Polanyi's Augustinianism:

A Mark of the Future?

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*The aim of this essay is to display a congruence between several important features of Augustine's theory of knowledge, including our knowledge of the world (**sapientia**) and our knowledge of the standards guiding our thought (**sapientia**), and Michael Polanyi's theory of personal knowledge. Its purpose is to commend an interpretation of Polanyi's thought which situates his major insights within an Augustinian intellectual tradition and which thereby offers fruitful possibilities for theological reflection, particularly on the reality of God.*

1. The Formulation of an Experiment

Those inspired by Michael Polanyi's epistemology frequently cite his contention that his theory of personal knowledge recovers a crucial Augustinian insight, namely that our thought unfolds out of our commitments to anterior frameworks.[1] In particular many theologically oriented interpreters of Polanyi's thought have found in this Augustinian emphasis on the priority of faith for understanding a powerful ally in their efforts to articulate the legitimacy or meaningfulness of Christian faith in the secular context of the contemporary world. Nevertheless the implications of this Augustinian feature of Polanyi's theory of knowledge are rarely explored in any explicit or detailed way.[2] This is an unfortunate gap in my estimation, since such unexamined connections to the Augustinian heritage might provide a potentially rich theological resource.

In an effort to illustrate what I mean and to convince other theologians of the value of developing the thought of Polanyi in terms of the Augustinian heritage, I propose to explore in this essay the possibility of there being additional epistemological similarities between Augustine and Polanyi. My intention perhaps can best be viewed as a thought experiment seeking responses to two interrelated questions. First, was Polanyi's rediscovery of the Augustinian insight into the importance of belief for understanding and his affirmation and incorporation of it into his theory of knowledge made possible by additional structural similarities in their respective epistemological positions? I believe that this can be convincingly demonstrated. Granted such an interrelated pattern of thought in their epistemologies, the second, related question is this: what is the value for theological reflection today of trying to understand Polanyi along the lines suggested by the Augustinian heritage?

Lest this proposal be misunderstood, I should like to clarify a bit what I mean by these questions. My comparison of Polanyi's and Augustine's theories of knowledge does not presume that Polanyi was dependent upon a formal, explicit study of Augustine for the development of his theory. As far as I have been able to discover, the earliest relevant reference to Augustine in Polanyi's published writings occurs in *Personal Knowledge*. Polanyi's work as a scientist, however, had convinced him of the need for the acceptance of authority in science long before this.[3] Indeed when Polanyi was asked explicitly toward the end of his life about the relationship of his thought to Augustine, his response simply mentioned his studies long past and his more recent reading of Peter Brown's biography.[4] Perhaps these studies occured in the context of his relationship with J. H. Oldham and the Moot. In any event, all this experiment in comparing Polanyi and Augustine need presume then is that, once Polanyi discovered this particular affinity to Augustine's thought, he was able to identify his project with Augustine's on this point because, in their respective cultural contexts, they had developed independently epistemological positions with several points of congruence.[5]

The point behind the second question can be brought into focus by recalling again Polanyi's observation that we understand reality in light of our commitments. Obviously, then, the dominant intellectual tradition within which one stands to read Polanyi will affect profoundly what one takes him to mean. This stage of the thought experiment will attempt to seek out what Polanyi's position would appear to be saying if read in light of a generally formulated Augustinian approach to knowledge. This requires, obviously, that much of this essay be devoted to an exposition of Augustine's epistemological assumptions. Its theological aim would be to discover how our knowledge of God might be understood from such an explicitly acknowledged interpretation of Polanyi's theory of personal knowledge.

One additional observation is necessary. Augustine was not a philosopher in the modern sense of the term. A few of his works do display the character of a sustained treatise on philosophical themes, such as his effort to combat skepticism in *Against the Academics*. Most of his vast literary output, however, is composed by way of response to pressing personal or ecclesiastical circumstances, not out of the studied leisure that is the mark of theoretical preoccupations. His major orientation, in other words, is theological and practical, even in his earlier works. When he identifies at the beginning of his literary career the most important topics of reflection to be God and the soul (*sol*., 1.17),[6] we discover what is at the heart of all his intellectual inquiries—the return of the soul to its source and genuine fulfillment in God. Consequently, since he has no treatise on the question, the task of formulating the general contours of Augustine's doctrine on knowledge requires that it be extracted from the corpus of his works wherever he saw the need to insert elements of his teaching on knowledge while in the process of discussing what was for him some more urgent topic. This would be a daunting task were it not for the fact that several scholarly studies of Augustine's view of knowledge have recently been published. I gratefully acknowledge that this outline of Augustine's theory of knowing, including the interpretation of the textual material, will be guided by these studies.[7]

2. A Preliminary Overview

Augustine formulated his views of knowledge out of his conviction that all learning is made possible through the acceptance of the authority based on faith in Christ and through the subtle reasoning manifested by the Platonists (*c. Acad*., 3.20.43). Before considering this twofold source of learning, it would be helpful to provide a preliminary glimpse into the intellectual world Augustine called "Platonist." What he meant by this term modern scholarship identifies as the tradition mediating Platonic doctrines to Augustine in their Middle

Platonic and Neoplatonic forms, particularly in the Latin versions of the works of Plotinus and Porphyry.

