PARTICIPATION IN THE DIVINE

A Philosophical History, from Antiquity to the Modern Era

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AUGUSTINE'S "ILLUMINATION" THEORY AS THE NATURAL PARTICIPATION OF THE HUMAN MIND

Correcting Bonaventure and Gilson via Plotinus and Marius Victorinus

Sarah Byers

IN THIS CHAPTER, I SHOW THAT AUGUSTINE'S "DIVINE ILLUMINATION theory of knowledge" is merely his belief that the human mind is capable of intellectual cognition because it naturally "participates" in the Divine Mind, as its image. Consequently, the claim that Augustine thought the human mind must be enlightened by special divine assistance in ordinary (nonmystical) intellectual cognition is erroneous. That is true of the whole of his writing career: earlier works such as *On the Teacher* and the *Confessions* agree with his presentation in *On the Trinity* 12. This resolution of a long-standing debate about how to interpret Augustine becomes possible when we pay careful attention to the ancient philosophical problems "illumination" is meant to resolve, and when we use Plotinus and the early Christian Neoplatonist Marius Victorinus to interpret his vocabulary and claims. The recovery of this late ancient context greatly clarifies Augustine's epistemological theory and reveals its explanatory power. For the Plotinian basis of the account is a synthesis of Aristotelian and Platonic elements that can explain why our minds are uniquely suited to abstracting intelligibility from sensory data, and how they do so.

6.1 Overview

The classic articulations of the "assistance" interpretation of divine illumination were given in the thirteenth century by Bonaventure and his followers.[1]

[1] Bonaventure (1221–74), Matthew of Aquasparta (c. 1238–1302), John Peckham (1240–92), Roger Marston (c. 1245–1303), and Henry of Ghent (c. 1217–93). See Henry of Ghent, alluding to earlier thirteenth century writers in his *Summa Quaestionum Ordinarianum* A1Q2 corpus: "They say that nothing true can be known by a human being by purely natural means, without a special divine illumination infused by some supernatural light. And they

These authors were attempting either to differentiate Augustine's account of knowledge of eternal truths from Aristotle's claim that intelligible truth is abstracted from sensory data by the agent intellect, or else to complement Aristotelian abstraction with what they took to be an Augustinian account of knowledge of eternal truths.[2] Aquinas and later thirteenth-century philosophers rejected Bonaventurian interpretations in favor of a naturalistic account: Augustine's "illumination" refers merely to the constitution of the human mind, which has a natural "participation" in the Divine Mind.[3] The twentieth and twenty-first centuries saw a revived debate about Augustine's views,[4] with the interpretative options being labelled "innatism," "formalism," and "ontologism." The definitions of these are roughly as follows. "Innatism" is the view that illumination is the mind's natural constitution, where this means that it natively possesses intellectual content. Those committed to "formalism" hold that the mind has rules of judgment provided by God in the act of knowing. "Ontologism" is the claim that in human knowing we know truths through the eternal ideas in God, as these ideas are known by God, with the assistance of God. Much of that debate took place prior to 1970, but historians of philosophy have expressed sporadic interest in the topic since then, and to this day no consensus has been reached about the correct interpretation.[5]

believe this to be Augustine's view in some of his works, wherever he claims that whoever sees something true sees it in the first truth, or in the eternal norms (*regulae*), or in the eternal light. As he says in *City of God* 11.10, 'It is not inappropriate to say that the soul is illuminated by the incorporeal light of God's simple wisdom, just as a body of air is illuminated by a bodily light'" (trans. Pasnau, amended). For overviews of the medieval "divine assistance" interpretations, see Noone (2014, 369–83); Cullen (2006, 77–87); Brady (1976).

[2] This project was occasioned by the translation of Aristotle's *On the Soul* into Latin in the early part of the century, which made it accessible to scholars in western Europe; but interest in theories of divine assistance in human cognition already existed, beginning with the translation of Avicenna into Latin at the end of the twelfth century. See Noone (2014, 373–6) on John Blund (c. 1175–1248), Robert Grosseteste (c. 1168–1253), and Richard Rufus (?–c. 1260). On Avicenna and the debate about whether he held that intellectual cognition occurred via emanation or abstraction, see recently Stephen Ogden (2020).

[3] Aquinas, *ver.* 11.1–2; ST I 79.12, I–II 91.2c with 93.2; also Richard of Mediavilla (c. 1249–1302) and Peter John Olivi (1248–98), references in Brady (1976, 64 nn. 32–3).

[4] Occasioned by the publication of Bonaventure's *opera omnia*; see Brady (1976, 57–9). The *loci classici* in Bonaventure are the *Disputed Questions on Christ* 4, and the university sermon *Christ Our One Teacher* (= Sermon 33), both printed in the fifth volume of the *opera omnia* (Quaracchi, Italy, 1891).

[5] For a thorough summary of the debate up to 1960, see Schuetzinger (1960, 16–63). Nash (1969, 111) argues that Augustine was committed to special divine concurrence. Bubacz (1980) suggests taking illumination as the mind's practice of creating a series of mental maps on an experimental basis in response to data (rather than a set of mental blueprints). Rist (1994, 37; 77–8) classes Augustine with Alexander of Aphrodisias and Bonaventure, asserting that we need assistance

Augustine makes two sets of claims that gave rise to the "knowledge requires divine assistance" interpretations. He says that there is light or illumination (*illustratur*) interior to reason or our "inner human," that light is truth, and that God is truth; concomitantly, he alludes to an "inner teacher" that must be "listened to" and identifies this teacher as truth, also called Christ.[6] These texts suggested to some readers a supernatural grace, or a special kind of divine concurrence peculiar to acts of knowing,[7] or divine inspirations like those attributed to Socrates' *daimōn* in Plato's *Apology*.[8]

As we will see in what follows, Augustine's theory of "divine illumination" is actually a metaphysical model of the mind and not a description of the activity by which we affirm a priori true propositions, as has often been assumed.[9] Augustinian "illuminationism" is actually the claim that the human mind is an "image." This model was elaborated in order to solve the epistemological problem of how sensation can provoke the formation and correct use of intelligible concepts.

This case illustrates the need for proper methodology when interpreting Augustine. It is futile to try to understand his claims without recourse to the philosophical vocabulary and problematics of late antiquity; yet the secondary discussion of "illumination" has read Augustine as if he had no historical-intellectual context, or compared him to classical Platonism alone, or read him through the lens of Bonaventure, or tried to read him through the lens of

from Christ ("inspiration," a grace) in addition to natural impressed notions. Pasnau (2020 and 1995, 51) presents Augustine as holding that special divine assistance is needed by God in knowing. Miner (2007) implies that illumination is a grace, since he says it is necessary for cognition (understood as recollection) given fallen human nature. Schumacher (2011, 58–65) says that Augustinian illumination is the incarnate Christ affecting cognitive processes so that they lead to knowledge that God is a Trinity, but doing so by serving as an example for humans to imitate. MacDonald (2012, 154–7) argues that Augustine was an innatist in the *conf.* but changed his mind by the time of *trin.*, on which see Section 6.7 below.

[6] *lib. arb.* 2.2.4, 2.14.38; *mag.* 11.38, 12.40; *conf.* 10.25.36–27.38, 11.8.10.

[7] When Augustine says "Christ dwells in the inner man," this language in particular can suggest to readers knowledgeable of medieval theology a supernatural presence and assistance because, according to medieval Christian theology, all grace comes from the incarnation of God as Christ (the Messiah) and at baptism God begins to "dwell" in the soul in a special way by grace. Bonaventure and Matthew of Aquasparta explicitly deny that divine illumination in ordinary knowing is a grace; they say it is a special concurrence (see Section 6.2). But this shows that the idea was on the table, even if only because their theory was charged with implying or entailing it notwithstanding their protestations to the contrary.

[8] See Pasnau (2020). In *Apology* 27d–e, Socrates describes an interior voice from a spirit (*daimonion/daimōn*), where "spirit" is defined as gods or children of the gods (a reference to the myths of Greek religion).

[9] This assumption goes back to Gilson (1960, see note 75); compare recently King (2014, 145–50). On these kinds of propositions and their relevance to what I am calling Augustine's "imagism," see Section 6.3.

modern philosophical assumptions. There are two crucial facts about late antiquity that have massive implications for understanding "illumination" in Augustine. The first is that Plotinus (fl. 250) had taken up the project of synthesizing Aristotle's account of abstraction with Platonism and called his resulting model of mind the natural "image" of or "participation" in the Divine Mind (*Nous*), also described as a natural "illumination" (*epilampsis*). Augustine tells us that he became familiar with Plotinus' *Enneads* before he started writing any of his own works.[10] The second is that Marius Victorinus, a famous Christian Neoplatonist of the fourth century[11] whose work Augustine knew,[12] used Plotinus to gloss the claim that Christ is "our one teacher" (Matthew 23:10). As we will see in Sections 6.4–6.7, Augustine appropriated Plotinus' model of mind with its attendant epistemology, as well as Victorinus' interpretation of Matthew 23:10. When Bonaventure later made Matthew 23:10 the title of his influential sermon on divine illumination, attributing his interpretation to Augustine, he did so without having access to Plotinus or the relevant material of Victorinus.[13]

[10] There is no way to rule out Augustine's knowledge of any portion of the *Enneads* in any part of his writing career and no particular reason to doubt his knowledge of this Plotinian model of mind/epistemology. He tells us that he had read "books of Plotinus" by 386 (*beata v.* 1; *c. acad.* 3.18), the first year in which he wrote anything that is extant. On the general question of Augustine's knowledge of parts of the *Enneads*, see Rist alluding to earlier discussions (1994, 406).

[11] Jerome, *chron.* 321a: Victorinus merited a statue in the Forum of Trajan (year 353), and *vir. ill.* 101, "Victorinus, an African by birth, taught rhetoric in Rome under the emperor Constantius [II], and in extreme old age converted to faith in Christ. He wrote very obscure books 'against Arius' in the mode of philosophical argumentation (*more dialectico*); they cannot be understood except by those who are learned. He also wrote commentaries on the Apostle [Paul]" (my trans.). Compare Augustine, *conf.* 8.2.3–5, 8.5.10; Cassiodorus, *inst.* 2.2.10, 2.3.13, 2.3.18, *exp. Ps.* 7; Boethius, *comm. Porph. Isag.* (both editions) and *comm. Cic. Top.*, *passim*; Alcuin, *adv. Elipandum* 4.9. These authors report that Victorinus also published Latin translations of Plotinus' *Enneads*, Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Aristotle's *Categories* and *On Interpretation*, and commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* and Cicero's *On Invention* (*Rhetorica*) and *Topics*. The attribution of a commentary on the *cat.* has been questioned: see Pierre Hadot (1971, 112; 187); Barnes (2005, 64–5); and the response of Josef Lössl (2012, 103; 109) to Anthony Kenny, (2005, 121–33).

