LIGHT & COGNITION
IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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Introduction

In medieval scholarship, divine illumination (hereafter, DI) is thought to be the guiding theory of epistemology in the Augustinian tradition. Since DI's inception in the 5th century, it has been regarded as fragmentary and ambiguous, but the significance of Augustine's thought demanded that numerous iterations and concessions be made to sustain it. DI's evolution into maturity through Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent cemented the theory as epistemological doctrine until its consequent rejection at the hands of Duns Scotus in the 13th century. The theory's hotly contested nature echoes into today, with scholars like Lydia Schumacher and Ronald Nash[1] opposing those who wave DI aside as a "platonic relic".

As Schumacher in "Divine Illumination" seeks to untangle Augustine's epistemology through a theological lens, I believe the common issue of inaccessibility lies in the philosopher's language regarding light. In the medieval discussion of beauty that takes place after Augustine, light is a frequent analogy characterizing epistemological relationships between the beauty of *scientia, sapentia*[2] and God. If we consider light's role in this discussion of beauty and other transcendentals, analogizing creative power in ontology and cognitive power in epistemology, we are able to expose and clarify the motif through visiting its repeated but unique instantiations in the Middle Ages. Because Augustine saw fit to place the light motif as a cornerstone of his epistemology, its importance in philosophy cannot be given short shrift.

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[1] Nash, Ronald H. The Light of the Mind; St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge. Lexington: U of Kentucky, 1969. Print.

[2] *Scientia* is concerned with knowledge obtained through sense perception. *Sapentia* is wisdom obtained through extended contemplation of *scientia's* relation to transcendental aspects of reality. I use these terms to refer to both knowledge of the objects which they concern and to the objects considered in themselves (objects *of sapentia*).

The timeline usually associated with divine illumination spans from its inception in Augustine's thought to the denial of the theory by Duns Scotus. We find that from the early 5th century through 11th century, divine illumination stayed grounded in its Augustinian roots. Upon the rediscovery of Aristotle and many Arabic philosophers, Augustine's theory took a decidedly Aristotelean turn through the minds of high scholasticism. Even through its defeat at the hands of Duns Scotus in the early 12th century, divine illumination was considered the basic theory of knowing from which leading epistemology was developed. If we trace divine illumination's evolution in the continuing tradition of Augustine, it is apparent that a similar process of clarification and refinement transpires for the motif of light itself, undoubtedly due to its crucial association with the epistemological theory.

Lydia Schumacher maintains that divine illumination should be defined as an "intrinsic cognitive capacity that is developed as the mind is intended to work for its purpose." As she elaborates on the theory, we find a five-fold terminology used to dissect it: capacity, content, divine orientation, process and certainty. DI is not to be mistaken with cognition itself, but it exists over and against the mind, responsible for that which the mind *is* and the fact that it *is capable* of knowing *sapentia* through *scientia*. The main source of opposition to DI as detailed by Schumacher is a "scholarly habit of taking Augustine's Divine Illumination at face value"[3]. Contrary to Robert Pasnau, who in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy writes, "To speak of this [divine] influence as an illumination is of course to use a metaphor, one not likely to be unpacked fully. Our own minds present enough of a puzzle to us: when we try to understand how the divine mind might influence our own, we must inevitably fall back on

[3] Schumacher, Lydia. Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. Print. 25.

metaphor"[4], I believe that it is wholly possible to elucidate Augustine's usage of illumination in its deliberate, **analogically** representative role. Pasnau's description of the common apathy towards light is one of the chief examples of DI being taken at "face value", a response seen across the board in reaction to the lack of systematization in Augustine's epistemology conflicting with the deep analogy of the light motif. Pasnau writes, "For most people today it is hard to take divine illumination seriously, hard to view it as anything other than a quaint relic. A first step toward developing a proper perspective on the theory is to see it in its broader context."

Modern efforts to explain the importance of divine illumination by Nash and Schumacher are mainly based in providing the proper theological context, relegating the confusion to the entanglement of philosophy with theology. While this is responsible for a large part of the obscurity, I believe similar clarity can be ascertained through an analysis of illumination. In order for this analysis to take place, I will have to redefine the motif as it stands in the Middle Ages, and prove its additive usefulness. The use of light lies in its ability to combat much of the opposition alluded to by Pasnau, including but not limited to: that the theory is exclusive to platonism, that it is characteristic of "forceful impression or interruption" of the mind, that DI exists without context and is irreparably fragmentary and finally that the language pertaining to illumination is overwhelmingly obscure.

In attempting to unpack light through aesthetics, and then in itself across the Middle Ages, the motif of illumination in Augustine will come to be seen as a crucially important

[4] Pasnau, Robert. "Divine Illumination." Stanford University. Stanford University, 02 Nov. 1999. Web. 03 May 2015.

analogy characterizing relationships within the created order[5]. Following this exposition, I will briefly address common criticisms of DI: using this redefined illumination to argue that the theory is in fact not a "relic", nor exclusively neoplatonic, and that ultimately, widespread de-contextualization of the theory has lead to a fundamentally confused debate in secondary scholarship. By applying a historically clarified account of the light motif as espoused by philosophers heavily influenced by Augustine, to Augustinian epistemology, I hope to motivate a modern reassessment of divine illumination.

[5] I define the created order as not exclusive to, but inclusive of created entities and their respective ontological & epistemological hierarchies. An example in ontology: as sand relates to rocks, rocks belong to an order of inanimate objects which by definition hold attributes of limited motion. In this limited motion, they yield marginal *being* which begets a lesser relation to God. I hold that the created order or *things* in it include both objects of *scientia* and *sapentia.*

