Luigi Gioia
The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate.
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The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate presents an interesting and sympathetic interpretation of Augustine's *De Trinitate*. Luigi Gioia attempts to understand Augustine's treatise as a unified and coherent work, even though a strict sequential reading might leave the reader with the contrary impression. Gioia begins by examining the central issues of the *De Trinitate*, namely the relation between scripture and the Trinity, the 'Arian' ontology, the relationship between knowledge and the nature of mystery surrounding the Trinity, and an account of the psychological analogies. Gioia maintains that these topics should be considered polemical, or introductory. Augustine, so the argument runs, aims to develop the reader's knowledge of God by introducing him into the practice of this knowledge. In attempting to consider the nature of the Trinity, so runs the narrative, we develop a theological understanding of God. The Trinitarian identity of God is the only way, as Gioia argues, to explain *how* we come to know him. Knowledge of the Father is possible only through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Love of God, as revealed by Christ and the Holy Spirit allows for the knowledge of God. Knowledge of God allows, *inter alia*, for one to acknowledge one's own deficiency, and opens up, thereby, the philosophical enterprise as a whole as it is summed up in Delphic injunction *gnothi seaton*.

Gioia's treatment of Augustine's views on Christ's sacrifice, his Christology, and the ontology that results, will interest the reader with some sophistication in theology. His discussion of the connection between soteriology and revelation is of great interest. His treatment of the relation and influence of Plato and the Neoplatonists is by no means a compendium. It will, however, be of interest to those concerned with the controversies concerning Augustine's influences. The author's interpretation is thoroughly defended with reference to the text. Those with some background in Latin will enjoy comparing translation with original, as the author has taken meticulous care in including the Latin where translation is important. A useful *index locorum* is included.

In what follows, I will focus my discussion around the epistemology that is attributed to Augustine, by asking the following questions. First, what are the philosophical merits of the epistemology Gioia attributes to Augustine? Secondly, are there reasons for thinking Augustine does not accept the epistemology that is here attributed to him?

The whole epistemological enterprise, it is suggested, depends upon our knowledge of God. However, the question of how we have knowledge of God is itself an

epistemological question. So how is it we have knowledge? It is through knowledge of God. And how is it that we have knowledge of God insofar as this is knowledge? If we answer that we have knowledge of God in virtue of having knowledge of God it seems that we simply reassert our *explanandum*. Neglecting to answer the question of how we have knowledge of God leaves the epistemology incomplete.

One way of responding to the criticism, suggested by Gioia's interpretation, would be to head off the regress by maintaining that knowledge of God is not the result of another epistemic state but, rather, the result of the love one has for God, once one comes to so love him through the practice of this knowledge. And while this view seems to have the peculiar consequence that one may engage in the practice of a certain kind of knowledge without having the knowledge in question, its seems that this is an idea one might, nevertheless, make intelligible. Just how love is converted into knowledge, however, seems to be left unexplained. Engaging in certain practices may lead one to love God. And that the love in question would entail *faith* is reasonable. But knowledge does not seem to be entailed by love. And, in any case, it seems that one might settle for—perhaps prefer—faith in place of knowledge.

It may be, however, that Gioia would not want to read Augustine as resting the whole epistemological enterprise upon knowledge of God, only the epistemological project of knowing one's self. And here I think there are some questions about Augustine's own view that may be pursued.

On Gioia's account, we come to know the self only when we have come to know God. However, one might argue that this is not Augustine's view. It would not be anachronistic to note that in *De Civitate Dei* XI.26, the *si fallor sum* passage, Augustine has been thought by some to anticipate Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum*. Would the knowledge of one's self depend, epistemically, upon God if one were a *res cogitans*? Descartes established his own existence, and his nature, before establishing the existence of God in the third and fifth meditations. Of course there is a distinction to be drawn between knowing thyself and knowing thyself to exist. And Augustine's arguments here are surely *contra Academicos*. We should note, however, that he says the following right in *De Trinitate* X.7.10-X.9.12: 'What is so present to the mind…as the mind itself?...But when it is said to the mind "know thyself" it knows itself the moment it understands what is said: "yourself"; nor does it know itself for any other reason than that it is present to itself…' Augustine states, therefore, that one knows one's self for no other reason than the fact that the mind is present to itself. Insofar as one knows one's self for no other reason than that the mind is present to itself, it appears that we need not appeal to knowledge of God as a reason for why we have self-knowledge. Indeed, it seems, on the basis of these locutions, that Augustine does not consider the enterprise of knowing one's self to present any real difficulty.

To be sure, Gioia is privy to the fact that according to Augustine mind and self-

knowledge are intimately related: 'Mind and self-knowledge coincide to the point that the suppression of either of the two entails the disappearance of the other, since the very substance of the mind is self-knowledge' (207). And the answer to the objection presently being pursued may be located in an analysis of *De Trinitate* 9.16. Therein, Augustine discusses with customary eloquence how when we know God we are made better than we were previously, having a kind of knowledge that we love, and which becomes word and a kind of likeness of God. And Gioia seems to suggest that through this recognition and love individuals become increasingly aware of their nature as something inferior to God and superior to body. It should also be said that Gioia's purpose in this book is not to 'solve the conundrums of Augustine's epistemology, but simply to highlight the strands of his theory of knowledge which either throw some light on his understanding of the way we know God or depend thereupon…' (196). And Gioia's descriptions of the strands of Augustine's theory of knowledge are interesting and useful. The ninth chapter provides a nice synopsis—nuts and bolts—of Augustine's views concerning perception, memory, intellect, and cognitive error.

In *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's* De Trinitate, moreover, Luigi Gioia attempts to read *De Trinitate* as a unified and coherent treatise. Those who would locate unity and coherence in the ability of a treatise to address familiar epistemological difficulties and paradoxes may be left yearning. Those who are looking for a thorough and mindful commentary of what Augustine says in *De Trinitate*, in contrast, will be amply rewarded.

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