

Original Article

A Contemporary Understanding of Divine Illumination as a Source of Knowledge

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Abstract: This paper examines the evolution of epistemology, the process for understanding the source of cognitive data, by contrasting theological, existential, and phenomenological approaches to synthesis. Data is not just an integral variable for obtaining knowledge but also becomes the raw material for individual understanding of reality. Starting with the Ancient Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, this timeline covers almost 1800 years, 470 B.C. to A.D. 1308. My objective is to connect the Greek philosophies regarding the source of knowledge to the Christian theologies of Saint Augustine, Saint Anselm, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Saint John Duns Scotus. The transition of the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire, the advent of Christianity, the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the subsequent reconstruction of the Holy Roman Empire, and the discord between the Western Latin Church and the Eastern Greek Church provide the context in which the evolution of epistemology is considered.

Keywords: Evolution of Epistemology, Phenomenological Approaches, Divine Illumination, Source of Knowledge.

I. A CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING OF DIVINE ILLUMINATION AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Epistemology, the theory of knowledge, has been debated throughout history. Theologians and philosophers fervently pursue questions such as: What is the source of knowledge? Is knowledge obtained through the skilled ability to reason, i.e., rationalism? And/or is knowledge acquired through making sense of our experiences, i.e., empiricism? Is the source of knowledge intrinsic and/or extrinsic? What role does divine illumination play in our understanding of how we know what we know to be true?

To grasp the significance of what these philosophical questions pose, one must be aware of the roots and ensuing evolutionary process from which the theological philosophy of divine illumination emanates. This evolutionary process is the progressive development of theological and philosophical thought regarding divine illumination. Therefore, this paper starts with a review of the Ancient Greek philosophers: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. An examination of the expanding Roman rule, including the birth of Christianity, is used as a bridge to connect the ancient period to the medieval period. Here, attention is placed on five noted Christian saints who were theologian philosophers of the late antiquity and medieval times: Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, Aquinas, and Scotus. The philosophical and theological contributions from each of these men, over a time span of nearly 1700 years, are instrumental to cultivating a contemporary understanding of divine illumination.

II. ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHERS

Socrates (470-399 B.C.), known as the father of Western philosophy, was the first moral philosopher of the Western ethical tradition of thought (Nails, 2018). He was a Greek philosopher from Athens whose mission “was to expose the ignorance of those who thought themselves wise and to try to convince his fellow citizens that every man is responsible for his own moral attitudes” (Grube, 2002, p. ix). He is known for encouraging his students to think for them. One of Socrates’ famous quotes from Plato’s *Apology*, “To find yourself, think for yourself,” encapsulates a fundamental praxis for awakening to the awareness of oneself as a being with the innate capability to be discerning: to find one’s own truth.

Socrates questioned the nature of the world and inspired his student followers to do the same; this encouragement eventually led to his demise. In 399 B.C., at the age of 70, Socrates was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death by poison for corrupting the minds of the Athenian youth and for impiety “for not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in new spiritual things” (Plato, 2002, *Apology* section, p. 28).

Although the messenger was killed, his message survives through his most noted student, Plato (428/7-348/7 B.C.). Socrates did not leave any written works of his own; however, Plato wrote an estimated thirty dialogues that depict teaching



conversations with Socrates (Nails, 2018). Although Plato was the author of these dialogues, many of the conversations are between Socrates and someone other than Plato. These teachings are foundational to Platonism, Plato's school of thought.

In the *Phaedo*, Plato captures the dialogue between Socrates and Cebes during Socrates's last hours before his death. Plato's theory of recollection stems from the teachings in this dialogue (Pasnau, 2020). Platonic epistemology is based on the premise that the knowledge of ideas (forms) is innate and that the process of learning is simply the recollection of ideas buried deep in the soul. Put succinctly, for Plato, learning is the process of recalling the knowledge we were born with; the process of gaining new knowledge is actually a function of remembering. "Plato's theory of recollection presupposes that the human mind somehow has built into it a grasp of the Forms, suggesting that at some point there must have been some kind of illumination" (Pasnau, 2020, Section 2).

Fundamental to Plato's theory of knowledge is the postulate that all knowledge comes from the rational intellect. Plato, like his teacher Socrates, was adamant that "knowledge is not sense-perception" (Copleston, 2003, Vol.1, p. 143) and believed that the rational intellectual mind is illumined with knowledge from an extrinsic source, which is recovered throughout the learning process of life.

