

AUGUSTINE ON THE UNCONSCIOUS MIND: INTELLECT AND MEMORY IN
ON THE CATECHIZING OF THE UNINSTRUCTED 2.3. AND *THE LITERAL
MEANING OF GENESIS XII*

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In chapter 2.3 of *On the Catechizing of the Uninstructed* (*cat. rud.*), Augustine describes a mental process involving various interactions of the conscious and unconscious mind. The process involves a descent in the realm of the soul from a vision in the highest part (an intellectual vision) which necessarily diffuses itself throughout the spiritual realm of consciousness and then to the physical sensory realms of expressed speech. *Cat. rud.* is actually a lengthy letter which Augustine wrote to a younger colleague, Deogratias, a Carthaginian deacon, in response to his questions.

In this letter, Augustine tells about how he endeavours to express the great idea motivating his orations, while in the process of composing his sermons. He admits his personal dissatisfaction at seeing or hearing the result, which he attributes to the incapacity of words or signs to represent the magnitude of the original inspiring thoughts, which he had experienced prior to the composition.

As I will argue in this paper, Augustine's conception of the unconscious mind plays a role in this incapacity. First and foremost, it must be said that there is no existing term in ancient history which conveys our modern term unconscious. Ancient thinkers did have a conception of the general meaning of our terms consciousness and in my view, of unconsciousness as well¹. Especially in works of Augustine, who wrote prolifically on the soul and the workings of the mind, we can recognize and glean the meaning of these modern terms to some extent from his expositions.

¹ A poignant example is Porphyry's *Sententia* 40. *Porphyry, Sententiae: Auxiliaries to the Perception of Intelligible Nature, Select works of Porphyry* (trans) T. Taylor, 1823.

Augustine's train of thought in the passage in question in *cat. rud.* 2.3, may not be immediately transparent to the modern reader. We therefore need to look at his epistemology in his theory of the three visions from *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (*De genesi ad litteram* = *gen. litt.*), book XII to arrive at a fuller understanding as to what he is precisely referring to. These three visions are, respectively, intellectual, spiritual and corporeal vision. Augustine's treatise on consciousness in *gen. litt.* XII, provides more detailed indications of the interplay of the conscious and unconscious mind, not immediately evident in *cat. rud.*

Augustine's description of the three kinds of perception in *gen. litt.* XII can also be described as three different states of mind (*gen. litt.* XII.36.69), well-defined variations of certain levels or modes of consciousness. Intellectual vision bears no mental images; it entails a conscious state of grasping or understanding abstractions. These things exist already in the remote reaches of the mind and become conscious within this tripartite visionary scheme, as a form of knowledge. Spiritual vision, on the other hand, contains lively imagery from the experiential world (deriving from corporeal vision-sense stimuli) which language and speech taps into.

Of interest here is Augustine's depiction of how memory functions on all three visionary levels, serving as a bridge between them. It is noteworthy for the sake of this introduction, that in ancient thought, and in particular Augustine, *memoria* is often synonymous with individual self-consciousness or the 'self'². There is much literature on the ancient aspect of the individual self and how it has influenced modern conceptions³. Yet this article will not deal with this fascinating topic. It suffices to say that in Augustine's Platonist way of thinking, each of the three visions have an impact on one's self-image and on one's view of the world.

In other works [such as *The Trinity* (*trin.*) IX and X and *Confessions* (*conf.*) X], Augustine goes to great lengths to attempt to capture the complex inner mechanisms of the human mind and memory. Articulations from these works, especially on memory as well as consciousness-or the lack thereof-will be sporadically utilised to supplement my explanation of *cat. rud.* 2.3 and the theory of three visions from *gen. litt.* XII. However a formal treatment of his conceptions of the mind in these works would require a great deal more space than this article will allow.

² *Confessions* (*conf.*) X.16.25-26; X.7.12-30.41; See e.g., (Teske 2001); (Taylor 1989: 134-36).

³ Sorabji (2008: 201-45, 211-21) provides a good overview of this problematic especially in the context of Augustine's notion of self-knowledge and awareness in *trin.* X.10.14 and 16. (Drever 2007: 233-420), (Zwollo 2018: 227-31, 243), (Taylor 1989: 127-42).

This paper will first elaborate briefly on the difficulties of interpreting ancient terminology, then it will explain the passages in *cat. rud.* After a short exposition on the three visions in *gen. litt.* and in particular intellectual vision, the passages in *cat. rud.* will be reiterated. In short, this article aims to show how the unconscious mind plays a role in *cat. rud.* and generally in Augustine's thought.

Allow me to interject this note, that my method here of extracting Augustine's ideas on the unconscious, is, at its basis, eisegetical (in contrast to exegetical) in character. This is due to the fact that Augustine does not explicitly refer to the unconscious and likewise, due to the fact that the term simply did not exist in antiquity as an already packaged concept. Therefore the term unconscious will necessarily be 'inserted', a method which is potentially controversial⁴.

