THE EMPIRICAL ASPECT OF AUGUSTINE'S EPISTEMOLOGY[1]

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Abstract

Although Augustine is rightly associated with the rationalistic epistemology of the Platonist tradition—which holds that knowledge comes from the mind rather than from experience—there is an underappreciated, and significant, empirical aspect to his epistemology, which I aim to clarify in this article. In Augustine's epistemology, knowledge of God depends on the history of his people, his revelation, and above all his Messiah. However, the empirical aspect of Augustine's theology does not overrule his rationalism, but rather is integrated into it. Augustine is a Christian representative of a broader epistemological tradition which includes Plato as well as Immanuel Kant and which considers warrant for our beliefs to come from the mind even as experience provides the input necessary for the process to begin. It is, of course, a Christianized version of such a nuanced rationalism. In both its rationalistic core and its empirical aspect, knowledge is explained in Christian terms: in the former because the mind does not have these ideas of its own powers but from God's indwelling and gracious assistance, in the latter because the experience leading to knowledge is the religious experience that founded the Christian church and Scriptures.

Keywords

Augustine, empiricism, rationalism, illumination, Plato, Kant

Although Augustine is rightly associated with the rationalistic epistemology of the Platonist tradition, there is an underappreciated, and significant, empirical aspect to his epistemology, which I aim to clarify in this article.

It is necessary, first of all, to get clear on the terms. "Rationalism" may mean, first, the theory that knowledge comes from the mind rather than from experience, especially sensory experience; second, the theory that we have innate ideas, ideas not derived from

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sensory experience; and, third, the tradition in early modern European philosophy that was committed to these views. "Empiricism," similarly, may mean, first, the theory that knowledge comes from experience, especially sensory experience; second, the theory that all our ideas are derived from sensory experience; and, third, the tradition in early modern European philosophy that was committed to these views.

I am interested in these terms in the broadest of these senses—the first ones. Platonic epistemology, going back at least as far as Plato's *Meno*, is on the rationalist side of the question and Augustine likewise. His epistemology is a "rationalism", because it considers knowledge to come from the mind rather than from experience. However, I will show that it also has an empirical streak: Some of our knowledge comes, at least in part, from or through experience. Although even Plato's epistemology may be characterized as having an empirical aspect, with Augustine the empirical aspect is more pronounced: The truth about God, the soul, and right and wrong is learned partly through history and particularly through the Incarnation and the events associated with it. However, the empirical aspect of Augustine's epistemology must itself be understood in largely rationalist terms. I suggest that Augustine is a Christian representative of a broader epistemological tradition which includes Plato as well as Immanuel Kant and which considers knowledge as coming from the mind yet requiring input from experience.

A better understanding of Augustine's epistemology is not only of interest for understanding Augustine, and for comparing and contrasting his work with that of other great thinkers such as Plato and Kant, but also promises to enrich contemporary discussions of religious epistemology and epistemology generally. In what follows, I will first overview the usual scholarly approach of considering the Platonic aspects of Augustine's epistemology. Then I will briefly overview the case for the same, focusing on Plato's *Meno* and Augustine's *De magistro* (*Mag.*). Then I will review empiricism in ancient philosophy and, following that, introduce the empirical aspect of Augustine's epistemology. Finally, I will make a beginning of explaining Augustine's empirical streak, considering its influence from Plotinus but also showing how it is similar to Plato's and Kant's in that all three consider warrant for our beliefs to come from the mind even as experience provides the input necessary for the process to begin. It is, of course, a Christianized version of such a nuanced rationalism.

1. Augustine and his modern readers

Numerous scholars have considered Augustine's epistemological connections to Platonism. A brief survey will suffice for our purposes.

Peter King in his introduction to *Mag.* well explains how this text develops a Christian epistemology in response to the Platonic doctrine of recollection: "In *The Teacher* Augustine explains how knowledge is acquired by means of a philosophically improved 'Christianized' version of Plato's theory of recollection, known as the theory of illumination."[2] According to this theory, knowledge comes from within. "The test of truth is inside, Augustine argues;" Christ is in the soul, and it is he who teaches us everything we learn. In the second edition to *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, King gives a more thorough overview of Augustine's epistemology.[3] He suggests that Augustine "initially adopted" Platonic recollection as an explanation for how we know the Platonic Forms, noting in a footnote that some have doubts about this.[4] He further explains that Augustine later explicitly rejects recollection and adopts illumination, which King explains in terms of the soul knowing immaterial reality directly, not necessarily in terms of God's presence in the soul,[5] but at least as the result of "God's causal influence on the human mind."[6] He also explains how illumination is superior to recollection in giving an explanation of what it is to know immaterial reality.[7] King also explains other topics in Augustine's epistemology including his views on self-knowledge, sensory knowledge, and testimony.[8]

Gerard J.P. O'Daly's *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* has a short but helpful discussion of illumination and recollection (with helpful references to earlier discussion including his own debates with Robert J. O'Connell).[9] O'Daly argues in some detail that Augustine does *not* accept the preexistence of the soul, merely considering it a possible option in the early writings before ruling it out. He says that Augustine also rejects the doctrine of recollection in any literal sense entailing preexistence, although he does talk of recollection in a metaphorical sense in the early writings.

[2] King 1995, xiii.
[3] King 2014, 142-165.
[4] King 2014, 147.
[5] King 2014, 148.
[6] King 2014, 150.
[7] King 2014, 149-152.
[8] King 2014, 152-161.
[9] O'Daly 1987, 199-207.

Gareth Matthews' article in the first edition of the *Cambridge Companion* is a helpful introduction to the theme of illumination, explaining the connections to Platonic recollection and to other aspects of Augustine's thought, such as his response to skepticism and his philosophy of time.[10] Matthews also does us the service of exploring illumination in a wide swath of texts, from *Mag.* to *Soliloquia* (*Sol.*), *De Trinitate* (*Trin.*), *Confessiones* (*Conf.*), and more.

Robert Pasnau provides a helpful introduction to the notion of illumination, emphasizing the *Conf.* and placing the doctrine in its historical context.[11] Pasnau is particularly helpful in distinguishing between two illumination theories—one in which God gives us the information we know and one in which God merely gives us "the insight into the truth of the information." Pasnau notes that both theories have precedent in Augustine, but that the latter is more important (on which more anon).

Robert Cushman's 1950 article is an insightful look at Augustine's religious epistemology, to which we will have occasion later to return.[12] The rationalistic and Platonic aspect of Augustine's epistemology comes across nicely. Cushman describes illumination in Platonic terms: "As the sun is the condition of sensible intuition, so God, the inward 'Illuminator' is the cause of 'all the certainties of the sciences.' They presuppose the *informing* of our minds by the Truth apprehended *a priori*."[13]

Robert Miner offers a subtle analysis challenging various interpretive traditions, including oversimplified versions of both the Christian-and-Platonic and the Christian-not-Platonic interpretations of Augustine. He argues through attention to the dramatic dialogue form of *Sol.* that in this early text Augustine endorses a version of recollection.[14] Indeed, "The *Sol.* are themselves an exercise in recollection."[15] A promising interpretation: *Sol.* is, like Plato's writings, a dialogue. The norm in Plato is for a character to discover the truth through the prompt of a question—without being instructed. This illustrates the idea that knowledge comes from the mind, and that what we think of as learning is merely a recollection of what was already there. Miner explains that the same model is in place in *Sol.*

[10] Matthews 2001, 171-185.
[11] Pasnau 1999/2015, section 3.
[12] Cushman 1950, 271-294.
[13] Cushman 1950, 276-277.
[14] Miner 2007, 435-450.
[15] Miner 2007, 439.

(although without these observations on Plato). Moreover, Miner argues that the Augustinian notion of illumination is compatible with recollection—and even complementary to it—and that Augustine's other writings point toward a doctrine of recollection informed by illumination, rather than merely a rejection of the one for the other. Note that the idea of recollection involved here is merely that knowledge is built into our minds; the famous Platonic notion of the preexistence of the soul is not necessarily included, and may not even be Plato's own view, although Miner notes that Augustine hesitates definitively to exclude this idea.

Roland H. Nash's *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* is a fine book, deeply informative.[16] Nash explains Augustine's place in the history of rationalist epistemology: "Augustine agreed with Plato and Plotinus that the senses alone cannot supply knowledge."[17] Considering Augustine's views on the Platonic Forms, Nash explains that knowledge of them is neither from the senses nor through Platonic recollection, a doctrine he says Augustine rejected.[18] Although in earlier writings he had said that learning is remembering, he may or may not have believed in the preexistence of the soul, and decisively rejected it later while continuing "to advance the thesis that learning is a kind of remembering." Nash claims that Augustine may have had a different doctrine of recollection than Plato.[19] To be precise, Augustinian "recollection" is "a remembering of the *present*" rather than the past because God is always available to give us the knowledge.[20] As with Miner, Nash's idea of Augustinian recollection is closely related to illumination,[21] and Nash gives an appropriately illuminating analysis of *Mag*. on the subject,[22] followed by a careful analysis of the major interpretations of illumination.[23]

Mary Clark has a helpful discussion of illumination in her book *Augustine*, drawing from Nash and others.[24] Clark explains that illumination involves knowing the Forms and knowing temporal reality in light of eternal reality. She gives a clear explanation of illumination

[16] Nash 1969.
[17] Nash 1969, 40.
[18] Nash 1969, 81-83.
[19] Nash 1969, 83.
[20] Nash 1969, 83-84.
[21] Nash 1969, 84-95.
[22] Nash 1969, 87-92.
[23] Nash 1969, 92-124.
[24] Clark 1994, 19-25.

and its light metaphor. Clark explains that Augustine does have some influence from Plotinus in these matters but is more interested in faithfulness to John 1, and that he distances himself from Plato's recollection theory and from the doctrine of the preexistence of souls.

Wayne Hankey gives a rewarding discussion of Augustine's views on faith, reason, knowledge, and several related areas.[25] Illumination is connected to Augustine's metaphysics and in particular his views on the Forms. There are helpful connections to and distinctions from Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and others, as well as various later thinkers. Hankey mentions that Augustine distances himself from the Platonic account of recollection. His analysis of how love factors into Augustine's epistemology is particularly helpful.