[12] Victorinus wrote Christian metaphysics (the large work *Against Arius* and a few short treatises) and hymns from c. 358. Augustine praises him as someone who "took gold from the Egyptians" – took ideas from the pagans in order to develop Christian thought – in *doct. Chr.* 2.40. He also says that Victorinus made the translation of Plotinus' *Enneads* that he read and describes conversations about him with Simplicianus, who knew him personally (*conf.* 8.2.3–5, 8.5.10).

[13] The Latin translation of Plotinus' *Enneads* made by Victorinus in the fourth century did not survive into the thirteenth. Victorinus wrote in Latin (sprinkled with Greek terms), but owing to the level of difficulty of his metaphysics (so Jerome, note 11) his metaphysical works became divided in the manuscript tradition by the time of Alcuin and subsequently virtually unknown. See Hadot (1954).

Consequently, he misunderstood Augustine. Contemporary historians of philosophy do have access to the *Enneads* and to Victorinus' works, but they have not exploited these to settle the question of Augustinian "divine illumination."

6.2 The Alleged Augustinian Theory of Divine Illumination: Bonaventure and His Followers

The philosophical problem that divine illumination is supposed to resolve, according to Bonaventure in the seminal texts *Christ Our One Teacher* and *Disputed Questions on the Knowledge of Christ*, is "full knowledge," meaning knowledge that is certain and infallible in its mode. This type of case he calls "scientific" knowledge; that is, self-evident truths of math or logic as well as axiomatic truths about physics, metaphysics, or ethical theory.

Bonaventure asserts that divine assistance is required for this kind of knowing. "For certain knowledge, an eternal ground of intelligibility (*ratio aeterna*) is necessarily involved as the normative and moving principle, but certainly not as the sole principle nor in its full clarity; rather, it is contuited by us in part with our created reason" (*ad certitudinalem cognitionem necessario requiritur ratio aeterna ut regulans et ratio motiua non quidem ut sola et in sua omnimoda claritate sed cum ratione creata et ut ex parte a nobis contuita; scientia Chr.* 4c).[14] As Bonaventure's pupil, Matthew of Aquasparta, explains in more detail, to say that God is required as the "moving principle" is to say that God must be active as a special influence (*influentia specialis, lux specialiter influat*) that supplements the human agent intellect, allowing it to see the intelligible aspects of things known by the senses (*de cognitione*, 2c). Supposedly, this special influence is not a grace (*donum infusum*) and does not constitute the knowledge gained as supernatural knowledge,[15] although this alleged distinction between a special intermittent concurrence and grace is unsupported in these accounts.

The proof that Bonaventure offers for his assertion runs as follows:

- Humans are capable of full knowledge, that is, infallible certainty.
- Infallible certainty requires both a completely immutable object and a knower who is entirely infallible (*omnino infallibem*).[16]

[14] Trans. amended from Hayes. All subsequent translations of this text are from Hayes.

[15] That kind of experience he calls "higher illumination," as distinct from ordinary illumination.

[16] *scientia Chr.* 4c: "If full knowledge *requires recourse to* a truth that is fully immutable and stable, and to *a light that is completely infallible*, it is necessary for this sort of knowledge to have

- Only God is entirely infallible.
- Therefore all certain knowledge by humans involves God as a concurrent knower.

The argument above is obviously unsound on the face of it. It contains an invalid move from a discrete act of infallible knowledge to a knower who is by nature infallible. Clearly, it does not follow that if some knowledge is certain and infallible its knower must be generally infallible.

Notice also that, contrary to what is sometimes supposed, Bonaventure's conclusion that God must be active as an efficient cause is not necessitated by the ancient Platonic problem of how the human mind, which is mutable, can "grasp" or "contain" eternally true propositions on the basis of sensory data. There are actually two problems that are sometimes cited here. One, since an effect cannot be greater than its cause, a mutable medium (the mind) and mutable object (e.g. three straws enclosing a right angle) cannot alone account for the immutable truth of an immutably true proposition ($a^2 + b^2 = c^2$). They are not "truth-makers" of this proposition.[17] This first problem does not necessitate God's active involvement in human knowing, however. Indeed, it has nothing essential to do with human knowing as such. It is resolved in other ways: by giving to eternal truths a substantial reality of their own (as Plato did on the penultimate level of his "divided line"), or by placing the propositions inside an eternal mind, or by providing an eternal metaphysical ground for the items which the propositions concern but not the propositions themselves. The second problem concerns the nature of the human mind only. Knowledge requires a similarity between knower and known; the human mind can grasp eternal truths but is not eternal; allegedly, then, an eternal knower (God) must be co-knowing the truths with the human mind. But again, this inference does not work, for Plato's claim is that the knower and known must be naturally alike, not that they must be naturally identical. So this Platonic problem yields only the claim that the human mind is immortal (unending but not unchanging), which is a likeness or participation of the eternal (Plato, *rep.* 9, 585c; *rep.* 10, 611e).

Now, I do not think that Bonaventure makes the mistake of supposing that either of those Platonic problems requires divine assistance in human knowing as its solution. No, his conclusion is driven mainly by the second part of the second premise above – "full knowledge requires an entirely infallible knower" (*scientia Chr.* 4c). Nor do I think that his argument is actually invalid.

recourse to the heavenly art as to light and truth: a light, I say, *which gives infallibility to the knower*, and a truth which gives immutability to the object of knowledge."

[17] So Noone (2014, 371).

The move from the first to the second premise apparently has an implicit supporting premise that makes it valid. Bonaventure evidently thinks that in any act of "full knowledge," we not only know *that* a proposition is eternally true, but we somehow *cognitively experience* it *as* eternally true and therefore infallibly true. This is what it means to grasp that the proposition is the kind of thing that cannot be false, he thinks: the mode of the knowledge that we have is eternal.[18] And so, because humans cannot actually experience eternality *qua* human (being mutable by nature), in such knowledge there must be an infallible knower with whose act of knowing we are joining in.

However, this implicit premise of Bonaventure is suspect. It is not at all clear how this knowledge in an eternal mode could be properly ours and also be ordinary rather than supernatural, given our nature. Indeed, merely knowing *that* such truths are eternally true is exactly what we should expect from a mind that is merely immortal and not eternal. For this is an inferior way of participating in an eternal truth, a way that is appropriate to our mind's natural inferiority. Bonaventure himself even invokes participation in his account, claiming that it is the human soul's status as an "image" of God that makes it able to engage in this kind of knowledge (*scientia Chr.* 4c). So it seems he should grant that human "full knowledge" is merely knowing *that* eternal truths are eternally true, the claim he denies. In the end, although Bonaventure insists that his account is not about supernatural wisdom but about ordinary knowledge, one might think that he has simply mistaken one thing for the other.

Textually, Bonaventure claims to find support for his account in texts such as *Confessions* and *On the Teacher*. Here, Augustine says that we should seek the truth interiorly and find it in the eternal truth, which he identifies as the Word of God, our one teacher (*intus quaereretur et inueniretur in aeterna ueritate, ubi omnes discipulos bonus et solus magister docet, conf.* 11.8.10; cf. *mag.* 11.38). However, the *Confessions* passage distinguishes between the eternal reason or Word itself, which is God's knowledge of the patterns of all natural types and which transcends us, and the "teaching" of this Word, which is in us. It is not self-evident that Augustine wants to say that this internal "teaching" that we experience is the same *kind* of knowledge of truth that God has – that we join in God's own eternal act of knowing whenever we are taught by the inner teacher. So Augustine's words fall short of Bonaventure's claim that we need an eternal *moving*, that is, efficient, cause of our knowledge.

[18] Cullen (2006, 78) speaks of a "mode of certitude," although it is not entirely clear to me whether he has in mind the quality of the experience in knowing, or the second Platonic problem above (which I have argued does not entail an eternal knower) when he says, "the judgments made by the mind possess an absolute necessity and certitude so great that they are truly outside of time – they are eternal" (2006, 80).

On the other hand, the claim that eternal norms (that subsist in God) are required to *ground* the *accuracy* of judgments about intelligible subject-matter (cf. the first part of premise two above), has clear foundations in Augustine's texts. In *On Free Choice* and *On the Trinity*, Augustine mixes talk of illumination or light with the language of eternal "norms" (*lib. arb.* 2.10.29, *trin.* 14.15.21: *regulae incommutables, lumina incommutabilia*; cf. Bonaventure, *regulans*). Obviously, to make a normative judgment, I must have access to the criterion itself, and so Bonaventure rightly concludes that in these kinds of judgments, the eternal norms in the Word of God are themselves objects (*obiecta*) of my knowledge.[19] However, they are poorly known: when making such judgments we know the criteria generally but not properly, determinately, and distinctly, he says (*scientia Chr.* 4ad16). For proper, determinate, distinct knowledge, we require abstraction from sensibles (Aquasparta, *de cognitione* 2c).

Yet just like the Platonic problems mentioned earlier, this genuinely Augustinian point does not necessitate divine activity in our judgments for its solution. Our accurate normative judgments could in principle be accounted for by other philosophical items such as innate ideas or an innate orientation of the mind, if not by Aristotelian abstraction alone.

6.3 What Philosophical Problem Does Augustine Think "Divine Illumination" Solves?

We have seen that Bonaventure's positing of divine activity is an attempt to solve a problem – the alleged problem of how a mutable mind can have an eternal kind of knowledge. We have also noted that this problem is not actually raised by Augustine. In order to clarify what Augustine intends with "divine illumination," therefore, we should ask precisely what he thinks "illumination" is supposed to explain.

It is immediately clear that this problem derives from Plato's *Meno*. Evidently, Augustine possessed a summary or a Latin translation of Plato's *Meno* that is no longer extant.[20] For he not only refers to Plato but paraphrases

[19] God "cooperates as an object (*obiectum*) and as a motivating cause" (*sermo* 33.17); the eternal norms are "contuited by us [along with sensory data] in part, as is fitting in this life" (*scientia Chr.* 4c); the higher part of the human mind bears the image of God, and being an "image" differs from having a "vestige" of God in that images "know God" (ibid.). Cullen (2006, 85) denies that God or the eternal types are objects of knowledge in Bonaventure's theory of illumination; but by this he apparently means that they are not known to humans as they are known by God ("ontologism").

