

Memory and Self- Knowledge in *Augustine's Confessiones*

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Since the foundational Delphic call to know thyself, philosophical wisdom has been pursued in light of an enigma which both powers and darkens the search. Penetrating the abyss of the self has been considered an integral aspect of the knowledge of the highest things. The desire for self-knowledge seems to aim at something more than just the essential nature of the human animal or the transcendental structure of experience—it does not seek only the *what* or *how* but the individual *who*.¹ Some, like Friedrich Nietzsche, cast doubt on the task set forth by the ancient oracle. He famously argues that the self is merely one more falsifying concept

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¹ Terence Sweeney comments Augustine's reflections can be bewildering to some, as they are not sure if he is seeking an 'academic' knowledge of the nature of soul, or to know his *own* soul. However, Sweeney suggests that Augustine ultimately keeps the "intellectual and existential" aspects united. Terence Sweeney, "God and Soul: Augustine on the Journey to True Selfhood," *The Heythrop Journal* LVII (2016), 679. Further, "Augustine's search for knowledge of soul and self is a search into the mystery of the self who is a soul. In this sense, his philosophy could be described an existential essentialism." *Ibid*, 680. To use Sweeney's terms, our focus here is more on the existential side which includes but surmounts the essential.

projected by reason upon the flow of becoming.² It is no surprise that we “fail to understand ourselves” for “we are *bound*” to do so.³ The search is misbegotten from the start because any self knowable by reason is just a projected fiction.

Like Nietzsche, Augustine emphasizes the mystery of the self—yet instead of a falsifying project of reason, this enigma stems from the *imago Dei* whereby the person somehow mirrors the incomprehensible Triune God.⁴ In Book X of his *Confessiones*, Augustine draws a close connection between this mystery and memory—the latter is somehow the source of the self and its connection to God. Given the incomprehensible divine nature, the human person created in God’s image is beyond easy conceptual domestication. This gives full measure to Nietzsche’s complaint, but for a wholly different reason.

² Our concepts are a series of metaphors that end up amounting to “lies.” Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” in *Epistemology: The Classic Readings*, ed. David E. Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001), 180-195.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3. Later on in the same text, Nietzsche notes that the weak man is “*Bound*” by his instinct of self-preservation to rationalize the lie of the subject or soul who subsists one’s actions with a kind of freedom. *Ibid.*, 29-30. Daniel Harris comments that Nietzsche continually seeks to displace rather than satisfy the desire for self-knowledge—it is useful for man’s social condition and “develops in the first instance not in order that we might know ourselves, but only in response to our need to communicate with others.” Daniel I. Harris, “Nietzsche and Aristotle on Friendship and Self-Knowledge,” *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* Volume 48, Issue 2 (Summer 2017): 245.

⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, accessed June, 2020: <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/august.html>. All translations herein are my own. Cf. *Confessiones*, 13.11.12, where Augustine explicates the Trinitarian analogy of the mind as a distinguishable but inseparable unity of *esse, nosse, velle*. Furthermore, we might also point to the aporetic struggle that the mind has in seeking knowledge of itself as an object. In commenting on Augustine’s *De Trinitate*, Mateusz Strozynski notes: “Whatever the mind finds, it is always an object different from itself, it is an image of the thing, not the thing itself, as Plotinus points out. If we try to make our mind the very object of the mind’s seeing, what we come to see is an image of the mind, similar to a reflection in a mirror, only inferior—ontologically and epistemologically—to a reflection in a mirror.” Mateusz Strozynski, “There is No Searching for the Self: Self-Knowledge in Book Ten of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*,” *Phronesis* 58 (2013): 286. There is a sense for Augustine in which self-knowledge is a senseless question because the answer is immediately intuitive: the mind knows itself by adverting to its own activity in a moment of self-presence. *Ibid.*, 300. Yet, I suggest, this self-presence is not the fullest sense of self-knowledge that encompasses the historically-developed, telic-destined person.

