

II—JOSÉ FILIPE SILVA

PERCEPTIVENESS

Augustine is often credited for upholding a theory of active perception, whereby our acquaintance with ordinary material objects and their properties cannot be explained by the causal efficaciousness of these objects. In a previous work, I attempted to connect this theory with the account of perception found in his treatise *On the Trinity*. Mark Kalderon has challenged this ‘reconciliationist’ reading, claiming that in this work Augustine admits to a strong causal role of the object in bringing about perceptual experiences. In this paper I stand by my original reading, with one important qualification: the object is a cause in determining the *content* of the act of perception, but not of the perceptual act or the activity of the soul in general.

We are not bodies, but intelligent beings, since we are life.  
— Augustine, *On the Trinity* 11.1.1

I

Augustine (354–430 AD) was a prolific author who was motivated by a drive to clarify theological issues left unsolved by early Christian thought. One of these matters concerned the constitution of the human person and the relation between its constituting parts, the body and soul. Another concerned the relation between the individual person and the world. What connects these two issues is that an answer to the latter is largely dependent on an answer the former. Understanding Augustine means to grasp a tension central to his thoughts concerning our natural inclination towards and dependence on material things and our ontological superiority to them, expressed in the spiritual nature of the soul. Later in life, Augustine wrote his treatise *On the Trinity* (*De Trinitate*, cited as *DT*), where he describes the human soul and the process of human cognition in a way that is analogous to the relation between the Christian God as constituted by common nature and three persons (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). In a previous work (Silva 2014a), I attempted to connect the account of perception offered in this work with what

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Augustine says elsewhere in his corpus. My original claim was that Augustine upholds a theory of active perception, whereby our acquaintance with ordinary material objects and their properties cannot be explained by the causal efficaciousness of these objects.

In his illuminating and insightful essay, Mark Kalderon (2017, p. 30) has taken issue with my ‘reconciliationist’ reading. We both agree that Augustine holds an active theory of perception and is a perceptual realist, in that he sees that external things are the primary objects of perception. He seems to accept that my reading accurately describes what Augustine has to say in works such as *On the Literal Commentary on the Genesis* (DGL, esp. 12.16.32) or *On the Quantity of the Soul* (DqA, esp. 25.48) or *On Music* (DM, esp. 6.5.8); what he disagrees with is that this same model applies to Augustine’s *De Trinitate*.<sup>1</sup> A developmental explanation, that he changed his mind over time, will not do, because in DGL, a work roughly contemporary to *De Trinitate* (Fitzgerald 2009), Augustine explicitly denies causal efficaciousness to the body over the soul (see Caston 2001 on this same point). So the problem Kalderon raises deserves careful consideration, because it questions not only my ‘reconciliationist’ reading but the coherence of Augustine’s thought. It seems to me, however, that our disagreement is not only about whether the model applies to *De Trinitate* or not, but what that model is. So in order to show that (and how) it applies, I will need to show what I take the model to be.

In doing so, some of the arguments will overlap with the original paper, especially because I still hold the same interpretation of key passages, but I hope that this visitation will only serve to make the arguments clearer. In §III, I turn to Roger Marston to show that not only does my reading address some of the main worries raised by Kalderon, but also that it was also the way Augustine’s theory was understood by late medieval Augustinians. Finally, I conclude by suggesting how this interpretation makes Augustine’s account of perception interesting to contemporary philosophy.

A caveat is in order due to the theological nature of the work which is the focus of our interpretations. However one reads this scheme, it is problematic to apply the analogy directly to perception, because in the case of the divine Trinity we are dealing with one and

<sup>1</sup> For Augustine’s works, I use the editions and translations given in the References section, and indicate when changes have been made.

the same substance in which different persons are distinguished (see, for example, *DT* 12.4.4), whereas in the case of perception there are three distinct natures, each of which has a different role to play in the process: the external thing, the body (in which the sense organs are located), and the soul (with its powers). Not only are these two kinds of substance (corporeal and spiritual), but they are at different levels of ontological hierarchy. This has an important consequence in considering the purpose of the analogy: the aim of the Trinitarian passage is, in the case of God, to prove the simplicity of *being*, whereas in the case of perception it is to prove simplicity of *explanation*. So when the visual analogy is applied, we must keep in mind that whereas in the case of the divine Trinity whatever is predicated of a person can in a sense be predicated of the others, because they have a common essence, this is not the case with the object and the cognitive subject, because they are distinct substances. (The importance of this last point will become clear later on.)