[20] We know that Apuleius (fl. c. 150, repeatedly cited by Augustine) translated the *Phaedo* (see Sidonius Apollinaris [mid-fifth c.], *Letters* 2.9.5); possibly he translated the *Meno* as well.

parts of his text that are not reproduced in Cicero, Plotinus, or other extant Latin authors (see *sol.* 2.20.34;[21] *mag.* 12.40;[22] *lib. arb.* 2.8.22–2.10.29, 2.15.40;[23] *trin.* 12.15.24[24]).[25]

The puzzle in the *Meno* is how people can correctly use universals such as *virtue*, also known as "[practical] wisdom" (*sapientia*),[26] even though they have not received instruction in what the content of these concepts is and cannot articulate the criteria governing such classes of items.[27] For instance, they can rule out incorrect definitions of "virtue" as being overly narrow or broad,[28] which shows that they know it to some degree or in some sense.[29] Yet they fail to provide a correct definition themselves (*Meno* 72e–74a, 74b–75c, 78c–80c).

Augustine also mentions that he possessed a compendium of philosophy by Cornelius Celsus (25 BCE–50 CE) (*sol.* 1.12.21) and Varro's (first c. BCE) *de philosophia* (*civ.* 19.1). None of these texts is extant.

[21] Someone can reject incorrect suggestions as wrong but cannot give an account of the right answer; compare *Meno* 72e–74a, 74b–75c, 78c–80c.

[22] "When I'm stating truths, I don't even teach the person who is looking upon these truths . . . if he were questioned, he could give answers even about these matters. What is more absurd than thinking that he's taught by my speaking, when even before I spoke he could explain these very matters were he questioned?" (trans. Williams). Compare *Meno* 85d–e, "If he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone's . . . he will perform in the same way about all geometry, and all other knowledge" (trans. Grube).

[23] "if I look for one in material objects and know that I have not found it, I must surely know what I was looking for and what I did not find there" (*lib. arb.* 2.8.22); compare *sol.* 2.20.34; *conf.* 10.18.27; *lib. arb.* 2.8.22, 2.15.40. Compare *Meno* 80d–e.

[24] "This is why that noble philosopher Plato tried to persuade us that the souls of men had lived here even before they wore these bodies, and therefore learning things is more a remembering of things already known than a getting to know new things. He told the story of some boy asked goodness knows what questions about geometry and answering as if he were most learned in that science. He was of course interrogated step by step very skillfully, and so he saw what was to be seen and said what he saw" (trans. Hill). Compare *Meno* 81b–85b, 85e–86b.

[25] Cicero, *Tusc.* 1.24.57–58 says merely that in the *Meno* Socrates asks a slave geometry questions in reference to a square and concludes from his ability to answer them that learning is recollecting (*discere nihil aliud sit nisi recordari*) what one has learned in a previous life. Plotinus does not explicitly discuss the problem posed by Plato despite speaking of "recollection."

[26] *Pace* Noone (2014, 370), Augustine's inclusion of (moral) *wisdom* alongside *unit* in *lib. arb.* 2.8.22–2.10.29, 2.15.40 is not his own addition. In Plato's dialogue, virtue is also called "wisdom" (*Meno* 88c–89a).

[27] The literal formulation of the problem in the *Meno*, which Augustine paraphrases repeatedly (see note 23), is that one cannot search either for what one knows or what one does not know (80d–e). That is, one cannot search for a definition of a concept without having a prior notion of that concept's content; but if one already knows the content of the concept, one need not search for it.

[28] Noted by Augustine, *sol.* 2.20.34.

[29] They have a "true opinion" about it, *per* Plato (*Meno* 85c, 86b).

Augustine adds what he takes to be another instance of the same problem: we naturally recognize intelligible characteristics of the extramental world, even though the empirical data alone do not suffice for teaching these to us.[30] Sensation – visible drawings in the dirt, in *Meno* – does not provide us with the universal notion *unit* (*unum*), since all things sensed are constituted from extended corporeal matter, which is divisible (*lib. arb.* 2.8.22–2.10.29, 2.15.40; cf. *vera rel.* 30.55–31.57). Nevertheless, the slave in the story, who has no instruction in mathematics, correctly uses the concept *unit*, as when he understands commands such as, "Double the area of this square" (*lib. arb.* 2.8.22). So for Augustine, the problem of how intelligible concepts are *occasioned by but not entirely caused by sensation*[31] is a version of the problem of how humans can show familiarity with intelligible subject-matter that they have not explicitly been "taught" in the sense of having been simply provided with it. Augustine also mentions intellectual judgments such as 7+3=10 and "Everyone should be given what is rightly his (i.e., treated with justice)" (*lib. arb.* 2.8.21, 2.10.28, cf. 1.13.27–1.15.31). Presumably his point here is that the conceptual activities implied by these are also spontaneous, given the right occasions (questions from an interlocutor or sensible examples). We naturally learn to count (recognize that groups of individual items are combinations of units), to see that statements about such combinations are either correct or incorrect descriptions of such groupings, and thence to realize that combining units as such is possible (arithmetic) and has correct answers (cf. *lib. arb.* 2.8.21–3). *Mutatis mutandis* for our natural concept of practical wisdom or virtue, and our natural recognition of the truth of the proposition that fairness ought to be observed. We recognize moral goodness in individual brave or generous actions, even though no one of these acts exhausts or fully contains the content of moral goodness; and we can, without instruction in ethics, make some true moral judgments about such act-types and reject false ones. From there we can begin to engage in ethical theory.

This Augustinian understanding of the *Meno* problem is clearly the context for the motifs of "illumination" and "inner teaching" in *On Free*

[30] Compare *conf.* 10.10.17, *recognoscere*.

[31] Some recent discussions of Augustine's theory of knowledge or "illumination" have missed this nuance, presenting Augustine as if he is simply committed to a dichotomy between things perceived by the senses alone versus things perceived by the mind alone (and sometimes taking the latter to mean understood without any intellectual representation at all). But *On Free Choice*'s discussion of *unit* and *wisdom* clearly concerns the relation between sensation and intellection, that is, the fact that we routinely know intelligibilities "partly through the sense of the body, but partly through the reason of the rational soul" (as he says in *trin.* 13.1.4).

Choice (388–391/5[32]) (*lib. arb.* 2.8.22–2.10.29, 2.15.40), *On the Teacher* (389) (*mag.* 11.38–12.40),[33] and the *Confessions* (396/7–401). In the latter text, the motifs are accompanied by the explicit claim that we have natural (unacquired) "memory" (*conf.* 10.8.15–10.19, 10.18.27–19.28, 10.25.36–27.38). Although *On the Trinity* 12.15.23–4 (399–419), referred to with approval in *Retractations* 1.4 (426–7), is sometimes taken to be a rejection of the claim that Plato had put his finger on an important epistemological problem, in fact it is not. Here Augustine again poses the same problem, and he again asserts that we ought to draw a conclusion from the evidence that generates the problem, namely that we see truths in an incorporeal light.[34]

So Augustine's understanding of the philosophical problem that "illumination" is meant to resolve is: How can humans *naturally* – without instruction – form concepts and make judgments that *accurately* correspond to the world?[35] Obviously, this problem has two components, neither of which is a mode of eternality in the act of knowing itself.[36]

Of course, this epistemological problem and whatever inference is made from it about the mind's constitution should not be confused with the *etiology*

[32] Augustine says that he wrote book 1 of *lib. arb.* in Rome in 388 and books 2–3 in Africa when he had become a presbyter (*retr.* 1.9), which was in 391 but lasted until 395 when he became a bishop. My citations from *lib. arb.* are from books 1–2.

[33] Following Burnyeat (1987), there has been discussion of what kind of knowledge Augustine seeks to explain in *mag.* and the nature of his claims about language. The former of these questions is more germane to this chapter than the latter; on this question, my account in Section 6.3 is most comparable to Nawar (2015, 8–10).

[34] *trin.* 12.15.24, "He [Plato] told the story of some boy asked goodness knows what questions about geometry and answering as if he were most learned in that science. He was of course interrogated step by step very skillfully, and so he saw what was to be seen and said what he saw . . . The conclusion we should rather draw is that the nature of the intellectual mind has been so established . . . and so it sees such truths in a kind of non-bodily light that is *sui generis*, just as our eyes of flesh see all these things that lie around us in this bodily light, a light they were created to be receptive of and to match." The twofold issue is clear here: the unlearned character of the knowledge is mentioned at the outset and correspondence to the world at the end. Compare *retr.* 1.4, still acknowledging the philosophical problem: "even those who are not proficient in them give true answers with regard to certain disciplines when they are asked in the right way."

[35] Augustine's use of a correspondence theory and his general commitment to realism are evident from early on. For example, in *c. acad.* (386) he does not challenge the Stoic definition of knowledge as consisting in a cataleptic impression, and in *ep.* 7.2.3–4 (dated 388–91) he repeatedly states that what it means for a mental representation or proposition to be false is that it fails to correspond to extramental reality. In *c. acad.*, he also argues that the senses do not deceive us in cases of sensory illusions, since they are accurately reporting intervening causes (it is instead rash judgment by the mind that is the source of mistakes).

[36] Though Augustine does say that eternal truth as such is higher than our minds (*lib. arb.* 2.6.14, 2.12.34, 2.15.39), this assertion is part of a proof for the existence of God. It does not concern the nature of our knowledge and hence does not imply a need for divine efficient causality.

proposed by Plato in *Meno*, which is reincarnation. This etiology is self-defeating given the proposed theory about the mind's constitution, since it effectively reduces the *innate* content of the mind to *acquired* content learned from a human teacher in a past life; and that leads to an infinite regress. Furthermore, the *Meno*'s etiology fails to explain how natural intellectual concept-formation and accurate intellectual judgments are a universal human trait and how they are specifically human traits.[37] It also entails that we should have inherited sense-memories, which we do not, as Augustine points out.[38] But these critiques do not bear upon the reality of the epistemological problem and what it may imply about the mind's native character.

It is indeed odd that Bonaventure does not focus on the problem with which Augustine is actually engaged. Possibly he, like Étienne Gilson much later, was led astray by the fact that Augustine says in his *Retractations* (426–7) that he dislikes the formulation he used the first time he broached the problem of the *Meno*, in the *Soliloquies* (386–7).[39] Augustine says it gives the impression that he then believed incorrectly, with Plato, that we acquired intellectual knowledge prior to our current embodied life and then forgot it (*retr.* 1.4; *sol.* 2.2.34–5). If so, Bonaventure should have paid closer attention to the fact that Augustine's critique here is directed to the *etiology* offered by Plato. Augustine does not assert that Plato's problem was a pseudoproblem, nor does he rule out that the human mind is naturally constituted with some kind of innate mental content.

