

Davi Chang Ribeiro Lin

**“RELATIONAL CONFESSION AS THERAPY OF THE HEART?”
A POSTMODERN DIALOGUE BETWEEN
AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO’S CONFESSIONS AND
ELEMENTARY EXPERIENCE IN PSYCHOLOGY**

Tese de Doutorado em Teologia

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Belo Horizonte

Faculdade Jesuíta de Filosofia e Teologia

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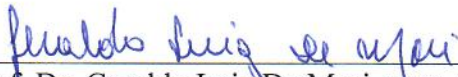
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Esta Tese foi julgada adequada à obtenção do título de Doutor em Teologia e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Curso de Doutorado em Teologia da Faculdade Jesuíta de Filosofia e Teologia.

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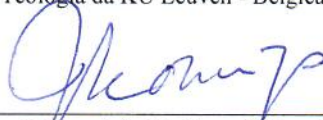
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ABSTRACT

Faced against contemporary individualism and modern autonomy, Augustine of Hippo can be a source of inspiration to contemporary times as *Confessions* brings a vision of relationality that is therapeutic to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Three modes of interaction between Augustine and therapy will be discussed throughout this work: the ‘historical’, Augustine’s confessional therapy within the fourth and fifth century context; the ‘appropriation of the Augustinian therapeutic ideas’ in contemporary psychology and in postmodern thought; and ‘interdisciplinary’ or ‘concepts in dialogue’ method, entailing Augustine’s idea of heart and Miguel Mahfoud’s Elementary Experience in Psychology.

The first part discusses therapy in *Confessions* in a historical perspective, under the axis of theography, dialogical language and therapeutic proposal. Augustine’s *Confessions* is a theography, a story that includes autobiographical content but points beyond itself. As dialogical language, *confessio* is a response to God’s healing grace through the psalms, creational personhood, the double movement of confession (sin, praise) and the confessing community of one heart. As therapeutic proposal, Augustine adapts the ancient philosophical therapeutic ideal through confession, opening the wounds, praising the doctor. The medical metaphor of patient-physician articulates a theological-Christological model of therapy. Augustine’s *Confessions* are a relational theographical narrative with a confessional language that carries therapeutic consequences to himself and his audience.

Secondly, we describe how Augustine’s *Confessions* therapeutic model has been interpreted by psychologists and postmodern readers; the reception of his therapeutic ideal is generally poorly understood by contemporary psychology, a perspective that often results in pathologizing his life events. Postmodern authors reinterpret Augustine’s therapeutic proposal by keeping it partially, finding in Augustine a partner to subvert the modern autonomous subject, but deconstructing the properly Augustinian idea of therapy by confession.

Thirdly, considering the need for an interdisciplinary approach, we place Augustine in dialogue with a psychological approach that is born out of the interaction between philosophy and theology. Miguel Mahfoud’s Elementary Experience in Psychology (EEP), in dialogue with phenomenological psychology and Luigi Giussani’s *The Religious Sense*, re-contextualizes the Augustinian perspective with a comparable Augustinian call to return to one’s heart, adding to it experiential sensitivity and contemporary relevance.

RESUMO

Diante do individualismo contemporâneo e da autonomia moderna, Agostinho de Hipona pode ser uma fonte de inspiração para os tempos atuais, visto que *Confissões* traz uma visão de relacionalidade que é terapêutica para os desafios do século XXI.

Três modos de interação entre Agostinho e a terapia serão discutidos: a “histórica”, a terapia confessional de Agostinho dentro do contexto do 4º e 5º século; a “apropriação das ideias terapêuticas agostinianas” na psicologia contemporânea e no pensamento pós-moderno; e "interdisciplinar" ou “conceitos em diálogo”, relacionando a ideia de coração de Agostinho e a Experiência Elementar em Psicologia de Miguel Mahfoud.

A primeira parte discute terapia em *Confissões* em uma perspectiva histórica, sob o eixo da “teografia”, linguagem dialógica e proposta terapêutica. As *Confissões* de Agostinho são uma “teografia”, uma história que inclui conteúdo autobiográfico, mas aponta para além de si mesmo. Enquanto linguagem dialógica, *confessio* é uma resposta à graça curadora de Deus através dos salmos, personalidade criacional, o duplo movimento da confissão (pecado, louvor) e a comunidade confessante de um só coração. Como proposta terapêutica, Agostinho adapta o antigo ideal terapêutico filosófico através da confissão, abrindo as feridas, louvando o médico. A metáfora do médico-paciente articula um modelo teológico-cristológico de terapia. As *Confissões* de Agostinho são uma narrativa teográfica relacional com uma linguagem confessional que traz consequências terapêuticas para si mesmo e para sua audiência.

Em segundo lugar, busca-se descrever como o modelo terapêutico de *Confissões* de Agostinho foi interpretado por psicólogos e leitores pós-modernos; a recepção de seu ideal terapêutico é geralmente mal compreendida pela psicologia contemporânea, muitas vezes uma perspectiva que patologiza os eventos de sua vida. Os autores pós-modernos reinterpretem a proposta terapêutica de Agostinho, mantendo-a parcialmente, encontrando em Agostinho um parceiro para subverter o sujeito autônomo moderno, mas desconstruindo a ideia propriamente agostiniana de terapia por meio da confissão.

Em terceiro lugar, considerando a necessidade de uma abordagem interdisciplinar, colocamos Agostinho em diálogo com uma abordagem psicológica que nasce da interação entre filosofia e teologia. A Experiência Elementar em Psicologia (EEP) de Miguel Mahfoud, em diálogo com a psicologia fenomenológica e a obra *O Senso Religioso* de Luigi Giussani,

recontextualiza a perspectiva agostiniana com um chamado comparável ao “voltar ao coração” de Agostinho, acrescentando-lhe sensibilidade experiencial e relevância contemporânea.

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“What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (1 Co. 4.7)

This is not the work of a solitary journey. It is the fruit blossomed in a pilgrimage with those who invested in my life: it is a thesis in response to love.

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*This dissertation has used the Chicago Manual of Style for reference notes and bibliographical entries, as found in Kate L. Turabian, *Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

ABBREVIATION LIST: Augustine's Works Cited (Abbreviations, Titles, Editions, and Translations)

Abbreviations	Latin Titles	English Titles	Latin Edition	English Translation
<i>Civ. Dei</i>	<i>De civitate Dei</i>	<i>City of God</i>	CCL 47–48	WSA I.6 + 7
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i>	<i>Confessions</i>	CCL 27	WSA I.1 (1997)*
<i>doc. Chr.</i>	<i>De doctrina Christiana</i>	<i>On Christian Teaching/Doctrine</i>	CCL 32	WSA I.11 (1996)
<i>en. Ps.</i>	<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i>	<i>Explanations of the Psalms</i>	CCL 38–40	WSA III.14–17
<i>ench.</i>	<i>Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate</i>	<i>A Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love</i>	CCL 46	WSA I.8
<i>ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>	<i>Letters</i>		WSA II.1–3
<i>ep. Jo.</i>	<i>In epistulam Joannis ad Parthos tractatus</i>	<i>Tractates on the First Letter of John</i>		WSA III.13
<i>gr. et lib. arb.</i>	<i>De gratia et libero arbitrio</i>	<i>On Grace and Free Will</i>		WSA I.26
<i>gr. et pecc. or.</i>	<i>De gratia Christi et de peccato originali</i>	<i>On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin</i>		WSA I.23 (1997)
<i>Jo. ev. tr.</i>	<i>In Johannis evangelium tractatus</i>	<i>Tractates on the Gospel of John</i>	CCL 36	WSA III.12
<i>lib. arb.</i>	<i>De libero arbitrio</i>	<i>On Free Will</i>	CCL 29	WSA I.3
<i>mag.</i>	<i>De magistro</i>	<i>On the Teacher</i>	CCL 29	WSA I.3
<i>mus.</i>	<i>De musica</i>	<i>On Music</i>		WSA I.3
<i>persev.</i>	<i>De dono perseverantiae</i>	<i>On the Gift of Perseverance</i>		WSA I.26
<i>retr.</i>	<i>Retractationes</i>	<i>Reconsiderations</i>	CCL 57	WSA I.2
<i>rhet.</i>	<i>De rhetorica</i>	<i>On Rhetoric</i>		
<i>Sermo.</i>	<i>Sermones</i>	<i>Sermons</i>	CCL 41	WSA III.1–11
<i>Simpl.</i>	<i>Ad Simplicianum</i>	<i>To Simplicianus</i>	CCL 44	WSA I.12
<i>Sol.</i>	<i>Soliloquia</i>	<i>The Soliloquies</i>		WSA I.3
<i>Trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate</i>	<i>The Trinity</i>	CCL 50/50A	WSA I.5

*A note on English translations of *Confessions*: the regular citations are from Maria Boulding's excellent translation in *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, Hyde Park: New City Press, 1997. A few times, when indicated, I have opted for Henry Chadwick's equally suitable translation: Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

INTRODUCTION

Augustine of Hippo, through his major work *Confessions*, carries out a theologically informed relational confessional narrative that may become a therapeutic resource to tackle a contemporary problem, the individualistic self-centered life in twenty-first century societies.¹ The Augustinian confession, with its other-centered perspective, dialogical speech and Christian adaptation of ancient philosophical therapy can foster a theological anthropology with therapeutic implications² in the contemporary context of autonomous individuals. Augustine proposes the act of confession in the double meaning of *pecatti* and *laudis* (opening the wounds of sin, praising the doctor), intentionally placing himself in openness to an alterity in the wounded vulnerability of love, as a patient before his physician.

Augustine's therapeutic proposal, however, emerged in a specific historical setting, that of the fourth and fifth century adaptation of the ancient philosophical therapeutic ideals. Its philosophical and theological framework is foreign to the present-day context. If therapy in ancient times was a task of philosophy and theology, therapeutic approaches in the contemporary world tend to reject his ancient perspective. Furthermore, the pursuit of the therapeutic migrated in the nineteenth century to the newly found perspectives of psychology and psychotherapy, within a modern scientific mindset.

We have suggested a recovery of the Augustinian theological anthropology of relational confession in order to convey therapeutic implications to the contemporary individualistic context. This task, however, is faced with major challenges. The first of them is historical: considering the distance between the ancient and the contemporary contexts, their diverse worldviews and cultures, would it still be possible to express contemporarily the Augustinian *confessio*, marked by the intimate vulnerability of a responsive relationality? The second main limitation is the reception of Augustine's *Confessions* in contemporary psychology and philosophy. Can the Augustinian theological therapeutic perspective be

1. As individualism in western societies, I would highlight Western Europe and North America; but there is also a growing trend of individualism in developing nations, particularly in societies where a capitalist mindset has shaped consumer culture.

2. Paul R. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010); Mark J. Boone, *The Conversion and Therapy of Desire: Augustine's Theology of Desire in the Cassiciacum Dialogues* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2016). Discussions around Augustine's reception and transformation of a classical philosophy therapeutic model, or psychagogy ('therapy of the soul'), and his own practice as preacher with therapeutic intents have increased since Paul R. Kolbet's book.

understood and valued by proponents of contemporary approaches of therapy under a newly founded discipline of the nineteenth century, psychology and its psychotherapeutic models? Thirdly, among the many, could we find a perspective in psychology that challenges contemporary individualism, dialogues with Augustine's theological anthropology in truly interdisciplinary conversation, and conserves its integrity as psychology yet being open to contributions of the Augustinian tradition?

This project will be a journey of three distinct but related parts. Firstly, the 'historical' provides a necessary grounding to understand Augustine's confession and its therapeutic effects in the framework of his ancient times. We will discuss Augustine's *Confessions* and his understanding of the confessional act in a historical perspective, focusing on three topics, namely: a confessional narrative as theography (Other-centered rather than autobiographic), dialogical language and the Christian adaptation of ancient therapy. Augustine's *Confessions* can be read as a relational theographical story with a confessional language that carries therapeutic consequences to himself and his audience.

Secondly, this work discusses the 'appropriation of the Augustinian therapeutic ideas' in contemporary psychology and in postmodern thought. We are called to retrieve how Augustine's therapeutic ideas in *Confessions* have been comprehended by the proponents of contemporary therapy, such as psychologists, psychoanalysts and psychotherapists. The reception of his therapeutic perspective is generally poorly comprehended by contemporary psychology, imposing theoretical concepts in order to interpret his biography, a viewpoint that often pathologizes his life events. Furthermore, philosophers in the postmodern mindset make use of Augustine's *Confessions* to counter autonomy, questioning the self-centered modern self. Postmodern authors use Augustine as a partner to deconstruct what is considered the malaise of modernity, an autonomous self-centered subject. For Jacques Derrida, Augustine is a partner to convey the vulnerability of a wounded confession, but Augustine's own perspective seems to be lost in order to serve a deconstructionist approach.

Thirdly, considering the need for an interdisciplinary perspective that is more attuned to Augustine's relational therapy and does not set philosophy, psychology or theology as opposites but as differentiated complementarities, we seek to place in dialogue Augustine's idea of heart and Miguel Mahfoud's Elementary Experience in Psychology (EEP). Mahfoud weaves a therapeutic perspective through phenomenological psychology and the notion of elementary experience, proposed by theologian Luigi Giussani in the work *The Religious*

Sense. Even though within different frameworks, EEP expresses similarities with Augustine's concept of heart. EEP seeks to recognize humanity's experiential dynamism of the heart's moving restlessness towards the infinite in the form of original "needs" and evidences," setting implications for psychological and psychotherapeutic work. We seek to understand whether Miguel Mahfoud's *Elementary Experience in Psychology* updates Augustine's relational therapeutic personhood for a contemporary audience.

The need for a relational theological anthropology

Over the last decade, having worked both as a psychotherapist and as a pastor-theologian, I have heard suffering patients and been attentive to contexts that contribute to both mental health and psychological illnesses. In my experience as a psychotherapist using an existential-phenomenological approach, I have noticed the difference between the complaint (the initial symptom) and the most fundamental existential demands.

The complaint or initial symptom has tended to be the sign of a deeper relational disharmony. While using a phenomenological method of therapeutic listening, when digging beneath initial complaints and symptoms, evidence has pointed to legitimate demands for meaningful I-Thou relationships in the midst of an emerging impersonal generation. Apparently disconnected physical symptoms, such as anxiety, insomnia and depression, when explored during the therapeutic process, have revealed the difficulty of establishing healthy bonds in a generation that carries the marks of relational fragility. Psychological vulnerability could be related to the growing individualism that lacks authentic relational responsiveness in contemporary societies.³ If on the one hand a defining characteristic of this mismatch is the fragility and the fugacity of the affective ties, on the other there is the experience of an inattention to one's own experience, or an absence of understanding about one's own

3. For an interesting review on the influence of individualism on mental illness treatment, shortcomings of individualistic approaches to recovery and a call for a relational perspective, see the article by Rhys Price-Robertson, Angela Obradovic, and Brad Morgan, "Relational Recovery: Beyond Individualism in the Recovery Approach," *Advances in Mental Health* 15, no. 2 (2017): 108-120. For a cross-cultural comparative study and the influence of individualism on mental health, in which the authors argue that the way forward in mental health systems relies on developing, promoting and implementing approaches that acknowledge the relational nature of recovery, see the article by Mauricio S. Sierra-Siegert and Anthony David, "Depersonalization and Individualism: The Effect of Culture on Symptom Profiles in Panic Disorder," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 195, no. 12 (2007): 989-95.

interiority (in Augustinian terms), which generates the incapacity to recognize one's self and the other. The combination of both factors, the fragile bonds and the absence of attention to one's interior life, may forge an individualistic mindset that is poor in meaning.

Given this scenario, one of the challenges for Christianity today is to provide a theological anthropology that favors the growth of responsive personhood into an integrated personality, with a relational consciousness of self in openness towards the other. By knowing oneself in the light of knowing an alterity, Christian faith in its dialogical implications could foster true human encounters that take the human person beyond individualism and contemporary self-centeredness towards a fuller relational life. Furthermore, any genuine witness will become truly provocative if embodied as a relational experience. Christian faith in an individualistic context requires the building of an ethical community that experiences the recognition of self and that of the other as the condition for the fulfillment of the human person.

There is a particular contribution of theology when it dares to look for orientation in the past, aptly discerns the present, and suggests an open door to the future. The historical reference for this present work is theology birthed in the early church, particularly in the fourth and fifth century, which had to emphasize both the interpersonal nature of God and the uniqueness of each person of the Trinity. It was an intense exercise of reflection on self and othering, on what it meant to live relationally without losing one's own uniqueness. Then, it was linked to the need to respond to the questions raised by the debates around Trinitarian faith, which also produced different responses and Trinitarian traditions such as those from the East and West. Theology in the fourth century wrestled with the interpersonal nature of a Trinitarian understanding of God and the need to respond to the questions posed by the threat of heterodox Trinitarian tenets such as Arianism or Sabellianism. During the fourth century, theologians such as Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers emphasized that God and the human do not exist outside relationality. It was then that Christian faith, in its Trinitarian thought, affirmed that God exists only through relationality, and this reality establishes the ontological foundation of being: "communion becomes an ontological concept in patristic thought. Nothing in existence is conceived in itself, as an individual [...] since even God exists through an event of communion. In this manner the ancient world heard for the first

time that it is communion which makes being “be”: nothing exists without it, not even God.”⁴ Today, people in different parts of the world are bound to answer the challenges of a generation that seeks personal fulfillment and could use some of this integrated relational personhood inherited from the Christian tradition. Consequently, a theological anthropology in dialogue with the fourth and fifth centuries, the most relevant time for the articulation of Trinitarian theology and relational personhood, has a peculiar contribution to contemporary discussions.

Over the centuries, as modernity developed its roots in western culture and also pursued to eclipse the Christian narrative, the idea of human beings connected to transcendence, stemming from the theological Trinitarian view of God, was gradually substituted by a notion of human agency as an autonomous being with consciousness.⁵ The Christian understanding of persons as gifted by the other, with its long history in western thought,⁶ is replaced in modernity by the notion of an isolated individual, as the Latin word *individuum* attests.⁷

One of the interests of this work is an interdisciplinary dialogue between theology, psychology and psychotherapy. Psychology, a science born in the nineteenth century as a child of philosophy, is heir to modern thought that emphasizes an autonomous subject and does not necessarily have a strong concept of relational personhood. As a recipient of the Enlightenment scientific project, it can flirt with notions of self-sufficiency: in the philosophical anthropology that undergirds current psychological approaches, relationality does not necessarily occupy an important place.⁸ Since therapy of the soul is not anymore

4. Iōannēs Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999), 17.

5. Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 98.

6. Geraldo De Mori, “A Trajetória do Conceito de Pessoa no Ocidente,” *Theologica Xaveriana* 64, no. 177 (2014): 59-98; Bernard Meunier, *La personne et le Christianisme ancien* (Paris: Cerf, 2006); Johan De Tavernier, “The Historical Roots of Personalism,” *Ethical Perspectives* 16, no. 3 (2009): 361-392. On the topic of the historical development of the concept of person in the west, see the article of Geraldo De Mori. For the concept of person in patristic thought, see the book of Bernard Meunier and the article of Johan De Tavernier.

7. The Latin word for the English term “individual” is related to *individuum*, or an “indivisible thing”, which is the neuter of *individuus*, the “undivided” or “indivisible”. The terms express a shift, a transition from the idea of personhood to an undivided, isolated, unshared existence rather than a communal one. In the development of the idea, nominalism and William of Ockham paved the way for modernity through the notion that an individual exists by himself. The deepening of the autonomous “individual” in modern times is an indication that subjects in modernity do not have anymore, as in ancient and medieval anthropology, a strong relational ontology.

8. The consequence of an emphasis on the subject in 20th and 21st century psychology has been a fragmentation of approaches, which could lead to reductionist philosophical anthropologies undergirding psychotherapeutic models. Even though effective on their own terms, each perspective favors aspects that

under philosophy as it was in ancient thought but under psychological approaches, psychotherapeutic goals could be drawn within this historically biased reductionist framework, as Alasdair MacIntyre aptly observes.⁹ By losing the horizon of humanity founded on a giving personal relationality, models of current psychotherapy can reproduce the notions that human beings are able to find themselves through a quest for individual freedom without depending on intimate I-Thou relationships.

This project, therefore, is also a response to an impersonal context, seeking to recover the relational dimension of personhood. It places in dialogue the Augustinian therapeutic proposal, rooted in theological anthropology,¹⁰ and a psychological approach informed both by phenomenological psychology and theology, such as Miguel Mahfoud's *Elementary Experience in Psychology*. It could be a challenge and contribution of theology to integrate a therapeutic perspective in the contemporary context with a comprehensive vision that human beings exist only through relationality.

Augustine's contemporary significance

After so many centuries of generations affectionately interested in Augustine's most read work have passed and new ones have arisen, it seems that the bishop of Hippo has that perennial capacity to speak to readers of different centuries ever anew, even though the major themes and the most read books differ from age to age and reflect interests of each

support one's own psychological approach, but not necessarily carrying an in-depth, holistic, unbiased and comprehensive observation at the human phenomenon.

9. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. cor. (London: Duckworth, 1987); Peter McMyler, *Alasdair MacIntyre: Critic of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1994), 26. Peter McMyler, commenting on MacIntyre's insight, puts it clearly: "if the manager obliterates the manipulative/non-manipulative distinction at the level of the organization, the therapist obliterates it at the personal level. The manager treats ends as given and is concerned principally with technique, how to transform the resources at his/her disposal into a final product, e. g. investment into profits. The therapist also has a set of predetermined ends, to which to apply technique. Mental illness, frustration, dissatisfaction, etc. are to be transformed to create 'healthy', i. e. self-directed, organized contented individuals. But neither manager nor therapist can meaningfully argue about the moral content of ends."

10. Theological anthropology carries a particular contribution, since Christian faith understands not only the nature of God, but the human condition. And a theologically informed approach on psychology carries a complementary perspective, for human experience itself tells us how nature points to transcendence and disposes the heart to aspire for God.

generation.¹¹ Augustine lived during the decline of the Roman Empire, when the world thought of itself in collapse, but found a theological orientation to keep alive a vision of hope amidst the ruins. As in the past, new generations may still find in Augustine resources to carry forward hope in times of disintegration.

Augustine seems to be relevant today as he was to his own times for, in the contemporary technologically developed world that is also uncertain, humanity still lacks a vibrant vision of relational fulfilment that could sustain a deeper human experience in times of change and individualism. Augustine wrote *De Civitate Dei* questioning the loves of those under a crumbling Roman Empire; but the human capacity to love and live through ordered loves does not seem to have evolved since then. On the contrary, as Charles Taylor suggests, individualism has made lives in contemporary societies diminish in meaning: “the dark side of individualism is a centering on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes us poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others in society.”¹² herself the physic A person’s citizenship is determined by the quality of the objects of one’s love: “two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self” (*De Civ. Dei* 14.28).

According to Zygmunt Bauman, in post-war western societies the measure of life is not self-giving love but individual freedom,¹³ giving rise to an individualistic mentality. The notion of wholehearted commitment to someone or something is substituted by a “liquid life”, a precarious living under uncertain conditions; it is a life that cannot stand still.¹⁴ Every aspect of human life, such as jobs, relationships, ideals, seeks to be as fluid and flexible as a liquid. Modern society prefers liquid metaphors to the weight of solids, emphasizing impermanence and plasticity. The individual faces a dilemma, for on one side a person needs others as the air he breathes, but at the same time he is frightened of committing to relationships that restrain him in a context of unending motion.¹⁵

11. Karla Pollmann and Willemien Otten, eds., *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine 1-3* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). It is significant to point out that an interest in Augustine’s *Confessiones* increased only in modernity, when the question about what it meant to be an individual self was of greater interest. Before that, *De doctrina christiana* and *De civitate Dei* were his most read, quoted and copied books.

12. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 4.

13. Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 9.

14. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 2-3.

15. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

As in the contemporary globalized and migratory twenty-first century, Augustine also lived in “a culture of displaced persons”.¹⁶ Provincial families sought upward mobility through a greater connection to the realms of imperial power. Through a gifted son able in the art of rhetoric as Augustine, a family could climb the social ladder. In a hierarchical society such as fourth-century Roman Empire, prestige was bound to study and professional opportunities, which made willingness to relocate indispensable. Augustine’s particular historical context emphasized the readiness to dissolve habits of sociability and bonds of affection, a geographical and social movement. Since marriage in Roman society was a juridical agreement, alien to modern romantic expectations, marrying the right patron or “father-in-law” would have to wait for Augustine’s peak in his worldly career. Marriage, therefore, had to be postponed for the sake of a higher position that matched the ambitions of Augustine’s family. Consequently, the relational aspect of life was bound and subservient to the standards of individual success. Augustine’s biographical section in *Confessions* is a story of loss, of torn relationships, either by death or for the sake of upward mobility.¹⁷

Enrique Rojas, in his book *El hombre light* suggests that the main aspect of contemporary life is to take out the weight of things, a symptom of a deeper anthropological crisis. In the symbolic sense, “light” has become a way of life in contemporary materialistic societies. The volatile, the ethereal stands out in an era of moral emptiness: food without calories, beers without alcohol, tobacco without nicotine symbolically refer to the loss of meaning, one’s essential qualities and the emptying of human experience.¹⁸ As I have argued elsewhere,¹⁹ even though the weightless fluid way of life can be a sign of an anthropological crisis, there is also a positive side to a light culture, in its striving for a less anxious and healthier lifestyle. Weight withdrawal can also be seen in its balancing aspect, since it is a counterpoint to the heavy market demands, founded on productive results. Lightness could also mean a necessary withdrawal in the face of unjust standards, unnecessary competition and a burdened life based on obligations. As Eugen Biser noticed, Nietzsche had tried all his

16. Kate Cooper, “Love and Belonging, Loss and Betrayal in the *Confessions*,” in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 70.

17. *Ibid.*, 71.

18. Enrique Rojas, *El hombre light: una vida sin valores* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1992), 11-19.

19. Davi C. Ribeiro Lin, “Mi Peso es el Amor : La Concepción Cristiana del ‘Peso’ en el Diálogo con la Teleología del Amor en San Agustín” (paper presented at the VI Congreso Internacional de Literatura, Estética y Teología “El amado en el amante: figuras, textos y estilos del amor hecho historia”, Buenos Aires, May 17-19, 2016), accessed February 27, 2018, <http://bibliotecadigital.uca.edu.ar/repositorio/ponencias/peso-amor-concepcion-cristiana.pdf>.

life to fight a “spirit of gravity.”²⁰ It is to be observed, however, that the triumph over the imbalanced heavy existence does not happen in isolation, trying to get rid of the overloads and burdens. The Christian view is a paradoxical invitation to embrace a different kind of burden, an existence in which weight is not denied, but serves as a union with the cross. It is a call to embrace paradox, in which a hard burden becomes soft by the presence of Christ: “come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”²¹ Christ calls for an easy yoke and a light burden, but also imposes overloads. In Christ, harmony with the weighty cross becomes an invitation for communion.

In a “light”, fluid culture, the Judaeo-Christian tradition can speak again about love, relationality and the weight of love. Since the biblical Scriptures,²² weight has been understood not only in its physical aspects, but also theologically, with a teleological dimension: weight does not necessarily need to be taken out, but redirected to a suitable end. For Augustine, *pondus* or weight has a particular association to love:

In your Gift we find rest, and there we enjoy you. Our true place is where we find rest. We are borne toward it by love, and it is your good Spirit who lifts up our sunken nature from the gates of death. In goodness of will is our peace. A body gravitates to its proper place by its own weight. This weight does not necessarily drag it downward, but pulls it to the place proper to it: thus fire tends upward, a stone downward. Drawn by their weight, things seek their rightful places. If oil is poured into water, it will rise to the surface, but if water is poured onto oil it will sink below the oil: drawn by their weight, things seek their rightful places. They are not at rest as long as they are disordered, but once brought to order they find their rest. Now, my weight is my love, and wherever I am carried, it is this weight that carries me. Your Gift sets us afire and we are borne upward; we catch his flame and up we go. In our hearts we climb those upward paths, singing the songs of ascent.²³ (*Conf.* 13.9.10)

20. Eugen Biser, “The Scales of the Spirit: Nietzsche's Battle with the Spirit of Gravity,” *Concilium: International Journal for Theology* 95, no. 5 (1974): 46-66.

21. Matthew 11:28-30 ESV.

22. In biblical terms, to give weight or to gain it is related to glory and honour due to someone, as in the Hebrew word *kavod* and the apostle Paul's expression “the weight of glory”.

23. “In dono tuo requiescimus: ibi te fruimur. requies nostra locus noster. amor illuc attollit nos et spiritus tuus bonus exaltat humilitatem nostram de portis mortis. in bona voluntate pax nobis est. corpus pondere suo nititur ad locum suum. pondus non ad ima tantum est, sed ad locum suum. ignis sursum tendit, deorsum lapis; ponderibus suis aguntur, loca sua petunt. oleum infra aquam fusum super aquam attollitur, aqua supra oleum fusa infra oleum demergitur; ponderibus suis aguntur, loca sua petunt. minus ordinata inquieta sunt; ordinantur et quiescunt. pondus meum amor meus; eo feror, quocumque feror. dono tuo accendimur et sursum ferimur; inardescimus et imus.” (*Conf.* 13.9.10)

Augustine of Hippo works with a pre-newtonian notion of gravity, on which objects are impelled by their weight to their correct place in the cosmos. Likewise, love is the weight that directs the soul to its appropriate place: in the love ordered in God, the passage from restlessness to authentic rest is made. The Augustinian vision includes a movement, the teleology of desire and the affections to God and others. This self-emptying movement towards the Other/other challenges an individualistic *light* culture and its contemporary relational fragility as it inspires a life of union and dwelling in the loved being. Saint Augustine offers a vision in which weight is not contrary to movement, but a unitive dynamic force directed towards and moved by love: in this teleological view of love, it is both the end of human movement and the force that directs human movement towards that end. Moreover, the weight of love is not ‘passive’ weight, but one that moves people to their proper end and makes them leave self-centeredness. By moving restless hearts upwards, like fire, it is weight that brings us to our proper end: the Other, God, whom actually is our deepest core, *interior intimo meo et superior summo meo* (*Conf.* 3.6.11).

If Augustine were to live in the twenty-first century, he most likely would find it awkward that in contemporary societies “losing weight” and not uniting in love became the standard for the human experience of beauty. For Augustine, this is not true beauty, but only a mask that could prevent humanity to love transcendently, to love all things in God. The most beautiful one, “Beauty so ancient and so new” (*Conf.* 10.27.38), is mystically hidden, paradoxically, in the suffering weight of the cross, the gift of a divine exchange where Christ takes ugliness in order to make humanity beautiful. Through the incarnation of Christ, God acquires weight and physical materiality and through it love becomes a reality, filled with grace and truth. Divine action, creating and recreating Augustine, calls the bishop of Hippo to respond to the weight of God’s love. Since grace recreated his self, he must speak to God, he must pray: “to speak with”, a “sacrificial confession”, becomes his life (*Conf.* 12.24.33).

If the confessional act was important to establish meaning for Augustine, can a corresponding experience, portrayed in a text written 1600 years ago such as *Confessiones*, still carry validity, legitimacy and weight to a contemporary audience with a different worldview and mindset? One cannot deny the historical and contextual distance between Augustine and our times. The hermeneutical philosophy of Gadamer has correctly pointed out the limits of interpretation as even words and communication mean different things at

different ages, which points to the fact that knowledge and concepts are linguistically and historically situated. Nevertheless, Augustine's world and ours have resemblances. Both are times of transition and change. Augustine's context resembles ours as a global arena of conflicting ideas. Rather than the homogenized climate of the Middle Ages, the twenty-first century bears a resemblance to Augustine's times as there are conflicting ideas and worldviews, where bits of Christianity and intermingled with other bits of 'isms' in an intellectual stew pot.²⁴

Even though the technological, globalized world of the twenty-first century seems miles apart from Augustine's ancient milieu, at the same time it seems as fragile as in Augustine's days. The twenty-first century is surely an age of uncertainty. The contemporary world does not live the fall of the Roman Empire of Augustine's last days, when centuries of an ancient glorious civilization collapsed. However, even with so many advances in technology and the advent of the internet that could foster a higher integration and dialogue, still the generations of the twenty-first century seem to be on the verge of collapse, as the fragile balance of power between nations could destroy the planet itself in a matter of weeks. Similarly, our generation, as the one of Augustine, experiences the 'end' of grand security narratives. Evidence has pointed to a diminished global political stability: our times feature some interesting but dreadful similarities. Furthermore, even though the world has changed considerably, particularly the western worldview which Augustine has so influenced, the human heart still holds the same unquiet quest for meaning and purpose. In an individualistic environment that has rampantly taken hold of the west, the fundamental questions about transcendence and meaning still lie under the surface of a materialistic worldview. Contemporary societies, narrow in meaning and relationality, expect the language of renewal of life. Paraphrasing Augustine, even in a fluid state in darkness, there is still the anticipation for a fuller life, even when one is not presently living the life of happiness (*Conf* 13.4.5).

The substitution of embodied encounters by social media "confessions" are an evidence of the change in the form of speaking intimately in a personal I-thou relationship in the digital age. There are limits to encounters outside embodiment, as the body itself is a means of one's gift and presence to the other. Even though the content may remain the same,

24. John Rist, *On Ethics, Politics and Psychology in the Twenty-first Century*, Reading Augustine (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 2.

the medium of social virtual media could foster impersonal exchange. Surely the new technologies have brought new possibilities to dialogue between persons, diminished distances and opened new horizons to human communication. However, present evidence has also showed that true encounters cannot rely merely on technological means as Jacques Ellul had already pointed out over fifty years ago.²⁵ Even as technology decreases geographical distance, a journey towards a relationally fulfilled life could be miles away from one's gaze. If this generation is losing the ability to confess intimately and is exchanging embodied relationality for a digital faceless impersonal confession, patristic thought can be recovered as a partner to speak again anew not only the doctrinal content of an intrinsically relational Trinitarian faith, but as a model confessional language. In Augustine's *Confessions*, both content and form matter: the content expresses faith in what God has done in his life and in creation, seeking a response with personal love and affections; the form is prayerful, in humility and praise. Its content and form establish a relational speech expressing a life of intimacy that responds to the gift of love.

As a psychotherapist and also a pastor-theologian in the developing world with an Asian-Latin American background (as "Mestizo Augustine"²⁶) and having lived both in North-America and Europe, I have come to realize how individuals from all over the world, and particularly in western societies, live the drama of having all the technological means for deep connections, but lack true encounters. As anxiety and depression seem to rise all over, they act as signposts reminding that the deep questions about meaning and relational fulfilment cannot be extinguished. Augustine's theological vision of a dependent, loving response to God's love could help this generation understand T. S. Eliot's paradoxical call to be still and still moving to a further union, through the dark empty and cold desolation, but for a deeper communion through which human hearts are lifted up.

In vulnerability and in prayer, Augustine seeks God, a search marked by contingency and consciousness of difference. However, identity and significance are bound to

25. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Knopf, 1964). Jacques Ellul has acutely observed significant consequences of an increasingly technological society for human personal relationships in the age of "mass man". His observations about one's confidence in impersonal technology and the loss of the human authentic freedom have become even truer in a digital age.

26. Justo L. González, *The Mestizo Augustine: A Theologian between Two Cultures* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016). González portrays Augustine as a mestizo that lives between two cultures, on one hand, the African, that valued spontaneity and emotions, and the Roman that prized for rationality and order (25-26). Even though he embraces both, he does not properly belong to any of them, which is an interesting position to generate new theological synthesis.

a continual conversion in the relationship to the Other, within and beyond the self, an Other that converts me to His love. *Confessions* not only points to the continual need to self-giving in love, a relational narrative, but describes and proposes a relational reformation and a renewed personhood amidst vulnerability. Furthermore, as Augustine developed in *De Trinitate*, even God does not have a self-enclosed identity, but the relationship with the Son and the Spirit are essential to selfhood, for the Trinitarian persons subsist as a unity, in relationality. Likewise, humanity lives through an ontology of relational dependency. It is an identity in the other, with and through a relational encounter, a narrative of dislocation, but placed within a loving conversion.

Discussions questioning the relational character of Augustine's Trinitarian thought have been carried out over the last decades, particularly with the accusation that Augustine emphasizes unity rather than community, substance over relation. Catherine Mowry LaCugna argues that in Augustine's *De Trinitate* the unity of the Trinity undermines the economy and God's salvific acts in history.²⁷ A response is carried out by Sarah Heaner Lancaster, who nuances the controversial parts of *De Trinitate* setting them in the light of the work as a whole, arguing that Augustine is not to be regarded as a biased author emphasizing essence over relation, even though his work has been utilized in different ways in later centuries.²⁸ For Augustine, the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity, and his concern for unity is precisely struggling with the mystery of talking about one God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a unity that emphasizes a relational essence. "The unity that he sees, though, is not simply absolute. It is the unity of relational essence. Augustine's vision of God as three-personed substance may prove to have more similarities with contemporary concern for relationality than once thought."²⁹

A similar debate is carried out as Colin Gunton claimed that Augustine granted to the west a theological tradition with inadequacies. According to Gunton, Augustine's particular construal of the doctrine of God led to major problems in grasping the relationship between Trinity, creation and redemption. Gunton suggests that Augustine's mistake focuses

27. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

28. Sarah Heaner Lancaster, "Three-Personed Substance: The Relational Essence of the Triune God in Augustine's *De Trinitate*," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 60, no. 1 (January 1996): 123-139.

29. Lancaster, "Three-Personed Substance," 139.

on a singular unity at the expense of community, on substance rather than the three persons.³⁰ In Gunton's view, the unity of God was stressed at the expense of plurality and the material world was disparaged, as the fusion with neoplatonic thought did not allow room for a relational view of God. Furthermore, Augustine is accused of squandering Cappadocian theology, as if God would be a sort of indivisible community that set a priority of oneness over Threeness. This imbalance diminished the connection between who God is and what he does in history. Bradley Green's assessment of Gunton's reading of Augustine contests his understanding.³¹ Green aptly highlights the communal character of the Trinity: Augustine has a vigorous doctrine of the three Persons as dwelling in self-offering relational community. As the redeeming work of the Son is central to Augustine's theology, it becomes an intersection between creation and redemption, showing that revelation and creation are mediated by Christ. Furthermore, Green demonstrates that Augustine's communalism offers a remedy to individualism, and proposes recommendations on how Augustine's theology of the Trinity can be read relationally. Green suggests, however, that Gunton is right to point out that the western tradition highlighted the primacy of the one, but as a later overemphasis of certain elements in Augustine's works. In the overall, Green argues that Gunton misread Augustine, for the bishop of Hippo allowed much more room for a relational God than Colin Gunton acknowledges, which makes Augustine an 'ally' rather than an 'enemy' of Gunton's own Trinitarian theological perspectives.

Methodological considerations

Augustine's reasoning in *Confessions* is polyphony of the heart, which in turn makes him move in and out of diverse registers even within a sentence: "impassioned prayer, quiet narrative, Bible texts, quoted and recombined and expounded, philosophical analysis of a problem, evocation of the classical canon. This is 'polyphonic discourse', not a melodic line".³² Since his thought does not follow a rational definite route, but follows the heart

30. Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1991), 43.

31. Bradley G. Green, *Colin Gunton and the Failure of Augustine: The Theology of Colin Gunton in Light of Augustine* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011).

32. Gillian Clark, *Augustine: The Confessions*, Landmarks of World Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 37.

touched by God, Augustine's reasoning resists systematization.³³ Rather than a rationalism that only accepts what is demonstrated, Augustine's thought is *cardio*-intelligence, making truth (*facere ueritatem*) and loving rightly. Augustine's interest is not to expound analytically so that rational systematization enters the reader's head. Augustine joins God's way of dealing with humanity, writing to stir hearts rather than to stimulate brains. It is God who first moves human hearts to take pleasure and joy pleasing him (*Conf.* 1.1.1) and Augustine writes to stir the hearts to respond to God's love in return. But let us not superficially consider Augustine an incoherent or simply disorganized thinker, to risk realizing later our own inability to render or make sense of such a multi-layered book.³⁴ Augustine is an associative thinker, not a linear one. The main issue is not Augustine's disorganization or lack of objective unity, but an insufficiency of our post-Cartesian rationality to understand and connect elements beyond our customary rectilinear thinking. As Brachtendorf puts it, Augustine holds in his hand all the threads of his thought at the same time, and can move from one theme throwing connections to many others; he is not a writer of weak associations and lost spontaneous ideas, but a systematic thinker that can follow consequences of a thesis all the time in different directions without losing sight and grasp of his main concern.³⁵

When great minds of the past are studied, readers also play a major role, particularly that of interpretation: as researchers relate to Augustine and his *Confessions* through their own set of questions, there is not only reading, but reinterpreting, misinterpreting, reappraising and recontextualizing. The reception of ancient works is a multifaceted process which involves levels of complexity, such as understanding the historical context of an ancient author, his or her worldview, the literary genre, the originally intended audience, the specific initial objectives of the author for composing the work, and complexities of the book itself. Moreover, the worldview of the contemporary researcher or author needs to be taken into account, it influences the ability to hear well and interpret sensibly through his particular contextual lenses. In the complex task of interpretation and recontextualization, there will either be a conversation that respects a dialogue between two centuries, with its limits and possibilities in reconceptualization, or a conversation between a

33. Servais Pinckaers, *Em busca de Deus nas Confissões* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2013), 29.

34. Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris: De Boccard, 1958), 61. Marrou once wrote that "Augustin compose mal" as if Augustine wrote badly. Later Marrou realized that his perspective had not been accurate, which led him to write a well-known and admirable retraction where he argued that Augustine's style is a musical one and a work of art.

35. Johannes Brachtendorf, *Confissões de Agostinho*, trans. Milton Camargo Mota (São Paulo: Loyola, 2008), 13.

dead ancient and a deaf contemporary. That is also true for Augustine: the reception of his works has been customarily many-sided, as the bishop of Hippo has been reinterpreted widely and diversely over 1600 years and continues to be so.³⁶ Likewise, Augustine's way of reflecting on his subjective relation to God has been, in different ways and directions, used in recent literature, particularly in recent appropriations of Augustine by postmodern thinkers.

As contemporaries approach the towering figure of Augustine and his over 5 million words, they meet both geniality and limitation of a man bound by his own times. Augustine may be accused of holding an incomplete scientific worldview (as expressed by his ancient notion of weight versus a Newtonian gravity) or reading with his own allegorical lenses the biblical author's meaning. Perhaps more problematic to some is his view on gender and women.³⁷ Nevertheless, Augustine's concept of orderly love has also been used by others to question female objectification.³⁸ Even though objections to Augustine's thought abound,³⁹ his apparent restrictions do not eliminate the valuable gold that can be dug and recovered, precious stones with theological, anthropological, social, cultural, relational, pastoral and ecclesiological implications.

One should also realize that there are complexities in writing about the already inhabited Augustine's *Confessions*. Even though over the recent decades there has been an overflow of books and articles on Augustine's *Confessions*, there is little consensus about interpretative questions such as unity, a unifying central meaning or how one should approach it.⁴⁰ Furthermore, as Luc Verheijen pointed out in his study about the style of Augustine's *Confessions*, it may seem temeritous to write a new book considering the vast amount of material already published on *Confessions*.⁴¹ Written in 1949, Verheijen's book remarked how Augustine's most widely read work had already been approached from different angles and disciplines, not only from theology but also in philosophy, history, psychology of

36. Pollmann and Otten, *Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*.

37. Kim Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine's Writing on Women* (London: Darton, 1995).

38. Margaret Ruth Miles, *A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast 1350 – 1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2008.

39. Other aspects of Augustine's thought deemed as problematic are the following: 'just war', religious intolerance, forced conversions, his absence on the questioning of socio-economic unjust situations (for instance, not objecting slavery), some aspects of his doctrine of grace, in which sexuality seems to be rather negative, unbaptized infants and virtuous non-christians eternal condemnation.

40. Jared Ortiz, *You Made Us for Yourself: Creation in St. Augustine's Confessions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), xvii.

41. Luc Verheijen, *Eloquentia Pedisequa: Observations Sur Le Style Des Confessions De Saint Augustin*, *Latinitas Christianorum Primaeva: Studia Ad Sermonem Latinum Christianum Pertinentia* 10 (Nijmegen: Dekker En Van De Vegt, 1949).

religion, pedagogy, literature and linguistics.⁴² Verheijen could not envision how much was to be published about Augustine and his *Confessions* after he put out his book in 1949. His point is even more acute if one considers how scholarship on Augustine grew immensely during the following decades of the 50s and 60s and has grown ever since, from time to time, with massive speed and interest. In order to justify his writing in an already vast and populated ocean of works and discussions about Augustine and his *Confessions*, Verheijen considers two main reasons⁴³ which are also relevant to carry forward the discussions contained in this project. We cannot but make Verheijen's argument our own.

Verheijen's first consideration is based on the way individual authors receive and interpret ancient texts, as single researchers bring new approaches and innovative readings on ancient texts such as *Confessions*. New interpretations, such as the postmodern reading of Augustine's *Confessions*, bring new discussions that must be evaluated and addressed. The second of Verheijen's reasons is related to how the world itself changes and poses questions that can allow for new synthesis and elaborations. As cultures and societies evolve, each generation poses a new set of questions to be addressed, many of them not previously considered. Social and cultural change may highlight certain themes and emphases already present in ancient texts which could speak anew into contemporary situations. If the linguistic and philosophical situatedness is respected, the interpretation of old authors can bear resources to speak anew to present-day problems. After so many generations of scholars have arisen, a particular contribution seems to be carried out through an interdisciplinary approach, by making connections that deepen the relevance of what has already been stated, but needs be rediscovered through a new set of questions. Furthermore, as José Comblin highlights, theology has a historically rich communal perspective on which past and present can dialogue to fertilize the future: it is up for theology, from positions acquired in the past, to open the way for the future; and by formulating questions derived from the common human search, foster a journey that is really a collaboration of many.⁴⁴

One limitation to be considered is how a research seeking contemporary relevance risks mirroring its own times to the point where Augustine is fitted to answer present-day issues and ends up being mischaracterized. In the mid-decades of the previous century under

42. Ibid., 1.

43. Ibid.

44. José Comblin, *A Força Da Palavra: No Princípio Havia a Palavra* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1986), 402.

the influence of Pierre Courcelle's important discussions on the platonic impact on the first Augustine⁴⁵ a whole generation occupied itself in, as O'Donnell puts it, elaborating hypothetical schemas based on the reconstruction of Augustine's readings and opinions, a 'galloping bibliography' (A. Mandouze) with optimistic positivism that mirrored its times. According to O' Donnell, that generation also fitted Augustine in a new intellectual location, not only as a bishop but as a man in constant dialogue with the outside world, a position that mirrored the post-war position of Christians in general and Catholics in particular.⁴⁶ O'Donnell's assessment is an important critique to be considered. If this work seeks resources to generate Christian thought in a changing culture by drinking from the water of the old tradition of the church, one has also to realize both the possibilities and the limits of dialoguing two different ages. One is called to cultivate an awareness of possible blind spots, of how one's own lenses could set a bias to prevent seeing the whole. Postmodern thought has gifted the humanities with a higher attentiveness to contingency and particularity. It is to be stated however, that critical approaches that have rejected religion and particularly Christian faith, such as those from Feuerbach, Freud, or Nietzsche, have seen Augustine as a religious underdeveloped narcissist. In these perspectives, Augustine seems to be fit into previous schemes and lenses to the point he could be mischaracterized and prevented from being read on his own terms.

Augustinian scholars have also tended to be critical of psychohistorical treatment of Augustine, which places Augustine under psychopathological interpretative categories.⁴⁷ Even though a dialogue with psychology and psychotherapy is a central part of this work's overall structure, this work has intentionally avoided fitting Augustine into previous psychological or psychoanalytical ideas. Psychotherapy as we conceive it today, including a professionally trained therapist, was not common in ancient times as "psychology" was under philosophical wisdom pursuits; but a therapeutic encounter, and healing through dialogical

45. Pierre Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin* (Paris: De Boccard, 1950).

46. James J. O'Donnell, prolegomena to *Augustine: Confessions*, vol. 1-3 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), xxi-xxii, accessed May 30, 2018, <http://www.stoa.org/hippo>. The quotations of this work will follow the references given in the website.

47. Donald Capps, "Augustine as Narcissist: Comments on Paul Rigby's 'Paul Ricoeur, Freudianism, and Augustine's Confessions,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 1 (1985): 115-127; Paul Rigby, *The Theology of Augustine's Confessions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Donald Capps and James E. Dittes, *The Hunger of the Heart: Reflections on the Confessions of Augustine*, Monograph Series 8 (West Lafayette: Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1990). See the discussion between Rigby and Capps. Rigby's most recent response is in his interesting book *The Theology of Augustine's Confessions*. See also the book of Capps and Dittes.

communication is very present in Augustine's work. The topic of therapy, therefore, needs to be firstly approached on the grounds of what it meant in Augustine's ancient philosophical context and what his audience understood as therapy. Reading Augustine through the lenses of prior concepts, contemporary psychological theories or a discussion about his psychological makeup risks interpreting Augustine mirroring alien ideas rather than his own.

In his exposition on the Psalms, Augustine suggests that the essence of his life is to confess: at the center of his therapeutic proposal stands a confessional relationship with God. "*Vita mea est confiteri te.*"⁴⁸ His life is based on this relationship which is expressed through the language of confession.⁴⁹ *Confessio/confiteor* is the *locus* to where different streams flow: "the heart of the matter, therefore, is to find out what he means by *confessio*, or the verb *confiteri*. There are several layers of meaning."⁵⁰ A study on *Confiteor/Confessio* is firstly important as it relates to the title given by Augustine: *Confessiones*, a rich and multifaceted word that expresses his relational depth to God. As names carry intentionality and are themselves a manner of circumscribing, a title suggests an author's point of view over his work. Since *Confessions* is a multilayered work which includes several complex elements, such as the literary unity or the stages of his conversion, the title could be a hint to the author's intended approach. Even though sometimes titles mislead rather than enlighten, Augustine's title *Confessions* suggests an entry point to approach the whole. As William Harmless puts it, *Confessions* is Augustine's "most precisely titled work".⁵¹

Even though an essential entry point, *confessio*, however, is not to be studied as a concept in isolation.⁵² In a multifaceted and complex work such as *Confessiones*, an all-encompassing model limited to one idea or a 'secret key' cannot access the whole, as James O'Donnell rightly argues.⁵³ *Confessio* is, therefore, the associative center to which the streams connect, without being the only key to interpret the whole.

48. en. Ps. 30.1.

49. O'Donnell, prolegomena to *Confessions*. James O' Donnell suggests that Augustine's relationship with the theme of confession is deeper and transcends the book itself; it runs beyond the pages of this text.

50. Maria Boulding, introduction to *St. Augustine's, The Confessions*, The Works of Saint Augustine: a translation for the 21st Century I/1, 2nd ed. (New York: New City Press, 2012), 23.

51. William Harmless, *Augustine in His Own Words* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 2.

52. As relational language of the heart, *Confessio* cannot be understood apart from other key concepts, such as grace, creation, love, praise. This chapter does not intend to find in confessional relationality the only key to open up Augustine's secret door.

