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The Nature of Memory (Book X)

At the beginning of Book X, Augustine makes a transition from the death of his mother in 387 A.D. to the time at which he writes the *Confessions* some ten to thirteen years later. This transition from the past to the present permits him to move from the episodes that he records in Books I–IX to memory as an ontological condition that makes these recollections possible. It also permits him to turn his attention to memory as an ecstatic dimension of consciousness that mirrors his recollection of ecstatic experiential episodes. The episodes in question not only include the three pivotal experiences in which Augustine finds God (7.1016; 7.17.23; 8.12.29; 9.10.24), but also the occasions upon which he falls away from God along the vertical axis of experience. The two most memorable occasions of this kind are the pear-stealing episode in Book II (2.4.9) and the encounter with absolute nonbeing that the death of his closest friend precipitates (4.4.7).

The transition from the past to the present has a spatial dimension that expresses itself in a new kind of community that Augustine addresses in Book X. Having dealt with the public aspect of his life in Books I–IX, he points to the new community he has in mind by praying for the soul of his mother at the end of Book IX (9.13.37). In this prayer, Augustine begins to shift his attention from the external world of Books I–IX, about which he could have provided many more details, to the internal world of his mother, which according to the demands of Christ, must be free from contradiction.¹ Augustine knows that despite the exemplary behavior of

Monica, she might have committed hidden sins that he does not know about or is in no position to know. Thus, he prays for her, asking his readers to pray for his mother and father as well (9.13.37).

At this point, a door swings open to the inner world of every believer, giving us access to the place where Augustine encounters God in Books VII–IX.² It is here that the most important and difficult questions for the Christian are played out; and it is in this context that Augustine confesses the sins with which he struggles, even as Bishop of Hippo (10.1.1). Augustine knows how important confession of this kind can be, since he also knows that if the demands of Christ that regulate the inner life can be met, appropriate external behavior will follow.

In the first nine Books of the text, Augustine speaks to a universal audience, where his purpose is to stir up the hearts of unbelievers by pointing to the depths from which we they must cry out to God and to delight the souls of believers because their sins have been covered by the waters of baptism (9.6.14). By contrast, in Book X, he begins to address the Christian community, whose members he asks to believe what he says because they love him. This request presupposes a community of charity, the members of which believe that Augustine's confessions are true because he is a fellow Christian (10.4.5). In this case, what he confesses is not intended to stir up the heart toward God, or to delight the ones who have been converted, but to express the struggle of a convert as he joins other Christians in moving from conversion to fulfillment at both the experiential and reflective levels.

The eternal dimension of Augustine's journey toward God emerges in the soul's attempt to move toward the knowledge of God through memory understood as a pathway. As Augustine understands its structure, memory is the mind's way to God (10.17.26); and forgetfulness is a cognitive and volitional reflection of the fall from Paradise that separates us from God (10.16.24–10.16.25). When God speaks to overcome our forgetfulness, he appears as the divine teacher;³ and when we listen, our temporal and reflective presents not only coincide in time, but are also brought together in relation to eternity. Since God is not in time, and since the memory of God emerges along the vertical axis of experience, the memory of the past becomes what Gilson has called, "the memory of the Present."⁴ Memory of this kind makes it possible for Augustine to bring himself into relation with the eternal present, not only by confessing his sins, but also by moving along the pathway of memory to recover his original relation to God.

The structure of Book X is a mirror image of the book as a whole, for after five introductory chapters that correspond to the first five chap-

ters of Book I, the central part of the book is divided almost equally between theoretical and experiential sections. Having discussed the nature of memory as a pathway to God in Section II, Augustine gives a detailed account of his present spiritual condition in Section III. It should not be surprising that the writer moves so abruptly from the discussion of memory to the confession of his present sins; for as James O'Donnell reminds us, sin has always been the primary threat to the kind of mysticism displayed in Augustine's intellectual conversion, which is recorded in Book VII (7.10.16).⁵

The confession of Augustine's sins in the second half of Book X is an embarrassment to Neoplatonists, who believe that he is converted completely to chastity and continence in the garden in Milan.⁶ If this is so, it is astonishing that he is still struggling to live up to his ideals so many years after the fact. However, his preoccupation with the sins described in Book X becomes intelligible if we realize that the task of an embodied soul after its conversion is not to separate itself from the body, but to engage in the difficult task of seeking fulfillment in relation to God. In confessing the sins that continue to beset him even after he becomes Bishop of Hippo, the saint who is recovering from sexual addiction⁷ undertakes a painful journey from conversion to fulfillment that only the grace of God will make it possible for him to achieve.

Augustine focuses on his need for grace when he considers the criteria that a mediator must fulfill in making grace accessible. At the end of Book VII, he realizes that he needs a mediator (7.18.24), and he finds the one he seeks in his conversion in the garden in Milan (8.12.29). Yet now he needs to make the transition from conversion to fulfillment, and he also needs to understand how mediation is possible at the distinctively reflective level. At the end of Book X, Augustine deals with the problem of fulfillment by indicating how the mediator can bring experiential and reflective stability to his soul (10.43.68–10.43.69); and he points to the way in which fulfillment can be anticipated by participating in the sacramental dimension of the Christian community (10.43.70).

