

# Augustine on Knowledge

*Divine Illumination as an Argument Against Scepticism*

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I have dedicated two years of my life to write this thesis. Years not only filled with Saint Augustine, but also with lots of other courses I had to take alongside this huge writing project in both religious sciences and philosophy. These two years of writing, however, have not been done in isolation. I would like to thank my friend and fellow student Katja van der Kamp for the time she dedicated in bringing my English to a higher level. I also want to thank my fellow research master student Rob van Grinsven who critically examined the content and arguments in this thesis. For the philosophical chapter of my thesis I want to thank dr. Han Thomas Adriaenssen whose interest and expertise in divine illumination and medieval philosophy helped me fine-tune my arguments and improve the overall structure of the third chapter. I am thankful to my partner Marcel van de Kamp who has been my rock and allowed me to blow off steam. Thank you for helping me formulate my arguments in such a way to make them understandable to laymen. I want to express my appreciation for Bianca Bosman as well, who, in the last stages of this thesis, worked closely with me on my language and overall structure. My gratitude also goes out to my supervisor Mathilde van Dijk, who has not only helped me with this thesis on Augustine, but also gave me guidance when I wrote about Augustine on foreknowledge and free will during my short stay at the *Concealed Knowledge* master programme. A last word of thanks to my second supervisor dr. dr. Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta who helped editing my thesis in its final stages.

A.vd.B

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## Preface

As a student of philosophy the common core of my writings often consisted of questions related to the justifications, foundations, and origins of one's knowledge. I found it striking that Saint Augustine was very underrepresented in the bachelor and master courses of my philosophical education. As someone specializing in medieval philosophy and theories of knowledge, I felt that I needed a deeper understanding of the religious matters connected to the problems often addressed in medieval philosophy and theology. Philosophy did not offer this which made me decide to take another research master in religious studies. As someone equally interested in medieval theology and medieval philosophy, choosing Augustine came naturally to me. After writing about his reconciliation of divine foreknowledge and human free will I decided to venture into his arguments against Academic Scepticism and one's ability to achieve absolute knowledge. I hope that my thesis will show that Augustine is still interesting to study inside Academia, both in religion *and* in philosophy and will trigger further investigation. Although I mainly regard Augustine in this thesis as an interesting historical and philosophical figure, he nevertheless is still important today. The controversial decision made by the United States and Britain in 2003 to go to war with Iraq is justified by, among other things, by Augustine's Just War Theory.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Just war theory hold that war is terrible, but it is not always the worst outcome. The aim of this theory is to argue that war sometimes is morally justifiable. For a war to be just it has to meet a series of criteria such as having a just cause, having the right intention, and a high probability of success. Based on Romans 13:4 Augustine argued that individuals should not immediately recourse to violence, but that God has given the sword to government for good reason. Since Christians are part of the government there is no need for them to feel ashamed when the government forces them to protect peace and punish wickedness. For more information see: Augustine of Hippo, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* (trans.), Richard Stothert (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887); Augustine of Hippo, *De Civitate Dei* (trans.), R.W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John M. Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

## **Abstract**

Scepticism, in general, consists of the view that nothing can be known with certainty. Saint Augustine disagreed with this view and argued that truth can be obtained by man. Mathematical truths, for example, can be known with certainty. But Augustine went beyond mathematical certainty and argued that we can achieve absolute knowledge concerning everything. To argue against Scepticism, mathematical certainty is often considered to be sufficient in secondary literature. I, however, want to make Augustine's cause stronger by showing how he successfully establishes the certainty of sensual knowledge. To achieve absolute knowledge concerning the external world divine illumination is necessary: God illumines the reality around us in order for us to make true judgements. Divine illumination is rarely considered in relation with Scepticism. Ronald Nash and Lydia Schumacher, for example, both discuss divine illumination as a separate element of Augustine's thought. Both the views of Cicero and Augustine need to be looked at anew, as commentators often neglect their context. It is precisely this context that gives us insight in to the question why Augustine stressed the need for divine illumination and discussed the pitfalls of Scepticism. The question concerning the justification of our knowledge and the threats of Scepticism may very well be the main source of inspiration for Augustine's ideas on divine illumination.

## Introduction

When one wonders how to justify the claim that one knows something for certain, one can raise the question if it really is the case that one knows it with utmost certainty. In the case of mathematical knowledge it is undeniable that propositions such as  $2+2=4$  are true. In the case of sensual knowledge however, this kind of certitude is harder to find. Perhaps one thinks that one has absolute knowledge about what one perceives, but one's senses can be misled. Due to the deceivability of the senses the Sceptics concluded that absolute knowledge is impossible. For Sceptics, claiming that the apple one sees is red, is a claim one cannot be certain about. They radically state that the sciences, i.e. the study of nature, mathematics, and natural philosophy, have no solid foundation. The classic Academic Sceptics, such as Carneades (214 – 129 BCE) and Arcesilaus (316/315 – 241 BCE), even held that absolute knowledge is impossible, which is why they suspended judgment in any case. Adherents of another form of Scepticism, known as Pyrrhonism, stated that one knows nothing for certain, and even this one cannot affirm. In this sense they differ from the Academic Sceptics who seem to be certain about one's inability to achieve absolute knowledge. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430), on the other hand, claimed that one has the ability to acquire certain knowledge albeit with God's help. God possesses absolute knowledge of everything. If he grants one to be bestowed with his divine illumination one too can achieve this certitude.

In this thesis I will discuss the perspectives of the Academic Sceptics and Saint Augustine concerning the certainty and justification of one's knowledge. I will investigate Augustine's concerns with Academic Scepticism and discuss the arguments he raised against them. For this purpose I will mainly use Augustine's *Contra Academicos*, but other major works such as the *Confessiones*, *De Magistro*, and his *Soliloquia* will also be used to reconstruct his arguments. The latter two books are particularly important with regard to Augustine's ideas concerning knowledge and divine illumination.

Some commentators, such as John Heil, do not take into account that the *Contra Academicos* was written to Romanianus nor do they pay attention to the dialogue form. The epistle dedicated to Romanianus seems not to be related to the bulk of Augustine's text, which is why some commentators tend to ignore it. They also tend to ignore the first book as they do not see a connection between the discussion about happiness and the discussion about Scepticism. However, as I will argue, the *Contra Academicos* is not just a refutation of

Academic Scepticism. It also establishes a connection between morality and the certain knowledge that will bring one happiness.

Augustine's main issue with Academic Scepticism was that it ruled out the possibility of certain knowledge. It will become clear that - throughout his works - Augustine emphasized that one can acquire absolute certainty by means of God's help. It is necessary to surrender oneself to faith, because Christ is the source that gives one true knowledge through illumination.<sup>2</sup> I will argue that Augustine's notion of divine illumination serves as an argument in response to the Academic Scepticism portrayed by Cicero in his *Academica*. Cicero is important in this context because Augustine became acquainted with scepticism through Cicero's *Academica*. Cicero was the first who wrote about Scepticism in Latin and since Augustine's Greek language skills were not well-developed he understandably turned to Cicero's work.

It should be noted that it is difficult to map exactly what Augustine meant by divine illumination. Many interpreters of Augustine and of his views on illumination (such as Lydia Schumacher, Ronald Nash and Augustine Curley) have an agenda. They often want to depict Augustine as saintly and holy as possibly by not talking about his pre-conversion sins. They also tend to devalue Augustine's stay among the various religious groups that he came into contact with before turning to Christianity. Some commentators, such as James Wetzel and Brian Stock, tend to be uninterested in Augustine's context. Stock, for example, completely ignores Augustine's exegesis.<sup>3</sup> Another problem is that Augustine wrote in hindsight about his encounters with, for example, the Manichaeans and his 'sinful' life. This makes it difficult to reconstruct a true account of what happened during these different periods in Augustine's life.

In the following parts of this introduction I will introduce Augustine and discuss the influence of the *Contra Academicos*. Both Academic skepticism and Cicero's skepticism will be addressed in the first chapter. The bulk of the first chapter contains an elaboration of Cicero's defence of Academic skepticism as he saw it. I will also make explicit why this form of Scepticism was favoured by Cicero. The second chapter addresses Augustine's spiritual journey and the events leading up to him writing his *Contra Academicos*. This second chapter

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<sup>2</sup> James J. O'Donnell, "Augustine: his time and lives", Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 8-25.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Harvard University Press, 1996).



consists of a deeper investigation of the *Contra Academicos* than the one given in the introduction. I will discuss why Augustine wrote this book and how it has been interpreted. I will argue that the *Contra Academicos* must be placed in a context in which Augustine was highly concerned with the treats of Scepticism. At the end of the second chapter I will elaborate on the problems Augustine encountered with Scepticism. This chapter concludes with a study of the arguments that Augustine raised against Scepticism. In the third and final chapter I will research Augustine's notion of divine illumination. When discussing Augustine's epistemology it will become clear that one's own cognitive capacities are insufficient if one wants to achieve certain knowledge. One needs God's divine light to give extra information to the knowledge one already has. Only then is one able to judge what is reality and what is not. In this final chapter I will also argue that Augustine's notion of divine illumination serves as an argument against Scepticism.

The following part of my introduction consists of a brief overview of Augustine's life and the influence of his *Contra Academicos*. In this work Augustine argued explicitly against the Scepticism put forward by Cicero and showed that truth can be attained by man. In chronological order I will discuss other works by Augustine in which he shaped and developed his perspective on divine illumination.

### **The life of Saint Augustine**

It is vital to know something about Augustine's life before one can understand his views. A lot of information has been made available through his *Confessiones*.<sup>4</sup> Augustine wrote this book between 397 and 400 AD and in it he described his youth and conversion to Christianity. This multifaceted work can be seen as an autobiography and an appraisal of God, but can also be viewed as a clerical work meant to encourage others to convert to Christianity. Lastly, the *Confessiones* was written after the model of Neo-Platonic works in which the human soul is on a quest for God.<sup>5</sup>

One can acquire information on St. Augustine through many existing biographies. I consider *Augustine of Hippo* by Peter Brown to be one of the most noteworthy.<sup>6</sup> The facts about Augustine's life are well-known. He was born in 354 CE in Thagaste, a small town now known as Souk Ahras in Algeria. He was the first of three children and had a younger

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<sup>4</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* (trans.), Frank Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993).

<sup>5</sup> See Bernard McGinn for an interesting overview of the roles of the *Confessiones*: Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (Michigan: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (England: Clays, 2000).

brother, Navigius, and a younger sister whose name we do not know. His non-Christian father Patricius was a town councillor and had the duty to collect taxes. Although he was a member of the ruling elite, Patricius was not rich.<sup>7</sup> Monica, Augustine's mother, was born in a devout Christian family and had an arranged marriage with Patricius. Augustine described that his father converted to Christianity on his deathbed due to the patience and prayers of his wife.<sup>8</sup> Although his parents were poor, Augustine's father believed it to be important that Augustine received a classical education.<sup>9</sup> This consisted of the seven liberal arts (*artes liberales*). Students of the *artes liberales* were prepared for the pursuit of science in the strict sense of the term, i.e. the combination of philosophy and theology known as scholasticism.

Augustine started with his schooling in Thagaste and also studied a year in nearby Madaura but had to return to Thagaste due to the poverty of his family.<sup>10</sup> Fortunately, due to the funding by Romanianus, a family friend, Augustine was soon able to study rhetoric in Carthage, the great Roman city of Africa. Here he became a professor in rhetoric.<sup>11</sup> Despite their efforts to give their son the best education, Brown describes Augustine's education as "meagre" with a "barren" content.<sup>12</sup> John Rist states that Augustine "was handicapped by his lack of knowledge of much of the best classical philosophy."<sup>13</sup> Brown states that, in the classical education that Augustine received, only the authors Vergil, Cicero, Sallust and Terence were studied in full detail and with an exclusively literary focus. This focus had as its consequence that "every word, every turn of phrase of these few classics [...] was significant."<sup>14</sup> It was difficult to teach a foreign language by means of this literary focus and the result was that Augustine found Greek to be boring and failed to learn the language. In his *Confessiones* he mentioned: "For those beginner's lessons in reading, writing, and reckoning, I considered no less a burden and pain than Greek."<sup>15</sup> As such, Augustine became

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<sup>7</sup> Brown, *Saint Augustine* 8; Eugene Portalie, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1975), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Portalie, *Thought of Saint Augustine* 5-6; Augustine Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1996), 19; Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 9.9.19.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, *Saint Augustine* 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.; Rist, *Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, *Saint Augustine* 25.

<sup>13</sup> Rist, *Augustine* 1.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, *Saint Augustine* 25.

<sup>15</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 1.13.20.

“the only Latin philosopher in Antiquity to be virtually ignorant of Greek.”<sup>16</sup> Only after discovering the Bible, Augustine recognized the usefulness of being able to read Greek. However, the aim of Augustine’s education was far more important than its content. Augustine learned the art of rhetoric: the art to persuade men of his opinion and to express himself.

In his *Confessiones* Augustine wrote that he considered himself a sinner before his conversion to Christianity. He described that his earthly passions had a great influence on him as he was driven by pleasures, especially during his student years in Carthage. At the age of seventeen Augustine became involved in a sexual relationship with a woman with whom he had an illegitimate son named Adeodatus.<sup>17</sup> His Christian mother did not take this lightly and prayed for Augustine’s conversion. It took, however, almost twenty years for it to take place.<sup>18</sup> Augustine wrote in hindsight about this long (spiritual) journey in which he went what now would be called ‘reli-shopping’ at other religions and schools. He tried to find something that suited him and answered his questions concerning creation, the existence of evil, and other related matters. He spend quite some time with the Manichaeans, a religious movement founded by the Persian Mani who advocated a dualistic cosmology in which the good, spiritual world of light struggles with the evil, material world of darkness.<sup>19</sup> The teachings of the Manichaeans were written down by Mani in either seven or eight books of which only scattered fragments and translations remain. Manichaeism dealt with the origin of evil by arguing that God is a powerful being, though not-omnipotent, and is opposed by the semi-eternal evil power. God created the first human who battled with evil and from this struggle humanity, the world, and the soul originated. According to the Manichaeans the earth nor the flesh were intrinsically evil, instead they were considered as a battleground between light and darkness.<sup>20</sup> Manichaeans believed that they were (at least partly) composed of exiled God-particles that needed to be freed from the power of evil. The idea of a struggle between good and evil powers fitted Augustine’s sense of his own internal struggles.

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<sup>16</sup> Brown, *Saint Augustine* 24.

<sup>17</sup> Rist, *Augustine* 2; Portalie, *Thought of Saint Augustine* 7.

<sup>18</sup> Curley, *Augustine’s Critique of Skepticism* 20; Portalie, *Thought of Saint Augustine* 7.

<sup>19</sup> R.E. Emmerick, “The Idea of the ‘Good’ in Manichaeism”, Kevin, J. Coyle (ed.), *Manichaeism and its Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 51-64.

