Greek physicians of the Roman imperial age and other Arabic works and on his own experience.

### **The philosophical system**

Like Aristotle, Avicenna assigned to metaphysics the study of being. According to Avicenna, the notion of being is the first to be formed, "it cannot be described other than by its name; since it is the first principle of all description, it escapes all description. But its concept immediately arises out of the mind without any mediating factor". Therefore, the point of departure for Avicenna's philosophy is the division of being into "being necessary by itself" and "being necessary in force of its cause". In the philosophical system of "necessity" and the "necessary being", Avicenna postulated the priority of necessity on the basis of his concept of creation, that is, as a necessary procession from the first principle.

The "necessary being" is the being whose nonexistence would be a contradiction. The logical concept of "essence" and the metaphysical concept of "existence" are identical for the highest being, the "necessary being". It can in no way depend on a principle apart from itself. In God alone essence, what He is, and existence, that He is, coincide. So, God is the first cause, the One, the highest light and the source of all light, as He is the highest intellect and the highest love. His essence is free from matter. All things proceed from Him, and things proceed from him necessarily, but it takes pleasure in and approves of that emanation. (This well-known Avicennian thesis regarding the necessity of creation, influenced the subsequent Islamic philosophy). Therefore, from the "necessary being", i.e., from God, proceeds the world, not through mechanical necessity, but through the requirement of divine goodness. Since only one can come from the One, only one thing in this world has a direct origin from God: "the prime intelligence". From the "prime or first intelligence" proceed nine other intelligences. The tenth intelligence, which is the most imperfect of all, closes the cycle of producing another intelligence

and it irradiates the intelligible forms and engenders in the material world everything that is perceived by the senses – among these forms are the individual souls of men. The tenth intelligence is the “Giver of forms” and it is the “agent intellect” that governs the souls of human beings. The argument of Avicenna to demonstrate the real distinction between essence and existence was taken up later by St. Thomas Aquinas. Although St. Thomas was inspired by the Avicennian methodology, we cannot conclude that the Thomistic notions of *essentia* and *esse* coincide with those of Avicenna. On the contrary, while there was similarity in their methods, they had a basic discrepancy as to the metaphysical framework they were working in.

## **ALGAZEL (1059-1111)**

### **Life and works**

Al-Gazel (Al-Ghazali), considered to be the greatest Moslem after Mohammed, enjoys a great place and authority among the Sunni (orthodox) Moslems. Al-Gazel was born in Tus, in north-eastern Iran, but most of his studies were conducted elsewhere: Giugian (near the Caspian Sea) and Nishapur. He was appointed to a professorship of the Nizamiah university in Baghdad; but, in 1099, after a period of severe spiritual crisis leading to his rejection of philosophy and rationalistic theology, he abandoned his position as a university professor. He devoted himself to the wandering life of the ascetic and Sufi religious practices. There are mainly four major works from Al-Gazel, two written before his “conversion” and two after. The works from the period before his conversion are *Maqasid al-falasifa* (*Intentiones philosophorum*) which is a methodological exposition of the principle doctrines of Islamic philosophers, especially of Avicenna, and *Tahafut al-falsifa* (*Incoherentia philosophorum*) which is a very severe critique of the errors of philosophers and philosophy. The other two works are *Ilhya ulum ad-din* (Revivification of the Religious Sciences) which gives a review of all theological questions, and *Al-Munqidh min addadal*, which is his autobiography.

### **Critique of philosophy**

His knowledge of Greek and Islamic philosophy, together with a good grasp of logic, initiated him to introduce a new form of theology less rationalistic and more responsive to the needs of the piety, thus helping the believer to draw near to God both in heart and in mind. In criticizing philosophers, he distinguishes them into three principal groups: materialists, naturalists and theists. He accuses the first two groups of atheism and he considers the materialists “atheists par excellence”. According to Al-Gazel, Aristotle is the best among the theists.

He criticized the philosophers on:

- i) their teaching on the eternity of the cosmos and the inconsistency of their claim that this teaching fits with the doctrine of creation by God;
- ii) their notions about God’s knowledge of either universals or particulars;
- iii) their doctrine of souls of the heavenly spheres and of their knowledge;
- iv) their theory of causation;
- v) their failure to prove or recognize the spirituality and immortality of the soul;
- vi) their denial of the resurrection of the body.