Memory also performs an essentially constructive role in conscious life, which is witnessed in Augustine's dialogical activity in the work as a whole. It is the power behind what I call "hermeneutical recollection," the activity whereby the person is manifested through the interpretation of his or her own past according to presently held principles and knowledge. Yet this method of understanding oneself is not by itself sufficient for self-knowledge, because the content of the presently held principles and the context of their application will make the essential difference. For Augustine, the self can be known through the self-constituting hermeneutical recollection that is *confessio*—even as this does not eliminate its enigmatic character. To develop this claim, I will (I) first consider the account of memory in *Confessiones* Book X to inquire what it is and its closeness to the self. Next in section (II), I turn to the activity of hermeneutical recollection to articulate how the self is made intelligible by means of memorial self-manifestation. Finally, (III) I will argue that for Augustine it is only in confession by means of the Light of Divine Wisdom that we tread the path of self-knowledge. Nevertheless, while it is by looking for God that one finds the *who* made in the divine image, it is that very image which secures the self's mystery.

I.

To seek an account of memory in Book X of the *Confessiones*, we must be sensitive to the context of Augustine's exposition. It is not a theoretical treatise, nor does Augustine exhaust the significance of memory in this text.⁵ Rather, it occurs within a prayerful inquiry into "where" God is to be found. However, if we should not expect a strict scientific description, we do find an analysis rich with eidetic and structural implications. Memory is multivalent in conscious life: its relation to perception and sensation is as a kind of storehouse (*thesaurus*) of images.⁶ While the

⁵ For instance, Paige Hochschild comments: "the first half of book 10 is generally considered the classic 'textbook' on what Augustine says about memory. Such an approach is insufficient, however, because this text on its own does not tell us why it is important that Augustine seeks after God within the scope of memory." Paige E. Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine's Theological Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3. Moreover, it does not explicate the Trinitarian dimensions that he will draw out in other texts like *De Trinitate*. Cf. David Tell, "Beyond Mnemotechnics: Confession and Memory in Augustine," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* Vol. 39, No. 3 (2006), 236.

⁶ *Confessiones*, 10.8.12.

sensations themselves are not kept, the byproducts or effects for each sense power are preserved and classified.⁷ It also stores what the imagination constructs (*contexere*) via the materials gained in sensation.⁸ Memory performs its own kind of abstraction from the objects of perception to produce the images which can be recalled by the mind for contemplation.⁹ Moreover, it contains the emotions and bodily affections in its own proper mode¹⁰—for example, one can recall physical pain, but does not immediately begin to wince.¹¹

Beyond sensation and its likenesses, memory contains something more than images by housing past learning and formulated thought.¹² Reminiscent of Platonic anamnesis, Augustine argues that the ideas or intelligible notions are somehow pre-cognized in the memory.¹³ Unlike images, he cannot explain how these realities could have entered into the mind by a sensible or external pathway.¹⁴ Through the experience of thinking and learning, the mind collects (*conligere*) these realities which it already holds somehow in a disorderly way.¹⁵ It both retains past experiences and acts as a source for the realities which render them intelligible. Memory thus has an affinity to the real, which somehow transcends the objects we sensibly perceive in the world.

Yet Augustine goes further and moves from the more mundane to the more paradoxical. One can remember that one has understood and remembered previously—the act reduplicates upon itself.¹⁶ Even

⁷ “Nec ipsa tamen intrans, sed rerum sensarum imagines illic praesto sunt cogitationi reminiscenti eas.” *Ibid.*, 10.8.13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.8.14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.16.25.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.14.21.

¹¹ “Nomino dolorem corporis, nec mihi adest dum nihil dolet...” *Ibid.*, 10.15.23.

¹² “Sed non ea sola gestat immensa ista capacitas memoriae meae. Hic sunt et illa omnia quae de doctrinis liberalibus percepta nondum exciderunt, quasi remota interiore loco non loco; nec imagines eorum, sed res ipsas gero.” *Ibid.*, 10.9.16.

¹³ In her introduction to *The Confessions*, Maria Boulding comments: “This is part of Augustine’s theory of illumination. It is derived from Plato’s doctrine of *anamnesis*, which held that the soul remembers eternal truths from an earlier existence before its birth in time; but Augustine discarded the reference to past experience, believing that the soul is in habitual contact with the world of intelligible truth here and now.” Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New York City Press, 2012), 26.

