

SAINT AUGUSTINE'S PERSPECTIVE ON MEMORY

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Abstract

Exploring the nature and function of human memory by Augustine is not surprising as he recalled the events of his life in his Confessions. The Doctor of Grace looked at his ability to retain and retrieve facts, images, feelings – as well as principles and laws of numbers and dimensions not conveyed by bodily senses. He pondered his ability to remember (and to forget), and the fact that without memory he could not even speak about himself. Memory, he said, is the “great force of life in living man” in which the mind can probe deeply without finding the end. But when neurons in the brain are lost and memories seem to be sealed in their cerebral caverns and hollows, those who suffer from dementia and Alzheimer’s disease may find increasingly that the power of memory that Augustine wrote about is beyond their reach. Some might ask God, as Augustine did, how they can find him if they have no memory of him.

Keywords: Augustine, Memory, Confessions, Doctor of Grace, God

Introduction

Great is the power of memory, an awe-inspiring mystery, my God, a power of profound and infinite multiplicity. ... So great is the power of memory, so great is the force of life in human being whose life is mortal. Confessions, X .17.26.

Augustine recalls and relates his life and his path to Christianity in the first nine books of *The Confessions*. For him memory has enabled this articulation of his life. Throughout *Confessions* Augustine relies greatly on memory and asks more of memory. Can it show who he is, what he is, in what way he exists? Can he, in conversation with memory, discover his self? Knowledge of God is sought, and the ostensible route to this goal is through self-knowledge. The book opens with Augustine seeking God and wondering whether God can be sought if God is not already known. The answer to this initial and central question of how a mere human can know God lies in memory. That is, Augustine will find God (and himself), and the answers to all of his questions, and the font and

guarantee of all knowledge by turning inward and reflecting on his own memory. He says: *"The power of memory is great, very great, my God. It is a vast and infinite profundity. Who has plumbed its bottom? This power is that of my mind and is a natural endowment, but I myself cannot grasp the totality of what I am."* Confessions, X.8.15.

Memory is Augustine's route to the knowledge he seeks, for memory enables questioning, answering, recognition, and understanding. Moreover, memory appears central both to any conception of self and to that being created in God's image, human being. Augustine's interest in the mechanism of memory is not, to be sure, for the sake of scientific knowledge. Indeed, such a purpose, in isolation, would exemplify the empty and sterile curiosity which he calls "lust of the eyes." (X.35) Leaving aside Augustine's rhetoric of self-effacement and intentional irony, it is patent that he knows a great deal about memory and its power.

Augustine's broad usage of the faculty of memory is more than just the ability to remember or the act of remembering. It encompasses all cognitive capacities.⁷ Memory is the repository of all of a person's experiences and knowledge. It includes sensations and perceptions, imaginations and dreams, hopes and fears, emotions and awareness of self.⁸ Memory is the locus of personal identity. Owing to the transience and mutability of the present, memory is the focal point of any sense of continuity experienced. Through memory the past and future both become present. Knowledge resides in memory. In short, memory is mind.⁹ Purpose aside, however, what Augustine produces is science broadly conceived, for his findings advance our understanding of memory and self, and they do so regardless of particular theological or religious commitments. Much like Martin Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, interrogated human being (Dasein) in order to understand being (Sein), so Augustine's questioning of memory in *Confessions* is an attempt to know God. Toward this end and along this path, Augustine produces a rich phenomenology of memory and self, one whose value extends to secular as well as religious understanding. In his early writings, where

⁷ J. McCrone, *The Ape that Spoke*, New York: Avon Books, 1991, p. 8. He explains further that memory is a general term that covers both natural abilities of the brain, such as the ability to recognize, and learned abilities of the brain, such as the ability to recall and replay events in our lives.

⁸ H. Chadwick, (trans.), *Confessions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 185.

