

**Augustine's and Polanyi's
Fiduciary Challenge to the
Critical Tradition of
The Ethics of Belief**

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Augustine and Polanyi and the Critical Tradition of the Ethics of Belief

Introduction:

I have long been perplexed about the ethics of beliefs. I am afraid that Peirce was correct: once beliefs are formed, it is quite difficult to see these revoked. Peirce calls this the fixation of beliefs, the tendency of humans, once a belief is formed as a part of one's belief system, to have and hold it tenaciously. Humans form beliefs and pack these away in the reservoir of habit and inclination such that the conscious repudiation of these is quite the formidable task. The issue of the fixation of belief and its revision highlights the importance of the conditions under which it is morally permissible to form a belief. We humans interpret new experiences in light of whatever beliefs are held by us and find it hard to retreat from our positions. Consequently, the origin of belief and establishing the conditions and occasions in which one fulfills one's epistemic duties are highly important. The subject of the ethics of belief attempts to establish these conditions.

I am sure my anxiety is two-fold. One reason for such perplexity and anxiety as this is that the Enlightenment taught that if one forms a belief in an uncritical fashion, that individual is irresponsible, even unethical. Locke suggested that a proposition ought to be assented to in accordance with the strength of the argument and evidence for it. To do less is a grave error, a moral error, of human judgment. Not only have rational beliefs in education and in the realm of religion been problematic for me, including the issue assenting to beliefs in general as well. I am struck with a sense of insecurity that maybe I am the origin of false belief among persons I

instruct, and that this false belief led to action which was not altogether right. The ethics of belief, which asks whether one rightfully ought to hold a belief and queries how one in authority ought to communicate it, is most serious for one who feels messianic impulses, like most clergy persons, professors, and social activists. Hence for me, a dark pilgrimage occurs each time I consider my own beliefs and which ones to communicate.

Modern philosophers have long been interested in the issue of the ethics of beliefs, although this language was not employed until Clifford in the nineteenth century. The critical tradition of epistemology provides the context and background for discussions of the ethics of belief since Clifford. I would claim that the assertion by Clifford which we will explore later is somewhat the logical consequence of the tradition of critical thought in the modern era. Since Descartes, philosophers have largely addressed belief formation in the language of epistemology; that is, they sought to develop an epistemic model which would grant certainty in believing. These accounts treat the ethics belief as a problem of justification; if one is justified in holding a belief, then one has met one's moral obligations and fixation, mentioned earlier, will be less of a problem. If one holds strongly to a particular belief, the very fact of justification renders it acceptable. Descartes had great confidence that once a method or model of inquiry was found that would grant certainty of belief, the model would be self-correcting even cathartic. His method of establishing justification was rooted in the notion that one had a duty to withhold belief unless one clearly and distinctly perceived it by reason. He wrote in the *Meditations* One that "reason persuades me that I should withhold my assent .. from things which are not plainly certain and indubitable," i.e. clear and distinct. Descartes objectivism, Polanyi's term and the tradition of critical thought he rejects in his post-critical epistemology,, has served as the default starting point for subsequent philosophers: one had a duty to withhold assent until justification

occurred. In light of this brief account, for my concern in this paper we might say that the ethics of belief is concerned with establishing the necessary conditions upon which a belief can be morally adopted as a satisfaction of one's duties, and, secondly, this implies that the only positive status of a belief is when these conditions have been met.

The equation of morally permissible belief with justification received from this tradition has dominated the landscape of twentieth century's quest in epistemology. C. I. Lewis stated that "Knowledge is belief which not only is true but also is justified in its believing attitude."¹ In this tradition, the believer ought "to be sure"² of a belief and does not have a "right to believe anything on insufficient evidence" are components of this tradition of the ethics of belief. To support the claim that concern for justification has dominated twentieth century accounts of knowledge, I cite below several statements from leading epistemologists. According to Roderick Firth: "To decide whether Watson knows that the coachman did it we must decide whether or not Watson is justified in believing that the coachman did it, we must decide whether his conclusion is based rationally on the evidence."³ Knowledge equals belief grounded in the evidence one possesses and of which one is conscious.

