Dubuque Iowa, is a timely work of reference. It helpfully summarises the current state of scholarship and it will cut many corners for undergraduates writing essays of the "What is a Gospel?"—"Examine Paul's use of rhetoric"—type.

More than 30 different forms, larger ones like gospel and letter, smaller ones like diatribe, household code, hymn or parable, midrash and miracle, are discussed in highly condensed but still readable chapters. Paul and the Evangelists are examined in depth; the rest of the New Testament gets very short measure: there is hardly anything for example on I Peter and nothing on the Johannine Epistles. Nevertheless, this is the most comprehensive guide generally available. At the end of each chapter, the authors explain the value for interpretation of the form under discussion and also supply an annotated bibliography for further reading—these are excellent ideas which turn what could have been a dull catalogue into a lively manual for serious study. The general reader, on the other hand, may find some sections too brief as they stand, with intriguing questions posed but not explored. For a more coherent and authoritative treatment, David Aune's *The New Testament in its Literary Environment,* (James Clarke 1987), could be a better buy (at 4 pence less for a hardback with 40 more pages!).

The one lasting impression left by these surveys is the amazing literary vitality and originality of earliest Christianity. The outpoured Spirit seems to have enlivened the old letter, remoulding and reconfiguring inherited forms to its new purposes.

JOHN MUDDIMAN

AUGUSTINE AND THE LIMITS OF VIRTUE, by James Wetzel. *Cambridge University Press,* **Cambridge 1992. Pp xiv + 246. £35.00**

Wetzel intends two main points by his phrase 'the limits of virtue', negatively Augustine's dissatisfaction with pagan virtue and its blindness to the psychology of inner conflict and, positively, his theistic reformulation of virtue as the motivational integrity of graced willing. Augustine, Wetzel maintains, indicts the *philosophi* for a not wholly realistic assessment of the human condition, but does not reject it totally. Augustine's late theological preoccupation with grace, he views as an extension of the earlier philosophical concern with virtue and human freedom. Never does he relinquish late antiquity's ideal of the bringing together of virtue, autonomy and human flourishing; what alters is not the ideal's nature, but the manner of its appropriation. Closely tied to this is Wetzel's belief that Augustine's particular interest in human autonomy necessitates a strong doctrine of grace, found especially in God's full control over human salvation.

Wetzel begins with Socrates' equation of virtue and knowledge. Augustine, he suggests, adopted this equation, in a Stoic form, in his earlier works. Later, his appreciation of sin's power called this view into

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question, not so that he rejected it, but so that he modified it. In a telling analysis of willing and memory Wetzel notes that the human condition is time bound; and so wisdom, from which virtue follows directly, and to which happiness is assimilated, is mediated through time. Once wisdom is learnt, the individual finds 'freedom', the result of grace liberating the individual from the confines of past sins. Accordingly, Wetzel's Augustine does not compromise his sense of human autonomy through his sense of divine grace and emerges with a sense of human experience and its inner conflict which is in marked contrast with Pelagius' thought that freedom is inalienable.

Wetzel's treatment of a perennial problem of both philosophy and Augustinian theology is closely argued, at times perhaps too closely argued, as more befits the doctoral thesis it once was. The treatment is however also rather disconcerting. Wetzel asserts that he intends to approach philosophy theologically. Yet the Augustine who graces his pages is more a Platonic philosopher with a keen psychological sense. There is no mention of Augustine on original sin, on the incarnation, on the church and on the triune God; there is Augustine *sans* God. The acknowledged debt to recent philosophers such as Iris Murdoch Martha Nussbaum and especially Harry Frankfurt perhaps is partly the reason. Frankfurt is seen as having 'helped to clarify the nature of free will by adopting a psychological focus on the will and characterising its freedom as a function of the internal coherence of a person's motivations' [p.222]. The second disconcerting factor is that it is not obvious that Augustine's earlier works will bear the sort of Platonic-Stoic analysis which they are given; and if they will not, the argument's centre is denied. A third unsettling factor is Wetzel's occasionally rather loose development of his argument. Selected Augustinian texts are isolated from their contexts and introduced to a particular thesis. In fairness to Wetzel, he does admit that he 'found it impossible to maintain a sharp distinction between interpretation and reconstruction' [p.xi], that he 'could not make sense of what Augustine said without sometimes having to consider what he was trying to say, what he might have said, or even on occasion what he ought to have said' [p.xi–xii], and that 'the fluidity of contemporary wisdom on free will and the strangeness of fourth century theological discourse make it inevitable that viable interpretations of Augustine on freedom merge our wisdom with his' [p.219]. Wetzel tellingly admits that 'this is likely to bother only those who see philosophy and the history of philosophy as two entirely different preoccupations' [p.xi]. While not seeing these two as entirely different preoccupations, there may be sufficiently different as to check, or at least slow down, Wetzel's free-wheeling argument.

Wetzel's book is primarily concerned with Augustine as a philosopher of antiquity. He does however alert his reader to Augustine's possible significance for current philosophical investigations of human autonomy. Wetzel recognises that he is swimming against the stream in imagining that being determined to respond to the good was a form of

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freedom. When, however, he notes that we can have limitations put on what we can do, to the extreme of ruling out action altogether, but it is within these limitations that we are more or less free, depending on the coherence of our motivations, memories of the rather scornful assertions of Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty, "when I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less", steal forward.

Wetzel's book is not an easy book. It may give a not very rounded picture of Augustine. It is, however, a spur to the continuing contemporary debate concerning human autonomy.

ALVYN PETTERSEN

AQUINAS ON HUMAN ACTION: A THEORY OF PRACTICE, by Ralph McInerny, *The Catholic University of America Press*, Washington, D.C.,1992, Pp. ix + 244. $19.95 [Paperback Edition].

This reviewer has often considered "Action Theory" to be one of the more difficult philosophical issues to elucidate and analyze with care. Beyond this general concern, the action theory articulated by Thomas Aquinas in the first section of the *Prima Secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae* is one of the more difficult bits of philosophical analysis in Aquinas to lay out clearly and perspicuously. Ralph McInerny, the Michael P. Grace Professor of Medieval Studies and Director of the Jacques Maritain Center at the University of Notre Dame, has attempted such a project with this well crafted and thoughtful book. Convinced that Aquinas's action theory is an important connecting link between the structure of natural law and the discussion of the ultimate end, Professor McInerny takes special care to provide a painstaking analysis of how Aquinas indeed elucidates a consistent and coherent theory of human action. The closest competitor to McInerny's analysis of these difficult texts in Aquinas is that given by the late Alan Donagan in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* [Cambridge, 1982].

The book is divided into two principal sections. The first part—nearly two-thirds of the book—consists of McInerny's elucidation of the *Prima Secundae* texts dealing with action theory. This first section contains large sections of Aquinas's text—both the Latin text and an English translation side by side—together with McInerny's thoughtful commentary. The second part contains six essays in which McInerny discusses contemporary issues directly related to action theory and to natural law.

Schematically, the issues of natural law theory determine the structure and scope of this book. Aquinas argues that "moral acts and human acts are the same" [I-II, Q 1, a. 3]. Historically, the canon for natural law in western moral and legal theory is Aquinas's account found in Questions 90-97 of the *Prima Secundae*. McInerny argues that this set of questions is in some ways a unique treatment of philosophical issues in Aquinas. He also argues that this discussion of natural law makes sense only if one understands Aquinas on action theory on the one hand

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