

**Zeitschrift:** Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie = Revue philosophique et théologique de Fribourg = Rivista filosofica e teologica di Friburgo = Review of philosophy and theology of Fribourg

**Band:** 58 (2011)

**Heft:** 2

**Artikel:** How the early Albertus Magnus transformed Augustinian interiority

**Autor:** Blankenhorn, Bernhard

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-761061>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 09.12.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

BERNHARD BLANKENHORN, OP

## How the Early Albertus Magnus Transformed Augustinian Interiority

The early Albertus Magnus undertook a significant revision of Augustinian anthropology, especially through a thorough reinterpretation of noetic illumination, the intellect's natural affinity for the immaterial realm, the function of memory and the knowledge of noetic objects by their presence within the soul. I will argue that the early Albert partly overturned Augustinian interiority in his early treatise *De Homine*, soon reverted back to Augustine in book one of the *Commentary on the Sentences*, yet then returned to a partial refusal of Augustinian interiority in his commentaries on the Pseudo-Dionysius. In all three works, the German Dominican also laid the foundations for a new interiority via an original doctrine of the agent intellect. The complexity and diversity of the German Dominican's three early approaches to central anthropologies themes set the stage for the epistemologies of Thomas Aquinas and Albert's German disciples, though the present article cannot pursue those doctrinal connections.

By Augustinian interiority, I mean the closely intertwined themes of memory, divine illumination for all cognition, the insufficiency of sense experiences to provide certain knowledge and the possibility of immediate access to God by turning within. Clearly, an exhaustive study of the early Albert's reception of these doctrines cannot be undertaken here. Rather, I will highlight some key texts in Albert's early corpus that treat these anthropological themes, with the aim of manifesting the general direction of his thought. Because of the evolving nature of the German Dominican's philosophy and theology, I will study him one text at a time. I will begin with a brief summary of Augustine's teaching on memory and illumination, essentially relying on the fruits of recent Augustine scholarship.

### 1. AUGUSTINE'S INTERIORITY: MEMORY, ILLUMINATION, IMMEDIACY

Memory is probably the central element in Augustine's epistemology. The Bishop of Hippo followed the Platonists in their conviction that sense objects alone cannot offer certain knowledge, whether of the material or the immaterial realm.<sup>1</sup> The soul therefore needs some type of direct access to the immaterial world in order to arrive at unchanging truth. With the

<sup>1</sup> CROUSE, Robert : *Théorie de la connaissance*, in: FITZGERALD, Allan D./VANNIER, Marie-Anne (ed.): *Encyclopédie Saint Augustin. La Méditerranée et l'Europe, IV<sup>e</sup> – XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris : Cerf 2005, 333.

exception of his early period, Augustine refused Plato's memory as a solution, and instead opted for divine illumination.<sup>2</sup> All learning presumes illumination, which is not an intrinsic human power, but the direct activity of God himself.<sup>3</sup>

Memory is the subject or site of illumination.<sup>4</sup> Noetic light in turn enables certain truth judgments, including the recognition of permanent ethical norms, for such light is the gift of Truth itself, of God dwelling in memory.<sup>5</sup> A central issue in Augustine's illumination theory is certainty in judgment about truth and falsity, but not an explanation of the formation of concepts. This is why the Aristotelian agent intellect has no place in a thoroughly Augustinian scheme. Augustine simply did not pose one of the burning questions that Aristotelian abstraction sought to answer.<sup>6</sup> Memory also contains in a latent way metaphysical, mathematical and logical objects. Such ideas, including unchanging ethical norms, are naturally impressed in the soul, waiting to be actualized through the human subject's conversion to the light within.<sup>7</sup>

The doctrine of memory is therefore all about a particular understanding of divine indwelling. Direct access to the God hidden within is essential for intellectual progress. God's hidden presence in memory is the force that impels us on the quest to see God's face. We can only strive to know and love God because we already know him in some way, for we naturally remember him, at least in an indistinct manner.<sup>8</sup> Because we remember God, we can identify our actualized knowledge of him as a fulfillment of the quest.

Remembering God involves a turn towards his latent presence in the soul. Since the same indwelling Trinity is the direct source of all noetic

<sup>2</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *Retractationes* I, 8.2: "The soul can act this way [i.e. remember] because it is naturally made to understand. It is connected to intelligible realities, even to immutable realities. Thus, in directing itself to these realities or to itself, it can find true responses".

<sup>3</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *De Magistro*, 14.46; RIST, John: *Augustine. Ancient Thought Baptized*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994, 77–78.

<sup>4</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *Confessiones*, 10.11.12; CROUSE, R.: *Théorie de la connaissance*, 333.

<sup>5</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *De Trinitate*, 14.15.21; BRACHTENDORF, Johannes: *Die Struktur des menschlichen Geistes nach Augustinus. Selbstreflexion und Erkenntnis Gottes in 'De Trinitate'*. (= Paradosis 19). Hamburg: Felix Meiner 2000, 233.

<sup>6</sup> LAUDER, Robert E.: *Augustine. Illumination, Mysticism and Person*, in: VAN FLETEREN, Frederick/SCHNAUBELT, Joseph C./REINO, Joseph (ed.): *Augustine. Mystic and Mystagogue*. (= Collectanea Augustiniana 3). New York: Peter Lang 1994, 183–184. Cf. BOOTH, Edward: *St. Augustine's "notitia sui" related to Aristotle and the Early Neo-Platonists*, in: *Augustiniana* 28 (1978) 183–221, here 197; NASH, Ronald, H.: *The Light of the Mind. St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky 1969, 96.

<sup>7</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *De Trinitate*, 8.3.4, 14.15.21; RIST, J.: *Augustine. Ancient Thought Baptized*, 76.

<sup>8</sup> BELL, David N.: *The Image and Likeness. The Augustinian Spirituality of William of St. Thierry* (= Cistercian Studies 78). Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications 1984, 25–26; BRACHTENDORF, J.: *Die Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 232.

light, the turn towards God is simultaneously the one path to access certain truth judgments. Therefore, all knowledge radically depends on remembering God, at least in an indistinct way.<sup>9</sup> Memory's act does not involve the grasp of a latent image or intelligible species that represents God, but rather direct contact with God himself, though memory's latent forms can become stepping-stones in the contemplative ascent.<sup>10</sup> This interior contact with the divine attainable through memory involves participation in a meta-conceptual awareness of God.<sup>11</sup> Ascent to God is a structured process that unfolds by turning away from the senses to one's inner self, and then to memory, the place of divine light. Here, the influence of Plotinus is evident.<sup>12</sup>

God's indwelling is a natural reality, and not simply the fruit of baptism. God is always present within the soul, so that even sinners can attain at least a fleeting, almost beatific glimpse of God in this life. Thus, in book seven of the *Confessiones*, Augustine describes how he attained a brief vision of God at Milan *before* his conversion, though such a vision is distinct from the experience of the saints in heaven.<sup>13</sup> Augustinian interiority leads to a kind of strong reason, so that some non-Christian Platonic philosophers attained knowledge of the eternal Logos. The gifts of grace and faith do not so much bring about a new knowledge of God that remained hidden to non-believers as a loving submission to God in Christ whereby one can attain permanent communion with the Trinity.<sup>14</sup>

Interior contact with divine light passes through the self, so that remembering God is inseparable from remembering the self. As God is constantly, naturally present and accessible to the soul, so is the soul always present and accessible to itself. Here too, Augustine followed Plotinus in neatly distinguishing the path to self-knowledge from the path to knowledge of other created beings.<sup>15</sup> Book fourteen of *De Trinitate* describes memory as the soul's self-presence, which in turn makes possible a type of self-understanding that is distinct from analytical, reflective

<sup>9</sup> CROUSE, R.: *Théorie de la connaissance*, 334.

<sup>10</sup> BRACHTENDORF, J.: *Die Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 232.

<sup>11</sup> BELL, D.: *The Image and Likeness*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *Confessiones*, 7.10.16, 17.23; DU ROY, Olivier : *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon saint Augustin. Genèse de sa Théologie Trinitaire jusqu'en 391*. Paris : Etudes Augustiniennes 1966, 72–73, 87.

<sup>13</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *Confessiones*, 7.10.16; BELL: *The Image and Likeness*, 48; VAN FLETEREN, Frederick: *Mysticism in the Confessions. A Controversy Revisited*, in: VAN FLETEREN, F./SCHNAUBELT, J.C./REINO, J. (ed.): *Augustine. Mystic and Mystagogue*, 312.

<sup>14</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *De doctrina christiana*, 1.10.10–12.12; *De civitate Dei*, 10.29.1–11; DU ROY, O.: *L'intelligence de la foi*, 99–105, 415.

<sup>15</sup> AGAËSSE, P./MOINGT, J.: *Notes complémentaires*, in: AUGUSTINUS : *La Trinité. Livres VIII–XV* (= Bibliothèque Augustinienne 16). Paris : Desclée de Brouwer 1955, 604; PUTALLAZ, François-Xavier : *Le sens de la réflexion chez Thomas d'Aquin* (= Etudes de la Philosophie Médiévale). Paris: Vrin 1991, 17–27.



knowledge of the nature or structure of the soul.<sup>16</sup> Book ten of *De Trinitate* presents self-understanding as a certain, direct, non-reflective grasp of the soul that is not mediated by the senses.<sup>17</sup> It is distinct from yet dependent on memory. Augustine clearly distinguishes such constant, non-reflective self-knowledge from deliberate, reflective, analytical self-knowledge. Augustine's exposition of the latter bears numerous similarities to Aristotle's psychology, since the Stagirite's intellect in operation has an intrinsic intelligibility. By contrast, for the Latin Father, reflective knowledge of the soul's universal nature requires contact with the divine ideas, which brings us back to memory and divine illumination.<sup>18</sup>

Memory is absolutely central to Augustinian anthropology, for it is the crossroads of multiple key doctrines: the nature of God's indwelling, the possibility of noetic ascent to divine light, the soul's epistemological relation to the body and the possibility of truth and self-knowledge. Therefore, any significant revision of Augustinian memory will almost automatically involve a significant revision of these other key doctrines.

## 2. ALBERT'S *DE HOMINE* (BEFORE 1242)

Albert began his career as a theologian in a scholastic world largely dominated by Neo-Augustinianism. Paris theologians such as William of Auvergne and several Franciscans including John of La Rochelle had proposed a certain fusion of Aristotelian anthropology, Augustinian illumination and Avicennian psychology. The anthropologies of William of Auvergne and Franciscans such as Alexander of Hales, John of La Rochelle, Roger Bacon and Bonaventure remained heavily marked by Augustine and his 12<sup>th</sup> century disciples. They form an important background to Albert's anthropology.<sup>19</sup>

The early Albert has three distinct doctrinal phases on the central themes concerning Augustinian interiority. Our key texts will be the *De Homine* (written before 1242), book one of the *Sentences* (lectured and

<sup>16</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *De Trinitate*, 14.11.14; AGAËSSE, P./MOINGT, J.: *Notes complémentaires*, in: AUGUSTINUS: *La Trinité*, 609–610.

<sup>17</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *De Trinitate*, 10.10.16; 9.3.3; BRACHTENDORF, J.: *Die Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 128.

<sup>18</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *De Trinitate*, 9.6.9; BRACHTENDORF, J.: *Die Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 150; Booth, E.: *St. Augustine's "notitia sui"*, 214–218; PUTALLAZ, F.-X.: *Le sens de la réflexion chez Thomas d'Aquin*, 17–19.

