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Book reviews

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Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Pp. xv+307. £40.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 521 65018 6. £14.95 (Pbk). ISBN 0 521 65985 X.

This handy volume contains eighteen articles, the fruit of cutting-edge research in Augustinian scholarship today, in biography, philosophy, theology, and the history of ideas. An extensive bibliography and a concise index render it not only a pleasant and informative read, but also a useful tool for research.

J. J. O'Donnell writes on new approaches to understanding and writing on Augustine's life, John Rist on faith and reason in Augustine, W. E. Mann on evil and original sin, James Wetzel on predestination, Pelagianism and foreknowledge, and Thomas Williams on Augustine's Biblical interpretation. Scott MacDonald's 'The divine nature', Mary T. Clark's '*De Trinitate*', and Simo Knuuttila's 'Time and creation', are followed by Roland Teske's 'Theory of soul', Eleonore Stump's 'Free will', and Roland Teske's 'Philosophy of memory'. Gerard O'Daly studies 'The response to skepticism and the mechanisms of cognition', G. B. Matthews 'Knowledge and illumination', Christopher Kirwan 'Philosophy of language', Bonnie Kent 'Ethics', and Paul Weithman 'Political thought'. M. W. F. Stone's account of Augustine's influence on medieval philosophy and G. B. Matthews's on 'Post-medieval Augustinianism' conclude the volume.

Despite the wide range of topics, as well as authors, the book is remarkably coherent. Many articles complement each other, others present different views on similar issues. As a result, Augustine comes across as a religious philosopher who transformed his own as well as future ages, and whose thought is still worth studying today.

A few remarks on individual points may further elucidate the character of this volume. John Rist excels in the difficult task of serving old wine in new skins. He demonstrates how Augustine tries to present a reasoned account of faith: that 'faith is an epistemic starting point … , especially for religious truths, but … not the ending point; [for] reason is necessary as well' (2). G. B. Matthews and Gerard O'Daly approach Augustine's epistemology from two different angles: Matthews from his concept of divine illumination, O'Daly from his refutation of scepticism.

They disagree, as 'O'Daly argues for a claim that Matthews disputes, namely, that for Augustine the objects of perception are images of the objects perceived' (5). M. W. F. Stone shows that Augustine's influence upon medieval philosophers, not only 'Platonists', but also 'Aristotelians' such as Albert and Aquinas, was stronger than is commonly thought. G. B. Matthews argues a similar case regarding post-medieval philosophy down to Wittgenstein and Russell. His case, however, is not as strong as Stone's, for in these later periods Augustine's influence is superseded by other factors: better access to ancient philosophical sources, the increasingly historical-critical approach to the sources, and the gradual liberation from ecclesiastical and political constraints on thought. These points are largely lost on Matthews.

Other articles, too, suffer from a certain lack of putting Augustine's ideas in perspective. This is partly due to the fragmentation of research. The articles on original sin, predestination and freedom, for example, separate three issues which Augustine treated as a complex. Though they implicitly complement each other, they do not expressly point beyond their own respective areas of research to hint at wider problems and possibilities for their solution. Thus, the particular problem posed by Augustine's concept of original sin is not that it results in ignorance and difficulty ('On Free Will' 3.18.52), as Mann suggests, but that the later Augustine held that the guilty act which causes that ignorance and difficulty is disseminated through natural procreation. Mann writes that Augustine did not in fact refute the charge that he held a concept of inborn (innate) sinfulness. That is wrong. He did. But be that as it may, the question is: can Augustine's refutation convince? For adamant as Augustine was about what his teaching was *not* to be (Manichean), or to do (deny freedom), he did not explain in any detail how his concept was supposed to work in terms of current teachings on the soul. His answers to these questions are aporetic or apodictic rather than argumentative. They address believers, who find it the easier to believe the more contradictory and obscure the doctrine.

Augustine was well aware of that. In 'Retractations' (1.9.2) he wrote that it is one thing to search for the root of evil, and another to describe a way out of it. That is true. But there is a link. The way one looks at a problem is influenced by what one assumes might be its solution. When the later Augustine wrote on evil, original sin, predestination, and free will, he did so, usually, in the context of his teaching on grace and salvation. His main purpose was to teach the latter. But in his view the acquisition of guilt through natural inheritance and the determination of the will through that inheritance, respectively through the predestination which liberates the chosen few, were necessary implications of that teaching. It was not for his teaching on grace and salvation that his opponents began to ask questions, but for these implications. This perspective gets all but lost in separate treatments of predestination and freedom as those by Wetzel and Stump.