⁹ J. J. O'Donnell, *Augustine, Confessions: Text and Commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 174.

his interest is more like what we consider today purely philosophical, Augustine discourses on the nature of memory, its role in the acquisition of knowledge, and the relationship of memory to the mind as a whole. But even after his conversion and elevation to the office of Bishop of Hippo, when he presumably had silenced some of the (what he considers to be) vain intellectual curiosity of his youth (X.35.54), he returns to the discussions of the nature of memory. These transformed memories allow Augustine to grasp, live, and dwell from the totality of his life, his friends, family within a *commemoratio* of God's eternity and love.

BEGINNING THE SEARCH FOR GOD IN MEMORY: Beginning Book X Augustine proclaims his aim to know God, and to know how he knows God. *"Let me know you my known; let me know Thee even as I am known."* Augustine undertakes this search through confession for the true self whose revelation will reveal truth, reveal God. In weighing the prospect of making public such an account, for how will the public know that what he says is true, he remarks that *"to hear from you about themselves is simply to know themselves."* (X.3) Memory is therefore seen as the seat of self, and knowledge of self seen as prerequisite to the knowledge of God. At this point, Augustine must engage in conversation with his self if he is to know himself and to thereby know God. He must remember his way to God if he is to both find God and understand the way of that finding. Memory, then, becomes the key to knowledge, whether of objects, principles, or God himself. A much straightforward description of memory's operations and limitations is presented by Augustine. For highest knowledge, however, there is implicit appeal to metaphorical or analogical explanation, in which the human being is related to God as the image is to reality. This appeal may be recast as a transformation or extension of Socratic reflection: knowing oneself truly is to know God. This explains why Augustine petitions God as noted earlier, to *"let me know Thee even as I am known [by Thee]."* (X.1) God knows Augustine fully and as he really is, and it is such full and real knowledge that Augustine desires of God.¹⁰

¹⁰ The same way Socrates was not satisfied to examine human being through reflection on the wonders of nature, so Augustine is not content to know God through His works, the myriad and marvelous entities that constitute the world. He must look away from material creation if he is to know God directly and unalloyed. His path is therefore an interior one. The allusion of Heidegger is apt in this case: you must understand Dasein (human being) in order to understand Sein (Being). So, if Augustine is to know God, he must first know himself. Indeed, it is through his self that he knows anything at all. And this avenue of the self is not one of pray and wait for God to present himself. Obviously,

Augustine expresses the belief that knowledge [that is, knowledge of true things] is unconscious – it can be found in all people but is not acknowledged or recognized unless touched by God. He is methodical in identifying memory as a viable source for knowledge of God. First he looks about the “*gates of the senses*” and asks the elements – earth, sun, stars, moon, heaven – what they know of God; the elements answer only “*He made us.*” Next he turns to himself and asks, “*Who are you?*” I am “*a man... a body and a soul, the one exterior, the other interior.*” (X.6) Augustine admits that he cannot find God using any of his senses, so he must turn his quest inward, into his mind. He likens memory to a storehouse: he begins with sensory memories, and wonders at how these memories can have such effect on the person remembering them. He is confounded by the number and variety of images that are stored in a human mind. This leads him to praise God, and see this as further evidence that human beings cannot fully understand their total selves. So which part is to be interrogated? Definitely, the soul, for soul gives life to body and not vice versa, and it is soul that enables perception and makes sense of exteriority. Yet life and perception are shared as well by horses and mules, so Augustine must surpass these forces if he is to find God. (X.7) Ascending by degrees toward his Maker, Augustine reaches “*the spacious fields and palaces of memory.*” Memory is a treasure trove of all that can be made present to mind in any way, a storehouse of images, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, principles – spiritual representations of every type and stripe. Only what is “*buried in forgetfulness*” is not there. (X.8)

MEMORY AND MIND: AUGUSTINE’S DUALISM: The pivotal transition at this stage of the discussion allows Augustine to move beyond the dimension of the soul (*anima*) that he shares with the animals to the rational side of the soul (*animus*) that is distinctively human. It is the *animus* rather than the *anima* that will allow the language of God and the soul to develop as Augustine moves upward toward God (X.8.12) When Augustine turns to the spacious halls of memory as a place where this language can unfold, he finds countless images of a great variety of things that have been brought there from objects perceived by the senses

the inquiry into memory, the confession of interior being, is, Augustine recounts, “*hard labor inside myself, and I have become to myself a piece of difficult ground, not to be worked over without much sweat.*” (X.16) Augustine here indicates both the magnitude of the undertaking and the means of its attempted execution, the close examination of oneself, of his own self. Cumbersome ground this human being-in-the-world, yet for Augustine ground that must be tilled if it is to yield self-understanding and knowledge of God.