53. O'Donnell, prolegomena to *Confessions*. O'Donnell makes a remarkable critique about the lock-picking approach, "One prevailing weakness of many of these efforts has been the assumption that there lies

In the first part, this work will seek a comprehensive view of the Augustinian confessional language, connecting it to other important themes in the work, such as grace, Augustine's use of Scripture and Psalms, the context of creation and relational personhood. These many aspects are related to the already established importance of understanding *confessio* as a double confession of sin and praise, which sometimes has also been understood to include a third meaning, confession of faith.⁵⁴ Furthermore, one cannot disregard that confessional language is related to and influenced by the interconnectedness of *Confessiones* three characters, namely, God, Augustine and the intended audience. Since Augustine is definitely an associative thinker, this work is called to embrace a many-sided and complex account of the Augustinian confession in order to do justice to this reality.

Augustine and postmodern thought

A discussion between Augustine and postmodern thought has been developed in recent decades, and involves the works of thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard⁵⁵, Jacques Derrida⁵⁶, Jean-Luc Marion⁵⁷ or the Radical Orthodoxy movement.⁵⁸

Of particular interest to this work will be postmodern use of Augustine, as postmodern thinkers find in the *Confessions* an ancient partner to question the autonomy of the modern subject, even though they reject the Augustinian theological framework. They insist on the fact that every identity (including the one of the faithful) is provisional. Concepts describing the otherness of God as expressed in religious vocabulary are not very much

somewhere unnoticed about the *Confessions* a neglected key to unlock all mysteries. But for a text as multilayered and subtle as the *Confessions*, any attempt to find one, or even a few, keys is pointless. Augustine says himself that he meant to stir our souls, not test our ingenuity as lock-picks", xxiii.

54. See Cornelius Petrus Mayer, "Confessio," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, vol. 1 (Basel: Schwabe, 1986), 1122-1134.

55. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Confession of Augustine. Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Bert Blans, "Lyotard and Augustine's Confessions," *Augustiniana: Tijdschrift Voor De Studie Van Sint-Augustinus En De Augustijnenorde* 53, (2003): 31-51.

56. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*, The Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2005).

57. Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

58. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 2001). Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy opt for the approach of critically raising questions to current secular assumptions. For Milbank, material and temporal realities of bodies, sex, art and sociality which modernity claims to value in their own right, derive their real value and meaning when one considers and values them as participation in the transcendent.

developed by these authors. In a sense, one has the impression that they redirect Augustine by leaving what is essential to him. However, confession is considered as very important, even in a not-theological context, because this genre of “confession” shows a kind of “fragmentalization” of a so-called universal message. As a consequence, Augustine has been creatively appropriated by postmodern thinkers who established a new set of questions and discussions.

This work will discuss mainly the “postmodern confession” in the work of Jacques Derrida, but also reference Jean-François Lyotard’s standpoint about postmodernity and how it influences his reading on Augustine’s *Confessions*. Jacques Derrida has brought a unique approach that highlights certain aspects of Augustine’s work, such as a non-autonomous vulnerable subject that opens space for another; but at the same time seems to undermine the central foundations of *Confessions* and claims to have a more radical confession. On one side, one could ask what benefits such an approach could bring, such as they carry forward a project to question the self-centred autonomous mentality of modernity; but on the other, one could consider the side effects and veracity of using Augustine selectively.

Over the last decades, relevant works were published on the interaction between Augustine and postmodern thought.⁵⁹ Few of them, however, have discussed how the Augustinian confession, with its intrinsically healing orientation, is able to carry therapeutic resources for contemporary cultures that prize some aspects of a postmodern worldview. It is well understood how Augustine’s work is used by contemporary postmodern thinkers, but not how his thought can bring therapeutic elements precisely to a framework influenced by postmodern ideas.⁶⁰ A recent exception has been Peter Tyler’s insightful book *Confession: the healing of the soul*⁶¹ which discusses the link between confession and therapeutic healing in a

59. A relevant collection of essays is Lieven Boeve, Mathijs Lamberigts and Maarten Wisse, *Augustine and Postmodern Thought: A New Alliance against Modernity?* Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 219 (Leuven: Peeters, 2009). See also Wayne J. Hankey, “Self-Knowledge and God as Other in Augustine: Problems for a Postmodern Retrieval,” *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch Für Antike Und Mittelalter* 4, (1999): 83-123; Gene Fendt, “‘Confessions’ Bliss. Postmodern Criticism as a palimpsest of Augustine’s ‘Confessions,’” *The Heythrop Journal* 36, (1995): 30-45; Larissa Carina Seelbach, “Glieder am Leibe Christi versus ‘Individuelles Glaubensdesign’: Das Individualisierungstheorem Der Postmoderne in Der Perspektive Augustinischer Christologie,” *Augustiniana: Tijdschrift Voor De Studie Van Sint-Augustinus En De Augustijnenorde* 56, no. 3-4 (2006): 401-410; Atanasio Alegre, “La relación agustiniana en la postmodernidad,” *Montalbán* 18, (1987): 199-209.

60. Andrés G. Niño et al., “Restoration of the Self: A Therapeutic Paradigm from Augustine's Confessions,” *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 27, no. 1 (1990): 8-18.

61. Peter Tyler, *Confession: the healing of the soul* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

postmodern context. Tyler highlights the healing character of Augustine's *Confessions* as a performative speech act that opens the self to transcendence. However, since Tyler's book is about confessional practice rather than about Augustine's *Confessions*, Augustine ends up as one precursor among others in the history of an idea. Tyler continues to analyze further developments in the history of confessing, focusing on the experiences of later practicing "confessors", such as Wittgenstein, Swami Abhishiktananda and John of the Cross. The way these three experience healing through confession ends up being more explored than the connection between the therapeutic character of Augustine's *Confessions* and postmodernity.

Augustine and Therapy

Over the last decades, Augustinian research has developed and increasingly sought a more interdisciplinary approach. It has developed intensely over the last decades and surpassed a solely theological approach without regard to related disciplines, such as history, philosophy or classical literature, among others. The topics are wide-ranging as the series *Augustine in Conversation: Tradition and Innovation* has demonstrated. The volumes include topics such as *Augustine and Politics* (2005), *Augustine and Literature* (2005), *Augustine and History* (2007), *Augustine and Liberal Education* (2008), *Augustine and World Religions* (2008), *Augustine and Philosophy* (2010), *Augustine and Psychology* (2012), *Augustine and Science* (2012), *Augustine and Apocalyptic* (2013), *Augustine and the Environment* (2016), *Augustine and Social Justice* (2016).

Mark Vessey's *A companion to Augustine* has also showed how broad a companion Augustinian can become, the work has approached a wide range of topics stretching from theology to Roman spectacles, from media to friendship.⁶² Considering so many fields of interest, the task to combine interdisciplinary efforts and a sense of coherent unity becomes an ever-growing challenge. A major task has become to give a proper weight to what is more central but also to include the dialoguing parts of an ever-growing comprehensible whole. Still, with so many fields of interest, important gaps may appear as we approach the vast and wide ocean of Augustinian studies.

62. Mark Vessey, ed., *A Companion to Augustine. Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

A field that has received an interesting contribution over the last years is the relationship between Augustine and therapy. The topic has been approached from multiple points of view, which I would narrow into mainly three groups. Firstly, there are Augustinian scholars seeking to understand Augustine in his cultural, philosophical and theological context and the way he adapted the classical therapeutic model within a Christian framework; the *Confessions* engages with but re-contextualizes a tradition that understands philosophy as a way of life, a therapeutic path to happiness. Recent research has been developed on how Augustine has both appropriated and modified ancient classical philosophical therapeutic proposals into Christian ideals. Boone has emphasized the therapy of desire within the *Cassiciacum dialogues*⁶³, Kolbet the rhetorical psychagogy in the sermons⁶⁴ and Brachtendorf how Augustine's theological approach to philosophy combined and changed therapeutic philosophical ideals.⁶⁵ Secondly, authors are coming from a contemporary psychological background, such as psychoanalysis, psychotherapy or social psychology trying to understand Augustine through lenses of a psychological diagnosis of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They tend to approach his works with lenses focused on the person of Augustine, often a perspective that results in pathologizing his life events or an over-diagnosis of some of his experiences, leading often to conclusions about neurotic mother relations or a pathological interpretation of his sexuality. One could wonder if Augustine is conceived on his own terms or is fit within interpretative grids by different psychological perspectives.⁶⁶ A third perspective seeks to understand how Augustinian theological anthropology dialogues with current models of psychology and psychotherapy, considering his notions about inner life, such as interiority, free will, memory, desire and restless heart. These could be seen as a kind of incipient psychological knowledge in the history of psychological ideas to be interpreted as

63. Boone, *Conversion and Therapy of Desire*.

64. Kolbet, *Augustine and Cure of Souls*.

65. Brachtendorf, *Confissões de Agostinho*, 20-25.

66. The history of seeing Augustine through the lenses of contemporary psychology is extensive. See Sandra Lee Dixon, *Augustine: The Scattered and Gathered Self* (Saint Louis: Chalice Press, 1999). This work brings an interesting literature review that summarizes the historical evolution of seeing Augustine through the eyes of psychoanalyses and psychopathology. For further reading, William B. Parsons, *Freud and Augustine in Dialogue: Psychoanalysis, Mysticism, and the Culture of Modern Spirituality*, Studies in Religion and Culture (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2013). See also Dong Young Kim, *Understanding Religious Conversion: The Case of Saint Augustine*. Eugene: Pickwick, 2012.

a resource to dialogue with contemporary concepts and psychotherapy models, such as Alexandra Pârvan's psychotherapeutic Augustinianism.⁶⁷

These three modes of interaction between Augustine and therapy will be discussed throughout this work, one in each of the three respective parts. Firstly, the 'historical', that places the theological therapy of Augustine's *Confessions* within the horizon of his ancient context. Secondly, this work discusses the appropriation of the Augustinian therapeutic ideas in contemporary psychology and in postmodern thought. Thirdly, the 'interdisciplinary' or 'concepts in dialogue method', setting in dialogue Augustine's idea of heart and Miguel Mahfoud's *Elementary Experience in Psychology*.

We will firstly set Augustine in his historical context and his view of therapy conveyed in *Confessions*. Out of the three approaches mentioned above, it seems appropriate to consider first Augustine's own starting point, the historical and theological context in adapting classical therapy rather than contemporary worldviews or questions about Augustine and psychology. Beginning with this approach undermines the tendency to fit Augustine into psychological or psychoanalytical categories. Placing him within our contemporary theoretical horizons could downplay the importance of the ancient world in his life and thought, which ultimately may use lenses too narrow to understand the complexities of the context which produced his work. As Sandra Lee Dixon puts it, "European and American schools of psychology lose track too easily of this dynamic interchange between individuals and their milieu. To understand Augustine psychologically requires tracing not only the unconscious influences in his life, but also the ideals that the ancient world had held up to its schoolchildren for generations."⁶⁸ Therefore, the historical-theological perspective discussed in the first part will also serve as a foundation for considerations in the second and third parts of this work.

The second part will focus on how Augustine's *Confessions* therapeutic ideal has been interpreted, both by psychologists and then by proposers of postmodern thought, entitled *Contemporary Reception of Augustinian Therapy: Psychological and Postmodern Readings*. The third and last step is setting Augustine's theological anthropology of the heart in

67. Alexandra Pârvan, "Changing Internal Representations of Self and Other: Philosophical Tools for Attachment-informed Psychotherapy with Perpetrators and Victims of Violence," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 24, no. 3 (2017): 241-55.

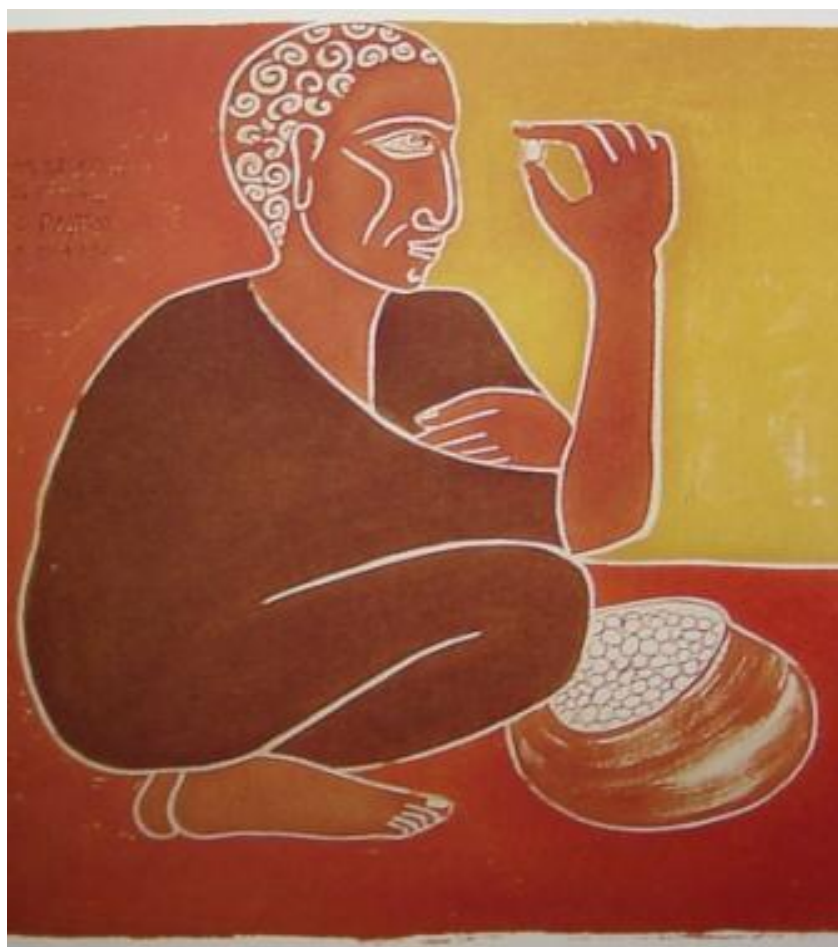
68. Dixon, *Augustine*, 207.

conversation with an emerging model of psychology, namely Elementary Experience Psychology.⁶⁹

Discerning Pearls: Augustine and Elementary Experience in Psychology in conversation

Cláudio Pastro's painting *O comprador de pérolas* or *The Purchaser of Pearls* pictures a man skilled in discerning the value of gems: with one hand he holds respectfully the pearl; with the other, he turns to his own heart. His eyes are fixed on his purpose, the acquisition of precious stones. His task is to be attentive to the details present in the small but valuable pearl. It is an assignment of two connected hands, for while one turns to reality and holds attentively the gem, with the other he moves to the heart. One hand is related to the exterior pursuit of seeking the best pearl possible, the other is integrated to his interiority. A hand directed to the outside mirrors the value recognized by the other hand, pointing inside to his inner center.

69. Later in this work, we will approach Augustine and therapy using the third methodological option mentioned, placing a current model in psychotherapy, Elementary Experience Psychology, in dialogue with Augustinian anthropology.



Cláudio Pastro's painting is the cover of Miguel Mahfoud's book *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia: aprendendo a reconhecer*,⁷⁰ which encapsulates the central ideas of the approach Elementary Experience in Psychology (EEP). Wheat among the chaff, the pearl among gems, the heart's central "exigences" among felt needs: Mahfoud indicates the need to recognize the pearls in human subjectivity. Finding precious stones is not only a miner's activity, but an all-enduring human task related to the heart, to humanity's elementary experience. As it is with pearls, it is also with experience; it indicates the learning process of carefully recognizing its central and most important aspects.

Due to the absence of a theological-psychological interdisciplinary interchange in the Augustinian-psychology debate, the relevance of a constructive dialogical approach such as with EEP is highlighted. The present work proposes a friendlier exchange between psychology and theology, in which both are allies to reconstruct a fuller picture of a human relational life. On one side, the Augustinian approach to therapy and the heart's desire, and on

70. Miguel Mahfoud, *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia: Aprendendo a Reconhecer* (Brasília: Universa, 2012).

the other, the exigencies and evidences of EEP. Instead of framing Augustine as a passive patient having his life scrutinized by psychopathology, or finding in him an ancient voice to reinforce present-day ideas, we have opted to bring to the forefront a psychological approach which has concepts that resemble the Augustinian theological anthropology of the heart. A dialogue with EEP contributes to the reframing of the psychological discussion on Augustine, for it places him as a pertinent partner to describe humanity's teleological subjectivity, with formulations that can foster a therapeutic vision.

Methodologically, after historically grounding Augustine's notion of therapy and discussing the challenges of its reception in contemporary times by psychology and postmodernity, this work takes along concepts from diverse perspectives, but still with a high degree of synergy, in order to foster dialogue. On one side, elementary experience in its adaptation to psychological work, on the other, the heart in Augustine's *Confessions*. By placing concepts side by side, one is able to check similarities and differences. Having as starting point a historically-oriented theological anthropology, we receive a more robust foundation for an Augustinian dialogue with psychology than if anachronistically beginning from contemporary psychological interpretations. As a result of this methodological choice, this work does not only avoid fixing Augustine's life story into previous concepts disregarding his own worldview or times, but proposes a contemporary reading of Augustine in the interface between theology and psychology. EEP, coming from the phenomenological psychology tradition, values as its psychotherapeutic standpoint an emphatic detached comprehension rather than enclosed interpretation. Miguel Mahfoud suggests that EEP is not a ready-made model, a theoretical box to frame subjectivity, but an invitation to a careful observation in order to reach a truthful recognition. By paying attention to experience and identifying its dynamic, one can carry consequences and attune to its defining aspects.⁷¹

Can we connect with Augustine's symphony? Do we capture the value of pearls? Will we become the friendly, open ear he desired the readers of *Confessions* to be (*Conf.* 10.3.3)? If our ear training is apt, can we then invite new musical instruments to accompany it? The melody and harmony remain the same as in the time of Augustine; but some musical accent with contemporary artistry could make the music even more alive. Mahfoud's drums could grip the rhythm and beat of Augustine's understanding of the heart and make its core valuable to a contemporary audience.

71. Mahfoud, *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*, 30.

1. THE AUGUSTINIAN CONFESSION: THEOGRAPHY, DIALOGICAL LANGUAGE AND THERAPEUTIC PROPOSAL

1.1 Introduction

This part firstly seeks to introduce Augustine's *Confessions* as a theography, a story that includes autobiographical content but points beyond itself, to God's action in creation and history. Secondly, it discusses the dialogical and responsive framework of the Augustinian *confessio* by exploring the depth of relational language conveyed by Augustine. Thirdly, by considering the ancient philosophical background and its re-appropriation, we suggest that Augustine's *Confessions* is a relational theographical narrative with a confessional language that carries therapeutic consequences. Narrative, language and therapy: in other words, the goal is to understand what kind of therapeutic relationship a theographical narrative proposes by excavating the layers of relationality in the language of Augustinian confession. Needless to say, in Augustine's framework this relationality is therapeutic only within a theological framework of a life in response to God and neighbor.

Since theology,⁷² philosophy,⁷³ and psychology⁷⁴ have made a turn to the importance of stories and narratives, the first theme within the chapter is Augustine's *Confessions* as a theography rather than a self-sufficient narrative. Augustine's conversion is

72. Current theology has also turned to narrative approaches and different schools of narrative theology have emerged. The common challenge of these schools has been to find answers to the question whether narratives reconstruct theology itself in terms of valid and valuable re-interpretation or redefinition of faith or its role is primarily to highlight the contents of Christian convictions as the gospel stories become an inspiration for Christian witness in the world. In other words, does theology not only contribute to the descriptive approaches but also to the normative constructive process. Scholars in this debate are Paul Ricoeur, David Tracy (Chicago School) and Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas (Yale School).

73. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Phillip Cary, John Doody and Kim Paffenroth, *Augustine and Philosophy*, *Augustine in Conversation: Tradition and Innovation* (Totowa: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010). Ricoeur draws on Augustine's *Confessions* for his *Time and Narrative*. For Ricoeur, personal identity can be considered in terms of a narrative identity: what story does a person tell about his or her life, or what story do others tell about it? In effect, narrative identity is one of the ways in which we answer the question "who?" Who is this? Who said that? Did that? Who is that? Who are we?

74. Julia Vassilieva, *Narrative Psychology: Identity, Transformation and Ethics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Narrative psychology seeks models of personality and self on narrative principles. Julia Vassilieva not only outlines the major characteristics of the narrative turn in psychology but discusses the context which produced this turn in the discipline. For a more broad interaction between Augustine and psychology, see Sandra Lee Dixon, John Doody and Kim Paffenroth, *Augustine and Psychology*, *Augustine in Conversation* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013).

a journey, a pilgrimage, something that is narratable, a story that can be told. But as Augustine retells, he places his story in the light of God's salvific grand story as described in Scripture. *Confessions* is, therefore, a 'theography', or biography in service of expressing theology. It is a story centred on God rather than Augustine, a narrative directed and guided by divine providence carrying out transformation over human hearts. In a sense, the highest subject of the *Confessions* is not Augustine himself, but Augustine's healer. Augustine's search for God can be described as an investigative truth-seeking interiority, an encounter and reorientation of one's heart towards the love of God. As O'Donnell suggests, *Confessions* is an artful presentation weaving themes of the Psalms, Genesis, Paul and Plotinus into a complex Trinitarian argument, the way God's image in man was obscured by Adam's fault and the ways God's gift of grace restores it.⁷⁵ As a restless heart that heard the gracious calling that converted his inner life, a relationship of humility and vulnerability is established. Augustine's biography is therefore a dialogue containing an intentional description of a relational proposal that, in denying human arrogance before its Creator, recovers identity and vocation by occupying a certain position in this loving relationship.

Secondly, Augustine seeks a relational language that acknowledges God's marvelous gracious healing, trying to affirm his continuous dependency on a divine Thou. *Confessions* is a work situated at a transitional time in Augustine's life, during the first years as a bishop when amidst pastoral challenges, theological discussions and Scriptural investigation, he experienced a renewed sense of being under the guidance of grace, which in turn, changed his speech, the way he approached language and interpersonal communication. Grace converts not only hearts but also language, and in this new context Augustine's self-expression is set for a radical change. Confessional language is both receptive and performative, a sacrificial response to love and a transformation in his inner life. Thoughtful inquiry on what Augustine means by confessing becomes a central task in understanding what kind of relational language emerges from *Confessions*.

Thirdly, Augustine's *Confessions* is within the antiquity philosophy tradition that seeks a path to a happy life and has soul therapy as one of its main tasks. Therapy presupposes diagnosis, and in Hellenistic ethics and philosophical schools the disease of the soul was in the internal attitude that sought happiness in wrong places. In order to achieve the

75. James Joseph O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 65-85.

highest good, the soul had to be delivered from its miscomprehension of the value of things. This task was carried out by a philosopher who should also have been a physician of the soul. According to Johannes Brachtendorf, its task was both to raise in the patient the knowledge of his illness and to develop therapeutic methods on which a man would become conscious of his disease and was led to a happy life.⁷⁶ Philosophy was to be psychagogy, theoretical wisdom integrated in a practical way of life as a therapeutic proposal. Through Augustine, however, it is not Hellenism but Christianity that takes to itself the soul therapy perspective that used to be in the domain of Hellenism. Its consequence is that Augustine Christianizes the concept of therapy,⁷⁷ linking to Christ himself who, as described in the gospels, had already described his mission as a doctor to heal the sick.⁷⁸ As a synthesis of ancient philosophy and theological understanding, the Augustinian confession aims at the happy and fulfilled life and is within the soul healing perspective; however, it has therapeutic properties only as a Christian narrative in dialogical language.

The three axes of this chapter, narrative, language and therapy are therefore interrelated: *Confessions*, a theological narrative written probably around 397-401⁷⁹ during Augustine's first years as bishop of Hippo, describes a middle-aged man looking at his soul in prayer and seeking an adequate dialogical communication with his gracious medical Doctor, the true therapist of his soul. Augustine of Hippo pens a storyline in which selected autobiographical details point towards a reality beyond themselves. They are present as expressions of his quest for truth and wisdom, which are ultimately met by God's prior search for him. *Confessions* is, therefore, not an unintentional autobiography, but one that includes biography to express theology: it is the "theography" of his inner life healing and the therapeutic effects of his Lord and God. Augustine was later called by the Church "the doctor of grace"; but it is rather ironic that the title "doctor" does not fit the Augustine described in

76. Brachtendorf, *Confissões de Agostinho*, 23.

77. *Ibid.*

78. Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31.

79. Frederick Van Fleteren, "Confessiones," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 227-322. In his late work *Retractationes*, Augustine looks back at the composition of his works and lists them in chronological order. *Confessions* is shown as the sixth work after his ordination as Catholic bishop. Since Augustine was probably consecrated during spring or summer of 395, the work recorded as before *Confessions* is *De Doctrina Christiana*, written in 396 and sent to Simplicianus in 398. Ambrose's death on April 4th 397 is not mentioned. For a concise but apt discussion, see the Van Fleteren's chapter. Van Fleteren describes that 397 is the *terminus post quem* for *Confessiones*, the *terminus ante quem* is given by *Contra Faustum Manicheum*, the work listed immediately after *Confessiones* in *Retractationes*. Since the meeting with Faustus happened no later than the year 401, and possibly at an earlier date, imaginably in 397, *Confessiones* was most likely written between 397 and 401, but with an earlier date such as 397 as the usual assumed year.

Confessions. The “doctor of grace” reference could even betray Augustine’s continuous reference to God as his doctor through grace and himself as a patient in need of healing, a perspective much present in *Confessions*: “let such a person therefore love you just as much, or even more, on seeing that the same physician who rescued me from sinful diseases of such gravity has kept him immune” (*Conf.* 2.7.15). A similar line of reasoning is carried by Augustine in later discussions, placing an emphasis on God as a medical doctor and assigning to grace the condition of therapy.⁸⁰ Acknowledging his ontological distance to the Creator, Augustine’s life is portrayed as a creature in need of divine healing; God, in his turn, is mysteriously but actively seeking humanity, and his grace through the humility of Christ heals the wounds of sinful human beings. Augustine’s *Confessions* pursues a relational language to capture the movement and beauty of this creator-creature unquiet exchange relationship, so distant in the nature of beings but at the same time so near in love, by Christ’s humble incarnation which heals human pride.

80. Thomas L. Holtzen, “The Therapeutic Nature of Grace in St. Augustine’s *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*,” *Augustinian Studies* 31, no.1 (2000): 93-115. Holtzen suggests that, by conceiving grace as therapy, which heals the will and kindles a free love to God, Augustine answers the difficult debate on the efficacy of grace in relation to free will. Grace is efficacious precisely because it heals the will by carrying the love of God to the human soul.

1.2 Theography and confessional narrative

*You first willed that I should confess to you,
my Lord and my God,
for your mercy endures forever (Conf. 11.1.1).*

The Sukuma people of Tanzania have a proverb: “I pointed out to you the stars, and all you saw was the tip of my finger.”⁸¹ In *Confessions*, Augustine is pointing his audience to the Creator of stars, but after numerous centuries many are still looking at Augustine’s finger. Augustine’s story is one in which the biographical description of his life is complemented by being a personal narrative directed to and under the light of the divine. Even though God is the most honored subject, Augustine’s unique voice is not denied; by being in relation to God, the interacting layers of biography and theology are enhanced and do not destroy each other. It is a theography, defined as a narrative weaving of biography and Other-centered theology, a narrative directed and artistically construed to place God as the most venerated subject. While every conventional autobiography would start with an “I”, describing the location or the circumstances of one’s birth, Augustine follows a different direction. The bishop of Hippo locates his confession on the greatness of his God rather than on his own biographical data. Since Augustine’s interest is in the existence of a human being in relation to God,⁸² his work is other-oriented relational spiritual dialogue. Augustine’s *Confessions* is not an autonomous biographical account, but a theography, a narrative directed and guided by God’s providence transforming human sinful desires. It is a theological narrative: the subject is not Augustine himself, but Augustine’s God. It is truth-seeking interiority with encounter and the reorientation of one’s desire towards the love of God, a masterwork of biblical spirituality.

Confessions is definitely a book about Augustine, but his concern is to be a person-in-relation to the highest subject. God is always first, even to his inmost thoughts, evidence that Augustine cannot be entitled the main character in the description of his own

81. The original saying is: *Nalukolekejaga sonda (ng'weli) walola lwala (Sukuma). Nilikuonyesha nyota (mwezi) na uliangvan fleteren alia kidole tu (Swahili).*

82. Clark, *The Confessions*, 2.

life. Furthermore, even as Augustine abandons God, portrayed as a representative of Adam's fallen race, the Father remains present in the hearts of men and women, waiting for prodigal children to return home after a difficult journey, ready to wipe away their tears. As Augustine puts it,

Clearly they do not know that you are everywhere, for you are not confined to anyplace, and you alone are present to those who run far away from you. Let them turn back, and seek you, for you do not forsake your creation as they have forsaken their Creator. Let them turn back, see! There you are in their hearts, in the hearts of those who confess you, who fling themselves into your arms and weep against your breast after their difficult journey, while you so easily will wipe away their tears (*Conf.* 5.2.2).

God's active presence in Augustine's life enkindles a vivid sense of personal affectionate relationship with God, which includes feelings of loyalty, sincerity and faithful devotion. "Let me love you, Lord, and give thanks to you and confess to your name" (*Conf.* 2.7.15).

Augustine's relational story includes selectivity and artistic choice, mainly as a story guided by grace on which the characters that direct his quest for wisdom, happiness and ultimately to the Christian God are prominent. There is plenty of evidence of selectivity in relational matters, as in Augustine's portrayal of his friendships and family relations. Friends are significant as they direct Augustine closer or farther from his God; his mother, a committed Christian seeking Augustine back to his Christian roots is much more often mentioned than his father, a pagan during many years who converted at the end of his life. His siblings are relatively absent in his descriptions and do not feature prominently in *Confessions*. There is intentionality and interpretation, which in turn does not deny the fact that Augustine still wanted his readers to believe his discourse was accurate.

Augustine's biographical parts in *Confessions* are not only an impartial narration of facts; they picture the position of humanity in relation to the Creator. Frederick Fleteren suggests that Augustine's interest in story-telling is not an objective, factual without subjective selectivity, but encompasses a point of view on which his life demonstrates a theological anthropology: that life is the product of human choices guided by God's grace to its appropriate end.⁸³ The masterpiece *City of God* applied to all creation what *Confessions* had already stated: though chaos may seem to reign, God was carrying out a history of redemption. Augustine's last days experienced a state of collapse in North Africa due to

83. Van Fleteren, "Confessiones," 228. Van Fleteren also suggests that Augustine's thesis is again picked up in *De Civitate Dei*, but applying it to all creation, in a type of theology of history.

barbarian invasions, but he continued to affirm that both personal life and collective history were guided by grace.⁸⁴ *De Civitate Dei* and *Confessiones* convey, respectively, interpretative grids to collective and individual history.

It is precisely because of interpretation and selectivity that discussions about historicity have been raised. Starting from the end of the nineteenth century, scholars have questioned the factuality of some parts of Augustine's *Confessiones*, especially the intellectual conversion described in book seven and the moral, spiritual conversion to grace in book eight. Among them are the important names of Alfaric, Courcelle and O'Meara.⁸⁵ One however, should notice that selectivity is not necessarily in conflict with historicity, and Augustine himself suggests that his writing is truthful, and affirms the authenticity of the events narrated. The narrator's view point is intentional and aims at impacting the reader. The more one enters into a certain story, the more one can consider that life resembles the story as told, possibly incorporating the worldview that this depiction brings.

1.2.1 A relational narrative: setting personal story in greater redemptive history

*Cur ergo tibi tot rerum narrationes digero?*⁸⁶ (*Conf.* 11.1.1)

Augustine's life in *Confessiones* is highly interpersonal for it is framed in a way that his life forms a drawing whose relationship to God alone succeeds in giving meaning:⁸⁷ "My God, I would not exist, I would not be at all, were you not in me. Or should I say, rather, that I should not exist if I were not in you, from whom are all things, through whom are all things, in whom are all things?" (*Conf.* 1.2.2). There is no Augustine outside relational life and his existence is meaningless if not in love to God and loving others orderly in God.

84. Although Augustine's historical context is marked by the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, Augustine believed that God's grace would lead humanity to Himself. He condensed the history of the world as if it were the history of sin and grace, looking to the historical drama enacted correspondingly to his soul's story. In that regard, *Confessiones* and *De Civitate Dei* form a complementary pair.

85. Prosper Alfaric, *L'évolution intellectuelle de Saint Augustin. 1: Du Manichéisme Au Néoplatonisme* (Paris: Nourry, 1918); Courcelle, *Recherches sur les confessions de saint Augustin*; John J. O' Meara, "Augustine's *Confessiones*: Elements of Fiction," in *Augustine: From Rhetor to Theologian*, ed. Joanne McWilliam (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), 77-95.

86. "Why then am I relating all this to you at such length?"

87. Aimé Solignac, introduction to *Les Confessions: Oeuvres De Saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1992), 12.

Augustine seeks to frame his life in God, within the life of God, the place his self and experiences have permanence and meaning.⁸⁸

There is a powerful relational aspect to Augustine's character portrayed in *Confessions*,⁸⁹ which in turn is a sign of his deep relational life as a whole. In *Confessions*, Augustine is never alone in his journey, even at the most crucial moments, as the presence of Alypius in the crisis in the garden of Milan attests. The company of a close friend in such an important moment signals his high regard for friendship; however, the presence of a friend did not exclude the need for some time of individual introspection. The balance between being in the presence of another and finding space to deepen one's interior life resonates as both-and perspective, as his rule for community life attests. Even before his conversion, still as a public rhetorician, Augustine sought life in community, and aspired to journey in the presence of others, as described in book 6 of the *Confessions*. Furthermore, after the description of his life in *Confessions* and as he entered his later years as a bishop, he continued to live as a man with open heart that could not live by himself without friends.⁹⁰ Van der Meer, in his account of Augustine's life focusing on Augustine as bishop, highlights that Augustine was not reclusive or unapproachable; Augustine was both a friend of important people, such as leading personalities that played important roles on synods, and also served those who were far from the public eye.⁹¹ When there were quarrels with some of his best friends, such as Severus, Augustine could place his own position in the wrong and afterwards, apologize.⁹² Furthermore, many of his works were not written as a self-aggrandizing project, but as a response to the request of fellow brother-bishops. He could answer questionnaires both from important people such as Simplicianus who had succeeded Ambrose as bishop in Milan, and men of lesser rank such as Quodvultdeus, who used to be under Augustine's spiritual guidance and only later became bishop of Carthage.⁹³ It is certain that Augustine had a high regard for friendship, and grew in the thought that Christ was the most important element in uniting men.⁹⁴ Augustine also developed long-lasting friendships such as that with

88. David Vincent Meconi, introduction to and commentary of *The Confessions: Saint Augustine of Hippo*, Ignatius Critical Editions (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), v.

89. Boulding, introduction to *The Confessions*, 27.

90. Frederik Van der Meer, *Augustine the bishop: The life and work of a Father of the Church* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 241.

91. *Ibid.*, 242.

92. *Ibid.*, 243.

93. Van der Meer, *Augustine the bishop*, 243.

94. As the example in a letter to an old friend who finally became a Christian, also quoting Cicero's definition of friendship, *rerum humanarum et divinarum cum benevolentia et caritate consensio*. Augustine

Alypius, who was with him both at his conversion at the Garden in Milan, and later in life, helping in the controversies against the Donatists (as one of the seven Catholic Bishops in the conference of 411) as well as travelling and discussing in Italy about the Pelagian controversy. One can affirm that *Confessions*, his relational narrative, is a sign pointing to a profound relational life.

As one resembles those one loves, humans as essentially relational, even as saints or sinners. Augustine knew that truth could not be found in isolation, but only in the company of others, as the Cassiciacum dialogues attest. Or even when acting against the law of God and men in the disoriented transitioning period of his adolescence, as when absent from classes in Carthage and wasting time with his friends, he did not steal pears in isolation. As his later reflection on the theft explains, “I would not have done it alone; I most certainly would not have done it alone. It follows, then, that I also loved the camaraderie with my fellow-thieves” (*Conf.* 2.8.16).

When he looks back at *Confessions* in *Retractationes*, Augustine also pronounces the relational aspect of his goal in writing, with three characters involved: himself, God and his audience. On one hand, it is a reassessment of his own life connected to the praising of a just, good God and the arousing of affections toward him; on the other hand, he wants his words to have an affective effect on “his brethren” as they raise their hearts to God.

The thirteen books of my Confessions concern both my bad and good actions, for which they praise our just and good God. In so doing they arouse the human mind and affections toward him. As far as I am concerned, they had this effect upon me in my writing of them, and still do when I read them now. What others think about them is for them to say; but I know that they have given pleasure in the past, and still do give pleasure, to many of my brethren.⁹⁵

In *Confessions*, theology of grace and biography intertwine, weaving a life directed to testify to God’s love. As David Meconi claims, *Confessions* is better understood when Augustine is seen through the inter-relation between biography and grace, or biography as a witness to God’s grace.⁹⁶ A narrative such as Augustine’s is constituted by, as Moltmann puts it, *ars Deo vivendi*, or “the art of living with God for God. We are artists of life and we

rejoiced that as an old friend became Christian, the most important element in their friendship became present, “through Christ”, *ep.* 258.1-2.

95. *Retract.* 2.6.1

96. Meconi, introduction to *The Confessions*, xii.

are called individually and communally to shape our life into an artwork which brings to expression something of the beauty of the divine grace and the freedom of the divine love.”⁹⁷

The relational character of Augustine’s narrative is also highlighted when compared and contrasted with one of the famous modern autobiographical works, that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This approach is taken by Servais Pinckaers, who argues that in Rousseau’s account, his own self occupies the central focal point, as God and the human race are just spectators, observers of his sincerity.⁹⁸ In Augustine, the self is shown in the light of God, who is the main author of his truth-seeking biography. Rousseau exposes his feelings, legitimizes them by sincerity rather than by truth: but contrarily to Augustine who accepts to be judged by God and his audience, Rousseau refuses to be judged, an ostentatious confession without repentance. Rousseau makes nature, as he conceives it, the supreme value criterion of his confession.⁹⁹ As Rousseau writes about himself on the first page of his own biographical confession,

I have entered upon a performance which is without example, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to present my fellow-mortals with a man in all the integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself. I know my heart, and have studied mankind; I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence; if not better, I at least claim originality, and whether Nature did wisely in breaking the mould with which she formed me, can only be determined after having read this work. Whenever the last trumpet shall sound, I will present myself before the sovereign judge with this book in my hand, and loudly proclaim, thus have I acted; these were my thoughts; such was I. With equal freedom and veracity have I related what was laudable or wicked, I have concealed no crimes, added no virtues; and if I have sometimes introduced superfluous ornament, it was merely to occupy a void occasioned by defect of memory: I may have supposed that certain, which I only knew to be probable, but have never asserted as truth, a conscious falsehood. Such as I was, I have declared myself; sometimes vile and despicable, at others, virtuous, generous and sublime; even as thou hast read my inmost soul: Power eternal! Assemble round thy throne an innumerable throng of my fellow-mortals, let them listen to my confessions, let them blush at my depravity, let them tremble at my sufferings; let each in his turn expose with equal sincerity the failings, the wanderings of his heart, and, if he dare, aver, I was better than that man.¹⁰⁰

97. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Open Church: Invitation to a Messianic Lifestyle* (London: SCM, 1978), 38-39.

98. Pinckaers, *Em busca de Deus nas Confissões*, 32.

99. *Ibid.*, 32-33.

100. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of J. J. Rousseau* (London: Privately Printed for the Members of the Aldus Society, 1903), accessed May 30, 2018, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3913>.

Augustine and Rousseau's work could not be further apart, as one is a work of a unique (modern) autonomous affirmation of one's own individual nature, and the other is a prayer of "Other-affirmation", asserting one's dependency and vulnerability.

Augustine's *Confessions* can also be described as other-oriented narrative by analyzing the verb *confiteri/confiteor* throughout the work. Verheijen's study on the uses of the verb *confiteor* and its associated words points out that the constant use of *confiteor/confiteri* linked with a pronominal second personal singular expression *tibi* establishes a continual pattern of speaking before God as a personal thou. It is significant that out of the 83 contexts in which *confiteri* is used, in 63 of them *tibi* is present: and through *tibi*, second person singular pronominal form, Augustine is addressing none other than God, his interlocutor. Verheijen adds that in those 20 where *tibi* is absent, it is replaced by a similar expression, as *nomini tuo, altitudini tuae*, etc.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, it is observed that if one considers only the pronominal form of the second person of singular (*tu, tibi, tuus*) and the verb form of this same person (*dixisti*) and vocatives directed to the divine as an apostrophe in the beginning of *Confessions* (between 1.1.1 and 1.3.3) there are plentiful occurrences, as much as 84 uses! The abundance of reference to a *thou* at the start of *Confessions* expresses the intent of deep personal conversation in form of a prayer.¹⁰² Verheijen emphasizes that confession is to speak to God in all loyalty according to certain knowledge, given by the light that God is the creator of all and savior of humanity.¹⁰³ *Confessio* is also a discourse under the illumination of God, by the knowledge brought through looking at God and all things under His light.¹⁰⁴ It also brings the awareness that one is only an ignorant sinful creature, carrying mortality as a testimonial evidence. In spite of human frailty and the ontological difference between Creator and creatures, by the goodness of God, one becomes a valuable human being touched by grace.

In Augustine's narrative, emphasis is placed on the action of God in transforming, converting and directing the itinerary of the human heart. The term *conversio* or *convertere* in classical Latin carried the sense of changing religion, philosophical doctrine or the change in

101. Verheijen, *Eloquentia Pedisequa*, 23-24.

102. *Ibid.*, 84.

103. *Ibid.*, 27.

104. *Ibid.*, 29.

behavior.¹⁰⁵ Conversion signifies the general orientation of the soul toward the divine: the act of returning to God is indicated, not by philosophical reflection, but by imitation of Christ's humility.¹⁰⁶ If in conversion there is a state of estrangement, an intermediate period of crisis and a return to order and unity, in Augustine's *Confessions* the emphasis of conversion rests upon the intervention of God, as a gift and mystery of His grace. The bishop of Hippo recognizes that the essence of conversion is the divine gift, a fundamental decision of God. It is divine interference and not the human will that drives the soul from its inclinations. Augustine alludes to the call of grace as the fundamental element of a converted life, a divine movement that generates response in the human being: "What have you done, O man, that you should turn to God and deserve his mercy? [...] we separate from You and if You do not return us to You, we will never convert."¹⁰⁷ Augustine reinforces the divine initiative that intentionally pursues him: if there was a step the son took towards the return home, it was because there had been a call, a voice that attracted, sought and waited for him. Augustine recounts his trajectory through the lenses of the parable of the prodigal son in the Gospel of Luke: "I took care that this excellent part of my substance should be under my own control, and I did not guard my strength by approaching you, but left you and set out for a distant land to squander it there on the quest for meretricious gratifications" (*Conf.* 4.16.30).

The image of the prodigal sets Augustine's story under the horizon of God's greater design for salvation of the human race. Augustine places his own story against the backdrop of every soul's journey. The persistent image of the prodigal wandering communicates human constant distancing, *aversio*, to God – "where were you at the time? How far from me? I was certainly roving far away from you, and debarred even from the pods I was feeding to pigs" (*Conf.* 3.6.10). When Augustine describes his return to God, it mirrors homecoming and rupture with the past not as an isolated never-repeated story, but a particular narrative connected to the common experience of the whole of human race.

As Augustine pondered on his baptism, his own experience would be interpreted within the framework of God's redemptive enterprise throughout human history, "we were baptized and all our dread about our earlier lives dropped away from us. During the days that followed I could not get enough of the wonderful sweetness that filled me as I meditated upon

105. José Oroz Reta, "Conversion," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 239.

106. *Ibid.*, 241.

107. *en. Ps.* 84.8, 74.9.

your deep design for the salvation of the human race” (*Conf.* 9.6.14). Once more, Augustine shows signs of a collective rather than an individualistic mindset, as he meditates over the salvation not of his soul, but of the whole human vocation. Augustine portrayed himself in the light of everyman’s destiny, and denied his baptism as an isolated, never-repeated experience. On the contrary, his case is placed as one exemplary story of a prodigal typological framework, of rupture and wandering, but also a return. Truth distilled and overflowed in the heart is to be everyman’s homecoming. As Van Fleteren aptly puts it,

He is the prodigal wandering far from his fatherland. He is Odysseus on a voyage. The events of infancy are described, not by memory, but rather from speculation about the nature of infancy and childhood in general, as observed in other children. The same is true for his adolescence. Stealing pears is hardly an event which would capture an autobiographer’s interest. Augustine is more interested in a biblically based theology of grace than autobiography.¹⁰⁸

Confessions is both singular and plural, as it includes a particular account of a personal story and at the same time describes a story that points beyond the autobiographical self, as an illustration of humanity’s universal pursuit for eternal realities. As our hearts are restless, the whole of humanity is seeking for the One. The gospel of Mark describes the first disciples echoing a truthful statement that surpasses their own generation: “everybody is looking for you”.¹⁰⁹ As there is “one God, one heart, one search, one rest”¹¹⁰ there is also only one human race seeking its connection back to its Creator.

If one takes the perspective that Augustine is writing a theography, on which his own story is part of God’s larger salvific history, the last three books are not problematic but are set in the context of God’s dealings with the whole of creation. The change of tone and the absence of objective events or biographical facts sequenced in the last and lengthy three books of *Confessions* have been a problem for scholars, as it is complex to make sense of a seemingly incohesive unity. But as James O’Donnell suggests, as from book eleven, there is an increase in the value of meditation in the law of God, *meditatio in lege Dei* that is valued as the continuing narrative in the post New Testament times of Augustine’s life.¹¹¹ The

108. Van Fleteren, *Confessiones*, 229.

109. Mark 1:37.

110. Meconi, introduction to *The Confessions*, xiii.

111. O’Donnell, *Confessions*, commentary 11.2.2. In his words: “the narrative has come so far that the relative value of *meditatio in lege dei* has increased vis-à-vis the value of continuing ‘narrative’. This encourages us to look closely just where narrative breaks off and see what gave it higher relative value to that point, and why the relative value changed. We are now in the post-NT times of Augustine’s life, in *hoc interim saeculo* (civ.

absence of autobiographical content in the last three books placed Augustine beyond himself and within God's dealings with the whole of creation. His future relies on loving God's commands as he becomes a man that discovers delight in God's law (Psalm 1).

Understanding *Confessions* as a theography helps us realize that the biographical content which is absent in the later books is not against the unity of *Confessions*, but actually testifies that a confessional narrative makes sense as part of a larger narrative of creation, redemption and consummation of God's active presence in history. *Confessiones* starts declaring the greatness of God and continues affirming it throughout its end as a meditation upon God's laws that guide his life. "Let me confess to you all I have found in your books, let me hear the voice of praise, and drink from you, and contemplate the wonders of your law, from the beginning when you made heaven and earth to that everlasting reign when we shall be with you in your holy city (*Conf.* 11.2.3). Augustine's relational narrative sets personal history within the horizon of God's greater redemptive story, and in doing so, becomes a paradigmatic account; but also a particular, contingent existence that points to the universal. As a relational theographical description of his own journey, Augustine finds his own self by abdicating being the most important topic of his own narrative. As his particular story is deliberately placed within God's creative action, Augustine's *Confessions* points to the eternal presence of his Creator, Redeemer, friend and Lord.

1.2.2 The context that led to the narratives of conversion and Confessions

*"Augustine wrote the Confessions for people (some suspicious, some admiring) who wanted to know how a rising young professor of Latin rhetoric had come to be what he then was: a bishop who lived in celibacy and austerity, a spiritual not a political leader. He had the double purpose of acknowledging the power of God manifested in his own life and in all creation. It is in this sense that his book is a confession, of sin, of faith and of praise. One man's life becomes a way of demonstrating true religion, and his experience displays the transformation of a culture."*¹¹²

11.1), between first and second coming, when incident and event and sequence are of less importance than in the prophetic and evangelic days that went before."

112. Clark, *The Confessions*, 1.

Augustine lived in a historical context that was ripe for Christian biographical accounts on the conversion of inner life. The Greco-Roman world already knew autobiographical accounts, such as that of Marcus Aurelius;¹¹³ however, the collapse of the Roman Empire turned people's attention even further to the inner world. Furthermore, in Augustine's lifetime, conversion of one's inner life substituted martyrdom as the peak of Christian existence. The end of persecution and the position of relative peace that Christianity occupied abolished martyrdom, a public witness before the opposing authorities which had been the high point of one's life of sacrifice to Christ. Conversion of inner life substituted martyrdom as the main sacrificial narrative: "accept the sacrifice of my confessions" (*Conf.* 5.1.1) writes Augustine.

In times of external collapsing such as the decline of the Roman Empire, the ruin of exterior cities created room for the exploration of interior houses: "the house of my soul is too small for you to enter: make it more spacious by your coming. It lies in ruins: rebuild it" (*Conf.* 1.5.6). As Brown suggests, in this historical period, the changes of one's life and conversions would be interesting to anyone who heard this shared experience: "Augustine found himself with an audience used to intimate biography, and so, ripe for autobiography. The stories that circulated about people concerned the events of their inner life."¹¹⁴

Augustine's Christian audience in Africa had already heard stories about interiority. St. Perpetua had already spoken from the heart, using the first person in her description of her time in prison.¹¹⁵ But this previous type of Christian biography dealt mainly with the story of martyrs. Their narrative was remarkable because of their death, the climax of life. In an age of persecution, one's whole story lost prominence compared to the significance of their martyrdom. Peter Brown points out that the biographer of St. Cyprian passed over the forty years of his life and deliberately focuses only on his Christian life after baptism. That was the part that interested the Christian readers in the third century.¹¹⁶

During the first centuries of Christianity, state persecution had been an exterior enemy, but after Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 inaugurated a policy of religious freedom, the climax of one's Christian life could not have been martyrdom anymore: it had to be conversion. Before the fourth century, the interaction between church and Empire used to

113. Former Roman Emperor (161-80 C.E), and stoic philosopher, he wrote *Meditations*.

114. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 152.

115. *Ibid.*, 159.

116. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 159.

be a precarious situation of a marginal group, which alternated times of relative peace and concentrated persecution in some parts of the Empire. However, after this context in which the blood of the martyrs would become the seed of the church (Tertullian), Christians saw church and state merge under the rule of Constantine. This ambiguous situation of church and state reinforcing mutual interests became the defining and dominating feature of their relations during that century.¹¹⁷ The power of the Roman Empire was turned to Imperial Christianity by the conversion of Constantine, the supreme emperor. In a narrow sense and politically speaking, it had been a story of conversion that gave Christianity its status of relative peace in the Roman Empire.

At the time of Augustine, many decades after persecution was abolished, Christians were not able to produce narratives of martyrdom, but could generate stories about one's inner life before God, a journey of moral transformation. The narratives in the fourth century had to do more with inner healing than external tyrannical persecution, with conversion of the heart than the risk of denying faith before the political authorities. In the context of relative peace, conversion took the place of martyrdom and became the climax of Christian life. *Confessions* can be described as a soul journey in which the doubts of a man, the corruption of his loves and interior fragmentation were his adversaries. The opposition was not persecution as the centuries before, but interior opponents. God is Augustine's guider and sustainer against the internal enemies, and he leads human life to its proper end. God is the deliverer from enemies, the rescuer from temptations: "you have enabled me to love you with all my strength and with passionate yearning grasp your hand, so that you may rescue me from every temptation until my life's end" (*Conf.* 1.15.24).

The legitimacy of conversion and purity of faith was a great interest of debate for Christians in the fourth century. As Constantine waded back to Arianism, kept pagan images in currency, delayed his baptism and even ordered the death of his relatives, the validity of such so-called conversion was at stake. Augustine himself would not be an exception to the doubts of fellow Christians, as he threaded an unconventional path to ordination and had previously pledged allegiance to the Manichean sect with gnostic influences (a so-called "Christian" group in the West, but not in the East). Furthermore, the end of persecution also raised the debates about the purity of the church. The unity of the church was wounded by the Donatist controversy in North Africa, a schism that had its roots in the "great persecution"

117. Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 132.

