



Reviews

AUGUSTINE AND WITTGENSTEIN edited by John Doody, Alexander R. Eodice, and Kim Paffenroth, *Lexington Books*, Lanham, Maryland, 2018, pp. xii +204, £65.00, hbk

Villanova University, founded in 1842 by friars of the Order of Saint Augustine in Pennsylvania, is the greatest centre of Augustinian studies in the English-speaking world. Their series of books considering Augustine's relation to politics, literature, history, liberal education, and suchlike domains, has now turned to his relation with the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, or rather to Wittgenstein's relation with him.

According to his friend M. O'C. Drury, Wittgenstein knew his way around Augustine's *Confessions* and even, in a moment of singular exuberance, declared it 'the most serious book ever written'. How much else he read remains unclear, probably very little, though, according to another friend, Norman Malcolm, he revered Augustine. He had tried but could not get on with *The City of God*, so he told Drury. Famously, anyway, he opened *Philosophical Investigations* (1953, posthumously) with Augustine's sketch in the *Confessions* of how an infant learns to speak — a misleading albeit quite natural account, so Wittgenstein says, 'as if the child could already *think*, only not yet speak' (§32), which the rest of the book dismantles: 'nothing is more wrong-headed than to call meaning something a mental activity!' (§693), as it concludes. 'Cut the pie any way you like, "meanings" just ain't in the head', as Hilary Putnam put it, somewhat more colourfully.

How wrong-headed Augustine's assumptions about the nature of language are, even in the sketch that Wittgenstein quotes, is of course up for debate. This volume opens by reprinting the fine analysis of language and learning to speak in Augustine's *De Magistro* by M.F. Burnyeat, Emeritus Professor of Ancient Philosophy at the University of Cambridge, a lecture delivered in 1987: in this wider setting, and allowing for Augustine's belief in the role of divine illumination in our coming to know anything, Augustine and Wittgenstein in effect agree that understanding is not transmitted by what some one else says but must be achieved by oneself. None of the nine new essays builds on Burnyeat's essay or even mentions it. The point of beginning with it is presumably to frame Wittgenstein's *Confessions* quotation so that it isn't read as merely dismissive of Augustine's conception of language in general, as students of the *Investigations* often assume.

Chad Engelland, in the first essay, drawing on his fine book *Ostension: Word Learning and the Embodied Mind* (2014), argues that Wittgenstein might have learned more from Augustine's reference to pointing at things, especially in the context of how infants naturally react to gestures, described already in the *Confessions* quotation. In the next chapter Erika Kidd considers the quotation in the light of her forthcoming book on how *De Magistro* should be read as a spiritual exercise and a memorial to Adeodatus, Augustine's son who died in adolescence.

Caleb Thompson, author of two remarkable papers on Wittgenstein's Augustine in the Swansea journal *Philosophical Investigations*, attempts to make sense of Wittgenstein's translation of another favourite passage in the *Confessions*: 'Woe to those who say nothing about [God] seeing that those who say most are dumb'. This seems to mean, so Wittgenstein thought, that it is misguided to stay silent about God because people talk such rot.

Brian R. Clack, returning to his *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion* (1999), explores how Wittgenstein and Augustine differ in their views of sex and its role in human life — 'Not every religion has to have St Augustine's attitude to sex!', as Wittgenstein exploded in conversation with Drury (both perhaps more captive to cliché than they realised). Espen Dahl, author of a fine book on Stanley Cavell (2014), compares Wittgenstein and Augustine on miracles and wonders: Augustine turns out more like Wittgenstein than one would have believed. David Goodill, with a book on moral theology after Wittgenstein forthcoming, compares how Augustine and Wittgenstein regard religious practices as expressing natural reactions that humans have to the world.

Garry L. Hagberg, with several fine books and articles on Wittgenstein, especially *Describing Ourselves: Wittgenstein and Autobiographical Consciousness* (2008), takes on memory, one of the deepest themes in Augustine, as everyone knows, but, as he shows, a pretty deep theme also in Wittgenstein's later work — much more pervasive than would be regulated by his claim that 'the work of the philosopher consists in marshalling recollections, *Erinnerungen*, for a particular purpose' (*Investigations* §127). Miles Hollingworth, author of *Saint Augustine of Hippo: An Intellectual Biography* (2013) and the even more provocative *Ludwig Wittgenstein: An Intellectual Biography* (2018), tackles time and freedom in the *Confessions* and the *Tractatus*, contending that, for Augustine and young Wittgenstein, without the supernatural and transcendental, freedom cannot exist, at any rate in words on the page or thoughts in the head (cf. p. 164). Finally, Duncan Richter, greatly respected for his work on the ethics of G.E.M. Anscombe as well as for his Wittgenstein studies, takes up the notion of the will, elusive enough to sort out in Wittgenstein let alone in Augustine; but again not so far apart as one might assume.

It would be difficult to judge whether Augustine emerges from the comparison more illuminatingly than Wittgenstein. The authors sign

themselves off mostly as philosophers. It is not difficult to make out where and how they have been taught to read Wittgenstein. Duncan Richter has a go at Peter Hacker, the leading Wittgenstein scholar at Oxford; otherwise rival interpretations remain out of sight. Devotees of Saint Augustine are unlikely to expect much to interest them in a philosopher they would probably regard as doing ‘linguistic analysis’ — ‘talk about talk’. In universities in which cognitive science, AI research and suchlike, dominate the most renowned (best funded) philosophy schools, there would not be much interest in Wittgenstein himself let alone in his relation with Augustine. This collection is a good read; the essays all deserve to be re-read and thought about. In a physically attractive book there are few slips: Arthur Kenny (p. 54), however, is Anthony.

FERGUS KERR OP

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL edited by Chad Meister and Paul K. Moser, *Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017, pp. xi + 273, £23.99, pbk*

There is clearly more than one problem of evil. One is medical and faced by physicians daily: ‘Why is so and so displaying the distressing symptoms that s/he currently manifests?’. Then there is a problem of evil expressed in questions like ‘What can we do to reduce the incidence of certain kinds of suffering?’. Again, there a problem of evil of the kind presented in the book of *Job*. Here we find Job, who is ‘blameless and upright’, but also afflicted by woes which lead him to ask why God is allowing him to suffer. The question at stake is ‘Why is God dealing with Job as he does?’. And, finally, there is the so-called ‘philosophical’ problem of evil, which current analytical philosophers take to come in two forms. The first is the ‘logical’ problem: ‘Is it not contradictory to assert both that God exists and that evil exists?’. The second is the ‘evidentialist’ problem: ‘Does not evil in its various forms count as evidence against God’s existence?’. The first problem here was famously raised by J.L. Mackie in ‘Evil and Omnipotence’ (*Mind*, 1955). The second was developed by William Rowe in ‘The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism’ (*American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1979).

In their Introduction to the present volume (henceforth CCPE), the editors assert that their book ‘focuses on the problem of evil for theism’. They then add that ‘the problem of evil has two major theoretical versions: the logical problem and the evidential problem’ (p. 3). Yet not all the essays in CCPE focus on logical and evidential versions of the problem of evil as the editors seem to understand them in their Introduction. This is especially the case when it comes to Part II of the book, titled ‘Interdisciplinary Issues’, in which we find five chapters.