<sup>19</sup> GILSON, Etienne: *Pourquoi Saint Thomas a critiqué saint Augustin* (= Vrin Reprise). Paris: Vrin 1986; TROTTMANN, Christian: *La vision béatifique. Des disputes scolastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII*. Rome: Ecole Française de Rome 1995, 139–140, 169, 200–203, 225–226; WÉBER, Edouard-Henri: *La personne humaine au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (= Bibliothèque Thomiste 46). Paris: Vrin 1991, 18, 337–338.

edited between 1243 and 1246) and the commentaries on Pseudo-Dionysius (1248–1250).<sup>20</sup>

The basic structure of the *De Homine* is crucial for a proper recognition of the nature of Albert's argumentation. The section entitled "On the soul in itself" dominates the work and employs an essentially philosophical methodology. Albert has evidently already begun his immersion in Aristotle's anthropology and its many interpreters, whom he quotes hundreds of times. In the section on the soul in itself, the theological sources do not function as authorities, but are placed within the disputation alongside philosophical interlocutors.<sup>21</sup> Albert's "philosophical treatise" within the *De Homine* is almost a commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*, one that employs the *quaestio* format.<sup>22</sup> Most of the text's *quaestiones* follow the thematic order set out in the *De Anima*, as it proceeds from an overall definition of the soul to its various parts: vegetative, sensitive and rational.<sup>23</sup> Only in the final pages of the work does Albert turn to the theme of the *imago Dei*, before proceeding to a very brief consideration of the body and its relation to the soul, including the body's characteristics in the Garden of Eden. The section on the *imago* naturally becomes much more theological in its method, yet is preceded by long and rigorously philosophical argumentations, especially concerning the agent and potential intellect.<sup>24</sup> In a few key passages, Albert performs (con-

<sup>20</sup> For the dates of these works, see ANZULEWICZ, Henryk/SÖDER, Joachim R. (eds.): *Preface*, in: ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine* (= Editio Coloniensis, vol. 27.2. Münster: Aschendorff 2008, xv; BURGER, Maria: *Thomas Aquinas's Glosses on the Dionysius Commentaries of Albert the Great in Codex 30 of the Cologne Cathedral Library*, in: HONNEFELDER, Ludger/MÖHLE, Hannes/BULLIDO DEL BARRIO, Susana (Hgg.): *Via Alberti. Texte – Quellen – Interpretationen* (= Subsidia Albertina 2). Münster: Aschendorff 2009, 572–574; EMERY, Gilles: *La Trinité Créatrice. Trinité et création dans les commentaires aux Sentences de Thomas d'Aquin et de ses précurseurs Albert le Grand et Bonaventure* (= Bibliothèque Thomiste 47). Paris: Vrin 1995, 27–29; SENNER, Walter: *Alberts des Großen Verständnis von Theologie und Philosophie* (= Lectio Albertina 9). Münster: Aschendorff 2009, 14–17; SIMON, Paul: *Preface*, in: ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *Super Dionysium de Divinis Nominibus*. [Henceforth SDN] (Editio Coloniensis, vol. 37). Münster: Aschendorff 1972, vi; WEISHEIPL, James A.: *Thomas d'Aquino and Albert, his Teacher*. Toronto: PIMS 1980, 3–11.

<sup>21</sup> SÖDER, Joachim R.: *Die Erprobung der Vernunft. Vom Umgang mit Traditionen in 'De homine'*, in: SENNER, Walter (ed.): *Albertus Magnus. Zum Gedenken nach 800 Jahren. Neue Zugänge, Aspekte und Perspektiven* (= Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Dominikanerordens 10). Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2001, 5, 8.

<sup>22</sup> In fact, *De Homine's* philosophical study of the soul is twice as long as Albert's official paraphrase of the *De Anima* that he composed a few years later as part of his philosophical encyclopedia.

<sup>23</sup> On the importance of Aristotle for the *De Homine*, see also ANZULEWICZ, Henryk: *Einleitung*, in: ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *Über den Menschen* (= Philosophische Bibliothek 531) Hamburg: Felix Meiner 2004, xxxiv–xxxix.

<sup>24</sup> Joachim Söder and Georg Wieland are thus correct in refusing Loris Sturlese's division of Albert's career between an early theological phase and a turn towards philosophy around 1250 through the commentaries on Aristotle. SÖDER, J.R.: *Die Erprobung der Vernunft*, 1–8; STURLESE, Loris: *Die Deutsche Philosophie im Mittelalter. Von Bonifatius bis zu Albert dem*

sciously or not) a subtle transformation of Augustinian memory and interiority. Following the order of the German Dominican's exposition, we will consider the themes of noetic illumination, the agent intellect as the immediate conduit of light, the partial reduction of Augustinian memory to Aristotle's blank slate, and the place of memory in the *imago Dei*.

In our first key text, Albert takes up the controversial issue of the separate agent intellect. An objection cites Augustine's *De Magistro*. Since God is the true interior teacher, it seems that he is the agent intellect enlightening every human being.<sup>25</sup> Albert answers that, indeed, God is the first cause without which all intellectual operations would be impossible. He notes that Augustine intends to explicate this doctrine in the discussion of the interior teacher. Yet the agent intellect, that is, the individual human intellect, has the power of illuminating intelligible beings "from itself and under itself".<sup>26</sup> This phrase must mean that the agent intellect has an intrinsic capacity that suffices to grant certain knowledge of at least some beings. In other words, any illumination beyond the intrinsic human power of knowing is unnecessary to attain philosophical knowledge about the world.<sup>27</sup>

Albert confirms this interpretation in an answer to the following objection in the same article. He states that some intelligibles are only accessible to us through divine grace illuminating the mind, namely, those things which are "above reason". Albert here refers to the articles of faith. He then explains that we understand other things rationally. He does not mean that we have a power of knowing that is absolutely autonomous. Rather the intrinsic, natural, operational capacity of the agent intellect comes to us from God.<sup>28</sup>

*Großen* (748–1280). München: C.H. Beck 1993, 332–342; WIELAND, Georg: *Zwischen Natur und Vernunft. Alberts des Großen Begriff vom Menschen* (= *Lectio Albertina* 2) Münster: Aschendorff 1999, 4. H. Anzulewicz has also pointed out the methodological difference between the philosophical and theological sections of *De Homine*. See his *Memoria und reminiscencia bei ALBERTUS MAGNUS*, in: PARAVICINI BAGLIANI, A. (éd.) : *La mémoire du temps au Moyen Age* (= *Micrologus*' library 12). Firenze : Sismel, Ed. del Galluzzo 2005, 171–173.

<sup>25</sup> Roger Bacon espoused this position in the early 1240's. See WÉBER, E.-H. : *La personne humaine*, 337.

<sup>26</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "De Intellectu Agente," a. 2.2.3, objection 21, p. 411.29–33: «In idem videtur incidere Augustinus in libro *De Magistro*, ubi per totum probat nihil posse hominem intelligere nisi deus doceat interius. Cum igitur omnis intellectus sit a lumine intellectus agentis, videtur intellectus agens nihil aliud esse quam deus instruens interius». Ad 21, p. 415.25–29: «Ad aliud dicendum quod Augustinus in libro *De Magistro* intendit quod omne lumen nostri intellectus est a causa prima et sine ipso nihil possumus facere; sed naturam illuminandi super intelligibilia intellectus agens habet ab ipso et sub ipso».

<sup>27</sup> Cf. FÜHRER, Markus L.: *Albertus Magnus' Theory of Illumination*, in: SENNER, Walter (Hrsg.): *Albertus Magnus. Zum Gedenken nach 800 Jahren*, 144.

<sup>28</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "De Intellectu Agente," a. 2.2.3, ad 22, p. 415.30–36: «Ad ultimum dicendum quod vis est in hoc quod dicit Apostolus: 'Non quod sufficientes simus cogitare aliquid ex nobis quasi a nobis'. In hoc innuit quod quaedam intelligibilia non

These two brief *De Homine* passages on illumination have three important consequences. First, Albert reduces Augustine's language of the interior teacher and divine illumination to God as the first cause of our intrinsic intellectual power. He attributes this meaning to Augustine himself. Second, Albert introduces a clear grace/nature distinction, so that some intelligibles can be understood without any special divine intervention. Third, Albert's appropriation of an Aristotelian agent intellect as sufficient to gain access to a whole realm of knowledge implicitly weakens or even excludes the need for Augustinian memory in Albert's philosophical epistemology. For Augustine, memory is the place where the divine light dwells, the light without which we cannot have access to truth about anything.

A few pages later, Albert turns to the question of the agent intellect's knowledge of itself. He remains faithful to his philosophical approach and essentially follows an Aristotelian investigation of the soul's acts while ignoring Augustine. Albert notes that sometimes the agent intellect does not abstract species from phantasms. At such moments, the agent intellect's light alone is in the possible intellect, so that the latter engages in a kind of "indistinct act". Thus, the possible intellect is always illumined in some way.<sup>29</sup> The agent intellect clearly has a function beyond abstraction. It is a perpetual source of operational actuality for the potential intellect. In the same article, Albert notes that the agent intellect is always in act, either by actualizing intelligibles, meaning other beings, or by actualizing the possible intellect, or both simultaneously.<sup>30</sup> The agent intellect has become the immediate interior source of all intelligible light. Consciously or not, Albert prepares the way for a new kind of interiority. His agent intellect goes beyond the historical Aristotle, apparently integrating the Platonizing anthropology of the Arabic commentators and the *Liber de Causis*.<sup>31</sup> The agent intellect seems to have taken over one major function of Augustinian memory.

Albert then turns to the relation between sense experience and human knowledge. The main theme pertains to the source of intelligible forms in our understanding. In opposition to Plato and the Stoics, Albert insists

intelligimus nisi gratia dei illuminante, sicut ea quae sunt supra rationem: quaedam autem rationabilia intelligimus a nobis, sed non quasi ex nobis, sed ex virtute agentis intellectus, quae data est nobis a deo». On the distinction between faith and reason in Albert, see WÉBER, Edouard-Henri : *La relation de la philosophie et de la théologie selon Albert le Grand*, in: *Archives de Philosophie* 43 (1980) 559–588.

<sup>29</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "De Intellectu Agente," a. 2.2.6, ad 3, p. 421.60–64.

<sup>30</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "De Intellectu Agente," a. 2.2.6, ad 5, p. 422.6–17. Ad 8 (p. 422.26–31) confirms that this is Albert's intention in ad 5.

<sup>31</sup> The Arabic commentators are constant interlocutors in *De Homine*. The present article twice cites the *Liber de Causis* and attributes it to Aristotle (p. 420.45–50). For an overview of Albert's doctrine of agent intellect in the 1250's and 1260's, see WÉBER : *La personne humaine*, 309–316.



that our knowledge of other beings must originate in the senses. His argument rests upon an appeal to experience: it is very difficult to teach a blind or deaf person. Albert strongly implies that, with the exception of inspired dreams and prophecies, there are no directly infused forms representing other beings.<sup>32</sup> The intellect's information is normally rooted in sense experience.

One Aristotelian principle leads Albert to another. Albert asks whether the intellect understands itself in the way that it understands other beings (a theme distinct from the agent intellect's self-knowledge). The response is complex. The species attained (from sense experience) through the agent intellect and through the species of the agent intellect itself actualize the potential intellect. Albert explains that the agent intellect's "species" refers to its two-fold operation of making actual both the intelligibles (found in material beings) and the possible intellect. He refers back to the article on the agent intellect becoming the potential intellect's act. In other words, the intellect's self-understanding does not involve the infusion of a separate species that represents the agent intellect. Rather, it parallels the way of understanding other beings, but only to a certain extent. The intellect's self-understanding requires actualization through the reception of intelligible species representing material beings, but it also requires the agent intellect becoming the act of the possible intellect.<sup>33</sup> That is, understanding is a kind of act, and act comes from information through species as well as a certain union of the agent and the potential intellect. This in turn enables the intellect to attain mediated self-knowledge by reflecting on its activity of knowing beings in the world. Albert here refers to intellect's explicit, reflective self-understanding. He makes no mention of direct contact with the divine ideas being necessary to attain such reflective self-understanding, an omission that logically follows from his previous reduction of noetic illumination in the realm of reason to the agent intellect's intrinsic operative capacity. Yet Albert does not fully overturn Augustinian memory in the quest for reflective self-knowledge, since a perpetually illuminating agent intellect stands at the center of this new philosophy.

Two articles later, Albert asks whether intelligibles are naturally in the soul or acquired through the senses. No less than seven objections cite

<sup>32</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "De Differentia Intelligibilis," a. 1, ad 8, pp. 446.60–447.5.

<sup>33</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "De Differentia Intelligibilis," a. 1, p. 447.53–58: «Secunda quaestio est, si intellectus intelligat se, utrum intelligat se sicut alia intelligibilia, aut alio modo. Et patet quod ipse per speciem agentis intelligit intelligibilia et per speciem eiusdem intelligit se, eo quod species agentis facit actu intelligibilia et intellectum possibilem, ut supra probatum est».



Augustine in favor of direct interior access to the immaterial realm.<sup>34</sup> Albert's solution significantly reinterprets the meaning of memory. When Augustine speaks of memory, he really means the mind. The species of things are always in the mind, but they are in potency until the phantasms arrive. The agent intellect abstracts species (from phantasms) and actualizes the possible intellect. In other words, Augustine's memory is really in harmony with Aristotle's blank slate (*tabula rasa*). Augustine's immaterial realm that is more or less accessible through interior ascent becomes pure potentiality waiting to be actualized through information via the senses. Albert essentially closes off *most* un-mediated access to the intelligible realm, at least on the natural plane. Furthermore, he seems to reduce memory to the thesaurus of forms. Nor does Albert discuss Augustine's conviction that sense experience alone can never lead to certain knowledge. Instead, Augustine seems to have become a convinced Aristotelian on a major epistemological theme!<sup>35</sup> Albert concludes by noting that this solution adequately responds to the many Augustinian objections, so that there is no need to answer them individually.<sup>36</sup>

34 ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "De Differentia Intelligibilis," a. 3, objections 1–7, pp. 452.61–453.43.