## II

According to Augustine, in the model of vision adapted from divine Trinitarian personal distinction, there are three elements in visual perception: the sensible thing or object of perception, vision or sense informed by the form of the sensible thing or object of perception, and the attention of the mind. Calderon and I agree on how to understand two elements of this trinity: in what concerns the object, it is clear that Augustine takes it to exist independently of the perceiving subject ('exist even before it was seen', *DT* 11.2.2) and that it is made available to the perceiving subject by means of the form (*imago*), in whatever way this 'being made available' is best accounted for. In what concerns the 'attention of the mind' (*intentio animi*) it is clear that it refers to the psychological power of becoming aware of and focusing on the external thing which is the object of perception. However, we disagree on how to interpret the second element of the trinity, vision.

In *DT* 11.2–4, Augustine makes clear that both the external thing and the sense (both organ and power) exist prior to 'vision', which is subsequent to the reception of the sensible form by the sense. More than that, vision is caused by the external object in the same way as

sensation is caused by (or proceeds from) the ‘living body that perceives’ (*DT* 11.2.3). What does the visible thing cause? Kalderon (2017, p. 24) takes it to be the exercise of the power or perceptual capacity to see; in other words, vision is the same as seeing, because the reception of the visual form is just the exercise of the activity. The issue is not whether this impression or reception takes place—it does, and its cause is the object—but whether or not this reception is the actualization of the power of sight for seeing *à la* Aristotle. For Aristotelians, the perceptual act is explained by the causal mechanism that gave rise to it: objects and their properties are the efficient causes of the actualization of the cognitive powers’ potentiality to perceive things. This could be called the causal dependency thesis, common to contemporary theories of perception. By identifying the reception of the form in the organ with the exercise of the power of sight, Kalderon submits Augustine to the passive model which he argues against in his other works; by refusing this identification, I take Augustine’s view in *DT* to be aligned with what we find in his other works, thus my ‘reconciliationist’ reading.

The textual support for Kalderon’s objection comes from the passages where Augustine states that vision ‘is the sense formed from without’ (*DT* 11.2.2) and that the object perceived is a *quasi-parens* of perception. However, things are never easy with Augustine, who in the same chapter seems to hold the opposite view, which is that ‘sensation proceeds, not from that body which is seen, but from a living body that perceives’ (*DT* 11.2.3). Augustine therefore seems to be committed to two opposing theses:

- T1: The external thing is the cause of perceptual experience.  
 T2: Perception is the soul’s awareness of its motion counter an affection of the body.

It is possible to deny that this impression in the sense organ *just* is perception and still argue, as Kalderon does, that this reception, which is passive in nature, entails primacy in terms of efficient agency to the object (T1). Although he takes this to imply a certain level of activity from the perceiver (2017, p. 26), in effect this means to reduce what it is to be the agent to being the subject: to say that it is me doing the seeing just means it is in me that the act of seeing happens to occur. But T1 is contrary to the active model of perception of T2 that Augustine extensively defends everywhere else in his corpus because of his commitments on two basic primitive

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notions of his thoughts: the Metaphysical Principle (MP), that material things lower in the scale of being cannot act on spiritual things, like the soul; in turn this is translated into the Epistemological Principle (EP), that cognitive acts of the soul cannot be caused by material things (*Silva* 2014a).

Let me give an example. I write these words in my office in central Helsinki, overlooking the cathedral. I am a living human being and my eyes are open; they receive ‘patterns of retinal stimulation’ and I see the wide expanse of white with a definite shape that constitutes the cathedral. But in what sense do my eyes receiving patterns of retinal stimulation *cause* my seeing of the cathedral?<sup>2</sup> For Augustine this cannot do, first of all because of his commitment to the principle of causal containment within the realm of physical things: that is, a perceptual experience of a living thing cannot be caused by whatever constitutes its object; and secondly, for experiential reasons: on occasion, we do not recall the taking of a certain path while walking, or what we were told or read (*DT* 11.10.17). This suggests that the reception of the sensible form in the organ is not on its own conducive to perception: something else is needed in addition.