6.4 "Illumination" Is a "Participation" by the "Inner Human"

We have seen that Augustine believes that we can infer an "illumination" of the mind from the spontaneity and accuracy of some of our concept-formation

[37] Unlike Plato's *Phaedrus* (249b, e), which stipulates that all human souls have contemplated the Forms before embodiment (implying that their native true opinions are due to that, rather than to piecemeal instruction by a human teacher or teachers in a previous incarnation).

[38] *trin.* 12.15.24; compare *trin.* 14.15.21.

[39] Gilson (1960, 83) misses the point of Augustine's presentation in *trin.* 12.15.24. He ignores Augustine's serious treatment of the *Meno* problem here and in *mag.*, *lib. arb.*, and *conf.*, thereby avoiding Augustine's sustained interest in the problem, and he takes *trin.* 12.15.24 to be indiscriminately about innatism, which is an insufficiently analytical reading. It is clear from how Augustine introduces the problem in *trin.* 12.15.23–4, as well as his language of "subjoined," that he is not rejecting innatism as such. He is arguing only against reincarnation. Presumably, Gilson took this approach because *retr.* 1.4 cites *trin.* 12.15.24 when criticizing *sol.* 2.20.35. But at *retr.* 1.4, Augustine's stated concern is just his use of the word "oblivion" in *sol.* 2.20.35, because that word suggests learning-acquisition and subsequent total forgetting (at reembodiment). See further Section 6.7.

and intellectual judgments. In this and the following section we will learn that this "illumination" means natural "participation." That is true not only of *On the Trinity* 12, where Augustine explicitly speaks of the human mind seeing intellectual truth in incorporeal light owing to its place in the "natural order,"[40] but also in his earlier works (388–401), where, in what sounds like a bizarre account of knowledge, he claims that we "listen to the inner teacher" in our "inner human" whenever we know truths "in the eternal light."

The first step is to notice that in the early texts he interchanges the use of the terms "illumination" and natural "participation," by employing the phrase "inner human" as a kind of middle term linking the two. It is the "inner human" that is illuminated; put otherwise, it is the "inner human" that participates. He tells us that it is the "inner human" that is illuminated in *On the Teacher* (written 389):

> When we deal with things that we perceive by the mind, namely by the intellect and reason, we're speaking of things that we look upon immediately in the inner light of truth, in virtue of which the so-called *inner human is illuminated* (*homo interior illustratur*), and rejoices.
>
> (*mag.* 12.40, emphasis added, trans. King)[41]

The *On Free Choice* (388–95) also connects "illumination" and "inner human," virtually if not literally.[42] Then in the *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions* (388–96), while laying out a hierarchy of nature, Augustine tells us that the "inner human" "participates in wisdom":

> What partakes of wisdom is also alive and exists, whereas what is alive must also exist but need not possess wisdom. Hence, since the human being *participates in wisdom according to the inner human*, he is to such a degree according to the image [of God] that no nature may be placed between them, and so there is nothing that is more united to God.
>
> (*div. q.* 51.2, trans. Ramsey, amended, emphasis added)[43]

[40] "The conclusion we should rather draw [from the slave's ability to answer questions] is that the nature of the intellectual mind has been so established by the disposition of its creator that it is subjoined to intelligible things in the order of nature, and so it sees such truths in a kind of non-bodily light that is *sui generis*, just as our eyes of flesh see all these things that lie around us in this bodily light, a light they were created to be receptive of and to match." (*trin.* 12.15.23–4, trans. Hill; cf. "the light of eternal reason is present to" us, *retr.* 1.4.).

[41] All subsequent translations from *mag.* are from King, sometimes amended.

[42] Augustine says that there is "inner" light (*lux interior/mentis, intus lux*) and that to reflect upon it we should "return within ourselves" (*in te ipsum redeas*) (*lib. arb.* 2.10.29, 2.12.34, 2.16.41).

[43] Subsequent translations of *div. q.* are from Ramsey.

The notion of "participation" that Augustine is working with here is the classic one presented by Plato in the *Phaedo* (78b–e, 100b–e), which he evidently knew in the translation made by Apuleius.[44] This is clear from his explanation of participation earlier in the text.[45] However, when Augustine says that we by nature "participate in wisdom" or "possess wisdom," this is not from the *Phaedo*, unlike the other examples Augustine gives there.

"Participation in wisdom," along with Augustine's statement at the end of this *Eighty-Three Diverse Questions* passage that there is nothing between us and God, signals that Augustine is employing Plotinus' claim that the human higher mind is "an image" (*hē eikōn*) "according to" the Divine Mind or Wisdom (*kata Noun/Sophian*), as distinct from being the Divine Mind itself (*ou Nous hēmeis*, *enn.* 5.3.3; cf. *enn.* 5.1.3 *ad fin*).[46] Christian Neoplatonists had utilized Plotinus' account, amending his theory of three unequal hypostases – of which Divine Mind or Wisdom is the second[47] – in service of explicating the biblical claim that the human being is "according to the image of God" (Genesis 1:26).[48] So when Augustine asserts that we by nature "participate in wisdom according to

[44] See note 20.

[45] "Everything chaste is chaste by reason of chastity, everything eternal by reason of eternity, everything beautiful by reason of beauty, everything good by reason of goodness; therefore also everything wise by reason of wisdom and everything like by reason of likeness . . . those things which, on account of their participation, are chaste or eternal or beautiful or good or wise admit, as it is said, of being able to be not chaste or eternal or beautiful or good or wise. But chastity, eternity, beauty, goodness and wisdom in no way admit of either decay or, as I might say, temporality or wickedness or malice. Those things that are alike on account of participation admit of unlikeness. But likeness itself can in no way be unlike in any regard" (*div. q.* 23, trans. Ramsey, amended). Compare *div. q.* 24, 46.

[46] Compare *enn.* 5.3.4 ("If, then, it were to say that it comes from Intellect [a.k.a. Divine Mind] and is second after Intellect and an image (*eikōn*) of Intellect, having in itself in a way all its writings, since the one who writes and has written is in the intelligible world"), 5.3.8, 5.3.9 (translations of Plotinus are from Gerson et al. [2018], unless otherwise noted).

[47] For Victorinus appropriating the names and some of the attributes of Plotinus' first two divine principles to the first two hypostases or persons of the Christian Trinity, see, for example, *adv. Ar.* (hereafter *AA*) 4.21, "first God, next the λόγος or νοῦς or whatever is different, or the One and the Other," 1B.49, "Before all the true beings [= Forms in *Nous*] was the One (*unum*), or the Singularity (*unalitas*), or the One in Itself (*ipsum unum*)," compare *AA* 4.24, 1B.48, 1B.54–6, 1B.60–3, 3.1, 3.7. Note that not only does Victorinus use the Plotinian term *Nous* for the biblical *Logos* (John 1:1–3) and "Son" (John 1:18), but Plotinus uses the term "Father" for the One and "Son" for Divine Mind and Divine Soul, *enn.* 5.8.12–13, *enn.* 6.8.14l. 38. Translations of Marius Victorinus in this chapter are from Clark (1981), often amended.

[48] Plotinus and the Christians (Origen, Ambrose, and Marius Victorinus were Augustine's chief proximate sources for this material) agree that the second divine hypostasis (the Divine Mind or Wisdom or Word or Son) is an image or likeness of the first (the One or the Good or the Father) (cf. Colossians 1:15). In other words, the human is an image of the Divine Image. At the same time, the Christians that Augustine takes as normative guides disagree with Plotinus' claim (and that of other late Platonists) that the second divine principle is

the inner human," he is asserting that "according to the inner human" we naturally participate in the Mind of God. This implies that "illumination," which is also in the "inner human," is this same natural participation.

But in order to make this conclusion more firm, we need a clear interpretation of the middle term, the strange-sounding moniker "inner human" (*homo interior*). The phrase is biblical (Ephesians 3:16, *ho esō anthrōpos*; cf. Romans 7:22, 2 Corinthians 4:16), but it also occurs in Plato's allegory of the human soul as comprised of a human, a lion, and a many-headed beast in *Republic* 9 (589a7, *ho entos anthrōpos*), which was taken up by Plotinus.[49] Origen and Marius Victorinus use the ultimately Platonic model to gloss the Pauline phrase.[50] Ambrose says more perfunctorily that the inner human is what was made according to the image and likeness of God (*ep.* 69.19); but he also says repeatedly that the image of God in us is our reason. Given this terminology in Augustine's sources, there is no reason to think that Augustine means anything other than the mind itself when he says "inner human." This conclusion is reinforced by the association of the words "mind," "reason," and "inner human" in his "divine illumination" texts (*mag.* 11.38–12.40; *lib. arb.* 2.16.41–2). Since "inner human" is thus a way of talking about the natural constitution of the human soul, we have another reason for thinking that "illumination" describes this constitution, namely the fact that it naturally "participates" in God's Mind, as its "image."

This thesis receives confirmation from Plotinus' use of the term "illumination" (*epilampsis* and cognates). Out of all of Augustine's sources, only Plotinus makes "illumination" *thematic* to his account of minds, just as Augustine does. But Plotinus' "illumination" is simply a poetic synonym for Platonic "participation" (*metalambanein*). Intelligibility is "light," and therefore all form enmattered in the world is a trace of light (*enn.* 1.6.5, 2.9.2–3, 3.8.5, 4.8.4, 4.4.18, 6.7.22, 6.7.31). The second divine hypostasis, Divine Mind, which contains the transcendent Forms, "is the first light shining primarily for itself," while the human rational soul is "illuminated" in the sense that it is naturally an image or likeness of it:

> And this light shone in the soul and illuminated it, that is, made it intellectual (*noeran*); that is, it made it to be a likeness of itself by means of the upper light.
> (*enn.* 5.3.8; cf. 5.3.3–4, *passim*)

inferior to the first. So they qualify the Plotinian formulation: the second is "like the first *in all respects*" or "substantially," thereby ruling out a *mere* similarity.

[49] The rational, spirited, and appetitive parts of the soul respectively. Plotinus, *enn.* 5.1.10, "I mean exactly what Plato means by 'the inner human' (*ton eisō anthrōpon*)."

[50] Origen, *prin.* 4.4.9; *in Gen.* 1.15; *in Iesu Nave* 9.9; *in Lev.* 14.3. Victorinus, *AA* 1B.63.

In relation to the thirteenth century, then, we can say that Aquinas, and not Bonaventure, hit upon the correct interpretation of Augustine's language of "illumination:" it means a natural participation in the eternal wisdom.[51] This is somewhat remarkable, since Aquinas did not have access to Plotinus. The reason for Aquinas' success was that he made *On the Trinity* 12, which implies that "illumination" is just the native constitution of the human mind,[52] the hermeneutical rule for reading *On the Teacher* and the *Confessions*, texts that on the surface can sound more like references to some kind of divine indwelling or aid. This method was risky, to say the least, since in principle Augustine could have changed his mind about "illumination" between these earlier texts and his later *On the Trinity* 12. But Aquinas happened to get lucky.