<sup>20</sup> For an overview of this cosmic drama see S.N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China* (Tubingen: 1992), 10-21.

In his *Confessiones* Augustine wrote that he started to doubt the Manichaeian doctrines when he compared them with philosophical doctrines: “As I had already stored up in memory many of the injunctions of the philosophers, I began to compare some of their doctrines with the tedious fables of the Manichaeians; and it struck me that the probability was on the side of the philosophers.”<sup>21</sup> Also, before arguing against the Academics and before becoming a Christian, Augustine briefly toyed with the idea of becoming a sceptic himself:

I was now half inclined to believe that those philosophers whom they call The Academics were wiser than the rest in holding that we ought to doubt everything, and in maintaining that man does not have the power of comprehending any certain truth.<sup>22</sup>

In the winter of 386 Augustine took his family to the country and prepared himself for baptism. During his stay he wrote his *Contra Academicos*, in which he argued in response to the radical Scepticism of the Academics. Augustine became acquainted with the Academic Sceptics by means of Cicero’s *Academica*. Cicero wrote his texts in Latin, as it was his aim to put Greek into the most elegant Latin form in order to extend the literature available to countrymen. When Cicero began to write, the Latin language was deprived of philosophical literature. Only those familiar with the Greek language were able to study philosophy. The kind of Scepticism that Augustine took from Cicero’s works was the one that Cicero himself endorsed and Augustine took this Scepticism to be the only sceptical position.

Cicero’s portrayal of Academic Scepticism shows that the Academics made the dogmatic claim that certain knowledge is impossible to attain.<sup>23</sup> Pyrrhonian Scepticism on the other hand refused to dogmatically assert universal claims as they did not affirm nor deny them. In Ancient Greece, being a dogmatist meant that one is someone who puts forward, and defends, positive answers to philosophical questions about knowledge, reality, ethical virtues, etc. Academic Scepticism and Cicero’s interpretation of it will be discussed in more detail in the first chapter.

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<sup>21</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 5.3.3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 5.10.19.

<sup>23</sup> In *Academica* 48.148 Cicero hints at dogmatic developments. See Myles Burnyeat and Michael Frede, *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997) for the different kinds of assent in Scepticism and the differences between classical and dogmatic Scepticism.

## **The influence of the *Contra Academicos***

Although Augustine's arguments against Academic skepticism were persuasive, his *Contra Academicos* appears to be one of his least successful works. This can be deduced from the relative lack of copies and manuscripts of it. The lack of references, however, hides its true influence since many thinkers had access to excerpts of the *Contra Academicos* and its influence can be traced throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and even the modern times.<sup>24</sup> The first manuscripts of Augustine's *Contra Academicos* date from the ninth century. They were included in medieval *florilegia* which consisted of a systematic collection of extracts from writings of the Church Fathers and classical writings.<sup>25</sup>

The *Contra Academicos* was considered to be the most important source in the Middle Ages that made people familiar with ancient Scepticism. Cicero's *Academica* was and a lesser known thirteenth century translation of Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* were available.<sup>26</sup> The influence of the *Contra Academicos* is evident in the role it played in scholastic discussions such as the one between Duns Scotus (1265/66-1308) and Henry of Ghent (c. 1217-1293) about the possibility of acquiring certain knowledge without divine aid.<sup>27</sup> The *Contra Academicos* also had a role to play during the growing interest in Augustine in the course of the reformation. Joannes Rosa (1532-1571), in agreement with Augustine's arguments, frequently cited it in his commentary on Cicero's *Academica*.

In order to fully grasp the force of Augustine's arguments it is important to understand the theory against which they are directed. Therefore the following chapter is dedicated to the Academic Sceptics and their ideas concerning knowledge, suspension of judgment, and probability.

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<sup>24</sup> Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism* 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Dominik Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit: Skeptische Debatten im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2006), 17.; Henry Lagerlund, *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 10.

<sup>27</sup> Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Skepticus: A Study of the Influence of the 'Academica' in the Renaissance* (London: Springer, 1972), 33.

## **Note on the quotations**

For this thesis I read the original Latin works in their English translations. None of the translations in this thesis are my own.

# 1. Scepticism

In order to comprehend the *Contra Academicos* one has to have an understanding of Cicero's Scepticism. In this chapter I will offer a brief overview of the views of the original Sceptics and discuss Cicero's interpretation of their position.

## 1.1. The original Sceptics

Two types of Scepticism can be found in ancient Greece: Pyrrhonic Scepticism and Academic Scepticism. Information about these two strands has been made available through texts of Sextus Empiricus and Cicero. Pyrrhonic Scepticism finds at its starting point a very enigmatic figure called Pyrrho (360 - 270 BCE). Pyrrho did not just create a theoretical position but a 'living Scepticism', a way of living. As a sceptic one questions everything, which will lead one to the conclusion that one knows nothing and even this one cannot know for certain. One has to suspend judgment (*epoché*) on everything. The aim of Pyrrhonic Scepticism was to reach *ataraxia*, a state of tranquility.<sup>28</sup> This tranquility leads to *eudaimonia*, a state of well-being. Scepticism is the way in which, as a philosopher, one can uphold one's life and by doing so one is following to correct path in the pursuit of *eudaimonia*.<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately we only have second-hand accounts of Pyrrho, presumably written down by Timon of Phlius who, arguably, was a pupil of Pyrrho. Most information, however, has been made available through other authors like Diogenes Laertius, Aristocles, Eusebius, and Sextus Empiricus. The latter of these authors lived almost half a millennium later than Pyrrho. Sextus Empiricus explicitly sided with Pyrrho and stated that one is only a true sceptic when one follows the Pyrrhonic line.<sup>30</sup>

The other line of Scepticism is the one held by the Academics of Plato's Academy and is therefore called Academic Scepticism. This form of Scepticism differs from Pyrrhonian Scepticism in the sense that Pyrrhonian Scepticism is more absolute. The Academics make the claim that knowledge is impossible where the Pyrrhonianists do not make any claim at all. They question whether knowledge is possible or not without taking side. Instead of making the claim that knowledge is impossible they stated that the question of the possibility of knowledge cannot be answered.

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<sup>28</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (trans.), Benson Mates, *The Sceptic Way. Sextus Empiricus's Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 90.

<sup>29</sup> Empiricus, *Pyrrhonism* 92-93.

<sup>30</sup> For more information about Pyrrho see: Svavar H. Svavarsson, "Pyrrho and early Prryhonism", Richard Bett (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Ancient Skepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 36-57.

The founding fathers of Academic Scepticism are Arcesilaus (316/315 – 241 BCE) and Carneades (214 – 129 BCE). The Academics were in discussion with the dogmatists, of which the Stoics were the most important group.<sup>31</sup> The Stoics were a school of Hellenistic philosophers who believed that certain knowledge could be attained by the use of reason. They claimed that knowing instead of believing something about the world is a matter of assenting to a particular kind of impression (*katalepsis*), which they called a cataleptic or cognitive impression.<sup>32</sup> Sextus wrote that the Stoics defined a cognitive impression as coming “from what is stamped and sealed exactly in accordance with what is, and of such a kind as could not come to be from what is not.”<sup>33</sup> Cataleptic impressions are impressions about which one cannot be mistaken. These impressions give a truth criterion, and on these impressions the Stoics based their epistemology. The provided truth criterion can be perceived as a measuring stick, used to determine what is reality and what is not. If the Academics are able to show that such impressions do not exist, then they are able to undermine the entire theory of knowledge held by the Stoics.<sup>34</sup>

The crucial question is whether one is able to tell the difference between a cognitive, or mentally graspable, and a non-cognitive impression. *Katalêpsis* occurs when one assents to a cognitive impression, and by doing so firmly grasps its truth. When one assents to a cognitive impression, one necessarily forms a true belief. The Academics did not believe that cognitive impressions exist and stated that nothing can be known with certainty. They wanted to disprove the claim made by the Stoics and tried so by means of several argumentative strategies described by Cicero as the Academic method.

The Academics made use of a system of tropes, also known as the modes of Scepticism. Tropes are general strategies and arguments that can be applied to any position. The aim of the tropes was to disprove the claim made by the opponents by means of another claim with the same force. To show how the argumentative strategy of the Academic Sceptics was applied I will use the trope of undecidability. This trope states that when there are conflicting appearances, and maybe one of them is true, a decision

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<sup>31</sup> Katja M. Vogt, “Scepticism and Action”, Richard Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Skepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 167.

<sup>32</sup> Casey Perin, “Stoic Epistemology and the Limits of Externalism”, *Ancient Philosophy Journal* 25 (2006), 383; Robert J. Hankinson, “Stoic Epistemology”, Brad Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60.

<sup>33</sup> Empiricus, *Pyrrhonism* ii 4, M vii 402, 426, 248.

<sup>34</sup> Thorsrud, “Cicero: Academic Skepticism” 5.



procedure for deciding between them is unavailable.<sup>35</sup> If a colour seems white to me and grey to my father, and if at most one of us could be right about the colour, then, since there is no decision procedure, rationality requires one to suspend one's judgment.<sup>36</sup>

The Academics also made use of sceptical arguments to show that cataleptic impressions do not exist. These counterexamples are scenarios in which a true impression cannot be distinguished from its false counterpart. One type of sceptical counterexample is the case of misidentification. Consider that one is in a conversation with identical twins. One believes that one is talking to person X, but in fact one is talking to person Y. According to Cicero the same goes for two identical eggs and two stamps made by the same ring<sup>37</sup>, one just cannot tell them apart:

You [the Stoic] deny that there is such similarity between things in nature. You may well be right; but there could be one between our impressions. If so, that similarity deceives the senses – and if one similarity deceives them, it will render everything doubtful.<sup>38</sup>

Another type of sceptical counterexample involves cases of dreams, illusion, and madness.<sup>39</sup> Impressions can be created by imagination, but also when under the influence of wine or when one is mad. One can also have impressions when one is dreaming, which look the same as when one is awake. Think, as another example, of a wooden stick. It is straight when one sees it before one's eyes, but as soon as one puts it in the water, the stick is no longer straight. Nothing has changed about the stick, it are one's eyes who provide the impression that the stick is curved. One's senses also show one impressions that are not real, such as a *fata morgana*.<sup>40</sup> The impression looks real, but in fact it is an impression of something that is not even there. The Academics demanded the Stoics to come up with a situation that is immune to such counterexamples.<sup>41</sup> Their response was that no two impressions can be identical.<sup>42</sup> They may seem identical, but there are distinguishable features. In cases like

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Woodruff, "The Pyrrhonian Modes", Richard Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Skepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 219.

<sup>36</sup> Harald Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* (Durham: Acumen, 2009), 48; 60.

<sup>37</sup> Cicero, *Academica* 2.84-87; Hankinson, "Stoic Epistemology" 68-69.

<sup>38</sup> Cicero, *Academica* 2.84.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 2.88-91.

<sup>40</sup> Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* 70.

<sup>41</sup> Thorsrud, "Cicero: Academic Skepticism" 6.

<sup>42</sup> Cicero, *Academica* 2.50.

these it is necessary that one develops one's powers of perception. In the meantime one must refrain from assenting to these impressions.<sup>43</sup>

The Stoics wondered how the Academic sceptic is able to act if he keeps on suspending judgment.<sup>44</sup> A problem for the Stoics is that it seems that even the sceptic acts which implies that he accepts some things, and one accepts things when one believes them to be true.<sup>45</sup> As I already mentioned, the Stoics believed in the existence of impressions and held that some of these were practical. This means that such impressions "prescribe an action as to be done, and that we either assent to our impressions or not."<sup>46</sup> When one assents to an impression, one believes something to be true. Something is called knowledge when the wise person holds it to be true. On several occasions Cicero pointed out that the Stoics and the Academics were investigating the perfectly wise human being, which they called the sage. The question about the possibility of knowledge on the side of the Stoics, and in Hellenistic philosophy in general, is a question about the possibility of wisdom.<sup>47</sup> The Stoics thought only few, if any, were wise. According to the Stoics, the knowledge of the sage is the knowledge that helps one to live the best life possible. They held this because they considered the universe to be arranged by providence. The Stoics stated that one must have the ability to satisfy one's desire for knowledge, since nature would not have given one such a strong desire when she had not given one the means to fulfill it.<sup>48</sup>

In the case of practical impressions, assent (*sunkatathesis*) is further identified with impulse (*hormê*). When there are no external obstructions, an impulse becomes an action.<sup>49</sup> According to the Stoics it is impossible to put Scepticism into practice: "No matter what the sceptic professes, he at least sometimes assents."<sup>50</sup> As a reply to the criticism that the Academic Sceptics should not be able to act if they suspend judgment, Carneades introduced the notion of impressions that are more or less persuasive. It is a fact that one is more convinced by some impressions than by others, even if one suspends judgment about

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 2.56-57.

<sup>44</sup> Vogt, "Scepticism and Action" 165-166.

<sup>45</sup> Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* 67; Vogt, "Scepticism and Action" 167.

<sup>46</sup> Vogt, "Scepticism and Action" 165.

<sup>47</sup> Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* 4; Hankinson, "Stoic Epistemology" 59.

<sup>48</sup> Thorsrud, "Cicero: Academic Skepticism" 5.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

them.<sup>51</sup> These persuasive impressions make one more prone to act than when one were to come into contact with an impression that is not persuasive. In order for the sceptic to act he has to believe that the impression is true, it does not matter whether the impression itself really is true or false. Arcesilaus also maintained that in order to act, one does not need to agree with something. According to him, all that is needed is an impression and an impulse.<sup>52</sup>

Cicero considered himself to be an Academic sceptic, but did not always hold the same beliefs and opinions as his ancestors. In the following pages I will discuss his views and make explicit where and how he differs from the 'original' Sceptics.

## 1.2. Cicero on Academic Scepticism

What Cicero particularly wished to achieve was the adoption of the Academic method of inquiry by the Roman elite. Cicero attempted to reach his goal by means of philosophical writing in Latin, a unique undertaking as it was believed that philosophy had to be done in Greek.<sup>53</sup> In order to "put philosophy on display to the Roman people" Cicero's plan was to write three books: the (lost) *Hortensius* (completed in 46 BCE), the *Catullus*, and the *Lucullus*.<sup>54</sup> The *Catullus* and the *Lucullus* are the first two books of the first edition of the *Academica* which was finished in 45 BCE. In the first volume of this trilogy Cicero supports the study of philosophy, the other two works contain his philosophical position as an Academic sceptic.<sup>55</sup>

Cicero's *Academica* consists of dialogues in which an Academic sceptic responds to dogmatic criticism. Alongside these dialogues, Cicero presented the evolution of the sceptical Academy. The crucial question is whether one is able to tell the difference between a cognitive, or mentally graspable, and a non-cognitive impression. Cicero responded by stating that it does not matter if impressions are strictly identical or just indistinguishable.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Marcus T. Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism* (trans.), Charles Brittain (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), 21; Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* 72-73; Vogt, "Scepticism and Action" 170.