Wetzel focuses on the soteriological dimension of predestination as taught by

Augustine. It means, he quotes Augustine, 'On the gift of perseverance' (14.35), 'that whoever is liberated, is most certainly liberated'. The 'dark corollary' to that, he concedes, is that whoever is not predestined to this 'most certain' liberation, is most certainly damned as part of the *massa perditionis*. However, he exhorts, one must not balk at the apparent contradiction of this view. What we have to do with Augustine, he writes, is to look to Christ, *the* predestined 'par excellence'. If we learn the lesson of God's love in Christ incarnate taught in 'Confessions' (8.12.29, citing Romans 13.14: 'clothe thyself in the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in carnal desires'), predestination will cease to look contradictory and reveal instead its full, salvific, meaning.

Thus Wetzel does not engage argumentatively with the problems posed by Augustine's concept of predestination. Rather, he suggests that by focusing on the promising bits of the concept its problems, including those regarding freedom and human agency, will eventually solve themselves, especially for those who believe in, and therefore begin to understand, the Incarnation. In contrast, Eleonore Stump concentrates on the problems of Augustine's concept of freedom, but she neglects the link between Augustine's concept of predestination and the problems it raises for his concept of freedom. She tries to give a description of Augustine's concept of freedom without looking at its philosophical foundations, the conditions under which it was developed in the first place. In Stump's view it is a libertarian, and not, as many philosophers today would argue, a compatibilist concept of freedom which Augustine develops in his teaching. For Stump, compatibilism is the view 'that the world can be causally determined and yet also contain free acts and acts for which an agent is morally responsible' (125), whereas libertarianism makes two basic claims: (1) 'An agent acts with free will, or is morally responsible for an act, only if the act is causally determined by anything outside [by ''outside'' Stump apparently means ''except''] the agent'; and (2) 'An agent acts with free will, or is morally responsible for an act, only if he could have done otherwise' (125–126). Stump argues that a position can be called 'libertarian', if it claims (1), even if it does not claim (2). She calls this position 'modified libertarianism', as opposed to 'common libertarianism', which claims (1) *and* (2). She argues that Augustine's concept of freedom is such a 'modified libertarianism'.

Stump herself concedes that many philosophers disagree with the way she defines libertarianism (125); and indeed, her 'modified libertarianism' is really a kind of compatibilism, while what she defines as 'compatibilism' is, on the face of it, merely a contradictory statement, not a philosophical position. This is more than just quibbling over words. Compatibilists argue that they are no determinists, i.e. that they have a concept of freedom, i.e. that they are, in a sense, libertarians. They do not make apodictic claims, but try to formulate their concept of freedom in such a way that it does not contradict the deterministic element in their theory. The earliest example of a compatibilist theory is that of the Old Stoic, Chrysippus. Looking at Chrysippus' theory it becomes also clear that there is a link between

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Stump's disagreement with the common understanding of compatibilism and her neglect of the connection between Augustine's concept of predestination and his concept of freedom. For like Augustine's theory of predestination and freedom, Chrysippus' theory, too, is less about agents and acts than states of mind, basic faculties of the soul and habits, behavioural attitudes that lead to certain acts and not to others. Chrysippus argued that a certain inclination, which is imprinted or implanted (*emphutês*) in the agent through habit, necessarily leads to certain acts. Preconditioned by necessity of nature, divine fate, and the formation of character in history, time and space, this habitual inclination renders the agent incapable of *not* acting the way he acts. Yet the agent remains fully responsible for all his acts due to his basic structure as an intelligent being, which made him adopt *this* kind of inclination and not another (cf. Plutarch. *comm. not.* 1059B–D). Later Stoicism watered down the subtle concept of imprinted habits and began to speak of innate, inborn (*eggenês*), habits, thus making the distinction between their compatibilism and physical determinism more difficult.

