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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY IN MODERN TIMES:
AN APPROACH BASED ON HUGH ST. VICTOR

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Teaching is always difficult no matter what the subject. So finding a wise and effective teaching method may be challenging for any teacher. Thus, the medieval method of Hugh St. Victor (1096-1141) could be interesting for modern teachers of philosophy who want to demonstrate to their students that philosophy is applicable to their lives and remains relevant. Hugh St. Victor's method focused on studying how "to read well" and how to practice what was read. And from this idea the philosopher strove to form the student intellectually to re-discover the knowledge humans lost after the fall in the Garden of Eden.

Keywords: education, Victor St. Hugh, philosophy, method, teacher, student.

ПРЕПОДАВАНИЕ ФИЛОСОФИИ В НАШЕ ВРЕМЯ:
ПОДХОД ГУГО СЕН-ВИКТОРСКОГО

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Преподавать всегда трудно независимо от предмета. В связи с этим поиск мудрого и эффективного метода обучения является сложной задачей для любого учителя. Поэтому средневековый метод Гуго Сен-Викторского (1096-1141) может быть интересен современным преподавателям философии, которые хотят показать своим ученикам, что философия актуальна и применима на практике. Метод Гуго Сен-Викторского был направлен на то, чтобы обучить студентов тому, как читать «правильно» и как интерпретировать прочитанное. Исходя из этой идеи, философ стремился интеллектуально подготовить ученика к тому, чтобы он мог заново открыть знания, утраченные людьми после грехопадения в Эдемском саду.

Ключевые слова: образование, Гуго Сен-Викторский, философия, метод, учитель, ученик.

The question of how to teach philosophy is a quandary that challenges every teacher of this science. The methods of teaching which have emerged over time provide an on-going evolution to the task. Contemporary teaching styles offer various approaches for conducting an academic course. Yet some older approaches (even those crafted centuries ago) might present a modern teacher with a source of unique inspiration. The teaching method of Hugh St. Victor is one such method, as it is an ordered system that conveys the interrelatedness of knowledge to the learner and builds an "entire relation between the 'text' and the experience of the text" [2, p. 123]. This article will investigate Hugh St. Victor's approach in an effort to answer the question how to teach philosophy wisely and effectively in the 21st century

Hugh St. Victor was a canon regular of St. Augustine, living in France during the 12th century. He was influenced by Saint Augustine's writings and Boethius's works. His approach may be seen as building a connection between man's reason and Divine revelation. St. Victor sought knowledge, which he saw as existing "...in the oneness with God" [5, p. 123]. The human being is blocked from gaining knowledge as a result of *original sin*. As one is prevented from gaining knowledge, they are also prevented from entering into oneness with God. To explain this issue further, St. Victor offered the three-eyes metaphor.

The first eye belongs to the flesh and allows a person to see physical world. The second eye is spiritual and allows one to observe his soul. The third eye belongs to the art of contemplation and offers the vision of God. The effects of original sin blind the third eye and blur the second eye. To restore vision to the third eye, one must engage in a process of clearing the first and second eyes. This is done "...through, meditation, and contemplation respectively. The progression toward the oneness that can only be achieved through the contemplation that follows meditation and thought is a teleological path that introduces order into seeking union with God" [5, p. 123].

Hugh of St Victor's approach to education moved beyond the traditional medieval religious approach of rejecting the world to achieve religious knowledge. He believed in pursuing intellectual inquiry in such a way that took him and his

monks outside of the religious setting. He educated students who would "go on to 'good jobs' in royal and ecclesiastical courts or noble and merchant households. These influential knowledge workers were ideally placed to apply their restored minds to restoring the human community" [3].

St. Victor wanted education to change the world; his students were the vehicles of change. This meant their education was more than analysing Holy Scripture. He emphasized "how to read" so the person's intellectual and spiritual formation (gained from the vision of their three eyes) was positively affected. The person formed by St. Hugh was trained intellectually. Education (and human formation) was reflected in how the students behaved, spoke, dressed, and lived [3]. St. Hugh advocated the student's rationality and abilities to grasp the information and develop from it. Therefore, his education was formative and expanded the mind while also building knowledge. The human might find truth, but this discovery had to be rooted in virtue to be understood.