Contents

A. Foundations: Beauty & Knowing

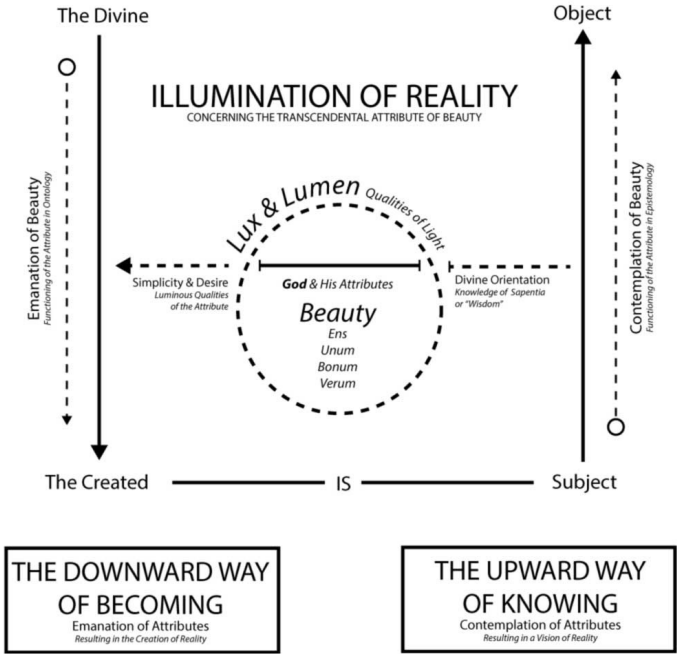
Concerning the far left side of the diagram: an exposition of light in ontology via aesthetics.

Light is most accessible through a discussion of beauty in the created order. Here, we see how Psuedo-Dionysius uses the light motif to ascribe the qualities of "call and plenitude" to (the interaction of) transcendentals within the created order. Specifically, Dionysius takes up beauty and describes how these same qualities map to the attribute in "simplicity and desire". This section also includes justifications linking beauty and other divine attributes to Augustine's "ways" of reality, namely ontology and epistemology.

B. Language of Light, Light to the Semiotician

Concerning the center of the diagram: an exposition of light in ontology and in itself.

Robert Grosseteste describes the transcendental attribute *ens*, or being, much in the same way as beauty interacts with reality through "extension and motion". Grosseteste strips away these qualities to reveal the pure qualities of light, independent of ontology and the transcendentals, as *lux* and *lumen*. We find that these pure qualities map to attributes, which themselves interact within reality. This three-fold relation is then clarified and packaged into a definition which we can rightly call light.



C. The Aesthetic *Visio*

Concerning the far right side of the diagram: an exposition of light in epistemology via aesthetics.

We transition back to Thomas Aquinas's aesthetics to see if this redefinition of the light motif holds in beauty's interaction with the "upward way". A brief description of Thomistic aesthetics follows: from beauty as *visa placent* to the formal criteria that constitute beauty, ending in the resulting aesthetic vision. Looking forward to an application of light to Augustine's DI, consideration of its functioning in epistemology via aesthetics is important.

D. Augustine's Epistemology Revisited

Concerning the relation of light to divine illumination: an application of light to Augustine's epistemology.

Beauty is then stripped from the "upward way" to reveal the analog for call & plenitude: meditative contemplation. Augustine's epistemology is re-read and illumined by the motif in terms of Schumacher's 5 facets: capacity, content, process, divine orientation and certainty. The main objections raised in scholarship are briefly addressed through a rebuttal to Duns Scotus and left open for a reassessment of divine illumination.

Foundations: Beauty & Knowing

In order to set the stage for our exploration of the light motif, it is important to see how we are warranted in constructing the definition in primarily aesthetic terms. In the first half of the following section, we will touch on the fundamental aspects of a metaphysically based, Neoplatonic conception of transcendental beauty in Pseudo-Dionysius. Because of the philosopher's consistent and heavily Neoplatonic tendencies, Dionysius works fantastically to frame Augustine's use of light in descriptions of ontology, which have an undoubtably Neoplatonic basis.

Although beauty falls neatly in line with Augustine's metaphysics, Neoplatonism does not fully account for and often falls in contrast to his epistemology, which is uniquely Augustinian as a result of his Christian apologism. If we are to achieve the proposed redefinition, the aspects of the light motif as bolstered by metaphysics must also carry over into a discussion of epistemology. In the second half of the following section, we will justify the use of beauty as the primary mode of discussion with which to explicate divine illumination, through parallels between Dionysius and Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas's discussion of the intimate relationship between *the beautiful* and knowing serves to make applicable to epistemology, aspects of light given primarily in metaphysics via aesthetics.

BEAUTY IN ONTOLOGY

Into the middle ages, the whole of neoplatonic ontology relies on the notion of emanation. Though emanation has many definitional facets, Dionysius initially and most plainly describes the concept as a "transcendent plenitude"[6]. To convey this to the reader, Dionysius makes heavy use of light. As light definitionally extends itself to illuminate the

[6] Brendan, Sammon. The God Who Is Beauty. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013. Print. 126

darkness, so too does that which transcends the dimness of the material realm. For Dionysius, all of the divine names are not merely attributes of God, but are identical to and convertible within his nature. So, this luminary nature of God equates with the emanation of all his divine names, and like light, transcendental beauty "accounts for the fact that it constitutes both the source of beautification as well as those things that become beautified."[7]

A large issue throughout the Neoplatonic account of emanation is how divine attributes within the created order avoid collapsing into a version of pantheism through "the beauty of all things", or *pankalia.* It is easily seen that Dionysius does not view God's creation on par with God himself, but His "transcendent plenitude" is easily confused with this pitfall of *pankalia*. The definitional facet of beauty that mitigates this problem is its "sublimely objective" quality, which Brendan Sammon describes as objective to and transcendent of that which it subjectively relates to. Although the definition and term itself seem contradictory, this quality is one of the most fundamental aspects of understanding for our definition of light. Beauty as a divine name often is rejected for this seemingly fundamental contradiction: that it does not neatly follow the contours of neoplatonic emanation. Sammon expands on this participatory nature of the transcendentals as "call and plenitude", or the simultaneous infinite overflow from God and reflection of these divine names inasmuch as they are displayed in the objects of illumination. This follows in suit with the transcendentals' luminary qualities, however, it is not immediately clear how a plenitude of beauty reflects in an object of illumination, as beauty is hard pressed to be seen as anything other than subjective preference.