6.5 The Teacher

More difficult to square with this "natural participation" interpretation, it might seem, are Augustine's allusions to an "inner teacher" that must be "listened to," and his identification of this teacher as truth, also called Christ or the Lord.[53] However, in these same passages Augustine identifies Christ or the Lord as the unchanging Wisdom or Word, which signals that he likely has in mind the Christian *Logos* as understood by his Christian Neoplatonic sources (i.e., as comparable to Plotinian *Nous/Sophia*). The most relevant author here is Marius Victorinus, who speaks of Christ as the divine teacher. Recall that Victorinus was a Christian Neoplatonist whose translation of Plotinus' *Enneads* Augustine read, and who wrote metaphysical treatises to which Augustine also alludes in his work *On Christian Teaching*.[54] He is

[51] ST I–II 91.2c with 93.2. [52] See note 34.

[53] "Regarding each of the things we understand, however, we do not consult a speaker who makes sounds outside us, but the Truth that presides within, over the mind itself . . . he who is consulted, he who is said to dwell in the inner human, does teach: Christ, that is, the unchangeable power and everlasting wisdom of God, which every rational soul does consult" (*mag.* 11.38); "everything which begins to be and ceases to be begins and ends its existence at the point when it is known that it is right for it to begin and end, in the eternal reason where nothing begins or ends. This reason is your Word, which is also the Beginning in that it also speaks to us . . . it should be believed and sought inwardly, found in the eternal truth where the Teacher who alone is good teaches all his students. There, Lord, I hear your voice speaking to me, for one who teaches us speaks to us . . . Who is our teacher except the stable truth? Even when we are instructed by some mutable creature, we are led to reliable truth when we are learning truly by standing still and listening to him" (*conf.* 11.8.10; trans. Chadwick amended).

[54] See notes 11, 12. Given the high regard in which Augustine's mentors Simplicianus of Rome and Ambrose of Milan held Victorinus, there is no particular reason to doubt that Augustine was familiar with Victorinus' hymns (quoted below, p. 144) as well as his treatises.

another figure whose relevant works were unknown to thirteenth-century philosophers such as Bonaventure, unfortunately.[55]

Rather than conceiving of divine teaching as divine assistance, Victorinus says the teacher is responsible for the *natural constitution* of the human mind. He asserts that Christ is the teacher of all human souls, which is a riff on the Gospel of Matthew 23:10 – "you have but one teacher, Christ" – and is the same verse that Bonaventure later used as the title of his famous sermon on divine illumination. But according to Victorinus, this line from Matthew refers not to special divine aid in knowing, but to *the act of creation*, when God the eternal Son (outside of time, prior to the incarnation) infused "laws of wisdom" into souls:

> *Christ* is therefore the universal act: act when he proceeds [from the Father] as Son;
> He is act as life *by which all things* proceed and *are created.*
> The same Christ becomes teacher and master (*doctor et magister*) [by] ...
> Leading all to their end, infusing laws of wisdom in souls sown through the ages ... Christ is Wisdom. (Hymn 1, emphasis added)

It is obvious that Victorinus is indebted to Plotinus for his way of understanding this "teaching."[56]

The particular evidence that this Victorine gloss on Matthew is the basis of Augustine's understanding of "Christ the inner teacher" is twofold. First, Augustine begins his *On the Teacher* with a reprise of Victorinus' understanding of the "inner human." He quotes 1 Corinthians 3:16[57] and then Ephesians 3:16–17,[58] omitting from the latter the reference to faith, and he asserts that they are both about human reason (*mag.* 1.2). This is a recapitulation of Victorinus' aggressively naturalistic interpretation of these same biblical verses, which takes them to be about philosophical anthropology.[59] Second,

On Augustine's general use of Victorinus, see Sarah Byers (2022; 2020, 154–74, 169–70); Alexey Fokin (2017); Lewis Ayres (2010, 26–33, 135, 293–6); Nello Cipriani (1994; 2002); Pierre Hadot (1962, 409–42).

[55] See note 13.

[56] We have already noted that he understands the *Logos* in accord with Plotinus' *Nous* (see note 47). In another hymn he calls the eternal Word "the Illuminator," repeating Plotinus' description of the Divine Mind (Hymn 3 l. 67; cf. *AA* 1A.4 and 4.33 glossing John 1:9). And Plotinus himself had already claimed that we have "laws like writings in our minds" derived from the Divine Mind or Wisdom (*nomoi hoion grammata, enn.* 5.3.4).

[57] "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

[58] "Christ dwells in the inner man by faith."

[59] *AA* 1B.61–3. Victorinus omits Paul's "by faith" from his citation of Ephesians 3:16–17 and subordinates the phrase "Christ dwells" to 1 Corinthians 3:16, which asks, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" He takes this "spirit of God dwelling within" as a reference to the human reason or mind (genitive of

Augustine's earlier works that concern "divine illumination" contain synonyms for the "laws of wisdom poured into" the soul (*scita sophiae inrigata*) which Victorinus says constitute Christ's "teaching" us at creation, namely the "laws of wisdom imparted to" our minds (*leges sapientiae mentibus nostris inditae*, *lib. arb.* 2.10.29; *mag.* 8.24, *mentibus nostris indita ipsa lex rationis*; cf. "impressed notions," *lib. arb.* 2.9.26, *sapientiae notionem in mente habemus inpressam*, and 2.15.40).

So, thanks to Victorinus, who is obscure today but was well known in Augustine's intellectual circle, we can finally arrive at a correct interpretation of "the teacher" in Augustine's eponymous text. Despite how the text looks at first, Augustine's claim that we know intelligible truth "with God disclosing it" is a reference to the continuous ontological relation that obtains between our mind and God.[60] It is not an assertion that God is an agent in our acts of knowing.

Augustine plays with this model a bit by putting Victorinus' account of the "teacher" together with Plotinus' metaphor of "listening to reason" (*mag.* 11.38; *conf.* 11.8.10). Plotinus says we are listening to reason when we form an intellectual concept, and he compares intellectual concentration to "hearing voices from on high" (*enn.* 3.6.2, 5.1.12). However, both of these descriptions of "listening" are metaphors and have nothing to do with actual divine or daimonic interventions, as Plotinus himself makes clear enough.[61]

We are therefore fully justified in concluding – unlike Aquinas, whose deflationary interpretation of the "one teacher" language also turns out to be

origin), in accord with earlier Christian exegesis that used Plato, *Timaeus* 90a, where the human mind or reason is called a "spirit" (*daimōn*). Victorinus unites this reading of Ephesians and Corinthians with the descriptor "created according to the image of God" from Genesis 1:26.

[60] *mag.* 12.40, *docetur ... deo intus pandente*; compare *panditur*, 11.46. The context here is whether things can be taught to us by others, that is, by their words (cf. *Meno*, whether virtue/wisdom can be taught). King (1995) translates "he is taught not by my words but by the things themselves made manifest within *when* God *discloses* them" and "is disclosed." The ablative absolute (*deo pandente*) can in principle designate time when something is done, but the Victorine-Plotinian context clarifies that this is actually a clause of accompanying circumstance and that the indicative verb *panditur* is a present progressive. So the sense is "with God making accessible or disclosing" and "is being made accessible or disclosed." Compare God "dwelling" in the *memoria*, *conf.* 10.25.26. On what this implies for epistemology and metaphysics, see Sections 6.4–7.

[61] Plotinus is cleverly giving a nod to *Apology* 31c–d when he speaks of "interiorly listening to a voice," but he explains it in the anthropological terms used by Plato in *Timaeus* 90a. There, Plato calls human reason itself a "*daimōn*" because it has a divine origin. And Plotinus explicitly tells us that his talk of inner listening is merely allegorical: it is *as if* someone were hearing a voice from on high (*enn.* 5.1.12).

right[62] – that Augustine's "divine illumination" by an "inner teacher" is nothing other than the natural constitution of the human mind.

6.6 Epistemology: An Aristotelian-Platonic Synthesis

Having established what Augustinian "illumination" does *not* imply about how humans know, we now turn to the more interesting question of what his doctrine of the "participating mind" does tell us about his epistemology. In relation to the secondary debate about "formalism," "innatism," or "ontologism" mentioned in Section 6.1, we can show that Augustine's epistemology is a modification of Plato's claim about the constitution of the human mind in the *Meno* by means of Aristotle's distinction between the active and potential intellect. We know this because (a) under the rubric of "illumination" or "image" of the "inner human," Plotinus lays out such a theory, and (b) Augustine is recognizably committed to this theory from 389 onward. This section is devoted to (a), while the next establishes (b).

Plotinus accepts the basic structure of the mind posited by Aristotle in *On the Soul*, because he thinks the arguments supporting it are sound. However, he thinks that Aristotle's account of the agent intellect is incomplete by his own standards. Consequently, Plotinus supplements Aristotle's account of the agent intellect by recourse to the *Meno* and *Theaetetus*.[63] His account runs as follows.

Plotinus is committed to Aristotelian abstraction, and he endorses the philosophical reasoning supporting the theory. He says that reason "extracts the form" (*exelein tēn morphēn*) from the representation (*phantasia*) gleaned from sensory perception (*enn.* 5.3.3, ll. 1–6; cf. Aristotle, *an.* 3.7–8). Abstraction is needed because sense data can only occasion, not explain, the presence of intelligibles in our cognition. If it could, even nonrational animals would engage in moral reasoning about the deliberate human actions they witnessed, for example; but they do not (see *enn.* 5.1.10–11 and 5.3.3, with reference to the "inner human"). Intelligible content can in principle be abstracted from sensory cognition, because form is immanent in material items as a vestige of the transcendent Forms subsisting in the Divine Mind (*enn.* 5.9.5, ll. 17–19).

Unsurprisingly, therefore, Plotinus also adopts Aristotle's distinction between the intellect as agent[64] and as potential: "the reason of the soul . . .

[62] *ver.* 11.10bj/ad15.

[63] Plotinus' Platonic material evidently comes from the second account of knowledge in Plato's *Theaetetus* (esp. 191a–199d) in addition to the *Meno*'s emphasis on the fact that our formation of at least some accurate concepts and judgments is natural, that is, untaught.