¹⁴ Augustine, *Confessiones*, 10.10.17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.11.18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.13.20.

forgetfulness (*oblivium*)—the opposite of remembrance—can be recalled. As this is an intelligible notion, Augustine muses that it should be the *reality* of forgetfulness; yet if it were, surely its presence would prohibit its being remembered at all.¹⁷ While memory at first is a kind of reservoir in mental space and next a power or faculty, it grows progressively closer to the person. This closeness enlivens Augustine’s wonder at a paradox: the self somehow contains and to some extent commands memory, yet at the same time “I cannot speak of myself without memory.”¹⁸ Augustine speaks as an agent who peruses the vast storehouse of memory in search of various images or realities, yet he also depends on this power to gain an awareness of himself. While part of and accessible to the mind, memory cannot be fully grasped by it.¹⁹ Even more, it seems to orient the human being toward its universal desire for happiness (*vita beata*)²⁰ which is fulfilled as joy concerning the truth (*gaudium de veritate*).²¹ Truth, for Augustine, is God; thus, memory is a kind of connection of the soul to its Source.²²

In addition to the interplay of the “I” and memory, it is in this enigmatic space that “I meet up with myself and I reflect on what, when, and where I have acted in whatever way, and how I have been affected

¹⁷ Ibid, 10.16.24. Maria Boulding comments in footnote #58: “The argument [about forgetfulness] is not rigorous... But the discussion serves his purpose of provoking himself and his readers to wonder at the mysteries of the human mind, through which we ascend to the mystery of God.” Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, 253.

¹⁸ “Et ecce memoriae meae vis non comprehenditur a me, cum ipsum me non dicam praeter illam.” *Confessiones*, 10.16.25.

¹⁹ “Magna ista vis est memoriae, magna nimis, deus meus, penetrale amplum et in infinitum, quis ad fundum eius pervenit? Et vis est haec animi mei atque ad meam naturam pertinet, nec ego ipse capio totum quod sum.” Ibid, 10.8.15.

²⁰ Ibid, 10.20.29.

²¹ “Beata quippe vita est gaudium de veritate. Hoc est enim gaudium de te, qui veritas es, deus, inluminatio mea, salus faciei meae, deus meus.” Ibid, 10.23.33.

²² Augustine describes this connection in terms of the *life* of the soul: “Quomodo ergo te quaero, domine? Cum enim te, deum meum, quaero, vitam beatam quaero. Quaeram te ut vivat anima mea. Vivit enim corpus meum de anima mea et vivit anima mea de te.” Ibid, 10.20.29. Here it sounds as though this connection is dependent upon the experience of learning of God in a personal past—yet, following Augustine’s customary orientation, God is prior to our being. Thus Hochschild notes: “God contains human memory, and in doing so fills it, illumines it, and speaks to it in a language it comprehends.” Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine’s Theological Anthropology*, 149.

when I had done so.”²³ At certain points Augustine seems even to *identify* the self with the faculty of memory. First, he suggests that the self *is* the mind, the interior whose exteriority is mediated by the bodily senses.²⁴ Next, the mind *is* the memory.²⁵ We might wonder, does this not reduce the person to a faculty, the whole to a part? Yet despite his rhetoric, Augustine is most interested in stressing the relationship of the mystery of memory and his very life:

The power of memory is great, my God, I know not its frightening depths and infinite manifolds. This is the mind, and this I am myself. Therefore, what am I, my God? What nature have I? A boundless life of extreme variation.²⁶

It is no longer the nature of the heavens or of earth which captivates Augustine’s wonder, but the power at the foundation of himself. Somehow, it is memory which can uniquely address his astonishment: “I am who I remember, I am my mind.”²⁷

II.

Throughout the *Confessiones*, Augustine displays this relationship between the self and memory in action. “Meeting up with myself in memory” is to recollect our actions, events, thoughts, affections, relationships etc. *Who* we are is made manifest in the mind’s internal play, as revealed through acts of recollection. This is not self-*creation* so much as a manifestation which invites understanding. Moreover, for any future action we rely upon a grasp of our past and our orientation towards future potentialities, e.g., knowing what we desire and are capable of achieving. Thus, the more we recollect, the more the self is constituted and known.

²³ “Ibi mihi et ipse occuro meque recolo, quid, quando et ubi egerim quoque modo, cum agerem, affectus fuerim.” Ibid, 10.8.14. Yet, to encounter God requires transcending memory—cf. Ibid, 10.17.26.

²⁴ “Homo interior cognovit haec per exterioris ministerium; ego interior cognovi haec, ego, ego animus per sensum corporis mei, interrogavi mundi molem de deo meo, et respondit mihi, ‘non ego sum, sed ipse me fecit.’” Ibid, 10.6.9.