Sammon writes a very apt exposition of light in Dionysius, and this explanation, like our pending redefinition of divine illumination, helps to mitigate most of the confusion about

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[7] *Ibid*

the philosophical system in question. Specifically, these luminous qualities clear the remaining question of "how subjective beauty subsists under the divine name" from Dionysius's ontology. Contrary to call and plenitude as the general qualities of light in ontology, Dionysius maps (similar) terms more suited to transcendental beauty onto the existing Neoplatonic system: simplicity and desire which constitute the attribute's "conditions of visibility"[8]. The nature of divine beauty is simple, not composite, because like light, it definitionally multiplies itself into difference without diminishing the source. This can be thought of like a light shining through a prism, only if we consider the prism's *capacity* of multiplication to be contained in the original light as well (or this difference *qua* difference). Concerning simplicity, Sammon concludes, "Consequently, not only are all things beautified by the simplicity of beauty, but also as beautiful all things share in beauty's original simplicity insofar as they are caused by it."[9]

To be desirous of beauty is to have first received it in the causal series. In virtue of receiving beauty as a non-univocal attribute of existence, we know that orientation towards God constitutes an increased capacity to intuit the beauty in all of his creation (things illumined). To explain this, Dionysius gives the example of the person of Jesus Christ. The personhood of Jesus is the primary example Christians turn to on how "make visible" (to **relate** to) God. Given Jesus's relation to God, typically thought of as "God made flesh", and despite his difference in attributes seen through his personhood, we can clearly see that a particular reflection of God's will allows us to better intuit our surroundings. In a more concrete example, we know that the artist as receiver of beauty is only able to produce more

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[8] Sammon 141

[9] Sammon 140

beautiful artwork in virtue of him contemplating beautiful things, much in the way that a saintly person becomes more holy only through meditation on divine truth. Thus, we can see that divine beauty produces a desirous (and reflective) "cognitive stirring"[10] in the beautiful.

BEAUTY IN EPISTEMOLOGY

In a shift towards beauty in epistemology, we turn towards the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. Contrary to Dionysius, Aquinas's notion of beautiful things comes from the view of the perceiving subject. Among other scholars, Umberto Eco hones in on the Thomistic *visa placent,* the view that an observer knows beauty because beauty pleases when seen. From this primarily Aristotelean viewpoint, Aquinas argues that beauty tends toward the side of the subject because it is evocative of pleasure and consequently ultimate happiness, in contrast with a more Platonic view that beauty is known *only* in virtue of formal characteristics. Jacques Martain explains that what undergirds this notion is less subjective and more relational, drawing similarity from the activity of a sort of meditative contemplation. "Knowing beauty is not the result of a discursive process, nevertheless it is an activity of the mind… an intellectual capacity"[11] Sammon elucidates further, "The *placent* formula expresses how beauty, in the mode of the beautiful, communicates itself as an event happening in between the real order and the order of thought."[12] Continuing this line of thought, what we are able to glean from Aquinas considering *visa placent* is that a *full and unrestricted* view of beauty to the subject is essentially self-evident beatific vision, or an orientation towards God's attributes in virtue of knowing them.

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[10] *Ibid*

[11] Spicher, Michael. "Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. University of South Carolina, n.d. Web. 03 May 2015.

[12] Sammon 335

For Aquinas, tracing Augustine's upward "way of knowing" in regard to beautiful things is a fundamentally epistemological *capacity of thought*. Aesthetic judgement is arrived at via contemplation of certain formal characteristics and their relation to the "flourishing" that is characteristic of beautiful things. However, the "*placent* formula" does not map so clearly to the light motif as do the ontological traits of call and plenitude. There becomes many other questions and traits of beauty (and thus, its luminary qualities) to consider, unique to the way of knowing. These topics are as Schumacher lays out: intellectual capacity, content, process (or Nash's procession of sensation, cogitation, intellection) and certainty.[13] Despite these questions to be answered and relationships to be made, which will come in the following pages, the point of *visa placent* in terms of light is that the term analogizes how one responds to the Dionysian call of God and his attributes, and therefore has implications for the subject's participation in reflective quality of divine light.

Remember that the call of transcendental beauty is to be desirous of certain formal characteristics which mirror the divine. Participation in the call necessitates meditation on the beautiful. This aesthetic vision, or *visio,* is Aquinas's way of describing the process by which the beautiful provokes desire within us. Not only does the term include the self-reflective quality of beauty, but also the way in which we enter communication with God. It is not merely enough for a thing to *be* well proportioned and clear, but also drawn towards these qualities insofar as they exist in the divine. Thus to "answer the call" so to speak, *visa placent* necessitates knowledge of beauty only reached by contemplation of the beautiful things perceived.

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[13] Schumacher 4

The main stumbling block *between* Augustine's two "ways" within reality, to which Schumacher does much justice, is the tension of his Neoplatonic roots and Christian theology. In many ways, Augustine's later philosophy intertwines the two so heavily that they become indistinguishable from one another. When considering divine illumination, this artful joining makes any visibility of theology confusing, because the typical reader depends on a Neoplatonic basis to unify the often fragmentary discussion of reality in Augustine. This is the chief reason why Schumacher decides to inject clarity via a theological analysis of the theory: to draw the dividing lines of context with which to interpret the Augustine's epistemology.

In his book, "Augustine: A Very Short Introduction", Henry Chadwick writes, "Augustine was convinced that… the teaching of the Church was essentially 'Platonism for the multitude', a pictorial and figurative way of addressing unphilosophical minds with the effect of making them rational , at least in conduct."[14] Similarly, Sammon takes the view, "that the ideas of Greek philosophy provide to Christian thinkers a grammar and way of thinking that proves to be a ready made vehicle for expressing the radically new vision of reality they encounter in Christ."[15] This is all to say that Neoplatonic monism, emanationism and the like, much in the way we have seen above with the aesthetic language, falls neatly in step with Christian theology. A reader of Augustine learns to depend on this foothold of Platonism-in-Christianity, so when the lines between the two become blurred, as in DI, confusion ensues. In her interpretation, Schumacher argues that despite the biographical division between Manichean and Christian Augustine, all of his work can be read in the theological context.

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[14] Chadwick, Henry. Augustine: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print. 26.

[15] Sammon 86

Augustine's earlier work which, "perhaps most forcibly articulates this theory of knowledge by illumination"[16] anticipates the Christian thought later described in a full formulation of his ontology (*City of God*). Despite the influence of Mani on him, Augustine was able to successfully define the primary contours of his epistemology around the transcendental divine light, which transcends the confines of a theological perspective.

