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CLEAR AND DISTINCT PERCEPTION IN THE STOICS,
AUGUSTINE, AND WILLIAM OF OCKHAM

There is a long history of philosophers granting a privileged epistemic status to cognition of directly present objects. In this paper, I examine three important historic accounts which provide different models of this cognitive state and its connection with its objects: that of the Stoics, who are corporealists and think that ordinary perception may have an epistemically privileged status, but who seem to struggle to accommodate non-perceptual cognizance; that of Augustine, who thinks that incorporeal objects are directly present to us in ‘intellectual perception’, and that, by way of contrast, ordinary sense-perception does *not* have a privileged epistemic status; and that of William of Ockham, who allows for unmediated action at a distance and is fairly generous about what counts as being directly present.

I

Introduction. There is a long history of philosophers attributing a privileged epistemic status to cognitive states seemingly caused by directly present objects. In this paper, I examine three such epistemic accounts prior to the better-known discussions of Descartes, namely, those of the Stoics, Augustine, and William of Ockham. Although these accounts are rarely, if ever, considered together, there are important historical connections between them and they provide three distinct and historically important models of the relevant cognitive state and its connection with its objects.

I first (§II) examine the Stoics, who hold an important place in the history of epistemology and are significantly responsible for developing a particular ‘criterial’ kind of epistemology which explicitly addresses concerns about warrant and epistemic praise and blame in a manner which arguably finds relatively little explicit precedent in earlier philosophers. The Stoics maintain that knowledge or apprehension (*κατάληψις*) occurs when one gives one’s assent to a ‘kataleptic impression’, that is, an epistemically privileged thought

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which is caused by what it represents, grasps what it represents in a special way, and serves as a ‘criterion of truth’ (Diogenes Laertius 7.46; Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 7.227; Nawar 2014).¹ It is often thought that Stoic kataleptic impressions are primarily and perhaps exclusively perceptual impressions, but in her rich and stimulating paper Katja Vogt (2022) argues that the Stoic response to the sorites paradox gives us reason to reject such a view. She suggests that non-perceptual kataleptic impressions, which may have an ‘indirect’ causal connection with what they represent, had an important place in Stoic epistemology. Such a picture is attractive in some respects, but I argue that the Stoics cannot easily accommodate non-perceptual kataleptic impressions.

I then examine Augustine (§III). Although he is often overlooked, Augustine also has an important place in the history of epistemology (notably for giving unprecedented attention to testimony and doxastic norms, responding to scepticism, and developing influential accounts of perception and intellection). Augustine, I suggest, offers an alternative model for thinking about the relevant kind(s) of epistemically privileged cognition. He thinks the direct presence of the object of cognition is necessary for, or at least highly conducive to, cognition being epistemically privileged in the relevant way, but does *not* think that the objects of sense-perception are directly present to perceivers and seems to largely agree with the Academic sceptics on the deficiencies of ordinary sense-perception. Instead, he offers an account wherein intellectual perception infallibly grasps directly present incorporeal objects.

Finally, I examine William of Ockham’s account of intuitive cognition (§IV). Ockham takes intuitive cognition to be a basic *de re* cognitive state naturally caused by directly present individuals and thinks it is required for much propositional knowledge of contingent truths. However, unlike Augustine (and many other medieval thinkers), Ockham accepts that there is unmediated action at a distance and is willing to countenance that the objects of sense-perception are in fact directly present to perceivers. Such an account, I suggest, is able to give a fairly unified explanation of various

¹ The Stoics distinguish between *κατάληψις* (typically rendered as ‘knowledge’, ‘apprehension’ or ‘cognition’) and a rare epistemic state, *ἐπιστήμη* (often rendered as ‘scientific knowledge’, but also sometimes as ‘knowledge’), which is described as *secure* and *unshakeable κατάληψις* and a system of *κατάληψεις* (for example, Cicero, *Academica* 1.41; Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 7.151; Stobaeus *Eclogae* 2.73.16–74.3 = LS 41H). (‘LS’ indicates Long and Sedley 1987.)

apparently different kinds of cognition, including ordinary perception and intellectual self-knowledge, but does leave open certain important questions about why the relevant cognitive states should be regarded as epistemically privileged.

II

Stoics and Sceptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions. Sextus Empiricus discusses a dispute between the Stoics and the Academics concerning what kind of impressions are trustworthy or warranted (*πιστάς*) (*Adversus Mathematicos* 7.401; cf. Cicero, *Academica* 1.40–1). The Stoics claim that kataleptic impressions satisfy this description.

For a kataleptic impression—to start with this—is one which [i] arises from what is/obtains; and [ii] is stamped and impressed in accordance with precisely that which is/obtains; and [iii] is of such a kind as could not arise from what is not/does not obtain. (Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 7.402)²

Precisely how [i], [ii], and [iii] should be interpreted is controversial (for detailed discussion, see [Nawar 2014](#)), but they seem to stipulate the conditions which are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for an impression to be kataleptic. As the Stoics describe things, kataleptic impressions are clear or evident (*ἐναργής*), distinct (*ἔκτυπος*), and striking in the manner they (typically) command assent (for example, Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 7.257–8, 405; Diogenes Laertius 7.46).³ A paradigmatic kataleptic impression is seemingly the kind of impression produced by something which is immediately and directly present to ourselves, such as occurs in perception in ideal conditions. Thus, for instance, one’s kataleptic impression of Socrates will typically (but not always, see [Nawar 2014](#)) immediately lead one to judge, for instance, that this is Socrates (on the content of kataleptic impressions, see [Nawar 2017](#), pp. 128–9).