35 ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "De Differentia Intelligibilis," a. 3, p. 454.33–60: «Dicimus, quod omnia scibilia possunt considerari in suis principiis, vel in seipsis. Si in seipsis, tunc non sunt in anima antequam discantur nisi potentia. Si in principiis, tunc duobus modis considerantur, scilicet secundum terminos principiorum et terminorum naturam: et sic generantur a sensu, sicut quod scammonia illius est naturae quod purgat choleram. Considerantur etiam in terminorum habitudine, et sic semper sunt in anima, sed tamen in potentia, cui potentiae sufficit notitia terminorum ad hoc quod reducat in actum. Unde dicit Philosophus, quod 'principia scimus in quantum terminos cognoscimus'. Et haec est sententia Aristotelis. Augustinus autem dicit, quod scibilia sunt in memoria, et accipit memoriam large pro mente, in qua est notitia scibilium, sive sint praesentia sive praeterita sive futura. Est autem scibile in duplici specie, scilicet intelligibilis secundum quod est intelligibile, et hanc speciem habet ab intellectu agente. Et est species mentis, et sic semper sunt in anima: sed haec species est in potentia, ut supra dictum est, donec adveniat phantasma, quod abstrahatur ad speciem intellectus agentis; tunc enim efficitur in actu et coniungitur intellectui possibili, et mediante ipsa discernitur hoc quod quaerebatur. Et hoc est quod dicit Augustinus speciem latere et in abditis thesauris esse reconditam ante studium. Est etiam species intelligibilis, quae est species rei, et haec abstrahitur a rebus, et non semper est in anima».

<sup>36</sup> Albert does make one reference to "con-created" forms in the human soul (*De Homine*, p. 430), but these appear to play no role whatsoever in Albert's extensive philosophical study of epistemology in the *De Homine*. In fact, Albert simply refers the reader back to *De IV Coaequ.* for an explanation of their nature. Markus FÜHRER proposes that Albert posits a place for innate Platonic forms in a "contemplative state". But he does not mention that the contemplative state in which the soul enjoys the con-created ideas is nothing other than the state of the separated soul (see *De Homine*, p. 430). See his *The Contemplative Function of the Agent Intellect in the Psychology of Albert the Great*, in: MOJSISCH, Burkhard (ed.): *Historia Philosophiae Medii Aevi. Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*. Vol. 1. Philadelphia: B.R. Grüner 1991, 307.

The bulk of *De Homine* offers a complete, systematic philosophy of the soul that can account for the intellect's reflective knowledge of itself and of the world without an appeal to Augustinian memory. The same philosophy overturns significant elements of Augustinian illumination. However, Albert also partly integrates Augustinian interiority into a new doctrine of the agent intellect. Because of the latter doctrine, Albert can account for certain knowledge of material beings and the intellect's self-understanding without appealing to *special* illumination, beyond the *general* illumination that is God's creative causality of all noetic powers. Albert thus overcomes one of the obstacles that Augustine had considered insurmountable without memory and illumination.

By following the structure of Aristotle's *De Anima*, Albert also avoids a philosophical discussion of our knowledge of God. The key articles on how we know in this life and in the next, which we considered above, essentially ignore or avoid the question of how we know God.<sup>37</sup> Albert can therefore delay the discussion of God until the section on the *imago*, which re-introduces theological authorities as authorities. The implication is that a theory of how the intellect knows itself and the world can and should be developed on strictly philosophical grounds, and that such an epistemology is possible without appealing to God's illuminating presence in memory, though this does not exclude a theological epistemology that completes and complements the philosophy. Because Augustine had proposed illumination as a necessary element for any certain knowledge, whether about God, the intellect's nature or the world, Albert's philosophical proposal implicitly throws into doubt Augustinian interiority in general.

When the *De Homine* turns to a study of the *imago Dei*, Albert's approach to Augustine shifts in a striking way. Memory is no longer simply an Aristotelian storehouse of abstracted forms, but also an operative faculty clearly distinct from the intellect. Memory is the storehouse of a natural *habitus* of the knowledge of the true and good, which are both God and the soul.<sup>38</sup> Albert explains that memory has cognition of the true and the good that simply *is* the soul. In other words, the soul's substantial

<sup>37</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "De Intellectu Agente," a. 2.2.6, pp. 419–22; "De Intellectu Possibili," a. 2.3.5, pp. 429–431.

<sup>38</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "Imago," a. 6.2.2.1, p. 549.34–48: «Dicendum quod memoria secundum quod est pars imaginis nihil aliud est nisi thesaurus habitus naturalis, qui est cognitio veri et boni, quod deus est, et veri et boni, quod anima sive mens est. Et propter hoc bene concedo quod abstrahit ab omni differentia temporis. Dicitur tamen memoria propter officium memoriae, quod habet in anima rationali, quod est retinere sive conservare intentiones et conceptiones rerum. Et hoc est quod dicit Augustinus quod non est tantum praeteritorum, sed etiam praesentium et futurorum. Hoc enim non posset esse nisi ab omni differentia temporis abstraheret, vel comprehenderet tempus secundum quod est tempus, sicut sensus communis. Cum igitur non comprehendat sic tempus, relinquitur quod ab omni differentia temporis abstrahat». Cf. a. 6.2.2.2, p. 551.50–60.

presence to itself enables some type of immediate, pre-reflective noetic contact with it. A similar doctrine pertains to memory's relation with God: its cognition is of the true and good that is God, not a mediating presence.<sup>39</sup> More importantly, in the following article, Albert notes that memory also retains knowledge of justice, which is likewise inserted or known by nature, a possible allusion to Augustine's teaching that memory enables us to grasp immutable ethical rules.<sup>40</sup> However, Albert's comments on these themes remain brief and vague.

Albert then makes explicit his *partial* synthesis of his doctrine of the agent intellect and Augustinian memory. He explains that the mind can fulfill its operation of constant, habitual self-knowledge because 1) the substance of the rational soul is essentially in the possible intellect, and hence need not be abstracted, and 2) the ever-illuminating presence of the agent intellect always enables the mind's habitual self-knowledge. Albert distinguishes such self-understanding from an analytical, reflective understanding of the soul's structure.<sup>41</sup>

39 ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "Imago," a. 6.2.2.1, ad 4-5, p. 549.51-63: «Ad id quod quaeritur, qualiter differt ab intellectu, dicimus quod memoriae est retinere naturaliter insertam cognitionem veri et boni, quod deus est; intelligentiae autem est intueri. Et haec duo simul sunt tempore, eo quod unum est ut conservans et alterum ut agens: et illorum unum non abstrahit ab altero, sed unum est causa alterius, quia ex memoria informatur intelligentia. Ad aliud dicendum, quod nosse secundum quod est actus memoriae, idem est quod notitiam rei tenere per has duas intentiones quae sunt verum et bonum, ex quarum altera informatur intelligentia, et ex reliqua voluntas. Intelligere autem idem est quod intueri, ut dictum est».

40 ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "Imago," a. 6.2.2.2, p. 551.50-57: «Dicendum quod accipiendo memoriam sicut Augustinus accipit eam, ipsa est prima inter potentias imaginis. Sic enim non est nisi conservatio habituum insertorum nobis a natura, sicut notitia veri et boni, quod deus est, et notitia veri et boni, quod mens est sive anima, et notitia veri et boni, quod iustitia tenenda est, et huiusmodi quae per naturam sciuntur a quolibet. Haec enim secundum rationem loquendo prius sunt in memoria quam in intelligentia vel voluntate, quia prius est habere aliquid in memoria sive anima quam praesenter intueri vel diligere illud». For Augustine, see BRACHTENDORF, J.: *Die Struktur des menschlichen Geistes*, 233.

41 ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "Imago," a. 6.2.2.1, ad 6, pp. 549.64-550.15: «Ad aliud dicendum quod nosse et intelligere differunt per modum dictum, et utrumque est semper. Mens enim semper meminit se, eo quod semper notitiam sui apud se tenet. Similiter semper intelligit se. Probatum est enim supra, quod omne intelligibile quod est in intellectu possibili, recipit lumen intelligentiae agentis ad complementum intellectus, qui est de ipso. Item probatum est ibi quod substantia rationalis animae essentialiter est in intellectu possibili et non indiget, ut abstrahat eam ad hoc quod intelligat. Cum igitur intelligere se sit idem quod intueri se in lumine intellectus agentis, patet quod mens semper intelligit se illo modo quo intuetur se in lumine intellectus agentis. Cum autem amor naturalis semper sequatur hunc intellectum, etiam semper mens vult se amore naturali. Et nota, quod aliud est intueri se in lumine intellectus agentis, et aliud converti super se considerando differentias et passiones naturae suae. Intueri enim se est hoc quod dictum est, scilicet praesentia sui in lumine intellectus agentis. Sed converti supra se est reducere subiectum in passiones et differentias per medium demonstrationis vel syllogismi; et hoc non semper facit mens. Primum autem semper facit, eo quod semper sibi praesens est. Et propter hoc dicit Augustinus quod mens non semper cogitat de se, quia cogitare de se est discernere se ab aliis rebus».

Albert retains Augustinian memory as an essential element of the *imago*. But he also significantly restricts memory's place in his overall anthropology. He denies the necessity of special illumination for the intellect's reflective self-understanding and knowledge of the world. Yet a new type of interiority also begins to emerge, centered on an original doctrine of the agent intellect, which takes over some important functions of Augustinian memory.

### 3. ALBERT'S *COMMENTARY ON THE SENTENCES*, BOOK ONE (1243–1246)

If Albert's *De Homine* represents his first major philosophical synthesis, then the Parisian *Commentary on the Sentences* represents his first major theological synthesis. I will focus on three key texts covering the themes of 1) noetic illumination; 2) higher and lower intellect; and 3) the relation of Augustinian memory to Albert's agent intellect.

Albert's *Commentary on the Sentences* discussion of our knowledge of God includes an article on divine illumination. He recounts the opinion of "certain philosophers" (apparently a reference to Averroes) who propose four essential elements to acquire truth through reason alone: 1) the potential intellect; 2) the agent intellect; 3) the thing or object known, either through images (phantasms) or "itself"; and 4) principles (of reason).<sup>42</sup> Albert maintains that these elements are insufficient for reason to acquire truth. Reason, he continues, also requires a certain "application" of uncreated light. There always needs to be a certain "conjunction" to divine light in order to know truth. This light is also called the interior teacher. However, sometimes the mind is also conjoined to angelic minds, when intelligences impress illuminations, as "certain philosophers" say. Albert explicitly cites Dionysius for this last doctrine. Albert specifies that such light is a grace in the broad sense, meaning that God freely gives it. The same teaching is expressed by a certain philosopher (again probably Averroes), who notes that all understanding involves a "conversion" to the light of the "uncreated intellect".<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Maria Burger identifies Averroes as [one of] the unnamed "philosophers" in the corpus of this article. See her notes for the forthcoming Cologne Edition of ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *Super I Librum Sententiarum*, p. 48.48, 48.63.

<sup>43</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *I Sent.* (= Borgnet Edition 25). Paris: 1893, d. 2, a. 5, pp. 59b-60a: «Dicendum, quod ista disputatio non est contra notulam: quia Augustinus dicit, quod mali nihil verum vident: et hoc retractavit, quia mali multa habent a Deo. Si tamen non fiat vis in hoc, dicimus quod in anima ad hoc quod accipiat scientiam veritatis exiguntur quatuor: intellectus possibilis qui paratus sit recipere: et secundo, intellectus agens cujus lumine fiat abstractio specierum in quibus est veritas, vel verum illud: et tertio, res objecta per imaginem, vel seipsam, de qua est veritas illa: et quarto, principia et dignitates quae sunt quasi quaedam instrumenta proportionantia compositiones et divisiones possibiles et impossibiles et necessarias ex quibus verum accipitur. Inter haec quatuor, primum est recipiens tantum:



On the surface, the philosophical opinion that Albert rejects seems to be close to his own *De Homine* epistemology, where he excludes the necessity of any special illumination beyond God's creative act for philosophical knowledge. If Albert simply intends to re-affirm his previous position that reduces illumination to God's creative causality of all noetic power, then it seems that he would have made this interpretation explicit in the present text.

However, I would argue that the relation between the *De Homine* and *Commentary on the Sentences* passages is more ambiguous and even in partial harmony. That is, both texts mark a quiet, partial turn away from Augustinian illumination. First, the language that describes the power of the agent intellect shifts. In the *De Homine*, Albert speaks of the intrinsic, natural power of illumination as "from and under it".<sup>44</sup> In the *Commentary on the Sentences*, he is more ambiguous, as he contrasts an opponent's agent intellect that has a *per se* capacity, in contrast to an application of uncreated light. *Per se* could be a synonym of "from itself", which would identify the teaching of Albert's opponent with his own *De Homine* position. However, the term may also mean "by itself", that is, without an evident connection to the divine first cause of knowledge, a causal link upon which the *De Homine* insists.