[16] Schumacher 28

Language of Light

As seen in the various sections of the above chapter, light in the strictly metaphysical sense frequently aids Dionysius in discussing God, his various attributes and their relationships to the created. Creation-specific mentions of light, including those made of transcendental beauty, are most consistent and dependable occurrences of the motif across the Middle Ages. So, it is most natural to begin expanding our definition based on these. I will describe these mentions as ontological, or specifically referring to the created *order;* rather than in reference to the broadness of all metaphysics.

When discussing the general ontology of the Christian tradition, it is essential to make reference to the biblical account of creation. One commentator in particular, Robert Grosseteste, makes heavy use of light in his *Hexameron,* in addition to writing a stand alone treatise on light, *De Luce.* He is among a seldom few in the Augustinian tradition to give such credence to light in itself. What makes *De Luce* so crucial as an addendum to the biblical account is its language, *lux* and *lumen*, which reoccurs in later philosophy. Whether Aquinas, Bonaventure and the rest were cognizant of the weight impressed on those terms by Grosseteste is debatable, but nevertheless, his account is crucial to unpack the motif. Additionally, *De Luce* is treatment of light from a primarily "philosophic-scientific"[17] point of view. Where Augustine thinks of Christianity as Neoplatonism for the masses, Grosseteste's writing thrives within the resurgence in Aristotle, attempting to map the systematic procession of Aristotelean philosophy to his theological perspective as the Bishop of Lincoln. Thus, Grosseteste by no means treats the motif lightly, but attempts to give literal weight to light's metaphysical role within his ontology.

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[17] Grosseteste 3

In contrast to Dionysius, Grosseteste has a slightly less mystical opinion of light as it relates to the divine. Instead of approaching light in respect to beauty, which lends itself to a more all-encompassing but ambiguous account in itself, he discusses light in terms of pure being, or *ens*. As you might be able to imagine, a rigorous account of light without strict reference to its purely physical properties while discussing being in itself is a daunting task and certainly reads as one. Nevertheless, motivated by the Aristotelean cosmology of the spheres, which we will not take issue with, Grosseteste asserts that light is divine self-reference insofar as it *is* the communication (not God himself, but his communicative quality by reference to *ens*) and the created. "Corporeity is either light itself or the agent which… introduces dimensions into matter in virtue of its participation in light, and acts through the power of the same light."[18] Similar to Dionysius, he takes light to inherently be super-abundant, emitting itself through the universe. He argues for light as plenitude on the basis of its infinitude and the infinite multiplication of the simplicity of God. He says, "the multiplication of a simple being an infinite number of times must produce a finite quantity" because the product of this multiplication (*ens*) exceeds infinitely: a) God must possess the divine attribute of being and B) again by this multiplication, things reached by *ens* are imbued with the substantial form of *ens* distinct from the divine simplicity. Grosseteste refers light in a twofold manner, as the simple quality of extension *and* the dynamic quality of matter.

Presumably the dynamism of matter has a teleological purpose, and in step with "call" in the Neoplatonic tradition, as well as desire in respect to beauty, Grosseteste chooses to address the dynamic quality of corporeity by reference to motion. If we imagine motion in the most plain sense, it is always towards some end, whether walking, sitting or climbing. In our

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[18] Grosseteste, Robert, and Clare C. Riedl. On light (De luce). Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1942. Print. 10

brief introduction to Dionysius's aesthetics, we saw that the quality of light falling into the category of call is desirous of beauty. Towards that same end, motion is an expression of extension. However, call and plenitude do not sufficiently describe light itself, because either of these terms is dependent on the subject-object relationship of God creating the created or the created attempting to observe the divine. Both Dionysius and Grosseteste say that these terms describe the relation of the attribute in question to man and back again, but the crucial distinction must be made that call and plenitude do not fall "directly under" qualities of the term *light.*

The redeeming value for all of the metaphysical confusion in *De Luce* is twofold: Grosseteste explains *ens* in similar terms as Dionysius does beauty and he is able to describe pure, non-contextual qualities of light, namely *lux* and *lumen*.[19] Riedl prefaces her translation with, "There seem to be no suitable English words to convey the distinction between *lux* and *lumen*… [Although] the distinction seems to be this: *lux* is light in its source, whereas *lumen* is reflected or radiated light."[20] It is not as though *lux* produces *lumen* or one in any way subsists under the other, rather, the are qualities of the same thing that both beget light's definition, which is why Riedl has little choice in translation of both to "light". Initially, it might seem incorrect to call one thing by two denotational names, but given light's "unity in diversity" it is warranted. *Lux* is light insofar as it exists in it's source and *lumen* is light insofar as it exists as communication.

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[19] This relieves pressure from the project in two ways. 1. That it is not *just* beauty that acts in this twofold manner in reality, but also being and as we come to find later, truth, in association with epistemology. 2. This twofold quality of light exists simply in itself without reference to God's qualities. Thus simple, divine light occupies an awkward space, not as God, but more "co-eternal" with him, and light's luminous quality as a function of His existence.

[20] Grosseteste 5

Augustine falls in agreeance with Grosseteste as he maintains that there are two types of light. When discussing the light of God, we think of the pure interplay of *lux* and *lumen* and how these qualities map accordingly to the entire created order with call and plenitude, and then to specific divine attributes (beauty: simplicity/desire, being: extension/motion). Because light and both of these definitional qualities are what remain constant through all of the transcendentals and various "levels" of interaction with the created order, light can be said to be "co-eternal" with God. The simple and necessary light of God diffuses into into all contingent things, though contingent things of the highest order, like the angels or intelligible concepts, are constantly oriented towards God, and thus exists in this uncreated (uncreated as *in the source*) light. Created (as *in creation*) light applies to all other, lower order, beings and things.

Augustine and Grosseteste both address ontological light in Genesis, with their initial inquiry being: "How did God say, 'Let there be light'?"[21] Augustine argues that the light God creates is material light that serves to make visible the heaven and earth that He created previously. God exists prior to his creations, and it follows that light does also, so in his creation of material light, he was merely illuminating the formless earth and heaven - giving form to these formless things. In this way, God opens the channels for self-communication himself, by imbuing the created world with light. Further, Augustine says that "The words, "Let there be light," refer to the illumination and formation of intellectual creatures." We find that although light is co-eternal with God, there are different qualities it assumes as the

[21] St. Augustine and Taylor, John Hammond. The Literal Meaning of Genesis. New York: Paulist Press, 1982. Print. Ch. 2

creator and in the created, many of which take on added layers of abstraction distinct from the divinity that inspires it[22].

