

# “Memory and Imagination in Augustine’s *Confessions*”

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“Memory, like love, is an act of imagination, an abandonment and a possession.”

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He who claims to have read all the works of Augustine, says Isidore of Seville, is a liar. Yet of all the works of the Augustinian corpus, few have received as much attention as the *Confessions*. One is tempted, thus, to paraphrase Isidore and say, He who claims to say something new about the *Confessions* is a liar. I have no desire to be called a liar; I have not read all the works of Augustine, nor do I claim to have absolutely new insights into Augustine’s great work. I do, however, wish to offer some provisional thoughts on a topic little discussed: Memory and Imagination in Augustine’s *Confessions*.<sup>2</sup>

Augustine’s theoretical treatment of memory, which has of course received extended treatment, occurs in book X of the *Confessions*. We cannot engage the vexing debate regarding the relationship between the first nine and final four books of the *Confessions* here. Suffice it to say that in writing the 13 books of the *Confessions* Augustine saw them as an integrated whole. It is not surprising, then, that after nine books of confessional remembrance of his life’s events and their meanings Augustine should turn to reflect on the faculty of memory itself.

The real continuity between book X and the narrative which precedes it lies in the fact that the *Confessions* as a whole are an ascent to God. That is, they are the record of a heart’s journey to God. The narrative of book IX ends with remembrances of Augustine’s mother Monica whose life had been so instrumental in her son’s conversion and with whom Augustine had shared a mystical ascent to the divine, shortly before her death. The shift from the content of memory to memory itself in book X is thus a natural one. If we ascend to God by means of remembrances, Augustine’s argument would seem to run, perhaps we may ascend higher by understanding more fully memory itself. In introducing the topic of memory he writes: “I shall pass on, then, beyond this faculty in my nature [i.e. sense perception] as I ascend by degrees

toward Him who made me. And I come to the fields and spacious palaces of memory . . .” (X.8).

The shift to memory is thus also a shift from material to spiritual reality. To be sure, memory is a “treasurehouse” a “great harbour” of images brought to us by sense perception. But it stores only images, not the material things themselves.<sup>3</sup> A “boundless subterranean shrine”, memory is the place which is no place. Thus, memory is part of Augustine’s shift—which he attributes to the writings of the Platonists, probably Plotinus—towards recognizing the reality of non-material substances.

Memory is more than just a storehouse of images derived from sense perception. For example, Augustine contends, in storing the liberal sciences learned at school, memory does not possess images of the knowledge but the knowledge itself. Further, there are things in memory which do not impress their images upon us from outside. The laws of number and dimension, for example, have their reality apart from a body. It would appear then, for Augustine, that they are known innately, from within. He writes:

Touch says, ‘If the thing is not a body I did not handle it, and if I did not handle it, I gave no information about it. From where, then, and how did they enter into my memory? I do not know. For when I learned them, I was not taking them on trust from some other mind; I was recognizing them in my own mind, even before I learned them, but they were not in my memory. Then where were they? Or how was it that, when I heard them spoken, I recognized them and said: ‘That is right. That is true,’ unless in fact they were in my memory already, but so far back and so buried, as it were, in the furthest recesses that, if they had not been dragged out by the suggestions of someone else, I should perhaps not have been able to conceive of them? (X.10).

Here Augustine approaches the Platonic teaching of anamnesis, that knowledge is the recollection of impressions made by eternal forms upon the unincarnate soul. But Augustine does not explicitly align himself with the Platonic teaching. At this point, his interest is more descriptive than metaphysical. Some of the things we know, he says, appear to be already within our memory, if only in “wonderfully secret hiding places” where they wait to be discovered.

Memory does not only house true things, for contained in the memory are false opinions, along with the distinctions by which memory judges them to be false. Memory also contains the feelings of the mind, of past fear or joy or surprise. But the mind can be happy while the

memory contains something sad. There can be, therefore, no one to one correspondence between memory and mind. The memory, as it were, opens wider than the mind, containing past states of mind which can coexist with the mind's present state. Memory, in some sense, is the locus of the mind.

