



Recollecting the Religious: Augustine in Answer to Meno's Paradox

Ryan Haecker¹ · Daniel Moulin-Stožek²

Accepted: 17 April 2021 / Published online: 23 April 2021
© The Author(s) 2021

Abstract

Philosophers of education often view the role of religion in education with suspicion, claiming it to be impossible, indoctrinatory or controversial unless reduced to secular premises and aims. The 'post-secular' and 'decolonial' turns of the new millennium have, however, afforded opportunities to reevaluate this predilection. In a social and intellectual context where the arguments of previous generations of philosophers may be challenged on account of positivist assumptions, there may be an opening for the reconsideration of alternative but traditional religious epistemologies. In this article, we pursue one such line of thought by revisiting a classic question in the philosophy of education, Meno's Paradox of inquiry. We do this to revitalise understanding and justification for religious education. Our argument is not altogether new, but in our view, is in need of restatement: liturgy is at the heart of education and it is so because it is a locus of knowledge. We make this argument by exploring St Augustine's response to Meno's Paradox, and his radical claim that only Christ can be called 'teacher'. Though ancient, this view of the relationship of the teacher and student to knowledge may seem surprisingly contemporary because of its emphasis on the independence of the learner. Although our argument is grounded in classic texts of the Western tradition, we suggest that arguments could be made by drawing on similar resources in other religious traditions, such as Islam, that also draw upon the Platonic tradition and similarly emphasise the importance of communal and personal acts of worship.

Keywords Religious education · Indoctrination · Plato · Meno's Paradox · Augustine · Memory · Eucharist

Introduction

'After all, who is so foolishly curious as to send his son to school to learn what the teacher thinks?'—Augustine of Hippo (c. 389/1995, p. 145).

✉ Daniel Moulin-Stožek
dpm50@cam.ac.uk

Ryan Haecker
rh648@cam.ac.uk

¹ Peterhouse, Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 1RD, UK

² Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, 184 Hills Rd, Cambridge CB2 8PQ, UK

Since the 1970s, philosophers of education have tended to hold religious education under suspicion as an example of indoctrination ‘*par excellence*’ (White 1970, p. 109). As the claims of religion are contestable, it seems to many that compulsory religious education is questionable, and religious initiation in childhood may be morally reprehensible (Tillson 2011, 2019). Against any such suspicion, the ancient African theologian, philosopher, and Doctor of the Church, Saint Augustine of Hippo, casts aside the authority of the teacher and recommends a programme of education that may be more liberal precisely because it is more religious. Although ancient in provenance, this radical position represents a novel turn in the philosophy of education. The possibility of religious education has been repeatedly contested by philosophers of education in the tradition of Analytic Philosophy of religious education (for example, see Attfield 1978; Hand 2006; Hirst 1974; Marples 1978), only more recently being reconsidered—and ‘reframed’—through the lens of post-secularity (Lewin 2016). Much of the scepticism about traditional forms of religious education has centred on a philosophical problem first proposed by Paul Hirst (1974), and later examined by Michael Hand (2006). The problematic of religious education turns on the justification of religious propositions: religious knowledge requires an assent to certain ‘religious propositions’; yet, it seems, the truth criteria of such religious propositions depend on faith, are private, and, as such, are not available to public scrutiny; therefore, religious education is not justifiable, nor indeed, even possible. Key to this argument is the supposed ‘private language’ of religious propositions: for, following Ludwig Wittgenstein, we suppose that a private act of faith excluded any public justification as true. Against this supposition, we may with Augustine argue that the supposedly private reserve of human subjectivity is radically open, as much to divine grace, as to public reason (Hanby 2003). Where, for Augustine, education is only possible through an inner awareness of a divine illumination, for Hirst, religious propositions are rejected outright, neither as knowable, nor as reducible to verifiable propositions. Against Hirst, however, we argue that a robust education requires, not only any assemblage of verifiable propositions, but, rather a certain recollection of the highest ideas, which were primordially announced in our oldest myths, and continue to be performed today in the rites of our religious observances.