Timothy Valentine explains Augustinian illumination in order to clarify Augustine's place in the philosophy of education.[26] He explains that the idea of illumination is part of Augustine's account of *eudaimonia*—the good, happy, and blessed life. Valentine says that Augustine did *not* accept the soul's preexistence but did employ some Platonic concepts such as the principle that knowledge does not come from sensory experience.[27]

Etienne Gilson's analysis of Augustine's philosophy is quite thorough. For now we need only note that Gilson aptly explains Augustinian epistemology, concluding that Augustine initially accepted Platonic recollection but eventually decisively rejected the preexistence of the soul.[28] Gilson also goes over similarities and differences between Platonic recollection and Augustine's Christian account,[29] and also gives a solid commentary on the metaphor of illumination.[30]

Jérôme Lagouanère has a rewarding discussion of Augustine's ideas of illumination.[31] He reminds us that Augustine was not out to develop a complete systematized doctrine and that his thought developed over the course of his career. After overviewing the major historical interpretations of the idea, from the medieval to the contemporary, Lagouanère traces the doctrine from the Cassiciacum dialogues through *Mag*. and *De libero arbitrio* (*Lib. arb*.), and up to the mature account in *Trin*. Lagouanère explains that Augustine began (in *Sol*.)

[25] Hankey 1999, 696-702.
[26] Valentine 2001, 385-393.
[27] Valentine 2001, 386-387.
[28] Gilson 1983, 71-72.
[29] Gilson 1983, 71-76.
[30] Gilson 1983, 77-96.
[31] Lagouanère 2012, 158-181.

with a largely Platonic account and ended with a more Christian one, where the idea of Christ the divine, mediating Word eventually replaces the Platonic metaphor of intellectual vision.

A detailed commentary accompanies Emmanuel Bermon's French translation of *Mag*.[32] This book, *La signification et l'enseignement*, is a careful reading of *Mag*. and a useful study of Augustinian epistemology. Although I cannot do justice to it myself, I will make a few observations on Bermon's analysis.[33] He explains the connections between Augustinian illumination and the teaching in *Meno*, especially that we do not learn from merely human teachers. But there is a strong emphasis on the differences. Augustine employs, among other epistemological terms, the language of recollection, but does not thereby imply a doctrine of the preexistence of the soul; moreover, there is an important difference between the Platonic idea of remembering what we have forgotten and the Augustinian idea of being taught in the present by Christ.

In her article on Augustine in *Die Philosophie der Antike*, Therese Fuhrer gives a thorough overview of his epistemology, including his views on sense-perception, illumination, self-knowledge, memory, and faith's relation to knowledge.[34] The account of illumination is a helpful introduction to the different interpretations of Augustine over the years. Fuhrer concludes her discussion of Augustinian illumination by explaining how it is like the Platonic doctrine, but with God replacing the Sun of Plato's Cave Analogy; she notes that this is *a priori* knowledge although it is not innate but comes from God.[35] Further, she observes that Augustine does not accept the full mythology of Platonic recollection although some scholars do argue that he at least believes in the pre-existence of the soul.[36]

Lydia Schumacher has written a remarkable book on Augustine's doctrine of illumination, on the course of its interpretation through the centuries, and on its good prospects for being a useful doctrine in the future.[37] The introduction alone is a good primer on that history of interpretation. Schumacher argues that the doctrine of illumination must be understood in relation to Augustine's theology. Her book is an important study on how exactly illumination works—

[32] Bermon 2007.
[33] Bermon 2007, 535-542.
[34] Fuhrer 2018, 1701-1712.
[35] Fuhrer 2018, 1706.
[36] Fuhrer 2018, 1709.
[37] Schumacher 2011.

as an exercise of the mind's own capacity as the image of God and not merely God imposing ideas on a mind that lacks them.[38]

Finally, let us briefly make some observations on the work of Phillip Cary, to whom we shall return later. In a rewarding discussion of *Mag.* and related matters, Cary takes illumination as an unambiguous case of Christian Platonism,[39] and says Augustine defended Platonic recollection in the early writings.[40] Cary explains that "illumination" is only one of several names that have been given for the "inner experience" that constitutes knowledge according to *Mag.*; other names include "mysticism" and "gift of faith."[41] He observes (correctly) that the term "illumination" "obscures the active role of the human mind in seeking and seeing." Cary's own preferred term "intellectual vision" is apt (while I retain the conventional term "illumination," in future we might be wise to consider shifting our terminology in this direction).

In short, it is very well known that Augustine's epistemology has much to do with Plato.[42] Comparing and contrasting Augustinian illumination with Platonic recollection is standard procedure. However, it has not escaped the notice of scholars that Augustine finds a place in his epistemology for empirical accounts of knowledge. King, for example, explains Augustine's views on sensory experience.[43] Likewise O'Daly.[44] Nash also explains that there is an empirical aspect of Augustine's epistemology, focusing on sensory knowledge. Augustine's belief that "the senses alone cannot supply knowledge" is not "rejecting sensation," but, rather, "putting it in its proper place."[45] In fact, there are "numerous passages where Augustine asserts the importance of sensation;" moreover, "knowledge of sensible objects is a practical necessity."[46] Nash goes on to explain

[38] See especially Schumacher 2011, 18, 57, and 62-65. This, by the way, apparently parallels what Socrates said about how education works in Plato, *Politeia*, 518b-c; but that is a topic for another study. Her account of how Augustine avoids the Meno Paradox on page 45 is interesting, but does not seem directly relevant to this article.

[39] Cary 2008, chapter 4.

[40] Cary 2008, 107.

[41] Cary 2008, 100-101.

[42] For additional sources the interested reader might consult the solid introduction in Tornau 2019, 5.2. See also Nash 1971, 47-67; TeSelle 1970, 103-107; and Trapè 1986, 420-422.

[43] King 2014, 155-159.

[44] O'Daly 1987, chapter 3.

[45] Nash 1969, 40.

[46] Nash 1969, 42.

Augustine's philosophy of perception.[47] Also, the fourth chapter of Gilson's *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* presents Augustine's views on sensory knowledge, placing them in the context of the quest for knowledge of God.[48]

2. Augustine and Platonic epistemology

Augustine's illumination theory, according to which God in the soul gives us knowledge, does indeed have much to do with Platonic recollection theory, according to which knowledge is built into the soul due to its preexistent state. Let us review these respective theories in turn.

a. Plato's Meno

Plato's recollection idea can be found in the *Meno*, a charming little book in which Socrates discusses with Meno, a young visitor from Thessaly, the question where virtue comes from. The first challenge is to figure out what virtue *is*. This leads to a deeper problem, the Meno Paradox: If we are going to inquire as to the nature of virtue, we ought to know what it is we are looking for; but if we already do know, we have no need to inquire! More generally and formally:

1. Either I know something or I do not know it.
2. If I know it, then I cannot seek knowledge of it.
3. If I do not know it, then I do not know what I am looking for.
4. If I do not know what I am looking for, then I cannot seek knowledge of it.
5. So I cannot seek knowledge.
6. So learning is impossible.

Meno initially presents this to Socrates as a skeptical argument for the uselessness of seeking knowledge, and the argument may be taken more broadly as a skeptical challenge to the possibility of knowing anything at all.

What to make of such a skeptical attack? Socrates neither fights the logic of the argument nor directly objects to its premises; instead, he outlines an alternative model for understanding knowledge. Knowledge, he suggests, is not gained by learning; it is innate. The soul

[47] Nash 1969, 44-59.
[48] Gilson 1983, 56-65.

preexists its time in this life. Knowledge remains[49] in the soul from its pre-life origin and comes with the soul into this life.

Socrates' strategy for explaining this idea and establishing its plausibility relies on the cultural influence of religion and draws on Pythagoreanism. He claims that poets and priests have delivered a doctrine of reincarnation. The soul is an immortal thing whose life predates its embodiment and will continue after it. In the infinite past times in which it has lived both within and without this world, it has learnt everything there is to know. Hence we need never fear that knowledge cannot be found. What we call learning in this life is only remembering. We do not get any *new* knowledge; we only rediscover what we already have—or reawaken the knowledge slumbering in the back of our minds.

Socrates' idea calls for some interpretation. For example, we may observe the use he makes of the doctrine of recollection in *Meno*, using it to encourage his young interlocutor to keep pursuing an understanding of virtue since knowledge is after all possible. Recollection is an inspiration that the philosophical quest for wisdom can succeed. Also, we face the question whether Socrates or at least Plato might perhaps not have meant this idea quite literally.[50] Socrates never directly refutes the idea that learning is not possible—the passage from a state of ignorance to a state of knowledge. If this change is not possible in *this* life, then it should not be possible in our earlier lives either—nor between lives. For this reason, I suspect that Plato does not take his own doctrine of recollection in a literal sense so much as a symbolic one (although Plato may yet believe in reincarnation). It is more a first step in understanding a rationalist epistemology than a sober treatise on religious theory. It is a ready-to-hand introduction to the idea that we enter into this life with knowledge already in our minds, and beyond that a metaphor for how knowledge of immaterial reality is built into the soul. Indeed, to have knowledge of immaterial reality is precisely what the soul is *meant* to do. The soul is itself an immaterial thing and its proper function is to know immaterial reality.

These interpretive issues aside, the main thing is to understand what sort of an epistemology Plato and Socrates are offering us. Is this an empiricism—does knowledge come from experience? Or is it a rationalism—does knowledge come from the mind? Plainly the

[49] The Greek verb *meno* means "remain."

[50] On the propriety of doubting this, see Miner 2007, 447-449, as well as Karfíková 2017, 84-85.

latter. However, this is a nuanced rationalism, a rationalism acknowledging the importance of experience in knowledge. Experience *reminds*. In this life we learn nothing from experience in that no knowledge is derived from experience. However, knowledge slumbers until experience awakens it, making us aware of what we know, helping us discover the knowledge we already have.