Lawrence Bonjour echoes this concern: We cannot, in most cases at least, bring it about that our beliefs are true, but we can presumably bring it about directly that they are epistemically justified. It follows that one's cognitive endeavors are epistemically justified only if and to the extent that they are aimed at this goal which means roughly that one accepts all and only those beliefs which one has good reason to think are true. To accept a belief in the absence of such a reason . . . is to neglect the pursuit of truth; such acceptance is epistemically irresponsible. My

¹ Lewis, *Analysis*, 9.

² Ayer, *Problem of Knowledge*, 28.

³ Firth, "Are Epistemic Concepts Reducible?" 219.

contention here is that the idea of avoiding such irresponsibility is the core of notion of epistemic justification.⁴ Earl Conee concurs: A person has a justified belief only if the person has reflective access to evidence that the belief is true . . . Such examples make it reasonable to conclude that there is epistemic justification for a belief only where the person has cognitive access to evidence that supports the truth of the belief. Justifying evidence must be internally available.⁵

In what remains in this paper after these introductory comments, I will lay out the historical conversation surrounding the ethics of belief by focusing on John Locke and then W.K. Clifford. I will then offer critical insights from Augustine and Polanyi appraising this tradition. I will conclude by contending for some insights from the Augustine *credo ut intelligam* program with some complementary perspective from Polanyi.

Ethics of belief in historical conversation:

In the brief introduction to the subject of the ethics of belief, I have claimed that the Cartesian tradition contends that an ethics of belief is satisfied when conditions of justification are met. This tradition insists that one withhold assent until these conditions have been satisfied. To clarify the challenge of an ethics of belief, I will explore two philosophers who pose the modern perplexity of belief permissibility: John Locke and W.K. Clifford.

Locke's Conception of Rational Assent

The strategies suggested above from the historic conversation of epistemologists guard, so they contend, one from the improper holding of belief. Embedded in the dogma that there is something wrong morally with believing erroneously, is the presupposition of rational assent, that is, a believer has the capacity to assent to beliefs and while errors are the consequence of doxastic irresponsibility assentually. The assumption of rational assent establishes the condition

⁴ Bonjour, *Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, 8.

⁵ Conee, "Evidentialism," 398.

which must be fulfilled in critical believing; a belief is critically held to the extent that it is rationally assented to when the grounds of justification have been met.

An exploration of the notion of rational assent as formulated by John Locke will focus our attention on the historic origins of the dogma. Locke recognized that indeed there was a difference between the doxastic state of knowledge and others such as belief or opinion. He proposed that persons in their everyday lives hold to varied positions concerning opinion. He claimed that these opinions were not always subject to persuasive, deductive demonstrations and yet persons still held them. He sought to discover just how the forming of these beliefs concurred with the view that one nonetheless was culpable for holding them. The forming of beliefs non-demonstrably deductively are, in fact, the kinds of belief states with which the critical tradition of the ethics of belief is most enchanted.

In book 4 of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke is concerned with knowledge or belief which is not demonstrable within the confines of formal logic. That is, belief which is held/formed not on the basis of logical deduction, which he, like most logicians, conceived as irrefutable. Locke was interested in establishing some condition whereby one could form a belief, hold it without its certainty and yet be seen as a morally and intellectually responsible agent. He was keenly concerned with establishing an ethic of belief, beliefs of which one is morally permitted to hold. Much of his interests developed as a response to what he called “enthusiasm.”

Enthusiasm developed because of the historic disregard for “reason and revelation” in holding belief according to Locke. Evidently, there were those in seventeenth century post-Cromwellian era who formed beliefs on the appeal to revelation, not revelation of the sacred text but “ungrounded fancies of man’s own brain.” He calls these fancies self-constructed

“illuminations,” ones which, in fact, were illusions. John Locke’s reaction to the enthusiasts gave rise to his concern for adopting only those beliefs for which one had at least some support. Unlike the enthusiasts who subjectively accepted beliefs because of authority or fear, Locke sought to establish some stronger grounds for the acceptance of belief. When one could not establish a belief certainly, one needed some other method for accepting it.