Sextus goes on to note that Carneades, an Academic sceptic, was unhappy with [iii] ‘for impressions come about from what is not as

² I have attempted to offer a ‘neutral’ translation. For parallel passages and some alternative translations, see [Nawar \(2014, pp. 2, 5\)](#). Other translations consulted include [Bett \(2005\)](#); [Brittain \(2006\)](#).

³ I take it that, for the Stoics, clarity is a feature which is accessible, at least upon reflection. However, there are also externalist readings. For discussion, and a defence of an internalist reading, see [Nawar \(2014\)](#).

well as from what is' (γίνονται γὰρ καὶ ἀπὸ μὴ ὑπαρχόντων φαντασίαι ὡς ἀπὸ ὑπαρχόντων, *Adversus Mathematicos* 7.402) and impressions which arise from what is not are (or can be) indiscernible from—that is, just as clear and striking (ἐναργεῖς καὶ πληκτικᾶς) as—those which arise from what is (*Adversus Mathematicos* 7.403–7; cf. 7.154–5, 164, 252).⁴

Moreover, and this seems to be an attack on [ii], the sceptics suggest that the impressions the Stoics regard as kataleptic do not allow one to tell apart highly similar distinct individuals such as twins (*Adversus Mathematicos* 7.408–11) and identify them as the precise individuals they are (Nawar 2017; Shogry 2021). After a brief digression on the epistemic shortcomings of vision and an appeal to conflicting appearances (*Adversus Mathematicos* 7.411–14; cf. Nawar forthcoming), it is again argued—this time by appealing to sorites cases—that there is no sharp distinction between putative kataleptic and non-kataleptic impressions (*Adversus Mathematicos* 7.415–23). As Sextus describes things, if α does *not* serve as a criterion of truth (that is, a suitable means of telling whether something is true), and yet there are circumstances in which one cannot tell α apart from β (that is, β is 'attached to' α), then β cannot serve as a criterion of truth either (*Adversus Mathematicos* 7.415).⁵ Since kataleptic impressions cannot be told apart from non-kataleptic impressions—or so the sceptic argues (Cicero, *Academica* 2.34)—it follows that kataleptic impressions cannot serve as the criterion of truth.

Moreover, Sextus continues (*Adversus Mathematicos* 7.416–17), if the Stoics were consistent they would end up suspending judgement and being sceptics. This is because Chrysippus suggests that, when confronted with a sorites sequence, one should 'keep quiet'—that is, refrain from assenting—at a certain point, seemingly a little bit before one comes to cases which are not clear (cf. Cicero, *Academica* 2.93–4). That is to say, when confronted with a sorites

⁴ The Academics object that hallucinations and illusions prompt exactly the same kind of behaviour as those impressions which the Stoics regard as kataleptic. This, the sceptic suggests, indicates that those impressions which the Stoics regard as kataleptic and those they regard as non-kataleptic are intrinsically and functionally indiscernible. Accordingly, or so the argument seems to go, there is no reason to suppose that they differ fundamentally in kind.

⁵ The argument is structurally similar to some modern soritical 'anti-luminosity' arguments (for example, Williamson 2000, pp. 96–109), but it is not immediately clear precisely what assumptions are being relied upon concerning the nature of the criterion. (For more general discussion of criterial matters, see Striker 1974 and Nawar 2014).

sequence which involves examining whether some items a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n are F (for instance, whether given numbers in a series of natural numbers are ‘few’, Cicero, *Academica* 2.93), Chrysippus seems to suggest that one should refrain from assenting that the relevant item is F not only in cases where it is not clear that the relevant item is F but also in some cases where it is clear that the relevant item is F (or at least it would be clear that the relevant item is F if one were not considering it as a part of the relevant sorites sequence). Why? Presumably because epistemic prudence dictates that avoiding error is to be prioritized over maximizing the truths one cognizes and one cannot mark a sharp distinction between those cases where it is clear that the relevant item is F and those cases where it is not clear that the relevant item is F .⁶ The same reasoning, the sceptic suggests, will lead to universal suspension of assent.

So much, then, for context. Now, Vogt (2022) considers four claims, which she articulates as follows and wishes to reject:

Simple Sensory Premiss: Only sensory impressions are candidates for being kataleptic.

Paradigmatic Sensory Premiss: Sensory impressions are paradigmatic candidates for being kataleptic.

Causal Sensory Premiss: Kataleptic impressions must be sensory because only sensory impressions involve causal dimensions that the Stoics ascribe to kataleptic impressions.

Discernibility Sensory Premiss: Kataleptic impressions are discernible, and discernibility is a feature of sensory impressions.

At least the first three claims find significant support in existing scholarship (for example, Striker 1974; Frede 1983; cf. Nawar 2014). Against Simple Sensory Premiss, Vogt adverts to the fact that the Stoics recognize that some knowledge is attained by means of reason (for example, Diogenes Laertius 7.52). She takes the existence of rational knowledge to indicate the existence of non-perceptual knowledge, and non-perceptual knowledge to indicate the existence of non-perceptual kataleptic impressions.

Against Simple Sensory Premiss, Paradigmatic Sensory Premiss, and Discernibility Sensory Premiss, Vogt adverts to the discussion of the sorites sequence of impressions which includes the kataleptic impression that, for instance, fifty is few (see above, Sextus Empiricus,

⁶ On whether Chrysippus is best construed as holding an epistemicist account of vagueness or not, see Williamson (1994, pp. 15–22) and Bobzien (2002, pp. 228–37).

