

Mind (*mens*)

Saint Augustine through the Ages: an Encyclopedia, edited Allan Fitzgerald, Eerdmans, 1999, 563-67.

For Augustine mind is not a mere aspect of his being or of his relation to the universe. Immortal mind defines the human and it is (and thus, Augustine finds himself to be) a horrifyingly fascinating infinity in which he is immersed (*conf.* 10.17.26), and which he endlessly explores with a continuing sense of wonder. Knowing fulfills human being; ultimately, it makes us happy. We seek union with the divine Good in contemplation. Vision is the realization of what love seeks; love is a steadfast perceiving (*trin.* 8.4.6; see 11.6.10). Knowing God and ourselves are indissolubly united. Knowing God depends upon coming to understand that mind is immaterial and that it is image of the trinitarian God (*conf.* 7.1.2; *trin.* 1.1.1; 2.18.54; 3.1; 10.10.15-16). Mind is common to God and the human; the infinite medium in which they meet.

Philosophy, in the Hellenistic world to which Augustine's thought belongs, has turned to the self and Augustine is essential to communicating this turn to the Latin West. Understanding Augustine depends upon appreciating how decisive is this mental turn inward. Only by the move within, away from the sensible, is the turn upward to the Truth possible (*conf.* 7.7.11ff.).

Properly, our beginning and end are with self-knowledge. Mind always knows itself, because it is always immediately present to itself, and so better known to itself than anything else can be (*trin.* 8.6.9; 9.3.3; 9.11; 10.7.10-10.10.16). The relation to God and all else is contained in true self-knowledge. We do not need to add anything to it. Rather we must subtract what we have wrongly added by our self-immersion in the sensuous below mind. When the confusions resulting from these self-obscuring additions are subtracted, the mind will be left with a knowledge of its nature or substance (*conf.* 10.15 & 10.16; Menn, 252).

When it comes to the true knowledge of itself, mind comes to God. Truth is the divine mind or Word (*trin.* 1.10.20; 4.1.2; 4.18.24; 7.3.5; 12.14ff.). There human mind meets what is superior to it (*conf.* 7, 10; *trin.* 8ff.; *en.Ps.* CXLV.5). Self-reflection is the medium in which the relation to all else occurs and, as opposed to the pagan Neoplatonists, this remains true for Augustine even in respect to union with God. For no other thinker in the Platonic tradition with which he identifies himself, is the mental world more inclusive. No pagan obeyed more completely than Augustine the Delphic command: Know thyself (*conf.* 10.3.3). Augustine also discovered the contradictions and self-deceptions of mental introspection (Dodaro). Augustine's decisive role in determining the specific character of the Latin West is critical in forming its tendencies to mind - body dualism, absolutising intellectualism and psychological introspection.

Mind as Trinitarian image: For mind to be the medium in which God and the human meet, it must be more than knowing. It is interconnected being, knowledge and will, or, better, the totally interrelated and self-reflexive activities of remembering, understanding and loving (*conf.* 10.10.16; 13.11.12; *ciu.dei.* 11.26; *trin.* 14.8.11). So, for example, mind is, not only, the unconscious depth in which union with the principles of its operation is given

(*trin.* 8.9.13; 11.7.11; 12.2.2; 12.3.3; 12.15.24). It is, equally, a conceptualizing comparable to speaking a word, a conceiving in which the being of mind expresses itself to itself. It is also a self-moved but self-transcending love comparable to the weight of a body (*ciu.dei.* 11.28; *conf.* 4.14.22; 13.9.10). Each of the three aspects of mind contains the others (*trin.* 14.6.8; 14.14.18; 15.21.40; 15.21.41). The triad of memory, understanding and love is present in each of the three activities of mind. So, for example, there is a knowing and a loving within memory before knowledge is projected into consciousness.

When the triadic activities of mind are fully directed severally and as a whole toward God, God and the human are finally united in the ultimate beatitude (*trin.* 15.12.21). Mind's capacity is judged by this view of its and the human destiny and purpose. This means both that the essence of God is entirely given in the divine thought and will, and also that human mind comes to union with God's essence as thus given in thought and love. Augustine's representation of the teleological future of human mind, and so of its capacity, and of its relation to being, stands in sharp contrast to that which dominated the Greek Christian tradition (see, for the earliest assessment of the difference, Eriugena, *Periphyseon* I. 446B) and is determinative of Latin Western theology, philosophy and culture including the onto-theological structure of its metaphysics (O'Leary).

The dependent connection of human mind in its essential activities with the trinitarian God is not, however, reserved for the life of the world to come, it is always present. Mind's activities depend on divine illumination (q.v.).

