

William Ligon Wade, S.J., *On the Teacher: Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas: A Comparison*. Edited by John P. Doyle. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2013.

In 1935, Father William Wade completed his dissertation, "A Comparison of the 'De Magistro' of Saint Augustine with the 'De Magistro' of Saint Thomas." Now John P. Doyle has published the dissertation under a new title, and with his own translations of the two eponymous texts added as appendices. The Augustine text is of course his dialogue *De Magistro*; the Thomas text is *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* q. 11. (Since standard translations of these two texts are widely available, I have chosen not to comment on Doyle's translations of them.) Wade's dissertation is not a modern work of scholarship on either Augustine or Thomas. But its publication, after many decades, remains of interest on account of certain aspects of its approach to Augustine in particular, which have the potential to challenge and enrich contemporary work on his epistemology.

Wade's dissertation is divided into three chapters: a first chapter on Augustine, a second chapter on Thomas, and a third chapter that draws conclusions about how they should be read together. Wade's central concern throughout, however, is with the proper interpretation of Augustine's doctrine of illumination. His treatment of Aquinas is aimed primarily at demonstrating that Aquinas misinterpreted Augustine's doctrine and falsely assimilated it to his own views. Thus the title of Wade's work (both in its original, dissertation form and in this newly published form) is somewhat misleading. This text is not really a "comparison" of Augustine and Aquinas, but rather an interpretation of Augustine, in which Aquinas's interpretation of Augustine is used as a foil, in order to clarify Wade's own view of Augustine's thought.

The root of Augustine's doctrine of illumination is a metaphor: just as we see visible things with our eyes only insofar as they are illuminated by the sun, so we understand intelligible things only insofar as they are "illuminated" for us by God. The question for Augustine's interpreters is to explain how this process of divine illumination works. Is Augustine appealing to a kind of Platonic theory of recollection, in which the soul has been exposed directly to the intelligible Forms before birth, and then must recall them? Or to a Cartesian notion of innate ideas, according to which the soul is created with certain conceptions, which each of us can discover within himself through a kind of meditative reflection on our own thoughts? Wade discusses and rejects these two lines of interpretation. His primary aim, however, is to criticize a third possible approach, proposed by Aquinas. According to Aquinas, Augustine's appeal to divine illumination should be understood as a reference to

the creation of the human soul with a capacity to acquire knowledge by reasoning. Aquinas identifies this capacity with the “active intellect” described by Aristotle in *De Anima* III.5 (430a10–25). For Aquinas, “illumination” refers to the original act whereby God created the human soul with a capacity to acquire knowledge. According to Aquinas, God “illuminates” the human mind, in the sense that it is from Him alone that we acquire the capacity to know. In *De Veritate* q. 11 and elsewhere, Aquinas both defends this position as his own view of the role of God in human knowledge, and puts it forward as the true interpretation of Augustine’s doctrine of illumination.

The central aim of Wade’s work is to oppose this Thomistic line of interpretation, and instead to argue that Augustinian illumination should be understood as a special act of God, distinct from the creation of the human soul, whereby God gives “a special help” (55) to the human intellect. As Wade himself notes, his interpretation of Augustine’s doctrine of illumination is similar to that proposed by Etienne Gilson in his classic *Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*. As Wade puts it: “The best interpretation of the illumination of the mind by the light of truth seems to be that given by Gilson, when he says that the illumination is a form of innatism or intrinsicism in so far as in every act of knowledge by which we know the truth there is an element which is neither from things nor from ourselves but from an influence superior to ourselves which is God” (55). For Wade as for Gilson, the Thomistic interpretation of Augustinian illumination is to be rejected, on the grounds that Augustinian illumination refers, not to something that God does in the creation of the human soul, but to a subsequent act whereby God helps the created soul to attain knowledge.

Wade’s kinship with Gilson’s interpretation notwithstanding, his reading of Augustine has its own interest and originality, on account of the particular stress that he places on the moral and spiritual aspect of Augustine’s epistemology. In this respect, Wade’s work feels surprisingly contemporary, insofar as its emphasis on the spiritual aspects of truth and knowledge resonates with similar themes in the work of recent historians of ancient philosophy such as Pierre Hadot. According to Wade, human knowledge is not attained in the first instance through the active exercise of human faculties, but rather through a certain receptivity of the soul to divine illumination. From this point of view, the task of epistemology becomes not so much to formulate a method for arriving at knowledge, but rather to cultivate the attitudes and habits that will allow the mind to receive illumination from God. Thus Wade locates the essential value of Augustine’s epistemology in its appreciation of “the influence of the will on the intellect” (61), and “the necessity of a good life as a prerequisite for arriving at a knowledge of the higher truths” (59). This aspect

of Augustine's theory of knowledge has been noted by others, including Gilson. But Wade's work is unusual in the way it places these themes at the center of Augustine's doctrine of illumination and deploys them in argument against Aquinas's interpretation. From Wade's point of view, Aquinas wrongly assimilates the divine light to a faculty of the human soul, and thus fails to capture the radical dependence of human knowledge on divine aid. As a result, Wade argues, Aquinas misses the importance of spiritual purification as a condition on the acquisition of knowledge. Wade's attention to this aspect of Augustine's epistemology makes his decades-old work feel fresh and provocative in the landscape of contemporary Augustine scholarship. It is recommended reading for anyone interested in his theory of knowledge.

Jay R. Elliott
Bard College

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