Adversus Mathematicos 7.418–20). This seems to be a non-perceptual impression, and yet is spoken of as a kataleptic impression or potential kataleptic impression.

Against Causal Sensory Premiss, Vogt suggests that even if kataleptic impressions need to be caused by what they represent, this does not entail that all kataleptic impressions are perceptual. She suggests that non-perceptual kataleptic impressions have incorporeal impressors and are also suitably caused, albeit perhaps indirectly caused, by what they represent.⁷ Thus a non-perceptual impression that three is few may be caused by the fact that three is few.

I think that Vogt effectively challenges several claims which discussions of Stoic epistemology have often taken for granted. However, while the Stoics do seemingly need some account of non-perceptual cognition, I think that the Stoics take kataleptic impressions to be epistemically privileged precisely because they are ‘straightforwardly’ caused by directly present objects, and that non-perceptual cognition is best explained through some other means. Moreover, there are at least three reasons why it is hard to see how non-perceptual kataleptic impressions can be accommodated within Stoic epistemology.

First, a significant part of our textual evidence suggests that kataleptic impressions are at least paradigmatically perceptual and, for at least some Stoics, perhaps exclusively perceptual. Even if we put aside evidence that Chrysippus claimed that perception and preconceptions are *the* criteria (Diogenes Laertius 7.54), it remains the case that surviving discussions of kataleptic impressions often occur in the context of discussing perception and whether all perceptual impressions are to be assented to or only some are. Thus, for instance, Cicero’s discussion seems to assume that kataleptic impressions are a subset of perceptual impressions (for example, *Academica* 1.40–1; 2.37–9).

Equally, although Sextus’s own discussion includes discussion of impressions which are not obviously perceptual by our own lights (for example, that three is few, and so on), he focuses almost entirely on perceptual impressions. Moreover, and this is quite important to

⁷ ‘[N]on-sensory impressions have incorporeal impressors ... Suppose one arrives at the conclusion that every proposition (*axioma*) is true or false. The proposition that *every proposition is true or false* is the incorporeal correlate of the non-sensory impression <every proposition is true or false>. It is an incorporeal impressor. It causes—in the indirect way that the Stoics indicate by the preposition *epi*—an impression. That is, both sensory and non-sensory impressions have impressors’ (Vogt 2022, pp. 174–175).

appreciate, it may be that the examples mentioned (for example, that three is few)—which the sceptics exploit to attack the Stoics, and which strike many of us nowadays as being non-perceptual—were in fact regarded by the Stoics as primarily or exclusively perceptual (to be glossed as something like these three *F*s are few; see also note 25 below) or else are raised only in sceptical responses to the Stoics and are not evidence that the Stoics themselves recognized non-perceptual kataleptic impressions of the relevant kind.

Secondly, the Stoics think that (at least some) perceptual impressions possess a clarity or perspicuity (*perspicuitas*)—a seemingly phenomenological and evidential feature of the impression which can be discerned just by itself (*per se cerneretur*, Cicero, *Academica* 1.41; Nawar 2014)—which is absent from dreaming or hallucinatory impressions.⁸ This suggests that discernibility is in fact a feature of perceptual impressions. Moreover, if the Stoics sought to explain why only kataleptic impressions could be clear by appealing to the causal process by which they are formed—so that a kataleptic impression is akin to an imprint which accurately and clearly reflects the relevant stamp because of the causal mechanism at work (Nawar 2014)—this gives one further reason to think that only perceptual impressions could have the right kind of causal connection to what they represent so as to be clear.

Thirdly, even if one sets aside some evidence which suggests that the Stoics embraced a causal account of representation (for example, Aetius, *Placita* 4.12.1–5; cf. Nawar 2020, pp. 152–3), it does seem that the Stoics stipulate that if an impression is kataleptic, then that impression is caused by what it represents,⁹ and Stoic discussions suggest that kataleptic impressions typically concern directly present objects (the content of kataleptic impressions is often articulated using deictic demonstratives).¹⁰ Moreover, the Stoics are corporealists who think that only bodies are capable of acting and being acted

⁸ According to the Stoics, that hallucinatory impressions *seem* intrinsically indiscernible from kataleptic impressions does not indicate that kataleptic and non-kataleptic impressions are intrinsically indiscernible, but merely that cognitively impaired agents cannot distinguish them *while impaired* (Cicero, *Academica* 2.50–2). For detailed discussion, see Nawar (2014, pp. 17–19).

⁹ This is contested by Sedley (2002) (at least for Zeno of Citium). For a response, see Nawar (2014) and Stojanović (2019).

¹⁰ On the use of demonstratives in articulating the content of kataleptic impressions, see Nawar (2017, pp. 128–9).

upon (for example, Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 8.263; Cicero, *Academica* 1.39),¹¹ and it is difficult to see how the Stoics might accommodate the relevant kind of non-perceptual impressions if such impressions are indeed caused by their objects.