On the surface, this sounds like a good thing. One ought to teach people a formula which governs the acceptance or rejection of a belief. Historically, it is an important point to make so as to guard against the excesses of individualism, that is, that everyone will subjectively accept whatever belief suites his fancy. Locke was trying to establish some normative principles to give direction to believers as they formed beliefs.

The principle which governed Locke’s thought was probability; one could justifiably accept a belief if there was a great deal of probability that it was true. To believe only on the basis of high probability was an epistemic duty. Locke in his essay writes: “For he governs his assent right and places it as he should. Who, in any case or matter whatever, believes or disbelieves according as reason directs him. He that does otherwise, transgresses against his own light, and misuses those faculties which were given him to no other end, but to search and follow the clearer evidence and greater probability.”⁶ One accepts a belief on the basis of the probability of its veracity. The firmness of belief, and consequently one’s commitment to it, is established by its probableness.

The perspective on belief mentioned above illustrates the voluntary character of believing in both Locke. One had the capacity to not form a belief until the probable evidence emerged and was appraised. I find this view contrary to much information about the formation of belief.

⁶ Locke, *Essay*, XVII 24.

The dogma of assent is closely connected to the development of the idea of probability as an account of rationality. The notion of probability as an account of rationality emerges within the discussion of assent in Locke. Locke's model is advanced as a way to strengthen the firmness of one's formation in believing.

Locke's discussion of probability occurs in his essay in book 4 chapter 15, and is simply entitled "Of Probability." Unlike Descartes who wished only to discuss certain knowledge which was discovered by an infallible method inferentially demonstrated, Locke acknowledges the existence of beliefs which one held or formed which did not conform to the standard of absolute inference. Although this kind of discussion was in no wise absolutely new (for instance in the "tropics" Aristotle discusses the phenomena of non-demonstrable belief), Locke's interest in the issue of how one can be morally justified in holding a non-demonstrable belief stimulated the continued discussion of an ethics of belief. The issue of an ethics of belief persists to this day in the context of philosophers influenced by the British analytic tradition. In the contemporary analysis of belief forming, one must acknowledge its indebtedness to this tradition.

Locke's discussion of probability has as its purpose the supplying of information so that one can make a judgment, i.e. assent or dissent to a proposition which culminates in belief. Belief for Locke is assent to a proposition. The state of a proposition's probability to be true provides the "Want" of demonstration that discussions of belief are subject to. Locke writes Our knowledge, as has been shown, being very narrow, and we are not happy enough to find certain truth in everything which we have occasion to consider, most of the propositions we think, reason, discourse, nay, act upon, are such as we cannot have undoubted knowledge of their truth; yet some of them border so near upon certainty that we make no doubt at all about them, but

assent to them firmly, and act, according to that assent, as resolutely as if they were infallibly demonstrated and that our knowledge of them was perfect and certain.⁷

Locke contends that a proposition's acceptability results from one fulfilling some normative condition. In this case if one finds a certain level of probability for the belief, then one is justified in holding it. It is important to keep in mind that "certain" beliefs are true just as Descartes earlier indicated. Certainty in believing was established because of the inferential structure of belief. That is in the foundationalist account of justification; a belief was inferentially related to an indubitable foundational belief. Here Locke is not so convinced that each belief or proposition has such a grounding. He, then, must establish another normative account from his forming a belief that does not require absolute certainty.

Probability, as a normative strategy, supplies the ground in uncertain situations so that one might make a judgment regarding a belief. Because knowledge requires intuition on the part of the believers, and belief not so, Locke sees probability as a guarantee of the condition of normativity in believing. He writes:

Probability wanting (lacking) that intuitive evidence which infallibility determines the understanding and produces certain knowledge, the mind, if it will proceed rationally, ought to examine all the grounds of probability and see how they make more or less for or against any proposition before it assents or dissents from it; and upon a due balancing the whole, reject or receive it, with a more or less firm assent, proportionately to the greater preponderance of the greater found of probability on one side or the other.⁸

For one to assent, i.e. form a belief, on grounds lacking probability is to believe irrationally and in Locke's view to believe immorally. Wolterstorff summarizes the Locke's

⁷ Locke, *Essay*, XV 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

position in his work on Locke's ethics of belief illustrated through principles of epistemic obligation. Wolterstorff contends for three: the principle of evidence;⁹ the principle of appraisal; and the principle of proportionality. One should only believe when one knows the evidence which supports a contention, (principle of evidence), one ought to assess the logical force of the evidence for a contention, (principle of appraisal), and one ought to proportion one's confidence to the probability of its truth (principle of proportionality). This concern for guarding our believing influences the later speculation about ethics and belief.

