

The Paradox of Consciousness in Augustine's *Confessions*:

A Voegelinian Reading

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Although Augustine wrote several books that are dialogues the *Confessions*, composed as a prayer, does not at first seem to be one of them. It appears rather to be a lengthy monologue addressed to God in which Augustine, in order to inspire in his readers a similar *metanoia*, reprises his internal *peregrinatio* that culminated, midway through the book, in the climactic moment when his relentlessly intensifying internal agon resolved in his acceptance of Christianity. The dialogic nature of the work emerges as the reader becomes increasingly conscious that the God Who is addressed is not only the primary auditor of Augustine's account of his life but also the silent and ineffable interlocutor Who has effectively composed the tale.

At the heart of Augustine's receptiveness to this eloquent silence is a profound anxiety, a metaphysical inquietude that drives the human quest for the *stabilitas* of Truth. As Eric Voegelin observed, "Even when faith has supervened, the one and only thing certain about existence remains the uncertainty about its ground," and "anxiety is the response to the mystery of existence out of nothing."ⁱ [1] The soul's natural response to such uncertainty is to embark on a quest for its origin, for it craves rest in the source of who, wherefore, whence, and whither it is. To the question why the soul responds this way Voegelin's answer is that we exist, by nature, in the tension of constantly being called to search for our beginning, for the mysterious origin of our being "is not a thing that once upon a time has caused other things, including man, to exist, but a power of origin, continuously radiating through consciousness the obligation to order existence toward the ground."ⁱⁱ [2] In accepting the obligation the soul undertakes the uncertain

quest to participate in the community of being. Rejecting the obligation leaves it immured in the illusion of security in isolation.

In this sense, Augustine's *Confessions* is a paradigmatic story in which a soul is reluctantly and yet willingly drawn into the paradox of consciousness in which existential anxiety moves it to abandon an unsatisfying partial truth in order to seek the ground of existence in ultimate Truth. The paradox, in Voegelin's analysis, is that the nature of consciousness makes it both an observer of and a participant in reality. It is part of our human experience that our consciousness seems to be located within our bodies and that we have an intentional awareness of other bodies, things, conditions, states of affairs--what Voegelin calls the "thingness of reality." But human consciousness is not limited to awareness of aspects of an external material world, for in another sense it is also a part of the reality that, in relation to consciousness, has become "thing-reality." "In this second sense, then, reality is not an object of consciousness but the something in which consciousness occurs as an event of participation between partners in the community of being."iii [3] In this sense, consciousness possesses luminosity, or "participatory illumination," rather than merely intentionality, and it is located "somewhere between human consciousness in bodily existence and reality intended in its mode of thingness."iv [4] The reality in which consciousness attains luminosity Voegelin calls "It-reality."

According to Voegelin, the in-between condition of participatory consciousness is one not of certainty but of tension. The symbolization of the It-reality is "the strong movement of a spiritual consciousness, imposing form on a formless and non-forming countermovement, the tension between a pneumatic, formative force and an at least passively resistant counterforce."v [5] There is an intrinsic tension in the It-reality, an imposing of order on that which

mysteriously resists order, a tension in which the human struggle for Truth participates without being able to define it. The poles of the tension should not be considered entities that exist in isolation from the experienced tension: "the tension itself is the structure to be explored."vi [6] The symbol for this exploration is the "story," a narrative in which events are arranged in an ordered whole that gives coherence to the "movement of resistance to the prevalent disorder,"vii [7] disorder being defined, of course, as the antithesis of the nature of the ground. "The story is the symbolic form the questioner has to adopt necessarily when he gives an account of his quest as the event of wresting, by the response of his human search to a divine movement, the truth of reality from a reality pregnant with truth yet unrevealed."viii [8] The story serves to provide symbolic and graphic testimony regarding the consequences both of seeking and of refusing to seek the Truth of the It-reality. In Voegelin's succinct formulation, "the event as a beginning is the story of an attempt to impose order on a wasteland of disorder."ix [9] And as the divine movement elicits a response which in turn meets a counter-response, the story becomes dialogue.

The story itself has a structure of beginning, middle, and end, as well as its own paradox, namely that one cannot really know how to begin until one knows the ending. The *Confessions* has an organized narrative structure in which Augustine begins seemingly far from God and gradually, and with great struggling against internal resistance, awakens to the love of God. In short, Augustine's *Confessions* is the story of a spiritual growth from the isolation in the self of intentional consciousness to the solitude of luminous, participatory consciousness in the community of being. What Augustine felt the need to confess as sinful was his resistance to this growth as it actually took place.

