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### Augustine's Defence of Knowledge against the Sceptics

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*Published in:*  
Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy

*DOI:*  
[10.1093/oso/9780198851059.003.0006](https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198851059.003.0006)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2019

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Nawar, T. (2019). Augustine's Defence of Knowledge against the Sceptics. In V. Caston (Ed.), *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (Vol. 56, pp. 215-265). (Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198851059.003.0006>

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# AUGUSTINE'S DEFENCE OF KNOWLEDGE AGAINST THE SCEPTICS

TAMER NAWAR

Accordingly, it should not be hoped that the philosophers will ever reach agreement about these things [theology and physics]. Only mathematics—if one approaches it appropriately—can offer secure and unshakeable knowledge to those who pursue it . . .

(PTOLEMY, *Almagest*)<sup>1</sup>

One should direct one's attention only to those objects concerning which our minds seem able to have certain and indubitable cognition . . . If our reckoning is correct, then of all the sciences already discovered, only arithmetic and geometry are left intact and observance of this rule restricts us to them.

(DESCARTES, *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*)<sup>2</sup>

Adapting a familiar saying, one might say that the real object of reason is reason itself. In arithmetic, we do not deal with objects which become known to us as something alien from outside through the mediation of the senses, but rather with objects which are immediately given to reason, which can fully grasp them as its own.

(FREGE, *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik*)<sup>3</sup>

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For comments on earlier versions of this paper, I would like to thank: Job van Eck; Matthew Duncombe; the audience of the *Via Moderna* in Groningen; and, especially, two anonymous readers for this journal and Victor Caston, whose extremely helpful comments helped me clarify and improve the articulation of many of the ideas and arguments in this paper.

<sup>1</sup> *Almagest* I. 1. 6. 16–19 Heiberg: διὰ τοῦτο μηδέποτε ἂν ἐλπίσαι περὶ αὐτῶν ὁμοιοῦσαι τοὺς φιλοσοφούντας, μόνον δὲ τὸ μαθηματικόν, εἴ τις ἐξεταστικῶς αὐτῶ προσέρχεται, βεβαίαν καὶ ἀμετάπιστον τοῖς μεταχειριζομένοις τὴν εἴδησιν παράσχοι. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

<sup>2</sup> *Regulae*, 10. 362–3 AT: circa illa tantum obiecta oportet versari, ad quorum certam & indubitam cognitionem nostra ingenia videntur sufficere . . . si bene calculum ponamus, solae supersint arithmetica & geometria ex scientiis iam inventis, ad quas huius regulae observatio nos reducat.

<sup>3</sup> *Grundlagen* §105: Man könnte wohl mit Abänderung eines bekannten Satzes sagen: der eigentliche Gegenstand der Vernunft ist die Vernunft. Wir beschäftigen

IN his *Contra Academicos*, Augustine offers one of the most detailed responses to scepticism to have come down to us from antiquity. In this paper, I examine Augustine's defence of the existence of infallible knowledge in *Contra Academicos* 3. I challenge a number of established views concerning the nature and merit of Augustine's defence of knowledge and propose a new understanding of Augustine's response to scepticism and several important elements of Augustine's thought concerning signification, cognition, and object-directed thought. I argue that once we understand Augustine's views about these issues properly, his arguments in defence of knowledge are more interesting and more successful than usually thought.

### 1. Introduction

Augustine reports that in his youth he was greatly impressed by the sceptical Academy.<sup>4</sup> While the arguments of the Academics played a role in interrupting his Manichaeian slumbers (*C. Acad.* 2. 2. 5; *Conf.* 5. 10. 19, 14. 25), the aftermath of Augustine's encounter with scepticism was pervasive doubt. After dedicating himself anew to the search for wisdom and a life of Christian contemplation, Augustine sought to respond to the arguments of the sceptical Academy and the obstacles they posed to prospective Christians with the strongest reasoning he could muster (*Ench.* 7. 20; *Retr.* 1. 1. 1; cf. *Civ. Dei* 19. 18). Augustine's earliest surviving work, the *Contra Academicos* (written c.386), preserves the result of this toil.

In the latter part of the dialogue, Augustine seeks to defeat the sceptics by defending some items of knowledge against sceptical attack (*C. Acad.* 3. 10. 22–13. 29). At least two strands of Augustine's defence of knowledge have attracted particular interest from philosophical commentators. Firstly, Augustine imagines the sceptic raising the possibility that the expression 'the world' may fail to refer or denote—perhaps the first instance of so-called 'external world scepticism' recorded in history—and offers a response to this sceptical move. Following the work of Gareth Matthews and Myles

uns in der Arithmetik mit Gegenständen, die uns nicht als etwas Fremdes von außen durch Vermittelung der Sinne bekannt werden, sondern die unmittelbar der Vernunft gegeben sind, welche sie als ihr Eigenstes völlig durchschauen kann.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. *C. Acad.* 2. 1. 1, 9. 23; 3. 15. 34, 20. 43; *Util. cred.* 8. 20; *Ench.* 7. 20; *Retr.* 1. 1. 1.

Burnyeat,<sup>5</sup> it is usually thought that Augustine's response to external world scepticism relies upon a form of so-called linguistic 'subjectivism' or 'solipsism', according to which the expression 'the world' always refers to the totality of appearances experienced by the subject making the utterance. Secondly, Augustine claims that there is something special about mathematical knowledge which makes it immune to sceptical attack. Christopher Kirwan, who offers the most detailed treatment of this aspect of Augustine's discussion, criticizes Augustine for committing a scope fallacy and failing to provide an account of the infallibility of mathematical knowledge. He thereby judges Augustine's defence of knowledge to be a failure on this score.<sup>6</sup>

In this paper, I examine these strands of Augustine's response to scepticism. I argue that existing accounts of Augustine's defence of knowledge are mistaken on several scores and offer a novel interpretation of Augustine which sheds light on his response to scepticism and several important elements of his thought. In what follows, I first (Section 2) examine Augustine's understanding of the sceptical Academy and clarify his broader strategy in responding to the sceptics in his *Contra Academicos*. I then (Section 3) examine the first relevant strand of Augustine's defence of knowledge: his response to external world scepticism. I challenge the subjectivist interpretation defended by Burnyeat and Matthews on a number of points and offer a more precise rendering of Augustine's argument which is better grounded textually and superior philosophically. On the view I defend, Augustine's response to the sceptic appeals to the thought that if the external world exists, then, in uttering 'the world', the speaker refers to or denotes the external world and if the external world does not exist, then, in uttering 'the world', the speaker refers to or denotes the speaker's ideas or appearances. I clarify and explain several features of the underlying semantic account and show how it affords Augustine a superior response to

<sup>5</sup> G. B. Matthews, 'Consciousness and Life' ['Consciousness'], *Philosophy*, 52 (1977), 13–26; *Thought's Ego in Augustine and Descartes* [*Thought's Ego*] (London, 1992); and M. F. Burnyeat, 'Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed' ['Idealism'], *Philosophical Review*, 91 (1982), 3–40.

<sup>6</sup> C. Kirwan, 'Augustine against the Sceptics', in M. F. Burnyeat (ed.), *The Sceptical Tradition* [*Sceptical Tradition*] (Berkeley, 1983), 205–23; and *Augustine* (London, 1989).

external world scepticism without falling prey to some of the objections faced by other interpretations.

Finally (Section 4), I turn to the second relevant strand of Augustine's defence of knowledge and examine Augustine's appeal to arithmetical knowledge, which he takes to be attained by reason alone. I here aim to shed light on an influential but poorly understood area of Augustine's thought often discussed under the guise of 'illumination' or 'divine illumination'. Against Kirwan, I argue that Augustine does in fact provide an account of the infallibility of arithmetical knowledge and show how Augustine appeals to the directness and immediacy of the cognition of intelligible items to argue that when apprehending arithmetical objects by means of reason, the resulting apprehension is so closely tied to its object that certain kinds of misrepresentation are impossible. Such apprehension is thus especially epistemically secure and immune to various kinds of error.

## 2. Academic scepticism and Augustine's *Contra Academicos*

Augustine takes the Academic sceptics to have argued principally for two theses. First is that humans cannot attain knowledge (e.g. scientia, *C. Acad.* 2. 5. 11; 3. 4. 10; *Trin.* 15. 12. 21). Second is that nothing should be assented to (*nulli rei esse assentiendum*, *C. Acad.* 2. 5. 12, 13. 30; 3. 5. 12, 10. 22):

(NK) For any  $p$ , it cannot be known that  $p$ .

(NA) For any  $p$ , it should not be assented that  $p$ .<sup>7</sup>

Augustine thinks the Academics infer (NA) from (NK) and an additional thesis:

(NORM) Knowledge is the norm of assent, i.e., one should assent only to what is known.<sup>8</sup>

Since nothing is known and one should assent only to what is known, one should therefore refrain from assenting to anything at all (cf. *S.E. M.* 7. 155–7).

<sup>7</sup> Augustine sometimes shows awareness that the views of the sceptical Academy may have developed (e.g. *C. Acad.* 3. 17. 39) or else distinguishes between the stances of (e.g.) Arcesilaus and Carneades (e.g. *C. Acad.* 2. 6. 14). However, he often speaks generically of 'the Academic' as arguing for (NK) and (NA) (e.g. *C. Acad.* 2. 5. 12; 3. 5. 11, 12, 10. 22, 16. 35).

<sup>8</sup> E.g. *C. Acad.* 2. 5. 11, 6. 14; 3. 5. 12, 10. 22, 14. 31–2, 16. 35; cf. *Sol.* 1. 3. 8–4. 9; *Ench.* 7. 20.

The notion of knowledge at issue in (NK) and (NORM) is *infallible knowledge*.<sup>9</sup> Whether the Academics genuinely believed or otherwise accepted (NK) and (NA) (rather than merely argued for them dialectically),<sup>10</sup> or whether the Academics argued for (NA) in the manner described by Augustine,<sup>11</sup> or whether the Academics are in fact best characterized by their arguing on behalf of *any* particular theses whatsoever (as opposed to their adopting a certain sceptical stance or method, cf. Cic. *Acad.* 1. 44–5; *Fin.* 2. 2; D.L. 4. 28), is difficult to tell.<sup>12</sup> Augustine recognizes at least some of the difficulties

<sup>9</sup> In speaking of knowledge as being infallible, I have in mind more or less the same thing as, for instance, David Lewis (e.g. D. Lewis, 'Elusive Knowledge', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 74 (1996), 549–67). Slightly more concretely, I can say that, as Augustine conceives of this kind of knowledge, it is, like all knowledge, factive. If one knows that *p*, then *p* is true (*C. Acad.* 3. 3. 5, 4. 10; *Div. qu.* 32; *Trin.* 15. 10. 17; cf. *Sol.* 2. 1. 1, 11. 20). Furthermore, Augustine takes knowledge to be infallible in that if one (infallibly) knows that *p*, then one's appearance that *p*—that to which one assents in believing the relevant proposition—'shares no commonality with false appearances' (*C. Acad.* 3. 9. 18; cf. *Civ. Dei* 11. 26; *Trin.* 15. 12. 21; Cic. *Acad.* 2. 34) or 'appears in such a way that something false could not so appear' (*C. Acad.* 3. 9. 21). Such remarks seem to be best understood as claiming that if one knows that *p*, then one's appearance that *p* is such that it is not possible that not-*p* (*C. Acad.* 2. 5. 11, 6. 14; 3. 3. 5, 9. 18, 9. 21; *Sol.* 1. 3. 8–4. 9), or that it is necessary, given the appearance upon which or the method through which one came to accept that *p*, that *p* (*C. Acad.* 1. 3. 7, 7. 19; *Ench.* 7. 20; *Trin.* 15. 12. 21; *Retr.* 1. 14. 3; cf. *Jo. Ev. trans.* 37. 3). It should be added that Augustine elsewhere frequently emphasizes that knowledge of the relevant kind is a thoroughly *rational* cognitive state. It is something which we attain through reason (per rationem, *Quant. an.* 30. 58; *Util. cred.* 11. 25; *Retr.* 1. 14. 3), which requires a grasp of reasons (e.g. *C. Acad.* 1. 7. 19; *Sol.* 1. 4. 9; *Quant. an.* 30. 58), and which is proper to the rational part of the soul, i.e. the mind (e.g. *Lib. arb.* 2. 3. 8–9; *Util. cred.* 11. 25). For discussion of Augustine's epistemic vocabulary and his conception of the relevant cognitive states, see T. Nawar, 'Augustine on the Varieties of Understanding and Why There is No Learning from Words' ['Varieties of Understanding'], *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, 3 (2015), 1–31.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine recognizes that the Academics dialectically drew upon theses of their Stoic opponents to argue for (NK) and (NA) and that in arguing for (NK), the Academic sceptics seem to have been especially concerned with targeting the Stoic account of knowledge or apprehension (*C. Acad.* 2. 5. 11; cf. 2. 6. 14; 3. 7. 16, 9. 18, 10. 22; cf. S.E. *M.* 7. 150, 153).

<sup>11</sup> There is evidence that (some of) the Academics refrained from assent due to the equal strength of opposing arguments (D.L. 4. 28; cf. Plut. *St. Rep.* 1037c). If that is true of the Academics more generally, then Augustine misconstrues the basis of suspension of judgement in Academic scepticism. However, there is also evidence that some Academics, such as Arcesilaus and Carneades, argued from the impossibility of apprehension or knowledge to suspension of judgement in the manner supposed by Augustine (e.g. Cic. *Acad.* 1. 45–6; 2. 59, 68, 78; S.E. *M.* 7. 150–7).

<sup>12</sup> Whether Arcesilaus argued for (NK) and (NA) merely dialectically (Philodemus, *Index Academicorum* 20. 2–4; S.E. *M.* 7. 150; cf. P. Couissin, 'Le stoïcisme de la Nouvelle Académie', *Revue d'histoire de la philosophie*, 3 (1929), 241–76, G. Striker,

involved in understanding the Sceptical Academy (*C. Acad.* 2. 13. 29–30; 3. 4. 10).<sup>13</sup> However, he focuses especially upon the fact that (NA) and (NK) occasion despair of attaining wisdom (as he conceives of it) and serve as obstacles to the search for truth, the practice of philosophy, and the acceptance of Christianity.<sup>14</sup>

In his *Contra Academicos*, Augustine is especially concerned with arguing against (NK) and (NA) and responding to the arguments offered on their behalf (*C. Acad.* 2. 9. 23, 13. 30; cf. *Ench.* 7. 20). Augustine elsewhere offers several reasons as to why one should reject the view that knowledge is the (regulative) norm of assent (a view commonly assumed in Hellenistic debates)<sup>15</sup> and why one should reject (NA). Most notably perhaps, he takes the Christian life to require assent on the basis of belief that falls short of knowledge. However, in the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine has three principal complaints about (NA).

Firstly, he rehearses the ancient charge that putative adherents of (NA) are condemned to inaction or pragmatic inconsistency. Simply put, human action requires assent. The person who assents to nothing does nothing and the person who does something while claiming to assent to nothing is pragmatically inconsistent—his walk belies his talk (*C. Acad.* 2. 5. 12; 3. 15. 33–4).<sup>16</sup>

'Sceptical Strategies' ['Strategies'], in M. Schofield, M. Burnyeat, and J. Barnes (eds.), *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology* (Oxford, 1980), 54–83) or doxastically accepted the premises, reasoning, and conclusions of his arguments (*Cic. Acad.* 1. 45; 2. 29, 59, 66–7; D.L. 4. 28, 32; S.E. *PH* 1. 226, 232) was not entirely clear even in antiquity (cf. *Cic. Acad.* 2. 148). There are reports of Academics 'quasi-apprehending' (NK) and (NA) (e.g. Gellius, *Noct. Att.* 11. 5. 8) and some Academics drew distinctions between different kinds of assent (*Acad.* 2. 104). On some interpretations (originating with Philo of Larissa and Metrodorus), Carneades seems to have demurred from certain construals of (NA) but allowed for certain sorts of assent (e.g. *Cic. Acad.* 2. 59, 67, 78, 112). However, whether Carneades himself put even these thoughts forward merely dialectically or not was unclear to even his keenest students (*Cic. Acad.* 2. 139).

<sup>13</sup> Augustine considers whether the Academics suspended judgement about (NA) and (NK) (cf. *C. Acad.* 3. 5. 11–12, 18. 41) or else secretly maintained Platonist doctrines (*C. Acad.* 2. 10. 24; 3. 7. 14, 17. 37–18. 40; cf. S.E. *PH* 1. 234). However, he seems to treat (NK) in particular as a *decretum* ('doctrine') of the public teachings of the Academy (*C. Acad.* 3. 8. 17; cf. *Cic. Acad.* 2. 29).