Analytic philosophy of education has often tended to marginalize the religious as a set of propositions that can either be publicly verified or excluded from knowledge, as from any publicly sponsored programme of education. It has rendered the ‘religious’ as a static inventory of discrete judgments rather than a living tradition of corporately recollective practices. Hirst (1966), for example, had recommended that the subject epistemes of any curriculum of religious education should be either publicly verifiable or dismissed as incoherent. We may, however, wager to begin from a radically different starting point. We suggest that just as history is taught according to the practice of historians, religious education should be taught according to the practice of the religious, open to a recollection, and explored by a philosophical theology of education. Such a philosophical theology of education should, we suggest, be considered differently than an exercise in theology, as it invites an engagement with theology with the methods of philosophy. At variance with the rhetoric of most analytic philosophy of education, our approach retains a more liberal openness of education to the religious. And rather than attempting to analyse religious into secular propositions, it instead seeks to critique this secular mode of exclusion. Theology is a *sui generis* discipline that gestures to God as its supreme object. Religious education may, in a similar way, raise some of the greatest questions for education. Given its distinct form of knowledge, Hirst and others reject religious education on account of its supposed lack of objectivity. Were the religious, in this way, to be analysable into ordinary propositions, the discipline of theology would appear as but an inessential supplement to the secular, as also

to any secularizing philosophy of education. The religious would, on this view, be thought to add nothing of any essential importance to the secular. Yet, we may argue, it is precisely on account of this presumption that the philosophy of education has tended to silence the problematic voices of religion in education. To listen to theology may, more radically, call us to reconsider, not only how religious education may be possible, but also and especially how theology can be shown to make the most decisive contribution to the philosophy of education. We wish, for this purpose, to invite a Christian theological investigation into an essential problematic of the philosophy of education. We recommend a novel approach to the philosophy of education that will be better equipped to answer to the most forgotten questions of religious education—the questions of theology.

The Problems of Religious Education

We may begin by considering the distinction between ‘confessional’ and ‘non-confessional’ religious education. The former is educating for faith within a given tradition, the latter a multi-faith approach that seeks to educate ‘about’ the facts of religions. Hirst had early held the concept of education to be of the ‘nature of knowledge itself’ for which the beliefs of a non-confessional religious education shared a ‘distinctive logical structure’; but later changed his mind and argued, to the contrary, that the propositions of such a non-confessional religious education could have no unique logical form of meaning, knowledge, or belief that could ever be corroborated by evidence or argument that may be open to public scrutiny. Hand (2006) subsequently argued against Hirst, that, although religion may be a unique form of knowledge, religious propositions can be analysed to show that their meanings do not differ in epistemological type from ordinary propositions. He argues that ‘religious propositions can be distributed without remainder’ (p. 93) to non-religious propositions, about gods with ‘minds and bodies’ (p. 118) which can be evaluated according to the same criteria of secular reason. Hand can, accordingly, conclude that religious education is possible. Yet, with this argument, he also appears to have tacitly assimilated religious to secular propositions, for which the religious is rendered as but a species of secular reason.

We may, however, start to question this dichotomy of confessional and non-confessional religious education on the basis that all education is in a certain sense confessional. Thompson (2004) for example, has argued that the efforts of ‘non-confessional’ religious education have merely served to promote the religious positions implicit in any given over-arching frame, such as radical pluralism for example. We also observe that theology, Christian or otherwise, is, as Augustine suggests, not necessarily ‘confessional’ in the problematic sense of religious indoctrination. We leave to another occasion the question of which educational and theological methods may or may not be justified within a society of plural religious beliefs. For the purposes of this argument, it suffices for us to suggest that the divorce of theology from religious education has resulted in its crisis and the philosophy of education has exerted a strong influence upon this. In the latter half of the twentieth century, as we have seen, influential philosophers of education in the analytic tradition had pursued a largely positivist appraisal of religious belief in educational curricula. Under such scrutiny, religious belief began to appear essentially problematic for secular education: for, it seemed, that if there is no objective religious knowledge, any attempt at religious education should either be preserved privately within one or another particular tradition where claims to knowledge are those that may be mediated by ‘culture’, or be merely an exercise in studying anthropological summaries of the various beliefs, rituals,

institutions or ‘worldviews’ that may here and there be collected like a cabinet of idle curiosities from around the world. On this view ‘confessional’ religious education may appear as little more than an indoctrination into an inherited melange of ultimately meaningless propositions that should be banished from public life. Yet such a ‘non-confessional’ religious education would also tend to ignore the interior role of religious knowledge in personal formation and marginalise adherents of religious and secular worldviews within its hegemonic framework. It erects a colonial ontology in the classroom under the guise of a conceited neutrality that may be problematic for both the religious and the secular alike as it preserves in some distorted forms, a vague commitment to the value of ‘religion’ as an anthropological category.