²⁵ “Hic vero, cum animus sit etiam ipsa...” Ibid, 10.14.21.

²⁶ “Magna vis est memoriae, nescio quid horrendum, deus meus, profunda et infinita multiplicitas. Et hoc animus est, et hoc ego ipse sum. Quid ergo sum deus meus? Quae natura sum? Varia, multimoda vita et immensa vehementer.” Ibid, 10.14.21.

²⁷ “Ego sum qui memini, ego animus.” Ibid, 10.16.25.

The answer to “who am I?” is enriched and expanded as the experiences of one’s life are brought to mind. Paradoxically at its beginning, the self requires *other people’s* memories to get its start.²⁸ One does not begin as a solipsistic monad but is born into a pre-existent world with formative aspects of one’s identity having been received. Moreover, where there is no memory, there is no self to be manifested.²⁹ In a certain way, the very being of the self *as* a mutable subject is limited to its capacity and perhaps willingness to remember.³⁰

Strikingly, this memorial constitution or manifestation contains an essentially interpretive or hermeneutical character. That which is recalled is put into a certain order and context in which it participates and from which it takes its meaning. To take just one example from the *Confessiones*, Augustine did not conceive of his sins in Carthage in terms of providential dissipation or integration. Yet at the time of writing, he does not merely call them to mind but he understands them newly as the soul’s turning away from the merciful God.³¹ This should not be understood as a memorial forgery or fictive composition where one’s personal history is remade in idyllic terms. Rather, this is something essential to our reflection on past experience and of who we are. If the subject operates within a certain horizon of meaning in the very having of experiences, they will be committed to memory in that way. Yet the meaning will be deepened, refined, perhaps even radically challenged, as a more expansive intelligible horizon is developed by the person. Hermeneutical recollection is not imposing an alien significance, but working upon an existing one. To be genuine, the original experience must be kept integral—the alteration occurs in grasping more deeply the

²⁸ E.g., Augustine understands his infancy primarily by means of what he is told by his parents: “et susceperunt me consolationes miserationum tuarum, sicut audivi a parentibus carnis meae, ex quo et in qua me formasti in tempore: non enim ego memini.” Ibid, 1.6.7.

²⁹ “Hanc ergo aetatem, domine, quam me vixisse non memini, de qua aliis credidi... Quantum enim attinet ad oblivionis meae tenebras, par illi est quam vixi in matris utero... Sed ecce omitto illud tempus: et quid mihi iam cum eo est, cuius nulla vestigia recolo?” Ibid, 1.7.12. And, “Nam et multa praetero, propter quod propero ad ea quae me magis urgent confiteri tibi, et multa non memini.” Ibid, 3.12.21.

³⁰ We must also keep in mind that Augustine has a particular audience and purpose in mind as an author which motivates what he recounts in the text. Nevertheless, even if the recollection remains private, one’s memory will be limited and there will be a certain intention that guides the recollection.

³¹ Ibid, 3.3.5.

implications of that event in light of present knowledge by which one judges. As I will consider further in section III, Augustine performs this activity to achieve a self-collection before God who is Truth. Hence, truthfulness and honesty, acknowledging what *is* because there is no hiding it, is the indispensable norm.

If perhaps this talk of “horizon” and “hermeneutics” seems abstract, let us pursue a concrete example. If one manages to transfer forcefully a piece of vulcanized rubber past a two-inch by four-foot strip of red paint beneath one and a half inches of frozen water, what will be remembered by the agent is not the quantitative conditions of the motion of a discrete object. Instead, what will be recalled will be shooting the puck past the goalie in overtime to score the championship-winning goal in the Stanley Cup finals. The *context* of that action which provides the *meaning* for the subject is present during the action itself, and thus will be committed to memory in those very terms. The player will understand the circumstances at the time the goal is scored. Now, this understanding can expand: if the goal turned out to be the last one of the player’s career, it would take upon itself an entirely different complexion than if it were just one more among many. The very description of the event can now be appended by new statements not true at the time of its happening. In hindsight, the present knowledge that the player retired immediately after the goal bears upon its significance *here* and *now*.