<sup>14</sup> *Ep.* 1. 2; *C. Acad.* 3. 20. 43; *Ord.* 1. 4. 10; *Trin.* 15. 12. 21; cf. *C. Acad.* 2. 1. 1; *Ench.* 7. 20; *Retr.* 1. 1. 1.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. *Cic. Acad.* 1. 42, 45; 2. 66–8, 77, 133; S.E. *M.* 7. 157; D.L. 7. 162; Stob. 2. 111. 18–112. 8 = LS 41G = *SVF* 3. 548.

<sup>16</sup> Sceptics were frequently charged with being inconsistent (*Cic. Acad.* 2. 28–9, 39, 61, 108–9; *Lucr.* 4. 469–72; cf. S.E. *PH* 1. 14, 1. 200; 2. 188; D.L. 9. 76) or else

Secondly, Augustine argues that adhering to (NA) is *not* in fact a good means of attaining one's goals qua epistemic agent (*C. Acad.* 3. 15. 34). Epistemic agents should withhold assent from falsehoods, but epistemic agents should also assent to truths (*Cic. Acad.* 2. 66; cf. *Conf.* 1. 20. 31). Withholding assent *tout court* will fulfil the negative aim at the expense of preventing the positive aim from being attained (*C. Acad.* 1. 3. 7; 2. 5. 11; 3. 15. 34–16. 35).<sup>17</sup> Augustine thinks that this is an unacceptable trade-off and that one will thereby lose more than one will gain and be condemned to unacceptable epistemic impoverishment (*Civ. Dei* 19. 18).

Thirdly, Augustine thinks that (NA) is an obstacle to attaining one's goals qua ethical agent or pursuer of happiness. Whatever one's conception of happiness or the goal(s) of life, Augustine thinks that most would agree that leading a good life or attaining happiness requires assenting to at least some truths, especially important ethical truths (*C. Acad.* 1. 7. 20; cf. *C. Acad.* 3. 16. 35–6; *B. vita* 2. 14). Accordingly, those who wish to be happy or good should not adhere to (NA).

Against (NK), Augustine also draws upon several considerations which might be deemed pragmatic. Thus, for instance, he thinks it obvious that wise persons (if there are any) must be wise in virtue of knowing something (rather than being wise merely in virtue of refraining from error while knowing nothing, *C. Acad.* 3. 3. 5–5. 11).<sup>18</sup> That being so, those who put forward (NK) must abandon pretensions to wisdom and presumably thereby forfeit pretensions to making pronouncements of the relevant sort (*C. Acad.* 3. 3. 5–6, 9. 19, 14. 31). Put in slightly different terms, we might say that if

being condemned to inaction (e.g. *Cic. Acad.* 2. 31, 109–10; *Plut. Adv. Col.* 1108 D, 1119 C–D, 1122 A; *D.L.* 9. 104; *S.E. M.* 11. 162; *PH* 1. 23–4, 226). Augustine argues that the policy associated with Carneades (*Cic. Acad.* 2. 99, 104) of either assenting to or perhaps merely 'following' without assenting to (*Cic. Acad.* 2. 59, 99, 104, 108; *S.E. M.* 7. 185) the 'probable' (probabile) or 'truthlike' (verisimile) involves several absurdities or inconsistencies (*C. Acad.* 2. 7. 16, 7. 19–8. 20, 11. 26–13. 30; cf. *Lucr.* 4. 473–7) and that action-guiding judgement requires more than assent to probabilities or verisimilitudes (*C. Acad.* 3. 16. 35–6). For discussion, see Kirwan, *Augustine*, 20–22; B. Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study [Augustine]* (Ithaca, 2016), especially 75–94.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Ep.* 1. 2; *Ench.* 7. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. 'Someone who has doubts about many things is no wiser than one who has never given them a thought' (neque doctior est qui de multis dubitat, quam qui de iisdem nunquam cogitavit, Descartes *Regulae* AT 10. 362, trans. Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch).



(NK) were true then no one would be in a position to assert it authoritatively.

Furthermore, Augustine thinks that philosophical inquiry is (pragmatically) inconsistent with (NK). On his view, attempting to become wise—i.e. inquiry or the practice of philosophy—requires not assenting to (NK). In fact, Augustine thinks, it requires believing the negation of (NK) (*C. Acad.* 2. 9. 23). Just as intending to perform an action requires believing that it is possible to perform said action, those who are *not* appropriately convinced that the truth can be known will be unable to engage in inquiry appropriately. Thus, inquiry requires believing that knowledge is possible (cf. *C. Acad.* 3. 9. 19, 20. 43).<sup>19</sup>

In the third book of his *Contra Academicos*, Augustine attempts to repudiate (NK) more directly by showing that some things may indeed be known for certain.<sup>20</sup> After some preliminary discussion (*C. Acad.* 3. 3. 5–5. 11), it is declared that the main issue requiring resolution is whether (NK) is in fact correct and thus whether knowledge lies within our reach or not (*C. Acad.* 3. 5. 12). Augustine departs from the earlier dialogical to-and-fro and focuses on making the case that (NK) may be resisted by means of a long speech.<sup>21</sup> After giving some attention to the Stoic account of apprehension (*C. Acad.* 3. 9. 18–10. 22),<sup>22</sup> Augustine attempts to repudiate (NK)

<sup>19</sup> The Pyrrhonian sceptics also complained that by adhering to (NK), the Academics were not genuine inquirers (S.E. *PH* 1. 1–4, 7; 2. 1). For discussion of whether the Pyrrhonian sceptics themselves could live up to their claims about being seekers of truth, see G. Striker, ‘Scepticism as a Kind of Philosophy’, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 83 (2001), 113–29, C. Perin, ‘Pyrrhonian Scepticism and the Search for Truth’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 30 (2006), 337–60.

<sup>20</sup> On Augustine’s understanding, the sceptics’ master argument in support of (NK) is that infallible knowledge lies beyond our reach because for any true appearance there is a false appearance indistinguishable from it (cf. Cic. *Acad.* 2. 83) and— or so suggests the sceptic—this indicates that for any appearance that *p*, it is possible that not-*p* (*C. Acad.* 3. 9. 21, 11. 24; cf. *C. Acad.* 2. 5. 12; 3. 1. 1; *Ench.* 7. 20). Cicero also seems to regard this, or something like this, as Carneades’ master argument (e.g. Cic. *Acad.* 2. 40–1; cf. *Acad.* 2. 34, 83).

<sup>21</sup> Like Cicero (*Tusc.* 1. 8. 16–17; *ND* 2. 20; *Fin.* 1. 29), Augustine seems to think that discussion without interruptions can sometimes be better for the presentation of an argument (*C. Acad.* 2. 11. 25; 3. 4. 9; *Sol.* 2. 7. 14).

<sup>22</sup> The Stoics thought that knowledge or apprehension (κατάληψις, perceptio, comprehensio) was the result of assenting to a kataleptic appearance (S.E. *M.* 7. 151), i.e. an appearance which ‘is from what is and is stamped and impressed exactly in accordance with what is, and is of such a kind that it could not arise from what is not’ (ἡ ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος καὶ κατ’ αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον ἐναπομειμαγμένη καὶ ἐναπεσφραγισμένη, ὅποια οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο ἀπὸ μὴ ὑπάρχοντος, S.E. *M.* 7. 248; cf. *M.* 7. 402, 426; 11. 183;

by offering a defence of knowledge in which he argues that certain truths can be infallibly known and claiming that there are at least some items of infallible knowledge which even he, a person who is

D.L. 7. 46, 50). How to understand this definition is controversial (cf. M. Frede, 'Stoics and Sceptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions', in Burnyeat, *Skeptical Tradition*, 65–93; T. Nawar, 'The Stoic Account of Apprehension', *Philosophers' Imprint*, 14 (2014), 1–21), but it is clear that the Stoics distinguish knowledge or apprehension (*κατάληψις*) from a more elevated cognitive state, *epistēmē*, which is the exclusive preserve of the sage and is formed of items of knowledge or apprehension(s) made absolutely steadfast by reason (Cic. *Acad.* 1. 41–2; 2. 145; S.E. *M.* 7. 151; Stob. 2. 73. 16–74. 3 Wachsmuth-Heinze = LS 41H = *SVF* 3. 112; cf. Augustine, *Quant.* au. 30. 58). Augustine regards the Stoic account of knowledge or apprehension with cautious approval (*Sol.* 1. 4. 10). Precisely how Augustine engages with what he found in Cicero's *Academica* deserves its own discussion (cf. B. Dutton, 'Augustine, Academic Skepticism, and Zeno's Definition', *Augustiniana*, 53 (2003), 7–30; T. Reinhardt, 'Cicero and Augustine on Grasping the Truth', in G. M. Müller and F. M. Zini (eds.), *Philosophie in Rom—Römische Philosophie?* (Berlin, 2018), 305–24). Here it suffices to note that Augustine offers several seemingly non-equivalent articulations of the Stoic account:

(A) '[Zeno said that] the truth which can be apprehended is that which is impressed on the soul from what it comes from in such a way that it could not be from that which it does not come from' (id verum percipi posse, quod ita esset animo impressum ex eo, unde esset, ut esse non posset ex eo, unde non esset, *C. Acad.* 2. 5. 11; cf. *Cic. Acad.* 2. 18).

(B) 'This can be more briefly and plainly said thus: the truth can be apprehended by these signs; what is false cannot have these signs' (quod brevius planiusque sic dicitur, his signis verum posse comprehendi, quae signa non potest habere quod falsum est, *C. Acad.* 2. 5. 11).

(C) 'Zeno contended that nothing could be apprehended except the truth which is such that it may be distinguished from the false by means of dissimilar marks' (Zeno... contenderetque nihil percipi posse, nisi quod verum ita esset, ut dissimilibus notis a falso discerneret, *C. Acad.* 2. 6. 14, cf. *Cic. Acad.* 2. 33, 36, 46, 51–4).

(D) 'But let us see what Zeno said. The appearance that can be grasped and apprehended is such that it does not have signs in common with the false' (sed videamus quid ait Zeno: tale scilicet visum comprehendi et percipi posse, quale cum falso non haberet signa communia, *C. Acad.* 3. 9. 18, cf. *Cic. Acad.* 2. 34).

(E) '[Zeno] said that the appearance that can be grasped is that which appears in such a way that a falsehood could not [so] appear' (id visum ait posse comprehendi, quod sic appareret, ut falsum apparere non posset, *C. Acad.* 3. 9. 21).

In (A), Augustine seems to assume a causal account. However, the other formulations offer no explicit causal stipulations. Instead, they claim that a kataleptic appearance is such that it has some feature (e.g. *nota*, *C. Acad.* 2. 6. 14 = (C); *signum*, *C. Acad.* 2. 5. 11 = (B), 3. 9. 18 = (D)) which false appearances lack and in virtue of which it may be distinguished from false appearances. It is assumed that this feature is accessible to the epistemic subject (*C. Acad.* 3. 9. 21 = (E)) and we may take this feature to be something like *being clear* (*evidens*, *manifesta*, *C. Acad.* 2. 3. 9; 3. 11. 25; cf. 3. 10. 22; *Civ. Dei* 19. 18). The kind of knowledge that Augustine goes on to defend is seemingly not the primary focus of (and, indeed, is not obviously catered for by) the Stoic account of knowledge or apprehension (*κατάληψις*), which seems to have focused primarily on giving an account of ordinary perceptual knowledge.

not yet wise, does know and which fall within the scope of philosophy (*C. Acad.* 3. 10. 22; cf. *C. Acad.* 3. 12. 27; *Sol.* 1. 4. 9).

### 3. Knowledge of the external world

Augustine begins his long speech in defence of knowledge by imagining Carneades waking from his slumber (cf. *Cic. Acad.* 2. 93) and appealing to the disagreements among philosophers about the plurality of worlds in order to put in doubt any knowledge of the truths of physics (*C. Acad.* 3. 10. 23; cf. *Cic. Acad.* 2. 55–6, 125).<sup>23</sup> While Augustine does not pronounce on whether the wise person needs to know about the plurality of worlds (*C. Acad.* 3. 10. 23),<sup>24</sup> he argues that some knowledge may still be salvaged in the face of the sceptic's attack. For *even if* one concedes to the sceptic that the number of worlds is unknown, there are still some truths concerning the number of worlds which can be known for certain:

in istis physicis nonnihil scio. certum enim habeo aut unum esse mundum aut non unum; et si non unum, aut finiti numeri aut infiniti. istam sententiam Carneades falsae esse similem doceat. (*C. Acad.* 3. 10. 23)<sup>25</sup>

In these matters of physics, I do not know nothing. I hold it as certain that either the world is one or it is not one; and if not one, then it is either of a finite number or an infinite number. Let Carneades show this view to be similar to a falsehood!

Call the relevant item of (putative) knowledge, which is expressed by an utterance of 'either the world is one or it is not one', (WORLD-1).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> It was often thought that the claims of physics were especially prone to dispute or vulnerable to Academic attack (*Cic. Acad.* 2. 55, 116; cf. *Ptol. Alm.* 1. 1. 6; *Galen, Lib. prop.* 19. 39. 17–41. 12).

<sup>24</sup> That the world was one was maintained by the Stoics and denied by the Epicureans (*Civ. Dei* 12. 12; 18. 41; *D.L.* 7. 143; *Lucr.* 2. 1052–1104; *Cic. ND* 1. 52–3) and the discussion had ancient pedigree (*Simpl. In Phys.* 178. 14–28 Diels).

<sup>25</sup> The text for Augustine's *Contra Academicos*, *De Magistro*, and *De libero arbitrio* is from W. M. Green and K.-D. Klaus, *Aurelii Augustini Opera: Contra Academicos, De Beata Vita, De Ordine, De Magistro, De libero arbitrio* (Turnholt, 1970). The text for Augustine's *De Genesi ad Litteram* is from P. Agaësse and A. Solignac (eds. and trans.), *La Genèse au sens littéral*, 2 vols. (Bruges, 1972). The text for Augustine's *De trinitate* is from W. J. Mountain (ed.), *Aurelii Augustini Opera: De trinitate Libri XV*, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 1968) The text for Augustine's *Confessiones* is from M. Skutella (ed.), *Augustinus: Confessiones* (Berlin, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> I prefer not to take (WORLD-1) to be a tautology or logical truth of the form  $\alpha \vee \neg\alpha$ . Augustine treats 'the world' as a referential expression and while the disjunction he

Instead of claiming to know some atomic proposition (e.g. that the world is one), Augustine claims to know that a relevant disjunction is true. Furthermore, if one supposes that the world is not one (or even if one supposes that it is), then one *knows* that either the number of worlds is finite or that the number of worlds is infinite.

Augustine goes on to claim knowledge of several other disjunctive claims (e.g. that the world will always exist or that it will not always exist, *C. Acad.* 3. 10. 23). Remaining firm in claiming to know that the disjunctions are true in the face of the imagined sceptic's insistence that he should claim to know only one of the disjuncts, Augustine points out that the knowledge claims he has made *are* discussed by the philosophers (and fall within the subject matter of physics), that the disjunctions are true, and that they are so evidently true that they cannot be put in doubt by the sceptic (*C. Acad.* 3. 10. 23). They thus seem to be items of knowledge by means of which one might rebut (NK). Augustine goes on to offer the sceptic a challenge:

ostende me ista nescire; dic istas disiunctiones aut falsas esse aut aliquid commune habere cum falso, per quod discerni omnino non possint. (*C. Acad.* 3. 10. 23)

Show me that I don't know these claims. Tell me either that these disjunctions are false, or that they have something in common with falsehoods on account of which they can't at all be distinguished [from falsehoods].

To this challenge, Augustine imagines the sceptic replying with a simple but powerful rejoinder: 'How do you know that this world exists if the senses make mistakes?' (unde, inquit, scis esse istum mundum, si sensus falluntur? *C. Acad.* 3. 11. 24).