Interestingly, the innatism of the later Stoics gave their compatibilism also a bad name among libertarian Early Christian writers. Refuting Gnostic innatism, for example, Clement of Alexandria (*strom.* 2.4.16.3f.) suggested 'implantedness [of habit]' as a compromise position between Aristotelian libertarianism and Stoic determinism. But Clement presented 'implantedness' as an Epicurean, not a Stoic, concept. The Stoics, like the Gnostics, and later on the Manicheans, were by now firmly held to be innatists, determinists and fatalists.

This situation had got worse in Augustine's time. Augustine's opponents immediately sensed innatism, when they saw that Augustine no longer held (2). Julian of Aeclanum quoted 'On Two Souls' (15), one of Augustine's earlier works, where Augustine had still held that 'free is only something in regard to which one has the ability *not* to do it'. Why had Augustine changed his view?, Julian asked. If Augustine had had Clement's philosophical background, might he have argued his case with the concept of 'implantedness'? One may doubt that; for that was, more or less, what Julian proposed, when he acknowledged the corrupting power of bad habit and bad examples ('To Florus' 1.94). Augustine did not move by an inch. It is not surprising, therefore, that Julian, after having sounded Augustine's position in this way, should have drawn the ultimate conclusion that Augustine was, after all, an innatist. One of Augustine's counter-arguments ('Unfinished Work', 6.11), also used by Stump (135), was that if (2) were applicable God himself would not be free for He cannot do evil. This cannot convince; for God is a special case. Even though we cannot judge God, we may say that God was, and still is, free to choose to create or not to create the universe; and granted that God *has* chosen to create the universe we are very well in a position to judge Him on the basis of His creation and the law laid down in it. This law, and our natural ability to recognize God in and through it, cannot be so easily suspended either by ourselves (through sin) or by God (in a move to punish our sin or to restore our natural

abilities after we squandered them through sin). It is not quite as easy to move from first-order volitions to second-order volitions and back, as Stump seems to suggest. Firstly, we cannot say whether at all a second order exists. Secondly, if it exists, it is not simply added on to our first-order universe, but constitutes another dimension. If we could at all speak of relations between the two orders, we would have to do so by way of analogy, defining special types of causes and effects. It would be quite wrong to speak of this reality in univocal terms, as if the second order was related to the first through direct causes and effects. Unlike Aquinas seven centuries later, Augustine lacked the philosophical techniques to make himself clear on this point. He relied on the suggestive power of his rhetoric. Julian of Aeclanum suggested to understand the Pauline teachings on predestination and original sin metaphorically and typologically on the ground of philosophically sound theories of freedom and human action. In that respect he was closer to Aquinas than to Augustine. It is true that Aquinas often quoted 'Sermon' 169.11.13 as a proof that Augustine, too, held that view: 'He who made you without you does not justify you without you'. But, as even Stump admits, the later 'Augustine becomes increasingly insistent that the will of faith is a gift of God in the sense that God alone is the cause of it.' In the end she is forced to use the dreaded expression: 'Augustine wants his theological position to be – somehow – *compatible* with the theory of free will he presented in his *De libero arbitrio*', even though he is unable to defend it on these grounds (137). Is this not exactly compatibilism as defined by Stump?

Stump's final attempt at rescuing Augustine's position consists in bringing in Aquinas's idea of an 'indifferent' state of mind, neither bound by sin nor freed by grace. 'If the will can move directly from rejecting to quiescence, without first moving to acceptance' (141), she writes, then Augustine's demand that grace as the sole cause of freedom for man is exclusively bestowed by God (in addition to what man has received in creation) is met *and* choice in the sense of (2) retained. But what has this to do with Augustine? As mentioned earlier, for Augustine the crucial issue here was salvation. Man is either saved or damned. What use would it be for man to be free, if he was not in a state of salvation through grace? In fact, Augustine once accused Caelestius to teach that infants who die unbaptised enjoy eternal life outside heaven, since they neither rejected God's grace nor accepted it in baptism ('On the merits and remission of sins', 1.20.26). This might indicate how Augustine would have reacted to Aquinas's – and Stump's – suggestions. It also shows that Aquinas's modifications of Augustine's thought on freedom and predestination are inspired by much the same spirit by which Pelagius and Julian of Aeclanum criticized it.