We may, on the contrary, stage a critique of the secular neutrality of religious studies. It has been previously argued by the Cambridge School of Radical Orthodoxy that the anarchic plurality of postmodern narratives admits, not only of a subtraction of the religious, but, decisively, of a performative elision of this secular narrative, in favour of a post-secular alternative, which may creatively extend beyond theology to philosophy, as well as to the philosophy of education (see Milbank et al. 1998). Simon Oliver (2008) has, for this purpose, previously argued that the relegation of theology to religious studies, and of religious education to the most marginal of the humanities, has resulted from a series of increasingly untenable philosophical dualisms—between public and private belief, as well as between faith and reason. He contends, with William Cavanaugh, that the public–private duality is the product of a narrative of the Wars of Religion that had been made for the purpose of legitimizing the secular autonomy of the modern nation state. And he further contends, following St Anselm of Canterbury, that the faith–reason duality can also be elided by appealing to a faith that is incipiently rational in its desire to know that which is true. With this double-elision of all such secular dualities, Oliver thus recommends a post-secular position for the philosophy of education, which may dispense with the presumption of any secular starting point for education. It announces a theoretical rupture with secular philosophies of education. And, as educationists, the ancestral practice of the religious may continue to reverberate in philosophies of education.

We may return, from this rupture of the post-secular, to the central questions of theology. We may ask: How is learning possible? How may we move from a position of not-knowing to a position of knowing? and, were it possible, how could we in knowing also know that of which we do not know? We shall consider Plato’s Meno paradox for the purpose of reframing the question of the possibility of religious education. In asking how it is possible to come to know that which is not in some sense already known, Meno’s Paradox will raise what is perhaps the most originary question of the possibility of inquiry. In questioning the possibility of inquiry, it raises a problem of fundamental importance for the philosophy of education. With Augustine, we shall suggest a recollection of the possibility of learning that is centered on the practice of religion, especially as it may even today be recollected in the studies of religious education: first, we introduce Meno’s Paradox as an essential problematic for the philosophy of education; second, we read Augustine’s reflections on memory and time to reconstruct a novel answer, in which the ‘mansions of memory’ are held in reserve for the creative ‘making’ of new knowledge; and third, we argue, with Augustine, that such a creative making of new knowledge can be corporately recollected in the liturgical rite of the Eucharist. We argue, in conclusion, that the essential problematic of Meno’s Paradox can be answered, not by predicating the ‘religious’ of education, but, more radically, by founding any programme of education on the practice of religion.

Meno's Paradox of Inquiry

To explore the possibility of inquiry, learning and teaching, Plato presents Meno's Paradox (Plato c.380BCE/1994). In the Meno dialogue, Plato asks us to suppose that knowledge is either known or unknown: if known, then a search is not necessary; and if not known, then a search is not possible (80d-e). Since we do not search for what is known, but only for what is unknown; we may only start to search for what is not known. Yet, if we search for what is not known, and we can only discover that which in some sense is already known, then, it seems, we can never discover anything that we do not in some sense already know. Socrates objects that this 'trick argument' is framed by a sophistic dichotomy between knowing and not-knowing, which, with its exclusive negation of a *tertium quid* intermediary, renders impossible any discovery of knowledge (80e). What is needed is something novel to emerge from the analysis of any inquiry; something not previously assumed of those who begin to search—else the search would be needless from the very beginning. An answer to Meno's Paradox may thus require an analysis of the possibility of learning, in which the ignorance with which the search for knowledge begins is determinative of the discovery in which knowledge may yet be found.

Socrates pursues an answer to the second lemma, that if knowledge is not-known then it can never come to be known, and argues, to the contrary, that knowledge must, in some sense already be known if it can come to be known in any discovery. Yet if one knows before one learns, and all learning occurs during life, then one must in some sense fore-know before one has learnt anything in life; before our entire life of learning; and, as he suggests, even before we were born. For this reason, Socrates asks us to entertain the ancient religious belief of the poets, priests, and philosophers that the soul is immortal; has been born before; and has learned all that can be known (81a-e). To illustrate this theory in practice, Socrates cross-examines a child with no previous knowledge of mathematics, and without offering any answers, observes as he intuitively solves a series of geometric problems (82b-85b). Plato suggests: 'the soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything that is' (81c).