This is often thought to be the first instance of so-called 'external-world scepticism', and it has been claimed that Augustine has himself invented the problem of external world scepticism and that the worry did not occur to other ancients because they lacked

offers *might look* like an exhaustive disjunction, it is not. Augustine's claim has existential import since, in order for the disjunctive claim he offers to be true, the existence of a referent for 'the world' is required. It is the presupposition or requirement that 'the world' has a referent which the sceptic will go on to question in order to put (WORLD-1) in doubt (see below, in this section). If (WORLD-1) were true in virtue of logical form, then both the sceptic's strategy and Augustine's own would be misguided.

certain presuppositions about the mind or soul.<sup>27</sup> If it is correct that Augustine has himself discovered or invented external world scepticism,<sup>28</sup> then it is nonetheless worth noting two points. Firstly, worries about private worlds and related issues had ancient pedigree (e.g. DK 22 B 89) and Augustine's thought on issues pertinent to external world scepticism seems to be motivated by several concerns.<sup>29</sup> Secondly, external world scepticism would seem to require not merely that some perceptual appearances are false and that it is impossible to rule out that not- $p$  on the basis of any perceptual appearance that  $p$  (cf. Cic. *Acad.* 2. 101–4; S.E. *M.* 7. 163–4), but that it is impossible to rule out that *all* perceptual appearances are false and that their inaccuracy is very major.

Putting to one side that it is unclear how the fallibility of the bodily senses makes external world scepticism salient, the sceptic's manoeuvre calls into question the existence of the external world and suggests that in claiming to know (WORLD-1), Augustine has illegitimately presupposed that there exists a referent for the expression 'the world' (and the same applies to his other claims about physics). This threatens the relevant knowledge claim because if there is nothing to which 'the world' ('this world', etc.)

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Burnyeat, 'Idealism', 23; K. Vogt, 'Why Ancient Sceptics Don't Doubt the Existence of the External World: Augustine and the Beginnings of Modern Skepticism', in G. D. Williams and K. Volk (eds.), *Roman Reflections: Studies in Latin Philosophy* (Oxford, 2015), 260–74.

<sup>28</sup> For doubts, see R. Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1983), 287–96; G. Fine, 'Sextus and External World Scepticism', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 24 (2003), 341–85; E. K. Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (Oxford, 2007), 173–5.

<sup>29</sup> Later Platonists thought their own concerns about intelligible and sensible worlds went at least as far back as Anaxagoras and Empedocles (e.g. *Simpl. In Phys.* 156. 13–157. 24, 160. 20–7 Diels; cf. DK 59 B 12). Augustine's own worries about the reference of 'mundus' and issues pertinent to external world scepticism are in fact probably motivated by several issues: (a) worries about the existential import of terms (notable in texts with which Augustine was familiar, e.g. Cic. *Tusc.* 1. 6. 10–7. 14; cf. 1. 37. 90); (b) certain sorts of thought experiments and geometrical manipulations (e.g. Augustine, *Ep.* 7. 2. 4); (c) imagining of various worlds (*Quant. an.* 5. 9); (d) questions about what might happen if the world is destroyed after one has perceived it (e.g. *Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 21); (e) questions concerning the truthmakers for claims about the destruction of the world after it no longer exists (e.g. *Sol.* 2. 2. 2, 15. 28); (f) broader worries about existential import, sometimes connected with God's omnipotence (e.g. *C. Faust.* 26. 5); (g) worries about how many worlds there are (Augustine later signals agreement with the Platonist view that there are two worlds, *C. Acad.* 3. 17. 37); and (h) the reference of 'mundus' when, for instance, Christ claims 'my kingdom is not of this world' (regnum meum non est de hoc mundo [John 18:36], e.g. *Ord.* 1. 11. 32; cf. 'caelum', *Conf.* 12. 13. 16).

refers, then the purported referential expression is empty and then (WORLD-1) and other relevant claims are not true (either they are false or they are neither true nor false). If the prospective knower cannot rule out that there is nothing to which the expression 'the world' refers, then he does not have infallible knowledge even of the minimal sort that Augustine seeks to defend.<sup>30</sup>

Augustine responds to the sceptic by claiming that there is *no way* that the relevant linguistic expression, 'the world', could fail to refer and thus that the putative counter-possibility raised by the sceptic is bogus:

[1] numquam rationes vestrae ita vim sensuum refellere potuerunt, ut convinceretis nobis nihil videri, nec omnino ausi estis aliquando ista tentare, sed posse aliud esse ac videtur vehementer persuadere incubuistis. [2] ego itaque hoc totum, qualecumque est,<sup>31</sup> quod nos continet atque alit, [3] hoc, inquam, quod oculis meis apparet a meque sentitur habere terram et caelum aut quasi terram et quasi caelum, mundum voco . . . [4] si autem hoc, quod mihi videtur, negas mundum esse, de nomine controversiam facis, cum id a me dixerim mundum vocari. [5] etiamne, inquires, si dormis, mundus est iste quem vides? Iam dictum est, quidquid tale mihi videtur, mundum appello . . . [6] quam ob rem hoc dico, istam totam corporum molem atque machinam, in qua sumus sive dormientes sive furentes sive vigilantes sive sani, aut unam esse aut non esse unam. edissere, quomodo ista possit falsa esse sententia. (*C. Acad.* 3. 11. 24–5)

[1] Thus far your arguments were never able to rebut the power of the senses to the point of showing that nothing appears to us — nor did you

<sup>30</sup> Peter King raises the following worry: 'Logical truths have no subject matter and therefore are not about the world' ('Augustine on Knowledge' ['Knowledge'], in D. Meconi and E. Stump (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2014), 142–65, at 145). According to King, since disjunctions are true in virtue of their logical form, they are not truths about physics or the world at all. There are two rejoinders here. Firstly, while I agree with King that the relevant claims (such as (WORLD-1)) are rather thin, as noted above, I do *not* think they are true in virtue of logical form in the manner King supposes. On this point, I should add that in his translation of the *Contra Academicos*, King reads the passage this way: 'I'm certain that the world is either one [in number] or not' (P. King, *Augustine: Against the Academicians and The Teacher* (Indianapolis, 1995), at 73). On the most natural reading of the English, the negation has narrow scope. Secondly, *even if* one were to interpret Augustine's remarks as being true in virtue of their logical form, then one might (plausibly) reply that the claims are still *about* something by indicating that the truthmaker of a disjunction is what makes one of its disjuncts true and that this truthmaker is its subject matter.

<sup>31</sup> On the text here, see T. Fuhrer, *Augustin: Contra Academicos (vel De Academicis) Bücher 2 und 3, Einleitung und Kommentar* (Berlin, 1997), 484.

ever attempt such things; instead you always relied heavily upon persuading us that things can be other than they seem. [2] And so I call this whole, whatever it is, that sustains and nourishes us, [3] this thing, which appears to my eyes and feels to me to have earth and sky or quasi-earth and quasi-sky, 'the world' . . . . [4] However, if you deny that this thing—which appears to me—is the world, then you're making a fuss over a name, since I had said that I called it 'the world'. [5] You'll ask me: 'Is this thing you see the world even if you're asleep?' It has already been said that I call 'the world' whatever seems to me to be such . . . . [6] Accordingly, I state that this whole mass of bodies and contraption in which we exist, whether we be asleep, insane, awake, or sane—either is one or is not one. Explain how this claim can be false!

In [1], Augustine rightly raises a worry concerning the sceptic's questioning the existence of the world and how this relates to the sceptic's prior worries. Whatever counter-possibilities the sceptic might have raised in the past, there were never grounds for the sceptic to argue that nothing was given to us in experience. In [2]–[6] Augustine goes on to defend his knowledge claim by saying that, whatever the sceptic might say, it is nonetheless guaranteed that 'the world' refers and that (WORLD-1) is thereby true.

As this passage has usually been understood, notably by Myles Burnyeat and Gareth Matthews, in responding to the sceptic's questioning the existence of the world, Augustine

has just invented the idea that we might designate as 'the world' the totality of appearances, including the 'as if' earth (*quasi terra*) and the 'as if' sky which contains them. (Burnyeat, 'Idealism', 40)<sup>32</sup>

On this interpretation, which seems to draw its textual support primarily from [3] and [5], Augustine embraces a form of so-called 'subjectivism' or 'solipsism' about reference or denotation. On such a view, which Burnyeat and Matthews do not seem to take to be a momentary dialectical concession to the sceptic, a person's utterances of 'the world' refer to the relevant appearances or ideas of the person making that particular utterance and when this account is generalized, a person's utterance of (e.g.) 'Socrates' refers to the speaker's appearance(s) or mental notion(s) of Socrates.

<sup>32</sup> 'Augustine suggests that one give the name 'world' to whatever impressions one has' (Matthews, 'Consciousness', 25). See also G. B. Matthews, *Thought's Ego*, 64–6.

On this reading, Augustine's knowledge claim is thereby saved from the sceptic's attack. *Even if* the external world does not exist, there is no possibility that the disjunction Augustine has offered is false because all that is needed for 'the world' to refer is that the subject has some appearance or other and, as Augustine notes in [1], the sceptic never sought to put in doubt that the speaker had certain appearances. This is the orthodox interpretation,<sup>33</sup> and one might seek to reinforce it by adverting to places where Augustine suggests that words signify a speaker's idea(s) (e.g. *Mag.* 2. 3; see below, nn. 45 and 46). However, such an interpretation faces several significant difficulties.

Firstly, the view attributed to Augustine renders the truth-conditions of many sentences entirely wrong and seems to make many kinds of communication impossible. Thus, for instance, 'the world is in my mind' turns out to be true (and so too does 'the world cannot be older than I am', and many other claims). Moreover, we very often seem to end up talking past each other—for you, in talking of the world, talk of your appearances, and I, in talking of the

<sup>33</sup> Cf. P. Bearsley, 'Augustine and Wittgenstein on Language', *Philosophy*, 58 (1983), 229–36, at 235; Dutton, *Augustine*, 180–2. The one significant challenge to this kind of interpretation of which I am aware is offered by C. Bolyard, 'Augustine, Epicurus, and External World Skepticism' ['Augustine'], *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 44 (2006), 157–68. Bolyard criticizes Burnyeat's account for failing to prove the existence of the external world (Bolyard, 'Augustine', 162)—something which it does not attempt to do—and offers an alternative 'Epicurean realist' interpretation of Augustine. Bolyard takes Augustine to follow Epicurus in thinking our appearances of sensible things are the result of streams of images (*εἰδωλα*) projected from sensible things and maintains: 'Epicurus holds that a true correspondence exists not between the impression and the qualities of the external object, but rather between the impression and the images: sensation is infallible insofar as it accurately reports the state of the images informing it. Thus, for Epicurus, global skepticism fails... With this understanding of Epicureanism, we can see how it provides a convenient interpretation of Augustine's quasi-earth passage. If all impressions are true, even those occurring in dreams and hallucinations, then it will immediately follow that global skepticism fails' ('Augustine', 167). Bolyard's interpretation faces a number of difficulties. Firstly, as Bolyard acknowledges, the response attributed to Augustine 'appears to be question-begging with respect to skeptical worries' ('Augustine', 168). Secondly, there is no good textual evidence to suppose that Augustine maintains the Epicurean account of perception that Bolyard attributes to him. In fact, in contrast with the Epicureans, Augustine denies that all perceptions are true (e.g. *Sol.* 2. 3. 3). Thirdly, Augustine's psychology is such that any Epicurean account of perception would be inconsistent with many of his deepest commitments concerning the nature of the soul and its relation to the body (e.g. Augustine thinks the soul is not *directly* affected by the body; cf. *Quant. an.* 23. 41; 25. 48; *Mus.* 6. 5. 10; *Gn. litt.* 7. 14. 20; 12. 16. 33).



world, talk of my appearances (cf. *S.E. M.* 7. 83–5). Insofar as this account is general, these worries apply to other referential expressions (e.g. ‘Socrates’) and result in a disastrous semantic theory.

Secondly, views of this sort seem to be rejected by Augustine elsewhere. Thus, for instance, in *De quantitate animae* (another early work), Augustine emphasizes that when using the expression ‘the Sun’ the listener’s attention is directed to precisely that thing which the speaker refers to, i.e. the Sun (*Quant. an.* 32. 65–6). Equally, in *De libero arbitrio* (written shortly after the *Contra Academicos*), Augustine rules out that each person should have their own sun, moon, etc. (*Lib. arb.* 2. 7. 16; cf. *Ep.* 147. 17. 43) and in his later *De trinitate* he discusses the signification of ‘mundus’ (‘world’) and takes what is signified by ‘world’ or ‘the world’ simply to be a corporeal thing, i.e. the external world, rather than some idea (*Trin.* 13. 1. 4).<sup>34</sup> In sum, Augustine elsewhere consistently rejects ‘subjectivist’ or ‘solipsistic’ semantic accounts.

Thirdly, it is not even immediately clear that in *C. Acad.* 3. 11. 24–5 Augustine does identify the referent of ‘the world’ with the speaker’s appearances or, if he does, then we need some account of how he does so because in [2] and in [6] Augustine seems to take ‘the world’ to refer not to the speaker’s appearances but to the external world or something akin to it, i.e. that thing which nourishes and sustains us.

In sum, the semantic account attributed to Augustine by ‘subjectivist’ or ‘solipsist’ readings is highly unattractive and seems to be inconsistent with many of Augustine’s remarks in the *Contra Academicos* and elsewhere. Those who take Augustine to put forward a ‘subjectivist’ account owe some sort of response regarding these points.

To attain a better understanding of Augustine’s response to the sceptic, let us return to what Augustine says in *C. Acad.* 3. 11. 24–5. We should first notice that we are presented with at least two sets of contrasting suggestions as to what the referent of ‘the world’ is. On the one hand, [2] and [6] suggest that Augustine takes the expression ‘the world’ to denote one of the *relata* of a certain

<sup>34</sup> ‘When this two-syllable noun “mundus” is said... what it signifies becomes known through the body, i.e. through the bodily eyes. For the world, insofar as it is known, is known by those who see’ (hoc enim nomen disyllabum cum dicitur, mundus, ... quod significat per corpus innotuit, id est per oculos carnis. mundus quippe in quantum notus est videntibus notus est, *Trin.* 13. 1. 4).

dependence or causal relation, i.e. the thing which sustains and nourishes us. The underlying thought in [2] and [6] seems to be that appearances and the agents who experience them do not float freely, and that such agents must be nourished and sustained by some non-psychological thing *external to themselves*. 'The world' is taken to refer to the relevant *something* in question. If this were the sum of Augustine's response, then his response to the sceptic might be regarded as straightforwardly realist (or 'commonsensical'), but question-begging in the extreme, for he would simply assume (without argument) the existence of the external world, which is precisely what the sceptic was questioning.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, Augustine's remarks in [3] and [5] seem to support the view that the expression 'the world' denotes the speaker's appearances or one of the relata of a certain perceptual or quasi-perceptual-type relation. While how to understand the relevant perceptual or quasi-perceptual verbs (and their ontological commitments) is not always entirely clear,<sup>36</sup> [3]'s talk of a 'quasi-earth' and 'quasi-sky' is suggestive of something in the speaker's mind (rather than out there in the world),<sup>37</sup> and [5] indicates that one can stand in this relation to one's hallucinations or dreams (or the objects represented therein) and thereby suggests that the relevant

<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Augustine is not even in a good position to claim that the possibility adduced by the (imagined) sceptic can be ruled out as an impossibility because, as noted above, he himself elsewhere entertains similar possibilities (e.g. *Sol.* 2. 2. 2, 15, 28; *Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 21).

<sup>36</sup> On the one hand, the perceptual-type relation might be understood to have a causal element. Thus, Augustine's response could be rendered consistent throughout for he would be making essentially the same point ('the world' refers to the external thing which causes the subject's appearances). However, thus construed Augustine's response is question-begging. On the other hand, the perceptual-type relation might be understood *not* to have a causal element and construed purely phenomenologically (so that one may stand in this quasi-perceptual-type relation to e.g. one's appearances or to queer objects, such as the objects of hallucination). This more naturally supports the subjectivist or solipsist reading.

<sup>37</sup> Augustine often uses this 'quasi' language to describe the *imagines* of the soul, which he takes to be quasi-material insofar as they are *a bit like* matter or *seem* material (e.g. *Ep.* 13. 2; *Quant. an.* 14. 23; *Gn. litt.* 7. 6. 9; 12. 7. 16, 21. 44, 23. 49, 26. 53; *Trin.* 13. 1. 4; *Civ. Dei* 8. 5; 18. 18; 21. 10). While they are likenesses of bodies, they are not corporeal as, unlike corporeal things, they have no resistance and they do not occupy space in the manner that bodies do (*Quant. an.* 5. 8–9, 14. 23; *Conf.* 10. 8. 15; *An. et or.* 4. 12. 17, 17. 25–18. 26, 21. 35; *Gn. litt.* 7. 6. 9, 21. 29; *Ep.* 147. 16. 38, 17. 43; 166. 2. 4; *Trin.* 10. 5. 7; 11. 2. 3; cf. Plot. *Enn.* 4. 4. 23. 20–8; 5. 1. 5; 5. 3. 8, 11; 5. 4. 2).

relation is quasi-perceptual, so that what is grasped is some psychological item.