This aspect of Platonic epistemology will be important later for our study. We must also understand how this connects to Plato's metaphysics. Briefly, the general idea seems to be that knowledge of the universal Forms remains eternally in the soul, but usually lies dormant until the worldly experience of particular things which share in those universals helps us become reacquainted with that knowledge (a more detailed analysis, well outside the scope of this article, would draw from other works of Plato, including *Republic*, *Phaedo*, and *Theaetetus*).

b. Augustine's De magistro

The classic location for studying Augustine's illumination theory is the early dialogue *Mag*.—"On the Teacher." Let us review the account here as a suitable introduction to Augustinian rationalism in epistemology.

Mag. is a conversation between Augustine and his son Adeodatus. It is partially a work of philosophical theology, an attempt to understand God and the soul—indeed a sequel of sorts to his still earlier *Sol*. in which he famously said *Deum et animam scire cupio*, "I yearn to know God and the soul." That earlier work had suggested a controversial (and somewhat confusing) argument for God's existence which had the appearance of making God dependent on the soul, although I have my doubts that such a thing was intended.[51] At any rate, this earlier argument had suggested that the soul is linked to God by its very nature. *Mag*. develops an epistemology fitting this notion. Or, rather, it employs this notion as the solution to an epistemological puzzle. God is in the soul, which is what makes knowledge possible.

Mag.'s puzzle is similar to the Meno Paradox.[52] It too can be presented as a skeptical challenge to the possibility of our having any knowledge. It too, if successful, would only prove that *learning* is not

[51] For helpful commentary on this, see Cary 2000, chapter 7; also see Boone 2016, chapter 5.

[52] Although we note, in passing, Bermon's insight that the puzzle itself is more closely anticipated by an argument found in Sextus Empiricus; for further commentary see Bermon 2007, 444-446.

possible. Finally, it too can be avoided by positing that the sort of learning critiqued by the argument is not a requirement for knowledge and that we get knowledge in some other way.

Augustine has been training Adeodatus in critical thinking by means of the rigor of philosophical dialogue. Their talk has occupied the intersection of semiotics, epistemology, philosophy of language, and philosophy of education as they try to figure out how language, signs, and teaching work. Finally, the skeptical puzzle emerges. Here is the argument stated and restated in *Mag.*:[53]

> […] nothing is learned through its signs. When a sign is given to me, it can teach me nothing if it finds me ignorant of the thing of which it is the sign; but if I'm not ignorant, what do I learn through the sign? (10.33)
> […] we don't learn anything by these signs called words. As I have stated, we learn the meaning—that is, the signification hidden in the sound—once the thing signified is itself known, rather than our perceiving it by means of such signification. (10.34)
> […] words have force only to the extent that they remind us to look for things; they don't display them for us to know. (11.36)

We may formalize the argument as follows:

1. Everything I learn, I learn through signs.
2. I cannot learn anything through a sign unless I already know that which it signifies.
3. So learning is impossible.

Recall that Socrates allowed the Meno Paradox to stand, opting to promote the pursuit of wisdom by defending the possibility of knowledge *without* learning—knowledge that derives from the mind rather than from sensory experience. Augustine also solves his own paradox by suggesting that knowledge can be in our minds without the benefit of experience. Knowledge, he suggests, comes from teaching, but not from merely human teachers. The real Teacher is divine. This is Jesus Christ, and he is in our souls, where he teaches us everything we know. As for signs, they are no longer considered the necessary path by which knowledge comes to us (and so much for the argument's first premise). Rather, they have the function of reminding, suggesting, or calling to mind that which we know from Christ.

The norm with Augustine is that he will articulate his theory in conjunction with some lesson on the right ordering of love. The theory

[53] Augustine, *De magistro*, trans. King, 1995.

of the inner teacher leads us to the lesson that we should love Christ better. Christ, within, "prompts us externally through men by means of signs, so that we are instructed to inwardly turn towards him. To know and love Him is the happy life […]" (13.46).

The illumination theory posited by this argument is a rationalism, not an empiricism. Knowledge comes from the mind. It does not come from experience. Or, we might say, knowledge comes *from* God but *through* the mind; at any rate, it is not the derivative product of experience.

Thus *Mag*. This text commits Augustine to a rationalistic approach in epistemology, and it seems he never abandoned it. However, there is more to Augustine's epistemology than a straightforward rationalism.

3. Empiricism in ancient philosophy

Before tackling the empirical aspect of Augustine's epistemology, a short review of empiricism in ancient philosophy would be in order. We will consider Aristotle, Epicureanism, and Stoicism.

Although the philosophical schools of Epicureanism and Stoicism were more dominant in the Roman world, we have to keep in mind that Aristotle is an important character in the history of empirical thought. Aristotle presents a basically empirical perspective at the beginning of his *Metaphysica*. "All men by nature desire to know," he says, taking as evidence of this "the delight we take in our senses."[54] He spends chapter 1 of Book I explaining the origins of knowledge in sensation. Sensation is the source of memory. Memory is the source of experience, *empeiria*. Experience is the source of both science (*episteme*) and art—this latter being the Greek word *techne*, which we could also translate as "skill" or "craft." *Techne*, he says, is knowledge of universals, while experience is knowledge of mere particulars. Science and *techne* are the source of wisdom, which is knowledge of "the first causes and the principles of things." But how do we get knowledge of universal principles from experience? By induction—by abstracting to universal principles from particular observations. This Aristotle explains in *Ethica Nicomachea* while considering the intellectual virtues.[55] Now of course Aristotle is well-known for his use of deductive logic—for syllogisms drawn from

[54] Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, trans. Ross 1941, book I, chapter 1.
[55] Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, trans. Ross 1941, Book VI, chapter 3.

universal principles. But this whole process of reasoning relies on the process of induction from experience which begins in sensation: "Induction is the starting-point which knowledge even of the universal presupposes, while syllogism proceeds *from* universals." Aristotle seems not much interested in the *Meno*'s account of innate knowledge, even noting that *avoiding* its conclusions is a reason to support his view that we can know things we have never thought of but yet understand because they fall under universal principles[56] (for example, even if you have never entertained the proposition "The star-nosed mole has hair," you know it is true because you know that moles are mammals and that mammals have hair).

Of course, Augustine picked up some knowledge of Aristotelian philosophy from Cicero. He had also read Aristotle's *Categoriae* while young (see *Conf.*, Book IV, chapter 16). *Contra academicos* (*C. acad.*) 3.19.42 shows us that in his early writings he held Aristotelian philosophy in high regard as, alongside Platonism, an instance of true philosophy—the philosophy that recognizes non-physical reality.[57]

What of Epicurean empiricism? Epicurus, of course, is a materialist, saying that all that exists is matter. Epicurus is famous for teaching that an understanding of materialistic metaphysics frees us from the fear of death and also of the gods. We can take a few pointers from the surviving letters on how this metaphysics connects to empiricism in its root and to happiness in its fruit. We begin with the *Epistula ad Herodotum*, which summarizes Epicurean metaphysics. In this letter he gives a materialistic account of both sense-perception[58] and the soul.[59] Later he explains that human knowledge is accumulated from the facts—these apparently being the facts with which sense-perception has acquainted us.[60] Always attentive to the eudaimonistic purpose of his philosophy, Epicurus' letter closes by explaining how his empiricism leads to tranquility.[61] We must be attentive to sense-perception and to the teachings of Epicurean metaphysics; then we will be able to have peace of mind, knowing that whatever happens is the result of the motions of atoms. We need not fear the natural phenomena people superstitiously attribute to whimsical, often

[56] Aristotle, *Analytica posteriora*, trans. Mure 1941, Book I, chapter 1.
[57] For a more detailed account of Augustine's acquaintance with Aristotle, see Fuhrer 2018, 1691-1692.
[58] Epicurus, *Epistula ad Herodotum*, trans. Inwood, Gerson 1994, 8-10.
[59] Epicurus, *Epistula ad Herodotum*, trans. Inwood, Gerson 1994, 13-15.
[60] Epicurus, *Epistula ad Herodotum*, trans. Inwood, Gerson 1994, 16.
[61] Epicurus, *Epistula ad Herodotum*, trans. Inwood, Gerson 1994, 18-19.

hostile gods. The *Epistula ad Pythoclem* teaches the same principle. The letter may appear at first glance to be merely a handbook for meteorology, but it is really a course of epistemological and metaphysical training. Epicurus tells Pythocles how to explain natural phenomena in materialistic terms—not as worrisome portents of divine wrath. The trick is to find a conclusion harmonious with the right metaphysics—a materialistic one—by sticking with the right empirical epistemology; we must "reason out what is consistent with the appearances," not insisting on just one acceptable explanation if more than one is available.[62]

Augustine, of course, interacts directly with Epicureanism in his epistemological writings. The centuries-long, three-way debate between the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Academics is the background of his first surviving book, *C. acad.*, which makes many references to Epicureanism. The major source of Augustine's knowledge of this philosophical system is Cicero, although he also likely read Lucretius.[63] Charles Bolyard argues that one of his arguments in *C. acad.* against skepticism makes the most sense as promoting a mind-independent physical world with which we are acquainted through sensory perception—an account drawn largely from Epicureanism.[64]

Thus Epicurean empiricism. And what about Stoicism? There is room for an entire book on the subject. Let us take a brief look at Seneca's epistemology and at some of the connections to Stoicism in Augustine's own writings.