This was a hierarchical world, with the highest reality purely spiritual. It was the revolutionary otherworldliness of Ambrose's sermons that probably first stirred Augustine to begin to see the limits of his materialistic conceptions of the divine (*conf.*, 5.10.19-20) and the need to seek for something more.[8] Once he had entered this world he saw that "the rational soul . . . has been placed in some kind of middle state, inasmuch as it has the bodily creation beneath it, but its own and the body's creator above it" (*ep.*, 140.3).

In this middle position, human reason or the mind correspondingly had two functions. "Higher reason" (*ratio superior*) understands eternal reasons (*rationes aeternae*) that are the principal forms of things and are contained in the divine Intelligence (*div.qu.*, 45.1-2). Reason in this sense leads to the contemplation of wisdom (*sapientia*). "Lower reason" (*ratio inferior*) has the function of knowing corporeal reality in light of these eternal reasons. When reason in this sense orders corporeal things according to some rationale or pattern, it leads to knowledge or science (*scientia*).

What allows the mind to function in these two ways, what is its underlying ground, so to speak, is memory. It is important to recognize immediately that Augustine means by "*memoria*" more than the ability to recollect past experiences. "The power of memeory is great . . . . It is awe-inspiring in its profound and incalculable complexity. Yet it is my mind; it is my very self" (*conf.*, 10.10.17). That which has gone to shape me, my experiences, my emotions, my habits, my insights actual and potential, are all there in my memory, according to Augustine, always operating in some fashion whenever we use our powers of reason.

3. The Role of Faith

Keeping these preliminary indications of Augustine's view of knowledge in mind, let us now consider his understanding of the role of faith in learning. Augustine's basic point, that with respect to our knowledge of the world faith functions as "a precondition for knowing,"[9] is well known to students of Polanyi through his appropriation of the formula, "unless you believe, you shall not understand."[10] Depending on its context the notion of faith can function in several distinct, but related, ways.

In its most ordinary sense, faith is necessary for the very continuity and stability of everyday life. Augustine asks us to consider, for example, how our self-identity is based on our trust in our parents and teachers, and how our further awareness of history is dependent on a reliance on testimony of others (*ep.*, 147.5; *conf.*, 6.5). In an ultimate sense, faith in the teachings of scripture and the Catholic church is necessary so that our reason may gradually be guided to the contemplation of the divine ideas through moments of mystical vision in this life or in the beatific vision in the next (*civ.*, 22.29; *div.qu.*, 48; *ep.*, 120.1.3).

With regard to knowledge (*scientia*), Augustine distinguished between "things seen and believed" (*ep.* 147.8). Those things that are seen are known directly in the sense of not relying on authorities. Knowledge of things that are not directly present to our awareness is believed on the basis of some form of authority. When we give our assent to such beliefs, Augustine is willing to call this knowledge (*scientia*). But even in the former case of directly experienced things, faith plays a role at least insofar as we rely on our sense perception (a matter to be discussed shortly).

Throughout his discussion of the role of faith, Augustine always recognizes the importance of reason. We need to be able to reason about and to understand, at least to some extent, what it is we are believing (*ser.*, 43.7). He carefully distinguishes faith from credulity, mere opinion, or wishful thinking (*ut.cred.*, 22 and 25; *trin.*, 8.4.6). Thus within "the citadel of authority" (*ep.* 118.5.32-33) Augustine upheld the use of reason and defended

it against critics who would suspect reason of elitism.[11] Likewise his faith in the authority of scripture did not warrant any sort of fundamentalism: what we clearly know about the universe from other sources cannot contradict the scriptures, and if we go on to expound them in such an erroneous way we subject Scriptures to scorn by those outside the faith (*Gn.litt*., 1.19.39). Finally, Augustine considered it essential to test or check our faith in our ultimate commitments. He illustrates this requirement in his discussions regarding how his beliefs in and practice of the Catholic faith allow him to appeal to qualities of authority and coherence that he believes shows its superiority over the Manichaean faith.[12]

In this brief exposition of a few features of Augustine's understanding of the role of faith in knowledge, we can clearly discern a characteristic feature of Polanyi's understanding of knowledge, specifically the need to rely on a range of beliefs to exercise our rational capacities which in turn can develop arguments to support, modify, or even overturn these beliefs.

4. *Scientia*: Knowledge of the World

Since this correspondence between Augustine's and Polanyi's appreciation of the important role of faith had already been affirmed by Polanyi, we need to move now to expose a few of the elements of Augustine's understanding of our knowledge of the world in order to begin our experiment in earnest. Here we shall focus on how our lower function of reason operates in our knowledge of things of the world, including our ability to use the scientific disciplines to expand and order our knowledge. We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that for Augustine it is the one mind that knows. Consequently it will be necessary to speak here of the mind's higher function of "remembering" the principal forms of things, although we shall not explore the significance of this further at this stage.