[64] In Aristotle, *nous poiētikos*.

which preserves its activity (*energeia*) in purity in order that it may be able to engage in reasoning (*logizesthai*)" (*enn.* 5.1.10, ll. 13–16);[65] "one part of mind is that which engages in reasoning (*ho logizomenos*) and one part is that which is ready for reasoning (*ho logizesthai parechōn*)" (*enn.* 5.1.10)[66] (cf. Aristotle, *an.* 3.4–5).[67] Once again, he endorses the Aristotelian supporting argument. Since our mind enters into occurrent activity from potentiality (*ek dunameōs eis energeian*, 4.3.6) and such activation requires something already in actuality,[68] we must have intellect always in actuality – agent intellect. "And if [our] soul sometimes engages in reasoning about these things[69] and sometimes does not, there must be in us [agent] intellect" (*enn.* 5.1.11).

Now, however, there is a problem. If the agent intellect has no prior idea of what it is looking for in the morass of per se unintelligible sensory data, then there will be no way to support the distinction between a *mere association* of similar things experienced through sense, and an *understanding* of common properties (universals) within sensorily different items. What is it about our minds that makes us naturally discount the sensory differences in individual things (differences of size, color, location, etc.) and zero in on the allegedly more pertinent way(s) that these items are intelligibly the same (both instances of "unit," both instances of "existing thing," and so on)? Surely this "experience of pertinence" requires that we already "know" in some way *what counts* as intelligibility (*enn.* 4.7.12, ll. 8–11, 5.3.2–3). So we need to posit the natural possession of intellectual criteria to explain our spontaneous experience of the *salience* or *relevance* of things' extrasensory features.

Notice that this difficulty not only looks like Augustine's iteration of the *Meno* problem and the problem that Matthew of Aquasparta mentions in defense of Bonaventure in the thirteenth century,[70] but is also suggested by Aristotle's own claim that intellection is analogous to physical sight, except that it is incorporeal. For a complete account of sight is not simply that I always actually have an eye. It is that my eye is constituted in such a way as to be receptive of light, as Aristotle himself points out (*sens.* 2, 438a–b). It is

[65] Trans. Armstrong, amended. [66] Trans. Gerson et al., amended.

[67] Note that the terms *to logizomenon* and *ho nous logizomenos* can refer to either the agent or the potential intellect in Plotinus. This is because in Plato's *Republic*, the mind (which is not divided into two, as in Aristotle) is called *to logistikon* (see, e.g., *enn.* 5.1.10, l. 10).

[68] For this principle from Aristotle, see *enn.* 5.9.4, ll. 4–6; as applied to the Divine Mind, *enn.* 5.9.5, ll. 1–4.

[69] "These things": namely (in this example), the nature of the right and the good, and whether some particular case meets the criteria, *enn.* 5.1.11, ll. 1–3.

[70] Matthew charges that Aristotle's account of sensory abstraction is incomplete because the forms enmattered in things in the world are *not sufficient* for making themselves known to our intellect (*de cognitione* 2c).

principally because my eye has cones, as we now know. Because of this constitution, a representation comes to be on my retina when I encounter diaphanous air and visible objects. In the parallel case of intellection, we want to know what it is about the constitution of the agent intellect that makes it able to "pick up" or "read" the intelligible features of the world. How is the activity of abstraction, *qua* abstraction, possible? To merely say that the agent intellect is in actuality per se does not answer this question.[71]

The closest that Aristotle comes to answering this question is his assertion that the agent intellect's constitution is like the principles of art in relation to the raw material used in artwork, and that it is a state or habit (*hexis*) like light, which makes things visible (*an.* 3.5). Both of these comparisons sound like the agent intellect naturally possesses the objective content of intelligible principles or concepts; for *hexis* comes from *echein*, "to have." Yet Aristotle also says that forms exist only in the potential intellect (*an.* 3.4, 429a28–9). Since the objective contents of concepts are forms, this means that he denies that there are actual concepts in the agent intellect, and since principles are propositions composed of concepts it also follows that there cannot be principles in the agent intellect. So the question of constitution ultimately remains unanswered by Aristotle.

Plotinus' solution is to cash out Aristotle's metaphor of "light" as our minds' natural possession of "traces" (*ta ichnē*) which are a "preservation" (*sōzein*) of the transcendent Forms (*ta prōta*) that subsist in the Divine Mind (*enn.* 5.1.10, 5.3.9). He argues that the natural possession of these is a necessary condition of our agent intellect abstracting intelligibility from sensory data.[72]

[71] Obviously, the argument that we must have an agent intellect – that part of our mind is always in actuality as intelligent, for otherwise we would not always be able to form representations (concepts) in our potential intellect – is a sound argument. But it does not answer the question of why the agent intellect is able to perform the particular kind of activity that is abstraction.

[72] *enn.* 5.1.11, "Since, then, there is soul that engages in discursive reasoning about just and beautiful things, that is, reasoning that seeks to know if this is just or if this is beautiful, it is necessary that there exists permanently something that is just, from which the reasoning in the soul arises. How else could it engage in reasoning? And if soul sometimes engages in reasoning about these things and sometimes does not, there must be in us [agent] intellect that does not engage in discursive reasoning, but always possesses [an image/trace of] Justice, and there must be also the principle of [our] intellect and its cause and its god [i.e., the God who is Mind [*Nous*], the second God/divine hypostasis]." Compare *enn.* 5.3.3, where after asserting that abstraction follows sensation, he adds, "and if it [the reasoning power] says whether he [the person encountered and sensed] is good, it says this based on what it has become cognizant of through sense-perception, but what it says about this it has already from itself, since it has a norm of the good in itself (*kanona echousa tou agathou par'autē*). How does it have the good in itself? Because it is like the good, and is strengthened for the perception of this kind of thing by Intellect illuminating it: for this is the pure part of the soul

His terms "illumination," "participation," and "image" refer to this constitution or native character of our agent intellect (*enn.* 5.3.3). He is explicit that what it means to say that the human mind is an image (*hē eikōn*) of the Divine Mind, is that it possesses (*echōn*) "something of the light" of the Divine "Light" or Mind, that is, of its ideas (*noēta*), the Forms (*enn.* 5.3.9, 5.1.10).

Here we can see that Plotinus is not an "ontologist" or a "formalist," and so to the extent that Augustine follows him, Augustine will not be either. Ontologism is ruled out by Plotinus' insistence that what we are in contact with during ordinary intellectual cognition is content that is a mere "trace"[73] or participation, rather than the transcendent Forms themselves, and that the human mind is an image and is not the Divine Mind itself (it should be emphasized, therefore, that Plotinus' account of the agent intellect is *not* the same as Alexander of Aphrodisias').[74] As for "formalism," this is out of alignment with the Plotinian model in two ways. Gilson, its most influential proponent, had in mind a priori rules by which to unify concepts,[75] but

and it receives the traces of Intellect that have been impressed upon it" (trans. Gerson et al., amended, consulting Armstrong).

[73] On the term/concept of "trace" in Plotinus, see also Noble (2013).

[74] The translation in the volume edited by Gerson, like Armstrong's in the Loeb series, presents Plotinus as if he agrees with Alexander on this point by capitalizing *nous* where it is referring to the human mind (*nous en hēmin*) in *enn.* 5.1.11, l. 6. It is true that taken on its own this passage could be interpreted to either agree or disagree with Alexander. However, taken together with 5.1.10 and 5.1.3, it is clear that Plotinus means to distinguish human *nous*, which has its own agent intellect, from *Nous*. He says repeatedly that this mind is "in us" (*par'hēmin*, *en hēmin*), in addition to existing in a transcendent way in the divine realm (as Divine Mind and Divine Soul) (*enn.* 5.1.10–11), because we "participate" (*metalabontes*) in Divine Mind (*enn.* 5.3.4). It follows that although Plotinus says that our mind (*nous*) "remains in the intelligible," he means this not univocally with the way that the Divine Mind (*Nous*) does, but in the sense that it "has something" (*nous echōn ti*) from it. The notion that Plotinus was generally influenced by Alexander (rather than simply engaged with and sometimes correcting him), was largely discredited in the literature in the 1960s; see summary in Schroeder (1984), 240–2. For a case of Plotinus engaging with but not entirely agreeing with Alexander (light and vision), see Gurtler (2015, 97–100).

[75] Presumably these are along the lines of Kant's categories of the understanding, though Gilson never explicitly alludes to Kant; see Gilson (1960, 86–9), for example, "what our intellect sees in the light of illumination and by its own light is the truth of its own judgments, not the content of its ideas ... In order to understand Augustine's mind correctly, we must concentrate our attention on this formal element of necessity, because it seems to be precisely at this point that divine illumination comes into play ... This judgment of truth based on rules at once incorruptible and inviolable ... with the necessary truth of the judgment, divine illumination had to intervene ... It would appear that Augustine regards the concept only as the subject of the apodictic judgments to which it gives foundation and that the chief function of divine illumination is precisely the explanation of this aspect of the concept." Unlike Kant, Gilson's Augustine held that these were infused, not naturally constitutive of the mind. Though Gilson was influential, his interpretation of Augustine was not universally accepted in the twentieth century; see Section 6.1.

Plotinus' theory is not fundamentally an attempt to account for the character of certain kinds of propositions. Instead he is endeavoring to explain a natural correspondence between the mind and the world, as he took the *Meno* and the second theory of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* to be attempting. Second, Plotinus' "traces in the mind" comprise not only "laws" (cf. Gilson's "rules") that when articulated are propositions or injunctions, but also the objective content of the universals used in simple apprehension. The latter point is clear from Plotinus' claim that our minds possess natural traces of "norms" (*kanones*); this is a Platonic term for the transcendent Forms, each of which is a singular divine idea (*enn.* 5.3.3–4).

However, epistemologically and metaphysically our naturally possessed intellectual content has a subtle status. Plotinus agrees with Aristotle that we do not have actual concepts in our agent intellect: these traces are not innate actual intellectual representations (ideas). In the language of the Aristotelian schema used by Plotinus, our agent intellect is naturally in *first actuality* (active potentiality) of knowledge of this content, not second actuality (see *enn.* 4.4.3, l. 10, 4.4.5).

Crucially, therefore, Plotinus is generally an empiricist about how we form concepts. We do not natively have them in our awareness (*antilēpsis*), and we cannot generate concepts in our awareness from the mind alone. Ordinary human intellectual cognition requires that the "traces" in the agent intellect pass to second actuality via use of the senses. Plotinus is explicit:

> Even though the soul is always moved to intelligent activity, it is when it comes to be in the representational power (*phantastikon*) that we apprehend it. The intellectual act is one thing and the apprehension (*antilēpsis*) of it another, and we are always intellectually active but do not always apprehend our activity; *and this is because that which receives it does not only receive acts of the intelligence, but also, on its other side, sensory perceptions* (*aisthēseis*).
> (*enn.* 4.3.30, trans. Armstrong, emphasis added; cf. 4.8.8, 1.4.9–10, 5.1.12)

> All human beings from the beginning, as soon as they are born, use sense-perception prior to intellect, and necessarily encounter sensibles first.
> (*enn.* 5.9.1, trans. Gerson et al., amended, consulting Armstrong)

This is why Plotinus riddlingly describes the innate mental content as "ours and not ours": we possess it by nature, but it is not naturally immediately accessible to "us," if "we" refers to our actual awareness (*enn.* 5.1.12;[76] cf. 3.6.2, 4.3.29).