Vogt suggests that the objects of non-perceptual kataleptic impressions exercise causal efficacy in an ‘indirect way’. This has precedent (Frede 1999, pp. 297–8, 302–3; Brennan 2005, pp. 78–9), but the examples thus far offered of suitable ‘indirect’ causal connections in such discussions seem to me to be perception (which is not indirect in the relevant sense) or else ‘crypto-perception’ (cf. *Adversus Mathematicos* 8.409–10) (which is mysterious, and may well simply end up being an instance of perception combined with acting upon oneself).¹²

Moreover, there is a twofold difficulty in discerning how the putative non-perceptual kataleptic impressions could be suitably caused—even in an ‘indirect way’ or through ‘indirect causal influence’ (Brennan 2005, p. 78)—by what they represent. On the one hand, consider, for instance, a case where one has a non-perceptual impression of the fact that it is now day (cf. Vogt 2022, pp. 165–183). In this case, the Stoics could point to some corporeal item which exercises causal efficacy upon epistemic agents. (In fact, it seems that they may try to do this in a rather literal-minded way: see Plutarch, *De communibus notitiis adversus Stoicos* 1084c–d.) However, it is hard to see by what means, other than perception, one could have a kataleptic impression (an impression which satisfies [i], [ii], and [iii]) of this fact or otherwise *immediately* grasp it. Equally, if one infers that it is day on the basis of something else then that is all very well, but it is hard to see that such inferential cognizance would be the result of simply assenting to a kataleptic impression.

¹¹ The Stoics maintain that only bodies *are* (εἶναι) (Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 10.218; 11.23; cf. Plato, *Sophist* 246a7–b3; Vogt 2009), and frequently argue that things such as the soul are corporeal precisely because they are causally efficacious (Seneca, *Epistulae* 106.4–5; 117.2; Nawar 2020).

¹² The example describes a case where a student is not directly acted upon by a teacher (for example, by the teacher prodding or pushing them), but instead watches what the teacher is doing and imitates their actions (*Adversus Mathematicos* 8.409–10). However, while this kind of example gives a prominent role to self-action, it relies upon the student perceiving the teacher’s actions, and thus seems to be a model for direct action *plus* self-action rather than indirect action (at least in the sense of ‘indirect’ that is pertinent to conceiving how incorporeal objects might indirectly exercise causal power).

On the other hand, take the impression that three is few, or that two plus two is four. Propositions are incorporeal items. When and only when they are true, propositions *obtain* (ὕπαρχειν) (Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 8.85–6). However, they do not thereby gain causal efficacy (*Adversus Mathematicos* 8.404, 407). Instead, there seems to be something which fulfils the role of a truthmaker for the relevant proposition, and it is this item—that is, some corporeal thing(s)—which presumably exercises causal efficacy. However, the Stoics seem to take significant steps to avoid reifying and hypostasizing metaphysically suspect items (see Sedley 1985; Caston 1999; Bailey 2014). Accordingly, it is not obvious what corporeal item—akin to a truthmaker—could serve to exercise causal efficacy in some of the relevant cases (for example, an impression that two plus two is four, and so on). Moreover, if it turns out that there is, perhaps, some corporeal item (pairs of things, the world, God, or something else) which does serve as a truthmaker in some of these cases, then the difficulties earlier noted arise as it is hard to see how something other than perception could put us in touch with it so as to bring about a kataleptic impression (and thus satisfy [i], [ii], and [iii] above).

Now, aren't these points simply objections to Stoic epistemology rather than objections to the relevant interpretation of Stoic epistemology? Perhaps. Moreover, the Stoics were a diverse set of thinkers who disagreed on many important issues and it may well be that certain Stoics accepted non-perceptual kataleptic impressions. However, it remains the case that—granting certain assumptions about Stoic psychology and representation (Nawar 2020)—the Stoic theory seems to do a fairly good job of explaining why certain perceptual impressions are clear and distinct by appealing to the process by which they were formed (and should thereby be granted a positive epistemic status) (see Nawar 2014, pp. 18–20). Such an account might also plausibly be extended to cover some other instances, such as self-knowledge, which would be treated as closely analogous to perception (compare Ockham, §IV below). However, if there is to be knowledge of numbers (for instance), then it must seemingly be rendered 'fairly straightforwardly' perceptual (for instance, these three apples are few) or else accommodated through some cognitive state other than kataleptic impressions.

In sum, while there may indeed be some textual evidence suggesting that the Stoics spoke of kataleptic impressions that may

strike us as being non-perceptual, it is not clear how much weight such evidence should be given or that the Stoics would have themselves thought that the relevant impressions were non-perceptual. What the Stoics say about representation in general and kataleptic impressions in particular seems to require that the objects of such representations have robust causal powers and ‘straightforwardly’ cause the relevant impression. Any attempt to allow for kataleptic impressions of putatively incorporeal objects seems to require that the objects and causes of such impressions are in fact corporeal or that incorporeal objects possess robust causal powers in a manner that Platonists would accept but orthodox Stoics would reject. Augustine, who discusses kataleptic impressions in some detail but whose remarks have been almost entirely neglected in discussions of Stoic epistemology, seems to pursue the latter kind of path. However, in so doing he marks a radical departure from the central commitments of the Stoics.

III

Augustine against the Sceptics on Knowledge and Intellectual Perception. As Augustine understands the Academic sceptics, they take it for granted that knowledge is the norm of assent or belief and argue that nothing is known, because for any true impression there is a false impression indistinguishable from it, or for any impression that p it is possible that not- p (for example, *Contra Academicos* 2.5.11). Since knowledge is the norm of assent, and nothing is known, it follows—the sceptic argues—that nothing should be assented to (*Contra Academicos* 3.9.21, 11.24; cf. Cicero, *Academica* 2.40–1, 83; Nawar 2019, pp. 218–24). Augustine regards universal abstention from assent as impracticable and undesirable and he rejects the widespread Hellenistic view that knowledge is the norm of assent or belief. After all, the Christian life requires assent to claims which may be justified or warranted but whose assent produces mere justified true belief rather than knowledge (*De utilitate credendi* 14.32; cf. Nawar 2015a, 2019).