Gregory Wiebe, in his lengthy discussion of the three vision theory in Augustine's *gen. litt.* XII, asserts that:

It is inevitable that Augustine's argument should seem flawed in a world after Freud. It is notable that he has no concept here of what we might call sub-conscious or unconscious knowledge.

Wiebe 2021: 108-11

Although I argue here that there is indeed a conception of the unconscious in Augustine's thought, by no means do I suggest that it is feasible, for instance, to read Freud's or Jung's theories of the unconscious into Augustine's ruminations on the human mind. However, I am convinced that a further study to explore the correspondences would produce interesting results.

Ancient vs. modern

The terms consciousness or the unconscious are household terms today which hold a plethora of nuanced significations which have been explored since the 19th century. Conceptually, they were well known in antiquity, yet expressed with different qualifiers⁵. One particularly salient

⁴ (Knotts 2021: 6-7).

⁵ It is not uncommon to encounter terms such as 'consciousness' in translations of ancient texts or in secondary literature in order to aid the comprehension of ancient philosophical notions (without further explication of their broad meaning). For instance, this term was used frequently in A.H. Armstrong's translation of the *Enneads*. Plotinus discusses consciousness/awareness (αἰσθάνεσθαι / παρακολουθεῖν) in e.g., *Enneads (enn.)* I.4.9-15. Another example is E. Hill's translation of *trin.*, the term consciousness is used for *in*

example of the difference between ancient and modern-day terminology is the word love or the regard for emotions in general⁶. Today many assume that love is centralised solely within the heart, emotions having a separate existence from the more amenable ambitions of the head. This distinction is reflected in the still popular theory (now refuted by neuroscientists) in which emotions pertain to the imaginative, or intuitive right side brain functioning, distinguished from the operations of the analytical, mathematical or logical left side⁷. This conception of love and emotion, radically reduced to the irrational, is not applicable to Augustine's way of thinking.

In a parallel manner, we should not regard the way Augustine viewed the unconscious in the same way we often do today: for example, from the framework of psychoanalysis, in relation to-among other things-irrational drives, repressed, or pushed away which can be brought to the conscious mind through psychotherapy. There is much ancient literature on emotions, passions, impulses and drives, the latter of which are to some extent seen as separated from rational thought. Yet the head and the heart were not always so sharply defined as in conventional modern thinking.

Another example is relevant to this article's main topic: Augustine applies the term intellectual to a vision which involves seeing God. In the present-day conception of intellect, we would find this extraordinary. Especially considering that Augustine's conception of intellectual vision can also entail experiencing ecstasy. Ecstasy and religious experience would also seem to us today as belonging solely to the realm of emotions and the irrational. Ancient thinkers' notions about the human being will necessarily differ from our contemporary views, which have been influenced in particular by Enlightenment philosophers⁸.

Augustine: the conscious and unconscious⁹

animus and *in animo* (in the soul) IX.10.16 (Hill, 2006: 282-3) (while McKenna translates this as 'the human mind': *trin.*, 37-8); (Zwollo 2018: 227-29).

⁶ Other multi-interpretable terms which occur often in modern translations of ancient literature: rational-irrational, spiritual, science, wisdom, intuition, memory and knowledge.

⁷ e.g., Gross, 1992. L. Schumacher claims essentially the same for modern philosophy: 'On the modern scene...religious knowledge and ordinary knowledge are not usually conceived in such a closely related fashion. In point of fact, revelation is for modern philosophers something quite irrelevant to reason; it is therefore something quite different than it was for Augustine.' (2010: 381).

⁸ Such as those of the Deists (Bristow 2017).

⁹ For an overview of contemporary philosophical discussions concerning the application of the modern conception of consciousness to ancient concepts (Heinämaa 2007: 1-10). Kany identifies various interpretation models in the scholarly literature of *trin.* from the middle of the 19th century to today (e.g., Taylor 1989), many of which (such as the idealistic, Platonizing and noetic models) have characterised *trin.* IX-X as '*eine Philosophie des Selbstbewusstseins*' (Kany 2007: 247-63); (Kany 2000: 13-28). See also (O'Daly 1987).

Horn designates Augustine as the first, or at least one of the first philosophers, to engage with the phenomenon of self-consciousness¹⁰. Indeed, the term ‘conscious’ is highly appropriate for the application to the doctrines of Augustine, as well as Neoplatonists such as Plotinus, because it signifies awareness and a process of knowing through (various kinds of) perception, as in the three kinds of visions to be explained below. Additionally, the concept of ‘consciousness’ in Augustine indicates a purely mental, non-corporeal manifestation, which is located solely in the soul (*mens* or *animus*). The term consciousness can be applied to Augustine’s descriptions of the mind in the context of reflexive cognitive activity (*se cogitare*) or in ‘being present to oneself’ (*se nosse*) (*trin.* X.10.14 and X.10.16). Subsequently these terms can also be translated as distinct forms of ‘self-awareness’ or self-knowledge (the key terms in books IX and X of *trin.*)

‘Consciousness’ or ‘awareness’, as non-physical faculties of the soul, are thus intricately related to gathering knowledge and Augustine’s ‘epistemology’. This modern term in the ancient context generally involves investigations into the nature and limitations of human knowledge (*trin.* IX-XIII). These, in turn, are directly related to Augustine’s doctrine of the soul and his exegesis of ‘the image of God’ (Genesis 1: 26-7) which he identifies as the highest part of the soul - *intellectus*.