<sup>52</sup> Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism* 79; Vogt, "Scepticism and Action" 167-168.

<sup>53</sup> The utility of Latin literature is debated in Cicero, *Academica* 1.3-12. For the intellectual context of Cicero's work in philosophy, see Elizabeth Rawson, *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic* (London: Duckworth, 1985), 282-97.

<sup>54</sup> Cicero, *Academica* 1.18.

<sup>55</sup> The development of Cicero's plans and his writing of the *Academica* are explained in M. Griffin, "The Composition of the *Academica*. Motives and Versions", B. Inwood and J. Mansfeld (eds.), *Assent and Argument* (Leiden 1997), 1-35.

<sup>56</sup> Cicero, *Academica* 2.85.

The problem is, according to him, whether we are ever really able to correctly identify an impression as true on the basis of its perceptual content. According to Cicero:

[...] [W]e don't [do away with truth altogether], since we discern as many true as false things. But our discerning is a kind of approval: we don't find any sign of apprehension.<sup>57</sup>

In response to the Stoic criticism against skepticism Cicero argued that the Academic sceptic can indeed act: "There are 'persuasive' or, as it were, 'truth-like' impressions, and this is what they [the Academics] use as their guiding rule both for conducting their lives and in investigation and argument."<sup>58</sup> I have showed that the 'original' Sceptics also claimed that they are able to act by relying on what appears to be subjectively plausible. According to Arcesilaus this is something that is reasonable (*to eulogon*), and Carneades referred to the subjectively plausible as that what is plausible (*to pithanon*). Cicero translated these words with *probabilitas* ('probable'), and also with *verisimilis* ('truthlike'), seeming to state that *probabilitas* is in a way like the truth.<sup>59</sup> This is a radically different meaning than the one held by the 'original' Sceptics. Augustine, as I will show, pointed out that the 'probable' (*probabilis*) or 'truthlike' (*verisimilis*) involves several absurdities and inconsistencies and that normative judgment of the sort that guides action requires more than mere assent to probabilities or verisimilitudes.<sup>60</sup>

It is important to note that Cicero's position was quite different from the one held by the earlier Academics. It is generally believed that this was the result of a misinterpretation on the part of Cicero. The earlier Sceptics were much more radical and stated that it is impossible to have or obtain any beliefs. They successfully countered every opponent's position and had no other choice than to suspend judgment and believe nothing. In contrast to this, Cicero's positive alternative had as its goal to obtain the most rationally defensible position possible, with the complete awareness of one's fallibility.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 2.111.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 2.32.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 2.7-9; 2.32; 2.99.

<sup>60</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Contra Academicos* 2.7.16; 7.19-8,20, 11.26-13.30; cf. 3.16.35-6; For discussion, see Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (London: Routledge, 1989).

## 2. Augustine and Scepticism

The previous chapter dealt with Scepticism and Cicero's position in particular. The current chapter focuses on the pitfalls that, according to Augustine, Cicero's Scepticism posed. Before discussing the problems Augustine encountered with Scepticism I will discuss the events leading up to Augustine's writing of the *Contra Academicos*. In this chapter I will have a closer look to the *Contra Academicos*. His book portrays the conversation and discussion between Augustine and his friend bishop Alypius of Thagaste, and with his two students Trygetius and Licentius. Augustine's role in the dialogue is to argue against Scepticism.

Augustine's spiritual journey started in 373 in Thagaste where he discovered Cicero's *Hortensius*, a book that drew his attention to philosophy.<sup>61</sup> Augustine mentioned in his *Confessiones* that it changed his "affections" (*affectum*).<sup>62</sup> For Augustine the soul consisted of four movements, which he described as affections.

In the ordinary course of study, I lighted upon a certain book of Cicero, whose language, though not his heart, almost all admire. This book of his contains an exhortation to philosophy, and is called Hortensius. This book, in truth, changed my affections, and turned my prayers to Yourself, O Lord, and made me have other hopes and desires. Worthless suddenly became every vain hope to me; and, with an incredible warmth of heart, I yearned for an immortality of wisdom.<sup>63</sup>

Augustine was affected by a desire for a life such as the one described by Cicero, and wanted to give up everything for truth and Wisdom.<sup>64</sup> In retrospect Augustine wrote that because Cicero did not mention Christ, of which his Christian mother had told him when he was a boy, he decided to compare Cicero's wisdom to the Christian Scriptures. Compared to Cicero, Augustine held the Sacred Writings to be quite disappointing as its language was nowhere near as noble as the language of Cicero.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, as a religious man he later wrote in his *Confessiones* he wrote that he was discontent with Cicero as well and believed that he (Augustine) should "love, seek, obtain, hold, and embrace, not this or that sect, but wisdom itself, whatever it were; and this alone checked me thus ardent, that the name of Christ was not in it."<sup>66</sup> Philosophy had won over Augustine's heart, yet the wisdom described

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<sup>61</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 7; Rist, *Augustine* 2.

<sup>62</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 3.7.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 3.4.7.

<sup>64</sup> Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism* 20.

<sup>65</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 3.5; 5.9.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 3.4.8.

by Cicero was not the one Augustine was after.<sup>67</sup> In retrospect, Augustine wrote that the wisdom he was after was one bearing the name of Christ.<sup>68</sup> In his *Confessiones* he explained that he tried to read Scripture and find the wisdom he was after. Augustine was unsuccessful in his quest and determined that he must seek elsewhere. For a while, Manichaeism was his answer.

## 2.1. Manichaeans

The Manichaeans were a religious group who advocated a philosophy of dualism. They believed the material world to be under the authority of evil; the spiritual world, including the soul, was controlled by the good. The evil material world and the good spiritual world had a continuous war with each other. According to the Manichaean view, evil could only be defeated when the soul was no longer held captive by the flesh, i.e. when the soul dies.<sup>69</sup>

According to the Manichaeans God can never be the source of evil, since he is wholly good. This view was a result of their dualistic thinking, implying that something evil cannot come from something good. They believed that God's good 'Kingdom of Light' was attacked by an evil force which they called the 'Kingdom of Darkness'. Manichaeism dealt with the origin of evil by arguing that God is a powerful being, though not-omnipotent, and is opposed by the semi-eternal evil power.

Manichaeism held that God created the first human who battled with evil and from this struggle humanity, the world, and the soul originated. According to the Manichaeans the earth nor the flesh were intrinsically evil, instead they were considered as a battleground between light and darkness. The same struggle is evident in humans who are composed of a soul (the good part, constituted of light) and a body (the bad part, constituted of dark earth). It is the soul that defines a person and it is incorruptible, but controlled by a foreign power.<sup>70</sup> This power can be overcome when humans identify who they are and are able to identify themselves with their soul.<sup>71</sup>

By means of this dualism the Manichaeans helped Augustine to understand why humans do evil deeds. They freed Augustine from his feeling of guilt since sinful behaviour and crimes were, according to them, the result of something extrinsic. Augustine wrote:

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<sup>67</sup> Portalie, *Thought of Saint Augustine* 7-8.

<sup>68</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 3.4.8; 5.14.25; Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 30.

<sup>69</sup> Eugenia Smagina, "The Manichaean Cosmogonical Myth as a 're-written Bible'", Jacob A. van den Berg and J. van Oort (eds.), *In Search of Truth: Augustine, Manichaeism and Other Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). 201-216.

<sup>70</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 36; 39.

<sup>71</sup> R.E. Emmerick, "The Idea of the 'Good' in Manichaeism" 51-64.

For it still seemed to me that it was not we that sin, but that I know not what other nature sinned in us. And it gratified my pride to be free from blame.<sup>72</sup>

Augustine was drawn to the Manichaeans because they promised to provide an answer to all his questions.<sup>73</sup> Augustine was interested in the natural sciences and hoped, with help of the Manichaeans, to find an explanation of nature and its mysteries. The Manichaeans told Augustine that nature had no secrets for their teacher Faustus.<sup>74</sup>

Augustine wrote quite extensively, though apologetically, in his *Confessiones* about his time with the Manichaeans. Jason David BeDuhn correctly writes that it is almost impossible to pinpoint what made the Manichaeans appealing to Augustine. As a high-standing Christian it was advantageous for Augustine to say in his apology that “in his misguidedness he had at least held fast to the name of Christ, however mistaken he had been about the legitimacy of the Manichaean claim to it.”<sup>75</sup> Even though Augustine described himself as a fervent member of the Manichaean religion, he wrote that their teachings never really satisfied him:

The snares of the devil were in their mouths [...] they cried out “Truth, truth;” they were forever uttering the word to me, but the thing was nowhere in them; indeed they spoke falsehood not only of You, who are truly Truth, but also of the elements of this world, Your creatures. [...] I swallowed them because I thought that they were Yourself: yet I did not swallow them with much appetite, because You did not taste in my mouth as You are - for after all You were not those empty falsehoods - and I was not nourished by them, but utterly dried up.<sup>76</sup>

Augustine was quite hard on himself when he described his years under the influence of the Manichaeans. Later commentaries and biographies on Augustine, however, try to downplay this participation of Augustine's. See for example Brown's biography in which he continuously emphasizes that Augustine was a young and sensitive man when coming into contact with the Manichaeans.<sup>77</sup> It is also very evident in Portalie who describes Augustine's time with the Manichaeans as a crisis and spends no more than a page on it.<sup>78</sup> It is, however,

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<sup>72</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones* 5.10.18.

<sup>73</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 3.6.10; Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism* 20.

<sup>74</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 5.3.3; 5.6.10; Portalie, *Thought of Saint Augustine* 8.

<sup>75</sup> Jason David BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma* vol. 1. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 33.

<sup>76</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 3.6.

<sup>77</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 35-49.

<sup>78</sup> Portalie, *Thought of Saint Augustine* 8-9.

not the case that Augustine briefly wandered the wrong path. He stayed with the Manichaeans for at least nine years and stayed a member, though not a very active one, for much longer. Recent studies emphasize the importance of Augustine's Manichaean past, arguing that he in fact never really got rid of it.<sup>79</sup>

Augustine's main problem with Manicheism was that he did not find any science amongst them, while science, or 'scientia', in the sense of knowledge of nature and its laws, was what Manicheism had promised him.<sup>80</sup> Augustine searched for a true explanation of nature and its mysteries and became disappointed when he found out that there was no such science to be found in the whole of Manicheism.<sup>81</sup> According to Augustine the Manichaeans limited human knowledge to what the senses were able to perceive and by doing so they came to the belief that matter is all that exists.

Augustine wanted to solve the contradictions that he encountered in Manicheism and turned to the leader of the Manichaeans: Faustus of Milevis. He was told that Faustus was a very educated man and could clarify everything to him.<sup>82</sup> Yet when Faustus arrived in Carthage in 383 Augustine found "at once that he knew nothing of the liberal arts except grammar, and that only in an ordinary way."<sup>83</sup> Faustus belonged to those Manichaeans who believed they were the reformers of Christianity, he was not so much interested in Mani's revelations. By this time Augustine had almost completely turned his back on Manicheism and was about to search for his 'Wisdom' somewhere else.<sup>84</sup>

In the same year that Augustine broke with Manicheism, at the age of twenty-nine, he sailed to Rome in the hope to find more kindred spirits.<sup>85</sup> He soon became a professor of rhetoric in Milan and turned again to Cicero, becoming acquainted with the sceptical views of the Academics. Augustine learned that the Stoics claimed that absolute knowledge of nature is possible, while the Sceptics claimed the opposite.

Up to now Augustine's main driving force was his quest for knowledge, his desire to discover nature's mysteries; after leaving the Manichaeans he also wanted to prove the

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<sup>79</sup> See for example Jason David BeDuhn, *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma* (University of Pennsylvania Press: 2011); J. van Oort, *Augustine and Manichaean Christianity* (University of Pretoria: 2012); Jacob Albert van den Berg and J. van Oort, *In Search of Truth: Augustine, Manichaeism and other Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Portalie, *Thought of Saint Augustine* 11.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 47-48; Portalie, *Thought of Saint Augustine* 11; Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 5.6.11.

<sup>83</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 5.6.11.

<sup>84</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 48; Portalie, *Thought of Saint Augustine* 11.

<sup>85</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 5.8.14.



falsity of Manichaeian convictions. After getting to know the view of the Academics, Augustine fell into a period of uncertainty and did not know whether absolute knowledge of nature was possible. He believed it to be wise not to remain a member of the Manicheans:

So, in what I thought was the method of the Academics - doubting everything and fluctuating between all the options - I came to the conclusion that the Manicheans were to be abandoned. For I judged, even in that period of doubt, that I could not remain in a sect to which I preferred some of the philosophers.<sup>86</sup>

Brown affirms that the Manicheans were very much exposed to the criticism of the Academic Sceptics. The Manicheans had promised Augustine absolute certainty and claimed that the wisdom in their books adequately described the reality of the universe. As a member of the Manicheans, all one had to do was to act in accordance with this knowledge. However, by supporting the Manicheans so strongly, Augustine was guilty of the recklessness described by Cicero on his *Academica*, namely the hot-headed favouritism of a schoolboy for a sect. It was no surprise that Augustine briefly considered Cicero's Academic Scepticism as a safe haven in his disillusionment.

There was another influence in Augustine's life, helping him argue against the Manichaeans. This influence was the bishop Ambrose who introduced Augustine to a different kind of thinking and was able to defend the Old Testament against the Manichaeans.<sup>87</sup>

First of all, his ideas had already begun to appear to me defensible; and the Catholic faith, for which I supposed that nothing could be said against the onslaught of the Manicheans, I now realized could be maintained without presumption. This was especially clear after I had heard one or two parts of the Old Testament explained allegorically--whereas before this, when I had interpreted them literally, they had "killed" me spiritually.<sup>88</sup>

Ambrose had read a lot of contemporary Greek theology, knew something about Greek Neoplatonism, and introduced Augustine to a 'Platonising' interpretation of Christianity.<sup>89</sup> Ambrose believed that God and the human soul were not connected with the material reality. According to Ambrose a man is his soul and the body is just its physical instrument,

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Rist, *Augustine* 3; Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 74.

<sup>88</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 5.14.25.

<sup>89</sup> Rist, *Augustine* 3.

like a clothing around it.<sup>90</sup> This new way of thinking was a turning point in Augustine's life and he would follow this direction until his death. In his 'divine illumination argument' against the Sceptics Augustine made use of the Platonic distinction between the realm of Forms and the material world.