[76] "Not everything which is in the soul is immediately perceptible, but it reaches us when it enters into perception; but when a particular active power does not give a share in its activity

I said "generally" at the outset of the previous paragraph because there are two exceptions to this empirical requirement in Plotinus' account of knowledge. One is the mind's accurate conception of its own nature, which is not generated from a representation of anything external (*enn.* 5.3.3, ll. 18–19). The second is a very rare occurrence: contemplation of a transcendent Form that subsists in the Divine Mind (*enn.* 5.1.6, 5.8.1, 5.8.4, 5.8.9). This "ontologist" kind of contact with the Forms requires extraordinary moral purification and divine assistance and is attainable only by advanced philosophers. Obviously, this is not ordinary human knowledge.

Lastly, it is important to note that although Plotinus sometimes calls the potential intellect's coming into activity in the processes of abstraction and evaluation a "remembering" of intelligibles (*enn.* 4.6.3; cf. 4.3.25, 4.8.4, 5.3.8), he does not mean that it is a recalling of information acquired in a previous incarnate life. He does not rely on the etiology of the *Meno* for explaining the human trait of intellectual cognition.[77]

6.7 Augustine's Unwavering Adoption of This Model of Mind, c. 389–430

Now that we know that Augustinian "illumination" comes from Plotinus and know the epistemology entailed by the Plotinian model, we can recognize Augustine's use of this same epistemology. We can see that Augustine is not an "ontologist," nor a "formalist," nor an "innatist" (as this term is commonly understood), but an "imagist." He espouses the Plotinian account of the agent intellect as an "image" containing unactualized traces of the content in the Divine Mind, from at least the year 389 onward.

There is a change in Augustine's presentation at the outset of his writing career.[78] The shift is from a Platonic to a Plotinian description of "recollection," and it occurs after the *Soliloquies* (386–7) and before the *On the Teacher* (389) and *On Free Choice* book 2 (from 391 onward).

to the perceiving power (*aisthanomenon*), that activity has not yet pervaded the whole soul. We do not therefore yet know it, since '*we*' are linked to the perceptive power and are not a part of soul but the whole soul. And further, each soul-part, since it is always living, always exercises its own activity by itself; but the discovery of it comes when sharing with the perceptive power and conscious awareness (*antilēpsis*) takes place" (trans. Armstrong, amended).

[77] See Section 6.8.

[78] It will be observed that this change is not a change from "recollection" to "rejection of recollection," as is sometimes claimed following Gilson (see note 39), e.g. Nawar (2019, 253); King (2014, 148).

In the *Soliloquies*, Augustine said that the human mind is constituted in complete forgetfulness at birth (*oblivio valdissima*, *sol.* 2.20.35). Soon after, however, he decided that the more accurate characterization was that our minds are in an intermediate state of semiunknowing: that of not having in mind intelligibles, but also not being completely ignorant of them.[79] It is a condition in which the mind can move itself (*se movere*) to knowledge (*mus.* 6.12.25, dated 386–91). This in-between and self-actualizing state of mind is recognizable as Plotinus' agent intellect in natural first actuality or active potentiality.[80] Augustine's reason for moving away from the *Soliloquies* presentation was that it implied the etiology offered by Plato in the *Meno*, as we have seen (*retr.* 1.4).[81] His shift in presentation regarding the constitution of the mind itself is clear by *On the Teacher* (389) and *On Free Choice* (book 2, 391 onward), when he uses technical terms from Plotinus and Victorinus: he alludes to "illumination," "listening" in our minds to the "teacher," and "norms," "lights," "laws," and "rational principles" that we possess as "notions."[82] Next, in the *Confessions* (396/7–401), he again says clearly that through sense perception we "recognize" (*recognoscere*) intelligible features of the world and the truth of true propositions stated by other people, which shows that "they were already there [in me] before I had

[79] He was already aware of these three possibilities in *Soliloquies*: (1) complete ignorance (*oblivio validissima*), (2) an intermediate state of not actually knowing but not being completely ignorant of something (*oblivio media*), (3) and actual calling to mind or having in mind (*recordatio*) (*sol.* 2.20.34). He even identified (2) as the category relevant to the *Meno*: someone in this state can reject incorrect suggestions as wrong, but cannot give an account of the right answer (ibid.). Yet he nonetheless claimed that when we are born our souls are in unqualified forgetfulness.

[80] Aristotle stipulated that a first actuality or active potentiality actualizes itself when in the presence of an occasioning cause, *an.* 2.4, 416a13–14; compare 2.7, 419a7–b3.

[81] It is not clear that Augustine ever countenanced reincarnation; for his complaint in the *Retractations* is simply that his language in *Soliloquies* sounds like that. Similarly, he says of the *Magnitude of the Soul* (387–8) that his words there should not be interpreted to mean that he actually held preexistence of the soul, since they can be interpreted instead to mean that the mind is naturally connected to the Divine Mind (*retr.* 1.8). Augustine did, however, c. 388–9 countenance preexistence of *disembodied* souls in the manner described by Plotinus (which was based on Plato's *Phaedrus*), as is clear in *ep.* 7.1.2–7.2.3. This letter was written after Augustine returned to Thagaste from Rome (see *ep.* 5), which took place sometime in 388–9 (*retr.* 1.7–10, 1.12) – evidently shortly thereafter, but certainly before the spring of 391 (*ep.* 21).

[82] Augustine's term *regulae* is a translation of Plotinus' *hoi kanones*; for Plotinus this is a synonym for the Forms, the archetypes of things (*enn.* 5.3.4), also called "light" or "lights." See *regulae et lumina sapientiae* (*lib. arb.* 2.10.28–9; *trin.* 14.15.21), which are *above* our minds, of which we have "notions" of wisdom stamped *in* us (*lib. arb.* 2.9.26, *sapientiae notionem in mente habemus inpressam*; cf. 2.15.40). Augustine's terms *rationes* and *leges* in *conf.* 10.12.19 are also technical terms from Plotinus (*logoi* and *nomoi*); on these, see Section 6.8. For "illumination" and "listening" to "the teacher," see Sections 6.4–6.5.

learned them, but were not in my [acquired] memory" (*conf.* 10.10.17). We do mentally contain these intelligibles, but we actually think (*cogitare*) with them when we are prompted empirically.[83]

The provocation for Augustine's fuller appropriation of Plotinus' epistemology after the *Soliloquies*, it seems likely, was his (ongoing) reading of Marius Victorinus in the early period of his writing career. Marius very briefly alludes to Plotinus' epistemology in an approving manner,[84] which could have been taken by Augustine as an endorsement by a reliable Christian authority.[85]

It would be a mistake to think that the mere absence of the terms "memory" and "inner teacher" from *On the Trinity* 12.15.23–4 signifies that Augustine later moved away from the Plotinian-Victorine model of mind that we saw in Sections 6.3–6.6. First, his assertion in this text that we see truths "in a kind of non-bodily light" shows continuity with the earlier works, since the motif of illumination, which is a reference to Plotinian *epilampsis*, is in all of these texts. Second, he says here and elsewhere in book 12 of *On the Trinity* that our intellect is naturally constituted as "subjoined" to intelligible things. This is another technical Plotinian expression.[86] As Plotinus explains clearly, "subjoined" is another way of saying "image of the Divine Mind'" and "naturally illuminated by the Divine Mind," and

[83] "They were already in the [natural] 'memory,' but so remote and pushed into the background, as if in most secret caverns, that unless they were dug out by someone drawing attention to them, perhaps I could not have thought of them" (*conf.* 10.10.17).

[84] "But all these latter [kinds of things] are in the nature of intellectual souls, not yet having understanding but disposed for understanding. For when the *nous* has been aroused in the soul, it illuminates the intellectual potentiality of the soul, enlightens it, giving it face and form, and there is born to the soul knowledge and perfection" (*gen. div. Verbi* 7). Although Plotinus is not mentioned by name, this is recognizable as Plotinus' account. In accord with Plotinus' equation of light with form, and his account of reality as consisting of levels in which light shines down from higher to lower levels successively, the idea here is that the human agent intellect is ontologically illuminated by the Divine Mind, and the human potential intellect is illuminated in cognition because the image/traces in the agent intellect cause concepts (forms) to come about in the potential intellect.

[85] This thesis is perhaps the more credible given that Augustine stayed in Rome for some time in 388, where Simplicianus resided. Simplicianus, whom Augustine had befriended in Milan two years earlier, was a personal friend and admirer of Victorinus. Presumably their intellectual friendship continued and included discussions of Victorinus as well as secular (Neo)Platonism. Augustine was in Rome long enough to write *Two Books on the Catholic Way of Life and the Manichean Way of Life*, *On the Magnitude of the Soul*, and book 1 of *On Free Choice*. He was back living in Africa by the time he wrote *On the Teacher* (sometime in 389). See *retr.* 1.7–10, 1.12.

[86] *subiungitur* or *subiuncta mens* (*trin.* 12.2.2, 12.15.23–4) is a translation of *exērtētai nous* (*enn.* 5.3.9, cf. *anērtēmetha*, *enn.* 5.1.11).

these descriptors indicate that the human mind naturally possesses traces of the Forms that subsist there (*enn.* 5.3.9). This "being subjoined," Augustine explains, is what makes possible our natural concept-formation and spontaneous accurate judgments about intelligible subject-matter.[87] So "subjoined" in *On the Trinity* 12 shows that Augustine is still utilizing Plotinus's model of mind as the solution to the *Meno* problem. There are instances in the earlier books of *On the Trinity* where he also cites the problem and gives what is recognizably the same Plotinian account.[88]

A similar point can be made about the continuity of the epistemology in Augustine's early works with the later *On the Trinity*. Augustine's distinction between the higher and lower parts of the mind in the later work clearly corresponds to Plotinus' adaptation of the Aristotelian agent intellect and potential intellect; but he is already using this distinction in the *Confessions*.[89] Again, Augustine knows the term *phantasia* in its Aristotelian sense,[90] namely the representation at the terminus of an act of sensation; and he invokes it in his accounts of sensory cognition from early on (*sol.* 2.20.34–5; *ep.* 7.2.4; *mus.* 6.11.32, 6.13.39; *conf.* 3.6.10, 9.10.25; *Gn. litt.* 4.6–7, 10.24, 12.15), right through book 11 of *On the Trinity*.[91] Abstraction as Augustine knew it from Plotinus is recognizably present, though sometimes implied. In *On the Trinity*, he refers to (Plotinian) abstraction as the "rational use" of the sensory *phantasiai*, and a mode of cognition by which we know intelligibilities "partly through the sense of the body, but partly through the reason of the rational soul" (*trin.* 13.1.4). But much earlier, he already identifies the problem that illumination is supposed to answer as that of the relation between sensation and intellection, as we saw in Section 6.3.[92] Likewise, when *On the Teacher*,

[87] *trin.* 12.2.2, "it pertains to the higher reason to make judgments on these bodily things according to non-bodily and everlasting rational principles (*rationes*); and unless these were above the human mind they would certainly not be unchanging, and unless something of ours were subjoined (*subiungeretur*) to them we would not be able to make judgments according to them about bodily things. But we do make judgments on bodily things in virtue of the rational principles of dimensions and figures" (trans. Hill, amended; cf. Plotinus, *enn.* 5.1.11, 5.3.3).