Arriving at long last at the illumination of consciousness that he had searched for enabled Augustine to see how the story of his encounter with God had actually begun in his infancy's isolated, limited, but desire-filled state of consciousness. The end of Augustine's story of the *metanoia* of his soul renders the time and place of his birth, the identities of his parents, or the general history and circumstances of his family irrelevant.x [10] What is significant about his beginning is the nature of his consciousness. He has to begin the story with his infancy because no one can tell him about his life in the womb and he has no recollection or knowledge of whence (*unde*) he came hither (*huc*) into this "*vitam mortalem, an mortem vitalem*." (I, 6) Here Augustine is already pointing out the experience of a mysterious tension or polarity in human existence, which he compresses into the rhetorically reversed paradox, *vitam mortalem, mortem vitalem*, in which earthly existence manifests itself as both a life-giving way to death and a death leading to life, but the manifestation involves, or evokes, the two different orientations of consciousness in the paradox of its existence, one focused on the isolation in the temporality of this world and the other directed toward the community grounded in the lasting Being beyond.

But the paradox, of course, was known (although probably not in the same terms) only to the adult Augustine, for Augustine the infant experienced only intentional consciousness in which things and other people were objects. Augustine describes his earliest condition as one of such a tension-free harmony of needs and satisfactions--God provided enough milk for his nourishment and he desired no more than what he needed--that his consciousness was minimal. But as it developed, he began to be aware of and desire other things that were neither necessary nor so readily supplied as milk. Here actually begins the story, for when he, a helpless infant, wanted to communicate his wishes to those who had the power to fulfill them (*et voluntates meas volebam ostendere eis, per quos implerenter*) (I,6) his inability to speak the language left him

isolated in powerlessness, in the tension between desires and fulfillment. When his resort to the only "language" he knew, uncoordinated gestures and inarticulate sounds, failed to conform the world to his will he sought to punish (*vindicabam*) those who disobeyed in the only way he could, by crying (*flendo*). Limited to intentional consciousness the infant Augustine was capable only of monologue, not dialogue, for his sole concern was that his self-centered desires should be satisfied by manipulating a world of objects.

Augustine *infans*--not able to speak--had to become a *puer loquens* in order to acquire some power over objects and to participate in society with other persons. This meant that he moved from the aphasic isolation of infancy to the anoetic isolation of living according to one's egocentric desires in the company of others doing the same. His recollections of his boyhood and adolescence are primarily concerned with his various desires and the ways in which he sought the power to satisfy them--by prayer, cheating at games, stealing, competing for prizes, resisting study in order to play. At this early stage of his life he was seeking *securitas* in the power to satisfy his desires and live without fear but he was already infected by the disorders of human existence. He first seriously probes his resistance in his discussion of the famous incident of pear-stealing in his sixteenth year. Although some commentators think that Augustine berated himself too much for a not uncommon sort of adolescent mischief, they miss the point, for in the light of luminous consciousness Augustine had come to see this act of stealing, twenty-five years or more in the past and the closest he had ever come to crime, as an archetype of spiritual rebellion.

When he asks himself why he had participated in the group theft of pears he finds two reasons: daring to assert the power to do what was forbidden seemed a pleasure in itself and,

besides, he did not want his peers to think him timid; that is, he wanted the esteem of others. His understanding of the first makes sense only in the light of the participatory consciousness in which he recalls it: *foeda erat, et amavi eam; amavi perire, amavi defectum meum* (II, 4). What does *amavi perire* mean? In what sense did Augustine love to perish, to be undone? The statement that he loved it implies that by his sixteenth year he had begun to be aware of the obligation to order existence toward the ground, which his immature, self-centered life of intentional consciousness resisted. It was not really perishing that he loved but his own will's self-assertion, of which spiritual perishing, in the sense of isolation from the ground, was the salient consequence. God's response to his consequent *miseria* in *imo abyssus* was *misericordia*. Indeed, one of the leitmotifs of the *Confessions* is the direct relationship between Augustine's *miseria* and the divine *misericordia*: The more the former increased the greater the latter.xi [11] *Miseria* is a term for the spiritual causes and consequences of resistance while *misericordia* is the divine resistance to the resistance. Human resistance seems to be based on a preference for the objects of intentional consciousness, which intensifies ego-gratification and a desire to remain within the realm of thing-reality where intentional consciousness can exercise a power and mastery entirely denied to it in the realm of It-reality. Augustine recognizes that the basic motivation for wrongdoing was not simply enslavement to appetites--there was no *libido* for pears--but was rather *superbia*, which, he says, imitates the *celsitudo* (II, 6) of God Who is *unus super omnia deus excelsus*. Pride means that the soul seeks not to participate in a higher reality but to master and control objective reality as the soul imagines a God masters and controls it. Augustine asks "*Quid ergo in illo furto ego dilexi, et in quo dominum meum vel vitiose atque perverse imitatus sum?*" [II, 4] Pride is the disorder of attempting to reproduce, in the isolated

microcosm of intentional consciousness, a simulated divine realm in which the self-will assumes the role of *dominus deus*.