Ambrose instructed Augustine in reading Scripture in such a way that it was intelligible and logical. Ambrose also taught Augustine to read Scripture allegorically.<sup>91</sup> Augustine wrote about his new state of mind in his *Confessiones*:

See, the things in the Church's books that appeared so absurd to us before do not appear so now, and may be otherwise and honestly interpreted. I will set my feet upon that step where, as a child, my parents placed me, until the clear truth is discovered. [...] A great hope has risen up in us, because the Catholic faith does not teach what we thought it did, and vainly accused it of.<sup>92</sup>

Augustine wanted absolute certainty on ultimate questions and was briefly satisfied with the suspension of judgment.<sup>93</sup> However, searching for wisdom and truth, Augustine became discontent with the suspension of judgment. Soon after finishing some of Plato's and Plotinus' works, Augustine gained a renewed hope of finding the truth.<sup>94</sup>

## 2.2. Platonism

Ambrose was not a Neoplatonist, but was acquainted with the Christian version of Platonism. Around 386 an unknown Christian person introduced Augustine to a set of Platonic books. Augustine also met the priest Simplicianus who introduced him to the Christian Platonists of Milan.<sup>95</sup> It should be noted that it is unclear to which "books" and which "Platonists" Augustine referred. Most authorities agree that the "books" mentioned by Augustine were the *Enneads* of Plotinus, translated into Latin several years earlier by Marius Victorinus.<sup>96</sup> In Milan, Platonism was Christian and the Christian Platonists held their own views which intrigued Augustine. In his *Confessiones* he stated that he found not the exact same words in Scripture and the Platonic books, but that the effect nevertheless was

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<sup>90</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 75.

<sup>91</sup> Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism* 21.

<sup>92</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 6.11.18.

<sup>93</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 83.

<sup>94</sup> Portalie, *Thought of Saint Augustine* 12.

<sup>95</sup> Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism* 21; Rist, *Augustine* 3.

<sup>96</sup> M.P. Garvey, *St. Augustine: Christian or Neo-Platonist* (Milwaukee, 1939).

the same.<sup>97</sup> Both Christianity and Platonism point in the same direction and are radically other-worldly. Christ had said that his Kingdom is not of this world whilst Plato had said the same about his realm of ideas.<sup>98</sup> The Platonic works showed that God is in no way similar to humans, while the Manichaeans proclaimed that God is present, i.e. visible to humans, yet also separate from them.<sup>99</sup> The Platonists conceived of God as being radically different from his creatures, whilst the Manichaeans thought of God like a sculptor and considered his creation as a sculpture in which there is always a part of the sculptor. This notion of the Manichaeans was very hard to understand for Augustine and he instead accepted the notion of the Platonists and its consequences. Augustine could no longer identify himself with his God and had to accept God's separateness:

I realized that I was far away from thee in the land of unlikeness, as if I heard thy voice from on high: "I am the food of strong men; grow and you shall feed on me; nor shall you change me, like the food of your flesh into yourself, but you shall be changed into my likeness."<sup>100</sup>

Augustine read the above mentioned Platonic works when he was still fighting off some of his Manichaean thoughts. He found it particularly hard to believe that the Good is something passive, invaded by evil. In the works of Plotinus he discovered that the Good always maintained the initiative and was not violated or diminished. Augustine took over the Plotinian notion of emanation and argued, in his *Confessiones* and in the *Enchiridion*, that evil is simply a lack of good. This is known as the famous 'privatio boni' argument.

Augustine went beyond the Platonic books when he started to see Christ as the only Way.<sup>101</sup> The Neo-Platonists spoke about God's nature whilst being unable to access this nature, and accessing this nature was what Augustine wanted. Yet Augustine did not immediately convert to Christianity after the discovery of Christ as the only Way. His will was not yet ready for baptism and he saw in pagan Platonism a great alternative to Catholicism.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless a void remained in this pagan Platonism and Augustine searched for something to complete the lucid spirituality of the Platonists. This is when

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<sup>97</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 7.9.13; Rist, *Augustine* 3; Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 84; Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism* 21.

<sup>98</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Contra Academicos* (trans.), John J. O'Meara (New York: Newman Press, 1951), 3.19.42.

<sup>99</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 7.1.1-2.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* 7.10.16.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* 7.9.14.

<sup>102</sup> Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* 96.

Ambrose stimulated him to read Saint Paul's texts. Augustine had read parts of these texts already during his time at the Manichaeans. Under Ambrose's guidance he read them for the first time as a whole. Augustine started to turn toward Catholic Christianity, and identified Platonism with the religion he got from his mother.<sup>103</sup> Brown writes that Augustine now no longer depended on himself alone, as was demanded by Platonism. Instead, Augustine now relied on God, whilst maintaining that a wise man is someone in the possession of the wisdom upheld by the Platonists.<sup>104</sup>

### **2.3. *Contra Academicos***

Augustine wrote his *Contra Academicos* shortly before his baptism, around 386 and 387. In it he attacked Scepticism because he believed that it stands in the way of reaching true happiness. Implicit in the background of his *Contra Academicos* lays a connection between morality and knowledge. One of the pitfalls that Augustine saw in Cicero's Scepticism is that it has the tendency to make one lazy. Having heard that the truth cannot be found, Augustine noticed that his contemporaries became lazy and did not even try to find the truth. As a result, knowledge about what is morally good or bad to do also becomes unavailable. These and other problems indicated by Augustine will be addressed in this section. I will also discuss Augustine's arguments against Cicero's Scepticism. Before doing so I will first briefly discuss Augustine's reasons for writing the *Contra Academicos*, give a short summary, and discuss some of the interpretations.

#### **2.3.1. Reasons**

From the title of Augustine's work it can easily be concluded that this work is directed against the Academics. More precisely, it is directed against Cicero's interpretation of their teachings. Unfortunately, Augustine's reasons for responding to them do not become evident. He only makes clear that he disagrees with the Academic Sceptics concerning their claim that knowledge is impossible.<sup>105</sup> However, there are several other problems that Augustine encountered with Academic Scepticism. Curley mentions that Augustine made a distinction between the effect of Academic Scepticism in its own time and its effect in Augustine's time.<sup>106</sup> According to Augustine, the effect of Academic Scepticism in his day was different from its original intention, which was to prevent people from becoming dogmatists.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 98.

<sup>105</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Contra Academicos* 2.13.30.

<sup>106</sup> Curley, *Augustine's Critique of Skepticism* 16.

In Augustine's time, however, the doctrine of the Academics became a hindrance because it prevented people to obtain knowledge. Augustine also complained about the laziness of his contemporaries who, after they found out that the truth cannot be obtained, did not undertake the effort to pursue it.<sup>107</sup> That Academic Scepticism causes people to become lazy was one of Augustine's major problems and he maintained that people only have to open their eyes to see that there are true things that can be known. When people realize this, they will be motivated to pursue the truth.<sup>108</sup> In his *Epistulae*, letters he wrote after his *Contra Academicos*, Augustine's frustration concerning the laziness of his contemporaries also becomes evident.<sup>109</sup> In his letter to Hermogenianus, about whom little is known, Augustine wrote:

But, nowadays, there is such shrinking from effort and such poor esteem of study that it is enough for shrewd thinkers to declare that nothing can be understood, and men forthwith give up the quest and doom themselves to eternal darkness.<sup>110</sup>

In his *Retractationes* in which he, among other things, discussed the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine put forward his biggest issue with Scepticism.<sup>111</sup> He held that the teachings of the Academics drove people to despair because they claim that the truth can never be found. Yet Augustine believed that people should be led to hope instead of despair and stated that people have to understand that the truth is not something about which one should be in despair:

Before my baptism I wrote, first of all, against the Academics or about the Academics, so that, with the most forceful reasons possible, I might remove from my mind – because they were disturbing me – their arguments which in many men instill a despair of finding truth and prevent a wise man from giving assent to anything or approving anything at all as clear and certain, since to them everything seems obscure and uncertain.<sup>112</sup>

In the *Contra Academicos* it also becomes evident that Academic Scepticism stands in the way of finding truth:

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>108</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Contra Academicos* 3.10.23.

<sup>109</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Epistulae* (trans.), P. Wilfrid (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2008).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>111</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Retractationes* (trans.), Mary Bogan (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 1.1.

It's enough for me to get over, by any means, the mountain that gets in the way of those who are beginners at philosophy. Casting shadows from unknown sources, it threatens that the whole of philosophy is likewise obscure, and it doesn't permit one to hope that any light is going to be found on it.<sup>113</sup>

A final problem I want to address here is closely related to the notion of probability. In the previous chapter I have shown that the Sceptics came up with the notion of 'convincing impressions'. Augustine held that the theory of convincing impressions is ridiculous and argued that, by means of this theory, the Sceptics implicitly declared that there is something like the truth: "They [the Academics] say that in this life they follow something truthlike, although they do not know what the truth is."<sup>114</sup> He argued for this further by stating that the Academics belong to a certain class and "in the same class are people who say: 'We *don't* know the truth, but what we see is *like* what we don't know.'"<sup>115</sup> According to Augustine it is absurd to claim that something looks like the truth, while at the same time one maintains that one does not know what the truth is. Augustine was able to make this claim due to a fault in Cicero's translation. Cicero wanted to translate *pithanon* and *eikos*, but translated these not as 'convincing' or 'probable' but as 'like the truth' / 'similar to the truth' (*verisimile*) or 'plausibly' (*probabile*).<sup>116</sup> According to Augustine the notion of 'like the truth' can only make sense in the context of an absolute standard. By implicitly posing a standard, i.e. the truth to which things resemble, one implicitly admits that there is such a thing as the truth. Notions about something being like the truth would be useless otherwise.

### 2.3.2. Summary

The *Contra Academicos* consists of three books and in each of them Augustine emphasized that its content is about oneself, one's life, one's morality, one's soul, and one's happiness.<sup>117</sup> According to Augustine, the Academics obstruct one in these matters. The Academics deny that one has the ability to know the truth. By doing so they, according to Augustine, make man someone who aimlessly wanders about in life unable to discover what is morally good and unable to achieve true happiness.

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<sup>113</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Contra Academicos* 3.14.30.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 2.7.19.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* 2.8.20.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* 2.5.12; 2.7.16; 2.7.19; 2.12.27; 2.12.28; Cicero, *On Academic Scepticism* 20-21.

<sup>117</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Contra Academicos* 1.7.20; 2.9.22; 3.1.1.

In the first book Augustine hardly ever mentioned the Academics. He first of all wanted to make sure that everyone agrees that one has to search for the truth.<sup>118</sup> Afterwards Licentius and Trygetius debate about the question if it is necessary to understand the truth or that happiness can be found in the search for truth, even though one may never find it. Another question raised in the first book is whether one wanders when one has not yet found the truth. In the second book and partly in the third, Augustine debated with bishop Alypius of Thagaste about the central question whether a wise man can know the truth. The answer to this question is that, *if* the truth can be found, the wise man is the one who will find it. After the debate Augustine continued on his own. He argued in response to the teachings of the Academics and won them over to his side. Augustine showed that simple truths can be known since someone can truthfully say that something tastes bitter, feels cold or sounds loud to him. Another step taken by Augustine is showing that someone who never consents to anything does nothing, and even if one does not consent one can wander.<sup>119</sup> Augustine clarified his statement with an example about two travelers which will be discussed in more detail when I will show how Augustine argued against the Sceptics. Augustine also showed that the teachings of the Academics are morally untenable. As shall become clear, Augustine undermined the support and the right to exist for the teachings of the Academics and completely ridiculed their body of thought.

### 2.3.3. Interpretations

There have been speculations in the last century about the reasons why Augustine wrote his *Contra Academicos*. The answers to these speculations are generally divided in two groups. One answer is linked to what David Mosher in his 1981 article calls the “received interpretation.” The received interpretation focuses mainly on the epistemological aspects of the *Contra Academicos*. Proponents of this interpretation believe that Augustine went through a period of Scepticism and that the *Contra Academicos* was his attempt to dispose himself of the sceptic doubts in order to accept the Catholic faith.<sup>120</sup> According to Charles Boyer, Augustine solidified his Christianity in the *Contra Academicos* by arguing against the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 1.2.5.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 2.15.33.

<sup>120</sup> An interesting work on Augustine’s Spiritual development is G. Boissier, “La Conversion de Saint Augustin,” *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 85 (1888), 43-69. (Put forward by Colin Starnes, *Augustine’s Conversion: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990).

Sceptics.<sup>121</sup> Bernard J. Diggs also follows this more traditional line by saying that Augustine's arguments and his later comments make clear that he saw his dialogue as a refutation of Academic Scepticism.<sup>122</sup>

For a group of scholars following the lead of Regnar Holte it is not evident that the *Contra Academicos* largely consists of a critique of Scepticism. According to Holte the *Contra Academicos* is not an epistemological attack on Scepticism, but considers instead the role of the moral critique of Scepticism. He believes that "The *Contra Academicos* is nothing else but a Christian contribution to the discussion among the ancient philosophical schools about the telos."<sup>123</sup> According to Holte, Augustine started by setting the different philosophical schools against each other and then introduced Christ as the only solution. Holte states that according to Augustine the ancient philosophers were right in determining the goal of mankind whilst here on earth, namely to find true and lasting happiness; a state of tranquillity reached by the discovery of certain knowledge. The Academic Sceptics in turn correctly pointed out that man is unable to achieve this goal, which is why Augustine, according to Holte, introduced one's need for the help and guidance of God.<sup>124</sup>

A new interpretation has emerged recently, interpreting the goal of the *Contra Academicos* as being connected to morality. According to Heil the content of the sceptical discourse was not what Augustine troubled most, he was much more worried by the effects that the sceptical discourse had on one's mind.<sup>125</sup> According to Heil Scepticism was seen as "a means to a personal, ethical end", and he argues that Augustine did not really give arguments against Scepticism. Heil does not believe that Augustine's arguments were of an epistemological nature. Instead these arguments appealed to "the moral sensibilities of men."<sup>126</sup> In line with Heil, Mosher also proposes a moral interpretation of the *Contra Academicos*. He argues against the interpretation of the *Contra Academicos* as an epistemological attack on Scepticism. Mosher states that for Augustine refuting the principles of Scepticism was only of secondary importance. What was of much more

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<sup>121</sup> Charles Boyer, *Christianisme et néo-Platonisme dans la formation de saint Augustin* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1953), 18.

<sup>122</sup> Bernard J. Diggs, "St. Augustine against the Academicians", *Traditio* 7 (1949-51), 91.

<sup>123</sup> Regnar Holte, *Béatitude et Sagesse* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1962), 76.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* 93.