Aristotle (384/3-348/7 B.C.) spent 20 years as a member of the Academy (Plato's school) under the direct tutelage of Plato. Copleston points out that when Aristotle entered the Academy, Plato was developing his dialectic technique (2003, Vol. 1). Dialectic is structured thinking and dialectic technique is "the art of investigating or discussing the truth of opinions" (Lexico, 2020). For Plato, this is the highest form of thought.

After Plato's death, Aristotle established a branch of the Academy where he "began to develop his own independent views" (Copleston, 2003, Vol.1, p. 267). Eventually, Aristotle left the Academy to join the court of Macedon where he served as tutor to Alexander the Great for seven years. After Alexander ascended the throne, Aristotle returned to Athens and established his own School of Aristotelianism.

Although Aristotelianism has its roots in Platonism, the two are often portrayed as opposing theses: Plato's thesis, the doctrine of transcendental essence (supernatural/metaphysical), and Aristotle's antithesis, the doctrine of immanent essence (indwelling/inherent). A primary distinction between these two philosophies is that "Platonism is characterized by reference to the idea of Being [absolute/unchanging reality] and Aristotelianism by reference to the idea of Becoming [changing/impermanent]" (Copleston, 2003, Vol.1, p. 372). Most significantly, Aristotle's theory of entelechy (the realization of potential) posits that the immanent substantial form (inherent inner being) "is enabled to attach meaning and reality to the sensible world which are missing in the philosophy of Plato" (Copleston, 2003, Vol. 1, p. 376). Aristotle realized that the immaterial form (our inherent/non-physical form) is intelligent. This profound thinking manifests in one's awareness of the spiritual essence of one's being. The discrepancy between Aristotle's immanent essence and Plato's transcendental essence sets the stage for future conflicts in the theological and philosophical world of the 13th century.

III. ROMAN PROGRESSION AND INTEGRATION OF CHRISTIANITY

The classical Greek period (510-323 B.C.), from which these three great philosophers emerged, was enveloped by the Roman Republic (5th-1st century B.C.) ("Classical Antiquity," 2020). During this period, known as the Greco-Roman Era, both Greek and Roman societies flourished and exerted immense influence throughout Europe, Northern Africa, and West Asia. The classical Greek period ended with the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C., which launched the beginning of the Hellenistic period in Greece. Subsequently, the Hellenistic period ended when the Roman Republic appropriated Greece in the 2nd century B.C. In 63 B.C., towards the end of the Roman Republic, the Romans conquered Israel. In 44 B.C., the transition from the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire began with the death of Julius Caesar, which cleared the way for his nephew, Augustus Caesar, to become the first emperor of the newly formed Roman Empire ("Roman Empire," 2020).

The advent of the 1st century heralds the birth of Jesus in Nazareth, Israel. Jesus dedicated his life to enlightening and empowering others through his preaching and teaching about the goodness of God and man. Unlike the philosophers who preceded him, Jesus was not a scholar; he was an enlightened being with a divine essence. This was alarming to the Jewish religious leaders of Israel who felt threatened by Jesus's teachings about forgiveness and salvation through him. Jesus's claim that he was the son of God agitated Jewish leaders, leading them to "[try] all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but he also called God his own father, making himself equal to God" (New American Bible, 2002, John 5:18).

The biggest threat to the established Jewish religious structure, as well as to the budding Roman Empire, was that people actually listened to Jesus. We learn through the gospels that thousands upon thousands were drawn to Jesus to learn about his radical teachings of love and his miraculous healings (New American Bible, 2002). Like Socrates 500 years before him, Jesus was considered blasphemous by religious leaders and his popularity was perceived as a threat to those in power. At the age of 33, Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted, tortured, and put to death by crucifixion. Here again, we find that the state has killed the messenger, but his message survives through the written gospels of his disciples: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. After the crucifixion of Jesus, Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire. Based on the foundational belief that there is only one God, Christianity presented an entirely new direction from the long-standing Roman pantheon.