Second, Albert appropriates the language of the interior teacher to describe the light of the uncreated intellect to which one must be joined for any and all knowledge. Clearly, he evokes Augustinian terminology, the very same language from the *De Magistro* that the *De Homine* identifies with God as the first cause of all knowledge that enables the agent intellect's intrinsic, sufficient capacity to know philosophical truth about the world. In the *Commentary on the Sentences* passage, Albert does not

secundum autem est dans lumen suum tantum : tertium est recipiens ab agente intellectu, et dans lucem veritatis distinctae possibili; quartum autem est motum ut instrumentum, et movens compositionem et divisionem ejus in quo est verum scitum vel quaesitum. Unde quidam Philosophi dixerunt, quod ista sufficerent ad cognitionem veri quod est sub ratione. Sed aliter dicendum, scilicet, quod lux intellectus agentis non sufficit per se, nisi per applicationem lucis intellectus increati, sicut applicatur radius solis ad radium stellae. Et hoc contingit dupliciter, scilicet, secundum lumen duplicatum tantum, vel etiam triplicatum: duplicatum ut si fiat conjunctio ad lumen intellectus increati, et illud lumen est interior magister. Quandoque autem fit ad conjunctionem intellectus angelici et divini: quia Philosophi quidam animam posuerunt instrumentum intelligentiae, eo quod intelligentia imprimat in eam suas illuminationes. Et hoc vocat Dionysius reductionem nostra hierarchiae per hierarchiam Angelorum, et Augustinus dicit hoc contingere multis modis. Et hoc vocant quidam Philosophi *continuationem intellectuum*: quia etiam ipsi dixerunt, quod nihil videtur nisi per lucem primam. Ad [objecta] hoc ergo quod quaeritur, Utrum exigitur appositio gratiae novae, Dicendum quod si gratia vocatur quodlibet donum a Deo gratis datum, tunc non fit hoc sine gratia: imo dicit quidam Philosophus, quod etiam si aliquid sciatur in habitu, non fiet conversio ad actum nisi per conversionem ad lucem intellectus increati».

44 ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *De Homine*, "De Intellectu Agente," a. 2.2.3, p. 415.29–30.



explain the function of the interior teacher's illumination. He simply affirms that there is some type of illumination.

The article's solution only twice refers to Augustine. It opens with Augustine's retraction concerning the ability of the wicked to know truth. Albert cites the mature Augustine to argue that intellectual illumination even reaches the sinner in some way. He has to account for the Augustinian dictum that all truth comes from the Holy Spirit and explain how sinners have access to the truth. Secondly, he cites the Bishop of Hippo as agreeing with Dionysius, that we return to God through the illuminations of the angels. Neither of the two explicit citations of Augustine gives specific indications of the type of illumination that Albert intends to describe.

The technical noetic language of Aristotelian commentators dominates the article. Albert twice mentions the terms "application", "conjunction", and "conversion", respectively, while once referring to a "continuation of intellects". The language of "being conjoined to a higher intellect" (i.e. the divine agent intellect) comes from Avicenna.<sup>45</sup> "Conjunction" and "continuation with a higher intellect", namely the agent intellect, are standard terms from Averroes (for whom the agent intellect is not individual in each human being).<sup>46</sup> The term "conversion" also emerges in Augustinian discussions of lower and higher intellect, as Albert himself will note later on in book one of the *Commentary on the Sentences* (distinction 17, article 4), but the present text explicitly connects the term "conversion" to the discussion of an unnamed philosopher, who turns out to be John of Ruprecht.<sup>47</sup> Thus, in this, his most substantial *Commentary on the Sentences* discussion of universal illumination, Albert prefers to focus on standard technical philosophical terminology related to the agent intellect.

Albert implicitly applies the language of a universal agent intellect to God, a standard theological position in Paris at the time, for example, in the thought of William of Auvergne and Roger Bacon. Alexander of Hales had also employed Avicennian epistemological tools and the language of impressed forms to promote a type of illumination in which forms are acquired directly from God, independent of sense experience.<sup>48</sup> But does Albert follow the Bishop of Paris and the Franciscan theologians in their synthesis of Augustinian illumination and Avicenna's separate agent intellect? I would argue that the German Dominican takes a different path. The brevity of his *Commentary on the Sentences* article is telling. Exactly

<sup>45</sup> AVICENNA LATINUS: *Liber de Anima seu Sextus de Naturalibus IV-VI*. Stuart Van Riet (ed.). Leiden: E.J. Brill 1968, pars 5, c. 5, pp. 128–129.

<sup>46</sup> AVERROES: *Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis de Anima Libros*. F. Stuart Crawford (ed.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Medieval Academy of America 1953, III, 36. Cf. DE LIBERA, Alain: *Métaphysique et noétique. Albert le Grand*. Paris: Vrin 2006, 287; 301.

<sup>47</sup> Again following Burger's notes for *Super I Librum Sententiarum*, p. 49.4.

<sup>48</sup> TROTTMANN, C.: *La vision béatifique*, 140 ; 159–160.

what does illumination do? He does not specify if it is necessary to know God and angels, a contemporary solution proposed in the *Summa Fratris Halensis*.<sup>49</sup> Exactly why does the agent intellect need light to know truth accessible to reason? Albert posits neither so-called conceptual illumination nor the gift of certitude in truth judgments. Albert does refer to “some philosophers” who discuss intelligences impressing illuminations, identifies the doctrine with Dionysius’s return through the celestial hierarchy and some [other?] philosophers’ “continuation of intellects”, while interjecting that Augustine also approves. The cascade of harmonized authorities only makes us wonder what these angelic illuminations are, since Albert offers no commentary of his own. It is striking that Albert does not so much argue for illumination as draw the conclusion with appeals to various doctrinal sources. It is not at all clear what philosophical or theological convictions require such illumination.

However, another *Commentary on the Sentences* article suggests that Augustinian illumination remains present in Albert’s thought at this point in his career, though in a significantly modified form. The text pertains to the Augustinian higher and lower intellect. It emerges in an article on whether the neighbor we love is better known than the love itself. This dense article is crucial for my overall argument:

“[...] there is an intellect in us that receives [knowledge] from phantasms, and knowledge would fail in this intellect if the senses were to fail. Hence, someone born blind cannot understand colors. But there is another intellect that does not receive [knowledge] from phantasms, but rather in the light of the agent intellect alone, and [also] in those things in which it is illumined by a more abundant light than the light of the agent intellect, such as the divine ray, or the ray of angelic revelation. Nor do I posit the existence of two intellects in number and subject, but two by mode of conversion to the superior and to the inferior. Just as Augustine says in the book *The City of God*, referring to Apuleius the Platonist speaking about the god of Socrates, who said that the philosophers cannot see God unless the intellect withdraws from the body, and such vision also requires being violently (*raptim*) quasi-mingled with light. The first mode is quasi common to us while we are in this life. The second mode will be more common in act after this life.

But if one seeks to know how the intellect has more capacity to understand, one must distinguish. For by its nature, intellect is more inclined to the superior reality, but in this state of life, it is more inclined to the inferior reality. Similarly, I distinguish from the part of that which is known. [1] For something is known by its own power, when it is itself the light and reason (*ratio*) of knowing other things. And if the power of knowing or understanding is stretched (*attendatur*) from the part of the object moving the intellect, that which is known in its own light and is the reason of knowing other things will be better known, than that which is only known by a different (*aliena*) light. And so the Philosopher says at the beginning of the

49 TROTTMANN, C. : *La vision béatifique*, 225–226.

*De Anima* that knowledge of the soul is more certain than knowledge of an animated body. Because the soul is the principle by which the accidents, operations and passions of animals are known. [2] A different kind of knowledge occurs through the power of knowing and understanding, which is moved (*movetur*) by that which is known, and in this mode, the things that are secondary in nature are often better known, just as an effect is better known than a cause. And in this [second] way, it is said that our intellect relates to those which are more manifest in [their own] nature, like the owl's vision to the light of the sun.

Employing this distinction, I say that God and uncreated charity and all which is potentially in the soul are better known in the first way of understanding, and according to the power of the intelligible moving [the intellect]. But one's brother and neighbor and all to which we have access through the senses are better known in the second way of understanding, and according to the power of understanding. And this is what Augustine seems to propose. Because he explains that something is 'better known' because it is more present, because 'interior, because more certain'.<sup>50</sup>

Albert begins by accepting the Augustinian distinction between the higher and lower intellect. Following Augustine, one and the same intellect has two names, depending on where its attention is directed. The respective objects of the "two intellects" are the higher, immaterial realm and the

<sup>50</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: I Sent., d. 17, a. 4c, p. 472: «[...] est enim aliquis intellectus in nobis accipiens ex phantasmate, et in illo perit scientia, si perit sensus: unde caecus natus non demonstrat de coloribus. Est autem alius intellectus non accipiens ex phantasmate, sed in lumine agentis intellectus tantum, et in his in quibus illuminatur etiam ampliori lumine quam sit lumen agentis intellectus, sicut est radius divinus, vel radius revelationis angelicae: nec hoc intelligo, quod sint duo intellectus numero et subjecto, sed duo per modum conversionis ad superius et inferius: sicut dicit Augustinus in libro de *Civitate Dei*, inducens Apuleium Platonicum de Deo Socratis, qui dixit quod Deum non videre poterant Philosophi nisi intellectu se a carne abstrahentes, et adhuc non nisi raptim quasi permicante lumine. Primus autem modus est quasi generalis nobis dum sumus in via. Secundus autem magis erit in actu post viam. Si ergo quaeratur, Quomodo intellectus sit potentior ad intelligendum? distinguendum est: quia de natura sui magis se habet ad superius, de statu autem hujus vitae magis ad inferius. Similiter distinguo ex parte ejus quod noscitur: aliquid enim ita noscitur secundum sui potestatem, quod ipsum est lux et ratio ad alia cognoscenda: et si attendatur potestas notitiae vel intellectus ex parte objecti moventis intellectum, magis erit notum quod noscitur in luce propria et est ratio cognoscendi alia, quam id quod tantum cognoscitur in luce aliena: et hoc modo dicit Philosophus in principio de *Anima*, quod notitia de anima certior est quam notitia de corpore animato: quia anima est principium quo cognoscuntur accidentia et opera et passiones animalium. Alia notitia est secundum potestatem noscentis et intellectus qui movetur ab eo quod noscitur, et secundum illum modum frequenter magis noscuntur quae in natura sunt posteriora, sicut effectus plus quam causa: et hoc modo dictum est, quod intellectus noster, sicut visus noctuae ad lumen solis, se habet ad ea quae sunt in natura manifestissima. Hac distinctione habita, dico quod Deus et charitas increata et omnia quae potential [sic] sunt in anima, sunt magis nota primo modo intellectus, et secundum potestatem intelligibilis moventis. Frater autem et proximus et omnia quae sensui appropinquant, sunt magis nota secundo modo intellectus, et secundum potestatem intelligentis. Et hoc videtur Augustinus sentire: quia sic exponit 'plane notioem' quia praesentioem, quia 'interioem, quia certioem' [...]. The translation is my own.

realm of the material cosmos. Faculties such as the agent and potential intellect therefore neither dwell only in the higher or in the lower intellect, since these “parts” only describe the direction of the entire intellect’s intention. Rather, the agent and potential intellect are involved in both the higher and lower “parts”. Albert explicitly connects the light of the agent intellect to the act of pondering of higher realities. By turning away from the sensible world, the mind (i.e. the potential intellect) only receives the agent intellect’s light (and not the noetic light of the material world), though it can also receive a divine or angelic ray.

Albert’s intention here is not to propose a development of the illumination theory that he set out in the previous article (distinction 2, article 5). The reception of intelligibility from the material world and the light received from the agent intellect by turning inwards are best understood as also always involving the agent intellect’s union with the uncreated light, leaving open the precise function of that uncreated light, which may or may not go beyond the *De Homine* teaching that God is the creative source of our intellectual power. The divine ray that is “more abundant” than that of the agent intellect probably refers to strictly supernatural illumination that can occur at various times.