(AD 303-305). During a fierce persecution, some clergy compromised to state and obeyed Diocletian's edict to hand over copies of the Bible. After persecution was over, the rigorist group considered them *traditores*, betrayers of faith; then after a struggle over the important bishopric of Carthage, Donatus emerged as the voice speaking for the uncompromising, who separated themselves from the Catholic Church. They thought to be in continuity with the true church of the martyrs, as Donatus questioned "what has the Emperor to do with the Church?"¹¹⁸

Several reasons could be listed as Augustine's motivations to write his *Confessions*, as the scholarly debate continues arguing over the importance of Manicheans or/and Donatists in the purpose of Augustine's writing. In such a polemic and rigorist context, writing *Confessions* is definitely related to both groups, with the degree of relevance of each still being debated. It is, on one hand, a response to Donatists, who accused Augustine of being a crypto-Manichean and questioned his conversion. Therefore, one of Augustine's most basic intentions for writing *Confessions* is a defense from suspicious questions over the authenticity of his conversion. As David Meconi puts it, *Confessions* "is no doubt his first public attempt to defend his Catholic conversion as authentic and fruitful."¹¹⁹ Augustine was a suspicious character: he had been a member of Mani's sect. He then was raised in the ranks of prestige and used to be a rhetorician in an imperial court with an Arian ruler. Moreover, his ordination had been an unusual arrangement which left Hippo, a small town of the periphery of the Roman Empire, with two bishops. The route which took Augustine to the priesthood was unorthodox, controversial and against his own will at first. Valerius, an aging Bishop at Hippo hurried to place Augustine as his assigned successor, and convinced the Primate of Numidia to ordain him as an auxiliary bishop. Such a situation was not only unheard of, but it was against the Council of Nicea's recommendation.¹²⁰ Megalius, bishop of Calama and Primate of Numidia then sends a letter to Valerius (and others) mentioning his concerns over Augustine's credentials, but it is Augustine that answers his letter.¹²¹ Only after Augustine's response, is Megalius convinced that Augustine is apt to serve in the ecclesial clergy. To sum up, as a bishop that had been a Manichean and known publicly as a Christian for not very long, probably around 10 years (15 at most), Augustine would want to demonstrate, against

118. Donatus in Optatus, *De schismate* 3.3

119. Meconi, introduction to *The Confessions*, x.

120. Meconi, introduction to *The Confessions*, ix.

121. Ibid.

Donatist claims, that he was thoroughly reliable as for his new position. Since there were those who still doubted his Christian worldview, it was a timely kind of an apology to his life,¹²² an *apologia pro vita sua*.

On the other hand, *Confessions* is not only a defense of Augustine's credentials but also the fruit of Augustine's zeal to impact and change his readers, both inside and outside the Catholic Church. On one hand, there were those from outside the Church, the implicit Manichean audience whom Augustine would like to bring to Christianity, some of them previously influenced by him as a Manichean; on the other, those among his own Catholic companions and congregation, whom his God commanded him to serve (*Conf.* 10.4.6). *Confessions* is in this sense, as Annamaré Kotzé points out, a protreptic text,¹²³ a speech designed to persuade and instruct. It is a discourse that seeks to transform the reader. In order to reach the Manicheans, Kotzé suggests, there is a Manichean subtext across the work since its beginning until the last words.¹²⁴ Furthermore, at Augustine's time there would have been a renewed interest in cosmology: not only by the renewed popularity of Plato's creation account in *Timaeus* but also as a consequence of the intentional diffusion of Manichean cosmology, with its worldview of conflict between the kingdom of darkness and light.¹²⁵ Read under this interest in cosmology, the account in the last three books could make more sense against the backdrop of a Manichean audience. Against Kotzé's excellent perspective and attention to Augustine's original readers, however, we contend that one should not oppose the healing of the author and the salvation of the audience. She writes:

Thus, I argue that for most 20th century readers the title 'Confessions' raises the illegitimate expectation, strongly influenced by a prominent work like Rousseau's *Confessions*, of a self-searching autobiography. For Augustine's contemporaries, in the context of early Christianity, however, this title would have had connotations that are almost diametrically opposite to this notion, denoting a work not primarily designed to achieve the healing of the author, but rather the salvation of his audience.¹²⁶

Augustine's interest in saving his audience comes precisely as a consequence of the therapeutic effects of confessional language in his inner life. Kotzé seems to emphasize the salvation of the audience against therapeutic autobiography; but the salvation of his

122. Boulding, introduction to *The Confessions*, 10.

123. Annemaré Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 71 (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

124. *Ibid.*, 207-213, 233-247, 245-247.

125. *Ibid.*, 145-166, 150-151.

126. Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions*, 145-166, 153.

audience and the therapeutic effects of a theography are not in opposition, but complement each other. As we will discuss in the next sections, salvation in Augustine's *Confessions* is also related to placing one's life under God's healing grace. But since Augustine's is a fully relational narrative, it includes an invitation to his audience to live under the hands of the *Christus Medicus*, one that follows his own transformation. His autobiographical account works for the salvation of his audience, not in opposition to the healing effects, but precisely as a consequence of being a therapeutic proposal.

1.2.3 Narrative and language in a rhetorician's life

I refuse to believe that people invented languages

It's the Spirit driving me

Wanting to be adored

(Adélia Prado, "The birth of the poem")

Augustine's narrative is a work in which language is especially important.¹²⁷ Augustine was well aware that language and manipulation have had a long-living distorted relationship in his own life. Later in life, as he becomes a Christian, Augustine abandons his career as a professional rhetorician. His conversion is also a transformation of language towards a humble expression of one's self in response to the words given to him at a garden. Even though Augustine's conversion marks a new stage in his communication, he still remains an orator and a powerful handler of words. Augustine then will become a different kind of orator, as the conveyer of a message beyond himself.

Augustine's own attainment of language as a baby, as described in (*Conf.* 1.6.8), was raised from a desire to impose one's selfish *voluntates*.¹²⁸ As Augustine moved from *infans* (non-speaking) to boyhood, his life became a way to use language in a self-serving perspective. It suited a way "up", towards a journey of marketed success: from infant to schoolboy orator, then a student of rhetoric who sought an imperial court prestige. In the

¹²⁷ Philip Burton, *Language in the Confessions of Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2007), 10.

¹²⁸ Burton, *Language in the Confessions of Augustine*, 10. Burton suggests that the plural *voluntates* expresses a divided will. In childhood were the roots of his own divided language, a conflict between selfish desires and loving others for their sake.

midst of upward mobility, Augustine did not find in the Bible a text to inspire him towards his career in rhetoric. But he finds in Cicero's *Hortensius* a model of speech that lead him to reject simple and archaic Scripture (*Conf.* 3.5.9). Cicero, however, planted the first seeds to strive beyond the market of words, to seek for wisdom, "my heart burned with longing for the immortality that wisdom seemed to promise. I began to rise up, in order to return to you" (*Conf.* 3.4.7). At a first moment, Cicero leads Augustine away from Christianity, but his influence and love for wisdom would generate in Augustine a quest that would be fulfilled in Christ, his true wisdom. During his youth, Augustine was also admitted to the Manicheans, a gnostic sect as he described later, of incessant talking proudmen¹²⁹ (*Conf.* 3.6.10). After being a student in Carthage, Augustine follows a career as teacher of rhetoric, a time when he was "selling talkative skills apt to sway others because greed swayed me" (*Conf.* 4.2.2.) The apex of his rhetorical career is a culmination as a court orator in Milan, but at this time, his departure from truth and history of torn relationships leaves his inner life a mess, putrified, in pain and despair (*Conf.* 6.15.25).

Even though throughout his life Augustine used language at his own self-centered interest, it is also through language that Augustine encounters a way back to humility and finds the proper place of communication in his life. As Augustine sought wisdom and true communication, he experienced the redemption of language by an encounter with the Word of God, Christ revealed in Scripture. Augustine's transformation was first paved by an encounter with Neoplatonism that freed his mind from a materialistic view of Manicheism, even though Manicheism in North Africa was very influenced by Christian ideas. But it was through an encounter with God's words in Scripture that a significant return is effected: Augustine heard the sermons of Ambrose in Milan which allowed him to rethink his view of Scripture interpretation, the narrative of God's greatness but humble communication to humanity. Augustine's conversion surrendered him to the words he did not speak but still constituted his most profound being, given to Him by Scripture and uttered through the voice of an infant (*Conf.* 8.12.29). The abandonment of his rhetorical career is a most needed and natural sequence of his conversion: "I should withdraw the service of my tongue from the market of speechifying, so that young boys who were devoting their thoughts not to your law, not to your peace, but to lying follies and legal battles, should no longer buy from my mouth the

129. Once more Augustine shows us his lenses as he interpreted past events. As more than straight-forward sequential autobiography, *Confessions* leads us beyond the chronological events of his life.

weapons for their frenzy” (*Conf.* 9.2.2). Since his Creator is the giver of words that pierced his heart, God’s words start a deep transformation within, as “we bore your words within us like a sword penetrating us to the core” (*Conf.* 9.2.3). Augustine then finds in the Psalms an alternative, counter-cultural discourse that changed his own prideful communication, as described in (*Conf.* 9.4.8), “how loudly I began to cry out to you in those psalms, how I was inflamed by them with love for you and fired to recite them to the whole world, were I able, as a remedy against human pride!” Augustine converted not only to an impersonal God, but the incarnate Word who humbled himself and spoke through him by the Scriptures, particularly the Christ revealed through the psalms.

Book nine of *Confessions*, a book whose primary theme is death and rebirth, narrates not only the death of his beloved mother Monica, but also the dying process of any attempt to make a successful career out of a humble crucified Savior. It had been the Father who glorified the Son and raised him from the dead (*Conf.* 9.4.9). Even though words are a sign of life, Christ, the very Creative Word, rose *speechless* and triumphant from the grave. It is in this context of accepting the death of his words, both to his dear mother and of his cherished career, that Augustine mirrors Christ’s resurrection and offers his confessions not in words, but in silence (*Conf.* 9.8.17). As death is also swallowed up into resurrection victory,¹³⁰ Augustine’s former marketed speech was swallowed by a new resurrected humble communication: confessional language. *Confessio* is, inspired by this transformative Spirit-filled truth, an application to his speech of a conversion from death to rebirth in a humble and other-affirming mode of expressiveness. Augustine found a language that rejoiced and praised his Lord’s name (*Conf.* 9.4.12), that emerged against a manipulative use of words. His language was therefore received rather than invented. He did not make it – the language itself was in a sense “making him”, producing an effect upon his inner life. Augustine’s narrative of transformation from career orator to Christian servant (*Conf.* 10.4.6) displaced him and at the same time reestablished his language in God. Augustine was being dislocated from a self-centered position and replaced to another on which speech would be the emptying of his self-sufficiency. This movement involves both the abandonment of his previous prideful language and the embracing of humble speech. As language dies and rebirths, it is a non-contradictory complementary movement, on which both play a singular but distinctive aspect of the same process.

130. I Corinthians 15:54.

Between the biographical narratives of book 9 (that end with the death of his mother Monica in 387) and book 10, in which Augustine confesses to his readers his present state, there is at least a decade of “silence” about his own biography, years on which his understanding of language also matures. Philip Burton highlights that in 386, in Augustine’s *De Ordine*, language is primarily understood as the product of human invention, on which social stable relationships are founded upon human rationality.¹³¹ Naming and speech shape societal organization, the product of human development. It seems that the perspective described in *De Ordine* already reflects a Christian understanding of language but still one that lacked the maturity about the effects of God’s grace on communication that would be present later in *Confessions*. Furthermore, before writing *Confessions*, Augustine also penned other works in which he reflected about language.¹³² However, by the time of theography, probably around 397-401, when his understanding of Scriptures and of St. Paul had already matured, language is taken primarily as a gift of God. It is God who loves first, and his Word generates humanity’s words as response to God’s graceful self-revelation. God’s love reached the unlovable and therefore is always a gift. Since his Lord and God is the truth himself, the goal of language turned into an expression of the truth about his Creator.

1.3 *Confessio* and the responsive relational language

*Linguists have taken fifteen centuries to rediscover,
like a sun which has risen anew, like a dawn that is breaking,
ideas which are already set out in Saint Augustine's text,
which is one of the most glorious one could read*
(Jacques Lacan)

131. Burton, *Language in the Confessions of Augustine*, 20.

132. Ibid., 9. Burton suggests the following works on language before writing confessions: *De Magistro*, in 389, on which he reflected about the nature of language and signs; *Ars Augustini Pro*; possibly also *Fratrum Mediocritate Breviata*. *Principia Dialecticae*, on stoic logic, and *De Doctrina Christiana* (which had its start prior to the publishing of *Confessions* but concluded in 426), on Christian education and Scriptures.

This part of our research focuses on the language of *Confessions*: it will suggest that the Augustinian confession, if comprehended within the framework of relationality with therapeutic consequences, contains four threads composing a part of the fuller picture, forming together a language of response to God’s healing grace. The four threads could also be described through musical analogy. *Confessions* can metaphorically be described as a song¹³³, written to be heard¹³⁴, weaved by the psalms in the sound of prayerful Latin. Since Augustine's writing “pulses with the music of the psalms, the great medium to express the life of the heart,”¹³⁵ the four threads of confession could metaphorically be spoken as four instruments of a string quartet (Violin I, Violin II, Viola and Violin-Cello) sounding together in a symphony, as suggested by James O’Connell.¹³⁶ God’s grace acts as the orchestra conductor and to her guiding gestures they respond, as each string instrument plays a distinct but important voice. In this orchestra-like symphony, the four threads of confession can be set in a sequence of four symphonic instruments playing the same confessional song. The arrangement of instruments is already given to us by Augustine in the sequence they appear in the prologue: (1) psalms, (2) creation, (3) double movement of confession of sin and praise and (4) the confessing community of one heart.

First, it is a reply to grace by means of the language of the psalms, as in “great are you Lord and exceedingly worthy of praise”¹³⁷ (*Conf.* 1.1.1.); second, it is a language of response of a creature to the Creator, “we humans, who are a due part of your creation, long to praise you” (*Conf.* 1.1.1); third, it is a language of the double complementary movement (*peccati, laudis*) of confession of sin and confession of praise. Humans are bound by sin “carry the evidence of our sin and with it the proof that you thwart the proud” (*Conf.* 1.1.1) even though they are meant to praise, “they long to praise you” (*Conf.* 1.1.1); and fourthly,

133. Catherine Conybeare, “Reading the Confessions,” in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 99-110. Catherine Conybeare argues for an artistic, song-like reading of *Confessions*, as it plays consistently with the sound of language, formed in a sequence of passionate dialogue, not the sound of a spoken word, but the sound of a song. It is also a song of incompleteness and imperfection, a language filled with imperfect tenses, but also a song of unlikeness and to the unlikeness of God.

134. Reading aloud was a common practice in antiquity as *Conf.* 6.3.3. and Augustine’s engagement with Ambrose suggests.

135. Paula Fredriksen, review of *Confessions*, ed. James J. O’Donnell, *The Journal of Religion* 74, no. 3 (July 1994): 391.

136. Robert J. O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978): 91-101. O’Connell argues that Augustine’s *Confessions* has the quality of a symphony. By emphasizing different instruments as part of the whole, or a string quartet (1st violin, 2nd violin, viola and violin-cello) the metaphor of orchestral instruments highlights that the whole depends on each instrument played synchronically, but each instrument brings its own peculiar sound.

137. See Psalm 47:2 (48:1).

Augustine sets the responsive language in the context of inviting his audience to find joy in praise with him, a confessing community where hearts are lifted up, “our heart is unquiet until it rests in you” (*Conf.* 1.1.1).

Augustine responds to God’s action in his life through psalms, as a creature, in confession of sin and praise (*peccati et laudis*), and fostering a community of confession. Firstly, it is confession through the Scripture language of the psalms, the paradigm language of *Confessions*. Secondly, creational personhood, an I-thou personal relationship in the context of God’s creation. It is a responsive speech to the graceful calling of the creator God that gives personhood for the speaker. Thirdly, it is response to God’s grace as Scripture-based discourse entailing a double movement of confession of sin and praise, where one is miserable but placed under the light of God’s assured merciful goodness. Since Augustinian confession carries an intrinsic therapeutic component, for it is speech to the soul’s healing doctor, the confession of sins shows the wounds to the physician, and the confession of praise gives thanks for health.¹³⁸ Fourthly, it is a manifestation of his graced self to God in the presence of others, inviting hearers to conversion, with a protreptic sense.¹³⁹ As the audience places their lives under God’s healing grace, Augustine the bishop of Hippo seeks to bring about a ‘confessing community’¹⁴⁰ of hearts that find their joy in praising God, the Church.

The four main threads are summarized as follows: the Augustinian confession is a responsive psalm language to God’s prior calling and healing grace, in the form of a personal I-thou relationship in the context of creation, which fosters a double movement of self-emptying and praise that places Augustine under the secure mercy of God, the Doctor that effects his soul healing; this in turn prompts Augustine to invite his audience to do the same, fostering a confessing community of believers.

Historically, scholarship focus has been on the twofold confession of sin and confession of praise (*peccati, laudis*) which embraces the emptying of one’s self that opens space for a relationship of love, wonder and praise. Despite being central to Augustine’s comprehension of confession, the primary meanings to which *confessio/confiteri* point, the context from which the double and complementary movement of confession of sin and praise

138. Saint Augustine, *Essential Expositions of the Psalms*, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2015), commentary on Psalm 111.

139. For a proper elaboration on this topic, see Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions*.

140. The term ‘confessing community’ will be used in further parts of this work and is picked up from Rigby, *Theology of Augustine's Confessions*, 6.

emerges relies on a complex theological foundation. For instance, Augustine can only express his misery if he believes intensely on the grace of the Creator. There is a relationality and creational account that is prior to his confessional words repenting from sin.¹⁴¹ The relational nature of *Confessions*, therefore, is to be understood in the larger picture of God's gift of personhood in the context of a new creation. Furthermore, in reflecting his engagement with his audience, his work cannot be properly understood outside an intentional invitation to unbelievers to repent and place their lives under the guidance of the Catholic Church. Augustine's pastoral role and his task to nurture a community that is healed by prayer and confession must be taken into account.

Confessions was a work not to be read by an individual, but heard in community. A relational confessional language is understood only if we take into account the three characters in *Confessions*, namely, God, Augustine and his hearers. Therefore, in order to comprehend the relational character and the therapeutic implications of Augustine's renewed speech, the Augustinian confession needs to be placed both within a larger picture of Augustine's relational gift of personhood in the context of creation which precedes the confession of sin and praise; and to be framed as to encompass not only God and Augustine in a type of enclosed dialogue with God without the visible world, but as an engagement with God in real life with implications for his audience.

Confessiones depicts a narrative of a conversion of a former displaced orator who, previously living in a self-centered way, recognizes himself as a vulnerable creature before the grace of God; by confessing, Augustine finds a language to respond to God's love, an expressiveness before the healer of his soul. This dialogical begging communication performs transformation and places Augustine ever more under God's love and mercy, sustaining his continuous conversion.

1.3.1 Under the conduction of Grace, responding in psalm language

*Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you (Psalm 63:3)*

141. As Genesis 1, the creation narrative, always precedes Genesis 3, the story of failure and the falling race of Adam, we suggest that the very term *confessio* can be read firstly within the horizon of a creational personhood.

This section will suggest that *Confessions* is Augustine's earliest mature work responding to God's grace; consequently, since Augustine is under the impact of grace and chooses to leave his profession as a rhetorician when he became a Christian, he sought a new model of self-expression, which became prayer through the psalms. Augustine found a poetic and passionate communication addressed to his God framed by words given to him through Scripture. The psalter came to be the fundamental mode of language to voice his intimate response to grace. The poetry and songs in the book of Psalms express the whole range of emotions and affections to God. They are relational language *par excellence*, the model to which his personal speech conformed. Augustine's response to grace is in prayer, through the psalms.

Before executing the symphony and the instruments start to play, the conductor needs to take her place as the guider of the orchestra. God's grace, expressed through his self-giving boundless love in Christ to Augustine, is the conductor of his confessional song. Being so, we firstly discuss the important connection of confession as response to grace. As the conductor directs the rhythm and sets the way musicians play, grace guides confession and changes Augustine's mode of communication. Secondly, after setting the context of a language that responds to the conduction of grace, we then turn to the first instrument, the language of the psalms. Augustine was a former professional orator who became a psalmist: as he speaks and the music sounds, he finds in psalm language a medium to voice praise.

Confessions expresses Augustine's biographical content interweaved with the biblical doctrine of grace. It can be called Augustine's first elaborated and integrated exposition on grace when, after a deeper understanding of Saint Paul, middle-aged Augustine fully realized how God's grace and providence had guided his life steps and conversion. Joseph Lienhard calls *Confessions* Augustine's first treatise on grace, understood in the formulation of: "God's given free gift by which he moves the human will to choose (freely) the good or the better."¹⁴² An important point on Augustine's understanding of grace is his reading of Paul's epistle to the Romans in 396, a year prior to writing *Confessions*, which carried Augustine to a fuller understanding of God's activity in his life. Paul's letter to the Romans had already been central to his conversion experience, when the mysterious voice of

142. Joseph Lienhard, "Augustine's First Treatise on Grace," in *The Confessions: Saint Augustine of Hippo*, Ignatius Critical Editions, ed. David Vincent Meconi (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 463.

a boy in a garden prompts him to open the Scriptures, which in turn fall on Romans 13:13. Augustine presents his experience as a work of grace on his life. As a light that flooded the heart (*Conf.* 8.12.29), to put on Christ, conversion and transformation were no mere human decision, but a gift received. Ten years after his conversion experience in the garden, the rediscovery of the apostle Paul by the encouragement of the Milan priest Simplicianus helped Augustine to fully realize what had happened to him.

An argument supporting *Confessions* as a first treatise on grace should not, however, assume a rupture with Augustine's early theological thought or undermine shorter works that often refer to grace such as *Ad Simplicianus*, but rather *Confessions* as the culmination of a maturation process that had already begun in 386 and was being developed in his earlier writings. Carol Harrison makes a compelling case that the defining features of Augustine's mature theology were already present in 386 and were fundamentally present onwards in his thought.¹⁴³ Against the 396-revolution hypothesis of the "two Augustines" approach by Alfarić¹⁴⁴ which was later picked up by Peter Brown and has had reminiscences on contemporary works such as Augustine translator Henry Chadwick's,¹⁴⁵ Harrison argues that Augustine became thoroughly Christian as he experienced an absolute need for grace in 386, undergoing an authentic Christian conversion. His conversion was not only to neoplatonic thought, but as the garden experience of 386 in the eighth book suggests, it is not mere ascetic self-denial, but a conversion to grace, a subjection to God in Christ as his Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.¹⁴⁶ Harrison's argument, however, should not lead us to disregard a process of transformation; Augustine's perspective certainly involves both continuity and discontinuity, a development through maturation. Anthony Dupont supports Harrison's argument that Augustine's fundamental intuitions and insights on grace are already present in the early Augustine, but rightly suggests the need to nuance how this continuity is

143. Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7.

144. Alfarić, *L'évolution intellectuelle de Saint Augustin*.

145. Henry Chadwick, "Self-justification in Augustine's *Confessions*," *The English Historical Review* 118, no. 479 (2003): 1161-1175.

146. Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 239. Harrison argues that in the process that culminated at the mysterious encounter with God through Scriptures in the garden of Milan, Augustine undergoes an authentic Christian conversion, not only a Neoplatonic one, although Neoplatonism gave him an intellectual framework for his existential conversion to Christianity.

construed. It included a process of evolution and maturation that culminated in later works, such as *Confessions*.¹⁴⁷

Since his new being is received by God's grace, Augustine seeks a speech that answers to God's prior calling and locates his self in this relationship: the language found is prayer, confessional communication, expressed through the form of intimate and poetic heart-language, in a dialogical I-thou relationship. *Confessio* is no elaborate human discourse that expresses achievement or right, but a feeble responsive speech which directs itself vulnerably to a divine Thou, even to the point he begs for grace to pray: "Allow me to speak in your merciful presence" (*Conf.* 1.6.7). It is a prayerful and praise-filled response to the grace that relentlessly sought Augustine in his misery: "praise be to you, glory be to you, o fount of all mercy! As I grew more and more miserable, you were drawing me nearer. Already your right hand was ready to seize me, and pull me out of the filth, yet I did not know it" (*Conf.* 6.16.26).

The first word is never Augustine's, but always God's; then Augustine's response seeks communication with the divine with God's own words abiding in him. God's initiative pierced human hearts with an arrow of love as His words penetrate and fixate on human souls. "with the arrows of your charity you had pierced our hearts, and we bore your words within us like a sword penetrating us to the core" (*Conf.* 9.2.3). Augustine's words are a response to God's grace: divine words abiding in his inner being are Augustine's deepest expression. It is not without reason that Scripture quoting abounds, for his self is being generated by God's nurturing word inside his heart. Even Augustine's tongue is fashioned by God in order to confess God's own name (*Conf.* 5.1.1.) "The graced word is God's first, then Augustine's; it is most truly Augustine's in the measure that it is God's word in him. At the deepest level of creaturely being, divine creativity gives birth to human self-expression."¹⁴⁸ Macfaden suggests that humanity is structurally being-as-response to God, open to God's word and

147. Anthony Dupont, "Continuity or Discontinuity in Augustine? Is There an 'Early Augustine' and What Is his View of Grace?", review of *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity*, ed. Carol Harrison, *Ars Disputandi: the Online Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, no. 8 (2008): 76. As Dupont puts it, "Augustine's thinking on grace – of which the fundamental intuitions are indeed present from the very beginning of his writing (since they were the reason and the essence of the 386 conversion) – underwent a process of deepening, development and refinement. This 'evolution' is caused because Augustine's thinking in general matures, by aging, by his pastoral experiences and the theological controversies he was entangled in".

148. Boulding, introduction to *The Confessions*, 25.

communication.¹⁴⁹ Humans are given a space to engage at liberty in the world, but their freedom entails responsiveness; they will not thrive if relying on their own resources apart from God.

Even though the Augustinian confession is a mode of speech, considered confessional speech when written down, such as in *confiteor tibi in litteris* (*Conf.* 9.12.33) or *cum leguntur et audiuntur* (*Conf.* 12.26.36), it does not necessarily mean it is spoken verbally. The paradoxical language of *confessio itaque mea, deus meus, in conspectu tuo tibi tacite fit et non tacite*, a confession in silence and not in silence (*Conf.* 10.2.2), suggests that this is heart language that surpasses words. As French dramatist Antonin Artaud puts it, “all true language is incomprehensible, like the chatter of a beggar’s teeth.” Augustine’s work conveys a view on confession as a language of surrender in the presence of God, a humble self-expression that cannot be wholly contained by modes of communication. This is a theme he will develop further in the *Expositions on the Psalms*. In a commentary on Psalm 32, Augustine suggests that what is sung in the heart in jubilation cannot be limited or articulated in words, for God transcends speech.¹⁵⁰ It is the heart, not the words, which brings the essential element that delineates true speech; but the heart also carries what challenges and defies language. Yet the confessor must not remain silent, for the goal of this communication is a union with God himself, the speech of a creature seeking a further union with the Creator. One cannot remain silent for the sake of this loving surrender, but the love for this union makes us aware that it cannot be confined by speech. As José Comblin highlights, truth in Christianity is not wholly contained in a discourse: but embodied in the real and concrete walk of the people of God, being lived and not spoken, for it involves doing and not merely saying.¹⁵¹ However, words are also necessary, for without them God’s people would be disaggregated and disconnected from its past, not being able to nurture a forward-looking

149. Alistair McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 19-21.

150. “Sing to him *in jubilation*. This is what acceptable singing to God means: to sing jubilantly. But what is that? It is to grasp the fact that what is sung in the heart cannot be articulated in words. Think of people who sing at harvest time, or in the vineyard, or at any work that goes with a swing. They begin by caroling their joy in words, but after a while they seem to be so full of gladness that they find words no longer adequate to express it, so they abandon distinct syllables and words, and resort to a single cry of jubilant happiness. Jubilation is a shout for joy; it brings that the heart is bringing forth what defies speech. To whom, then, is this jubilation more fittingly offered than to God who surpasses all utterance? You cannot speak of him, because he transcends speech; and if you cannot speak of him, yet may not remain silent, what else can you do but cry out in jubilation, so that your heart may tell its joy without words, and the unbounded rush of gladness not be crumpled by syllables? *Sing skifully to him in jubilation*. (*Expositions of the Psalms*, 32.2.8).

151. Comblin, *A Força Da Palavra*, 241.

picture of future.¹⁵² As Boulding points out, words involve participation in the transcendent mystery and are to be connected with God's Word. Otherwise, they become chatter and lose their self-transcending character:

The graced, God-given word is therefore self-transcending, like any genuine symbol of the divine, whose function is to be transparent to the mystery beyond itself. If it is to be the means of illumination and effective communication in the world of grace it must remain open to the eternal Word of God, and allow itself to be shaped by him. Human words, however inadequate and stumbling, must remain one with the Word by self-transcendence, or they will degenerate into *loquacitas*.¹⁵³

Even though Augustine speaks to himself, *Confessions* is not a monologue or an apparent dialogue, but the response of the ears of his heart attuned to the mouth of God. Confession, far from chatter, is listening with the ears of the heart to what God's grace has spoken, and responding to it in a request for nearness: "bring the ear of my heart close to your mouth" (*Conf.* 4.5.10). He is subtly perceived in the interior of the soul, a mysterious character, but nevertheless, the substantial personal truth, sovereign over all who turn to him, who is able to respond to all at once.¹⁵⁴ God is seemingly mute but in reality not all are attentive to hear. Many are simply selective hearers, non-dialogical partners, listening only to what they wish, conforming God to their wills. But one is called to be relationally responsive, as Yahweh's call to his people is the Hebrew *shema*, a call to hear the Lord and embrace his words. As Augustine writes, "your best servant is the one who is less intent on hearing from you what accords with his own will, and more on embracing with his will what he has heard from you" (*Conf.* 10.26.37).

Chapter 9 of *Confessions* describes how Augustine renounces the mouth as weapon in legal battles (*Conf.* 9.2.2) and exchanges armed discourse into the language of the psalms. Augustine joins the psalmist David in songs full of faith, outbursts of devotion, a loud crying out inflamed with love (*Conf.* 9.4.8). The psalms, the collective prayer book of Israel and Christ's church, becomes for Augustine a personal book that conveys a language of

152. *Ibid.*, 241. "A verdade de que se trata aqui não está num discurso: a verdade mesmo está na caminhada real e concreta do Povo de Deus: está sendo vivida e não dita. Consiste em fazer e não em dizer. Contudo, o dizer também é necessário: sem ele o povo de Deus não se reuniria, ficaria desagregado e disperso. Estaria desligado do seu passado. Não teria imagem prospectiva do seu futuro."

153. Boulding, introduction to *The Confessions*, 25.

154. Solignac, introduction to *Les Confessions*, 13.

intimacy. Augustine then lives in the psalms¹⁵⁵ and makes it the language of Confessions since its first line, as he exalts the greatness of God using Psalm 47 (*Conf.* 1.1.1). As Augustine “withdraws the service of tongue from the market of speechifying” (*Conf.* 9.2.2), Scripture quoting becomes his primary mean of eliciting a purposeful transformation of his former self-affirmatory, prideful language. In *confessio* through the psalms, the public communication of an orator becomes the language of intimate relationality. As an orator, Augustine knew how crafty and deviously deceptive language can be. But as a Christian following Scripture and the apostle’s Paul advice to the Christian community, Augustine speaks in psalms, the language of gratitude in the heart for believers (Ephesians 5.19-20).

Augustine was a former orator, but in the light of this grace, God would not be impressed by Augustine’s capacity to speak or deceived by crafted speech. Neither would matter to be acclaimed as one of the prestigious rhetoricians in the Roman Empire, as Augustine’s fanciful words could not change God’s love for him. As a man directed by his Lord’s merciful presence, *Confessions* elicits a new way of telling and recounting reality, “have mercy on me, so that I may tell” (*Conf.* 1.5.5). Since God is actively redeeming and making all things new in his life and around him, Augustine seeks a language that is adequate to join in this recreation process. In order to express and participate in this renewed reality, Augustine finds in *confessio* a prayer that not only empowers the confessor, but gives him voice to participate in the redemption of all creation, joining the divine process of recreation.¹⁵⁶ He discovers in confessing, therefore, a responsive speech to the grace of his Creator, an intimate communication in passionate prayer.

As Augustine abandons his polished self-affirming discourses and embraces humble communication, the message is not conveyed through self-interested disputes on the market of speechifying, but by those words given to him by God, through the psalms in the Bible. Scripture is set as the opposite to false words, and becomes to him the non-deceitful means of communication, the alternative to the presumption of his former speech. “Circumcise all that is within me from presumption and my lips without from falsehood. Let your scriptures be my chaste delight, let me not be deceived in them nor through them deceive others” (*Conf.* 11.2.3). Augustine’s life would be permanently marked by speaking as a

155. Augustine has written on the psalms more than any other Christian writer and his commentary on the psalms are his longest work. He used the psalms both for personal prayer and the collective nurture of his congregation. He spent the years of 392 until 418 preaching, commenting and explaining the psalms.

156. Ortiz, *You Made Us for Yourself*, 126-128.

response to grace, in prayer, bursting with God's words in him through the psalms as an alternative language begging for grace to speak.

Augustine suggests that the confessional language of the psalms excludes the swollen spirit (*Conf.* 9.4.8) and heals human chaotic experience. Speaking in psalms, therefore, includes a therapeutic component. The language of the psalms transforms the affections and heals the chaos: as a sewer system that controls water pollution in the soul, the psalms convey the confessional language that overcomes sin and fosters health. "The psalms offer to men and women not only a reflection which serves as a diagnosis of their condition before God; they also, more especially, offer a therapy for human affective life bereft of its primordial harmony."¹⁵⁷ Communication through the psalms sustains and upholds the conversion of the heart. As Cameron puts it, words, and particularly God's words, are not only informative, but performative, molding human affections: the psalms are a mirror that shapes experience, for when the psalms pray, one also prays, and whether the psalmist rejoices or laments, hopes or fears, the reader does also follow that same affective journey.¹⁵⁸ One's emotions are brought back in the healing presence of God through the medium of the psalms, and in doing so, they mold and shape chaos into order as words participate in the creative, organizing process that generates life.

For Augustine, the psalms became a remedy for pride, an antidote the Manicheans were unaware of (*Conf.* 9.4.8) and unknown to him during the years of his own prideful language. "Scripture is a reality that grows with little children, but I disdained to be a child and in my high and mighty arrogance regarded myself as grown up" (*Conf.* 3.5.9). Augustine's was at first unimpressed with the Bible. After he found Cicero's eloquent prose, a comparison was inevitable. However, intimately and read in retrospect, it had been his own inability to embrace humility that led him astray from the Scriptures. Only the humble submit to the paradox in which wisdom is hidden in simplicity, where one finds joy in being shaped by words other than one's own.

Augustine's mind and heart were equipped with a remarkable knowledge of Scriptures that overflowed in pastoral homilies during most of his time as bishop. While writing *Confessions*, Augustine also preached from the psalms, which later became a

157. John Rotelle, introduction to *Expositions of the Psalms* 1–32, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. 15 (New York: New City Press, 2000).

158. Michael Cameron, "Enarrationes in Psalmos," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 293.

homiletical commentary named *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, or Explanations of the Psalms, one of Augustine's major works. The period that comprehends *Enarrationes* spanned the first years of Augustine's pastoral work in 392 until 418.

Unlike other books of the Bible, the psalms not only heal the affections of the readers but also bring them to the presence of the whole Christ (*totus Christus*) as the Word of God is revealed through human words. Augustine's interpretation is Christological, on which Christ is seen as the centre to which the entire Old Testament points: "our whole purpose when we hear the Psalms, the Prophets and the Law is to see Christ there, to understand Christ there" (*en. Ps.* 98.1). Since "the comprehensive mystery underlying all of Scripture is Christ and the Church" (*en. Ps.* 79.1) the psalms for Augustine are not only the songbook of Israel, but are God's book of songs which fosters an encounter with the humble incarnate Christ, who shamelessly prays the psalms with humanity. By crying out on our behalf, his voice incorporates those of his followers; they speak with him, the head of the body, as *una vox*: they are participants in the one voice. Christ's own voice, one with his body, the *totus Christus*, is the radiating hermeneutical centre of the psalter.¹⁵⁹ Effecting a transaction, Christ executes the great exchange, of his humanity for our divinity, on which humans receive grace and beauty and Christ takes their sin and ugliness. As Jason Byssee argues, the psalms are the school of Christ through incarnation pedagogy, by which, from ugliness to beauty, Christ reshapes human desire and affection.¹⁶⁰ As Augustine puts it,

But let us, who are now the body of Christ, acknowledge our voice in the Psalm, and say to him: "the unjust have told me stories of their pleasures, but they are nothing compared to your Law, O Lord." As I journey through it, breathing hard in that sweat of our human condemnation, Christ meets and refreshes me everywhere in those Books, everywhere in those Scriptures, in their open spaces and in their secret haunts. He sets me on fire with a desire that comes from having no little difficulty in finding him. But that only makes me eager to clutch whatever I find, to soak it deep into my bones, and to hold in close for my salvation.¹⁶¹

159. Cameron, "Enarrationes in Psalmos," 293.

160. Jason Byssee, *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 109.

161. *Against Faustus the Manichee* 12.27 [CSEL 25/1:356]. Augustine invites believers to find their voice in the words given to them by God himself, *agnoscamus in psalmo vocem nostram*, invites them to retell their stories not as individualistic stories about their own pleasures *narraverunt mihi iniusti delectationes*, but as those who have found in the law of God the source of their pleasure *sed non sicut lex tuae, Domine* (psalm 1). Furthermore, Augustine's life is a journey of sweat, marked by our human condemnation, but a story that Christ meets and refreshes his people in and through Scripture, *Christus mihi ubique illorum librorum*, and set them on fire with a burning desire for him *desiderium inflammat*.

In the preceding text, Augustine calls believers to find their voice in the words given to them by God himself through the psalms, *agnoscamus in psalmo vocem nostram*, and invites them to retell their stories not as individualistic stories about their own pleasures *narraverunt mihi iniusti delectationes*, but as those who have found in the law of God the source of their pleasure *sed non sicut lex tua, Domine* (Psalm 1). Furthermore, even though Augustine's life is a journey of sweat, marked by our human condemnation since Adam, it is also a story that is met and refreshed by the encounter of the Living Christ with his people in and through Scripture, *Christus mihi ubique illorum librorum*. As Augustine is met by Christ, he is set on fire with a burning desire, *desiderium inflammat*.

Time and again, people within the Judeo-Christian tradition have run to the psalms in times of distress when their words not enough. They are drawn to voice God's words which become their own as believers pray by "the book". Among them ranks the fourth-century Athanasius, who was five times exiled for championing Nicean faith against Arians and found in the psalms a source of healing and hope. In the 20th century, Natan (Anatoly) Sharansky, an Ukranian-Israeli politician, survived nine years as a soviet prisoner by holding fast to the language of the psalms. His remarkable experience of uncountable days reciting the psalms with the pictures of his loved ones is a witness to the strength of the psalms amidst turmoil.¹⁶² The interior life in times of fragmentation and suffering can find in the psalms a major source of resistance. As for Augustine himself, in his last illness and before Hippo fell to the Vandals who besieged his city, Augustine found in the Psalms consolation for the last days of his life, as described by Possidius, biographer and disciple:

Now the holy man in his long life given of God for the benefit and happiness of the holy Church (for he lived seventy-six years, almost forty of which he spent as a priest or bishop), in private conversations frequently told us that even after baptism had been received, exemplary Christians and priests ought not depart from this life without fitting and appropriate repentance. And this he himself did in his own last illness of which he died. For he commanded that the shortest penitential Psalms of David should be copied for him, and during the days of his sickness as he lay in bed he would look at these sheets as they hung upon the wall and read them; and he wept freely and constantly. And that his attention might not be interrupted by anyone, about ten days before he departed from the body he asked of us who were present that no one should come in to him, except only at the hours in which the physicians came to examine him or when nourishment was brought to

162. Natan Sharansky, *Fear no evil* (New York: Random House, 1988). Sharansky retained his sense of self through the book of psalms. When the soviet KGB confiscated Sharansky's book, he entered a hunger strike which led him the weight around 35 kilos. Sharansky resisted realizing that nobody could humiliate him, but he was the only one who could humiliate himself, and he could do it in the presence of God through the psalms.

him. This, accordingly, was observed and done, and he had all that time free for prayer.¹⁶³

The psalms are for Augustine the paradigm and model to which *confessio* conforms: it is relational language *per excellence*. The psalms are the foremost paradigm form of *confessio*. As poetry based on images, the psalms capture the imagination and the affections before they reach the reason and cognitive thinking; they place people in relation to, and connected to feelings, metaphors, and lament that convey a worldview under God. Since Augustine decides to abandon his career as a rhetorician and follow in the steps of Christianity, through the psalms, Augustine finds his own voice, a renewed language of a converted orator. The psalms became the primary mode of language to which Augustine sings in his personal, faithful voice.

1.3.2 *Confessio* as creational personhood: responsive speech to grace in a personal I-thou relationship in the context of a new creation

1.3.2.1 Confession and creation

*Accept the sacrifice of my confessions,
offered to you by the power
of this tongue of mine
which you have fashioned
and aroused to confess to your name (Conf. 5.1.1).*

After framing Augustine's communication as the responsive prayerful life to grace through the psalms, the second thread of Augustinian confession this work highlights is how Augustine understands creation, and the notion of personhood that is generated by seeing oneself as part of a God's relational creation. It could also be described as the second musical instrument in a symphonic string quartet of the Augustinian orchestral language. Creation is the context that frames gifted personhood in I-thou relationship. Augustine's life is comprehended in the context of being a renewed creature touched by God's new creation: the

163. Saint Possidius, *Sancti Augustini Vita Scripta a Possidio Episcopo*, introduction notes, revised text, and English version by Herbert T. Weiskotten (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1919), 141.

most frequent sentence in *Confessions* is addressing his Creator as the “God who made heaven and earth.”¹⁶⁴ Without creation, on which the notion of confession is rooted, the plain meaning of *confessio* cannot be understood.¹⁶⁵ Augustine, in the introduction of his *Confessions*, opens the book with a distinction between Creator and creature, in which one is great, *magnus*, and the other is a small part of creation, *portio creaturae tuae*. After this distinction he points out the connection between biblical anthropology and creational intentionality, “You made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you” (*Conf.* 1.1.1), situating the heart in the context of being made and ordered towards God, *fecisti nos ad te*. The restlessness of the human heart is an expression of a desiring wound for the Creator placed upon the heart of His creatures. As the very prologue to the book suggests, there is discontinuity, an ontological distance between the world and God; but there is also continuity between God and creation. Both the human heart restlessness in Augustine and redemptive history in the biblical narrative are framed by creation’s relationship with the Creator. In this paradoxical discontinuity-continuity movement of relational proximity and ontological distance, a space is generated for an I-thou personal relationship.

The creation account is essential for a theological comprehension of experience, human nature and destiny, not only for Augustine, but for a Christian worldview.¹⁶⁶ The particular divine-human relationship is to be comprehended within God’s personal relationship with his whole creation. Both Genesis and Revelation, the beginning and consummation of the biblical story, set the narrative in the context of God’s presence with the created reality, with a new heaven and a renewed earth.¹⁶⁷ The biblical account of creation provides a framework to understand creation in relation to its Creator. It is not an impersonal reality, for the creational biblical-theological anthropology finds its source in the Creator God, the divine initiator who in love, by his Word, gave birth to the world. Augustine knows that God does not create out of necessity but freely, out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), bringing them into being as a marvelous gift of his essential goodness. Humans are therefore intrinsically relational beings, for at the origin of life, humanity was created by the pouring out of divine goodness and love (*Conf.* 13.1.1-2.2). Human beings find their vocation in

164. O’ Donnell, prolegomena to *Confessions*.

165. Ortiz, *You Made Us for Yourself*, xx.

166. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 236.

167. Cherith Fee Nordling, “The Human Person in the Christian Story,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 66.

openness to God and others in this divinely created world, persons-in-relation, because the love which created them was an outflow of the relational invitation to a life in God.

Augustine's use of "creation" is many-sided and its use requires some nuance. Jared Ortiz suggests that when Augustine uses the term creation, the word is multifaceted: it is firstly, *divine activity*, for God created from nothing and all came into being; secondly, it also means all *the created things*, the very creatures God made into being; thirdly, creation for Augustine has deeper sense, related to the way in which he *defines how he understands* the relationship between God and the world.¹⁶⁸ Augustine's doctrine of creation also presupposes the desire for the joy of another: it is God's pure desire for the benefit and the delight of another who remains other, a selfless love without self-centered hidden interest.¹⁶⁹ Even though there is ontological distance, he made something other than himself and gifted it beauty and existence. "You do not withhold existence from good which neither benefits you nor is of your own substance and therefore equal to you, but exists simply because it can derive its being from you" (*Conf.* 13.1.2).

Even though Augustine has been portrayed as an anti-worldly, Platonist escapist or hierarchical dualist, Augustine's creational anthropology is more subtle and complex, for Augustine affirmed both discontinuity and continuity between God and his world. On one hand there is discontinuity, for the cosmos is not eternal, it is God-created. Though philosophers such as Aristotle and world religions such as Hinduism believe in the eternity of the world (monism), in the Christian story the cosmos is not eternal or divine, but it is sacred. The earth is distinctive, formed at a point in time, divinely touched with a special design, an environment that allows life to flourish. Without God's initiative, there would be only chaos, darkness and shapelessness. As Alister McGrath points out, the doctrine of creation affirms both the uniqueness of the world and negates its divinity (pantheism), "Creation leads to a critical world-affirming spirituality, in which the world is affirmed, without falling into the snare of treating it as if it were God."¹⁷⁰ There is also sacred continuity between God and his created world, as God pronounces the goodness of his creation as described in the first chapter of Genesis. The text communicates 6 times that "God saw that it was good", expressing how created matter and physicality participate in the goodness of a Creator. The world, therefore,

168. Jared Ortiz "Creation in the Confessions," in *The Confessions: Saint Augustine of Hippo*, Ignatius Critical Editions, ed. David Vincent Meconi (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 476.

169. Rowan Williams, "'Good For Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994), 20.

170. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 234-235.

is not a problem to be overcome. In the biblical worldview, the world is not a place of shadows and delusions, but a marvelous place made by a personal and loving God. In the biblical narrative, by the end of the sixth day on which humanity is formed, God gives his ultimate verification, his seal of approval: “God saw all that he had made, and it was *very good*” (Gn 1:31). All creation is affirmed in its embodied existence, and as Peter Brown suggests, Augustine was “ever more convinced that human beings had been created to embrace the material world.”¹⁷¹ As a former Manichean,¹⁷² Augustine distinguished himself from their teachings and came to portray the universe as the result of a good creation made by a relational, loving and powerful being. At the origin of human life there was not only creation, but creation-in-love and creation-in-freedom. In the biblical narrative, God did not form the world out of necessity; in His holy love he freely chose a specific being to be his covenantal partner, assigning humanity a relational vocation. Consequently, it is not possible to oppose continuity and discontinuity between God and the world in Augustine’s perspective, for there is a dialectical interconnectedness. The continuities also press and lead inevitably to a fundamental ontological opposition. In summary, Augustine argues for both continuity and discontinuity between God and the world he created: a Christian worldview, to which Augustine subscribes, holds that the world itself is contingent, distinct from God but sacred and where God is paradoxically present.¹⁷³

Augustine’s thought is holistic, affirming the material as well as the spiritual. Its all-embracing character is also relevant to contemporary discussions, such as environmental care. Rowan Williams argues for continuity and discontinuity between God and his world and how it participates in God as being a coherent system.¹⁷⁴ Charles Mathewes also pursues an understanding of a worldly Augustine.¹⁷⁵ As Rowan Williams suggests, Augustine views an

171. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 425.

172. For further research see Mathijs Lamberigts, “Was Augustine a Manichean? The Assessment of Julian of Aeclanum,” in *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West: Proceeds of the Fribourg-Utrecht International Symposium of the International Association of Manichaean Studies (IAMS)*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 49, eds. Johannes van Oort, Otto Wermelinger, and Gregor Wurst (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2001), 113-136.

173. Ortiz, “Creation in the Confessions,” 477.

174. Williams, ““Good For Nothing?”,” 9-24. Engaging criticism that Augustine is a hierarchical dualist, starting with quotes both from environmentalists and feminists, Williams writes about how Augustine is accused of reinforcing a dualism between creator and creature.

175. Charles Mathewes, “A Worldly Augustinianism: Augustine’s Sacramental Vision of Creation,” *Augustinian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010): 333. By analyzing Augustine’s theology, ecclesiology, ontology, anthropology, and politics, Charles Mathewes argues for a worldly Augustine; he suggests that Augustine turns his audience to a more serious attention to the created reality.

universe in motion, on which everything seeks its place within a network of interaction; to see the ordered beauty of the world is to see interdependence as a whole, as a coherent system, and in Augustine's worldview, one cannot think of a particular in isolation. Created things find their place in God. This universal motion desires equilibrium and is itself a way creation manifests the traces of its Creator, a continuity with the life of God. However, there is also discontinuity, in the sense that creation speaks about God by being different from him, by being temporal and changeable.¹⁷⁶ As Williams puts it, the ideal creation, one not attainable in this life but still living a process of redemption, "is the realm in which good or beauty or stability, the condition in which everything is most freely and harmoniously itself in balance with everything else, is being sought and being formed. This is, of course, why there can be no short route to heaven: we must grow into new life, as the *Confessions* constantly reminds us."¹⁷⁷

Augustine affirms both the contingency and the goodness of the material world in contrast with Manichean cosmology. While part of the Manichean sect, Augustine assumed that matter could not be totally good, even though containing divine life imprisoned in it. As a former Manichean, Augustine knew how God could be reduced within the horizon of the worldly, without transcendence. After questioning his own gnostic beliefs, Augustine came to consent on the universe as created by one sole principle of goodness rather than a conflict between darkness and light. In the section 7.10.16 of *Confessions*, Augustine describes how his view changed, a distinction between God and the world through the books of the Platonists. Having left Manichaeism, Augustine finds in Neoplatonism an alternative explanation that evil has no ontological consistency. Augustine, consequently, does not identify evil any more as a cosmological explanatory principle. By changing his conception on evil (although not underestimating it), Neoplatonists allowed an alternative to the Manichaean conception, paving the way for Christianity.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, Neoplatonists allowed Augustine to comprehend the immutability of God and see beyond a materialist view

176. Williams, "Good For Nothing?," 14-15.

177. *Ibid.*, 18.

178. Gillian R. Evans, *Agostinho sobre o mal* (São Paulo: Paulus, 1995), 16. Augustine characterizes his conversion to the Christian faith as the flood of light and the absence of the shadow: "the light of certainty flooded my heart all dark shades of doubt fled away" *Conf.* 8.12.29. According to Gillian Evans, this sentence describes the principle that solved the problem of evil: where darkness shines there can be no darkness. When light comes, it becomes clear that darkness is no more than the absence of light. Where good exists, evil has been cast out; it is clear that it is no more than an absence of good. Augustine recognizes a new position in which evil becomes the absence of being and no longer the explanatory principle.

of the world, opening him to the immaterial realm of reality. Later, in his Commentaries on Genesis, Augustine refutes the Manichaean explanation and defends the creation of the world as a consequence of a single principle of goodness.