THE MEANING OF CONFESSION (10.1.1–10.5.7)

Just as Augustine provides an introduction to the book as a whole in the first five chapters of Book I, he provides an introduction to this stage of his inquiry in chapters one through five of Book X.⁸ In both places, he begins with a prayer (1.1.1; 10.1.1). Yet in the second introduction, he

expresses his longing to know God (10.1.1) and no longer claims that his heart is restless until it comes to rest in God (1.1.1).

On the basis of the three pivotal experiences that bring Augustine's existential journey to completion,⁹ Augustine wants to know the one he has been seeking; and he wants to understand the one he has found. Thus, he says at the beginning of Book X, "Let me know you, I shall know you," "even as I am known" (10.1.1). The subjunctive ("Let me know you") expresses a request addressed directly to God, and the future indicative ("I shall know you") expresses confidence that Augustine will find the knowledge that he seeks.¹⁰ Faith seeking understanding must neither abandon the trust with which it begins, nor turn away from the knowledge of God to which it is oriented. Thus, Augustine brings faith and understanding (*intellectum*) together when he asks God to reveal himself, and when his faith assures him that this understanding will one day be achieved.

It is important to notice that at this stage of the *Confessions*, Augustine is not seeking objective truths about God's nature and existence of the sort that he has found by reading the books of the Platonists (7.9.13) or the pathway that leads to God, which he has found by reading the Epistles of the Apostle Paul (7.21.27). Rather, he is seeking knowledge of himself that only God has and that he can have only by knowing God. Augustine needs this knowledge in order to obey the mandate of Christ to fulfill the Law inwardly.¹¹

Augustine asks God to enter and transform his soul so that the one who has brought him into existence may possess it "without spot or wrinkle" (10.1.1).¹² In somewhat different terms, he wants the transcendent power of God to become immanent within his soul, where the basis for this request is that he has loved and done the truth by coming to the light (10.1.1). In Book VII, Augustine sees an unchangeable light and moves toward it (7.10.16), where "doing the truth" (*facio*) does not mean "making the truth," as the Latin verb permits,¹³ but "acting in accord with the Truth," as the context demands. At this later, more theoretical stage of the book, Augustine wants to continue to act in accord with the Truth by engaging in confession, not only in his heart, but also before God and in his "writing before many witnesses" (10.1.1).

Augustine's confessions in Books I–IX are a public account for a public audience about matters in the public sphere. By contrast, the confessions of the thoughts and feelings of his inner life are a private matter between himself and God.¹⁴ Yet if he refuses to confess the hidden sins with which he continues to struggle, even though he does not hide himself from God, he hides God from himself (10.2.2). In addition, when

God is hidden from us, we lose our positive orientation toward him; and our failure to know God becomes a volitional orientation in the opposite direction. The only way to overcome this problem is to renounce oneself and choose God, where one can be pleasing either to oneself or to God only because of God (10.2.2). Once more Augustine places confession before profession (10.2.2), suggesting that confession is the only way to speak to God, and to speak to others about the source of power that creates and sustains us.

Augustine's primary mode of speaking uses the words of the soul and the "outcry of thought" to address God directly rather than bodily words and sounds that he might utter in the presence of other people (10.2.2). The soul and the body are separated by the distinction Augustine makes here, but it is important to notice that there is a semantical solution to the problem of their unity.¹⁵ When he distinguishes the words of the soul from the words of the body, this distinction not only separates two kinds of entity, but also binds them together by extending the concept of discourse as it pertains to the body to discourse as it pertains to the soul. The analogical distinction between the soul and the body that holds them apart is an important dimension of Augustine's thinking, but the language of the soul as a metaphorical extension of the language of the body is important as well. It is this metaphorical extension of discourse from one context to another that permits Augustine to bind the soul and the body together in semantical terms.

Augustine begins to formulate the meaning of the kind of confession in which he intends to engage in Book X by claiming that when he is evil, confession is nothing else but being displeased with himself, and that when he is upright, it is nothing else but refraining from attributing goodness to himself (10.2.2). As they stand, these formulations are problematic because they seem to eliminate all reference to God and to suggest that confession is little more than the conversation of the soul with itself. However, Augustine reintroduces a transcendent dimension into the discussion by claiming that God blesses the just man and that he justifies the one who has been ungodly (10.2.2). Even though he avoids ontological references to God at this point, Augustine makes a soteriological reference to him by drawing a distinction between the one who is justified and the one who justifies. Thus, what appears to be a way of collapsing the relation between God and the soul into an identity between them opens out into a dimension of difference that confessional discourse evokes.