Albert seems to confirm this interpretation by giving an example of the divine ray, namely, the vision of God enjoyed by the Platonists as a form of rapture, i.e. a charismatic gift. Albert’s intention behind the term *raptim* surfaces as he connects it to our common state in the next life, i.e. the beatific vision. Albert followed Augustine in identifying the gift of rapture with the beatific vision of the divine essence becoming accessible in this life, with Paul being the classic model.<sup>51</sup> Albert proposes that certain pagan philosophers also enjoyed this gift, apparently following Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*. In fact, the *De civitate Dei* passage cited is more concerned with Plato’s opposition to the carnal vices of the poets’ gods.<sup>52</sup> Albert probably synthesizes two distinct Augustinian doctrines on the knowledge of God that are only loosely connected to the *De civitate Dei* passage: 1) the possibility of the philosophers’ direct divine vision, which is distinct from the beatific vision, as discussed in the *Confessiones*, and more extensively in *De Quantitate Animae*; and 2) the gift of rapture of Augustine’s *De Genesi ad litteram*, which imparts a vision of God like that of the blessed but also requires abstraction from the senses, a reality quite distinct from

<sup>51</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *Quaestiones* (= Editio Coloniensis 25.2). Münster: Aschendorff 1993, “Quaestio de Raptu,” a. 1, section 3, p. 93.51–56. For the date of the disputed question (between 1245 and 1248), see TORRELL, Jean-Pierre: *La question disputée ‘De Prophetia’ de saint Albert le Grand. Edition critique et commentaire*, in: *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 65 (1981) 202.

<sup>52</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *De civitate Dei*, 8.14.



the diminishing of carnal vices mentioned in the *De civitate Dei*.<sup>53</sup> Albert thus appears to modify Augustine's notion of the philosophers' divine vision by making it depend on a "maximum grace", especially sanctifying grace. He also collapses the distinction between the vision of God enjoyed by certain pagan philosophers in this life and the blessed in the next, but precisely by wholly transferring the philosophers' vision into the realm of the supernatural. Albert confirms this quiet modification of Augustine by explaining that we will enjoy the philosophers' direct vision of God in the next life. Albert operates a significant change in Augustine's thought through a scholastic appropriation of the Latin Father's teaching on prophecy. So much for the Bishop of Hippo's natural vision of God attainable here below through the philosophical life.

Yet Albert does not just aim at significant, quiet transformations of Augustine. The second paragraph of the present article deals with degrees of intelligibility. Albert begins by noting that the soul considered in its own nature, meaning, in abstraction from the body, is more apt for the knowledge of higher or immaterial realities. However, because of our present state, that is, because of the soul's union with the body in our fallen state and before the gift of glory, the soul is more apt to know lower realities or material beings. Albert accepts one of Augustine's central anthropological convictions, namely, that the soul by itself naturally belongs in the immaterial realm and is therefore naturally made to know this higher realm more than the physical world. This central Platonic doctrine is deeply intertwined with Augustinian memory and interiority. Illumination accessible through memory is *the* way to overcome the limitations that the soul-body union imposes on the soul. For illumination grants direct access to the immaterial world, meaning, to God, to eternal principles and to the soul. Albert confirms his support for this Augustinian doctrine in the answer to the *sed contras*, where he states that, in this life, the intellect's engagement with sensible beings frequently blinds or darkens (*obcaecat*) the mind's activity in the higher part.<sup>54</sup> The material world thus appears as an obstacle for the soul's interior ascent to God. Nor does the present article limit such immediate, interior knowledge to the pre-reflective realm. For Albert employs the same term (*notitia*) as he contrasts the activity of higher and lower intellect, so that it no longer bears

<sup>53</sup> AUGUSTINUS: *Confessiones*, 7.10.16; *De Quantitate Animae*, 33.73–76; *De Genesi ad litteram*, 12; See TESKE, Roland J.: *St. Augustine and the Vision of God*, in: VAN FLETEREN, F./SCHNAUBELT, J.C./REINO, J. (ed.): *Augustine: Mystic and Mystagogue*, 287–289, 293–299.

<sup>54</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *I Sent.*, d. 17, a. 4, ad 5, p. 473a: «Ad aliud dicendum quod omnia illa procedunt quae in contrarium obijciuntur secundum primum modum intellectus, et secundum potestatem ejus quod noscitur: et non secundum intellectum phantasticum, et secundum potestatem intelligentis in via in quo magna frequentia sensibilibus et phantasmatum obcaecat oculum intellectus secundum primum modum considerati».



the strict, technical meaning that it has within the context of the Augustinian *imago*.

Albert then distinguishes higher and lower intellect in detail. All understanding involves not just the passive reception of an intelligible object, but also the “light” of the mind that enables us to grasp an object. He contrasts two ways in which this intrinsic intellectual power is affected by the object known. First, the intellect’s power can be stretched or expanded (*attendatur*) by the object of knowledge. Certain objects offer not just intelligible content but a higher capacity that (at least temporarily) elevates the intellect’s own operational ability. Such intelligible objects logically become more knowable than those which only offer intelligible content. The second way in which the intellect is affected by the objects known is when it is only “moved” by them, i.e. only given intelligible content, and not a more intense capacity of knowledge. Albert notes that the second way applies to the things “posterior in nature”, i.e. those which are on the lower, material end of the cosmic hierarchy. Here, effects are better known than causes. In this second realm, Aristotle’s epistemological convictions are accurate. Albert concludes the article’s corpus by pointing to the connection between his first category of knowing and Augustine’s epistemology. One of Augustine’s central noetic doctrines is the conviction that God’s presence in the soul heightens our capacity to know him (though there are obviously various degrees of illumination that result from God’s interior presence, since grace also heightens our ability to know). Albert therefore notes approvingly that for Augustine, something is more clearly known because it is more present, more interior to us. We seem to find ourselves at the heart of Augustine’s illumination doctrine.

One of Albert’s major tasks in this article is to harmonize the epistemologies of Aristotle and Augustine. Such a project inevitably demands major modifications of both thinkers, since Albert does not allow one to dominate the other. For Augustine, illumination covers the totality of knowledge. That is, for the Latin Father, only illumination enables certain knowledge about anything, including material beings. For Aristotle, abstraction also covers a totality, so that knowledge of the immaterial realm always remains indirect and more obscure than our knowledge of material beings. Neither global explanation survives Albert’s synthesis. Instead, Aristotle offers the better explanation of how we know the material world, where objects “move” (i.e. inform) us. Augustine provides the better explanation of how we know God in a direct way, where the divine light expands the mind’s operational or receptive capacity. The Aristotelian element of the article reminds us of the philosophical epistemology of the *De Homine*. For the *De Homine* and the present article in the *Commentary on the Sentences* show Albert constructing an epistemology of the material realm independent of Augustinian illumination. The Augustinian element reminds us of the *imago Dei* section of the *De*

*Homine*, the only part of that work which offered any extensive treatment of our knowledge of God. In the present *Commentary on Sentences* article, Albert quietly integrates two competing epistemologies: 1) Aristotelian information or abstraction for our knowledge of the cosmos; and 2) Augustinian knowledge through presence, developed with a notion of the agent intellect as a conduit of light, far more than a tool transmitting intelligible forms to the potential intellect. Finally, let us note that Albert explicitly accepts a doctrine that the divine interior presence brings about (or can bring about) knowledge of God, for he will soon change his mind.

A modified Augustinian illumination clearly has an important place in Albert's *Commentary on the Sentences* anthropology, yet not without difficulties. It is not clear if Albert espouses the necessity for *special* illumination for all knowledge, which would mark a break with the *De Homine*. Albert fails to explain explicitly the function of divine illumination, though the article on the higher and lower intellect strongly suggests an answer. His somewhat vague descriptions of illumination favor the terminology of the Arabic commentators, not that of Augustine. Yet he clearly espouses Augustine's doctrine of the knowledge of immaterial realities by presence, not information. However, he prefers an Aristotelian approach to explain our knowledge of the material realm. Meanwhile, Augustine's memory seems to have been partly subsumed by the agent intellect. The *Commentary on the Sentences* thus presents a highly tentative, partially Augustinian interiority. Albert's next major theological corpus, the commentaries on Dionysius, manifests a noticeable doctrinal evolution.

#### 4. ALBERT'S COMMENTARIES ON DIONYSIUS (1248–1250)

Albert was already familiar with the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite before moving to Cologne in 1248. His *Commentary on the Sentences* treatment of divine naming often invokes the supposed disciple of St. Paul. But the Cologne regency gave Albert the first opportunity to reflect and comment upon Dionysius in a thorough way.<sup>55</sup> Albert's attentive reading of Dionysius meant that he could directly engage a monumental theological authority and genius whose vision of the human being has little room for Augustinian interiority and emphasizes the utter necessity of sensible mediations as the starting-point for the ascent to God.

I will summarize this new "exteriority" by highlighting three anthropological themes of the Cologne master's Dionysian corpus: 1) the receding influence of Augustinian illumination in Albert's thought; 2) the sensible mediation of all knowledge; and 3) the triumph of knowledge by (Aristo-

<sup>55</sup> For the place of Dionysius in Albert's Cologne curriculum, see BURGER, Maria: *Thomas Aquinas's Glosses*, 567–574.

telian) information over (Augustinian) interior presence. But the new “exterior anthropology” will be partially balanced by the continuing development of the new interiority that already emerged in the *De Homine* and the *Commentary on the Sentences* doctrines of the agent intellect, our fourth and final theme.

The turn towards exteriority begins to manifest itself in Albert’s exposition of noetic illumination. In chapter four of the *Commentary on the Divine Names*, Albert roots the agent intellect’s capacity to abstract quiddities from sense data in a “continuation” with divine and angelic light, employing Averroist language.<sup>56</sup> The terminology is close to that of the *Commentary on the Sentences* (book one, distinction 2, article 5), a text whose doctrine remains rather ambiguous. But Albert also seems to imply a connection with the *De Homine* restriction of illumination to God’s creative causality. In the *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, he notes that the agent intellect’s capacity to abstract species does not suffice in every case. Rather, it can also be illumined by angelic and divine light so as to be able to abstract all species.<sup>57</sup> He suggests that the power to abstract often suffices without any divine illumination, which seems to bring us close to the teaching of the *De Homine*. This means that the illumination language from chapter four of the *Commentary on the Divine Names* may well refer to nothing but the creative causality of the *De Homine*.

Albert distinguishes between several forms of illumination. The outpouring or flux of divine light in the broad sense of God’s primary causality of all intelligibility is fundamental for Albert, an epistemology rooted in the *Liber de Causis*.<sup>58</sup> Yet within that flux, one can find gradations of illumination. Another passage from the *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy* distinguishes universal or natural illumination from particular illumination through grace.<sup>59</sup> The *Commentary on the Divine Names* posits the agent intellect’s mediation of interior revelations, an intellectual act

<sup>56</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SDN*, c. 4, ad 1, p. 126.1–8: «[...] scientia nostra causatur ab ente, quod est extra animam, quod imprimit intentionem suam in sensus nostros, a quibus abstrahit intellectus noster simplices quidditates rerum, quantum potest, secundum continuationem ad lumen divinum et angelicum, quia lumen superius semper est formale et movens respectu inferioris, ut prius dictum est».

<sup>57</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *Super Dionysium de Caelesti Hierarchia* [henceforth *SCH*] (= Editio Coloniensis 36.1). SIMON, Paul/KÜBEL, Wilhelmus (ed.). Münster: Aschendorff 1993, c. 9, p. 157.24–29: «Ad secundum dicendum, quod cognitio hominis incipit a phantasmate et terminatur ad intellectum et secundum hanc viam potest etiam illuminari ab angelis, cum non sufficiat ad abstractionem omnium specierum lumen intellectus agentis, nisi adiungatur lumen angelicum vel divinum».

<sup>58</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SDN*, c. 4, p. 126.7 refers back to p. 121.46–56, a text clearly marked by the *Liber de Causis*.

<sup>59</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 1, p. 7.40–42: «Et potest hoc intelligi universaliter de illuminatione naturali vel particulariter de illuminatione per gratiam [...]».

that clearly goes beyond the mind's natural, intrinsic capacities.<sup>60</sup> The *Commentary on the Mystical Theology* refers to angelic and divine light strengthening agent intellect to receive prophecies and inspired dreams.<sup>61</sup> In his Dionysian Corpus, Albert does not explicitly state whether the agent intellect's natural capacity to abstract the species of material beings requires any special illumination beyond God's ongoing creative causality, yet none of Albert's arguments imply the need for such illumination. One should also note that Albert's main interlocutors in these passages on illumination are Aristotle and the *Liber de Causis*, but not Augustine.

More significantly, Albert's Dionysian Corpus appears to restrict the content of interior illumination to prophecies and dreams. For example, in commenting on the Areopagite's *Epistle 9*, Albert mentions in a disputed question that the "higher intellect" can receive "simple realities" directly, without the mediation of the senses.<sup>62</sup> This passage seems to offer Albert's most explicit affirmation of unmediated content illumination in his commentaries of Dionysius. But how can the higher intellect attain such knowledge? The larger context of the passage manifests Albert's intention. He introduces Dionysius's *Epistle 9* by inserting its central theme of divine visions within the three-fold Augustinian scheme of prophecy.<sup>63</sup> Then, just before the disputed question on the higher intellect's direct connection with immaterial realities, Albert ties the Augustinian language of intellectual prophetic vision to Dionysius's unveiled vision of divine things enjoyed by the higher intellect.<sup>64</sup> In other words, direct content illumination involves a charismatic gift. The higher intellect can grasp simple realities directly not because it is naturally turned towards the immaterial realm, nor because the divine light that already dwells in us can always grant such access, but rather because of an occasional, un-merited gift or *gratia gratis data* that the prophet receives. Albert performs a subtle, radical restriction on Augustine's higher intellect by employing Augustinian

<sup>60</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 15, pp. 234.86–235.8.

