

not negate the weaknesses of the human soul, but rather integrates them in a universal hermeneutics of love and charity.

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Giulio D'Onofrio, *Vera Philosophia: Studies in Late Antique, Early Medieval and Renaissance Christian Thought*, Nutrix 1, English text by John Gavin, Brepols, Turnhout, 2008, ISBN 978-2-503-52546-4, 406 p.

The book is based on a collection of reworked and revised articles and studies written by the author in the last twenty years and dealing, as he explains, with the origins and constitutive conditions of Christian philosophical-theological thought in Late Antiquity, early Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Postfatio, p. 357). It is a good overview and analysis of these periods without completely neglecting the High Middle Ages either. However, this period is mentioned just in passing. Had it had a separate chapter on that, the book would have been more unitary. The main characters, whose views and works seem to influence, according to D'Onofrio, numerous later authors and trends, are Cicero and the authors also providing the two suggestive mottos of the book: Augustine (*vera philosophia* is the *studium vel amore sapientiae* – *Contra Iulianum* IV.14.72) and John Scot Eriugena (*vera philosophia* is *vera religio* – *De praedestinatione* 1.1). Other relevant authors are especially Boethius, Anselm of Canterbury and Nicholas of Cusa.

The first chapter of the book deals with what D'Onofrio calls 'converted thought' and starts from a few ideas of Cicero and of the Stoics, later to be either adopted or criticized by Augustine. It is the most complex chapter offering not only the theoretical premises of the book, but also concrete examples for these theoretical premises in late antique philosophy. The rest of the book relies on this chapter and often refers back to it. Thus, while having virtue as its main topic, late antique philosophy seems to answer questions regarding both individual happiness or ethical norms and social life and its laws. In Cicero's view, philosophy is defined as *vitae dux*, responsible for the formation of human beings, their education, their capacity of distinguishing between good and evil and also having a consolatory component at the same time. Moreover, philosophy is described not only as a formative discipline for human beings, but also as mediating humans' relationship with the divine – it is *scientia divinarum*



*humanarumque rerum* (pp. 11-12). A significant difference is made here in this sense between the Stoic *ars iudicandi*, which is dialectics, and the *ars inveniendi*, which is topics, the *topoi* being the schematizations that assure the coherence between discourse and reality. The distinction in Cicero, following Panaetius, between the perfectly right actions (*katorthomata*) of the perfect wise and virtuous person and the 'appropriate' or reasonable actions (*kathekonta*) that can be also performed by the imperfect, less wise persons and defined by D'Onofrio, following Cicero, as *officia* or practical duties (p. 19), is used to explain the problems of probabilism and dialectic in philosophy, the distance of logic from reality.

Numerous examples are offered by the author in this sense in order to prove that the Stoics' purported correspondence between the interior logos and the natural order actually became their most persistent enemy precisely because it implied a coherent, necessary, but never fully verifiable truth (p. 27). And here the Academic substitution of the Stoic criterion of evidence with that of probability is preferred. Cicero's *De fato* is also discussed in as much as it concentrates on the opportunity to separate the ontological truth from the laws of logic (p. 29). The distinction between the logical and ontological level is mentioned to support Cicero's admission of the absolute incomprehensibility of the truth on the part of humans and of the impossibility for philosophy to define totality in an exhaustive form. In spite of that, the search for truth, even if inexhaustible, must be pursued methodically and completely in order to reach the best possible formulation, a conception of the truth formulated by Cicero that, according to D'Onofrio, had a strong impact on the Roman culture of the following centuries (even when criticized) (pp. 30-31).