To underscore the crucial role God plays in the *Confessions*, Augustine speaks about the order in which the language of the text unfolds. First,

he says that God speaks to him; then he says that he speaks to God; and finally, he says that he speaks to us (10.2.2). The *Confessions* is an expression of the language of God and the soul, not primarily because it is language about God or about God's relation to us, but because it attempts to teach us how to listen and how to speak to God, where this, in turn, permits us to speak to one another. The language of God and the soul is language addressed to Augustine before it becomes language addressed to God and other people, where the fundamental purpose of this kind of discourse is to point to the priority of God and to renounce authorial control over the confessional enterprise.

Augustine expresses his reluctance to speak to many of those who are anxious to hear his confessions, even though he is required to do so (10.3.3). Part of the reason for his reluctance is that his audience is unable to cure him of his disease and feebleness (10.3.3). People of this kind are eager to know about another human being's life, but are reluctant to correct their own. As a consequence, they are curious about Augustine,¹⁶ but are unwilling to display a confessional openness of their own. Finally, those who approach Augustine in this way are unable to know whether what he says about himself is true, since no one knows "what goes on within a man but the spirit of man which is in him" (10.3.3). Since this is so, Augustine suggests that the best thing for his readers to do is not to ask him about himself, but to ask God to speak to us (10.3.3). If we do this, we can join his confessional enterprise, not as curious bystanders, but as individuals prepared to engage in confessions of our own.

If we turn away from curiosity to enter the same vertical space that Augustine occupies, there is at least one way in which we can listen to the confession of his present sins that transcends curiosity. Knowing that it is part of the Christian life for Augustine to confess his sins to other members of the Christian community, and recognizing that he cannot prove that what he says is true, we can approach him with charity and listen to what he says in love. Augustine suggests that we will have a reason for believing him only if we love him, where the community into which he is attempting to lead us is a community of love. Across the chasm of suspicion that might otherwise separate us from him, Augustine asks us to listen to what he says about himself in the spirit of charity (10.3.3). Thus, the trust with which faith seeking understanding begins becomes a principle of communication in terms of which we can believe what Augustine says, where members of the community in which this occurs overcome the suspicion that often separates us with the love that binds us together.

Augustine's appeal to a community of love as a way of moving beyond the hermeneutics of suspicion¹⁷ is especially relevant to the reception the *Confessions* has been received in the twentieth century. This reception has often reflected the conviction that Augustine does not mean what he says at many places in the text and that he even fabricates incidents in order to enhance the rhetorical power of his story.¹⁸ The most interesting fact about this view is not that it casts doubt on Augustine's veracity, but that Augustine anticipates the kind of critical spirit that gives rise to it. In appealing to a community of charity, he admits that his audience has no way of knowing whether what he says is true unless charity opens the ears of its members to what he is attempting to communicate. Yet if this occurs, Augustine says that we will realize that he is not lying by speaking out of the source of himself, but pointing instead to the truth that is grounded in God. Thus, a willingness to participate in the vertical dimension of experience becomes a necessary condition, not only for finding God, but also for embracing the Truth of Augustine's confessions as he stands in the presence of God.

Besides stirring up the hearts of unbelievers to cry out to God from the abyss into which they have fallen, the profit that arises from confessing past sins is that good people enjoy hearing about misdeeds that no longer trouble the one who makes the confession. In this case, the audience recognizes the fact that the deeds in question are not present evils, but sins that no longer trouble the individual who confesses them (10.3.4). However, Augustine wonders about what benefit (*fructus*) accrues from confessions that focus on what he is rather than on what he was. In this case, he suggests that the benefit of his confessions is that his readers will give thanks for the extent to which he is able to approach God and will pray that he will not be held back from God by his own weight (10.4.5). Thanksgiving and prayer are marks of the fact that Augustine and his audience are parts of the same community, where this community is bound together by the principle of charity that makes it possible for us to love Augustine in God.

Even though the community to which Augustine commits himself is founded on the principle of love, its members will not be uniformly positive in their appraisals of what Augustine confesses. Rather, they will love those things in Augustine that ought to be loved and will lament those things in him that ought to be lamented. Yet members of this community will not be hostile to him, even when they blame him for some of his actions (10.4.5). This community draws a radical distinction between positive and negative behavior, but they rise above the binary logic of the

Law and the perpetual conflict between good and evil by placing them both within the context of love.

Rejoicing over what can be approved expresses love, but sadness over what must be disapproved expresses love as well. Though the love that binds the community together sometimes manifests itself in negative terms, the opposition between good and evil that Augustine struggles for so long to transcend never splits the community apart. Thus, he says that it is men like these to whom he is willing to reveal himself and that anyone else is a stranger (10.4.5). Finally, in laying bare his feelings before God, Augustine says, "And do not, on any account whatever, abandon what you have begun in me. Go on, rather, to complete what is yet imperfect in me" (10.4.5).