Augustine is within a biblical and patristic tradition attempting to come to terms with the interaction between creation and the relational implications flowing from it. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann suggests that the biblical account emphasizes that at the origin of life, humanity is portrayed as an intrinsically relational being, dependent on God's initiative to sustain life, agents and creatures in relation to the giving God.¹⁷⁹ In Genesis 2:7, God formed the human from the earth and breathed to enliven Adam. He became a "living being" (*nephesh*) by God's breath. The first humans were meant to pursue a double orientation: accountable to God and steward of the earth. The human being was called to be the embodied mediator between heaven and earth, the manifestation of God's personal and caring character to the created order. Humanity was to image the glory of God in relational wholeness, in harmony with God, each other and the whole of creation. Jürgen Moltmann argues that the nature of human beings springs from their relatedness to God, and this bond gives human nature its meaning.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, the patristic period wrestled with the challenge to find an ontology that could avoid monistic Greek ontology as well as a gnostic abyss between God and the world.¹⁸¹

As God calls creation to turn back to him, Augustine affirms that all creatures must return to God to receive both existence and its appropriate essence, and by imitating the Son in turning to the Father, they point to the divine goodness which made them.¹⁸² Creation joins the chorus of praise affirming their bond with God echoing aloud the declaration that they only exist in connection to a Creator: "then they lifted up their mighty voices and cried: he made us" (*Conf.* 10.6.9) It is only by participating in the divine essence that the world is redeemed: "God is not part of the world, but brings all things into being from nothing. This means that for anything to be, it has to be drawn back to God so it can share in his being in some way."¹⁸³

179 . Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 453.

180. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 220.

181. Zizioulas, Iōannēs. *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, 16.

182. Meconi, commentary to *Confessions*, 410, (*Conf.* 13.2.3).

183. Ortiz, *You Made Us for Yourself*, 230.

In view of creation's relevance to substantiate the understanding of *confessio*, it is pertinent to point out that creation is not a theme in isolation in Augustinian thought, but a central, unique and fundamental theme connected to conversion and prayer.¹⁸⁴ Created in the image of God, humanity is deformed by sin but reformed by conversion. It is conversion that restores the human person to its original creational intent in its orientation to God, which is only sustained by a continual process of returning to God through prayer. In the new context of God's renewal of creation, conversion and prayer become the means by which divine life in humanity is restored. Augustine's conception of humanity in *Confessions* is of dependent creatures that can only be fulfilled by moving beyond themselves, through a journey of conversion and prayer to the source of life itself, the Creator. Therefore, *Confessions* points not only to the renewal of creation, but the renewal of a converted I-thou relationship in prayer, a new creational personhood, a theme to which we now turn. Augustine shapes a rich vision of a relational interaction between God and humanity, a model of dialogical communication and listening ability. Augustine's emphasis is also an inspiration to the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which also stressed the connection between church and society in relational terms.¹⁸⁵ As the Vatican II dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum* attests, quoting Augustine, listening to revelation leads to a conviction of faith and hope that becomes loving expectation.¹⁸⁶

1.3.2.2 Creational personhood: response to grace in a personal I-Thou relationship

Confessional speech acknowledges that it is God, rather than Augustine, who is the initiator and first speaker in this relationship. God is a *thou*, an active subject, a personal being, who chose humanity as his dialogue partner; to be human is, consequently, to act in response to a personal address by God. In this section, we have intentionally chosen the terms

184. Goulven Madec, "La conversion et les Confessions," in *Augustin: Le Message De La Foi*, (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer 1987), 26.

185. Christoph Theobald, *A revelação* (São Paulo: Loyola, 2006), 44-49. Christoph Theobald emphasizes the different accents of the first and second Vatican Councils, as instruction and communication. In Vatican II, the self-revelation of God becomes a starting point, for God in his goodness and wisdom has revealed himself in person, an event of communication. Vatican II accentuated that revelation is not only a series of theological assumptions of dogmatic truths, but an invitation to enter into relationship. Revelation is conceived in a dialogical framework, as an invitation that shifts absolute truths to a communicative relationship.

186. Vatican Council, *Dogmatic constitution on Divine Revelation: Dei Verbum*, solemnly promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965 (Boston: St. Paul Editions, [19--]). It is significant that, at the beginning of the proclamation of the dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, St. Augustine is quoted ("De Catechizandis Rudibus" C.IV 8: PL. 40, 316.). As *Dei Verbum* affirms, "so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe, by believing it may hope, and by hoping it may love."

person and personhood rather than personalism.¹⁸⁷ Augustine's use of *persona* is a multi-sided one, embracing different dimensions, such as the anthropological, the Christological and the Trinitarian. But as Quatrefages pointed out, there is a primacy of the theological use¹⁸⁸ and the anthropological sense is derivative from it. Consequently, it is possible to speak about human persons in Augustine, and central to personhood in Augustine is self-giving in love as a response to the love of God.¹⁸⁹ It is the concept of the human person as object of God's gracious love that better explains an Augustinian understanding of personhood, for it is God who proposes himself to humanity as a Thou.¹⁹⁰

Confessio is not a speech where Augustine is the leader and sets the agenda, but instead God himself is the conductor, and sometimes is regarded as the agent, as in "*cui confitentur ex me miserationes tuae*"¹⁹¹ (*Conf.* 5.10.20). By being object of a saving love, one discovers a new value for the self as a received identity. Meaning is established by otherness, gifted by a gracious divine being. God is the initiator who is also interested in human response: "you first willed that I should confess to you, my Lord and my God" (*Conf.* 11.1.1). As the leading partner, there is an anteriority of God's call: in Marion's perspective, it is a self that is preceded by what is anterior and exceeds the self.¹⁹² Therefore, humanity is marked by an essential readiness to receive the gift and a self which is ordered by a fundamental responsive act of self-giving. This new relational context provides a dynamic of dialogical freedom, on which one can respond personally, speak in first person to an all-knowing thou, and even accuse himself of sin in expectation of mercy; or in speaking to a larger audience, invite them to place their stories under the same impact of grace. Furthermore, as Jean-Marie Le Blond indicates, a confessional act is within a philosophy of freedom.¹⁹³ In order to individually respond to God, Augustine had to reject a Manichean cosmological account of evil, on which "it is not we who sin, but some other nature within us that is responsible" (*Conf.* 5.10.18). Freedom also entailed personal responsibility, for which each human being is

187. Personalism as a movement that started in the 20th century, should not be equated to person and personhood, which is related to a longer and historical tradition of the concept of person in the West since the first Trinitarian debates.

188. Michel Quatrefages, "Augustin et 'Persona'," in *La personne et le christianisme ancien*, ed. Bernard Meurnier (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 73-99.

189. Emmanuel Housset, *La vocation de la personne. L'histoire du concept de personne de sa naissance augustiniennne à sa redécouverte phénoménologique* (Paris: Épipiméthée, 2007).

190. Jean-Marie Le Blond. *Les Conversions De Saint Augustin* (Paris: Aubier, 1950), 10.

191. "O God, God to whom your own merciful dealings with me confess."

192. Marion, *In the Self's Place*.

193. Le Blond, *Les Conversions*, 7.

held accountable and can respond to God's redeeming work, even when bound by the limitations of his own free will. It is also worth noticing that Augustine's understanding of freedom is not univocal. Freedom in Augustine's perspective also has many layers, as freedom from evil, freedom of judgement, as well as freedom to respond within a loving personal relationship with God.

As a relational responsive discourse to the calling of his gracious Creator, *confessio* inaugurates a personal distinctive identity through relationality. O'Donnell calls it a special divinely authorized speech that establishes authentic identity for the speaker - the true and proper end of mortal life.¹⁹⁴ It is as an I speaking to a Thou that Augustine confesses, a responsive discourse to the active grace of God recreating Augustine's life. Due to the abundance of I-Thou language in his prayerful *Confessiones*, it can be stated that through Augustine, a new man appears in the history of consciousness, the 'I' of an interpersonal dialogue with a divine Thou.¹⁹⁵ Augustine develops a personal I-thou relationship through which he speaks to the most venerated subject, his Creator: but Augustine, a humble creature raised up and gathered together by God (*Conf.* 1.3.3) also speaks in first person, as an 'I'. Augustine is a dependent being, but nevertheless remains a unique voice, one of a personal subject that addresses God. John Hugo highlights that, due to the sense of uniqueness and unity of the person present in Augustine, *Confessions* is the truly first existential meeting in an I-Thou dialogue in the mode of a relational confrontation of a human person with a personal God in the history of the West.¹⁹⁶

Evidence through the use of *confiteri/confiteor* suggests that Augustine continuously places himself before God speaking in the first person singular to a personal divine thou. There are 72 uses in first person singular, "I confess".¹⁹⁷ Augustine expresses himself in the first person as a man touched by grace that speaks humbly and directly to his personal Savior. In his relationship and through God's recreation of Augustine, he receives "creational personhood": Augustine is "a person in a relationship whose existence is and will be recognizable because of the Other."¹⁹⁸ God does not need Augustine's confession, but Augustine and his audience are dependent on God for life. Thus, to communicate to God is

194. O'Donnell, prolegomena to *Confessions*.

195. Pierre Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1968), 16.

196. John Jacob Hugo, *St. Augustine on Nature, Sex and Marriage* (Chicago: Scepter, 1969), 19.

197. Verheijen, *Eloquentia Pedisequa*, 25.

198. Allan Fitzgerald, "Confession, Prayer, Transformation," in *The Confessions: Saint Augustine of Hippo*, Ignatius Critical Editions, ed. David Vincent Meconi (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 497.

his soul's need: "I confess to you according to my soul's need, and acquiesce as you chide me for those evil ways of mine and bring me to love your good ways" (*Conf.* 1.22.23).

Following the biblical tradition, the *shema*, "hear O Israel", Augustine places humanity as intrinsically responsive, and by its constitutional nature a hearer of God's words and calling. God's action and initiative is always first, as grace comes to us before humanity participates, it is *gratia praeveniens*. But still humanity is called to follow, to respond, to keep a position of constant attentive listening. As Leonardo Boff suggests, its fundamental position is that of one of permanent hearing, that which receives continuously its being only from a relationship with the Transcendent, a dialogical nature. Since dialogue presupposes freedom to speak, humanity can exercise this freedom by opening one's self to the Creator or, oppositely, by locking oneself up revering an environment without God, partially fulfilling his destiny.¹⁹⁹ A person cannot avoid God's grace, but one can refuse to listen to the voice which speaks to the heart.

In Augustine's philosophy and theology there is no knowledge of God without relationality. The unfathomable God is a loving being that invites the world to participate in the divine life. Theology for Augustine has an intrinsic affective association which is not in opposition to knowledge or authentic theology: it carries a genuine theological understanding prior to the historical ruptures that tended to make theology a fragmented discipline. Augustine understood theology, spirituality and prayer as one and the same relational expression, for the theologian was the one who prayed. On his commentary about *Confessions*, Dominican Belgian theologian Servais Pinckaers suggests that after Augustine, the history of spirituality has grieved two ruptures. The first one occurred in the 14th century, when abstract theology moved away from spiritual theology. Previously, theology had an affective reference, an integrated theological and spiritual pursuit of head and heart. The second rupture, in the 17th century, happened when moral theology, which focused on the study of obligations, separated itself from mystical theology. It generated a spiritual elite and a further separation between the laity and the religious, a disunion unknown to Augustine. The bishop of Hippo fostered the opposite, the unity of the divine knowledge movement, one

199. Leonardo Boff, *O Destino do Homem e do Mundo: Ensaio Sobre a Vocação Humana* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1978), 55.

single wisdom that has everything, a theology that is at once, theology, spiritual, moral, ascetic, mystical, pastoral, philosophical and scientific.²⁰⁰

A contemporary theologian who has sought to point out this unity between knowledge and affection in Augustine is Hans Urs von Balthasar. In Augustine, an affective component is not against scientific and authentic theology: in the *tabula rasa* of affectionate love that expects everything and does not anticipate taking anything, knowledge is relational, linked with this attitude of the heart.²⁰¹ Balthasar goes back to Augustine in order to reassess the unity between theological thought and prayer. Drinking from the Augustinian tradition and quoting Augustine's *ut inventus quaeratur, immensus est* (*Jo. ev. tr.* 63.1), von Balthasar recognizes that when God is found, he is always greater. Von Balthasar affirms that God cannot be contained by our schemes, for when encountered he is always higher and beyond. This encounter leaves an impression and generates an answer, a prayerful seeking, which is something that I cannot produce, but it is still personal encounter. It has reached me and I cannot but respond to God's awakening touch, "You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours" (*Conf.* 10.27.38).²⁰² True knowledge comes from outside, affecting, striking and attracting: a begging and worshipping prayer is the only *objective* attitude towards Mystery.²⁰³ Only a theology that is born of something that comes from outside imprints a wound of love, transforming within and integrating true knowledge with affectionate response. Augustine's relationship of faith in the search for God is further developed by Augustine in other works, such as *De Trinitate*²⁰⁴ or in *Enchiridion*²⁰⁵.

200. Pinckaers, *Em busca de Deus nas Confissões*, 16.

201. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Ensayos Teológicos I* (Madrid: Verbum Caro, 1964), 266.

202. Here I have opted for Henry Chadwick's translation. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

203. Von Balthasar, *Ensayos Teológicos I*, 266.

204. In *De Trinitate* Augustine sets believing and understanding as mutually necessary. Augustine generally uses *fides* (noun) and *credere* (verb) in the sense of trusting and believing; often in his works, paraphrases Isaiah 7: 9, "unless you believe you will not understand." Augustine will try to know the Trinity, but always with a conscience that understands something mysterious, recognizing that the more he understands, the more he needs to look. Faith seeks, understanding finds: seek to find and find to seek. If the dispute between faith and reason became fierce from modernity, in Augustine there is duality, but not opposition; there is a relationship of mutual enrichment. Man must be intelligent to seek God. Intelligence, as described in *De Trinitate* (8.3) is a relational process which includes hearing, a call to one to enter, to perceive the good and God that becomes an adhesion. Intelligence accomplishes an adhesive love to God that beatifies and makes the human happy.

205. In this work, in which he explains the basics of the faith to a layman named Laurentius, Augustine says that Christian faith is not only knowledge of what Catholics believe, but a way of life and worship from

Confessional language implies a further union, where human words participate in the divine process of creating through words. Boulding highlight that *Confessions* goes beyond a language that speaks in the presence of someone. It is language that creates, participates in a creative process as it adds an extra layer of union with God, “the speaker is at one with the Creator God, and in turn becomes co-creator of himself – and constitutes himself by confession. Words are signs that fulfill the goal of self-transcendence.”²⁰⁶ God’s word continues to create; confession joins the process of renewing creation carried out by the Creator. By joining a communication based on God’s words to him, Augustine not only receives language but is also an originator of it, and in this dialectical process, he is actively transformed. His redeemed prayerful words perform a further communion with the Word of God.

1.3.3 *Confessio*: double movement of confession of sin and praise

*Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper,
But the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)*

*Let me confess my disgraceful deeds to you,
and in confessing praise you.
Allow me this, I beg you and
grant me to trace today the twisting arguments
that led me astray at past time (Conf. 4.1.1)*

Augustine makes his life a song of praise as he recognizes the contrast between the deepness of his sin and the redeeming work of salvation that is gift of grace. Augustine’s quoted text above, at the start of the fourth book of *Confessions*, suggests that, by confessing one’s feebleness, the “disgraceful deeds”, one is launched towards praising the graceful, marvelous deeds of God. Confessional language expresses an intimate and intricate bond between vulnerability and mercy, humility and grace. It is not a self-sufficient verbal

what is believed, and the ordering of loves and hopes from faith. In this work Augustine clearly treats faith, hope and love as interdependent, and these three become together life of worship and prayer.

206. Boulding, introduction to *The Confessions*, 25.

performance, but the words of a suppliant heart, beggar's language, that expresses one's self both in defenseless exposure and adoration. Consequently, Augustine materializes a dependent relational openness by a confessional act, a dependent expressiveness with two main parts. First, it is the confession of his own miseries and sins (*peccati*), and second, a confession of praise (*laudis*) declaring the greatness of God that overcomes his misery. Augustine, even as a converted Catholic Christian and a North-African bishop, is still aware of the divisions within his own will. Therefore, Augustine invokes God for a continual conversion of his inner life, placing himself humbly under God's mercy. By accepting the responsibility for his sin, the confessant turns to the God who saves and by receiving liberation, the consequence is praise and gratitude.²⁰⁷ Since *Confessions* intentionally recognizes weakness in order to turn to the physician of his soul, it also establishes movement, fostering the transition of a self-centered inner life to a relational bond. As Augustine himself puts it, "by confessing we lay bare your loving devotion. Our hope is that we may cease to be miserable in ourselves and may find our beatitude in you; for you have called us to be poor in spirit" (*Conf.* 11.1.1). The use of confessional language intentionally places oneself under the mighty hand of the most high God. This relational movement seeks to follow a journey towards the emptying of one's self that directs itself towards a loving personal relationship.

Since the divine is seen as a generous and trustworthy lover, Augustine is called to expose himself, even his deepest and most horrendous sins. The freedom given by the accepting atmosphere of this relationship, to be a recreation of his inner life by the God of grace, gives Augustine security to launch into the confession of his miseries with boldness and a peaceful spirit: "in your presence, my God, I can remember it now and be at peace" (*Conf.* 1.16.26). Acceptance of Augustine's debilities and disabilities by his graceful Father prompts him to a continuous bold speech about his disgraceful deeds, which in turn leads Augustine to the praise of the grace that met him in his weakness. As sins are brought to light in the presence of God, a passage from misery to a life under mercy is fostered, as stated by Meconi: "in God, even the confession of past sins can be salvific: Augustine can recall even the wretched deeds of his past life as an act of praise because he now sees how the Lord was faithful to him even in those times, laboring to bring him to a true life of grace."²⁰⁸

207. Pinckaers, *Em busca de Deus nas Confissões*, 31.

208. Meconi, commentary to *The Confessions*, 27.

Augustine's double movement of confession only makes sense if grace is a living reality and confession of praise complements confession of sin. Otherwise, it could become an incomplete movement of shame that binds one's self to a guilty conscience. Confession of sin and confession of praise are the two complementary parts of the same relationship with the Creator where Augustine conceives his renewed self as a gift by God. As the wrong and right of this relationship with one's doctor, it mirrors a type of appropriate relationality with one's graceful, loving Creator.

Paul Rigby, in his study about original sin in *Confessions*, suggests that the two doctrines, of original sin and the doctrine of grace "are the face and counter face of the same truth drawn from the same experience".²⁰⁹ Both are pillars of the one and only edifice, the two parts of the same reality. They mutually illuminate each other, for in Augustine the need for grace reveals the depth of sin. Rigby suggests that Augustine's doctrine of original sin is not derivative or secondary to his doctrine of grace, but a first premise founding his anthropology and soteriology.²¹⁰ His understanding of both sin and grace is forged by the encounter of his conversion experience with Paul's theology. It is in a sense an encounter with three stages: his personal conversion experience, then his struggle for perfection in the subsequent decade still influenced by Neoplatonism, and the biblical theology of St. Paul on grace and sin.²¹¹ It is from 397 onwards though, that this triple staged development finds a medium, the autobiographical and theographical account of *Confessions*, that communicates the interpenetration of conversion experience, lack of confidence on his own perfection and Scripture.

Confessional language performs an internal transformation in Augustine, namely, an increase in Augustine's love for God and a deeper assurance of God's love for him. Augustine recalls sins in order to love God, for as he remembers the deceitfulness and bitterness of his past life, God's presence grows sweet in his heart (*Conf.* 2.1.1). Grace as love leads Augustine in a prayerful communication in which his mouth abounds in praise: "let me love you, Lord, and give thanks to you and confess your name" (*Conf.* 2.7.15). As one confesses, a passage from self-absorbed subject to an emptying toward a loving relational center is made. Augustine complains about the human struggle to embrace humility: "God has

209. Paul Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987), 7.

210. *Ibid.*, 12-13.

211. *Ibid.*, 13.

humbled himself – and still man is proud!”²¹² As God gives humanity a new form and recreates broken Augustine, the confessional language of praise becomes the way to unite himself to this rehabilitated reality. As Augustine voices his confession of sin and praise, the Father continues to recreate and reshape the prodigal son’s dark, void and empty world.

In an article about the originality of Augustine’s use of confession, the early Joseph Ratzinger discussed the semantic development, historical and theological meanings of the Latin term. He pointed out that in the non-Christian understanding of *confessio-confiteri* in the Greco-Roman world, the primary sense is judicial and negative, the confession of criminal offenses.²¹³ As the antithesis of *defensio*, *confessio* entailed the revelation of one’s guilt. It was primarily a confession lacking ethical value, a forced *confessio* within a forensic coercion.²¹⁴ It is therefore, very far from Augustine’s idea of confession as a personal responsive acknowledgement before an accepting other weaving both sin and praise. In the development of the term, there was an unfolding of a special Christian understanding, of *confession/confiteri* linked to martyr theology. *Confiteri* retained the notion of being a confession in court, a juridical term, but undergoes a reappraisal. In a world in which Christians are accused of being enemies of the Roman state, atheists and criminals, Christianity transformed values and produced an irony of inverted roles: confession in court became a glorious statement of faith, *confessio gloriosa*. In this sense of confession, the defendants themselves were the claimants of truth: they publicly undergo not a coerced confession, but a free declaration of faith. St. Cyprian saw in confession the starting-point of glorification, as confession became the necessary part to follow the sacred way of the martyrs.²¹⁵ It would be the confessing church that followed closely Jesus’ faith before the authorities.

However, confession as public statement of faith was not the only sense present in a Christian understanding of the term prior to Augustine. Christians also received from Judaism and the Old Testament Scriptures other meanings of confession, such as the confession of sin related to God’s mercy in wisdom literature.²¹⁶ It is through *humilitas* and

212. *Sermo* 162.6.

213. Joseph Ratzinger, “Originalität Und Ueberlieferung in Augustins Begriff Der Confessio,” *Revue D’Etudes Augustiniennes Et Patristiques* 3, no. 4 (1957): 377-379.

214. *Ibid.*, 378.

215. Ratzinger, “Originalität Und Ueberlieferung in Augustins Begriff Der Confessio,” 380.

216. Proverbs 28:13.

confession of sin that the Psalms of David would find God's forgiveness.²¹⁷ The other common sense, praise, also came from Scripture, particularly the psalms and wisdom literature, on which both the Greek and the Hebrew terms conveyed the double meaning of thanksgiving and pardon of sins. To sum up, the word *confessio*, originally meaning only juridical confession, had already gained three new meanings in the pre-Augustinian Christian language of ecclesiastical Latin: creed of the martyrs before a tribunal; confession of sins, the penitential confession; and confession of praise. The latter meaning was the least common and possibly the least understood,²¹⁸ but had been pronounced after the psalms in western theology by theologians such as Hilary and Jerome.

It is certain that Augustine did not ignore the term *confessio* in the sense of profession of faith, as a public attestation of one's loyalty to Christ. However, and along with Verheijen, Ratzinger and Solignac, I suggest that Augustine does not indicate that this meaning receives in his work *Confessions* a primary role. Historically, after church and state merged, the public confession of faith of the martyrs would lose its urgency. The last books do expound on Augustine's faith on his Creator, but it is not proclaimed thoughtfully as a confession of faith; therefore it is preferable to realize that even though the term in *Confessiones* is multi-sided and does include confession of faith, the primary use of the term *confiteri* and *confession* conveys the double meaning of sin and praise.²¹⁹ That is sufficient to say that Augustine's double meaning of confession of sin and praise in *Confessiones* (on which confession of faith is present but occupies a secondary role), was an original development in a new stage of Christian history and understanding of the term.

The use of confession/*confiteri* is multisided, but there is a central weight placed on confession of sin and praise. As I have argued before,²²⁰ the context from which the double and complementary movement of confession of sin and praise emerges also entails a complex interrelated understanding, such as the doctrine of creation, a deep immersion in the Scriptures and the background of an audience. *Confessio* expresses a range of emphasis. Sometimes *confessio/confiteri* will focus on the consciousness of being illuminated by God, occasionally on the feelings of being a creature, other times of being a redeemed sinner; when

217. Psalm 50 (51).

218. Ratzinger, "Originalität Und Ueberlieferung in Augustins Begriff Der Confessio," 379.

219. Solignac, introduction to *Les Confessions*, 11-12.

220. See introduction to section 1.3, *Confessio* and the responsive relational language.

the attention is directed towards God rather than human miseries, it is impregnated with gratitude and praise.²²¹

The centrality of Augustine's intention, since its first line, is to confess God's mighty greatness and glory. As the psalmist, *confiteor tibi, Domine* (I will praise you, Lord), Augustine is grateful for the marvelous glories of God's salvation, the mercies, for God being his healing doctor, for the forgiveness of his sins. Praise is the language of the Psalms, is the language of a confessing heart, one that understands that all that he is comes from the gift given him by God. The chorus is continuous throughout the books: Augustine praises the mercy that reached his misery.

Confessional language rejects an egocentric interior life and intentionally empties one's self on the way to a loving Other. Augustine places himself as a beggar asking for grace to pray: "Allow me to speak in your merciful presence" (*Conf.* 1.6.7.), and through a language that does not only describe transformation but effects it, Augustine crosses from sin to praise, from pride to humility.

1.3.4 *Confessio*: responsive speech to grace as a manifestation of his self to God in the presence of an audience with intent

*I do it to arouse my own loving devotion toward you,
and that of my readers,
so that together we may declare,
Great is the Lord,
and exceedingly worthy of praise. (Conf. 11.1.1)*

Augustine's transformation of language into *confessio* carries a resource to foster humility and generate space for community life. At the center of a Christian community cannot stand a leader who uses words as swords and divides the ecclesial unity. Augustine seeks to model a language on which the hearers would follow him by laying down the arms of one's pride. Augustine knows that proud-speaking men, both in form and content, betray the

221. Verheijen, *Eloquentia Pedisequa*, 35.

posture of the true Word of God, who emptied himself. As a skilled career rhetorician, Augustine had been heading towards reputation, rather than compunction. In his transformation of rhetoric, the language of *confessio* becomes, therefore, the opposite of presumption (*Conf.* 7.20.26). As a result, the creative process in his transformed use of words also fostered humbleness and hope in those around him (*Conf.* 10.3.4). The conversion of his rhetorical skills was bound to produce communion rather than self-affirmation, intimacy rather than competition. Consequently, Augustine's transformation of language reinforces that Augustine is to serve his brethren and form a truthful Christian community. Humans cannot find true communion in pride, but only in humbleness. God resists the proud, and so does true ecclesial community. In a context of vulnerability, true confession creates a space not only for God, but for others who, along with Augustine, are companions in joy and in mortality, citizens in pilgrimage (*Conf.* 10.4.6).

It is significant that at the start of book eleven, Augustine quotes the same words from the psalms as in the prologue in book one. However, *magnus dominus et laudabilis valde*²²², are words set from a new beginning in a new context, a sort of second prologue, that of a joint declaration of praise from a confessing community. Rather than an individual confession, Augustine seeks to *excitare*, to arouse an affectionate devotion for God from himself and of his readers, so they *together*, may praise the greatness of their Lord. Courcelle pointed out that Augustine subtly plays in a reference of symmetry between the prologue of the first part (book 1) and the prologue of the second part (book 11).²²³ Knauser highlights that the most essential variation is that now Augustine pictures his readers as those who join his confession.²²⁴ After a meditation on past and present from books 1-10, Augustine conceives a new beginning in the book, the praises of a confessing community, united with him in love for God.

Already at book 10, and particularly at its closure, Augustine had set the Eucharistic language and placed an emphasis on the liturgical setting of a confessing

222. Once again using the language of the Psalms and echoing the first line of the work, the Latin words are the same as in two psalms, namely, Psalm 47:2 (48:1) 'magnus dominus et laudabilis valde in civitate dei nostri, in monte sancto eius'; and Psalm 144(145):3 'magnus dominus et laudabilis valde et magnitudinis eius non est finis; laudabo nomen tuum in saeculum et in saeculum saeculi'. Which are also similar to 'magnus dominus et laudabilis nimis', Psalm 95(96):4.

223. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les confessions de saint Augustin*, 26. In his own words, "Augustin souligne, par un jeu subtil de référence la symétrie entre le prologue de sa seconde partie et celui de la première."

224. Georg N. Knauser, *Psalmenzitate in Augustins Konfessionen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck Und Ruprecht, 1955), 153.

community, “I eat it, I drink it, I dispense it to others, and as a poor man I long to be filled with it among those who are fed and feasted. And then do those who seek him praise the Lord” (*Conf.* 10.43.70). Through the image of being a priest leading the Lord’s Supper where believers take part in feasting, Augustine prepares room for the new communal prologue at the start of book 11. As O’Donnell puts it, at the end of book 10 there is a discourse that does not only represent liturgical prayer, but accompanies and embodies it, not a descriptive treatise of what the Eucharist means, but an embodied appearance to us as at the altar.²²⁵ This image also suggests that *Confessions*’ communal voice of praise should be understood in the context of Augustine’s life and his position as the bishop of Hippo. His situation and ecclesiastical stand counts for the meaning and intentionality. And as a bishop, in a position that has the soul-caring process as a central interest, Augustine would be interested in nurturing a community of confessants: “the *Confessions* is a sacrifice which the bishop Augustine offers as a kind of Eucharist, an offering of praise in thanksgiving, for the sake of taking up his readers into God and through them advancing the redemption of all creation.”²²⁶

O’Donnell goes ever further, suggesting that, since books 1-10 are a meditation on past (1-9) and present (10), the first lines of the whole work, *magnus es, domine* (*Conf.* 1.1.1) can be read retrospectively as praise that arises from liturgical confession.²²⁷ On a deeper level, the communal confession of praise in book eleven carries more relationality, and shapes the way we retrospectively approach the first sentence of the whole *Confessiones*. There is a symbolic return to the place once began, not as an individual private confession, but as a communal voice of praise in love. In the past, Augustine had been a career rhetorician that could disguise and speak deceitfully for his own self-interested purposes. But at the time of writing, he stood as a Christian pastor and orator in a confessing community that he was accountable to and that he loved. Augustine does not speak alone: he “speaks with”, *cum-fessio*, for the purposes of nurturing the church, desiring to serve the flock entrusted to him by God, “a longing on fire not for myself alone but to serve the brethren I dearly love” (*Conf.* 11.2.3).

Throughout *Confessions*, Augustine is well aware of the presence of his audience, their reactions and the effect of his words on them: “your spiritually-minded faithful will gently and lovingly laugh at me if they read these confessions of mine; all the same, that is

225. O’Donnell, *Confessions*, commentary on 10.43.70.

226. Ortiz, *You Made Us for Yourself*, 233.

227. O’Donnell, *Confessions*, commentary on 10.43.70.

what I like” (*Conf.* 5.10.20). Book 10 describes Augustine’s present situation at the time of writing *Confessions*, at least ten years after his conversion. He wants to communicate what grace has done in his life and invite readers both to join in thanksgiving and in prayer as he faces his own current challenges. Here Augustine describes a double interest in writing the *Confessions*, related to both reader and writer. He had described his past in order to direct others towards God – but in book 10 he also describes his present so his own spiritual journey could be nurtured by the prayers and joy of his readers. Book ten is divided into three parts, focusing on the purpose of writing (which includes the effects on his readers), on memory and on the dangers Augustine was facing against *concupiscentia*.

As Christ calls Augustine to live under his new creation, a renewed humanity is brought by the Creator not only in Augustine but to those who hear God’s call and bow to the Creator. By the agency of the Holy Spirit, life becomes confession, an adequate sacrifice in a context of a humbled but recreated humanity. Even though lowering themselves, they are raised and lifted up, healed from false pride and nourished in true love (*Conf.* 7.18.24).

Augustine realized that the *cor unum* of the first Christians in Jerusalem was an important ideal for community life. Nowhere else but in the community described in the biblical book of Acts was the breaking of barriers so inspiring, uniting and world changing. The voluntary giving of possessions was a visible expression of being-for-the-other; that marvelous community announced to the world the beauty of being of one heart and mind (Acts 4:32). After Pentecost, at the center of faith stands not only an individual but a community, empowered by the Spirit to become the restored humanity that re-presents Christ to the world. Augustine later would develop the implications of this oneness of heart experience, *anima una et cor unum*, both for monastic life and for his congregation through his sermons; solidarity of heart of those playing the same piece of music, tuned to each other playing the symphony of the song of love for God and neighbor.²²⁸ Augustine’s monastic rule has also become a source of inspiration for communal sharing of goods, as in the contemporary readings by liberation theologians such as Clodovis Boff.²²⁹

Augustine’s writing shows a communitarian sense from his early writings. As early as in *Soliloquia*, truth happens not in an isolated individual, but through persons-in-relation

228. Anthony Dupont and Pierre-Paul Walraet, “Augustine on the Heart as the Centre of Human Happiness,” *Studies in Spirituality*, 25 (2015): 73.

229. Clodovis M. Boff, *A via da Comunhão de Bens: A Regra De Santo Agostinho Comentada na Perspectiva da Teologia Da Libertação* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1988).

in community and where hearts and souls are well attuned. Later, as a priest and bishop, his pastoral ministry would be understood relationally, as God would call him to account for those who were under his care. The later Augustine started to realize even further how sin is related to a self that fails to live in community:

Augustine's thought in his fifties began to be dominated by the notion that the roots of sin lie in the self's retreat into a privacy which is deprivation: the self is deprived of community. All community — with God, with one's fellows, and even with one's own self — is fatally ruptured by sin. The radical flaw in human nature is now transcribed in terms of a retreat into a closed-off self.²³⁰

A relevant appropriation of the Augustinian tradition by the confessing community as a context of welcoming vulnerability is the one made by Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, firstly in his doctoral dissertation and then in his later book *Life Together*.²³¹ Bonhoeffer suggests that the goal of Christian community is an encounter of transformation as bringers of the Word of salvation in a context of vulnerability. The community creates space for transformation through confession and welcoming of the weak. For Bonhoeffer, it is the power of a communal confession of sin, bringing truth and light, which finds the only way to create communities.²³² This is definitely in tune with Augustine's own perspective in his "second prologue" at the beginning of book 11: Augustine seeks

230. Robert Markus, *Conversion and Disenchantment in Augustine's Spiritual Career* (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1989), 31-32.

231. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). Bonhoeffer lived in the dark times of Nazi Germany, but highlighted that confession in community breaks the power of darkness and expresses a commitment to a life in the light. Bonhoeffer called his political and religious resisting group, which did not capitulate to Hitler, the "Confessing Church". He emphasized the connection between confession and community, in which sin comes to light and through communal confession a breakthrough happens. His doctoral dissertation, named *Sanctorum Communio*, makes significant use of Augustine's ideas. Bonhoeffer ties the Augustinian emphasis on charity as the church's bond and its authority to forgive sins – not from the ecclesiastical office (in a time church authorities were bound to the state) but the community of saints, as the Christ who bears them is in their midst. See also Peter Frick, ed., *Bonhoeffer's Intellectual Formation: Theology and Philosophy in His Thought* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 13.

232. Bonhoeffer points out that, "In confession there takes place a breakthrough to community. Sin wants to be alone with people. It takes them away from the community. The more lonely people become, the more destructive the power of sin over them. The more deeply they become entangled in it, the more unholy is their loneliness. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of what is left unsaid sin poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen in the midst of a pious community. In confession the light of the gospel breaks into the darkness and closed isolation of the heart. Sin must be brought into the light. What is unspoken is said openly and confessed. All that is secret and hidden comes to light. It is a hard struggle until the sin crosses one's lips in confession. But God breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron (Ps. 107:16). Since the confession of sin is made in the presence of another Christian, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders, giving up all evil, giving the sinner's heart to God and finding the forgiveness of all one's sin in the community of Jesus Christ and other Christians. Sin that has been spoken and confessed has lost all of its power. It has been revealed and judged as sin. It can no longer tear apart the community." Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 110.

Christian men and women that confess praise and sin together in a context of humble vulnerability, and in doing so, are transformed by the word of salvation.

1.4 Augustine's Confessions and philosophical therapy: confession as soul healing and therapy by the "Doctor *Humilitatis*"²³³

*For I have been healed by the same doctor
who has granted him the grace not to fall ill,
or at least to fall ill less seriously.
Let such a person therefore love you just as much,
or even more, on seeing that the same physician
who rescued me from sinful diseases of such gravity
has kept him immune (Conf. 2.7.15).*

This part of our research will first discuss the therapeutic goals of ancient philosophy, Judeo-Christian engagement with its surrounding philosophical culture and the Augustinian appropriation of Hellenistic ideals. Secondly, it will argue that the acknowledgement of being a sick patient and relying on a graceful doctor carries the same dynamic of a double confessional movement. Confession of sin as sickness and praise of the doctor's medicine are the face and counter face of the same relational confession. Augustine's usage of the *Christus Medicus* not only highlights his own illnesses, but also seeks to praise God's goodness and invite his readers to place their lives under the same medical treatment. Thirdly, the metaphor patient-physician not only expresses the double movement of confessing, the relational confession of praise and misery, but it embraces in itself a theological-Christological model of therapy, through a complex theological argument including creation, incarnation and deification.

1.4.1 Take and use their gold: the adaptation of an ancient therapeutic ideal

There is, I assure you a medical art for the soul.

233. Simon Icard, "Augustin, docteur de la grâce: histoire d'un titre," *Revue d'études augustiniennes et patristiques* 63, no. 1 (2017): 196; Rudolph Arbesmann, "The Concept of 'Christus Medicus' in St. Augustine," *Traditio* 10, (1954): 1-28. This work has opted to suggest that Augustine is better described as the doctor of humility rather than the doctor of grace. Humility is the medicine against human pride, and God is the doctor who transforms Augustine, the patient, through divine grace. Simon Icard has recently argued that the title "doctor of Grace" is a later reading on Augustine and a modern invention: "L'invention du titre doctor gratiae est la synthèse d'un double mouvement de hiérarchisation et de spécialisation, qui accorde une place particulière à Augustin dans le renouveau patristique à l'époque moderne." Arbesmann aptly emphasized the important link between *medicus* and *humilis*.

*It is philosophy, whose aid need not be sought,
as in bodily diseases, from outside ourselves.
We must endeavor with all our resources and
all our strength to become capable of doctoring ourselves.
Cicero, (Tusculanae Disputationes 3.6).*

Philosophy in the ancient world was a choice of a mode of life related to philosophical discourse as integrated theory and practice. Pierre Hadot highlights that the choice of a way of life was not only an appendix or accessory to the philosophical activity, but its beginning, related to a global vision of a certain approach to living.²³⁴ Philosophical discourse originated as a choice of an existential option, never made in isolation, but done in a philosophical school. It demanded a change of lifestyle, conversion of being, desire to be and live in a certain way as a preparation for wisdom.²³⁵ The task of philosophical schools became to justify that existential option and worldview and incorporate it into practice, a theoretical discourse integrated to an application of an ideal: philosophical discourse as an expression and the means of a type of a chosen life of perfection.²³⁶

Ancient philosophy and its major schools consented to an interrelated analogy between philosophy and the art of therapy. Orators were in the business of curing souls as words not only communicate, but impact listeners and implement change. In that regard, there was a certain type of manipulation of one's thoughts and ideas for the good, towards an ideal of formation towards happiness and wisdom. As Martha Nussbaum argues, it was a medical perspective on philosophizing, for Hellenistic philosophy was concerned to ensure the flourishing of life by using arguments and sound reasoning.²³⁷ These arguments were mainly towards directing human affections, guiding passions, desire and its motions. As Epicureans,

234. Pierre Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 3. Pierre Hadot's book shows the significant difference between what ancients considered philosophy and philosophy as we understand it today. Hadot's perspective is of continuity between Augustine and Platonism as an overlapping of the essential parts of Platonic doctrines with the essential part of Christian Doctrines. Hadot, based on *De Vera Religione*, suggests that Augustine confronts Platonism and Christianity, but there is continuity as Augustine argues for the same fundamental core between both. Hadot emphasized that Christianity did what Platonism could not – to convert the masses, as in Nietzsche's words, "Platonism to the people" (see Hadot, 251-252).

235. *Ibid.*, 4.

236. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

237. Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 14-16.

Stoics, and Skeptics sought to relieve human suffering, they were also driven to produce diagnosis and understand the means by which these illnesses would be therapeutically treated. Human diseases were seen as the product of false views and beliefs. The consequence is that Hellenistic philosophy produced complex understandings of health and illness that would inspire Augustine to be found, himself, among those proposing therapy, albeit not only strictly in the framework of classical philosophy, but adapting it within a relational and theological framework.

Therapeia was an ancient concern, one that occupied much space in philosophical, medical and theological endeavors. The ideas of therapy found its first developments in the fields of medical history, philosophy and theology in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the ancient world, the disciplines were already finding their specificities, such as the different approaches to therapy in medicine and philosophy. Hippocrates, who incarnated the values of what is today the medical profession, tended to highlight the somatic treatment, even though he strived for both a healthy mind and body. By an emphasis on the natural causes rather than the supernatural, Hippocrates fostered clinical observation and diagnosis, a movement that distinguished medicine as a separate discipline. Philosophers, in contrast, were skilled in the healing through beautiful words, in the art of rhetoric. Among philosophical approaches, Platonism also had keen interest in therapy. The Socratic questioning or maieutic expressed an elaborated view of philosophy as therapy based on the method of inquiring human beliefs and opinions. For Socrates, erroneous understandings of reality lead to ignorance. The philosopher is to question in order to birth life as a midwife of wisdom with the duty to bring about true knowledge.²³⁸

The Hellenistic philosophical tradition of therapy has also been stated as “psychagogy”, a developed system of care dedicated to development in wisdom. Psychagogy was a search for knowledge and an internalized wise existence in the context of a learning and therapeutic relationship. The emphasis was not on medicine for the body, but speech and rhetoric as the main tools to foster a process towards maturity. However, speech was not enough, as the ability to persuade relied on being attentive to the illnesses, restrictions and circumstances of the recipient. Psychagogy refers to, as Paul Kolbet aptly summarizes,

philosophically articulated traditions of therapy, common in Hellenistic literature, pertaining to how a mature person leads the less mature to

238. See Robert Earl Cushman, *Therapeia: Plato's Conception of Philosophy* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers), 2004.

perceive and internalize wisdom for themselves. These traditions, moreover, stress that for therapeutic speech to be effective, it must be based on knowledge and persuade by adapting itself in specific ways both to the psychic state of the recipient and to the particular occasion”²³⁹

Search for wisdom, persuasive speech and consideration of one’s audience: by these three elements in the definition of psychagogy, it follows that Augustine’s biography and conversion placed him as a suitable rhetorician to embrace these ideals and at the same time subvert them. Augustine was well-versed in these three domains: wisdom, speech and audience responsiveness, being at the same time aware of its potentials and restrictions. His youth had been marked by a search for wisdom since reading Cicero, but he later realized the limitations to self-knowledge. Augustine had embraced a career in rhetoric and the persuasive discourse of the Manicheans, later to change his communication by speaking with God-given words. As a former teacher of rhetoric, he sought to be attentive to his students’ conditions and needs; later, he would have to reframe his sermons to reach his mostly non-educated audience in Hippo in a liturgical setting. But as an apt orator, Augustine adapted himself to different audiences and cities, such as elaborated ideas to the more educated hearers from Carthage, as many of these sermons attest. Michael Cameron discussed how Augustine’s audience, even the illiterate, participated in the psychagogical process through hearing sermons, as the Christological message worked as a spiritual exercise that stretched people’s consciousness and fostered a participation in mutual indwelling.²⁴⁰

Psychagogy was also appropriated by Hellenistic Jews and Christian apologists before Augustine, who were interested in developing an integration of the Judeo-Christian tradition with the teachings of Hellenistic philosophy. With the expansion of the Christian faith in a theologically articulated perspective about life, ancient theologians validated the philosophical ideal of therapy and appropriated it within the Christian tradition. In the interaction between the Greco-Roman heritage and the Judeo-Christian tradition, Christian philosophers accepted for themselves practices of Hellenistic philosophy and adapted it by affirming the Christian faith as the true *philosophia*.

239. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of souls*, 8.

240. Michael Cameron, “Totus Christus and the Psychagogy of Augustine’s Sermons,” *Augustinian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2005): 69. “Augustine shaped his sermons as adapted *exercitationes* for the non-sophisticated Christians who made up most of his audience [...] the sermon initiates a toto-christological spiritual exercise whose stretching and straining actualizes the death and resurrection of Jesus in the people’s consciousness; this staple of the Augustinian psychagogic process of pastoral care gave knowledge and increased capacity for spiritual development.”

Out of the recent studies on the Christian adaptation of Hellenistic therapy, Paul Kolbet's approach has been most read and reviewed. He highlights that Augustine appropriated the psychagogic tradition to Christian purposes, as he laid out a rhetoric to convey Christian truth, using methods and goals of Greek philosophical traditions.²⁴¹ Since Augustine adapted rhetorical ideals rather than rejected them,²⁴² Kolbet emphasizes how the goals of a philosophical therapy remain in Augustine's sermons, even though they have been recontextualized and modified to fit his homilies in Christian liturgy.²⁴³ His study looked at how Augustine received the classical tradition of the cure of souls and how his attitude renovated and reframed the classic rhetorical tradition into a Christian one.

Augustine was not the first to adapt therapy principles into the Judeo-Christian tradition. Centuries before Augustine, Philo, a Hellenistic Jew, produced a synthesis between Jewish anthropology and Hellenistic therapeutic ideals. Philo and the therapists of Alexandria lived in the first century of the Christian era in a cauldron of encounter between Greek culture and Jewish tradition. Philo brought both the responsive listening of Judaism and the holistic Old Testament anthropology as elements to therapy within Hellenic culture. As Leloup suggests, Philo used an ancient holistic Hebrew approach that stands against a fragmented look at the individual and in favor of caring for the whole person.²⁴⁴ Recognizing that the task of philosophy included the fostering of therapy, he integrated the classic goals into the framework of Hellenistic Judaism, a synthesis that produced an integrated model of the unity of the person. His approach sought to care for the human person in body, soul and spirit: ancient therapists with a holistic anthropology, seeking the care of human beings in their corporal, psychological and spiritual dimensions. Furthermore, since the *shema* and the call to hear the Lord are an essential part of keeping God's law, his approach also emphasized the ability of responsive listening. Philo stands as an example of integration between Hebrew thought and Hellenistic therapeutic ideals, even though not particularly within a Christian framework.

Christian philosophers brought to Christianity practices from secular philosophy, as they adopted *philosophia* to designate faith as the great philosophy and the way to a wise life. In order to bridge a message born out of Judaism and originally foreign to the Greek and

241. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls*, 12.

242. *Ibid.*, 12.

243. *Ibid.*

244 Jean-Yves Leloup, *Prendre soin de l'être: Philon et les thérapeutes d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999).

Roman mentalities, Christian apologists since second century A. D. tried to present Christianity as the supreme philosophy. Greek philosophers were conceived as having only portions of the *Logos*, and as Clement suggested, Christianity was the true revelation of *Logos*.²⁴⁵ Origen introduced his students to the wisdom books of Proverbs (ethics, initial purification), Ecclesiastes (physics, to go beyond the material) and Song of Songs (epoptics or theology, union with God)²⁴⁶, in a type of spiritual preparation for wisdom so common to the philosophical schools. The monastery became the means of preparation to join persons with a lived wisdom. Furthermore, there was the Christianization of secular themes. The spiritual exercises of the ancient philosophical schools were read as if they had been already present in Old and New Testaments.²⁴⁷

Augustine lived, however, in a Christian ecclesiastical context with diversity of opinions on how to approach Roman culture and Greek philosophy. As early as the second century, the apologists had opposing views on Christianity's appropriation of classical antiquity. Tertullian suggested that Athens and Jerusalem were miles apart and had nothing to do with each other. Irenaeus, oppositely, used the language of Athens to reinforce the truths of Jerusalem. As a consequence, persuasive speeches and rhetorical classical strategies were also used by Christians. In the fourth century, this debate was even further deepened as Christianity became entangled with the political power of the late Roman Empire. Scholars in Augustine's generation continued the passionate debate about the interaction between Christianity and its surrounding culture. Rufinus considered Jerome more Ciceronian than Christian due to his appreciation of classical culture; Jerome in return suggested that the flow of words and clarity of thought through which Rufinus conveyed the truths of Jerusalem would have come from Greek tradition or Cicero himself. If the purity of Christian identity was at stake in the new context, on which the great Cathedrals and political power was built over the blood of the martyr's tombs, in North Africa these issues were ever highlighted by the Donatist controversy over the purity of the church and the desire to differentiate Christianity from its surrounding culture.

Augustine finds a way out from the polarized debate between Jerusalem and Athens through a metaphor related to the Israelite engagement in Egypt. Therefore, it could be said that he found a "local" perspective: he finds neither in Asia, nor in Europe, but in his own

245. Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 239.

246. *Ibid.*, 239-240.

247. *Ibid.*, 248-249.

North Africa a third way of engaging classical philosophy. It would not be Athens nor Jerusalem, but the gold out of Egypt (*Conf.* 7.9.15), the answer for a Christian engagement with culture:

Moreover, if those who are called philosophers, and especially the Platonists, have said aught that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it. For, as the Egyptians had not only the idols and heavy burdens which the people of Israel hated and fled from, but also vessels and ornaments of gold and silver, and garments, which the same people when going out of Egypt appropriated to themselves, designing them for a better use, not doing this on their own authority, but by the command of God, the Egyptians themselves, in their ignorance, providing them with things which they themselves were not making a good use of; in the same way all branches of heathen learning have not only false and superstitious fancies and heavy burdens of unnecessary toil, which every one of us, when going out under the leadership of Christ from the fellowship of the heathen, ought to abhor and avoid; but they contain also liberal instruction which is better adapted to the use of the truth, and some most excellent precepts of morality; and some truths in regard even to the worship of the One God are found among them. Now these are, so to speak, their gold and silver, which they did not create themselves, but dug out of the mines of God's providence which are everywhere scattered abroad, and are perversely and unlawfully prostituting to the worship of devils. These, therefore, the Christian, when he separates himself in spirit from the miserable fellowship of these men, ought to take away from them, and to devote to their proper use in preaching the gospel. Their garments, also, that is, human institutions such as are adapted to that intercourse with men which is indispensable in this life, we must take and turn to a Christian use.²⁴⁸

Take their gold and turn to a Christian use: the sentence had already been used by Irenaeus and Origin; but it is through Augustine's taking of the gold and the goal of soul therapy, one that used to be in the domain of philosophy (and the appropriation of philosophy as "*ancilla*"), that their precious stones were cut and polished with Christian content and form weaving narrative, confessional language and therapy. Augustine's *Confessions* can be described as a model of Christian therapeutic re-appropriation of the antiquity philosophy tradition.

As a summary, it can be stated that Augustine made use of classical therapeutic ideas within a Christian framework. In his perspective classical therapy persists as an ideal of transformation in wisdom. Even though in a different context, psychagogy is still manifested through a rhetorician/orator leading the listeners to a more mature comprehension of their illnesses, even in a different setting as a biblical expositor in homilies in the periphery of the

248. *Doc. Chr.*, 240.