(X.8.12). In addition to images generated by the activity of the senses, he also finds products of the activity of thinking that have been stored away in this context (X.8.12).

His description of how his memory functions is one of Augustine's classic passages in the *Confessions*, and it is of special significance because it undergirds the process that he undergoes in writing a book that requires him to remember so many things about his past experiences. He writes:

"When I am in that realm, I ask that whatsoever I want be brought forth. Certain things come forth immediately. Certain other things are looked for longer, and are rooted out as it were from some deeper receptacles. Certain others rush forth in mobs, and while some different thing is asked and searched for, they jump in between, as if to say, "Aren't we perhaps the ones?" By my heart's hand I brush them away from the face of my remembrance until what I want is unveiled and comes into sight from out of its hiding place. Others come out readily and in unbroken order, just as they are called for: those coming first give way to those that follow. On yielding, they are buried away again, to come forth when I want them. All this takes place when I recount anything from memory. (X.8.12)

After pointing to the ways in which acts of remembering occur, Augustine tells us that the images we remember are kept distinct and organized under categories. This is the finite, structural dimension of memory, which permits him not only to give a chronological account of events, but also to collect images from the storehouse of memory to reconstruct the story of his life. Collecting the images that he needs for this purpose is made possible by the fact that they do not exist in his memory haphazardly, but according to kinds (X.8.13). In addition to the finite dimension of memory, Augustine suggests that it displays an infinite capacity by claiming that it has "hidden and inexpressible recesses within it" (X.8.13). Memory as a context in which we can attempt to find God is finite and infinite at the same; and in this respect, it reflects the structure of the soul as it journeys toward God. Once again, we find that the structure of memory is the condition that makes the journey toward God possible, and an image of that journey at the distinctively reflective level.

Memory is "vast and unbounded" says Augustine and that it is not possible to penetrate it "to its very bottom" (X.8.15). In doing so, he reminds us again of the infinite dimension of memory that makes the journey toward God possible. On the other hand, he says that memory is a power of his soul (animus) and that it belongs to his nature. This

suggests that he does not comprehend all that he is and that his soul (animus) is unable to possess itself. Yet if the infinite power of the soul (animus) is within Augustine rather outside him, how is it possible that he is unable to comprehend it? The answer to this question is that Augustine is not only finite and infinite, but also present and absent at the same time. "Great wonder" arises within Augustine, and "amazement seizes [him]" as he confronts the phenomenon of self-transcendence (X.8.15). This phenomenon implies that self-consciousness is not self-contained, and that as a consequence, it points beyond itself toward a higher principle. The interplay between presence and absence and between finite and infinite dimensions of the soul calls our attention to the fact that we transcend ourselves by moving from one level of cognition to another. The journey toward God begins by turning away from objects toward the soul, but it can be brought to completion only when the soul's knowledge of itself leads to a self-transcendent knowledge of the ground of its existence.

IMAGES AND THINGS THEMSELVES

IMAGES: Augustine argues that memory contains only images: of things in the world, of the self-remembering, and of God. Book X of the *Confessions* describes the workings of memory as a form of representative realism. That the mind contains only images or representations and not things themselves in part dictates his incarnational epistemology [his religious commitments require same conclusions though.] And he maintains that while "*the treasures of innumerable images of all kinds of objects brought in by self-perception*" (X.8.12), might be perfectly detailed and completely accurate, they are still images. Everything that passes through the sense organs is stored in memory as an image. Images can be conjured in memory while the objects themselves are absent. Memory can distinguish among various sensory images, or among the images created by a single sense even when no object is present (X.8.13). Though he notes limits to the number of images produced by memory. Iterated memories exist – a person can remember that he remembers (X.13.20) – but not ad infinitum.

