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**Gramigna, Remo: Augustine's theory of signs, signification, and lying.** – Berlin: De Gruyter 2020. (XI) 229 S. (Religion and Reason, 60), geb. € 86,95 ISBN: 978-3-11-059577-2

In his first monograph to date, Remo Gramigna wades into the deep waters of Augustine's theory of signs. As G. notes, the literature surrounding A.'s distinction between *res* and *signum* has been the subject of study for historians, theologians, and philosophers – of both language and semiotics. The primary text for most studies of A. on this distinction is his *De Doctrina Christiana*, with several others considering the *De Magistro* and even fewer the *De Dialectica*. One of the most significant contributions to G.'s study is the incorporation of A.'s treatment of lying (*De Mendacio* and *Contra Mendacium*) and how these two works on the subject ought to be considered alongside these other significant works of A. The author offers as his thesis, "the present work, thus, endorses the trend traces by Eco in order to reconsider and explore, from a purely semiotic angle, the fundamental structure of the sign and signification in Augustine [...] because certain fundamental concepts of the discipline – first and foremost the concept of *signum* – are explicitly treated in his works" (6). G. proceeds to explicate A.'s understanding of sign organized chronologically by the works dedicated to this topic. Although G. is quite aware of the wealth of material in other disciplines, this study stays close to its intended aim by primarily putting A.'s contributions to the field in conversation with contemporary semiotic theory.

Each chap. begins with a cursory note on the historical setting of the work. Following the context, G. engages the secondary literature in semiotics and the work of A. to establish an outline of the work under consideration. G. then homes in on the sections of the work which treat signs and signification. One of the great strengths of the work are the helpful tables which match A.'s sometimes confusing narration of the distinction he makes between similar vocabulary. Although nearly every chap. and the conclusion contain helpful tables and charts, the expansive chart at 110–111 most clearly evidences the strength of these charts. Additionally, the tables 6 and 7 in the Conclusions section also help to map the various vocabulary in A.'s works, noting where it is consistent and inconsistent.

For want of space, I will limit my comments on each individual chap. to a few of the more novel analyses from the respective works of A. As far as originality is concerned, *De Dialectica* contains A.'s only fourfold notion of the relationships under which a sign functions. He distinguishes between *verbum* ("the word that refers to itself"), *dicibile* ("what is understood in the word"), *dictio* ("the unifier of the signifier and signified"), and *res* ("the external object") (30). One other point of note is that A. recognized that certain words have a "force" beyond mere referent. This emphasis in A. is often lost in the philosophical reflections on his work.

Chap. two turns to the *De Magistro*. In some respects, the *De Magistro* is the most lucid description of *signum* and *res*, but in its clarity, it is also quite simple. To wit, A. makes a simple division between only the *signum* and *res* without much further elaboration (49). Although the treatise moves through various questions and answers with some further clarifications – notably non-verbal signs and signs which show – the most profound conclusion of the whole treatise is the rather restrictive explanation of how language works. G. summarizes A.’s contention, “[a]lthough this conclusion is partially negative [signs don’t teach], failing to envisage that signs have no teaching function, Augustine does not disparage the office of words, to which he still grants a limited yet important, function” (97). It should be noted that Philip Cary, a scholar absent in this study, takes A. at his word that signs do not teach and criticizes A.’s lack of understanding of the utility of words.

To begin his chap. on *De Doctrina Christiana*, G. makes clear his awareness of the debates surrounding A.’s intention for this treatise. For G., the importance of A.’s work lies in the fact that A. was one of the first to consider semiotics rigorously. Contrary to the simplistic notion – signs do not teach – from *De Magistro*, *De Doctrina* demonstrates A.’s contention that “things are learned by signs.” “Augustine, thus, postulates an epistemological relation between the knowledge of things and the learning through signs that a subject can experience.” (107) G. does not spend any time reflecting on why Augustine changes his mind on this matter, but does note that there is something of a contradiction between the two treatises. Augustine gives the *classical* definition of a sign, specifically, “a sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses” (124). One noteworthy section from this large chap. is the discussion of the frequently mistranslated phrase from A. *signum datum*. Many contemporary writers opt for a form of “conventional sign” rather than a more literal “given sign”. G. prefers “given sign” because it is closer to the Latin and does not obscure the significant element of will in the phrase (133). There are *signum naturale* which have no will in the part of those who use them. *Signum datum*, however, relates to the will in the user, which is critical for A.’s notion of a sign which comes into play in the two works on lying (136).

G. considers A.’s notion of lying in the fourth chap., a significant addition to the field of semiotics. More than just obscurities and ambiguities, the lie constitutes a willful decision on the part of the speaker to deceive (144). G. follows A.’s argument through many different subdivisions of lying, but A.’s emphasis on habitual lying appeared the most interesting for those more broadly interested in Augustinian theology. This is considered in 4.12 – not in 4.13 as indicated in note 4 on p. 146.

Chap. 5 moves quickly through several other treatises, ranging from *Soliloquia* to several of the works on Genesis to *De Trinitate*. One worthwhile distinction appears in A.’s consideration of Genesis 1. G. notes that A. understand image to be “genetic” while “likeness is mere similitude” (189). The concluding section has many helpful charts and notes some of the unique contributions A. offers to those who study semiotics (205).

This reviewer found the volume to be a helpful reference tool even beyond the field of semiotics, as it has several pages of helpful elucidation of the divisions of various works and their historical background. It seems that this book could be best characterized as a kind of history of semiotics, especially the originality and origin of the discipline in the writings of A. Although G. was primarily concerned with the areligious field of semiotics, the monograph could have been improved by at least considering how *sacramentum* functions in *De Doctrina Christiana* and the other places where A. considers signs. Certainly *sacramentum* is a more theological notion, but it fits within the

very same conversation. Despite this one drawback, the work will be very helpful for scholars of Augustine and semiotics more generally.

About the Author:

*Charles Kim Jr.*, Dr., Instructor of Latin at Saint Louis University, MO, USA (Chad.kim@slu.edu)