For instance, as part of what D'Onofrio calls the Christian colonization of classical philosophy (p. 43), Cicero's theme of the *dis-sensio philosophorum* was later used as an argument in defence of faith and Christian doctrine, perceived as self-founded and self-verified through its embedding within the concept of the divine Logos, thus offering a perfect triangulation among divine intelligence, the created order and its logical-scientific reconstruction on the part of humans (pp. 37, 42-43). In a similar manner, D'Onofrio points out that the Neoplatonic rebirth of philosophical realism, to be found in the intuition of the original chain that connects, in the perfection of the *ordo idearum*, the complexity of the *ordo rerum* to the complexity of the *ordo verborum*, influenced Augustine quite substantially (p. 44). On the basis of such Neoplatonic views, Augustine criticized Cicero's *Contra Academicos* for two main errors in which the searcher for the



truth might find himself: the contempt for knowledge (as in Carneades and Cicero) and the presumption of the truth (as in the other schools of Antiquity). To that Augustine adds that, since only sages aspire to happiness (*beatitudo*), one should ask the question whether the end of wisdom is indeed the *inquisitio veritatis* (the search as such), as the academic probabilists want, or rather the *inventio veritatis*, which would have to emerge from the conclusions of the search (pp. 48-49).

For Augustine, the *verum invenire* acts only as a point of departure, as the probable hope of being able to reach the truth. In this sense Augustine displays, according to D'Onofrio, only a moderate probabilism, which admits, in agreement with Carneades, that every form of knowledge is probable, but also, in disagreement with Carneades, that the very possibility of finding the truth is also probable (p. 55). While the academic criterion of probability as taught by Cicero refers to the 'probable' or 'verisimilar' as to that which allows for the orienting of the self in action without relying upon cognitive assent since to know the final nature of their actions exceeds the capacity of humans (p. 52), Augustine emphasizes the necessity to work out a complete and definitive conversion of the investigative stance which was particular to classical philosophy. He does not seek a logical foundation for faith, but he must find a reason for conversion (p. 59) since the truth (*veritas*) cannot be anything else but divine (pp. 62-63). Thus, all the philosophies embraced by Augustine (Stoic, Neoplatonic, Cicero's eclecticism) have as an end the 'converted philosophy', the Christian philosophy or the *certissima scientia*, the one that overcomes the *dissensiones philosophorum* (pp. 69, 73).

The second chapter, referring to the 'garment of philosophy', treats about Boethius, considered to be the last of the ancient philosophers and the first of the new, himself influenced by the Stoics, Neoplatonics and Cicero and also by the Neopythagoreans and Aristotle (pp. 79-81). The main point of the discussion here is the issue of *sapientia* (the perfect knowledge) – *scientia* (progressive maturation) – *philosophia* (the stage of perfecting the cognitive human capacities which bears *scientia* to *sapientia*) (pp. 84-85). In this sense, D'Onofrio maintains that, in 'appropriating' the truth of the philosophers, Christian intellectuals found in Augustine's thought a way of giving life to a systematic rational philosophy by grafting onto it the Neoplatonic program of restoring the comprehensibility of a cosmos which is assumed to be ordered according to laws of a divine and universal reason. In such a context, Boethius' speculative contribution must be seen as grafting itself on the same problematic of the 'overturning' of the Ciceronian critical reason that other Christian thinkers (Augustine



included) brought about (pp. 83-84). Thus, according to D'Onofrio, Boethius considers the inner powers of the soul to be innate principles of cognitive activity, despite his Aristotelian conviction that their strength is sustained and put into movement by the occasional addition of the senses (p. 116). According to the Boethian doctrine of knowledge as explained by D'Onofrio, the super-rational intelligence is capable of directly intuiting in an all-comprehensive view the authentic perfection of the truth and it is the form possessed in a constant and inalienable way only by the divinity. The direct contemplation of reality cannot exist, except as a form of knowledge which is divine in itself. Intelligent creatures are themselves able to participate in this knowledge, but only partially and episodically (pp. 123-4). Consequently, one reaches *sapientia*, the object of philosophy (which is *studium sapientiae*) through an ascending perfection of the human cognitive capacities by the contribution of various *scientiae*, which pursue with single, limited and diverse steps the complex reconstruction of an object that is in itself 'absolute' and penetrable only by a view which is superior to that of discursive reason (by being intuitive and totalizing) (p. 131).

