

Reviews

AUGUSTINE AND HIS CRITICS: ESSAY IN HONOUR OF GERALD BONNER ed. by R. Dodaro and G. Lawless *Routledge (Taylor & Francis Books Ltd.)*, London, 2000. Pp. xiii, 274. £55.00 hbk.

Augustine wanted serious criticism and he has certainly provoked criticism, some of it serious, especially since the Enlightenment. His contemporary critics are generally a ferocious lot, and a range of them are discussed in the present volume: some theological, some secular, some a mixture of the two; some ignorant or malicious, others honest and thoughtful.

The overall tone of the volume suggests that much of the criticism is theologically tendentious, ignorant of their subject's views (as distinct, sometimes, from the views of those who thought of themselves as his followers), or based on contemporary assumptions which Augustine himself could without difficulty have called into question. Yet while the Dodaro-Lawless group generally allows that a hard core of serious objections remains, it is to be regretted that in treating these serious objections they often content themselves either with showing that modern critics think about Augustine anachronistically—often the case and importantly so: Augustine's assumptions may be better than ours—or with reproving Augustine without engaging in the much more interesting and constructive task of asking exactly why he went wrong and whether his "errors" can be corrected more or less within his own parameters: in other words, is he wrong about basics or about details, or is it not so much that he is wrong as that we do not like what he says?

The book is dedicated to a great Augustinian and opens with an appreciation of Bonner's work and a select bibliography (Hardy). There follows some helpful comment (Drobner) on recent trends in Augustinian studies including a few well-aimed remarks on prevailing practice in varying parts of the scholarly world: Germany-Austria, North America, the "southern Mediterranean" and France. Drobner would like to see scholars pay more attention to what happens outside their own area, and if he is thinking *inter alia* of the unpreparedness of many North Americans, operating within a largely monolingual philosophical community, to read at least French, he is on the right lines!

The largest group of papers are attempts to tell the true story about Augustine's theology and so to avoid further attempts (à la Nygren) to read him as selling out to a Hellenism currently out of theological fashion. Thus Crouse wants a new approach to Augustine's conversion of Platonic theology to Christianity (he underestimates the progress made), though he gives little help as to how we should begin with Augustine himself, let alone with confronting the wider but unavoidable question of the consistent use of Platonism by most of the Fathers whenever they try to philosophize. Ayres is more forthright: he accuses Augustine's Trinitarian critics of outdated misreadings of their target and in particular of neglect of the (platonizing) notion of God's simplicity. Comparable ignorance is castigated by Milbank (90) who, however, misreads Plato several times (e.g. on eros, 84 and on 'Platonic interiority', 91)—apart from spending pages on whether

Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity is a 'subversion' of (Dumézil's version of) the supposedly tripartite structure of the 'Indo-European soul'.

Three further largely 'intra-Christian' pieces defend Augustine against the charges first of an excessive asceticism (Lawless perceptively emphasizes his anti-perfectionism, 152), secondly of compromising with the decadent habits of ancient rhetoric in preferring persuasion to truth: Harrison's plausible version would make Augustine the advocate of something like the reformed rhetoric of Plato's *Phaedrus*. That is interesting but only skirts the difficulty (217) of whether with his 'Christian aesthetic' Augustine comes to undervalue that wider pagan heritage—and not merely that of late antiquity—which had contributed so much to his own greatness, thereby blindly bequeathing an impoverished version of Christian 'humanism'. Finally Wetzel, rightly insisting that Augustine's predestinarianism is not merely the product of a sclerotic old age, tends to agree with many, including Bonner, that Augustine's predestinarian theology 'of selective compassion' (124) is guilty of 'one unforgiveable sin: its presumption to limit God's love'. This essay is one of those which would have been more interesting if its author had considered the causes of Augustine's position rather than merely attempting to soften it in various less than convincing ways. At least three possibilities which could be canvassed are: Augustine's inadequately developed account of omnipotence; his inability (for whatever reason) to harmonize reflections on one biblical text (say, John's Epistle) with those on another (say, Romans); his incomplete theology of baptism.