Augustine was a realist who sought out the truth to the best of his ability; he remained so even after his conversion. This meant that understanding our knowledge of the world required an accounting of sensory perception. The culturally dominant theoretical views of the Stoics and Epicureans generally held our senses to be passive receptors of external influences that produced modifications in the soul. For the recent convert to a Neoplatonic version of Christianity, such predominantly materialist views were abhorrent: only the higher reality, the soul, could play the active role in the formation of knowledge, including that form based on sensation.[13]

In following the lead of Plotinus on the issue of sensation, Augustine was aware of the physiological basis of sensation, including the notion of nerves sending stimuli to the brain (*Gn.lit*., 7.13.20). But these internal stimuli, affected by external objects, function as servants to the mind, which attends[14] to these impressions in order to form an image which it can store in memory or which it can judge according to the standards of the eternal forms present in the mind. Here is Augustine's expression of this point regarding the active role of the mind in the process of coming to know an external object:

> Although we see some things with the body, others with the mind [i.e., the eternal forms], the distinction between these two sorts of sight is seen by the mind, not the body. The objects which are beheld by the mind have need of no senses of the body to let us know that they are true, but those perceived through the body cannot be included in our knowledge if there is no mind to which these incoming messages can be referred. And it is a fact that those incoming messages, which it is said, in some wise, to receive, are left outside, but it forms images of them, that is, incorporeal likenesses of physical things, which it commits incorporeally to the memory, so that from there, when it has the

will or power, it may give judgment on them, after bringing them out of custody and displaying them in the sight of its thought (*ep.* 147.38).

Notice Augustine's reference to memory in the process of knowing. The point is not simply that we store an image of something perceived. More importantly Augustine carefully observes how all sensory perceptions occur over time in the sense that this phenomenon involves not only divisible parts but also requires a durational continuum. Consider, for example, his discussion of hearing:

> Unless the spirit immediately formed within itself and retained in memory an image of the word perceived by the ears, one could not tell whether the second syllable was actually the second one, since the first would no longer exist once it had impinged upon the ear and passed away. And so all habits of speech, all sweetness of song, all motion in the acts of our body would break down and come to nought, if the spirit did not retain a memory of past bodily motions with which to join further operations (*Gn.lit.*, 12.16.33).

Our perceptual knowledge of the world, therefore, is never merely a series of "impressions" made upon someone's mind as though it were a blank tablet. For Augustine, everything we perceive is formed by the active shaping of the mind ordering its sensory impressions through memory and judging them in terms of patterns of meaning also "derived" from memory.

A consequence of this account of the perceptual basis of *scientia*, our knowledge of the world, is that we can be in error insofar as we can confuse different objects because of their similarity and thereby judge incorrectly (*Gen.lit.*, 12.25.52). Augustine is quite fully aware that this is not due to our perception as such, for if we merely assert that something appears to me in some manner then we cannot possibly be deceived (*c. Acad.*, 3.10.26). Rather the risk of error derives from our desire to seek the truth present in our experiences with its implicit presupposition of a criterion for judging. We can minimize the possibilities for error by checking the comprehensiveness of our perception and the normal context for the working of our perceiving faculties.[15] "On the whole, however, Augustine assumes, rather than demonstrating, that most, if not all, sense-perceptions convey genuine and reliable information about the external world."[16]

Among the reasons for Augustine's vigorous defense of the sort of knowledge derived through our experience of the world surely is his theological conviction that certain truths of the faith require trusting sensory perceptions. But his sharp departure from his Neoplatonic heritage in accepting so large a role for trusting our sensory perceptions is just as strongly grounded in Augustine's conviction of the reasonableness of accepting our knowledge of nature, history, and world events mediated through our own experiences or the testimonies of others' experiences (*trin.*, 15.12.21). Such wondrous advances in our knowledge are worth the risk; "for if one who trusts his senses is sometimes deceived, he is more wretchedly deceived who fancies he should never trust them" (*civ.*, 19.18).

To be sure, Augustine thus recognizes that strictly speaking *scientia* does not bear the marks of immutability and certitude, so that it is not properly knowledge; yet commonly speaking he is willing to accept both our grasp of eternal truth and our perceptions of the world as knowledge (*retr.*, 1.14.3). He is so convinced of the value of our knowledge of the world that he practically argues for the necessity of science in the face of the Neoplatonic metaphysicians who know eternal truths by challenging them to answer whether they can know the variety and development of animal life merely by grasping their eternal exemplars (*trin.*, 4.16.21).

What, then, can we conclude about our scientific knowledge of the world? As we have already seen, "knowledge is born from both, from the one who knows and the object that is known" (*trin.*, 9.12.17). The human knower, when encountering a range of phenomena, draws out from the recesses of memory under the stimulus of this encounter appropriate principles to order and comprehend the data. In this sense, scientific knowledge

(as underlying principle or order) is present to our minds in a latent state, needing to become actual and reflectively structured by our encounter with the data of the world.