In attempting to understand Augustine's response, one might simply think that Augustine's remarks about the referent of 'the world' are inconsistent and that this is evidence of a broader confusion or lack of clarity on Augustine's part about reference, signification, or language more generally.<sup>38</sup> Alternatively, one might attempt to argue that Augustine's response is in fact consistent in one of the ways already described. Thus, for instance, a proponent of a thoroughgoing straightforwardly realist (or 'commonsensical') interpretation might argue that 'the world' always denotes the external world, that the perceptual-type relation invoked in [3] and [5] has a causal aspect, and that one stands in this causal relation to some corporeal thing external to oneself. Thus, one might attempt to grant Augustine consistency across the passage. However, the attempt to explain away Augustine's remarks in [3] and [5] in this way fails to get several features of the text right while also making Augustine's argument question-begging (see above, n. 35) and rendering his reasoning in the passage highly opaque.<sup>39</sup>

Equally, a proponent of the subjectivist interpretation could argue for consistency in the passage by claiming that, in [2] and [6], Augustine is speaking somewhat loosely and that some elliptical perceptual-type qualifiers should be supplied. Thus, for instance, when, in [2], Augustine says, 'And so I call this whole, whatever it is, that sustains and nourishes us...', what he means is: 'And so I call this whole, whatever it is, that *seems to* sustain and nourish us...' When these qualifiers are added, any apparent reference to or denotation of the external world in the text can be glossed as a reference to or denotation of *what it seems to the speaker is the external world*. This, in turn, may be glossed as a reference to the speaker's appearances. However, the attempt to read [2] and [6] in this way requires going against Augustine's remarks in the passage and, as noted

<sup>38</sup> E.g. 'Words convey thoughts, but it is unclear whether Augustine means that words signify the thoughts they convey or the things which are the subject matter of those thoughts (or both)' (Kirwan, *Augustine*, 40).

<sup>39</sup> Thus, for instance, Augustine's remarks in [1]—that the sceptic never sought to put in doubt that the speaker had certain appearances—are rendered irrelevant or false. Equally, such a reading requires taking [3]–[6] to confusingly repeat the point made in [2] (which is a poor reading of the text) and struggles to accommodate those remarks in which Augustine seems to offer a revisionary account of the signification of 'the world'.

above, attributes to Augustine an extremely unattractive semantic theory which is inconsistent with what he frequently says elsewhere.

However, it is possible to offer a better understanding of Augustine's response to external world scepticism which avoids the problems of the two readings just described. Offering such a reading seems to require at least three things. Firstly, recognizing that Augustine is willing to consider how the expression 'the world' denotes or signifies in both those cases in which the external world exists and (as per the sceptic's scenario) in those cases in which it does not. Secondly, that Augustine is making the point that in both cases 'the world' still refers or denotes *even if the referent is not the same in each case*. Thirdly, that Augustine is insisting that *in either case*—i.e. whether the external world exists or not—the knowledge claim he has offered, (WORLD-1), comes out true. On the reading I propose, the core of Augustine's argument is best understood to have something like the following form:

- (1) a speaker, *a*, utters 'either the world is one or it is not one' and in uttering 'the world' intends to refer to or denote the external world;
- (2) *a* has certain ideas or appearances;
- (3) if there is some *x* such that 'the world' refers to or denotes *x*, then 'either the world is one or it is not one' is true;
- (4) either the external world exists *or* it is not the case that the external world exists;
- (5) (if the external world exists, then, in uttering 'the world', *a* refers to or denotes the external world) and (if it is not the case that the external world exists, then, in uttering 'the world', *a* refers to or denotes *a*'s ideas or appearances);
- (6) | the external world exists;
- (7) | 'the world' refers to or denotes the external world;
- (8) | there is some *x* such that 'the world' refers to or denotes *x*;
- (9) | 'either the world is one or it is not one' is true;
- (10) | it is not the case that the external world exists;
- (11) | 'the world' refers to or denotes *a*'s ideas or appearances;
- (12) | there is some *x* such that 'the world' refers to or denotes *x*;
- (13) | 'either the world is one or it is not one' is true;
- (14) 'either the world is one or it is not one' is true.

Thus understood, Augustine defends his knowledge claim by arguing that it is guaranteed that 'the world' refers and that 'either

the world is one or it is not one' is true *whether the external world exists or not*.<sup>40</sup> In doing so, Augustine dialectically considers some situations in which 'the world' refers to or denotes the external world and other situations in which 'the world' refers to or denotes the subject's appearances (or something comparable) and Augustine shifts between whether 'the world' refers to or denotes the external world (e.g. in (2) and (6)) or to the subject's appearances (e.g. in (3) and (5)) because Augustine is considering what 'the world' refers to or denotes in different situations as his confrontation with the sceptic demands.

On this reading, Augustine is *not*—as per the straightforwardly realist (or 'commonsensical') interpretation described above—simply insisting that 'the world' always refers to or denotes the external world.<sup>41</sup> Equally, Augustine is *not*—as per the so-called 'subjectivist' interpretation put forward by Matthews and Burnyeat—proposing that 'the world' always refers to or denotes the speaker's ideas.<sup>42</sup> Instead, Augustine is suggesting that 'the world' denotes or refers to different things in different situations and that either 'the world' refers to or denotes the external world (as in (2) and (6)) or 'the world' refers to or denote the speaker's ideas (as in (3) and (5)). Regardless of whether the external world exists or it is not the case that the external world exists, 'the world' still denotes *something* (because if it is not the case that the external world exists, then 'the world' refers to or denotes the speaker's ideas) and the claim 'either the world is one or it is not one' is thereby true.

On this reading, Augustine neither is merely dismissing the sceptic's hypothesis in a question-begging and uninteresting manner, nor is he falling into solipsism so that a speaker always ends up talking about their own ideas. This reading thus offers a significant advance on existing interpretations and, insofar as it does so, one

<sup>40</sup> Thanks to the editor, Victor Caston, for suggestions regarding presentation of the argument. The discussion that follows concerning Augustine's semantics was much improved by the comments and criticisms of two anonymous readers and the editor.

<sup>41</sup> As noted above, this would only safeguard the truth of the relevant claims Augustine has offered, such as (WORLD-1) (i.e. the content of 'either the world is one or it is not one'), in a question-begging fashion by denying the possibility which the sceptic raises without offering any reasons for doing so.

<sup>42</sup> As noted above, this has numerous adverse consequences such as getting the truth-conditions of most statements entirely wrong and rendering intersubjective reference difficult or perhaps impossible.

might think that this suffices. However, to ascertain to what degree Augustine's response to the sceptic is successful, we need to determine whether the premises of his argument are defensible or dialectically appropriate. In particular, it seems that while the sceptic should grant (1)–(4),<sup>43</sup> it is less clear why the sceptic should grant (5). That is to say, it is less clear why one should think that 'the world' refers to the external world in certain cases and to the speaker's ideas in others, and why it is the case that even when there is no external world 'the world' nonetheless succeeds in referring.<sup>44</sup>

In his *Contra Academicos*, Augustine gives no explicit account of why a speaker's utterance of 'the world' would denote their ideas or appearances (as opposed to e.g. nothing) if the external world did not exist. However, some insight into this matter may be provided by turning to Augustine's *De Magistro* (another early work, written shortly after the *Contra Academicos*) and several other works in which Augustine discusses the relation between language, thought, and reality. While I cannot do justice to all of Augustine's views on these issues, I can outline why (5), and especially the second conjunct of (5)—which claims that if it is not the case that the external world exists, then 'the world' refers to or denotes the speaker's ideas or appearances—is not a purely ad hoc manoeuvre on Augustine's part.

<sup>43</sup> It seems that (1) has to be granted by the sceptic if there is to be an argument. Equally, (2) should be granted by the sceptic because, as Augustine himself notes in (1), the sceptic never sought to put in doubt that his opponent had certain appearances. The situation concerning (3) and (4) is slightly trickier (I discuss the matter of the sceptic's relation to logical principles in Section 4), but here it suffices to note that the claims are extremely plausible, dialectically effective, and that Augustine does not think that the sceptic may challenge (3) or (4).

<sup>44</sup> Discussion of dialectical requirements is a delicate matter. However, it seems that what the sceptic should show is that the dogmatic philosopher cannot, *by his own lights* (i.e. the lights of the dogmatic philosopher), rightly claim to know that *p* (and this is how the Academics are construed by those who adopt *dialectical* readings of Academic scepticism). The sceptic's challenge need not be consistent with the particular knowledge claims being challenged (e.g. the sceptic can challenge the existence of the external world if the dogmatic philosopher claims to know that it exists or presupposes that it exists), but it does seem that the sceptic's challenge should be consistent with the dogmatic philosopher's other central commitments. Thus, for instance, if (5) is a dialectical and ad hoc manoeuvre on Augustine's part, then this may be challenged by the sceptic. However, if (5) is a consequence of a more considered linguistic theory, then the sceptic should leave it in place *while challenging the presupposition that the external world exists*. The sceptic is within their right to challenge the linguistic theory, but in doing so they are changing the subject.

Near the beginning of his *De Magistro*, Augustine suggests that certain token linguistic expressions signify and denote the speaker's ideas or mental states (e.g. *Mag.* 2. 3),<sup>45</sup> and that certain token linguistic expressions signify and denote things in the world (e.g. *Mag.* 3. 5).<sup>46</sup> In a sustained exposition offered towards the end of *De Magistro*, Augustine puts forward a more detailed account of what speech is about which gives us some insight into how he thinks denoting and reference work:

namque omnia, quae percipimus, aut sensu corporis aut mente percipimus. illa sensibilia, haec intellegibilia sive, ut more nostrorum auctorum loquar, illa carnalia, haec spiritalia nominamus. de illis dum interrogamur, respondemus, si praesto sunt ea quae sentimus, velut cum a nobis quaeritur intuentibus lunam novam, qualis aut ubi sit. . . . cum vero non de his, quae coram sentimus, sed de his, quae aliquando sensimus, quaeritur, non iam res ipsas, sed imagines ab eis impressas memoriaeque mandatas loquimur, quae omnino quomodo vera dicamus, cum falsa intueamur, ignoro, nisi quia non nos ea videre ac sentire, sed vidisse ac sensisse narramus. ita illas imagines in memoriae penetralibus rerum ante sensarum quaedam documenta gestamus, quae animo contemplantes bona conscientia non mentimur, cum loquimur. (*Mag.* 12. 39)

Everything we perceive, we perceive either by the bodily senses or by the mind. The former we name 'sensibles', the latter 'intelligibles'—or, to speak in the manner of our authorities, the former we name 'carnal' and the latter 'spiritual'. When we are questioned about the former, we answer, so long as the things we sense are present as, for instance, when observing the new moon we are asked what it is like or where it is. . . . When we are asked *not* about those things which we are sensing presently, but about

<sup>45</sup> In examining what 'si' ('if') signifies, Adeodatus claims: 'It seems to me that "if" signifies doubt. Now where is doubt but in the mind?' (*Mag.* 2. 3). The second word, 'nihil' ('nothing') poses a similar problem, and after some to-and-fro on the issue, Augustine suggests that the word also signifies a certain state of mind (*affectio animi*, *Mag.* 2. 3).

<sup>46</sup> Augustine has been accused of confusion or lack of clarity on the issue (e.g. Kirwan, *Augustine*, 40). However, there is no inconsistency. As E. Bermon (ed. and trans.), *La signification et l'enseignement: texte latin, traduction française et commentaire du De magistro de Saint Augustin* [*La signification*] (Paris, 2007), 178–215 points out, Augustine's remarks in *De Magistro* (2. 3–4) should not be taken (as they are often taken) to claim that all token linguistic expressions denote psychological states. The claim is put forward *provisionally* in order to explicate what *certain token syncategorematic terms* and *certain token interjections* signify (cf. *Doc. Chr.* 2. 11. 16; *S. Dom. in Monte* 1. 9. 23). Bermon does not discuss what this implies for Augustine's account of reference or denotation more generally and merely notes that the text I cite below from *Mag.* 12. 39 is 'difficile' (*La signification*, 472).

those which we previously sensed at some point, we speak not of the things themselves, but of the images impressed by them and committed to memory. I don't know by what means we say truths when contemplating falsehoods, unless it's because we report not that we are seeing and sensing these things but that we saw and sensed them. In this way, we carry these images in the innermost parts of memory as kinds of attestation of things sensed previously. Contemplating these images by means of the mind we do not lie when we speak in good conscience.

It has been thought, for instance by Gareth Matthews,<sup>47</sup> that Augustine is here claiming that when speaking from memory and not being able to perceive some corporeal thing *A*, we are limited to denoting or referring to the *imago* of *A* rather than *A* itself. Thus, for instance, when a speaker cannot perceive Socrates the speaker's utterance of 'Socrates' refers to or denotes the speaker's *imago* of Socrates rather than Socrates himself. Accordingly, it has been thought that on Augustine's view we cannot speak about or denote objects that we are not currently perceiving. Such a reading might seem to support the subjectivist or solipsist interpretation of Augustine's defence to scepticism, and such a reading is suggested by some of Augustine's remarks in the passage (most notably, when he says: 'we speak not of the things themselves, but of the images impressed by them and committed to memory'). However, this kind of reading is not, I think, correct.

Augustine's remarks in the passage are primarily limited to saying that when we have direct cognitive access to a perceivable thing—when the thing is *present* to us and we have perceptual access to it—we may directly signify or speak about (e.g. *directly refer to*) it (cf. *Mag.* 4. 9, *Conf.* 10. 14. 22–15. 23). However, when we *do not* have direct cognitive access to the thing and cannot perceive it, we must instead *consult* (*consulere*) an *imago* (idea or representation) of *A* in our memory in order to speak of *A*. It thus seems that Augustine holds that if a speaker, *S*, uses an expression 'α' intending to refer to or denote *x*, then (if *S* has direct cognitive access to *x*, then *S* refers to or denotes *x* by means of 'α') and (if *S* does not

<sup>47</sup> E.g. G. B. Matthews, 'Augustine on Speaking from Memory', *American Philosophy Quarterly*, 2 (1965), 157–60. Cf. G. O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* [*Philosophy of Mind*] (London, 1987), 138–43.



have direct cognitive access to  $x$ , then  $S$  consults  $S$ 's *imago* by means of  $\ulcorner a \urcorner$ .<sup>48</sup>

It is important to notice that this falls short of the kind of view attributed to Augustine by Matthews, who thinks that when we consult a thing in this way we thereby denote or refer to *that thing*. However, Augustine's remarks at *Mag.* 12. 39 (and elsewhere) need not be taken to claim that when we consult an *imago*, the *imago* is necessarily that which we denote or refer to. Instead, Augustine is merely saying that when we lack direct cognitive access to a thing we *consult* the relevant *imago*. This is consistent with thinking that we consult the relevant *imago* in order to denote, refer to, or speak about something else. As a matter of fact, if we take into account what Augustine says elsewhere, it turns out that when we consult an *imago* in the manner Augustine describes above, the *imago* typically acts an intermediary. By consulting an *imago* the speaker may *indirectly signify* (e.g. *denote*) a thing which stands in an appropriate relation to the *imago* (e.g. something which satisfies the relevant descriptive content of the *imago*),<sup>49</sup> i.e. the thing of which the

<sup>48</sup> I'd like to thank an anonymous reader and Victor Caston for several helpful criticisms and suggestions which pressed me to improve several of my views (and the articulation of these views) about *Mag.* 12. 39 and Augustine's views about consulting and denoting.