Some commentators have suggested Meno's Paradox is not really a paradox at all, insisting it rests on a mere equivocation. John Dewey claimed that the 'Greek dilemma' overlooked the possibility of hypothesis, conjecture and tentative knowledge in the pursuit of science (Dewey 1916). Following Wittgenstein (1958), philosophers of education in the analytic tradition have argued that we may come to know new things through the verification of propositions by publicly available evidence, and through the logical analysis of those propositions and those which may be known a priori, such as in the case of mathematics. The example in the Meno of the child solving the geometric problems may perhaps accord well with a Hirstian conception of education as the acquisition of knowledge in learning the application of logically coherent propositions. And according to Hand, it also presents a paradigmatic example of how philosophy should be conducted: conceptual analysis is possible by coming to a new understanding of what was previously unconsidered through the 'disciplined scrutiny of the meanings of words, of the ways in which words are logically connected' (Hand 2001, p. 71). Plato's doctrine of recollection will serve as a useful metaphor to understand how recollection may make explicit certain answers to philosophical questions that had otherwise been only latent in our understanding. Yet, for Hand, such a recollection cannot be more than an empty metaphor. In a stricter sense it would require having known and having come to know

in a previous life, and, as such, provides no real explanation of the process of knowing. Furthermore, it is unnecessary because philosophical knowledge only requires thinking through the logical application of the language we already know. As such, we would argue that it neglects to attend to the gravity of this paradox of inquiry as a concern of the philosophy of religious education.

Augustine rejected Plato's solution to the Meno Paradox. He also would have rejected Hand's. He dismissed Socrates' dialogue with the child for it made no sense to argue learning mathematics was possible because everyone had been a geometer in a previous life (King 1998). Given Augustine's own theory of learning this lack of attention is unsurprising. For Augustine, learning does not principally occur in the process of our efforts to verify the truth of propositions, or even by a corresponding reference to any fact of external reality. Such demands for verification have arisen from a conspicuously modern predicament, in which the proposition is rendered as the atomic ground of truth, and the external world has been held apart from the originary source of divine creation. Rather, he insists, it occurs through a process of inner reflection, or of divine illumination. Philosophy is, for Augustine, not, therefore, a project of analysing language, words, and signs. Otherwise we would forever be trapped at the superficial level of mere words which do not teach us. Philosophy must, moreover, move beyond the evident meaning of words to their interior meanings. This is of critical importance to our argument. For if the claims of religion were not based on a knowable reality independent of the teacher, religious education really would be impossible. The sentence that follows the quotation of Augustine introduced at the beginning of this article indicates this view:

When teachers have explained by means of words ... those who are called 'students' consider within themselves whether truths have been stated. They do so by looking upon the inner Truth, according to their abilities Augustine (c.389/1995, p. 145).

The relevance of Augustine's theory to contemporary philosophy of language has long been established. For example, King (1998) and Matthews (2003) have shown how as it eludes a Wittgensteinian externalist account of language, it anticipates the problem of meaning Searle identifies in the well-known 'Chinese room argument'. Our concern at present, however, is to consider how Augustine would solve the Meno paradox when applied to the more specific problem of religious education. This is especially relevant given the distinct nature of religious knowledge in Augustine's philosophy. We pursue such a solution by recommending a novel turn in Augustinian scholarship to consider how Augustine's famous *Confessions* (c.400/2012) can be read in anticipation of an answer to Meno's Paradox. Examining the *Confessions* will allow us to give a rich account of how religious education may be possible, including how the acquisition of religious knowledge may be mediated by affect and memory, among other things. Although theological in its method and conclusions, Augustine's answer is rigorously philosophical in its method, and, for this very reason, serves as a useful example of how theology can engage with philosophy, as well as with the philosophy of religious education.