<sup>61</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *Super Dionysii Mysticam Theologiam et Epistulas* [henceforth *SMT* for the *Commentary on the Mystical Theology* and *SE* for the *Commentary on the Epistles of Dionysius*] (= Editio Coloniensis 37.2). SIMON, Paul (ed.). Münster: Aschendorff 1972, c. 1, p. 464.38–61.

<sup>62</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SE* 9, p. 539.3–13: «Aliter potest dicit, quod in anima sunt duae partes, quaedam quae accipit ipsa simplicia secundum se, ut intellectus simplex, quaedam vero quae accipit a phantasmatis, et ista magis est connaturalis animae secundum naturam ipsius, et in actu eius frequentius sumus, quia accipimus scientias ex sensibus; sed secundum primam partem attingit intelligentias; et ideo quando etiam divina sine symbolis accepta sunt, ut melius ea possimus inspicere, reducimus ad sensibilia consueta nobis et connaturalia cognitioni nostrae».

<sup>63</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SE* 9, p. 528.24–53.

<sup>64</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SE* 9, p. 538.10–22.



theology. He used the same interpretive strategy in the *Commentary on the Sentences* in his discussion of the pagan philosophers' rapture.<sup>65</sup>

We find confirmation of Albert's interpretive project in the same passage on how we know simple realities. The prophetically inspired higher intellect often has recourse to sensible images in order to better understand infused knowledge, because this is more connatural to the soul. The *Commentary on the Sentences* passage on the higher intellect's direct access to divine light emphasized that the intellect as such is naturally more inclined to higher things. Its inclination to lower or sensible things is a result of this state of life, i.e. the soul's connection to the body in our fallen state.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, in commenting on the Areopagite's *Epistle* 9, Albert identifies knowledge through sensible realities as natural to the soul, but never adds any qualifications such as "in this state of life", or "insofar as it is connected to the body".<sup>67</sup> The human being is no longer turned to the heavens, but to the world. For Albert, the intellect's natural place in the cosmos is no longer Augustinian, but Aristotelian and (with qualifications) Dionysian.

In Albert's commentaries on Dionysius, interior illumination almost always concerns a means or a "that by which" (*quo*) and not an object or a "that which" (*quod*). The gift of light is supernatural faith, the *habitus* of grace, a light that convinces us to accept the truths of Sacred Scripture.<sup>68</sup> Because of Albert's firm restrictions on content illumination, the human being radically depends on the mediation of the material world to advance in knowledge. The interior gift of divine light imparts above all a new capacity to penetrate the sensible veils, not to bypass them. Interior illumination makes it possible to receive fruitfully the external illuminations, especially the light of biblical revelation. Albert channels the doctrine of interior illumination into sanctifying grace. By focusing on interior light as a *quo*, he makes the soul depend on the exterior light as a *quod*, as offering specific intelligible content. Interior light enables not so much an interior ascent to God, but a graced, exterior, mediated ascent.

Albert enthusiastically picks up on the Dionysian language of veils transmitting divine light. His commentaries on the Areopagite often emphasize the human being's lack of proportion to the divine light, a distance that calls for a two-fold remedy.<sup>69</sup> First, the human being's intrinsic

<sup>65</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *I Sent.*, d. 17, a. 4.

<sup>66</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *I Sent.*, d. 17, a. 4.

<sup>67</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SE* 9, p. 539.3-13.

<sup>68</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 2, pp. 7.80-8.5; *SCH*, c. 4, p. 71.12-31; c. 11, p. 177.4-9; *SDN*, c. 1, p. 4.77-83; c. 4, p. 220.50-78; c. 7, p. 363.70-74; *SMT*, c. 1, p. 463.27-33, c. 2, p. 466.75-77; *SE* 7, pp. 502.83-503.1.

<sup>69</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SE* 1, p. 481.65-70. See TUGWELL, Simon: *Albert and Thomas. Selected Writings* (= Classics of Western Spirituality). New York: Paulist Press 1988, 82; WÉBER, Edouard: *Introduction*, in: ALBERT LE GRAND : *Commentaire de la 'Théologie mystique' de*



capacity to dive into the divine mysteries must be elevated by the gift of sanctifying grace. Second, because of this lack of proportion, we necessarily turn to the senses. Here, Albert not only refers to philosophical knowledge gained through our experience of the world, but also to the sensible encounter with God's supernatural gifts, especially Sacred Scripture and the sacraments.<sup>70</sup> The divine light leads us back to unity with the Father in a way that is connatural or proportionate to us, meaning, through sensible realities.<sup>71</sup>

Dionysius was convinced that the Bible and the liturgy are the indispensable mediations for virtually all progress on the path of return to the One. Albert manifests a partial awareness of the many liturgical allusions in the Dionysian corpus, but he expands the meaning of *veils* to include sensible reality in general. Such a broadening of the vocabulary enables Albert to posit a new synthesis between the Areopagite and the Aristotelian tradition on the theme of the external mediation of knowledge. A few lines after his comments on the sacred veils, the Cologne master introduces a disputed question. He asks whether it is more connatural for us to receive knowledge through sensible realities rather than directly. The solution turns on the nature of the agent and possible intellect. The light of the agent intellect does not by itself produce distinct knowledge. Albert here alludes back to his doctrine that the agent intellect's simple union with possible intellect only brings about a vague or confused knowledge. Nor, implies Albert, does the possible intellect naturally contain any forms of intelligibles, nor does it receive them directly from God or angels (against the *Liber de Causis*). Rather, the possible intellect only attains distinct knowledge through species abstracted from phantasms.<sup>72</sup> Albert justifies the Dionysian insistence on the sensible mediation of divinizing light in two ways. First, he appeals to the potential intellect's state as a *tabula rasa*. Second, he strictly limits the agent intellect's intrinsic capacity to produce intelligible content to the activity of abstracting species from phantasms. The disputed question mentions neither Augustinian illumination nor memory.

*Denys le pseudo-aréopagite suivi de celui des épîtres I-V* (= Sagesse Chrétiennes). Paris : Cerf 1993, 26.

<sup>70</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 1, p. 13.36–45.

<sup>71</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 1, p. 12.28–31. Cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *Super Dionysium de Ecclesiastica Hierarchia* [Henceforth *SEH*] (= Editio Coloniensis 36.2). BURGER, Maria/SIMON, Paul/KÜBEL, Wilhelm (eds.). Münster: Aschendorff 1999, c. 4, p. 97.56–68.

<sup>72</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 1, p. 12.66–73: «Dicimus, quod lumen intellectus agentis non facit in nobis distinctam cognitionem alicuius intelligibilis, sicut nec lux solis alicuius coloris. Intellectus autem possibilis est in potentia ad omnia intelligibilia, nullum eorum habens actu ante intelligere. Non autem recipit species nisi a phantasmatis, quae se habent ad ipsum sicut color ad visum, et ideo acceptio per corporalia nobis connaturalis est».

Albert thereby confirms that his doctrine of illumination is far from Augustinian illumination. The present passage appears above all as a fusion of the Dionysian and Aristotelian emphasis on the embodied nature of knowledge. Despite his constant tendency to read Aristotle through the Platonizing Aristotelian tradition of the Arabs, Albert in a sense announces a project to reinsert the body at the center of his theological epistemology. It is no accident that this “turn” in Albert’s thought occurs near the very beginning of his extensive body of commentaries on Dionysius. The first turn in Albert’s thought that occurred at Cologne is not from theology to philosophy, but to a more Dionysian theology that can be synthesized much more easily with the Aristotelian philosophy that Albert wholeheartedly promoted in *De Homine*. Albert’s *De Homine* philosophy of embodied knowledge has found its theological complement.

The disputed question on the sensible mediation of knowledge implies that the potential intellect is only naturally receptive to species abstracted from phantasms. Albert soon makes this doctrine explicit, as he notes that the potential intellect is only receptive to “spiritual things” through a “super-added light”, i.e. grace.<sup>73</sup> Later in the same work, Albert also speaks of the light “super-added to nature” that enables this new receptivity.<sup>74</sup> The higher intelligible realities (i.e. God and angels) are still received through sensible experience, for example, through the metaphors of Scripture, whose truth can only be grasped by divine light or grace and the “principles of faith”, meaning the Creed.<sup>75</sup> The emphasis on grace is Augustinian, but Albert opposes (consciously or not) the Augustinian mind’s natural affinity for the immaterial realm.<sup>76</sup>

The importance of the “embodied nature” of knowledge for Albert’s own theology becomes evident in light of the doctrinal connections that he draws. In the *Commentary on the Divine Names*, he explains that all our knowledge about God comes from participations, meaning created perfections, but that the path of insight rises to the participated reality itself, just as our cognition begins in the senses but rises towards intelligibles. He immediately adds another comparison, namely, the intellectual ascent

<sup>73</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 2, p. 22.67–72: «[...] possibilis intellectus non est in potentia ad dictam acceptionem secundum se, sed tantum ad illa quae sunt in potentia in phantasmatis, sed extenditur eius potentia ad spiritualia per aliquod lumen superadditum a deo».

<sup>74</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 6, p. 84.28–32.

<sup>75</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 2, p. 22.38–45: «Dicimus, quod cognitio spiritualium, secundum quod traduntur in sacra scriptura per symbola, non potest reduci in principia rationis, et ideo intellectus agens non potest in illa; non enim coniungitur primum ultimo nisi per medium; medium autem inter intellectum agentem et id in quod deducit, sunt principia, et ideo non potest in ea quibus sua principia non applicantur».

<sup>76</sup> The first *sed contra* of the disputed question at *SCH*, c. 2, p. 22 that I have been discussing refers to intellect needing something “extrinsic” (*extrinsecum*) in order to grasp the biblical symbols (ll. 24–31).

from effect to cause.<sup>77</sup> Albert recognizes a consistent “theological style” at the center of the Areopagite’s thought, namely, a wholehearted emphasis on the partial, mediated, indirect knowledge of God in this life. Albert’s commentaries on Dionysius consistently integrate this style, in direct opposition to the dominant neo-Augustinian current of the Paris theology faculty.<sup>78</sup> Albert surely realized that the theme of sensible mediation was inseparable from the Dionysian negative theology that he had set out to promote and systematize in his commentaries. On the other hand, he also transforms the Areopagite’s doctrine of contemplative ascent in a significant way. The Greek Father maintained that the (liturgical) sacred veils are sensible signs of divine light whereby the contemplation of God must *begin*, yet its perfection comes in the direct encounter with divinizing light *beyond* all lights, sounds, thoughts and words. The veils and all mediations eventually become obstacles. But Albert appropriates the axiom of divine light’s sensible mediation as a universal principle for all knowledge, so that God is always known in signs and effects (which include immaterial effects such as created grace), even at the height of the spiritual life.<sup>79</sup> From our perspective, Albert’s Dionysius is somewhere between Aristotle and Proclus.<sup>80</sup>

I will briefly mention three other connections with sensible mediation in Albert’s Dionysian Corpus. First, Albert invokes the Dionysian triad of essence – operative power – operation to explain why we only have indirect knowledge of immaterial beings. The species of the latter are only understood by recognizing operations, for example, the vivifying power of the soul in the body or the illuminating activity of the angels in the universe. The reason is that our cognition begins in the senses. The mind thus ascends from act to operative power to substance or essence.<sup>81</sup> The sensible mediation of our understanding of the immaterial realm is not simply a launching point for interior ascent. Rather, such mediation structures the whole path of ascent, which remains indirect. No direct infusion

<sup>77</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SDN*, c. 2, p. 81.27–38. Cf. c. 7, p. 358.6–7.

<sup>78</sup> TUGWELL, S.: *Albert and Thomas*, 79–83.

<sup>79</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SMT*, c. 1, pp. 460.62–69, 463.26–34. For the Dionysian re-appropriation of the body and bodily knowing, see BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von: *Herrlichkeit des Herrn II. Fächer der Stile*. Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag 1962, 164, 183; RIORDAN, William: *Divine Light. The Theology of Denys the Areopagite*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2008, 85–90. The place of the body in contemplative ascent also emerges through liturgical allusions in key passages concerning union with God. See ROREM, Paul P.: *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to their Influence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993, 143–147, 190–191.