How then are memory and mind connected? Augustine, as he frequently and artfully does, resorts to metaphor:

. . . the memory must be, as it were, the stomach of the mind, and happiness and sadness like sweet and bitter food, and when they are committed to memory it is as though they passed into the stomach where they can be stored up but cannot taste. A ridiculous comparison, perhaps, [he concludes,] and yet there is some truth in it (X.14).

What Augustine does not develop is the means by which we recall stored memories and experience them again, though as memories and not the things themselves. For the mind is not just the portal through which images proceed, it is also the place where, as it were, we chew the mental cud. More precisely, memories are viewed by the mind, from which proceed images of memories and of the new feelings those memories provoke.

The storage of memories takes place both by means of and apart from images. Those people who are not healthy, Augustine says, still retain through the force of memory an image of health (X.15). Yet, when I name the numbers, he continues, it is the numbers themselves and not their images that are in my memory. What happens when we remember memory itself? Do we remember an image or the thing itself? Augustine writes: "I say 'memory' and I recognize what I mean by it; but where do I recognize it except in my memory itself? Can memory itself be present to itself by means of its image rather than by its reality?" (X.15) The answer, as far as it goes, is no; memory can only be present to itself in its reality. Forgetfulness, on the other hand, is the privation of memory and as such must be retained in memory, not in its reality (for then we would not remember it), but in its image (X.16). Like evil, forgetfulness is a privation of being.

As part of his ascent, Augustine tries to go beyond the power of memory itself but recognizes that he cannot. One cannot strip memory away the way one can in thought close off sense perception. Memory thus becomes not only the locus of stored sense perception but the field in which we carry on our spiritual striving for God. We can go no further than memory. Or can we? Even beasts have memory, Augustine notes, or birds would not be able to find their nests. How then does our memory

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differ from that of beasts, and what separates man from four-footed animals? At this point in the discussion, Augustine is not compelled to give an answer.

The first half of Augustine's account of memory, as we have seen, concerns the functioning of memory and the character of its contents. Beginning at chapter 20 of book X, however, Augustine moves to consider in more detail the problem of anamnesis. This second half of his account is devoted to the question of whether we seek something by remembering or by learning something unknown.

"How, then, Lord do I seek you?" he writes at X.20. The cry recalls the initial movement and continuing theme expressed at the very beginning of the *Confessions*: "Grant me, O Lord, to know and understand which should come first, prayer or praise; or indeed whether knowledge should precede prayer. For how can one pray to you unless one knows you?" (I.1). We seek God, but how? Is he present in my memory, and if so is he there in image or reality? And how did he get there? These questions Augustine does not ask straightforwardly, but one can hardly avoid their nagging presence in the context of Augustine's reflections.

Augustine begins with a simpler question. When we seek God, he writes, we seek the happy life. All have knowledge of the happy life. Man would not love the happy life unless he had some knowledge of it. Do we seek the happy life by remembering or by learning something new? Perhaps it is in our memory, Augustine suggests, whence it is left over from some previous experience of the happy life. The fully Platonic route—namely the transmigration of souls—is not open to Augustine here, but he does not seem overly perplexed by the precise origin of the knowledge of the happy life. Simply, Augustine concludes, all men desire to be happy: "and this would not be so unless the thing itself, signified by the word, was contained in their memory" (X.20). When memory possesses the good life—as when it possesses number—it grasps not the image but the reality itself.

Similarly, men have some knowledge of truth. For if all men desire to be happy, they desire a state of joy not in deception but in truth. Augustine writes:

For they love truth also (because they do not want to be deceived) and in loving the happy life (which simply means joy in truth) they must certainly love truth too, and they would not be able to love it unless there were some knowledge of it in their memory (X.23).

Memory then, contains innately and in reality the knowledge of the happy life and of truth. But where does this lead in our seeking after

God? I shall quote Augustine at length:

See what a distance I have covered searching for you, Lord, in my memory! And I have not found you outside it. Nor have I found anything about you which I have not kept in my memory from the time I first learned you. For from the time I learned you, I have not forgotten you. For when I found truth, then I found my God, truth itself, and from the time I learned you, you stay in my memory, and there I find you whenever I call you to mind and delight in you (X.24).