As Christianity spread, so did the Roman Empire, which reached its peak size during the 2nd century (“Crisis of the Third Century,” 2020). Throughout this century, both the Romans and the Jews persecuted Christians for their faith. Due to the rapid expansion of the Empire, Romans faced untenable challenges in the 3rd century. There were a multitude of invasions and migrations into Roman territory, which brought an unmanageable number of Goths (Germanic people) and other non-Roman people. This led to civil wars, peasant rebellions, and religious conflicts that resulted in political instability and economic disorder. The ensuing military anarchy during this time culminated in what is known as the “Crisis of the Third Century,” which had a profound impact on the empire’s institutions, society, and economic life. An attempt to stabilize and decelerate the decline of the Roman Empire resulted in the division of the empire into the Latin West and the Greek East, each ruled concurrently by multiple emperors.

In 313, Western Roman Emperor Constantine I and Emperor Licinius, Constantine’s counterpart in the East, agreed to change their policies regarding Christians in an agreement known as the Edict of Milan (“Edict of Milan,” 2020). This agreement gave legal status to Christians and, more importantly, gave them a reprieve from persecution. Twenty years later, Constantine witnessed the move of the *Caput Mundi* (capital of the world) from Rome to Constantinople (“Constantine the Great,” 2020). It was more than forty years after the death of Constantine, in 380, that the Edict of Thessalonica made Catholic, i.e., Nicene, Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire, allowing Christians to advance to positions of power (“Edict of Thessalonica,” 2020).

A. Saint Augustine

Saint Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo, was 24 years old when Christianity was legalized (Tornau, 2019). He was born in Roman North Africa and educated with the parental hope that he would secure a position in the higher imperial administration. Augustine was born with a drive for knowledge and a determination to understand the world. This ambition took him to Milan, Italy, which was then the capital of the Western Roman Empire.

For Augustine, his time spent in Milan was a period of self-exploration and discovery that included a thirst for spiritual enlightenment which brought him to study both secular and religious teachings (Tornau, 2019). Augustine was moved by Cicero’s *Hortensius*, which taught him that happiness is not found in the physical pleasures of luxurious food, drink, and sex, but in the dedication of the mind to the discovery of the truth. Cicero’s words urged Augustine to seek wisdom. Manichaeism also captured Augustine’s attention; he spent nine years adhering to this religious ideology, which was founded in the 3rd century by the Persian prophet Mani. “Manichaeism taught an elaborate dualistic cosmology describing the struggle between a good, spiritual world of light, and an evil, material world of darkness” (“Manichaeism,” 2020). Platonism, however, had the most profound and lasting effect on Saint Augustine.

In 386, at the age of 32, after living most of his life unrestrained by a moral code, Augustine converted to Christianity. He claims to have had a mystical experience, during which he heard a child’s voice singing, “Pick it up and read it. Pick it up and read it” (“Conversion of St. Augustine,” n.d.). Realizing this could be a message from God, Augustine found a bible and read the first passage he came to, which was from the Letter of Paul to the Romans:

Let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy. / But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh. (New American Bible, Romans 13:13-14).

This profound experience launched Augustine on his personal journey as a Christian seeking spiritual awakening. “Within a few months, Augustine had abandoned his marriage, his public position, his hopes of financial security and social prestige” (Brown, 2000, p. 109). He returned to Africa, was baptized and ordained, and presided over a minority community in Hippo that was “under the necessity of fighting for its life against a militant majority [Donatists]” (Chadwick, 1991, p. xii).

Saint Augustine was the first Christian theologian philosopher of antiquity (Tornau, 2019). The basis of his epistemological thinking, which is prevalent throughout his extensive literary output, is that divine illumination as a source of knowledge comes from above, the light of God illuminates the mind, and the source of illumination is an extrinsic supernatural force. Most important is the human reliance on supernatural or spiritual assistance to perform the cognitive function of knowing. It is this distinction that opposes naturalism, which is the theory that only natural (versus supernatural) laws and forces operate in the universe, and supernatural or spiritual explanations are excluded or discounted. Augustine's doctrine of divine illumination precludes the physical world as an object of truth and precludes the senses as a source for that truth. Augustinian philosophy is firmly grounded in the belief that the mind cannot rely on the senses: the mind must rely on God.

In spring of 430, the Vandals, a Germanic tribe, invaded Hippo (Pasnau, 2020; Tornau, 2019). Later that year, Saint Augustine died of natural causes at the age of 76. His literary contributions include an estimated 100 books, 300 letters, and 500 sermons. Saint Augustine had a profound impact on Western Civilization through his influence on Western theological philosophy and Western Christianity. He is deeply respected as one of the most important fathers of the Latin Church.