<sup>49</sup> In several places (e.g. *Dial.* 10, *Trin.* 8. 4. 7–5. 7), Augustine is inclined to think that an idea denotes something in virtue of that thing satisfying the relevant descriptive content of the idea. This kind of descriptivism seems to have had precedent among Christian thinkers and later Platonists and Stoics (e.g. Ammonius, *In De Int.* 43. 8–12; Origen, *De Oratione* 24. 2. 1–7; Basil of Caesara, *Adv. Eunomium* 29. 577. 35–580. 4; cf. A. Graeser, 'The Stoic Theory of Meaning', in J. Rist (ed.), *The Stoics* (Berkeley, 1978), 77–100, P. Kalligas, 'Basil of Caesarea on the Semantics of Proper Names', in K. Ierodiakonou (ed.), *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources* (Oxford, 2002), 31–48, T. Nawar, 'The Stoics on Identity, Identification, and Peculiar Qualities', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 32 (2017), 113–59). However, Augustine thinks that, in the manner of a cluster descriptivist theory, 'Paul' can succeed in denoting or referring to the Apostle Paul despite significant inaccuracies in the associated content (*Trin.* 8. 4. 7–5. 7), and he also seems to entertain the notion that ideas denote in virtue of standing in a suitable causal relation to their objects (e.g. *Trin.* 8. 6. 9). Augustine's thought on these matters is complicated by at least three facts. Firstly, an idea may denote or represent  $x$  at least partly in virtue of sharing the same form as  $x$  (but this cannot be the whole story as isomorphism of this kind is symmetric and one would not want to say that  $x$  also represents the *imago*). Secondly, Augustine distinguishes between different kinds of *imagines* on the basis of how they are formed, notably he distinguishes between remembered representations (*phantasiae*) of Carthage, formed through the bodily senses, and *imagined* representations (*phantasmata*), formed through imagination (e.g. *Ep.* 7; *Mus.* 6. 11. 32; *Trin.* 8. 4. 7–6. 9; 9. 6. 10;

*imago* is an *imago*. That is to say, the *imago* is not (as per Matthews and others) always the item denoted. Instead, the *imago* is typically *the means by which* something else, i.e. the intersubjective objects which we typically speak and think about, is denoted.<sup>50</sup> Thus, for instance, as Augustine describes things in the *Confessiones*:

nomino quippe lapidem, nomino solem, cum res ipsae non adsunt sensibus meis; in memoria sane mea praesto sunt imagines earum. nomino dolorem corporis, nec mihi adest, dum nihil dolet; nisi tamen adesset imago eius in memoria mea, nescirem quid dicerem nec eum in disputando a voluptate discernerem. nomino salutem corporis, cum salvus sum corpore; adest mihi quidem res ipsa; verum tamen nisi et imago eius inesset in memoria mea, nullo modo recorderer, quid huius nominis significaret sonus. (*Conf.* 10. 15. 23)

Of course, I denote a stone and I denote the sun when the things themselves are not present to my senses though images of them are clearly present in memory. I denote bodily pain when nothing pains me and it is not present. However, unless its image were present in my memory, I would not know what I was saying and in discussing it I would not be able to distinguish it from pleasure. I denote bodily health. When I am healthy, the thing itself is present to me; however, unless its image were in my memory, I would in no way remember what the sound of this noun signified.

As Augustine here makes clear, a speaker's *imagines* are typically *intermediaries* which the speaker employs or consults in order to denote or speak about *something* else. If *A* itself is not present to the speaker, then some *imago* of *A* needs to be present to the speaker if the speaker is to denote or speak about *A*.

When perceiving *A*, we may speak about or denote *A* more directly. In contrast, when we speak about *A* from memory, we signify or denote the thing more indirectly because we rely upon the *imago*. However, while there is a difference in whether a thing is signified directly or indirectly, so long as the relevant item stands in a suitable relation to the speaker's *imago* (e.g. so long as Socrates stands in a suitable relation to the *imago* associated with 'Socrates'),

15. 7. 13). Thirdly, in his *De trinitate*, this kind of account is supplemented by an account of non-linguistic 'inner words' (e.g. *Trin.* 15. 10. 17–15. 25) which seem similar to Fodor's mentalese. A full account of the issues is beyond the scope of this paper. For the sake of simplicity, something like a descriptivist account may be assumed.

<sup>50</sup> As Augustine points out in another context, we should not confuse the two (*Trin.* 9. 11. 16).

then there is no reference shift (as there is, for instance, for Matthews) between the speaker's saying 'Socrates is a brave citizen' when perceiving Socrates and the speaker's saying 'Socrates is a brave citizen' when not perceiving Socrates and speaking from memory.<sup>51</sup> In both cases, the speaker designates or denotes Socrates. However, when Socrates is not present to the speaker, in using the term 'Socrates' when intending to refer to or denote him, the speaker consults an *imago* of Socrates in their memory and only succeeds in denoting Socrates if an appropriate relation obtains between Socrates and the *imago*.

If some object, such as Socrates, stands in a suitable relation to the *imago* (e.g. some object satisfies the descriptive content of the *imago*), then the speaker succeeds in *indirectly signifying* (e.g. *denoting*) Socrates. However, if it is not the case that some object stands in a suitable relation to the speaker's *imago*, then the *imago* which is consulted is the *terminus* of signification and the *imago* is also what is referred to or denoted by the relevant speaker. This explains both how we may speak of things we are not perceiving or have never perceived, such as historical persons or far distant places (so long as we have an *imago* which stands in a suitable relation to the relevant items), and why Augustine maintains—as per the second conjunct in (5)—that 'the world' refers to the speaker's ideas in those cases wherein the external world does not exist.<sup>52</sup>

On the kind of view described, Augustine seems to think that reference or denotation in general functions in a manner similar to how some moderns take demonstrative expressions to function.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> A different kind of example, inspired by a reader's objection, might also be helpful. Consider a speaker's utterance of the following argument: (I) Tibbles is a cat; (II) if Tibbles is a cat, then Tibbles is cute; therefore, (III) Tibbles is cute. Assume that a speaker articulating this argument is able to perceive Tibbles when uttering (I) but is not able to perceive Tibbles when asserting (II). Accordingly, in asserting (II) the speaker will *consult* their *imago* of Tibbles. So long as Tibbles stands in the appropriate relation to the speaker's relevant *imago*, the speaker will succeed in referring to or denoting Tibbles in both (I) and (II). Thus, the object of denotation or reference remains constant and there is no reference shift between (I) and (II). What will vary between the speaker's utterance of (I) and (II) is the *means by which* Tibbles is denoted and the speaker will denote Tibbles *less directly* in asserting (II).

<sup>52</sup> It may also explain Augustine's relevant remarks ('we speak not of the things themselves, but of the images impressed by them and committed to memory') in *De Magistro* (12. 39).

<sup>53</sup> Thus, for instance, Kaplan proposes that the reference of demonstrative-tokens is fixed by what the speaker is perceiving and their intentions at the time of utterance in such a way that, e.g., if *S* uses a demonstrative to refer to *x*, then *S*

On Augustine's view, reference or denotation is seemingly always (not just in the case of demonstrative noun phrases) accompanied by something similar to *demonstration* or *deixis*.<sup>54</sup> A simple sentence is constituted by a noun (or noun phrase) which picks out an object and a predicate (or verb phrase) which says something about the object named (*Mag.* 5. 16). So too Augustine is inclined to think that talking or thinking about something requires identifying or picking out something so as to attribute predicates to it (the notion has precedent, notably in Plato),<sup>55</sup> and that identifying or picking out a thing requires perceiving or quasi-perceiving it or *some imago* of it in thought or memory (e.g. *Trin.* 8. 6. 9; 12. 14. 23; *Gn. litt.* 12. 6. 15).<sup>56</sup> In each case, *something or other* must be *present* to the speaker (*Mag.* 12. 39; *Conf.* 10. 15. 23).

To denote something by means of the relevant kind of expression (e.g. purportedly singular referential expressions of the relevant kinds),<sup>57</sup> either the object itself must be present to the speaker

perceives *x* and *S* intended to refer to *x*. See D. Kaplan, 'Demonstratives: An Essay on the Semantics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Demonstratives and Other Indexicals', in J. Almog, J. Perry, and H. Wettstein (eds.), *Themes from Kaplan* (Oxford, 1989), 481–563.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. 'A name is that by which a god or a human receives its individual identification; when we say "that Jupiter", "this Apollo", "that Cato", "this Brutus"' (Diomedes, 1. 320. 15–16: *nomen est quo deus aut homo propria dumtaxat discriminatione enuntiatur, cum dicitur ille Iuppiter, hic Apollo, item Cato iste, hic Brutus*).

<sup>55</sup> Such a thought is often thought to be central to Plato's *Sophist*. For instance: 'the crucial move Plato makes... is to point out that to make a statement we have to do two things: (1) identify an item we mean to say something about, and (2) specify something we mean to say about it' (M. Frede, 'Plato's *Sophist* on False Statements', in R. Kraut (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge, 1992), 397–424, at 413–14; see also L. Brown, 'The *Sophist* on Statements, Predication, and Falsehood', in G. Fine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato* (Oxford, 2008), 437–62 at 452–3). One finds echoes of it in the Platonic tradition (e.g. Plutarch, *Quaest. Plat.* 1009 c–d), and it has also proven intuitive to at least some more recent philosophers, e.g. P. Strawson, 'On Referring', *Mind*, 59 (1950), 320–44.

<sup>56</sup> E.g. 'And when I want to speak of Carthage, I search within myself in order to speak of it and I find within myself an appearance of Carthage... So too, when I speak of Alexandria, which I have never seen... just as it could be described to me, I constructed an idea (*imago*) of it by means of the soul insofar as I was able' (*Trin.* 8. 6. 9). 'The other [kind of vision], by which absent corporeal things are considered, is not difficult to introduce. Even when placed in the dark, we can consider the sky and earth and those things which we can see in them; we are not seeing anything with the bodily eyes, but are gazing on *imagines* of corporeal things with the soul' (*Gn. litt.* 12. 6. 15). Cf. *Mus.* 6. 11. 32; *Conf.* 10. 8. 14, 14. 22–15. 23; *Trin.* 8. 4. 7, 6. 9; 11. 3. 6; 12. 14. 23; 13. 1–3.

<sup>57</sup> It is worth noting how frequently Augustine uses demonstrative noun phrases in responding to external world scepticism. Thus, for instance: 'I know that this

(as in perception or intellection of intelligible objects) or some *imago* of the object must be present to the speaker (as when we talk about corporeal things which we remember or imagine but cannot currently perceive). Augustine thinks that we look to or consult (consultere, *Mag.* 11. 38–12. 40; cf. *Trin.* 11. 3. 6; *Gn. litt.* 12. 6. 15) these items—the objects themselves or their *imagines*—in attempting to denote or refer. When the relevant corporeal item is not directly accessible to us, we contemplate some inner *imago* and use it to speak about those things in the world that we intend to speak about, and it is in virtue of these *imagines* that we succeed in denoting the relevant object.

When consulting *imagines* to denote something else, there is still something akin to *demonstration* or *ostension* going on, but it is akin to *deferred ostension* (as when, for instance, we point to a photograph to indicate the person who is depicted in that photograph). When there is nothing in the world that stands in the appropriate relation to the *imago* (e.g. nothing which satisfies its descriptive content), there is still something which we are gazing or contemplating within ourselves (i.e. the *imago*) and so that item (the *imago*) is what we denote and speak about.

Thus understood, we can see why (5) is not a purely ad hoc manoeuvre on Augustine's part, but rather a consequence of some deeper commitments concerning reference, object-directed thought, and intentionality. This semantic account is not entirely unproblematic (for instance, in a manner which would have proved utterly unsurprising to Russell, it faces challenges in accommodating negative existential claims or claims about fictional entities),<sup>58</sup>

world of ours is so arranged either by the nature of bodies or some providence' (scio mundum istum nostrum aut natura corporum aut aliqua providentia sic esse dispositum, *C. Acad.* 3. 10. 23); 'How do you know that this world exists if the senses make mistakes?' (unde, inquit, scis esse istum mundum, si sensus falluntur? *C. Acad.* 3. 11. 24); 'this whole, whatever it is' (hoc totum, quaecumque est, *C. Acad.* 3. 11. 24); 'Is this thing you see the world even if you're asleep?' (si dormis, mundus est iste quem vides? *C. Acad.* 3. 11. 25); 'Accordingly, I state that this whole mass of bodies and contraption in which we exist' (quam ob rem hoc dico, istam totam corporum molem atque machinam, in qua sumus, *C. Acad.* 3. 11. 25).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. B. Russell, 'On Denoting', *Mind*, 14 (1905), 479–93. Thus, for instance, it seems that without some modifications or additional stipulations, Augustine is committed to claims like 'the holy grail does not exist' typically being false (since typically speakers who utter such claims will have *imagines* of the holy grail and their *imagines*, which do exist, will be the items denoted). On Russell's view, any attempt to defend Augustine on this score, for instance, by claiming that the claims

but it is clearly far more satisfactory than the 'subjectivist' or 'solipsist' accounts. For instance, it offers intuitively plausible truth-conditions for more of our statements and does not lead to us being trapped in our own private worlds unless there really is no external world or we are entirely cognitively divorced from it.

On the account proposed, it seems that Augustine has a principled and well-grounded response to offer the sceptic as to why (WORLD-1) turns out to be true and knowable *even if the external world does not exist*. In a manner which is analogous to some modern semantic externalist responses to scepticism, it seems that Augustine ensures that 'the world' always denotes by appealing to 'the *preconditions for thinking about, representing, referring to, etc.*'<sup>59</sup> One might worry that Augustine does not thereby prove that the external world exists, but this was not his aim. Instead, Augustine was primarily concerned with disproving (NK) by insisting that—whatever else might be the case—'either the world is one or it is not one' is true. In this, it seems, he has some measure of success.<sup>60</sup>

#### 4. Mathematical knowledge and intelligible objects

After responding to external world scepticism, Augustine proceeds to argue against (NK) by claiming that he also has several other items of knowledge:

si autem unus et sex mundi sunt, septem mundos esse, quoquo modo affectus sim, manifestum est et id me scire non impudenter affirmo. . . . credo enim iam satis liquere, quae per somnum et dementia[m] falsa videantur, ea

*should* come out false because the relevant items 'have an existence in heraldry, or in literature, or in imagination' would be 'a most pitiful and paltry evasion' (B. Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (London, 1919), 169).

<sup>59</sup> H. Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge, 1981), 16. The details of Augustine's account of signification, reference, and other matters, such as precisely how Augustine's response compares to modern semantic externalist responses to scepticism, require their own detailed treatment.

<sup>60</sup> One might worry that while the speaker confronted with external world scepticism is in a position to know that 'the world' refers to something or other and that 'either the world is one or it is not one' is true, it does not seem that the speaker is in a position to know what 'the world' refers to (whether the external world or not) or, as a result, precisely what they have said. This is indeed the case (and may not prove especially attractive) but it does not, strictly speaking, threaten Augustine's case against (NK).

scilicet quae ad corporis sensus pertinent; nam ter terna novem esse et quadratum intellegibilium numerorum necesse est vel genere humano stertente sit verum. (*C. Acad.* 3. 11. 25)

Yet if there are one plus six worlds, whatever way I might be affected, it is [nonetheless] clear that there are seven worlds and it is not impudently that I affirm that I know this... I believe it is now clear enough which falsehoods seem to be the case because of sleep or madness: it is those which pertain to the bodily senses. For that nine is three times three and the square of rational numbers need be true, even if the human race were snoring.

The possibility that I am dreaming does *not*, Augustine here claims, act as a counter-possibility against knowing arithmetical claims because—in contrast to cases of ordinary perceptual appearances—even if I am dreaming, this does not make it likely that my belief in the relevant proposition is false (cf. *Imm. an.* 14. 23). Indeed, as Augustine points out elsewhere, even if the world were to go out of existence, the truth of the relevant claims would not be affected (*Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 21).<sup>61</sup> These remarks are followed by a brief interlude in which Augustine rehearses his earlier appeal to disjunctive claims (but this time appeals to disjunctions which pertain to ethics)<sup>62</sup> and reconsiders the epistemic value of the senses while imagining what an Epicurean or Cyrenaic might say in their defence (*C. Acad.* 3. 11. 26).<sup>63</sup>

Augustine's discussion of the senses and how a defender of the senses might respond to scepticism merit their own detailed discussion. However, here it may be noted that Augustine imagines the defender of the senses claiming that variations in appearances

<sup>61</sup> 'I do not know how long anything I touch with the bodily senses will last, for example when I sense the Earth or the sky or any physical objects in them. However, seven and three are ten not only at the moment, but always' (et quicquid sensu corporis tango, veluti est hoc caelum et haec terra et quaecumque in eis alia corpora sentio, quamdiu futura sint nescio. septem autem et tria decem sunt et non solum nunc sed etiam semper, *Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 21, trans. King).

<sup>62</sup> Thus, Augustine claims to know that man's highest good is in the mind or it is not (*C. Acad.* 3. 12. 27; cf. *Civ. Dei* 8. 8; *Cic. Acad.* 2. 129–33).