What Augustine presents in *De Trinitate* as vision must be unpacked into two separate but concomitant processes different in nature: the first is the physiological process of the interaction between two physical entities—object and organ—whereby the organ receives the form of the sensible thing in the sense organ (*DT* 11.5.9), that is, the pattern of retinal stimulation. However, this is not seeing. Seeing is the psychological process which occurs *at the same time* the form is received in the organ and is the exercise of the power to see—the awareness of the external thing.<sup>3</sup> The cognitive power analogous to the third person of the Trinity, the power of attention or *voluntas*, is responsible for keeping this awareness focused on the external thing for the duration of the perceptual experience. The fact that Augustine brings to the fore in such a compressed discussion the cases in which we do not remember what was present to our eyes makes clear that it is this second psychological level that does the real explanatory work. To explain the reason why this issue is absent from the *DT* 11 account, we must go back to the need for caution in applying the divine Trinitarian

<sup>2</sup> The issue here is not about seeing it *as* the cathedral, but what is the cause of the seeing.

<sup>3</sup> These two processes correspond to the objective (OA) and subjective accounts (SA) in *Silva* (2014a).

model to the process of cognition. In this model there can be only three elements, which urges Augustine to simplify things.

With this in mind, we can now return to the original question, what does the object cause? The sensible form which is received by the sense *organ*. What does the perceiving subject cause? The perception of the visible thing. The affection of the sense organ by the form of the object and the awareness by the soul of the object are modes of describing two parallel processes that have the same content: the form of the object. What is central to Augustine's view is that these two processes are not related in terms of efficient causality: it is an effect in the body and an awareness of the soul of the bodily sense-effect-causing object. Introducing this distinction between the levels of causality and cognition, Augustine still needs to account for how the perception of an external thing via a sensible form is possible in a way that is not causally related to the reception in the organ of that form. In other words, he needs to elaborate on the role played by the form in the cognitive process, and also on the role of the third element of the trinity, the intention of the soul.

The discussion in *DT 11* seems, however, to overlook a cornerstone of Augustine's accounts of perception elsewhere, where he makes perception dependent on the images of external things produced by the soul upon the reception of the sensible form in the external senses (for instance, *DT 10.5*). Augustine unequivocally affirms this production:

There can, after all, be no bodily [vision] without the spiritual, since *in the same moment* a sense of the body is touched by [an external] body, some such thing is also produced in the soul, not to be exactly what the body is, but to be like it; and if this were not produced, neither would there be that [such a thing, i.e. a likeness] by which extraneous things present are sensed. (Augustine, *DGL 12.24.51*, p. 492, with changes and emphasis added)

According to Augustine, the reception of the form in the sense organ gives rise concurrently to the soul forming a perceptual representation, which is stored in memory to be used either immediately in a current episode of perceptual experience or later on in an episode of imagination or remembering. Although he often remarks that

T3: sensible forms produced by the soul and stored in memory are used *only* in the absence of external things,

he also clearly denies T<sub>3</sub>, for instance, when claiming that we need the sensible forms to perceive a full word from its constituent syllables, in other words, that ‘no bodily vision can occur unless spiritual vision also occurs simultaneously’ (*DGL* 12.24.51).<sup>4</sup> I take Augustine to be committed to the thesis that images play a role in sense perception, and that he takes the absence in a very weak sense to refer to the features of things that no longer impress upon the sense organ; so a syllable is no longer heard, although the saying of the whole word is still on going.

Why is it necessary to stress this point in the context of understanding the nature (passive or active) of perception in the Augustinian model? The answer comes in a passage soon after, where Augustine explains that this must be so because ‘it is not the body that senses, but the soul through the body’. His point is that whatever goes on at the physiological level, or the level of interaction between material things such as an object and an organ, is necessary but not sufficient to explain what occurs at the psychological level of becoming aware of an external object. Perception entails, not simply the reception of a form from the object in the organ, but also the formation of a perceptual representation in and by the soul, through which we stand in an epistemic relation to the particular sense-affecting object in the world. The production requirement dovetails with, and the psychological process is not reducible to, the material change in the organ. The physiological and psychological processes must be simultaneous, otherwise the psychological level of explanation would be at best redundant and at worst useless. Call this claim the Concurrency Thesis. The processing by internal sensory powers of sensory information is concurrent with the reception of sensory information in the external sense modalities, and the spiritual seeing *must* be taken as part and parcel of the description of an actual perceptual experience. In other words, when I perceive *x*, the description of this experience must include both the reception of the form of the thing in the sense organs (bodily vision) and the internal

<sup>4</sup> Augustine seems to have in mind a twofold account of spiritual vision: ‘concurrent spiritual vision’, which takes place together or simultaneously with bodily vision, and ‘independent spiritual vision’, which takes place without bodily vision (in cases such as dreams and imagining). Common to these two kinds of spiritual vision is its operation via the likenesses of external things, which are stored in memory. Early medieval readers often take bodily and spiritual vision as modes of seeing corporeal things—as displayed in chapter headings in the text (see *Keskiahio* 2015, p. 152).

concurrent processing of that information by the sensory soul, *tout court* (spiritual vision).