> From this we can conclude that learning these facts [of scientific principles], which do not reach our minds as images by means of the sense but are recognized by us in our minds, without images, as they actually are, is simply a process of thought by which we gather together things which, although they are muddled and confused, are already contained in the memory. When we give them our attention, we see to it that these facts, which have been lying scattered and unheeded, are placed ready to hand, so that they are easily forthcoming once we have grown used to them (*conf*., 10.11).

Even though the principal ideas structuring our scientific knowledge are thus not derived from sensation but elicited out of the "muddled" recesses of our memory, it is precisely this sort of cumulative skill in scientific knowing that can mediate our awareness of these ideas. Indeed we grasp these unchanging, eternal principles only in transitory glimpses, so that they can be stored in an orderly way in our memories and used to organize further empirical data. In other words our growth in scientific knowledge requires recognition of increasingly more complex spheres of experience understood in light of the underlying principles; and this corresponding expansion in understanding of data allows us to grasp with greater facility and clarity additional principles to apply in further efforts at applying our scientific knowledge to the world.[17]

This must suffice for our presentation of the main contours of Augustine's understanding of our knowledge of the world. While it definitely is incomplete[18] and ignores more subtle nuances of his position,[19] nonetheless I trust that this outline provides us with a sufficient glimpse into Augustine so that we now have a basis for conducting our experiment of relating his thought to Polanyi's. Once my own attention had been directed toward this possibility, I was quite amazed by the structural relationships that emerged between their respective positions.

The underlying basis of this similarity, in my estimation, is their convergence on the insight that there is no knowledge without a meaningful relationship established by a knower to something known (*trin*., 9.12.17). For Polanyi this is the personal coefficient in all knowing, and for Augustine it is the fact that only a rational soul or mind is capable of knowing. And for both of these thinkers, this personal coefficient was not limited to explicit, formal thought-processes. Polanyi's recognition that we know more than we can tell was a way of pointing to the tacit dimension, just as Augustine's reflections on the powers sustaining our reasoning led him to ponder their grounding in the vast recesses of "memory."

From this fundamental structural similarity flow several additional specific points of convergence. For both, perception is the active integrating of or attending to bodily modifications produced by external realities in order to discern their focal meaning or their instantiation of formal principles. Even at the level of perception knowing is a process occurring through time which requires the participation of the knower's tacit powers or memory to complete. Consequently in both positions knowing is always an achievement upheld by a changeable human being that is subject to error. But the risks are worth it since the achievement can lead to an ever more comprehensive understanding of our environment through the scientific disciplines.[20] And just as the development of science itself depends upon catching a glimpse of higher realms of meaning which are discovered in memory and used to order the phenomenon for Augustine, so, too, for Polanyi the creative imagination "racks our brain" until we catch a glimpse of the gradient of meaning that resolves the quest.[21] For both thinkers the ordered pattern of meaning discerned in this way is a higher level of reality or more real than its instantiation in a particular object.

In closing this stage of the experiment, I should like to emphasize that the point behind engaging in this sort of comparison has been not to make an unnuanced sort of claim that would equate, say, the tacit dimension with memory. The claim of a structural similarity being advanced here means rather that the tacit dimension functions in many important and relevant respects in Polanyi's theory of knowledge similarly to the way that memory functions within Augustine's. It is this sort of connection that I have been attempting to portray and which must be appreciated, if this experiment is to be deemed successful.

5. *Sapientia*: Knowledge above the Mind

In the hope that this experiment is proving to be at least provisionally attractive, I now would like to move toward its completion. This requires indicating how Augustine's understanding of *sapientia*, the goal or object of the higher function of reason, might validly be used to guide an aspect of Polanyi's thought with theological implications. That is, I hope to be able to explain how Augustine's approach to our knowledge of eternal reasons might help us understand how we can uphold a knowledge of God in Polanyian terms.

At first glance this might not appear terribly promising, for what Augustine means by wisdom is illustrated by the kind of knowledge resulting from the acknowledgment, even if begun in doubt, required of ourselves as knowers.[22] In this case Augustine believes we have a knowledge which is true, *a priori* (i.e., not derived from a perception of external objects), certain, and immutable.[23] One would be hard pressed to find any depiction of knowledge understood along these lines in the Polanyian corpus.[24] While this observation is correct, it poses no significant problem to this project if we keep in mind that the aim is to explore Augustine's effort to explain the intellectual process whereby he thought we came to know wisdom. Thus even if the particular Neoplatonic context of his characterization of wisdom may be too culturally bound to be of service to us (a claim I would find too unhistorically nuanced, but must put aside here), his account of our intellectual appreciation of them perhaps is not. Finally we also need to keep in mind that our purpose is served simply by understanding Augustine's general outline of the basic dynamics of this intellectual activity, without our needing to resolve any of the fine points of interpretation that has occupied much of subsequent Augustinian scholarship.