Augustine seems to concede to the sceptics that we cannot attain infallible knowledge through perception, and suggests that the

Stoics failed to appreciate that no corporeal thing could be apprehended or known if apprehension or knowledge was as they defined it (*Contra Academicos* 3.17.37–9; *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 9).¹³ However, in some works, Augustine responds to the Academics by contending that we may nonetheless know some things for certain.

Thus, for instance, in his *Contra Academicos* Augustine argues that even if there is intractable disagreement over whether p (for example, over whether the world is one or not), one may nonetheless infallibly know that either it is the case that p or it is the case that not- p (*Contra Academicos* 3.10.22–3). Equally, when the sceptic suggests that knowledge of apparently exhaustive disjunctions of the form ‘ α is F or not- F ’ may be threatened if the apparently referential expression ‘ α ’ fails to refer, Augustine argues that—in the relevant case (which involves ‘world’ or ‘the world’, and thus amounts to a form of ‘external world scepticism’)¹⁴—‘ α ’ refers even if it does not actually refer to that which one might think it refers to (*Contra Academicos* 3.11.24–5; for detailed discussion, see Nawar 2019, pp. 224–43; cf. Nawar 2021b). He goes on to argue that arithmetical knowledge is immune to sceptical attack, and so too is knowledge of certain logical truths (*Contra Academicos* 3.11.25, 12.28–13.29; Nawar 2019, pp. 243–59), and that—even if dreaming impressions and waking perceptual impressions are intrinsically indiscernible (the Stoics deny this, see §II above)—one may nonetheless know that it seems to oneself that p (*Contra Academicos* 3.11.26; cf. *Soliloquia* 2.3.3).

Elsewhere (and several readers have here been struck by apparent similarities to Descartes), Augustine responds more summarily to the sceptics by arguing that they cannot make salient the possibility that I am mistaken in thinking <I exist> (cf. *De civitate Dei* 11.26; Matthews 1972), and by appealing to examples of self-knowledge (I know that I am thinking, doubting, and so on; for example, *De Trinitate* 10.10.14, 15.12.21; Nawar 2021c). Augustine’s examples

¹³ Augustine speculates that the Academic sceptics may have in fact been crypto-Platonists who aimed to undermine confidence in sense-perception (*Contra Academicos* 3.17.37–9; *Epistulae* 118). For texts and translations of the *Contra Academicos*, see Green and Daur (1970); King (1995).

¹⁴ On whether this is the first instance of so-called ‘external world scepticism’ in Greco-Roman philosophy, see Burnyeat (1982), Fine (2003), Vogt (2015), Nawar (2019, p. 226).

of knowledge that resist sceptical attack are not terribly substantive, but do thus include:

- ‘disjunctive’ knowledge (that is, knowledge of some particular disjunctions);
- arithmetical knowledge (knowledge that two plus two is four, and so on);
- ‘logical’ knowledge (knowledge of inferential rules such as *modus ponens*); and
- first-person experiential knowledge and certain kinds of self-knowledge (knowledge that it appears to oneself that *p*, knowledge that one is thinking, doubting, and so on).

Augustine recognizes that, in arguing that nothing is known, the Academics are targeting the Stoic account of knowledge or apprehension (*Contra Academicos* 2.5.11; cf. 3.9.18). However, although Augustine discusses the Stoic account of kataleptic impressions on several occasions,¹⁵ it is not clear whether the kinds of examples he offers would count as knowledge or apprehension (if such states require assenting to a kataleptic impression) according to the Stoics themselves or whether Augustine himself thinks that they would.¹⁶

In discussing the relevant items of knowledge, Augustine himself emphasizes that, when they are the result of appropriate consideration, such impressions are clear or perspicuous (for example, *Contra Academicos* 3.11.25; cf. *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 9) and, especially, that they are such that they could not be false when uttered or thought and are items of infallible knowledge (for example, *Contra Academicos* 3.11.24–5; Nawar 2019). In his *Contra Academicos*, Augustine says little about the relevant items of cognizance having a suitable causal connection with what they

¹⁵ Throughout the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine offers several seemingly non-equivalent accounts of the Stoic account of kataleptic impressions. On one occasion, Augustine speaks of Stoic apprehension requiring a causal connection with the object apprehended (*id verum percipi posse, quod ita esset animo impressum ex eo, unde esset, ut esse non posset ex eo unde non esset*, *Contra Academicos* 2.5.11). However, on other occasions (such as *Contra Academicos* 2.5.11, 2.6.14, 3.9.18, 3.9.21), Augustine simply says that the impression which gives rise to apprehension or knowledge has some distinctive feature which false impressions lack, seemingly its *being clear* (*Contra Academicos* 2.3.9; 3.11.25). For discussion, see Nawar (2019, pp. 222–3).

¹⁶ No surviving sources indicate that the Stoics themselves offered these kinds of replies to their sceptical opponents, and Augustine himself often complains that the Stoics struggle to accommodate non-perceptual knowledge (cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.7; *De Trinitate* 10.5.7–8.11; Nawar 2021c).

represent or being of directly present objects, but what he says elsewhere reveals that he takes these to be important reasons to grant the relevant items of cognition an epistemically privileged status. This has not been widely appreciated, but I think that there are three important points to appreciate here.