But the proud love of wrongdoing turns out to be *gratis malus* and the love of nothing. It is the refusal to participate in reality, a demand that reality conform to the soul's own wishes, the love of a *celsitudo* that deceives the soul into believing that it is God-like. It is here in Book II that Augustine first uses the word *abyssus* for the spiritual suffering, the helplessness, groundlessness, and death, in the mysterious depths of resistance to true Goodness: *ecce cor meum, quod miseratus es in imo abyssi*. [II, 4] The abyss is the distance from God, the immersion in intentional consciousness that isolates the soul and causes it to "love" precisely that which isolates it. All this psychological complication Augustine captures in the compact question "*Quis exaperit istam tortuosissimam et implicatissimam nodositatem?*" [II, 10] This "most intricate and entangled knottiness" is the source of *miseria* because the soul persists in pursuing fruitless desires that are quickly surfeited even as it purports to be seeking lasting happiness. As soon as they had carried off the stolen pears Augustine and the other boys lost all interest in them and were left with the nothingness of self-will. The constant satisfaction of desires for control of objects in order to provide the soul with the illusion of power and security merely increases the soul's sense of desolation, Augustine's meaning when he says that in his youth he became to himself a *regio egestatis*, a wasteland. By contrast the mature Augustine realizes that his soul really desires a participation in luminous subjectivity, which he finds himself longing for with *insatiabili satiete*. (II, 10) The soul's hunger to participate in actual divine existence, not the mere imitation of it, is like a physical hunger that, rather than being sated, intensifies with each taste of food. Intentional consciousness seeks to abolish tension and

minimize consciousness itself by satisfying all desires as quickly as possible, but participatory consciousness finds its fulfillment only through boundlessly increasing the tension.

The reciprocal of anoetic isolation is society, in the sense of an aggregate of isolated, self-centered individuals who associate with each other in order to further their own gratifications. In stealing the pears Augustine first encountered the nihilistic effects of this kind of society, for he would never have stolen the pears by himself. This *nimis inimica amicitia* [II, 9] drives conduct and consciousness toward the lowest level as the members of society give free reign to their desires to provide themselves with their own happiness and obliterate their existential tensions and anxieties, for the drive to willful action is an intentional consciousness that seeks only what Hobbes later called "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death," a desire that seeks "not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time, but to assure forever the way of future desire." (*Leviathan* I, 11). Such a minimal, infantile level of consciousness in which the psyche, by seeking to create a stable ground of existence through its own powers, is actually fleeing the ground of stability, is what Augustine means by the *violentia consuetudinis*, the impetuosity of the habit of acting on desires with minimum consciousness, a habit that eventually becomes a necessity because the egocentric consciousness believes it will find its security in the power to gratify its own desires.xii [12]

Not long after Augustine's involvement in resistance through theft he arrived in Carthage to continue his studies, a city he found rife with every sort of vice and disorder. While hurling himself into this sizzling frying pan, this maelstrom of desires and passions that were violent in their complete lack of noetic rationality in the sense of orienting the soul toward the true ground and *stabilitas*, he also experienced the dawning of the consciousness of the Beyond and became

more explicitly aware of himself, indeed of all creatures, as in-between being and non-being, a condition seemingly perilous and fraught with existential anxiety. Reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, in his nineteenth year, awakened in him a burning desire to abandon earthly delights for divine Wisdom, although he did not know what God was going to do with him (*inmortalitatem sapientiae concupiscebam aestu cordis incredibili, et surgere coeperam, ut ad te redirem* ♡. *Quomodo ardebam, deus meus, quomodo ardebam revolare a terrenis ad te, et nesciebam quid ageres mecum!*). Yet, despite all his ardor, as soon as he began to study Scripture he judged it as a rhetorician, finding it stylistically much inferior to Cicero and therefore unworthy of interest.