In the *Hexameron*, Grosseteste has a similar view that light is "co-eternal" with God. He also refers to a distinction between the created light and divine, simple light by quoting St. Basil, "It was not by movement of the sun's body, but by the pouring out of the *original* light - now sent out, now brought back according to the divine command ."[23] In this first procession of light from God to the cosmos, *lumen* is simple light and *lux* is "begotten from the first body". The first body that he refers to is the material firmament to which God first bestows light. As Grosseteste uses *lumen*, Augustine also differentiates between first light and additive light. "Again, one might say that the brightness of day was increased by the addition of the sun…"[24]

Light to the Semiotician

Now that we have a solid foundation on which to talk about light in the metaphysical capacity, it is necessary to address exactly *what* light is in relation to the areas of philosophy & concepts that it maps to. I have been using the word "motif" in a fairly loose way, and it is also tempting to use words such as metaphor or allegory loosely, despite the fact that these terms may not fully encapsulate *what light does* in its application. I will briefly investigate the semiotically correct terms in which to discuss the motif as an increasingly weighty concept within itself, and not merely as a flighty descriptor.

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[22] If we refer back to the initial diagram, there are three main tiers of reality to which light diffuses, and in which its qualities are reflected. Although there are many other distinctions to be made within the ontological order, I identify these tiers as: pure light with God, light as reflected in the upward way of being (call & plenitude) and downward way of becoming, and light as reflected in the created order as attributes (beauty: simplicity & desire).

[23] Grosseteste, Robert, and C. F. J. Martin. On the six days of creation. Oxford: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 1996. Print. 88

[24] Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis, Ch. 11

Umberto Eco, a prominent semiotician and medievalist, includes in his book, "The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas" an idea which he calls the "the model of universal allegory."[25] As opposed to what Eco calls the "symbolic attitude", in which particulars are directly representative of the divine in virtue of their existence, universal allegory allows for more complexity in metaphor. For example, on the symbolic view, a rose is directly a sign of God's creative power, while the allegorical view grounds itself in a more complex series of compatible relationships: "the rose is to its thorns as the martyr is to its prosecutors."[26] Eco defines allegory in this sense as, "a chain of codified metaphors which are deduced from one another."[27] In contrast from the symbolic view, the initial subject of the allegory can be dissimilar from the end point, while what gives the allegory itself any explanatory power is the essence of the relation between these things.

Pseudo-Dionysius addresses this very topic in his "Celestial Hierarchy": "That divine and heavenly things are appropriately revealed even through dissimilar symbols."[28] He speaks about a similar poetic allegory in the bible, where "heavenly and godlike intelligences" are represented as oxen, eagles, and lieutenants among other things. Dionysius asserts that the use of poetic imagery is not for "the sake of art", but on the contrary, as a "concession to the nature of our own mind."[29] It is not simply because theologians wish to give a "corporeal form to the incorporeal", rather, they work to imply a sort of negation[30]. This representation say of

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[25] Eco, Umberto. *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988. Print. 141

[26] Eco 143

[27] Eco 144

[28] Luibhéid, Colm, and Paul Rorem, eds. Pseudo-Dionysius: the complete works. Vol. 54. Paulist Press, 1987, Celestial Hierarchy, Ch.2

[29] Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy, 148

[30] There are endless similarities of Hegelian *aufhebung* to the medieval light we are detailing. In fact, it is common for supporters of divine illumination to champion the theory based on its foreshadowing of concepts in German Idealism. For the sake of brevity, I choose not to fall down *that* rabbit hole of comparisons.

the holy spirit as a dove is working to point out how "transcendent beings far surpass our discursive and bodily reason, just as material representation is something far beneath those [same] entities…"[31] Simply put, when a representation is incongruous to the represented thing's form, it allows us "not to dwell on these [particular] types as true"[32] therefore unlocking a glimpse at the transcendent form for us. As it applies to physical beings, the outlook is the same, for Dionysius makes it clear that the physical reality of a being does not change its formal relationship to the divine.

Sammon clarifies further, that, "Dionysian symbolism [concerning beauty & the other transcendentals] as a mode by which… intelligibility becomes communicable is initiated by the world of things, not by escaping from it."[33] In this way, we could say that a thing's being a subject of an allegory is a doorway to its intelligibility, and both the start and end points of the series of relations indicated by the allegory are equally valuable. As we have already indicated that light as *lumen* constitutes a relation, light participates in universal allegory inasmuch as it *is* allegory itself, not the subject of one. **Light can be defined thus far in the semiotic, non-contextual capacity as allegory for the standard functioning (or more loosely, linear 'relationships') between things in the created order, either in reference to themselves in a *lux*-like quality or to other philosophical entities, such as attributes of God or other objects of *sapentia*, in a luminous quality.**[34] This is deeper than regular allegory, which is said to make visible steps in a relation while still placing the main connotation on the end term (x:y, y:w, w:z, so z:x). In a consideration of *lumen* (complex light, which we are mainly

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[31] Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy, 151

[32] Dionysius, Celestial Hierarchy, 152

[33] Sammon 148

[34] Not the created order to God directly, as Grosseteste says that *lux* exists within the first body which is created, but also "co-eternal" as an attribute of God, as, God is said to create himself.

concerned with), digging into the term makes visible the relation of the relationships of the created order to the concepts and areas of philosophy to which the term applies.

For example, light in a metaphysical discussion of emanation imbuing being, makes visible the entire causal series from end to end by which a thing is extended and exercises its extension in motion. Here, the procession of the causal series itself (*lumen*) describes emanation and being by definition, what it means to exist as an extending being by way of God's creative power. An example lower in the created order, and a far more easily accessible allegory, physically expressed rather than solely found in concepts, is the light of creation in Genesis. "Let there be light" is a physical expression of God casting his creative powers upon the formlessness of the firmament.[35] Here, the God literally molds the entirety of creation out of *ens* itself, which again gets at communication as a function of the causal series. Thus, it can be said at this point in our explanation that light (as *lumen*) has explanatory power as a powerful allegory in virtue of the complexity of the interplay of relationships that it connotes, and not through any content in itself.