Augustine confesses his present sins to "the believing sons of men," who partake in his joy, who share his mortality, and who are fellow pilgrims and citizens of the City of God (10.4.6). The band of pilgrims to which he refers in this passage is forged at the end of Book IX, where he prays for his father and mother and asks the servants of God to remember them at the altar of the Church (9.13.37). The audience to which Augustine is appealing is not simply readers who are willing to respond to what he says with open minds, or readers who are sympathetic with theism as a general philosophical position, but the community of the Church whose members are bound together by the cords of love (10.4.6).¹⁹

It is important to notice that the community to which Augustine refers in this context is not identical with the visible Church. The first arises out of the second through the public confession of our inner life. In the course of the *Confessions*, Augustine creates it by giving encouragement and warning to every Christian struggling with problems similar to his. The community in question is identical with those who seek Augustine's help and seek to help him with charitable intent. Augustine responds by making the example of his own life available to those whom God has commanded him to serve.²⁰

The perils in confessing private sins are great: shading the truth, leaving something out, and making some additions, all of which are possible because the kind of truth under discussion is unobservable. As a consequence, Augustine confesses his present sins, not only in words, but also in deeds. He writes:

. . . Your Word would be but little to me, if he had given his precepts in speech alone and had not gone on before me by deeds. I do this service by deeds as well as by words. . . . (10.4.6)

Standing under that shadows of God's wings, Augustine knows that members of the Church will be able to conclude that he is telling the truth, not only by listening to what he says, but also by attending to what he does. Action is the fruit by which Augustine wants to be judged, where what he says and what he does must never be separated from one another. Thus, he reveals the details of his present spiritual condition to the people that God has commanded him to serve, and he does this on the basis of deeds as well as words (10.4.6). Yet in doing this, he depends upon God for stability and is never able to judge himself; and this leads him to say, "In this manner . . . let me be heard" (10.4.6).

When Augustine confesses his sins in the second half of Book X, it is easy to believe that the audience he has in mind is made up of fellow Christians. Who else would have the patience to listen to the lengthy and often tedious confession of his present spiritual condition? But does Augustine intend to address this same audience in the first part of the book that focuses on the problem of memory? This section deals with many technical problems that only a philosopher would be likely to appreciate, leading us to wonder whether the discussion of these issues is intended exclusively for members of the Church, or for members of a wider philosophical community.

Had Augustine not committed himself so explicitly to the Christian community in the opening paragraphs of Book X, we might be warranted in concluding that his discussion of the nature of memory is addressed to the purely philosophical intellect. Yet as things now stand, we must open ourselves to the possibility that his discussion of this issue, and of the other philosophical problems with which he deals in Books XI–XIII, is addressed to the intellect that begins with faith. Augustine claims again and again that understanding completes faith;²¹ but if this is so, Christian philosophers who begin with faith and move toward understanding are the audience to which Augustine is speaking in the reflective part of his inquiry.

The purpose of Augustine's discussion of the nature of memory is to retrace the pathway to God that he has traveled in his own experience (10.8.12). It is important to do this because memory is both an ontological condition and an imagistic reflection of Augustine's experiential journey. As a consequence, one of our most important tasks in this chapter is to indicate how Augustine's discussion of the nature of memory is not simply a theoretical examination of a philosophical problem, but a way of instantiating his journey toward God in distinctively reflective terms.

Augustine refines the concept of the kind of confession he intends to undertake in Book X by claiming that even though no one knows the

things of a man but the spirit of man that is in him, there is something in man that even the spirit of man does not know (10.5.7). He also tells us that he knows something about God that he does not know about himself: he knows that God is not subject to violation, but he does not know which of the temptations that encroach upon him can be resisted and which cannot. Thus, Augustine wants to confess not only what he knows about himself, but also what he will not know until his darkness is made as noonday in God's sight (10.5.7). The confessions that Augustine is about to make to the community of love to which he has committed himself is complete, not only because it includes what is evil as well as what is good, but also because it includes what he does not know as well as what he knows. What Augustine does not know will prove to be just as important as what he knows, since his ignorance is a window that permits him to move beyond himself to the transforming source of power that manifests itself in the reflective context to which he now turns his attention.

THE MIND'S WAY TO GOD (10.6.8–10.27.38)

Augustine begins his account of the mind's way to God by claiming that he knows that he loves God, saying that the Word of God has transfixed his heart and that he loves God because he has responded to what he has heard (10.6.8). Heaven and earth and everything in them say that he should love God, and Augustine claims that they never cease to say this to all of us. On the other hand, hearing the voice with which nature speaks presupposes the mercy of God that allows us to hear what it says. Otherwise, the voice of nature would speak about God to "deaf ears" (10.6.8). Once more, Augustine begins with speaking and hearing as primordial phenomena,²² claiming that nature plays an important but derivative role in giving us access to God. As he has discovered from his own experience, God transforms the soul directly (10.6.8), while nature mediates our cognitive access to God by providing us with a realm of symbols that point beyond themselves to a transcendent source of transformation (10.6.9).

