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*Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a
Christian Platonist* (review)

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Phillip Cary
*Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self:
 The Legacy of a Christian Platonist*
 New York: Oxford University Press, 2000
 Pp. xvii + 214. \$49.95.

Phillip Cary argues that Augustine invented the concept of the self as a private inner space where one can enter and find God and that Augustine's call for an inward turn and to find Christ in the heart "directs our attention toward something that does not exist (the inner self) and away from that in which resides our salvation (the flesh of Christ)" (x). Cary offers "a serious warning for Christians who are attracted to an inward turn" (xi).

The book consists of two parts. In part 1, Cary explores the concept of inwardness as found in the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, sources for Augustine's own philosophy. Cary argues that Plato's doctrine of recollection of Forms inaugurates the concept of inwardness. Aristotle's epistemology takes Plato's theory a step forward. Cary contends that Aristotle is the first to argue that "the soul is the Forms it knows" (20), which "means [that] . . . we are identical with the same things God is identical with, which means that we are . . . identical with God" (21). Plotinus, synthesizing Plato and Aristotle's theories, argues that the soul, when contemplating its true self, will discover its identity with the divine Mind and with its divine and eternal origin. Plotinus' method in finding the One is a one step procedure of "turning inward." Augustine's inward turn, on the contrary, consists of two movements, "first *in*, then *up*" (39).

In part 2, Cary details the development of Augustine's thought about the inner self. He explains how Augustine abandoned the Cassiciacum project of trying to find something immutable and divine about the soul and developed the idea of the mutability and incorporeality of the soul, which gives birth to his concept of the self as a private inner space where one can find God. For Augustine this inner privacy is a result of the Fall. Without sin the inner space would not be private because human bodies would not have become opaque.

Such is the general thesis of Cary's painstaking and provocative book. However, I do have some reservations. First, Cary's study is *mainly* limited to Augustine's early and middle works. Most of his use of Augustine's later works is scant. Nonetheless, many of Cary's statements are claims about what, generally speaking, Augustine's position is. This might lead less suspecting readers to believe that Augustine did not further develop his thought on these subjects and, thus, is more radical than he actually is. I shall use two examples to illustrate my point.

First, I am astonished that Cary did not take time to consider how Augustine's theory of memory (a place where one can find God) in his mature works differs from Plato's theory of recollection. Since the mature Augustine did not uphold the pre-existence of the soul, in what sense is the Intelligible Truth and God forgotten but not unknown and, therefore, can be remembered and found? A careful discussion of later texts, e.g., *De Trinitate* XII, 24, is crucial on this point, but Cary simply glosses over this subject in an endnote (note 58 of chap. 10).

Secondly, Cary takes issue with Augustine's position on the human mind's ability to comprehend God. He argues that Augustine never sees that "human nature needs to be elevated by a supernatural gift of grace in order to see God" (67). He writes, "[T]his point is stated clearly enough in Augustine's essay 'On Ideas.' It is the nature of the mind's eye, when purified of sin . . . to see the Ideas in the divine Mind" (69). Nor can the distinction between the possibility and the actuality of created human nature save Augustine from this controversial conclusion because, Cary argues, this distinction is simply not in Augustine's philosophy (68–69). This reading of Augustine is not very accurate. For "On Ideas" (section 46 of *On Eighty-Three Different Questions*), which Cary heavily relies on, is an early work. Many texts from Augustine's later works would contradict Cary's interpretation. For example, *De spiritu et littera*, 63–66 clearly made the distinction between the *possibility* and the *actuality* of sinlessness, and emphasized the point that grace is needed "for that righteousness in which we shall hereafter live forever in the contemplation of Himself [God]." Thus, even when we are purified from all sins and return to the original state of nature, God's grace is required for us both to contemplate and to see Him.

Lastly, I also found Cary's interpretation of Aristotle's epistemology odd. As quoted earlier in this review, Cary argues that since Aristotle holds that the soul is identical with the Forms it knows, and God is identical with the Forms that He contemplates, the soul is identical with God. But something is amiss here. It seems that Cary has confused epistemological identity with ontological identity. Aristotle's *De Anima* III, 4, 429a 12–18 ("The thinking part of the soul must therefore be, while impassible, capable of receiving the form of an object; that is, must be potentially identical in character with its object *without being the object*") clearly indicates that although an epistemological identity exists between the soul and the Forms when the soul actually knows, this identity is *not ontological*.

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