

Book reviews

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Phillip Cary *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist*. (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2000). Pp. xii + 214. ISBN 0 19 513206 8. £30.00.

In *Confessions* VIII.ii.4, Augustine tells the story of Marius Victorinus' conversion to Christianity. He claims to have been told it by his 'catechist' in the run up to his baptism at Easter 387. The African born Victorinus (ca. 281/91–365) had been a famous rhetorician in Rome. SPQR had erected a statue in his honour. In his later life he had shown great interest in the Christian doctrine, but rejected baptism and participation in the eucharist. 'Is it the church walls that make you a Christian?', he is supposed to have asked a Christian friend. One might ask whether he held that position as a pupil of Plotinus, who had taught that perfection lay in the intellect. Other Platonists, like Iamblichus, had maintained that theurgic practices too were required. Augustine knew Victorinus' philosophy and was influenced by it. He had read some of Victorinus' translations of the writings of Plotinus and Porphyry. His 'catechist', the deacon and later bishop of Milan, Simplicianus, who had known Victorinus personally, had also taught him a thing or two about this kind of Platonism, as had the then bishop of Milan, Ambrose, through his sermons. But the point which Augustine, like Simplicianus before him, wants to make in his story is not that Victorinus was a Platonist, but that in the end he did decide to get baptized, profess the Christian faith, and attend the Christian liturgy, much to the dismay of his pagan friends. Yet this raises the question even more, as to why a Plotinian intellectualist joined a religion which considered certain, partly external, acts, like baptism, as a minimum requirement for salvation. Had he become an Iamblichian? On what grounds did Victorinus decide to get baptized?

In the *Confessions* Augustine does not directly answer that question. Here, the story of Victorinus' conversion has something miraculous about it, not unlike Augustine's account of his own life. Everything in it seems determined by God's grace. Elsewhere, Augustine develops arguments about the role of language, rationality and belief in the process of acquiring a notion of the truth of the Christian religion. The formal quality of even these arguments, however, does not

explain the fundamental assumption that baptism and full participation in the liturgy of an orthodox (= Catholic) congregation are minimum requirements for salvation. In order to ground that belief Augustine has to develop, or, in Phillip Cary's terminology, to 'invent', a fundamental tenet entirely different from either the Platonist idea of a universal (divine) intellect, or the biblical teaching of the universe as God's creation. To be sure, Augustine tries to assert either of these two teachings, and he combines them in creative and ingenious ways. But he also attaches to them a third, in his view no less fundamental, teaching, according to which the transgression of the first human being, Adam, renders humanity a mass of culpably damned individuals, only a few of whom God elects to be saved. For some reason Augustine is absolutely certain that those few who are elected, are elected exclusively among those who die as baptized and orthodox Christians. The majority of the human race, even of those baptized, is eternally damned. Their earthly lives are mired in guilt; even their virtues are just dazzling vices. Their intellect too is affected by their sin. During their earthly lives it is hardened in error. Only at the last judgment God's grace (= Christ, the presiding judge) reveals to them the awesome truth of their pitiful, but wholly deserved, state. Then they do indeed 'see' in an intellectual vision, which is not a beatific vision, however, but a painful one of horror, terror, and despair.

When, towards the end of his book, Phillip Cary speaks of being simultaneously dismayed and fascinated by Augustine's teachings, he may be thinking of the one outlined above. As a philosopher, however, he does not use mythical language, but abstract concepts, thereby dissolving Augustine's powerful images into small elements of carefully balanced arguments. Nevertheless, he sets out to tell a story. But it is a different story, the story of Augustine's invention of the inner self. His narrative progresses by way of two main parts: a shorter one with four chapters (9–60), and a longer one with six (63–139). It is rounded off by a conclusion (140–145). There are two appendices: the first lists Augustine's writings in chronological order; the second contains translations of two texts, an extract from Augustine's epistle 18.2, outlining his three-tier ontology (mutable creatures, immutable creatures, God), and Question 46.1 'On ideas' from Augustine's work 'On eighty-three different questions'. Endnotes (151–193), a bibliography listing sources (195–200) and literature (200–205), and an index conclude the volume.

