

that evangel is the great gift of this book, which should be read by everyone who can read.

Peter M. Candler, Jr.
The Honors College
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97144
Waco TX 76798
USA
Peter_Candler@baylor.edu

Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought by Phillip Cary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxiv + 344 pp.

Phillip Cary has written another highly significant book on Augustine, and his writing displays the art of a master stylist. A complement to his *Inner Grace, Outward Signs* extends Cary's thesis in *Augustine and the Invention of the Inner Self*: that Augustine's Trinitarian and semiotic theology, groundbreaking as it was, remains beholden to a Platonist privileging of inner vs. outer and idea over sacramental performance. *Outward Signs* should be of special interest to readers of *Modern Theology*, because the inwardness Cary interrogates displays a dimension of Augustine's work that receives significant attention from a number of *Modern Theology* authors.

Cary introduces his general thesis in Chapter 1, where he identifies "expressionist semiotics" with the "twin theses that words are external signs, and that they get their significance by expressing things that belong to the deeper ontological level that belong to the soul or inner self . . ." (p. 17). He argues that Greek semiotics lacks these two theses because it "is a theory of inference, not of communication or expression. Plato, who originates the ontology of the soul that results in Augustinian notions of inner depth, does not develop a semiotic theory of language, nor make a sharp ontological distinction between inner words . . . In the Hellenistic era, the stoics developed a philosophy of language which incorporated a verbal notion of signs, but which did not subsume words under the classification of signs nor treat meaning as a function of the soul." Cary notes that the later philosophic skeptics treated all signs as ambiguous or "common" to more than one thing signified "and thus unsuitable to be the basis of an empirical science—though useful in daily life as reminders." Augustine, he argues, followed the skeptics.

From his opening pages, Cary makes sure we know why his thesis matters: "In Augustine's Platonism, word and sacraments can have their significance and their use, but they cannot give us the inner good they signify. So it is not by turning to them that we find the knowledge of God but by turning inward, looking in a different dimension from all bodily things" (p. 4). "Expressionist semiotics with its self-negating signs is of importance beyond theology, as it came to be taken for granted by philosophers of language in the Middle Ages and long afterward. It provides the framework for many modern theories of meaning and self, together with their postmodern deconstruction. Indeed, I do not think it too much to say that what poststructuralist-postmodernists attempt to deconstruct is essentially Augustinian semiotics as represented by two of Augustine's modern philosophic heirs, Ferdinand de Saussure and Edmund Husserl" (p. 4).

I believe Cary's critical reading serves as an important cautionary tale for Augustine enthusiasts. But I am also concerned that Cary is attracted to overly defined terms that tend at times to participate in the "inner/outer" dialectic that he attributes to

Augustine, with Cary on one side as the “objectivist” and Augustine on the other side as “subjectivist.” I believe the more fruitful alternative is to acquire Cary’s cautions about the subjectivist tendency in Augustine and, rather than turn away from Augustine, to press Augustine’s semiotic toward its other, mediatory tendency. Even if the latter tendency is weaker in Augustine’s writings, it displays relative strength in his doctrinally Trinitarian work.

Still in Chapter 1, Cary draws hard on recent scholarly evidence about the difference between semiotics (*semeia*) and semantics (*semaina*) in Greek and Stoic thought. “The stoics in particular developed theories of both. Their theory of language made prominent use of semantic vocabulary (*semainoma*, ‘Things that are meant’) while their theory of influence relied on semiotic vocabulary (*semita*, ‘things signified’)” (p. 19). Cary seeks to expose misreadings of Augustine that fail to distinguish these two sources: since “Latin has a special vocabulary for semiotics but not for semantics,” Augustine scholars tend to mis-name his claims about *semaina* (meaning) as claims about inference by way of signs (*semeia*). Cary argues, for example, that a company of scholars including Robert Markus fails to “take the full measure of Augustine’s originality in inventing expressionist semiotics. Markus recognizes that ancient semiotics is a theory of inference rather than language but cannot quite believe the consequences of his own recognition, because he fails to doubt that words are signs” (p. 266 n7).

This is, once again, a useful but overstated caution. Even if Markus underplays the expressionist dangers in Augustine’s semiotics, I believe he shows greater sensitivity than Cary to Augustine’s mediatory tendency. Markus labels this tendency “triadic” and claims explicitly that Augustine anticipates but fails to achieve the more fully mediatory or non-dualistic character of Charles Peirce’s triadic semiotics (See R. Markus, *Signs and Meanings*, pp. 71–104.) Markus’s reading tends not to oversynthesize Augustine’s corpus, as if it were the expression of a singly coherent *cogito* or, in this case, “inner soul.” Instead, he allows Augustine’s writings to display varying tendencies of varying strength, and I find this the most helpful way to make use of such a thinker’s work. Cary’s masterful attention to Augustine’s Platonism merits a non-dualistic reading on its own terms: an effort, not to argue simply for sacramental objectivism, but to strengthen Augustine’s more integrative, Trinitarian tendencies. Markus’s Peircean reading of Augustine’s semiotics serves the latter purpose.