Clifford's account of an ethics of belief.

In 1877 W.K. Clifford published what would become the *locus classicus* of the modern debate in the ethics of belief. It was entitled "The Ethics of Belief" and published in Contemporary Review. William James identified Clifford as that "delicious enfant terrible" and his "Will to Believe" became Clifford's the companion piece to the discussion. This piece by Clifford is the result of the epistemic assumptions embedded in the Lockian tradition of assent and its moral implications.

Clifford begins his account by imaging a shipowner who was to send out his ship to the sea. Given that the ship was old and needed possible repairs, the shipowner had some doubt about its seaworthiness. Instead of entertaining the doubt, he suppressed it and sent it to sea while all along the way believing that things would be just fine. The ship did not reach its destination and the seamen were killed. His belief was not well-grounded and as Clifford claims, "he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him."¹⁰ If one alters the illustration so that the seamen survive, will that give an exception to the principle of no right? Clifford says no. He claims that "the question of right or wrong has to do with the origin of his belief, not the

⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Locke's Ethics of Belief*.

¹⁰ W.K.Clifford, *Ethics of Belief*, p. 19.

matter of it; not what it was, but how he got it; but whether he had a right to believe on such evidence as was before him.”¹¹ The Cartesian ground of doubt satisfaction and the Lockian principle of evidence had not been met. The shipowner was iniquitous in believing in the seaworthiness of the vessel.

Now as we consider the argument that unfolds in the article, Clifford asserts several conditions for morally permissible assent to a proposition. Until these are met, the believer is morally bound to withhold judgement/belief. His first assertion is that people need a rule/principle for arriving at beliefs because beliefs culminate in action. Believers are disposed to action as a result of holding a belief; one might say that belief includes an assent to a proposition but also includes a disposition to act correspondingly to it. He avers that although folks may not immediately take action on a belief, at some point an action will follow a belief held. In light of the example and the first principle, Clifford claims that it is “wrong to believe on insufficient evidence or to nourish a belief by suppressing doubts and avoiding investigations.” He believed it to be a human’s “sacred duty” to satisfy this principle which guides the will’s decision to believe.

One might ask who is responsible to satisfy the condition identified in the last paragraph. Clifford responds with the claim that no “simplicity of mind or station” can excuse someone from following one’s epistemic duties. To fail to meet the condition of evidence and doubt would have adverse effects on human inquirers. Clifford contends that to allow oneself to believe for unworthy reasons one “weakens the powers of self-control and of fairly weighing evidence.” He sums up his argument with the claim that “it is wrong always, everywhere and for anyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.” Andrew Chignell summarizes the position in two

¹¹ Ibid., p. 20

propositions and a conclusion. One has an epistemic obligation to possess sufficient evidence for all one's beliefs is the first proposition. The second is that one has a moral duty and ought to feel the weight of it to satisfy one's intellectual obligations. The conclusion Clifford draws is that one has a moral obligation to possess sufficient evidence for all of one's beliefs. The critical mind has a duty to satisfy these stipulations and the Lockian framework from which they derive.

The Augustine and Polanyi challenge to the hegemony of the critical attitude concerning the ethics of belief.

I would now like to consider a couple of ways that Augustine and Polanyi respond to the position in the ethics of belief outlined above. The confidence of this tradition that culminates in Clifford's rather stringent conditions is addressed in such Augustine works as *On the Usefulness of Belief* and section three of Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*.