But this still leaves us with the second problem, the nature of the causal role of the object in perception.<sup>5</sup> If the forming of the image and the awareness of the external thing by the soul follows the action of the object upon the senses, the external thing must play the role of efficient cause. This is the line Kalderon takes from Augustine's qualification of the object as the *quasi-parens* of perception, with emphasis on the 'parent' side of the expression. It is one thing to say that the soul brings about its own acts in causal independence, and another to say that it is able to produce a representation of a particular external thing without the contribution of *that* external thing. The difficulty here is to explain it in a way that is compatible with the claim that 'sensation proceeds, not from the body which is seen, but from a living body that perceives' (*DT* 11.2.3)? To explain this, we must turn to a distinction Augustine introduces in *DT* 11.6.10 between the soul's general intrinsic intentionality for seeing and the special intentionality for seeing this or that particular thing (a scar, a window). The reasoning is implicit in the text, but the only way to accommodate these two basic explanatory premisses is:

- T4: There is a force in the soul that prepares the power to perceive.  
 T5: There is force in the soul that is determined to perceive a particular external thing.

T4 appeals to the definition of soul as the principle of life and its mode of being in the body as present wholly in each part of the body in a sort of vital attention (*Epistula* 166.2.4) in all parts of the body as one and the same subject. In *DM* 6.5.9, the soul is described as animating the body through 'the intention of an agent' (*intentione facientis*), with *intentio* meaning a basic sort of concentration on the body. This *state* of (at)tending to the body, which here I call 'perceptiveness', is a necessary 'background' condition that enables

<sup>5</sup> A main issue for this model is the qualification of the determinative causal role of the object—variously described as 'occasional', 'sine qua non', 'excitive', or 'terminative' cause (Silva 2014b). Roger Marston (see below) entertains this as a possibility: '[I]n the same way as excited by an external agent the internal moving power produces a form in matter, also in this case from the change in the organ the soul is excited to make in itself a similar [form] to the external exciting [thing]' (*Disputed Questions on the Soul (Qda)*, pp. 394–5). (All translations of Marston are my own.)



perception of determinate objects. For the perceptual power to direct itself to particular objects, the soul must already be present in the body and be latching out to the world. In the model of the *DT*, this means that prior to and in order for the sense to receive the form of the external thing, the will must move the sense (power) ‘to be formed to the sensitive body’ (*DT* 11.3.6, 11.5.9). There is a sense in which this intention is present before the act by which it comes to perceive the external thing, as Augustine points out:

... the sense that was already in the living being, even before it saw what it could see when it came upon something visible. (Augustine, *DT* 11.2.2)

Augustine dwells here on a distinction between vision as the bodily sense organ informed by the form of the thing and a sensation that ‘proceeds from a *living* body that perceives’, that is, the body endowed with appropriate (‘fitting’) sensory powers by the soul that informs it and makes it living and sensation-ready (or at least capable) (*DT* 11.2.3). Perception is not the result of a simple actualization of a potentiality of the perceptual power, but the soul’s active intending to the body, producing its operations rather than submitting to the bodily affections.<sup>6</sup> A clear expression that this is the way Augustine understands the causal ordering of the process is the following passage, which appears in the context of the discussion of the bodily impediments to the soul’s attention. When this happens, these impediments act by

blocking the internal routes through which the soul’s attention was striving to reach out and sense things through the flesh. (Augustine, *DGL* 12.23.49)

The attention of the soul directed to the world (to ‘sense things through the flesh’) is prior to any particular episode of perceptual experience, because it is directed to no object in particular. ‘Prior’ here should be taken to mean both prior in nature and prior in operation: if there is no attention paid to the body, then there will be no attention paid to the thing which is the object of that particular

<sup>6</sup> ‘I think that the soul, when it perceives things, produces these operations to the affections of the body, rather than receiving these affections’ (*DM* 6.5.10). The continuation of the text makes clear that the soul produces these acts or operations on its own, operations that run counter to the affections of the body,—and that the soul is aware of its own operations by which it adjusts itself to the body (*DM* 6.5.12–15). Only these operations act upon the soul, not the preceding bodily affections.

bodily affection from which the sense experience arises. Even in the case of impediment of the organ, the attention continues unceasingly and is undiminished (*DT* 11.2.2), an idea Augustine repeats in *DM* 6.5.11: the ‘same soul, which prior to this sound, gave life to the body of the ears in a vital movement in silence’.