As we have already seen, the ideas are "above" the mind (*trin*., 2.6.11) in the divine Intelligence. Nonetheless somehow our minds must be joined to them (*trin*. 12.2.2) if we are to use them as standards of judgment. At other times Augustine simply affirms that they are in the mind (*civ*., 8.6) contained in the memory (*conf*., 10.12). If we are to interpret Augustine fairly, all these claims must be understood to be describing the complex activity of our knowledge of truth, and so must somehow cohere with each other in Augustine's thought. Apparently he meant by these claims that the human mind is informed by a structure of rationality that is patterned on the divine Intelligence.[25] This rational pattern is in the mind potentially, that is, as something we do not always perceive to be there; yet it is present even if we are not aware of it at the moment (*imm.an*., 6). Augustine, in other words, seems to hold that we have a virtual knowledge of the forms of things that is patterned on the divine Intelligence and that we become aware of these in the course of our lives through the concrete application of them in the sciences as we have seen earlier or in the introspective contemplation of concepts such a truth and goodness with their normative content and power.

When it comes to the matter of how we are able to know these truths, Augustine generally has recourse to the metaphors of recollection and illumination. Recollection and its correlate of memory serve Augustine particularly well in contexts where he speaks of all that is latent in consciousness. Because of his awareness of misconstruing recollection as a literal remembering, however, his preferred manner of speaking on this ability

of the mind to know is illumination.[26]

In its most prominent usage in Augustine's writings, this light is divine and "is above minds and transcends all minds" (*Io.ev.tr*., 3.4.3). Just as in the case of the eternal forms, though, there is a created light, which is the human mind's ability to understand both material and spiritual realities and which is clearly distinct from the divine light.[27] This created light of the intellect, nonetheless, ultimately derives its light from the constant, immanent presence of God.

> But distinct from these objects is the Light by which the soul is illumined, in order that it may see and truly understand everything. . . . For the Light is God Himself, whereas the soul is a creature; yet since it is rational and intellectual, it is made in His image. And when it tries to understand the Light, it trembles in its weakness and finds itself unable to do so. Yet from this source comes all the understanding it is able to attain (*Gen. lit*., 12.31.59).

While no human being, even the ungodly (*trin*., 14.15.21), is ever entirely without this divine light, still a life of genuine piety allows this light to enlighten the soul to a greater degree (*div. qu*., 46). Finally, it is necessary to realize that this divine light is present in all forms or levels of knowledge, including perception, imagining, belief, as well as the sciences and wisdom (*ep*., 120.10). In short we can say that Augustine holds that the created light of the human intellect enjoys a continuous, direct relationship with the divine light which is the ultimate source of intelligibility and whose illuminating power is normally experienced in the normativeness of our judgments and moral choices (*trin*., 14.15.21) but with the guidance of faith may on occasion be directly touched (*conf*., 9.24).

Are there any clues in Augustine's writings that will help us understand further this direct presence of the divine to the human mind? Interestingly in his description of his own quest for God in the *Confessions*, Augustine affirms that he found God in his memory, once he learned of God (*conf*., 10.24). But even before he learned of God, he was able to search for God above himself (*conf*., 10.16). Why does he speak this way? I think his earlier description of his experience of the divine light after learning of the teachings of the "Platonists" may help us understand.

> Under your guidance I entered into the depths of my soul. . . . I entered, and with the eye of my soul, such as it was, I saw the Light that never changes casting its rays over . . . my mind. It was not the common light of day that is seen by the eye of every living thing of flesh and blood. . . . What I saw was something quite, quite different from any light we know on earth. It shone above my mind, but not in the way that oil floats above water or the sky hangs over the earth. It was above me because it was itself the Light that made me, and I was below because I was made by it. All who know the truth know this Light (*conf*., 7.10).

Here Augustine clearly affirms the utter transcendence of God, who simultaneously is present as the guiding light of the mind seeking truth. This light completely surpasses our intellect, hence it is above the mind; yet even in our unknowing, it functions in our efforts to discover the truth. Once we explicitly discover God's presence in our life, we find God is so intimately related to us that the divine is now a feature of our memory, that vast generally unknown dimension of my self.

Using these Augustinian reflections on the awareness of the reality of God sustaining our cognitive activity, I would now like to offer a suggestion on how we might interpret Polanyi's position along analogous lines. Presupposed in this is the recognition that the notion of "reality" in Polanyi's thought is multivalent and not univocal.[28]