I mention the image of the sun, and this is present in my memory. I recall not the image of its image, but the image of itself (X.15.23). Memory can discriminate among different things, prefer on type of object over another, desire one sensory experience as opposed to another without apparent or obvious

external stimuli. But he is not consistent in maintaining that all memories are representational.

OBJECTS THEMSELVES: Unlike learning, recognizing and remembering sensory particulars, learning, remembering or acquiring more abstract pieces of information does not involve images. Augustine writes: “For all that we contemplate we either perceive through cogitation, or through a sense or through the intellect. But those things which are perceived through sense we also sense to be outside us, ... But those things which are thought are not thought as being in another place other than the very mind which thinks them... (DIA 6.10)¹¹

Memory’s understanding of itself cannot be imagistic, lest a regress of images or of memories or of faculties of memory arise (X.15.23).¹² Since God cannot be represented, whatever is understood of God in memory must not be imagistic. The division of what is known via images and what is known in itself has to do with whether or not there is at least a potential physical object corresponding to the content of the mental state. Augustine gives three examples of skills which, unlike ordinary empirical knowledge, leave no object outside the mind when they are learned. He says that the skill or idea of what constitutes literature, the art of dialectical debate, and how many kinds of questions there are reside in memory in this distinctive manner (X.9.16). It is the case with the liberal arts that a memory trace inferior to the thing itself is not retained (X.12.19).¹³ He says “it is clear not only that an art is in the mind of the artist,

¹¹ De Immortalitate Animae, translated as *Concerning the Teacher and On the Immortality of the Soul*, by George G. Leckie, New York: Appleton-Centure Crofts, 1938.

¹² This fact applies to what is known, moreso, what Augustine knew, and talks about often in the *Confessions*, regarding self-deception. I wouldn’t want to go into the highly unsettled issue of the psychology of self-deception in this paper.

¹³ When Augustine speaks of the liberal arts, he implies the trivium and the quadrivium that formed the basis of classical education. In some sense the arts reduce to number theory of one sort or another. His discussion of what is knowable without recourse to sense perception reinforces the view that he thinks the liberal arts, mathematics, logic and dialectic are roughly equivalent. Cfr *Contra Academicos* and *De libero arbitrio*. He is convinced that they are learned and remembered in the same way. What is important about the arts he discusses is their relationship to the science of number. He believes that the principles and laws of numbers and dimensions lack sensory qualities and are not known through images. O’Donnell confirms that it is possible to argue that Augustine’s use of the ‘*artes liberales*’ in book X is coextensive with his use of the ‘number.’ O’Donnell, James J, *Augustine, Confessions: Text and Commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 183.

but also that it is nowhere else except in the mind" (DIA 4.5). Although with regard to the liberal arts, we discover things that exist 'nowhere else but in the mind,' the objects are indeed discovered and not made by the mind (DIA 4.6).

The sounds used to designate these concepts are mere signs and not principles in themselves. The mental numbers stored in memory are really numbers, while numbers used for counting are mere signs (X.12.19). Neither the arts nor number theory are learned from sense perception. He says: *"I retain images of the sounds which constitute these words. I know they have passed through the air as a noise, and that they no longer exist. Moreover, the ideas signified by these sounds I have not touched by sense-perception, nor have I seen them independently of my mind. I hid in my memory not the images but the realities."* (X.10.17) Sometimes then, memory can bring back exactly (or seemingly so) what was learned, the object itself, unenhanced, undiminished, unchanged (*non imagines earum, sed ipsas*). Whereas in knowing external objects we change them, in knowing the arts (number theory) we do not transform the object of knowledge. There is no external object to be changed into an image (or a brain process). Augustine says that memory is the stomach of the mind. I can store things without itself tasting them (X.14.21). He compares remembering to rumination, *just as food is brought from the stomach... so also by recollection these things are brought up from the memory* (X.14.22). If his physicalistic metaphor is played out, what is brought forth from memory is never the same as what entered originally. So with respect to the arts, if the object is not external, and thus not put in in the first place, when it is brought forth, it can be exactly the same object time and again. Memory holds the realities themselves. But then one wonders how those realities got there.