Augustine wrote **On Usefulness of Belief** in response to a position taken by the Manichees, a group against whom Augustine had a running feud. The principle mentioned earlier from Descartes that one needed justification to make a belief morally permissible to hold is equivalent to the position taken by the Manichees. This group held that no one had a right to hold to a belief until the truth of that belief had been established with certainty.¹² Augustine contends that they harangued at great length and with great vigor against the errors of the simple, that is, those who trust in the authority of the church tradition. They "censure" anyone who hold to the authority of the Old Testament and promote the principle that without knowledge, certainty, one was immoral in holding that something was the case. This requires an ideal knower, one that comes to some subject matter without prejudices or positions or beliefs from

¹² Augustine, *On the Usefulness of Belief* p. 292

the status of an objective observer who without commitments evaluates claims regarding reality. The ideal knower according to the Manichees, Descartes' rational agent, is the one pure enough to understand and properly believe about God and the Scriptures. Augustine then engages in refuting several positions taken by the Manichees on Scripture, reading, and hermeneutics. The weight of Augustine's argument for our purpose is located in his assessment of the possibility of an ideal knower. Such a one does not exist by Augustine's account and this claim discredits the good design of God in the kind of knowing in which people do in fact engage.

Augustine's rejection of such knowers is rooted in what the reformed theological/philosophical tradition identifies as the *noetic* effects of sin. Polanyi in "Faith and Reason" acknowledges this tradition as the "predicament of fallen man." Augustine calls the presence of the noetic effects of sin the "struggle of the old man" rooted in the love of things disproportionately and characterize by pride and hubris. A quick survey of "Usefulness" establishes Augustine's take on this problem. The *nous/mens* is debilitated by the fall. The good order that God made in creation and in the ways humans come to know is vitiated culpably by humans who practically and theoretically reject the good design of God. The ideal knower model disregards the human incapacity to know in the way it contends leading to what Augustine calls the "negligence" of God's design.¹³ This negligence of the good design of human knowing fosters the sense of autonomy, a kind of prideful arrogance. It is interesting to note that at the end of Polanyi's section on personal knowledge, he identifies the slide into arrogant objectivism a kind of nihilism which affects political and economic relationships. Humans malfunction in their capacities for belief and understanding which leads to the fragmentation of belief, a failure of consistency.

¹³ Augustine, p. 266.

A second problem with the critical outlook on the ethics of belief is located in epistemological internalism. Internalism avers that for belief to be critically held one must have conscious access to it. The internalist contends that a correct epistemological theory ushers our belief into the court room of examination for analysis which either exonerates or condemns the belief. The method of epistemology one holds grants justificatory status to the belief which has been placed on the table for inspection. The internalist perspective suggests that in critical believing, one's *assent* to a *belief* must be rational to fulfill one's intellectual obligation. Theoretically, internalism requires that one have inferential access to all those beliefs that support the acceptance of a proposition under examination.

In "Justification in the Twentieth Century" Alvin Plantinga suggests three motifs which define internalism. The first motif is that the internalist asserts that "epistemic justification is entirely up to one and within my power." An individual to have critical and epistemic blamelessness must fulfill her duties which, because of the liberty of will, one has the capacity to fulfill. Error originates when one misuses that liberty. Descartes exemplifies this approach. He writes: But if I abstain from giving my judgment on anything when I do not perceive it without sufficient clearness and distinctness, it is plain that I act rightly . . . But if I determine to deny or affirm, I no longer make use as I should of my free will, and if I affirm what is not true it is evident that I deceive myself; even though I judge according to truth, this comes about only by chance, and I do not escape the blame of misusing my freedom; for the light of nature teaches us that the knowledge of the understanding should always precede the determination of the will. It is in the misuse of the free will that the privation which constitutes the characteristic nature of error is met with.¹⁴

¹⁴ Descartes, *Meditations*, 4.

The internalist position suggests that misbelief and all critical belief is up to me.

A second motif of internalism is that when one does not fulfill his duty, he is violating one's own nature as a human being. Locke wrote that to disregard one's total evidence one "transgresses against his own light, and misuses those faculties which are given him." This implies that a person will know when and if he/she has applied the norms of critical belief to a particular belief.

The third motif of internalism is that one must have some sort of guaranteed access to past beliefs if one is going to critically revise them. In other words, one must have the cognitive resources to evoke and bring into a present, occurrent state beliefs for evaluation. Internalism suggests that this can, in fact, be accomplished.

