Too many theologians writing about Augustine in recent decades have fallen under the malign spell of Olivier Du Roy’s substantial monograph of 1966 on faith and intelligence in Augustine’s Trinitarian thought – an essay which argued in detail for an almost unqualified Platonism and individualism in Augustine generally, and an isolation of his trinitarian theology from the economy of salvation. Du Roy’s book, along with a somewhat misread passage in de Régnon’s studies in the history of Trinitarian theology, produced a curious ‘received wisdom’ about Augustine as the source of all the theological ills of Western Christendom or even Western society; he appears to have been responsible for everything but the common cold. And, while a definite new look in Augustinian studies has flourished in the English-speaking world over the past ten to fifteen years (Ayres, Barnes, Hanby, Matthews – with Kany bringing up solid support in Germany), it has not yet quite overtaken the caricatures in less specialist literature stemming from cursory readings of Du Roy.

Dom Gioia’s book is a first-class attempt to tackle the caricatures head-on. He begins his study with a careful exposition of Du Roy’s case and the arguments of other prominent critics, outlines the main points of the ‘new look’ and embarks on some very impressive close reading of the de trinitate to set the record straight. He rightly protests against the habit of reading the treatise as something other than what it is: a protracted reflection on the actual character of Trinitarian faith as lived out by believers. We need to beware of looking for systematic argument where it is not meant to be; even the notoriously technical discussions of Books 5 to 7, Gioia stresses, are essentially polemic against imposing artificial categories on speech about God, categories which derive from the analysis of material objects.

For the crucial point of the argument is that God in Trinity is not conceivable as an object of any sort. Absolutely the only knowledge we can have of the Trinity is through conformation to Christ by the power of the Spirit. Once this is granted, all kinds of things in the rest of Augustine’s intellectual world fall into place. The supposed Platonism of his ontology is revealed as a way of talking about how all things share, in finite degree, in the eternal movement of love that is the life of the Word in relation to the Father. The illumination of the mind by eternal ideas is a matter of the human intellect becoming so absorbed in the life of the Word (through faith in the Incarnate Christ) that it is shaped or formed by the active love and knowledge of God to the extent that it can discern the inner rationale of specific created things. And above all, the image of God is not a correspondence or continuity...
of any kind between two varieties of spiritual essence, but a capacity for relationship, for the condition in which the created subject is (again) formed by what it contemplates and associated with the eternal movement of Son to Father. Anything less than claiming to be knowledge either of things or of God is illusory, doomed to the self-defeating logic of cupiditas.

Gioia is basically right, I believe, on all these points and more. To read the de trinitate as focusing on any impersonal or third-person knowledge of God, any system of natural illumination or crudely analogical deduction is a nonsense, and, happily, a nonsense that is becoming less and less frequently repeated in the textbooks. What Gioia does, however, in a reading of painstaking detail, is to spell out the way in which the correct understanding of Augustine’s doctrine of the image of God is a key to the entire epistemology of the work. En route, he illuminates in a quite fresh way a large number of passages and themes; perhaps his chapter on the role of the Holy Spirit is the most original here, though his treatment of ‘illumination’ is also excellent. He brings together the themes of wisdom and worship in a way completely congruent with Augustine’s mind, and altogether triumphantly restores his arguments to the sphere of Christology and even ecclesiology in the widest sense, rather than second-hand and not very well-understood metaphysics.

Gioia’s Augustine is startlingly Barthian at many points: Christology is the sole entry point for knowledge of God, in the sense – at the very least – that all true knowledge of God is ‘filial’. A fuller argument about Augustine’s work would have been able to develop this further in relation to the Confessions, which has some of the classic passages that establish the relational (and kenotic) character of knowing God, and the de civitate, which likewise sets out the epistemological consequences of pride (which is the self-reliant refusal of incorporation into Christ). He does very helpfully discuss the roots of many of the ideas he presents in Augustine’s earlier work (the de vera religione, the de Genesi ad litteram as well as the Confessions), but the book is not conceived as an overview of all this. What it does is to lay some very sound foundations for such an overview, and in that sense is of interest to anyone examining almost any mature Augustinian work.

This means that it does not address the ‘genealogical’ question: how did this develop from what even Gioia (and I) would have to admit is a significantly different idiom and ethos in the early works. There is some good discussion of Plotinus and Victorinus (a bit hard on the latter, perhaps, as Gioia recognizes) to bring out what makes Augustine different, but just a suspicion that his mature thought is being presented as sprung fully armed from the head of Jove. The issues around how Augustine refined his views would demand another book (there are, though, some very good remarks on the development
of his ideas about use and enjoyment between the *de doctrina* and the *de trinitate*). As it is, this is a most impressive monograph; it is written with clarity and elegance (the signs that English is not the author’s first language are astonishingly few) and with a wide acquaintance with the secondary literature. Occasionally, there are passages where the use of Hill’s generally serviceable translation in the text causes some passing confusion (the second quotation on p. 203 is one of several cases in point where Hill’s version is not the best or clearest rendering of the Latin). But in general this is a pleasure to read and a very significant and authoritative contribution to the renewal of Augustinian studies.

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★★★★


The combination of these books made for an insightful study of Kierkegaard’s growth as a philosopher, his writing style, and how he has been understood by subsequent thinkers. Alastair Hannay’s introduction, and Sylvia Walsh’s astute volume, together put Kierkegaard into context as a response to State Christianity and its stagnating affect on individual religiosity, as well as to non-Christian philosophy attempting to offer a systematic rationalism that incorporated some Christian terms while emptying them of meaning. My own interest in Kierkegaard was increased and deepened as I came to understand more of his intellectual and personal development as well as the challenges to which he was attempting to respond. For instance, it was helpful to see that the ‘leap of faith’ for which Kierkegaard is so well known has been misunderstood and misused by many subsequent thinkers.

The Postscript is written in a pseudonymous voice named Johannes Climacus. The work is a follow-up to *Philosophical Crumbs*, which had considered the question of how eternal happiness could be based on something that is simply historical (Hannay, x). This is a question that