Furthermore, D'Onofrio explains that human contemplation of the absolute is not only possible as an end for philosophy (as conceived by Boethius), but it is also the constitutive presupposition of the *sapientia*, towards which it tends, as in the Neoplatonic tradition. Moreover, in accordance with Christian hermeneutics and with the teaching of Augustine, the truth, in itself irremediably unknown for humans, was integrally unveiled to them by the Revelation (p. 135). In spite of that, theology is still a philosophical discipline for Boethius as well as for the ancient philosophers, being defined as the peak of the hierarchy of the human sciences. Moreover, in the Christian era, it has an even more privileged position due to the Revelation, which exalts philosophy to a level above the natural capacities of knowledge and still nearer the realization of the *sapientia* itself (p. 136). Thus, one can find in Boethius, according to D'Onofrio, the Platonic cognitive methodology that guides the dianoetic-discursive reason of the sciences to the point of raising itself, according to its own possibilities, up to the noetic intellect (p. 142).

The third chapter, referring to the theological mission of the sage, concentrates on John Scot Eriugena and his importance for the future of theology/philosophy not only in the Carolingian times and, generally, in the early Middle Ages, but also much later, up to the Renaissance. Here D'Onofrio refers to the Carolingian times as the period when the concept of *translatio studiorum* (from Ancient Greece



to scholastic Europe) became an important issue that developed in parallel with that of the *translatio imperii*. For instance, he observes that Thomas of Ireland, referring to the origins of the University of Paris mentions John Scot Eriugena among the four legendary founders of the university and as an example of the *translatio studiorum* due to his translation into Latin of the works of Dionysius the Areopagite (p. 149). Alcuin is often mentioned as well and also as an example of the function of the sage within the *translatio studiorum* / *translatio imperii* (pp. 151-52).

However, beyond the importance he ascribes to the Carolingian scholars, D'Onofrio also points out the great influence of Augustine himself in the early medieval period. Under this influence, theology is described as both *vera sapientia* and *vera philosophia* in the early Middle Ages and it is also stated that all theoretical knowledge, which investigates the real nature of things beyond the sensible appearances, can only be a form of theological knowledge (p. 153). Regarding the theological method in the Carolingian age, D'Onofrio emphasizes the unity and the rules of the theological method concentrating on *lectio*, *traditio*, *ratio* – scriptural exegesis, ecclesiastical and patristic heritage, and the systematization of it (pp. 152-54) and also the influence of the liberal arts (p. 158) and especially of dialectics (in Martianus Capella's division) in Eriugena's *De predestinatione* and *Periphyseon* (pp. 162-168). John Scot seems to have been extremely important, according to D'Onofrio, also due to the fact that he tried to combine the complete recovery of being and One advanced by the Greek fathers with the historical and systematic perspective of Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. D'Onofrio insists that both the philosophical and the theological Middle Ages begin at this point.

The fourth chapter is dedicated primarily to Anselm of Canterbury and to the 'divine logic' he represents, in D'Onofrio's view. The chapter is a detailed and comprehensive presentation of medieval logics, which will be but briefly summarized here through the two ways asserted by Anselm: the *ratio fidei*, the affirmative way of the *Monologion*, under the influence of Augustine (pp. 231-36), and the negative way of the *Proslogion* (pp. 237-247). Moreover, D'Onofrio insists that, in the *Monologion*, Anselm maintains the respect for Christian dogma as the final criterion for the verification of the correctness of all mental procedures (p. 226) and the idea that theological knowledge is truly a rational illustration of the faith without ever presuming to be able to formulate a judgment upon its truthfulness (p. 231).

The fifth and last chapter, the 'Renaissance of the *vera philosophia*' concentrates again on the cognitive ascent of the soul assured by



the successive contribution of multiple faculties and disciplines, which are capable, through a progressive climb, of perceiving ever better the founding presence of the divine in the known object (p. 268). The influence of Nicholas of Cusa is often pointed out as well as the influence of the Platonic or Neoplatonic gnoseology of Eriugena in Nicholas of Cusa (p. 284). The book seems to come now full circle and the numerous assumptions and theoretical premises in the first chapter seem to find their accomplishment in Renaissance philosophy even if the synthesis offered here by D'Onofrio may sometimes lack depth due to the very diverse and complex material. However, the hierarchization of the cognitive activities, already to be observed in Anselm while describing the ascending stages of the human spirit from the sphere of corporeity to the contemplation of invisible realities and, furthermore to the direct intuition of the divine, reachable by means of the highest cognitive (non-discursive intellectual-noetic) grade (p. 285), seems to be for D'Onofrio one of the main characteristics of Renaissance thought and the way it is discussed in the last chapter adds to the consistence of the book.