[35] This is curious because the firmament is often described as the first body, which Grosseteste says is synonymous with *ens,* and co-eternal with God as one of his attributes. In my opinion, a great way of seeing how God "creates himself" and is thus uncreated.

The Aesthetic Visio

Much like Pseudo-Dionysius, and very often in homage to him, St. Thomas Aquinas discusses beauty as an all encompassing attribute of the cosmos. However, due to his Aristotelean take on philosophy, Aquinas approaches the disputed transcendental in a much less mystical manner, but, like Grosseteste, through a philosophic-scientific lens. As such, beauty takes personal a turn towards the subject as "that which pleases when it is seen" and Aquinas then becomes responsible for not only defining transcendental beauty and its attributes, but also what aesthetic vision is. Because of its focus on the subject, Aquinas's view moves the guiding question of a discussion of the beautiful from "what qualities constitute beauty in an object" to "by what faculties of the mind do things evoke pleasure in us". Unsurprisingly, the qualities of light rear their head again to aid Aquinas in defining the relation between the beautiful and pleasure.

It can be said at this point in our explanation that light has explanatory content inasmuch as it is able to analogize the complex, and often multi-dimensional, relationships between universals, particulars and areas of philosophy. In the qualities of call and plenitude, we are already familiar with how light is the sending and receiving that the divine metaphysically *creates*. However as light is not exclusive to metaphysics, we are able to find the same qualities mirrored in the *knowing* of *created* things, which moves us into the domain of epistemology and towards divine illumination. In order to apply the definitional facets of light in a brief re-reading of DI, it is essential that we examine the ways in which it exists in epistemological doctrine. Despite our proposed treatment of base definitional facets of light in perception, from Aquinas's epistemology via aesthetics; in order to approach a re-reading of Augustine's divine illumination, this is not to say that Augustinian and Thomistic knowing are

compatible. Thus, we can only treat the most general and basic qualities of light in perception that have to do with knowing in and of itself as represented by Aquinas, notwithstanding the specific differences between Augustine and Aquinas's accounts.

Umberto Eco begins his account of Aquinas's aesthetic vision by discussing the criteria by which a thing can be said to be beautiful. Aquinas writes, "Man, takes pleasure in the beauty of sensible things", which begins an irreversible discussion that there is indeed a sort of formal beauty that beautiful things subsist under, which mankind *looks* upon with pleasure. This question of aesthetic pleasure: how beauty is seen in the created, leads Aquinas to establishment of the *visio*. Like Dionysius, who gives an account of simplicity (quality of *lux*) and desire (quality of *lumen*) from the standpoint of creation, Aquinas's account of aesthetic vision deals with the same relation, but from the standpoint of the perceiving subject. Aquinas addresses the *visio* as an aptitude for perceiving, knowing beauty in the beautiful and experiencing pleasure, as a result of the formal qualities of beauty in an object which awaken such faculties in the mind. Beginning with a brief introduction to the formal criteria of beauty, it is important to note that Aquinas' treatment of the disputed transcendental stands as the sum total of prevailing views on the subject preceding the 13th century. Aquinas gives a firm philosophical treatment of the mystical and theological mentions of beauty that predate him, especially those of Augustine and Dionysius, while augmenting the viewpoint by addition of the subjective stance.

THE FORMAL CRITERIA OF BEAUTY

Eco quotes a passage from Aquinas' *Commentary on the Divine Names* that lists the major criteria:

> *God confers beauty on things in that he is the cause of consonance and clarity in all things. So we call a man beautiful on account of him being well proportioned in his dimensions and surroundings, and because of his having a clear and bright complexion.*[36]

Looking closely, we can see that Aquinas lists proportion, clarity and integrity (consonance) as the three focal points of beauty. Proportion is the first and most plainly seen through the senses, but integrity and clarity are more metaphysical affairs that require an amount of contemplation and abstraction. Integrity is "perfection or wholeness… in a formal character of beauty… A breadth or power that generates pleasure of a very general kind."[37] It can also be said to be the adequacy of a thing to itself. Clarity is defined by Eco as, "a formal element… governed by proportion…the coefficient of perfection."[38] An image that would help to understand the relation of all three is that of a diamond. To be identified as a diamond, the gem must have the proportions of a diamond. This is defined not only in its cut by the jeweler, but by its other physical traits; a physical communicability perceived with the eye that evokes sensory pleasure. Integrity is the diamond being whole, not fragmented or jagged or otherwise formally unidentifiable in itself. It defines a general pleasure communicated by the form's wholeness received by the observer. Eco defines the final criteria, clarity as, "the rationality that belongs to every form is the 'light' that manifests itself to aesthetic seeing… objectively existing proportion."[39] Clarity appears in the diamond when the rays of the sun beam down onto the gem, reflecting its form in all of the its facets, communicating its relation to other beautiful gems as the most beautiful in the created order.

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[36] Eco 65

[37] Eco 99

[38] Eco 119

[39] *Ibid*

Eco devotes much space in his writing on Thomistic aesthetics to the question of whether "things are beautiful because they give pleasure or give pleasure because they are beautiful" to which Aquinas answers, "things are called beautiful which please us when they are seen"[40]. As we are said to "experience pleasure through sensible harmony… connecting the soul and material reality", it would be permissible to say that *visa placent* requires an operation of cognition, and it is not happenstance that we come to know beautiful things.

Providing a brief explanation of proportion as Eco details it is necessary for understanding the cognitive faculty of aesthetic vision, as knowledge of sensible proportion becomes the gateway to aesthetic knowing via integrity and clarity. There are three types of proportion as Eco explains them, and to understand all three in combination is to truly *see* beauty. Eco describes the first kind as "the suitability of matter for receiving a form."[41] Specific matter cannot reveal more beauty than it can accept physically as a result of its formal composition. The second kind is purely qualitative, a relationship between parts. The third type of proportion, proportional harmony in beings, "is beautiful insofar as it 'is', because it is in virtue with a harmony of essence with existence. [In this way,] something is beautiful insofar as it 'is' and 'is' insofar as it is beautiful, [so] it has beauty in that it has proportion."[42] It is apparent how Aquinas sets up the *visio* to be the gateway by which the subject is able to perceive a particular thing independent of its relationship to the rest of the created order. Although the third type may seem similar to clarity, it only requires that the subject acknowledges that the object is a functioning whole within the created order, and does not

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[40] Eco 56

[41] *Ibid*

[42] Eco 85

require any additional contemplation. Only when the subject is able to *see* many different objects in the complete 3-part sense of the *visio,* can he comprehend the beauty of a thing by relation to others (clarity and integrity) and thus completely *know* the beauty of a thing. What is required on the part of the subject to enter the *visio* is a deep cognitive focus.