I suggest, therefore, that despite its abstract formulation hermeneutical recollection is quite commonplace. Reflection on one’s past according to present understanding will heighten the significance of certain things and minimize others. It may even uncover a latent meaning completely unforeseen during the past events themselves. In the *Confessiones*, Augustine can now view his own life in scriptural terms that render experiences “meaningful and purposeful, rather than empty or painful.”³² The Scriptural images that permeate his conversion narrative take their root, not in the meaning of historical moments, but in the ideas and images from his Catholic faith active in the present. More than articulating, say, the natural shame one might feel after acting against

³² Kim Paffenroth, “Book Nine: The Emotional Heart of the *Confessiones*,” in *A Reader’s Companion to Augustine’s Confessiones*, eds. Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 141.

conscience, Augustine is now able to recast such events in terms of a separation from or merciful return to God.

To sum up thus far, Augustine recognizes a strong relation between memory and the self. In the *Confessiones* he demonstrates its activity in conscious life by “meeting oneself in memory.” The self is understood by means of hermeneutical recollection according to current knowledge and principles. Yet, if to that extent we have recognized an Augustinian method for self-knowledge, we still must address the proper context and possible extent of its success.

III.

I began by advertent to Nietzsche and the rejection of self-knowledge. We have seen that Augustine views memory as indicating the mystery of the self which links one to the Truth that is God. Yet, will hermeneutical recollection as a method alone be sufficient? Will reflection upon one’s past experience, even benefitting from hindsight, attain self-knowledge and determine the mystery? After all, Nietzsche himself admits that it is through retrospection that the failed attempt for self-knowledge takes its course.³³ What, then, is the difference which leads Augustine to the opposite conclusion? Simply stated, it is the right context and the right present principles: for Augustine, self-knowledge requires prayerful dialogue with God and the truths of the faith. To flesh this out, we must (a) consider more closely what *confessio* is and (b) how it is the setting for hermeneutical self-constitution *par excellence*.

(a) *Confessio*: As an activity, confession includes several aspects. It is a recalling of one’s past sins and transgressions—yet it is done in the hope of forgiveness that mitigates distress over them.³⁴ Calling them to mind is not done so as to mire in guilt and shame, yet to inflame a desire for the God who blots these out: “I wish to record my detestable past

³³ “In much the same way, we rub our ears *after the fact* and ask in complete surprise and embarrassment: ‘What was that we just experienced?’, or even ‘Who *are* we really?’ Then we count back over in retrospect, as I said, every one of the twelve trembling strokes of our experience, our life, our *being*—and alas!” Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 3.

³⁴ “Quid retribuam domino quod recolit haec memoria mea et anima mea non metuit inde? Diligam te, domine, et gratias agam et confitear nomini tuo, quoniam tanta dimisisti mihi mala et nefaria opera mea.” *Confessiones*, 2.7.15. Hochschild notes: “This psychological peace is the result of his hope of being entirely in God. His conviction that God not only rescued him in his youth, but even now will not allow him to come to harm, buoys him and enables the present confession to occur.” Hochschild, *Memory in Augustine’s*, 143.

actions and the fleshly corruptions of my soul, not because I love them but in order that I love you, my God.”³⁵ Moreover, it praises God’s merciful deeds in one’s own life.³⁶ Confession is public rather than private—this takes on a new dimension *as* a text in that the *Confessiones* becomes an instrument for inviting readers into their own imitative acts.³⁷

As bearing out the “abyss of the human conscience,” confession does not inform God of anything, yet it is a kind of return of consciousness revealing one’s comportment toward him.³⁸ Far from being a fiduciary “balancing of the books” that accounts for all debts, to confess is to recognize inherently that one is far beyond a relationship of mere rectificatory justice. Augustine states that he can say nothing in truth to God (or anyone else) unless the Lord has first told him.³⁹ Everything that is from God, and every prayer that recognizes good things is itself received from God as a gift.⁴⁰ Thus, while there is a kind of cycle of reception and return to the Giver, it far exceeds any concept of economy or exchange.

Yet if confession is a kind of verbalized, integrating return to God in contrition and praise that does not seek to balance a debt, what is its purpose? Augustine states this plainly—we confess to God in order to:

Lay open our love by confessing to you our miseries and your mercies upon us, so that you would complete what you have begun in freeing us.

³⁵ “Recordari volo transactas foeditates meas et carnales corruptiones animae meae, non quod eas amem, sed ut amem te, deus meus.” *Confessiones*, 2.1.1.

³⁶ “Sed sic eram nec erubescio, deus meus, confiteri tibi in me misericordias tuas et invocare te, qui non erubui tunc profiteri hominibus blasphemias meas et latrare adversum te.” *Ibid*, 4.16.31.