But perceptiveness as a general state of cognitive beings requires further determination to particular episodes of perceptual experience, that is, to be of *this* thing; and the role of the object is precisely to determine this general intentionality by effecting a bodily affection as a *quasi*-cause. It is the interaction between the object and sense organ that explains why I see this rather than that object, whereas it is the general intentionality that explains *why* I see, or even *that* I see. Following from this distinction, we cannot, as sentient beings, avoid perceptiveness *tout court*, because that is the direct result of the soul’s mode of being in the body as its vivifying principle, but it is possible to block perception of a determined object, as when avoiding touching an object or closing our eyes or ears so as not to see or hear something (*DT* 15.8.15; see Hölischer 1982, p. 96). One way to characterize these two levels of intentionality is to take intentionality in the first sense as a *state*, the state of attention, and intentionality in the second sense as a *process*, the process of attending.<sup>7</sup>

Kalderon is right in arguing for the object to be counted among the causes of perception and against me for not having made it clear enough. To be explicit about what I am conceding: the object is a cause in determining the *content* of the act of perception by impressing its form on the sense organ, but not of the perceptual act or the activity of the soul in general. This is true of what Augustine says in *De Trinitate* as elsewhere. Perception is an awareness of the affection of the body, and that affection is in the soul in the form of content, but the principle of action, the being turned to the body that focuses on a particular affection at one time, is not caused by the external thing, and precedes the particular affection. Being the condition for perception, the soul’s intentionality explains perception by explaining perceptiveness, instead of explaining perception by means of the content of perception. I therefore stress the *quasi*, the ‘as it were’, of

<sup>7</sup> I borrow this second way of formulating the basic Augustinian distinction from Wu (2013, p. 103). In Silva (2014a, p. 94), I called these ‘ontological intentionality or intentionality of state’ and ‘epistemic intentionality or intentionality of content’.

the *quasi-parens* Trinitarian expression because only the soul is the efficient causal principle of acts of perception.

By emphasizing the priority of a basic power or force of the soul that makes perception possible, Augustine makes clear that seeing is caused or produced by the cognitive subject doing the seeing: the soul is the principal agent of perception. It is impossible for what is corporeal to act on what is spiritual, because the corporeal ultimately lacks this preparatory disposition or condition that only living things possess. Later Augustinians will emphasize precisely the vital aspect of what is cognitive to justify the impossibility of being caused by non-living things qua objects of sensation and the reading of cognitive acts, like perceptual ones, as immanent and causally originating in the soul itself.<sup>8</sup>

### III

Having, hopefully in a convincing way, defended the objections to the application of the activity model to *De Trinitate*, I would like to show that my way of reading Augustine is consentaneous with the way he has been read by late medieval authors, in particular with the way his account in *De Trinitate* can be understood as upholding an active account of perception that refuses to give causal efficacy to the object. In order to do so, I propose to concentrate on Roger Marston (c.1235–1303) and the view he offers in question eight of his *Disputed Questions on the Soul (Qda)*.<sup>9</sup>

The question, in a very scholastic fashion, focuses on a specific problem: whether the sensitive soul receives species or representations of the things it knows from the outside or forms them within itself; and if so, how. Marston starts by presenting the view of Aristotle (*Qda*, pp. 385), according to which the soul receives species of sensible things without matter from the outside (*Qda*, p. 376). On this

<sup>8</sup> One of the best expressions of this principle is found in Peter John Olivi: '[I]t is necessary that the immediate principle of the act of being alive and knowing is essentially alive and cognitive; the essence of that act follows and flows from its immediate principle. But the species of the body that first and foremost inform the corporeal organ cannot be essentially alive and cognitive' (*QIIS*, q.73, p. 83, my translation).