The first part is entitled 'Platonism: a tradition of divinity within'. Chapter 1 relates the concepts of the soul and Platonic form. It treats topics like the soul and the good, transcendence, intelligibility, and the concept of intellectual vision. Chapter 2 puts these items in historical context. Aristotle's idea of knowledge as identity with God is discussed, as is Alexander of Aphrodisias' Platonizing exegesis of Aristotle, his 'invention' of a (divine) *intellectus agens*, who effectively draws and guides the ascending human intellect toward itself. Cary's narrative in this section of the book culminates in Plotinus' teaching on unity and division, and on turning to the inside as *the* way to 'salvation' (intellectual vision). Chapter 3 retells

the story of Augustine's reading of Plotinus in the context of his biography, as seen from a particular angle in modern scholarship. This chapter culminates in some examples of 'Augustinian Plotinism'. Chapter 4 discusses some problems posed by such a 'Christian Platonism', in particular with regard to the doctrine of salvation through the whole person of Christ (i.e. his body, or 'flesh', as well as his mind) and with regard to the notion of God's incomprehensibility.

The second part of the book concentrates on the main topic, 'Augustine inventing the inner self'. Chapter 5 presents Augustine's inward turn and quest for intellectual vision as a philosophical project. It points out that in Augustine's day nature and grace were not yet seen as separated and in competition, and that it was possible to conceive of a philosophical quest for intellectual vision involving the religious dimension of divine grace. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 explore the divinity of reason, the problem of the soul participating in this divinity, and Augustine's solution, his concept of the soul as a created individual, or 'will'. Chapter 9 discusses the fall as a result of the soul's (= created will's) mutability. Chapter 10 concludes with issues arising from the model of an inner self, like memory as an inner world, places in memory, seeking and finding in the memory (= forgetting and remembering), location of the soul, powers of the soul, the size of the soul etc.

Cary's idea of narrating these issues, and thereby making them more appealing to a wider audience, deserves sympathy, especially since the book is well written. The style is sometimes a bit broad and heavy, but it pays to stay engaged, read on, and resist the temptation to fling the book across the room every time one disagrees with the author. It is also worth mentioning that at the beginning of each chapter a short summary, set off against the main text by a different type face, and in the style of the *argumenta* of old, informs about the content and the point of the argument discussed in that chapter. All of this makes the book commendable and definitely worth reading.

Yet there is also plenty in this book that deserves criticism. Cary's narrative style, to begin with, appealing as it may be, also tends to hide problems rather than discuss them. A philosopher or historian of ideas who tells a story, instead of arguing a case, may as well be writing an historical novel, or a grossly simplified, simplistic version of events. Cary writes about Alexander and Plotinus as if he was dealing with the only influences on Augustine. Porphyry is mentioned once in passing, Victorinus not at all. Cicero is mentioned in connection with the concept of intellectual vision. The reading of the *Hortensius*, however, led Augustine to join the Manichees. Cary later mentions the Manichees (and the Stoics) for their materialism, which Augustine rejected. But it seems that Augustine had held materialist views before joining the Manichees in 374. He had acquired them through the Catholicism of his mother. They influenced him in 374 when he first joined the Manichees, then when he got baptised in 387, and finally when he developed his teachings on the sacraments against the Donatists, and his doctrine of original sin and predestination against the Pelagians. They also helped him to

retain a positive notion of the role of Christ's flesh in the process of salvation. Cary cannot understand why Augustine should have taken an inward turn, if he really believed that salvation is to be found in the flesh of Christ (x). Indeed! But equally: why should Augustine, like Marius Victorinus, have received baptism, if he found his salvation in an inward turn? Maybe Cary's thesis is wrong and Augustine did not 'invent the inner self'? Cary himself concedes precisely that (5, 140). First he questions the very concept of 'invention', whether it means 'collecting and arranging material for a speech', as in Latin *inventio*, or 'constructing an innovative type of technical gadget', as in 'Edison invented the light bulb', or 'discovering a phenomenon', as in 'Crick and Watson discovered the α -double-helix of DNA', i.e. they 'discovered' the phenomenon, but they 'invented' the model. Clearly, a concept of inwardness existed before Augustine, not just in Platonism, but also in the Biblical tradition, e.g. in Paul, as shown by Theo K. Heckel, *Der innere Mensch: Die paulinische Verarbeitung eines platonischen Motivs* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993). Augustine may have made a more sophisticated use of the concept and rearranged the imagery, but whether that amounts to an achievement which can be called an 'invention', remains to be determined. Augustine himself would almost certainly have been terrified at being called an 'inventor'. In his time that label was largely reserved for heretics (see Klaus Thraede, 'Erfinder II', in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 5, 1273–1276).

