

## ST AUGUSTINE THROUGH THE EYE OF THE ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHER

CH. KIRWAN: Augustine. The Arguments of the Philosophers (Augustinus). Ed.: Ted Honderich. London and New York, Routledge, 1991, 246 p.

In the two libraries of Bratislava in Slovakia, where Christopher Kirwan lectured on analytic philosophy at Comenius in 1992, one can borrow his volume on St Augustine. Apart from multiple other merits, which I intend to take up, the book, in this part of the world, undoubtedly has an additional one: it sensitizes the reader to lacunae in our cultural diet, the ignorance and neglect of our Christian roots being the most grievous and deliterious.

Religion and the entirety of theological discourse are not just "that messy cultural stuff" but the central set of beliefs and practices of a community. Some say that religion, which originally extended to everything, now has its days numbered. I am suggesting that, inhabiting the modern world, we still have many shared truths and goals. This is a public world, not that of private thinking, and Christianity within it, in our case, sets the fashion. Our moral thinking is fed by its spirit, our political and economic values are infused with religious values. No doubt, Christopher Kirwan is only too aware of this when, having skipped large stretches of Augustine's philosophic thought (yes, the author's subject in this volume is exactly *philosophy* of this Doctor of Church), he has placed free will and the topics which spring from this major problem in the centre of the stage. There can be no radical private existence, we live in a "we" world, which can only endure if it exhibits moral unity. Are not, after all, individual rights and, say, notions of economic fair play connected with the religious, even the sacred we all share?

Christopher Kirwan's erudite volume is an invitation to re-enter the disrupted web of intertextuality, which is considerably responsible for our "Christian" identity. The book observes Augustine, as the author hastens to make it clear in the opening lines of his *Preface*, from a stance which is outside the Christian theologic tradition, "the stance of an analytic philosopher, who happens also to be an atheist (though that should make little difference), and who knows something of Augustine's Greek predecessors in philosophy but not much of his medieval or renaissance successors" (vii).

Ch. Kirwan's Oxford-trained idiom, a happy marriage between the analytic clarity of argumentative prose and the narrativistic delights of rhapsodic orality, is very instrumental in conveying the intellectual tenor of Augustine's own day and the personal story of this towering figure in the history of Western Christianity. Someone nonequipped with a blissful blend of the two traditions (stardardly known as pre-literate and literate) would have hardly succeeded in "fixing" the *flux* of events and polemics of the time when Christianity was not seen as the pious glue securing society's unity. Then, again, he/she would have necessarily failed in expressing, by means of structural relations between words of only *one* stylistic order, the *processual eventfulness* of Saint Augustine's mostly intellectual conversion to Christianity...

The message of the opening chapter, in short, is this: Augustine's (Aurelius Augustinus, 354-430) personal and intellectual background clearly prepared him for what he was - *the*

defender of the Christian faith and the one who wanted to do more than parry threats to the faith, namely to bring together classical philosophy and Christian theology. Intimate affinities with the ancient mentality and expression, the employment of the analytic tool kit, and a sort of personal touch of the author's intellectual integrity make this piece of meticulous scholarship a captivating reading too. The ensuing collage might be illustrative:

"At the time of Jesus, Judaism was gaining converts throughout the romanized Mediterranean. Christianity inherited this proselytizing habit through Paul; and gradually the new religion, imbued with Jewish culture and morality but disowned by the nation of its founders, established churches in every part of the Roman Empire" (p. 1).

Born in Thagaste (now part of Algeria) to a Christian mother and pagan father in the year 354 moved to Carthage, metropolis of Roman Africa, to finish his education at the university. "At first he made the most of student life: he was top of his class, enjoyed the bawdy theatre, used sex in search of love and consorted guiltily with a student group who called themselves the Smashers ("eversores") (p. 2);

"but within two years the style had changed completely: he was living with a woman..., he had a son by her..., and his reading of Cicero's now lost dialogue *Hortensius* had put into his head the ambition of an intellectual life in which he should abandon power and pleasure in order to devote himself, preferably in a kind of monastic community of kindred spirits, to the pursuit of truth" (pp. 2-3).

Later, at Milan "a circle of Platonists, led by an elderly Christian called Simplicianus, drew him into their number, rescued him from the Ciceronian scepticism which his stay at Rome had nurtured, and exposed him apparently for the first time to the serious – and of course basically Greek – traditions of ancient philosophy.

This Platonism, which we call Neoplatonism, had been instituted a century before by Plotinus (205-270) and disseminated by his pupil and editor Porphyry (c.232-304)... The combination which they found, or thought they found, in Plato of ascetic high-mindedness and systematic metaphysics appealed to the visionary spirit of the times. Augustine was impressed" (pp. 3-4).