<sup>9</sup> I focus on Marston rather than Olivi or Crathorn, who are mentioned by Kalderon (2017, esp. pp. 30–1) because they hold two extreme theories of perception: Olivi refuses the existence of species, and Crathorn not only accepts them but takes them to be natural likenesses (Pasnau 1997, pp. 89–100).

view, the senses are passive powers. Aristotelian authors claim that sensation is an operation of the soul-body composite, meaning that it is the animal, not the soul, which perceives, and that the reception in the sense organ is the reception in the sense power (*Qda*, pp. 382–3). The causes of perception are the features of things our perceptual system is causally sensitive to.

Objecting to this model, Marston explicitly denies that the reception of species in the soul suffices for perception.<sup>10</sup> Perceived objects are not able to transcend their nature and generate spiritual entities ontologically superior to themselves (*Qda*, p. 382) which can be received in the soul. Such an action would be contrary to the basic ontological hierarchy of the world, an argument that rests on the authority of Augustine (especially *DT*). The solution is then to claim that in any perceptual experience there are two sorts of species, one in the organ of the senses and another in the cognitive power. There is no transmission of information from the organ to the cognitive power, but the sensitive soul makes an internal perceptual representation similar to (*consimilis*) the species received in the organ of sense.<sup>11</sup>

According to Marston, what explains this productive power of the soul is a special sort of connection (*colligantia*) the soul has via its powers with the organs it informs, at the interface between the soul and the external world. As a result, the soul produces a species in itself that mimics the species in the organ in all significant respects, and it is through this species it has formed in itself that the soul perceives the world.<sup>12</sup> This view is grounded on what Augustine says, for instance in *De Musica*, that the body cannot act upon the soul but ‘the soul makes in itself the species by which means it cognizes’ (*Qda*, p. 386). In this view, corporeal vision cannot take place without spiritual vision. However, to make species of bodily things in and of itself (*in semetipsa de semetipsa*: *Qda*, p. 381), that is, from its substance and on its initiative, the soul must be able to move itself

<sup>10</sup> ‘[T]hat [view] which puts the reception of the species in the soul in an absolute way without any operation of the soul, [making] that species the efficient [cause], is contrary to the intention of Augustine’ (*Qda*, p. 388).

<sup>11</sup> ‘[T]hey say that the species is received in the bodily organ, after which the power of the soul makes from that [species] made in the organ a species proportioned to the soul, by means of which [qua] cognizes’ (*Qda*, p. 385).

<sup>12</sup> ‘[S]ense is made by the soul which, countering that change made in its organ to which it is united according to a mediating proportion and which it perfects, makes in itself a similar species in virtue of its natural connection’ (*Qda*, p. 392).

to the actuality of cognition. By doing so, Marston is being faithful to Augustine's MP, which grounds his denial of an efficient causal role of the object as explanatory prior to perception (expressed in EP). This is the centre of the battleground over causation in perception where the dualism in Augustine's philosophy of perception is more strongly felt. Determination of content is fine, but causation of cognitive acts is off limits.

Marston aims at proving the soul's spontaneity with the argument that the soul is able to move the body in pursuit or avoidance by apprehending the form of what is beneficial or harmful; thus, the soul moves the body because it moves itself (*Qda*, p. 384). He continues to explore this with the case of sound presented by Augustine in *De Musica*. Here he talks about the three aspects constitutive of hearing: (i) the external sound (*in voce*); (ii) the motion of the soul directing itself to the affections of the body (*passiones corporis*) as the result of its attentive look; and (iii) the attention proper, that is, the awareness of its own operation that does not go unnoticed and which is the hearing of the sound.<sup>13</sup> In other words,

the soul, when it senses in the body, is not affected by it, but acts on its affections in an attentive matter. And these actions, which are either easy due to being convenient or difficult due to being inconvenient, do not go unnoticed, and the whole of this is called 'to sense'. (Marston, *Qda*, p. 390)

What constitutes perception properly is not the affection of the body but for the soul to move itself against the affections of the body (*Qda*, p. 399). The primary source of the soul's activity is not the external thing (object or species) but the soul itself *as its own internal moving power*.<sup>14</sup> When this attentive motion of reaction is easy it is pleasurable, and when difficult it is painful. Whereas in Aristotle the explanatory work of reception is done by the material determinations of the bodily sense organ such that it must be neutral to the (species of) qualities received in order to be able to receive them and

<sup>13</sup> 'We must distinguish three elements, in the same way as he did, i.e. the sounding [numbers] [*sonantes*], which are external, the concurring [numbers] [*occursores*], which are made by the soul's attentive action turning to the affections in the [sense] organ, and the attention in acting if it does not go unnoticed by itself [the soul], which is what "to perceive" is' (*Qda*, p. 387). The picture is more complex (there are five types of number), but this captures the essential structure of the process.