The notion of 'inner self' is problematic too, and Cary is the first to admit this. On 143 he apologizes for having talked too much about inwardness, and not about how Augustine relates inwardness, the outer world (= the material universe and other bodily creatures) and the beyond (= the spiritual world and God). It is as if he was pulling the plug on his own study and declaring that the issue is not really Augustine's invention of the inner self, but Phillip Cary's invention of the inner self, as in Augustine. The three concepts which Cary proposes to discuss in further inquiries, sign, grace, and reason, are constitutive for the present inquiry into Augustine's concept of the self – not just the 'inner self'! Augustine never held a quasi-isolated concept of the inner self. From the debris of his attempts to prove the immortality of the soul without admitting to its divinity, he developed, one might argue, the concept of the created self, or individual will, *voluntas*, as constituted and moved (*causatur*), intellectually, morally, and even physically, by God's grace. Yet again, a similar notion of self existed in the Platonist and Biblical tradition before Augustine, while Augustine never carried it as far as medieval and modern philosophers in emancipating the self. In that respect a 'Pelagian' like Julian of Aeclanum is far more a disciple of Aristotle and Alexander, and thus a predecessor of Thomas Aquinas, than Augustine. The notion of an emancipated self as part of an incorruptible (created) nature is also essential for the concept of improvement or development from the good toward the better, not only in merely spiritual terms, but for human nature as a whole. Augustine did not believe that a

sacramental sign like baptism could be an efficacious means of grace. That kind of belief emerged only in the 'High Middle Ages'. The principle however, to understand God's salvific will in reasonable human terms was already shared by Julian of Aeclanum, in whose opinion it was a staple of Christian tradition. For Augustine, in contrast, getting baptized was almost like taking part in a lottery (or think of Pascal's Wager). It increased only slightly the chance of being saved rather than not being saved – from zero to one among many thousand – though taking seriously the mathematical value of zero, even that difference is, of course, enormous. Yet that cannot be how Marius Victorinus, or, for that matter, Augustine in 387, understood their baptism. Augustine developed this view bit by bit, in the decade after 387. His ongoing study of Platonism did play a part in this development, as Cary rightly points out, but not the only one. What emerged in its course, Augustine's philosophy of inwardness, as Cary outlines it in his book, was a philosophy against all philosophy, a reasoning in the face of something grotesquely unreasonable, an attempt to comprehend the essentially intelligible through the essentially unintelligible, God through a *creatio vergens in nihilum*. No wonder this kind of thought inspired Deism, or worse (cf. 122–124), despite skilfully mapping the inner world of the self it created (125–139). (In this last section one misses a reference to G. J. P. O'Daly's study *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (London: Duckworth, 1987)).

There is more to this than Christian Platonism. Before Augustine (and in the East, with some exceptions, after him as well) intellectual vision was identified with beatific vision in the presence of God. Salvation was *ὁμοίωσις θεῷ*. Much less thought was given to the 'dark side' of the scenario. Two things remained ultimately unintelligible in traditional Early Christian theology, God and evil. In trying to make them intelligible Augustine reintroduced elements to his theology which he thought to have repudiated at his conversion, gnostic and Manichean concepts, concepts against which he polemicized when he saw them professed in contexts other than his teaching on the grace of God and Christ. For Augustine it was that grace that made everything intelligible, even the unintelligible. It was itself *intellectus*. In outlining part of the Platonist background of Augustine's intellectualism, and focusing on the inwardness of the self as the manifestation of that intellectualism in Augustine's thought, Cary has treated an aspect of that intellectualism. How fundamental an aspect it is, and how characteristic of Augustine's thought as such, could be argued. In the reviewer's opinion, identifying intellect and grace and then using this concept for addressing the problem of God and evil is a far more characteristic and fundamental trait of Augustine's thought; and it is not just influenced by Augustine's reading of Plotinus.

JOSEF LÖSSL
Catholic University, Leuven

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Samuel M Powell. *The Trinity in German Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Pp. 280. £40 (Hbk). ISBN 0 521 78196 5.