<sup>63</sup> The Epicureans seemingly claimed: that every appearance (*φαντασία*) is true (*ἀληθής*) (e.g. *S.E. M.* 7. 203–4; cf. *Plut. Adv. Col.* 1109 A–B); that perception (*αἴσθησις*) is always truthful or all percepts (*αἰσθητά*) are true (e.g. *S.E. M.* 8. 9; *Cic. Acad.* 2. 79); and that perceptions (*αἰσθήσεις*) were the criterion of (i.e. the appropriate means of discovering the) truth (e.g. *D.L.* 10. 31). The Cyrenaics seem to have thought that nothing external was apprehensible and that only our affections (*πάθη*, *S.E. M.* 7. 191, cf. *permotiones*, *Cic. Acad.* 2. 142) could be apprehended (*Cic. Acad.* 2. 76, *S.E. M.* 7. 191; cf. *Plut. Adv. Col.* 1120 C–1121 E).

can be accounted for by examining their causal histories,<sup>64</sup> and that one should refrain from taking oneself to know how things are in themselves (*per se*), but claim to know only how things appear to oneself (*C. Acad.* 3. 11. 26). Thus, Augustine thinks that the appropriate response to the sceptic on behalf of a defender of the senses is not to assent firmly to content of the form  $\langle x \text{ is } F \rangle$ , but instead to content like  $\langle x \text{ seems } F \text{ to me} \rangle$  or  $\langle \text{I am now being affected } F \text{-ly} \rangle$  (*C. Acad.* 3. 11. 26; *Sol.* 2. 3. 3).<sup>65</sup> Elsewhere, Augustine seems to propose a similar line of thought and claims that the senses are not capable of misreporting how they are presently affected (e.g. *Vera rel.* 34. 62),<sup>66</sup> and that it is the job of reason to form judgements concerning what the senses report.<sup>67</sup> The precise role of the senses and of reason here is not entirely clear, but if

<sup>64</sup> Augustine correctly thinks that an Epicurean would say that an oar in water *should* look bent by appealing to its causal history (nam causa accedente, quare ita videretur, *C. Acad.* 3. 11. 26; cf. S.E. *M.* 7. 203–10; Lucr. 4. 353–468; Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1121 A–B; D.L. 10. 31–2, 46–50). He also (justifiably) observes that it is not entirely clear how this helps save the truth of the appearances (*C. Acad.* 3. 11. 26; cf. *Sol.* 2. 6. 10).

<sup>65</sup> It is sometimes thought that Augustine is original in this regard and that Augustine himself endorses the view described (e.g. Burnyeat, 'Idealism', 23, Kirwan, *Augustine*, 28, O'Daly, *Philosophy of Mind*, 93). However, it is not clear that in the *Contra Academicos* Augustine does unqualifiedly endorse the defence he describes and taking Augustine to be original on this matter requires an idiosyncratic construal of evidence concerning Antiochus (e.g. Cic. *Acad.* 2. 19–21), Aenesidemus (S.E. *PH* 1. 87, 93, 112), the Cyrenaics, and the Epicureans (see above, n. 63). For discussion, see V. Tsouna, *The Epistemology of the Cyrenaic School* (Cambridge, 1998), G. Fine, 'Subjectivity, Ancient and Modern: The Cyrenaics, Sextus, and Descartes', in J. Miller and B. Inwood (eds.), *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2003), 192–231.

<sup>66</sup> While an early discussion of perceptual error is inconclusive (*Sol.* 2. 3. 3, 6. 9–7, 13, 9. 17), Augustine generally thinks that the eyes do not err, but simply report how they are affected (sed ne ipsi quidem oculi fallunt; non enim renuntiare possunt animo nisi affectionem suam, *Vera rel.* 34. 62; cf. *Gn. litt.* 12. 25. 52; *Ep.* 7. 2. 3). The outer senses act as messengers (cf. *Ep.* 147. 17. 41) and it is up to the soul to judge accordingly (*Vera rel.* 34. 62). Much depends here on precisely what it is that we grasp in perception, the content of perceptual appearances, and how one forms judgements on the basis of appearances (cf. Plot. *Enn.* 5. 3. 2. 1–9, 3. 1–9). For discussion of Augustine's view concerning the rational and non-rational aspects of perception, see C. Brittain, 'Non-Rational Perception in the Stoics and Augustine', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 22 (2002), 253–308, S. Byers, *Perception, Sensibility, and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (Cambridge, 2013).

<sup>67</sup> Judging the deliverances of the senses is the function of reason or some inner sense which is in turn governed by reason (*Lib. arb.* 2. 3. 8–6, 13; cf. *Civ. Dei* 11. 27. 2). For Augustine, rational souls are distinctive in their free judgement in assenting or not assenting to their impressions (*Gn. litt.* 9. 14. 25). Cf. *Quant. an.* 30. 58;



there is to be genuine *knowledge*, then reason must be involved in a significant way (*Lib. arb.* 2. 3. 9).<sup>68</sup>

Whether Augustine's remarks on the knowledge that may be gleaned from the senses constitute a correct or apt response to the sceptic is not entirely clear (and, as mentioned, the issue deserves a separate discussion).<sup>69</sup> However, whatever might be said of the senses, Augustine's defence of the possibility of knowledge in his *Contra Academicos* depends especially upon the sort of cognition yielded by reason alone independently of the senses.<sup>70</sup> Thus, Augustine quickly returns to his earlier line of argument and goes on to say:

ego vero plura quam de quavis parte philosophiae. nam primo illas omnes propositiones, quibus supra usus sum, veras esse ista me docuit. deinde per istam novi alia multa vera. . . . si quattuor in mundo elementa sunt, non sunt quinque; si sol unus est, non sunt duo. . . . haec et alia multa, quae commemorare longissimum est, per istam didici vera esse, quoquo modo se habeant sensus nostri, in se ipsa vera. (*C. Acad.* 3. 13. 29)

[I know] more [about dialectic] than about any other part of philosophy. In the first place, it taught me that all the propositions I employed before are true. Furthermore, through dialectic, I know many other truths. . . . [For instance,] if there are four elements in the world, then there are not five. If there is one Sun, then there are not two. . . . These, and many other claims, the recollecting of which would take too long, I learned were truths by means of this part of philosophy [i.e. dialectic]. Whatever state our senses might be in, these claims are true in themselves.

Augustine here claims that *dialectica* or 'dialectic'<sup>71</sup> has, in some sense, grounded the items of knowledge he has previously offered,

*B. vita* 2. 7; *Sol.* 2. 1. 1–3. 3; *Vera rel.* 33. 61–34. 63; 39. 73; *Gn. litt.* 12. 25. 52; *Civ. Dei* 11. 27. 2; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 7. 14. 20–3.

<sup>68</sup> See Nawar, 'Varieties of Understanding'.

<sup>69</sup> Regarding correctness, hypochondria and dreams seem to indicate that we *can* be mistaken even concerning what we currently experience (cf. Plato, *Phileb.* 36 E 5–10). As regards aptness, the examples Augustine produces might be counterexamples to (NK) and to the Academic claim that any perceptual appearance is such that an appearance which is intrinsically identical to it but which is false could exist (*Cic. Acad.* 2. 99). However, there doesn't seem to be much in the defence of the senses described above that a figure like Aenesidemus would disagree with (e.g. S.E. *PH* 1. 78; cf. *PH* 1. 87, 93, 215).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Quant. an.* 30. 58; *Sol.* 1. 3. 8–4. 9, 14. 24; *Ep.* 118. 3. 19–20; *Civ. Dei* 19. 18.

<sup>71</sup> Augustine recognizes the Stoics as masters of *dialectica* (e.g. *C. Cresc.* 1. 13. 16–14. 17, 19. 24; *Mag.* 5. 16) and his conception of it (mediated in part through Cicero, e.g. *Cic. Acad.* 1. 19; cf. *Acad.* 2. 91; *Leg.* 1. 62) owes much to them.

such as (WORLD-1), the various disjunctions and conditionals defended, and also his knowledge of certain arithmetical truths. Augustine seems to think the knowledge attained by *dialectica* is attained by reason alone, independently of the bodily senses,<sup>72</sup> and that the relevant claims are immune to the attacks of the sceptics either because the relevant claims are true in themselves or else because they are cognized through *dialectica* and are thus immune to the attacks of the sceptics which appeal to the fallibility of the bodily senses.<sup>73</sup>

One might think that Augustine is too quick here on several fronts. In particular, Christopher Kirwan ('Augustine against the Sceptics', *Augustine*), who offers the most detailed and careful examination of this aspect of Augustine's discussion, raises two worries: firstly, that Augustine fails to provide an account of the signs of truth of the relevant appearances and why the relevant appearances should be recognized as true; and secondly, that

*Dialectica* encompasses more than (what we would regard as) formal logic and Augustine characterizes *dialectica* as the science of arguing well (*scientia bene disputandi*, *Dial.* 1, cf. *Dial.* 5; *C. Cresc.* 1. 14. 17; cf. *disciplina disputandi*, *Sol.* 2. 11. 19) but also as the art responsible for: the discerning of truth and falsehood (*Dial.* 8; *C. Cresc.* 1. 15. 19); definitions (*Sol.* 2. 11. 19–21); and the explanation of truth (*Dial.* 7; cf. *Cic. Acad.* 1. 19; 2. 91–2, 114, 142–6). It is fundamental in that it grounds all disciplines and in that any science or item of certain knowledge requires it (*Sol.* 2. 11. 21, 13. 24, 15. 27, 18. 32; *Ord.* 2. 13. 38, 18. 47; cf. Plato, *Phileb.* 57 E 6–7; *Cic. Top.* 13. 54; *Plot. Enn.* 1. 3. 4–6).

<sup>72</sup> E.g. *Civ. Dei* 8. 7; cf. *C. Acad.* 3. 11. 25, 13. 29; *Cic. Acad.* 1. 30–3; 2. 91; [*Apul.*] *Peri Hermeneias* 1.

<sup>73</sup> Augustine wonders whether (some of) the Academics might have been Platonists in disguise (*C. Acad.* 3. 17. 37–18. 41; cf. 2. 10. 24; *Ep.* 1. 3; 118. 3. 16) and considers whether the true purpose of the Academy's sceptical arguments was to lay the groundwork for Platonism by undermining confidence in perception (*C. Acad.* 3. 9. 20; cf. *Conf.* 5. 10. 19) and stimulating the use of one's own *ratio* (cf. *Cic. Acad.* 2. 60). Augustine seems to have reached such a view more or less on his own (cf. C. Brittain, *Philo of Larissa: The Last of the Academic Sceptics* (Oxford, 2001), 245–7), but he was not alone in voicing such thoughts about the sceptical Academy (Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* 14. 6. 6; S.E. *PH* 1. 234). The Academics *did* aim to prevent the influence of mere *auctoritas* on their students and emphasized that one must follow *ratio* (*Cic. Acad.* 2. 60, 63; *Nat. Deo* 1. 10; cf. Striker, 'Strategies', 60). However, the notion that they were Platonists in disguise seems a fanciful reading of the evidence (cf. S. Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge, 1998), 139 ff., 186), and it is hard to see how the relevant Academics might accommodate Platonistic views (with regard to Carneades, consider for instance his arguments against the reliability not only of the senses, but also of reason, e.g. S.E. *M.* 7. 159; *PH* 1. 100). Augustine does not clearly endorse this view about the hidden designs of the sceptical Academy (e.g. *C. Acad.* 3. 20. 43), and in later works it is not clear that he holds it (e.g. *Civ. Dei* 19. 1. 3).

Augustine has committed some sort of scope fallacy in his knowledge claims in this area. Due to these two concerns—and what he takes to be Augustine’s failure to answer them—Kirwan judges that Augustine’s defence of knowledge should ultimately be regarded as a failure.<sup>74</sup>

The first objection is put neatly by Kirwan:

it is a defensible view that none of them [the class of true appearances] can be taken for false — that is, disbelieved — or even doubted; they compel assent. What he needs, then, is a reason for treating indubitability, or unrejectability, as a sign of truth. But unlike Descartes, Augustine offers us no such reason; so the game goes to the Academics. (Kirwan, *Augustine*, 29)

That is to say, even if we suppose that certain thoughts or appearances (including, for instance, the thought or appearance that three threes are nine) have a certain ‘mark’ (e.g. being regarded as clear or evident) or are impossible to doubt, Augustine—the objection runs—fails to provide us with an account of why only true appearances (i.e. thoughts or appearances the content of which is true) should have this feature.

<sup>74</sup> There is another worry here which Augustine does not squarely face. Augustine notes that the sceptic may appeal to a number of so-called ‘weapons’ (arma) to support their cause (*C. Acad.* 2. 1. 1) and, amongst the sceptics’ weaponry, Augustine takes note of the Liar and the Sorites (*C. Acad.* 2. 5. 11). The Academics appealed to *insolubilia* like the Liar to challenge unrestricted bivalence or the universal validity of *modus ponens* (cf. *Cic. Acad.* 2. 95–6). If the claims Augustine has put forward above, such as (WORLD-1), are true in virtue of their logical form, then it is troubling that there are untruths (or non-truths) of the same form. Unlike e.g. Chrysippus (*Cic. Fat.* 21), Augustine has little to say about how such ‘Greek chicanery’ (*ars Pelasga*) is to be dealt with (*C. Acad.* 3. 13. 29–14. 30; cf. *Doc. Chr.* 2. 31. 48–32. 50). Augustine’s remarks on the matter might amount to mere bluster and one may criticize him for not addressing this worry appropriately, but two points deserve attention. Firstly, as noted above, *dialectica* encompasses more than *formal* logic and, as I have suggested above, even if *dialectica* grounds Augustine’s knowledge of claims like (WORLD-1), such disjunctive claims need not be (and probably are best not) viewed as truths which are true in virtue of their *logical form*. Secondly, whether or not (WORLD-1) is viewed as being true in virtue of its logical form, the sceptic needs to give some reason to think that the relevant *insolubilia* pose a problem for the claims Augustine has offered. For instance, how does the Liar or the Sorites undermine the knowledge claim that Tibbles either is or is not a cat or that the world either is one or it is not one? Unless the sceptic succeeds in making this salient (e.g. by showing that ‘cat’ presents the same problems as ‘heap’), then it is not clear that Augustine needs to offer a full-blooded defence of formal logic to defend the knowledge claims he offers. Thanks to Nick Denyer for discussion of issues relevant to this point.

The second objection that Kirwan raises is that Augustine commits some sort of scope fallacy in his defence of knowledge. Kirwan's objection is not entirely clear.<sup>75</sup> However, there is, I believe, a significant worry in the vicinity. To see its nature, consider again my belief that three threes make nine. The content of this belief is a *necessary* truth (as Augustine himself often emphasizes).<sup>76</sup> In contrast to the claim that I am writing these words, it is not possible for the claim that three threes make nine to be false, and so long as I believe that claim, Augustine affirms, I cannot go wrong regardless of whether I am dreaming or otherwise adversely affected (*C. Acad.* 3. 11. 25, 13. 29). The worry here is that one might construe Augustine's thinking to be limited to the following: from the fact that it is not possible that not- $p$  (i.e.  $p$  is some necessary truth), it follows that it is not possible (regardless of what state I might be in, whether dreaming, etc.) to be mistaken in thinking that  $p$ . Put unambiguously:  $\neg\Diamond\neg p \vdash \neg\Diamond(Bp \wedge \neg p)$ .

Now, *if* that is indeed the limit of Augustine's thought on the matter, then there is indeed a problem, for it secures infallible knowledge only on the cheap or conflates the modality of a proposition with the (in)fallibility of the means by which one forms judgements about it. What Augustine needs to show is *not* that his accepting that  $p$  or his appearance that  $p$  is such that some particular proposition  $p$  could not be false, for that will be trivially satisfied by assenting to any necessary truth (even if one merely assents to a necessary truth as a result of a guess). Instead, in order to show that there is infallible knowledge that (e.g.) three times three makes nine, Augustine must show not just that a person cannot possibly think <three times three makes nine> and be in error, but that one could not have formed a false belief or judgement *concerning whether three times three makes nine* or at least not when using the relevant method (cf. *Sol.* 1. 3. 8). Put unambiguously, what is needed is an account of why, for some field (e.g. arithmetic) or some method

<sup>75</sup> 'Augustine has begun unpropitiously by looking for propositions having no sign in common with any falsehood, or even for propositions not provably capable of falsehood. I take him to be correcting these lapses when he substitutes the condition "unconfusable with any falsehood"; but the condition is still weaker than Zeno's. By a scope fallacy he then tacitly infers that what satisfies the condition will be incapable of being taken for false' (Kirwan, *Augustine*, 29).

<sup>76</sup> E.g. *Imm. an.* 2. 2; *Mus.* 6. 12. 35; *Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 21; *Doc. Chr.* 2. 38. 56.

(e.g. the use of pure reason), someone could not arrive at a false judgement in that field or using that method.