To appreciate St. Victor's educational approach, it must be remembered he was a monk. Living life in a religious community can be challenging, as daily life with the same people requires patience and discipline. It is unsurprising that "at St. Victor, the communal, ascetic life prepared the canon for the 'real work' of ministry to the outside world" [3]. The monastic view is also present in St. Victor's approach to human dignity, which originates from the person's *capas dei,* i.e., ability to receive God's grace and so seek the path to perfection as a child made in God's image.

In the 1120s, Hugh St. Victor compiled his work "Didascalicon", which encapsulated his educational approach. This can be summarized as knowing "how to read"; it uses an ethical and spiritual approach to reunite the person with the wisdom God intended for him. To regain the knowledge lost from original sin the person should read and meditate. This mentality is a reflection of the religious mind set present in the medieval era. "Reading" for St. Victor was more than noting the words composed by letters. It was a process of deciding what materials to read, designating an order with which read the selected materials, and then finally reading the materials

themselves. With this system, St. Victor presented an approach for undertaking the study of all knowledge and reuniting the soul with God.

Following St. Victor's teachings, one understands that he believed the consumption of educational materials as actively contributing to the persons' understanding of themselves and the world around them. They perceive themselves as a person, a human being with dignity and purpose. By studying theoretical, practical, logical and mechanical disciplines they forms a practice of "contemplation" by which they discover the truth [q.v.: 4]. The "Truth" is God, and so they find how they have been created in His Divine image. Reading (and by this study – understanding) brings the person within a proximity of the Divine. Knowledge allows them to find the fingerprint of God in the awesome scheme of nature.

After having decided what to study and discerned the order in which order to study the materials, a person needs to actually "read" the chosen pieces. In reading, the individual should also then fulfil the materials by acting on what was learned and "practicing" it in real life, and by this transform "the concreteness of the world into the most ordinary site of reading" [2, p. 122]. Through practice, a person finds one restoring the integrity which is naturally his. In this way, St. Victor's method of reading is holistic. A person gains knowledge through reading what he has chosen. Then, he goes out and uses this knowledge as it was intended to be used. By doing as the reading told him, he achieves a restoration of his soul. Through the actualization of his knowledge, he generally restores what original sin stole from humanity. With this knowledge and striving to return to the pre-original sin state, the person ascends to the study of higher groupings of knowledge. In this journey, education must not be seen as mundane – i.e., rote memorization to pass an exam before being lost. It is an active process that brings a person from the state of ignorance closer to the pre-original sin perfection experienced by Adam and Eve.

To fulfil the process, an individual cannot be lax in study. Once he has decided to "read", he must be aware he have made a conscientious, intellectual decision to set out on a quest with spiritual implications. The journey of the intellect will take him through physical hardship as he endeavour to practice what he has learned. To engage

in this experience, one must be mindful that he is ignorant and is deficient in various areas of intellectual and spiritual formation. In this way he gains the humility necessary to engage in true study, as he is aware of what he lack and can envision what he might gain. He may then begin to develop understandings of the possibilities that will emerge from further intellectual progress. With this continued progress, the person becomes aware of his personality and abilities.

Through "reading", a student learns to understand the complex structure of knowledge his reading acquires. This gradually cleanses the physical senses of the prejudices that veil true reality from them. And ultimately, one finds the scales of ignorance, branded onto humanity by original's sin effects, removed from his mind. Free of the blindfold of sin's obliviousness, a person is able to see the world as God created it. Through studious endeavours, one discovers God as He wants him to, and his relationship grows – free from prejudices, the blockades of sin, and the fallen world. Education allows for unity with God, as an individual learns to identify Him in the world around.