The ongoing influx of migrations during the 5th century, involving vast invasions by Germanic people and the Huns of Attila, contributed to the ultimate fall of the Roman Empire (Pasnau, 2020; Tornau, 2019). In 476, the Western Senate sent the imperial insignia to the Eastern emperor, signifying the surrender of their power to the Eastern Empire. The Eastern Roman Empire became known as the Byzantine Empire and continued to rule from Constantinople for another thousand years.

The deconstruction of the Western Roman Empire marks the end of antiquity ("Fall of the Western Roman Empire," 2020; "Roman Empire," 2020). The medieval period begins with the reconstruction of an empire that consisted of a multi-ethnic complex of territories in Western and Central Europe, referred to as the *universum regnum* (the whole kingdom, as opposed to regional kingdoms) and/or *imperium christianum* (Christian empire).

In the 8th century, tension between the Western Roman Church and the Eastern Byzantine Empire grew as a result of the Iconoclastic Controversy ("Fall of the Western Roman Empire," 2020; "Roman Empire," 2020). Emperor Leo III, the Byzantium Emperor (who still held the honorary title of ruler of the Roman Empire) outlawed Christian symbols and religious icons in an attempt to prevent the worship of idols. This controversy led the church council to initiate a split from the Byzantine Empire. The papal approval and coronation of Charlemagne, independent of approval from the Byzantine Emperor, marks the dawn of the realm later designated as the Holy Roman Empire.

B. Saint Anselm

Saint Anselm (1033-1109), Archbishop of Canterbury, was an 11th century Italian Benedictine monk, natural theologian, metaphysician, and, following Boethius from the 6th century, one of the fathers of Scholasticism (Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2). Anselm was an independent thinker with deep roots in Augustinian theological philosophy. His intellectual devotion was dedicated to understanding the doctrine of Christian faith.

Anselm's motivation is depicted in his motto, *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). "Faith for Anselm is more a volitional state than an epistemic state: it is love for God and a drive to act as God wills" (Williams, 2015, Section 2.1). This means Anselm's faith comes from a place of willingness (to understand/to know God) rather than a place of cognition (of having actual knowledge). This distinction is significant.

[Anselm] accepted the primacy of faith and the fact of authority and only then went on to attempt to understand the data of faith ... he believed the doctrine first of all, and only then did he attempt to understand it. (Copleston, 2003, Vol.2, p. 158)

Anselm believed in the Christian doctrines as truth and accepted these truths as facts, through reasoning, without empirical data from experience. Through faith (his belief in the truth), he made sense from these facts, which brought him to understanding. Anselm used reason to understand the illumination he experienced through faith.

Anselm embraces naturalism, as opposed to Augustine's supernaturalism (Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2). The theology of naturalism provides arguments for the existence of God based on reason, observed facts, and experiences of nature rather than dogmatic theology based on theoretical truths as revealed through mystical and supernatural experiences of faith. Anselm's ontological argument for God as an existent being is based on the premise that the ability to imagine a perfect being is, in itself, demonstrative of the existence of God.

Although Anselm is a natural theologian rather than a revealed theologian, his desire for understanding parallels that of Augustine. Anselm agreed with Augustine that illumination of the mind (spiritual insight) comes from a source other than self. In this passage from his *Proslogium*, Anselm illustrates his longing for guidance from an extrinsic force to illuminate his understanding of that force, which is God:

I do not attempt, O Lord, to penetrate Thy profundity, for I deem my intellect in no way sufficient thereunto, but I desire to understand in some degree Thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand, in order that I may believe; but I believe that I may understand. For I believe this too, that unless I believed, I should not understand. (Anselm in Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2, p. 156)

In his *Monologion*, Anselm attempts to update and modernize the *De Trinitate* (Trinity of Persons in one Nature), Augustine's account of God, the image of God, and re-conforming to the image of God. In *Monologion*, Anselm applies the use of scholastic dialectical reasoning to the dogmas of faith to appeal to "what is logically necessary or fitting rather than to authority" (Schumacher, 2011, p. 87). Arguments are based on reason alone rather than Scriptural authority.