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Marcel Sarot *Living a Good Life in Spite of Evil.* (Contributions to Philosophical Theology, 3). (New York/Bern/Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999). Pp. v+167. £17.50 (Pbk). ISBN 3 631 35332 4.

This book, the third in the sequence 'Contributions to Philosophical Theology' edited by the author, Gijsbert van den Brink, and Vincent Brümmer, is based on guest lectures given at the University of Lancaster in 1997. The lectures were first published in Dutch as *Het goede leven* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1997). The book is a 'completely revised, updated and extended translation of that Dutch monograph' (5). It consists of six chapters and the discussion is very wide-ranging, including examples ranging from Aristippus of Cyrene to the Spice Girls (an all-female British popular song quartet). The text also includes 396 footnotes, teeming with references to the more than 300 items in the bibliography.

Sarot's book is addressed to the central question 'What is the good life?'. He lists the four types of standard that he thinks one might employ in deciding what is to count as a good life:

(1) subjective standards: standards that are determined by personal preferences;
(2) objective standards: standards that are independent of the human subject;
(3) intersubjective standards: standards according to which the goodness of life is dependent upon relationships with other persons;
(4) basic standards: standards specifying the basic conditions that have to be fulfilled before a human being can strive after a life that is good in the subjective, objective and intersubjective senses. (18–19)

The fourth type here is not a type of standard for deciding whether a life is good, but rather a standard specifying the necessary conditions for *the pursuit* of a good life. It plays little further part in the book. The first is ambiguous between the view that each individual sets his or her own standards for his or her own life and the view that each individual sets his or her standards for the good life in general, to whomever the life belongs.

The second is also ambiguous, this time between the view that the standards for the good life obtain independently of the human subject's views about them and the view that the standards for the good life make no reference to the human subject. This ambiguity seems to me to lead Sarot astray in this book. The reader expects the first view to be meant, in contrast to the first type ('subjectivists and objectivists are diametrically opposed', 19), and in accordance

with the normal meaning of 'objective' ('the Latin *obiiectum* sometimes means: something that is presented to someone', 19), yet Sarot persistently seems to take it that the second is in view.

Similarly, the reader expects the meaning of 'intersubjective standards' to be that the standards are determined, not by the individual but by a community of individuals ('a middle position in between subjectivists and objectivists', 20). However, Sarot clearly intends to refer not to how a standard is *determined* but rather to the *content* of the standard ('According to *intersubjectivists*, it is having the right relationships with other persons that makes a life worthwhile: only in and through relationships can we become fully human', 20). His reading of (3) is therefore a sub-type of (1) or of (2) on their natural readings. He tries to demarcate the intersubjectivists from the others thus: 'Over against the subjectivists they maintain that within a personal relationship human beings always depend on other persons. … Over against the objectivists they maintain that the relationships that make life worthwhile are never entirely given to us' (20). This, in my view, misses the point; the subjectivist's claim that one does not depend on others does not apply in this context to *personal relationships*, but merely to *the determination of standards*. Similarly, objectivists here claim that *standards*, not *relationships*, are given to us.

Sarot's particular mode of inquiry is to test 'models' of the good life to see how well they would help one to cope with one's experience of evil and suffering. In the second chapter he offers the following taxonomy of evil: metaphysical evil; pain and suffering; non-moral evil; and moral evil (39). Again, it is arguable that this classification is unsatisfactory. The third and fourth classes together exhaust the field; the first two are sub-classes of the third. What the author seems to mean, however, by 'non-moral evil' is the causes of pain and suffering that are not free actions. But it is not at all clear that these are evil in any sense. Granted that their effects – pain and suffering – are evil, why should one say that they themselves are evil too?

After a brief *excursus* outlining his favoured conception of evil as tragedy, Sarot next turns to detailed exposition of the various 'models' of the good life, writing that 'the subjective model of the good life equates the good life with the happy life. ''Happiness'' is a purely subjective term: in principle, each person is the best judge of his or her own (un)happiness' (53). It is not at all clear to me why the subjectivist should equate the good life with the happy; the subjectivist may presumably pick whatever standard she or he likes. Certainly, many subjectivists think that the good life consists in something subtler than happiness: wellbeing or self-actualization, for example. Secondly, it seems equally unclear that 'happiness' is a 'purely subjective term'; the fact that each person is best placed to judge whether she or he is happy does not imply that each person lays down a personal standard for what is to count as happiness.