<sup>14</sup> '[I]t is the soul that makes such species, not the object or the corporeal species that is its efficient [cause]' (*Qda*, p. 396).

thus to perform its function, in Marston the explanatory power resides in the capacity of the power to conform itself to the organ (and via the organ to the external thing) in order to produce in itself the image of the affecting external thing.<sup>15</sup> This assimilative power of the soul to the affections of the organ is made very explicitly in the following passage, where Marston presents his interpretation of the classic metaphor of the wax and the imprinting seal:

And in the same way as the wax, if it were to have the power to apply itself to the seal and conform itself to it, at once the seal being present it would configure itself to it, much more expressively and efficaciously can the soul, via a sensitive power, conform itself to alterations made in the organ, whose perfection it is, due to the fact that it is wholly present in whatever part of the body. (Marston, *Qda*, p. 394)

The contrast between the way Marston understands the wax analogy and the mainstream Aristotelian passive account is clear (for other Augustinians, see [Silva 2014b](#)). According to Aristotle, perception is the effect of sensible forms actualizing the potentiality of the senses. It is understood in the general framework of a theory of change and according to the principle of act-potency: the taking on of the sensible form, and the sense's becoming like the object of perception, is caused by that object. According to Augustinian theory, in contrast, it is as if the wax, *by pressing itself against the seal*, makes itself like the seal. The sensory soul is the efficient cause of the perceptual act rather than receiving the motion or being causally determined from the outside (*Qda*, p. 394). In other words, we should

not say in a proper manner that the soul acts upon itself when forming the species in itself, but rather that conforming itself to the species existing in the organ . . . makes the likeness [of the species] in itself. (Marston, *Qda*, p. 401)

The wax analogy also expresses well the two levels of activity at play: the living wax and the assimilative wax, which correspond to the two kinds of attention—to the body and to the object, or to the body in general as a mode of presence and to the particular affection

<sup>15</sup> '[I]n the particular organ a species from the object is imprinted, from which the species makes an impression in the sensitive power, not that the species that is in the organ imprints something in it [the soul] but from the power conforming itself to the organ results a certain imprinting in itself, as in the wax applying itself to the seal' (*Qda*, p. 398).

of the body by an external thing—are the presence of the external thing affecting the body. The reception of the species is not *sufficient* for sensation, but it is *necessary* that the organ be altered as the result of the action of the object and the existence of the sensitive power (*Qda*, p. 401). Like Augustine, Marston unrelentingly emphasizes the compatibility between the action of things upon the bodily sense organs giving rise to determinate internal representations of the affecting thing, and the agency of the soul, which is the maker of these representations. The productive aspect of the theory does not diminish its realist claims, because the species in the sense organ and in the soul are not the same ontologically, but are the same *qua* representations or likenesses, because both represent the same thing (*Qda*, pp. 403–4).

We have now seen that according to Marston, the presence of the species informing the organ of sense is a necessary requirement for perception, but it is the action of the soul reacting to this affection that properly and primarily constitutes perception. But this is only explanatory if this act of reaction constitutes the thing as cognized or as a representation by which the thing is cognized, and if one takes the presence of the soul as wholly in each part of the body to constitute the first level of intentionality. The attention of the soul to particular things which constitute the content of its perceptual experience is built on this level. The similarities with the reading of Augustine I have proposed are hopefully clear, as the aim was to show not only that this reading makes sense but also that it corresponds to the way Augustine was read in the late Middle Ages.

In this model there is a basic separation at the level of causality, between the object and the sense organ on the one hand and the self-causation of cognitive acts on the other. Perception is explained by internal cognitive mechanisms that bring about their own acts, the contents of which are specified or determined by objects impinging their sensible forms upon the sensory bodily apparatus of perceivers. The object must play an explanatory role in perception, not as an efficient cause, but as the determination of the more general and sensation-enabling intentional act of the soul attending to the body it vivifies.

## IV

I turn now to the suggestion found in the last section of Kalderon's paper, according to which Augustine has something to offer to contemporary debates on perception, provided we (i) give up dualism, and (ii) naturalize his account of intention/attention. I am sympathetic to making Augustine's philosophy of perception relevant, but we must proceed with caution, because the suggestion rests on us taking the object to be at least a partially efficient cause of perception. I would suggest another road, because the role of the object is, as I have shown, problematic, and Augustine's theory of knowledge is unintelligible without this dualism.