The intellect, in Augustine’s depiction, is, in my view, a kind of higher consciousness or state of heightened mental lucidity, in contrast to the ordinary, awake state of mind involving physical sensory perception, while, for example, performing perfunctory, habitual activities. ‘Intellect’ is involved in a process of progressive actualization. The proper philosophical term for this higher state of mind is ‘intellection’, which requires more explanation in order to not confuse this with general modern conceptions of ‘intellect’, which often involve empirical perception or discursive thought¹¹.

The term unconscious in Augustine, roughly speaking, can be assumed in the sense of presently not knowing something – not being aware of something, which will be known at a later moment (to be illustrated below in the context of the three visions); or something which one had once learned and had consciously known, yet had forgotten due to disuse, lack of relevance, or a memory lapse; a recollection which could be fully or partially retrieved later. How Augustine uses what we moderns call the unconscious (for example as a psychic reality)

¹⁰ (Horn 2012: 208).

¹¹ (Zwollo 2018: 319-23).

cannot be explored in its entirety here. His conception of the unconscious does not, at least in the sources mentioned here, involve dreams, which when analysed, reveal unconscious development processes or suppressed drives, as in early 20th century psychoanalysis¹².

Augustine acknowledges that the human mind contains so much data that we cannot possibly grasp all of it at once¹³. Further, he asserts, we can only truly know ourselves through the search to know God (e.g., *trin.* IX.6.11). But because God's Being is unknowable, it is likewise not possible to completely fathom the human mind in its entirety. Not only does the mind hold too much content, there is also much simultaneous activity, some of which becomes parked in the recesses-the unconscious mind, or in the knowledge repository-the memory, which is not always retrievable upon request. Or sometimes it is not even retrievable at all. How and why human minds function in this manner and what essentially happens to this retrievable or irretrievable knowledge, are issues to which Augustine claims ignorance (*cat. rud.* 2.3; *gen. litt.* XII.18.39-40).

***Cat. Rud.* 2.3: the inadequacy of the spoken word to express the intellect of the speaker**

In antiquity, it was common for intellectuals, like Augustine, to employ the occasion of answering a letter for providing a full-blown exposition on a certain topic. For that reason, this letter is principally an instructive treatise geared to a wider readership. The famous rhetorician and bishop of Hippo responds here to the Carthaginian deacon Deogratias, who was already well known for his talent of instructing persons who have little or no knowledge of the Christian faith. Deogratias had inquired about 'the manner in which a suitable declaration is to be made of the precise doctrine, the belief of which constitutes us Christians'.

Augustine responds to this specific request in the following way:

...you have made the confession and complaint that it has often befallen you that in the course of a lengthened and languid address you have become profitless and distasteful even to yourself...

¹² M. Henry's summary of Freud's depiction of the unconscious from Freud's article 'The Unconscious' of 1914 seems to adequately fit my definition of Augustine's conception of the unconscious in a general way: 'There are some representations I think about, but from the moment that I cease to think about them they leave the circle of light of representation, which identifies them with the conscious mind. They become unconscious representations, or memories, and they go to fill that container, that is my unconscious.'). Henry further identifies Freud's conception as 'the unsustainable aporetic concept of an unconscious representation ... For phenomenologists...the very affirmation of an unconscious leads to a sort of aporia.' (Henry 2009: 110).

¹³ E.g., *trin.* XIV.6.8, XV.12.21, XV.7.13.

While addressing his public, Deogratias often frets that he is ‘delivering a poor and wearisome discourse’. The content of his discourse seems to himself to be unworthy to the ears of others. Augustine sympathises and admits to often feeling the same way. As a clarification of this discontent, Augustine describes in *cat. rud.* 2.3, the mental processes while composing a lesson or a sermon. Here we see how Augustine uses his psychological skills to depict the workings of the unconscious in the memory.

Indeed with me, too, it is almost always the fact that my speech displeases myself. For I am covetous of something better, the possession of which I frequently enjoy within me before I commence to body it forth in intelligible words: and then when my capacities of expression prove inferior to my inner apprehensions, I grieve over the inability which my tongue has betrayed in answering to my heart.

For it is my wish that he who hears me should have the same complete understanding of the subject which I have myself; and I perceive that I fail to speak in a manner calculated to effect that, and that this arises mainly from the circumstance that the intellectual apprehension diffuses itself through the mind with something like a rapid flash [*intellectus quasi rapida coruscatione perfundit animum*], whereas the utterance is slow, and occupies time, and is of a vastly different nature, so that, while this latter is moving on, the intellectual apprehension has already withdrawn itself within its secret abodes [*iam se ille in secreta condidit*].