Having begun by claiming that he loves God, Augustine turns abruptly from what he knows to what he does not know by asking, "What is it then that I love when I love . . . [God]?" (10.7.11). This transition from confidence in the existence of God to a lack of confidence about the nature of God is typical of Augustine; for even at relatively early stages of his development, he believes in God's existence without understanding

God's nature (10.6.9). However, the fact that he raises a question about the nature of God at this juncture might seem strange in light of the fact that he has encountered God already in the mystical experiences of Books VII and IX (7.10.16; 9.10.24). The identification of God with Truth in both these contexts should lead us to expect that this concept of God will govern the present discussion, making us wonder why Augustine asks what he loves when he loves God.

The answer begins to emerge when we notice that even though Augustine has identified God with Truth, he has not been able to place God in a systematic relation with everything else. It is one thing to claim that God is identical with Truth and quite another to say how Truth is related to all the elements of the cosmos that stand in contrast with it. In the account of his mystical experiences in Milan and Ostia, we find informal sketches of Augustine's answer to this question (9.10.24). However, he does not give a systematic answer to it until he describes the stages of the mind's ascent toward God.

Augustine begins to answer it by moving through a series of negations, claiming first that God is not bodily beauty, temporal glory, or the radiance of the light. Then he says that God is not the melody of songs, the fragrance of flowers, the taste of honey, or the limbs that we embrace in physical love. Yet having begun with negations, he moves to symbols that point beyond themselves by saying that he loves "a certain light, a certain voice, a certain odor, a certain food, and a certain embrace when [he loves] God"; for God is "a light, a voice, an odor, a food, [and] an embrace for the man within me" (10.6.8).

This extension of bodily predicates to God serves to bind God and the soul together, where the soul is bound already to the body by the metaphorical transfer of bodily predicates to it. Of course, both God and the soul have no body; but this does not prevent Augustine from speaking as though they do by binding them together in metaphorical terms. Augustine says that our senses, and the metaphors that cluster around them, give us access to God by pointing to light that "no place can contain," to words that "time does not speed away," to an aroma "that no wind can scatter," to food "that no eating can lessen," and to a "satiety" that "does not sunder us" from him. Finally, he brings this figurative description of the relation between God and the soul to a conclusion by saying, "This is what I love when I love my God" (10.6.8).

Having moved from what he knows to what he does not know, and from what God is not to what he is, Augustine passes the entire natural order in review, asking every part of it from the earth to the stars whether

it is God, and hearing in each case the reply, "I am not he!" (10.6.9). Then he asks the things that he perceives to tell him something about God; and all of them cry out: "He made us" (10.6.9). According to Augustine, Creation is the fundamental relation between God and the world (10.6.9); and having come to know God through direct experience, he is able to understand that God is the creator by observing the beauty of nature (10.6.9). The question that Augustine puts to nature and the beauty with which it responds allow him to hear the voice with which the natural order speaks about the ground of its existence.

Unlike Aquinas, Augustine does not give a cosmological argument for the existence of God that begins with a premise about the natural order and that ends with a conclusion about God the creator.²³ Instead, he begins with the existence of God and turns to nature as a domain of symbols that gives him access to the nature of God (10.6.9). In doing so, he embraces a dialogical context rather than an argumentative framework, where his gaze is the question that he puts to nature, and where the answer is the beautiful forms that the natural order displays. Augustine already knows that God exists before he turns his gaze toward nature, and the answer that nature gives him about its relation to God points toward God the creator rather than requiring us to make a mediated inference to him. Formulated in somewhat different terms, Augustine's question leads to an immediate inference that God is the creator, not asking us to begin with nature and to move away from it toward the existence of God by means of an argument.²⁴

At this crucial juncture, Augustine turns away from nature and turns inward to continue his account of the journey toward God (10.6.9). He has traveled this pathway before by participating in self-transcendent experiences that have given him access to God (10.6.9), but now he begins to generalize the pattern of those experiences by giving a systematic account of it. The structure of the journey toward God is a condition for and an image of his earlier experiences; and as he reflects upon this structure, the one who asks nature where God is to be found begins to ask questions about himself. In doing so, he attempts to find a place of access to the one who transcends him infinitely.

When Augustine asks himself, "Who are you?" the answer he gives is "A man!" (10.6.9). However, at the more abstract level of philosophical analysis, he also claims that the body and the soul are in him and ready to serve him, one exterior and the other interior. This means that he has both a soul (*anima*) and a body (*corpus*), that both principles make him what he is, and that these principles are to be distinguished from one

another in terms of their distinctive functions. Thus, Augustine asks which of these principles ought to be his point of departure in seeking God, whom he has sought already among bodily things by sending out “beams from his eyes” as far as he has been able to project them (10.6.9).²⁵

Augustine answers this question by suggesting that the soul (*anima*) is the principle through which the search for God should be conducted, claiming that the inner man is better than the outer man because it rules and judges (10.6.9). When Augustine asks where God is to be found, his senses report the answers of heaven and earth to the inner man by saying, “We are not God!” and “He made us!” Thus, “the inner man” is higher than “the outer man” in the order of being; and Augustine expresses the importance of the distinction between them by claiming that the inner man knows what the heavens and the earth say about God through “the ministry of the outer man” (10.6.9). Yet then in one of the most important but most misleading sentences in the *Confessions*, he says, “I, the inner man, know these things: I, the mind (*animus*), by means of my bodily senses” (10.6.9).