He criticizes the philosophers because their views are in basic conflict with Islam, especially on the eternity of the world, their views on God's knowledge of particulars, and their denial of the resurrection of the body.

### **The question of the eternity of the world and its emanation**

Al-Gazel is very fierce on the teaching of the philosophers about the eternity of the world and the related concept of the emanation of the world, because it offended strongly against his belief in the contingency of God's act of will in creating the world out of absolutely nothing. According to him, the philosophers assumed things about causation which there is no need to assume, that is, that every effect has a cause and that a cause lies outside of the effect and that a cause will lead immediately to an effect. Therefore they argued that if the world came into being at a particular time, there must be a cause of God's change of mind; but this is impossible since at the time in question *ex hypothesi* nothing else existed. So the world must have been in existence from all eternity. But Al-Gazel counters this by saying that we could equally believe that the cause of God's willing lies within his mind; God can will from all eternity, but at differing times : there is no need for the effect to follow directly upon his willing. God's will is not in any case bound by anything. Al-Gazel is especially critical of the philosophers because they are happy to think of God's knowledge as being of quite a different character than ours, but they continue to make close comparison between our will and his. Actually, according to him, the philosophers really reduce God.

### **God and His attributes**

Al-Gazel organizes, following the example of Al-Ashari, theology around two fundamental doctrines of Islamic faith: God's unity (Allah is Allah) and God's message (Mohammed is his prophet). According to Al-Gazel, God is unique because God is uncaused, without principle; the prime principle and final end of each thing, God is one in His essence without associates, Single without anyone like Him, Lord without any to oppose Him. He is One, Eternal without a First, Perpetual without principle, Perennial without end, always Eternal without end, Subsistent without creation, Continuous without interruption. From the fundamental attribute of uniqueness, Al-Gazel logically reaches all the other attributes: Simplicity, incorporeity, immutability. God is the only creator of everything that exists; God is omniscient and omnipotent: His science and His will know no limits. Al-Gazel teaches that God, the eternal has manifested in a complete and definitive way through His messenger, his prophet, Mohammed, who gathered the Word of God in the Quran.

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## **4.6 WESTERN ARAB PHILOSOPHERS**

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Islam spread to Europe when the Moslems crossed Gibraltar in 711 and conquered the Iberian Peninsula. They were stopped at Poitiers by Charles Martel in 732 and were driven out of Europe in 1492. Their stay in Spain and Portugal that lasted for almost eight centuries produced a Hispano-Islamic culture in which philosophy flourished. Spanish Arabic Philosophy was represented by Ibn Masarra (883-931, a native of Cordoba, who went to the East to study philosophy, becoming a neo-Platonist, returned to his native place during the Caliphate of Abderraman III), Avempace (ca. 1070-1138, born in Saragossa, had an important and wide-

ranging influence on medieval thinkers, especially St. Albert the Great, Alexander of Hales, Roger Bacon and Raymund Lull. He held the view that the agent intellect is extrinsic to man, that it is divine, immortal and eternal), Ibn Tufail (ca.1110-1185, born in Guadix) and Averroes.

### **AVERROES (1126-1198)**

#### **Life and Works**

Averroes (Ibn Rusd) was born at Cordoba in Spain. The young Averroes received a complete education in theology, law, medicine, mathematics, astronomy and philosophy. From the twentieth year of his life, he dedicated his time to study Aristotle and he spent his life commenting on Aristotle's works; for that he received the title Commentator par excellence. He wrote three types of commentaries on those works: the greater commentaries (written at the end of his life), the lesser or 'middle' commentaries, and the paraphrases. These works which he wrote in Arabic were later translated into Latin in 1230; as Aristotle's commentator, his works were widely used among the Scholastics in the Latin West. The influence of Averroes in Islamic philosophy was also important because he dared to disregard the authority of Avicenna, which was unchallenged and widespread at that time. Averroes' another famous work is *Destructio destructionis philosophorum* (*Tahafut-al-Tahafut*), which he wrote in defense of philosophers and philosophy, when Algazel attacked philosophy as an enemy of religion.