To simplify, it is already apparent that Augustine's story is a dialectic of powerful attraction and almost equally powerful resistance to something greater than himself. In his infancy and boyhood he experienced the attraction to pleasures that led him to resist the authority of adults. During his Manichean years he gradually internalized this awareness, when he was attracted to divine Truth while believing he resisted because of an evil divine agent within him. At the time of his conversion struggle he unmasked the resister and found himself.

As his attraction toward participatory consciousness developed he became increasingly aware of mysterious depths of existence that his consciousness could not penetrate. He gropes for language, in various places in the *Confessions*, to communicate the enigmatic source of knowledge and consciousness where he intermittently finds solitude with God: *intime, grande profundum est ipse homo, fundus arcanus, homo interior, in animo meo ex intimo corde meo* (IV, 13), even, perhaps most intimately, *in cubiculo nostro, corde meo* (our bedchamber, my heart). (VIII, 8) He is aware of a reality--Truth, Beauty, Good--transcending the material things of the

world, but he does not grasp how he is aware of those non-thingly realities or what they meant for his life and happiness. He sought to know what beauty is and why it attracts us so powerfully, and he began to see the difference between what is and what becomes. But why we should seek Beauty at all, rather than fame, wealth, honors, and pleasures, was a question he could not yet answer.

At one point Augustine, admiring Epicurus, put to his friends Alypius and Nebridius the question why we would not be happy (*beati*) and in need of nothing more if we could be immortal and enjoy bodily pleasures perpetually, without fear of losing them. By the time he wrote the *Confessions* this imaginary *beatitudo* in the mastery of the world of desired objects had shriveled to *magna miseria* because of this scenario's absence of participatory consciousness. Yet Augustine, no longer *demersus et caecus*, now sees *ex intimo* that as he becomes *miserior* God becomes *propinquior*, that is, paradoxically when Augustine thought he was fleeing God he was actually being drawn closer. Yet, blind though he may have been, nonetheless, from the time that he read the *Hortensius* and soon thereafter fell in with the Manichees he longed ardently for something more, without knowing how to attain it. *O veritas, veritas, quam intime etiam tum medullae animi mei suspirabant tibi* (III, 6)xiii [13] In short, from at least his nineteenth year Augustine had begun to awaken to the paradox of consciousness, a paradox from which he sought to escape, in the only ways he could then imagine, either by a life of seeking participation in Wisdom with no desires for earthly pleasures or by finding complete happiness in the satisfaction of earthly desires. Feeling himself strongly pulled in two opposite, irreconcilable directions, he outwardly pursued the second while his ardent longing for the first gradually intensified.

One moment of epiphany in which Augustine became acutely conscious of the widening rift between his life seeking security according to the terms of intentional consciousness and the deeper aspirations of his soul occurred in Milan, when he had reached the point in his career at which he expected to win the applause of the crowd and the friendship of the powerful by eulogizing the emperor in terms that he and everyone else knew perfectly well were the lies and flattery of rhetorical and political convention. His heart eagerly desiring (*anhelaret*) such an advancement of his career, he was boiling with the fever of these consuming thoughts (*cogitationum tabificarum febribus aestuaret*, Book VI, 6) when he passed a somewhat inebriated and rather cheerful beggar who seemed far more contented with his lowly condition than Augustine had ever felt with his promising career. Suddenly the façade of Augustine's prospective success and happiness disintegrated, filling him with envy of the beggar's life of temporal happiness without the tension and uncertainty of struggling to attain elusive goals only to find them, when finally reached, not so satisfying in the realization as they had been in anticipation, and he began to comment to his companions on the *multos dolores insaniarum nostrarum*. He knew that though his career might well prosper his soul was *misera*, although he did not yet know what to do about it. He knew only that he desired *securam laetitiam pervenire*, which the beggar seemed to have attained, at least in some superficial sense, without difficult labor. Yet he also recognized that he, perversely, preferred his misery to the beggar's superficial cheerfulness. He was aware that he felt superior because of his learning but did not rejoice in it and used it, not to instruct others, but only to gain their admiration. One might also argue that Augustine could see his successes as sorrows because he lived, at least partly, in a higher consciousness that was drawing him, despite his resistance, to a higher life that he desired without being in a hurry to pay the price, giving up power, in order to reach it. The cheerfulness

of the beggar seemed to be more akin to Augustine's earliest state of minimally conscious contentedness in the satisfaction of basic needs.