There is, however, something to Augustine's theory, with its basic vital understanding of cognition and directedness to the world, which resonates with both an enactivist and a phenomenological account of perception. I shall resist the urge to identify his view with any particular modern one,<sup>16</sup> but rather insist on the modernity of his theory built around a notion of intentionality as a property of what is cognitive, a property which aims at protecting and fostering the well-being of the living thing it defines. Intentionality is therefore the intrinsic feature of the agent of sensation to be in a permanent state of implicit possibility of acquaintance with the world that particular perception experiences as instances of this more general and undetermined latching on to objects in our surroundings. It is a mode of presence that is prior to whenever and wherever something acts upon us. This implicit possibility is characterized by its embodied nature, because primarily vital intentionality is directed to the body as its undetermined object (directed to no particular part of the body), and only secondarily directed to the external things affecting the bodily senses.

This is true even as the direct objects of awareness — i.e. what we experience — are the external things made possible due to the isomorphism of intermediary ('but-not-perceived-as-such') perceptual representations, which in turn are reliant on the soul's essential capacity to produce such representations which accurately hook

<sup>16</sup> The argument for enactivism would be bolstered by bringing into the picture Augustine's extra-mission theory of vision, according to which visual rays exit the eyes and spread throughout the medium as cognitive instruments. Apart from the incredibility associated with holding such an account, there are serious philosophical objections to it, namely, concerning the physical nature of such rays. One option is to consider the extra-mission model without the visual rays, replacing them with the notion of virtual attention, as found in Peter John Olivi and Peter Auriol (for the latter, see Licka forthcoming).



onto the world. (What grounds this capacity is, to my knowledge, never made explicit by Augustine, but is another primitive notion in his theory.) The content of our perceptual experience is the object standing before us, determining our perceptiveness, as the internal perceptual representation is accessible only via introspection (see [Silva 2014a](#); as a common feature in medieval accounts, see [Perler 1996](#)). At the same time, by proposing that the soul is always in mediated contact with the world, the dualist nature of the theory cannot be ironed out. Rather, it is imbedded in the tension between taking the body as part of the human person that needs to be taken care of and protected, and the use of the body as an instrument for knowledge acquisition of sensory realities.

Most of what was said in the previous paragraph can be read in a very modern sense, and this may be because it is highly speculative: speculation concerning historical sources usually creeps in from the different worries that motivate past and present-day debates. Augustine has very little to say about the proper phenomenological ‘what it is like’ aspect of perceptual experiences essential to us; similarly, his remarks about the soul’s tending for the body are motivated by a concern to secure good conditions for its use as a primary instrument for knowledge and to safeguard the unity of the human person, rather than a concern that arises from a robust sense of self or self-identity. However, the fact that Augustine’s worries are very different from ours does not mean that we cannot find a degree of philosophical relevance in his conceptual framework harbouring the thesis that living beings endowed with cognitive powers have an undetermined intentional directedness to the world as their normal waking state. The success of perception cannot be explained by low-level metaphysical structures and mechanisms that apply indifferently to changes in nature, but only in those that arise from the specific living nature of cognitive beings (in the sense of the ‘whole-animal functions’ in [Burge 2010](#), pp. 370–1). What makes it even more special, historically and philosophically speaking, is the internal and autonomous (or self-caused) nature of the principle of vital-cognitive activity. To return to an expression used early on in this paper, perception is something we do because what we are rather than what happens to us as the result of the way the world of objects and their properties act upon us.

Augustine’s theory of intentionality offers a promising starting point to build on, for instance, combined with the notions of inherent

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rationality, habitual dispositions, bodily constitution, or self-identification conditions. Our directedness to the world is disposed to take on certain forms determined by the way we are and take the world to be. To do so, one would need to move the Augustinian conception of intentionality from its vital-cognitive sense to a conception of intention as a reason or motive for latching on to particular things in the world. But that would mean to lose the original un-determinedness of his original proposal. Whatever particular form this theoretical framework can be developed into, the historical starting point is true only if we accept the interpretation according to which causal efficaciousness in perception concerns what makes perception possible rather than what a particular perceptual experience is about. In Augustine's theory of perception, there is a primacy of ontology over content which downplays the causal role of sensory stimuli, and this is also true—so I argued, and continue to argue—of his account in *De Trinitate*.<sup>17</sup>

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