<sup>80</sup> Albert invokes Aristotle for the principle that all cognition begins with the senses (*SCH*, c. 6, p. 84.1–6). He also discusses the sensible mediation of knowledge of God in reference to the Areopagite’s symbolic theology, i.e. the Proclan strand of Dionysian cosmology (*SE* 9, p. 528.1–17, 44–49.).

<sup>81</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SDN*, c. 4, p. 177.4–26.

or vision of immaterial forms is attained, with the exception of prophetic gifts.

Second, Albert explains the hierarchy of intelligences as a kind of cosmic fall in which intelligible darkness intensifies as one descends the ladder of beings. Some intelligences (i.e. angels) have the capacity to grasp simple (immaterial) quiddities in a clear or “brilliant” way, while others (human beings) can only know such quiddities with a mingling of temporality. Because we only receive cognition from sensibles, we need the process of reasoning, the intellectual motion that involves a relative imperfection in the hierarchy of intelligences, in order to arrive at an understanding of a simple intelligible form. Albert willingly adopts the language of a cosmic falling away from perfection and simplicity, a common theme of the Neo-Platonic tradition. But unlike Augustine, for whom interiority and illumination are the path to overcome the limitations of the cosmic fall and temporality, Albert follows Dionysius in accepting our place on the hierarchy as proper and natural.<sup>82</sup>

Third, Albert comments on the Dionysian incarnational principle. At the beginning of his *Commentary on the Epistles of Dionysius*, Albert contrasts knowledge of God in himself, which is a direct, un-mediated grasp of the divine nature, with the knowledge gained through the human nature that has been assumed, i.e. assumed by Christ. Albert notes that since our knowledge is from sensibles, we know God through the sensible nature that Christ has taken on.<sup>83</sup> Albert’s invocation of the Incarnation as a proportioning of divine knowledge to our nature stands in contrast to Augustine’s tendency to posit the Incarnation as primarily a path to moral purification, and not so much a revelation of the Trinity.<sup>84</sup>

The third significant shift away from Augustinian interiority concerns Albert’s rejection of knowledge by assimilation in favor of information. He first announces this doctrinal evolution near the beginning of the *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*. The context is a series of disputed questions which follow Dionysius’s claim that we only know spiritual realities through corporeal realities. An objection proposes that cognition occurs through assimilation. Since our intellect has more in common with spiritual essences than with corporeal things, the former are more known *per se* or directly than through the mediation of material beings. Albert’s response is brief. He explains that our cognition does not come about through assimilation but through information, that is, through species received from the object known.<sup>85</sup> A subsequent objection receives a

<sup>82</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SDN*, c. 4, p. 179.45–64.

<sup>83</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SE* 1, p. 479.1–25.

<sup>84</sup> See DU ROY, O. : *L’intelligence de la foi*, 101–105.

<sup>85</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 2, pp. 16.74–17.3, 17.38–42.



similar answer: distinct cognition of angels requires more than a reception of angelic light in the mind, for we also need species.<sup>86</sup>

Later in the same series of disputed questions, Albert turns to the theme of knowledge through presence, which is another Augustinian formulation of knowledge by assimilation. The first objection cites the Bishop of Hippo. What is essentially in the soul (i.e. God, the soul itself) is known by us most of all and directly, i.e. without the mediation of the senses. Albert answers that the realities which are essentially in the soul are most knowable *per se* or according to their nature. In other words, by or in itself, the essentially present "object" (i.e. God or the soul) is much more intelligible than material beings. However, this is not the case from the knowing subject's perspective.<sup>87</sup> Albert's reasoning continues that of the disputed question's corpus. There, he offers an Aristotelian explanation of the Dionysian insistence on the sensible mediation of knowledge. For the human intellect, sensible nature is most manifest or accessible. The mind relates to the most intelligible realities as the eye of a bat to the sun (i.e. Aristotle's owl, which Averroes changed to a bat).<sup>88</sup> In the *Commentary on the Sentences* (book one, distinction 17, article 4), Albert applied the same Aristotelian principles along with the example of the owl's sight to the lower intellect, but also retained direct, interior knowledge of God by an appeal to the higher intellect, where the owl's relation to the sun no longer applies. The present passage from the *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy* completely ignores this distinction. Lower intellect no longer obscures the activity of the higher intellect. Rather, knowledge of immaterial realities now passes through knowledge of the lower realities. Lower intellect enlightens the higher intellect! Knowledge through mediation and information seems to replace knowledge through the immediate presence of the object known. Albert appears to save Augustine's authority by reinterpreting him. God and whatever is essentially

<sup>86</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 2, p. 17.43–49.

<sup>87</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 2, p. 18.7–11, 39–42: «[Objection 1] Videtur enim, quod non sit congruissima cognitio nobis per sensibilia. Sicut enim dicit Augustinus, ea quae per suam essentiam sunt in anima, optime cognoscuntur a nobis; huiusmodi autem non sunt sensibilia; ergo cognitio per ea non est maxime congrua nobis [...]. [Response] Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod ea quae secundum suam essentiam sunt in anima, optime cognoscuntur per se secundum eorum naturam, sed non secundum quod competit nobis».

<sup>88</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 2, p. 18.25–38: «Dicimus, quod cognitio potest dici magis congrua aut certa dupliciter: aut secundum condicionem cogniti vel cognoscentis. Cognitio autem intellectualium est magis congrua secundum naturam ipsorum cognoscibilium, secundum autem nostram naturam, qui sumus cognoscentes, minus; magis enim nobis est cognata cognitio sensibilibus. Unde dicit Philosophus, quod intellectus noster se habet ad manifestissimam naturam, id est secundum naturam, sicut oculus vespertilionis ad solem. Si tamen sensibilibus perfectam cognitionem habere velimus, oportet accipere per intelligibilia, resolvendo substantias sensibiles in prima principia substantiae, quae secundum quod huiusmodi non sensibilia sunt».

present to the soul is indeed most knowable [...] in itself, in its own nature, but not for us. Augustine would hardly agree.

In the *Commentary on the Divine Names*, Albert returns to the theme of God's immediate or essential presence in the soul. An objection assumes that all knowledge must pass through information, and since in this life we have no abstracted intelligible species that represents God, we simply cannot know him.<sup>89</sup> Albert answers:

"God is in the soul by essence, not as a certain nature of the soul, but as a certain light of the intellect, and this suffices for him to be known by the intellect. Indeed, what is in the soul in this way is known under the species of any intelligible, just as the Philosophers say about the agent intellect. And similarly, we know about God 'that he is' through the cognition of any creature".<sup>90</sup>

Although he posits the presence of divine light as sufficient to bring about knowledge of God, Albert does not propose an exception to knowledge by information. For, he continues, whatever is essentially in the soul as light will be known by the (abstracted) species of any intelligible object. He then draws the comparison between divine light and the light of the agent intellect. Albert here refers to our indirect knowledge of the agent intellect through its activity of abstraction. By reasoning back from the mind's acts, we arrive at an indirect intellectual grasp of the agent intellect's existence and nature. Knowledge of the agent intellect, continues Albert, can be compared to our knowledge of God. Both are understood in an indirect way, through our engagement with the world. We do not abstract a species that represents the agent intellect, and neither do we abstract a species that represents God. Both are a kind of light that makes knowledge possible, and both are intimately present to the soul. Both are known as causes, as that by which we encounter the world, and not as things ("a certain nature") dwelling within us waiting to be grasped. Albert thus overcomes the extreme apophatism of the objection, but precisely by insisting on our indirect, external path to God. Interestingly, the corpus of this disputed question invokes the example of the owl and the sun. Divine light does not so much stretch the mind's capacity so that it can see God directly in this life, but rather overwhelms and blinds it. As in the *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy*, Albert does not restrict the example of the owl to the lower intellect, in contrast to the *Commentary on the Sentences*.

<sup>89</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SDN*, c. 7, p. 355.59–75.

<sup>90</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SDN*, c. 7, p. 356.67–74: «Ad secundum dicendum, quod deus est per essentiam in anima, non tamen ut natura quaedam animae, sed ut lux quaedam intellectus, et hoc sufficit ad hoc quod cognoscatur per intellectum; immo quod sic est in anima, cognoscitur sub specie cuiuslibet intelligibilis, sicut dicunt Philosophi de intellectu agente. Et similiter de deo cognoscimus, 'quia est', per cognitionem cuiuslibet creaturae». The translation is mine.

Throughout the Dionysian Corpus, Albert's transformation of Augustinian interiority occurs rather quietly. But in one striking passage from the *Commentary on the Mystical Theology*, the confrontation between Augustinian interior contact with God and Dionysian apophatism surfaces. The context is the Areopagite's paradoxical language of knowing God by not-knowing, seeing by not-seeing. The fourth objection begins with the claim that the most noble noetic vision is farthest removed from negation and darkness. Albert then cites Augustine, for whom the object of the intellect's most noble vision (God) is essentially present in the soul. The Dionysian discourse of not-seeing therefore seems utterly out of place.<sup>91</sup> Albert's answer is worth quoting in full:

"The most noble way of seeing is two-fold: [1] either from the part of the medium, as in science *propter quid*, and this mode is farthest removed from vision, and so it is not the most noble mode of the divine vision; [2] or from the part of the object, in which that is called the most noble mode of vision through which we see the most noble object, and thus is the most noble mode of the divine vision. But this [vision] has many forms of non-vision because of the eminence of the object, as the Philosopher says [Metaphysics II, c. 1]. Yet it must be known that the saying of Augustine is false (*dictum Augustini habet calumniam*). For in order that something be known, it does not suffice that it be in the possible intellect, unless [intellect] is informed by its [the thing's] form and so brought into act, just as matter is brought into act through the form of the agent in it, and not through its essence, even if it were present in it. Hence, the Philosopher says that the intellect understands itself as it understands other things".<sup>92</sup>

Albert accepts the Dionysian principle that divine eminence makes any direct, clear vision of God in this life impossible. Albert cites Aristotle to support this claim, even though the language of eminence and non-vision is thoroughly Dionysian. This may indicate that the master of Cologne is quite consciously forging a Dionysian-Aristotelian alliance to confront the excesses of Augustinian interiority. Albert then rejects "the saying of Augustine". Does he intend to oppose not so much the great Latin Father

<sup>91</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SMT*, c. 2, p. 466.52–58: «[...] nobilissimus modus visionis maxime remotus est ab omni negatione visionis sicut maxime album maxime removetur a nigro; sed, sicut dicit Augustinus, nobilissimo modo videntur, quae sunt in anima per sui essentiam, inter quae est deus; ergo modus videndi deum maxime remotus est ab omni non-visione».

<sup>92</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SMT*, c. 2, pp. 466.87–467.11: «Ad quartum dicendum, quod nobilissimus modus videndi est dupliciter: vel ex parte medii, sicut in scientia propter quid, et iste modus maxime remotus est a visione, et sic non est modus nobilissimus divinae visionis; vel ex parte obiecti, ut dicatur nobilissimus modus visionis, per quam nobilissimum obiectum videmus, et sic est nobilissimus modus divinae visionis; sed iste propter eminentiam obiecti habet plurimum non-visionis, ut dicit Philosophus. Sciendum tamen, quod dictum Augustini habet calumniam; non enim sufficit aliquid esse in intellectu possibili ad hoc quod cognoscatur, nisi informetur forma eius et sic fiat actu, sicut materia fit actu per formam agentis in ipsa et non per essentiam ipsius, etiam si in ea esset. Unde dicit Philosophus, quod intellectus intelligit se sicut et alia». The translation is mine.



as some of his 13<sup>th</sup> century disciples, perhaps Alexander of Hales or William of Auxerre?<sup>93</sup> Whatever the intention may be, Albert's critique very much pertains to the historical Augustine. Albert does not deny that God is essentially present to the soul, as the source of its being and intellectual light. Rather, he refuses the consequence that such presence enables a direct intellectual grasp of the interior object.

Albert could have avoided this confrontation in a number of ways. For Augustine, God's essential presence in the soul enables immediate access because the Creator especially dwells in memory. Albert's response assumes that such divine presence has its seat in the potential intellect. He continues the *De Homine* and *Commentary on the Sentences* tendency to subsume part of memory under the intellect. Second, Albert does not appeal to the distinction between constant, pre-reflective knowledge and reflective, analytical knowledge, either of God or of the intellect. Such a distinction would have allowed him to save Augustine's authority by re-interpreting him. Albert appears to be convinced that the Augustinian language of vision involves some kind of reflective understanding of God, which is historically correct. The language of information points to reflective, analytical understanding. In fact, Albert does not reject all Augustinian pre-reflective knowledge of God. In a text composed shortly before the present passage, he clearly affirms the Augustinian notion that we have a certain confused knowledge of God all along, a kind of obscure *habitus* whereby we can recognize that we have found the God we are seeking when we acquire actual knowledge of him.<sup>94</sup> But it becomes clear in Albert's Dionysian commentaries that the actualization of this obscure knowledge of God is attained in rather un-Augustinian fashion.