Seneca's philosophy is a true Stoicism, aimed at cultivating virtue and tranquility. He draws from observations on physical phenomena and human experience to bolster his case. For our purposes a few observations on three texts should be sufficient. Seneca's *De prouidentia* is a dialogue with Lucilius, who had asked him to explain why the good suffer in a world governed by divine providence.[65] Lucilius still believes in providence and need not be *shown* it. However, the introduction to Seneca's letter hints at how we *could* show that providence guides events in this world: We observe order by observing nature.[66] Even "those natural events which appear capricious and undetermined" have causes that can, at least in principle, be understood by studying nature. The letter goes on to explain that

[62] Epicurus, *Epistula ad Pythoclem*, trans. Inwood, Gerson 1994, 27.
[63] Jackson 1990, 71-77.
[64] Ch. Bolyard 2006, 157-168.
[65] Seneca, *De providentia*, trans. Davie 2007, 3.
[66] Seneca, *De providentia*, trans. Davie 2007, 3-4.

all events have their causes, are arranged by divine providence, and are ordered to the good of the virtuous person. Turning to Seneca's *De uita beata*, we read that "an experienced guide" will help us on the journey to happiness.[67] We learn from nature how to be happy[68]—including here both observations on the natural world *and* an understanding of *human* nature.[69] In Seneca's *Naturales quaestiones* we find a reading on earthquakes. Also a letter to Lucilius, Book VI is simultaneously an explanation of natural phenomena and a spiritual exhortation to the principles and practices that cultivate tranquility.[70] Seneca explains that it is not natural disasters but our irrational fear of death that is the problem with things like earthquakes. As experience shows, death comes to all. We observe change everywhere, and should expect it in the future.[71] The consolation for death is to realize its inevitability.[72] Seneca goes on to consider the possible causes of earthquakes, namely water, fire, earth, and air.[73] He eventually concludes that "The main cause" of earthquakes is air, citing as one piece of evidence that air was involved in past earthquakes.[74] He then considers theories of mixed causes as well as different types of earthquakes and suggests they have different causes not strictly limited to air.[75] Epicurus, he notes, also considered air as the main cause of earthquakes and did not limit himself to just one cause. He closes his letter by reiterating his advice not to fear death.[76]

Augustine knew Stoicism well enough through Cicero's *Academica* and other secondary sources, but some primary sources were also available to him, particularly the writings of Seneca, which may well have been part of his formal education.[77] Tracing the connections between Augustine's own views and Stoic ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology would call for a separate, book-length study. For our purposes here it will suffice to note a few connections to Stoic epistemology and metaphysics.[78]

[67] Seneca, *De vita beata*, trans. Davie 2007, 85.
[68] Seneca, *De vita beata*, trans. Davie 2007, 87.
[69] On these sense of nature in Seneca see Reinhardt 2007, xiii.
[70] Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones*, trans. Davie 2007, book 6.
[71] Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones*, trans. Davie 2007, 221.
[72] Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones*, trans. Davie 2007, 223.
[73] Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones*, trans. Davie 2007, 225-235.
[74] Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones*, trans. Davie 2007, 234-235.
[75] Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones*, trans. Davie 2007, 236-242.
[76] Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones*, trans. Davie 2007, 245-248.
[77] A classic source on Augustine's education is Marrou 1949. For a short summary, see Vessey 2007, 2-5. See also Harrison 2000, 47-48.
[78] The interested reader may also consult Fuhrer 2018, 1692-1693 as well as 1711.

Augustine, of course, conversed with Stoicism from the very beginning—in the Cassiciacum dialogues. In *C. acad.* 2.5.11, he reviews the history of Stoicism and the Stoic criterion of knowledge—that when we *know* a truth we can tell for sure that it cannot be false. He proceeds to consider at length the history of Stoicism vs. Academic skepticism (*C. acad.* 2.5.11-2.6.15), and later considers the same history in a broader context, stretching back to Pythagoras (*C. acad.* 3.17.37-3.18.41). Augustine's critique of skepticism is also largely a critique of Stoicism, although the interactions with the Stoic epistemology are not wholly negative.[79] *De ordine*'s metaphysical investigations also include some interactions with Stoic ideas.[80]

Charles Brittain guides us in a lengthy and valuable study on Augustinian connections to Stoic empiricism.[81] After explaining the Stoic view on non-rational perception (i.e., the sort of perception of which animals are also capable), Brittain outlines Augustine's view on the same and traces some connections between the two in *De quantitate animae* (*Qu. an.*), *Lib. arb.*, *Trin.*, and *De ciuitate Dei* (*Ciu.*). Brittain argues that Augustine takes the same idea borrowed from the Stoics and develops it into an account of the perception of souls and even God (an argument outside the scope of my article and requiring its own special treatment). Similarly, Lagouanère also argues that *Qu. an.* demonstrates Augustine's familiarity with Stoic thought.[82] And Van Riel explains Augustine's theories of perception, emotions, and desire as an overall Platonic account drawing partly from Stoicism.[83]

So there was already a rich tradition of empirical epistemology in Greco-Roman philosophy before Augustine, with which he was well acquainted; numerous connections to it may be traced in his own reflections on perception and knowledge. How then does empiricism connect to his theology? To this we now turn.

[79] Kirwan, for example, observes that "in looking for propositions that compel assent and cannot be doubted, Augustine was following in the Stoic tradition" (Kirwan 1983, 218). However, the Stoic epistemology focuses on sensory perception; in using the Stoics' own criterion for knowledge to undermine Stoic claims to knowledge, the Academic Skeptics were really targeting their underlying empiricism. See Rist 1994, 53. Of course, Augustine sides with the Skeptic critique of Stoicism by touting a more Platonic metaphysics in *C. acad.* My own more detailed analysis of these matters is presented in Boone 2016, chapter 2. The interested reader might also consult Cary 2008, 47-64.

[80] Some of which I note in Boone 2016, chapter 4.

[81] Brittain 2002, 253-308.

[82] Lagouanère 2018, 229-256.

[83] Van Riel 2004, 507-531.

4. The empirical aspect of Augustine's epistemology

In considering the empirical aspect of Augustine's epistemology, we will consult a range of texts showing that Augustine recognizes an important role for experience in the acquisition of knowledge.[84]

We begin with the early texts. We have already seen some passages from the earliest surviving writing, *Contra academicos*. Let's take another look at this work. The text is pretty friendly to an overall Platonic epistemology and metaphysics. The Academic skeptics had used their skeptical methodology to argue against Stoic materialism (*C. acad.* 3.17.39) and Augustine seems content to let these arguments stand for now: We should not look to the physical world and the five senses if we want to have knowledge. Indeed, he presents the Platonic tradition as making this very point (3.11.26).[85] This follows on a series of arguments that a wise person does exist (3.9.18-3.16.36). One argument is moral (3.16.35-3.16.36). One is an empirical argument of a sort: It is certain that the world appears to me in the way it does (3.11.24).[86] The others are *a priori* arguments independent of experience, drawing on mathematics and the truths of logic. In the climax of the dialogue against Academic skepticism Augustine unmasks the skeptics as secret Platonists (3.17.37-3.18.41). We recall that in *Retractationes* 1.1.1 Augustine suggests that this book is "about the Academics" (*de academicis*) or "against the Academics" (*contra academicos*). In this passage, where Augustine is writing *contra* the Academics' public position, he is also writing *de*—about or concerning—their insight into immaterialistic philosophy! All this serves to argue that it is possible for a human being to know the truth—that it is possible for our desire or wisdom to be satisfied.

And yet, immediately following on this, the most triumphant argument for the possibility of a human gaining wisdom is given, and it is not a Platonic argument but a historical one (3.19.42): "[…] *nunquam ista ratio subtilissima reuocaret, nisi summus Deus populari quadam clementia diuini intellectus auctoritatem usque ad ipsum corpus humanum declinaret, atque submitteret* […]." The subtlest reasoning would never recall us to knowledge had not God lowered the authority of the divine understanding into the human body. Although

[84] We cannot be thorough in a brief study; the interested reader might consult Schumacher 2011, 30-38 on the topic in *De Genesi ad Litteram*.

[85] For more on this theme, see Fuhrer 2018, 1690-1691 and, again, 1701.

[86] Gilson's analysis of the place of sensory knowledge in *C. acad.* seems to me just right; see Gilson 1983, 41.

true philosophy points to non-physical reality, God condescended to take on a human body to free us from error. Christ's *deeds* (from *factum*) no less than his teachings lead us to the truth. This is not an appeal to innate ideas or to knowledge coming from the mind, but to the deeds of the incarnate God acting in the course of human experience.

Now we turn to *Qu. an.* This work is more interested than *C. acad.* with sense-perception, and what empiricism turns up here is somewhat less theological. Let's take a quick look at some of the main points from the text, whose main purpose is to gain a working understanding of the greatness of the soul in non-spatial—i.e., non-physical—terms. Hence, playing in English with the Latin *quantitas*, we could say that the soul has *greatness* without *magnitude*. This involves an extended analysis of sense-perception. One reason for the analysis is to give a working understanding of how it is that the non-spatial soul can interact with the spatially extended body. Another reason is to show how a proper understanding of sense-perception will recognize the superiority of the immaterial soul. Sense-perception is not a purely passive bodily experience, but involves the action of the soul; the soul is the senior partner in sense-perception.[87] Fairly early in the text, Augustine gives Evodius a fairly standard account of reason and authority—the latter being an adequate way of getting to the truth for most, the former being preferable, when possible, to add to authority (*Qu. an.* 7.12).[88] Augustine and Evodius spend quite some time considering a definition of *sensation* (*sensus*) (23.41-25.48). Sensation is a bodily passion or experience of which the soul is aware through the experience itself, or directly. After some work, the definition is critiqued as too narrow—for animals have sensation but not knowledge (*scientia*) (29.56-29.57). But then the definition turns out to be acceptable since sense-perception is awareness but *not* knowledge

[87] "The ultimate purpose of the analysis of perception in *Qu. an.* 41-61 is to argue that the ability to perceive presupposes the incorporeality of the soul;" Brittain 2002, 274. See also Fuhrer 2018, 1702; O'Daly 1987, 84-87; Van Riel 2004, 505-515; and Lagouanère 2018.

[88] This, of course, is a major topic in Augustinian studies. The interested reader may consider Lütcke's thorough work on the topic, with attention to the history and cultural significance of the relevant terms as well as a careful look at all aspects of the concept of authority in Augustine. See Lütcke 1968. Catapano provides a thorough introduction to the Latin term *ratio*, its Greek precursor *logos*, how they are used in both pagan and patristic literature, and the uses of *ratio* by Augustine, including its relation to *fides*. See Catapano 2019, 1069-1084. Other sources are of interest and will serve as pathways into the massive literature. For example, Gilson 1983, part one, chapter 1; Rist 2001, 26-39; and TeSelle 2006, chapter 2.