First, seemingly like the Stoics (see §II above), Augustine gives a causal account of representation. Any representation must, in some sense, be ‘printed out’ (*exprimitur*) or ‘come about’ (*gignere*) from what it represents (*De Genesi ad Litteram imperfectus liber* 16.57–8; *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* 74; Nawar 2021a, pp. 96–101; cf. Nawar 2019, pp. 230–43). However, unlike the Stoics, Augustine happily attributes robust causal powers to incorporeal items, and holds that they may causally interact with our minds (cf. Nawar 2021d). (Also, unlike the Stoics, Augustine thinks our minds are incorporeal.) Thus there is good reason to think that a representation of an incorporeal item should be caused by that item, and that this does not pose a special difficulty for Augustine, who happily speaks of ‘incorporeal impressors’ in a manner which the Stoics would not (for example, *De libero arbitrio* 2.8.24–9.26; Nawar 2019, pp. 253–9; Nawar 2021d).

Secondly, Augustine grants a privileged epistemic status to cognizance wherein the object of said cognizance is directly present (for example, *De magistro* 12.39–40; Nawar 2019). This, he thinks, is why (certain kinds of) perception are epistemically privileged when compared with imagination. However, what Augustine counts as being directly present might prove surprising. Thus, for instance, as he makes clear in *De Trinitate* 11, Augustine think that the objects we ordinarily perceive through sense-perception are *not* directly present to perceivers, and that sense-perception involves a series of distinct representational items (*formae, species*) in the perceiver’s sense organs, memory, and mind (Nawar 2021a, pp. 89–101). Equally, Augustine thinks that incorporeal objects—such as numbers—may be directly present to the mind (*De magistro* 12.40; *De libero arbitrio* 2.8.23–4; Nawar 2019). (Given that Augustine often says such directly present incorporeal objects are cognized through ‘intellectual perception’, it is not clear how apt it is to speak of such intellectual cognizance as ‘non-perceptual’.)

Thirdly, Augustine thinks that the kind of intellectual knowledge he defends as being immune to sceptical attack—such as arithmetical knowledge and certain kinds of self-knowledge—is infallible and

epistemically secure because of its independence from the bodily senses. Simply put, many of the sources of error which occur in ordinary sense-perception, such as misrepresentation due to deficiencies in the medium (as occurs when one sees a bent stick in water) or the perceptual organ, are absent in intellectual cognition (Nawar 2019, pp. 248–59). Moreover, such intellectual cognition has a distinctive clarity or perspicuity which marks it out as such (for example, when compared with mere imagining) and in this respect also seems to differ from perceptual-type impressions (which Augustine thinks cannot be discerned from, for instance, hallucinatory impressions).¹⁷

Some may think that Augustine concedes too much to the Academic sceptics as far as ordinary sense-perception is concerned (his views of its epistemic limitations are persistent, but Augustine is flexible on whether or not we call the cognition attained through perception ‘knowledge’, for example, *Retractationes* I.14.3),¹⁸ and that his account of intellection of directly present incorporeal items is ultimately mysterious. (After all, how can incorporeal items be *directly present*? See Nawar 2019.) However, it deserves notice that such an account seems to enjoy a certain enduring appeal and that even more recent philosophers have shown sympathy with the view that there is a strongly ‘immediate’ connection between our intellects and items such as mathematical objects (Gödel 1983, pp. 483–4; cf. Frege 1884, §105).¹⁹

¹⁷ Augustine does not subscribe to the Stoic suggestion that clarity is a feature particular to certain waking perceptual impressions (Cicero, *Academica* 2.50–2; Nawar 2014, pp. 17–20; §II above) and instead accepts the sceptic’s contention that waking perceptual impressions are or can be intrinsically indiscernible from, say, dreaming or hallucinatory ones.

¹⁸ Medieval thinkers drew liberally upon Augustine’s remarks about ‘intellectual vision’ and ‘divine illumination’ (on which, see Nawar 2015a, pp. 23–9; 2019, pp. 251–2), but even those with avowed ‘Augustinian’ inclinations were often loath to accept Augustine’s pessimism concerning sense-perception. Whether they had good reason for their optimism is another matter.

¹⁹ ‘Despite their remoteness from sense experience, we do have something like a perception also of the objects of set theory’ (Gödel 1983, pp. 483–4). ‘In arithmetic, we do not deal with objects which become known to us as something alien from outside through the mediation of the senses, but rather with objects which are immediately given to reason, which can fully grasp them as its own’ (Frege 1884, §105). Precisely how these remarks of Frege are consistent with his so-called ‘context principle’ and what he says elsewhere in *Grundlagen* about how numbers are ‘given to us’ (1884, §62) is not immediately clear.

IV

Ockham on Intuitive Cognition. From at least Duns Scotus onwards, Latin medieval philosophical discussions often gave significant attention to ‘intuitive cognition’, a basic form of cognition directed towards directly present objects which was thought to be required for much propositional knowledge of contingent truths. According to William of Ockham, who offers one of the most detailed and influential such accounts, evident cognizance (*evidens notitia*) is a secure and paradigmatic form of propositional knowledge (*scientia*) which arises from a certain non-complex (*incomplexa*) (that is, non-propositional) *de re* cognizance, namely, intuitive cognition (*cognitio intuitiva*).²⁰ In non-supernatural cases, intuitive cognition of α :

- is (efficiently) caused by α ;
- either is or requires direct acquaintance with α ; and
- is the basis of evident cognizance concerning α (for example, *Ordinatio* Prologue q.1, *OTh* 1.31, 1.38; *Quodlibet* 5, q.5; *OTh* 9.495).