The *Proslogium* and The *Monologion* were written more than 20 years after the East-West Schism of 1053 (Williams, 2015, Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2). The East-West Schism of the 11th century is the culmination of the issues and incongruities that had been developing since the 5th century during the fall of the Western Roman Empire. The most contentious conflict in this schism was the disagreement on the procession of the Holy Spirit. In the 6th century, the Latin Church added the *Filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed without consulting the Greek Church. Anselm supported this inclusion at the Council of Bari, proclaiming that the procession of the Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son, not just the Father (the accepted belief in the Greek Church).

The estrangement between the Byzantine church and the Roman church had been brewing for more than 500 years. In 1053, the final separation between the Eastern Church and the Western Church occurred with the mutual excommunications by the Roman pope and the Byzantine patriarch ("East-West Schism," 2019). The excommunications held for another 900 years, until they were lifted in 1965. The reorganization in the West became known as the Holy Roman Empire.

In addition to being a prolific theological and philosophical thinker, Anselm was also an integral player in the Investiture Controversy of 1078 (Wolter, 2020). This controversy was concerned with whether the right to invest/install an ecclesiastical authority with the symbols of their respective offices should fall to a secular ruler or to the pope. Anselm was a major figure at the Council of Bari (1098), establishing a clear distinction between the spiritual side and the state/business side of the ecclesiastical responsible for overseeing the property and land. Anselm was adamant that he should not be perceived as owing his spiritual and ecclesiastical authority to the emperor.

Saint Anselm died in 1109 (Williams, 2019). In 1122, Pope Callixtus II and the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry V, reached a compromise that would bring a balance of power through the separation of the church and empire in regard to land management ("Concordat of Worms," 2015). The Concordat of Worms temporarily settled the lay-investiture controversy.

C. Saint Bonaventure

Born Giovanni di Fidanza (1217-1274), Saint Bonaventure was a medieval Italian Franciscan scholastic theologian, philosopher, teacher, and preacher who was deeply committed to his faith. He vowed to follow in the footsteps of Saint Francis, as devoted his life to venturing the route first charted by Saint Augustine. The driving forces behind his endeavors were the pursuit of union with God and his longing to understand the soul's relation to God (Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2). Bonaventure turned this pursuit into a practice of divine worship.

Bonaventure studied with Alexander of Hales at the University of Paris, a school composed of the monastic schools on the Left Bank (Church of Rome) and the cathedral school at Notre Dame (Holy Roman Empire) (Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2; Noone & Houser, 2020). Hales was the founder of the Franciscan order that Bonaventure later joined in 1243, at age 27. While at the university, Bonaventure experienced several unexpected impediments caused by ridicule from the secular community towards the mendicant orders. He was expelled and refused recognition as a doctor and professor in 1255 but appears to have been reinstated in 1257 through Papal intervention. Subsequently, Bonaventure assumed the Franciscan chair in theology, previously held by his tutor, Alexander of Hales, "but taught only at the Franciscan convent, unrecognized by the university" (Noone & Houser, 2020, Section 1).

In February 1257, prior to his reinstatement in the university, Bonaventure was appointed/elected Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor (OFM) (Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2; Noone & Houser, 2020). At the time, the order was struggling with internal dissension between the two factions of Friars, designated the *Spirituales* and the *Relaxati*. From this point forward, Bonaventure focused on the unification and spiritual edification of the Order, which became the foundation for his work. Bonaventure wanted to provide an educational structure to support the development of the Friars, whose vocation was centered on preaching.

Bonaventure commenced with a scholastic approach to meet the needs of the OFM. Scholasticism is the educational methodology utilizing systematized thought as the voice of authority to perpetuate the teachings of Christianity (Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2; Pieper, 2019). Scholastic arguments begin with a conclusion that is then supported with dialectical reasoning used to resolve contradictions. Boethius, a 6th century scholar and one of the founders of Scholasticism, asserts, “As far as you are able, join faith to reason” (Pieper, 2019, Roots of Scholasticism section). This injunction became “the formal foundation of Scholasticism” for centuries. For Augustine and Bonaventure, knowledge is obtained through supernatural faith rather than the natural light of reason. This fundamental yet significant distinction separates Augustine and Bonaventure’s theological philosophy from the theological philosophies of Anselm, Aquinas, and Scotus.