LEARNING, RECOGNITION AND FORGETTING: Since the realities that he apprehends do not enter his soul through the senses, Augustine wonder whence and how they enter his memory, the object thought must lie in memory. And he argues: *"How, I do not know, for when I first learned (discere) them I did not give credence to another's heart, but I recognized (recognoscere) them within my own, and I approved them as true, and I entrusted them to my heart. It was as if I stored them away there, whence I could bring them forth when I wanted them. Therefore they were there even before I learned (discere) them, but they were not in memory. Where, then, or why, when they were uttered, did I recognize (agnoscere) them, and say, "So it is; it is true," if not because they were already in memory, but pushed back as it were in more*

hidden caverns that, unless they were dug up by some reminder, I would perhaps have been unable to conceive them. (X.10.17)

Here we see Augustine presenting something very much like the story of the slave boy Plato uses to solve the heuristic paradox in the *Meno*. The paradox lies in the supposed impossibility of searching for something one does not already know, because unless the object sought is in memory, it cannot be recognized and hence it cannot be found. Augustine suggests that he does not learn truths from the liberal arts, but that he learns them by recollection when he is placed within a context where the liberal arts are “taught” (X.9.16). In addition, the Latin terms that are translated by the word “recognition” (*recognoscere*, *agnoscere*) point toward a doctrine of recollection: the meaning of the first word is “to know again” and the second is “to know on the basis of previous acquaintance” (X.10.17). Finally, Augustine seems to confirm this interpretation by moving back and forth between the dimensions of presence and absence as they pertain to the acquisition of knowledge. First, he claims that the truths of the liberal arts are present in his heart even before he learns them (X.10.17). Then he says that these truths are not in his memory (X.10.17). Yet when he asks where and why he recognizes them as true when they are uttered, he concludes that they are present in his memory after all (X.10.17). This conclusion suggests the hypothesis that these truths have been pushed back into “hidden caverns” of the memory and that unless they are drawn forth by some reminder, he would have been unable to conceive of them (X.10.17).

Augustine claims he does not know how the truths of the liberal arts entered memory in the first, since they don’t come from the senses (X.10.17) we discern the ideas inwardly as they really are, through the concepts themselves (*per se ipsa intus cernimus*). As a consequence, he turns away from telling a recollection myth as a way of undergirding the claim that learning is recollection of what we have “known” before.¹⁴ In using words for “recognition” within the context of learning, Augustine also points beyond the platonic doctrine of recollection to the distinctively doctrine of illumination, where a direct recognition of the truth can be identified with immediate insight that the light of Truth makes possible.¹⁵

¹⁴ C. G. Vaught, *Metaphor, Analogy, and the Place of Places*, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2004, p. 83.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

The words, the physical expressions, by which we learn the liberal arts or other nonsensory ideas are but signs. He says that by acts of thinking, we collect (colligere) things that memory contains here and there without any order and that we observe them and place them near at hand so they may occur easily to the mind (animus) that is familiar with them already (X.11.18). However, the process of coming to know these things must occur repeatedly; for if I cease to recall them for only a short period of time, they are forgotten and must be called forth again as if they were new. Augustine formulates the point thus:

"We find that the process of learning is simply this: by thinking we, as it were, gather together ideas which the memory contains in a dispersed and disordered way, and by concentrating our attention we arrange them in order as if ready to hand, stored in the very memory where previously they lay hidden, scattered and neglected. Now they easily come forward under the direction of the mind familiar with them (X.11.18).