Ockham’s various discussions suggest that perception of present objects is the paradigmatic instance of intuitive cognition (for example, *Ordinatio* Prologue q.1, *OTh* 1.31; cf. *Quodlibet* 6, q.6, *OTh* 9.604–7) and that, in typical cases, intuitive cognitions automatically bring about assent and the relevant evident cognizance. Thus, for instance, when one sees Socrates, one has an intuitive cognition of Socrates, and this results in (and perhaps warrants) the evident cognizance that Socrates now exists. Similarly, intuitive cognition of Socrates and his whiteness results in (and perhaps warrants) the evident cognizance that Socrates is now white (*Ordinatio* Prologue q.1, *OTh* 1.6–7, 23, 31; cf. *Quodlibet* 5, q.5, *OTh* 9.496).

While intuitive cognition is thus a fundamental form of basic *de re* cognition which produces propositional knowledge, there is also another form of basic cognition which is prior to belief or knowledge: abstractive cognition (*cognitio abstractiva*).²¹ Whereas intuitive

²⁰ *Ordinatio* Prologue q.1, *OTh* 1.5; *Quodlibet* 5, q.5; *OTh* 9.498; *Prologus in Expositionem super viii libros Physicorum* (Boehner and Brown 1990, pp. 4–5). Texts and translations consulted include Freddoso and Kelley (1991); Gál and Brown (1967); Piché (2006); Wey (1980).

cognition is directed towards singular objects which are directly present, abstractive cognition is directed towards things which are not directly present (taking this contrast to be epistemically fundamental has neglected Augustinian precedent, cf. Nawar 2019, pp. 236–43) and is *general* (rather than singular) (*Quodlibet* 1, q.13). Whereas perception of present objects is the paradigmatic instance of intuitive cognition, imagining something which is not directly present is a paradigmatic instance of abstractive cognition. Moreover, just as Ockham characterized intuitive cognition by its causes and its ‘outputs’, so too Ockham claims that—unlike intuitive cognition—abstractive cognition cannot produce evident cognizance about contingent truths of the relevant kind (such as that Socrates currently exists, and other singular contingencies) (*Ordinatio* Prologue q.1, *OTh* 1.32, 61; *Quodlibet* 5, q.5, *OTh* 9.498).²²

Like the Stoics and Augustine, Ockham seemingly gives a broadly causal account of representation (according to which if α represents β , then α was naturally caused by β).²³ Unlike Augustine (and arguably also unlike the Stoics, cf. Nawar 2014), Ockham has little to say to sceptics, and does not seem to be very interested in how one may identify intuitive cognition or evident cognizance as such (Scott 1969, pp. 43–7; Adams 1987, pp. 583–601), and there seem to be good grounds for attributing to Ockham an externalist account of epistemic warrant. (In this, he differs from Augustine and arguably also the Stoics.) However, there are at least three things worth noticing about Ockham’s account.

First, unlike Augustine (and many medieval philosophers), Ockham embraces a form of direct realism, and explains sense-perception without appealing to a series of representational items (in the medium, the sense organ, etc.; contrast Augustine in §III above). On Ockham’s view, indirect realist accounts of perception are motivated in large part by the desire to avoid the object of perception

²¹ Note, however, that abstractive cognition presupposes intuitive cognition (for example, *Quodlibet* 1, q.14; *OTh* 9.78).

²² It has often been thought that abstractive cognition also differs from intuitive cognition in that only the former can produce false beliefs, but this is contested (Karger 1999).

²³ For instance, in response to certain thinkers—who seemingly assume that representation occurs through likeness alone and suggest that the existence of intrinsically indiscernible items would threaten Ockham’s claims about the *singular* nature of intuitive cognition (roughly: if α represents β through likeness, and yet β and γ are intrinsically alike, then α will represent both β and γ and thus α will not be singular)—Ockham claims that α will represent β rather than γ (or β and γ) in virtue of naturally being caused by β (*Quodlibet* 1, q.13, *OTh* 9.74–6).

acting at a distance. However, Ockham himself happily accepts, and indeed argues for, the possibility of unmediated action at a distance (*Quaestiones in librum tertium Sententiarum (Reportatio)* q.2; cf. Goddu 1984; Adams 1987, pp. 827–52) and supposes that a thing may be ‘directly present’ to a perceiver even if it is not in contact with that perceiver (cf. Tachau 1988, pp. 130–5; Pasnau 1997, pp. 162–7).²⁴ This is also, Ockham thinks, what often occurs in (non-supernatural cases of) intuitive cognition.

Secondly, unlike the Stoics, Ockham is no corporealist, and while he often appeals to ordinary perception as a paradigmatic instance of intuitive cognition, he thinks that there is also intuitive cognition of (singular) incorporeal items, such as psychological items (*Ordinatio* Prologue q.1, *OTh* 1.39 ff.). On Ockham’s view, we attain knowledge of our mental states and intellectual acts through a higher-order intuitive cognition (which brings about the relevant higher-order evident cognizance, *Quodlibet* 1, q.14, *OTh* 9.78–82; cf. Brower-Toland 2012; Schierbaum 2014). Thus, just as intuitive cognition of Socrates may bring about my knowing that <Socrates currently exists>, so too my intuitive cognition of my thinking that <Socrates currently exists> may bring about my knowing that <I currently think that Socrates currently exists>. Ockham thus offers a unified account of the cognition which occurs in ordinary perception and intellectual self-knowledge, and one might hope that other forms of knowledge would also be susceptible to similar explanation.²⁵

Thirdly, Ockham—like most of his contemporaries—thinks that whenever α is caused by β it is nonetheless the case that α could have been caused directly by God without β exercising any causal efficacy or even existing (*Ordinatio* Prologue q.1, *OTh* 1.35). God can thus produce an intuitive cognition of Socrates even when Socrates does not exist, and this seems to lead to at least two potential worries. On the one hand, given what Ockham says about representation

²⁴ Might this kind of option have been open to the Stoics and thereby allow for non-perceptual kataleptic impressions? Perhaps. However, despite what the Stoics have to say about *sympathy*, it is not easy to see how this would work or that if the relevant impressions were kataleptic they would be non-perceptual.