Copleston posits “that it is impossible to study Scholastic theology without acquiring a knowledge of philosophy, so that philosophical and theological studies were both necessary” (2003, Vol. 2, p. 241). Bonaventure did not make rigid distinctions between theology and philosophy. At the time, Christian theology was (mostly) based on the work of Augustine and philosophy referred (mostly) to the work of Aristotle. Bonaventure respected the work of Aristotle and found merit with his philosophical contribution. However, Bonaventure also took issue with the metaphysical work of Aristotle, claiming “it has no place for personal communion with the Godhead and no place for Christ” (Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2, p. 242). Aristotle’s work lacked the supernatural and the inclusion of faith, which are foundational to Bonaventure. “Bonaventure insisted that no satisfactory metaphysic or philosophical system can be worked out unless the philosopher is guided by the light of faith and the philosophies in the light of faith” (Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2, p. 245).

Bonaventure, the last true Augustinian theologian philosopher, became one of the most prominent men in the Christian world. Bonaventure’s life ended abruptly when he unexpectedly died (under the suspicion of foul play) after preaching about the unification of the Eastern Greek Church with Western Latin Church at the Second Council of Lyons, 1274 (Robinson, 1907).

D. Saint Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was a medieval Italian Dominican friar, theologian, philosopher, and scholastic jurist. Among his many contributions to the development of Christianity and Western Civilization, Aquinas was the first to differentiate between theology and philosophy and he stressed the importance of both. For Aquinas, “the study of philosophy is not about knowing what individuals thought, but about the way things are” (Feser, 2019, p.1).

Like Saint Anselm, Aquinas was an avid proponent of natural theology: the theology that provides arguments for the existence of God based on reason, observed facts, and experiences of nature. At the time, natural theology was in direct competition with revealed theology, the prevailing belief system of the Holy Roman Empire. Revealed theology is based on dogmatic theoretical truths as revealed through the supernatural experience of faith (Saint Augustine and Saint Bonaventure).

Aquinas (Dominican) and Bonaventure (Franciscan) were contemporaries at the University of Paris. As a mendicant, Aquinas also underwent conflict, discrimination, expulsion, and reinstatement at the university (Chenu 2020; Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2). When Aquinas arrived at the university, Arabian-Aristotelian science was creating considerable excitement in the Holy Roman Empire. This excitement resulted in an effort by church authorities, “to block the naturalism and rationalism that were emanating from this philosophy and, according to many ecclesiastics, seducing the younger generations” (Chenu, 2020, Studies in Paris section).

Aquinas studied with Saint Albertus Magnus, who is most noted for his Latin translation of Aristotle’s *corpus*. Aristotle’s philosophies had a profound impact on the world of academia, especially since they “reopened the question of the relation between faith and reason, calling into question the *modus vivendi* that had obtained for centuries” (McInerny & O’Callaghan, 2014, Introduction). Aquinas was driven by his motivation to see Aristotle through the lens of Christianity, as evidenced by the integration of Aristotelian philosophy into his theological thinking. Aquinas successfully achieved “the expression of Christian ideology in Aristotelian terms” (Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2, p. 303).

Aristotle's influence dominated Aquinas's view of the world; Aquinas adopted Aristotle's position that the study of metaphysics is about being as being. This means that Aquinas starts his arguments with the existent being/world rather than with the soul, as Bonaventure does. Aquinas is "objectively" focused (as opposed to Bonaventure being "subjectively" focused), claiming that the object of human intellect is the essence of the material thing.

"[Aquinas] builds up his philosophy by reflection on sense-experience" (Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2, p. 309). Aquinas explained the nature of beings not just using the facts of authoritative arguments but also using "a knowledge of facts that come through their causes." (Vollert, 2002, p. xiv). "Arguments drawn from authority convince us of the existence of a supernatural truth; they do not give us an intelligence of it" (Vollert, 2002, p. xiv). Aquinas's inclusion of sense-experience is foundational to his *Summa Theologica*, which is the synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology that describe the relationship between God and man.

In 1274, Thomas Aquinas was en route to the second Council of Lyons, which had been convened to repair the schism between the Eastern Greek Church and the Western Latin Church, when he fell ill and died (Chenu, 2020). His theologies and philosophies evolved into what has become known as Thomism. Surviving 600 years of controversy and discrimination, the Code of Canon Law of 1917 (the official compilation of church law) established Thomism as the official philosophy of the Roman Catholic Church.