Bishop Williams' essay is aimed rather differently: although one of his antagonists (Hick) is writing from some sort of Christian perspective, his objections to Augustine's account of evil as privation derive also from the world of secular philosophy. Williams has little difficulty in showing that Hick's account of Augustine is a travesty, and his other interlocutor, Kathleen Sands, relies on an account of goodness (influenced by Martha Nussbaum's 'brilliant study') as 'vulnerable, rather than unified and stable', thus demanding an account of God impossible not only for Augustine but for any Christian philosopher. To attack or defend Augustine on this level of generality requires a far bigger canvas than would have been possible in the present volume.

Ann Matter and Lamberigts offer related studies: the former of Augustine's account of gender difference and evaluation of women, the latter on sexual desire. Again, as with Wetzel, Matter's discussion would have been more interesting if she had concentrated less on putting some sort of spin on Augustine's words and on his personal life and looked more at his underlying assumptions, contradictory as they may be. This is certainly more difficult than in the case of predestination, but in the absence of a clear account of complementarity, helpful would have been more on the masculine and feminine mind (*sapientia* and *scientia*) and on the notionally superior feminine 'incarnations' of love (and on the relationship between love and the mind in a perfected humanity) as well as more mundanely on bizarre but widely-assumed ancient accounts of the processes of conception. Augustine often does better on what it means to be female than on what it means to be feminine!

As for Lamberigts, he has chosen largely not to reply to modern critics

(though he repeats some well-aimed criticism at the over-influential Pagels, 184-5), but to concentrate on the admittedly able though scatter-shot critique of Augustine's own adversary, Julian of Eclanum. Though Lamberigts' remarks about Julian are generally well-taken, his strategy prevents him from facing various moderns good and bad. Thus he only minimally reflects on the Augustinian assumption that, given a Fall, there is no reason why sexual desire should be exempt from its effects: we all know, though we often do not want to know, that there really is a universal temptation to manipulate sexually. Modern anti-Augustinian 'heresies' about the neutral purity of the sexual drive—a revised Julianism in contemporary dress, and with more attention to women—deserve serious reconsideration as does the widespread ancient (and not merely Christian) axiom that pleasure should not be pursued for its own sake (cf. *Conf.* 10.31.44; 10.33.49; etc.).

The final essay, by Dodaro, is the most challenging. Taking his starting point from William Connolly's Feuerbachian claims that by confession Augustine projected and constructed a jealous God (whose devotees must reject the claims of all inferior versions: no pluralism here), Dodaro considers, in dialogue with Connolly, why Augustine refuses to advocate pardon without further penalty for repentant pagan rioters at Calama where he is willing to concede it to Christians. The reason is that only Christian repentance—with its essential claim that further sinfulness cannot be avoided without a recognition of one's inability to achieve a pagan self-sufficiency of virtue—is able to work genuine improvement in the body politic. If Augustine is even partly right about this - and it is hard to accept the uniqueness of Christian revelation without being forced to admit he can make a strong case (albeit perhaps not as strong as he thinks) - then the consequences for those of us willing to go along with many norms of secular ('pagan') social practice are more unnerving than we may like to recognize.

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ISSUES FOR A CATHOLIC BIOETHIC, ed. Luke Gormally *Linacre Centre*, London, 1999. £18.95 pbk.

In the summer of 1997 the Linacre Centre, the widely-respected Catholic bioethical research institution, held a conference in Cambridge to celebrate twenty years of existence. Here its director brings together seventeen papers presented at the conference, three exchanges and the opening address by Cardinal Winning, a collection which conveys a sense of varied and interesting proceedings, though without that evenness and coherence which always beckon, yet usually elude, conference planners. Unsurprisingly, it is a homey, family affair, a discussion among soulmates. It conveys predictably that Catholic bioethics has as much concern with philosophical issues about body and soul as it has to do with medical casuistry. Less predictably it offers some welcome indications that current Catholic discussion is biblically, as well as philosophically formed: a rather good section called 'Anthropology' contains two memorable essays, one by Professor John Haldane on the philosophy of the body and one by Gregory Glazov on biblical anthropology. There are discussions of sexual ethics (with especial reference to John-Paul II's allocutions) as well as of the