In this discussion of how beautiful things produce pleasure in us, we are plainly talking how one perceives a thing's structural integrity in itself and its communicability. Before abstracting these aesthetic qualities into pure qualities of light, let us recapitulate Aquinas's system:

> There are three major qualities of beauty inherent in objects: proportion, integrity and clarity. Because integrity and clarity either describe a thing in relation to itself or requires knowledge of the object inasmuch as it relates to other objects in the created order, it is necessary to consider the criteria of proportion as the focal point of aesthetic seeing. Proportion is the only quality that is made available outright, without any prior knowledge, as a sense intuition of the relation of parts to wholes. Because of *visa placent,* Aquinas's subjective view on beauty, the subject must be able to cognize proportion in an object in order to experience any pleasure at all. As a result of this, Aquinas formulates the aesthetic *visio,* a subject's faculty to see beautiful qualities and then internalize and abstract knowledge of beauty about them.

On Aquinas's view, aesthetic vision in itself, and thus pleasure, is attained by a cognitive faculty of inherent and subsequently developed in the mind, which we can call the *visio*[43]. In our previous discussion of Pseudo-Dionysius, we saw how the artisan can only hope to create ever increasing benchmarks of skill by repeated, deep analysis of that which he hopes to

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[43] *Visio* translated as vision can refer to both the entire process seeing, the end vision or the seeing process taking place.

create. Through this contemplation of beautiful qualities, the artist engages in the cognition of beauty. The process of cognition which grounds aesthetic vision, as the *visio* is only an epistemological attainment of beauty, can be defined as this very process of contemplation. Like call and plenitude (loosely as pure qualities of light: *lux* & *lumen*) that characterize the relation in **creation**, contemplation is the act of subjective participation in the various relations of the created order, consequently encountering **knowledge** of both the self and object. The *visio* as meditative contemplation of beauty leads us directly to the epistemological groundwork that a discussion of divine illumination and the light motif necessitate.

Augustine's Epistemology Revisited

Meditative contemplation *of beauty* is the cognitive process by which perceiving subjects know *beauty* in the created order. De-scoping the process from beauty and discussing it in general: meditative contemplation in itself is the purely epistemological process by which we come to know the created world, or in Nash's terms, to trace "the upward way of knowing". Consider this passage concerning Augustine's philosophic-scientific view of light:

> *The shaft of rays from our eyes, to be sure, is a shaft of light. It can be pulled in when we focus on what is near our eyes and sent forth when we fix on objects at a distance. But when it is pulled in, it does not altogether stop seeing distant objects, although, of course, it sees them more obscurely than when it focuses its gaze upon them. Nevertheless, the light which is in the eye, according to authoritative opinion, is so slight that without the help of light from outside we should be able to see nothing. Since, moreover, it cannot be distinguished from the outside light.*[44]

When discussing contemplation without reference to the qualities of things, as purely as light in the passage above, we can see the qualities of *lux* and *lumen* mirrored in this cognitive process. When a subject engages in contemplation, focusing on the qualities of an object, the subject can internalize these qualities enough, not only to "send [them] forth" in creation (as artworks in the case of beauty), but to cognize the chain of creation in reference to them. Whether the passage above concerns Augustine's view of light physically or philosophically is negligible, as it clearly does not change in his writing specifically on the process in the explicit context divine illumination:

> *The earth is visible and light is visible but the earth cannot be seen unless it is brightened by light. So, likewise for those things which…everyone understands and acknowledges…to be most true, one*

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[44] Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis, Ch. 16

> *must believe that they cannot be understood unless they are illumined by something else as by their own sun.*[45]

Stripping away beauty from Aquinas's aesthetic vision gives us meditative contemplation, which sits as the core functioning of Augustine's epistemology. Much as we were able to see call & plenitude (emanation) in ontology through the discussion of Dionysian simplicity and desire, the aesthetic *visio* is built on the notion of contemplation in epistemology. Recall what Augustine means by divine illumination: not cognition itself, but a five-fold (on Schumacher's view) functioning over and against the mind, by which the mind *is*, and *is able* to cognize *sapentia* through *scientia*. This cognitive process of contemplation, which directly constitutes the two facets of "process" and "content" in Divine Illumination on Schumacher's view, stands as the very core faculty of cognition on which the other facets of certainty, divine orientation and capacity rely on.

In Nash's volume, "The Light of the Mind", he details Augustine's three-tier view on contemplation (from which we are proceeding into the theory of DI) as cognitive process. "Augustine distinguishes three levels of perception or vision - corporeal, spiritual and intellectual."[46] In corporeal vision, or sense perception, Augustine is characteristically Platonic in his foundations. He asserts the adages from Plotinus, that "sense perception alone cannot account for reality" and "that to physically perceive is to have only a cursory and dim grasp of reality." Despite this, he does not discount the important role of corporeity as a gateway to synthesis in the spiritual mode of contemplation. Though, in Augustine's account of corporeal vision, there is a prominent theme of "dimness" and the darkness of intellect that is only

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[45] Schumacher 5

[46] Nash 39

clarified through further contemplation. Schumacher elaborates, "The low grade of light at which the mind initially sees results in narrow-minded judgements, since darkness excludes what light subsumes and appropriately includes… inhibiting the human ability to navigate the world confidently in the knowledge that there is a place for everything in it in the divine order and thus to identify God's goodness in all things."[47] What Schumacher encapsulates here is that corporeal vision lies at the tail end of the divine light's reach within the created order, and only through further contemplation can one further realize the relations of things, or move *scientia* into *sapentia*.