E. John Duns Scotus

John Duns Scotus (1265/66-1291) was a Scottish Franciscan friar (who was elected minister general of the Franciscan order at the Pentecost chapter), philosopher, and natural theologian who argued the existence of God based on reason independent of revelation. He was of the generation immediately following Bonaventure and Aquinas. Personal biographical information is limited for Scotus, but his education included 13 years at the University of Oxford, as well as a stint at Cambridge, although the exact timing is uncertain (Wolter, 2020). Upon receiving his mastership in theology, Scotus was appointed the Franciscan chair of theology at the University of Paris, the chair previously held by Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure.

The political climate at the University of Paris had intensified since the days of Bonaventure and Aquinas. The flames of the long-smoldering feud between King Philip IV and Pope Boniface VIII were fanned by the taxation of church property to support the king's wars with England. Pope Boniface excommunicated King Philip. King Philip, in turn, "[called] for a general church council to depose the pope" (Wolter, 2020, University of Paris section). The king's call led to an uprising of antipapal demonstrations, forcing the friars to choose between the king and the pope. Scotus was loyal to the pope and, thus, was exiled (along with 80 other friars) from France.

Pope Boniface responded with a papal bull, which suspended the university's right to award academic degrees in theology or canon and civil law (Williams, 2019; Wolter, 2020). Boniface died after suffering harassment and imprisonment at the hand of the king's minister. Benedict XI succeeded Boniface as pope and lifted the ban against the University of Paris, allowing the king to facilitate the return of students. Scotus was among them.

As a Franciscan, Scotus studied the theological teaching of Saint Francis. In particular, he examined the interpretations by Bonaventure, "who saw the Franciscan ideal as a striving for God through learning that will culminate in a mystical union of love" (Wolter, 2020, Early Life section). As a scholar, Scotus had an affinity for the works of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas; "[Like all good Aristotelians,] he thinks all our knowledge begins in some way with our experience of sensible things" (Williams, 2019, Section 2.1).

Scotus's theory of knowledge presents a new lens for understanding cognition. Like Aristotle and Aquinas, Scotus believed that human beings have two separate cognitive powers: senses and intellect (Williams, 2019; Wolter, 2020). The primary distinction between the two is that senses are a function of physical organs and intellect is an immaterial field of energy. Information from the senses comes in the form of mental images/mental formations/phantasms, which are used as objects for understanding. This process is known as abstraction. The active (or agent) intellect transforms the mental images derived from sense experiences into intelligible data. This intelligible data is actualized by the passive intellect, which receives and stores the data provided by the active intellect.

Aristotle and Aquinas see the active and passive as two separate intellects. Scotus, alternatively, posits there is only one cognitive intellect, which has two distinct functions or powers. He further declares there must be some sensory context to the function of intellectual cognition. Scotus agrees with Aquinas, "the human intellect never understands anything without turning

towards phantasms” (Williams, 2019, Section 4.1). Scotus qualifies this premise by asserting that our reliance on phantasms is temporary and suggests there is another kind of intellectual cognition that bypasses phantasms. This is what Scotus refers to as *intuitive cognition*.

Intuitive cognition differs from abstraction. Where abstraction relies on the retrieval of phantasms as objects of intelligible data, intuitive cognition “yields information about how things are right now” (Williams, 2019, Section 4.2). Intuitive cognition requires being fully present and aware in the moment so that there is an inherent intuitive understanding of the experience without the use of intellectual abstraction. Thomas Aquinas was among the first theologians to integrate the philosophies of Aristotle into his work, which is based on the reasonable and rational intellect as the primary source of knowledge, the senses secondary. John Duns Scotus attempts to integrate the intellect of Aristotle and Aquinas with the Franciscan/Augustinian tradition of illumination by faith through what Scotus calls *intellectual intuitive cognition* (Copleston, 2003, Vol. 2). Where Thomas Aquinas departs from faith as a primary source of knowledge, John Duns Scotus restores faith to the epistemological equation of understanding how we know.

John Duns Scotus died November 8, 1308. He was unpopular among the 16th century English reformers due to, “his strong defense of the papacy against the divine right of kings” and he was labeled a “dunce” (a Dunsman), which eventually became a word of obloquy; a discriminating slur (Wolter, 2020, Cologne section). However, John Calvin (French/Genevan Protestant Reformer) suggests Scotus’s intuitive cognition reveals how God may be experienced. Nineteenth century American philosopher, Charles Sanders Pierce was deeply influenced by John Duns Scotus. Pierce considers Scotus “the greatest speculative mind of the Middle Ages as well as one of the ‘profoundest metaphysicians that ever lived’” (Wolter, 2020, Cologne section).