Augustine refers here to an ‘intellectual vision’ without providing an explanation of it¹⁴. This vision entails an apprehension, a rapid flash of intuition which diffuses downward through the soul. In doing so, the content of the diffused flash seeks the form of impressions *vestigia*. These enter the realm of the memory and are thereafter translated into the area of the mind of discursive thinking where words are formed in the language particular to that individual. Yet something of that original intellectual vision becomes lost in the translation process, withdrawing ‘within its secret abodes’ (*cat. rud.* 2.3). This journey of vestiges takes place in the spiritual realm of the soul.

¹⁴ *Gen. litt.* XII, where he explains this, was written at a later date. *Cat. rud.*: ca. 400; *gen. litt.*: books IIIb-XII: 412-414.

Yet, in consequence of its having stamped certain impressions of itself in a marvellous manner upon the memory [*tamen, quia uestigia quaedum miro modo impressit memoriae*], these prints endure with the brief pauses of the syllables; and as the outcome of these same impressions [*uestigiis sonantia*] we form intelligible signs [*signa peragimus*], which get the name of a certain language, either the Latin, or the Greek, or the Hebrew, or some other. And these signs may be objects of thought [*cogitentur haec signa*], or they may also be actually uttered by the voice.

Here Augustine specifies that the content of an intellectual vision, while being diffused to a lower region of the soul, is, as vestiges, first imprinted onto the memory as a non-verbal message. When this content is to be communicated to others, these impressions are gradually formed into images, then into signs from the individual's native language or through the particular conventions of language, and finally, as sounds coming from the mouth, perceptible to the listeners.

On the other hand however, the impressions themselves [*illa uestigia*] are neither Latin, nor Greek, nor Hebrew, nor peculiar to any other race whatsoever, but are made good in the mind [*efficiantur in animo*] just as looks are in the body [*ut uultus in corpore*].

...But, again, it is not in our power to bring out those impressions which the intellectual apprehension stamps upon the memory [*illa uestigia quae imprimit intellectus memoriae*] and to hold them forth, as it were, to the perception of the hearers by means of the sound of the voice, in any manner parallel to the clear and evident form in which the look [LZ: an image perceptible to the viewer) appears.

Two things are discernible here about the content of intellectual vision before it is turned into human language: the intellectual content and its vestiges have a significance which is universal in character and are not clothed in images. Now, in the passages directly above, Augustine contrasts the communication of intellectual content with words to that of emotions conveyed by physically perceptible images, that is, the communication of a mood or disposition directly from the inner world of a person to exterior viewers. He uses the example of the look on a person's face, which expresses a clear-cut emotion, such as anger, which is perceptible to bystanders non-verbally. Unlike this spontaneous flowing manner of communication of an inner state to the realm outside of us, the totality of the intellectual content as it descends through the soul as vestiges cannot be communicated in the same expedient way to listeners.

This example serves to underline a discrepancy which is the cause of frustration for the composer of a spoken or written text.

For those former are within in the mind, while this latter is without in the body. Wherefore we have to surmise how far the sound of our mouth must be from representing that stroke of the intelligence, seeing that it does not correspond even with the impression produced upon the memory.

cat. rud. 2.3

First of all, the journey of the content of intellectual vision – the original ‘stroke of intelligence’ – to the mouth, where audible words from a particular language will flow out, takes much longer than the journey of the emotion conveying ‘I am angry’, to the expression of the face. It can be explained in the following way from Augustine’s theory of the three visions: the former entails a descent from the intellect to the corporeal (a declension of two levels of the soul), whereas the latter is only a descent from the spiritual to the corporeal. This comprises a decline to only one level which solely consists of corporeally derived or corporeal images. Both factors would facilitate the speed of transmission.

Here it is suggested that not only a deceleration, but a degradation is taking place, from the quickly apprehended great ideas to the sluggish and cumbersome mental processes which translate universal vestiges to language through the choice of words. It is this transfer of thought to more material or weightier realms, which produces in us a sense of failure-the failure of expressing what we really mean- which, in turn, instils self-doubt.

Now, it is a common occurrence with us that, in the ardent desire to effect what is of profit to our hearer, our aim is to express ourselves to him exactly as our intellectual apprehension is at the time, when, in the very effort, we are failing in the ability to speak; and then, because this does not succeed with us, we are vexed, and we pine in weariness as if we were applying ourselves to vain labors; and, as the result of this very weariness, our discourse becomes itself more languid and pointless even than it was when it first induced such a sense of tediousness.

The overall narrative here is that the original stroke of intelligence, which one seeks to objectify in language in order to express oneself or instruct others, has diminished to a great extent. Augustine’s grievances were stirred by this realisation and that he has fallen short of fulfilling

his deepest wish: to convey the original intellectual vision directly from his mind, to the minds of his pupils or listeners. What he infers here is the impossibility of this feat. Whatever an author ends up composing, it should fall short of the original intellectual impressions. Obviously, this philosophical confirmation (as well as the whole letter) is intended to be supportive and not discouraging. Further in the text, he offers solutions as to how to communicate a memorable oration. Yet this is not our concern here. The question now, is how memory and the unconscious play a role in the mental processes at hand here?