Roman Empire. But breaking with classical pagan philosophy, Christ and not the philosophers incarnates the *medicus* that possesses healing knowledge. Here stands the distance between the answers of Athens and Jerusalem, the Areopagus and the Calvary, the wisdom of philosophy and the foolish-wisdom of the cross. The difference is between presumption and confession, “those who see the goal but not the way to it and the Way to our beatific homeland” (*Conf.* 7.20.26). Even though the ideals persist, Augustine came to believe that the response to the human predicament would not be found solely in human formation towards wisdom. God himself knows human interiority far beyond human capabilities. It is Christ, the mediator and healer, who repairs the disease of human pride by humbly becoming man and leads them towards a homeland beyond their reach.²⁴⁹

1.4.2 A therapeutic relational confession: a wounded patient and a divine Doctor

*The wounded surgeon plies the steel
That questions the distempered part;
Beneath the bleeding hands we feel
The sharp compassion of the healer's art
Resolving the enigma of the fever chart.
(T. S. Eliot, East Coker, Four Quartets)*

Augustine’s relational confession conveys not only other-centred narrative, a language that acknowledges one’s sin and God’s praise, but also a therapeutic perspective. In consonance with the double movement of *confessio*, this work turns now to the discussions on the roles of patient and physician in Augustine’s writings, particularly in *Confessions*. God is the all-knowing humble physician and Augustine places himself intentionally through rhetorical artistry as the sick patient who longs for a further union and transformation: “when I have adhered to you with the whole of myself, I shall never ‘pain and toil’ and my entire life will be full of you. You lift up the person whom you fill. But for the present, because I am not

249. See Thomas F. Martin, “Paul the Patient: Christus Medicus and the ‘Stimulus Carnis’ (2 Cor. 12:7): A Consideration of Augustine’s Medicinal Christology,” *Augustinian Studies* 32, no. 2 (2001): 219-256.

full of you, I am a burden to myself ...see I do not hide my wounds; you are the physician and I am the patient”²⁵⁰ (*Conf.* 10.28.39). In book 10, even though as a baptized Catholic Christian, Augustine intentionally does not hide his wounds, as they will deepen in his audience the upward spiral of confession of praise to his physician. As Pamela Bright suggests, “the acknowledgement, the ‘confession,’ of his profound and continuing woundedness leads to the further ‘confession’ of his need to ‘adhere’ to the only physician who can heal his condition.”²⁵¹ As day and night are corresponding parts of the same movement of life, *confessio* also works within the pattern of doubles, face and counter face that express the same relational reality. Confession of praise and misery are mutually dependent aspects which complement each other to uncover the same truth, a movement which includes the double pattern confession of sickness and confession of ongoing healing. The deepness of sin reveals the need for grace; God’s amazing graceful attitude uncovers the depth of humanity’s sickness and reinforces dependence on God’s gift.

God is Augustine’s therapist, his inward healer, *medice meus intime* (*Conf.* 10.3.4), the doctor of his inner life who listens to his deepest wounds and tears. Augustine is heard with an unconditional acceptance by his Lord and God who has ears present in his deepest and hidden places; as Augustine cries desperately from the depths (*Conf.* 11.2.3), God’s presence comforts him, bringing him rest, unlike any other. In times of desolation and grief, God was the one who listened to him. By the time his dear mother passed away, Augustine writes: “I found comfort in weeping before you about her and for her, about myself and for myself. The tears that I had been holding back I now released to flow as plentifully as they would, and strewed them as a bed beneath my heart. There it could rest, because there were your ears only, not the ears of anyone who would judge my weeping by the norms of his own pride”²⁵² (*Conf.* 9.12.33). As Augustine writes to God, his dialogical partner, the accepting grace installs a desire for further union and fosters a safe space to communicate his sickness. With his tongue-pen, “my pen serves me as a tongue” writes Augustine (*Conf.*

250. I have opted on this citation for Henry Chadwick’s emphasis on the complementary role of physician and patient rather than Boulding’s “you are my physician and I am sick.”

251. Pamela Bright, “Book Ten: the Self Seeking the God Who Creates and Heals,” in *A Reader’s Companion to Augustine’s Confessions*, eds. Kim Paffenroth and Robert Peter Kennedy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 156.

252. Sheed’s translation of *Confessions* puts it rather poetically: “I no longer tried to check my tears, but let them flow as they would, making them a pillow for my heart: and it rested upon them, for it was Your ears that heard my weeping.”

11.2.2), Augustine describes not only his distresses, but the encounter in expectancy of healing with a divine doctor who came in flesh.

Humans can only come to God for healing because the agent of cure revealed himself through Christ Jesus, full of grace and truth, crusher of human pride: sick patients need the omnipotent Doctor, the *Christus Medicus*. Christ's incarnation allowed a divine exchange, on which human beings bring their illnesses but through his wounds are given life. At the center of Christian faith stands a truly alive human being, Jesus Christ, the pinnacle of God's relational self-revelation, who through his incarnation opens the door for a union between humanity and God in a very personal manner. Humanity is saved from pride by "embracing the mediator between God and humankind, the man Christ Jesus, who is also God... who raises to himself those creatures who bow before him" (*Conf.* 7.18.24). As fully God and fully human, he draws fallen humanity to God, re-creating, saving and restoring.

Augustine's understanding of Christ as physician is also dependent on previous Christian authors. Augustine's rich image of the *Christus Medicus* is like an abundant fruit on the tree, but one that relies on biblical roots and patristic trunk. The psalms had already associated sin and sickness and a humble confession to God as treatment.²⁵³ The New Testament had both Christ identifying himself as the physician²⁵⁴ and letters attributed both to the apostles Peter and Paul.²⁵⁵ Paul as Christ's patient was also an inspiration to the Augustinian medical analogy. Paul's former condition as a proud Pharisee and persecutor of the church is an evidence of the physician's skills, and his transformation a type of public announcement that the *Medicus* can heal anything and anyone.²⁵⁶ Paul's conversion involved Christ both as a savior and as a physician that made him recover sight.²⁵⁷ Patristic thought also built upon the biblical foundation: prior to the bishop of Hippo, Cyprian and Ambrose had already reflected on Christ the physician, but focusing more on individual healing.

253. "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psalm 32:3-5).

254. Mark 2:17, Matthew 9:12.

255. I Peter 2:24, 2 Cor. 12:7-10.

256. "Doctors like to prove their healing skills by treating desperate cases, and so did our physician and savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He demonstrated the magnitude of his healing power in the desperate case of a man who had been a persecutor of the Church, for he made him not only a Christian but an apostle too, and not just an apostle like the others but one who worked harder than any of them, as he says himself. Paul was evidently endowed with outstanding grace." *En Ps.* 130.7

257. Acts 9:1-19.

Augustine, however, spreads the idea that humanity is one big patient, and that it participates as a whole in Adam's fallenness, holding together both the wide-ranging universal and the singular fallen individual. We are all, therefore, collectively and individually, spiritually sick, needing a medicine that is not achievable through hard moral effort.

Augustine's continual use of a medical analogy was also shaped by a number of biographical and historical factors, such as his two near-death experiences described in *Confessions* (*Conf.* 1.11.17; 5.9.16) and the instability of his personal health and of those around him. Augustine often lost dear ones due to health reasons. He also lived amidst the challenges of a still developing medicine in late antiquity, or the North African vivid image of Asclepius, a god that was supposed to work healings. Overall, the historical and personal intersect with the theological and the rhetorical, weaving an abundance of unparalleled images:

a number of factors coincided to lead Augustine to exploit the notion of a *dispensatio medicinalis* as centerpiece for an authentic understanding and appreciation of the Christ-event: personal experience of ill-health and consequent amateur medical study; shared communal experience of the terrors, tortures, and unpredictability of the theory and practice of ancient medicine; rich and profound theological insight; his own rhetorical genius and artistry. Together they enabled Augustine to describe, explain, and explore as no one had done before the remarkable efforts by the Divine Physician on behalf of humanity's *salus*.²⁵⁸

Augustine comprehends that he is a not completely cured patient and still needs his doctor, even after baptism. The bishop of Hippo carries the realization that present life on earth will be lived among the paradoxes of an existence between two ages, where both dawning light and residual darkness are present: Augustine is aware of present ambiguities, as in "your dawning light in me and the residual darkness that will linger until my weakness is swallowed up by your strength." (*Conf.* 11.2.2). Even though a man with residual darkness, Augustine is a man saved in hope, and bound by a continual expectation that God will continue to perform the work begun, until it is finished through a complete union with his savior.

Saint Augustine is a patient in between times: he confesses his present healing but also lives in hope of transformation and perfection of the work already begun. He had been a sick prodigal son wandering far from care and health, but one found by grace and healed; however, his present life after baptism is still a struggle against concupiscence, one in

258. Martin, "Paul the Patient," 228.

expectation of full recovery among joys and sorrows: “there is a struggle between joys over which I should be weeping and regrets at matters over which I ought to be rejoicing, and which side has the victory I do not know.”²⁵⁹ (*Conf.* 10.28.39) Augustine is still seeking to overcome lingering misery and temptations, as a patient who found the light but still does not see it completely. Happiness, therefore, is not flawlessness in present life, but a continual return to grace and joy in the truth that will complete the renovation of his inner house. Augustine seeks to be found among those poor in spirit who cling to the already-not-yet paradoxical dynamic of God’s Kingdom: “we confess to you our miseries and the mercies you have shown us in your will to set us free completely, as you have begun to do already; and by so confessing to you we lay bare our loving devotion. Our hope is that we may cease to be miserable in ourselves and may find our beatitude in you” (*Conf.* 11.1.1).

Augustine’s perspective on soul healing, coming from *Confessions*, is not that of a one-time event, but that of a gradual process, which involves development, shortcomings and continual retrieval of hope on the way towards the *patria*. Even the crisis experience in the garden, narrated on book 8, was not a one-time isolated event, but a culmination of a process of search for God, followed by other continual callings to put on Christ. The picture emerging is not that of a clear-cut path without fumbles or temptations, but an existence *in via*, on the way, as pilgrims towards God’s Sabbatical rest. As O’Donnell suggests, if Augustine wanted a narrative of ascent to God, the work would be finished on 10.27.38 (which also would ease discussions on composition and unity).²⁶⁰ But that is not the case, for the work as a whole seems to intentionally embrace wrestling, a struggle, as Augustine ambiguously describes his pursuit of chastity and self-control but actually not yet (*Conf.* 8.7.17). Furthermore, book ten has that janus-like quality of looking backwards drawing together the previous narrative and at the same time pointing forward to the theological and biblical reflection of the last three books (11-13).²⁶¹ It connects Augustine’s own inner journey on a movement of looking back in joy to the healing past and looking forward through theological reflection. Augustine’s remembrance of past grace received shapes his present, but it also involves a teleological direction, a forward-looking exercise: God’s future consummation sustains the hope of being led by the Spirit in continual conversion until future eschatological redemption.

259. I have used Henry Chadwick’s translation here due to its clarity on the struggle emphasis of the text.

260. O’ Donnell, *Confessions*, introductory commentary to book 10.

261. Bright, “Book Ten,” 165.

As O'Donnell highlights, in Augustine there is a reversal of Greek philosophical therapeutic ideals: the transformation of the self into object of inquiry both reflects the maxim 'know thyself', but in Augustine the answers to questions come not from the cleverness of the questioner (who is now the object of the question), but from divine grace.²⁶² "Noverim te" is the only access to "noverim me," as knowing oneself happens in the light of knowing the Other, as the *Soliloquies* suggest.²⁶³

A patient is also called to participate in the process of healing, even though without possessing the medicine itself. Patients are called to open up the limited knowledge they have about their pains and symptoms. Confession is a way of narrating one's weaknesses exposing sicknesses for medical intervention. Augustine knew that humanity could lose sight of salvation by abandoning the reality of a fallen humanity accountable to God. People unaware of their own brokenness and sin do not allow room for healing, for Jesus has come to call sinners to repentance. Augustine was aware that, as words not only inform but shape the direction of the treatment, acknowledgement and repentance are the first steps towards recovery:

Every soul, Augustine argues, needs a doctor, or rather the doctor, Christ. The medicine that we need is 'the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord'. How does the doctor achieve his cure? The first thing that is necessary is for the patient to show him the true extent of his illness. What is needed for healing is confessio not defensio, and this in turn requires humility: pride, with its accompanying self-justification, is the greatest obstacle to our recovery.²⁶⁴

Even though God is the therapist of the soul, Augustine was not against the mediation of human participation as conveyers of heart therapy. In one of his letters, he recommends a treatment of the inner life, a guidance that resembles a recommendation to psychotherapy today: "If these problems bother you, just as they disturb me, discuss them with a heart doctor (*cordis medico*), if you find someone where you live or when you go to Rome."²⁶⁵ Even though Augustine is in favor of human participation, it also must be stated that he carried a vivid sense of incapacity for transformation without divine intervention. Even in his own preaching, Augustine carries the sense of dependency, for unless God acts,

262. O'Donnell, commentary on 10.33.50.

263. *Sol.* 2.1.1. See also Domingo Natal Álvarez, "Noverim Me Noverim Te: La Práctica Agustiniiana Del Encuentro Consigo Mismo Y Con Dios," *Mayéutica* 36, no. 82 (2010): 323-63.

264. Margaret Atkins, "'Heal My Soul': The Significance of an Augustinian Image," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 23, no. 4 (2010), 355.

265. *Ep.* 95.6.

nothing would happen by human strength alone. Nevertheless, humans have an important role through language, as proper words are a type of medicine, Augustine's perspective relates healing and humble confession:

For Augustine, healing begins with proper confession. The initial return to wholeness commences when we confess and allow the expression of who we are become the medium by which relationship and the attendant vulnerability is realized. In a more modern idiom, the therapist Dr. Steven Levenkron in his book *Cutting: Understanding and Overcoming Self-Mutilation*, advises a female patient that, "Maybe you need words instead of blades or knives." Confession takes us into a deeper understanding of who we are. It is true that we are wounded and errant; but it is even more true that we are beloved and made for eternal communion.²⁶⁶

Confessions is a narrative with a clear location for the three main characters, namely, God, Augustine and his audience. In relation to God, *Confessions* places Augustine as a patient in need of healing, even after his Christian conversion. Until the eschatological Sabbath rest, Augustine would be found among those still vulnerable to unstable passions, but one saved in hope of union with God. In relation to his audience, I suggest Augustine could also be placed as a therapist assistant, one who is stirring hearts to open humanity to their medical doctor's intervention: "what are you, man, but a sick person needing treatment? Do you want to be my doctor? Join me in looking for the doctor."²⁶⁷ It is also a type of midwife's work: Augustine is not the doctor himself, but a kind of insistent midwife retelling humanity to knock and strive for a return to God, from whom all life is birthed. Augustine cannot force life into his readers or his congregation, but he can share the path and the medicine, standing by them and infusing hope. By seeking to bring his audience to praise with him, Augustine prepares his readers to return to their hearts, to the fundamental position of creaturely rest in God.

It is not difficult to recognize that Augustine's intention is to connect the images of healer and savior, *iatros* and *soter*. By linking salvation and therapy, redemption and healing, Christ becomes not only the *Medicus* of humanity, but its proper *medicamentum*. As a consequence, the Christological concentration is highlighted by the use of the medical metaphor and the theological aspect of healing reinforced. Furthermore, Augustine lived in a North Africa marked by the fragility of public health systems. Paganism expressed this

266. David Vincent Meconi, "Ravishing Ruin: Self-loathing in Saint Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 45, no. 2 (2014): 244.

267. *Sermo*. 99.9.

concern through the continuous worship of Asclepius, the Greek god specialized in healing. This context made *Christus Medicus*, savior and healer, as a favorable component to connect the gospel of salvation to the social and cultural *milieu* of his audience.

Nowhere better than in his sermons Augustine occupied this role as midwife to point to Christ, the *medicus*. The images abound, as Christ is not only a simple doctor, but best of physicians²⁶⁸ (*optimus medicus*) and the complete medical doctor of our wounds²⁶⁹ (*totus medicus vulnerum nostrum*). The sermons are so full of the metaphorical image directing humanity towards the *medicus humilis* that Arbesmann in mid-1950s claimed the metaphor was largely confined to the sermons.²⁷⁰ William Harmless however, argued for the continual invocation of *Christus Medicus* in the context of the pelagian controversy, particularly emphasizing how original sin was intergenerational and contagious since Adam's fall, which makes Christ not only the *medicus*, but the pediatrician.²⁷¹ Harmless also suggested that in the pelagian controversy, there was not only a conflict about different anthropologies, but different Christological standpoints in which the descriptions of Christ the physician, original sin as disease and baptism as medicine were part of a "war of metaphors".²⁷² Margaret Atkins balanced approach argues for the importance of the medical image in sermons, in which the term *medicus* is used 659 times, often referring to Christ, but also highlights its importance beyond it; the term is used over a 1000 times in his writings, and finds importance in *Confessions*, through the twin images of sin as sickness and Christ the physician.²⁷³

In his sermons, Augustine plentifully used words related to medicine, such as *infirmitas* (infirmity), *aeger* (sick), *morbus* (disease), *medicus* (doctor), *medicina* (medicine), *medicamentum* (medicine), *sanare* (to heal), *sanus* (healthy), *salus* (health).²⁷⁴ Through his analogies, Augustine established a positive view of medical science (*medicina*) and the

268. *Sermo*. 97A.2

269. *Jo. ev. tr.* 3.3.

270. Arbesmann, "Concept of 'Christus Medicus' in St. Augustine," 7.

271. William Harmless, "Christ the Pediatrician: Infant Baptism and Christological Imagery in the Pelagian Controversy," *Augustinian Studies* 28, no. 2 (1997): 7-34.

272. *Ibid.*, 33. "It is true that at one level the clash between Augustine and the Pelagians was a clash of anthropologies, a conflicting diagnosis over what in the human condition and who in the human race needed healing. And the usual battleground was the interpretation of Paul, especially Paul's letter to the Romans. But what has been often overlooked and underestimated is the underlying christology, one shaped not by technical formulations of 'person,' 'nature,' 'union,' but rather by a cluster of images: Christ as physician, original sin as disease, baptism as medicine. This was not just a fight over biblical texts; it was a war of metaphors."

273. Atkins, "Heal My Soul," 351.

274. Martin Claes and Anthony Dupont, "Augustine's Sermons and Disability," in *Disability in Antiquity*, ed. Christian Laes (New York: Routledge, 2017), 330.

professional practitioner of medicine, the *medicus*, even in a time where medicine itself was still an incipient practice with much room for development. But above all, he used medicine as an analogy to convey theology or a theological understanding of the human condition's illnesses and healing. Claes and Dupont suggest that that the medical analogy assists him to explain the relationship between illness and spiritual growth; Augustine often places the physical deliverance into the context of eschatological redemption, not ignoring physical disability, but integrating it into God's salvation purposes.²⁷⁵

By an intentional guiding of his listeners to question themselves, *Interroga cor tuum*,²⁷⁶ Augustine inspired his congregation to allow the Christ present in the biblical text to effect change in their hearts. They are not only to be mere listeners, but are called to question themselves and ponder their inner lives by allowing the text to question their presuppositions.²⁷⁷ Under these circumstances, they are passed from words to lived experience. As Augustine and his listeners knock together, they are confirmed and strengthened as the biblical meaning imprints change.²⁷⁸ By leading them to question their own blindness, Augustine's audience is stirred to allow the divine doctor to apply his Scriptural eye-salve. By transforming their longings and desires, Christ inflames them with love for the light:

What then does the physician? He brings them back to their usual ways, and applies the eye-salve to nourish the longing for seeing that which was seen only for a moment, so that by the very longing he may cure more completely; and if any stinging salves are applied for the recovery of soundness, let the patient bear it bravely, and, inflamed with love of the light, say to himself: when will it be that with strong eyes I shall see what with sore and weak eyes I could not? He urges the physician, and begs him to heal him.²⁷⁹

One particular contribution of *Confessions* to understanding Augustine's medical image is that the bishop does not give his audience a medicine he had not experienced first, as theology emerges in an interweaving with the biography of a man healed from pride:

You know how much you have changed me, for you began by healing me of the itch to justify myself, so that you could be compassionate to all my other

275. Ibid., 333-334.

276. *en. Ps.* 98.3

277. *Jo. ev. tr.* 4.16.

278. *en. Ps.* 10.8, "*neque inflantur cognitione, sed confirmatur.*" See also Allan D. Fitzgerald, "Introduction," in *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1-40*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2000), 20.

279. *Jo. ev. tr.* 18.11

iniquities as well, heal all my ailments, rescue my life from decay, crown me in pity and mercy and overwhelmingly satisfy my desire with good things. You crushed my pride by inspiring in me reverential fear, and you made my neck submissive to your yoke. And now I wear it, and find it benign, as you have promised and as you have made it (*Conf.* 10.36.58).

Through preaching, Augustine reinforces an inner journey of transformation of one's affective life through Scriptures, one that Augustine himself experienced. His intention is to serve "the Lord, who has restored me to health."²⁸⁰ As described in *Confessions*, Augustine's wanderings were met by Christ's healing grace and his search for wisdom turned from the presumption to confession; Furthermore, Augustine's biography was aware that biblical language carried the Word that conveyed transformation. He had his affections healed by the psalms, as "in the biblical words he had discovered a medium of expression adequate to his own soul".²⁸¹

Augustine's Christian appropriation through his sermons contributes to a mature bond between language, vulnerability and desire.²⁸² Augustine's approach to preaching is highly attentive to his listeners. His homilies nurture the goal to stir the heart and buildup of their faith. Augustine's perspective is that of a contextual pastoral theology with intent, as his sermons seek to produce a therapeutic effect. It is an invitation to listen with him to the voice of Christ that transforms human existence. However, Augustine is working with more than rhetoric, for Scripture itself can bring healing. Words perform, but the living incarnate Word of God, present in Scripture is the Word through whom God created all things (*Conf.* 11.2.4) and continues to recreate worldly existence. Since the biblical words effect change, such as in the ancient practice of hearing the word of God in *lectio divina*, the desired effect surpasses that of human speech-making and its medicine more potent than Hellenistic therapy.

1.4.3 The theology of the Christus Medicus model in *Confessions*

He saw them standing in front of his cross, having foreseen them before the foundation of the world. It was for them that he said, 'Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing' (Lk 23:34). They were killing the healer; the healer was

280. Sermo 20b.11. "I know your eagerness, brothers and sisters, but it is also necessary for you to spare my fragile state of health. No, I don't want to refuse your holinesses the ministry of my preaching, whatever it may be like, so that I may serve *the Lord, who has restored me to health*. However, we still have to deal gently with the more recent scar, which is not yet, perhaps, completely healed."

281. Michael Fiedrowicz, "General Introduction," in *Expositions on the Psalms 1-32*, WSA, III/15, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 2000), 38.

282. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls*, 11.

making a medicine for his killers out of his blood. What a wonderful mercy and glory! (Sermo 229e.2)

The act of confession carries therapeutic implications within a theological structure, or implies a therapy attached to “Augustine’s theological macrostructure”.²⁸³ It is not only a philosophical perspective, but a participation in the human-divine drama of redemptive history and transformative union. First, confession establishes a movement that counters the human tendency to distance oneself in pride, turning humanity to its original dialogical posture, towards the *telos* to which it was created. Secondly, it embraces and participates in the humility of the incarnation, denying human presumption to self-knowledge and overcoming the distance imposed by pride. Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection set the pattern for humility and self-giving, which is the foundation of health. Thirdly, confession sustains an ongoing conversion and reordering of heart towards the supreme good. Consequently, the horizons of creation, fall, incarnation, human redemption and eschatological consummation are not only theological concepts, but a reality that involves us and implicates humanity in therapy.

Augustine’s perspective on recounting his story uses a thoroughly theological response to the human drama. Medicine conveys a relational therapeutic proposal, on which biblical-theological diagnosis is intersected by medicinal Christology:

Augustine has taken all these fundamental tenets of Nicene Christology and re-worked them into a "medical drama," not thereby diluting them but, rather, seeking to imbed these tenets imaginatively and deeply into the faithful heart of the Christian community at a level of conviction beyond words and perhaps beyond concepts. Within the framework of this medicinal Christology, Augustine is thus able to effectively and affectively explore the meaning of salvation and draw forth its most profound implications and its most demanding and comprehensive utilization. Here content and method do indeed intersect, one driving the other, as the very affirmation of *Christus Medicus* impels the exploration of its all-encompassing therapeutic application.²⁸⁴

Although created for communion, Adam’s fall has turned humanity to see virtues as one’s own and ascribe goodness to ourselves. Humility, however, relies on a clear

283. David Meconi, *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 240.

284. Martin, “Paul the Patient,” 254.

understanding of the reality about one's own condition in relation to God and others. Augustine in *Confessions* echoes Paul the apostle in I Corinthians 4:7, "for who has anything that he has not received?" (*Conf.* 7.21.27) and will continue to do it much of his life.²⁸⁵ Augustine knows that the pride of humanity distances it from acknowledging their Creator. Proud humans exchanged the freedom to respond to God for self-affirmation apart from God. Adam's fallen race without God is slave to their own self-serving desires, living in opposition to their God-given nature, in a dreadful state of infection. Human fallenness is contradiction in human nature generated by the human self-affirmation of life apart from God. Humanity cannot be free through living its identity independently. In an Augustinian perspective, the denial of its needy status in creation inserted evil into human nature, with consequences to the subsequent members of the race. Humanity must be awakened to its desire to do good, to the later realization that it does not possess the capacity to live it out apart from a healer.

In the overall, sin has been related to the sickness of pride, misuse of love and unbelief. Mathijs Lamberigts suggests that there is not a single, clear-cut definition of sin, but different ones with "temporally changing focal points".²⁸⁶ Even though there is not a systematic definition, the picture that emerges from the whole is a vibrant inter-related formulation that keeps developing in the many decades of Augustinian writings. It is also the attitude of seeking pleasures in created realities rather than the Creator and the wrong attitude of human free will to attach itself to beings lower than God.²⁸⁷ Humans are creatures subject to change, and can misuse creation by choosing evil and disrespect the order of reality. Sin in this regard is also a misuse of love *secundum hominem*, an aversion to Creator and conversion to created things, ontologically inferior beings. Therefore, sin is a consequence of pride, of not opting to serve but to rule over created reality. In *Confessions*, sin is exemplified in Augustine's own life: an *aversio* to God, a substitution that overvalues the created realities in a pursuit of self-centered pleasure apart from its source. The sickness of pride misdirected Augustine's longings and brought him great sorrow. Since the remedy for sin is recognizing one's own illness in the presence of the Medical Doctor, confessional language is the way proposed for transformation.

285. See Mathijs Lamberigts, "The presence of 1 Cor 4,7 in the anti-Pelagian works of Augustine," *Augustiniana: Tijdschrift Voor De Studie Van Sint-Augustinus En De Augustijnenorde* 56, (2006): 373-399.

286. Mathijs Lamberigts, "Peccatum," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. Karl Heinz Chelius and Cornelius Petrus Mayer, vol. 4 (Basel: Schwabe, 2014), 582.

287. *Ibid.*, 582-583

Augustine understood the human situation not only as a “flaw” or the lack of willpower to do what is right, but the absence and perversion of the good, an insertion of sin in the whole of human existence. Biblically, the picture about sin and its evil nature includes every dimension of human life (physical, social, psychological, spiritual), the society as a whole and the physical environment, which is under a curse (Genesis 3) but also a covenant (Genesis 8:20-9:17). Therefore, the whole set of relationships between God, humans and the earth is disintegrated: the fall is a holistic disorder. Even though for Augustine sin is ontologically nothing, the absence of good (a position he stressed against Manichean teaching but maintained throughout his life), the realm of sin includes all areas of existence. The prideful human rebellion distorted relations between humans and the order of creation. This contagious disease is systemic, occurring in all of human life, directed towards selfish desires, bent inwards upon itself. Sin caused disorder not in different dimensions of human existence (personal, spiritual and physical) but also in societal and environmental aspects. Sin inserted a corrupted, wicked dimension in the whole of life. In *Confessions*, Augustine also highlights that sin is not a solely individual predicament. He would not have participated in a theft of pears without his peers. Its consequence is that Augustine does not limit sickness to an isolated individual, but his approach to illness and the human predicament indicates the intergenerational solidarity of the human race which stems back until the first human, Adam:

Augustine believed in the necessity of a universal liberation from original sin through Christ the physician. Brokenness and disability were in this way raised by Augustine above the purely individual perspective and broadened into a theological interpretation of salvation and liberation. He is able to proclaim this anthropological view in a way understandable to his audience through applying the imagery of disability to the whole of humankind. Augustine was deeply convinced that God created mankind well, and that man’s original good nature was not destroyed by original sin, however it is tainted by it (*natura uitata*).²⁸⁸

Augustine also connects the idea of original sin as incapacity or the weakening (*defectus*) of human nature on which humans undergo high fever.²⁸⁹ There is an intrinsic contradiction to nature in the present human life. Created as *Imago Dei* but possessing a corrupted image, there is a conflict between the original nature of humanity and its actual empirical nature. Existence is lived between good and evil, unable to live up by its proper designation. The apostle Paul describes the human condition as one of ambivalence and

288. Claes and Dupont, “Augustine’s Sermons and Disability,” 336.

289. en. Ps. 35.17.

anxiety: “I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Romans 7:18). As Augustine suggests,

Man’s nature was indeed at first created faultless and without sin: but nature as man now has it into which everyone who is born from Adam, wants the Physician, being no longer in a healthy state. All good qualities which it still possesses ... it has from the most High God, its Creator and Maker. But the flaw which darkens and weakens all these natural goods, it has not contracted from its blameless Creator...but from that *original sin* which it committed of *its own free will*.²⁹⁰

Augustine’s focus in *Confessions* is not in the description of his sickness *per se*, but with the intentionality of a story-teller, to highlight how the needy and humble human response to the covenantal God creates space for divine presence and favor. His accent is on stirring humanity to become responsive to the grace and presence of God. The presentation of sickness is for the sake of opening space for relationality. In the prologue, Augustine does present the human condition carrying their mortality as consequence of sin, but in sequence Augustine introduces the themes of *cor inquietum* and transcendent desire to praise the Creator.

While retaining the same ideals for wisdom he inherited from Cicero’s reading, Augustine sees in the *Christus Medicus* a model of the wise philosophical physician: the incarnation of Christ, his humanity, has enabled a change in which human beings bring their illnesses, but through their identification with human wounds, Christ gives them life. The consequence is that Augustine retains the philosophical ideal, and at the same time brings the idea of therapy to Christology and theology. As Thomas Martin suggests,

Medicus ever remains for Augustine a divine title, with the *medicamentum* that is the incarnation, passion, and death of Jesus Christ expressing all the reality and depth of the true humanity of this divine physician. In laying out this identity and practice of *Christus Medicus* the divine economy is both revealed and affirmed, an intimate linking of doctor and medicine and patient. This intention is sometimes implicit, but always deliberately affective, persuasive, and, certainly for Augustine, truly faithful to the deepest core of the tradition.²⁹¹

In the New Testament, Christ reveals God to humanity and is himself the true human. He is compassionate as Yahweh is compassionate (Mark 6:34), loves perfectly and

290. St. Augustine, as quoted by Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 241-242.

291. Martin, “Paul the Patient,” 255.

empties himself (Philippians 2:6-11 is a text quoted by Augustine over 300 times), embraces fully what it means to be human, yet without sin. While Adam failed to be the representative of humanity, Jesus is victorious; he is the paradigm of redeemed humanity, the God-man in which “the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9).

Christ’s humble incarnation sustained not only Augustine’s conversion, but the continual healing of his inner life. The incarnation of God’s Word had been a central doctrine in Augustine’s conversion, and one that would continue to have consequences for his thought and implications for his understanding of therapy. That the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, *verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis*, was doctrine absent in platonic thought²⁹² (*Conf.* 7.9.13) but present in Augustine for his entire life; as Athanasius had stated, Christ’s incarnation is truth with uncountable consequences, for grasping them is like gazing at the ocean and trying to count its waves.²⁹³ The incarnation of God’s son sought humanity so it would begin to seek God, calling his believing people to be sons by adoption (*Conf.* 11.2.4). Augustine meditated on Christ’s mediatory role in his incarnation and passion, as victor and victim, the priest and sacrifice, one that serves humanity by becoming one of them and calls his creation not anymore servants, but sons and daughters (*Conf.* 10.43.69). By raising them to God and uniting himself with humanity, the *Christus Medicus* heals their brokenness. Through this divine exchange Augustine finds hope, not only as a former source of life, but as an ongoing process of hope over despair; his infirmities, even though manifold and grave, and will be covered by God’s far reaching healing power:

How you loved us, O good Father, who spared not even your only Son, but gave him up for us evildoers! How you loved us, for whose sake he who deemed it no robbery to be your equal was made subservient, even to the point of dying on the cross! Alone of all he was free among the dead, for he had power to lay down his life and power to retrieve it. For our sake he stood to you as both victor and victim, and victor because of victim; for us he stood to you as priest and sacrifice, and priest because sacrifice, making us sons and daughters to you instead of servants by being born of you to serve us. With good reason is there solid hope for me in him, because you will heal all my infirmities through him who sits at your right hand and intercedes for us. Were it not so, I would despair. Many and grave are those infirmities, many and grave; but wider-reaching is your healing power. We might have despaired, thinking your Word remote from any conjunction

292. O’Donnell, commentary on 10.43.69

293. Athanasius Alexandrinus, *De Incarnatione*, trans. R.W. Thomson (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971), 54. “In short, the achievements of the Saviour effected through his incarnation are of such a kind and so great, that if anyone wished to expound them he would be like those who gaze at the vast expanse of the sea and wish to count the number of its waves.”

with humankind, had he not become flesh and made his dwelling among us.²⁹⁴

Although Christian theology reoriented Greek wisdom towards Christ, Augustine was aware that healing through the weakness of a humble savior was a stumbling block to the proud, and the cross a scandalous image to the surrounding culture. In the words of the Apostle Paul, “foolishness to the Greeks,”²⁹⁵ as salvation through a disgraceful death, that of an insignificant crucified Jew, was so counter-intuitive and somehow absurd to be regarded as knowledge or wisdom. That wisdom was to be found revealed and hidden in the incarnation of the Son of God and death on a repellant cross of a criminal would be nonsensical and outrageous to Hellenistic philosophers and classical therapists. Using the image of a mother Wisdom as chicken (a puny animal itself) he describes how Christ’s incarnation is wisdom hidden in feebleness, but one that gathers and nurtures life. “So what did our mother Wisdom do? She became weak in the flesh, in order to gather chicks together, in order to lay eggs and hatch them. But the weakness of God is stronger than men (I Cor. 1:25)”²⁹⁶

Augustine identified that the wisdom of God in its weakness is a potent medicine against human pride. Even though God’s therapy is knowledge beyond human capabilities, his medical activity seems nonsensical and paradoxical to human minds. But there is also an inner logic that Augustine explores through the medical image. The way to health as an art of disabling diseases by establishing a balance through contraries, such as applying cold to a hot inflammation, or humility to the prideful human rebellion:

Any treatment, of course, is a way to health: so this treatment undertook to restore sinners to complete health. And just as when doctors bind up wounds, they do not do it untidily, but neatly, so that the bandage, as well as being useful, can also to some extent have its proper beauty, in the same sort of way Wisdom adapted her healing art to our wounds by taking on a human being, curing some of our ills by their contraries, others by homoeopathic treatment. It is the kind of a way a doctor treating the body's wounds sometimes applies contraries, like something cold to a hot inflammation, or something moist to a dry condition, or other things of that kind; and he also applies like to like, as for example a round plaster to a round wound, or an oblong to an oblong one, and does not apply the same sort of bandage to all the limbs, but fits like to like. That is how the Wisdom of God treats the ills of humanity, presenting herself for our healing, herself the physician, herself the physic. So because man had fallen through pride, she applied humility to humanity's cure. We were deceived by the wisdom of the serpent; we are set

294. *Conf.* 10.43.69

295. I Corinthians 1:23.

296. *Sermo* 305a.6.

free by the folly of God. On the one hand, while her true name was Wisdom, she was folly to those who took no notice of God; on the other hand while this is called folly, it is in fact Wisdom to those who overcome the devil. We made bad use of immortality and so ended up dying; Christ made good use of mortality, so that we might end up living.²⁹⁷

What is unique within the theographical approach in *Confessions* that reverts the classical approach to therapy? I suggest that a relational confession, one in which Augustine is not the main character in his own story, is an evidence and sign of Augustine's own limitations to self-knowledge. By pointing to the non-sufficiency of human wisdom, Augustine reverts the "know thyself" Socratic approach. However, as book ten reminds us on its long discussion about memory, Augustine does not abandon the search for knowledge about one's inner life, but finds his answer when on his knees in surrender, to a therapy beyond his control, to the presence of his inward doctor that understands his inner life better than himself. It is precisely because Augustine's narrative required a solution outside his competencies, beyond self-enclosed knowledge and marketed rhetoric, that the limits of human search for a wise life are highlighted and Hellenistic therapy transformed towards a relational confession.

Due to his lingering temptations and before God's all-knowing presence, Augustine is bound to acknowledge that he remains a *quaestio* to himself ("enigma" in Maria Boulding's translation): "But do you hear me, O Lord my God: look upon me and see, have mercy and heal me, for in your eyes I have become an enigma to myself, and herein lies my sickness"²⁹⁸ (*Conf.* 10.33.50). It is the presence of another that brings the painful but fruitful recognition that one is not the master of his own house. The anthropological consequence is that humanity's self-awareness is still bound by an enigma, an Augustinian standpoint contemporary psychological approaches would emphasize many centuries later, such as psychoanalysis and the unconscious dimension of life. In *Confessions*, there is a clear rejection of any possibility for self-sufficient therapy for the bishop of Hippo points continuously to a resolution above his capabilities.

Bearing in mind the great propensity to self-aggrandizement and the pride that distances creatures from their Creator, Augustine reminds us that individuals are not called to

297. doc. Chr. 1.14.13

298. *Tu autem, domine deus meus, exaudi: respice et vide et miserere et sana me, in cuius oculis mihi quaestio factus sum, et ipse est languor meus.*

their own success, but covenantal faithfulness to God and neighbor, and ultimately, to mirror a journey of conversion from self-centered lives to becoming persons-in-relation. Those who affirm that Christ is the true human and *vero medicus* of the human predicament are invited as companions to share in what takes place around the presence of another. Since what takes place around the *Medicus* is salvation, healing and liberation, in the appropriate order of reality humans are not to attach much importance to their failures or accomplishments, but to attune their hearts to the posture of being responsive, ready for a dialogue, seeking an encounter.

Although fallenness and wounds are present in one's story, the possibility of responding to the covenantal God always gives each human being the space to encounter hope. The wounds and scars are not the last word in broken stories; ultimately, the resurrected life offered through the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus announces that every life can participate in Christ-like resurrections that provide new beginnings. Augustine's story is a testimonial to God's therapeutic action through the Word that brings life.

1.5 Conclusion

*Do not let me hear
Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,
Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,
Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.*
(T. S. Eliot, *East Coker, Four Quartets*)

Augustine's *Confessions* connects narrative, language and therapy in a way that encompasses both humbleness and a challenge. It implicates humility because Augustine's relational narrative, dialogical language and therapy foster oneself to be shaped by another. It is a narrative focused on someone rather than oneself, a respondent language to a gift in trust, seeking a therapy that is beyond one's control. No wonder the only wisdom Augustine hoped to acquire would be the wisdom of humility, with the praise of another and the remodeling of a self-serving language into a service to foster a confessing community. Augustine's conversion birthed a language of humility, weaving the psalms in a response to grace humbly showing the wounds before one's Doctor. But it also birthed a challenge. *Confessions'* narrative, language and therapy involve a process, a crossing. Dispossessing to encounter another is counter-intuitive, for it goes against the human desire to acquire and to show oneself to have many capabilities. It requires transformation, to turn away from pride and to embrace a posture of heart that is expressed in beggar's language.²⁹⁹ Augustine would be therapeutically healed through confessing, since the words of his mouth and the meditation of his lips would be united to perform a transformation of his oratory and inner life. But, as a challenge, it needed also to embrace the recognition of being a humble creature, and through it open space for a deeper communion, one where language would express a confidence in love.

299. Many times in *Confessions*, Augustine uses language suggesting that he is God's beggar. "I beg you" is a recurrent theme such as in (*Conf.* 10.37.62). Prayer is beggar's language expressed from one's heart.

Augustine's therapeutic vision laid out in *Confessions* includes the realization of one's dependent nature moving towards transcendence, which makes him lay down his pride through the language of *confessio*. *Confessions* is an autobiographical narrative that is generated to be silenced,³⁰⁰ it is a life that seeks to move beyond itself towards the love of God, it is a theography of a loved lover. Recognizing sin and praising the curative power of his Doctor drives a wounded man to recover the position of self-surrender to God, to discover himself anew in him. Augustine's return to the humble posture of *confessio* sustains his continuous desire towards the highest good, God. The movement of the heart towards its creational telos in a relational responsive biblical language performs a therapeutic transformation of one's previous scattered inner life. Through the prayerful confession, Augustine regained the essential inner dynamism of his interior life and realized that his cure is to be sustained by responding to this love.

300. Patrick Riley, *Character and Conversion in Autobiography: Augustine, Montaigne, Descartes, Rousseau, and Sartre* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2004), 25.

2 THE CONTEMPORARY RECEPTION OF AUGUSTINIAN THERAPY: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND POSTMODERN READINGS

Upon you I call, O God, my mercy, who made me and did not forget me when I forgot you. Into my soul I call you, for you prepare it to be your dwelling by the desire you inspire in it. Do not forsake me now when I call upon you, who before ever I called on you forestalled me by your persistent, urgent entreaties, multiplying and varying your appeals that I might hear you from afar, and turn back, and begin to call upon you who were calling me. (Conf. 13.1.1)

2.1 Introduction

In the first part we have approached the topic of Augustinian therapy setting the bishop of Hippo in his historical and theological context. The background is the adaptation of ancient philosophical ideals into a theological perspective, by placing himself as a humble lover in confession before the healer of human pride, his divine Doctor. Augustine reorients the model of care of souls of ancient philosophy into a medical metaphor that embraces a theological-Christological model of therapy. Augustine puts forward the Christian *confessio*, which is in itself an act of therapy, for it restores the original human posture of humility that fetches the possibility of genuine healing of wounds in an I-Thou relationship. He is a patient in confession, in the double act of opening the wounds and acknowledging gratefully the doctor's healing power. By the language of a relational confession, a human person finds himself 'in therapy', in a journey from restlessness to stillness, in response of faith to the God who interpellates him.³⁰¹ Confessional relational language is, therefore, an intentional proposal of therapy that conveys until its last page an invitation to his audience to pursue the doctor with him.

301. Henrique de Noronha Galvão, "O Cor inquietum como chave hermenêutica das Confissões," in *Actas do Congresso Internacional As Confissões de Santo Agostinho 1600 anos depois: Presença e Actualidade* (Lisboa: Universidade Católica Editora, 2002), 39-55.

The therapeutic vision of Augustine's *Confessions*, established in its ancient context, is not self-evident for a contemporary audience, which is also immersed in a present-day environment where psychology and therapeutic ideals are much present, while at the same time very distant from Augustine's therapy.³⁰² It knows Freud's couch, Jung's archetypes, and seeks self-help books, but does not know Augustine's therapeutic *confessio*. Nevertheless, *Confessions* is still read by psychologists and contemporary thinkers, by those who have themselves a variety of different ideas on therapy, while not corresponding to what Augustine proposed. The therapeutic model of *Confessions* has been readapted in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by interpretation grids that are not his own. Among the readings that participate in a conversation about therapy in *Confessions* this work discusses those who read *Confessions* in the field of psychology and the postmodern readings.

Questions arise as to whether psychological and postmodern readings help us understand anew and recover Augustine's therapeutic ideal or, on the contrary, misread and misplace our reading of *Confessions*; consequently, there are implications of not bringing the complete movement of the Augustinian therapeutic relational confession. In the case of postmodern readings, such as Jacques Derrida's which split Augustine's therapy from his theological anthropology, the end result may be that the Augustinian therapeutic structure loses its proper sense. In finding Augustine as a companion to deconstruct the self-enclosed autonomous subject, with a similar beginning but a different endpoint, will postmodern readings destroy or reinforce the very Augustinian perspective that served as companion and ally?

302. See the consequences of what Philip Rieff calls the Freudian revolution in the emergence of a "psychological man" in his work *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (London: Chatto & Windus), 1966.

2.2 Considerations about psychological readings of *Confessions*

All the cases of Augustine's reception in psychotherapy have in common the fact that through direct or indirect contact with his writings, Augustine is translated into a different discourse, into a scientific context and its cultural, partly secular background, and Augustine's thoughts are used for purposes different from his own. Augustine's "book" in psychotherapeutic literature sometimes keeps no trace of Augustine at all.

(Alexandra Pârvan, "Beyond the Books of Augustine into Modern Psychotherapy")

Augustine's *Confessions* constitutes a masterpiece, a symphonic work, and in a sense, a complex pearl. Being so, it demands careful observation, interpretation and evaluation. Nevertheless, it seems rather peculiar that psychological readings of this work have abounded, not as careful, watchful and sharp-eyed readings, but as a reasonably inattentive audience, unable to capture the symphony present in *Confessions*. Instead of attuning to the music, psychological studies of religion applied to Augustine's *Confessions* have missed historical and theological elements, fitting Augustine in a narrow psychopathology that is not in itself a solid ground to build an interpretation of a work with an alien and ancient worldview. The result has been a narrow reading that ultimately does not comprehend *Confessions* in its literary, philosophical, rhetorical, historical and theological depth.

This section will argue that, since *Confessions* has been taken as a test-case for psychoanalytical and psychotherapeutic theories, a two-way dialogue between theology and psychology has been substituted by the monologue of a unilateral street approach, which is inherently reductionist and possibly misleading. As *Confessions* becomes a tool to test the wideness and applicability of psychological concepts and theories, the symphonic character of *Confessions* is missed; the pearl is not discerned. Consequently, the abundance of psychological readings which disregard Augustine's own theological framework foment a

discussion about the larger and more complex question of how psychology and theology are to interact, or the method for conversation between disciplines.

2.2.1 The forefathers' approach the *Confessions*

The real work of interpretation is to hear the text.

(Richard Hays, "A Hermeneutic of Trust")

Since the beginning of modern psychology, Augustine's *Confessions* and particularly his narrated inadequacies have been considered as biographical case study material to be fitted into psychological theory concepts.

In his classic work *The varieties of religious experience*, William James (1842-1910) turned to the study of individuals that made their religious experiences public, and among those 'religious geniuses', Augustine is set as a proper case of a divided self. Augustine was an emblematic example of a discordant personality, with melancholy in the form of self-condemnation for his own sins: "Augustine's psychological genius has given an account of the trouble of having a divided self which has never been surpassed."³⁰³ James was a precursor to the modern venture to develop psychologies that explore religious experience, or psychology to illuminate and interpret the religious phenomena. In *Varieties*, the phenomenon of religious experience is examined through at least three different approaches, that of the experimental psychologist (description and classification), that of the pragmatist (significance and value) and of the theist-politheist (over-beliefs).³⁰⁴ As Jacob A. Belzen puts it, *Varieties* was a type of *captatio benevolentiae*, an appetizer for a more substantial dinner that was to come, the development of psychology and the emergence of psychology of religion.³⁰⁵

303 . William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), 172. See also Donald Capps, "Augustine's Confessions: The Story of a Divided Self and the Process of Its Unification," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 29 no. 1 (2007): 127-150.

304. Ruth Anna Putnam, "Varieties of Experience and Pluralities of Perspective," in *William James and 'The Varieties of Religious Experience': A Centenary Celebration*, ed. Jeremy Carrette (London: Routledge, 2005), 149.

305. Jacob A. Belzen, "The Varieties, the Principles and the Psychology of Religion: Unremitting Inspiration from a Different Source," in *William James and 'The Varieties of Religious Experience': A Centenary Celebration*, ed. Jeremy Carrette (London: Routledge, 2005), 68.

The most vigorous critique to James' approach comes from Charles Taylor. He suggests that James' perspective, stemming mainly from an engagement with North American Protestant Christianity, which privileges individual feelings and beliefs, did not pay enough attention to the importance of collective religious life. James appears to look at the communal spiritual life as subordinate to religious private experience, "what James can't seem to accommodate is the phenomenon of collective religious life, which is not just the result of individual religious connections, but which in some sense constitutes or *is* that connection."³⁰⁶ If Taylor's critique of William James is right, Augustine's *Confessions* could have been read in a more relational approach. This would render a closer stance to what Augustine himself intended, for his speaking to God is also meant to be heard by an audience, a community of hearers. The question posed about his audience in book 10 still remains: "will they really recognize me?" For Augustine, it is communal love that allows those who have not seen him lay ears to his heart (*Conf.* 10.3.4).

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), founder of psychoanalysis, assumed that religion was created by man for reasons of self-preservation, as a response to unconscious desires; organized religion functions as a projection of orphanhood and childish narcissism.³⁰⁷ These childish longings were not meant to be treated by structures of organized religion, which maintained a cycle of childhood dependency to a divine power; but by psychoanalysis, as one faced one's own neurosis in a long-term treatment. Freud was surely a critic of religious experience: he was a medical doctor in the conservative and sexually repressing Vienna of the late nineteenth century, and grasped that there was too much under the surface that was being overlooked and repressed. Furthermore, with the development of science as a distinct body of knowledge and the discourse of inevitable confrontation between science and religious hierarchy, his times breathed the idea of inevitable conflict with organized religion, questioning its assumptions. As Margaret Miles points out, Freud's life-long project was of the institution of a psychoanalytic knowledge. He set out to discredit religious belief and appropriate its niche: in order to establish psychoanalysis, Freud had to de-legitimize religion.³⁰⁸ It is likely that, since the previous cultural and social space of counselling was

306. Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 24.

307. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. Todd Dufresne (Peterborough: Broadview, 2012).

308. Margaret Ruth Miles, "Augustine and Freud: the secularization of self-deception," in *Augustine and Psychology*, eds. Todd Breyflog, Sandra Dixon, John Doody, Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, Morton Kelsey, Kim Paffenroth, and Paul R. Kolbet (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 119.

highly identified with religious institutions, in the figures of pastoral care given by rabbis, ministers and priests, Freud intentionally puts forward a therapeutic replacement, considering the religious perspective insufficient and pathological.

Religious institutions and the Catholic Church reciprocated with comparable enmities and hostilities. With few exceptions such as Oskar Pfister,³⁰⁹ Christians and the Church in the first half of the 20th century opposed the “tyrannical” determination of Freudian psychoanalysis and Christian churches condemned the “pansexuality” model. For many decades, Freud’s works were disqualified. In the early 1950s, according to the Vicariate of Rome, it was a “mortal sin” when a Catholic turned to seek a psychoanalyst.³¹⁰ However, this story of enmity has also turned in recent years to a story of partial reconciliation. The Second Vatican Council exerted a significant role in stating that secular disciplines, such as psychology and sociology could play a role in the development of faith among Christians and at the same time recognized the difficulties of a thorough harmonization.³¹¹ More recently, Pope Francis has also described publicly the six months when weekly he profited from meeting a psychoanalyst in the 1970’s. This interaction turned in the end to be a two-way interchange: later, as his therapist was about to die, Bergoglio was called for, as he described it, a “spiritual dialogue”.

Of Jewish origin, Freud engaged religious figures such as Moses³¹² and did not occupy himself directly with Augustinian ideas; this charge would be later discussed by some major exponents who engaged psychoanalytical ideas, such as Carl Jung or Jacques Lacan. It is also worth noticing the absence of Sigmund Freud’s entry in the reception of Augustine in the wide-ranging *Oxford Guide to the Reception of Augustine*, which included, among entries,

309. Karin Wondracek, *O amor e seus destinos: a contribuição de Oskar Pfister para o diálogo entre psicanálise e teologia* (São Leopoldo: EST/Sinodal, 2005).