If this is granted, I believe that Polanyi's understanding of the tacit dimension requires the acknowledgment that every human knower implicitly relies on an openness to all of reality in every act of knowing.[29] What this tacit orientation to the totality of reality involves can only be expressed explicitly in light of the intellectual tradition in which an individual dwells. Such a form of indwelling set up its heuristic field through which the person discovers himself heading toward an ever more comprehensive discovery of reality.[30] In the case of the Christian community such a heuristic field allows Christians to discern their salvation in the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Several features of Polanyi's reflections on our knowledge of God and religious dynamics that are sometimes considered puzzling can be illumined when viewed in this perspective. In his discussion of the difference between verification and validation, Polanyi observed how, as our degree of participation in a heuristic vision grew more profound, we came to rely increasingly on internal criteria of mental satisfaction.[31] But now the Christian's discernment of God in the world or in herself would have its appropriate ontological correlate in the infinitely open grounds of the tacit dimension. Just as was the case with Augustine, the presence of the divine reality within Polanyi's theory is tacitly known and functions normally as the ontological correlate grounding the intelligibility of our deepest convictions and sustaining our affirmations made with universal intent. But there can also be those rare moments where an individual "breaks out," as Polanyi puts it, toward the fullness of the reality toward which our tacit openness is directing us, namely God.[32] If these fairly describe the dynamics of our awareness of God, Polanyi then was correct to emphasize that God was beyond our explicit conceptions and thus could never be apprehended as a "fact." God would be, as Augustine put it, "quite, quite different from any light we know on earth." The Christian religion is more appropriately understood to be functioning as a heuristic vision fostering an attempt at "breaking out" toward that wholly other reality who nevertheless is present in our tacit awareness. Even Polanyi's later reflections on religious myth and ritual as involving transnatural integrations whereby we are carried away so as to allow us to "participate in an ultimate meaning of things"[33] can be understood in this light. For here we have another instance wherein Polanyi's account helps us to understand how communal worship functions by allowing its participants to glimpse, however momentarily or fleetingly, that toward which their tacit awareness opens them, namely God.

In short, I believe that when read in light of Augustine's theory of knowledge, Polanyi can be legitimately understood to have grounded the ontological referent of Christian symbolism in the depths of our tacit knowing and that he did this in such a way that he explained how living faithfully within a Christian community can be understood to provide opportunities for Christians to experience the reality of God directly in worship and contemplation.

6. Concluding Reflections

The point of this experiment has been twofold. The first was to explore the possibility that there might be sufficient structural similarities between Augustine's view of knowledge and Polanyi's that would allow us to use it to point to a way of defending the reality of God for a Christian believer within a Polanyian perspective. I hope some success has been achieved in this.

The second, which is indicated more in the title of this essay than in its text, has been to raise the question, particularly for theologians, of how Polanyi's thought ought to be interpreted. Since Polanyi has shown us that there are no neutral vantage points for understanding reality, we must commit ourselves by standing somewhere. I do not think it is sufficient for a properly theological level of inquiry simply to identify itself as Christian. A further specification of some intellectual heritage for mediating the Christian faith is necessary. I am personally beginning to appreciate that perhaps those inspired by Polanyi ought to identify themselves as standing in the tradition of Augustine. Recently Jaroslav Pelikan has opined that Whitehead's remark about Western thought being a "series of footnotes to Plato" could just as well have been a "series of footnotes to Augustine," through whom Platonic ideals have been so long mediated to the West.[34] He has claimed further that "so long as our civilization maintains its identity, continuity with him will always be a characteristic of it."[35] One of the drawbacks frequently attributed to Polanyi's theory of knowledge is that it does not speak to the Western philosophical heritage. That may be true of the contemporary state of the traditions of philosophical inquiry. This may be more a sign of their own "forgetfulness," however, than it is of a limitation in Polanyi's theory. For if my thought experiment has been to any degree successful, then perhaps Polanyi's Augustinianism may be a sign of the future.

Notes

1. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Harper Torchbooks, 1964), p. 266.

2. For exceptions to this observation, see Patrick Grant, "Michael Polanyi: The Augustinian Component," *New Scholasticism*, 48 (1974), 438-63 and R. Melvin Keiser, "Inaugurating Post-critical Philosophy: A Polanyian Meditation on Creation and Conversion in Augustine's *Confessions*," *Zygon*, 22 (1987), pp. 317-337. Both authors explore relationships to Augustine by uncovering structural similarities in the process of conversion, Grant placing these in the context of the learning process and the human pilgrimage, Keiser in the cosmic setting of creation. The epistemological focus of this essay is thus rather different, although a convergence toward a similar conclusion may be discerned where Grant speaks of illumination (448-49) and Keiser explores the possibility of including an awareness of the divine Light (334) in the profundity of our knowing (330).

3. See, for example, the essay, "Self-Governance in Science," (originally published in 1942) in *The Logic of Liberty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 52-56, which already acknowledges the role of tradition in fostering scientific inquiry. Or see *Science, Faith and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964; original edition, 1946), p. 45, where Polanyi relates the acceptance of scientific beliefs to the maxim, *fides quaerens intellectum*, but without any expression of a possible connection to Augustine.

4. See letters from Patrick Grant of February 19 and March 8, 1973 and Polanyi's responses of March 5 and 15, 1973 in the "Polanyi Papers" 12:2 and 4, Regenstien Library, University of Chicago.