It should also be noted that the two main mental operations referred to – firstly, a rapid flash or intellectual apprehension which diffuses through the mind and secondly, the impressions of such being translated into speech - were of a vastly different nature. By the time the deceleration of the thought process has taken place and the speaker's or writer's concentration is on the choice of words, 'the intellectual apprehension has already withdrawn itself within its secret abodes', as Augustine expressed above.

Noteworthy here throughout this whole passage is Augustine's indication of how something which had once been present to the conscious mind has now retreated into a region which is apparently no longer accessible. Perhaps the memory did not pick up this impression; or perhaps it did and was just not registered in the conscious memory. Whatever the case, we could interpret this phenomenon as the workings of the unconscious because it can entail a temporary forgetfulness; or a permanent one which cannot be wrested out of the memory. If the forgetting was temporary, then its eventual recovery could be only partial, on the condition that the vestiges, which had adhered themselves onto syllables of words and relay content of personal significance, were repeated in such a way to attract one's attention (*conf.* X.16.24-26).

Apropos the signs (*signa*)¹⁵ mentioned in *cat. rud.* 2.3, they are by their very nature less apt to convey the totality of the universal significance of their content; their value is that they refer to it or indicate it in some way. Thus, a sign can awaken a recollection or activate other spiritual images. Signs themselves pertain to either the corporeal or spiritual realms. If a sight, object, word or even a scent is perceived with the senses, it becomes imprinted onto the memory and accordingly becomes spiritual imagery. If the image is a sign, then it contains a specific meaning, and it is associated with something of greater importance than the original object

¹⁵ Zwollo 2019: 115-22.

itself. A good example of a sign is smoke which indicates fire. Language is an entire system of signs. Augustine's theory of signs is crucial to his definition of *sacramentum*, the latter of which involves objects, words or spiritual images which instigate the presence of an invisible, or divine reality in one's mind¹⁶.

Yet what exactly happens on this journey from the loftiest regions of the mind (or intellect) to the body is not clear. The manufacturing of these images, or signs in the spiritual realm of the soul, is a complex mental operation, which Augustine admits to being unable to explain. Yet he conjectures that it must be a function of the memory which somehow creates these mental images (*gen. litt.* XII.16.32, 18.39-40).

Augustine's explanation in *cat. rud.* unveiled a central discrepancy which causes the author's feeling of dismay at what he/she is communicating. The transmission of information taking place here from the mind to the body involves a metaphysical variance. He suggests this in a comment added later, quoting Paul 'For in this life who sees except as in an enigma and through a glass?' [*sed per speciem, non per aenigmatē* (1 Cor.13:12)] (*cat. rud.* 3.4). We can infer from his usage of this quote elsewhere (in his exploration of the human mind in *trin. passim*), that he is indicating that the human mind is not only unable to fully grasp itself, it is neither capable of grasping the world around us all at once. We can however understand the concept world in the intellect, as this concept is essentially imageless. Yet it is impossible to fully comprehend the world in all its dimensions and totality with spiritual or corporeal vision, because the human spirit is too limited for such a feat. The crux of the difficulty conveyed in Paul's statement is that the human perspective of the exterior world is as the sight obtained by peering into an ancient mirror: the image is not only burnished or distorted,¹⁷ it is also backwards.

There is thus a distinction in metaphysical value between, on the one hand, the material world, human physical bodies, spirit and memory-which interiorly creates images of the exterior world, and, on the other hand, the world of mind and intellect. The human mind comprehends itself in the sense of being wholly present to itself. Yet the mind sees itself through the three kinds of visions. It is most present to itself during intellectual vision (*se nosse*). Yet in the other

¹⁶ Zwollo 2019.

¹⁷ Perhaps in some way comparable to the shadows or images seen in Plato's allegory of the cave, in *The Republic* (514a-520a).

two lower visions, while regarding itself through corporeal and spiritual images, the mind is less able to apprehend its true self (*se cogitare*).

This may sound as if Augustine is sceptical as to whether complete self-knowledge is possible. On the contrary, Augustine is optimistic that the mind can achieve much more than assumed. Knowing oneself, according to Augustine's thinking, takes place in a long-term trajectory of development. Yet the only way to truly know oneself, in Augustine's view, is to strive to know God and that is only accomplished through intellectual vision¹⁸.

The exposition below on the three visions will enhance the predicament Augustine highlights in *cat. rud.* Then, to summarise, I will show how using the modern terminology of the unconscious becoming conscious will further our understanding of both texts.