310. Andrea Tornielli, “Church and psychoanalysis, from condemnation to partial reconciliation,” *La Stampa*, August 31, 2017, accessed November 30, 2018. <http://www.lastampa.it/2017/08/31/vaticaninsider/church-and-psychoanalysis-from-condemnation-to-partial-reconciliation-yb3zn5cOzFwrl1Zw7CDrbL/pagina.html>.

311. “Although the Church has contributed much to the development of culture, experience shows that, for circumstantial reasons, it is sometimes difficult to harmonize culture with Christian teaching. These difficulties do not necessarily harm the life of faith, rather they can stimulate the mind to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the faith. The recent studies and findings of science, history and philosophy raise new questions which affect life and which demand new theological investigations . . . In pastoral care, sufficient use must be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology, so that the faithful may be brought to a more adequate and mature life of faith.” *Gaudium et Spes*, section 5, 3

312. Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism: An Outline of Psycho-analysis and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud 23 (London: Vintage, 2001).

psychotherapy, Carl Jung, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault. But the Freudian absence does not mean Augustine and Freud have not been placed in conversation by different generations of psychoanalysts and contemporary authors. The task of reading *Confessions* under a psychoanalytical framework was picked up after the Second World War by patristic scholars and psychoanalysts, who were eager to use Augustine as a case study for Freud's metapsychology.

Beyond the oft-used and simpler route of taking Augustine as an example of psychopathology for Freudian ideas or labelling psychoanalysis as non-compatible with Christianity, one can also find theoretical points of contact between Freud's unconscious and Augustine's *Confessions*. Even though not denying its major differences, one important insight, common to both, is the realization that one's self is not the master of his own inner house. There is a space for discovery of what is hidden, not grasped by the exterior and ephemeral outlook. Both the Augustinian confession and the psychoanalytic setting propose a decentering of the self by an inner journey of self-discovery before another. By opening and speaking to either the psychoanalyst or to God, one is called to deconstruct false illusions and pride that so often characterize an unattended inner life.

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), Swiss psychotherapist, formerly within Freud's psychoanalytical circles and later founder of Analytic Psychology, often turned to Augustine to find support or endorsement for his own ideas; however, Jung repeatedly quoted Augustine in Latin but also misinterpreted and misjudged, even for words or ideas never claimed by Augustine himself.³¹³ According to Pârvan, Jung credits the origin of his ideas on archetype from Augustine. Nevertheless, instead of following Augustine's perspective, the approach Jung takes when reading *Confessions* is that Christianity fostered the domestication of libidinal compulsions in late antiquity.³¹⁴ Jung sees *Confessions* within a larger struggle of a moral impulse that opposed behavioral decadence in favor of a more austere life. Augustine's restlessness, therefore, is interpreted within the framework that a dissolute life is naturally conflictive and seeks to be resolved, such as in Alypius' passion for the gladiatorial shows and the struggle against it.

As Jung reduced Augustine into his framework, evidence suggests that his reading of Augustine expresses his passionate yet ambivalent connection to Christianity. Son of a

313. Alexandra Pârvan, "Psychotherapy," in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, eds. Karla Pollmann and Willemien Otten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1244-1246.

314. *Ibid.*, 1245.

Swiss Protestant Reformed pastor, Jung admired Christianity and religion as a deep psychological response to the unconscious but also sought to correct and rebuke it, as a doctor treats his ill patients. Jung's assessment of *Confessions* and Christianity as domestication and austerity (even though Jung did not consider *libido* in exclusively sexual terms as Freud) shows itself partial and reductive. It shrinks the Judeo-Christian tradition, disregarding sources in which bodily expression and human sexuality are celebrated (as in the canonic book of the Song of Songs) or overlooks Christ's and Paul's struggle to go beyond a law-abiding and moralistic conservative first-century Judaism. Augustine believed that Christianity was about surrender and love and its different forms; in a Johannine fashion, Augustine contraposed love to dominance and fear. Furthermore, Jung is not completely accurate in his evaluation of Augustine, as he also invented an untrue quotation about Augustine in order to illustrate the unconscious nature of dreams:

Jung takes a creative use of Augustine a step further when he repeatedly offers a fictitious quotation from Augustine meant to illustrate eloquently his theory of the powerful and unrelenting unconscious: 'I thank thee Lord, that thou dost not make me responsible for my dreams'. Thus, Augustine is forced into supporting Jung's argument, not simply because Jung practically invented a quotation of Augustine, but, more importantly, also because this reflects precisely the opposite of what Augustine himself maintained in Conf. 10.30.41-42.³¹⁵

Even though Jung failed to comprehend Augustine's thought on its own framework and the considerable distance between the perspectives, I would like to suggest the bishop of Hippo and the founder of Analytic Psychology have affinities that should not be neglected. One of them is on the level of diagnosis of the human predicament or the consequences of modernity to the human psyche. Jung's critique of modernity pointed out the dangers of a culture that values rationality and efficiency and neglects the inner world. If Augustine were alive to critique modernity, he would very much agree with Jung's diagnosis that contemporary people pay a high price by neglecting introspection. Jung suggested rationalism destroyed the ability to react to numinous ideas and symbols, and in believing to be free from superstitions, humanity lost spiritual values on an alarming scale. Jung realized the dangers of moral and spiritual traditions being disintegrated, and the consequence is universal disorientation and disassociation.³¹⁶ Likewise, Saint Augustine highlighted the consequences of disordered affections and sought to model his story as part of a greater

315. Pârvan, "Psychotherapy," 1245.

316. Carl Jung, *Man and his Symbols* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 82.

spiritual tradition. Jung believed his psychotherapeutic method was built upon the idea of confession, as an artificial introversion in order to make conscious the unconscious elements of psychic life; and valued Catholic confession as a way to combat man's insecurity, suggesting a loss in Protestant circles with the absence of confessional practice.³¹⁷ A generous dialogue between Jungian thought and Augustine's *Confessions* considering both differences and possible convergences is yet to be developed. Such dialogue would be better realized if it avoided the pitfall of considering Augustine's *Confessions* as a test-case for Jungian theory. The dialogue is more fruitful on a conceptual level, including themes as confession, individuation, mid-life transition, memory, *persona*, self and the role of symbols for subjective life.

Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) esteemed Augustine's insights and placed him as a foreshadower of psychoanalysis.³¹⁸ Lacan particularly credits Augustine for highlighting the limitations, ambiguity and mistakes of language, "In short, Saint Augustine orients his entire dialectic around these three poles, error, mistake, ambiguity of speech."³¹⁹ As Dollimore points out, Lacan's project of re-presenting psychoanalysis in post-structuralist form approximated his thought to Augustine's, that of an identity that is constituted rather than constitutive.³²⁰ Jacques Lacan has also spent a seminar on an investigation of Augustine's *De Magistro*, particularly observing the theme of language. Lacan's admiration for Augustine's work is described openly:

And it is quite telling that the linguists have taken fifteen centuries to rediscover, like a sun which has risen anew, like a dawn that is breaking, ideas which are already set out in Saint Augustine's text, which is one of the most glorious one could read. And I treated myself to reading it again for this occasion. Everything I have been telling you about the signifier and the signified is there, expounded with a sensational lucidity, so sensational that I am afraid that the spiritual commentators who have given themselves over to its exegesis have not always perceived all of its subtlety. They think that the profound Doctor of the Church has strayed off his path into rather futile things. These futile things are nothing other than the latest developments in modern thought on language.³²¹

317. Elisabeth Todd, "The Value of Confession and Forgiveness According to Jung," *Journal of Religion and Health* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 45.

318. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 20, quoted in Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 282.

319. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 260. More specifically, see "De Locutionis Significatione," chapter XX.

320. Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 281.

321. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 249.

Even though Lacan did not engage the *Confessions* fully, he admired Augustine for his registry of speech as an expression of ambiguity and his pertinent description of the problems of language. Suman Mennel describes Lacan's interest in Augustine mainly because of Augustine's "absence of a simple referential word-to concept or signifier-to-signified relation, the expansion of signification into the wordless realm of gesture and mime, and the location of speech in the register of error, mistake, and ambiguity."³²² Mennel also points out that even though the treatment of language in *De Magistro* is highly appreciated, the same features are also present in *Confessions* with even more implications, a development in Augustine's own thought Lacan himself did not pick up: "the themes Lacan finds in this early dialogue, written more than ten years before the *Confessions*, are exemplified more forcefully in the *Confessions* themselves, where their implications regarding the self are also developed. In fact, the problems of communication through language that Lacan identifies are sharpened in the later text."³²³ Furthermore, Lacan seeks to rewrite Descartes' *cogito* and brings the psychoanalysis notion of the unconscious to destabilize modern autonomy. His step to depart from the modern Cartesian self takes him to Augustine's understanding of language. The relationship between Lacan and Augustine is worth reviewing: if Lacan believes Augustine foreshadows psychoanalysis, he seems to foreshadow a postmodern reading of Augustine. The Lacanian and Augustinian interaction, particularly related to language theory, seems to be a field yet to be developed by scholars.³²⁴

Another use Lacan makes of Augustine is by taking a passage of *Confessions* to exemplify his own views on the importance of infant jealousy to human subjectivity. As a result, Lacan repeatedly quoted Augustine's observation of pre-language infant rivalry in order to illustrate the important mirror stage of his theory, "I have watched and experienced for myself the jealousy of a small child: he could not even speak, yet he glared with livid fury at his fellow-nursling"³²⁵ (*Conf.* 1.7.11). As Barzilai suggests, key concepts of Lacanian thought are supported by analogies present in *Confessions*.³²⁶ Inheriting a comparable disgust

322. Susan Mennel, "Augustine's 'I': The 'Knowing Subject' and the Self," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, no. 3 (1994): 291-324.

323. *Ibid.*, 294.

324. See also Zachary Tavlin, "Signifying Truth: Augustine, Lacan and a Theory of Language," *Language and Psychoanalysis* 2, no. 2 (2013): 64-76.

325. *Vidi ego et expertus sum zelantem parvulum: nondum loquebatur et intuebatur pallidus amaro aspectu conlactaneum suum.*

326. Shuli Barzilai, "Augustine in Contexts: Lacan's Repetition of a Scene from the *Confessions*," *Literature & Theology: An International Journal of Theory, Criticism and Culture* 11, no. 2 (1997): 200-221. Barzilai describes the following connections through Lacan's use of the rivalry scene description in *Conf.* 1.7.11:

to religion Sigmund Freud had, Lacan interpreted religion as an underdeveloped way out of conflict arisen by the loss of the maternal object,

what Lacan could apprehend, then, in the Augustinian anecdote of the jealous child was a twofold development: the initial exposure to maternal loss and its relation to the process of self-transfiguration. Yet, where Augustine invokes the divine (or symbolic) father in order to implement his passage from malaise to rebirth, Lacan does not in the first specular instance call upon or for paternal intervention. If one cannot have the maternal object—that is, the object irretrievably lost from the moment it is recognized as such, the object first constituted through separation—then one will be without it.³²⁷

By briefly retrieving important precursors of psychology and psychoanalysis, the picture that emerges, and has set the tone for the following generations, is on one side admiration for Augustinian geniality, and on the other, a selective appropriation to support contemporary approaches. Augustine is either a revered figure from ancient times to be recovered as a supporter of one's new theories or a model of a neurotic patient that exemplifies the extent of one's psychopathological standpoint. William James, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan, when approaching Augustine, have in common the absence of a comprehensive engagement with Augustine's own perspective on therapy.

2.2.2 The psychoanalytical and psychotherapeutic use of Augustine's *Confessions*

None of these have laid their ears to my heart, though it is only there that I am whoever I am (Conf. 10.3.4).

It is worth highlighting the dissonance between psychoanalytical evaluations of *Confessions* and the theological nature of Augustine's view on therapy stemming from relationality and humility. Augustine has been usually read in a kind of psychohistory which tended to impose theoretical frameworks onto his biography, a hermeneutic of suspicion centered on his relationship with his controlling mother Monica. *Confessions* is then placed within systems of thought that fit Augustine and his personal experience into a foreign scheme of thought, read through concepts such as Oedipus Conflict, castration, repression, guilt. The text is then forced into the psychoanalytical concept, leading to an abundance of

(1) a rival relationship with a double during the *infans* stage, before the child can speak (the mirror stage); (2) anguish attributed to the loss of the first nurturing relationship, followed by the lack of something unknown, represented by the term 'objet petit a'; (3) a gap between motoric prematurity and intellectual capacity that has wide-reaching ramifications for both authors (4) after the description of fraternal rivalry, a motif corresponding to the Lacanian concept of desire appears in Augustine's text.

327. Ibid., 213.

creative readings that does not seem to check their interpretation against Augustine's historical context or rhetorical intent.

If these interpretations are found wanting, on the other hand, historians and theologians have intuited the psychological acuteness of Augustine but not necessarily bridged the gap of a proper interdisciplinary pursuit. Paula Fredriksen has pointed out that historians and theologians in the traditional field of patristic studies sense the importance of bringing a psychological approach to Augustine, but hesitate in familiarizing themselves in the "psychologist burden" and the knowledge of this field.³²⁸ By this absence of a proper interdisciplinary dialogue between grounds, in the overall, the charge has been picked up by studies without a proper regard to the ancient historical milieu and not steeped in Augustine's world or his philosophical and theological worldview.

The first works suggesting a pathological interpretation of Augustine's relationship with a domineering mother are from the first years after Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* (1927). In 1928, E. R. Dodds' article "Augustine's Confessions: A study of Spiritual Maladjustment" proposed psychoanalytical concepts to interpret Augustine's life with an emphasis on Oedipus complex through Augustine's special relationship with Monica. Rebecca West (1934) wrote a biography on Augustine with a psychoanalytical orientation. Even though Freud himself is not mentioned, her focus is on the Oedipal triangle, having Monica as the Christian castrative side and the pagan father, Patricius, who receives the hatred and animosity of his son. Paul Archembault captures the dissonance between her interpretation and the text itself, ironically stating: "the reader of the *Confessiones* is left wondering what seething sense of Oedipal resentment and repressed parricidal impulses he missed in reading the few lines wherein Augustine mentions his father."³²⁹

In her bibliographical review of psychohistorical readings of Augustine in the twentieth century,³³⁰ Sandra Lee Dixon suggests that psychoanalytical studies from the 50s,

328. Paula Fredriksen, "Augustine and his Analysts: The Possibility of a Psychohistory," *Soundings* 61, (1978): 214.

329. Paul Archembault, "Augustine's Confessiones: On the Uses and the Limits of Psychobiography," in *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T. J. Van Bavel*, eds. Bernard Bruning, Mathijs Lamberigts, and Jozef Van Houtem (Heverlee: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1990), 87.

330. Dixon, *Scattered and Gathered Self*; Alexandra Pârvan, "Beyond the books of Augustine into Modern Psychotherapy," in *Augustine beyond the Book: Intermediality, Transmediality, and Reception*, eds. Meredith J. Gill and Karla Pollmann (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 313-338. Dixon reviewed the continuing discussion between psychoanalytic interpretations and claims for historical accuracy until the end of the twentieth century. In a more recent evaluation, Pârvan discussed how Augustine is quoted and understood by psychologists and psychotherapists,

60s and 70s tended to suit Augustine's *Confessions* to confirm the psychopathology theory of their choice.³³¹ Dixon, a proponent of a psychoanalytical reading of *Confessions* herself, aptly points these works abound in Freudian ideas but rarely quoted Freud and did not reference carefully his texts.³³² Consequently, this perspective has been criticized over the years both by psychoanalysts and patristic scholars alike. Psychoanalysis without Freudian accurateness and *Confessions* without Augustine: these leanings have been found wanting in accuracy and abounding in anachronisms.

The impulse to interpret Augustine within psychoanalytical concepts grew from the second half of the 50s, as the texts of these decades abound in psychopathologizing Augustine. Walter Langer, former president of the American Historical Association, challenged historians to adopt psychoanalysis as a hermeneutical tool to interpret the past.³³³ Following the same direction, Charles Kligerman in 1957 reduced Augustine's subjective life to fit psychoanalytical frameworks, missing contextual historical accuracy in order to make a point and match Augustine's biography to his psychoanalytical theory.³³⁴ Kligerman thought Augustine exhibited the perfect test-case to be studied, as his text seemed to him an example of psychoanalytical free-association. The charges then abound, including compulsive sexuality, infantile behavior, and the abandonment to exert a fully masculine sexuality. Augustine has been portrayed as confined and enslaved by a governing mother, and his religious pursuit seen as a dependent projection of that previous controlling relationship. As James Dittes suggests in his "Continuities between the Life and Thought of Augustine", Augustine found a repressing solution to appease his conflicting Oedipus complex:

Augustine submitted. He surrendered to his mother, and to her church and to her wishes. He abandoned masculine sexuality. He abandoned all active personal striving, including his vocational roles and aspirations. He abandoned those things which his father particularly endorsed and represented. He abandoned, in short, the effort to be a father. Instead he became an obedient son.³³⁵

331. Dixon, *Scattered and the Gathered Self*, 3.

332. Sandra Lee Dixon, "Teaching Freud and interpreting Augustine's *Confessions*," in *Augustine and Psychology*, eds. Sandra Lee Dixon, John Doody, and Kim Paffenroth (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 23, 35.

333. Archembault, "Augustine's *Confessiones*," 83.

334. Charles Kligerman, "A Psychoanalytic Study of the *Confessions* of St. Augustine," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 5, no. 3 (1957): 469-484.

335. James E. Dittes, "Continuities Between the Life and Thought of Augustine," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 5, no. 1 (1965): 135.

Paula Fredriksen has pointed out that these studies turned out to be problematic, for ancient material has been fit into a present-day theoretical framework, as contemporary judgments are passed on the nature of Monica's libido and Augustine's neuroticism. Monica is seen as sexually controlling in order to fit the theory; ultimately, "they forget that the writer is Augustine, not Freud".³³⁶ Patricius is seen as the representation of paganism to Augustine, as Kligerman suggested.³³⁷ Augustine's father is pictured seeking to influence his son to become pagan like himself, an argument that does not find evidence in the text. It is fair to argue that *Confessions* does not portray Patricius in opposition to Augustine's Christianity, but rather focuses on Monica's ambition that Augustine would become Christian. Augustine's father in this regard is, notably, absent. Augustine was a catechumen in his infancy and Patricius himself becomes a Christian later in life.³³⁸ Fredriksen's conclusion is that psychohistorical readings have demonstrated unfamiliarity with the historical period, one that has led to precipitated conclusions, which label but do not illuminate; rather than an accurate interpretation checked against the historical data, they lead to arbitrary conclusions.³³⁹ Because of historical ineptitude, Paula Fredriksen suggested the route of "first things first": to "establish Augustine in his period first, and then proceed to apply psychoanalytic interpretative models."³⁴⁰

The discussion about psychoanalytic interpretations also verges on the debate about *Confessions* as a model of psychoanalytical free association or, oppositely, intentionally construed discourse with rhetorical elements. Kligerman saw in *Confessions* the fundamental method of talking-cure in psychoanalysis, "the text has the spontaneous quality of free association".³⁴¹ Upholding that Augustine's method in *Confessions* is free association justified a theoretical use of psychoanalysis to scrutinize Augustine's life. Augustine's confessional discourse seems to resemble free association in its associative reasoning, where objectivity, factual description is substituted by a writing that follows the movement of the heart. Augustine's writing is not systematic or linear, but circular; yet it reaches its intended objective, as an eagle which navigates in a spirally circular path. This interpretation of *Confessions* as free association, however, mistakenly diminishes the importance of intentional

336. Fredriksen, "Augustine and his Analysts," 209-210.

337. Kligerman, "Psychoanalytic Study of *Confessions* of St. Augustine," 470.

338. Fredriksen, "Augustine and his Analysts," 209.

339. *Ibid.*, 214.

340. *Ibid.*

341. Kligerman, "Psychoanalytic Study of *Confessions* of St. Augustine," 99.

artistry, portraying Augustine more as a psychoanalytic patient and less of an acute, purposely driven writer with rhetoric in his veins. In *Confessions*, beginning and end are deliberately connected, such as in the restless journey to final rest, or the three ending books, which discuss the creation narrative. Calling *Confessions* free-association is an anachronism, an inconsistent juxtaposition of concepts from different times that does not pay attention to Augustine's selectivity and choices of symbolic events to instill beliefs. Moreover, it does not critically question what is in fact historical in the narration.³⁴² As the late Luc Verheijen pointed out in his last text about *Confessions*, the challenge to discern what is of essentially historical significance in the narration remains.³⁴³ Was Augustine setting his life's journey as an argument against Donatist critiques, and therefore, far from free-association, his ancient rhetoric was intentionally construing an anti-Manichean narrative?

Although psychoanalytical interpretations of Augustine should not all be placed in the same homogeneous box, nevertheless, they express one common element, which is de-emphasizing theological and strictly historical approaches in order to explain Augustine's journey in terms of psychoanalytical theories and concepts. William Parsons suggests two different moments in the psychoanalytical interpretations of Augustine, the earlier oedipal studies and later those focusing on narcissistic elements and preoedipal aspects. The readings also vary in terms of Augustinian diagnosis as in a wide spectrum: on one side Augustine is portrayed as conflicted and regressed; to others, on the positive side, a model of adaptive and therapeutic value of his religious conversion. But all have one element in common: "in all cases, however, Augustine's journey is presented as explicable within the terms of the models of self and development found in these theories"³⁴⁴

342. O'Meara, "Augustine's *Confessions*." An interesting discussion questioning the strict historicity of *Confessions* without regarding it as untruth can be found in O' Meara's text about Augustine's treatment of fiction, poetry and selectivity. He writes, "The necessary indirection of poetry and particularity of the use of Psalms, and Scriptures generally, to describe things, added to cultivated detachment from particulars, leaves one frequently uninformed where one might very much wish to be informed. What was the name of Augustine's mistress? What was the name of the friend of his early youth who died and left him disconsolate? What Platonist books or excerpts did he read? Did he get to know Ambrose at all well? The method of the *Confessions* is not that of even direct narrative. The accumulation of the considerations that I have advanced, to show how qualified must be our expectation of strict historicity in the *Confessions*, does not mean that Augustine tells untruths. Much of what he wants to say has reference to states of soul rather than to any particular facts; and these states of soul involve imaginative reconstruction and for him imaginative, indeed emotional, and poetical expression."

343. Luc Verheijen, "Two grids of Composition and Reading," in *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T. J. Van Bavel*, eds. Bernard Bruning, Mathijs Lamberigts, and Jozef Van Houtem. (Heverlee: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1990), 175-204.

344. Parsons, *Freud and Augustine in Dialogue*, 12.

In summary, psychoanalysts from the mid decades of the previous century have tended to engage *Confessions* reductively and in a non-dialogical perspective. But not only that: they have misread the text, forgotten that Augustine was well-steeped in rhetoric and they overlooked the historicity of a book originated in the context of the late Roman Empire. As Parsons summarizes,

in the last few decades psychoanalytic studies of Augustine have met with responses from numerous quarters, the most effective of which can be grouped into three methodological perspectives: historical, literary, and theological. These diverse approaches have collectively yielded a wide-ranging critique of the reductionist literature: psychoanalytic interpretations often misread the text; they do not take into account Augustine's rhetorical strategy; they do not adequately situate the author in his sociocultural context; they do not restore the full scope of his teaching about mystical ascents with respect to the larger context of his teaching; and they are necessarily limited by the narrowness of their theories concerning the nature of psyche and soul. Overall, the message is that unless such psychological forays engage the *Confessions* in true dialogue they are bound to be misleading and reductive.³⁴⁵

Over the last decades, new voices within the psychoanalytical world have questioned Freud's assessment of religious belief and practice as universal obsessional neurosis and proposed a more positive interaction between psychoanalysis and religion. If the twenty-first century is to inaugurate a new period of dialogue, then an important question is raised by David Black's book *Psychoanalysis and Religion in the Twenty-first Century: Competitors or Collaborators?*, which surveys the historical interaction between the two fields and includes the collaboration of fourteen different authors.³⁴⁶ In fact, a dialogical posture is not a new proposal within the psychoanalytical movement, and it emerged since its first generation, as the correspondence between Freud and his friend, the Protestant pastor Pfister, attests;³⁴⁷ nevertheless, Pfister's voice in a more positive dialogue between psychoanalysis and Christianity has been overlooked and left largely in the periphery. A relevant contribution in recent years comes from Marie Balmory, a French psychoanalyst in the Lacanian tradition who enters conversation with Jacques Lacan's younger brother, Marc-François, a Benedictine monk.³⁴⁸ Even though a dialogical posture does not mean overcoming

345. Ibid., 18.

346. David M. Black, ed., *Psychoanalysis and Religion in the Twenty-first Century: Competitors or Collaborators?* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

347. Sigmund Freud and Oskar Pfister, *Briefe 1909 – 1939*, ed. Ernst L. Freud (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1963).

348. Marie Balmory, *Le Moine Et La Psychanalyste* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006).

the habit of using psychoanalytical theory to look at Augustine's *Confessions* it could create an environment where Augustine's worldview, in its historical and theological frameworks, may be respected, or at least heard in its basic assumptions.

Beyond the scope of a psychoanalytic reading of Augustine and entering into the broader field of psychological approaches, it is also realistic to affirm that contemporary psychologists and psychotherapists in general have fallen prey to an oral culture that quotes but does not read Augustine. Much is attributed to the bishop of Hippo but considerable quotations or allusions do not belong to his authorship and in fact could be traced to a different author; or Augustine is quoted out of context, to reinforce a theory or a point that does not necessarily match his original intent. Pârvan suggests that what is common in psychotherapeutic readings of Augustine is a reception that fits Augustine for purposes different from his own; there is a "book" beyond Augustine own books, which in the end results in Augustine:

all the cases of Augustine's reception in psychotherapy have in common the fact that through direct or indirect contact with his writings, Augustine is translated into a different discourse, into a scientific context and its cultural, partly secular background, and Augustine's thoughts are used for purposes different from his own. Augustine's "book" in psychotherapeutic literature sometimes keeps no trace of Augustine at all. In this book Augustine is sometimes Plato, Tertullian, or Bonaventure. Most times Augustine is at hand for any use the author needs him for, without directly consulting him. Many a time Augustine is too famous to preserve his authorship, he becomes popular knowledge, a famous saying, and psychotherapists see little use in concerning themselves with actually reading him.³⁴⁹

Furthermore, Augustine is mainly read by psychotherapists and psychologists through secondary sources,³⁵⁰ which leaves us with the challenge to discern which Augustine and through which lenses he is being interpreted. A curious case of interpretation, or on the verge of a misrepresentation, has emerged when Augustine is read by psychologists through Charles Taylor's "In Interiore Homine" in his book *Sources of the Self*. In Taylor's history of ideas approach, Augustine stands "on the way from Plato to Descartes."³⁵¹ In this interpretation, Augustine grants western thought a focus on interiority and anticipates

349. Pârvan, "Beyond the books of Augustine into modern psychotherapy," 337

350. Ibid., 317. Alexandra Pârvan suggested that Augustine is read "beyond the book", "as the authors do not cite Augustine; no direct reference is made to any of his works; he is usually read through another author (e.g. Taylor)".

351. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 127.

Descartes' *cogito*. Being a station between the ancient platonic and the Cartesian self, the bishop of Hippo is then seen as a forerunner of the individualistic self or at least its anticipator. Augustinian inwardness is then stretched as if his inner focus would be responsible for the western individualistic mindset. For Harvey Aronson, Augustine's legacy is the "the enshrinement of the individual."³⁵²

The American psychologist James Hillman, a Jungian analyst associated with the Archetypal Psychology movement, has approached Augustine as an advocate of an individualistic mindset. He suggests that Augustine has left a legacy of "intense individualism" and gave "the individual an overriding importance."³⁵³ Hillman contrasts the political and public community of the polytheistic Greeks to the solitary Christian affirmation of the monocentric and private individual: Augustine is read as a Christian who opposes the pagan public virtues and values introspection and isolation. Hillman also suggests that neither Freud nor Jung have found a way out of individualism, one that has been entrenched in western culture through Christianity, a detrimental legacy to a time such as ours. It is clear that Hillman does not know Augustine's writings, as the relational confession of *Confessiones*, the rapport demonstrated in the letters, the communitarian approach of the Augustinian rule for monks or the political concerns of *De Civitate Dei*. A man that writes about relationality with such passion, such as in "if you see charity, you see the Trinity"³⁵⁴ or "may I know you, O you who know me" (*Conf.* 10.1.1) could never be an "intense individualist". Furthermore, interiority in Augustine is never solipsism, but a place of encounter. In Hillman's defense, however, it could be said that not knowing the bishop of Hippo is the standard condition among those steeped in a science and practice that started in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Additionally, Hillman's ideas positively include that the goal of therapy should include a challenge to individualism in times such as ours.

Psychoanalysis and modern psychotherapy, born on this side of the Enlightenment, cannot escape the impact of a hermeneutics of suspicion, which could obstruct an exercise of receptive listening to Augustine. Hermeneutics of suspicion positively have shown us hidden agendas and prevented readers from a naïveté towards the text.

352. Harvey Aronson, "Buddhist Practice in Relation to Self-Representation: A Cross-Cultural Dialogue," in *Buddhism and Psychotherapy Across Cultures: Essays on Theories and Practices*, ed. Mark Unno (Boston: Wisdom, 2006), 68.

353. James Hillman, "One Hundred Years of Solitude, or Can the Soul Ever Get Out of Analysis?," in *The Evolution Of Psychotherapy: The Second Conference*, ed. Jeffrey K. Zeig (New York: Routledge, 1992), 316.

354. *Trin.* 8.8

Nevertheless, there is a counter-cultural posture when Scripture and also the Church Fathers are read through a receptive reading, which Richard Hays also calls hermeneutics of trust: it is a readiness to receive trustingly the text, as an exercise of listening and discernment.³⁵⁵ That sympathetic reading does not mean accepting everything in the text at face value, disregarding elements of fiction or forgetting that interpretations are shaped by historical interests and governed by institutions. In *Confessions*, one has to comprehend that Augustine's rhetorical text is not an objective account of a factual chronological life, but one that weaves events and their interpretation, in a biographical construction that is also text making. Nonetheless, distrust in his own theological standpoint engenders a conceptual narrow grid to interpret Augustine's experience, generating a psychological approach where Augustine's own point of view is placed in the background or finds itself entirely absent.

One of the most challenging (and needed) conditions for psychologists approaching *Confessions* is an open and receptive reading of Augustine's own therapeutic perspective stemming from *Confessions*; and his framework is not psychological or psychoanalytic, but first and foremost, theological. Since the present work is within a dialogue between Augustine and psychology seeking to discuss *Confessions*' soundness to contemporary psychotherapy, it has considered as valid the advice to steep ourselves first in Augustine's world and follow it as a methodological pathway. In our earlier discussions, we sought Augustine's therapeutically oriented theological vision against the background of the ancient philosophical ideals. This historical route has not only proven itself as a methodological antidote to psychologisms about Augustine, but demonstrated the depth of Augustine's theological therapeutic proposal.

In summary, due to an emphasis in the psychological readings and *Confessions*, it is adequate to say that Augustine's own theological viewpoint about therapy has been neglected. Augustine is often used to support theories, either as a patient analyzed as an example of neuroticism, or as a master from primordial times, who conveys ancient authority to modern psychological concepts and contemporary approaches. Even though recent works have tried to narrow this gap, the task of interpreting Augustine and psychology, or at least letting Augustine speak by himself and contribute to psychotherapy with his own voice, is still at hand and underdeveloped in the centuries old inhabited world of Augustinian studies.

355. Richard Hays, "A Hermeneutic of Trust," in *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on preaching, Augustine to the Present*, ed. Richard Lischer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 269-274.

This task is be picked up by twenty-first century theologians, psychologists and historians who are interested in an interdisciplinary pursuit.

2.2.3 Synergy without complete harmonization: psychology and theology in dialogue

Classical Christianity is thoroughly psychological because it is based on a biblically inspired understanding of the psyche, the self, the soul. In modern technical theological language, Christianity's reading of human nature is referred to as theological anthropology. It offers an analysis of the soul's strengths and weaknesses, and suggests means for strengthening, repairing, and cultivating the soul. This is to say that Christianity is fundamentally and thoroughly a therapeutic offering, once known as the cure of souls, perhaps today more gently put as the care of souls. (Ellen Charry)

After discussing psychological readings of Augustine's *Confessions*, this section will suggest that, rather than rivals, while the boundaries between these disciplines remain, Christian theology and psychology can be set as allies in order to provide insights and rebuild a fuller account of relational human flourishing. Supporting this claim paves the way for affirming that Augustinian anthropology and a contemporary approach of phenomenological psychology such as EEP can be mutual supporters to reconstruct a broader account of humanity's experiential dynamism. While resisting complete harmonization, its synergy, through its interaction and cooperation, produces a greater understanding about the nature of the heart's desire than the sum of their separate ideas. Furthermore, since patristic theology and Augustine's *Confessions* have conveyed an elaborate conception of soul therapy centuries before psychology became science, the relation between psychology and other fields is not necessarily a story of inevitable conflict, but it can open itself up to an interdisciplinary dialogue of cooperation and mutual enrichment. As Entwistle suggests, psychology and Christian theology are not antithetical or irrelevant to each other, but as systems of thought in dialogue they can offer "useful perspectives through which we can study and understand human behavior, and together they can give us a more complete and accurate picture of human nature and functioning than either perspective can provide alone."³⁵⁶

356. David N. Entwistle, *Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity: an Introduction to Worldview Issues, Philosophical Foundations, and Models of Integration* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 3.

Since Christian mission involves the caring for the person and her world, the Christian cultural mandate to inspire a fuller life on earth finds similarities with the human flourishing goal proposed by contemporary psychology and mental health initiatives. Christian faith, as well as the spiritual experience in many religions, seeks the flowering of the human experience and the common good of all society. It is not accidental that Christianity absorbed an impulse to care for the sick and poor. Throughout history, Christians have sought to embody a holistic care, such as modelled by the story told by Christ in the parable of the Good Samaritan.³⁵⁷ This desire led in the Middle Ages to the institutionalization of care, such as embodied by the Jerusalem Hospital in the twelfth century.³⁵⁸ Run by the religious order of the Hospital of St. John, named also “hospitallers”,³⁵⁹ they established a partly shelter and partly medical center institution. The Jerusalem Hospital was the outcome of an order that consecrated itself for the care of the sick and indigent pilgrims; the Hospitallers monks followed a rule which had its inspiration in the Rule of Saint Augustine. The hospital provided free care for the needy and beds to the outcasts and disabled in a time when only the rich could afford their own beds. It was the building of a caring place for the other: Christ-like commitment to the poor and suffering was an intimate part of the hospital’s original philosophy and everyday operations. This impulse to care, exemplified by this initiative, suggests that Christianity can inspire a vision in which human life is attended, nurtured and valued. The kingdom of God is *shalom* (peace), justice and joy, the fullest of life, lived under the shadow of God’s almighty Reign. Consequently, the church is not an end in itself, but a means to extend the dignity of a restored human life. As Moltmann points out, “the real goal is not to spread the church, but to spread the Kingdom. The goal is not the glorification of the church, but the glorification of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.”³⁶⁰ In Augustine, as points out Raymond Canning, love of neighbor can be seen as the foundation and main characteristic of the church. Since the church is loved because of the neighbor (*ecclesia propter proximum diligitur*) and not an end in itself, the transitory church

357. Gospel of Luke 10.25-37.

358. Clifford Hugh Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (London: Longman, 1984). “Some twenty-five years before the launching of the First Crusade, a group of pious merchants of Amalfi had built, or perhaps simply restored, the Benedictine monastery of St. Mary of the Latins on a site adjacent to the Holy Sepulchre. In order to provide for the increasing flow of pilgrims, the monks built a hospice, dedicated to St. John the Baptist.”

359. For a balanced approach on the history of this order which originally did charitable work and which later added to itself military functions, see Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Knights of St. John in Jerusalem and Cyprus, C. 1050-1310* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1967).

360. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A contribution of Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 11.

carries the mission of bringing people in the unity of love with one another in Christ.³⁶¹ As *Gloria Dei est vivens homo* (St. Irenaeus), the glory of God is an alive human being, Christians find their purpose and glorify God when serving society and human beings are living life in wholeness. If that is so, psychology and Christian theology are not to be competitors, but are called to work together for the common good, fostering a vision of holistic care to the needy and ill.

In spite of the present-day caution about the possibilities and boundaries in the dialogue between these disciplines, the theological tradition is rich in this interdisciplinary interface that respects the beacons of both fields. Since the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which more deeply articulated the dual nature of Christ, maintaining both its divine and human nature, two dimensions are articulated without losing the validity and uniqueness of both. In recovering the paradigm proposed by Chalcedon, the Princeton theologian James Loder has set an example of the ability of interdisciplinary dialogue between psychology and theology, from the standpoint of theological anthropology.³⁶²

Even though there are resources within the Christian tradition that facilitate and provoke a respectful dialogue with psychology, a Christian devotion devoid of knowledge of the Scriptures and theological tradition in conversation with the contemporary world can be reduced in a closed mindset of an anti-intellectualist bubble. This attitude not only prevents interdisciplinary expansion but also inspires a vision of conflict between Christianity and secular psychology. In the context of the interaction between psychology and theology, these Christian combatants believe psychologists are distorting truth and undermine believer's faith through their philosophies, devices, and supposed therapies. As proponent of the biblical counselling model Jay E. Adams suggests, "the work of changing men's lives belongs to the Christian ministry in particular and the Christian people in general; not to some self-appointed caste of humanistic priests that has moved into the church's territory."³⁶³ Adams seems to work with a Christendom model of "church territory" and neglects that those who seek *shalom*, a holistic understanding of human flourishing, are also allies of Christianity for the cultivation and thriving of life in God's earth. Furthermore, Christians are called to embrace

361. Raymond Canning, *The Unity of Love ofr God and Neighbour in St. Augustine* (Heverlee-Leuven: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993), 18-19.

362. James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

363. Jay E. Adams, *The Big Umbrella and Other Essays on Christian Counselling* (Amityville: Calvary Press, 1972), 8.

the reality that God himself speaks to those outside the church. They enter into dialogue with people God already addresses. Throughout the Bible, God not only communicates to those called his own people, Israelites or Christians, but with foreigners such as Abimelech and Nebuchadnezzar. The book of Isaiah even calls Cyrus, a foreign Persian king, as God's anointed one, which would bear a blessing that benefited the exiled people of Israel.³⁶⁴ Biblical narratives point to the fact that all humans are open to God's address, that they "would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him."³⁶⁵

One of the ongoing and possibly continual tensions between psychology and Christianity is that they both inhabit a not so clear borderline between the psyche and the spirit, while at the same time seeking therapeutic objectives. This overlapping can be seen as an everlasting source of conflict and friction or a possibility for further cooperation and dialogue. As Browning and Evison state clearly, "from the moment modern psychiatry emerged as a distinct profession, psychiatry and religion have overlapped and at times overtly competed. The reason for this is clear: both seek to heal forms of brokenness that stand on the ambiguous borderline between body and what is variously referred to as 'psyche' or 'spirit.'"³⁶⁶

Psychology, as a science born in the nineteenth century generated at the confluence of the natural sciences, philosophy and study of physiology, has established a relationship of differentiation. However, an emphasis on distinction could also bring a further challenge to interdisciplinary approaches. A bridge is built with foundations on different parts: due to a lack of knowledge about the psychological understanding prior to the nineteenth century, modern psychology can adopt a one-way interpretative approach instead of a methodological approach that values mutual enrichment with fields such as philosophy and theology. Theology, philosophy and psychology are called to participate in interdisciplinary dialogue, recognizing limits and possibilities, retaining epistemologies and opening the construction of bridges of contact.

The path of interdisciplinary conversation between theology and psychology has become necessary in the face of the non-helpful polarization and disjunction between

364. Isaiah 45.1.

365. Acts 17.27.

366. Don S. Browning and Ian Evison, introduction to *Religious and Ethical Factors in Psychiatric Practice*, by Don S. Browning, Thomas Jobe, and Ian S. Evison (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1990), 3-4.

theology and psychology, or the risk of overlapping, which does not understand the uniqueness of each approach. A path of fruitful dialogue between psychology and religious faith will also depend on the training of professionals in psychology who have a respect for the human dimension in their search for transcendence and meaning; consequently, they will be open to receiving the search contained in the human experience of their clients, which includes a search through spiritual quests. It is up to psychology, in an attitude of openness before the sources we receive from the past, to find room for interdisciplinary dialogue.

Through Augustinian articulation, Christianity carries integral psychological notions, one that convey both appealing similarities and genuine tensions with modern secular psychology. In Ellen Charry's view, the most important of these tensions is that Augustine believed spiritual illness to be a universal condition³⁶⁷ and modern psychology defined itself apart from these very theological notions; for Augustine, a rift between psychology and spirituality would be incoherent.³⁶⁸ Other points of tension include the temptation to easily translate him to contemporary psychological thought without regarding the untranslatability of Augustinian terms;³⁶⁹ the integration in Augustine's thought between ethics and therapy, a holistic approach where ethics, psychology and spirituality are part of the same problem and repair;³⁷⁰ and the modern tendencies to divide and isolate disciplines, which led to contemporary divisions between psychological schools, such as behaviorist, psychodynamic, or cognitive.³⁷¹

Theologians interested in Augustine's psychology have highlighted that the dialogue between psychology and theology does not need to be inaugurated, but renovated. As Charry points out, the goal of such exchange

is not to inaugurate a conversation between two disciplines, theology and psychology, in order, for instance, to create a contemporary psychology studded with biblical verses or glossed with theological notions psychologically reconstrued. The structure of Christian psychology is already in place. Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 3, and Romans 7 are among Western Christian psychology's foundational texts, showing that the human soul teeters between its identity in the divine image and its fallen reality, seeking repair, release, redemption. The task is not to construct but to reclaim this Christian psychology. And that includes correcting its

367. Yet in *Confessions*, Augustine's formulation on original sin is not present, a conceptual development that would find its way into later works.

368. Ellen T. Charry, "Augustine of Hippo: Father of Christian Psychology," *Anglican Theological Review* 88, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 575-589.

369. *Ibid.*, 581.

370. *Ibid.*, 582.

371. *Ibid.*

weaknesses, augmenting its strengths, and applying its insights felicitously in language that is presently understandable. In my judgment, this could well be done in conversation with contemporary neurobiology, psychopharmacology, and experimental psychology, and it may be enriched by secular psychodynamic theory as long as its inspiration is properly and fundamentally theological.³⁷²

Even though Augustine cannot be placed as a contemporary psychologist, his discussions about a theological anthropology also carry psychological implications, an actuality that the forefathers of psychology (such as Jung and Lacan) have glimpsed. An Augustinian theological anthropology with psychological consequences is supported by different recent authors. Joseph Torchia, in a work discussing the restless mind and curiosity in Augustine's thought, suggests that Augustine's theological understanding fosters a profound psychological discovery, namely that desire encompasses also an intellectual component.³⁷³ Another discussion about the extent of Augustinian thought as psychological knowledge comes from Ellen Charry's article on Augustine as father of Christian psychology. Charry suggests that since Augustine was the first ancient theologian to articulate the unsteadiness of desire and the ambiguity of love, Augustine builds a psychology that is organized as an assessment of love.³⁷⁴

Charry makes an even further claim, that Augustine's psychology is so elaborated that his writings and *Confessions* should be recovered as a reference in the current discussion between psychology and Christianity. She argues that Augustinian theology is already psychological and the fields are intrinsically related. Current initiatives on the conversation between the two disciplines, such as by the Christian Association for Psychology Studies (CAPS) should not 'reinvent the wheel' but reclaim its Christian psychology legacy, recovering what has been forgotten in the Christian tradition of psychological understanding,

Christian theology, quite apart from modern secular psychology, is and always has been a psychological enterprise. There is a distinctly Christian psychology and has been for more than 1,500 years. From this vantage point, asking how theology and psychology relate to one another misses the point. The question is not—and never was—whether or how theology and psychology are to relate to one another. Ought they be integrated or remain in separate spheres, on analogy with the religion and science debate? That

372. Charry, "Augustine of Hippo," 577.

373. Joseph N. Torchia, *Restless Mind: Curiositas & the Scope of Inquiry in St. Augustine's Psychology* (Milwaukee, Wis: Marquette University Press, 2013), 10-11. He also states that "In Augustinian terms, however, any discussion of a Christian anthropology (encompassing theories of human nature and personhood) is ultimately a matter of psychology in its most literal sense (i.e., a study of the soul").

374. Charry, "Augustine of Hippo," 578.

way of putting the question may work for religion and science: science is a field outside of religion, and religion must determine how to face it. But this is not the case with theology and psychology. Theology is already psychological, quite apart from any question of its relation to the modern secular discipline.³⁷⁵

For didactic purposes and clarifying this work's own stance, it is worth discussing Entwistle's six different models for relating psychology and theology.³⁷⁶ Entwistle gives an interesting perspective on how different premises and goals generate diverse representations of articulation between these two fields. These models are, respectively, "enemies", "spies", "colonialists", "rebuilders", "neutral parties" and "allies". In the "enemies" framework, psychology and Christianity (or religions) are fundamentally conflicting to and irreconcilable with each other. The result is the polarization between secular and religious combatants. The following four are under the category of intermediate models. "Spies" are not committed to religious systems, for these are considered solely psychological phenomena. "Spies" study religious effects on human welfare with a pragmatic intent. "Colonialists" believe Christianity personifies the true revelation of God to humankind. Psychology, if correctly understanding human problems, can be useful to illustrate what Scripture tells us. Rebuilders critique secular foundations of present-day psychology, as well as its inattention to theological and philosophical reflection on what it means to be human. The psychological landscape needs to learn in dialogue with specifically Christian foundations. "Neutral Parties" value disciplinary sovereignty and psychology and theology need to be separated to keep each other from contamination (*disciplinary isolationism*). Nevertheless, there may be equivalents between the findings of psychology and theology which are to be detected (*isolated correlationalism*). The last model in the spectrum, "allies" as subjects of one Sovereign, believes that, since God is the author of all truth, although psychology and theology are separate disciplines with specific sources, methodologies and findings, they both express truth about the human nature. The six models express different assumptions about the objectives of each field as well as different ways of handling conflict.

Augustine's "take and use their gold", the plundering of the Egyptians, could be fitted as a comparable view to a colonialist model.³⁷⁷ Current colonialists use psychological

375. Charry, "Augustine of Hippo," 576.

376. Entwistle, *Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity*.

377. David Entwistle, "Instructional Resources," *Wipf and Stock Publishers*, accessed February 15, 2019, <https://wipfandstock.com/integrative-approaches-to-psychology-and-christianity-third-edition.html>.

method or content to illustrate and enhance theological beliefs. Its consequence is a non-engagement with the broader discipline of psychology, which tends to segregation and like-mindedness. Although to some degree Augustine could be seen as a colonialist because of his adaptation of the goals of philosophical formation in order to reinforce Christianity as therapy, nevertheless it is anachronistic to set him as colonialist, for the strict boundaries between the disciplines are a modern construction and alien to the ancient world. There is no such a thing as a colony if there is no clear demarcation of territory. Furthermore, his knowledge of Cicero, rhetoric and the Platonists points to a deep engagement with authors beyond the Christian tradition.

Three consequences of our discussion come to the forefront. Firstly, since psychological readings of *Confessions* tend to misread the text, not doing justice to Augustine's own purposes as writer, imposing on him alien psychological concepts in order to support one's own theory, further readings are called for in a movement away from such a methodological stance. The inadequacy of overly psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic interpretative readings highlights the mandate to abandon the psychopathologization of ancient characters. The task of listening to complex ancient texts such as *Confessions* requires attentiveness and humility, as well as careful historical research, elements which psychological readings tend to ignore. In the quest of finding the theoretical "fitting" illness, Augustine becomes a lifeless patient dissected by psychopathology. Such misreading calls for a posture that avoids fast conceptualizations and anachronistic interpretations, as it seeks Augustine's own voice to resonate. Such substitution generates the necessary conditions to comprehend Augustine's relational perspective. We will never master his thought and works, but in an attitude of careful listening, we can be mastered by the same methodological humility that drew *Confessions* to be written. As Jonas Madureira suggested, Augustine's perspective is of a "humbled intelligence";³⁷⁸ it is such attitude that might help one recover the ability to hear Augustine's voice once again. Furthermore, since these interpretations are found wanting, a collaborative reading is summoned to the forefront, one that takes psychology and theology as partners with valid voices to be heard. A communitarian reading, on which both voices are perceived, seems to do more justice to that friendly ear Augustine himself asked from his readers.

378. Jonas Madureira, *Inteligência Humilhada* (Vida Nova: São Paulo, 2017).

Secondly, it is also important to read *Confessions* appropriately in a psychological perspective, as it adds depth to the already established philosophical, theological, biblical renderings of the *Confessions*. Psychological readings are not to be substitutive of others, but complement, intersect, and deepen previous viewpoints. Over its long history, the field of Augustinian studies has benefited more from philosophical and theological interpretations of *Confessions* than psychological ones; but reading *Confessions* in partnership with psychology, allowing cross-fertilization, is a valid and necessary task. Current findings of psychology could bring light to portions of Augustine's life and thought other fields do not look into with necessary depth. There is room for multidisciplinary work: "psychological analyses are most fruitful when the psychologist sits at the table not only with fellow social scientists but also with textologists, historians, theologians, literary critics and philosophers. A self-reflective, reformulated, and dialogical psychology can be an indispensable tool."³⁷⁹

The third consequence of our discussion is that one does not need to start from foreign psychological concepts to explain *Confessions*, for a rich psychological perspective is already at work since the beginning, proposed by the writer himself, waiting to be reaped by his readers. First and foremost, we don't need to look at Oedipus Complex, narcissism or sibling rivalry to understand *Confessions* psychologically; *Confessions* is a rich masterpiece with plenty of psychological themes to be explored, such as self-knowledge, the affections, memory, the pursuit of happiness. As Marina Massimi suggests, the thought of Augustine has been taken up by several contemporary authors with psychological interests precisely because of *Confessions* importance with regard to the conceptualization of subjectivity.³⁸⁰ Furthermore, modern psychology attempted to deal with the challenge proposed by Kantian philosophy on the knowledge of self and has typically embraced the model of the experimental sciences. However, recently, several approaches to psychology and psychiatry have also turned to study of autobiographical sources with new interest,³⁸¹ making Augustine's psychological themes in retelling his life story a fruitful reference to psychology in the quest for self-knowledge in reference to an alterity.

379. William B. Parsons, "Augustine's Analysts: Reflections on the Psychological Reception History of the *Confessions*," in *A New History of African Christian Thought: From Cape to Cairo*, ed. David Tonghou Ngong (New York: Routledge, 2017), 103-104.

380. Marina Massimi, "Narrativa autobiográfica e experiência subjetiva, segundo Agostinho e seus intérpretes contemporâneos," *Memorandum: Memória e História em Psicologia*, 25 (2013): 38.

381. *Ibid.*, 39.