Although not by name, Polanyi addresses the inadequacy of internalism. Section 5 of the chapter entitled *The Personal Mode of Knowing* uncovers this inadequacy. He writes, "I must admit that I did not start the present reconsiderations of my beliefs from a clean slate of unbelief. Far from it, I started as a person intellectually fashioned by a particular idiom, acquired through my affiliation to a civilization that prevailed in the places where I had grown up. This is the matrix of my intellectual efforts." Tacitly implies that "I can only explore my meaning up to a point, I believe that my words must mean more than I shall ever know, if they are to mean anything at all."¹⁵ In a beautiful and telling passage, he writes, "A truthful statement commits the speaker to a belief in what he has asserted: he embarks in it on an open sea of limitless implications. An untruthful statement withholds this belief, launching a leaking vessel for others to board and sink in it." The vessel metaphor is interesting in light of Clifford's earlier use. For

¹⁵ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. P. 252.

Polanyi to disregard and not see the positive status of stable beliefs without the full blown access to these is to sink. In the end, “objectivism requires a specifiably functioning mindless knower.”

In the chapter entitled “The Critique of Doubt” Polanyi brings into focus the misuse of the objectivist’s internalism. He contends that “the ideal of a virgin mind is to be pursued to its logical limit, we have to face the fact that every perception of things, involves implications about the nature of things which could be false.” The inferential access of the internalist is limiting the grand possibilities of comprehending a deeper appreciation and critical apprehension of beliefs one holds. Given that one “embodies” the context of one’s past and culture, changes and alterations within it as one indwells one’s beliefs, and this is a good thing. What we might call the done deal idea of an ethics of belief does not take into account intellectual passions which keep alive the hope of seeing new things in old and for pursuing the indeterminate future manifestation of it that keeps alive the prospects of inquiry. For Polanyi, rationalism has promoted a skewed sense of doubt which in the end is “illusory.” There is indeed a positive place for doubt in the fiduciary programme that Polanyi promotes that does not require the impossible task of suspending one’s beliefs, and it requires a rejection of the internalism implicit in the dominant critical tradition of the ethics of belief.

A third area of criticism pertaining to the critical notion of an ethics of belief is found in what George Marvodes called the “threshold” requirement of this tradition. The threshold requirement suggests that unless sufficiency is met, one is immoral in holding a belief. Determining that level of sufficiency is behind what Locke averred as the proportionality principle and which was rooted in his conception of probability. For Polanyi, this idea distorts what commitment entails in believing. This “regulative principle” denies, disguises, or

minimizing the fact that one is already holding a belief to begin an examination of it.¹⁶ To believe is risky business; in it one has “staked his life” in commitment to it. Further Polanyi contends that “to postpone decisions on account of their conceivable fallibility would necessarily block all decisions for ever, and pile up hazards of hesitation to infinity. It would amount to voluntary mental stupor. Stupor alone can eliminate both belief and error.”¹⁷ The threshold requirement as the objectivist tradition of an ethics of belief contends would create a “strict skepticism” and it would “deny itself the possibility of advocating its own doctrine.” Its realization is “unattainable.

In this section, I have identified three objections to what I have called the critical tradition of an ethics of belief by citing objections from Augustine and Polanyi and its main contentions: ideal assent, internalism, and the threshold requirement. I have claimed that in this tradition there is no intrinsically valuable/positive place for currently held beliefs to play in the enterprise of an ethics of belief. In the next section, pulling from Augustine and Polanyi I will attempt to construct a positive account for belief in satisfying one’s moral responsibility to believe responsibly.

Augustine’s *Credo ut Intelligam* tradition with Polanyi Insights:

Polanyi’s post-critical philosophy was inspired by St. Augustine’s rejection of the rationalism of the ancient world that birthed an objectivism similar to the one he rejects in modernity. This objectivism, then and now, turns the relationship of the mind of the knower to the known into an I-It relation that treats one’s knowledge of things into a observer role yielding a kind of reductionism and abstractionism of the known. Polanyi wrote in his article “Faith and Reason” that the medieval attempt to reconcile faith and reason “was first formulated by

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 307.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 314-315.