³⁷ “Cui narro haec? Neque enim tibi, deus meus, sed apud te narro haec generi meo, generi humano, quantulumcumque ex particula incidere potest in istas meas litteras. Et ut quid hoc? Ut videlicet agoet quisquis haec legit cogitemus de quam profundo clamandum sit ad te.” *Ibid*, 2.3.5.

³⁸ “Et tibi quidem, domine, cuius oculis nuda est abyssus humanae conscientiae, quid occultum esset in me, etiamsi nollem confiteri tibi?” *Ibid*, 10.2.2.

³⁹ “Neque enim dico recti aliquid hominibus quod non a me tu prius audieris, aut etiam tu aliquid tale audis a me quod non mihi prius dixeris.” *Ibid.*, 10.2.2. “Vide cor meum, domine, qui voluisti ut hoc recorderar et confiterer tibi.” *Ibid*, 6.6.9.

⁴⁰ “Multa nobis orantibus tribuis, et quidquid boni antequam oraremus accepimus, a te accepimus; et ut hoc postea cognosceremus, a te accepimus.” *Ibid*, 10.31.45.

Then we will cease to be wretched in ourselves and be made blessed in you.⁴¹

Confession is for self-change, but in the sense of a recovery of what one is supposed to be. There is indeed a therapeutic aspect to it; yet it is no mere psychological technique to be practiced and perfected, because the confessor is not ultimately in control.⁴² In this context, hermeneutical recollection takes on a determinate aim in support of conversion. It aids the expansion of the subject's horizon and the establishment of a new "concrete synthesis in living" the Christian faith.⁴³ Augustine still retains habitual remainders of his previous sins, but confession seeks to establish new spiritual, intellectual, and practical habits. In other words, it is the process behind achieving Augustinian *continentia*, the self-collection in God that counters the state of disorderly dispersion.⁴⁴ This healing integration of soul occurs within the divinely ordained response of the rational being in humility to God. Yet confession is not limited to the end of continence; as evidenced by the last four books of the *Confessiones*, it also allows a kind of hopeful speculation on the truths of the faith guided by the Truth. Confession itself is dynamic participation in God's own works: the speaker is "at one with God who is

⁴¹ Ibid, 11.1.1.

⁴² Paffenroth highlights a psychological reading of Augustine: "The [*Confessions*] is therapeutic in a deep and ancient sense—diagnosis and healing of a sick and broken human nature—and on this point at least I agree completely with the evaluation of Margaret Miles: '*Confessions*' is primarily therapy in the Platonic sense of a methodical conversion from a 'misidentification of reality,' to...the construction of an articulated orientation to a final, authoritative, and implicit reality.'" Paffenroth, "Book Nine," 138. Paffenroth notes that knowing self and God requires an integrated unified self, that is, psychologically healthy. Ibid, 153.

⁴³ Bernard Lonergan, "Subject and Horizon" in *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, ed. Philip J. McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 281. Lonergan analyzes the conversion of a subject to a new philosophical horizon, but a theological application seems clear insofar as there is an intellectual component involved in living out the faith. "Such a change is a conversion in the subject. Without that conversion in the subject running concomitantly with the broadening of the horizon, the new ideas not only are inoperative in one's own living—it is clear that the conversion is needed for them to be operative in one's living—but also they are insignificant to oneself" Ibid., 281.

⁴⁴ "Per continentiam quippe conligimur et redigimur in unum, a quo in multa defluximus." *Confessiones*, 10.29.40.

creating him; he becomes co-creator of himself, constituting himself in being by confession."⁴⁵

(b) *Confession as key to self-knowledge*: I have argued that hermeneutical recollection of one's past in light of present principles is a method modeled by Augustine for understanding oneself as an individual. Yet this alone is insufficient unless the whole endeavor and interpretive principles flow from the stance of faith. That makes possible a mutually revealing dialectic of self and God. "Let me know you, my Advocate, let me know you just as I have been known."⁴⁶ To hear from God is at the same time to hear about oneself.⁴⁷ It is in the dialogue with God that the Light is progressively known and thus the light necessary to know oneself is bestowed.