²⁵ One might worry about how Ockham would account for knowledge of metaphysically peculiar items such as numbers. However, Ockham would follow a prominent strand of ancient thought in thinking that number terms (such as ‘two’ or ‘three’) do not pick out metaphysically peculiar items (and are often *not* singular), but instead have as their extension sets or collections of concrete items (on this kind of view, see Nawar 2015b, p. 2356 n.18).

requiring a causal connection (see above), how can an intuitive cognition represent something which had no role in actually causing it? On the other hand, as Ockham notes, one might worry that the relevant intuitive cognition (produced by God in Socrates' absence) would result in evident cognizance that Socrates is now present or does exist when he does not.

Ockham's response to the former worry seems to consist in countenancing that α may represent β even though, in actual fact, α was not caused by β in this particular instance but merely *naturally* would be.²⁶ Ockham's response to the latter worry is that since intuitive cognition results in evident cognizance and evident cognizance is, by definition, true, it follows that the intuitive cognition of Socrates which is produced by God when Socrates does *not* exist or is not currently here results in the evident cognizance of true propositions, such as <Socrates does not exist> or <Socrates is not here> (*Quodlibet* 5, q.5, *OTH* 9.498; *Ordinatio* Prologue q.1, *OTH* 1.31–2). However, this does leave open some questions about the precise role of causation in representation, how Ockham thinks intrinsically identical mental states may result in distinct beliefs or knowledge (that is, the details of some of his externalist views about mental states), and why intuitive cognition should be given an epistemically privileged status.

Although it might seem natural to construe Ockham's epistemic account as being similar to some modern accounts of warrant which appeal to 'normal' conditions (for example, Goldman 1986), Ockham seems to show very little interest in explaining why the relevant processes are reliable or produce true judgments or knowledge in 'natural' cases. That is to say, even if we put to one side the fact that Ockham is uninterested in responding to sceptics and does not think that intuitive cognition or evident cognizance has an accessible, discernible feature through which it may be identified as such (and, more generally, often shows little interest in offering guidance on how one should respond to apparent evidence, for example, *Quodlibet* 4, q.6, *OTH* 9.327), Ockham simply doesn't seem especially interested in explaining why mental states which come about in a certain way are likely to be accurate or why certain belief-forming processes are more

²⁶ As I read him, Ockham embraces something like the kind of 'counterfactual (causal) dependence' thesis discussed (but rejected) by Brower-Toland (2007, p. 327; cf. Panaccio 2010, pp. 248–52).

reliable than others. It is thus puzzling why, for instance, Ockham explicitly follows Augustine in thinking that my knowledge that I think or I understand (*ego intelligo*) is more certain and evident (*certius et evidentius*) than the knowledge attained through ordinary sense-perception (*Ordinatio* Prologue q.1, *OTb* 1.43).

V

Conclusion. I have here considered the epistemic accounts of the Stoics, Augustine, and William of Ockham, all of whom attribute a privileged epistemic status to a cognitive state seemingly caused by directly present objects and modelled, in some sense, upon perception in ideal conditions.

In her paper, Katja Vogt (2022) suggests that the Stoics recognized non-perceptual kataleptic impressions and granted them a prominent role in their epistemology. There is some textual evidence for there being kataleptic impressions which we would regard as being non-perceptual, but I have argued that the Stoics' corporealism and the causal constraints imposed upon kataleptic impressions and representation make it hard to see how they could easily accommodate non-perceptual kataleptic impressions or grant them a privileged epistemic status in the same way as perceptual kataleptic impressions.

Like the Stoics, Augustine imposes certain causal constraints upon representation. However, although Augustine does think that cognizance of directly present objects is epistemically privileged, he maintains that the objects of ordinary sense-perception are *not* directly present to perceivers, while also claiming that certain incorporeal objects of intellection (such as numbers) *are* directly present to our minds. (Unlike the Stoics, Augustine attributes robust causal powers to incorporeal items.) Augustine thinks that we can have infallible knowledge of the relevant incorporeal objects because the sources of possible error which occur in ordinary sense-perception are absent in intellection.

Finally, I examined Ockham's account of intuitive cognition, a basic *de re* cognitive state naturally caused by directly present objects. Unlike Augustine (and many other medievals), Ockham thinks that corporeal objects are directly present to perceivers because he

accepts the existence of unmediated action at a distance. While Ockham does seem to think that representation requires causation in some sense, he seemingly maintains that an intuitive cognition of α may represent α even though it was not caused by α but merely *naturally* would be, and appeals to this to deal with certain problem cases. Those drawn to naturalized epistemology and willing to accept action at a distance might award Ockham high marks for offering a unified account of various forms of cognition ranging from ordinary sense-perception to intellectual self-knowledge. However, Ockham doesn't seem to be especially interested in explaining why the relevant processes and cognitive states are epistemically privileged, and it is hard to escape the suspicion that Ockham's account manifests not only some of the putative virtues, but also some of the putative vices of certain forms of naturalized epistemology.²⁷

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²⁷ I'm grateful to Guy Longworth for helpful written comments.

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