This is a learned and lucid account of one of the most obscure recesses of the Teutonic *Ideenparadies*; reflection on the Christian dogma of the Trinity. Powell emphasizes the cardinal importance of the German Idealists for the revival of the doctrine of the Trinity in twentieth-century theology, especially in Barth and Pannenberg. He astutely presents Hegel's Trinitarian theology as rooted in Lessing and Leibniz. But he also provides a fascinating discussion of the centrality of Luther and Melancthon. Powell gives a brief review of Barth, Bultmann, Moltmann, Tillich and Pannenberg. The book is organized both historically and systematically. Powell analyses the history of approaches to the doctrine of the Trinity systematically in terms of self consciousness, revelation and history.

Given the prevalence of so many naive, polemical – and often simply false – views about German thought which are quite pervasive in the kind of British theology fuelled by 'postmodern' historiography, it is to read such an informed and penetrating analysis. This author is steeped in German; although the learning is worn lightly. It is a largely descriptive book, but I think it should be a most useful reference work on a central, but rather elusive and difficult, realm of speculation and reflection. Powell perhaps neglects somewhat the German reception of Neoplatonism, especially the tradition of *das seiende Eine* of Parmenides which was instrumental for the development of the doctrine of the Trinity for the Idealists, via Augustine's employment of self-consciousness as the paradigm of Absolute subjectivity conceived as a relational unity. It is an embarrassing fact for those modern theologians who wish to harness the doctrine of the Trinity to the decentralization of subjectivity in the American-Gallic avant-garde, that the revival of the Trinity in modern theology was the achievement of the German Idealists, especially Hegel. It is perhaps surprising that Schelling is omitted from the discussion. He was an important influence on Hegel, and in some respects is much more 'Trinitarian' than Schleiermacher. One might look at the superb article by Barry Nisbet, 'The rationalisation of the Holy Trinity from Lessing to Hegel', *Lessing Yearbook*, 41 (1999), 65–89, and the present writer's *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion, Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) on how the Germans took over many of these problems from debates in the English Enlightenment, and Coleridge promptly took them back over the Channel!

My major criticism of Powell's narrative revolves around his relative neglect of the mystical and Socinian traditions. On the signal importance of these two

strands of thought, see the classic essay by Troeltsch, *Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt* (Aalen, 1911). The vehicle of the reception of Platonism in German Idealism was often the 'spiritualist' or mystical tradition, a strand of thought which was a decisive influence upon Lessing. The German Idealists were influenced by south-west German mysticism. However, there is also the issue of the influence of Socinianism. Powell discusses the lack of sympathy which the Liberal school felt for the doctrine of the Trinity; Harnack, especially, combines the old style combination of Unitarianism with a critique of Trinity as a Platonic corruption in his *Dogmengeschichte*. This was not exclusively German – the debate goes back to the seventeenth century, and writers such as Petavius and Soverain. Further, I don't think that Powell does justice to the importance of Socinianism as a force in its own right, as opposed to being just part of a loose alliance of anti-Trinitarian movements.

Powell describes how Schleiermacher's influence in nineteenth-century German thought was closely linked to the rejection of Hegel by the renegade Hegelian Ritschl! Odd as it seems now, Hegel was much more of an influence on creative nineteenth-century theology until Ritschl revived some of Schleiermacher's interests. And some of the later Hegelians, like Biedermann, had distinct sympathies for Schleiermacher. Powell also shows how an anti-speculative influence upon liberals like Harnack came through Luther himself, and that Harnack saw his work on the dogmas as finishing a purge which Luther himself had begun.

Powell moves directly from Hegel/Schelling to Ritschl. Ritschl was a product of the Hegelian school (Tübingen), and Powell does not describe the debate between the Hegelians and Schleiermachians over the ontological-economic Trinity from 1832 up to the ascendancy of Ritschl and Harnack. Writers such as Marheineke or Nitzsch in theology, or I. H. Fichte, Weisse, Staudenmeier or Anton Günther in philosophy, are barely known in the English-speaking world, but were an important part of the debate in the discussion of the Trinity in the period between Hegel and Ritschl. It is perhaps a shame that these debates are not really noted; yet these are observations about a very valuable book.

DOUGLAS HEDLEY
Clare College, Cambridge

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Godehard Brüntrup and Ronald K. Tacelli (eds) *The Rationality of Theism*. Studies in Philosophy and Religion, 19. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999). Pp. 280. £80.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 7923 58289 5.