"Yet marriage, he now felt, actually defiled those ambitions, for it would perpetuate his enslavement to sexual pleasure. Augustine was ill and deeply wretched ... The "medicine" was dispensed ... through acquaintance with Milan's bishop Ambrose... Augustine heard the bishop's sermons and was enthralled. It occurred to him to study the Bible. They met ... and we can imagine Augustine's feeling that in this man his mother's piety was fused with an intellect worthy of his own and his friends' philosophical aspirations.

Through these or whatever means Augustine came to his conversion: to the moment in a Milanese garden in August 386 when ..." (p. 4).

*Against the Sceptics* (Chapter II), where Ch. Kirwan, one by one, is examining Augustine's three arguments and critically assessing their consistency, is an impeccable performance of *philosophic labour*, or the labour of reasoning, if you prefer: doing philosophy in analytic tradition... Perfectly at home with the ancients (and not with them only, for that matter), Ch. Kirwan, while attending to the second element, intersperses his own comments with references to particular works and pages both of Augustine and his adversaries (the author's usual technique the volume through). When the voices of the ancients are taken over by the moderns and organized by the author in an impressive polylogue, you find yourself *involved* in the controversy, which ceases to be remote from our current difficulties. The up-dating power of Ch. Kirwan's argumentative lure invites you to a symposium, where St Augustine emerges as immediately relevant to these days'"mortal" questions.

Ch. Kirwan's volume is too rich and learned in the best connotation of the word to be paid due tribute even by a much lengthier review written by a more competent pen than the one wielded by the author of these lines. But at least one point more. Toleration, winning

allegiance or communion by coercion, by compulsion people to good as well as paternalism-these constitute the stuff of the section *Compel them to come in*. Its heading is the allusion to Jesus'parable of the great supper, at which the host, "snubbed by those he had invited, sends his servant to summon the poor and crippled and blind and lame. When there is still room for more he says: 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in' (compelle intrare, Gospel according to Luke 14:23). Augustine had fatuously applied this text to his own anti-Donatist policy..." (p. 216).

Saint Augustine's *The City of God* is his evergreen legacy of a political and moral philosopher, and it is Ch. Kirwan who points out the most topical places. The author opines that Augustine has left us no blueprint for human society on earth, the 'terena civitas'. And we cannot suppose this to be accidental, he adds, because there is little doubt that Augustine thought human institutions had to go much as the always had had: "wars must be fought, slaves bought and sold, fallible judgements handed down, innocents subjected to judicial torture" (p. 218). Yet, in the wake of it, Ch. Kirwan assures us that Augustine regarded justice as the paramount virtue and he quotes the celebrated passage from *The City of God*: "So if justice is off the scene (remote justitia), what are kingdoms but large-scale terrorist gangs?" And what about the heavenly city? In Augustine's view, it is a communion of men bound together by no institutions or laws, Ch. Kirwan contends, but by fellow feeling and shared values alone. "In the Augustinian view the city of God is not a political association. It has no politics; politics belong with sin" (p. 224). Here Saint Augustine and Christopher Kirwan at their most political.

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## O FILOZOFII DEJÍN N. BERĎAJEVA

N. BERĎAJEV: *Smysl istorii (Zmysel dejín)*. Moskva, Mysl 1990, 175 s.

Kniha *Zmysel dejín* je práca, v ktorej N. Berďajev najúplnejšie vyložil svoju koncepciu filozofie dejín. Rozvinul v nej mnohé myšlienky, ktoré už predtým vyjadril v knihe *Filozofia slobody*. Osnovou knihy sa stali koncepty jeho vlastných prednášok z rokov 1919-1920 vo Vofnej akadémii duchovnej kultúry v Moskve.

Autor v danej práci vystihol najdôležitejšiu charakteristickú črtu celého ruského filozofického myslenia vôbec, a sice, že filozofia dejín bola pre ruských filozofov primárnou problematikou a mala významnú úlohu vo formovaní ruského národného povedomia. Preto neprekvapuje, že aj vývin Berďajeva ako mysliteľa je spätý najmä s otázkami filozofie dejín. Čas Berďajevovej mladosti a dospelosti bol poznačený hlbokými sociálnymi otrasmi. Autorom knihy je človek, ktorý má za sebou svetovú vojnu, tri revolúcie a pokúša sa pochopiť, "kam nás akadámsi osud udalosti" (S. Jesenin).

Pre pochopenie Berďajevovej filozoficko-historickej koncepcie je nevyhnutné poznať východiskové body jeho tvorby.

Po prvé, Berďajevova filozofia dejín je náboženská. Bol toho názoru, že "svojbytná ruská myseľ sa upriamuje na eschatologický problém konca, má apokalyptický nádych" (s. 3). Hneď však upresníme, že hoci autor sám seba pokladal za kresťanského mysliteľa, jeho filozofické hľadanie bolo neokresťanské a mimokonfesionálne. Je to kresťanstvo Nového zákona a všetok elán neokresťanského filozofického úsilia smeroval k hľadaniu odpovede na otázku, akým