<sup>125</sup> Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism" 99.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* 110-111.



importance is that the wise man is able to know wisdom and can assent to it.<sup>127</sup> Mosher also says that for Augustine the ability to suspend judgment and the ability to act on the probable were moral inconsistencies instead of logical inconsistencies. He therefore concludes that Augustine's refutation of Scepticism was based in moral considerations, not on epistemological ones.<sup>128</sup>

So what is the *Contra Academicos*? Although most of what Augustine wrote seems to contain a logical critique, I argue that the relationship between Academic Scepticism and ethics is indeed something that should not be overlooked. The *Contra Academicos* is much more concerned with morality, i.e. how one should live instead of justifying the claim of having certain knowledge. It seems, then, that Augustine's own reasons for writing his *Contra Academicos* are in line with the moral interpretations of the *Contra Academicos*.

The debate between Licentius and Trygetius enabled Augustine to expound his moral critique of Scepticism. I believe the dialogue to be much more focused on how one has to live than on how one is justified for claiming knowledge. Indeed, there is a logical critique of Scepticism. However, when one solely focuses on this aspect one runs the risk of missing Augustine's purpose for writing the dialogue in the first place. When reading the dialogue as a work that focuses exclusively on epistemology, one might become puzzled with Augustine's arguments. In this case, the bewilderment already starts at the beginning of the book in the dedicatory epistle to Romanianus. Solely focusing on the epistemological aspect of the *Contra Academicos* has as its consequence that the epistle to Romanianus seems to be the odd one out compared to the rest of the book. This is why it often gets ignored. Also, when viewing the *Contra Academicos* as merely a critique of the Academic theory of sense-perception it becomes strange that Augustine's discussion of this theory comes rather late in his book. It appears just after the seemingly endless and childish debate between Trygetius and Licentius. The argument in the first book is not directed towards Cicero's interpretation of Academic Scepticism, instead its purpose is the definition of happiness. The relationship between Augustine's discussion of happiness and his discussion of the Academics is not surprising when one keeps in mind that (classical) Scepticism had as its goal to safeguard against unhappiness. Sextus Empiricus, who has been introduced in the previous chapter,

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<sup>127</sup> David Mosher, "The Argument of St. Augustine's *Contra Academicos*", *Augustinian Studies* 12 (1981), 89-113.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* 103.

described the goal of Scepticism as follows: “quietude in respect of matters of opinion and moderate feeling in respect of things unavoidable.”<sup>129</sup> Scepticism had to make sure that one remains happy, even though things are uncertain. Commentators often focus on the third book of the *Contra Academicos* when writing about Augustine’s critique of Scepticism and largely, if not completely, ignore the first and the second book. I believe it therefore to be highly probable that they miss Augustine’s true purpose for writing his work.

From what has been discussed above it can be concluded that the *Contra Academicos* can be viewed as a logical and epistemological critique of Scepticism, but also as a moral critique. Augustine considered Scepticism to be an enemy of morality because he believed that the Sceptics did not have a basis for choosing the right actions. Augustine’s main goal was to determine what makes a life a happy life. In order to achieve this he had to free himself from the sceptic thoughts he had when he was younger, as he would otherwise not be able to make decisions on how to live his life. At the time of his conversion Augustine stated that he was:

Trying to deal with that knottiest of questions which baffled the most acute men of the Academy, whether a wise man ought ever to affirm anything positively lest he be involved in the error of affirming as true what may be false, since all questions, as they assert, are either mysterious or uncertain. On these points I wrote three books in the early stages of my conversion because my further progress was being blocked by objections like this which stood at the very threshold of my understanding.<sup>130</sup>

The most important choice for Augustine to make was whether or not to undergo baptism and he faced this choice at the time of writing the *Contra Academicos*.

I have put forward Augustine’s reasons for writing his *Contra Academicos* and showed that he had some serious issues with the sceptic’s claim that knowledge is impossible. He saw the doctrine of the Academics as a hindrance as it prevented people from obtaining knowledge. Another complaint was that his contemporaries became lazy as soon as they found out that the truth cannot be found. Augustine also believed that the teachings of the Academics drove people to despair and that by arguing that the truth

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<sup>129</sup> Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.25

<sup>130</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Charity* (trans.), L. Arand (Maryland: The Newman Bookshop, 1974), 7.20.

cannot be found, Academic Scepticism stands in the way of finding the truth. The question that needs answering now is how Augustine argued against Cicero's Academic Scepticism.

#### **2.4. Arguments against Academic Scepticism**

Augustine was mainly concerned with the sceptic's claim that the truth cannot be known. According to Augustine one can have certain knowledge and the first step in his argumentation is to show the things of which one can be certain. One of Augustine's arguments is that he knows for certain that the world exists, but how can he be so sure of this? The Academics had countless examples showing that one's senses can be misleading, or that one might be dreaming or hallucinating. Augustine points out that when, for instance, an oar in the water is bent, that this is true. The eyes see this oar as bent and do not mislead one in showing this:

If it [the oar] were to appear straight while dipped in the water, then with good reason I would blame my eyes for giving a false report. They wouldn't be seeing what should have been seen, given the existence of such an intervening cause.<sup>131</sup>

According to Augustine when it comes down to perceiving, the Sceptics have never proven that one is unable to perceive anything. One really perceives things and Augustine stated that "the whole that contains and sustains us, whatever it is" is what he calls the world. By this he understood "the whole [...] that appears before my eyes, which I perceive to include the heavens and the earth (or the quasi-heavens and quasi-earth)."<sup>132</sup> If the Sceptics would claim that one not only know nothing, but also perceive nothing, then Augustine is willing to let his argument go. However, when they want to deny that what Augustine perceives is the world, the discussion would result in a battle over words because Augustine said that *he* calls it the world. However, as I have already shown, the Academics claimed that one might be able to perceive things, yet one should not assent to these things. When one rashly accepts the things one sees, one might be led astray. Responding to this, Augustine used the same kind of argumentation as the stoics. He also stated that one will not be able to act when one does not assent to anything:

A hoary old objection should be made, one where the Academicians also have a reply to offer. Well, what else shall I do? You're pushing me out of my strongholds! Shall I plead for assistance from the learned, with whom, if I'm unable to win, it will be

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<sup>131</sup> Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.11.26.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* 3.11.24.

perhaps less shameful to use? So I shall hurl with all my might a weapon that is now rusty and musty but, unless I'm mistaken, is still effective: someone who gives his approval to nothing does nothing.<sup>133</sup>

As already learned discussed, the Academics responded to this objection by stating that there are convincing impressions who stimulate one to act. Augustine had major problems with this argument and held that one can always be led astray, even if one has not given one's assent. To illustrate this he used an example of two travellers who are both on their way to the same destination. One is too trustful, while the other rarely gives his assent. When the first traveller has asked a shepherd for directions, he immediately sets off. He assented too hastily, did not think his decision through and, according to the Academics, this is why he was led astray. But the shepherd did guide the traveller on the right direction. The second traveller did not assent and waited. However, he believed it to be wrong to do nothing and asked a wealthy man for directions. This man was unreliable, and gave him false directions. The traveller chose the wealthy man over the shepherd and it is therefore more likely that he will assent to the directions of the wealthy man. However, since he did not want to be deceived he said: "I don't give my approval to this information as true, but since this information is truthlike, and remaining idle here is neither appropriate nor advantageous, I'll take this road."<sup>134</sup> The traveller who does not assent to anything is, according to the Academics, unable to be led astray. Nevertheless, he still had not reached his destination by nightfall. The first traveller did eventually reach his destination, even though he went astray.<sup>135</sup> This example shows that it is according to the Academics impossible for someone to wander whilst following the correct path. The one who does not assent and, on the grounds of probability continues on the directed path, will not go off wandering. Because Augustine wanted to show that he does not approve when one irresponsibly agrees with something, he argued that both travellers were led astray.

Augustine argued that the Academic teaching is also morally indefensible. Imagine, he said, that a young man hears the Academics say: "It's shameful to be in error, and hence we ought not to consent to anything; but when someone does what seems plausible to him he's neither remiss nor in error: he'll only have to remember that no matter what comes to

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 3.15.33.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 3.15.34.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

his mind or senses, it shouldn't be approved as truth."<sup>136</sup> What if this young man, after hearing this, goes off to seduce someone else's wife? He will be summoned to court and Augustine wondered how the Academics would defend this young man. They would say that he has done nothing wrong, and did not made a mistake. The young man "didn't convince himself that adultery should be committed is a truth."<sup>137</sup> It seemed plausible to him and he acted based on this plausibility. It can also be the case that he did not act, but only *thought* that he had seduced the wife. According to the Academics the young man did not wander and this is why he should not be convicted. Still, the judges will not pay attention to the Academics and punish the young man according to the crime he has committed. Even if the judges would pay attention to the Academics they would still convict the young man, this time on account of probability and resemblance with the truth. The Academic, acting as defendant, is perplex and does not know what to do:

He won't have any reason to be angry with anyone, since they all say that they did nothing in error when they did what seemed plausible while not assenting to it. So he'll put aside the role of lawyer and take up that of the philosopher offering consolation. He'll thus easily convince the young man, who has already made such progress in the Academy, to think that he has been found guilty only in a dream.<sup>138</sup>

Augustine showed by means of this example that it is incomprehensible how a young man could have sinned when someone who acts on account of what seems plausible does not sin. Were one to believe the Academics, one should not punish a murderer when he says: "I consented to nothing and so was not in error, but how could I not do what seemed plausible?"<sup>139</sup> Augustine also believed it to be absurd that "the Academicians say that in their actions they follow only the plausible, and that they are searching mightily for the truth, although it's plausible to them that it can't be found."<sup>140</sup>

After showing why Academic Scepticism is an unsustainable position, Augustine admitted that it was not his goal to prove them wrong. In fact, their position may very well be plausible, and he may be the one who is mistaken:

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 3.16.35.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 3.16.36.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

I've convinced myself at times, as far as I could, that this view of the Academicians is plausible. Yet it doesn't matter to me if it's false. It's enough for me that I no longer think that the truth can't be found by man."<sup>141</sup>

Augustine wanted to prove that the truth is something that can be discovered by man, and this is something on which he can elaborate. Now that Augustine has made clear which things can be known with certainty, he has to show how the truth can be discovered. This will be the main subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 3.20.43.

### 3. Divine illumination

In this chapter I will investigate Augustine's theory of knowledge and the workings of divine illumination. I will briefly compare scholarly discussions and review what Augustine himself had to say about his idea that God somehow illuminates the mind of man. I will conclude this chapter by showing how divine illumination can serve as an argument against Cicero's interpretation of Academic Scepticism.

Before one can say anything about the workings of divine illumination it is important to ask why Augustine put so much emphasis on its necessity. To answer this question it is vital to research Augustine's ideas concerning the process by which one acquires knowledge and the role that divine illumination plays in this process. I will show that, because the 'natural' way of acquiring knowledge does not result in absolute knowledge, a 'supernatural' step is needed. This supernatural step is divine illumination.

It should be noted that Augustine in his earlier writings held that knowledge of God and a complete understanding of God's knowledge is possible in one's earthly life. In his later works, especially in his *Civitate Dei*, Augustine no longer supported this view and instead held that such knowledge is only accessible when one is in the direct presence of God's light. However, since this thesis concerns itself with Augustine's notion of divine illumination as an argument against Cicero's Academic Scepticism, and focuses on the (early) works in which Augustine dealt with this Scepticism, I make use of Augustine's view that absolute knowledge is accessible while on earth.

#### 3.1. Augustine on knowledge

In his *De Trinitate* Augustine clearly and systemically described the process by which one acquires knowledge. According to him material objects contain 'species', representing the shape, figure and form of external objects. Augustine argued that species make it possible for one to obtain an understanding of the external world. One's process of knowledge starts when the species of material objects travel from the external object to one's eyes, and enter one's sense organs. The species will eventually reach one's perceptual and cognitive faculties.<sup>142</sup>

In this arrangement, then, while we begin from the bodily species and arrive finally at the species which comes to be in the intuition (*contuitu*) of the concipient, we find

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<sup>142</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* XI.2 (trans.), William Harmless (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), XI.2.

four species born, as it were, step by step one from the other, the second from the first, the third from the second, the fourth from the third: since from the species of the body itself, there arises that which comes to be in the sense of the percipient; and from this, that which comes to be in the memory; and from this, that which comes to be in the mind's eye of the concipient.<sup>143</sup>

Due to the existence of 'species', one is able to obtain knowledge of remote objects or recollect objects that one has perceived in the past. According to Augustine the process of knowledge starts when the body undergoes a sensation caused by species. The mind, in turn, acts upon that sensation and forms an image of what it has observed.<sup>144</sup> In order for the mind to act upon a sensation the notion of mental attention is important. Augustine held it to be insufficient that sense organs undergo sensations. The mind has to pay attention to the state of the sense organs so that it becomes aware of what is happening there. When doing so the mind becomes aware of the sensible world that is affecting the sense organs. According to Augustine this 'mental attention', however, only happens when the will causes the mind to pay attention to sensation.<sup>145</sup>

The next step in the process of knowledge is imagination, here the soul adds and subtracts elements to the images that one creates. I have, for example, never actually seen a castle in the sky, but I can perfectly bring it into being from things that I did previously perceive. Simply put: to my image of a castle I add my image of the sky resulting in an image of a castle in the sky. For this step the memory is important. According to Augustine the sensory input has to be stored in the memory in order to get a coherent sensory experience. If I want to experience, for example, the word 'horse' as a whole, I have to remember the horse's tail when I hear the horse neigh etc. I cannot remember the whole horse if I have not yet previously perceived all its parts and stored them in my memory. Augustine described the memory as that place which contains "countless images of all sorts brought there from objects perceived by the senses."<sup>146</sup> In *De Trinitate* Augustine argued that thought is composed of 1) the memory of the external object that one has perceived, 2) an internal vision of its likeness, and 3) the will guiding the internal vision to the memory of the object that one has perceived. "When these three are gathered into one, it is called thought from

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid. XI.9.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. X.2; IX.11.

<sup>145</sup> Michael B. Dauphinais, "Imago Dei", *Aquinas the Augustinian* (Washington: 2007), 104.

<sup>146</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 10.8.12.



this being gathered together.”<sup>147</sup> According to Augustine, one can only remember something if one stores in one’s memory that what one wants to remember, since one cannot remember what one forgot. Augustine held that there is a trinity in every act of recollection: “[T]hat which is hidden in memory even before it is thought of, that which results in thought when it is seen, and the will which forms a link between the two of these.”<sup>148</sup>

The process just described is the one going from perception to imagination. The next process involves the stage of thinking. There are four species that one encounters in the development from sensation to rational knowledge:

From the species of the body itself, there arises that which comes to be in the sense of the percipient; and from this, that which comes to be in the memory; and from this, that which comes to be in the mind's eye of the concipient.<sup>149</sup>

According to Augustine, species are how the mind perceives an external object.<sup>150</sup> He argued that one first encounters the corporeal species, which are the physical objects as they are in themselves. From the corporeal species one encounters the sensible species, which is how an object appears to one’s sense organ. From the form in one’s senses one gets a form in one’s mind which is the third species; the mental species. From this form an image gets created in one’s memory.<sup>151</sup> One’s process of thinking starts when external objects send out species which in turn make one’s sense organs undergo a sensation. The species enter one’s sense organs, one’s will directs the mind’s attention to what happens in the sense organs, and lastly an image gets created and stored in one’s memory. According to Augustine one can think about the images in one’s memory when the eye of one’s mind is directed towards it. One is then able to think about this image, remember it and add and subtract other images to it.