Memory depends upon God for the innate principles it can call into consciousness. It holds Augustine's historical experience -- in memory he even retains a relation to what he has forgotten (*conf.* 10.16.25) and to the subconscious. So, in the vast and wonderful world of memory, mind finds God within itself. In thinking, mind mirrors the divine conception of an inner word. In true knowledge, it touches and sees God above it. All its judgments are so made in relation to the standard of the divine Truth that Augustine can regard himself as always moved and moving in relation to it. In the desire for happiness, consciously or unconsciously, mind is moved by God (*conf.* 10.20 ff.) When this love properly understands the nature of its satisfying end, mind reaches out for union with God.

Time-consciousness and mediation (*conf.* 11): In time consciousness, with its union of memory, of thinking awareness, and of the will's capacity for repulsion, attraction and anticipation, the relation of mind to God for its activity is manifest. In the present of consciousness, the past is remembered. Equally, by love and expectation, in the same present, mind reaches out to the temporal and eternal future in hope or fear. Human awareness of time, our connecting of past, present and future in the present of consciousness, depends upon and reveals a mediation of the divine and human within mind. By its consciousness of time, human mind participates God's eternal present which contains what, by our form of mental activity, is divided into past, present and future. In our time consciousness, with its present of the past and of the future, our mind bridges time and the eternal. In consequence of the mind's mediation of the divine and the human, despite the dividing temporality essential to our form of reasoning, we can attain

the divine perspective necessary to interpret *Genesis*, where the beginning is before the creation, and to understand God's speech to us in the Holy Scripture.

The mental power by which Augustine is able to move back and forth between his search for God, on the one side, and God's speech to and knowledge of him, on the other side, or between his own words, on one side, and the words of Scripture, on the other, enables Augustine to place his own particular conversion not only within the divine shaping of the universe, but also within the universal structure of mind itself. At every level, as a whole and in each individual, whether merely corporeal, living or intelligent, whether human, angelic or divine, there is a triadic going out -- or speech or self-expression or fall -- and a restoration -- or return to source and unity in judgement or beatifying fulfillment (*conf.* 12; 13; especially 12.28.38). Grace and revelation restore and bring to self-consciousness the divine image impaired but never lost (*trin.* 14.8.11) so that the historical mediator, Jesus Christ, restores in the human and also represents in it a mediation always and necessarily present to the activity of mind (*conf.* 7.9.13ff.; 10.42.67ff.; 11).

In sum, human mind is mutable and temporal, but is essentially dependent upon the immutable and eternal Truth for its structure and operation, and is created in such a way so as to end properly in remembering, understanding and loving itself and all else in and through the divine trinitarian being, knowledge and love (*conf.* 13, *trin.* 15). It knows its own mutability. So it is inferior to and does not judge the eternal Truth in the light of which it discerns its own inferiority. However, in the knowledge by which it compares itself to what is above, human mind also contains the mediation which the historical mediation of Christ shows as well as establishes.

Human knowing in the hierarchy of being and knowledge (*quant.*; *lib.arb.*; *conf.* 10; *trin.*): In its relation to sense, common sense and imagination, mind is receptive to, brings into unity, creatively organizes and reconstructs the sensible below it. The temporal and sensible is an inferior reality which by its mutability scarcely is (*conf.* 12.9-12.28). Nonetheless, through sense, mind recovers self-knowledge. By the grace of the Incarnation, mind, fallen into self-forgetful occupation with sensible externality, has the revelation of its trinitarian structure and can come to ultimate community with God.

Reason judges the activities of the lower powers of the soul. Reason, a very comprehensive term for Augustine, is the defining power of the human, not only separating humans from animals but distinguishing the human mind from the angelic and divine intellects. In *scientia*, reason knows, and provides the basis for governing, the corporeal. As intellect and *sapientia*, mind reaches out to the realm of true being above (*conf.* 7; 9; 10; *trin.* 12).

The human mind, which is mutable but touches the immutable above it, thus stands in relation to all the hierarchically graded forms of being (*conf.* 7.7ff.; 9.10.24; 10.25ff.; *conf.* 13.11.12; *trin.* 5.2.3). The human self and its destiny are determined by the level of reality towards which mind turns itself in the love by which it moves (*conf.* 12.9ff.; 13.9.10). Boethius, and mediaeval Augustinians like Eriugena and Bonaventure, will develop this Augustinian teaching to reconcile the human to the universe or even to construct it, and, like Augustine himself, to guide the soul through the ordered levels of

reality to God. Thus Christian Platonism repeats the journey up Plato's line and out of the Cave (*Republica* 509ff.; *conf.* 7, 9, 10, *Consolatio philosophiae* 4 and 5, *Periphyseon* 2 and 4, *Itinerarium mentis in deum*).

Relation to sources. Augustine follows Plato in thinking that the soul is a simple immortal substance with an existence independent of body. Mind, the best part of soul, characterizes the human and shows its origin with and likeness to God (*quant.* 1-2). However a full account of his view of mind requires understanding almost the whole history of philosophy between Plato and Augustine, as well as a knowledge of the ecclesiastical authorities and the Neoplatonic theology (Christian and pagan) affecting the doctrine of the Trinity (Madec, Crouse).