Unfortunately, in giving an account of the process of learning, Augustine did not mention a state of preexistence in which our knowledge is complete, but confines himself to the scattered condition of what we are trying to learn and to the process of collecting what is scattered that makes learning possible. In fact, his words are compatible with the notion that these words are heard or read, yet their significance or signification (that for which they are signs) may not be understood on first hearing. And what is not comprehended is most often forgotten. He notes that once something enters the senses it is there forever; it is imprinted indelibly (X.18.27, X.19.28). It is well known that in order to remember something one must think of it often. For this reason Dennett says:

"...this practice of rehearsal creates a memory of the route by which we have arrived at where we are (what psychologists call 'episodic' memory), so that we can explain to ourselves... just what errors we made... mutual accessibility of contents provides the context without which events occurring "in consciousness" would not – could not – make sense to the subject. The contents that compose that compose the surrounding context are not themselves always conscious – in fact, in general they are not accessible at all..."¹⁶

"Any of the things you have learned can contribute to any of the things you are currently confronting."¹⁷

¹⁶ D. C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1991, p. 278.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 279.

Augustine now moves from beyond the issue of memory to the problem of forgetfulness, suggesting that when we say the word “forgetfulness” and understand what it signifies, we recognize the reality to which it points by remembering it. Recollection and knowledge involve repeated thought. So what happens is that the idea is learned, not fully understood, and so forgotten. Somehow, it is recalled, or relearned, and when it is recognized, it seems to have been hidden. In this case, appearance is reality. It seems to have been hidden because it was hidden, but just because it was lost does not imply that it was gone forever. When we remember memory, memory is “present to itself through itself (X.11.18); and when we remember forgetfulness, “both memory and forgetfulness are present: memory by which I remember and forgetfulness which I remember” (X.16.24). Forgetfulness itself cannot be remembered at all.¹⁸ Since one cannot remember what one does not remember, forgetfulness itself cannot reside in memory. Nor can the image of forgetfulness be in memory, for the only way for an image to get impressed one memory is for the object to be present itself – internally or externally – in the first place (X.16.24-25)

Augustine claimed that when we remember forgetfulness, memory and forgetfulness are present together, he holds memory and forgetfulness apart by suggesting that memory is the *act* by which we remember and that forgetfulness is the *content* toward which this act is directed. In his discussion of the happy life, Augustine claims that all of us remember God, at least in the minimal sense that we remember that we have forgotten him (X.23.33). In this way, he uses the phenomenon of forgetfulness to advance his discussion of the nature of memory as a

¹⁸ In page 186 of O'Donnell's book *Augustine, Confessions: Text and Commentary*, he wonders why Augustine treats forgetfulness as a thing rather than as a privation. Involved in part is the tendency of language to reify. O'Donnell seems to have taken the discussion too serious. He seem to be assimilating Augustine's discussion of epistemological puzzles to his discussion of evil. His thinking is ok, but not in this case. Because when Augustine is discussing evil explicitly he has to arrive at prespecified conclusions that always accord with the notion that evil is a privation, when discussing the nature of forgetfulness he is under no such constraints. Moreover, Augustine is only reflecting on his experience. When Augustine asks the rhetorical question, “what is forgetfulness, unless it be a privation of memory?” (X.16.24). This question suggests that Augustine should have analyzed forgetfulness in the same way that he analyzes darkness and silence, where all three concepts are privations. Augustine moves beyond the negative analysis of forgetfulness by suggesting that it has a positive role to play. Moving in this direction we encounter a paradox: forgetfulness is present so that we are not forgetful of it; but when it is present, we forget (X.16.24-25).

pathway to God. On the other hand, he believes that our forgetfulness of God and our consequent separation from him are so serious that more than a memory of God is required to overcome the chasm that separates us from him. As his analysis of the nature of memory moves in this direction, Augustine indicates how its structure not only permits us to transcend ourselves in our journey toward God, but also how the fissure of forgetfulness can become a “window” through which God manifests himself to the one who has forgotten him.