2.3 Postmodern approaches to *Confessions*: an Augustinian response

Augustine's *Confessions* is being retrieved by postmodern thinkers such as Jacques Derrida's *Circumfession*³⁸² and Lyotard's work on Augustine's *Confessions*.³⁸³ They seem to expand beyond Christian confession: Lyotard considers Augustine a postmodern *avant la lettre* and Derrida claims to a more deep-seated confession, a type of a kenotic self-emptying without religious content. Since Augustine confesses a wounded self without pretense to autonomy, which is opposite to the Cartesian *cogito* and pure reason,³⁸⁴ postmodern thought has found in Augustine an antecedent to critique modernity. Augustine's *Confessions* is re-contextualized to deconstruct the self-sufficient subject, valuing "struggle with difference, with otherness, at the borders of all meaning and identity."³⁸⁵ Augustine confesses his misery and praises God, intentionally placing himself vulnerably, opening a space for the other: Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard realize the important movement of self-emptying and find in Augustine a partner to deconstruct the self-centered modern subject. Aware of inner conflict and longing for wholeness, Augustine drives his life to find satisfaction in moving beyond himself, in a journey to God.

This work has been discussing different modes of interpretation and appropriation of Augustine and therapy, and in the present part, we will investigate how this interaction is understood by contemporary readers of *Confessions*. Postmodern authors are part of this ongoing conversation: they appropriate to their own postmodern principles the first movement of Augustine's therapeutic proposal, that of a vulnerable subject that denies self-sufficiency. If on one hand the postmodern reading resembles Augustine in creating a space for the reconstruction of oneself in openness to the other, on the other hand, however, they deconstruct the very idea of a present divine doctor that heals the wounds and, consequently,

382. Jacques Derrida, "Circumfession," in *Jacques Derrida*, Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

383. Lyotard, *Confession of Augustine*. This is Lyotard's very last work, published after his death. It is a collection of notes and sketches of his reading. In Lyotard's previous works there was a more negative assessment of Augustine, also influenced by a psychoanalytic reading of *Confessions*. However, in his last work he takes a more positive approach, seeing Augustine as a partner against modernity and as a precursor of postmodernity. In the overall, Lyotard criticizes Christianity as a narrative of love in service of power, questioning possible hidden agendas of control and intolerance.

384. Caputo and Scanlon, *Augustine and Postmodernism*, 492.

385. Lieven Boeve, "Retrieving Augustine Today: Between Neo-Augustinianist Essentialism and Radical Hermeneutics?," in *Augustine and Postmodern Thought: A New Alliance against Modernity?*, ed. Lieven Boeve, Mathijs Lamberigts, and Maarten Wisse (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 13.

the relationality that sustains therapy. This partial appropriation is claimed by Derrida to be a more authentic confession. Derrida establishes an admiring yet contrary reading to Augustine himself, appreciative of Augustine's vulnerability in *Confessions* but undervaluing it for being "pre-determined" towards a specific destination.

The present section will argue that, even though postmodern readings create a privileged space for the reconstruction of oneself in openness to alterity, nevertheless, postmodern appropriation of the Augustinian therapeutic view undervalues what sustains healing, that is, confession as occupying that space of surrender that responds to grace. In "confessing to you we lay bare our loving devotion" (*Conf.* 11.1.1) writes Augustine, linking the act of confession to an intentional responsive love. This confessional movement follows love, the weight of the soul, appetite and unitive force, for grace at work affects Augustine in a way that he is called to respond in surrender. By admitting sins and praising the doctor, confession performs transformation in him. As Lamberigts pointed out, grace does not only influence people, but affects the totality of their lives, performing holistic change, "Augustine is of the opinion that the gift of grace not only has an effect on human beings, but also affects them. The gift of grace through love thus has to do with the human being as a whole."³⁸⁶ By emphasizing a vulnerable non-autonomous subject, postmodern confession creates the condition of possibility for treatment, but neglects the foundational relational movement of grace, love and surrender that undergoes the Augustinian therapy.

Since this section seeks to understand the origin and consequences of a postmodern interpretation of Augustine's therapeutic model, we will firstly bring in the historical and cultural context which made Augustine an interesting ally (even though a foreigner) to postmodern thinking. As Lyotard defines postmodernity as incredulity towards master narratives, the main reason for convergence seems to rely on Augustine's pre-modern approach that also questions the main metanarrative of his times, the progress and virtues of an empire in a crumbling world, with correspondences to the postmodern questioning of modern ideals. Secondly, we discuss a main postmodern reading of Augustine's *Confessions*, Derrida's autobiographical text "Circumfession." Of particular interest is its use of Augustine's text, as Derrida claims a postmodern confession to be more wounded and radical. Thirdly, in order to respond to a postmodern negative assessment of Augustine, we are called

386. Mathijs Lamberigts, "Augustine's View on Love as Grace in the Controversy with Julian of Aelclanum," *Augustiniana* 64, no. 1-4 (2014): 83.

to read Augustine again, particularly attentive to his idea of confession as surrendering oneself in conversion to love. Postmodern confession neglects this relational movement that upholds the Augustinian confession. Fourthly, in a context of self-centered autonomous individualism, the Augustinian relational confession seems to confront and speak into some contemporary challenges in a way a non-complete appropriation of the Augustinian therapeutic confession is not able to address.

2.3.1 So ancient and so new: why are his *Confessions* so attractive to postmoderns?

To take such a view of Augustine's religion is perhaps only possible for a post-modern reader, one who has learned afresh from the most recent generation of Parisians that the map is not the territory, that the narrative is not the event, that a text is not a life (James O' Donnell)

Augustine's *Confessions* retells a personal story in an era of decline of the main metanarrative of his times. The Roman Empire was considered prosperous due to the security of its gods, the strength of its emperors and the great virtue of its citizens. Augustine's story is embedded in the complexities of the shattering of these "ideal" foundations, the end of an era, a time of transition, which would soon come to be known as the fall of the Western Roman Empire by barbarian invasions. *De Civitate Dei* reminds its readers that civilization is not in a secure movement towards progress as it once was. Augustine's later writings have as background the pressing barbaric invasion of the cities of North Africa, evidencing his life as part of an intricate and frail moment in the overthrow of a major ancient civilization. *Confessions*, work from Augustine in his forties, also happens to be part of these exposed yet fruitful times, conceived in the vulnerability of a man in "pain, silence, and prayer."³⁸⁷

After the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476, the early medieval period is marked by migration, counterurbanization and population decline. The High Middle Ages, started in the eleventh century, experience agricultural advances and the birth of the first universities. As civilized progress would once more be on the rise, the technological advances and the return to the ancient sources changed Europe's cultural atmosphere, generating the

387. Garry Wills, *Augustine's Confessions: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 15.

early modern era. The European Renaissance of the fourteenth to the sixteenth century marked the transition from the medieval era to the modern.

During modernity, the West experiences abundant anthropological optimism, manifested in trust of science, technology, order and progress. Human advancement would be achieved through the rational control of the world and nature. The growth of Europe's economic and political power provided material support for optimism, as modernity believed that the new rational and scientific mindset would provide security and advancement. The emphasis on the role of reason to the detriment of divine intervention laid the foundation for the secular variant of "providence," the idea of progress. As Bauman puts it, "the kind of society that, retrospectively, came to be called modern, emerged out of the discovery that human order is vulnerable, contingent and devoid of reliable foundations. That discovery was shocking. The response to the shock was a dream and an effort to make order solid, obligatory and reliably founded. This response problematized contingency as an enemy and order as a task."³⁸⁸

The modern ideal is deepened in the seventeenth century rationalism of René Descartes and Baruch Spinoza and eighteenth century Enlightenment, which believed in the triumph of reason and the power of the human mind over ambivalence and uncertainty. As a kind of intellectual ferment that began in the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment stimulated the advances in technology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to David Lyon, the years 1789-1989 became the two symbolic centuries of the consolidation of the modern age because they expressed politically the search for an ideal of social reconstruction in a rationalized world, from the French Revolution to the fall of the socialist state and the wall of Berlin.³⁸⁹

Even though nurtured by longings for progress and rationality, the optimism of modernity is countered by the inconsistencies and tragedies that shattered its great expectations. Predictions in the potential of rationality, economic growth, technology, and scientific advances have generated unsustainable internal contradictions. The same scientific progress that was supposed to improve human life was, paradoxically, a major instrument of some of humanity's greatest tragedies. Historical examples of modern ideals in collapse come from transformations in the twentieth century. European colonialism, supported by

388. Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), xi.

389. David Lyon, *Postmodernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 6.

industrialization, rigorous ethics and the belief in progress, boomed during the English Victorian era of the nineteenth century (1837-1901), but weakened after a rise of independent nations in the following century. World War I heralds unprecedented nationalistic conflicts and in 1929 a major crisis shakes the world economy. In the face of emptied accounts of emancipation and human liberty, modernity has in World War II a powerful blow against the expectations of progress. Economy, technology, and warlike advances were used for a “new barbarism”, destruction, and complete irrationality.

French sociologist Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) is the first to introduce the term postmodernity in the human sciences (1979), signaling a shift in cultural tides. He characterizes postmodernity as a time of disbelief in metanarratives, or the incredulity towards master narratives.³⁹⁰ Metanarratives (*métarécit* in French) are worldviews that give reference to the totality of life and to the place one occupies in the wide scheme of things. Lyotard argues for the growing suspicion towards the totalizing aspects of metanarratives and their dependence on a universalized truth. An absence of metanarratives means there is no single paradigm, no comprehensive worldview to ensure unity in Western culture and a central system of belief to give overarching meaning into one’s life. There is no longer a unifying modern ideology, such as progress, idealism or Marxism. For Lyotard, it is time for the *petits récits*, the contextual and local narratives, opening space for the diversity of human experience and the multiplicity of theoretical perspectives.

Postmodernity, or to some, Late Modernity,³⁹¹ translates the bankruptcy of the utopias that modernity had believed, the reaction against the ideas of progress and vigorous belief in rationality. As Rouanet suggests, postmodern man is the inheritor of the contradictions of modernity: as a response, he is trying to get rid of diseased modernity, marked by the hopes betrayed, utopias that took place in the form of nightmares, by obscene neo-fundamentalisms, by reason transformed into power, by the domestication of the consciences of the industrialized world, and by political tyranny and marginalization of the poor, the largest part of the world.³⁹² In modernity, certainty, a solid order and homogeneity were needed as part of reaching progress. In postmodernity, diversity, skepticism and

390. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

391. The term late modernity emphasizes the understanding that the modern /postmodern transition is a process of non-rupture, but of a transformed continuation.

392. Sérgio Paulo Rouanet, *As Razões do Iluminismo* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987), 269.

tolerance become a necessary antidote against tyrannical ideologies that have brought false hopes.

There is no consensus, however, that we are still living in such an age called postmodernity. Others, such as Gilles Lipovetsky, suggest the move from “post” to “hyper”, stating that postmodernity was a period of transition at the end of the 20th century and has now been surpassed.³⁹³ Advanced post-industrial societies have become so consumeristic that we are now moving beyond postmodernity to the age of hyper-modernity, characterized by hyper-consumerism and hyper-individualism. The new hyper-modern logic is organized by market forces in a hedonistic culture. It emphasizes the immediate satisfaction of desires, calls for pleasure, worships self-fulfillment, and seeks well-being and comfort.³⁹⁴ One could ask if an all-encompassing worldview has been truly surpassed, or if the absence of alternative metanarratives has just given way to a hegemonic capitalist one, on which a consumerist society shaped by market forces reinforces an individualistic mindset.

Even though there are different assessments of what a postmodern condition is and if we are moving beyond it, I would like to suggest that an absence of metanarratives as proposed by Lyotard does highlight certain cultural tendencies which are still present in contemporary societies. Bauman calls them “a state of mind.”³⁹⁵ A decline of meta-narratives raises the value given to otherness, contingency and plurality. Metanarratives are substituted by a higher importance given to provisional stories and localized language games. As one’s story is not connected to a system of meaning that makes sense of the whole, postmodernity tends to value contextuality and particularity.

Lyotard is especially against totalitarian masternarratives that produced unjust victims, and of self-enclosed narratives that foment an exclusion of difference.³⁹⁶ His critique is particularly acute to those who do not pay attention to what happens at the border of the narrative, for they may reproduce a hegemonic discourse of exclusion that negates difference. Lyotard considers Christianity a metanarrative that, in the name of love, leaves no room for otherness. Even though this claim is debatable, on the grounds that Christianity is already an

393. Gilles Lipovetsky, *Hypermodern Times*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 35.

394. *Ibid.*, 37.

395. Bauman, *Intimations of postmodernity*, vii.

396. Lieven Boeve, *Lyotard and Theology: Beyond the Christian Master Narrative of Love* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 135-136.

open narrative that does not eliminate alterity as the New Testament constantly points out,³⁹⁷ it is within this perspective that Lyotard echoes a critique to Augustine in *The Postmodern Condition*.³⁹⁸ In Lyotard's view, Augustine projected a great narrative of unity that was to be rejected on the grounds of being a representative of a self-contained system in times when we should advocate for the end of all great narratives. In *Libidinal Economy*, Lyotard works within psychoanalytical lenses to criticize Augustine's teleology of sexual desire as being too domesticated and dominated by only one principle, "What is natural theology? The libido inventing unheard-of statements, adding supplicative phrases to the pulsional band, prayers, apologies, reflexive metaphysics."³⁹⁹

But why, even in the context of these objections, is Augustine still attractive to postmodern thought, to the point Lyotard found in Augustine a partner in postmodern writing? Later in life Lyotard had a more positive approach to Augustine: for those who have been tired of an autonomous modern self, Augustine is an encouragement and a distinct ally. Chris Doude van Troostwijk suggests that in Augustine's *Confessions* Lyotard found "a kindred spirit, a colleague in 'postmodern' writing. Augustine, the writer, experiments with the absolute that brings and keeps his writing into motion [...] Lyotard visits the *Confessions* because of the soul which lives there, the soul of one wounded, of one alienated, of somebody taken hostage by the absolute."⁴⁰⁰

Augustine has also lived questioning the great metanarrative of his times, the Roman great pride of its civilizational achievements. His own story in *Confessions* questions a narrative of progress, as he found in being a career orator in that Empire's system a meaningless pursuit for vanity and success. Augustine is a vulnerable man that authentically lives the pains of existence, portrays himself as a weak subject in need of grace, opening space for God and others. By questioning the narrative of progress both in personal life and in the Roman Empire at large, Augustine is a useful partner to be retrieved in a type of postmodern alliance against modernity. Furthermore, as part of these great intellectuals who

397. See the gospel of Luke 4:14-28; Acts 10, Galatians 3:28, Revelation 7:9.

398. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*.

399. Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 68. See also Blans, "Lyotard and Augustine's Confessions," 34.

400. Chris Doude van Troostwijk, "Augustinus aan zee," in *Augustinus' belijdenis*, Jean-François Lyotard, trans. Chris Doude van Troostwijk and Frans van Peperstraten (Baarn: Agora, 1999), quoted in Lieven Boeve, "Retrieving Augustine Today: Between Neo-Augustinianist Essentialism and Radical Hermeneutics?," in *Augustine and Postmodern Thought: A New Alliance against Modernity?*, ed. Lieven Boeve, Mathijs Lamberigts, and Maarten Wisse, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 219 (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 12-13.

have stirred humanity with a vast contribution to posterior ages, Augustine has offered inspiration to those who do not have the same creed as himself. Augustine has been retrieved, and at the same time, creatively secularized,⁴⁰¹ and thus de-Augustinized.

It is a known fact that Augustinian reception is not homogenous science. In view of his own context of social transformation, of the very evolutions of his conceptions, and of the intense debates with several opponents, the work of St. Augustine is massive and multifaceted, generating complexities of interpretation and different “Augustinisms.” Diversity, polarization and paradox mark the appropriation of the legacy of Augustine over the centuries, with polarized groups claiming their authority as the right interpreters of Augustine.⁴⁰² The very evolution of his thought runs through the decades of both personal transformation and heterogeneity of his interlocutors. Augustine was already aware that his life and thought was not a straight, clear line and writes *Retractationes* reviewing his works and positions, seeking to clarify possible misunderstandings and direct the posthumous reception. If on one hand Augustine’s legacy is appropriated by postmodern exponents such as Derrida and Lyotard precisely to reinforce postmodern ideals, on the other the opposite is also true, for Augustine is retrieved to deny postmodern propositions. The Radical Orthodoxy movement uses Augustine as an instrument to disprove postmodernity: John Milbank aims at countering contemporary nihilism and relativism by appealing to a created harmonious world, which does not exclude subjectivity, but relates it to and gives it a place within the concept of harmony and transcendent participation.⁴⁰³

In the face of evident heterogeneity in the Augustinian work, a recurring movement over the centuries is the use of Augustine taking advantage of his thought, without being fixed in its basic assumptions. If on the one hand it is difficult to adapt his thought into a narrow conception because of the different “Augustines”, the risk is to be lost in decharacterization. In Augustine’s thought, the absence of homogeneity points not to contradiction but to evolution and complementarity. But when his thought is modified so that his work is based on something different and even contradictory to the author’s intention, or even the situation of pseudepigraphy, of the falsification of Augustine’s name as author in order to reinforce personal arguments, this untrue reception induces obscuring his original

401. Karla Pollmann, “Augustine’s legacy: success or failure?,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. Eleonore Stump and David Vincent Meconi, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 340.

402. *Ibid.*, 345.

403. Milbank, Pickstock, and Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy*.

thinking.⁴⁰⁴ As in all creative appropriations, Postmodern reception of Augustine may be a double-edged sword: a new outlook that sheds light in a certain aspect of his thinking, while at the same time, falling into the trap of making Augustine's *Confessions* serve a different agenda, and by doing so, miss its essential proposal. Can a house still stand if one of its central pillars is taken away? Does a foreign appropriation of Augustine make his therapeutic proposal less plausible or applicable?

2.3.2 Jacques Derrida approaches Augustine's *Confessions*

If confession is guided by a teleology, it is not confession. It's just an economy, it's a therapy [...] confession must remain meaningless. It is always the other in me or the other as me who decides and who confesses (Jacques Derrida, *Confessions and "Circumfession": A Roundtable Discussion with Jacques Derrida, in Augustine and Postmodernism*).

In Book 10 of *Confessions*, Augustine puts to himself the following question "quid ergo amo, cum Deum meum amo?" (*Conf.* 10.7.11), questioning what he loves when loving his God. As an exiled self who is a question unto himself, a wounded person without autonomy, Augustine has drawn to himself the interest of postmodern thinkers. Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard have made Augustine a dialogue partner: the former writes his own *Circumfessions* inspired by Augustine, and the latter wrote his last (posthumous) work about Augustine's *Confessions*. In postmodern readings, Augustine's *Confessions* is re-contextualized to deconstruct the autonomy of a self-centered autonomous modern subject. Jacques Derrida, as a main exponent of postmodern thought, will be the representative in this discussion about postmodern appropriation of Augustinian therapy.

Jacques Derrida was a French philosopher of Jewish background born in Algeria, who became an important figure in French intellectual circles from the 1960s onwards. Derrida's treatment of Augustine's *Confessions* is circumscribed to his text "Circumfession," an autobiographical diary inspired by Augustine's *Confessions*, published in 1991 in a book co-authored with Geoffrey Bennington, named after himself, Jacques Derrida.⁴⁰⁵ The title is

404. Pollmann, "Augustine's legacy," 337.

405. Derrida, "Circumfession."

inspired by the prologue of Augustine's *Confessions*, *homo circumferens mortalitatem suam*, carrying in his body his mortality (*Conf.* 1.1.1), or *circum+fatēor*, confessing around something. In Derrida's use, *circum* refers both to "around" and "circumcision."⁴⁰⁶ The text provided a chance to reflect on his personal memories before his mother's death. Derrida's autobiographical details parallel Augustinian background elements, such as the Algerian childhood and a house located on *Rue St Augustin*.

Derrida's "Circumfession" is an unusual text. It is within a book co-authored with Geoffrey Bennington, who wrote a comprehensive explanation of Jacques Derrida, called "Derridabase." This text is set on the two-thirds of the page, and Derrida's response, appearing in the lower third of each page as a sort of footnote-commentary, is named as "Circumfession". This uncommon writing is Derrida's attempt to demonstrate that his own work cannot be systematized and exceeds Bennington's exposition and expectations: it is a statement that his thought cannot be schematized, as Bennington's highly skillful text fails to fully comprehend Derrida's works. Derrida wants to write something that was not captured by Bennington's "Derridabase" and subvert his text by declaring it not definite (a movement that is similar to Augustine's awareness of the contextually situatedness of his works).⁴⁰⁷ Derrida disputes G's reading (G, who would be Geoffrey, but also Georgette, his mother) by invoking secrets that neither we nor G. could have imagined. Derrida's life is constantly subject to irreducible plurality and translatability. We are not allowed to determine the secret when interpreting a deconstructionist, for he refuses deterministic linguistic thinking. Derrida confesses what Bennington does not know, among other things, that he calls himself a man of prayer and tears. Derrida has struggled with his religious Jewish heritage, while embracing a "religion" without religion's God. It is by confessing an unpredictable faith that Derrida is able to reveal the insufficiencies of those who seek to detain his life and thought within a foreseeable system.

406. Robert Dodaro, "Loose Canons: Augustine and Derrida on Their Selves," in *God, the gift and postmodernism*, eds. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, The Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 81.

407. Augustine recognizes that his thought has developed over time and his ideas developed through polemics with his opponents. He acknowledges that in his younger days he did not have the same ideas as when he became an older and mature bishop. As he reflects back in the work *On the gift of perseverance*: "And yet, I would not want anyone to embrace all my views in order to be my follower, but only those points on which he sees that I am not mistaken. [...] I have not always held the same views, rather, I think that, as I wrote, I made progress by the mercy of God, but not that I have started off with perfection. [...] We can, of course, have good hope for someone if the last day of this life finds him making progress." *persev.* 21, 55.

As Derrida himself admits, his reading of *Confessions* is not a perversion of Augustine, but an intentional misleading to places he would and could not go.⁴⁰⁸ Although Derrida explicitly admires Augustine, he is also aware that he does not know Augustine's perspective well enough, and "confesses": "what I do is mis-lead him".⁴⁰⁹ As he puts it,

The way I refer to St. Augustine is really not very orthodox; it is rather – a sin! I have to confess that my relation to St Augustine's *Confessions* is a little strange. If I had to summarize what I am doing with St Augustine in *Circumfession*, I would say this. On the one hand, I play with some analogies, that he came from Algeria, that his mother died in Europe, the way my mother was dying when I was writing this, and so on. I am constantly playing, seriously playing, with this, and quoting sentences from the *Confessions* in Latin, all the while trying, through my love and admiration for St. Augustine – I have enormous and immense admiration for him – to ask questions about a number of axioms, not only in his *Confessions* but in his politics, too. So there is a love story and a deconstruction between us.⁴¹⁰

Derrida's appropriation could be described as an ambiguous love-deconstructionist story, in which much is learned and adapted from Augustine's tears and wounded self-description, while at the same time, as Thomas Martin pointed out, Derrida's reading seems elusive and idiosyncratic, most at home with the 'lost Augustine' of the early books of *Confessions*, such as in "I became to myself a region of need" (*Conf.* 2.10.18) and "I became my own great question" (*Conf.* 4.4.9).⁴¹¹ Wayne Hankey suggests Derrida's ambivalent state towards Augustine as "the one from whom he must escape and the one with whom he associates his own enterprise."⁴¹²

As John Caputo points out, Derrida's "Circumfession" believes his confession to be more radical than Augustine's, as a destitute, destabilized state, a confession without a confessional bond, a more wounded word.⁴¹³ Both Derrida and Augustine confess their mortal nature and lacerations, but Augustine stands on his need for a God who can bind up wounds, a physician of his heart. Derrida claims to stand on a non-teleological confession, circum-

408. Jacques Derrida, Composing "Circumfession," in *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, The Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2005), 23.

409. Ibid.

410. Jacques Derrida, "The Villanova Roundtable: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida," in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 20-21.

411. Thomas F. Martin, *Our Restless Heart: The Augustinian Tradition*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 153.

412. Hankey, "Self-Knowledge and God as Other in Augustine," 90.

413. Caputo and Scanlon, *Augustine and Postmodernism*, 103.

severed from the Truth.⁴¹⁴ Without knowing who to pray to, unaware of confession's destination, Derrida asserts a more radical confession than the negative theologian to the *deus absconditus*, that is, to confess its unknowability in absolute night. Prayer is not determining the destination, not capturing the game. The most destitute confession is from the one who says: "God, if there is a god." Derrida's confession is not guided by teleology, it has no common sense or assured meaning, but it is the confession of the other in him.⁴¹⁵ There is something true with the event that visits me, which is not produced by me, but it is an intrusion, an irruption, the unexpected that falls upon me.⁴¹⁶ Derrida radicalized the question of truth to the point of saying that confession is not related to truth, but at the same time he does not want to give up the value of what is true, the unexpected event.

"Circumfession" is like a postcard with no destination, *destinerrance*, not reaching a predestined spatial objective. Prayer is like a postcard sent without the assurance of arrival, and confession is prayer without truth. Its meaning is not nominative, naming something somewhere, but invocative and provocative, to make something happen. He does not want salvation as a stable destiny, but seeks a return to life. Derrida distinguishes a relative hospitality of visitation when one invites a pre-selected group of guests of an absolute hospitality of visitation, when one is visited by the unseen.⁴¹⁷ An unplanned visitation highlights confession as the openness to the event, which overtakes and astonishes me.

As Caputo points out, Derrida's confession is not nominative, to pick out an entity, but invocatively, to call upon and provoke an event.⁴¹⁸ Since one is a "subjected subject" visited by the unpredictable, one is led to open space for another within. The self is a subject subjected to the event, not the author subject. To this most radical event, Derrida calls it "perver-formative" for its unpredictability. An event is unpredictable and it comes over me, surprises me, and comes to me as a helpless child delivered up to circumcision. The event needs to be visited upon the subject and only then will it (not me) do the truth (*facere veritatem*).

414. Would not the denial of a teleological confession be in itself a kind of veiled teleology?

415. Jacques Derrida, "Confessions and 'Circumfession': A Roundtable Discussion with Jacques Derrida", in *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, The Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2005), 25.

416. *Ibid.*, 23.

417. *Ibid.*

418. John D. Caputo, "Shedding Tears Beyond Being: Derrida's Confession of Prayer," in *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon, The Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2005), 109.

Andrew Rawnsley suggests Derrida's complex thought in dialogue with Augustine in "Circumfession" can be summarized in three simple themes, interiority, conversion and eschatology.⁴¹⁹ Rawnsley points out that interiority in Derrida's "Circumfession" articulates a shift from subjectivity in the double poles of object-subject to one understood existentially as the interiority of a life.⁴²⁰ This reconceptualization contains a change from a philosophical search for transcendent foundations. This shift is from a philosophical 'God' to a subjective experience. This reformulation depends on a subjective conversion. Interiority and conversion give rise to the third theme, eschatology, and for Derrida, this is an ethical category rather than a cognitive or metaphysical one.⁴²¹ In this perspective, Derrida leaves us with a model of interiority that seeks personal conversion, that prays to "another", but that does not know who to pray for, unknown but not ignored. Prayer is born out of a deprived vulnerable subject. But is it possible to pray to God in an absolute night? For Derrida, the destiny of prayers is kept secret. Augustine, on the other hand, asks, "must we know you before we can call upon you? Anyone who invokes what is still unknown may be making a mistake" (*Conf.* 1.1.1).

Even though not calling its own perspective therapeutic or psychological, a postmodern confession such as Derrida's could also be read as entailing implicit therapeutic consequences, for in responding to the illnesses produced by modernity, it became a way of thinking and living that entails space for the reconstruction of one's self in openness and denial of self-sufficiency. Postmodern lenses to human experience are therapeutic while affirming the need for a vulnerable subject that opens itself to the gratuity of the unexpected, to the unpredictable that comes upon life. Furthermore, postmodern thinkers seek critical-constructive ways through a provisional and unfinished identity with sensibility towards difference.

As Mexican theologian Carlos Mendoza Alvarez points out, postmodern vulnerability awakes humanity against its desires towards omnipotence, offering a spiritual dimension of subjectivity exposed to and open towards the irruption of the other. It is a nihilist conscience of dispossession, openness, gratuity and gift.⁴²² Its consequence to

419. Andrew Rawnsley, "Jacques Derrida," in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, eds. Karla Pollmann and Willemien Otten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 871.

420. *Ibid.*

421. *Ibid.*

422. Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez, *O Deus Escondido da Pós-modernidade: desejo, memória e imaginação escatológica: ensaio de fundamental pós-moderna* (São Paulo: É Realizações, 2001), 179-180.

theological thought is a reconnection to transcendence not as a self-centred omnipotent self, but as a vulnerable subject that opens itself in an experience of gratuity.⁴²³ Deconstruction is also interested in giving voice to interpretations that have been marginalized, interpretations silenced by the status quo, in vigilance against the logic of totalitarian systems and its violent traits.⁴²⁴

According to Mendoza, Derrida postulates deconstruction as a method of renunciation of omnipotence in order to arrive at self-consciousness, in a deep awareness of finitude. For this reason, Derrida proposes to speak of “différance” as an action of extreme openness, without limit, of the self to others, including the world, technique, ethics and religion.⁴²⁵ Mendoza argues that it is not the principle of identity, but of difference, which establishes a relational ontology capable of accounting for the plurality of meanings, the ambiguity of actions and the polysemy of language. It has the intention of dismantling the will to omnipotence: in order to achieve this goal, Derrida drew the ultimate consequences of the Heideggerian *Dasein* with regard to exposed subjectivity, which is inevitably oriented to the agony of meaninglessness, a lack of foundation, facing absence of purpose and destination.⁴²⁶

In conclusion, by emphasizing individual subjectivity and recognizing the bankruptcy of modern ideals, postmodernity proposes a way out of a civilizational crisis by sanctioning and celebrating new narrative constructions, opening the possibility of emptying the self-centered individual. This movement allows the reconstruction of an open identity for the irruption of the other, opening space for an alterity that recognizes difference, destabilizing a self-ruling and omnipotent subject and revealing new possibilities for subjectivity. The other is not only the object of one’s desire or love, but the one who interrupts my expectations, an irreducible alterity. Derrida highlights the intentional act of giving up one’s self-centred autonomy. To confess is an act of a subjected subject, not of an autonomous author. The most radical confession would be to give up all of its autonomy, an incision or circumcision of the decision and the autonomy of the decision.⁴²⁷ The radical confession is never mine, but a decision of the other in me that comes over, covers, dominates, surprises me. It is a “you in me” the other who confesses in me. It is Derrida’s

423. Mendoza-Álvarez, *O Deus Escondido da Pós-modernidade*, 249.

424. *Ibid.*, 196.

425. *Ibid.*, 178-179.

426. *Ibid.*, 177.

427. Jaques Derrida, introduction to *Augustine and Postmodernism: Confessions and Circumfession*, edited by John D. Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2005), 5.

mother, Georgette, who is being confessed and is dying at the time of *Circumfession*. The unpredictability of her death and of death itself makes for the event.

In claiming a more radical confession, would it also not be asking which *kenosis* is more far-reaching, and in a sense, the one that corresponds better to a therapeutic ideal? For Derrida, it is an openness that unties space for the event, for the unpredictable, not naming otherness. Kenosis is no longer incarnation, for no incarnation can fully express God if there is one, thus flirting with atheism. Confession in Augustine's perspective, on the other hand, is an emptying that opens space for a relationship towards a nameable destination which prevents the heart from wandering aimlessly. Questions arise about the validity of these confessions as modes of authentic living, or the existential implications of such confessions.

2.3.3 Love's crossing: an Augustinian response

Only truth wins, but the victory of truth is love

Victoria veritatis est caritas (Augustine, *Sermo*. 358.1).

Although postmodern readings of human experience include a therapeutic component that counters self-sufficiency and affirms the need for a vulnerable subject, nevertheless, postmodern partial acceptance of the Augustinian proposal does not comprehend Augustine's therapeutic ideal. Therapy in Augustine is a compound, having two main ingredients, combining consciousness of finitude with responsive self-surrender, expressed in *confessio* (*peccati* and *laudis*). By separating Augustine's philosophy from his theology, postmodern readings underestimate the double movement of *confessio*, confession of sin and praise, which is an act of inhabiting an intentional surrender that manifests itself in a conversion to love which has its origin and dynamic in God.

If on one hand Augustine bears a resemblance to the postmodern pursuit in questioning human prideful self-mastery, bringing an awareness of finitude, "*et homo circumferens mortalitatem suam*," carrying mortality about with us (*Conf.* 1.1.1); on the other, however, this consciousness of finitude is combined with an awareness of Divine existence, "*Magnus es, Domine, et laudabilis valde*", and creational ontology, *aliqua portio creaturae tuae*, or humans as a due part of creation. Consequently, there is an anthropological element

that differs greatly from postmodern thinking: humans are endowed with a desire for responsiveness, *et laudare te vult homo*, manifested in a longing to praise (*Conf.* 1.1.1). In Augustine's confession, contingency opens doors to self-emptying as an intentional reply to God's grace. As God reveals himself and yet remains an unknown mystery, human happiness relies on seeking and adhering to this relationship, "now the happy life is joy in the truth; and that means joy in you" (*Conf.* 10.23.33).

Confession for Augustine has always a double movement, for it is never consciousness of sin without realization of grace. If anyone considers confession as solely admitting sins and finitude, confession is bound to failure: true confession is self-emptying which entails a complementary responsive act towards praising the loving kindness received. When the burden of guilt is great, in which sins hinder an awareness of God's love, the notion of Augustinian confession will not appear.⁴²⁸ The objective of raising an awareness of human sins is not to burden or oppress a guilty conscience. The gospel of grace is better comprehended by those who humble themselves, who are aware of their failures. A sense of one's misery becomes constructive if it is understood under the light of grace: one can truly confess if saving grace plays a central role. That is why *Confessions* already expresses Augustine's mature thought on grace, for it expresses existentially that salvation is a gift, raising an attitude of grateful humility. As the heart heard the call of the one who has converted his inner life, a special kind of relationality is established, an affinity of dependence and vulnerability. Not a realization of sin without grace, not desperation without hope, for grace is made perfect in weakness, a Pauline theme much appropriated by Augustine already present in *Confessions* (*Conf.* 10.3.4, 10.35.57) and deepened in the Pelagian controversy.

Since confession is an act recognizing the prior gesture of grace, surrender is the intrinsic attitude towards this encounter. It is the acknowledgement that someone has touched me and something happened in me that awakened and gifted my existence. Accepting one's finitude, intentionally revealing wounds, is never the first movement, but a responsive laying down of pride and adhering to love. In his book "On Love, Confession, Surrender and the Moral Self," Ian Clausen argues that surrender is the implicit posture in the Augustinian confession, for this loving encounter demands personal account of my place and location in

428. For a psychological perspective informed by theological reflection on the need to hold together guilt and grace see the work of a Swiss psychiatrist, Paul Tournier, *Guilt and Grace* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962).

the world.⁴²⁹ He rightly points out that a journey of desire unfolds its destination through a self-disclosing encounter, which makes me nothing but a lover on the way, *in via*.⁴³⁰ Confession, love and surrender are all intricately joined in the act of “laying bare the loving devotion” and arousing this love in him and the readers,

Why then am I relating all this to you at such length? Certainly not in order to inform you. I do it to arouse my own loving devotion toward you, and that of my readers, so that together we may declare, Great is the Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise. I have said already, and will say again, that it is out of love for loving you that I do this, even as we pray for things though Truth tells us that Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. We confess to you our miseries and the mercies you have shown us in your will to set us free completely, as you have begun to do already; and by so confessing to you we lay bare our loving devotion (*Conf.* 11.1.1).

As Clausen argues, in the Augustinian tradition, the tears of confession are not only self-emptying, but a path to occupy the place of the moral self, a position of personal reckoning and conversion, which is also a loving self-surrender, “now occupying the place of confession, prayer, and weeping – the place of the moral self, this man starts to reclaim himself as a lover.”⁴³¹ In affirming that self-surrender is the path to the moral self, the Augustinian perspective affirms we are only to arrive at our proper destination if love is the motion that stimulates one’s interior journey. Without recognizing the voice of the lover and responding to it, disregarding the ears of the heart (*Conf.* 1.5.5), one is left with a yawning void and the burden of isolated self-creation leading to inauthentic loves. Truth cannot be merely known: it must be loved, for the victory of truth is love.⁴³²

Augustine describes love as the weight of the soul, an appetite and a unitive force. As weight of the soul, love directs the soul to its proper place. As appetite, in Augustine’s anthropology of dependence, the love of God appears in humanity as the pursuit of eternal values and the delight in lovely things.⁴³³ As unitive force, because of God’s gratuitous love, the heart is lightened and empowered to overcome self-centered desires by the work of the Spirit, “which bears us upward in a love for peace beyond all care, that our hearts may be lifted up to you” (*Conf.* 13.7.8). The Augustinian perspective includes a journey of desire

429. Ian Clausen, *On Love, Confession, Surrender and the Moral Self*. Reading Augustine (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 2.

430. *Ibid.*

431. *Ibid.*, 126.

432. *Victoria veritatis est caritas (Sermo. 358.1)*.

433. John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007), x.

towards God that inspires a life of affection and surrender, directed to the union and in the loved one. Love, the unitive force of the soul, appetite and engine in search of what corresponds to happiness' goal, is the weight driving the heart towards the dwelling in God: "my weight is my love, and wherever I am carried, it is this weight that carries me. Your Gift sets us afire and we are borne upward; we catch his flame and up we go" (*Conf.* 13.9.10). The human being is carried by love, which is God himself: the place where humans are really themselves is in God.

Augustine emphasizes the centrality of love in the Trinitarian life and places love as the renewing element in our likeness to the Trinity.⁴³⁴ Johannes Brachtendorf suggests that, in the 13th book of *Confessions*, Augustine sketches the idea that in the interiority of man there is a structure that is parallel to the Trinity, an idea that will be developed in works such as *De Trinitate*.⁴³⁵ Augustine establishes the notion of self-giving in love as a fundamental ontological reality. Since the love of God has been poured out in the hearts by the Spirit, the Gift, a continuous rhythm of giving and receiving is established at the heart of Trinitarian spirituality.⁴³⁶ As Canning pointed out, if love for God has an ontological priority, this self-giving response does not exclude love for another human being, for in practice, in concrete reality, love of neighbor comes first, expressing a unity of love of neighbor and God.⁴³⁷

I would like to suggest that Augustine's concept of confession is related to the idea of "love's crossing". Crossing in English, *traversée* in French, can be described as a displacement between two points, which is characterized by a course with a starting point, a path and an arrival. Crossing is the action of traversing something, and it includes the idea of movement from one place to the other, possibly a body of water, a lake, river; it could also be applied to crossing land areas, such as deserts or forests. In addition to a geographical crossing, with boats and exterior landscapes, crossing describes an inner journey. It is a metaphor of the human condition, of the transformation of subjectivity. In biblical tradition, God's people experience crossings, such as in the Exodus through the Red Sea or living years in the desert towards an expected land. Christ is portrayed calling his disciples to come to the other side or to cross the Sea of Galilee. While it is on one dimension an exterior *traversée* of

434. Mary Clark, "De Trinitate," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 99.

435. Brachtendorf, *Confissões de Agostinho*, 289. It is also significant that *De Trinitate* starts being written in 399, when *Confessions* was still being composed, raising questions about similarities.

436. Clark, "De Trinitate," 99.

437. Raymond F. Canning, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour in St. Augustine* (Louvain: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1993).

a lake in a boat (Mark 4:35), it is never merely an exterior crossing, for divine presence with them on the way reveals grace and increases confidence in love.

Christoph Theobald describes the existential human passage that is made possible by closeness with revelatory people, “boatmen” who give meaning to crossing of the inner life.⁴³⁸ They are people who trust in the mystery of existence and propose a new way of inhabiting reality. Leaving the undifferentiated crowd for a trajectory towards interiority, the space of singularity, these boatmen invite a crossing to the other side: these revelators wish that others, whose path is crossed by them, can get to the bottom of the experience of revelation intended for them.⁴³⁹ Augustine of Hippo is a boatman that stirs the crossing of his audience’s interior life in conversion. By weaving the threads of meaning by linking texts to events,⁴⁴⁰ Augustine invokes in our common humanity an attention to interiority in contact with transcendence.

Interior crossing in Augustine is bound to theology, related to the action of God who pierced his heart and transformed the prodigal son’s inner life. The parable of the prodigal son, described in the Gospel of Luke, sets the framework of participation in God’s larger redemptive plan. Augustine is the prodigal son who could not love properly and travelled away to dissipate his substance in meretricious gratifications (*Conf.* 4.16.30). Leo Ferrari points out that there is a link in *Confessions* of “my path”, “my ways” (*vias meas*) and the prodigal son parable.⁴⁴¹ Augustine wanders with a stiff neck on his own path further away from God because he loves his ways and not God’s, *amans vias meas et non tuas* (*Conf.* 3.3.5). Interior crossing is then a movement from the disordered loves and its prideful ways towards the higher paths of God’s love. If on one hand Augustine is a model for the *homo viator*, the journeying man in pilgrimage, he is primarily, on the other, the son lost and found that in homecoming surrenders himself to grace.

This crossing from pride to self-surrender, from lost woundedness to broken homecoming is a confession of a vulnerable subject in awe. Love has a weight that carries me to a mysterious destination: it is unpredictable, I cannot capture the game, but it still continuously draws me towards itself. Postmodern thought opens itself to understand the

438. Theobald, *A Revelação*, 73.

439. *Ibid.*, 153.

440. *Ibid.*

441. Leo Charles Ferrari, “The Theme of the Prodigal Son in Augustine's Confessions,” *Recherches Augustiniennes Et Patristiques*, no. 12 (1977): 108-109.

vulnerable Augustinian confession, but the surrender does not go very far: postmodern confession acknowledges the unpredictable event, but in fear of tyranny, rejects the *caritas* that comes unexpectedly and makes me bow down and love the infinite. Would a responsive self-surrender in love not be a more radical confession? Confession of sin is an invitation for the joy of surrendering to grace. This is a crossing that Augustine, surrounded by the witnesses of faith, can propose and reveal. And it can only be so because of a trust in faith in the counter-intuitive mysterious embrace that has not called him a servant, but through an unpredictable event of a feast, raises him again as son. As Augustine writes, in this biblical encounter, the Father wipes away the tears, and this forgiving embrace makes Augustine weep even more. Maybe Augustine could respond to Derrida's claim of his more radical confession by showing him his tears. In the Augustinian confession there are abundant tears: As Augustine puts it, the prodigal cries twice, first as a lament of his woundedness and secondly for the joy of being accepted in that same vulnerability.

Let them only turn back, see! there you are in their hearts, in the hearts of all those who confess to you, who fling themselves into your arms and weep against your breast after their difficult journey, while you so easily will wipe away their tears. *At this they weep the more, yet even their laments are matter for joy*, because you, Lord, are not some human being of flesh and blood, but the Lord who made them, and now make them anew and comfort them (*Conf.* 5.2.2.).

The double crying, for lament and joy, sin and praise, are an evidence that Augustine does not deserve his place, but all that really matters is that the grace that sustains in weakness must be responded to in surrendered love. Augustine's confessional stance is also captured mightily by Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son*.⁴⁴² In this famous Dutch painting of the seventeenth century, father and son's loving embrace stand out against the contrasting darkness.

In the novel *The Lord of the Rings*, J. R.R. Tolkien describes a scene in which the small hobbit Pippin finds himself hopeless face to face with the powerful commander of the forces of darkness, the Witch King. As Pippin faces his tragic death, he hears the call of horns coming from afar. An equally powerful cavalry, the riders of Rohan have come to Pippin's assistance. He hears the sound of his salvation and is deeply moved. As Tolkien describes it, "Pippin rose to his feet as if a great weight had been lifted from him; and he stood listening to

442. Rembrandt Van Rijn, *The Prodigal Son*, 1669, oil on canvas, The Hermitage Museum, St. Petesburg.

the horns, and it seemed to him that they would break his heart with joy. And never in after years could he hear a horn blown in the distance without tears starting in his eyes.”⁴⁴³ Even years later, Pippin could not hear the sound of horns without breaking down into tears. In a likewise manner, the Augustinian *confessio* is a response of a heart who heard the horns of salvation and cannot but break down into joyful tears, recognizing his vulnerability and praising his salvation. According to the description of the *Life of Augustine*, written by his friend Possidius, Augustine is in tears on his deathbed, contemplating the life he has lived, “and this he himself did in his own last illness of which he died. For he commanded that the shortest penitential Psalms of David should be copied for him, and during the days of his sickness as he lay in bed he would look at these sheets as they hung upon the wall and read them; and he wept freely and constantly.”⁴⁴⁴

2.3.4 Limits of a postmodern confession

*Si Deus dilectio, quisquis diligit dilectionem Deum diligit*⁴⁴⁵ (Commentary on the first letter of John).

The postmodern perspective deconstructs Augustine’s confession, a responsive movement of surrendering oneself to love of God. In Augustine’s *Confessions*, accepting that one is formed towards the Creator effects a conversion in which searching becomes loving. Augustine binds together the direction of a heart, made for transcendence, and the love for God, the goal towards which it strives. But this love is not only the teleological future objective; God’s love is already at work, being the essence of human interior life and the dynamism that directs humanity towards the goal. If the Augustinian confession has a fuller understanding of the dynamism of self-surrender in love, it could be implied that a postmodern deconstructionist confession may not be as adapted to convey therapeutic resources in a context which includes hyper-individualism.

443. John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, *The Return of the King: Being the Third Part of The Lord of the Rings* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 126.

444. Saint Possidius, *Sancti Augustini Vita Scripta a Possidio Episcopo*, 141.

445. If God is love, the one who loves love loves God.

As a way of life, postmodern confession strives for tolerance rather than certainty, pluralism rather than unity, vulnerability rather than certainty, truth as a contextual construction. For minorities and people on the margins of societies, postmodern values bring a breath of fresh air in affirming different kinds of existence as legitimate. On the other side, it could be argued that its emphasis placed in non-determinate arrival has substituted pilgrimage for tourism; postmodern lives may move towards places of pleasure, rather than sacrifice, and the consequence is a life without clear sense of purpose. As Bauman puts it metaphorically, postmodern heroism is in the “tourist”, who moves because he expects to find a more enjoyable place. Home is largely seen as unattractive, and they are set in motion according to their felt desire, and leave the location when new opportunities signal elsewhere. Tourists do not belong to the place they are visiting, and intentionally keep their distance and avoid fixation. Postmodern lives value mobility, with few roots, setting camps, not households. Their alter-ego are the “Vagabonds”, the dark moons, the outcasts, tourists who went wrong and cannot move by the free choice of their itinerary.⁴⁴⁶ In postmodern societies, the biblical (1 Peter 2:11) and Augustinian metaphor of the Christian path, the pilgrim, with seasons and purpose to a final destination, is substituted by what Bauman calls a liquid life.⁴⁴⁷ Bauman suggests that postmodernity has brought an uprooted, temporary lifestyle. Since the quest is to evade a solid foundation in a permanent place, the postmodern individual seeks freedom without strict frames of reference and avoids making lasting commitments.

Confessiones is a dialogue between three persons, namely God, Augustine and his audience, and therefore, cannot be understood outside of self-giving relationality to God and neighbor. It is a confession of misery and praise, and follows the path of self-emptiness in order to humbly position himself and humanity in a personal relationship of love with the most venerated subject, the Creator God. Without regarding these elements, the three characters and the double confessional movement of acknowledging sin and praise, one might wonder if postmodern readers of Augustine have understood his perspective. Three limits of a postmodern confession will be suggested. Even though positive effects such as a vulnerability that opens space for the other, plurality that establishes tolerance and marginalized voices that are heard, the postmodern confession lacks the ability to integrate opposites and embrace mystery in a way that surrenders oneself to love. In the contemporary age of liquid lives and

446. See Zygmunt Bauman, “Tourists and Vagabonds: The Heroes and Victims of Postmodernity,” in *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 83-94.

447. Bauman, *Liquid Life*.

loves, a postmodern confession is also less prone to sustain sacrificial responsiveness to relational commitments. Furthermore, the narratives of continual dislocation do not open space for a rooted balance between movement and permanence that allows human life to thrive. Even though the postmodern confession looks for a space for the unexpected and seeks to keep itself open to the unforeseen, it has missed much of Augustine's central therapeutic perspective, which presupposes a healing perspective and a vision of recovery in God.

2.3.4.1 Opposites, Paradox and Mystery

The first limitation of a postmodern confession is that, by seeking to correct the excesses of modernity, postmodernity is not necessarily able to integrate opposites. Even though it strikes a necessary correction to a self-centered subject, as a response in denial to modernity, it can ignore aspects that were inconvenient in the previous structure but are still part of a coherent whole. A correction of an excess does not necessarily occur by polarization or reaction, but by holding together the dissimilar lines, in a both-and rather than an either-or perspective, by integration and conjunction. Life is intrinsically bound to some inescapable opposing dualities: night and day are inseparable pairs, light and shadow, recollection and expansion, movement and rest. Even peace finds its proper meaning if lived in the light of the possibility of conflict. Peace without criterion, or a "peace" that excludes justice runs the risk of suppressing one of the parties, generating resentment. A necessary correction of modern malaises may not happen by a reactive denial of its ideals, but by holding together the counterparts. The integration may include an initial necessary push-back, a first stage in a pendulum movement. The next step, aiming at recovering what is most significant, may include some element from the previous perspective which one sought to deny.

Every good story helps us to understand something about ourselves and our condition. Every well-written narrative has an element of truth that guides us about our situation in the world. This could also be a way of saying that we are not to choose between "big" or "little" narratives, but both make sense as one participates, challenges, and enlarges the other. The biblical Scriptures, which contains the narrative of a larger story, the creation, fall and redemption of the world, also grows in meaning with its readers, who shed light in the larger story as they participate in the spiritual drama. Augustine associates his own little narrative of the theft of pears with the greater fall of Adam. If on one hand Adam is an

inspiration for Augustine's portrait of his story, on the other, he sheds light in our understanding of the fall through lived experience. Furthermore, even the small stories of the vulnerable faithful characters such as Hannah, a barren disposed woman (I Sam 1), or Ruth, a Moabite widow, become protagonists who carry on salvation history. Since grace is perfected in weakness, the ones conducting the larger story are precisely those on the margins of power whose story seems worthless. Postmodern confession resists oppressive ideological elements that have been part of Western master narratives: the biblical and Augustinian consciousness of responsive vulnerability can be an ally rather than an enemy in disrupting ideological worldviews that shields people from the unpredictable, vulnerability and death. Furthermore, Augustine suggests we are not to fear the infinite, the threat of God, but while being Christ's beggars we can find ourselves participating and gifted by the larger stories.

Postmodern reading separates and disintegrates central aspects of Augustinian thought and does not hold its complementarity. Without its proper theological content, the postmodern reading does not comprehend the kenotic relational dimension which is the destiny of the Augustinian confession. As Wayne Hankey puts it, the postmodern reading exerts a series of separations and exclusions of key elements in Augustine's compound of theological and philosophical elements:

The postmodern theological reading must exclude from Augustine: (1) the union of substance and subjectivity, (2) intellectual individualism independent of communitarian praxis, (3) self-presence as rational certainty simultaneously established against and constituting objectivity, (4) the unity of the normative and the rational which holds together knowledge and love and (5) the union of self-relation and the relation to God as other. Derrida has no interest in saving Augustine for Christian theology, but the rest of the project is his own.⁴⁴⁸

The experience of speaking to God in *Confessions* is a passion for paradox, as demonstrated by the language used by Augustine in book one (*Conf.* 1.4.4).⁴⁴⁹ Just as night and day are inseparable pairs, life is made up of dualities, and finds deeper meaning by holding opposites together. However, as a prodigal son that abandons the incongruences of his former modern house, postmodernity could eliminate the condition of its own

448. Hankey, "Self-Knowledge and God as Other in Augustine," 86.

449. "Ever active, ever at rest, gathering while knowing no need, supporting and filling and guarding, creating and nurturing and perfecting, seeking although you lack nothing. You love without frenzy, you are jealous yet secure, you regret without sadness, you grow angry yet remain tranquil, you alter your works but never your plan; you take back what you find although you never lost it; you are never in need yet you rejoice in your gains, never avaricious yet you demand profits. You allow us to pay you more than you demand, and so you become our debtor, yet which of us possesses anything that does not already belong to you?" (*Conf.* 1.4.4)

reconciliation with its history and origin. It risks throwing away the pearls as it eliminates the dead shell. The correction of an excess does not necessarily happen through opposition, but by integration and conjunction, by keeping the parallel threads of the paradox.