As with Plotinus and Porphyry, there are relations, more or less direct and both positive and negative to Plato, Aristotle, the Skeptics, Stoics, and Middle Platonists. Augustine's own particular position within the Neoplatonic synthesis of Hellenic thought is not comprehensible apart from seeing how he transformed Plotinus, Porphyry and Marius Victorinus (see Beierwaltes, Booth, Cipriani, Crouse, Dillon, Hankey, Lilla). In this transformation his acceptance and understanding of the Trinitarian theology of the Church is essential. As we have seen, mind, for Augustine, is trinitarian, and is the best image of God.

Nothing is closer than mind to the divine, nor better among creatures (*quant.* 34.77; *diu. qu.* 51.2; *Gn. litt. imp.* 16.60; *ciu. dei* 10.2; 11.26). So far Augustine is with Plotinus. Beyond Plotinus, memory for Augustine is more than Platonic reminiscence, though certainly it is a relation to the forgotten or innate principles and to the origin of mind's knowing and loving. Memory includes and preserves the historical experience of the soul's single historical existence. Both Platonic reincarnation and the memory of a life before our descent into the sensual are excluded.

Augustine's intellectualism is more complete than the Plotinian noetic world. Here his position is more Aristotelian or Middle Platonist. There is no One beyond intellect accessible only for a love beyond knowing. In consequence, self-knowledge and knowledge of God never part company, and being, intellect and love are not hierarchically ordered from lower to higher but are equalized like the Persons of the Trinity to which they correspond (Booth, Crouse, Hankey). So, self-knowledge and the knowledge of God are inescapably intertwined, and include the knowledge of all else (*uera rel.* 39.72; *conf.* 7.1-2 & 10; *en. Ps.* 41.6-8; 145.5; *sol.* 1.2.7; *trin.* 14.12.15ff.).

With Plotinus, in coming to his understanding of mind, Augustine must free himself from Stoic corporalism. For Augustine this escape is above all from Manicheism. However, for both thinkers the knowledge of the incorporeal is not just negative. It is a positive metaphysical knowledge and arrives at seeing God with the mind. For Augustine mind can see with its own inner eye the immutable light above the mind, this is the light and truth by which it ultimately knows. This truth, which is known as standard, and in which all else is properly known and judged, is God as Truth (*lib. arb.* 2&3, *conf.* 10).

On his way from Manicheism to Platonism Augustine passes through Scepticism (*c. Acad.*; *conf.* 5.10.19; 5.14.25; 6.11.18; 6.16.26.22-26). The result is his account of mind with its indubitable union of being, thinking and loving (*conf.* 13.9.12; *trin.* 15.12; *ciu. dei.*

11.26). With Plotinus, the Stoics and Skeptics and Hellenistic thinkers generally, Augustine begins with the desire for peace, rest, or quietude (*conf.* 1.1.6-7; 6.16.26; 13.38.53), and with Plotinus, he finds his way there by a reflexive movement into the self as against the sensible. The fundamental difference between Augustine and Plotinus is that Augustine is able to carry this self-reflexivity all the way through.

The unbreakable self-reflexive unity of remembering, understanding, and loving, which is essential to mind not only involves an indubitable certainty (*trin.* 10.10.14; 15.12.21.), but, establishing that we are rational is required to lead us to God. So, the *de Trinitate* is a step by step deepening of the understanding that we are essentially rational, what this means, what it makes possible, and what it requires (*trin.* 2.16.27; 2.17.28; 3.2.8; 3.10.21; 4.1; 11.1; 12.15.24; 14. *passim*; 15.15.25). If the essential incorporeal rationality of the human soul could be denied, Augustine's whole theological argument would fall (*trin.* 15.12.21; see 14.19.26).

In sum: Mind is what makes us capable of union with God. Ultimately, this is owed to the trinitarian form of both the divine and the human. The human can thus reiterate at a lower level the divine infinite self-relation (*conf.* 13.11.12).

Beatitude in contemplation, the vision of all things in the eternal Word which is their good, is the human goal. That goal is a return to our beginning, to what is both psychically and objectively before our self-conscious knowing. The before in this knowing before knowing, which belongs to memory, corresponds in our minds, and in our being, to the priority of the divine Principle in the universe. Final contemplation is a return to that gaze of eternal being which belongs to memory and to the fundamental structure of our minds. The joining of that finality with the relation to the Principle which belongs to the before of memory allows mind, in virtue of its access to its own source and end, to have its own self-completeness. By self-reflexion in and through its relation to the Trinity as the beginning and end of the human mind, a Trinity in which each divine relation or Person is also an activity of mind, divine form is given to the human. In this final remembering, understanding and loving the human mind has the divine both as its object and as its own form (*trin.* 14.12.15 & 16).

Wayne J. Hankey

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