Worthy of note about the relation between memory and forgetfulness is that the fissure of forgetfulness at the heart of memory makes it possible for God to manifest himself, where this self-manifestation (illumination) is the ground for philosophical conversion in which Augustine participates in Book VII (VII.17.23). The relation between memory and forgetfulness is the condition that makes it possible for Augustine to undertake a journey toward God, and the structure of memory that includes forgetfulness is a reflective image of the relation between God and the soul that the mystical experiences of Book VII propose (VII.17.23)

MEMORIES OF EMOTIONS: Feelings too are present in memory. In addition to the memory of sense perceptions, real or imagined, and abstract concepts, Augustine also discusses memories of emotions. Mind contains memory and memory contains mind’s feelings. In memory, however, these feelings are experienced as memories and not as immediate affections of mind. This raises questions for the near synonymy of mind and memory that suffuses Augustine’s account. Given that “we call memory itself mind... how is it that when I, being happy, remember my past sadness – so that the mind contains happiness and the memory contains sadness – the mind is happy because of the happiness in it, but the memory is not sad because of the sadness in it?” Augustine notes how emotions are remembered in a different way from that in which they were originally experienced. The memory of an emotion does not bring with it the experience of the emotion. He contends that the same is true of physical pain; it can be remembered without being re-felt (X.14.21). Since remembered emotions and pains operate differently from remembered physical objects, according to Augustine they must be implanted in memory differently. When we imagine a purple cow it really looks purple; we seem to be seeing purple. We can sing a song in our heads, imagining all the nuances of melody, or the lyrics. But we can remember having been happy or hungry without re-experiencing any of

the original feelings. And fortunately remembered pains do not hurt (X.14.22, X.15.23).

Looking at the differences between remembered perceptions and remembered emotions, Augustine concludes that knowledge of things such as happiness does not come via the senses (X.15.23). As with abstract objects, the thing itself must be present to the memory (X.20.29, X.21.31).

Augustine suggests again that we know what “happiness” means and that we desire to be happy because all of us have experienced it. He maintains that this “earlier” experience takes place, either individually or in Adam prior to the fall, where in this second case, we are present participants (X.20.29). Though Augustine believes that all of us remember the happy life, he does not believe that all of us are happy. The recollection of the happy life is the epistemic framework within which we can ask about the relation between God and the soul; and without this framework, we would be unable to undertake the journey toward the one whom we have forgotten. Yet Augustine insists that the joy we seek is not granted to the wicked, but only to those who worship God for his own sake and for whom God himself is joy (X.22.32). Thus he writes:

“This is the happy life, to rejoice over you, to you, and because of you: this it is, and there is no other.” (X.22.32)

Augustine still calls our attention to the transcendent dimension of joy that manifests the grace of God. Though Augustine’s recollection of joy generates the epistemic framework within which his thought develops, he experiences the transcendent side of joy of this kind in Milan and Ostia (VII.17.23, IX.10.24), and he describes his relation to joy in a fashion that reflects these earlier experiences.

GOD AND BEAUTY: *“Late have I loved You, o Beauty so ancient and so new. Late have I loved You. And see, You were within and I without, and there did I seek You. I, deformed, I plunged into those fair things which you made. You were with me, but I was not with You! Those things kept me far from You, which unless they had their existence in You, had no existence at all. You called and cried aloud and forced open my deafness. You did gleam and shine, and chase away my blindness. You were fragrant and I drew my breath, and now pant after You. I have tasted You, and I feel but hunger and thirst for You. You touched me and I am set on fire for your peace.”* (X.27.38).

Moving from the nature of memory to a faint recollection of the happy life, from the memory of the happy life to a recollection of God’s

immanent side, and from a memory of the immanent side of God to an encounter with the God beyond the mind, Augustine admits that he has loved God belatedly (X.27.38). Though God is “within,” Augustine is outside himself; and as a consequence, he looks for God among the things that God has created. Augustine’s preoccupation with finite things has caused him to “rush headlong” toward them, where he forgets God by falling away from him (X.27.38). Augustine is not a character in a platonic recollection myth who forgets what he once knows, but a protagonist in a Christian drama that chooses to turn away from the ground of his existence. Yet there is a remedy for Augustine’s fragmented condition, and he reminds us of it by remembering his intellectual conversion in Milan and his Christian conversion in the garden afterwards.