Augustine on Memory and Time

In *The Confessions*, Augustine presents an account of his life as he performs in writing a recollection of his entire past. As he comes to know of God, he also comes to know of a God who knows himself, and of his knowing of God's knowing the secret recesses of his heart (10.1). The human heart, he says, is but an 'abyss' that 'lies naked' before 'you who know me', with whom 'I shall know even as I am known.' (10.1-2). And, as in Plato's dialogues, the same questions may be raised by the readers; to teach the reader to 'hear from you about themselves' (10.3) and 'mouset by stages to him who made me' (10.8). He thus describes how the 'innumerable images' of the senses were brought forth from the objects perceived by the senses to the vast 'mansions of memory' (10.8). His memory contains in its 'secret and unimaginable caverns' all of the trace images of what was past as these may be read to be recollected in and for the present (10.8). The *Confessions* may be read, for this pedagogic purpose, as a dialogic mirror for the examination of conscience: for in reading Augustine's dialogue with the God who knows his heart more intimately than he knows himself, the reader must also ask these same questions of themselves.

In *Confessions* 10.18-19, Augustine pauses his investigation of memory to raise the same question as Meno's Paradox. He illustrates this question with the Gospel parable of the lost coin (Lk. 15:8), in which a woman is said to search her whole house for one lost coin, as of one lost sinner (10.18). This lost coin is emblematic of Meno's Paradox: for, if lost, it is not known, and yet, if searched for, it must in some sense be known. He then restates the second lemma of Meno's Paradox: 'if we remember that we have forgotten something, we have not forgotten it entirely. But if we have forgotten altogether, we shall not be in a position to search for it' (10.19). This Gospel parable furthermore provides, for Augustine, a decisive 'clue' to its discovery: for since our memory can recall, not only what is present, but also what is not present, we may, with our memories, start to 'feel' for the 'missing element [to] be restored' (10.19). He suggests here that some material trace of that which was forgotten must endure if it is ever afterwards to be remembered. For it is only as its 'image persists within us that we may ever hope to discover it outside us' (10.19). And we may, most of all, desire to discover in this material trace a lure of memory that may guide the mind beyond its present condition as to the source of its lasting satisfaction.

Creativity is, we suggest, the key to Augustine's response to the problem of religious knowledge. He describes an active process of sifting what is now and for the present: 'I can recall at will... within myself in the immense court of my memory... together with everything that I have ever been able to perceive in them... and there I come to meet myself... everything is there which I remember' (10.8.14). Memory is, he insists, not something that is passive, but is itself always interrogated, dialogical and creative: for in memory, the mind does not return in the present to the past, but, rather, is productive of its entire past, and creative of every act of remembrance. He can, for this reason, momentarily characterize the activity of remembering as an activity of making (*facio*) new memories in cognition (*cogito*) (10.11). He describes how thoughts are "herded together" in every act of thought (10.11). And, in this process, we can, at times, even learn things without the senses, such as the ideas, which though scattered can also be collected as the past is produced in and for the present (10.11-12).

If Augustine is correct, we can never begin to think except as we first remember. For if *cogito* is *facio*, and thinking is making, then to make anything that is new we must first recollect in creating all that is old as new. To think forward, we must first think backwards

from the time that is now to the time that is past by analysing this current of causation from the present effects to the prior causes, as ultimately to the first principles of theology. The discovery of something new is then only possible as the assumptions once held to be true may be suspended so as to analyse any prior conditions for the creation of thought as true.

Forgetting represents a failure to remember. To forget is thus to hold the present in an amnesiac isolation. Yet it is also never completely forgotten (10.16). It can, on the contrary, only be recognized as it is forgotten by a further remembrance. A trace of the forgotten remains in each remembrance. And in recollecting this trace, all disconnected forms can be reconnected and recycled in the circuit of our memory to prepare for a momentous new creation. For not only may we remember our memories, but we may also remember remembering, so that when we remember that we've forgotten something, we also can remember our very remembering of having forgotten it.

To remember anything at all, we must recollect the first moment of creation that comes before all that can be forgotten. It comes neither before the past, nor after the past—not at all in time—but, rather, as its absolutely originary generation as that which was and is not. The past is equally present as its past-ness is convertible into its present-ness, and both the past and the present are productive, in the immanent futurity of each present moment of time. The future is only then that which will be. Its arrival annuls even as it opens again to a new expectation as the entire past flowing through the moments of its expected arrival. Memory is, we may say, the site of remembering, of the recollection of the past in the present, and of this production of the future from the past that is made present.