5. In this respect my proposal is analogous to Gerald Holton's conclusion in "Michael Polanyi and the History of Science," *Tradition and Discovery*, XIX, no. 1 (1992-93), 16-30. Holton claims that Polanyi was able to discern accurately the actual course of Einstein's development of his theories without the requisite historical research because of his internalization of the practice of scientific discovery. My suggestion is that Polanyi's rediscovery of the post-critical stance carries with it further similarities to Augustine's position which explicit analysis might uncover.

6. References to Augustine's writings will be given parenthetically in the text of the essay. For a key to the abbreviations used, the Latin title of the texts, their location in Migne's *Patrologiae Latinae*, and the English translation used, see the bibliographic entries listed under "Works of Augustine Consulted" at the end of this essay.

7. Primarily I am relying on Ronald H. Nash, *The light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1969) and Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (Berekely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987). Also helpful has been Bruce Bubacz, *St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge: A Contemporary Analysis* (New York and Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), though his interpretative scheme must be viewed with caution.

8. See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1969), pp. 84-7 for an assessment of this likely relationship.

9. Nash, p. 24.

10. This is the Septuagint version of Isaiah 7.9 to which Augustine refers (*lib.arb*., 1.2.4).

11. *ep*., 120.3: "Far be it from us to think that God would hate in us that which distinguishes us from the beasts."

12. For a fine exposition of Augustine's efforts of making rational appeals within socially conditioned realms of discourse, see William J. Collinge, "The Relation of Religious Community Life to Rationality in Augustine," *Faith and Philosophy*, 5 (1988), 242-253.

13. Nash (p. 43), O'Daly (p. 84), and Bubacz (p. 93) all emphasize the active character of sensation for Augustine.

14. Notice Agustine's language here: "Hence, when we see a body we have to consider and to distinguish the following three things . . . : first, the object which we see . . . , and this can naturally exist even before it was seen; secondly, the vision, which was not there before we perceived the object that was presented to the sense; thirdly, the power that fixes the sense of sight on the object that is seen as long as it is seen, namely the *attention*

[*intentio*] of the mind" [emphasis added] (*trin*., 11.2.2).

15. "It is one thing to see; it is something else to grasp the whole of something by seeing, since, indeed, a thing is seen when it is perceived as present in any way whatsoever, but the whole is grasped by seeing, when it is seen, so that no part of it escapes the notice, or when its outlines can be included in the view, as nothing of your will at present escapes your notice . . ." (*ep*., 147.21).

16. O'Daly, p. 95.

17. *Trin*., 12.14.23: "Only a few succeed in arriving at these things [eternal reasons] with the eye of the mind, and when it does arrive insofar as it can, the one who arrives does not abide in them, but is repulsed by the rebounding, as it were, of the eye itself, and thus a transitory thought is formed of a thing that is not transitory.

"And yet this transitory thought is committed to the memory by means of the sciences in which it is instructed, so that there may be a place to which the thought that was forced to pass from thence may again return. . . . Yet what the gaze of the mind snatched from it, even though only in passing, and swallowing as it were into a belly, stored it in the memory, over this it will be able in a certain measure to ruminate again by recollection, and transfer what it has thus learned into the respective branch of knowledge."

18. For example, his instrumental understanding of language as pointing to a "meaning" which only another person can grasp. See *mag*., 38-46.

19. For example, sensory perception includes a stage of imaging constructed by the sub-rational level of the soul, as exists in animals, which is earlier analyzed as "internal sense" (*lib. arb*., 2.8-13) and later as "spiritual sight" (*Gen. lit*., 12.9.20).

20. Hence we must appreciate that, although Polanyi characterizes Augustine's position as devaluing science, this would not have been due, if historically correct, to his theory of knowledge, but perhaps to his theological conception of the nature of or means towards salvation. See *Personal Knowledge*, p. 141.

21. "The Creative Imagination" in *Toward a Unity of Knowledge*, ed. by Marjorie Grene (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1969), pp. 64-67.

22. For examples of Augustine's discussion of this so-called *si fallor, sum* argument, see *civ*., 11.26; *trin*. 10.10.14 and 15.12.21; and *lib.arb*., 2.3.7.

23. Consider, for example, this claim made by Augustine: "The ideas are certain original and principal forms of things, i.e., reasons, fixed and unchangeable, which are not themselves formed and, being thus eternal and existing always in the same state, are contained in the Divine Intelligence" (*div.qu*., 46.2).

24. A possible exception is that in *Science, Faith and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1964) Polanyi refers to transcendent value as "spiritual reality" (pp. 56-7). Subsequently in his new introduction, however, he explicitly rejects the need for such an interpretation (p. 17).

25. Nash, p. 109; and this, in turn, is due to the mind's "participation" in the divine light.

26. *retr*., 1.4.4.: "Again, in a certain place, I said that `without a doubt, those well versed in the liberal disciplines bring out, in learning the knowledge buried in oblivion within them and, in a certain sense, dig it out' [*sol*., 2.20.35]. But I disapprove of this also. For it is more credible that even those who are ignorant of them, when properly questioned, reply truly concerning certain disciplines because, when they have the capacity to grasp it, the light of eternal reason by which they perceive those unchangeable truths is present to them."