God too is there in memory. But was he always there? Augustine's strange mixture of tenses suggests that the answer is yes. Indeed, he has already conceded that truth is innately in memory—to be discovered, as it were. God is truth and when he found truth he found God. God resides and is sought in memory. In true Plotinian fashion, God is to be sought within. But how does one seek God? How does one go about discovering God in one's memory? Augustine tells us all he can; he tells us how he himself found God—he narrates, in books I through IX, the confession of his conversion.

What then of imagination? Imagination in Augustine has received little attention. This is so partly because Augustine has no explicit or developed theory of imagination (the way, for example, Coleridge does).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, one must take care not to read back into Augustine a later formulation of a notion of imagination. Further, there is—as is frequently the case with Augustine's terminology generally—a shift in his understanding of imagination over time. The most perplexing problem is that Augustine uses the word *imaginatio* in at least three different senses.

In the first place, Augustine uses *imaginatio* in the sense of the “vain imaginations” of Romans 1:21. The most explicit use of imagination in this sense comes in the *De vera religione* composed around 390. Here, imaginations are derived from things perceived by the senses and are barriers to proper contemplation.

Obstinate souls! Give me a single man who can see without being influenced by imaginations derived from things seen in the flesh (*sine ulla imaginatione visorum carnalium*). . . . And in imagination (*figmento cogitationis*) I go where I like, and speak to—whom I like. These imaginary things are false, and what is false cannot be known. When I contemplate them and believe in them, I do not have knowledge, because what I contemplate with the intelligence must be true, and not by any possibility what are commonly called phantasms (*phantasmata*)." (DVR, 64).

Imagination clouds the mind with illusions and fantasies. Near the

end of the work he utters a stern warning: "Let not our religion consist in phantasms of our own imagining. Any kind of truth is better than any fiction we may choose to produce." (DVR, 108)

That imagination leads us into falsehood and distraction is a theme found also in the *Confessions*. Here, however, it is a criticism reserved primarily for non-Christian literature. Augustine denounces "Homer's fictions" (I.16–7) and condemns the stage plays whose fantasies evoke false emotion: "I used to sympathize with the joys of lovers, when they wickedly enjoyed each other, even though all this was purely imaginary and just a stage show (*quamvis haec imaginarie gererent in ludo spectaculi*)" (III. 2). Such imaginings, moreover, distracted him from the state of his own soul: he wept at the death of Dido yet bore with dry eyes his dying heart (I. 13). Imagination in this first sense draws the mind away from what is truly real.

Augustine seems to have modified his consideration of imagination in the time between the writing of the *De vera religione* and the *Confessions*. In several letters exchanged with his friend Nebridius in the early 390s, Augustine moves to a distinction between *phantasia* and *imaginatio*, the two of which had been convoluted in the formulations of the *De vera religione*. Nebridius (ep. 6) poses a question for Augustine concerning the images present in memory. These he calls *phantasiae*. In his reply Augustine prefers to use the several variations of the word *imaginatio* to refer to "what you have proposed to call by the name of *phantasiae* (*quae phantasiarum nomine appellare voluisti*)" (ep. 7). In distinguishing between *phantasia* and *imaginatio*, Augustine accords a strong degree of reality to images present in memory, something he was not willing to do in the *De vera religione*. The distinction seems to have been lost on Nebridius. In letter 8 Nebridius persists in the use of *phantasia*, and Augustine in letter 9 gently admonishes his friend to re-read the letters, for he has not fully understood them.

This shift is borne out in the *Confessions* where *imaginatio* comes to have a second sense, namely the formulation of mental images more generally. Thus, the mind can imagine the sun rising and the memory can contain 'images' of the happy life or of truth. In contradistinction to the images produced by literary fictions, imagination now has a positive connotation.

Third, imagination takes on, in the *Confessions*, the sense of expectation or "prediction". This sense can only be understood in conjunction with Augustine's views on the relationship between memory and time. People, Augustine remarks in book XI, frequently speak of time in terms of past and future. But how can this be? Augustine asks. Things which have happened in the past have passed away and

consequently no longer exist; things which will happen in the future do not yet exist. How then, Augustine queries, do we speak of past and future as though they exist? Augustine's answer is this: past and future exist only in the present by means of memory.