Now that Augustine’s account of thought has been discussed, the question that needs answering is which thoughts can be classified as knowledge. In what follows I will show that, for Augustine, there are three instruments of knowledge, namely *ratio*, *intellectus*, and *intelligentia*. The *ratio* corresponds to the corporeal vision and has sensation as its level of perception. *Intellectus* corresponds to imagination and has cogitation as its

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<sup>147</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* 11.3.6.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* 11.7.12.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* XI.9.16.

<sup>150</sup> Michelle Karnes, “Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages”, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 36 (Chicago: 2014), 95.

<sup>151</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* XI.16.

level of perception. Lastly, *intelligentia* corresponds to non-corporeal objects and has intellection as its level of perception.

The lowest level of perception is sensation, both common to humans and animals and corresponding to the corporeal vision. The second level of perception is cogitation and corresponds to the imagination. This is unique to man and is used to judge sense objects by rational standards. Sensation and cogitation together form the “lower reason”. This lower reason gives one knowledge about the representations of physical objects formed by one’s mind in one’s imagination. This knowledge belongs to one’s “lower level of thought”, which establishes knowledge (*scientia*) of the natural order. To obtain knowledge about non-corporeal objects Augustine argued that one has to address one’s *intelligentia* and its corresponding level of perception which is intellection. This is the highest level of perception, only possessed by humans and relating to *sapientia*. On the level of intellection the mind contemplates the eternal truths.<sup>152</sup> These eternal truths are similar to what Plato called Ideas: the true forms, blueprints one might say, of objects and creatures. Via the senses, the imagination, and the intellect one forms a representation of, for example, a horse. One then judges this representation in the light of the eternal idea of ‘horse’. According to Augustine the non-corporeal objects belong to one’s “higher level of thought”. When one is alive, i.e. in the corporeal realm the incorporeal objects of one’s higher level of thought are the ideas on the basis of which the mind deduces the function of those things represented in the imagination. By one’s higher level of thought one gets via earthly experiences, so indirectly, an insight into God’s wisdom (*sapientia*). In heaven one gets a direct experience of his wisdom.<sup>153</sup>

As has become clear from Augustine’s theory of knowledge, one starts with sensation but one’s aim is always to reach to eternal ideas which are present in God’s mind.<sup>154</sup> God is both the source of one’s existence and the goal of one’s knowledge.<sup>155</sup> At the higher level of thought one looks up to the eternal reality. At the lower level of thought one looks down to the visible, corporeal reality.<sup>156</sup> The two levels of thought both generate different kinds of

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<sup>152</sup> Ronald H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine’s Theory of Knowledge* (USA: Academic Renewal Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>153</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Genesi ad Litteram* (trans.), John H. Taylor (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 3.20.30.

<sup>154</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Libero Arbitrio* (trans.), Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), II.3.7-II.15.39; *Confessiones* VII.7.

<sup>155</sup> Nash, *The Light of the Mind* 5.

<sup>156</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* XII.15; XII.24-25; XIII.1.1-2; XIV.1.3; XIV.6.11.

knowledge. The higher level of thought supplies one with wisdom (*sapientia*), the lower level of thought supplies one with knowledge (*scientia*).

It seems that one is perfectly able to obtain knowledge at both the lower and higher level of thought. Nevertheless, Augustine argued that the lower reason needs help. One's lower reason is not sufficient when one wants to know if a representation is reliable. The lower reason misses the possibility to check whether a representation is reliable and misses the ability to receive extra information via divine illumination regarding a representation. For this the lower reason needs access to the eternal ideas, which it can never reach without knowledge of unchangeable objects (the higher reason). The lower reason consist of a naturally given insight whereas the higher reason consists (partly) of supernaturally given insight. In what follows I will show why Augustine held that this supernaturally given insight, or divine illumination, is necessary for knowledge and understanding.

### **3.1.2. The Necessity of Divine Illumination**

Just as one cannot properly see when it is dark around or when one's eyes are closed, so too does the mind need help in seeing and understanding. The question that needs answering here is why it is that the lower reason cannot fully understand things on its own. According to Augustine, one's minds is created in God's image, meaning that one can know like God. However, only before the Fall one was perfectly able to think like God. After the Fall one's mind no longer thinks properly, one has no longer access to the eternal ideas in God's mind:

That vision of eternal things is withdrawn also from the head himself, eating with his spouse that which was forbidden, so that the light of his eyes is gone from him, and so both being naked from that enlightenment of truth [...].<sup>157</sup>

In his early works, Augustine treated Adam and Eve as symbolic categories. He associated Adam with the spiritual and Eve with carnal lust.<sup>158</sup> According to Augustine one is both constituted of Adam and Eve, since one is a composite of body and soul. The relationship between Adam and Eve was seen by Augustine as "a single person" working in harmony.<sup>159</sup> Reason has to govern the bodily passions and appetites, which makes the man superior to

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<sup>157</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* 12.8.13.

<sup>158</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *On Original Sin* (ed.), Kevin Knight, retrieved from: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/15062.htm>, 38.

<sup>159</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos* (trans.), Roland Teske, *The Fathers of the Church* 84 (1998), 2.11.15.

the woman.<sup>160</sup> Connected to this Augustine wrote that everybody should “exercise a proper lordship or mastery over this part of ourselves, and become a kind of wedded couple in the very self, with the flesh not warring against the spirit with its desires but submitting to it, that is, the desire of the flesh not opposing reason but rather complying with it.”<sup>161</sup> After the Fall reason gave in to passions, i.e. the body became superior over the soul. The soul gave in to its carnal desires and is now led by them. Reason, Augustine wrote, “can only be brought down to consenting to sin, when pleasurable anticipation is roused in that part of the spirit which ought to take its lead from reason, as from its husband and guide.”<sup>162</sup> Eve’s offering of the fruit can be seen as the carnal desires fighting against reason. When reason lets in the enemy, i.e. when Adam eats the apple, the harmonious male-female relationship ceases to exist. The consequence is that one can no longer conceive of God as the Highest Good and no longer know that one is made in God’s image so that one can know Him. The consequence of this is that one no longer has the desire to know God. After the Fall one now desires those things that bring immediate, short-term happiness.<sup>163</sup> In the sensible realm one is focused on the wrong things which do not effectuate happiness but instead enslave one to desire temporal and fleeting goods.<sup>164</sup> Happiness, according to Augustine lies not in the fleeting and temporal moments. What does lead to happiness is the search for Truth. However, since one is corrupted after the Fall one cannot focus one’s attention on those things that will yield real and lasting happiness. One needs God’s help in the search for Truth as he is the only one eligible to be one’s teacher:

When I speak the truth, I do not teach someone who sees these truths. For he is taught not by my words but by the things themselves made manifest within when God discloses them.<sup>165</sup>

Without God’s teaching, i.e. his divine illumination, one would only achieve mere belief and not the true knowledge that will lead to happiness. This is why Augustine continuously stressed that one should not seek knowledge for its own sake. One has to seek knowledge because knowledge is the only means by which one can achieve true happiness. When one’s

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 2.11.15.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 2.12.16.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. 2.14.20.

<sup>163</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* 10.6.8; 10.8.11.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. 13.7.10.

<sup>165</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Magistro* (trans.), Robert Russell (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968). 12.40.

mind is compliant to God's law, one makes use of one's ability to understand and to know reality by means of one's belief in God.<sup>166</sup> According to Augustine, when one judges material goods in light of the fact that they all come from God, one's intellect is no longer able to desire the narrow-minded earthly ideas of what is good. One can then find the good in all things, and are therefore truly happy.<sup>167</sup>

According to Augustine one's focus is on the wrong things, but why would one not be able to obtain knowledge about these wrong things? The fact that I have an unhealthy or a morally incorrect focus on eating delicious food, does not mean that I cannot have knowledge about that food. However, in my reading of Augustine, one's incorrect focus and one's inability to obtain certain knowledge are related. As discussed in the previous chapter, Augustine held that once one comes to know that the truth cannot be found, one becomes lazy and does not try to find it. The same goes for one's incorrect focus. The focus on delicious food and other wrong and distracting things, has made one intellectually lazy. This has caused one's intellectual abilities to become weak in the sense that one cannot obtain knowledge, but only mere belief. One's lazy and weakened intellectual abilities also cannot deal with the same criterion problem that the lower reason faces. One's defective focus makes one unable to figure out if a given representation or sensory input is reliable. One needs divine illumination to shift one's focus and show one the nature of reality.

In what follows I will research how divine illumination provides one with extra input and absolute knowledge. I will start by discussing some of the current interpretations of divine illumination and then move on to research what Augustine himself had to say about the matter. I will conclude this section by arguing against Schumacher's internalist interpretation of Augustine's notion of divine illumination and hold that it is not either intrinsic or extrinsic but a mixture of both.

### **3.2. The workings of Divine Illumination**

In the scholarly research about divine illumination it remains very much unclear what divine illumination actually is. Scholarly interpretations differ widely.<sup>168</sup> Generally, two large camps can be distinguished: those who hold that divine illumination is extrinsic and those who hold that it is intrinsic. Dr. Lydia Schumacher, at the School of Divinity of The University of

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<sup>166</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Gen. Litt.* 8.14.31.

<sup>167</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* 8.4.6-8.5.8.

<sup>168</sup> Matthews, "Knowledge and Illumination" 180; Nash, *The Light of the Mind* 94-101; Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 7-13.

Edinburgh, believes that only the Thomistic interpretation of Augustine's divine illumination is correct. According to her the Thomistic interpretation considers Augustine's divine illumination to be an intrinsic force.<sup>169</sup> Within the intrinsic account there is no external help, but oneself has to illuminate the external reality. The divine light simply bestows an intrinsic cognitive capacity to form ideas.<sup>170</sup> In defending this interpretation Schumacher argues that there is nothing extrinsic about Augustine's ideas concerning divine illumination. She holds that illumination is the "source of an intrinsic cognitive capacity that the mind gradually recovers as it forms a habit of operating by faith in God."<sup>171</sup> On Schumacher's interpretation, illumination is in ordinary learning and she seems to argue that one obtains knowledge by means of signs. Schumacher argues that illumination for Augustine is only "an illustration of the process involved in conforming to God's image, or the recovering of the cognitive capacity by regaining the ability to use it for its proper purpose."<sup>172</sup> Thus, for Schumacher, illumination is the restoration of the intrinsic capacity of one's intellect. This capacity consists of knowing in God and knowing through God when one's intellect moves towards God. Schumacher argues that divine illumination results from an intrinsic intellectual capacity possessed by all human beings so that one can illuminate God's nature. She argues that when divine illumination is phrased in this way it is not susceptible to problems often connected to interpretations that consider divine illumination to be an extrinsic power.<sup>173</sup> For Schumacher illumination is intrinsic because the goal of cognition is to restore one to one's original status of being the "image of God". This original status is made manifest in knowing God and making God known. This inner, mental and ethical process is what one, according to Schumacher, should identify with Augustine's notion of divine illumination.

As far as the second, extrinsic interpretation of Augustine's account illumination is a force that comes from outside the human mind itself. Those who advocate an extrinsic interpretation hold that human beings are passive in their own acts of knowing in the sense that the ideas received from above through illumination are necessary to support cognition by either maintaining the process of cognition or by granting cognitive content.

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<sup>169</sup> Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 8.

<sup>170</sup> Some modern advocates of this account include Maurice De Wulf, Charles Boyer, and F. Cayre.

<sup>171</sup> Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 18-19.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.* 58.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* 65.; The treats concerning the extrinsic interpretation of divine illumination will be discussed later in 3.2.1.

The scholarly consensus is that the extrinsic interpretation is correct, though variations in interpretation apply. The ontologist interpretation, for example, holds that the mind directly obtains from God all of its ideas, even about empirical realities. The mind thus sees all things in God.<sup>174</sup> Formulated this way, illumination efficiently takes over the part the human mind would have played in its own cognitive process.

Bonaventure, the thirteenth-century advocate of Augustinian illumination, is perhaps the most well-known supporter of the Franciscan interpretation. According to this interpretation, ideas received through illumination regulate the process of cognition. By doing so illumination ensures that the concepts generated by the mind, with respect to its experiences, conform to divine ideas about reality and are therefore free from doubt.<sup>175</sup>

The difference between the intrinsic and extrinsic interpretation is that according to the intrinsic account, one has been illuminated by God during creation when one received intellectual abilities from God. The extrinsic interpretation agrees with this and takes it a step beyond by arguing that God keeps illuminating one's intrinsic abilities as long as one is alive. In arguing this, the externalist are presupposing a passive human nature. The intrinsic interpretation, on the other hand, emphasizes the active nature of the knowing agent.

I have explained that biographies about Augustine are often ideological and emphasize what fits within the author's goal. The same goes for Augustine's notion of illumination, which is why I dedicate the following paragraphs of this section to what Augustine himself had to say about divine illumination. I will use his statements to argue against Schumacher's intrinsic interpretation. Augustine himself sometimes described man as a passive element of God, but, as will become clear, divine illumination is not something that one passively undergoes. Rather, God and man are seen as a team that works together.

The most significant works about divine illumination are Augustine's *Soliloquia* and *De Magistro*, which he wrote during the summer at Cassiacum, preparing for his conversion to Christianity. I will consult both works in order to establish an interpretation on divine illumination. Augustine discussed illumination both before and after his conversion and the question arises as to whether in both cases illumination means the same. I will argue that

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<sup>174</sup> For more on this interpretation, see Ronald Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Ohio: Academic Renewal Press, 2003) 102.

<sup>175</sup> The idealist interpretation that has been espoused more recently by Bruce Bubacz resembles this one in many respects. See Bruce Bubacz, *Saint Augustine's Theory of Knowledge: A Contemporary Analysis* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981); Bruce Bubacz, "Augustine's Illumination Theory and Epistemic Structuring," *Augustinian Studies* 11 (1980): 35-48.

the common core of remains unchanged in the sense that extra input through illumination is needed because humans are not naturally equipped to achieve certain knowledge.

Besides, Augustine's *Retractiones* provides solid evidence that he maintained roughly the same ideas about divine illumination throughout his life. The *Retractationes* is a work in which Augustine retracts, amends, or clarifies previous views. Illumination is one of these cases. He mentions, for instance, that his later views on illumination in *De Trinitate* are consistent with his earlier writings in the *Soliloquia*.<sup>176</sup>

In what follows I will investigate what Augustine himself had to say about divine illumination in his *Soliloquia* and *De Magistro*. I will argue that illumination is a mixture of both extrinsic and intrinsic elements. In section 3.3. I will give my interpretation of divine illumination as argument against Academic Scepticism.