Augustine in terms that became statutory for a thousand years after.” In place of some early church enthusiasm in the Montanists or the fideism of Tertullian, Augustine saw that “Reason was ancillary to faith and that opened up new paths for reason.”¹⁸ The Augustinian edict of *nisi credideritis, non intelligitis* was adopted by Polanyi which he named the “Fiduciary Programme.” Polanyi’s appropriation of Augustine’s insight gave a framework for what he had discovered in his own epistemological pursuits. He had discovered that “our tacit powers decide our adherence to a particular culture and sustain our intellectual, artistic, civic and religious deployment within the framework.” He continues that the “articulate life of man’s mind is his specific contribution to the universe; by the invention of symbolic forms mans has given birth and lasting existence to thought.”¹⁹ Augustine’s perspective ensures value for beliefs currently held within a belief system and establishes a positive location for “antecedent beliefs,” ones that have not met the conditions proffered by Locke and Clifford. So, let’s explore some of Augustine’s terrain so that we can discern why this program is so attractive to Polanyi.

The critical tradition required that a belief’s positive status, its value, rested in meeting the necessary conditions of an ethics of belief. I have argued that the conditions suggested were ultimately implausible and, following Polanyi, possibly nihilistic. It seems the model needed is one that has both a normative account of believing and grants a positive status to belief prior to epistemic duties being satisfied. Augustine provides such an account.

For Augustine, as it is for Polanyi, belief/faith by its nature longs and seeks to understand. This idea is present in numerous pieces by Augustine including the work entitled, **On the Free Choice of the Will**. Understanding is stifled unless one believes first. This, for Augustine, is the norm that God established and one’s epistemic life is guided by it. The order of

¹⁸ Michael Polanyi, “Faith and Reason.” Section 237. *Journal of Religion* 41: 4. October 1961.

¹⁹ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy*. P. 264.

God's design for all of creation including the structure of understanding is normative. The norms for understanding are embedded in humans, but they need proper cultivation for their maturation. The order runs something like this in Augustine. Humans are blessed with a desire for the truth as part of their being. In **On True Religion**, he calls this part of the beauty of the created universe. The order of design functions through authority preceding and stimulating reasons quest to understand and ultimately to understand that which is believed. Augustine writes, "Authority demands faith, and prepares a person for reason. Reason leads to understanding and knowledge. Reason does not entirely desert authority, however, when we consider who is to be believed; and of course, once the truth is known and made manifest, it has supreme authority."²⁰ He continues by claiming that this structure is a kind of "temporal medicine calling those who believe back to health."²¹ The ordering of understanding begins, by necessity according to design, through faith.

It might be helpful to recall Augustine's definition of faith. In **On the Predestination of the Saints**, Augustine ties the notion of belief with thinking. He writes that "belief is thinking with assent."²² Belief is a doxastic state, a condition or attitude of the mind, that has both propositional and personal content. Belief as a propositional attitude is to assert and affirm that such and such is the case; belief as personal attitude implies trust, humility, and commitment. This is roughly equivalent to the Polanyian notion of belief as the personal assertion of fact that one indwells with commitment. To think with assent entails a dispositional proclivity to be guided and patterned by those things which one believes. Belief affirms a proposition or person. Unlike opinion and credulity, belief manifests a confidence in the proposition and person at play.

²⁰ Augustine. *On True Religion*. P. 247

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 247

²² Augustine. *On the Predestination of the Saints*. 2.5..

An additional normative part of the design pertains to the kind of thinking that one employs when one believes. Again, **On the Free Choice of the Will** serves as a starting point. Augustine provides the reader with a cognitive design that in some sense is progressive and mutually intertwined. Following Polanyi, one might call this an ontology of the mind. As one thinks, one comes to believe and reflects on it. This ontology of the mind is best understood by considering three notions: *anima*, *animus*, and *mens*. Augustine believed that human existence (*anima*) when living according to one's design manifests self-reflexivity with appetite, the desire to see one's design actualized. *Mens* is known through its various operations: perception, an inner sense, reason, and wisdom. One thinks as one perceives about the reality it has been designed to discern. Reality itself is wooing the mind to perceive in a correlative fashion. The "inner sense" for Augustine is a faculty that thinks about and appraises the deliverances of perception. One focuses on some aspect of what sensate experience has given. This requires reflection, meditation, and an analysis of the fidelity of the perpetual execution. It also considers other senses that might be confirming or disconfirming these deliverances.