If we are to avoid misunderstanding at this juncture, it is important to notice that Augustine’s identification of himself with his soul (*animus*) is derivative upon his identification of himself as a man. His initial answer to the question, “Who am I?” is “A man!,” where to be human is to be a composite of a soul (*anima*) and a body. From an ontological point of view, this means that when he uses the word “I,” he is talking first about himself and only derivatively about his soul or his body. The true man is not the soul, but the composite of the soul and the body, where the concepts of the inner and the outer man involve metaphorical extensions of the concept in question to the soul and the body considered in themselves.²⁶

When Augustine claims that the soul is better than the body, this does not mean that the soul is the true man, but simply that the inner man is higher than the outer man. The true man is the soul and the body taken together, where the soul is the higher part of man understood as a composite. On this basis, it is possible to distinguish three Augustinian concepts of what it means to be human against the background of his initial identification of himself as a man. First, to be a human being is to be a composite of a soul and a body. Second, to be human is to be a soul, which Augustine calls “the inner man.” Finally, to be human is to be a body, which Augustine calls the outer or the exterior man. Augustine’s strong identification of himself with his soul (*animus*) at this stage of his inquiry does not cancel the fact that he is a composite, but points to the distinctive function of his soul in the journey toward God.

Augustine suggests that the soul (*animus*) uses the bodily senses as instruments to understand the answers of the natural order to the questions he raises about where God is to be found (10.6.9). In doing so, he begins with the soul (*anima*) as it is engaged in the act of sensation; but in understanding what the senses teach, he moves beyond the *anima* to the *animus*. This does not mean that there are two souls, the *anima* and the *animus*,²⁷ but that the same soul has different roles to play in the journey toward God. As partially constituting a human being, the soul is called the *anima*; as the starting point for an inquiry about God, it is called the *anima* again; but in judging what the senses teach, it is called the *animus*. Yet even though Augustine identifies himself with his soul (*animus*) for the purpose of ascending toward God, he continues to be a composite of a soul (*anima*) and a body (*corpus*) that God has created.

The priority of the composite to both the soul and the body is not merely linguistic, but points to an ontological priority in virtue of which the composite is more fundamental than its constituents. When Augustine identifies himself as a man, he is claiming that he is a human being fundamentally, and that he is a soul and a body derivatively. This explains the fact that he answers the question, "Who are you?" with the exclamation, "A man!" where to be a man is to be a composite of a soul and a body. However, it is important to notice that from a metaphysical point of view, Augustine understands the soul, the body, and the composite as substances, all of which display a certain measure of independence.²⁸

As his argument progresses, Augustine moves back and forth between the unity and the separation of the soul and the body, saying on the one hand that he is a man, and hence a soul (*anima*) and a body, while claiming on the other that he is a soul (*animus*) using a body to understand what the senses teach. This does not mean that Augustine is confused about the relation between the soul and the body,²⁹ but that he has a subtle and fundamentally rhetorical way of articulating the identity and the difference between them.³⁰ When he is emphasizing a function that the soul or the body is playing, Augustine subordinates them to the human being of which they are constitutive elements; but when he points to properties in terms of which the soul and the body can be distinguished, he construes them as substances in their own right. It is the subtlety with which he moves back and forth between these two ways of speaking that enables Augustine to unify and to separate the human being, the soul, and the body.

Augustine begins to develop the epistemic side of his thinking by reclimbing the Neoplatonic ladder from sensation to higher levels of

cognition that he first introduces in Book VII (7.5.7). In doing so, he suggests that the beauty of nature is apparent to everyone whose senses are sound (10.6.10). Augustine also claims that though animals know beauty because they see it, they are unable to ask questions about what they see or judge the validity of the evidence that the senses report. By contrast, human beings are able to ask questions about the natural order, where the “answers” nature gives permit us to understand the invisible things of God through the things that he has created (10.6.10). Once more, Augustine uses nature, not to frame an argument for the existence of God, but to understand the nature of God on the basis of the things he has made (7.5.7).

Though human beings can reason about the validity of evidence, we are often no better than animals. We sometimes love created things too much; and when we subject ourselves to them, we are unable to pass judgment upon them. As Augustine formulates the point, some of us only look at things, while others both see and ask questions about them (10.6.10). The author of the *Confessions* claims that though nature speaks to both classes of individual, only those who compare what nature teaches with “the truth within” understand it (10.6.10). Thus, the capacity to consult Truth as a standard of judgment not only separates men from animals, but also permits us to distinguish those who know God tacitly from those who know him explicitly.