The next fold of contemplation is spiritual vision or "cogitation", from which the subject moves *scientia* into *sapentia.* Nash defines this level as, "the [functioning] of a man's mind by which he can arrange, collect, and reassemble sense knowledge stored in memory.", the beginning of movement towards divine orientation.[48] "For the understanding is not something other than the soul, but a thing of the soul… understanding and the mind [are] enlightened by the higher light."[49] Nash stresses that clarity in the darkness of corporeal vision is only found when one *cognizes his own* illumination and luminary abilities of cognition. Because light is seen as indicative of the relationships within the created order, knowing the divine light is an additional exercise of cognition, called cogitation, as opposed to solely obtaining *scientia* as such.

Where contemplation ascends to *sapentia* is through the third aspect of contemplation in intellection. I will not belabor the intricate details of this stage, as the motif of illumination is the paramount concern here, but Augustine sees intellection as the synthesis of lower reason

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[47] Schumacher 61

[48] Nash 62

[49] Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium* XV, 19-20

in higher reason, specifically that higher reason which most resembles the transcendental attributes of God. As the artificer in Dionysius orients himself towards beauty in the created order so that he may attain knowledge of it, eventually, intellection of beauty lower in the created order (things of primarily corporeal vision) becomes insufficient in his quest for knowing. As the artificer approaches cognition of beauty itself, he also approaches cognition of *ens, verum, and bonum,* by which he becomes more oriented towards the divine. Not only does this mode of contemplation require cognition of *sapentia* in the created order, but also introspection indicated by *meditative* contemplation and cognition of the unity of the created order as a *related* whole. Schumacher balks at the "construal of DI as offensive extrinsic conditioning"[50] because of these thoughts; that "to the extent which [the mind] has recovered its capacity, comes to know what God knows in full, which is quite simply the goodness of God, as it can be perceived through a meditation of natural experiences scrutinized from the standpoint of faith."[51] Thus, the analogy of light in respect to the cognitive process of contemplation refers to the quality of things to know and be known on each individual tier of the created order, simply put: opals to slate, rocks to mountains, mountains to immobility, immobility as a deficiency of *ens*. Consider the possibilities if you began from slate, or frogs, or *only* knew the immobility of all mountains. An active intellect that is able to recollect relationships in an upward "tracing" of the created order is essential for divine orientation on Augustine's view.

Fortunately, extended analysis of the four remaining facets of Schumacher's DI terminology in this brief re-reading of the theory is unnecessary as many are encapsulated

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[50] Schumacher 62

[51] Schumacher 63

within our analysis of process in Nash. However, the most important addition to our analysis yet untouched is divine certainty, which is arguably the most contested subject within divine illumination and leads to much of the conflict found in opposition to the theory. In fact, cognitive certainty was the basis on which John Duns Scotus refuted divine illumination at the end of the 13th century. For Scotus, there is conflict in the fact that the human cognition is fallible and needs "external" verification via illumination, when the divine light of *verum,* or certainty itself, is a necessary condition for cognition in the first place. If divine illumination imparts a fallible cognitive ability, then the whole theory rests on a false foundation. Scotus asserts that because we know erroneous thought exists, then the divine light cannot be as directly responsible for cognition as the Augustinian tradition espouses. While this is not a refutation of Scotus, a turn towards Aristotelianism in the Thomistic tradition (we can even see this in Grosseteste) certainly rubs against Platonically based divine illumination. As such, we know that a consideration of light in any more empirical of a way than the philosophic-scientific descriptions made by Grosseteste are problematic for a coherent account of the theory. The empiricism in Aristotle certainly does not do divine illumination any favors in this regard, but Augustine's conception of illumination in itself certainly transcends any Platonic fetters holding DI.

Schumacher rightly resists temptations to upsell the forceful externality of the theory, that God interrupts cognition and impresses ideas upon the mind, which Scotus seems to embrace that misconception to an extent. Obviously, Scotus was deeply informed of the theological context of the theory, but as we have come to see, considering light and its usage as a part of the context is crucial for any serious discussion of DI. In respect to divine certainty, Scotus is correct that this conflict undermines divine illumination as a hard and fast

epistemological theory, but what he fails to consider is the nature of light. We discussed a dimness in sense certainty, so it cannot be that cognition more aligned with the pure light is equivalent to all cognitive functioning. In the dimness of the light for the perceiving subject, cognition intuits a diminished sense of beauty, truth and goodness. On his refutation, Scotus views truth as fundamentally opposed with error, as in *ens*: a body is either extended or is not. What I believe that Scotus fails to consider is a quality of truth akin to desire (versus simplicity or extension, qualities mirroring *lux*), that would allow for variance in representation of the quality. A being cannot be halfway extended, but can be in a varied amount of motion, and as beauty and being have parallels to *lumen,* so too must truth. The luminous quality of a divine attribute must deal with relation, not its own existence, and things *are* of varied relation to each other.

The buck-stopping weight of Scotus's refutation comes when he, "[shows] that sensory knowledge rests on inductive knowledge, that inductive knowledge rests on self-evident knowledge, and that introspective knowledge can be defended as analogous to self-evident knowledge. Scotus's implicit aim is to shift as much weight as possible onto the broad shoulders of self-evident knowledge."[52] Scotus wields immediately apparent knowledge as opposed to DI because of the external impression of the divine light having to constantly illuminate the mind, reliably and consistently. He says that illumination has no stake in self-evident knowledge because of this. Scotus rejects that contemplation cannot be part of DI when it considers of self-evident knowledge. In failing to consider the importance of light, he depends on the notion that the divine light does not ebb and flow in its representation in the created order. Especially when light is considered in epistemology, it analogizes relationships,

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[52] Pasnau, SEP

so to say that x relates to y is to carry one's entire history of previous relations with you. The luminous quality of one's own knowing may only extend so far, dissipating into a series of weak relationships near the end of a "series of cognitions" as characterized by the motif. Scotus is correct is asserting that most contemplation lies on the shoulders of self-evident knowledge, but only as a result of the divine light inherent in the causal series.

What Scotus succeeds in doing is terminating divine illumination as a seriously considered theory of knowing, and helping to establish that stake-holding philosophical inquiry into DI had been outgrown. However, this does not discount the theory's historical importance or prevent illumination, and especially light, from being a continued topic of discussion. Light is as crucial a concept to grasp within divine illumination as it is within the whole of philosophy. A consideration of light in Scotus's refutation seems to revive many of the discounted themes within the theory, injecting ready-made context, that although broad, lends itself to the specificity and magnitude of things within the entirety of the created order.