Augustine gives the following example of imagination as expectation:

I am looking at the dawn sky and I foretell that the sun is going to rise. What I am looking at is present; what I foretell is future. What is future is not the sun, which is already in existence, but its rising, which has not yet taken place. Yet unless I could imagine in my mind this rising (*tamen etiam ortum ipsum nisi animo imaginarer*) (as I do now in speaking of it), I should not be able to predict it (XI.19).

Augustine's point is not that if he imagines something in the present, it will happen. Rather, he is contending that the future exists (for the finite human mind) only insofar as it exists in the present imagination, expectation, or intention.

Imagination, then, "fills gaps" so to speak in the memory by picturing what one can expect in the future. Imagination thus has a creative power. From images in memory, imagination creates new images which reside in memory.<sup>5</sup> At least one example suggests that imagination could also supply information missing from the past. Thus, in book I Augustine notes that he has no memory of his infancy. Yet, he can infer from his knowledge of other infants what his own infancy must have been like. Augustine does not explicitly call this inferring 'imagination' but for us to do so would be consistent with Augustine's other uses of the term. Imagination thus supplies images of things which do not yet or no longer exist.

Augustine—to repeat—does not have a theory of imagination, but does appear to have a coherent threefold use of the word *imaginatio* meaning: fantasy, simple mental image, or a mental image produced by intentional creative act. A fourth meaning may also be implicit in Augustine, namely, the sense that imagination orders the content of memory. The crucial passage comes at book X chapter 11:

We find, therefore, that to learn those things which we do not draw into us as images by means of our senses, but which we perceive inside ourselves [i.e. imagination in the second and third senses] as they actually are without the aid of images means simply this: by the act of thought we are, as it were, collecting together things which the memory did contain, though in a disorganized and scattered way,

and by giving them our close attention we are arranging for them to be as it were stored up ready to hand in that same memory where previously they lay hidden, neglected, and dispersed, so that now they will readily come forward to the mind that has become familiar with them.

By act of thought—the word Augustine uses here is *cogito*—we are able to discover and apprehend true realities in our minds *without* the aid of images. There is at least one instance in the *Confessions* (albeit pejorative; V.3) of Augustine using *cogitatio* and *imaginatio* synonymously, a fact which lends some credence to the assertion that the arrangement of memory is indeed a fourth aspect of imagination.

If this is true, then imagination becomes central to the whole of Augustine's enterprise. For to ascend to God by means of memory is to ascend to God by means of memory rightly ordered by imagination in accordance with the truth. Truth cannot come forward in memory until the things stored there are arranged by "close attention." To be in a state of sin is to have a disordered memory. But the extent of the disorder is known only after the fact by memory. That is, the disorder is recognized in retrospect. Thus, Augustine can write that Alypius' future healing was being "stored up in his memory" (VI.9).

Memory and imagination are part and parcel of what E. R. Dodds has outlined as Augustine's therapeutic activity in the *Confessions*.<sup>6</sup> The awareness of sin is the awareness that one must need healing which in turn leads to a call for the medicine of grace. God, to Augustine, is constantly "my Physician" in the *Confessions*, but the medicine of grace is administered through memory. "*Noverim me, noverim te*: I would know myself that I might know you God," writes Augustine. Augustine continues to undergo conversion as he re-collects the working of God's grace. Indeed, to some extent imagination is identified with the act of confession itself, for, as Augustine acknowledges, his *confessions* are an arranging of his memories and their meanings. Conversion thus becomes a function of imagination, the ordering of memory. The *Confessions* are thus a means of therapy by which Augustine, through the ordering of memory, seeks an understanding of the meaning of his past, and consequently of his present. The Christian, for Augustine, is never fully healed on this earth. Writing the *Confessions* was part of that process of healing. Thus Peter Brown writes of Augustine's reflections on memory: "The amazing Book Ten of the *Confessions* is not the affirmation of a cured man: it is the self-portrait of a convalescent."<sup>7</sup>

Augustine's act is not a solitary affair. He is very much conscious of his wider audience. "Why then," Augustine writes at X.3, "do I bother to let men hear my *confessions*?" There was a need in the growing Christian

community for the *servi Dei* to explain and justify the dramatic changes in their lives. The ordering of memory in the act of confession thus takes on communal importance. Augustine writes:

So in confessing not only what I have been but what I am the advantage is this: I make my confession not only in front of you, in a secret exultation with trembling, with a secret sorrow and with hope, but also in the ears of the believing sons of men, companions in my joy and sharers in my mortality, my fellow citizens and fellow pilgrims—those who have gone before and those who follow after and those who are on the road with me. These are your servants and my brothers; those whom you have willed to be your sons, my masters whom I am to serve if I wish to live with you and of you (X.4).