We may, in this way, remember not only our memories, but even our memory of having remembered in a memory that reflects upon its own remembering. For in remembering a prior act of remembrance, thought reflects upon itself, analyses its anterior conditions, and recollects a chain of causes from the present to the past, as ultimately to the primordial origin of all that can be thought. Augustine attributes to Christ the Son the 'beginning' of creation (11.3). Yet, in each passing moment of 'change and variation', he also speaks of a novel creation, in which 'something is made that was not previously there' (11.4-6). All things are, from this instant, 'uttered simultaneously in one eternal speaking' (11.7). And the narrative arc of 'the whole of both past and future flows forth from him who is always present', and of the present as recalled before a single act of creation, where, he says, 'today is eternity' (11.11-3).

Such a surplus of divine creativity is, for Augustine, the absolutely unforgettable principle of the instantaneous generation of time in eternity—the productive creativity of memory. He writes: 'the Lord God of the mind... who has dwelt in my memory from the first day that I learned to know you... because I have been remembering you since I first learned to know you and there I find you when I remember you' (10.25). As the 'Lord of the mind', God is, for Augustine, not passive, as an object to be remembered, but active, as the subject who is ever at work to guide the mind in recollection. And since, for Augustine, Christ the 'beginning' of creation instantly creates in each and every passing moment of time (11.9-11), such a 'tension' may be created even in the smallest of things (11.23) like the recitation of a poem (11.28) or the writing of his *Confessions*—as it may ever be made from our memories (11.27). That which we make from our memories can, thereafter, only be communicated through the material media that opens to be drawn in every act of knowing (11.26-29), which while foreknown is also created in surplus of all that is known—a 'true mediator' 'who may stand between God and men' (10.40-3).

Augustine's *Confessions* can now be read in answer to Meno's Paradox. For, as we have seen, the essential problematic of Meno's Paradox results from the exclusive negation of non-knowledge, such that if knowledge is not known then it is also not discoverable, and,

bereft of discovery, learning is not possible. To learn, we must, in some mysterious sense, be able to discover that which, while not yet known, can yet come to be known. We must, as Augustine suggests, discover a lure of learning from the unknown to the known, which, while its matter is evident to the knowing of the senses, its form escapes into unknowing, as it is guided along to knowledge of the true. In *The Confessions*, he states the second lemma of Meno's Paradox, suggests a material trace of recollection as a lure of memory, and, in answer, recommends a creative 'making' (*facio*) of new thoughts (*cogito*). (10.18-19). It is, we suggest, with this creative making from memory of new thoughts that Augustine can, in contrast to ancient and modern answers, answer Meno's Paradox, and come to know that which is not yet known.

Recollection in the Eucharist

Meno's Paradox can, in this way, thus be read to open at the point of its exclusive negation to a more material lure of recollection. It may, for Augustine, be read more materially precisely because it must be recollected through all of the material media of sensation, flesh, and affect. It can only be communicated as it may also be mediated by the organs of the body, even as all of its encounters may be given again as a material lure to be learned in each and every moment. It must appear as the trace of some addition that is shown, not as it is known, but, rather, by some wondrous instant of surprise and sudden recollection. The incarnation of Christ at first shows all that is unknown of God in a way that may be known, and yet, after the ascension, retains only a trace in scripture, tradition, and the rites of the liturgy, with which to repeat in gesture its coming as from behind a veil of unknowing.

For Christian theology, the Eucharist shows the concrete sign of this material lure, consecrated in gesture, of recollection. The Greek word for recollection 'anamnesis' appears at a pivotal point in the *Gospel of Luke* (22.19), when, at the Last Supper, Jesus breaks the bread and says 'this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance (*anamnesis*) of me' (Skyles 1960). The eucharistic liturgy has, for this reason, been styled as a 'rite of remembrance', in which, in commemorating the Last Supper, Christians recollect in the visible bread and wine, the real presence of Christ, the atoning sacrifice of the Cross, and the entire cycle of salvation that is spoken in and by the divine *Logos*. Origen of Alexandria (c.244CE/2018) had, in evident response to Plato, thus read the rite of eucharistic thanksgiving as a recollection (*anamnesis*), in which Christ the *Logos* eternally speaks of knowing-in-unknowing; as materially present in the Eucharist; as well as in every act of learning.