Sarot then discusses two ways in which, from the subjectivist point of view, one

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may find happiness: *optimizing* – or changing the world to conform to one's wishes, and *adapting* – or changing one's wishes to conform to the world. He discusses optimizing first. After pointing out, citing an experiment on rats, that it is self-defeating to strive indiscriminately after pleasure, he distinguishes three responses to this problem:

> Aristippus of Cyrene: one should forego some short-lived pleasures now for longer-lived ones later;
> Hegesias: one should strive for the absence of pain rather than the presence of pleasure;
> Epicurus: one should strive more for the higher pleasures than the lower ones.

Sarot dismisses them all: 'striving for the gratification of desires does not lead to complete satisfaction, and may even lead to complete unhappiness' (62); 'the absence of sorrow is no guarantee for a good life' (64); 'the last form of hedonism … requires such a long process of training, it can hardly be construed as a form of optimizing' (64). But these denials, in the absence of much supporting argument, seem hardly sufficient to refute the subtler forms of hedonism mentioned above. The author then discusses adapting, citing Epicurus now as an adapter. Again, adapting is dismissed: 'having minimal wants may lead to minimal frustration, which means in turn minimal unhappiness' (68). This begs the question: the adapters claim that minimal frustration means maximal happiness. Sarot also thinks that subjectivism about the good life implies subjectivism about morals (80), and that this implies consequentialism (106). This may be mistaken: 'good' in 'the good life' is not a moral 'good', as he himself says (16). What is to stop someone from thinking that some actions are objectively morally wrong, and yet what makes a life worthwhile is determined by the one living it? And what is to stop a subjectivist about morals from saying that she or he decrees that certain *actions* are right and others wrong?

In the fourth chapter Sarot turns to consider objectivism, starting with the concept of *eudaimonia* or 'self-actualization' (87). He writes that one's potential 'is not based on a human choice, but is, for a human being, a given. It is already there, waiting to be actualized. By adopting this given potential as the standard for the good life, eudemonism employs an objective, rather than a subjective, standard' (87). This seems to embody a level confusion: a subjectivist could adopt *eudaimonia* as her or his own personal standard for the good life, even though the precise potential that she or he has is not determined by her or his own decision. What makes a theory objectivist is not whether or not the existence and the nature of *eudaimonia* (or whatever) are determined by the individual, but rather whether or not the fact that *eudaimonia* (or whatever) constitutes the standard is so determined.

Sarot then considers a theological version in which it is God that draws out the

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potential in an individual, but, when he comes to discuss how the objectivist models cope with pain and suffering, he claims that its promise of eternal bliss performs too well:

> **We are dealing here with human feeling, with human pain, with human suffering, and these are being trivialized. What else can you call it when someone assures you that even the most horrific suffering is negligible in comparison with an eternity of happiness? That is not an appropriate way of dealing with suffering! No suffering is negligible! And those who claim that it is, reveal thereby, not only their complete moral insensitivity, but also contribute to immoral behaviour.** (104)

Sarot does not explain to this reader why he thinks the belief in an afterlife will lead the believer not to fight pain in the here and now. When he turns to moral evil, he claims that objectivism implies a 'virtue or character ethic' (106). This seems as surprising as his claim that subjectivism implies consequentialism. He does not tell us why he thinks an objectivist about the good life cannot think that, ultimately, some *actions* are right and others wrong, and that virtues and vices are derivative from this. Just as puzzling is his statement that 'at least a whiff of egocentrism attaches to the objectivist approach to moral evil. Should everything, in the final analysis, revolve around one's own ego?' (107). One might have expected to find such a statement concerning *subjectivism*, but it is hard to see that it is egocentric to claim merely that what makes up the good life is not determined by oneself.