(30.58). The definition of sensation requires that a bodily experience not escape the notice of the soul—*non latere*—not that it be fully *known* in any strict sense of the term.

Meanwhile, as this dialogue has proceeded, Augustine has been working on some other insights in a philosophy of perception specifically and of knowledge generally. Sight sees *through* the eyes (*Qu. an.* 23.43). The soul's power of perception is in control; sense-perception is not to be understood in physical terms. We know (*cognosco*) by means of sight (*uisum*) more than the eyes actually see (*uideo*) (24.45)! Sight is the soul's power making use of the body.[89] The soul itself is what actually senses (33.71). Everything we truly *know* (*scio*), we know through reason (*ratio*) (29.57). Knowledge as such does not come from bodily experience. In fact, reason is for knowing the truth directly (26.50-27.53). Reason*ing* (*ratiocinatio*) is for gaining truth by inference from other truths, but gaining truth by inference requires a starting-point, a foundation. Animals, with their lesser-powered souls, have sense-perception but not *knowledge* (*scientia*), which transcends the power of the senses; and we should seek God's help in retreating from the senses (28.54-29.57). Knowledge of God is not a sensory affair (33.76).

And where, then, does *Qu. an.* leave empiricism? Not doing too well: Sense-perception plays only a minor role in knowledge. Still, it does play *a* role. It is not a matter of rejecting all accounts of sensory knowledge so much as integrating into an overall rationalistic epistemology an account of sensory knowledge—or at least of the sensory contribution to knowledge.

We now turn to *De utilitate credendi* (*Vtil. cred.*; *On the advantage of believing*). Augustine explains that "certain miracles had to be presented for the eyes to see" in order to confirm an authority (*Vtil. cred.* 15.33).[90] We, who are not wise, needed to be given wisdom by God. But, Augustine explains in a problem strikingly similar to the Meno Paradox, if we are *not* wise then we do not even know how to recognize someone who is (*Vtil. cred.* 13.28). So God not only sends us wisdom in the person of the Messiah and in the apostles, Scriptures, and the church established by him; God also ordains miracles as a sign to confirm his authority. In this way, beginning with the sensory experience that witnesses these miracles, those unable to get to knowledge of God may yet be able to receive that knowledge when

[89] See also Fuhrer 2018, 1703-1704.
[90] Augustine, *De utilitate credendi*, trans. Kearney 2005.

it comes to them.[91] Religious knowledge from experience also may be drawn from prophecies that have been fulfilled in recent days.[92]

Probably the most important text we must consider here is *Conf.*, Book VII. In 7.9.14 we read that Augustine had read in the Platonists that the Word was in the beginning with God, and was God; in the Platonists he read that wisdom for humans comes from the wisdom in God; here, however, he did not read of the Gospel, the facts of which were not known to proud philosophers through their reasonings. Here also we find the famous passage in which Augustine describes how much the Platonists got right—from 7.9.13 to 7.17.23. The analysis culminates in an account of how Augustine had briefly ascended to a knowledge of immaterial reality: "Thus in the thrust of a trembling glance my mind arrived at That Which Is. […] but I lacked the strength to hold my gaze fixed," and fleshly habits pulled him back to the physical world.[93] So Augustine "set about finding a way to gain the strength that was necessary for enjoying" God (7.18.24). And it turns out that the only way was Christ. Only through the Incarnation of God was Augustine able properly to know God—i.e., with the kind of knowledge sufficient for happiness. Elaborating a few pages later, Augustine explains that the whole area of Christology is entirely unknown to Platonic meditation (7.21.27). These things may be read in Scripture, writings written in time by those who knew the Messiah through the historical events of his Incarnation, life, death, and resurrection. Platonists had achieved *some* knowledge, including a glimpse of the happiness of knowing the immaterial God. But God the Son joined the human race at a particular point in time, and it is only through the historical experience of this human encounter with God that we are able to know about it—about the eternal begetting of God the Son by and equal to God the Father, and about the way to this happiness. This happiness is a destination of which the Platonists had known through their reflection, but another source of knowledge drawn from history was necessary for any of us to know how to get there.

[91] On the Augustinian approach to history and authority, see Lütcke 1968, 96-99. See also Lütcke 1968, 147-148 for the observation that Christ, the divine authority, becomes manifest by appearing in history, himself being the foundation of the authority of Scripture and the church.

[92] See *De fide rerum quae non uidentur* on the fulfilled prophecies. On the prophecies, the miracles, and other clues to the presence of divine authority, see Lütcke 1968, 182.

[93] Augustine, *Confessiones*, trans. Sheed 2006.

It is important not to leave out *Trin*. I have no expectation of adding anything significant to the interpretation of a large and subtle book long pored over by scholars perhaps too numerous to name. For our purposes a quick glimpse, according to my own working understanding, of a passage dealing with sensory experience should suffice. In Book X, chapter 3 Augustine considers the topic of the relation of mind to body.[94] The analysis, despite its brevity, is extremely relevant to the contemporary philosophy of mind no less than to the ancient philosophy he references. In any case, the main point of the passage is that we should not think of the mind in physical terms. If we would know ourselves—keeping the motto not only of Socrates (referenced here by Augustine) but also of Augustine's *Deum et animam scire cupio* ("I yearn to know God and the soul") from the Cassiciacum era—we must consider the mind directly and on its own terms. The mind itself may know itself directly without the intervention of images derived from sense-perception. The mind knowing itself knows, among other things, its own memory, understanding, and will; and these, Augustine explains in chapter 4, are an image of the Trinity in our minds. However, he delays a direct look at this image for some time in order to accommodate slow minds—or perhaps in order to ascend only by degrees towards the vision of God.

Thus Book XI gives us a model of lesser images. The Prologue to Book XI explains that these are not the Trinity-image of the mind knowing itself, but rather "some trace of trinity in this outer man too" (*Trin.* 11.1.1). The Pauline inner man, which has understanding, is more the image of God than the outer man, which has the lesser power of sensory perception. Yet here too a trace (*uestigium*) may be found. Chapter 1 finds a convenient analogy in the act of seeing a physical object: There is the visible body, the mental image (or the sight or the sensation of it), and the will or intention to look at it. The sight is in a sense begotten of the visible body, as the latter makes an impression on the faculty of sight. These three, though distinct, are yet "compounded into a kind of unity" (*Trin.* 11.2.5). Taking one step inward, Augustine now looks—in chapter 2—at the triad that occurs when we remember our sensory perceptions. First there is the mental image or the thing recalled, an image "held in the memory;" next there is the recollection, a sort of copy of the memory; finally there is, again, the will or the mental attention that recalls the mental image. The conclusion: "And here too a unity is produced out of three," with

[94] Augustine, *De Trinitate*, trans. Hill 2015.

the difference that these three are not (as in the previous triad) distinct; rather, "because all this is inside and it is all one consciousness," they are all one (*Trin.* 11.4.7). Yet this image is still not properly called the *imago Dei*, for only the soul itself deserves this name; still, like all things, it has some resemblance (*similitudo*) to God. In chapter 3 Augustine does his best to clarify these trinities. Among other things, he explains that, although we are not talking about begetting exactly but only about something resembling it, there are actually *three* such acts: Loosely speaking, the physical object seen begets the image perceived, which begets the image stored in memory, which begets the one examined when we recall it. Moreover, and very importantly, the will is neither begetter nor begotten in any of these relationships. The shorter chapter 4, which ends Book XI, links sight, memory, and will to Augustine's number, measure, and weight. Love, as we know from *Conf.* 13.9.10, is our weight or *pondus*, carrying us where we go—if a good love, toward God and, if a bad love, towards lesser goods and, ultimately, disappointment and destruction. As love in *Conf.* XIII, so will (*uoluntas*) here: Will, related to love in *Trin.*, is my weight (*pondus*) which drives the soul to perceive and remember these physical objects (*Trin.* 11.11.18). Augustine has in fact already explained that the will may do so well, referring them "to the better and truer life" and not resting in them, or may do so badly, defiling itself by wallowing in sensuality (*Trin.* 11.4.8). No surprise that the final words of Book XI commend us to the inward turn to look at the soul more directly.

And where does all this salutary reflection leave empiricism? The answer must be subtle, in keeping with the subtlety of *Trin.* The initial insight from Book X, chapter 3 that the mind must turn inward and learn about itself without the aid of sensory images is certainly a point against empiricism. Yet almost immediately there follows an account of sensory perception, the very giving of which shows that a complete epistemology would account for sensory perception and that it must play some role in the acquisition of knowledge. Along similar lines, the limitations of sensory experience do place certain limits on our thoughts. We can only entertain conceptions of the physical world which can be constructed out of memories drawn from our own experiences. *Sensus enim accipit speciem ab eo corpore quod sentimus, et a sensu memoria, a memoria uero acies cogitantis*: "The senses receive the look of a thing from the body we sense, the memory receives it from the senses, and the thinking attention from the memory" (*Trin.* 11.7.14). Yet even so we can know certain things which go beyond these limits set by sensory experience. Not only must we

turn inward and know the soul and God without sensory distraction, but reason (*ratio*) tells us that there is an infinity of numbers and that a physical object (*corpusculum*) can be divided infinitely—although we have no ability mentally to picture these facts based on our memories drawn from sensory experiences (*Trin.* 11.10.17).

In short, Augustine's very subtle account of mind in this passage from *Trin.* informs us that what we can know apart from the senses is superior; yet sensory experience is a source of mental content and plays a role in the pursuit of wisdom. Indeed, perhaps this lengthy analysis is placed in this book for the reason that souls which descended to wallow in sensory things can also begin there to ascend to God. For "it is easier and almost more familiar to deal with visible than with intelligible things," according to the Prologue of Book XI (*Trin.* 11.1.1).

Before leaving *Trin.*, we should mention that it is here, in Book XI, and in Book XII, that Augustine specifically addresses the Platonic notion of recollection by reincarnation (*Trin.* 12.15.24). Although Augustine evidently did not read the *Meno*, he had some familiarity with its ideas from Cicero.[95] Here he emphatically rejects the transmigration of souls, raising a couple of objections to the Platonic account, and presents a doctrine of illumination: God has designed our minds to see intelligible truths "in a kind of non-bodily light (*in quadam luce incorporea*)" known to the mind and not the body.