Of course, the culmination of Augustine's struggle to find happiness through participation in the quest for Truth comes in Book VIII, which dilates the actual crisis-time of his inner transformation and puts it under a magnifying glass so that he can examine and evaluate every detail of the process. He had been approaching, and backing away from, this moment for some time, but when it arrived he was taken aback by the ferocity of his internal resistance to a complete surrender to the life of participation. He says that he was strongly attracted to following Christ but annoyed by the straitness of the way (*et placebat via, ipse salvator, et ire per eius angustias adhuc pigebat.*) Intentional consciousness resists yielding its pleasure in the power to gratify the self. Even though he blazed up (*exarsi*) with the desire to imitate Victorinus, who had overcome his reluctance and embarrassment to publicly announce his conversion to Christ, still he hesitated, wavered, and resisted. He sighed (*suspirabam*) for an opportunity to give himself over entirely to living for God, yet his *ferrea voluntas* forbade it. His iron will, his old will that security and happiness would be found only in acquiring power over the things of intentional consciousness, became the chain that constricted him, the same chain of habit and mortality that he said in Book IV was deafening him to God with its constant rattling. But there had grown in his soul a *nova voluntas* which, although not yet strong enough to quash the old will, made adamant by its long duration, was able to contest it. *Ita duae voluntates meae, una vetus, alia nova, illa carnalis, illa spiritalis, confligebant inter se, atque discordando dissipabant animam meam.* Like two military forces the two wills, one of the flesh and the other of the spirit, one of intentional consciousness and the other grounded in

participatory consciousness, engaged each other in a conflict that seemed to him then to be breaking up and destroying his soul.

Augustine reached this point only because, despite all the sins he laments, his soul had long been in constant dialogue with God, although he does not seem to have reached the full consciousness of his free will. As he wrote in Book IV, *ego conabar ad te et repellebar abs te, ut saperem mortem, quoniam superbis resistis*, (IV, 5) and in Book VII, *Et non stabam frui deo meo, sed rapiebar ad te decore tuo, moxque diripiebar abs te pondere meo, et ruebam in ista cum gemitu; et pondus hoc consuetude carnalis*. (VII, 17) The verbs that he uses, *rapio* and *diripio*, suggest that he thought of himself as passively snatched by God and then snatched back by the weight of his desires for earthly pleasures, without his having willed either.

Moments of blazing ardor and even visions of God (such as the vision he describes in VII, 10) alternated with long periods of immersion in secular ambitions until Augustine finally realized that to find God he had to abandon desires and withdraw into the depths of his soul. But his long-established custom of living had become strong against him *quoniam volens quo nollem perveneram*. Augustine had arrived at the center of the knottiness of consciousness where he had to make the transition to luminous participatory consciousness, even though that meant willing to die to an intentional consciousness that he yet willed to follow, a prospect of death that aroused the fear of the loss of being by entering into the unknown. Referring to Romans vii, 23 Augustine decides that the law of sin in his members is the *violentia consuetudinis, qua trahitur et tenetur etiam invitus animus*. The mind deserves this captivity because it originally willed it, even though it now seeks to will something quite different. In his conflict of wills Augustine is caught in the paradox of consciousness: he lives as a subject pursuing objects of desire, but he is

pulled into the in-between, participatory consciousness in whose light he sees the severely limited capability of intentional consciousness to satisfy his soul.

The visit of Ponticianus and his tale of the conversion of comrades (*contubernales*) who were inspired by the story of St. Anthony served as the catalyst that finally completed Augustine's own *metanoia*. While Ponticianus was speaking Augustine heard God speaking through him, revealing to him *quam turpis* , *quam distortus et sordidus, maculosus et ulcerosus*, how entirely lacking in beauty he was. Of course, what makes Augustine able to see himself as flawed is his luminous consciousness of God as Perfect Beauty and Good.

Augustine found himself internally divided, which he first characterizes as a struggle between himself, attempting to seek God, and his soul, which resisted without defending its resistance (*renitebatur, recusabat et non se excusabat*). It would be more accurate, however, to say that Augustine had always been internally divided as his soul struggled to find its balance in the paradox of consciousness. Augustine finally entered into the most intense stage of the struggle with himself, a somewhat paradoxical process that he characterizes in the compact phrase *insaniebam salubriter et moriebar vitaliter*.xiv [14] From the standpoint of the consciousness that informed his previous life he was acting like a madman and dying, but from the standpoint of the participatory consciousness he was becoming healthy and very much alive. The two were inseparable, for he could not attain the new life without dying to the old belief in the soul's own power and self-sufficiency.