Sarot next considers intersubjectivism, which he here defines as the view that 'the good life consists in good relationships with other persons' (109). The author discusses a theistic variant on intersubjectivism too: the view that the good life consists in relationship primarily with God and secondarily with others. He claims that this model deals quite well with the problem of metaphysical evil: 'those who expect an eternal life after death, suffer less due to their limitations and finitude here and now' (123). This seems confused: a life that is eternal in duration is not for that reason infinite in every way, so we have been given no reason to suppose that we shall lose most of our metaphysical limitations after death. Sarot makes the point in connection with pain and suffering that eternal bliss 'does not remove the problem but, at most, relativizes it' (123). It seems strange to me that he does not apply this reasoning to the case of metaphysical evil too. Finally, he once more finds an implication from views of the good life to views of morality: he thinks that intersubjectivism about the good life implies the view that '[m]oral good is what benefits relationships, and moral evil is what harms them. Ethics is concerned, then, with rules of conduct for communities and relationships' (129). The author does not explain why the intersubjectivist about the good life should affirm that moral good consists in benefiting relationships; still less why he thinks it follows that ethics should be concerned with *rules of conduct*.

Sarot ends the book by putting forward his own model of the good life, saying

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that humans 'can find the good life only in relationship with God' (141), which view leads him to adopt his understanding of the intersubjectivist model of the good life, with some features of the other models thrown in. He neatly combines the main points of both the theistic and the secular intersubjectivist models by claiming that 'more than anywhere else … we can find God in human beings' (142), and saying that 'we can experience all beneficent actions of other people towards us as particular manifestations of God's love for us' (142). This strikes this reader as slightly odd; we have been given no reason not to believe, granted the author's insistence on the same page on human (libertarian) freedom, that beneficent actions are more manifestations of our love than God's.

Sarot then begins to test his model against evil. He claims that 'metaphysical evil is given with the finiteness of the world, and that finiteness follows from the fact that the world is created. A world that would not be finite would coincide with God, and thus be God rather than a creation of God' (143). His inferences may be questionable here; does he really mean to deny what many scientists believe, namely that the universe itself is infinite? As for the impersonal causes of pain and suffering, Sarot claims that 'fixed order and regularity, combined with finiteness, *cannot fail to* lead to nonmoral evil' (143, my italics). This looks too strong, particularly since his own example is 'The same laws that govern the water cycle, and consequently lead to rain and the possibility of life, *may* also lead to periods of extreme doubt' (143, my italics).

Sarot thinks that his model has the best of it in the response to pain and suffering by understanding 'the suffering of our neighbour as God challenging us to help that neighbour' (147). This is somewhat startling, as the author certainly does not accept that God causes or allows pain in order to challenge us; rather he accepts the free-will defence (143). Why should we understand our neighbour's suffering this way if that is not, in fact, the reason for it? When we are incapable, says Sarot, 'of helping our suffering neighbour, it is important that we do not ignore her, but open ourselves to her suffering and make it our own by sharing it with her' (147). While these are clearly possible on the intersubjectivist model, it is hard to see that they are exclusive to it.

Unfortunately, I noticed numerous misprints in the book. It contains an excellent bibliography, and indexes both of names and subjects.

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Colin Grant *Altruism and Christian Ethics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001). Pp. xix+250. £35.00 (Hbk). ISBN 0 521 79144 8.

'It seems clear that in Western culture, Christianity is the ultimate source of the concept of altruism' (167). This claim is the fulcrum on which the argument of this book turns. Grant contends that our modern intellectual culture has a deeply ambivalent attitude to altruism; in particular, contemporary morality can't live with it and can't live without it (so to speak). This is because 'altruism is a modern secular concept that betrays theological overtones', and 'dismissal of the notion endangers the lingering theological sensibility it echoes' (xiii). If the meaning of this sentence, expressly described by Grant as his 'thesis', is hard to pin down (just what sort of fault is it to endanger lingering theological sensibility?) this is, I think, because the argument as a whole is hard to pin down.