Augustine's theory of the three visions in *gen. litt.* XII¹⁹

In *cat. rud.* 2.3, we witnessed Augustine describing a descent of the content which can be known from the highest part of the consciousness down to the lowest form of sensory perception and expression. His three-vision theory in *gen. litt.* does the opposite: it offers a kind of a roadmap on how to ascend to the divine: a rising of the consciousness from physical sensory perception of the world of material images, through the soul, where sensory images are translated to spiritual images and then further to the intellect, in which the images originally derived from the physical world are no longer manifest²⁰.

The general context of Augustine's theory of the three visions in *gen. litt.* XII revolves around Paul's words of 'being snatched up to third heaven' or paradise (2 Cor.12: 2-4), which finalises Augustine's reflections on the creation story in Genesis. Here he reviews all the various visions documented in the Old and New Testaments, explaining them in the framework of his three categories. His application of this theory to the visions and miracles of biblical prophets is unique in ancient literature. I have already discussed the three visions in a rudimentary way, thus this section will necessitate some recapitulation, now in a more systematic manner. The accent here will be on spiritual and intellectual vision.

¹⁸ (Zwollo 2018: 232-255); See Augustine and Plotinus' ruminations on whether partial self-consciousness is possible: Aug. *trin.* X.4.5-6; Plotinus: *enn.* V.3.5.6-20; (Zwollo 2018: 325-326).

¹⁹ (Zwollo 2018: 183-188), (Wiebe 2021: 108-111).

²⁰ Undoubtedly influenced by reading Plotinus and/or Porphyry where the same three visions are expounded. (Zwollo 2018: 191-194); Plotinus: *enn.* VI.9.11.11-29; Porphyry: in Aug. *City of God (civ.)* X.9, 32 and XXII.29. See also (De Marco 2021: 56-61). See Schwyzer (1975) for a comparison of Plotinus' notion of intellect and theory of Ideas with Jung's conception of archetypal unconscious.

The first type of vision, *visio corporalis*, consists of physical sense stimuli, in particular, corporeal images (XII.2.3) derived from our physical eyes. The second type, spiritual vision, appears in our minds in the form of recollections (*phantasmata*), visualizations of the imagination (*phantasiae*) or dreams, containing images absorbed from sense perception, internalised and impressed onto the memory. The term *spiritualis* (XII.7-9)²¹ refers to the human spirit (*spiritus* or *animus*) or soul, in contradistinction to physicality (the senses) in the material world. Spiritual images are all stored in the memory which serves as a kind of a knowledge chamber (*conf.* X.9.16). The crucial difference between the *spiritualis* and *intellectualis*, the third kind of vision, as already mentioned, is that no physical images of any kind are present to the mind's eye.

Some spiritual images have no meaning at all²². Others function as signs in varying degrees. It has already been suggested that Augustine designates words, objects, gestures, rituals, etc. as signs, on the condition they refer to something else. Some signs bring a person to grasp deeper truths, such as imageless objects perceived while in intellectual vision. The intellect fathoms their referents instantly.

Spiritual images are subject to deception. Augustine often brings up the example of someone viewing spiritual images with such acute clarity, such as in a dream, that one mistakes them for physical reality (*gen. litt.* XII.2.5; 18.39; 25.52). Spiritual images cast into the human mind by a demon was considered a real danger in Augustine's time. The spiritual world is literally the work terrain of demons or angels, who are bodiless. These images could be used to mislead their receiver in order to convey an illusion (*gen. litt.* XII.17.34). However, spiritual imagery projected into the human mind by an angel is never deceptive, as it will always point to something of a higher significance (VIII.25.47).

Spiritual images are unreliable in other ways as well. Recollections are rarely a perfect reproduction of an event which occurred in the past. Spiritual images, such as those seen in dreams, are inherently susceptible to delusion and misrepresentation, depending on their

²¹ The English term 'spiritual' or even the French *esprit* do not exactly correspond with Augustine's definition of his second type of vision.

²² 'About one thing nonetheless there should be no doubt, that the bodily images which are perceived by the spirit are not always signs of other things, whether in people awake or asleep or delirious. It would be most surprising however, if there could be a case of ecstasy in which such likenesses of bodily things did not signify anything.' (*gen. litt.* XII.13.27).

polyvalence or their provenance from beneficial or malignant spirits. Yet in Augustine's view, pictures in dreams can also be charged with profound meaning and even serve as divinatory.

Most important, the images in spiritual vision are the cogs and wheels of the memory, which is an important reflexive mechanism for obtaining knowledge, and especially the more sought-after kinds of knowledge, such as of oneself and of God. These images are the building blocks of worldly science and essential for reflection and managing our physical existence²³. Epistemologically, spiritual images are also the content of discursive thinking and opinion, yet also the stepping stones to universal truth.

The intellect

The intellect and its particular visionary manner understands, interprets and judges spiritual and corporeal visions, even when these images are enigmatic (*gen. litt.* XII.25.52)²⁴. Seeing how intellectual vision (or simply the intellect) stands above material images²⁵, no delusion and deception can take place on this level. Because there are no physical images to weigh it down, intellectual vision affords an immediate intuitive apprehension of truth (XII.14.29). Moreover it is infallible (XII.25.52), thus superior to the other two types of visions (XII.14.29 and 30).