27. *contra Faustum*, 20.7; PL 42.

28. This must be emphasized since it is possible to develop a reading of Polanyi which holds to a univocal understanding of his definition of reality with the attendant theological consequences. See Harry Prosch, *Michael Polanyi* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), p. 249.

29. See my *Doers of the Word* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 131-45 for a more detailed defense of this claim with citations from Polanyi's work supporting it. At the time I was unaware of the Augustinian connection.

30. *Personal Knowledge*, p. 403.

31. *Ibid*., p. 321.

32. *Ibid*., p. 164. For a defense of the claim that "breaking out" has an ontological basis in Polanyi, see my *Doers of the Word*, pp. 197-8.

33. Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch, *Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 153.

34. Pelikan, *The Mystery of Continuity: Time and History, Memory and Eternity in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986), p. 140.

35. *Ibid*., p. 151.

WORKS OF AUGUSTINE CONSULTED

Abbreviations, Titles, Translations

c. Acad. *contra Academicos* PL 32; *Against the Academics.* trans. by John J. O'Meara. Ancient Christian Writers, No. 12. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1950.

civ. *de civitate dei* PL 41; *The City of God.* Books 1-7. Trans. by Demetrius Zema and Gerald G. Walsh. Books 8-16. Trans. by Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monahan. Books 17-22. Trans. by Gerald G. Walsh and Daniel J. Honan. The Fathers of the Church, vols. 8, 14, 24. New York: The Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1950, 1952, 1954.

conf. *confessiones* PL 32; *Confessions.* Trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin. New York: Penguin Books, 1961.

div. qu. *de diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* PL 40; *Eighty-three Different Questions*. Trans. by David L. Mosher. The Fathers of the Church, vol. 70. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982.

ep. *epistulae* PL 33; *Letters*. [1-270] Trans. by Sister Wilfrid Parsons. The Fathers of the Church, vols. 12, 18, 20, 30, 32. New York: The Fathers of the Church, Inc. 1951-56.

Gn. litt. *de Genesi ad litteram* PL 34; *The Literal Meaning of Genesis.* Trans. by John Hammond Taylor. Ancient Christian Writers, Nos. 41 and 42. New York: Newman Press, 1982.

imm. an. *de immortalitate animae* PL 32; *The Immortality of the Soul*. Trans. by Ludwig Schopp. The Fathers of the Church, vol. 4. New York: Cima Publishing Co., Inc. 1947. Pp. 1-47.

Io.ev.tr. *in Iohannis evangelium tractatus* PL 35; *Tractates on the Gospel of John.* [tractates 1-27] Trans. by John W. Retting. The Fathers of the Church, vol. 78 and 79. Waxhington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988.

lib.arb. *de libero arbitrio* PL 32; *The Free Choice of the Will.* Trans. by Robert P. Russell. The Fathers of the Church, vol. 59. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968. Pp. 63-241.

mag. *de magistro* PL 32; *The Teacher*. Trans. by Robert P. Russell. The Fathers of the Church, vol. 59. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968. Pp. 1-61.

retr. *retractationes* PL 32; *The Retractations.* Trans. by Sister Mary Inez Bogan. The Fathers of the Church, vol. 60. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968.

sol. *soliloquia* PL 32; *The Soliloquies*. Trans. by Thomas F. Gilligan. The Fathers of the Church, vol. 5. New York: Cima Publishing Co., Inc., 1948. Pp. 333-426.

trin. *de trinitate* PL 42; *The Trinity*. Trans. by Stephen McKenna. The Fathers of the Church, vol. 45. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1962.

ut.cred. *de utilitate credendi* PL42; *The Advantage of Believing*. Trans. by Luanne Meagher. The Fathers of the Church, vol. 4. New York: Cima Publishing Co., Inc., 1947. Pp. 383-442.

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Submissions for Publication

of interest to persons interested in the thought of Michael Polanyi are welcomed. Review suggestions and book reviews should be sent to Walter Gulick (see addresses listed below). Manuscripts, notices and notes should be sent to Phil Mullins. All materials from U.K. contributors should first be sent to John Puddefoot. Manuscripts should be doublespaced type with notes at the end; writers are encouraged to employ simple citations within the text when possible. Use MLA or APA style. Abbreviate frequently cited book titles, particularly books by Polanyi (e.g., *Personal Knowledge* becomes *PK*). Shorter articles (10-15 pages) are preferred, although longer manuscripts (20-24 pages) will be considered.

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Electronic Discussion Group

The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group exploring implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. For those with access to the INTERNET, send a message to "owner-polanyi@sbu.edu" to join the list or to request further information. Communications about the electronic discussion group may also be directed to John V. Apczynski, Department of Theology, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778-0012 PHONE: (716) 375-2298 FAX: (716) 375-2389.

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