As mentioned, the subject's act of confession is only possible because God calls it forth first. Moreover, the very integrity of the memories themselves are subject to the aid of God's care.⁴⁸ In the narrative portions of the *Confessiones*, Augustine continually inquires of God's operations at the time of the past events.⁴⁹ He begins to understand his own experiences recalled to mind as providentially ordered by virtue of his *now* believing in God's care for all things, including his whole life. Confession plays an essential *interpretive* function in the conversion of the person to the revealed horizon of creation and its personal invitation to the beatific vision. God is the companion of Augustine, condition for his search, and ultimately the objective sought in that very reflection.⁵⁰

In other words, genuine self-knowledge is only possible in the self-constitution occurring in confession. Only when the aim of self-knowledge is contextualized toward a higher one which *displaces* the self will the confessing person begin to attain the first aim. In faithful dialogue

⁴⁵ Cf. Maria Boulding's Introduction to *The Confessions*, 25.

⁴⁶ "Cognoscam te, cognitor meus, cognoscam sicut et cognitus sum." *Confessiones*, 10.1.1.

⁴⁷ "Quid a me quaerunt audire qui sim, qui nolunt a te audire qui sint... Quid est enim a te audire de se nisi cognoscere se?" *Ibid*, 10.3.3.

⁴⁸ "Ecce cor meum, deus meus, ecce intus. Vide, quia memini, spes mea, qui me mundas a talium affectionum immunditia, dirigens oculos meos ad te et ellevens de laqueo pedes meos." *Ibid*, 4.6.11.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ibid*, 4.3.5 where Augustine recognizes God at work through the wise man who dissuaded him from astrology.

⁵⁰ "Inde ingressus sum in recessus memoriae meae, multiplicites amplitudines plenas miris modis copiarum innumerabilium, et consideravi et expavi, et nihil eorum discernere potui sine te et nihil eorum esse te inveni." *Ibid*, 10.40.65.

with God, Augustine makes use of an analysis of memory and the soul for the sake of the higher integrating goal of understanding his own lived-life in the context of revealed truth. "Let me therefore confess what I know and don't know about myself, because what I know about myself is due to your shining light upon me, and of what I don't know I will continue in ignorance until my darkness is as bright as midday in your face."⁵¹ In fact, Augustine may well *agree* with Nietzsche that the self is naturally lost in a dispersion of fragmentary passing moments. Yet, only the search for God will put the pieces back together again: "until I should flow back together into you, having been purged and purified by the fire of your love"⁵² where then "I am made firm in you, in my form, by means of your truth."⁵³ Augustine finds respite and unification in the pouring out of his soul in the joy of praise, but immediately adds "yet (my soul) is sorrowful, because it sinks back and becomes an abyss, or rather it senses itself to still be one."⁵⁴ The fog surrounding this enigma is *not* simply dissipated because Augustine returns to God in the practice of confession, and the irony remains that the self integrated before God is no less mysterious. But the abyss is traversed now in the hope for an abundance of intelligibility toward a divine *telos*. Just as Augustine is still subject to temptation and relies upon the virtue of hope and the mercy of the Lord, so too his knowledge of himself is in progress. Yet, now the true identity of the self is made manifest in its status as an individual created in the *imago Dei*—the haze has only *begun* to clear with each humble step back to God.

⁵¹ "Confitear ergo quid de me sciam, confitear et quid de me nesciam, quoniam et quod de me scio, te mihi lucente scio, et quod de me nescio, tamdiu nescio, donec fiant tenebrae meae sicut meridies in vultu tuo." Ibid, 10.5.7.

⁵² "At ego in tempora dissilui quorum ordinem nescio, et tumultuosis varietatibus dilaniantur cogitationes meae, intima viscera animae meae, donec in te confluum purgatus liquidus igne amoris tui." Ibid, 11.29.39.

⁵³ "Et stabo atque solidabor in te, in forma mea, veritate tua..." Ibid, 11.30.40. There is further potential overlap between Augustine and Nietzsche: for instance, Mateusz Strozynski notes that in *De Trinitate* Book X, Augustine claims that it's illusory that the mind knows itself "as an object, just as in the case of other things that it knows." Strozynski, "There is No Searching for the Self," 285. If Nietzsche argues that our reason necessarily fails to know the self because its mode of comprehension (conceptual), Augustine's view does not seem so distinct.

⁵⁴ "Et adhuc tristis est, quia relabitur et fit abyssus, vel potius sentit adhuc se esse abyssum." Ibid, 13.14.15.