Augustine was wrongly in love with the beauty of the world, he learned to love the beauty of God late in life. Life brings numerous temptations, regardless of anyone’s status, from which only God can save. Augustine considers the three kinds of temptations: lust of the senses, curiosity, and power. God gave him strength to give up sexual activity, but his old habit still haunts him as erotic dreams. The pleasures of taste cannot so easily be given up, because one must eat. But one must be careful not to take inordinate pleasure in satisfying this need. The temptations of sweet smell are not difficult for Augustine to resist, but the temptations of sound, and especially music, are strong. Hearing hymns sung, his reason takes pleasure in the words, but he is always tempted to let his irrational pleasure in the sounds themselves take over. The temptations of sight are impossible to avoid, because they are everywhere, in colors and in light. Love of physical light can be sinful, but God himself offers spiritual light. All beautiful human arts and crafts come from God, but human beings do not move from these lower beauties to the higher beauty. Lust of the eyes is related to the second temptation, curiosity. Curiosity is a kind of craving after knowledge and experience for its own sake. Theater appeals to this craving, as does science, magic, and the demands of the faithful for signs and miracles. The third temptation is power. Human beings long to be feared or loved by others. Augustine admits he cannot control this temptation, because he can never disentangle his love for his fellow human beings from his desire for approval.

At the end, Augustine meditates on his physical senses and his memory, and through them, he can sometimes ascend to a moment of contact with God, but he can never sustain it, so he falls back to his old self. Only Christ, who was fully human and fully God, can mediate between

humans and God. And only Christ can cure Augustine and all of us of sin and give hope!

CONCLUSION: CONVERSION OF MEMORY

The first nine books of the *Confessions* is the account of the conversion of Augustine's own memories, a conversion that awakens him in a more comprehensive biographical manner to the eternal love and forgiveness and justice of God. Even the simplest memories that he has, like stealing fruit [like Adam and Eve did] are transformed into forgiven acts by which God's glory shines upon him and the world, and he is elevated into the light of God's loving forgiveness as a son of God the Father. Throughout the previous nine books, Augustine recalls with God's help the multitude of memories of relationships with family and friends and teachers. In each case, these memories are transformed in God's light. We see how Augustine discerns the dialectic of sin and grace operative in his life, and how God's grace was working at every moment, even those that were the result of his own sin as he was tossed or tossed himself into the storms of life. He came to apprehend God's pursuit of him even in those dark and descending moments in his life. After his conversion, recalling every memory as he does in the *Confessions* involves a transformation of his presence with the others in his life. They come to dwell in him as creatures and as part of God's loving providence, as individuals in a fallen world whom God calls out like He did in the Garden of Eden... where are you? Why are you hiding? Reading through the *Confessions* you realize that before Augustine's conversion, he was in the "out of doors" and enslaved in his disordered desires. He could not think of God or of other human beings excepts in material images (God as a kind of infinite matter with an infinity of space). God allowed him to travel through a multitude of experiences (including his journey as a Manichean) that constantly included God's response – sometimes one of desolation that was a result of his fleeing from God, other times one of consolation in which God was awakening him to the truly good. These moments, especially those that awoke him to the question of good and evil, eventually brought him to a moment in which his mind was elevated to apprehend reality that was beyond material (VII.10) and that his sinful state was far from the light above.

Augustine's reformed memories offered him the opportunity to grasp, live and dwell from the totality of his life, his family and friends within a *commemoratio* of God's eternity and love. That is the real *commemoratio* of the human race. Some years after writing the *Confessions*, his *City of God*

expands his *commemoratio* to include a transformation of how a person should live in the totality of history as a dialectic between the city of man and the city of God.

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