The intellectual region of the soul can function independently, whereas the corporal and spiritual levels require the intellect to make sense of their images. It is the realm in which one grasps in an instant the deeper meaning of signs or their referent (*res*), as well as the archetypal causes, the Ideas of God, some of which have no physical counterparts. Thus the inferior means of perception can only attain their full realisation by ascending to the superior level of the intellect; intellectual vision is what lends spiritual and corporeal images their significance and impact (XII.11.22, 24.51).

All three visions have an object. The contemplative objects of intellectual vision, such as God, the Holy Trinity, or the divine Ideas, are of true Being, eternal and unchangeable²⁶. Consequently these objects can in no way bear resemblance to mutable and temporal material images or to our recollection of them. A person is able to judge corporeal and spiritual images

²³ E.g., Zwollo (2018: 244-51).

²⁴ (Zwollo 2013), (Zwollo 2018: 181-85).

²⁵ *Gen. litt.* XII.8-9.

²⁶ (O'Daly, 1987: 41-42).

in intellectual vision when the mind is focused on God and subsequently undergoes divine illumination. During this state, the person contemplating (the subject) also contemplates her/his self, as the ‘image of God’ (as object), subsequently developing a better understanding of one’s relationship to the Creator. Integral to this goal, the Ideas serve as standards or norms for assessment, as to the degree of resemblance or dissemblance (XII.3.6), as well as the relationship between images and their corresponding Ideas or models. Augustine provides some additional examples of objects perceived by the intellect, for example, virtues [such as prudence, justice, chastity, charity, loyalty (XII.3.6)], justice, and wisdom (XII.4.12)²⁷. We could say that knowledge of the objects obtained in a *visio intellectualis*, according to Augustine’s theory, is to some extent *a priori*²⁸. Taking virtues as an example, a contemplating person can have knowledge of these Ideas or ideals by recognizing them in themselves. During intellectual vision the person assesses the extent in which the degree of virtue has already been acquired. In other words, a person is able to conceive of perfect virtue without having to possess the degree of perfection themselves.

There are several variations of the experience of intellectual vision which Augustine describes in *gen. litt.* They all generally entail an ascent to God, which begins by transcending the physical images of the two inferior visions, progressing beyond to a region of the intelligible and then the supra-intelligible. These will now be discussed, applying the terms conscious and unconscious mental activity.

Augustine’s personal experiences provided the material for his famous accounts of the ascent to God in *conf.*,²⁹ which can be characterised as remarkable episodes of intellectual vision. As in *conf.*, Augustine refers to intellectual vision in *gen. litt.* XII as an instantaneous, overpowering experience of light, a wholly conscious experience, which left him with a deeper understanding of himself, of God or of his relationship to God³⁰.

²⁷ ‘So too by charity, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, restraint (Gal. 5: 22-23) and the rest by which one draws near to God, and God himself...’ (*gen. litt.* XII.24.50); ‘things seen by intellectual vision... the virtues...loving kindness...faith...hope...patience...’ (*gen. litt.* XII.31.59). E.g., one’s life, willing, thought, memory, understanding, knowledge, and faith (*Letter* 147.1.4).

²⁸ Cf. (Taylor 1989: 135), (Nash, 1999, 440).

²⁹ *Conf.* VII.10.16; IX.10.24; X.8.12.

³⁰ ‘But the light itself is something else, the light by which the soul is enlightened in order to truly understand and observe all things either in itself or in this light. ... So when it strives to gaze upon that light, it blinks and shivers in its weakness, and quite simply lacks the power to do so. Yet that light is what enables it to understand whatever is within the range of its power. When therefore it is snatched up there, and being withdrawn from the senses of the flesh is set more firmly in the presence of that vision, not spatially but in its own kind of way, it also sees above itself the one by whose aid it also is enabled to see whatever it can see in itself by intellectual understanding.’ (*gen. litt.* XII.30.58)

In *gen. litt.* XII, another kind of intellectual vision depicted is the mind being ‘carried out of the bodily senses’ (XII.26.54). The mind is snatched away out of its ordinary consciousness and cast into a perfect virtuous existence in which bliss, rapture or ecstasy may be experienced. One’s mind is elevated to the region in which the intellectual is equal to the intelligible³¹, that is, to the region of pure Ideas, such as Virtue, where there is awareness of the presence of the divine:

The one virtue and the whole of virtue there, is to love what you see and the supreme happiness is to possess what you love. An unutterable vision of truth, where beatitude is imbibed at its source...There the brightness of the Lord is seen, not through a symbolic or corporeal vision...but through a direct vision and not through a dark image [*sed per speciem, non per aenigmatē*], as far as the human mind elevated by the grace of God speaks face to face to him whom He has made worthy of this communion. And here we are speaking not of the face of the body but that of the mind.

gen. litt. XII.26.54

The passage above circumscribes a complete or perfect vision of God for saintly persons after the death of the physical body and the resurrection. Such a sustained and perfect *visio Dei*, equivalent to beatification, hence, a *visio beatifica*, is out of reach for the most of humanity in this life with the possible exception of a very few (such as Moses and Paul)³². Augustine includes the condition that being carried out of the physical senses in this kind of intellectual vision must entail a sort of provisional death (*gen. litt.* XII.27.55).