IV. CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING

Socrates had a vision about the morality of being human. In the face of opposition from powerful leaders, he strove throughout his life to plant the seeds of his vision in others. This effort to enlighten humanity came at a great cost: the cost of his life.

Plato asserted that humans are born with innate ideas (forms) and that the function of learning is the process of recalling these innate ideas. For Plato, the recollection process is the actualization of knowledge. Plato, following in the path of his teacher, Socrates, professed that knowledge comes solely from the rational intellectual mind that has been illumined by an extrinsic source and does not come from sense perception.

Aristotle took the opposing position. He focused on the existence of the intellectual indwelling/inherent nature of our being, our spiritual being. Furthermore, Aristotle believed that the senses are an integral source of data to be utilized in the process of understanding the world.

A major transformation of the Roman world occurred over the next 700 years. The advent of Christianity was a turning point for Western Civilization. Jesus was another freethinker who changed the world who, like Socrates, was killed for his influence on others. The birth of the Christian Church initiated a new field of study: Christian theology. The integration of this profound paradigm shift challenged the geopolitical climate during the Roman reign, which ultimately led to a political incongruence between the Roman Empire and the Church.

Saint Augustine, a worldly man, converted to Christianity during a time when the accepted Christian belief, stemming from the original Apostle/Nicene Creed, was that the Holy Spirit comes only from the Father and does not include the son/human. Augustine asserted that knowledge is revealed through divine illumination given from God above. For Augustine, the process of illumination is the understanding through reasoning that comes from the extrinsic supernatural light of God.

Saint Anselm, a natural theologian, incorporated human participation into his theory of knowledge, which is predicated on the observation of facts and experiences of nature. The driving force behind Anselm’s focus is his faith in the scriptures as the truth. Professing that the Holy Spirit comes from both the father and the son, Anselm based his faith on the rationalization of written scriptures of man, not on divine illumination from an extrinsic source.

Saint Bonaventure asserts “what we believe we owe to authority, and what we understand we owe to reason” (Copleston, 2003, Vol 2, p.245). Bonaventure’s arguments for God are based on rational/intellectual reasoning without reference to dogma. Having had a mystical/spiritual experience, Bonaventure based his belief system on knowledge that begins with faith in the scriptures, as revealed through divine illumination, which is understood through intellectual reasoning. Saint Bonaventure’s

devotion inspired others to lead a spiritual life deep in faith. Bonaventure's death bears a resemblance to the deaths of Socrates and Jesus; Bonaventure died mysteriously immediately after preaching about healing and unification.

Saint Thomas Aquinas differentiates between philosophy and theology positing that the difference is in the starting points. Philosophy begins with the light of reason with knowledge arising as a function of philosophizing/rationalizing, and theology begins with the supernatural light of faith with knowledge as the manifestation of revealed dogma. One of the most significant contributions from Thomas Aquinas is the inclusion of the senses, as first proposed by Aristotle, as a source of data for gaining knowledge. Aquinas remained a true rationalist, utilizing reason as the primary source, yet opened the door for Aristotle's empiricism, which utilizes the senses as a secondary source of knowledge.

Saint John Duns Scotus was the first to postulate that one can come to know God independent of revelation. Furthermore, Scotus elevated the function of the senses as an integral source of knowledge (spiritual insight) by synthesizing the intellect with divine illumination, which he calls "intellectual intuitive cognition." Although the procession of the Holy Spirit remained a point of contention between the Greek East and the Latin West, Scotus' intellectual intuitive cognition acknowledges the power of the spiritual nature of human existence. Saint John Duns Scotus opened the door for understanding free will.

What comes from reviewing the flow of thought regarding the source of knowledge (epistemology) are three progressive postulates for determining individual reality: first, God illumines the mind; second, we can see for ourselves without the illumination of God; and third, both God and self are necessary to understand the world. The skilled ability to reason combined with the human spiritual potential is the ultimate source of knowledge. To synthesize divine illumination through spiritual insight is to actualize intellectual intuitive cognition, to actualize your humanness as a spiritual being.

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