Finally, we come to a relatively late text, the *Enchiridion* (*Ench.*), Augustine's handbook on Christian theology. Early in the text Augustine explains the sources of Christian belief:

> These are the truths we should defend by reason (*ratione*), whether we know them from our bodily senses or have discovered them with the understanding of our minds (*ab intellegentia mentis*). But the things that we have not discovered through sense experience (*corporeo sensu experti*—tested through sense experience), and have been and are unable to reach with our minds (*mente*), must be believed in (*credenda sunt*) without any doubt on the evidence of the witnesses by whom those writings that have already gained the name of sacred Scripture were compiled: They were able to see these things, or even to foresee them, either physically or in their minds with divine help. (*Ench.* 1.4)[96]

[95] See Tornau 2019, 5.2; also O'Daly 1987, x; and Karfíková 2017, 95. Karfíková's article is a good introduction to the topic. Further commentary may also be found in Bermon 2007, 535-542.

[96] Augustine, *Enchiridion*, trans. Harbet 2005.

A familiar distinction between two major sources of true belief, reason and authority. Reason is further divided according to its own sources. Reason may operate on either of two different sources of information, that which the mind knows directly or that which we learn through our bodily senses. Authority is rooted in the testimony of the authors of the Bible, and it is also divided according to *their* sources. They are enabled by God to know that which they wrote, and their knowledge came either through their own bodily senses, or through what God allowed them to know directly in their own minds. Plainly, then, Augustine recognizes that sensory experience is a source of knowledge, to be built on by means of reason. Even our knowledge from the authoritative Scripture derives, in part, from the sensory experience of its authors. This refers, in part, to their witnessing of miracles (which Augustine also mentions elsewhere, such as in *De uera religione* 25.47).[97]

In sum, Augustine's epistemology is by no means exclusively rationalistic. It has a significant empirical component: Some knowledge comes through experience, including sensory experience. What's more, Augustine's defense of the practicality and rationality of *fides*, faith or trust, a well-known area of his thought,[98] is an at least partially empirical epistemology. It is "empirical" in the broader sense of the term referring to knowledge which is not innate or *a priori*; it does not come from the mind alone, but requires experience. Knowledge by testimony is how we know history, geography, medicine, and much besides.[99] Most importantly, knowledge of God, the *summum bonum*, requires the experience of historical events: Incarnation, miracles, the resurrection of the Messiah, and fulfilled prophecies. On this topic Cushman is insightful:

> For Augustine the Incarnation gave meaning to history, which it could not possess for those classical thinkers to whom history was, along with nature, the realm of the insubstantial and the changing. But the

[97] This is, of course, a simplified summary of the epistemological views in *Ench.* For a more detailed analysis, the reader may consult Catapano's article on *Ench.* 7.20, its critique of Academic skepticism, and how it relates to other texts such as *C. acad.*, *Ciu.*, and *Vtil. cred.* See Catapano 2016, 219-233.

[98] Just to cite a few examples, King and Ballantyne 2009, 195-214; MacDonald 2010, 167-196; or Van Fleteren 1973, 33-71. See also the sources in note 88 above.

[99] Technically, Augustine shies away from using words like "knowledge" for this sort of belief. In *Conf.* 6 and *Vtil. cred.* he will favor verbs like *credo* over *disco* and *intelligo* to describe beliefs reliant on trust—even as he defends their rationality and necessity. In *Retractationes* 1.14, he acknowledges that such belief can be loosely called knowledge. See also Tornau 2019, 5.2.

> doctrine of the God-man signified henceforth that ultimate reality could be apprehended rightly only through a particular history in time, namely, Jesus Christ.[100]

The ultimate knowledge, that of God, comes not from contemplation but is the result of experiences in historical events. Cushman well explains how different this conception of knowledge is from Platonism.[101] Similarly, Morgan's book uncovering the social and linguistic aspect of man's knowledge of God in *De doctrina christiana* (*Doct.*), *Conf.*, and *Trin.* explains that "language and the very act of speech is the chief mediation point between God and humanity in Augustine's thought."[102] Writing on *Doct.*, Morgan states that in Augustine's view "God is revealed to the mind as eternal in and through historical particularity […]," in the speech and commands and history in the Bible.

5. Not from experience, but in response to experience

If the likes of Nash, Miner, and Bermon are correct in using the term "recollection" loosely enough to not require belief in the preexistence of the soul,[103] it is much easier to say that Augustine accepts "recollection." Either way, it is clear that his epistemology is rationalistic in the same way Plato's is: Knowledge comes from the mind and not from experience. However, rather a lot of human knowledge does draw from experience. We must now see how Augustine's epistemology is also like Plato's in how it analyzes such knowledge.

Augustine's empirical streak should not be ignored, but it also need not be interpreted as conflicting with his ultimately rationalistic approach to epistemology. We might think of pure rationalism and empiricism as two ends of a spectrum, with epistemologists like Kant, Plato, and Augustine somewhere in the middle. This is not a bad strategy for modeling epistemological theories, but it fails to capture some of the essential concepts. We are not dealing with *compromise* positions so much as nuanced *hybrid* approaches. These theories deny that knowledge is merely the derivative of experience but nevertheless claim that it is the product of noetic processes making use of

[100] Cushman 1950, 271-272.
[101] Cushman 1950, 272.
[102] Morgan 2010, 171.
[103] For that matter, belief in preexistence of the soul need not require belief in the transmigration of the soul; see Tornau 2019, 5.2.

experience. In other words, Augustine is part of a broader tradition of hybrid rationalist—or rationalist-leaning—epistemologies that include empirical elements. As a model for thinking through the idea of such a nuanced rationalism, I propose the nuanced rationalism of Plato and Kant, although Plotinus is more important as a historical source of Augustine's epistemology.

First we shall overview Augustine's prioritizing of the mind as fundamental in the process of knowing. Then we shall consider the nuanced rationalism of Plotinus, and then consider Plato's and Kant's versions of the same theory. Finally, we shall consider how Augustine falls into the same epistemological tradition of nuanced rationalism with an empirical aspect.

a. The fundamentality of the mind

A serious objection confronts the idea that Augustine's epistemology is largely empirical. Even when we learn as a result of experience, it seems that God's direct action in or on the soul is necessary for us to gain knowledge.

Let us take a quick look at one scholar who presents this objection, examine several moments in Augustine's writings, and then see if we can state the objection a bit more precisely. In *Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought*, Cary argues that Augustine's concept of grace pertains to the inner regions of the soul, where God helps us directly; outer things do not convey grace, but are only signs of what God does within.[104] Even "the Scriptures do not reveal God but consist of signs pointing out the way our souls must take to see God for themselves."[105] Cary is on to something. Let us look at a few passages in Augustine's oeuvre.

Let us first revisit *C. acad.* 3.19.42. Augustine does not actually say here that the Incarnation and the deeds of Christ are how we *gain knowledge from experience*—it is more a matter of Christ waking us up (from *excito*) so that we can return to ourselves and to God. Knowledge is possible because of Christ's acts in history, but knowledge does not come *through* them. What does come through them is true beliefs which we can hold by trusting in authority. See the next paragraph,

[104] Cary 2008. Note that I am not evaluating Cary's way of reading Augustine, or most of his conclusions. His analysis (or critique) of Augustine is an important topic for more direct consideration. An alternative reading that may weigh against Cary's on some points is Cameron 1999, 74-103.

[105] Cary 2008, ix.

C. acad. 3.20.43: The twin weight (from *geminum pondus*) of reason and authority drives us to learning. Authority gives us the truth, but Augustine hesitates to call it knowledge until we understand it through the same reason—*subtilissima ratione*—which could never have gotten us to the truth without Christ. True belief, but not knowledge, may be said to be established empirically by the deeds of Christ in history. Thus Augustine desires that he will seize the truth not only through believing but also through understanding—*non credendo solum, sed etiam intellegendo apprehendere*. Here we may note that the analysis in *Vtil. cred.* also does not present knowledge as coming from experience so much as it presents faith based in the historical Messiah as a training of the mind towards being able to know God directly.[106]

The basically rationalistic approach of *Mag.* is present in Augustine's pastoral writings as well, for an example of which we may consult his *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (*En. Ps.*): "For Christ dwells in the inner person, as the apostle says; and to Christ belongs the capacity to see the truth, for he said, *I am truth.*"[107] This is from the *enarratio* on Psalm 4, which belongs to a section of the *En. Ps.* that was completed relatively early.[108] Here we read that Christ inhabits or dwells in (*habitat*) the soul, or in the inner man (*interiore homine*), and that to see the truth (*uidere ueritatem*) pertains to or relates to or is the concern of (*pertinet*) the same one (*ipsum*) who dwells there. The truth Augustine is talking about here is the goodness of God: "This light is the complete and true good (*totum uerum bonum*) of humankind; it is seen not with the eyes but with the mind." This good is the light of which the Psalmist writes in Psalm 4, which Augustine says is written in answer to the question "Who has anything good to show us?" in the same verse. The long and short of it is that the human quest for happiness and the philosopher's quest for wisdom are completed if we take the Psalmist's advice to seek the truth within the soul—not coming into the body from outside the body—where Christ dwells, knowing God the Father and making God known to us.

Have things changed by the time of the writing of the *Conf.* (397-401)? Apparently not. We may look back on Book VII and reconsider just what it teaches us about empirical knowledge. The

[106] See Catapano 2019, 1075. See also Bochet's explanation of how Augustine draws from the Academic skeptics in order to argue for the necessity of faith as a preparation for knowledge; Bochet 2016, 193-217.

[107] Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos 1-32*, trans. Boulding 2000, exposition of Psalm 4, section 8.

[108] On such as we can know about the composition of the *En. Ps.*, I suggest Bourke 2001, 55-70.

Platonists were able to know something about the *patria*, the fatherland or the homeland, the destination of the journey towards wisdom; what they lacked was the *uia*, the way there: They lacked Christ.[109] This way comes to us in historical experience. But it is the way *to* knowledge of God; when we know God, we know directly, in a manner not unlike what the Platonists taught. When we know God, we know quite independently of experience. However, we are restored to a place where we are capable of this knowledge through the mediator—Christ the way—who came to us in experience.