Other medieval tendencies, related to earlier, late antique and early medieval models, to be perpetuated in the Renaissance philosophy and theology, are also pointed out in this last chapter, conceived as a synthesis of all these tendencies. For instance, a serious change from the thirteenth century onwards, generated by the massive influx of Aristotelian gnoseological realism into the Christian West in the works of John of Salisbury, Alan of Lille, Honorius Augustodunensis, Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, Isaac of Stella, Bonaventure, etc. is studied by D'Onofrio together with its effects in the Renaissance (pp. 292-297). In fact, he notes that the thirteenth century witnessed the first attempts to work out a synthesis between the two psychological nomenclatures – Platonic-Augustinian and Aristotelian (p. 297) towards an 'overturning' of the relationship between subject and object of knowledge leading to a phenomenological orientation of knowledge towards resolving the philosophical disagreement between Platonism and Aristotelianism. Nicholas of Cusa, for instance, initiated a new perspective which brought into discussion the objectivity of scientific knowledge, which was the very basis of the Aristotelian-Scholastic philosophy in all its actualizations and variations (pp. 301-302).

Thus, D'Onofrio points out the existence of a humanistic reform of theology. As the first centuries of the Christian era had contributed to the unmasking of the vanity of ancient thinkers' hope to formulate incontrovertible truths, in the years that witnessed the



gradual failure of the irenic promises of the councils of Constance, Basle and Ferrara-Florence-Rome, the echo of unjustifiable *disensiones theologorum* had also arisen (alongside those of the *disensiones philosophorum*) and they referred primarily to the incapacity to find theoretical accord regarding the fundamental themes of the revealed message (pp. 319-20). And here, Barlaam of Calabria, as a theologian opposed to the Thomistic method, is credited by D'Onofrio with the recovery of the mystical-negative orientation recommended by the Greek fathers and also by Eriugena (pp. 322-24). Furthermore, while briefly mentioning Ficino, Pico, Aegidius of Viterbo or Agostino Steuco (p. 326), D'Onofrio refers to the return of the humanists to the ancient sages and to the Fathers of the Church while pursuing the so-called 'concordistic' synthesis of the Renaissance thought – the humanists restoring theology to its authentic nature as a fecund and constant pursuit of a knowledge which will never be fully reduced to the doctrinal fulfillment of earthly science (reform both of its original and practical ends and of the adequate means to realize these ends) (pp. 328-9). However, although D'Onofrio seems to master here all these complex issues, one would expect maybe a more in depth study of the Aristotelian tradition and of the ways it contributed to or rather impeded such a 'concordistic' synthesis.

Finally, D'Onofrio maintains that the possible reunification of all philosophies or philosophical theologies within the higher unity of noetic knowledge becomes in the thought of many Renaissance theologians an acceptance of the idea that even the various historical religions were attempts of approaching the divine on the part of natural human intelligence. Each religion might therefore be considered as a form of evidence for at least partial manifestations of the truth. The consequence of the acceptance of the human incapacity for achieving a single and univocal form of knowledge is the possibility of a significant opening to inter-religious concordism, for D'Onofrio, in partial agreement with Nicholas of Cusa, the author he quotes most here and who was referring to a so-called *concordantia catholica*, the search for universal concord among human minds, the peace of faith or irenicism (p. 330). With that, the very complex book by Giulio D'Onofrio comes again full circle while noting a return of the philosophical probabilism discussed at the beginning in relation to the late antique authors and a strong emphasis on 'the truths of tolerance' (p. 336).

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