Augustine recognized that to enter into God's will and covenant all he needed to do was will it, but this was the difficulty, for although he did will it he also did not will it. Unlike his body, which obeys every slight motion of his will, his mind does not: *imperat animus corpori, et*

paretur statim: imperat animus sibi, et resistitur. (VIII, 9) After some reflection Augustine concludes that it is not a source of amazement (*monstrum*) that the will is not obeyed by the mind, for the will simply does not command *plene*: the weight of custom hinders the mind, which is not unified because it is caught up in the paradox of consciousness: the more consciousness seeks participation the less it can enjoy the power and pleasure of control over objects, yet it must continue to possess intentional consciousness while living in the world of objects. There is resistance either way. The resistance to the life according to custom is the soul's profound and innate dissatisfaction with an existence that lacks transcendence. But the quest for transcendence meets resistance in the soul's fear of a life that seems to be without power and security. This one consciousness that exists in two dimensions is the basis of Augustine's internal strife, his apparent split into two hostile camps: *ego eram, qui volebam, ego, qui nolebam; ego eram. nec plene volebam nec plene nolebam. ideo mecum contendebam et dissipabar a me ipso.* The paradox of consciousness produces a paradoxically self-contradicting will.

Approaching and being pulled back from the goal of saying Yes unequivocally, Augustine could not quite grasp it, *haesitans mori morti et vitae vivere.* The death to which he seeks to die still seems like life, and the life to which he aspires also fills him with horror at what he must surrender. Finally a secret contemplation (*alta consideratio*) drew from the *fundus arcanus* of his soul all of his misery, along with a flood of tears, and he heard the mysterious voice chanting *tolle lege, tolle lege*, which moved him to read the passage from Romans that definitively decided the matter for him. The *fundus arcanus* is the mysterious depth where God dwells in and speaks to the soul. It is below, or beyond, the reach of Augustine's consciousness, but it radiates into consciousness; it is the *omphalos* where *miseria* is assuaged by *misericordia*.

It is, in fact, a sign of Augustine's growth in consciousness that he can even conceive of a secret, personal, intimate, mysterious foundation of his soul, for the intentional consciousness, with its fixation on perceived objects and how they are related to the psyche, has no sense of mysterious hidden depths that are beyond its grasp. Like *imo abyssi* the concept, or symbol, of *fundus arcanus* can exist only within a participatory consciousness that has become open to the mystery of existence. Underneath Augustine's flow of words the reader becomes increasingly aware of the ineffable mystery of divine presence within the soul, a mystery that silently communicates everything. It is the world and the intentional consciousness of it that, when isolated from the participatory consciousness, is filled with noise and confusion while leaving the soul empty. Augustine can describe the internal effects of his resistance to and acceptance of the divine indwelling but he cannot grasp or even be conscious of the divine presence itself as an object.xv [15] He can only accept participation in it in faith, trust, and love, for this is the inner source of grace.

His free will is also a mystery. It seems not to have played a part in his many years of searching but only at the crisis-moment of decision: *de quo imo altoque secreto evocatum est in momento liberum arbitrium meum, quo subderem cervicem leni iugo tuo, et umeros levi sarcinae tuae, Christe Iesu, adiutor meus et redemptor meus?* What "evoked" his free will? Why did what once had seemed horrifying, giving up a life of pleasure, now seem *suave subito?* Augustine resorts to the passive--*evocatum est*--to refer to his consciousness of his free will, and here seems to be the ground of his later disagreement with Pelagius, for Augustine does not really know how the tumult dissolved into sweetness. He does not really know how his "iron will" vanished or how he was cured of all his feverishness or how he stopped resisting.xvi [16] His explanation will eventually be "grace."

Why was the resistance so strong in the first place, especially considering Augustine's ardent desire for Truth? The intensity of the resistance, the strong inclination to love transitory things, the crushing weight of habit, is the basis of Augustine's later conviction that human nature is corrupted, and the difference between Augustine's pre-conversion and post-conversion states of consciousness is apparent in the transformation of language. All of the once pleasing things of the world that he had sought as the desirable grounds of happiness are diminished to *inania, vanitas, nugae, mortalitas*. Formerly delightful pleasures have become *foedi, flagitiosi, turpes*, and the actions that yielded them have become *peccata, iniquitates, facinora, insania, dementia, miseria, fornicatio*. The essential idea is a void, almost an absence of goodness, an inability to satisfy desires that the soul must satisfy. On the other hand, what he had once fled as the loss of happiness is now the only source of *salus* and *vita*, namely, surrender of his will to God. Fullness had become emptiness and emptiness fullness.