### **3.2.1. De Magistro**

In order to interpret Augustine's account of divine illumination it is essential know more about the context in which he developed his ideas regarding the matter. The *Soliloquia* is part of four books that Augustine wrote at Cassiciacum in 386, around the time of his conversion. *De Magistro* is written three years later, around 389. What is important to remember is that the *Contra Academicos* and *De Libero Arbitrio* were also part of the four books written at the same time as the *Soliloquia*. It can therefore be assumed that Augustine's mind was still dealing with the pitfalls of Academic Scepticism.

*De Magistro* focuses on Augustine's theory of language and aims to show that words cannot teach anything. This book is important for my purposes because it shows the flaws in one's own cognitive capacities and the need for a divine teacher.

In *De Magistro* one finds a dialogue between Augustine and his son Adeodatus about the possibility of teaching and the learning of words (*verba*) and signs (*signa*).<sup>177</sup> Augustine considered words to be signs and wondered if what a word signifies can be shown by pointing. This is a question regarding 'ostensive learning', about how one is able to make the right connections between language and the world. Not only does ostensive learning include pointing to the signified object, it also includes demonstrating without a sign. Augustine asked Adeodatus if someone who is already walking can demonstrate to someone else what "walking" signifies. The reply of Adeodatus was that the walking person could just walk a

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<sup>176</sup> Augustien of Hippo, *Retractiones* (CCL 57, 13-15); (CCL 57, 36); (CCL 57, 101-2).

<sup>177</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Magistro* 1.2.



little faster.<sup>178</sup> Augustine then asked his son if he does not know that hurrying is not the same as walking. More examples like this are to be found in *De Magistro* and they all show that ostensive learning is afflicted with ambiguity and open to misunderstanding. All examples conclude that a teacher can never sufficiently limit the possibilities of ambiguity in order for his student to clearly understand the right object of signification.

The conclusion at the end of the dialogue is even more radical, since it affirms that nothing can be taught by words and signs. To argue for this Augustine made use of the word *sarabarae*, of which the meaning is unknown to him. Augustine held it to mean ‘head coverings’ and wondered if someone can learn what a ‘head’ or a ‘covering’ is when the meaning of *sarabarae* is explained to him.<sup>179</sup> If *sarabarae* indeed means ‘head coverings’, it signifies head coverings. Augustine argued that knowing what a word is, consists of knowing what it signifies. This means, according to him, that one has to be familiar with the things themselves. It will therefore not be enough to prove by means of synonyms for *sarabarae* that I know what it signifies and thus, according to Augustine, what it is. Only if one is familiar with the things signified, in this case the *sarabarae* themselves, one is able to know what the word is.

According to Augustine one is unable to find out what head coverings are without “consulting our senses.” However, if one is unable to remove the ambiguity in the ‘walking’ example, one is also unable to get rid of the ambiguity when trying to get help in mentally grasping what a head covering is. The question then is how the person who does succeed in finding out the correct signification reaches this goal. This is where Augustine inserted his ideas on divine illumination. These ideas involve the claim that someone “is taught not by my words but by the things themselves made manifest within when God discloses them” through “the inner light of Truth in virtue of which the so-called inner man is illuminated.”<sup>180</sup> Augustine saw Christ as the inner teacher, described by him as the light that one turns to in order to gain understanding.<sup>181</sup> Illumination is that which, in the case of walking, puts the right interpretation to that what is being pointed at or demonstrated.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid. 3.5.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. 10.33.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. 12.40.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>182</sup> Matthews, “Knowledge and Illumination” 173-75.

It seems that divine illumination is an extrinsic force that one passively undergoes as it is God who has given the light of the mind. This can give rise to the criticism that divine illumination turns one into a passive receiver and takes away one's ability to discover, learn, and understand things by oneself. In my reading of Augustine, however, divine illumination does not contribute to the perceiver's passivity. In order to steer away from this possible threat one needs to make an analogy between the sensible and intelligible realm. God illuminates the mind in a way similar to how one comes to experience sensible objects. In the sensible realm one has to really focus one's attention and try to distinguish different features that at first do not seem to differ much epistemically. The same goes for objects one encounters in the intelligible realm.<sup>183</sup> The way Augustine thinks about divine illumination is not different from how one encounters objects in the sensible realm. In the intelligible realm one also has to develop one's perceptual abilities in order to differentiate objects from each other.<sup>184</sup> From what Augustine wrote in *De Magistro* it becomes clear that he wants one to use the effort and ability involved in the intelligible realm in the sensible realm.<sup>185</sup>

### 3.2.2. Soliloquia

In his *Soliloquia* Augustine is in dialogue with his reason (*ratio*) and through many metaphors a sketch of a theory of knowledge can be discovered. In the *Soliloquia* Augustine reflected on questions concerning God and one's soul. Do they exist and can one know them? In dialogue with his reason he tried to find answers to these questions.

The *Soliloquia* consists of two books of which the first explores God as the principle of truth. The second book considers the soul as the place to discover the truth. Augustine expressed to God his desire to know him: "God, always the same, let me know myself, let me know You. I have prayed."<sup>186</sup> For Augustine God is the highest truth. God is the goal, and therefore "the condition for every genuine search for the truth."<sup>187</sup> Dupont and Knotts state that it was necessary for Augustine to ask God for help, because true knowledge is not possible without him. This is why the prayer in 1.3 starts with *Te invoco*. God, as intelligible

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<sup>183</sup> Michael Mendelson, "By the Things Themselves: Eudaimonism, Direct acquaintance, and Illumination in Augustine's *De Magistro*", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 39 (2001), 19.

<sup>184</sup> Mendelson, "By the Things Themselves" 484; Rist, *Augustine* 77.

<sup>185</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Magistro* 12.40; Mendelson, "By the Things Themselves" 484.

<sup>186</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Magistro* 2.1.

<sup>187</sup> Anthony Dupont and Matthew Knotts, "In dialogue with Augustine's *Soliloquia*. Interpreting and recovering a theory of illumination", *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 74 (2013), 435.

light is the source of one's understanding. He makes sure that the intelligible is intelligible to one. Yet God is also transparent, meaning that one, as God's image, has to do some self-examination in order for one to access God's knowledge. A purified soul, a good understanding of what one (i.e. one's soul) is, and a life consisting of honouring God are, for Augustine, the tools needed if one wants to come to know like God and receive his illumination.<sup>188</sup>

In trying to determine which kind of knowledge cannot be put into question, Augustine argued that sensory knowledge does not provide this certainty.<sup>189</sup> For Augustine, scientific, geometrical knowledge in turn is certain as it is not deceptive nor doubtful.<sup>190</sup> Although one can come to know scientific propositions, these propositions themselves cannot make them known to one. For this God is needed, as he makes their knowledge possible "as the sun demonstrates himself to the eyes" and allows one to see the world.<sup>191</sup> However, this does not happen all of a sudden and one has often experienced that, when the light goes on in a dark room, the eyes need time to adjust to this light.<sup>192</sup> The same goes for the eyes of the soul; they do not immediately fully adjust to the light:

There are some eyes so healthy and vigorous that they can fearlessly turn toward the sun as soon as they are opened. [...] Others, however, are dazzled by the very lustre which they so ardently desire to behold [...] To these, even though they now are such as might rightly be called healthy, it is dangerous to want to show what they are as yet incapable of seeing.<sup>193</sup>

Those whose eyes need to gradually adjust to the light are the ones who need a teacher. This teacher gives them increasingly brighter things to see until the eyes of the mind are fully adjusted. Or in Augustine's own words:

They should be shown some things which do not shine with their own light, but which may be seen only by means of light [...] then, they should be shown something which, though it does not shine with its own light, yet glitters more fairly by means of that light, such as gold [...] Then, perhaps this earthly fire should be carefully shown to them, then the stars, then the moon, then the brightness of dawn and the

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<sup>188</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Soliloquia* 1.7.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.8.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* 1.9-1.11.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.* 1.12.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. a similar remark can be given about Plato's cave allegory.

<sup>193</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Soliloquia* 1.13.23.

splendour of the whitening sky [...] sooner or later he will behold the sun without flinching and with immense light.<sup>194</sup>

It is God's illumination that attributes extra input to one's own cognitive abilities.

Augustine wanted to examine, with the help of his reason, how his soul can come to the vision and understanding of God, which is the goal of book 1. Augustine came to the discovery that he first had to get rid of all doubts before he can find the truth. This meant that he had to cleanse his soul by removing sensory doubts and free his soul from (sensory) longings.<sup>195</sup> One can only see when one's eyes are clean, because purification gives a healthy sight to one's eyes.<sup>196</sup> However, one's soul is unable to fulfil its cleanse on its own. This is the reason why Augustine in his *Soliloquia* put forward the view that it is reason that brings the soul a beginning (of purification) which is then completed by faith, hope, and love.<sup>197</sup> This means that the next step in finding the truth consists of the theological virtues which provide the "correct and perfect sight" and will eventually lead one to the vision of God.<sup>198</sup> Augustine's conclusion was that faith is necessary if one wants to achieve absolute knowledge. Since sensory ambiguity is always a threat, one needs God to give one the guarantee that what one tries to understand is in fact true. Here too, as in *De Magistro*, one is unable to truly understand things if one is not in the possession of God's illumination.

In the *Soliloquia* the search for truth is a passive process since one cannot properly see without the light of the sun, i.e. God's illumination even if one has managed to purify one's soul and eyes. I have discussed that one has to disconnect oneself from sensory longings and free one's soul from all doubt. However, one cannot achieve this without the ongoing help of God. The idea behind illumination is that one's cognitive capacities are made possible and maintained by God. He provided reason and cognitive capacities being the internal instruments that one uses to come to know things. However, in the accurate wordings of Robert Cushman, "[natural] reason is never fully 'natural'" because God's help is always needed in order for one to determine what is reality and what is not.<sup>199</sup>

However this is not enough: the notion of the will also plays an important role when it comes to receiving divine illumination. As *De Libero Arbitrio* affirms, only when one's choices

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid. 1.13.23.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. 1.12.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. 1.13; We also encounter this notion in Matthew 5:8 and Luke 2:21-22.

<sup>197</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Soliloquia* 1.13.

<sup>198</sup> Dupont and Knotts, "In Dialogue with Augustine's *Soliloquia*" 436.

<sup>199</sup> Robert Cushman, "Faith and Reason in the thought of St. Augustine", *Church History* 14 (1950), 276.

are free, is the individual accountable for them. The free movement of the will differs widely from a movement that happens out of necessity, like a stone falling down.<sup>200</sup> For Augustine a choice is free when it comes from oneself. God can teach one about the truth, but only if one wants to.

To clarify this notion, I propose that one's free will and divine illumination might be best described as partners in a dance: God leads, but one does not have to follow.<sup>201</sup> In his *Confessiones* one finds Augustine's famous exclamation: "Oh, Master, make me chaste and celibate - but not yet", which indicates that he does have the knowledge as to how to obtain divine illumination, but he just does not will to receive it yet.<sup>202</sup> The purpose of the good will is to guide one to the knowledge of the greatest good. One should not be led astray by a desire for corporeal things rather than spiritual things. This does not mean that one should avoid these things altogether. True knowledge depends on a good will which shall bring the enjoyment of the pleasant and the suffering of the bad in a proper proportion.<sup>203</sup>

From what has become clear from *De Magistro* and the *Soliloquia* one can say that one's mind is equipped with natural cognitive capacities which are insufficiently able to find out what is true. God's extrinsic, ongoing assistance is needed for one to cleanse the eyes and free the soul from all doubt. Divine illumination gives one the possibility to obtain certain knowledge.

In what follows I will argue against Schumacher's intrinsic interpretation. Admittedly, if one wants to read Augustine's view of illumination in an intrinsic vein, it is possible to find some support in Augustine's corpus. However, much more evidence –either ignored or overlooked by Schumacher- can be found in support of an extrinsic interpretation.

### **3.2.3. Against Schumacher**

My reading of *De Magistro* and the *Soliloquia* supports an externalist view of divine illumination. Schumacher herself states that when *De Magistro* is taken at face value, it indeed leads one to interpret divine illumination as something extrinsic.<sup>204</sup> However, if one pays heed his mature theological treatises one sees that, for Augustine, "the function of Christ's illumination in human knowing [...] is simply to illumine the Triune nature of God and

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<sup>200</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Libero Arbitrio* 3.1.2.9.

<sup>201</sup> I would like to thank my supervisor dr. Mathilde van Dijk for clarifying this to me.

<sup>202</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* 8.VII.16.

<sup>203</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* XI.4.7.

<sup>204</sup> Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 59.

His image on the human mind in the same instance – to illumine an intrinsic intellectual capacity and its Triune source.”<sup>205</sup> However, as I have shown, Augustine often describes illumination to be a turning towards God in order to have access to the eternal ideas in God’s mind so that one can make judgments and form concepts. This is an important extrinsic element of divine illumination that cannot be easily overlooked.

Schumacher’s view also seems to be that illumination comes from ordinary learning and that one obtains knowledge by means of signs. However, “[f]rom words,” Augustine argued, “we learn only words,” and a sign can “teach one nothing, if it finds me ignorant of the thing of which it is a sign.”<sup>206</sup>

Knowledge cannot be obtained through signs, but comes from the things themselves. As I have shown, one obtains knowledge of physical objects via corporeal vision, but knowledge from the things *themselves* is obtained when God illuminates one’s mind. What Schumacher tries to argue is that, in illuminating the mind, God does not interfere with one’s natural capacities. Instead, God makes it possible that one can exercise these natural capacities. Nevertheless, as I have shown, one needs God’s help because the natural capacities are underdeveloped. One needs God to shine his light on what one has perceived with the natural capacities. God has to super add information to what one has come to know and help one in judging what is reality and what is not. This information over-and-above the natural perception is God’s infallible knowledge. God does interfere, but this does not turn one into a passive receiver. One has to earn access to the eternal ideas in God’s mind by cleansing the eyes and freeing the soul from all sensory doubt. In addition to that one has to develop one’s perceptual abilities so that one can actually look into God’s light.

Schumacher’s internalist reading seems to devalue the fact that Augustine’s God is something transcendent and eternal. Although Augustine’s God is very much involved with his creation, he remains external. The quotations that Schumacher gives in the introduction of her book show this transcendence and support an externalist reading of Augustine’s notion of divine illumination:

The earth is visible and light is visible but the earth cannot be seen unless it is brightened by light. So, likewise for those things, which ... everyone understands and acknowledges ... to be most true, one must believe they cannot be understood unless

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<sup>205</sup> Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 59.