Cary uses the phrase “triadic semiotics” to refer, not to Peirce and Markus’s notions of mediatory and Trinity-related relations, but in the strictly quantitative sense of a three-part association in which (a) external words mean (b) things, by way of expressing (c) inner thoughts. This triad diagrams Cary’s understanding of the expressionists’ error, but I believe his reading warrants only a critique of the reduction of a genuine triad to this single instance. Genuinely triadic relations, Peirce and Markus would argue, may include relations among things and subjective claims, but only as parts of a much greater and authoritative network, including inner, outer, and that which is both or neither. Cary does not attend to Markus’ claim that Augustine sought but simply failed fully to achieve this.

The “outward signs” that claim Cary’s greatest attention are the sacraments, about which his argument is, again, abundantly clear: Augustine believes the sacraments, as merely outward signs, can signify divine gifts but not confer them. This is his means of arguing, against the Donatists, that the salvific efficacy of the sacrament is “found not in the external sacrament itself but in the inner unity and peace of the Church, outside of which is no salvation” (p. 193). And this is consistent with his Platonizing goal of ascending from the sensible (material signs) to the intelligible (spirit), as for example in *de Musica* 6:32–33 (pp. 55–58). The result, Cary argues, is that “There is no room in Augustine’s thought for a concept of Christ’s life-giving flesh . . . [But] what a theologian says about the sacraments . . . parallels what he says about

Christ in the flesh. If there is no external efficacy in the one, there is none in the other. . . . This is the great reason to be critical of any inward turn in Christianity, and to be grateful for medieval accounts of sacraments as efficacious, external means of grace" (p. 222).

Cary's critique leads directly from Augustine to his Calvinist heirs: "The main point of this book could be summed up by saying that Calvin is right about Augustine [as anticipating Calvin's critique of medieval sacramental theology], even if he is wrong about the sacraments" (p. 224). This critique does not apply to Luther, however: although "Luther also undermined the medieval distinction between sacraments of the Old Law and the New, Luther's point is clearly the opposite of Calvin's: not only do New Testaments sacraments give salvation, but so do Old Testament sacraments" (p. 225).

Cary's critique has implications, finally, for the study of Augustine's account of knowing God. "If Augustine's expressionist semiotics and his thesis *On the Teacher* are correct, then the knowledge which our life is all about is not like believing a friend, but like seeing with our own eyes" (p. 120). "For Augustine, knowing God is not like knowing another person, but like seeing an eternal form."

Once again, Cary has offered an appropriate warning about any uncritical embrace of Augustine as the theologian for the church today: the embrace could bring with it a turn to spiritualism, subjectivism, intellectualism, and also supersessionism (since the Old Testament and Jewish "law" belong to the merely outward life of the Word). Like Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Richard Rorty before him, Cary captures the line of potential influence that moves from Plato to Augustine to Descartes and Kant. Here, knowledge tends to ocular knowing, and Cary shows how inadequate that model is to account for performative knowing in the church, of which sacramental life is one instance.

But performative knowing would apply, as well, to the study of Augustine's writings. Read "outwardly," Augustine's corpus generates several possible vectors of theological practice. The stronger vectors may point "inward," but readers should also attend to those (weak or strong) which point to that which is inward, outward, both, and neither.

Peter Ochs

Edgar Bronfman Professor of Modern Judaic Studies

University of Virginia

Department of Religious Studies

Charlottesville, VA 22904-4126

USA

pvo3v@cms.mail.virginia.edu

Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics by Shane Mackinlay (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2010), xiv + 283 pp.

Shane Mackinlay's book is probably one of the best accounts of Marion's work to date. Apart from some edited volumes, notably Kevin Hart's *Counter-Experiences* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) and Benson and Wirzba's *Words of Life* (Fordham University Press, 2010), this book stands out as one of the first long and persistent meditations on Marion's thought by a single author and will perhaps turn out to be a landmark in the reception of Marion's philosophy and theology in America.

Mackinlay's aim is mainly to introduce a role for hermeneutics in Marion's phenomenology of givenness by showing how, in each saturated phenomenon, a role is