[88] *trin.* 10.1.2–10.2.4, 10.4.6–10.5.7.

[89] His *mens qua cogitatur* (*trin.* 14) is a Latin equivalent of *ho nous logizomenos*, by which Plotinus refers to the Aristotelian potential intellect. Compare *conf.* 10.10.17–12.19.

[90] This should not be confused with the Stoic sense, also found in Augustine, especially in his action theory. On this, see Byers (2013, 14–15, 24–39).

[91] There have been a few attempts recently to paint Augustine as a kind of modern representationalist – someone who thinks that the content of our sensory representations is partly constituted by the action of our own minds. These have been ably refuted by Nawar (2020).

[92] Some recent discussions of Augustine's theory of knowledge of intelligibles have missed this nuance, presenting Augustine as if he is committed to a simple dichotomy between things perceived by the senses alone versus things perceived by the mind alone, taking the latter to

On Free Choice, and *Confessions* claim that truth "presides over our minds" but is simultaneously "in the inner human,"[93] this is clearly just another way of saying that our minds are "subjoined" to or "imaging" the intelligible truth or light (as in *On the Trinity* 12).

Given this thorough and consistent appropriation of Plotinus' model of mind and epistemology, we can conclude that Augustine is not an "ontologist" or "formalist." The kind of knowledge that "ontologism" posits does occur, according to Augustine, but it is not ordinary knowledge. It is a relatively rare contemplative and so-called mystical experience of a transcendent Form, brought about by grace, as in Plotinus.[94] "Formalism" was the interpretation of Augustine penned by Gilson, but he was evidently led astray by the morphological similarity between Augustine's Latin *regula* and the French *règle*. Augustine's term is actually a translation of Plotinus' *kanōn*, and a *kanōn* is not a rule.

It is likewise clear that Augustine is not an "innatist" (as this is usually understood), but an "imagist." His position with regard to natural mental content is qualified in the way that it is for Plotinus. Our possessed notions of "norms" and "laws" are not fully actual intellectual representations (concepts, ideas), and we do not generate such representations from the mind alone, except in the case of the mind's self-reflection.[95] We possess traces of the divine ideas even without thinking of them (*conf.* 10.11.17; *trin.* 14.15.21), but we come to active understanding of what we possess in this natural "memory" through external stimuli or signs (*conf.* 10.10.17 *ad fin*; cf. *mag.* 11.38–12.40).[96]

To say more about what our innate mental content is like is impossible, of course, since it is by definition phenomenologically unavailable to us. We can infer *that* we possess it, if we reflect upon the fact that we do in fact successfully abstract, that is, recognize intelligibility in particular individuals. But we are unaware of it as such.

mean understood without any intellectual representation (concept) occasioned by sensory data. This is at variance with his statements in a number of places.

[93] *mag.* 11.38; *conf.* 10.25.36–27.38; *lib. arb.* 2.2.4, 2.10.29, 2.14.38.

[94] For explication and analysis, see Byers (2020).

[95] An exception that Augustine also learned from Plotinus; see Section 6.6 *ad fin* and *trin.* 10.9.12, 10.10.16.

[96] Note that *ep.* 7.2.5 is logically compatible with this. Augustine says that we knew intelligible disciplines such as geometry without sensory images before embodiment, but that after embodiment it is impossible to think about them without *phantasiai* originating in sensation. The implication is that in our embodied life, it is through sensation (only) that we initially cognize ("remember") intelligibles.

6.8 The Explanatory Power of "Illumination"

Despite this limitation on what we can say about the furniture of our minds, we can make a further observation about the explanatory power of Augustinian-Plotinian illuminationism as an account of abstraction. This has not been pointed out in foregoing discussions of this topic, although it is highly important.

The best way to come at this is to ask *why* Augustine holds that both kinds of content are naturally possessed by us – individual notions and complex axioms or laws. The short answer is that in Plotinus' metaphysics of minds, what Divine Soul (*Psuchē*) knows in second actuality is what the human soul naturally knows in first actuality (as a possession). And the kinds of things that Divine Soul knows are individualized notions and complex laws.

The more complete answer requires that we advert to the reason for this content-identity, and to Divine Soul's relation to Divine Mind, in Plotinus' account. The human soul is "an image of the Divine Mind" because Divine Soul is the image of the Divine Mind in Plotinus' tritheistic hierarchy (*enn.* 5.1.3, 5.1.7, 5.3.4), and the human soul existed with Divine Soul prior to its falling into the body (*enn.* 4.3.15, 4.4.3, 4.8.1, 4.8.4, 5.1.1). When it fell, its knowledge degraded to a first actuality (active potentiality).[97] While Augustine either rejected or was ultimately noncommittal about all of these cosmological-metaphysical theses,[98] he did consistently adopt the specifically Plotinian understanding of the claim that the human mind is an "image," as we saw in Sections 6.4–6.7.

Very well, what does Divine Soul know, and why? Divine Soul knows *the Forms as applicable to space-time particulars.* It is an eternal mind knowing all the diverse ways that the Form of a horse, for example, can be instantiated in particular matter. This is because it is the intermediary between the Divine Mind and the world of particular things, which it makes. Plotinus calls these mental items the "eternal rational forming principles" (*logoi aidioi, enn.* 2.3.16–18, 3.5.9, 5.7.1, 5.7.3, 5.9.3). They are distinct from the Forms (*hai*

[97] This account combines elements of the *Phaedrus* myth (246a–250c) with *Timaeus* 89e–90c. Generally speaking, the human soul loses its perfect identity with Divine Soul by committing the moral error of audacity, wanting to rule its own body rather than remain above in contemplation of the Forms in the Divine Mind, though in some rare cases, wise souls may be sent down through no fault of their own, to serve a prophetic or leadership role.

[98] Rejecting any claim of a hierarchy between the divine hypostases from the beginning of his writing career onward, for example, *beata v.* 4 (dated 386); *mus.* 6.17.59 (dated 388/390); denying early on that the human soul should be identified with the third divine hypostasis (the Holy Spirit, in Augustine's Christianized Plotinianism) (*div. q.* 51.4); noncommittal about whether the human soul preexists its body by 391 (*lib. arb.* 3.20.56–21.59; *trin.* 14.15.21).

ideai, ta eidea/eidē, ta onta, or *ta prōta*) in the Divine Mind. Augustine's term, *rationes aeternae,* is a translation of Plotinus' name for these items, and it should not be translated "eternal reasons," as it so often is. Of course, Divine Soul also knows the cosmos-to-be-made *as an ordered whole,* and not as a heap of unrelated items (Plotinus, *enn.* 2.3.16–18; cf. Augustine, *lib. arb.* 3.11.32–4). Its cognizance of how the *logoi* can interact with and affect one another is called the "law(s)" (*nomos*) of the whole. Hence, Plotinus says that Divine Soul is "like the legislator" of the natural world (*enn.* 2.9.15, 3.2.4, 3.2.8, 4.3.15, 4.4.39).

It follows that each human soul both "possesses all the rational forming principles (*logoi*) of all individual living things" and "has something like laws written" in the mind (*enn.* 5.7.1, 5.3.4 respectively). This is the precise meaning of Augustine's claims that we have "implanted" "notions" and "laws."

The explanatory power of this epistemological account is obvious. It entails that what we naturally mentally possess is uniquely suited to recognizing and abstracting intelligibility from the sensory data we take in from the world of particulars. For it provides an account of why we have a knack specifically for *connecting universals with particular instantiations.* It explains why the intelligible features *of material things* are salient to us. It also accounts for our innate knack for *recognizing coherence and validity* when thinking. For it means that we possess latent appreciation of how intelligible features of reality can be related to one another.

No doubt it will be objected here that Augustine does not have a right to this explanatory power, since he has rejected the cosmological-metaphysical basis that this has in Plotinus. If Augustine denies that the human mind is the same in nature as the Divine Soul, which he does, then he cannot retain the epistemological benefits that follow from it being so. But of course, this is not true. The only assertions he needs to affirm from Plotinus are that the human mind is a participation of the Divine Mind by natural constitution, and that this means it has the kind of content that Plotinus situates in the Divine Soul (as a possession and not in act). He can then change out the Plotinian metaphysical cosmology for a simple assertion that God has created each soul with this kind of mental content. This is, no doubt, the full significance of his assertion in *On the Trinity* 12 that "the nature of the intellectual mind has been established as subjoined to intelligible things *by its creator.*"

6.9 Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter, I used scare quotes around the entire phrase "divine illumination theory of knowledge." It should be clear by now why

I have done so. Although Augustine certainly has a theory of "divine illumination," it is not a theory about our acts of knowing, as Bonaventure and Gilson supposed. Rather, it is a theory about the human mind as a metaphysical participation. This theory does entail specific epistemological claims, however, namely those of the synthetic Aristotelian-Platonic model of mind as "image" presented by Plotinus. Augustine endorsed this model from at least 389 onward, after briefly describing the human mind's constitution in a way that sounded more straightforwardly Platonic in the *Soliloquies* (366–7).

We have also seen that the Plotinian-Augustinian model is important in its own right, because of its special explanatory power with regard to abstraction. It provides an account of why we have a knack specifically for recognizing universals in particular instantiations, and for recognizing coherence and validity.

Last but not least, we have observed that although Augustine's vocabulary and theses came from Plotinus and Marius Victorinus, he did not passively parrot these authors. Rather, he considered Plato's claims in the *Meno* on their own terms, thinking through the epistemological problem as well as the difficulties implied by Plato's proposed etiology. He took ownership of the alternative and more sophisticated Plotinian theory about the constitution of our minds. He then critically evaluated Plotinus' account itself, rejecting cosmological-metaphysical claims that were extraneous to solving the epistemological problem.[99]

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