Indeed, Augustine recognized that biography had played a substantial role in his own conversion. The conversion of Victorinus and Ponticianus' recounting of the conversion of two imperial officials—both biographies profoundly affected Augustine's own approach to Catholic Christianity.

This was what Ponticianus told us, [Augustine writes]. But you, Lord, while he was speaking, were turning me around so that I could see myself; you took me from behind my own back . . . and you set me in front of my own face . . . (XIII.7).

Stories—or as we now call them more professionally, 'narratives'—thus serve as mirrors in which Augustine wishes us to see ourselves and so to turn to God.

Is there any relationship between imagination and knowledge? The critical passage from book X chapter 11 would suggest that there is. The aim, Augustine says, is to apprehend the realities in themselves and not their images. That is, the grasping of a number itself is 'more real,' so to speak, than the apprehension of the image of the sun rising. There are things, Augustine tells us in the *De doctrina christiana*, and there are signs. Things stand for themselves; signs point to what lie behind the signs. When we have the memory of the sun rising, we possess the image, the sign; in the case of number, memory contains the thing itself.<sup>8</sup> Augustine's aim is to achieve an imaginative rendering not of the sign but of the thing itself. The sign points to what lies behind it.

The most obvious and conventional signs are words. Thus, part of the operation of imagination is to effect the apprehension of the things themselves without words, without mental images. The ascent to God through memory thus reaches its highest stage in that act of the

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imagination which apprehends things without the aid of signs. Thus, we get the famous mystical vision at Ostia, based on Plotinian ecstasy. In that extraordinary account of the beatific vision, earth and heaven grow silent, images and signs pass away, "and in a flash of thought" Augustine and Monica make "contact with that eternal wisdom which abides above all things" (IX.10).

Less mystically, perhaps, Augustine elsewhere speaks of breaking through "the knots of language" (I.9) and of making his confession not "by means of the words and sounds of the flesh, but with words of the soul and the crying out of my thought which your ear knows" (X.2). In book XII Augustine regularly speaks of the "inner eye" and the "inner ear" with which we perceive truth without sensory or mental images. Indeed, Augustine tells us, "the poverty of human understanding (*intelligentia*) shows an exuberance of words, since inquiry has more to say than discovery, asking takes longer than obtaining, and the hand that knocks does more work than the hand that receives." (XII.1) The more words, the further we are from the reality of the thing itself. Augustine's ascent to God thus has a firmly apophatic character.

Augustine speaks of understanding (*intelligentia*) not knowledge (*scientia*) and the difference is of some importance here. "Grant me, O Lord, to know and to understand (*scire et intellegere*)," Augustine writes in the opening paragraph of the *Confessions*. The two go hand in hand, but are somehow different. Augustine achieved rational certainty of the truth of the Catholic faith, he tells us in VIII.7, but his soul refused to act:

I lashed my soul on to follow me now that I was trying to follow you. And my soul hung back; it refused to follow, and it could give no excuse for its refusal. All the arrangements had been used already and had been shown to be false. There remained a mute shrinking; for it feared like death to be restrained from the flux of a habit by which it was melting away into death (XIII.7).

The will does not always follow the reason. Rational knowledge is thus necessary for Augustine, but not sufficient for commitment. One's memory can contain the truth and even be recognized by mind; this is knowledge. But in understanding, the truths in memory are properly arranged, inclining both the mind and the heart to certainty. What is required is the ordering of one's heart, one's entire being towards God. The connection between heart and memory is strong for Augustine: "My heart and my memory are open before you (*coram te cor meum et recordatio mea*)" Augustine writes (V.6). Reason brings the soul to knowledge, imagination orders the memory and disposes the heart to an understanding which grasps the reality that reason can apprehend only in signs.