The voice of Truth says to us, “Your God is not heaven and earth, nor any bodily thing.” Indeed, the nature of things says this; for we see that the physical world is a mass in which the parts are smaller than the whole. This property differentiates the world from God, permitting Augustine to appeal to what is self-evident in drawing a radical distinction between God and the visible world (10.6.10). At the beginning of Book VII, Augustine sees that God is incorruptible, inviolable, and immutable, where these concepts follow immediately from the concept of God (7.1.1). Now the voice of Truth teaches him that God is not to be identified with heaven and earth, where this conclusion is equally clear on the basis of the concepts involved.

Having pointed to the fact that bodies are not to be identified with God because they are finite,³¹ Augustine says that the soul (*anima*) is better than the body because it animates and gives life to it, and that God is better than the soul because he is the life of life (10.6.10). When these two claims are taken together, it is evident that the three substances to which Augustine refers are ordered hierarchically, beginning with God, moving to the soul, and concluding with the body. It is also true that the

soul (*anima*), insofar as it quickens the body, is to be distinguished from the soul (*animus*), insofar as it thinks and judges. However, we must understand once more that there are not two souls, but that the soul plays two characteristically different functions in contrast with the body.

Augustine begins to bring the epistemic and the metaphysical strands of his thinking about the relations among God, the soul, and the body together by emphasizing self-transcendence. He writes:

What therefore do I love when I love my God? Who is he who is above the head of my soul (*anima*)? Through my soul (*anima*) will I ascend to him. I will pass beyond that power of mine by which I adhere to the body and fill the body's frame with life. Not by that power do I find my God. For "the horse and the mule in which there is no understanding" would likewise find him, since in them there is that same power, and by it their bodies also live. (10.7.11)

When Augustine asks what he loves when he loves God, and when he wonders about the identity of the one who is above his soul (*anima*), the one who loves and wonders is Augustine, the man, understood as a composite of a soul and a body. And when he says that he will ascend toward God through the soul (*anima*), passing beyond the power by which he adheres to the body and gives life to it, the one who ascends is Augustine himself, insofar as he identifies himself with his soul (*anima*). In claiming that he will ascend toward God by means of his soul (*anima*), Augustine implies that he will continue to be embodied, even though he must transcend the body in his upward journey toward God.³²

The power of the soul by which Augustine begins to ascend is the power of sensation, and he describes this power in the following way:

But there is another power, by which I not only give life but sensation as well to my flesh, which the Lord has fashioned for me, commanding the eye that it should not hear, and the ear that it should not see, . . . and [giving] . . . to each of the other senses powers proper to their organs and purposes. I, who am one single mind (*animus*), perform these diverse things through the senses. But I will pass beyond this power of mine, for this too the horse and the mule possess. They too sense things by means of the body. (10.7.11)

In this formulation, Augustine claims that he gives sensation to his eyes, his ears, and all his other senses, which God has fashioned to sense the world through “powers proper to their organs and purposes” (10.7.11). Thus, the soul is bound to the body, not only because it animates it, but also because it senses by means of it.

Augustine does not understand the soul as the passive recipient of images that external objects inscribe upon it, but as the active agent that generates images in accord with changes in the body that the outer world produces. This fact follows from the claim that the soul is higher than the body and from the general epistemological principle that what is lower can never act on what is higher.³³ However, the power to generate images is not the means Augustine uses for reaching God; for as he indicates once more, animals share the power of sensation with us. Augustine concludes that if having a soul that animates the body and that senses the world by means of it were sufficient to find God, even the horse and the mule would be able to do so (10.7.11).

At this stage of the argument, Augustine identifies himself with the *animus* and claims that he performs diverse functions through the senses (10.8.12). However, this claim should not lead us to conclude that he exercises these capacities *qua animus*; for it is not necessary to have a rational soul in order to encounter the world by means of the senses. This is evident from the fact that the lower animals have the power of sensing without being able to engage in reflection about what they have seen. What then does Augustine’s reference to the *animus* mean at this juncture, and how is it related to the mind’s way to God?

In establishing the framework in which he undertakes his journey toward God, Augustine identifies himself in a variety of ways. First, he claims that he is a composite of a soul (*anima*) and a body, where the two constituents are distinct ontologically (10.7.11). Then he says that he is a soul (*anima*) adhering to the body and sensing by means of it (10.7.11). Finally, he tells us that he is a soul (*animus*) engaged in the distinctive epistemic functions of thinking and knowing (10.8.12). Augustine’s first way of identifying himself points to the ontological unity of the soul (*anima*) and the body of which he is a composite. His second way of identifying himself points to the ontological unity of the soul (*anima*) and the body to which it adheres, but also calls our attention to the epistemic separation between the soul (*anima*) and the body that it uses to make cognitive access to the world. Finally, his third way of identifying himself points to the epistemic separation between the soul (*animus*) and the

body, since no reference to the body is required in saying what is distinctive about the act of thinking. However, since the *anima* and the *animus* are not two separate souls, but one soul with different functions, the epistemic separation between them does not cancel their ontological unity.