Recollection thus assumes a new symbolic form in the Eucharist: for, as Augustine appears first to have fully appreciated, the Eucharist is saturated with this semiotic circuit of symbols that narratively indexes a mnemonic circuit of recollection. The symbolic trace of the Eucharist thus extends in and beyond the text of scripture, as its symbolic structures may be signified in the performance of every gesture, rite, and liturgical consecration. It is, contrary to Derrida, absolutely the signifier and the signified of every sign (Pickstock 1998). The Eucharistic rite appears, in this way, as a performance of recollection, as its shining signification is traced through all of the orders of signs; every remembrance of pastness as produced in and for the present; and, indeed, of any recollection. Its semiotic circuit may thus be analysed to show the simplest form of the mnemonic circuit, in which, in remembering its signs, we may, with Augustine, also recollect the singularity of all signification as given in a single primordial act of creation from the divine *Logos*;

spoken from eternity; and signified in every sign. The recollection of the Eucharist, once announced in the Gospels, can thus be repeated in every performance of the Eucharistic liturgy; every practice of religion in education; and in every act of learning as remembering.

Conclusion: Religion at the Centre of Education

Meno's Paradox presents a problem of fundamental importance for the philosophy of education. For it challenges, not merely the fact of learning, but, moreover, the very possibility of inquiry, as it may be understood in any programme of education. As we have shown, it argues that if knowledge is either known or not known, learning is either known and not necessary, or not known and not possible. At the gap of this exclusive negation, the questions of education can begin to be answered by those of philosophical theology: for, with Augustine, that which is most of all unknown has given itself to be made known to us in the Eucharist; and yet, even in its material lure to learn, it also escapes from knowing into unknowing. This trace can neither be known nor not known. It must, in some mysterious sense, be neither known nor unknown, but rather something that may be added to knowledge in every act of recollection, making memories, and coming to know anything at all. It can only be completed from the centre that makes what it thinks in the pastness of the present, and of the present as a surplus creativity of something new.

With Augustine's *Confessions*, we may read of how, in his knowing of God, and of God's knowing of himself, how any reader may come to know of God's knowing of the secret recesses of the heart; of the memory; and of its every recollection. Memory is here the secret home of theological reflection: for to remember is at once to make its pastness in the present, as it remembers and rethinks what is known. In remembering the pastness of the present, we must re-think the past, and, in rethinking the past, also remake it again, creative and new, as the pastness that is made present. To learn is for Augustine, to remember God is the Lord of mind in memory.

We may, of course, remain unconvinced by religious claims. We may suspect that such a conclusion appears to endorse the 'indoctrination' of which philosophers of education have been so wary. Yet on Augustine's view, genuine education proceeds on the action of a third person beyond teacher and pupil. No human teacher can speak to the totality of what is true, and any pupil may be free to judge their teachings as a semiotic assemblage of mere words. In this sense, religious education may be radically non-confessional. Of course, some may counter that this philosophy of education itself is skewed, biased and confessional in its very setting up.

Erroneous philosophies of education are no doubt possible. Yet it would be no less presumptuous to simply reject Augustine's answer to Meno's Paradox as meaningless. For, as this essay has attempted to illustrate, the purpose of the *Confessions* is to illustrate how such a belief may nevertheless be possible when we are given a starting point absent of belief. Along with Hand, a reading of the *Confessions* would be possible as part of a non-confessional religious education. In its own terms, it refers to a deeper knowledge which is, by definition, at once knowable but also unknowable. There appears to be a momentous problem of fundamental importance for religious education which is shared by the confessional and non-confessional educationist alike. For the former, knowledge of God is to be found in the apophatic tension of knowing in unknowing, and only truly performed in this world in the partaking of the Eucharist. Yet for the latter, this impossibility may be

presented by the inability to enter into this knowledge without engaging in any concomitant religious practice.

Augustine's answer to Meno's Paradox may prove illuminating, even and especially in a religiously plural context. For it documents a philosophical journey and a resolution that is publicly accessible, even as it is not predicated on propositional or 'cognitive' knowledge alone. Readers may find an opportunity in these remarks for parallel philosophical investigations into various religious traditions—even for those to who would disavow the idea of the Eucharist. Likewise, it would be possible for those to partake in the Eucharist fully without knowledge of this philosophical perspective. For, in each case, there may emerge a site of 'knowing in unknowing' or 'unknowing in knowing' in which genuine religious education may be possible. To search for such a paradoxical knowledge of an unknown God is to stand in wonder before a higher and hidden mystery. It bespeaks an intellectual humility of knowing in part, knowing that we cannot know fully, which, among the Abrahamic religions, proceeds towards the knowledge and love of God. Additionally, it is worth noting that responses to Meno's Paradox comparable to Augustine's were also made by the great medieval Islamic philosophers, such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1150–1210) (Jacobsen Ben Hammed 2020).