<sup>206</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Magistro* 11.36; 10.33.

they are illumined by something else as their own sun. Therefore just as in the sun one may remark three certain things, namely that it is, that it shines and that it illumines, so also in that most hidden God whom you wish to know there are three things, namely that He is, that He is known and He makes other things to be known.<sup>207</sup>

Also:

You have seen many true things and you distinguished them by that light which shone upon you when you saw them; raise your eyes to that light itself and fix them upon it, if you can.<sup>208</sup>

And lastly:

The Light by which the soul is illumined in order that it may see and truly understand everything ... is God Himself ... when it tries to behold the Light, it trembles in its weakness and finds itself unable to do so. ... When it is carried off and after being withdrawn from the senses of the body is made present to this vision in a more perfect manner, it also sees above itself that Light, in whose illumination it is enabled to see all the objects that it sees and understands in itself.<sup>209</sup>

Indeed, one has to do some internal work before one can receive God's illumination. However, I am not in agreement with Schumacher's statement that Augustine's illumination is *completely* intrinsic.<sup>210</sup> For Augustine, divine illumination refers to an extrinsic standard such as the eternal ideas in the mind of God.

In what follows I will research if and how divine illumination serves as an argument in response to the Academic Scepticism portrayed by Cicero.

### **3.3. Interpreting Divine Illumination as an argument against Academic Scepticism**

I have already discussed that one needs God's continuous help in one's quest for truth. This does not mean that one has to sit passively and wait for illumination to take place. It has become clear from the previous sections that in the first place one needs to purify the eyes so that they are able to receive God's light. Secondly, one has to free the soul from all

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<sup>207</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Soliloquia* 1.8.1.5. Quotation given by Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 5.

<sup>208</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* 15.27.50. Quotation given by Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 6.

<sup>209</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Gen. Litt.* 12.31.59. Quotation given by Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 7.

<sup>210</sup> Schumacher, *Divine Illumination* 19.

(sensory) doubts. Via the light of God one can come to know the truth of everything. For Augustine, all knowledge comes from divine illumination:

For that light is already God Himself; the soul, on the other hand, is a creature, although in reason and intellect it is made in his image. And when the soul tries to fix its gaze upon that light, it quivers in its weakness and is not quite able to do so. Yet it is from this light that the soul understands whatever it is able to understand.<sup>211</sup>

Support for this idea can also be found in *De Magistro*, where Augustine wrote:

Concerning *everything* we understand we consult, not the speaker who makes noises outside us, but the Truth that presides over the mind within.<sup>212</sup>

It seems that the process of acquiring true knowledge rests solely on clean eyes and a purified soul free from doubt, and God's illumination. In other words, obtaining the truth is something internal and supernatural. The external world, with in particular one's senses, is not needed. The question that needs answering now is how divine illumination can serve as an argument against Cicero's interpretation of Academic Scepticism when it seems to disregard sense experience.

As discussed in the first chapter, the Academic Sceptics showed by means of sceptical counterexamples that one should never trust the senses. One's senses can be deceiving, because they, for example, show that a stick in the water is bent while it is in fact still straight. In addition to giving wrong information about what one sees, the senses can also give one impressions that are not even real, such as a fata morgana. According to Cicero, one can never correctly identify an impression as true on the basis of its perceptual content. He held that one does not have the ability to develop one's powers of perception in order to overcome possible deceptions. Cicero did not deny that the truth exists, what he did deny was that one can grasp the truth with certainty, which is a direct result of one's insufficient powers of perception. Augustine was willing to grant Cicero's Sceptics the insecurity of the bodily senses as "everything which the bodily sense touches and which is called sensible is constantly changing [...] that what does not remain stable cannot be perceived [...] [and] therefore that truth in any genuine sense is not something to be expected from the bodily senses."<sup>213</sup> However that there is nothing one can have absolute knowledge of, was not

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<sup>211</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Gen. Litt.* 12.31.59.

<sup>212</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Magistro* 11.38..

<sup>213</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De diversis quaestionibus octaginta tribus* (trans.), David Mosher, *The Fathers of the Church* 70 (1981), 40-42.



something that Augustine wanted to grant the Sceptics. What one perceives with the senses is uncertain, but what the mind has access to, and the judgements made about them, are certain. Augustine brings in his notion of divine illumination in order to argue for this.

The memory receives corporeal species from sensations and in turn the mind's eye has access to them. One thus needs the external world in order to start to think. However, as already indicated, one is unable to think unless one remembers something. One remembers through sensory intervention, such as a smell or a sound that brings one back to something that has already taken place.

Although Augustine was influenced by the Platonic tradition, he believed the soul to not be in the possession of innate ideas. For Plato, ideas (of the Forms), blueprints as it were, of how things really are, are innate and remembering them (i.e. to recollect them) results in certain knowledge about these objects.<sup>214</sup> For Augustine, the ideas are in God. The Augustinian soul can recognize and identify, it judges the truth of things in the light coming from God. This light puts, as it were, intelligibility on the external things. Although one has supernatural help, this does not mean that one does no longer need sensual knowledge. Sensations, on the contrary, are necessary because they bring one back to one's inner light by which one judges material things: "When I learned the thing itself, I trusted my eyes, not the words of another – though perhaps I trusted the words to direct my attention, that is, to find out what I would see by looking to which the master directs our attention."<sup>215</sup>

The senses are not of any use. Augustine regarded the senses as a source of error distracting the mind from what is really important. They distract one from the purification of the eyes (i.e. the eyes of the mind) and the freeing of the soul from all (sensory) doubt. The senses cannot tell one that an impression is true and one cannot form judgments on the basis of sensory impressions alone. God has to shine his light on the impressions given by the senses. One can then judge those impressions in the light of God's intelligible truth, as the intellectual vision does not err.<sup>216</sup>

Augustine considered the senses only as a hindrance in the way of obtaining knowledge when they are not controlled by a good will. When the senses are not directed

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<sup>214</sup> For more information about the role of the senses in Platonic recollection see: Joseph Bedu-Addo, "Sense-Experience and Recollection in Plato's *Meno*", *The American Journal of Philology* 104.3 (1983), 228-248.; Norman Gulley, "Plato's Theory of Recollection", *The Classical Quarterly* 4.3-4 (1954), 194-213.

<sup>215</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Magistro* XI.35.

<sup>216</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Gen. Litt.* XII.25.52.

towards the inner light they “must be forsaken entirely, and, as long as we bear this body, we must have care lest our wings be entangled by their sticky lime, as we need whole and faultless wings to fly from darkness to that light.”<sup>217</sup> Only then are the senses an obstacle in the way towards true understanding.<sup>218</sup> Only then should one resist one’s senses and find a way of doing without them.<sup>219</sup> In *De Trinitate* Augustine argued that:

We are so familiarly occupied with bodies, and our thought has projected itself outwardly with so wonderful a proclivity towards bodies, that, when it has been withdrawn from the uncertainty of things corporeal, that it may be fixed with a much more certain and stable knowledge in that which is spirit, it flies back to those bodies, and seeks rest there whence it has drawn weakness.<sup>220</sup>

The soul can either turn to the tangible realm (i.e. earthly things) or the intelligible realm (i.e. eternal things). This is why Augustine, as already discussed, made a distinction between a lower and a higher reason in his theory of knowledge. The soul, connected to the senses, directs the senses to these eternal things in the higher reason in which one judges the data in God’s light. Augustine placed the Ideas in God’s mind and these intelligible Ideas can best be considered as a kind of eternal prototypes of things, which makes God’s mind the foundation of all intelligibility.<sup>221</sup> Because one cannot participate in these Ideas in order to obtain knowledge, one’s intellect has to be dependent on God’s intellect. Since one is dependent on the mind of God one can also come to know another world which one cannot understand by means of the senses. In other words, in this other world one gains an understanding of notions such as truth, beauty and goodness. It is this intelligible world that makes all sensible things intelligible as one can only understand the meaning of the sensible world in light of the eternal truths in God’s mind.

Cicero’s Sceptics regarded the senses as obscure, but for Augustine this was not the case. For him the senses are not useless, they are not just a source of error. In fact, the senses are necessary to start the process of thinking. They bring one back to the eternal light by which one obtains a true understanding of the sensible objects, as well as notions such as the truth. The senses can be misleading, but, contrary to the Academics, Augustine did not

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<sup>217</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Soliloquia* I.XIV.24.

<sup>218</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* XI.1.

<sup>219</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Epistulae* 8.

<sup>220</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De Trinitate* XI.1.1.

<sup>221</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones* XII.25.

believe the senses to be useless. He agreed with Cicero's Sceptics in that they both acknowledge that true knowledge cannot be achieved via the senses alone. What Augustine denied was the sceptic's thesis that the truth cannot be found by man. Augustine has shown that one can find the truth, but that one needs some help in one's search. Not only does divine illumination serve as an argument against Cicero's Sceptics because it helps one to obtain true knowledge, but also because Augustine does not disregard the role of the senses. Although the senses can be deceiving, they do bring one to the source of truth which is God.

To conclude one can say that Augustine agreed with Cicero's Sceptics concerning the uncertainty of the senses and the underdeveloped powers of perception. In themselves, the senses can never give one complete and undoubtable knowledge. This, however, does not mean that one should become sceptical towards one's senses. It also does not mean that the truth is unattainable. The truth is out there in God's mind, and one can have access to it. Divine illumination resolves the threat of Scepticism by granting one access to the intelligible truth. For Augustine the uncertainty of the senses was not a problem since divine illumination guarantees the formal correctness of one's reports of the sensible realm.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Spruit, *Species* 129.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I researched Augustine's justification for the certainty of one's knowledge, this being a response to Cicero's portrayal of Academic Scepticism. I have shown that, for Cicero, true knowledge is not something that can be achieved. This does not mean that he believed that there is no such thing as the truth, but he held that one can never develop one's cognitive capacities to the level required to reach absolute knowledge. At first sight Cicero's Sceptics seem to have made strong arguments for the case that true knowledge cannot be obtained by man. The Sceptics had counterexamples in response to the Stoic's who believed in the existence of so-called cataleptic impressions which give a truth criterion which can be perceived as a measuring stick, used to determine what is reality and what is not. The Sceptics argued that such impressions do not exist and showed, by means of their system of tropes and counter examples, that it is better to suspend judgment when there is no procedure to decide on the nature of reality.

In my chronological analyses of Augustine's spiritual journey leading up to the development of his notion of divine illumination, I have shown that Augustine came into contact with religious and philosophical groups, including Scepticism. The arguments of the Sceptics were so convincing to him that he briefly played with the idea of becoming a Sceptic himself. However, Augustine soon started to see the pitfalls of Academic Scepticism and wanted to disprove their claim that knowledge cannot be attained by man. Although Cicero put forward that the goal of Academic Scepticism was to achieve and maintain happiness while knowing that the truth cannot be found, Augustine argued that Scepticism leads to despair. The doctrine of the Academics was considered by Augustine to be a hindrance in the way of obtaining knowledge. Another important problem was that Augustine's contemporaries, after they had been convinced by the sceptic claim that the truth cannot be found, became lazy and did not undertake the effort to pursue it. After showing that Cicero's Scepticism was an unsustainable position, Augustine had to show which things could be known with certainty and how the truth could be discovered.

In the second chapter I have discussed which things, according to Augustine, can be known with certainty. Amongst these certain things are simple truths, such as something tasting bitter or the sensation of feeling cold. One can also know for certain that the world exists and that mathematical and geometrical knowledge are beyond doubt. This does not mean, however, that one can just go out in the world and point out many true things and

make true statements. One needs a teacher if one wants to achieve a complete understanding of the external world. In chapter three I have made clear why a teacher is needed. After the Fall one's mind is incapable of discovering the true meaning of things on its own. This is due to two reasons, which are the imperfection of one's cognitive capacities and the defective focus of one's mind. After the Fall one's reason gives in to passions, i.e. the body and its impulses achieve superiority over the soul. However, the fact human focus is incorrect does not necessarily imply the impossibility of realizing about it. In my reading of Augustine, one's incorrect focus and one's inability to obtain certain knowledge are related. One's defective focus has made one intellectually lazy, causing one's intellectual capacities to become weak in the sense that one can only obtain mere belief instead of absolute knowledge. One's defective focus makes one unable to figure out if a given representation or sensory input is reliable. One needs someone to make one shift one's focus and teach the truth of the matter. From *De Magistro* it seems clear that such teacher cannot be a mundane one, as the latter is unable to fully resolve the ambiguities connected to ostensive learning, i.e. learning through words and signs. A different teacher is needed and for Augustine this teacher is God. After researching both *De Magistro* and the *Soliloquia* it has become clear how God's teaching, or his divine illumination, provides one with the extra input needed to obtain absolute knowledge.

In dealing with divine illumination I discussed both the intrinsic and extrinsic interpretations of the notion. As to the former, one already possess illumination as a cognitive capacity that one develops as one keeps on contemplating one's faith in God. As to the latter, differently, God keeps on illuminating one's cognitive capacities during one's lifetime on earth.

I have argued that Augustine's account of divine illumination does not turn one into a passive receiver, as it is not the case that one can just sit around and wait for illumination to strike. Active participation from one's side is required before one is able to receive God's light. First of all one has to get rid of all doubts before one can see the truth; one has to cleanse the eyes of one's soul by removing sensory doubts and earthly desires. God illuminates the mind in a way similar to how one comes to experience sensible objects. In the sensible realm one has to really focus one's attention and try to distinguish different features that at first do not seem to differ much epistemically. The same goes for objects one encounters in the intelligible realm and one has to develop one's perceptual abilities in

order to differentiate objects from each other. God's illumination attributes extra input to one's own cognitive abilities, making one better equipped to discover what is certain about the judgments one makes and the objects one perceives.

In arguing how Augustine's account of divine illumination serves as an argument against Cicero's Scepticism, I acknowledged the criticism that may arise stating that Augustine seems to devalue the role of the senses in one's process of acquiring absolute knowledge. It indeed seems to be the case that the process of acquiring knowledge rests solely on clean eyes, a purified soul free from doubt, and God's illumination. The external world, with in particular the senses, is not necessary. How can divine illumination serve as an argument against Scepticism when it disregards sense experience? After all, that the Sceptics were focused on the fact that the senses can be misleading and therefore cannot provide knowledge. Augustine goes beyond Cicero's Sceptics: if they assumed that the senses cannot provide one with knowledge that is free from doubt, he in turn, assumes there must be something else that can. For Augustine this is God, but the senses nevertheless do have a role to play. The external world is necessary to start the process of thinking and without sense perception one is not able to use God's extra input to make true claims about what one has perceived. By showing how certain knowledge can be achieved and that the senses play a necessary role in this process, Augustine's perspective on divine illumination is indeed an argument against Cicero's interpretation of Academic Scepticism.

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