The book is divided into three parts, each with three chapters. Part 1, entitled 'Alien altruism' discusses the possibility of altruism, especially in the context of neo-Darwinian sociobiology. Richard Dawkins and his 'selfish' gene figures prominently here, as does E. O. Wilson. Grant argues convincingly that Dawkins seems to think we are biologically programmed to act selfishly (or at least egoistically) while at the same time calling upon us to rise above this nature. But if we can rise above it, genetic programming cannot be the ultimate explanation. Something of the same charge can be laid at Wilson's feet (as Grant notes in a later chapter), if, as seems to be the case from time to time, he too is a biological determinist. Now while I have myself no inclination to defend Dawkins, whose views, when they depart from the narrow confines of evolutionary biology, seem to me crude and foolish, the following points have to be made. First, it is not obvious that Dawkins is consistently a biological determinist. Second, in the course of a celebratedly acrimonious dispute with the philosopher, Mary Midgley, some years ago (to which Grant makes reference) it emerged that the word 'selfish' in the title *The Selfish Gene* does not really mean what, for the purposes of attracting a readership, it might be thought to mean. The claim that people are naturally selfish is an old one; the claim that the underlying explanation of all biological forms is to be found in the unceasing struggle of genes to perpetuate themselves is rather newer. In the sight of the unwise they can be made to appear to amount to the same thing, but in fact they are quite different. Correspondingly, the problem that the phenomenon of 'altruism' presents to evolutionary biology is 'altruism' in a special sense also. Nor is its altruistic character of special interest. Just the same problem is posed by the phenomena of sterility (which Grant, as it seems to me, confuses with altruism in this debate) and homosexuality (which he does not mention).

Grant's criticism of Dawkins, Hamilton, Wilson and the like amounts to the

complaint that in trying to explain altruism, they effectively explain it away. This is a telling criticism only if we confuse the age-old debate about psychological egoism with the argument over evolutionary biology. The task of the biologist (as of any scientist) is to explain how what appears to be a phenomenon incompatible with a theory, is in fact compatible with it. Inevitably, this requires a distinction between appearance and reality which implies that what *appears* to be the case is not *really* the case, and this makes it vulnerable to the charge of explaining away. Properly understood, though, all explaining of this sort is inevitably explaining away. In the old debate, egoists do indeed argue that what appears to be *unselfish* behaviour is always and everywhere and underneath *selfish* behaviour. But in the contemporary debate about biology, the issue is not this at all, but whether behaviour that would seem to reduce the probability of reproductive success does indeed reduce that probability.

Having dismissed arguments for the genetic impossibility of altruism, but remaining in the realms of the factual, Grant goes on to cite positive evidence of altruism drawn from the empirical investigations of C. Daniel Batson: 'Batson concludes that, contrary to the sense of altruism as an unnatural chore … the truth may be almost the exact opposite, that we are characterized by a natural inclination to care about other people' (50). But if so, this presents us with another difficulty. If people are already spontaneously altruistic, how can altruism be a moral ideal? A spontaneous 'lack of deliberateness and calculation suggests that understanding altruism in terms of a direct focus on the other may be as unsatisfactory as the self-referential concern this is taken to preclude' (55) It is this thought that leads (after another chapter) to Part 2, entitled 'Ideal altruism'.

The problem Grant discusses in Part 2 is one that philosophers have debated for a very long time. What is the rational (as opposed to the natural) basis for altruism? Can we devise a philosophical explanation of the desirability of altruism? Three possible lines of thought are explored – social contract theory, Kantian constructivism, and an ethics based on sympathy and care. In his discussion of the first, Grant finds reason to consider the sociobiologists once more, then Hobbes's contemporary representative, David Gauthier, and finally Rawls in his 'justice as fairness' phase. His conclusion is that '[t]hese three prominent versions of self-interest ethics … suggest that ethics is either illusory, contradictory or unnecessary' (109). It is worth noting that altruism has here become ethics, a point to which I will return.

Rawls makes a second appearance in the chapter on 'constructed altruism'. This is the Rawls of *Political Liberalism* rather than *A Theory of Justice*, but he fares no better. 'Rawls might be seen to add to the sociobiology version … the claim that as rational beings we can be expected to appreciate the reasonableness of [reciprocal altruism]. What the position does not allow for, any more than sociobiology does, is the reality of genuine altruism' (28). Impartiality, we might say, is not a mode of caring, and this thought leads Grant to consider something he

names 'collegial altruism'. The chapter begins with a short discussion of Hume on sympathy as the basis of ethics, followed by a longer discussion of the feminist ethics of care as elaborated by Carol Gilligan. At the heart of her position, it is alleged, lies a contradiction between 'a demand for self-assertion on the part of women and the ethics of care that she finds so natural for women'. Grant's point is that we have no reason to assume that the natural disposition to care will remain a central part of the psychology of women who have been inducted into a spirit of self-assertion. It is a reasonable point, but it is not easy to see how the failure of an ethics-of-care account of altruism leads Grant to the conclusion that '[t]he devastating difference between self-love and love of others may be recognizable only from the perspective of an ideal that transcends the social horizon', which is the contention that is intended to link us to the third and final part of the book – 'Real altruism'.