Contained herein are the printed papers of a conference on the theme of the title (but with particular reference to Christian theism) held in Munich in May 1998. Some of the names are well-known and nearly all the topics are predictable. Thus Wolfhart Pannenberg on 'The rationality of Christian theism'; Richard Swinburne, 'Many kinds of rational theistic belief'; Richard Gale, 'A new argument for the existence of God: one that works, well, sort of'; Gerard J. Hughes SJ, 'Towards a rehabilitation of Aquinas's Third Way'; Alvin Plantinga, 'Warranted Christian belief: the Aquinas/Calvin model'; Peter van Inwagen, 'Christian belief and Platonic rationality'; Linda Zagzebski '*Phronesis* and Christian belief'; and William Alston 'The distinctiveness of the epistemology of religious belief'.

Some contributors will be less well-known: Lorenz B. Puntel, 'The rationality of theistic belief and the concept of truth'; Friedo Ricken, 'Perspicuous representation and the analogy of experience'; Reiner Wimmer 'The negative and positive task of reason in relation to religious attitudes'; Michael Czapkay-Sudduth 'Proper basicity and the evidential significance of internalist defeat: a proposal for revising classical evidentialism'; and Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp 'Belief and the logic of religious commitment'.

A pretty disparate collection, then. Papers of different levels of technical sophistication, the more technical not easily lending themselves to comment in a review such as this. Is there a leading edge, a wave of the future? It's not easy to discern one. However, several of the papers give either oblique or direct attention to the relation between belief and normative and even ethical issues, such as the right to believe, rationality and the nature of virtue, entitlement to believe and responsibility for belief. So I'll say a word about each of these.

Richard Swinburne thinks that faced with many kinds of rational theistic belief (internalist, externalist, short-term, long-term, etc.) we should ask which of these is (or are) in the long term worth having. He assumes that what matters to one person is what matters to any person (29). And if we want the sort of epistemic justification that will guide our conduct (epistemic and other, I think) then we need objectivist internalist justification. But only if we don't have strong externalist belief in God (34). But is it clear that an externalist's belief that there is a table in front of him cannot guide his conduct with respect to it?

Clayton and Knapp defend what they call an account of religious acceptance, not belief (a kind of possibilism, as they call it). They dispute the Cliffordian principle, and claim that a possibly true, important proposition, on which one is

prepared to act, is a case of doxastic commitment, a case of quasi-belief, faith in an apprehended possibility. What is not so clear is why belief that *p* is possibly true is not also the belief that *p* is possibly false, a case of real unbelief, disbelief in an apprehended possibility. What does acting on the possible truth of a proposition have to recommend it if it entails the belief that it has an equal possibility of being false?

Peter van Inwagen is at his trenchant best in arguing that a person such as a Christian may be rational (in an un-Platonic sense) in believing some matter of faith even if he cannot evaluate arguments attacking his faith. He has great fun with a quotation from Van Harvey about New Testament criticism, which as he shows, carries the consequence that one is not entitled to a non-expert opinion about anything on which there are experts who disagree.

Taking up the work of Hilary Putnam, Linda Zagzebski reflects on the relationship between two sorts of rationality; the sort that is internal to a culture – immanent rationality, and the sort that enables communication between cultures to take place – transcendent rationality. She formulates certain principles about reason, for example, the principle that if a belief is rational its rationality is recognizable (in principle) by rational persons in other cultures. She draws out strong parallels between virtue and rationality; just as virtue, rationality can be defined not by reference to the following of a set of rules but in relation to its paradigm instances. All cultures have their *phronomoi*. All this is interesting stuff, but in the short section that she devotes to Christian belief I could not see much payoff in illuminating its rationality.

Finally, William Alston develops what might be called an ethic of meta-belief. He proposes ways in which epistemologists, whom he thinks have in general treated religious belief in terms of its similarities with other kinds of beliefs, might conduct themselves, given a proper regard for the differences distinctive of religious, and especially Christian, belief. These differences include the place of authoritative texts, tradition, events in life that are interpreted providentially, experience of the presence of God, and the presence of evil. Alston thinks that one other important difference is that Christians may occupy very different epistemic positions on these matters (compared with, say, our differences over what is perceivable by sight). And he gives especial importance to the place of intuition in religion, Newman's 'illative sense', and to faith. What epistemic difference do or should all these differences make? What Alston gets from this mainly descriptive paper by way of a meta-epistemic ethic of belief is a bit thin, as he admits. What it boils down to is that the epistemologist of religious belief should be sensitive both to the point of view both of the participant in religion and also to those who engage in defence and attack.

PAUL HELM
University of London