A personal story might help illustrate these two aspects of *mens*. When I was younger, after church one Sunday afternoon, I was invited to dinner with a family in the congregation along with a number of other college students. As we were approaching the house, I smelled something fishy, literally. I am not sure what other areas of the country eat for Sunday dinner, but in my Western PA steel town culture, people ate some sort of beef for that meal. Much like the Zande Polanyi talks about, my symbolic world did not entertain as plausible the notion that one would cook otherwise. In James' terms, it was not a live option. And so, what Augustine called the inner sense and its use of memorial beliefs, convinced me that I was perceiving badly at that point. When the meal was presented, I was sitting in a large hall at the home of the

inviting family and when they brought out the meat I perceived that it was a loaf of some kind, but noticed it was awfully pale. I quickly judged the state of my perception, and concluded that the cook needed a lesson from my mother on how to prepare meat loaf so that it did not look so sickly. Two perceptual states were challenged by the memorial beliefs that I held in my belief system. I yielded to these until I tasted the meat. No amount of ketchup could disguise what I was tasting; no memorial beliefs made implausible the deliverances of my taste buds. You may have guessed it was salmon loaf. Polanyi would have great fun pointing out the focal and subsidiary aspects of this experience. I concluded that the person who cooked such a thing was from a different culture and this did not alter my expectation that next Sunday, normalcy would return.

Mens operates as reason (excellence in argument and logic) and as *sapientia* (wisdom) which brings all that one believes into a coherent system corresponding to the universe and developing along the way through engaging reality and one's beliefs about it. Augustine averred that at every point along the way of this mental reality illumination was present. Illumination is luminosity so that one can see, reason, and coordinate things aright in wisdom. He equates illumination with Jesus Christ, the light of the world who discloses through the design given by God the status of a belief we wish to understand. Christ, who is wisdom, enables understanding because of his status as the light of the universe. When one adheres to this design, one lives a life that is progressively purified from the vitiation that results from pride and acedia which we discussed earlier as a critique of the ideal knower condition in the critical model of an ethics of belief. One has a duty to pursue the truth discoverable through this design. One has a duty to cultivate the order of God's shalomic design by attending to the aspects of the ontology of mind

that he has introduced. One has a duty to favorably entrust and engage one's beliefs that lead to understanding and manifest one's commitment to reality as it has encountered humans.

Let me end this paper by mentioning a few of advantages that belief has that Augustine discusses in **On the Usefulness of Belief**. These show the positive status of belief prior to justification or fulfilling the ethics of belief discussed earlier. I do this in summary fashion. Belief is beneficial according to Augustine because without it, one will not understand.²³ Further, without belief an inquiry will not be conducted. To withhold consent impedes the very prospect of discovery. Augustine claims that without belief an inquiry will not advance and there will be no interpretation of reality.²⁴ Belief, positively, is curative for the soul, one fraught with the effects of sin. Belief is required if one is to live rightly before God and neighbor and society and this is not at all possible without belief.

One might substitute some of the components of Augustine's thought with Polanyi insights. In the third section of *Personal Knowledge* these things are adaptable and illuminated by Polanyi's analysis. So, I need more space and time to explore further connections. But the importance of a kind of normative design, one's duty to actualize that design, and to live within the beliefs that one has seems to be Polanyi's commitment as well. My perplexity is benefitted by the fiduciary programme advanced by Polanyi and inspired by St. Augustine. Beliefs are properly and positively components of the normative structure of understanding and so although one holds them with some measure of confidence, by their nature and the ontology of mind proposed by Polanyi and Augustine, even fixation of belief stands in a renewed relationship to the believer.

²³ Augustine, *On the Usefulness of Belief*, p. 303.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