Albert therefore proposes that Dionysius and Aristotle are the better guides to recognize how we come to reflective understanding of God. In this realm, Augustine's knowledge through the presence of the known is simply false (*habet calumniam!*). By implication, an object does not stretch our noetic capacities. One must choose among the traditions. Henceforth, the path to deeper actual knowledge of God passes through the mediations of creation and the biblical divine names.<sup>95</sup> For knowledge through information and participation is essentially indirect in its nature. Even though

<sup>93</sup> TROTTMANN, C. : *La vision béatifique*, 139–140; TUGWELL, S.: *Albert and Thomas*, 51.

<sup>94</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SDN*, c. 7, pp. 345.69–346.9: «Ad quartum dicendum, quod illud unum, antequam inveniatur, non est neque simpliciter ignotum neque notum; non enim simpliciter notum, quia tunc discere esset rememorari, ut dixit Plato; neque est simpliciter ignotum, quia quando inveniretur, nesciretur esse inventum et sic habitum quaereretur et numquam esset status in cognitione; sed est secundum quid notum, scilicet in potentia non materiali tantum, sed in quodam habitu confuso, qui est inchoatio perfecti habitus, et secundum quid ignotum, scilicet in actu perfecto. Unde etiam patet solutio ad rationem Platonis et Augustini, qui in hoc secutus est eum».

<sup>95</sup> Cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SCH*, c. 2, p. 18.51–57.



Albert agrees with Augustine on a pre-reflective, implicit knowledge of God, his vision for bringing that knowledge to fruition is far from the Augustinian inner path.

However, as in the *De Homine* and the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Albert proposes a new kind of interiority, especially in one passage of the *Commentary on the Divine Names*. The context for Albert's discussion is Dionysius's three motions of the soul. The significance of Albert's comments only fully emerges in light of the Areopagite's intention behind the doctrine. Dionysius summarizes a "contemplative method" that he employs throughout his corpus, especially the *Divine Names*. The soul has a "straight motion" towards material beings through which it comes to ponder God directly in simpler acts of understanding. Second, the soul's "oblique or spiral motion" involves an ascent to God through repeated discursive reflections enabled by illuminations. Such lights essentially consist of the manifestation and uplifting power of divine light mediated through the Scriptures and the Liturgy. Third, the soul's "circular motion" involves a turn inward, ascending to God by a simple act of knowing with the help of angelic light, thus attaining graced union with the Good and the Beautiful. This motion is circular because it involves no discursive thought or going outward to encounter material beings. It is a simple intellectual pondering of the One.<sup>96</sup>

Albert dedicates a lengthy disputed question to the identity of the soul's circular motion. His response explicitly and heavily depends on Averroes. Circular motion refers to the soul's most simple act, which must pertain to the agent intellect. It both gives its form to all intelligibles and illumines the potential intellect through the power of divine light "flickering" or "vibrating" (*micantis*) in it. Normally, the potential intellect does not directly ponder the agent intellect itself. Instead, the potential intellect gazes upon the agent intellect indirectly, insofar as the latter has become the form (i.e. the source of actuality) for this or that intelligible object. The potential intellect can only ponder the light of the agent intellect directly by withdrawing from all exterior things so as to fix its attention upon the mind's "inner eye". Albert then connects such introspective contemplation of the agent intellect with Augustine's teaching on perpetual self-remembering and self-understanding in book nine of the *De Trinitate*. The soul only considers or becomes aware of this constant internal noetic activity by withdrawing from exterior things and going within. Albert adds that such introspective contemplation of the agent intellect enables the divine light that shines in the agent intellect to enter

<sup>96</sup> DIONYSIUS THE AEROPAGITE: *Corpus Dionysiacum I. De divinis nominibus*. Beate Regina Suchla (ed.) (= Patristische Texte und Studien 33). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1990, IV.9, 705A-B, pp. 153–154. See DE ANDIA, Ysabel: *Henosis. L'union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite* (= Philosophia antiqua 71). New York: E.J. Brill 1996, 138, 424; RIORDAN, W.: *Divine Light*, 202–205.

the potential intellect, thus leading the mind back to the divine source. Albert compares this process to that of the angels returning to the Good and the Beautiful in their circular motion, whereby they ascend to God by gazing upon the divine effects or gifts within their being.<sup>97</sup> Albert fittingly alludes to the Dionysian doctrine of procession and return in the human soul's circular motion. The outpouring of divine light into the agent intellect forms the first half of the circle, while the potential intellect's reception of that mediated light and subsequent ascent to its divine source completes the circle.<sup>98</sup>

This passage is highly significant for several reasons. First, Albert directly applies Averroes' description of the separate agent intellect to the individual human intellect. Second, Albert proposes a new synthesis of Averroes' agent intellect, Dionysian circular motion and Augustinian self-understanding. In the background stands Albert's established doctrine that the perpetual light of the agent intellect enables constant self-remembering and self-understanding. Yet he develops his thought by employing an Averroist agent intellect to explain not just our constant, implicit self-knowledge, but also our conscious self-awareness of inner acts of the soul. Averroes accounts for our capacity to reflect upon the *imago*. Agent intellect rather than memory is *the* conduit of divine light.<sup>99</sup> Memory appears to do nothing, except to remember itself. The illumination of memory, if it still exists as a distinct faculty, now seems to be mediated through the agent intellect. Albert reverses the path of Augustinian illumination. Third, Dionysius had proposed that externally mediated illumination and the assistance of the angels enable the soul's simple

97 ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SDN*, c. 4, pp. 202.60–203.12: «Dicendum, quod, sicut dicit Commentator, motus circularis est essentialis animae et est de motibus eius simplicibus, et ideo oportet quaerere motum circularem animae in eo quod in ipsa simplicius et nobilius est, et hoc est lumen intellectus agentis, quod etiam dat formam suam omnibus intelligibilibus et illuminat intellectum possibilem virtute luminis divini micantis in ipso. Sicut autem quando visus accipit lumen solis, secundum quod est forma coloris, aspiciendo in album, et secundum quod est determinatum, inquantum vero est in se simplex et universale, non determinatum ad hoc vel ad illud, non potest aspicere ipsum, nisi subtrahat se ab omnibus coloribus qui sunt materia ipsius: ita etiam anima considerando res exteriores non inspicit lumen intellectus agentis nisi particulatum ad hoc vel illud intelligibile, secundum quod est forma huius vel illius. Unde si debeat ipsum lumen secundum se inspicere, oportet, quod retracta ab omnibus exterioribus infigat oculum mentis in se, sicut etiam dicit Augustinus in IX *De Trinitate*, quod anima numquam considerat, quod sui semper meminerit et se semper intelligat et diligat, nisi quando retrahitur ab exterioribus ad seipsam. Et ideo in motu circulari animae primo ponit introitum ipsius ab exterioribus ad seipsam, non tamquam partem circularis motus, sed sicut remotionem impedimenti. Quando autem anima conversa est ad seipsam, lumen proveniens a primo in ipsam secundum esse reflectit in primum secundum intellectum, et sic concluditur circulus in ipso primo, sicut dictum est supra de motu circulari angeli».

98 ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SDN*, c. 4, p. 203.50–54.

99 Cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SE* 5, p. 496.31–33: «Sed intellectus agens in nobis est medium movens inter lumen divinum et intellectum possibilem».

ascent to God, its circular motion. Albert does not appear to have any need for external mediations or the angels once the soul turns within. Its previous acts of knowledge did depend on the material world for actualization, but the soul now appears quite able to leave these mediations behind. At this point in the spiritual path, the internal light of the agent intellect apparently suffices for ascent to God, though other passages already discussed show that Albert's agent intellect mediates angelic light and the divine illuminations for the potential intellect. Fourth, Albert does not explicitly state in this passage if such a process involves grace, but Albert's Dionysian corpus is filled with the constant mantra that grace alone enables union with God "beyond mind".<sup>100</sup> Albert is clearly aware that Dionysius' circular motion involves procession and return, meaning, he realizes that he is describing a path of divinizing union with God. Albert also insists that the whole teaching of the *Divine Names* is properly theological.<sup>101</sup> That is, he hardly intends to construct a philosophical alternative to graced union with God.

Overall, Albert's Dionysian commentaries present an explicit turn away from Augustinian illumination and immediate access to the indwelling God in favor of a Dionysian theology synthesized with Aristotle and Averroes. The natural causal flux of divine light that actualizes the agent intellect at every moment suffices to gain access to true knowledge about the world. Content illumination is firmly restricted to unusual supernatural occurrences. Interior light is largely concentrated on grace, on the means to accept the noetic content presented through light mediated by the material world. The soul's natural place in the cosmos is in the body, encountering God through the sensible veils of creation and the Bible. Indirect knowledge of God is not to be surpassed, but accepted. All reflective knowledge requires some kind of information, not just the presence of the object known. Augustine's claim that God's indwelling suffices to grant reflective knowledge about him is simply false. Memory almost disappears, replaced by an agent intellect on steroids. It mediates all interior light, though it does not contain any forms. We ascend to God in part by going within and contemplating our own conduit of divine light, for its activity is a similitude of the Creator's. Yet most of the time, our attention should be fixed outward on the material world, on the Sacred Scriptures, the sacraments and the whole of creation.

<sup>100</sup> E.g., ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SDN*, c. 1, p. 28.2–5; c. 2, p. 80.34–40; c. 4, p. 225.11–16; c. 7, p. 348.56–73; *SMT*, c. 1, pp. 462.18–38, 463.27–33, 463.64–70; c. 2, pp. 465.21–32, 466.59–85.

<sup>101</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SDN*, c. 1, pp. 3.39, 3.64–65, 5.59–6.5.

## CONCLUSION

Albert's *De Homine* and his commentaries on Dionysius significantly transform Augustinian illumination and memory. Yet the project remains incomplete in the *De Homine*, where it is mostly restricted to a philosophical treatise on the soul. The *Commentary on the Sentences* proposes a partial return to Augustine, though with some ambiguity. In the Dionysian commentaries, Albert breaks with much of Augustinian interiority through a large-scale appropriation and subtle, possibly Aristotelian domestication of the Areopagite's doctrine of mediated divine light crowned by an exclamation point: *dictum Augustini habet calumniam*.<sup>102</sup>

Albert knew exactly what he was doing. His Aristotelian revolution in Cologne around 1250 was nothing new, for it was essentially a continuation of the philosophy taught in the *De Homine* in the early 1240's. The actual revolution that occurred on the banks of the Rhine consisted of a large-scale replacement of Augustine's anthropology with that of a scholastic Areopagite, now firmly allied with Aristotle. Albert the Parisian bachelor seems to defer to the theological authority of Augustine on illumination. In Cologne, master Albert found the liberty to immerse himself in a detailed study of Dionysius, for which there was no place in the Parisian curriculum. In the Areopagite, Albert found a Church Father whose authority and speculative power could compete with Augustine. He had found the perfect theologian for the Stagirite.<sup>103</sup>

Overall, this analysis leads to an additional hermeneutical principle for Albert studies today. On key anthropological themes such as noetic illumination and the sensible mediation of knowledge, one can identify at least three early Alberts. If the "young" Albert evolved so much and so quickly, then perhaps there are multiple late Alberts as well. But then the project of reconstructing a systematic Albertian noetic that served as the foundation of a single, clearly defined "Albert school" becomes highly problematic.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup> ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *SMT*, c. 2, pp. 466.87–467.11.

<sup>103</sup> My study therefore supports the thesis of Richard SCHENK, namely, that the 13<sup>th</sup> century theologians had to define their relationship to the two major Platonic traditions (the Augustinian and the Proclan-Dionysian) before adopting a position towards Aristotle. See his *From Providence to Grace. Thomas Aquinas and the Platonisms of the Mid-Thirteenth Century*, in: *Nova et Vetera. English Edition* 3 (2005) 307–320. For a more detailed study, see SCHENK, Richard: *Die Gnade vollendeter Endlichkeit. Zur transzendentaltheologischen Auslegung der thomanischen Anthropologie*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder 1989, 121–253.

<sup>104</sup> I am grateful to Gilles Emery, Walter Senner and an anonymous reviewer of the *FZPhTh* for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.



*Abstract*

*In his early works (1240–50), Albertus Magnus transforms and overturns Augustine’s anthropology of interiority, especially the doctrines of noetic illumination, memory, knowledge by assimilation to an interior object, and the soul’s natural place in the cosmos. Three of the early Albert’s major works manifest distinct approaches to Augustine’s anthropology: the *De Homine*, the *Commentary on the Sentences* and the commentaries on *Dionysius*. The critique of Augustinian interiority reaches a crescendo in the *Dionysian commentaries*. Here, Albert offers a new Aristotelian-Dionysian synthesis that emphasizes the place of mediations, especially material creation and Scripture, in human cognition.*