The *Confessions* take up many of the issues with which Augustine wrestled in his early writings, and upon which he continued to reflect during the remainder of his prolific career. In the *Contra academicos* composed at Cassiciacum in November of 386, three months after his conversion, he wrestled with the questions of knowledge, certainty, and doubt. In the *De libero arbitrio*, begun in 388 but not finished until 395, Augustine confronted the problems of evil and free will, and with them the questions of God's existence and our knowledge of truth. From 396 to 397 Augustine struggled (for the second time, the first was in 389 in the *De magistro*) with the problems of signs, reality, and interpretation in the *De doctrina christiana*.

Some time in 397, Augustine interrupted his work on signs in the *De doctrina christiana* in 397 to compose the *Confessions*. Augustine's shift from dialogues and treatises to the unquestionably unique narrative genre we call the *Confessions* may well have grown out of his consideration of signs and representation. The fact that he did not resume work on the *De doctrina* until 426 suggests that he may have considered the *Confessions* its completion. The *Confessions* are unique not because they represent a discontinuity of content, but rather a discontinuity of form and style. That is, they are an attempt to treat artistically and dramatically the questions of knowledge, God, doubt, truth, and signs.

To a large degree, the *Confessions* incorporate the other genres of Augustine's production. They are, but not merely so, a historical narrative of a man's life. They are deeply philosophical, as we have seen, and controversial (eg. anti-Manichaeism) like his anti-heretical tracts. Further, they are exhortative like his sermons, as personal as letters, as well as being a dialogue of sorts. Above all, the *Confessions* are literary, full of rich imagery and fine rhetorical style. The contemporary authority on Augustine's aesthetics has described the work as "a symphony" and has demonstrated the truly poetic character of the composition—after all, we know that Augustine wrote elegant and prize-winning poetry. Consider Robert J. O'Connell's rendering and translation of several passages from the *Confessions* into free verse.<sup>9</sup>

The "rhythmic evocation of silence" at Ostia:

If to anyone the tumult of the flesh were hushed,  
hushed the images of earth, and waters, and air,  
hushed as well the very heavens;  
did the soul, indeed, fall silent to itself,  
and mount, by not thinking on itself, beyond itself . . .  
and He alone spoke, not through these things  
but through His very Being  
that we might hear His word . . . (IX 10).

*Si cui sileat tumultus carnis  
sileant phantasiae terrae et aquarum et aeris,  
sileant et poli  
et ipsa sibi anima sileat  
et transeat se non cogitando . . .  
et loquatur ipse solus non per eas  
sed perseipsum,  
et audiamus Verbum ejus . . . .*

Or this passage from X.27:

Late have I loved Thee, Beauty,  
ever ancient, ever new,  
late have I loved Thee!

.....

Thou didst call, cry out to me, and shatter my deafness;  
Didst flash forth and shine to me, and scattered my blindness;  
Didst send forth Thy fragrance, and I drew in breath and now  
pant for Thee.  
I have tasted, and now hunger and thirst for Thee;  
Thou hast touched me, and I burn for Thy Peace.

*Sero te amavi,  
pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova,  
sero te amavi.*

.....

*Vocasti et clamasti et rupisti surditatem meum,  
coruscasti, splenduisti, et fugasti caecitatem meam,  
gustavi et esurio et sitio,  
tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam.*

Indeed, the moving cadence of the Latin would have been like music—the book would have been read aloud, not silently.

Memory and imagination lie at the heart of the *Confessions*, for together they overcome the problem raised implicitly by the *De doctrina christiana*: Leaving behind the signs to apprehend the things themselves. Signs, even in memory, risk being conceived of corporeally. Augustine's poem-like narrative of prayer and recollection serves as a complex of signs, the reality behind which cannot be thought of corporeally.

Augustine gives us a life, a memory whose process of being ordered points the reader to God even as Augustine's own discovery of God is being reenacted. Augustine "does not tell us what to do or how to speak theologically, but [rather] by showing us how God is related to all creatures through the story of his own experience of coming to belief . . . ." <sup>10</sup> By imaginatively entering into Augustine's life and witnessing the arrangement of his own memory, we are invited to do the same in our own. All exists in the present by means of memory. What we are and what we will be are defined by memory. More precisely, we are defined by how we order our memory. In this way, imagination becomes the center of man's whole rational, intellectual, and spiritual existence.