In a sense, the will is the soul's power to determine whether or not it will accept existence in the community of participatory consciousness. The soul can choose to accept participatory consciousness and live with the forces that will continue to resist this, or it can choose to reject such consciousness and live with the resistance to the rejection. As Voegelin put it, "The thinker engaged in the formative quest is a human being plagued by the forces of self-assertive resistance in his soul just as much as his counterpart, the resister to the paradoxical structure of consciousness-reality, is plagued by the truth of reality." xvii [17] For many years Augustine experienced the latter, as Truth would not let him find rest in thing-reality, and his decision to enter into participatory-consciousness presents him with the problem of dealing with continued resistance, as he documents in his list of temptations in Book X.

Even though his freely-willed conversion is the culmination of the story, it is actually placed in the middle of the book. In writing the story of his quest for Truth Augustine was "conscious of a Beginning beyond the beginning and of an End beyond the end of his story."xviii [18] Augustine could not end the story with his conversion or baptism because that would leave out the context of his search. Therefore, in Book IX he tells the story of his mother's life and death, for having given birth to him Monica was, in a sense, his earthly beginning, and her death is also the end of Augustine's narrative. He symbolizes his new life in solitude with God and the community of being in the story of the conversational vision of heaven that he shared with Monica shortly before her death. Beyond the story of his mother is the dimension of memory in which he must search for his past and identity, and for God, and beyond that is the mysterious reality of the time in which he has lived and which is preserved in his memory. The end of the *Confessions* is a lengthy discussion of the Beginning beyond his beginning, God's Creation of the world.

All of this is a response to the God Who draws him through time to eternity. Augustine confesses so that he can make known to himself what is already known to God in order to increase and deepen his participation in luminous consciousness. Although the dialogue between the soul and God is outwardly expressed in terms of the words used by the soul, the actual communion is silent, as Augustine describes his initial discovery of the mysterious depths of his soul in Book VII chapter 10. With God as his *dux* and *adiutor* he entered into his *intima* and saw, with the eye of his soul that above this eye and above his mind was a *lux incommutabilis*. It was above him not in a spatial sense but in a metaphysical sense, *quia ipsa fecit me*. This is followed by a passage in which Augustine struggles to put the ineffable light into words: *qui novit veritatem, novit eam, et qui novit eam, novit aeternitatem. caritas novit eam. o aeterna*

veritas et vera caritas et cara aeternitas! Tu es deus meus ♦ *et eum te primum cognovi, tu assumisti me, ut viderem esse, quod viderem, et nondum me esse, qui viderem.* Since light, truth, and eternity are the same, those who one know this mysterious reality, and they know unchanging Being. *Caritas*, (meaning love, affection, dearness, high price), the love that makes sacrifices, knows the light. That is, such knowledge requires being in a certain state of soul, a state that Augustine had not yet attained. God helped him to see that there was a greater reality to see, even though Augustine could not yet see what it was, that is he entered into participatory consciousness. His cycle of eternal truth, true love, and beloved eternity is simply a way of invoking what he had become conscious of but could not yet, if ever, fully articulate.

The *Confessions* is a speech, but whose speech is it? It is Augustine's response to God, but it is also God's response to Augustine. At the heart of the hundreds of pages of speech is the profound silence of Augustine's solitude in communion with God. The only way in which Augustine can communicate the mystery of the silence is through words. As Voegelin put it, "In reflective distance, the questioner rather experiences his speech as the divine silence breaking creatively forth in the imaginative word that will illuminate the quest as the questioner's movement of return to the ineffable silence. The quest, thus, has no external ♦ object,' but is reality itself becoming luminous for its movement from the ineffable, through the Cosmos, to the ineffable."xix [19] The reader first hears Augustine's questions in the language of intentional consciousness but, with patience, can eventually discern the silent response.

i [1] Eric Voegelin, "Anxiety and Reason," in *What Is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings*, in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Vol. 28, ed. by Thomas A. Hollweck and Paul Caringella. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 69, 71.

ii [2] Ibid., 90.

iii [3] Eric Voegelin, *In Search of Order (Order and History, Volume V)* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 15.

iv [4] Ibid., 16.

v [5] Ibid., 20.

vi [6] Ibid., 20.

vii [7] *In Search of Order*, 25.

viii [8] Ibid., 24.

ix [9] Ibid., 25.

x [10] He does mention some of these matters later. Had he been writing the autobiography of a celebrated rhetorician and lawyer he very likely would have weighed these details of his humble origins differently.