While it is true that Augustine does not make his thinking concerning the epistemic security of arithmetical knowledge explicit in the *Contra Academicos*, it is not true that Augustine has no account to give. In fact, Augustine has a significant amount to say on the matter, and we find that in other works, his thought on the cognition of intelligible items is guided by concerns and views about object-directed thought which are closely related to those already examined above (see Section 3). More concretely, it turns out that Augustine thinks that the epistemic security of our cognition of intelligible items (such as mathematical objects) is grounded in large part on the fact that various possible sources of misrepresentation present in ordinary perceptual cognition are absent and that in cognizing intelligible items we need not rely on intermediaries, such as *imagines*, because the relevant intelligible items are always themselves *immediately present* and *directly cognitively accessible to us*.

Thus, for instance, in his *Soliloquia*, Augustine discusses mathematical knowledge as a kind of paradigm epistemic achievement which owes its epistemic security to its independence from the senses (*Sol.* 1. 3. 8–5. 11). Similarly, in *De Magistro*, after discussing the shortcomings of cognition attained by the bodily senses wherein we often do not have immediate and direct perceptual access to the relevant objects (*Mag.* 12. 39), Augustine emphasizes that when the mind cognizes intelligible items, it does so in such a way that these objects are *directly accessible and present* to the mind:

cum vero de his agitur, quae mente conspicimus, id est intellectu atque ratione, ea quidem loquimur, quae praesentia contuemur in illa interiore luce veritatis, qua ipse, qui dicitur homo interior, illustratur et fruitur. (*Mag.* 12. 40)

When we consider those things observed by the mind, that is to say by intellect and reason, we are speaking of present things we contemplate in the inner light of truth, by which the so-called inner man is illuminated and rejoices.

We may thus always contemplate and think about intelligible objects of the relevant kind *directly* without having to rely upon remembered *imagines* which, even if accurate when formed, are like old photographs of long-lost relatives and may no longer

accurately represent their objects due to a change in the object or a change in the *imago*. While Augustine says little more about the matter in *De Magistro*, this is a consistent thread in his thinking which he expands and develops in other works. Thus, in *De libero arbitrio* (written shortly later), Augustine offers additional remarks as to how our cognition of intelligible objects, such as numbers, is superior to that of sensible objects:

hoc ergo quod per omnes numeros esse immobile firmum incorruptumque conspicimus, unde conspicimus? non enim ullus ullo sensu corporis omnes numeros attingit, innumerabiles enim sunt. unde ergo novimus per omnes hoc esse, aut qua phantasia vel phantasmate tam certa veritas numeri per innumerabilia tam fidenter nisi in luce interiore conspicitur, quam corporalis sensus ignorat? his et talibus multis documentis coguntur fateri, quibus disputantibus deus donavit ingenium et pertinacia caliginem non obducit, rationem veritatemque numerorum et ad sensus corporis non pertinere et invertibilem sinceramque consistere et omnibus ratiocinantibus ad videndum esse communem. (*Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 23–4)

How do we see what we see to be unalterable, firm and uncorrupted for all numbers? We do not make contact with all the numbers through any bodily sense; they are innumerable. How then do we know that this holds for all numbers? By what appearance or imagined construct can such certain truth about numbers be seen so confidently (unless it is in an inner light which the bodily senses ignore)? Those inquirers to whom God has granted the ability and who are not blinded by stubbornness are compelled by these and many such examples to admit that the intelligible structure and truth of numbers does not pertain to the bodily senses. It remains pure and unchangeable, and is seen in common by all who reason. (trans. King, slightly modified)

As Augustine here emphasizes, there is a puzzle concerning how it is that we grasp things such as arithmetical truths because in cognizing numbers we do not rely upon appearances or imagined constructs in the manner that we frequently do elsewhere.<sup>77</sup> However, while it is well known that Augustine often takes reason to be akin to sight and God to be like the sun which illuminates those things we see (e.g. *Sol.* 1. 1. 3, 6, 12, 8. 15),<sup>78</sup> a satisfactory account of

<sup>77</sup> Augustine's rhetorical question in the passage expects the answer that we do not employ *phantasiae* or *phantasmata* (cf. *Sol.* 1. 4. 9; *Gn. litt.* 12. 6. 15).

<sup>78</sup> Augustine's remarks on such matters proved remarkably influential and gave rise to a so-called 'Augustinian' tradition of thought. However, the tradition seems to have been united not by especially determinate philosophical views but primarily

Augustine's thought on the epistemic issues has not yet been given.<sup>79</sup> What requires explaining is precisely *why* cognition of the relevant sort should be deemed especially secure and otherwise epistemically privileged.<sup>80</sup>

We have seen how Augustine thinks that in order to talk or think about a thing, *something* (either the thing itself or some *imago* of it) must be present to the speaker (see Section 3) and that we succeed in referring, denoting, talking about, or thinking about the relevant items by perceiving the items themselves or consulting *imagines* which stand in an appropriate relation to the relevant items. According to Augustine, our cognition of intelligible items, such as mathematical objects, is epistemically privileged because of the nature of object-directed thought when the object of thought is an intelligible item which is always directly accessible to the mind and because the sources of uncertainty and possible error which the sceptic uses to cast doubt upon the deliverances of the bodily senses are absent. It is by understanding properly these aspects of Augustine's thought that we may better appreciate why Augustine takes our knowledge of certain arithmetical truths to have a

by preference for certain analogies and metaphors. See S. P. Marrone, *The Light of Thy Countenance: Science and Knowledge of God in the Thirteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 2001).

<sup>79</sup> Existing treatments typically focus on what God is responsible for in human cognition and touch on the epistemic matters I here focus on only obliquely if at all (for an overview of past treatments, see E. TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (London, 1970), 103–7). As regards God's role in cognition, matters are not entirely clear, but Augustine appeals to so-called 'divine illumination' to explain: (a) how we attain understanding of the metaphorical meanings of scripture (e.g. *En. Ps.* 118. 18. 4); (b) how it is that we have certain *notiones* or contemplate certain *ideae* or intelligible items (e.g. *Div. qu.* 46; *Trin.* 12. 15. 24; *Civ. Dei* 11. 27. 2); (c) the objective nature of truth (e.g. *Conf.* 12. 25. 35, *Lib. arb.* 2. 12. 33, 2. 19) or, perhaps, what grounds the truth of propositions (e.g. *B. vita* 4. 35); (d) how we cognize certain truths (e.g. *Div. qu.* 46; *Sol.* 1. 8. 15; *Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 21); (e) our access to a standard or *kanōn* by means of which we make apt judgements (*Trin.* 15. 27. 50; cf. É. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (London, 1961), 87–90); and (f) our dependence on God in cognition; the nature of this dependence is underdetermined, but without God's illumination we would not be able to apprehend anything intellectually (e.g. *Sol.* 1. 8. 15; *En. Ps.* 118. 18. 3–4; *Civ. Dei* 10. 2; *Gn. litt.* 12. 31. 59; *Ep.* 120. 2. 10). In what follows, I focus primarily upon the epistemic issues.

<sup>80</sup> Perhaps the clearest treatments of Augustine's account of intellectual cognition are offered by G. O'Daly, *Philosophy of Mind*, and his 'The Response to Skepticism and Mechanisms of Cognition', in E. Stump and N. Kretzmann (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge, 2001), 159–70; King, 'Knowledge'. However, these do not explain *why* the cognition of intelligible objects is especially secure and immune to the attacks of the sceptics.

privileged epistemic status. Several elements of this account deserve special attention.

Firstly, Augustine thinks that when the mind cognizes certain intelligible items, such as mathematical objects, it does so with a special unmediated directness as if consulting something *present* to itself (e.g. *Mag.* 12. 40; *Trin.* 8. 6. 9; *Gn. litt.* 12. 6. 15).<sup>81</sup> The precise nature of this presence or unmediated directness is something which Augustine is puzzled by (e.g. *Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 20, 11. 30) and sometimes he is tempted to make sense of this unmediated directness by appealing to Platonic thoughts about recollection or reminiscence (e.g. *Imm. an.* 4. 6),<sup>82</sup> or to Plotinian views according to which the mind does not contain representations of intelligible objects but the intelligible objects *themselves*.<sup>83</sup> The Plotinian line of thought is difficult to understand satisfactorily,<sup>84</sup> and in his mature works, Augustine does not ultimately endorse it (e.g. *Trin.* 12. 15. 24; *Retr.* 1. 8. 2) but instead favours the view that the mind is simply connected in some special, direct way to intelligible objects because of their kinship.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Thus, for instance, in discussing how one thinks of justice (which is an incorporeal entity, cf. *Quant. an.* 4. 5) in *De trinitate*, Augustine contrasts this with how we think about corporeal things like Carthage (which he has seen) or Alexandria (which he has merely imagined): 'I do not conceive of some absent thing, like Carthage, or make up something insofar as I am able, as is the case with Alexandria, whether it is in fact this way or not. Instead, I discern something present and I discern it within me, even if I am not myself what I discern' (non aliquam rem absentem cogito sicut Carthaginem aut fingo ut possum sicut Alexandriam, sive ita sit sive non ita; sed praesens quiddam cerno et cerno apud me etsi non sum ipse quod cerno, *Trin.* 8. 6. 9).

<sup>82</sup> For a clear discussion, see King, 'Knowledge', 147–52.

<sup>83</sup> E.g. *Conf.* 10. 8. 15–9. 16; cf. *Imm. an.* 6. 10, 10. 17; *Util. cred.* 13. 28; cf. Plot. *Enn.* 5. 3. 3. 18–19; 5. 3. 5. 21–6; 5. 5. 1. 19–23; 5. 5. 2. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Plotinus seems to think that in intellectual apprehension, the relevant intellectual powers (and their manifestations) are identical with their objects and thus the intelligible objects are themselves in the mind (e.g. Plot. *Enn.* 5. 5. 1; 5. 3. 5. 5. 8. 4–5; cf. 5. 5. 1. 56–8; 5. 3. 5. 23–6; 5. 5. 2. 1–20). Plotinus seemingly takes the fact that apprehensions are identical with their objects to rule out the possibility of error because (seemingly) with no representation comes no possibility of misrepresentation.

<sup>85</sup> Augustine briefly discusses the nature and location of the relevant intelligible objects on numerous occasions (e.g. *Imm. an.* 15. 24; *Quant. an.* 13. 22–14. 24; *Mag.* 12. 40; *Sol.* 1. 6. 12–13; 2. 4. 6; *Div. qu.* 46. 2; *Ord.* 2. 3. 10; *Lib. arb.* 2. 12. 33; 3. 5. 13; *Gn. litt.* 12. 6. 15), but his most detailed remarks are arguably those offered in *De libero arbitrio*, the *Confessiones* and *De trinitate*. In the course of investigating how we apprehend numbers in *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine speaks of *notiones* of happiness or wisdom being stamped in our minds (*Lib. arb.* 2. 9. 26). He does not make clear whether intelligible numbers are themselves in our minds or not (indeed,



Independently of the 'location' of the relevant intelligible objects, Augustine takes the immediate presence of such items to grant epistemic security in two principal ways. On the one hand, there is no need for intermediary representations or relying upon memory (as there is when consulting the relevant *imagines* in *memoria*) and just as a painter who aims for accuracy is better served by having their object in front of them, so too a thinker is better served by having their object present to them instead of relying upon a remembered *imago*. On the other hand, there is no medium between the object itself and the agent who apprehends it. In cases of ordinary perception, the perceptible object informs the relevant sense organ by producing its form (*forma*) or likeness (*similitudo*) in the sense organ in the manner of a seal leaving an impression upon wax; this likeness is then somehow committed to memory (e.g. *Trin.* 11. 2. 3 ff.; *Civ. Dei* 11. 27. 2; *Ep.* 147. 16. 38). However, as Augustine notices in the *Contra Academicos* (3. 11. 26), in bodily perception the medium may corrupt the likeness impressed upon the sense organ (as happens in the case of a stick appearing bent in water, cf. *Vera rel.* 34. 62). In contrast, in the case of intelligible items, there can be no misrepresentation of the object due to the medium because, quite simply, there is no intervening medium.<sup>86</sup>

Secondly, Augustine affords privileged epistemic status to the cognition of intelligible objects because of the nature of these objects and how they are apprehended. He frequently emphasizes that corporeal items are such that they are unstable, corruptible (i.e. they are changeable and often change simply as a result of being perceived), and typically only partially perceivable insofar as at any point in time we typically only perceive some part of the

he seems cagey on the matter), but in stressing how truth is common to all even if the relevant items seem to be present to the mind, he repeatedly falls short of saying that they are in the mind (e.g. *Lib. arb.* 2. 10. 28–11. 30) and stresses that such items and the truths about them should not be called 'mine' or 'yours' (e.g. *Lib. arb.* 2. 12. 33) and that the items and relevant truths are above our minds (*Lib. arb.* 2. 12. 34–13. 35). In *Conf.* 10. 8. 15–9. 16, Augustine stresses that we do not have *imagines* or *notiones* of the objects of the *disciplinae liberales* and suggests that the objects themselves (*res ipsae*), such as numbers, are present in *memoria* (*Conf.* 10. 12. 19; cf. *Ep.* 7. 2. 4). There are, perhaps, some contrary hints (*Conf.* 10. 17. 26) even within the *Confessiones* (although, as was pointed out by an anonymous reader, this may have to do with the distinct natures of the various liberal arts). In *De trinitate*, the view that the intelligible objects themselves are in the mind or memory is rejected (*Trin.* 12. 14. 23–15. 24).

<sup>86</sup> E.g. *Imm. an.* 6. 10, 15, 24; *Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 20–2; *Trin.* 8. 6. 9; *Gn. litt.* 12. 6. 15.

object and not the whole of it.<sup>87</sup> Thus, for instance, Augustine emphasizes that the objects of smell and taste are such that when perceived they are corrupted and become part of the subject, and also that two distinct subjects cannot perceive the same part of the same thing (*Lib. arb.* 2. 7. 17, 19). Equally, the objects of the other senses are such that at any point in time we only perceive a part of the object and not the whole for we can only see a *part* of an object, or hear a particular temporal slice of a sound.<sup>88</sup>

Intelligible objects, such as numbers, and the grasp we are afforded of them differ significantly from corporeal objects and the grasp we are afforded of them in the relevant respects. Intelligible objects are supremely stable, incorruptible, universally accessible, and comprehensively graspable (we are not limited to grasping only *some* features of them at any given time), and they are not altered through being perceived (*Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 20–1; *Div. qu.* 32). Furthermore, Augustine often emphasizes that all humans—in virtue of having reason—may always directly access these objects and the truths about them (e.g. *Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 20, 24; 2. 12. 33). This affords our cognition of such intelligible objects a privileged epistemic status.

Thirdly, the proper means by which we cognize the truths of mathematics and certain other truths concerning intelligible items, i.e. intellectual vision (*visio intellectualis*) or the gaze of the mind (*obtusus mentis, visus mentis, visio mentis*), is such that it is infallible.<sup>89</sup> As Augustine puts it:

*intellectualis autem visio non fallitur . . . , sed adhibetur intellectus, quaerens quid illa significant vel utile doceant, et aut inveniens ad fructum suum*

<sup>87</sup> E.g. *Ep.* 2; *Quant. an.* 32. 67–8; *Lib. arb.* 2. 7. 17–18, 12. 33; cf. *Ep.* 147. 9. 21.

<sup>88</sup> The objects of vision and hearing are such that two different subjects can both simultaneously hear the same word or see the same thing and so the objects of vision and hearing are 'more common to us, since they are not changed and converted into our own private property' (*magis nobis esse communia, quia in nostrum proprium et quasi privatum non vertuntur atque mutantur, Lib. arb.* 2. 7. 19). However, when we see we still only cognize a part of the object and we do not hear the sounds all at once; we must hear one syllable first and then another (*Quant. an.* 32. 68; *Lib. arb.* 2. 14. 38; cf. *Mus.* 6. 8. 21; *Conf.* 4. 11. 17; 11. 15. 20, 26. 33).

<sup>89</sup> The crucial thing to appreciate is that Augustine is thinking of some kind of cognitive faculty of the rational part of the soul—which he speaks of variously as the intellect (*intellectus*), mind (*mens*), and reason (*ratio*)—and that he often associates it with pure reason (*C. Acad.* 1. 2. 5; *Mag.* 12. 40; *Sol.* 1. 6. 12; *Quant. an.* 14. 24; *Div. qu.* 46. 2; *Gn. litt.* 12. 7. 16, 18; *Trin.* 9. 7. 12; 11. 1. 1; 14. 7. 10; *Ep.* 147. 1. 3–4, 4. 10, 9. 21–2; *Retr.* 1. 8. 2).

pervenit aut non inveniens in disceptatione se tenet, ne aliqua pernicioosa temeritate prolabatur in exitiabilem errorem. (*Gn. litt.* 12. 14. 29)

But intellectual vision does not make mistakes. . . . However [in contrast with corporeal vision], when the intellect is employed, it seeks out what those things signify or whether they reveal something useful and either it makes a discovery, [thus] attaining its object, or it does not make a discovery, holding itself back in judgement.