#### **Relationship between Philosophy and Religious Knowledge**

On the relationship between Philosophy (reason) and religious knowledge (faith), Averroes teaches that only philosophy can properly express the truth; however, the same truth can be also shown by theology, although in a different manner, that is, allegorically. With this epistemological principle, he formulated the following hermeneutic rule: "We steadfastly say that every revealed text, whose literal sense contradicts a truth apodictically demonstrated, must be interpreted allegorically in accordance with the rules of this interpretation in the Arabic language". The allegorical reading of revelation is possible, according to Averroes, by the divine origin itself of the Koran that is so rich in meaning comprehensible by all sorts of men. About the relations between philosophy and religious knowledge, Averroes writes, "The demonstrative speculations of philosophy cannot arrive at contradicting the content of the Law because truth cannot place itself in conflict with truth; on the contrary, the former is in agreement with the latter and testifies to it. That this is the effective situation arises from the fact that when a demonstrative knowledge leads to the knowledge of something real, then the only possibilities are the following: either the Law says nothing about it, or the Law says something. If the Law does not say anything, then there can be no contradiction. If it does say something, then the external expression either agrees with what is said by demonstrative speculation, or the two are contradictory. If they agree, then there is nothing to add. If they contradict each other, then an interpretation becomes necessary. The goal of this interpretation is to extract the profound meaning of what the word of the Law expresses in a figurative way".

According to this text, Averroes attempts to reconcile his Islamic faith with Aristotelian philosophy. He thinks that this can be done with the allegorical reading of Quran.



Averroes did not hold the doctrine of “double truth” – attributed to him by his followers in 12th century, the so called Latin Averroists – which says that what is true for philosophy may be false for theology; that is, there can be a philosophical truth contrary to a theological truth about the same matter, with neither of the two “truths” being false. It is evident that Averroes subordinated theology to philosophy, because according to him it is the task of philosophy to determine which revealed truths must be interpreted allegorically, and which and how those truths must be taken literally. The subordination of religious matters to philosophical knowledge earned for him great difficulties before the extremely conservative members of the Almohade kingdom.

### Creation

For Averroes, the world is eternal and it was created by God. Hence God can be called the cause of the world. He answers the question of how and when it was created: according to him, creation was a free act of God, the Almighty. Since God is Almighty, there is no reason to think that after that decision of God to create He would delay its execution in time. Such delay or waiting would imply that He is determined by something extrinsic to Himself, and that is contrary to God’s essence. Besides, since the divine will is immutable, neither can it be thought of as waiting to create and subsequently creating. And being Pure Act, He cannot delay acting; a non-acting Pure Act is inconceivable. Thus, with this argument and other similar ones, Averroes reached the conclusion that creation is eternal.

### Unity of all human intellect

A doctrine of Averroes which became particularly well known in the Christian west is the doctrine of the unity of all human intellects. Averroes maintained that there are three intellects: passive (material) intellect, active (efficient) intellect, and acquired (corruptible) intellect. The passive intellect is eternal and is no part of the essence of the individual soul but one and the same for all mankind. Because this intellect is a separate substance which exists outside the individual man and outside of matter, it is immortal. Therefore, Averroes regards the passive intellect as incorruptible. The active intellect transmits the *intelligibilia* for the passive intellect, which, in grasping them, becomes, in a particular individual, first active and then acquired intellect. Although different persons differ in intelligence and knowledge thus obtained, there is always the same amount of intellectual knowledge in the world.

### Check Your Progress II

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Explain *Halam* and *Falsafa* in Islamic philosophy

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2) Explain the important philosophical contributions of Al-Kindi

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 3) What is the theory of Unity of all human intellect according to Averroes?  
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#### 4.7 LET US SUM UP

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We have observed in this unit that during the scholastic period of the Western Philosophy, there were quite interesting and profound contributions from Jewish and Islamic philosophers. Theirs was totally influenced by their religious conviction as that of the Christian philosophers of the West during the same period. Their contribution also enlightens the students of philosophy that their faith claims were strengthened by their leaning towards Greek philosophy and consolidating their claims as reasonable faith.

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#### 4.8 KEY WORDS

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**Halām:** that which deals mainly with Islamic theological questions

**Falsafa:** that which deals with interpretations of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism

**Sharia:** Islamic religious law

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#### 4.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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