The unity and the separation of the soul (*anima*) and the body in Augustine's thinking are not only expressed ontologically and epistemically, but also semantically. From a semantical point of view, the soul and the body are separated by the fact that they have distinctive properties. For example, the soul is in time but not in space, while the body is in time and space as well. On the other hand, the soul and the body are unified by the fact that properties of the one can be transferred metaphorically to the other. For example, Augustine sometimes speaks about his bones as if they could cry out to God, and he sometimes speaks about his soul as if an arrow had transfixed it. When we put these two dimensions of Augustine's approach to the problem of the soul and the body together, we find that they are not only unified ontologically and separated epistemically, but also unified and separated in semantical terms. This does not betray confusion on Augustine's part, but is one of the facts that gives his language about God and the soul so much of its richness.

One of the things that makes Augustine's treatment of the problem of the soul and the body so difficult is that he speaks ambiguously about the senses. Sometimes he treats them as if they were parts of the body (10.8.13); but on other occasions, he regards them as dimensions of the soul (10.7.11). However, he has good reasons for doing this; and they are analogous to his reasons for moving back and forth between the unity and the separation between the soul and the body. Sensation has a physiological basis; and for this reason, Augustine links perception to the eyes, the ears, and other organs of sensation (10.8.13). Yet he also believes that if sensing is a way of knowing, the senses must be dimensions of the soul as well. This leads him to distinguish the eyes and the ears as parts of the body from seeing and hearing as epistemic acts (10.8.13).

The eyes and the ears register changes in the world at the physiological level; and when the soul attends to these changes, it produces images that allow it to make cognitive contact with its environment. More accurately, the eyes send out visual rays to their objects that permit the body to be modified at a distance; and sensations result when the soul makes images that notice and correspond to these modifications.³⁴ As Augustine moves back and forth between these two conceptions of sensation, we are led once more to the need for subtle uses of language that bind these conceptions together and also hold them apart.

The next and most important step Augustine takes in tracing out his journey toward God is to move beyond the power of sensation, and ascending step by step to his creator, to enter “the fields and spacious palaces of [his] memory” (10.8.12). This way of formulating the nature of his journey is important because it points to the orderly progression of the stages involved in his ascent toward God. By moving toward God in stages that are arranged in a hierarchy, Augustine makes it clear that he is now attempting to give a systematic picture of the mystical experiences that have been recounted already in Books VII and IX (7.10.16; 9.10.24). The hierarchy of stages to which this picture calls our attention is both a condition that makes these earlier experiences possible and an image of the ascent toward God understood in reflective terms. It is also important to notice that when Augustine refers to “[his] memory” in the passage before us, the one who has the memory in question is a man rather than a soul. This will become clear when we find that Augustine virtually identifies his memory with his soul (*animus*) (10.8.12).³⁵ Once this identification has been made, the only one left to “possess” the memory in question is Augustine himself rather than his soul (*animus*).

The transition that Augustine makes at this stage of the discussion allows him to move beyond the dimensions 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 be developed as Augustine moves upward toward God in a series of stages. When he turns to the spacious halls of his 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 (10.8.12). In addition to images generated by the activity of the senses, he also finds products of the activity of thinking when he turns inward toward the soul (*animus*). The mind generates these products by increasing, lessening, or altering the images that sensation produces (10.8.12). Finally, Augustine’s soul finds “whatever else has been entrusted” to his memory which “forgetfulness has not yet swallowed up and buried away” (10.8.12).

In these reflections about what he finds when he turns inward, the word Augustine uses for image is *imago* rather than *phantasma*. The images he has in mind give him access to what stands in contrast with him, and they differ from the phantasms that imprison him at earlier stages of his development (7.1.1). The images Augustine remembers allow him to take up the disjoint moments of his experience and to reorder them into a

coherent pattern. Yet his memory also brings him face to face with the problem of forgetfulness, where memory is important to him, not only because of what it allows him to remember, but also because of what he forgets.

Augustine's description of the way in which his memory functions is one of the classic passages in the *Confessions*, and it is of special significance because it reflects the process he undergoes in writing a book that requires him to remember so many things about his past. In this connection, Augustine says,

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. (10.8.12)

This passage points in three directions. First, it emphasizes Augustine's active role in remembering: he does not remain passive when he turns inward to the storehouse of memory, but asks what he wants to remember to reveal itself. Second, some of the things he seeks are harder to find than others: some of them come forth immediately; others bury themselves in secret cells; and still others rush forth in crowds, even when Augustine does not ask them to appear. Finally, some images suggest themselves without effort and in continuous order, where the linear dimension of the *Confessions* depends upon Augustine's capacity to remember his experiences in this way.

Having pointed to the way in which acts of remembering occur, Augustine tells us that the images we remember are kept distinct and are 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 he needs for this purpose is made