Another kind of intellectual vision is the perfect vision which angels enjoy. Angelic vision involves a total glimpse and simultaneous understanding of the whole of creation, of all creatures and their causal principles (*gen. litt.* III.20.31-32). It also consists of perfect knowledge of God given by Christ, the *Verbum Dei*, which is so glorious that they remain in constant praise of him as thanks³³. Perfect angelic knowledge is not attainable for humans in this life, yet it can be obtained in the afterlife.

³¹ Similar to the Platonic world of Ideas. In the Plotinian context: the intellect becoming one with the intelligible. Plotinus: *enn.* IV.10.30-37; (Zwollo 2018: 186-87; 319-22).

³² *Gen. litt.* XII.28.56 and 36.69.

³³ *Gen. litt.* IV.29.46, 30.47; XII.28.56 and 32.60-36.69.

Thus in Augustine's teachings, *visio intellectualis* has various degrees and implications. As such, the intellectual realm of the mind contains much unexplored territory. There is much true universal knowledge to be obtained. The mind has access to a certain boundlessness in so far it forms a relationship with the divine and maintains it. In intellectual vision there are always new vistas to discover, new insights of God, of oneself and the world³⁴. The knowledge acquired from intellectual vision, being universal and unchangeable, is of higher being. Yet because the intellect is essentially a human creature, it is subject to changeability. Its knowledge can be forgotten or fade, if not regularly sustained or by falling into sin.

As I see it, the unconscious which is at stake here in intellectual vision is a form of sustainable knowledge which has not yet been attained. What is presently unconscious, gradually becomes conscious, similar to the way in which a child grows up to learn about the adult world, through daily practice and exercise. The promise of a higher form of knowledge is invested in salvation itself.

On the level of corporeal and spiritual visions, in spite of the boundless number of these images, Augustine regards the mind as decidedly diminished in refinement. The knowledge acquired there, being of a temporal and changeable character, can be more easily forgotten due to its irrelevance with time or to the multitude of images amassing upon the memory daily which cloud a potential transparent vision of truth. Attaching oneself to these images, to form one's own self-image, is not recommended by the church father (*trin.* X.6.8) because of their inherently unstable character. We can thus conjecture that Augustine would have likely believed that most of the unretrievable unconscious was involved on this level.

The unconscious mind and its role in *cat. rud.* 2.3 and *gen. litt.* XII

In relating the exposition on the three visions back to the general context of the passages in *cat. rud.*, we can deduce that the original stroke of intelligence which Augustine or Deogratias experienced, motivating the instruction of Christian faith, had to do with a certain elevating experience of the divine. Yet, there is also a large twilight zone of consciousness, not necessarily undefined by Augustine, which he located somewhere between spiritual and intellectual vision. We can thus read into Augustine's epistemology that there are mental spaces in oneself or self-knowledge where one's conscious mind has not yet tread. Although these 'grey zones' are susceptible to the fallibility of the human power of recollection, they are

³⁴ Cf., Horn (2012: 207-8) on self-knowledge in Aug. *trin.* X.

not always vacuous. On the contrary, in Augustine's view, they could have enormous potential, especially as signs – spiritual images – which, when activated by intellectual introspection, will render the presence of a higher metaphysical reality, and in turn trigger an experience of divine illumination³⁵. As such, one will come to a conscious understanding of what was formerly unknown in oneself.

The areas of the mind that are not yet conscious, could be so for different reasons. The mind may not yet be fully illuminated. Yet no matter how illuminated one's mind can be, the human intellect still differs drastically from God. Darkness still exists in the soul, as in ignorance, but also because of sin and vice, the consequence of either original sin and/or a narrowed perspective of universal truth. The key to developing awareness and progressing out of the dark unconscious zones, is, for Augustine, reflexivity: the recognition of one's sins, shortcomings and wrongdoings, imperative self-knowledge for a Christian. The more self-knowledge, the stronger the realisation of the necessity of virtue and humility, instrumental for taming one's arrogance and egoism.

With this in mind, the dismay and discontent described in *cat. rud.* which present themselves to an author in evaluating his work, are the expected effects of the descent. Universal impressions of the intellectual experience or higher consciousness are compressed into non-universal spiritual signs and words, thereby qualitatively degrading into lower forms of consciousness and to some degree infelicitously disseminating into the zone of the unconscious. In stark contrast is the ascent from the corporeal to the intellectual, a heightened awareness and accumulation of self-knowledge often accompanied by intense happiness, fulfilment or even ecstasy.

Sigla

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³⁵ See Aug. *civ.* XXII.30 for an interesting depiction of the unconscious and how all the trauma from this life will be known by the mind in the afterlife, but in feeling, forgotten.

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