Practical usage in teaching

Following the teaching methodology of a monk might seem laughable to a modern teacher. St. Victor was "hidden" from normal life and engaged in a lifestyle that is a far cry from the modern person's reality. Yet, from this type of study, achieved by true "reading", St. Victor envisaged that the individual would gain access to secular and divine truth, develop critical thinking skills, more efficiently be able to live in the world as a person and be able to communicate better with others. Even if modern philosophical teachers seeking to use St. Victor's methodology is not an individual helping students pursue teleological goals, they may still find his ideas useful. St. Victor forged a bond between study and teaching, the tangible and intangible realities, and a subsequent relation between reading and reality. This is useful for teachers who want to impress students the influence of philosophy on their in day-to-day life. It awakens in students the understanding of what they learn can be actualized and help them to pursue knowledge.

In the process of deciding what to study, a teacher makes two decisions. The first is what to place on the syllabus as "required reading". These are the materials which are absolutely essential for the course and for achieving a baseline of knowledge acceptable for gaining a general understanding of the subject. These materials should be related immediately to the course and correspond with various deviations the lecture might make. The second decision is with regard to "recommended reading". This material should not be required for passing the subject but is additional and highly advisable for a student to read. It takes the achieved general understanding and develops it further. This may not relate directly *to* the class, but instead, venture beyond it and so widen the scope of the student's knowledge. This also allows the student to decide what to read. Although he must fulfil the required reading requirements, he has the immediate option of choosing among the recommended readings. Having been selected by the teacher, who used his own knowledge and discernment, he is sure to contribute to the student's intellectual development. The teacher is also honour the student's dignity as a person, as he does not impose an undue burden for passing the course. The student is given the *choice* to select from the recommended readings and do so according to any number of variables affecting his particular academic life – such as available time for additional study, research interests, or affinity to a particular author.

Following the selection of readings, a teacher must list these on the syllabus in an order corresponding with the lecture topics. Readings should reinforce the ideas delivered in the lecture, as well as provide some supplementary knowledge. In consideration of this task, it may also be advised to place the "supplementary readings" into a cohesive order, which the teacher might find as incrementally developing the student's knowledge. This is sensible, as one would not begin study of the Bible by reading the Apocalypse. Similarly, when teaching a course, for example, that introduces philosophy, one might be strongly recommended to begin with introducing their student to Plato and his dialogues with Socrates. Then, seeing how the development of philosophy materialized, one could begin a study of selections from Nichomachean Ethics to see how philosophy approaches the issue of ethics. The

list of readings does not have to be extensive, but it should ensure the students' experience growth of knowledge that is logical, comprehensive, and does not leave gaps in their learning process.

Next, students should be encouraged to "practice" what the philosophers taught. This does not mean a literal interpretation. Rather, it means what Hugh St. Victor encouraged – exercising self-discipline in such a way as to implement learned principles and concepts into everyday life and the "relation to the world" [2, p. 122]. For example, if one were to read Marcus Aurelius with their students, they might encourage their students to consider Aurelius's advice on the happiness of life: "I am rising to the work of a human being. Why then am I dissatisfied if I am going to do the things for which I exist and for which I was brought into the world? Or have I been made for this, to lie in the bed-clothes and keep myself warm?" [1]. Students could be asked to practice for a week waking up and considering the day ahead of them with positive thoughts – and so view their alarm clocks as something good. By waking up and setting about their days they can pursue their teleological fulfilment more than staying in bed and scrolling through "TikTok". After a week the students may be invited again to read Aurelius's quote and asked what it means for them. Having lived this philosophical idea, have their lives changed somehow? Consequentially, they see that after having read a chosen reading at a specific time on their philosophical journeys and actualized it, philosophy might have had made an impact in their lives.

Conclusion

After considering Hugh St. Victor's approach towards teaching, and then seeking to apply this approach practically, we can make the conclusion. It was studied what made and continues to make Hugh St. Victor's method particularly interesting for a philosophy teacher. Theologian medieval system categorized knowledge so that the students received a well-rounded education. By learning how to choose readings wisely, how to read effectively and how to practice what was read Hugh St. Victor prepared students for their achievement of knowledge and restoration of what was lost to them because of original sin. Equipped with their gained

knowledge and prepared for a lifetime of learning, students can then work towards the fulfilment of their teleological goal of unity with God and self-fulfilment.

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