In *Conf.* Book X Augustine suggests that sensory experience is largely worthless without interpretation by the mind, which in turn must be enlightened by God. Reviewing the spiritual lessons of creation—that it is indeed *creation*, made by God—Augustine considers how it is that he knows this. The soul knows through the body; "I, the inner man knew them, I, I, the soul, through the senses of the body" (10.6.9). Animals, whose souls lack reason, do not know this (10.6.10). But a human can "interrogate" the world and thus learn from it. Yet this great knowing power of the soul is not independent; complimenting his soul on its superiority to the body, Augustine reminds it of its inferiority to God, on whom the soul depends for its own life: "And I tell you, my soul, you are better, since you vivify the whole bulk of the body: You give the body life, which no body can give to a body. But your God is the Life of your life." We should keep in mind that Book X is one of the central Augustinian passages on ascent to God. Gilson explains how properly making this ascent in learning about God through the world actually depends on already having some *a priori* knowledge of God.[110]

Conf. also tells us that God's action in our souls is necessary for us to know the truth of Scripture. Various passages in the later books of this work teach that, when we learn from the Bible, we learn from God speaking in our hearts.[111] In *Conf.* 12.15.18 Augustine tells us that he learns of various spiritual truths directly from God: "Truth told me with strong voice in the ear of my spirit […]." Now these are truths Augustine proposes to find in Genesis 1 and he explains in *Conf.* 12.18.27 that, when we know such a truth from Scripture, we

[109] A helpful commentary on these matters is Madec 2001, 129-134.

[110] See Gilson 1983, 187-188 for a short introduction to this idea; the next four chapters explain in more detail.

[111] Cary 2008, 104: "So the epistemology of *On the Teacher* remains in place in the theory of exegesis in the *Conf.* Indeed, in the *Conf.* not even Jesus Christ is an exception to the rule that we learn nothing from the words of external teachers."

know it in the same way: "While therefore each one of us is trying to understand in the sacred writings what the writer meant by them, what harm if one accepts a meaning which You, Light of all true minds, show him to be in itself a true meaning […]?" Indeed, not only *what* truths Scripture conveys, but *that* it is true and the Word of God we learn from God also. Augustine prays in *Conf.* 13.29.44: "You told me with strong voice in the ear of Your servant's spirit, breaking through my deafness and crying: 'O man, what My Scripture says, I say.'"[112]

Another interesting passage is *Ciu.*, Book XI, chapters 2-3.[113] Augustine talks about the sort of ascent through creation considered in *Conf.* X, and then states that only after that do we learn, not from creation, but from God himself (*ex ipso*), that God is its creator. Augustine explains that God gives true knowledge of himself directly; we hear from God by means of the mind, not the body (*mente, non corpore*). However, our souls distracted by carnality need healing, calling for the Incarnation, for the testimony of Christ, and for the testimony of the Bible. These we must trust with faith until our minds are prepared for direct knowledge of God. To know (*scire*) is to know firsthand, and what we trust (*credimus*) is not, strictly speaking, what we *know*. Now there is an empirical component to this account: What we know through the bodily senses firsthand *is* knowledge, and I think it likely that this is meant to apply to the knowledge of the eyewitnesses of the man Jesus. The right beliefs may come through trust in the testimony of those who have experienced them, and sensory experience counts. But I find in this passage no hint that *knowledge of God* as such derives from sensory experience—only trustworthy belief about those signs by which Christ draws us back to God. This passage, according to my working understanding, still employs a basically rationalistic epistemology with some empirical components.

We may state this objection a bit more precisely as follows: Even when we learn from experience, God's presence in the soul is necessary for us to recognize what we learn; in fact, we do not really learn *from* experience, but directly from God. Experience is an occasion or catalyst for learning and we learn from God rather than from experience. In short, it appears that in Augustine's epistemology the mind is fundamental to a correct understanding of experience. The mind, that is, must inform experience rather than vice versa. And not the mind alone, for Augustine looks deeper still. The whole point of

[112] See also Cary 2008, 136.
[113] *Ciu.* 11.2-3.

the theory of illumination is that *God* is fundamental to the mind's comprehension. God must inform the mind if the mind is properly to inform experience.

I believe this objection is correct, and that it fits the Augustinian corpus as a whole, although to confirm this in detail would require further research.[114] The objection, as it seems to me, must be considered fatal to the idea that Augustine's epistemology makes room for empiricism as such. However, his empirical streak is not to be discounted so easily. Rather, what this insight shows is that the empirical aspect of Augustine's epistemology is part of a rationalism subtle enough to incorporate empirical elements. This we shall soon consider with the help of some comparisons to Plato and Kant.

b. The nuanced rationalism of Plotinus

But first, where might Augustine have learned to think of the mind as fundamental in the gaining of knowledge, even as that knowledge makes use of the data of experience? Although this epistemology has much to do with Plato and Kant, Kant came much later, and Augustine himself was no great reader of Plato. For the sources of his epistemology we would do better to look to Plotinus. Let us begin with some passages investigating the problems and puzzles regarding the soul. Having already discussed the questions of an individual human soul in relation to the universal Soul, of the soul's coming into the body, and then of its departing the same, Plotinus subsequently turns to a study of memory.[115] The goal is to consider the nature of a soul's personal memories after death, which requires a more general analysis of memory and in particular an understanding of what exactly *has* memory (*Enneades* 4.3.25). The answer is, unsurprisingly, that memory is entirely an act of the soul, not of the body (4.3.26). Memory happens in body-soul combinations, but is not the act of the body or of the combination (4.3.25). In this respect it is unlike sensation, which is the work of the combination. Thus we see that in the Plotinian account of knowledge the body plays a role in sense-perception. Moreover, sense-perception itself is (according to my working understanding of a subtle passage) the source of those impressions with which memory deals (4.3.26).

[114] The interested reader may consider Bermon's *La signification et l'enseignement* as a source on the consistency of *Mag.*'s epistemology with *Trin.* and other later works; see Bermon 2007, 60-61.

[115] I follow John Dillon's summary of the passage; see Plotinus, *Enneades*, trans. MacKenna 1991, 251.

Memory can only take place within time and due to experience, and Platonic recollection is not the same thing as memory but is a purely internal awareness of the soul (4.3.25). Of sensation Plotinus says: "the body is a means but all culminates in the soul," presenting a fundamentally rationalistic outlook that accounts for bodily experience as a part of the process of human knowing (4.3.26). Plotinus goes on to consider the soul's memory after death (4.4.1-5), followed by other questions about the soul.

Ennead. 5.1 is one of the major ascent passages in Plotinus' work, being an account of the ascent of the soul from physical to immaterial reality. The ascent climbs to the universal Soul, thence to Mind or Intellect, and thence to the One. The first step is to recognize the importance—even the divinity—of our own souls (5.1.10). This begins by habituating ourselves to paying attention to our own souls and their powers—turning inward, as it were, while also attending to "the sounds from above" the soul, the call of higher reality (5.1.12). And yet, sense-perception is still recognized as a component of the process of knowing. The human is the whole human, and "the human being includes sense-perception," and we only know what has passed through this faculty. Our job is to learn from the faculty of perception, to "turn the perceptive faculty inward" and learn the power of the soul.

Thus Plotinus himself represents an immaterialist metaphysics with an epistemology that accounts for sense-perception—a Platonic epistemology which recognizes the importance of sense-perception in the gaining of knowledge for humans. This approach was available as a model to Augustine.[116]

c. Plato and Kant

How should we think about this epistemology that sides with rationalism over empiricism and that yet refuses to wholly abandon empiricism? The idea is not so unusual, and in recent centuries philosophers have learned it from Kant. However, this idea goes back at least as far as Plato. Here I shall summarize the idea of a nuanced rationalism with some empirical elements built in, drawing from Plato and Kant as models.

Recall that in Plato's epistemology knowledge comes from the mind but through experience. The soul has an awareness of the Forms built in. However, embodied experience *reminds* us of the Forms.

[116] And, of course, its influence could be traced in some detail in another study. The interested reader is suggested to consult, for an introduction to the topic, Lagouanère 2018. Also Van Riel 2004.

In the theology of *Meno*—and in the psychology or the metaphysics of the human person which it develops—we lose our understanding of the Forms through embodiment, and experience of those physical realities ordered by the Forms helps us recover what we lost.

The position of Kant is similar: the great enlightenment philosopher taught us to not think in binary terms of thoroughgoing rationalism versus thoroughgoing empiricism. Early modern philosophy included a grand debate on epistemology. The likes of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume believed that our ideas derive from sensory experience, thinking we have no innate ideas. The likes of Descartes and Leibniz thought differently, arguing that we do have innate ideas. Kant steps into this debate and largely sides with the Rationalists over the Empiricists, arguing for ideas not derived from experience. However, the peculiar genius of Kantian epistemology—just as much a psychology and a philosophy of perception—is that his largely rationalist view incorporates elements of empiricism. Our innate ideas are not separate from experience, nor are we ever aware of them apart from experience. Yet they are not *derived from* experience; rather, their relation to experience is that they *structure* it. To use my favorite example, think of what Victoria Falls looks like. It will probably help to pull up a picture on your computer or smartphone. That picture on your screen is flat, consisting of nothing but shades and colors. But of what else does any other visual experience consist? *All* you see with your eyes is a congeries of colors and shades. None of it entails any more depth than the flat surface of a photograph or a phone screen. And yet we know when we use our eyes that what we are looking at is a three-dimensional world. The concept of three-dimensional space does not come from the eyes. Rather, our *minds* use this concept to interpret the color-and-shade data from our eyes. We do not learn from experience the idea that we are in three-dimensional space; that idea is in our minds independently of experience, but not separate from it; for, while it is not the derivation of experience, it nevertheless is an idea we believe only after we begin to experience the world. Moreover, it organizes the raw data of sensory experience and gives us a chance of learning something about the world from that data.