xi [11] Augustine the rhetorician loved to play with terms such as these, for example in the passage *Quid enim miserius misero non miserante se ipsum* (I, 13)

xii [12] The language that Augustine uses for the *violentia* of his secular strivings is often quite turbulent in its forces-of-nature metaphors. Regarding stage-plays, for example, Augustine finds a pseudo-*miser cordia* in the members of the audience who feel a kind of friendship for the suffering characters in the play, but this compassion is a feeling that provides them with pleasure rather than moving them to assist the sufferer. This life according to the pleasures of feelings is one that to Augustine *decurrit in torrentem picis bullientis, aestus immanes taetrarum libidinem, in quos ipsa mutatur, et vertitur per nutum proprium de caelesti serenitate detorta atque deiecta*. [III, 2]

xiii [13] Similar statements are *Quomodo ardebam, deus meus, quomodo ardebam revolare a terrenis ad te, et nesciebam quid ageres mecum!* (III, 4) *At ego nec priori illa, sed te ipsam, veritas, in qua non est conmutatio nec momenti obumbratio, esuriebam et sitiebam*. (III, 6)

xiv [14] The *Confessions* is filled with paradoxes, partly as a rhetorical technique but primarily because Augustine is trying to express a paradoxical reality. As Voegelin explained, "There is no autonomous, non-paradoxical language, ready to be used by man as a system of signs when he wants to refer to the paradoxical structures of reality and consciousness. Words and their meanings are just as much a part of the reality to which they refer as the being things are partners in the comprehending reality; language participates in the paradox of a quest that lets reality become luminous for its truth by pursuing truth as a thing intended." (*In Search of Order*, 17) The paradox is inescapable because the It-reality, which cannot be grasped, can be referred to only in terms of Thing-reality language that does profess to grasp and define objective reality. Statements about the It-reality are true, but also not true. To complicate matters further, the Thing-reality is in-between Being and non-being, so that things partly are and partly are not. For example, Augustine's attempt early in Book IV to answer the question what God is shows the unavoidability of paradox in using the language of thing-reality to characterize Transcendence: *semper agens, semper quietus, collagens et non egens* *quaerens, cum nihil desit tibi. Amas nec aestuas, zelas et securus es; paenitet te et non doles* (I, 4), or his statement that God is *miser corditer saeviens*

(II, 2) Only a soul struggling to find its balance in the tension and its ground of existence could experience "merciful cruelty." Thus, the *Confessions* transforms the rhetorical language of power-seeking to serve as the honey that will entice the reader, not to swallow the wormwood, but to become enthralled by the supersensory, transcendent sweetness of God.

xv [15] "Plato carefully stresses that ♦the divine' cannot be discerned by itself alone; there is no participation in ♦the divine' but through the exploration of the ♦things' in which it is discerned as formatively present." *In Search of Order*, 103.

xvi [16] Within a few years of writing the *Confessions* he became embroiled in the lengthy dispute with the Pelagians over the question how much free will human beings actually have. Pelagius believed that Augustine's position, that original Sin had corrupted human nature so that it was incapable of responding to God without the grace to move the will, effectively undermined human freedom, attributing to God the source of all good choices. Augustine, on the other hand, argued that human nature could not freely respond to God by its own power, for all of its power was a gift from God. Pelagius believed that Adam had harmed human nature only by bad example and Christ had saved it only through good example and "asserted that the general grace of God in the endowment of human nature enabled us, if we were willing, to perform His will." [John Ferguson, *Pelagius: A Historical and Theological Study*, (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1956), 172-73] To Augustine the critical question is that of how we become willing. He believed that our tendency to resist God's will was too strong for us to bring ourselves to acceptance by our own powers, and the strong tendency to resist, given the Absolute Goodness of God, was explainable only on the assumption of human incapacity through corruption.

To some extent the disagreement between Augustine and Pelagius is, as Ferguson observes, essentially a difference of emphasis, but the question of the corruption of human nature is more than this. In his *Confessions* Augustine analyzes his own response to God and it seems to be on the basis of his own personal experience of divine initiative and the difficulty of his response that the corruption of human nature interpretation made sense to him. But what he understood as the corruption of human nature acquires meaning only in the effort to articulate the internal experience of searching for Truth against all the internal resistance to the search, the experience that Augustine analyzes in detail in the *Confessions*.

xvii [17] *In Search of Order*, 39.

xviii [18] *Ibid.*, 29.

xix [19] *In Search of Order*, 103.