Part 3 begins with a long discussion of Anders Nygren's account of Christian love in *Agape and Eros*. Grant remarks that it 'is striking that Nygren does not deal with *philia* … . He deals with *eros* negatively, *agape* positively and *philia* not at all' (74). What this omission reveals is the inadequacy of an exclusive focus on *agape* as the central ethical concept. This is because *agape* is too distant from its objects, and involves no necessary mutuality, a feature which makes it destructive of altruism. 'There is … an exposure of a kind of debilitating inversion implicit in the assistance on the independent sufficiency of agape; the insistence on self-sacrifice has the effect of emphasizing the self. The result is that the supreme form of caring love idealizes and promotes an isolated self-sufficiency' (175). In this way, it seems, traditional religious accounts of altruism fare no better than their secular counterparts. Grant summarizes the position thus:

> **Altruism discloses its problematic through the psychological paradox that all pleasure is our own pleasure, the moral paradox that the more we take altruism to be real the less we need to aspire to it and the more we feel the need to aspire to it the less real it seems to be, and the religious paradox that deliberate altruism ceases to be altruism.** (248)

How then is the religious account of altruism any better? Grant's answer is that altruism is genuine when it is other-directed (as self-interested versions cannot be) and when it is unreflective (as the moral version cannot be).

> **Altruism is achieved best where it is least intended. Unintentional altruism is most natural for the transcendent sponsorship of the religious level, where we are delivered from ourselves. It could be said that altruism is a test of the seriousness of religious vision. The fact that there is not more altruism in the world than there is may be an indication of how superficial much of our religion is.** (248)

Thus summarized, Grant's book can be seen to have a clear and developing structure, and a concern with issues that are widely discussed in contemporary philosophy and theology. Yet to my mind, the structure and the development are misleading. The focus on altruism distorts a good deal of the argument, and at

crucial points the language is too imprecise to address the problems it alludes to. Some reminders might lend support to this criticism. Altruism is not all of ethics, and ethics is not the whole of social philosophy. I do not, myself, think that Rawls is concerned to show that altruism is a virtue, or that the rational strategies of the Hobbesian are intended to show that we should care about others. Rather, Rawls (in the earlier work) wants to establish a rationally self-interested basis for justice, and Hobbes wants to demonstrate the rationality of obedience to political power. Accordingly I cannot see that Hobbes (even in the form of Gauthier) is part of the same debate as Gilligan. There is a difference between civic virtues and moral virtues (of which altruism is only one).

To the degree that too much is squeezed into a single and confining mould, the resulting conclusions are weakened. The 'paradoxes', too, upon which a good deal turns, are not altogether convincing. For example, even if it is true that all pleasure is our own pleasure, this is at best a trivial truth that disguises the important fact that I can take pleasure solely in those things that benefit me, or I can take pleasure in things that benefit others as well. The 'paradox' arises only if we falsely suppose that if I can be said to take *pleasure* in the good of others, the good of others effectively falls out of the picture. This is an old error.

Most importantly of all, for similar reasons of unclarity, the defence of the main thesis is not wholly convincing. Suppose it is indeed true that altruism, properly so called, has to be unintended. There are many people who exhibit this unintentional altruism without entertaining religious thoughts or beliefs. What is being said about them? That their altruism is unintelligible in the absence of such belief? That they would be more altruistic yet, if only they were more religious? That only the existence of God makes such people possible? Without a great deal more clarity on these points, those concerned to defend the intelligibility of altruism and who share Grant's rejection of its sociobiological challengers, are unlikely to be persuaded of the necessity of pressing on from familiar secular arguments to more unfamiliar religious ones.

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