Thus, when using so-called ‘intellectual vision’, the mind grasps its objects accurately or not at all (cf. Plot. *Enn.* 1. 1. 9. 12–13; 5. 8. 4. 4–6).<sup>90</sup> Given that Augustine seems to think that forming judgements about a thing requires *identifying it* and *picking it out* or *grasping* or *gazing upon it* in thought (see Section 3), this indicates that—if we are using intellectual vision—then either we successfully grasp or alight upon the intelligible object and represent it accurately, or else we fail to grasp the intelligible and do not represent it *at all*. On this kind of view, failure does not result in errors of misrepresentation or mistakenly judging one’s objects; instead, failure results in not grasping one’s object and not forming any judgements.

Despite its pedigree (cf. Arist. *Metaph. Θ.* 10, 1051<sup>b</sup>17–1052<sup>a</sup>4; Philo, *De ebrietate* 157–8), such an account of the privileged epistemic status of intellection might seem mysterious. One might appeal to analogies to elucidate the account or render it plausible—for instance, a digital calculator either gives the right answer, or it does not give any answer; in no case does it yield a mistaken answer—but, simply put, for Augustine matters are as follows. In grasping intelligible items, intellectual vision is akin to a perceptive faculty like sight (*Quant. an.* 27. 53) or touch (*Imm. an.* 6. 10). However, it does not suffer from the shortcomings and sources of possible error that ordinary perception does. In perceiving corporeal objects or remembering corporeal objects we may misrepresent the objects in various ways despite having *some grasp* of them and, for the reasons discussed above (e.g. misrepresentations due to the

<sup>90</sup> Cf. ‘The intellect either touches [something] or it does not and so is infallible’ (ὁ δὲ νοῦς ἢ ἐφήψατο ἢ οὐ, ὥστε ἀναμάρτητος, Plot. *Enn.* 1. 1. 9. 12–13, trans. Armstrong, with modifications). ‘For all things there are transparent, and there is nothing dark or opaque; everything and all things are clear to the inmost part to everything; for light is transparent to light’ (διαφανῆ γὰρ πάντα καὶ σκοτεινὸν οὐδὲ ἀντίτυπον οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ πᾶς παντὶ φανερός εἰς τὸ εἶσω καὶ πάντα· φῶς γὰρ φωσί, Plot. *Enn.* 5. 8. 4. 4–6, trans. Armstrong).

medium, alterability of the object or *imago*), even when conditions are optimal, there is no guarantee that the objects are *in themselves* (per se) the way they seem to be (*C. Acad.* 3. 11. 26).

However, in cognizing intelligible objects by using intellectual vision, these possible sources of error and misrepresentation are absent. While our grasp of the relevant objects may not always be complete (cf. *Mag.* 11. 38–12. 40; *Gn. litt.* 12. 6. 15), when using intellectual vision we either grasp the intelligible object and thereby form accurate judgements (*Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 22), or we do not grasp the intelligible object and thereby do not form any judgements concerning that object. There is no room here for mistakes about the relevant object (*Gn. litt.* 12. 14. 29; *Retr.* 1. 8. 2; cf. *Trin.* 14. 6. 8). Accordingly, in using pure reason, Augustine thinks that we are guaranteed—due to the nature of the intelligible objects cognized, the faculty which cognizes them, and the mechanism by which the objects are cognized—not to make certain kinds of mistakes.

We may, of course, utter arithmetical falsehoods (e.g. by uttering ‘two plus three makes seven’) and Augustine is *not* committed to the claim that no one has ever made any mistakes in arithmetic. While intellectual vision is unerring, he leaves open the possibility that we can make mistaken judgements about mathematical claims by *not using* intellectual vision to apprehend the relevant intelligible items directly. Thus, for instance, Augustine would say that we may make mistakes in mathematics by (e.g.) relying upon *memory* (which he thinks we rely on whenever things take place over time, *Gn. litt.* 7. 18. 24), which is fallible. Moreover, even if what intellectual vision delivers is correct, we may misremember some step(s) in a complex argument or calculation and thereby form a mistaken judgement (cf. *Sol.* 1. 1. 1; *C. Acad.* 2. 9. 22), or we may go wrong by solving a geometrical problem by picturing the relevant shapes or numbers and thus relying upon imagination (which is a poor guide to intelligible items) rather than intellectual vision.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Augustine criticizes those who rely upon diagrams or *imagines* in mathematics (e.g. *Quant. an.* 13. 22–15. 25; cf. *Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 21; *Sol.* 2. 20. 34–5; cf. *Ep.* 7. 2. 4–5; *Civ. Dei* 11. 29; cf. *Gn. litt.* 12. 6. 15). He thinks that in relying upon *imagines* to think about intelligible items, there is a tendency to take the relevant intelligible items denoted by the *imagines* to be corporeal (cf. n. 37 above) and thus to get their nature so wrong that it seems we are no longer speaking about even the relevant intelligible items at all but merely about the *imagines*. Thus, for instance, in *De Genesi ad litteram*, Augustine says: ‘You see, a man or a tree or the sun, or any other body (whether celestial or terrestrial), can be seen when present in their forms, and

Such attempts to safeguard the infallibility of intellectual vision and explain away errors that might otherwise be attributed to intellectual vision might not seem especially fruitful. After all, it does seem that some of us are more than capable of making errors in very simple sums without the intervention of either memory or imagination. Moreover, even if one were to accept the attempt to safeguard the infallibility of intellectual vision in the manner described above, one might worry that Augustine would, at best, have explained why a certain method or faculty (the use of pure reason or 'intellectual vision') is such that it does not allow of mistakes while still allowing for mistakes in arithmetical judgements.

That is to say, *even if* one accepts that intellectual vision is unerring, one might still make mistakes about arithmetic by using some other method and Augustine would need to provide a guarantee that one had used the epistemically secure method, i.e. intellectual vision or pure reason (as opposed to some other method, such as imagination), in forming judgements about arithmetical matters. All that can be said on this score is that the simple arithmetical truths Augustine appeals to are such that there is no disagreement about them (cf. Galen, *Lib. prop.* 19. 39. 17–41. 12) and that Augustine thinks that the deliverances of pure reason possess a special clarity and evidentness which other faculties lack (cf. *Mag.*

reflected upon when absent by means of the images impressed upon the soul... But is love really seen one way in its appearance [species] when present, and another way in some image [imago] that is like it when it is absent? No, of course not. Instead, insofar as it can be discerned by the mind (more by one person, less by another), it is *itself* discerned. If some sort of bodily image is being reflected upon, then it is not itself discerned' (nam homo vel arbor vel sol et quaecumque alia corpora, sive caelestia sive terrestria, et praesentia videntur in suis formis et absentia cogitantur imaginibus animo impressis... dilectio autem numquid aliter videtur praesens in specie, qua est, et aliter absens in aliqua imagine sui simili? non utique. sed quantum mente cerni potest, ab alio magis, ab alio minus ipsa cernitur; si autem aliquid corporalis imaginis cogitatur, non ipsa cernitur, *Gn. litt.* 12. 6. 15). As we have seen in Section 3, for an *imago* to represent or denote *A*, there needs to be an appropriate relation between the *imago* and *A*. If the *imago* fundamentally misrepresents *A*, then this appropriate relation can fail to hold. To be clear, this is not to say that any speaker making a false arithmetical statement is thereby not talking or thinking about numbers. However, when someone (sincerely) says something like 'two plus three makes seven', this is a bit like saying 'this married man is a bachelor', 'green ideas sleep furiously', or 'love weighs four kilograms'. The semantic deficiencies of the utterance suggest that the speaker had not succeeded in picking out what the subject-term would usually denote or that the speaker had meant something other than what is traditionally meant by the use of such terms.

12. 40; *Lib. arb.* 2. 10. 28).<sup>92</sup> The clarity of such judgements is such that one should not doubt them (e.g. *Ep.* 147. 1. 4) and in such cases, one apprehends intelligible items directly and simply sees how things are (*Lib. arb.* 2. 12. 34).

The account just described is likely to leave the sceptic unmoved and others may find it to be, at best, a 'likely story' or 'plausible myth' (εἰκῶς μῦθος). I leave it to the reader to cast judgement at their leisure. However, I would emphasize three points. Firstly, such an account is not the result of some scope fallacy and seems to possess a significant measure of internal coherence. Secondly, whether or not such an account might ultimately be judged successful, it is neither fair nor accurate to say, as Kirwan does, that Augustine simply has nothing to say on these matters. Thirdly, whatever the problems such an account faces, appreciating these aspects of Augustine's thought gives us a much better understanding of *why* Augustine thinks that mathematical knowledge is especially epistemically secure and helps shed light on a historically influential account of cognition.

## 5. Conclusion

On Augustine's view, the lessons to be drawn from the arguments of the sceptical Academy are a certain sort of epistemic humility, an awareness of the epistemic limitations of much of what passes for knowledge, and the failings of those who place too much trust in the bodily senses and take ordinary perceptual knowledge to be the highest form of cognition.<sup>93</sup> Neither the bodily senses nor the

<sup>92</sup> E.g. *Sol.* 1. 5. 11–8. 15; *Quant. an.* 7. 12; *Ep.* 147. 1. 4, 6, 17. 42; cf. Plot. *Enn.* 5. 5. 1. 6–11. Not everyone is equally sensitive to this clarity (cf. *Mag.* 11. 38) and it can be obscured by sin (*Quant. an.* 33. 75; *Civ. Dei* 11. 2; *Ep. Jo.* 8. 6; *Duab. an.* 6; cf. *Civ. Dei* 22. 24), but it is nonetheless there (*Lib. arb.* 2. 8. 20–1, 9. 27, 12. 33–4). Like Descartes, Augustine seems to think that the beneficence of God is what ultimately guarantees that those who use reason in the right spirit will arrive at the truth (*Quant. an.* 15. 25).

<sup>93</sup> E.g. *Div. qu.* 9; *Util. cred.* 1. 1; *Conf.* 10. 6. 9 ff.; *Ep.* 118. 3. 19–20; *Civ. Dei* 8. 7; cf. Plot. 6. 1. 28. 3–8. In the *Contra Academicos*, Augustine largely concedes the field to the sceptic's attacks on the senses and perceptual knowledge (e.g. *C. Acad.* 1. 1. 3; 2. 3. 9; 3. 6. 13; cf. *Sol.* 1. 3. 8, 14. 24–5; *Div. qu.* 9) and elsewhere he often takes genuine knowledge to be the distinctive product of reason (e.g. *Lib. arb.* 2. 19. 51; cf. *Mus.* 1. 4. 6–8). However, in later works, Augustine is more willing to apply the terms '*scientia*' and '*scire*' to cognition attained through the bodily senses or through

imagination can yield knowledge of God or the soul (*Sol.* 1. 14. 24; *Ep.* 147; 166. 2. 4), and humans are often misled by relying overly upon the bodily senses, as this often leads humans to think that the soul and God must be corporeal (*Quant. an.* 31. 63; *Gn. litt.* 10. 24. 40; cf. *C. Acad.* 3. 6. 13).

However, against the Academics (as he understands them), Augustine seeks to show that (NK) is false and that genuine knowledge may be attained when one depends upon reason rather than the bodily senses (*Quant. an.* 30. 58).<sup>94</sup> Of course, as mentioned above, Augustine also differs from the Academics in that he does not take knowledge to be the norm of assent and allows for belief to be guided by faith and *auctoritas*. If the account I offer here is correct, then it sheds light not only upon Augustine's response to the sceptic but also his views of language, cognition, and object-directed thought. Moreover, I hope to have shown that Augustine's response to external world scepticism in the *Contra Academicos* does not rely upon the so-called 'subjectivist' view of language attributed to him by Burnyeat and Matthews, but instead upon another (significantly superior) semantic account and that Augustine's views concerning the security of mathematical cognition appeal primarily to the directness and immediacy of such cognition.

When it comes to evaluating whether Augustine is ultimately successful in his defence of knowledge, one might think that for him, as for many others, no genuine victory against the sceptic is possible here. I have myself noted that Augustine's response is not without weaknesses and the workings of the account which underlies his appeal to mathematical knowledge are especially likely to

testimony (e.g. *Ep.* 147. 3. 8; *Retr.* 1. 14. 3; *Gn. litt.* 12. 25. 52; *Trin.* 13. 1. 2; 15. 12. 21) though he still emphasizes that such cognition is not infallible (*Util. cred.* 10. 24–12. 26; *Div. qu.* 48; cf. *F. invis.* 2. 4) and even in later works Augustine thinks that the paradigm of *scientia*—and what '*scientia*' denotes in its strictest and most proper usage—is a kind of cognition which is the distinctive product of the mind (rather than the senses) and which is infallible (e.g. *Ep.* 120. 2. 9–11; 147. 16. 38; *Trin.* 15. 12. 21; *Retr.* 1. 14. 3).

<sup>94</sup> In several works, Augustine deals with the Academics far more summarily, notably by employing 'cogito-like' arguments which typically argue that one cannot be mistaken in thinking <I exist> (*Civ. Dei* 11. 26; cf. *Lib. arb.* 2. 3. 7; *Trin.* 15. 12. 21; cf. *B. vita* 2. 7; *Ench.* 7. 20). For discussion, see G. B. Matthews, '*Si fallor, sum*', in R. Markus (ed.), *Augustine: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, NY, 1972), 151–67; *Thought's Ego*, 33–4; L. Castagnoli, *Ancient Self-Refutation: The Logic and History of the Self-Refutation Argument from Democritus to Augustine* (Cambridge, 2010), 197–204.

leave the sceptic, and many others, unmoved. However, three points in Augustine's defence should be observed. Firstly, while the sceptic might challenge some of Augustine's claims to knowledge by disputing (e.g.) the account of language on which his response to external world scepticism is based, in doing so the sceptic seems to no longer be playing by the rules of the game. For, as was noted above, it seems that what the sceptic is supposed to show the dogmatic philosopher is that—*by his own lights*—he cannot rightly claim to know that *p*. Insofar as Augustine appeals to deeper commitments that are not ad hoc about the nature of thought and language to respond to sceptical worries, and by doing so manages to defend certain items of infallible knowledge, it seems that he has some measure of success.

Secondly, it might seem that the knowledge Augustine seeks to rescue in the *Contra Academicos* is very minor. However, if his defence of knowledge is successful even in part, then he manages to show that at least some things can be (infallibly) known. The items of knowledge offered suffice to show both that universal suspension of assent is unwarranted and that inquiry is possible (as mentioned above, the practice of philosophy or an appropriate search for truth requires believing that the truth *can* be known, e.g. *C. Acad.* 2. 9. 23). The admission of *some* infallible knowledge would seem to serve not so much as a foundation upon which to establish further knowledge (as for Descartes), but as a paradigm for inquiry to aim towards.

Thirdly, Augustine seems to lift a page from the book of the Academics (cf. Cic. *Tusc.* 1. 8. 17 ff., 1. 11. 23) in that he points out that, *even if* one thinks that he has *not* successfully shown that (NK) is false, there is nonetheless a sort of victory to be grasped from the jaws of defeat. For if Augustine—a person who takes himself currently to lack wisdom (*C. Acad.* 3. 12. 27; *Sol.* 1. 4. 9–10; *Ord.* 1. 5. 13)—has merely *plausibly* argued that some things can be known for certain, then he has nonetheless succeeded in rendering dubious the claim that knowledge is *impossible* and thus rendered doubtful that one should despair of attaining knowledge and refrain from assent (*C. Acad.* 3. 12. 27, 14. 30; cf. *Sol.* 1. 4. 9 ff.). That is to say, Augustine has shown either that (NK) is false or, more modestly, that it is plausible that (NK) is false. *Either way*, universal suspension of assent and pessimism about knowing the truth are unwarranted and this suffices for Augustine's aim of providing



medicine to those suffering from the Academic malaise (cf. *C. Acad.* 2. 1. 1, 9. 23). One's ardour for discovering the truth should not be dimmed by the arguments of the Academics or those who claim that knowledge is impossible. Humans may live in the hope of knowledge rather than despair of it and may—and indeed *should*—search for truth accordingly (*C. Acad.* 2. 9. 23; *Sol.* 1. 14. 24–15. 28; *Trin.* 9. 1. 1).

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