In this way Kant presents his brilliant theory that ideas not derived from experience are nevertheless bound up with it, and reliant on it in some sense. Without experience these ideas would never rise to a conscious level, nor even mean anything to us. Hence Kant's brilliant observation that concepts without percepts are empty, while percepts without concepts are blind. *Percepts* are the raw sensations of sensory experience and Kant borrows from the Rationalists the

insight that they are the source of no meaningful or useful information. *Concepts* are the mind's innate ideas, which it brings to sensory experience, and by which some sense is made of the buzzing percepts so that a coherent picture of the world may be constructed out of them. Kant borrows from the Empiricists the insight that these concepts are useless as organizing principles for an understanding of the world unless we have some perception *of* the world to apply them to. They are as *empty* without sensory input as sensory input without some principle by which to interpret it is *blind*.[117]

In short, the epistemologies of two of history's greatest philosophers, Plato and Kant, converge on an integration of rationalism and empiricism in which knowledge depends on ideas not derived from experience, and yet includes the data of experience. This nuanced rationalism in these characters has no causal relation to Augustine's views beyond some mostly indirect influence of Plato. I suggest we consider Plato's and Kant's views as a model for a nuanced rationalism in epistemology which may be helpful in categorizing Augustine's epistemology. Let us look at this nuanced rationalism a bit more systematically, and then see where Augustine fits in.

d. The nuanced rationalism of some great epistemologists

There are three common threads in the epistemologies of Plato and Kant. First, knowledge is not derived from experience independent of the mind. Second, knowledge comes about in response to experience. Although knowledge depends on ideas not learned from sensory perception, nevertheless sense-perception plays a crucial role in the acquisition of knowledge. And, third, ideas not derived from experience are what correctly interpret experience.

Kant made a name for himself in the history of epistemology by showing how we can integrate rationalist insights on how knowledge comes from the mind with empiricist insights on the crucial role of experience in human learning. If this makes Kant a great epistemologist (and it does, in my opinion), then the same thing makes Plato a great epistemologist.

[117] In this paragraph I am using a simplified popular version of what Kant says. Although I believe my account here is an accurate paraphrase, his own vocabulary is a bit different. The interested reader may consult the *Critique of Pure Reason*, specifically the Introduction to the Second Part of the Transcendental Doctrine of Elements.

And if Kant and Plato, then also Augustine. For the same ideas occur in his epistemology as well, although they are appropriately Christianized. Of course, Kant is not where we should look for an interpretive lens in exegeting Augustine; even Plato, to whom Plotinus is to be preferred, has his limitations in this regard. Yet in the history of epistemology and its grand debate over the origins of knowledge, Augustine stands alongside Plato and Kant.

First, the points of commonality are there. Knowledge comes from the mind rather than from experience, as we have seen above in *Mag.*, *Conf.*, *En. Ps.*, and elsewhere. Yet knowledge is just what the mind does in response to experience. And, in fact, this knowledge from the mind is what correctly interprets experience. Second, Augustine has baptized this nuanced rationalism. For it is not the internal perceptual structure of the mind that is the source of knowledge, nor the soul's experience of the immaterial world prior to embodiment; it is God himself in the soul who gives her the knowledge she needs. Moreover, when Augustine focuses on the experience which results in knowledge, it is not the universal sense-experience that captures a philosopher's attention, but the particular historical events of the Messianic prophecies, Incarnation, death, burial, resurrection, and establishment of the church which are the interest of the Christian theologian and pastor.

Nor have these points gone unnoticed by Augustinian scholars, although the elaboration of what this means for Augustine vis-à-vis empiricism has rarely if ever been articulated.[118] As already noted, Pasnau observes that Augustine's view of illumination "seems largely to be" a theory according to which God does not give us "the information itself, but the insight into the truth of the information:" Illumination sometimes (not always) means that God does not give us the facts, but the ability to know them *as* facts.[119] Briefly, Valentine notes the following: "Contrary to the caricature that Christian philosophy relies exclusively upon authority in its search for truth, Augustine insists that the mind arrives at knowledge in two ways: with the help of the senses and through its own structures."[120] Gilson also explains that sensory knowledge actually comes from the soul and acts *on* sensory experience.[121] And O'Daly explains that illumination's "influence extends to all forms

[118] In addition to the sources noted below, the interested reader might consult Bermon 2007, 470-471.

[119] Pasnau 1999/2015, section 3.

[120] Valentine 2001, 392.

[121] Gilson 1983, 63-65. Compare Fuhrer 2018, 1703-1704 and 1705-1706 (citing Bruce Bubacz).

of knowledge, belief, and imagination."[122] Lagouanère, moreover, helpfully explains how profoundly Christian Augustine's idea of knowledge not derived from sensory experience becomes.[123] Although it may be classified as *a priori* and bears some resemblance to the Kantian synthetic *a priori*, it is knowledge mediated by Christ; Augustine's theory of it is a moral and not merely an epistemological theory; and this knowledge happens through active relationship with Christ, not merely by the soul passively receiving information about non-physical reality. Schumacher explains how Augustinian illumination involves seeing the created world in light of the goodness of God.[124] It involves learning from experience precisely by interpreting experience in light of what we know about God.[125]

Nash explains that the soul is primary in sensory knowledge,[126] an important aspect of a sophisticated rationalism: Learning from experience relies on insight from the mind. In Augustine's epistemology he wrestles with "the difficulty of relating the universal and particular, reason and experience, the certain and probable, knowledge and belief."[127] The only reason "knowledge of the world is possible" is "because God has patterned the world after the divine ideas." Indeed, we get knowledge of the world through our inner knowledge of the Forms.

Cushman concurs: "the Platonists are correct that" we cannot learn the Forms from experience, "rather, their apprehension is the pre-condition of experience."[128] Cushman also explains how Augustine's Christology is integrated into both the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* aspects of his epistemology. The same Christ is the source of knowledge within the mind and the object of knowledge from the divine history in which he became a man.[129] Cushman even suggests that Augustine improves on Plato, for the understanding of what

[122] O'Daly 1987, 207.
[123] Lagouanère 2012, 174-179.
[124] Schumacher 2011, chapter 1.
[125] In illumination, "the intellect […] comes to know […] the goodness of God, as it can be perceived through the mediation of natural experiences scrutinized from the standpoint of faith. Although the knowledge of Truth is something that is sought after 'from below,' or through the use of the natural capacity to comprehend natural reality, one can still affirm in a qualified sense that it is something that is received from above, to the extent that the mind acknowledges that the employment of its natural capacity represents a participation in the knowledge of what is above;" Schumacher 2011, 63. See also pages 36-38 on knowing the created world in *De Genesi ad Litteram* and page 47 on *Trin.*
[126] Nash 1969, 43-44.
[127] Nash 1969, 123.
[128] Cushman 1950, 277.
[129] Cushman 1950, 278-279.

Christ has wrought shows how the knowledge of universal immaterial reality can be filtered through experience. Cushman:

> Augustine has at length, through reflection upon the Incarnation, succeeded in showing what Plato wrestled to make plausible, namely, how, from the knowledge of the particulars, the mind could mount up to the intuition of divine Reality. It is because, in a singular instance, the universal unfolds itself without deficiency in the particular.[130]

Similarly, Miner builds on his analysis of an Augustinian notion of recollection by exegeting *Mag*., explaining that Augustine's understanding of recollection recognizes the importance of the signs by which we learn—or, rather, by which we are reminded.[131] True, the dialogue concludes that signs do not teach. Signs, however, receive a "partial rehabilitation" and are "pedagogically necessary."[132] Questioning, the work of human teachers, prayer, and language in general all serve as necessary reminders of the knowledge God has placed in our souls.

In short, knowledge, in Augustine's epistemology, comes from the mind; yet we learn in response to experience, with that which always remains in our minds as the precondition for our experiential learning. Augustine is like Kant here—yet unlike, for it is not the perceptual structure of the mind as such that interprets experience, but Jesus Christ himself. Augustine is like Plato here, but his is a baptized Platonic epistemology: The knowledge which comes from the mind and which is necessary for learning from experience is not merely the mind's encounter with the Forms, but the work of Christ. Perhaps, by neglecting the empirical aspect of both, we have not quite recognized the full extent of Augustine's Platonism. They both have an epistemology which is essentially rationalistic but includes an empirical aspect, in which knowledge from the mind informs input from experience. However, Augustine makes this into a Christian doctrine, and teaches that Christ himself is the source of this knowledge.

6. Conclusion

We have seen that Augustine considers knowledge to derive from the mind and not from experience. This situates him in the tradition of rationalism, broadly speaking. Augustine's own rationalism is—again

[130] Cushman 1950, 291.
[131] Miner 2007, 444-446.
[132] Miner 2007, 444.

speaking broadly—in the tradition of Platonism. In books like *Mag.* he develops a view in epistemology which may be understood as a Christian development—or correction—of the Platonic doctrine of recollection from books like Plato's *Meno*. Knowledge does not come from the soul's past experiences before embodiment, but from God's presence in the soul.

Yet we have seen that Augustine's epistemology also has a notable empirical streak. Besides giving an account of sensory knowledge, Augustine thinks that knowledge of God depends on the history of his people, his revelation, and above all his Messiah.

The empirical aspect of Augustine's theology does not overrule his rationalism, but rather is integrated into it. For it turns out that Augustine's is a nuanced rationalism: In his account, although knowledge comes from God's actions in the mind rather than from experience, it nevertheless comes about as a response to experience. In having a rationalism of this sort Augustine resembles both Plato and Kant. Yet his is a Christian version. In both its rationalistic core and its empirical aspect, knowledge is explained in Christian terms, in the former because the mind does not have these ideas of its own powers but from God's indwelling and gracious assistance, in the latter because the experience leading to knowledge of God is the religious experience that founded the Christian church and Scriptures.

In short, Augustine must be recognized as an epistemologist in that rationalist tradition which considers knowledge to come from the mind rather than from experience; as an epistemologist whose rationalism, like Plato's and Kant's, is nuanced so as to account for the role of experience in knowledge in such a way that ideas not derived from experience interpret the data of experience; and as an epistemologist whose nuanced rationalism is a part of his Christian theology.

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