

**AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO AND HIS MONASTIC RULE** by G. Lawless. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987. Pp. xix + 185. £25.

This important book fills a gap in Augustine studies. The author looks at the development of Augustine's monastic ideal during the years 386–96, attempting to set it in context in the world of thought in which he was then moving, and exploring the evidence for the existence of a monastic community at Thagaste between 388 and 391.

The author's thesis is that Augustine became convinced of the value and rightness of the ascetic life at the same time as his conversion to Christianity, and that it was already in the period before he was ordained that he was drawn to a life of celibacy as a servant of God. He explores this early formative period of Augustine's vocation, and the implications of becoming a bishop for his thinking, and for his practice of monastic life, in the opening and concluding sections of the book. Between are sandwiched editions and translations of the texts which make up the *Regula Augustini* and a series of studies of the disputed questions.

The great difficulty about the *Regula Augustini* is the lateness of its attribution to Augustine. Eugeippius, a hundred years after Augustine's death, is the first to say that he was the author of such a Rule, and the first mention of Augustine as author of the *Regula* itself occurs in a manuscript written more than a century and a half after his death. The Rule survives in four sets of regulations for monks and five pieces for nuns, including regulations and a reprimand for quarrelling nuns.

Lawless draws on the exhaustive work of Verheijen and others on the manuscripts, but he provides a clear and elegant conspectus of the *status quaestionis*, and English translations designed to be used by Augustinians of the present day for the purpose for which the Latin was intended: that is, to be read to the community once a week, and 'held up as a mirror' for those living under the Rule to see themselves, to remind them of the way they should be living (p. 118).

Among the 'disputed questions' considered here is the major one of Augustine's failure to mention a Rule, in his *Retractiones* or elsewhere. Lawless suggests that we should not perhaps expect him to do so. The Rule was a private pamphlet for domestic use. He assembles the varied corroborative evidence for a Augustinian origin. On the question whether the Rule was originally addressed to men or to women, Lawless takes the view that it was adapted for women, again with a careful review of the evidence, and of the debate until now. The third 'disputed question', on the date of composition, is similarly thoroughly and judiciously treated. There are two Appendices, on the later version of the Rule known as the *Regula recepta* and on the *Ordo monasterii*.

This is, then, a comprehensive reference book on Augustine's monastic Rule and its evolution both in Augustine's lifetime and afterwards; and on its claims to be truly Augustinian; and at the same time a practical handbook for those living by the Rule today. It deserves to become a standard work.

G.R. EVANS

**GROUNDWORK OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION** by D.A. Pailin, Epworth Press. Pp. ix + 258 1986. £8.50

In the forward of *Groundwork of Philosophy of Religion* the author reveals that writing the book gave him a 'summer's fun', and his enjoyment of any enthusiasm for the subject matter is certainly evident. D.P. Pailin has written a spirited introduction to traditional problems and positions in the philosophy of religion, and shows a partiality for a notion of God understood along the lines of C. Harsthorne's process theology. Unfortunately, the level of rigor and clarity of Pailin's presentation does not match the level of enthusiasm.

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In a thorough, but wordy, 238 pages, Pailin brings in the range of traditional issues in the philosophy of religion, and some having to do with theology proper. Chapters 1 and 2 contain definitions and discussion of the notions of religion, faith, philosophy, theology and reason. Chapters 3–5 focus on the specifically theological issues of revelation, doctrine, culture, the Bible, history and hermeneutics. In chapters 6–8 Pailin develops his own view of a God in process and discusses the attributes of God, the traditional problems of miracles and evil, and the traditional arguments for God's existence. Chapter 9 treats the question of immortality; chapter 10 deals with morality and theism; and chapter 11 takes up questions of religious language.

As indicated, my major criticism of the book is its lack of conceptual clarity and argumentative rigor. A clear example of the former is Pailin's discussion in chapter 1 of the work's central concept, religion. Pailin claims, quite plausibly, that there is no single essence of religion; it is 'family resemblances' which religions as such share. 'Instead of trying to formulate a neat definition of the essence of religion,' Pailin writes, 'let us ... try to specify some of the central characteristics of religion.' (p. 12) His list of these includes concern with ultimacy and with the holy, divine self-revelation, moral norms, communal cultic activity, personal commitment, concern with salvation and the reification of certain values. However, in expounding these characteristics, Pailin leaps from the merely descriptive task to the introduction of controversial philosophical and theological positions on the religious beliefs of people. For example, in discussing revelation he gives us a few sentences on K. Barth's claim that it is revelation and not natural reason which is the basis for a genuine theology. It seems right that a common characteristic of religion is divine self-revelation, but there is no good reason to bring Barth's theological claims into an initial clarification of the concept of religion.

The confusion just becomes worse when Pailin introduces, as a central *characteristic* of religion, Feuerbach's controversial claim that 'religious beliefs express projections of our ideas, reifications of our values (i.e. presenting abstract values as if they were concrete objects or actual persons).' (p. 20) This is a philosophical *view* about religious beliefs, and not an identifying characteristic of religion. Pailin has here conflated the neutral analysis of the concept of religion with the introduction of philosophical and theological positions about religious claims. Because of this, he does not succeed either in clarifying this concept (which is central to his work), or in satisfactorily introducing and criticizing the philosophical and theological positions he mentions. In reading this passage—and, I am afraid, many others in Pailin's text—one feels that the author has tried simply to pack in information, but has left its presentation confused and undisciplined.

Rigor of argument, as well, is frequently hard to find in this book. In his chapter on the arguments for God's existence, Pailin presents a cursory summary of the main arguments, and the major objections to each. He does not claim that they either are or are not successful in establishing theism, but he does seem to suggest that the proper way of considering them, and thus of reaching a decision about theism, is to consider them all together as a cumulative case for theism. 'In the end ...' Pailin tells us, 'the problem of the reality of God is to be solved by judging whether the story of reality which theism tells makes more sense of reality than any other story.' (p. 179) This claim, however, is either trite or obscure. That is, either Pailin is saying that we must accept the view which is best supported by the evidence, which best explains the relevant phenomena, or it is not at all clear what he is saying. Pailin denies this decision should rest on the 'mechanical addition of probability-values,' (*ibid*) but he does not give us much of a hint on how the decision should be made. One is left wondering what the argument of these pages is, or whether there is one.

The book, I believe, fails in what is the primary task of an introductory work in philosophy, namely, to cultivate clear and rigorous thought among beginners in the field. In spite of the enthusiasm and thoroughness of Pailin's book it fails to manifest or encourage clear-headed and incisive thought on the issues. For this reason I do not think a beginner—or, indeed, any reader—will be greatly aided by it.

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