We have, for much of the past century, witnessed how religious education has tended to be marginalized alongside religious studies as a colonial hybrid of the humanities that may be led along rather than free to develop by the secular arts and sciences. Secular studies of the philosophy of religious education have tended to marginalize and to problematize the status of the 'religious'. Yet, as we have attempted to illustrate, the essential problematic of religious education has arisen, not from any logical problem with religious propositions, or religious education, but rather from certain questionable secular assumptions shared within cultures of religious educators. The recent philosophy of religious education has, for this reason, typically neglected to engage with Christian and non-Christian sources. The religious has, accordingly, only come to be predicated of education, as though there were some religiously subtracted regime of education awaiting discovery anterior to our ancestral memories of myth, revelation, and religious practices. Yet as this article has illustrated, Augustine's answer to Meno's Paradox has conceived of the religious as the founding site of education. Rather than adding the religious alongside education, we can, to the contrary, conceive of a programme of education that could be developed from within the traditional practices of religion. In recollecting a material lure of creative freedom, we can, in answer to Meno's Paradox, come to know that which is not yet known, learn in ignorance, and hold our thoughts open to what may yet be discovered waiting beyond the horizon of the world.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Attfield, D. 1978. Is religious education possible? A reply to Roger Marples. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 12 (1): 93–97.
- Augustine c.389/1995. *The teacher [De Magistro]*. Trans. P. King. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Augustine c.400/2012. *The confessions: Saint Augustine of Hippo*. Trans. M. Boulding O.S.B. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Dewey, J. 1916. *Democracy and education*. London: Macmillan.
- Hanby, M. 2003. Augustine and Descartes: an overlooked chapter in the story of modern origins. *Modern Theology* 19 (4): 455–482.
- Hand, M. 2001. Is religious education possible? (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oxford).
- Hand, M. 2006. *Is religious education possible? A philosophical investigation*. London: Continuum.
- Hirst, P.H. 1974. *Knowledge and the curriculum*. London: Routledge.
- Hirst, P.H. 1966. The logical and psychological aspects of teaching a subject. In *The concept of education*, ed. R.S. Peters, 38–49. London: Routledge.
- Jacobsen Ben Hammed, N. 2020. Meno's paradox and first principles in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. *Oriens* 48 (3–4): 320–344.
- King, P. 1998. Augustine on the impossibility of teaching. *Metaphilosophy* 29 (3): 179–195.
- Lewin, D. 2016. *Educational philosophy for a post-secular age*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Marples, R. 1978. Is Religious education possible? *Journal of Philosophy of Education*. 12 (1): 81–91.
- Matthews, G.B. 2003. The educational thought of Augustine. In *A companion to the philosophy of education*, ed. R. Curren, 50–61. Oxford: Wiley.
- Milbank, J., C. Pickstock, and G. Ward, eds. 1998. *Radical orthodoxy: a new theology*. London: Routledge.
- Oliver, S. 2008. What can theology offer to religious studies. In *Theology and religious studies: an exploration of disciplinary boundaries*, ed. S. Oliver and M. Warrier, 15–29. London, New York NY: T&T Clark.
- Origen of Alexandria c.244CE/2018. *The commentary of origen on the Gospel of St Matthew*. Trans. R.E. Heine. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pickstock, C. 1998. *After writing: on the liturgical consummation of philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Plato c.380BCE/1961. *The complete dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Skyes, M.H. 1960. The eucharist as 'Anamnesis.' *The Expository Times* 71 (4): 115–118.
- Thompson, P. 2004. Whose confession? Which tradition? *British Journal of Religious Education* 26 (1): 61–72.
- Tillson, J. 2011. In favour of ethics education, against religious education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 45 (4): 675–688.
- Tillson, J. 2019. *Children, religion and the ethics of influence*. London: Bloomsbury.
- White, J.P. 1970. Indoctrination: reply to IMM Gregory and RG Woods. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 4 (1): 107–120.
- Wittgenstein, L. 1958. *Philosophical investigations*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Wiley.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.