Coleridge captures the Augustinian spirit well when he writes:

Religion necessarily, as to its main and proper doctrines, consists of ideas, that is, spiritual truths that can only be spiritually discerned, and to the expression of which words are necessarily inadequate, and must be used by accommodation. Hence the absolute indispensability of a Christian *life*, with its conflicts and inward experiences, which alone can make a man to answer to an opponent, who charges one doctrine is contradictory to another,—“Yes! it is a contradiction in terms; but nevertheless so it is, and both are true, nay, parts of the same truth.” <sup>11</sup>

Of the life that Augustine gives us in the *Confessions*, if I may paraphrase Baron von Hügel, only such a life so large and alive can be largely persuasive for us and in our times. <sup>12</sup>

- 1 Susan Dodd, *Mamaw*, New York: Viking, 1988), p. 92.
- 2 I am grateful to Marcus Hodges, OP for kindly inviting me to read a version of this paper at Fisher House, Cambridge. A version of this paper was also read at the 1993 Patristic, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies Conference at Villanova University.
- 3 In this, as we might expect, Augustine rejects Lucretius' material theory in which memory is constituted by the collection of many "thin films" which come to rest there. While Lucretius' scheme gives an explanation for the presence of images in memory, Augustine confesses that he does not know how these images are formed. Nonetheless, the images are present to be brushed aside or called up when needed.
- 4 Here I take exception to some of the work of Robert J. O'Connell.
- 5 See also *De libero arbitrio* (especially book II), where Augustine says that one can only conceive of things that actually are.
- 6 E. R. Dodds, "Augustine's Confessions: A Study of Spiritual Maladjustment", *Hibbert Journal* 26 (1927-1928) p.460.
- 7 Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) p. 177.
- 8 In many ways, the centrality of numbers in Descartes' discussion of certainty (in the *Meditations*) is an Augustinian impulse.
- 9 Robert J. O'Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine*; (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp.119, 215.

- 10 Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1975) p. 165.
- 11 S. T. Coleridge, *Literary Remains*, (New York: AMS Press, 1967) vol. IV, p. 63 (emph. mine).
- 12 "Only a life sufficiently large and alive . . . a life dramatic with a humble and homely heroism which, in rightful contact with and in rightful renunciation of the Particular and Fleeting, ever seeks and finds the Omnipresent and Eternal; . . . only such a life can be largely persuasive, at least for us Westerns and in our times." Baron F von Hügel, *The Mystical Element in Religion*, 1st ed., (London:1909) vol.I, p. 368.

## Reviews

**THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO AQUINAS**, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, *Cambridge University Press* 1993, paperback £12.95

This is the latest in Cambridge's series of companion volumes to the great philosophers: collections of specially commissioned essays of critical exposition by international scholars, plus a substantial bibliography, designed to serve as reference works for student and non-specialist alike. *The present volume succeeds admirably: its ten essays are well-chosen and informative and the bibliography is very full up to 1991 (to 1992 as regards works by the essay-authors).* Of course, it is once again Aquinas as philosopher, not as theologian, that is covered, which is a pity and causes some problems for the essayists.

The essays themselves fall into three main categories: three 'backgrounders', followed by five dividing up Thomas's work according to certain non-Thomas subject-divisions, and a final two dealing rather summarily with the fact that most of Thomas's works are not themselves works of philosophy though containing philosophy.

The first backgrounder, "Aquinas's philosophy in its historical setting" is from the Hollands scholar, Jan A. Aertsen (and perhaps one should say that the English of this essay is sometimes obscure, and would have profited from more editorial scrutiny). The essay does two things: it gives a very adequate introduction to the medieval university context of Thomas's work, and it presents the more orthodox view of Thomas's philosophy as having its own proper positive independence from theology (a view which a later contributor — Mark Jordan — finds not nuanced enough). The second backgrounder is a magisterial account of "Aristotle and Aquinas" from the veteran scholar Joseph Owens, attempting to compare and contrast the philosophies of the two thinkers, and finding the difference in Aquinas's deeper account of what existence means. Finally