2.3.4.2 Relational commitments in an age of disintegration and liquid love

The second limitation of a postmodern confession is that, even though postmodernity tends to hold living truth by loving truly, it seems less prone to sustain relational commitments in an age of disintegration and liquid love. In a capitalist consumer society and a supermarket culture that tends to keep options open, postmodern readings suspend the naming of the loved other. As Derrida insists in a general nameless alterity, if postmodernity takes itself as a way of living, it can foster an excessive fluidity in relationships, a “liquid love” that loses love’s *gravitas*. The Augustinian weight of love and *ordo amoris* is different from postmodern liquid love of an undefined and undetermined other that postpones adhering to a precise destination of love. For Augustine, love carries life in a certain direction and to a specific place.

Without a teleological confession, questions arise about the theme of responsibility and the absence on responsiveness in a postmodern Derridean confession. Derrida focuses on a confession without destination, on which it is always the other who confesses in me, who decides in me, while at the same time claiming that this confession does not exonerate his responsibility.⁴⁵⁰

Even though Derrida suggests that one remains responsible, a postmodern confession, which has a strong ontology of alterity, may have a feeble ontology of responsibility. As João Manuel Duque points out, the irruption of the other in myself, in an interpellation that surpasses all my logical-rational or systematic categories, is an excess that summons me to an answer, a call towards responsibility.⁴⁵¹ Postmodernity emphasizes the irruption of the other in one’s self, but can minimize the importance of one’s ability to respond. As Paul Ricoeur argues in *Soi-même comme un autre*, the identity of who we are is related to a human being different from us, and at the same time, the gift of another that calls

450. Derrida, “Confessions and ‘Circumfession,’” 25.

451. See João Manoel Duque, *Para o Diálogo com a Pós-modernidade* (São Paulo: Paulus, 2016), 43-44.

for our responsible responsibility.⁴⁵² In reaction against master narratives, postmodern thought could produce a thin subject that may not find a referential grid that upholds meaning in order to sustain its narrative involvements. It risks not carrying the weight of suffering love: by not having a goal towards which love strives, it may not be able to support one's role in the story of others. Because postmodern lifestyle tends to be fluid rather than solid, it has less permanence to commitments for those whom one is called to uphold. A postmodern view of *Confessions* tends to emphasize the irruption of the other into myself, but does not place sufficient light on the responsiveness of which Duque speaks. Thus, it does not confront a missing central point in the pluralistic consumer culture that insists on keeping the options constantly in suspension: the responsibility for the other that begs for my answer. The Augustinian confession, on the other hand, is surrendering his will to another; this replacement is intrinsically sacrificial and other-centered, as so many times Augustine links *confessio* with sacrifice (*Conf.* 5.1.1, 8.1.1, 9.1.1).

2.3.4.3 The Emergency of narratives of dislocation and a life that cannot find balance between "being still and still moving"

The third limitation of a postmodern confession is that, by the loss of the horizon and anchor of relational responsiveness, personal narratives in the contemporary world cannot find balance between moving and being still. Augustine, however, is a source of balance, for conversion is both disruption of the self and an invitation for a further union. As T. S. Eliot suggests, amidst the ruins of the dark and empty desolation, it is possible to strive for a deeper union and deeper communion that allows the paradoxical being "still and still moving",

We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and empty desolation.⁴⁵³

452. Paul Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Editions Du Seuil, 1990). See also Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: Clark, 1984).

453. Thomas Stearns Eliot, "East Coker," in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), V.

As I have noticed within my private practice in clinical psychology, for those who have embraced deconstruction as lifestyle, personal stories tend to be narratives of continual dislocation. Even though these narratives positively affirm temporality and avoid unhealthy fixations, it also fosters anxiety and sometimes does not bring an amount of healthy relational constancy that maintains both the openness to otherness and a bond as self-giving responsiveness. Postmodern mentality values continuous dislocation, when sometimes the most needed and authentic attitude is to remain where you are, wait for the storm to pass and rebuild the shelter so others can find a better place upon their arrival.

Ironically, if my observations are right, a psychological consequence of a postmodern reading of Augustine could be the opposite of *Confessions*' goal of finding the place the soul rests. *Confessions* proposes a journey that seeks and finds one's place and true self in ordered love towards God, and at the same time is able to affirm provisionality, contingency and particularity, through a continuing loving conversion. Through conversion, the opposites of relational permanence and transience find their complementary movement, keeping stability while maintaining the need for identity transformation. As Jean-Luc Marion suggests, by dislocating the autonomous subject until its place in God, one finds *au lieu de soi*, the place of the true self.

In summary, even though a postmodern confession embraces a necessary critique of a self-absorbed, self-centred modern subject, it seems to be a confession that could entail some side-effects. Firstly, as postmodernity seeks to correct the excesses of modernity, the postmodern response seems less able to integrate opposite aspects, and therefore, cannot embrace paradox and mystery as the Augustinian confession does. Secondly, it seems less able to respond to love commitments in an age of liquid love than the proper Augustinian Confession. Thirdly, self-identity could be understood as a narrative of constant displacement and therefore less able to establish balance between dislocation and responsive love which is at the core of the Augustinian conversion experience.

2.4 Conclusion

Derrida's reading of Augustine's *Confessions* is marked by an absence of key discussions about the central themes of *Confessions*. As it has been in psychological and psychoanalytical approaches, Augustine is taken to function within a different theoretical grid and a servant for a different agenda. Derrida's relation with Bennington in "Circumfession", with "G" may well symbolize the link of the self and God, but understood through this time-based encounter. There is an absence of any discussion referring to what was crucial for Augustine himself, such as questions about the being of and faith in God, and how this relationship and knowledge places light upon himself. This absence may be an indication of a monologue, or a coming to the text not completely opened for its provocative elements neither receptive to the "visitation" of the author's own perspective. The consequence is that Augustine himself is not heard and his own therapeutic perspective is lost.

The modern self has sought independence and self-sufficiency, emphasizing the human capacity to respond and impact reality. Postmodernity has sought openness towards vulnerability. Because he is neither postmodern nor modern, Augustine did not choose between vulnerability and responsiveness, but found them to be complementary. In confessional terms, Augustine shows the wounds and thanks the doctor, integrating a vulnerable exposure and the receptive gratitude. The reading of *Confessions* through postmodern lenses contributes to an update of the Augustinian humble, vulnerable and non-autonomous subject, providing an antidote against the self-sufficient subject, but on the other hand, deconstructing the Augustinian theological edifice in his proposal of therapy which has interesting applications towards a responsive love that counters contemporary individualism.

As Augustine suggests, since grace is made perfect in weakness, (2 Cor. 12.9) whoever does not hold himself to be weak, cannot receive any medicine; consequently, vulnerability is the condition for treatment. But therapy is incomplete if it does not maintain the awareness of a relational trust to the doctor's treatment. It is not enough to show the wounds without trust in the healer. Belief in medicine is not enough: the Doctor must be praised. For Augustine, the victory of truth is love, and therapy is complete only if it includes loving responsiveness:

inasmuch, then, as strength is made perfect in weakness, whoever does not own himself to be weak, is not in the way to be perfected [...] by such grace

it is effected, not only that we discover what ought to be done, but also that we do what we have discovered — not only that we believe what ought to be loved, but also that we love what we have believed.⁴⁵⁴

Augustine calls us to humbly respond to that curative medicine passed on to us: if on the one hand admitting weaknesses is the condition for improvement, a life under grace is not a life of “oughts” in moral obligations, but a vulnerable subject that opens the heart in confession for the sake of responsive love.

Psychological readings on *Confessions* tend to impose a reading grid, which does not actualize its thinking in contemporaneity. The postmodern view on confession positively opens the self-centered subject to vulnerability, but does not fully absorb the Augustinian relational confession that calls us to love in a relational selfhood. The challenge remains to update the theological anthropology of Augustine not losing his “heart” and at the same time deepen its relevance for the twenty-first century.

The absence of a proper interdisciplinary approach in psychological readings of Augustine reinforces the significance of a constructive, bridge-building perspective, such as with EEP. *Confessions* has been regarded as a test-case for psychoanalytical and psychotherapeutic theories, fostering a monologue, a reductionist tool that examines the extent of psychological conceptual systems. By bringing a psychological framework that conceptually resembles the Augustinian heart, this work reframes the psychological discussion on Augustine, allowing interdisciplinary work with connecting points stemming from both ends. Since Augustine has been situated in the context of dialogue between theology and psychology, it is an appropriate moment in this work to build two foundational columns. Our bridge-building process is established in the pillars of Elementary Experience in Psychology and the Augustinian understanding of the heart. The former is Miguel Mahfoud’s particular appropriation of the concept of elementary experience and its consequences for psychological work. The latter is a key concept in *Confessions* which institutes a conceptual framework for conversation. We seek similarities as well as dissimilarities, opening room for the connecting beam, a structure that establishes contact between both sides.

454. *gr. et pecc. or.* 13[XII].

3 THE HEART IN AUGUSTINE'S CONFESSIONS IN DIALOGUE WITH ELEMENTARY EXPERIENCE IN PSYCHOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

*I love you, Lord, with no doubtful mind but with absolute certainty.
You pierced my heart with your word, and I fell in love with you.
But the sky and the earth too, and everything in them -
all these things around me are telling me that I should love you;
and since they never cease to proclaim this to everyone,
those who do not hear are left without excuse. (Conf. 10.6.8)*

Augustine's proposal of therapy, which adapts ancient philosophical ideals into the framework of *confessio*, showing the wounds of sin and praising the Doctor, is based on the dual pillars of philosophy and theology. Although Augustine's therapeutic ideals are culturally and historically very different from ours, nevertheless, Augustine's legacy is still felt as relevant wisdom that may convey resources for our present-day challenges. But how can one speak of updating Augustinian therapy in the contemporary world, if therapy is not anymore under the domain of either philosophy or theology as it was in the past, but is largely a pursuit of a science founded in the nineteenth century, psychology? Further problems arise: as the second part of our research has shown, major psychological standpoints have not been able to listen properly to Augustine's own voice: Augustine is often revered as a valid ancient source but used to reinforce one's own theoretical position. Questions arise about a perspective that could help us re-present to the twenty-first century some essential elements of Augustine's therapeutic relational proposal layed down in *Confessions*.

In view of updating Augustine's therapeutic proposal for the challenges of twenty-first century, this project has discussed different modes of interaction between Augustine's *Confessions* and therapy. The first step was setting the context to understand Augustine's perspective, that of his adaptation of philosophical therapy as a way to happiness into the framework of *confessio*, into the patient-physician Christological metaphor. In the

second part, this work has suggested that his therapeutic ideal is generally poorly understood by contemporary psychology and postmodern thought.

It is worth highlighting the significance of a more dialogical interdisciplinary conversation in the face of previous interactions between psychologically oriented readings of *Confessions*. Psychological, psychoanalytical and postmodern readings have undergone a listening limitation, with a tendency for reductionist readings. *Confessions* is taken as a tool, a means rather than an end, as a useful example for reflecting on how widely and well psychoanalytical, psychotherapeutic and deconstructionist ideas apply.⁴⁵⁵ At the background of this methodological orientation is an antagonistic perspective on the interaction between the disciplines.

In contrast, instead of considering psychology and theology as rivals or enemies, this work pursues a different linkage: rather than a neurotic patient or *Confessions* as a test case for psychological theories, an Augustinian interface with Elementary Experience Psychology (EEP) engages the content and form of an Augustinian theological anthropology offering its therapeutic contributions and possible applicability to present-day psychology. The method proposed is to consider the psychology of EEP and the Augustinian theological anthropology as allies (even though resisting complete harmonization) to reconstruct a synergic account for a fuller relational perspective on the heart's experiential dynamism which in turn could actualize Augustine's therapeutic ideals.

In this part, we set Augustine's ideas about the inbuilt need for transcendence in the form of the restless heart, which convey a dynamic theological anthropology of desire and love, in dialogue with a contemporary psychological approach. Our current chapter seeks to relate Augustine's *Confessions*, particularly its understanding of the heart, with the work of the Brazilian phenomenological psychologist Miguel Mahfoud (1956-), who brought the concept of "elementary experience" from the theological articulation of Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) to psychology in order to develop an approach called Elementary Experience in Psychology (EEP). Elementary Experience is a notion that outlines a transcendent imprint that arouses authentic human dynamism. It describes an in-built original impetus through which humanity engages reality, pursuing to imprint the ideal image that fuels life from within.⁴⁵⁶ Miguel Mahfoud's EEP discusses the psychological consequences of two central aspects of

455. Dixon, "Teaching Freud and interpreting Augustine's *Confessions*".

456. Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 9.

elementary experience: the fundamental constitutive needs, *exigências*: the human intrinsic volition towards happiness, justice, love, freedom, meaning, beauty; and the evidences, *evidências*, the existence of a transcendent imprint that is expressed existentially through humanity's passionate search for ultimate answers.

This part proposes a journey in three steps. After having “cleared the ground” in the survey of the interaction between Augustine and psychology, we suggest a dialogical interaction in an interdisciplinary bridge-building process model. This pursuit includes the establishment of pillars and a connecting beam. The two pillars are: Elementary Experience in Psychology and Augustine's concept of heart, setting the substance for conversation. The connecting beam, or the structure that directs the points of contact between each other is supplied by surveying and comparing perspectives and methodologies as accepted in EEP with Augustinian concepts such as the heart, reality, inner dynamism, and we evaluate how “different” perspectives dialogue with each other, comparing possible convergences as well as dissimilarities.

Firstly, this chapter discusses Miguel Mahfoud's approach named Elementary Experience in Psychology. In order to discuss Mahfoud's work we are called to retrieve some of his sources, such as his academic journey, the phenomenological psychology background, as well as Luigi Giussani's influence and the concept of elementary experience. Mahfoud points out that through an understanding of the inner dynamic of humanity's elementary experience, which is marked by a desiring restlessness and a central point of reference (elementary experience or heart), it is possible to identify the fundamental needs at the core of experience in order to facilitate a movement towards authentic human life. By placing the heart and its exigencies at the center of subjectivity and drawing its implications for psychological work, EEP is a unique synthesis of phenomenological psychology and theological anthropology.

Secondly, this work will turn again to Augustine's anthropology, setting the ground for its conversation with EEP; the focus will be on the ancient bishop's ideas about the human heart, which is both the center of the human quest for happiness and the interior place where humanity, made for God, has a need, an inbuilt demand for transcendence. Although being a limited creature and part of Adam's fallen race which is bound to sin, nevertheless, in the journey of one's heart, the ship is designed with an inbuilt compass, pointing towards a north. The heart movement restlessly waivers between sin and love: it points towards

transcendence and longs for happiness and beauty. Even when experiencing the distance between its restless quietness and its fulfilled loving life in God, terrestrial navigation can still renew its proper course by the attuning to the inner dynamism of the heart.

Thirdly, our goal is to establish an interface between the two sides, the Augustinian anthropology and EEP, in which two systems of thought find points of connectedness. Our hypothesis is that Augustinian therapy and EEP are distinguishable, yet convergent: Mahfoud formulated a therapeutically oriented psychological model attuned to the Augustinian concept of heart and its dynamism, while at the same time actualizing the Augustinian tradition with an experiential realism. Our hypothesis suggests EEP has granted an opening in psychology to an emphasis that contemporizes Augustinian ideas. Convergences, however, do not deny the restrictions: if on one hand EEP integrates theological anthropology and phenomenological philosophy into psychology, its appropriation of Augustine's theological therapy is incomplete, for EEP retains its integrity as a psychological approach. Nevertheless, Miguel Mahfoud's perception of a return to Elementary Experience brings a contemporary audience closer to Augustine's call to move into one's heart.

3.2 Elementary Experience in Psychology

*I identify this **heart** with what I have called **elementary experience**; that is, it is something that tends to indicate totally the original impetus with which the human being reaches out to reality, seeking to become one with it. He does that by fulfilling a project that dictates to reality itself the ideal image that stimulates him from within (Luigi Giussani, The Religious Sense).*

Elementary Experience in Psychology (EEP), has emerged through the work of Miguel Mahfoud (1956-), professor of psychology at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG). Place also defines academic production: the social and geographic elements of the state of Minas Gerais express similar analogies with EEP. Minas is a traditional and diverse region, the meeting point of Brazil, expressing the diversity of the nation's multi-ethnic people. Its inhabitants are a balanced mix which includes one third of native Indians descendants, another third descending from African heritage and the last third from Caucasian Europeans; the three parts are, at the same time, one unique people. Minas Gerais, a land also known for its mountains, mining and baroque churches, is the home of encounters, a place of synthesis, where seemingly diverse perspectives can find conversation and be assimilated into a different whole. It resists reductionisms and tends to forgo *ghettoes*. Likewise, EEP has been born in this context of openness to creative integrations and opposition to a non-dialogical psychology. As Mahfoud himself admits, he initially did not intend it to become an innovative approach, but merely to offer a critical review to the existing reductionisms of psychology when approaching human experience. Against the prevalent thought in academic psychology in Brazil, Mahfoud has also emphasized that religious belief and practice is not necessarily an alienating experience, but rather part of the dynamism of openness to alterity that is an intrinsic part of our humanity, present in different cultures and expressed as an ever-enduring quest for meaning.⁴⁵⁷ In practice, Mahfoud and EEP opened psychology to understand experience through interdisciplinary lenses, accepting the conceptual work of theological anthropology and phenomenological psychology. The work of Miguel Mahfoud consists of an approach where three different elements found a synthesis, namely, theological

457. Miguel Mahfoud, "Experiência Elementar e Psicologia da Religião: Interdisciplinariedade para Revisão Crítica de Nossa Disciplina," in *Psicologia da Religião no Mundo Contemporâneo*, eds. Marta Helena de Freitas, Geraldo José de Paiva, Celia de Moraes (Brasília: EdECB, 2013), 110-111.

anthropology, phenomenology and psychology. Without being reduced to one of them and including them all, these three retain their uniqueness and at the same time express a singular whole. According to Italian philosopher Angela Ales Bello, in Brazil, the vision of a non-reductionistic, philosophical description of the human being capable of justifying its complexity has been developed through the works of phenomenologists such as Miguel Mahfoud, Marina Massimi and others, who adapted the phenomenology of Husserl and Stein in dialogue with psychology.⁴⁵⁸

Between 2005 and 2012, when Mahfoud's main book summarizing *Elementary Experience in Psychology* was published,⁴⁵⁹ EEP experienced an exponential growth as over 450 people had already studied the introductory courses; and almost 1000 people had received psychological care based on this approach, through a service in UFMG's psychological walk-in clinic, called "plantão psicológico".⁴⁶⁰ Furthermore, the perspective also received attention beyond Brazil, being used by Argentinian and Italian researchers as inspiration for psychological and psychiatric work.⁴⁶¹

One major source for Miguel Mahfoud's formulation has been Luigi Giussani, particularly through the latter's interpretation of "religious sense" and "elementary experience", as well as his focus on the premises of realism, reasonableness and morality. The religious sense is understood as a mark, an imprint upon humanity's original nature. But related to this concept, in the book *The Religious Sense*, Giussani also delineates the concept of "elementary experience", which relates to how this imprint is a living tension, an engine that is sparked in real life experience manifested through evidences and needs. It is this theme of elementary experience, or an existential accent to the idea of religious sense, that Miguel Mahfoud will pick up and develop in an interdisciplinary approach with phenomenological psychology.

458. Angela Ales Bello, preface to *Edith Stein e a psicologia: teoria e pesquisa*, eds. Miguel Mahfoud and Marina Massimi (Belo Horizonte: Artesã Editora, 2013), 12.

459. Mahfoud, *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*.

460. Miguel Mahfoud, Roberta Vasconcelos Leite, Yuri Elias Gaspar, and L. C Maia, "Introduzione del Lavoro sulla esperienza elementare nella Facoltà di Psicologia della Università Statale in Brasile come lavoro di equipe," in *Atti del 4° Convegno Operatori Psicosociali* (Milano: Associazione Medicina & Persona, 2012), 21-22.

461. Maria Teresa Ferla, "Experiência elementar e consciência do eu no sofrimento psíquico: contribuições da fenomenologia," (lectures, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, April 19-23, 2012). See also Maria Teresa Ferla, *O homem da morte impossível e outras histórias: psicopatologia fenomenológica*, trans. Guilherme Tostes (Belo Horizonte: Artesã, 2011); Gracia Maria Clérico, "Unidad y diversidad en los abordajes multiculturales: estudio crítico desde la experiencia elemental de alumnos migrantes" (lectures, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, April 23-27, 2012).

For Mahfoud, experience has a unity in itself and provides objective criteria in subjectivity that allow us to arrive at personal judgments regarding the correspondence between what the person finds in the world and the longings that constitute his or her own person.⁴⁶² Elementary Experience in Psychology seeks to recognize humanity's experiential dynamism as evoked by an encounter with reality. As it awakens the fundamental aspects of experience, implications for psychological work are established, on which each person can learn to be attentive to the elementary experience of self and others. Through a careful recognition of the human experiential dynamism, it is possible to identify the fundamental needs and evidences, and by doing so, stimulate a movement towards the center of authentic human life. In the dramas of a concrete and often fragmented existence, one's life is better apprehended if understood within the framework of a teleological dynamic unity of human experience which is evoked by an encounter with reality.

The concept of elementary experience describes a unique stimulus through which humanity reaches out to reality, an interior impulse directed towards the infinite, an engine that puts the human heart in movement: an "original impetus with which the human being reaches out to reality, seeking to become one with it. He does this by fulfilling a project that dictates to reality itself the ideal image that stimulates him from within."⁴⁶³ As part of human nature, elementary experience describes an immanent desiring inner centre which is also a force, an engine that underlies human gestures. Elementary experience is constituted by the evidences and "exigencies" (needs): the evidences refer to the existence of a transcendent reality that is sought for, expressed through humanity's search for definite and ultimate answers. And the fundamental, constitutive needs are expressed in a never-ending striving for happiness, justice, love, freedom, meaning and beauty.

As Mahfoud suggests, the idea of experience in psychology has been reduced in many cases to the pattern of a naturalistic model; EEP, then, seeks to recover the centrality of the person who experiences, in his relation to the world.⁴⁶⁴ Mahfoud has taken Giussani's philosophical-anthropology in dialogue with phenomenology, and brought its implications to fertilize psychology. Giussani's book *The Religious Sense* has been studied through the lenses of Miguel Mahfoud's synthesis between phenomenological psychology and anthropological theology. His achievement is not a psychological theory of Giussani's work; but having his

462. Mahfoud, *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*, 34.

463. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 9.

464. Mahfoud, *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*, 36.

anthropology as a foundation, Elementary Experience in Psychology seeks to recognize authentic dynamism of the human inner center in order to arouse the elementary and significant aspects of experience. As Mahfoud expressed, “with Giussani's anthropology we want to learn to recognize the essence of experience in order to see human dynamism in action and to identify consequences for psychological work.”⁴⁶⁵ The work of Elementary Experience in Psychology (not elementary experience psychology) is an interdisciplinary cross-fertilization, as the concept of elementary experience is brought within psychological work and broadens the sense of “experience” used by the field.

In order to clarify Elementary Experience in Psychology, we will follow the subsequent steps: first, we will study Luigi Giussani's understanding of the religious sense and the formulation of the concept of elementary experience, as Giussani constitutes Mahfoud's main source; second, this work surveys Miguel Mahfoud's own biographical and academic journey in order to explain how he came to pick up and adapt Giussani's conceptual work into psychology in order to formulate EEP. Miguel Mahfoud has been a psychologist with interest in understanding religious expressions as part of the dynamism of a genuine human experience. In this quest, Mahfoud was led to study how psychological work can identify the experiential dynamism already present in a person and to become a presence to help sustain that dynamism. Thirdly, we focus on Miguel Mahfoud's ideas of elementary experience as the heart, or how the metaphor of a teleological inner center relates to the concept of elementary experience. We hope this discussion about EEP, when placed in dialogue with the idea of heart in Augustine's *Confessions*, will establish a bridge for a dialogue between psychology and theology.

3.2.1 Mahfoud's main source: Luigi Giussani's *The Religious Sense*

*The bee knows the secret of its beehive, and ant knows the secret of its anthill, but man does not know its own secret – the structure of a human being is a free relationship with the infinite, and therefore, it has no limits. It bursts through the walls of any place within which one would want to restrain it (Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 79).*

465. Mahfoud, *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*, 31.

3.2.1.1 The Religious Sense as a theological response to a changing culture

Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) was an Italian theologian and founder of the movement *Communion and Liberation* (CL), a relevant voice in the Catholic Church during the twentieth century. His legacy was cherished by prominent figures in the Catholic world. Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), at Giussani's funeral, suggested Luigi understood Christianity not as an intellectual system, nor as a collection of doctrines and dogmas, neither a moralism; but Giussani comprehended Christianity as an encounter, a love story through an event.⁴⁶⁶ Jorge Bergoglio⁴⁶⁷ (who would later become Pope Francis), was an admirer of Giussani's work *The Religious Sense*. Bergoglio points out that Giussani's thought has been both a source of personal inspiration for him and shows signs of an original thought as a phenomenology that reaches the most intimate elements of human longing. As Bergoglio would recall it,

The writings of Monsignor Giussani inspired my reflection. *The Religious Sense* is not a book for the exclusive use of those who are part of the Movement; not even for Christians or for those who believe. It is a book for all men who take humanity seriously. I dare say that today the question that we must mainly face is not so much the problem of God, the existence of God, the knowledge of God, but the problem of man, the knowledge of man and find in man himself the mark that God left in him to meet him [...] for a man who has forgotten or criticized his fundamental 'whys' and the yearning of his heart, speaking about God becomes an abstract, exoteric discourse or a stimulus to devotion with no incidence in life. You cannot start a conversation about God unless the ashes that suffocate the burning ember of the fundamental 'whys' are not blown away.⁴⁶⁸

In the 1950s, Luigi Giussani's personal journey took the unusual path of resigning from his position as professor of theology in Venegono: he ventured to regenerate Christian witness among high school students, when the existential *problématiques* in post-war Italy were at its peak and Christian presence was diminishing. Giussani's influence upon this first group of students was so remarkable that this first group grew and became a world-wide movement in over 70 countries. Even though Giussani had previously resigned as a professor

466. Joseph Ratzinger, "Funeral Homily for Msgr. Luigi Giussani," *Communio* Winter 2004: 685. At Luigi Giussani's funeral, Cardinal Ratzinger suggested that Giussani was "wounded by beauty", an existence that fixed his eyes fixed on Christ: "he understood that Christianity is not an intellectual system, a packet of dogmas, a moralism; Christianity is an encounter, a love story; it is an event."

467. Bergoglio, quoted by Massimo Borghesi, in Bergoglio e Giussani, "As sintonias profundas", in http://arquivo.revistapassos.com.br/default.asp?id=344&Pagina=6&id_n=3885 accessed Nov. 15 2018.

468. Ibid.

of theology in favor of bringing witness among teenage students, Giussani also built his movement alongside his theological reflection. From 1964 to 1990, he was a professor of fundamental theology at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan. As Angelo Scola points out, Giussani's thought is generative and creative, skillful at giving a systematic and critical reason to man's elementary experience.⁴⁶⁹

Although the corpus of Giussani's writings is itself wide and relevant, our interest relies on his work *The Religious Sense*, and particularly the concept of elementary experience stemming from it. In 1986, when Giussani formulated the third and definite version, Miguel Mahfoud spent a year in Milan and received firsthand knowledge; twenty years later, as a professor of psychology, Mahfoud proposed elementary experience as applied to psychology. There is obviously a unique trajectory from Giussani's ideas to Mahfoud's appropriation; the following discussion will then pave the way to understand how a theological concept from Luigi Giussani has found a place in psychological work. This section will focus on the theological anthropology roots of EEP, considering Giussani's concept of elementary experience as a creative appropriation of the anthropological idea of the religious sense.

In 1957, Luigi Giussani published the first version of his work *The Religious Sense*, responding to the works of the Jesuit Jean Daniélou and the pastoral call from Cardinal Giovanni Montini to recover the meaning of religious sense in a changing culture. In the post-war years, militant atheism was on the rise, suggesting that religious belief was destined to dissolve itself with the advent of technology and progress. After Europe experienced totalitarian regimes, such as Nazism, and under the increasing influence of dialectical materialism of Marxism, faith was being regarded as a useless passion, and the religious influence in life was relegated to parishes and to the "weak" and "simple. The Church, however, was unable to aptly respond to this new context with the theological apparatuses of the beginning of the century. As Massimo Borghesi pointed out, in the Catholic conservative reaction to modernism in the first half of the previous century the role of human anthropology in Christian theology had been downplayed. A certain type of conservative Neo-Thomism

469. Angelo Scola. *Luigi Giussani, un pensiero original* (Madrid: Encuentro, 2006). See also a series of essays in English from a diverse group of contributors in Elisa Buzzi, ed., *A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003). Buzzi agrees that Giussani's approach is generative, for "getting directly to the origin, that is, to the fundamental questions of meaning in the human experience and the Christian Event, with a deep awareness of their wide-ranging existential, theoretical, and cultural implications, it generates thought, in a constant passionate dialogue with the most varied of interlocutors." Elisa Buzzi, ed., *A Generative Thought: An Introduction to the Works of Luigi Giussani* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), x.

absorbed itself in the rational premises of faith, neglecting the religious dimension of human nature.⁴⁷⁰ In the fifties, however, with the challenge of Marxist atheism to Christian anthropology, there was an opening to recover a Thomism in dialogue with the Augustinian tradition and the longing of a return *ad fontes*, and an anthropology that could understand humanity in a biblical way, intrinsically oriented towards the search for God. In the fifties, through the work of theologians such as Cornelio Fabro⁴⁷¹ and Jean Daniélou, there was a resurgence of the question about the religious dimension being a pre-philosophical tendency towards an absolute.

In 1956, Jean Daniélou, one of the names in the emerging *Nouvelle Théologie*, published *Dieu et nous*, which discusses in its first chapter the religious dimension of ancient paganism. God has spoken to men and women of all times through the cosmos and conscience, as a kind of first (still to be completed) revelation.⁴⁷² The text, translated to Italian in 1957, would have a significant impact in the first draft of Giussani's *The Religious Sense*.⁴⁷³ While recognizing the limits of paganism, Daniélou's important contribution was to positively appreciate the religious dimension of all of humanity, including non-Christian cultures.⁴⁷⁴

About the same time (1957), Giovanni Battista Montini, then cardinal of Milan, wrote a pastoral letter reflecting about the need to recover the religious sense in post-war Europe. The letter suggested moderns were losing the religious sense, understood as an opening of humanity towards God, a tendency that is part of an essential shape of being human. Montini's emphasis enlightens the importance given to an encounter, which is how Mystery reaches humanity, touches him in the space and time of history with signs that provoke him to respond. The encounter is the tangible modality through which the religious sense passes from latent to manifest. The innate tendency towards God inscribed *a priori*, does not so eliminate the novelty of the *a posteriori*, the unpredictable manner with which God's action, grace, manifests itself.⁴⁷⁵ Furthermore, the letter explicitly recuperated Augustine's *cor inquietum* as an inspiration to the discussion of his times, which also may

470. Massimo Borghesi, introduction to *Sul senso religioso*, Giovanni Battista Montini and Luigi Giussani (Milan, BUR Rizzoli, 2009), 9-10.

471. Cornelio Fabro, *L'uomo e il rischio di Dio* (Roma: Editrice Studium, 1967).

472. Borghesi, introduction to *Sul senso religioso*, 15.

473. *Ibid.*, 13.

474. *Ibid.*, 18.

475. Massimo Borghesi, in "Bergoglio e Giussani, as sintonias profundas," accessed Nov. 15, 2018, http://arquivo.revistapassos.com.br/default.asp?id=344&Pagina=6&id_n=3885

have marked an Augustinian accent to Giussani's writing of *The Religious Sense*. Montini's call to recover the religious sense, which inspires Giussani's first version in the 50s, includes an association between *Confessions* and the core of his call: "and our hearts are restless until they rest in you... and that is the religious sense."⁴⁷⁶

In the third, revised and final version of *The Religious Sense*, written in the 80s, Giussani maintains an Augustinian inspiration: even though the Augustinian restless heart is not explicitly the main topic in Giussani's approach, it still lies in the background as a force exerting a significant influence in Giussani's understanding of the idea of a religious sense. The reality of being human is characterized by a religious tendency, which expresses itself not only in terms of organized religion, but is in its essential aspect an "intelligent intuition and dramatic emotion".⁴⁷⁷ It is an openness for inquiry and searching that raises questions about the ultimate meaning of existence, such as the problem of pain and mortality or the purpose of life. These are evidences that we are made for transcendence and pointers to the enigmatic character of life. As questions attached "to the very core of our being"⁴⁷⁸ they are not able to be extinguished; they cannot be rooted out, but could be substituted, denied or emptied, resulting in a non-authentic human position. These fundamental questions provoke humanity to move continually, to wander in search for ultimate answers, those that will always linger at the deepest core of what it means to be human:

What is the ultimate meaning of existence? Or why is there pain and death, and why, in the end, is life worth living? (...) the Religious Sense lies within the reality of our self at the level of these questions: it coincides with the radical engagement of the self with life, an involvement which exemplifies itself in these questions.⁴⁷⁹

3.2.1.2 From the "religious sense" to "elementary experience"

In the 1986 revised and updated version, the notion that every human being contains some innate sense of divinity is understood alongside an additional nuanced concept: elementary experience. It describes the center and the dynamic movement that sets the heart in motion in a restless journey: "I identify this heart with what I have called elementary experience, that is, something that tends to indicate totally the original impetus with which the

476. Giovanni Battista Montini, *Sul Senso Religioso*, Lettera pastorale all'arcidiocesi ambrosiana per la Quaresima, 1957., accessed Feb. 20, 2019, <http://www.gliscritti.it/blog/entry/3732>.

477. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 46.

478. Ibid.

479. Ibid., 45.

human being reaches out to reality, seeking to become one with it. He does that by fulfilling a project that dictates to reality itself the ideal image that stimulates him from within.”⁴⁸⁰ Elementary experience, an anthropological term connected to the idea of a religious sense, describes an imprint that stirs human life from within, or an inner centre that expresses itself by enticing humanity to seek transcendent realities, in the form of “evidences” and “needs” that are aroused by an impact with reality. In Luigi Giussani's formulation, elementary experience designates the original impetus that underlies every human gesture or position, by which the person can recognize his fundamental “exigências” (of happiness and justice, for example) and also recognize central evidences, as in one’s own existence and that of a reality that transcends oneself. Elementary experience is understood as the heart, which involves both an objective subjectivity (original needs and evidences) and a movement to imprint in reality this original mark that sets humanity in a restless search.

The most comprehensive definition of elementary experience given by Giussani is the following:

What constitutes this original, elementary experience? It can be described as a complex of needs and “evidences” which accompany us as we come face to face with all that exists. Nature thrusts man into a universal comparison with himself, with others, with things, and furnishes him with a complex of original needs and “evidences” which are tools for that encounter. So original are these needs or these “evidences” that everything man does or says depends on them. These needs can be given many names. They can be summarized with different expressions (for example, the need for happiness, the need for truth, for justice, etc.). They are like a spark igniting the human motor. Prior to them, there is no movement or human dynamism. Any personal affirmation, from the most banal and ordinary to the most reflected upon and rich in consequences, can be based solely on this nucleus of original needs.⁴⁸¹

The conceptual formulation of elementary experience gives the religious sense an experiential accent, for it underscores that the human dynamism is aroused by an existential encounter, an impression awakened by the impact with reality itself. The engine of the human heart towards transcendence is activated in the pathway of reality, in experience, with its dramas and tensions, as reality itself provokes and evokes the human dynamism. In *The Religious Sense*, through the concept of elementary experience, Giussani conducts the idea of religious sense towards an existential turn while retaining the integrity of both subjective

480. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 9.

481. *Ibid.*, 7.

experience and objective reality. In doing so, Giussani paves the way for a theological anthropology that reintroduces its interest in the idea of experience, a move from the dogmatic to the experiential and also present in theologians such as Schillebeeckx;⁴⁸² and even though neither articulating nor elaborating a psychology, it creates space for further dialogues, such as the one Mahfoud would conduct.

Giussani articulates the book *The Religious Sense* based on three premises, namely, realism, reasonableness and morality. Through these premises, Giussani seeks to counter reduced rationalistic approaches present in modernity that believe if one knows about a fact, it is understanding through a system of thought rather than experiential knowledge. In that regard, he considers Augustine to be a realist and suggests that his own position finds reference in Augustine's conception of knowledge, for in it relationality precedes thought and ideas:

Saint Augustine, however, warns us that the contrary is not true. To think something is an intellectual, ideal and imaginative activity regarding the object and often, in giving too much weight to thought, without even realizing it – or, in reality, even justifying it – we project what we think onto the fact. The sane man, instead, wants to know about the fact, to know what it is, and only then can he also think it.⁴⁸³

Realism, Giussani's first premise in *The Religious Sense*, takes us on a path that leads to the concept of elementary experience. Realism is the attitude of not privileging an already-made preconceived scheme, but ascribing to reality a passionate and insistent observation. Realism is a premise that places the method of existential inquiry as imposed by the object, not produced or randomly created by the subject;⁴⁸⁴ it respects the dynamic of experience that was not defined by human subjectivity but given to it by its relational structure. Giussani argues that the proper method of knowing is not defined by oneself, but dictated by the object; likewise, religious experience has a dynamic that was not created by me, even though it still involves my subjectivity. By emphasizing realism, Giussani seeks to avoid a kind of subjectivism that does not find an objective criterion to understand

482. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*, trans. John Stephen Bowden (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). According to Schillebeeckx, Christianity is not primarily a creedal doctrine in which one must believe, but an experience in faith that is then embodied and transmitted through a message. For a dialogue between Giussani and Schillebeeckx, see Paulo Alves Romão, "A estrutura sacramental da história salvífica: estudo comparado de Edward Schillebeeckx e de Luigi Giussani" (PhD Diss., PUC-Rio, 2012).

483. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 4.

484. *Ibid.*, 5.

transcendent meaning; and also to escape the taming of reality through preconceptions that block the authentic religious quest.⁴⁸⁵ The preconceived ideas of a moralist eventually undermine an engagement with knowledge and do not foster the passionate search that accepts the provocations and callings of what is encountered.

True non-biased realism leads us to a proper notion of experience: to realistically experience something in Giussani's view is within the logic of accumulating sensations, feelings or facts, but "coincides with a judgement we make about what we try."⁴⁸⁶ Experiencing involves discovering the meaning that lies at the foundation of what is lived. It contains a criterion on which a judgement about what is lived can be drawn. This criterion is not "borrowed from the outside", risking alienation, but found within humanity, it is a given: "now, to state that this criterion is inherent within us is not to argue that we alone provide it. Rather, it is to assert that it is drawn from our nature, it is given to us as part of our very nature. [...] the criterion for judging this reflection on our own humanity must emerge from within the inherent structure of the human being, the structure at the origin of the person."⁴⁸⁷

This immanent criterion to judge what we live, the mechanism that undergirds the passage from trying to experience, is what Giussani calls elementary experience. It is also the heart, the judging center of human subjectivity containing at its nucleus needs and "evidences". Elementary experience is pronounced as the complex of needs and "evidences" which follow humanity as it comes to face reality. Human nature is endowed with needs and evidences as gifts, tools for encounter, pushing humanity towards a universal comparison with himself, others, and things, in order to experience and imprint in reality this inner mark that constitutes life.⁴⁸⁸ This "original experience" involves a duty to learn that it is possible to judge what is tried and compare every proposal with this elementary experience, this interior stamp that fosters a criterion to relate to exterior aspects of life. It is to become a habit to pay attention to the complex of needs and evidences which accompany us. These original needs and evidences are the essence of interiority but also instruments for an encounter. They are a spark igniting human motor setting what is properly human in movement.

485. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 109.

486. *Ibid.*, 6.

487. *Ibid.*, 7.

488. *Ibid.*, 7.

The “evidences” exist at the core of one’s being and are expressed in existential inquiry as an awareness that life is a gift stricken by an “inexorable presence”.⁴⁸⁹ Questions such as “what does reality consist of and what is it made for?” or even “why do I wake up today and engage life?” or “why do I exist even though I did not create myself” are ultimate questions awakened through awe, “not as a cold observation, but as wonder pregnant with an attraction, almost a passivity in which simultaneously is conceived an attraction.”⁴⁹⁰ This original awe is also an attraction to harmonious beauty,⁴⁹¹ but points to humanity in its dependent condition: I did not make the beauty I seek and need. Therefore, both the “evidences” and the original needs point to humanity as dependent, being made, a creation,

I do not consciously say ‘I am,’ in the sense that captures my entire stature as a human being if I do not mean ‘I am made.’ The ultimate equilibrium of life depends upon this, the human being’s natural truth, as we have seen, is his nature as creation – he exists because he is continually possessed. And, when he recognizes this, then he breathes fully, feels at peace.⁴⁹²

As these existential ultimate questions are expressions or evidences of the infinite restlessness of the human heart, if one is truly engaged in these questions, the more one finds its nature in a dependent bond with the infinite. In Giussani’s approach, every movement of the human person, working or playing, eating or drinking, living or dying, are expressions of a dynamic center that pulses for something in a search for someone the self does not comprehend, but still seeks; the core of the person, the heart and its original needs and evidences are pointers to the existence of an Other.

Giussani suggests that there is an inexhaustible movement in humanity towards the depth of reality, for the origin and destiny of life.⁴⁹³ It is common to all even though culturally singular depending on the contingency of each situation. It is not particular to specific cultures but a movement towards transcendence that constitutes every life, the religious sense that is within both the believer and the non-believer, an intense movement of reason (openness) to penetrate and embrace reality.⁴⁹⁴ Addressing the sacred-secular divide, Giussani thinks that one of the great problems is a kind of dualism that separates humanity into religious and members of civil society: “one of the great errors of our day in my opinion,

489. Ibid., 101.
490. Ibid.
491. Ibid., 104.
492. Ibid., 106.
493. Ibid, 55.
494. Ibid., 57.

is the kind of dualism that divides humanity into religious people and Christians on the one hand, and members of civil and political society on the other. Unfortunately, many baptized persons today live out precisely this kind of dualism.”⁴⁹⁵ The original needs for goodness, justice, truth and happiness are universal and express our common humanity. Therefore, elementary experience celebrates our common needy humanity, “elementary experience, as we stated, is substantially the same in everyone, even if it will be determined, translated, and realized in very different ways- so different, in fact, that they may seem opposed.”⁴⁹⁶

According to Giussani, by nature, we are fundamentally open to all of reality and the human soul is fascinated by the world in its entirety: it is oriented to an encounter with the whole as such and with God as the ultimate *telos*. There is a human original structure, one that is constantly looking for answers; that plea can be suppressed, forsaking something nature pushes us towards, resulting in an inhuman, inadequate position; ⁴⁹⁷ nonetheless, one can deny the possibility that an adequate answer exists, but never extinguish it. But since it is by nature an unfathomable answer, only Mystery suits its structure. This fact leads humans to the humble position of begging, of mendacity, for what corresponds to its nature is not given or possessed by themselves. ⁴⁹⁸ Therefore, the heart’s position is one of openness and its reasonable posture is to seek in order to discover ultimate answers. The human destiny is to be found in the affirmation and recognition of the Absolute. Denying this authentic search will result in loss of the capacity to live reality intensely, *id est*, in relation to the divine.

Christianity, instead of a system of thought or doctrines, is comprehended as an encounter with the Jesus presented to us by the gospels, in which Christ activated and satisfied the human “exigencial” structure of the disciples in its quest for an infinite answer. Giussani’s theological articulation happened in decades in which dogmatic theology had been questioned, which opened space for a revived interest in the life of Jesus. Giussani’s accent relies in the association of anthropology and Christology, on how Christ’s presence impacted the human experience of the first disciples. Giussani believed the first disciples followed Jesus not because of his systematized thought, but because they were astonished by his presence. They were amazed, there was awe, and the truth of his message made sense to them

495. Luigi Giussani, *Morality: Memory and Desire*, trans. K. D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 23.

496. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 10.

497. *Ibid.*, 61.

498. *Ibid.*, 57.

as a consequence of a wonder-filled involvement. The journey started as an experience of wonder and awe and matured until it became conviction. Humanity's dramatic nature, which has an intuition of beauty, truth, love but does not know its source, is satisfied through Christ, who became man so the world could encounter God through a personal experience that fulfilled that very needy human core. Therefore, in Giussani, human experience is at the center of Christian life; and anthropology constitutes the foundation for Christology.

The final version of the book *The Religious Sense* became the first volume of Luigi Giussani's trilogy entitled "PerCorso" (way, path) containing the three following works: *The Religious Sense*, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*⁴⁹⁹ and *Why the Church?*.⁵⁰⁰ The journey, the path proposed encompasses a movement from theological anthropology, then to Christology culminating in ecclesiology, the living experience of Christ manifesting himself through the Church. Giussani's trilogy starts with theological anthropology, the religious sense as a manifestation of humanity's original and structural openness in the world. Consequently, Giussani points out that even though at its core humanity begs for a complete answer, the religious sense contains a structural disproportion in the face of the required answer: "the inexhaustibility of the questions heightens the contradiction between the urgent need for an answer and our human limitations in searching for it."⁵⁰¹ This disproportion is both at the foundation and core of our humanity but also sets life in a drama, for humanity is incapable to satisfy that intuition. The constitutional core is satisfied with a response from an incommensurable object. Consequently, this situation invites humanity to the humble position of acknowledging a gap, a disproportion between human capacity and ultimate horizon,⁵⁰² which paves the way for a move towards revelation, a *percorso* from anthropology to Christology.

In the second work of the trilogy, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, Christianity is presented as the recognition of an exceptional encounter, Christ's self-revelation, which bridged the human limitation by revealing his extraordinary presence. In *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, Giussani points out that, in the history of God's relationship with humanity, the revelatory event has been an encounter, established as a

499. Luigi Giussani, *At The Origin of the Christian Claim*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGillQueen's University Press, 1998).

500. Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

501. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 48.

502. *Ibid.*, 50-51.

relational experience. Since the beginning, in the account of human origins of the book of *Genesis*, Yahweh has been seeking the face of concrete humans, searching for personal encounter with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his people. Although the human heart is set in a drama, for in every movement it seeks the infinite while not attaining it completely, nevertheless, God has decided to reveal himself in history. The climax of God's historical self-revelation is the incarnation, the human life, death and resurrection of Christ. Christ's incarnation is the fulfillment of the human predicament: Giussani suggests that "the incarnation is a transcendent response to a human need which great geniuses have always been able to sense."⁵⁰³ Faith in Christ is then relocated from having a set of rules to a living encounter with a historical person that fulfills humanity's dramatic core expressed as a desire for ultimate happiness, truth, beauty and love. The disciples' hearts found the presence that surprisingly and evidently matched their desire for beauty, truth and justice that constituted their nature. God becoming human, the Word made flesh, brings authentic human experience to the center of the Christian life. It is an encounter with a person, a lived experience, a love story revealed through an amazing presence as God himself experienced humanity in history. The third volume of the trilogy verifies the claim that the Church embodies Christ. The Church not only carries Christ's work but is Christ's very continuation of the event of Christ's entry in time, re-presenting Jesus in a historical sense, making him present again.

3.2.1.3 An experiential common quest for transcendence

Giussani cemented a way to present the Christian message as connected to a common humanity in the quest for transcendence. The religious sense is humanity's interior destination expressed in the world, in an openness that is attracted to the whole of reality in search to find out ultimate responses. Since humans are primarily open, the human soul is fascinated with the world in its entirety, leaning to an encounter with the whole. Giussani suggests that any human motion has a religious component in the form of an ever enduring quest to discover the enigmatic source. He interprets the Pauline engagement with the Athenians at the Aeropagus (Acts 17:25-26) as a contact point with their religious sense.⁵⁰⁴ Paul interprets their religious activity as a human striving to relate to God the Creator, the

503. Giussani, *At The Origin of the Christian Claim*, 101.

504. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 47.

source of life. Paul's message on resurrection is not accepted by all and later regarded as foolishness by many Greeks; but his message was accepted by some, and his methodology included highlighting humanity's quest for transcendence as a pedagogical instrument to connect the gospel of Christ to the deepest longings of human effort to find meaning.

Life in the world is a struggle between openness towards the unachievable object that constitutes the telos of life and the ideological societies that freeze human authentic search and impose determinate conceptions.⁵⁰⁵ Human life is "hunger, thirst, and passion for an ultimate object, which looms over the horizon and yet always lies beyond it."⁵⁰⁶ When this search is recognized, a person becomes a tireless seeker. The human destiny is set to affirm the Mystery, but when one arbitrarily rejects the validity of this search, one loses the tension towards living connected to the center of life. A truly human position is to realize that, even though the answer is beyond oneself, it is not a motive for despair or abandoning the quest, but an invitation to go deeper into its answer even though not defined or controlled by the subject.

In a conference lecture called *La Soglia Antropologica*,⁵⁰⁷ Carmine Di Martino made four central remarks about Giussani's understanding of experience. Firstly, the fundamental aspect of what might be called the phenomenological location of Luigi Giussani is that a deeper understanding of reality becomes evident through experience. To begin from reality is always having experience as starting point. This association allows and contributes to removing Giussani's position from a kind of realism we might call naïve, pre-modern, or dogmatic. Each reality offers itself and reveals itself only within an experience. In this phenomenological inclination, being in the world is constituted from the dynamism and the internal laws of experience, recognized in the original intentional structure of experience itself. The significance of Giussani's realism is embraced in the concept of experience, a category which is appropriated by Giussani in an original way.

Secondly, Di Martino pointed out that Giussani's approach is not an empiricist concept of experience. Experience implies the intelligence of the meaning of things, a judgment that requires a criterion from which it is actualized. An empiricist notion of experience suggests it is made up of sensations which are then recomposed by the psyche,

505. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 51.

506. *Ibid.*

507. Carmine Di Martino, "La Soglia Antropologica," paper presented at the Simpósio Internacional e Interdisciplinar sobre Experiência Elementar, Belo Horizonte, March 2009.

according to the laws of habit or imagination. But the concept proposed by Giussani is antithetical to this idea of experience, for what characterizes experiencing is to understand something, to discover its meaning. Giussani shows that in order to cultivate experience, as an occasion for the revelation of the meaning of things, one needs understanding, which implies the need for a judgement. Consequently, experience entails discernment and a judgement, which leads to the need of an evaluating measure. So if experience implies the intelligence of meaning, it also includes a discernment, a recognition, a judgment based on a criterion. Giussani calls this criterion elementary experience. “All the experiences of my humanity and my personality are filtered through the sieve of a primordial ‘original experience’ that constitutes my identity in the way I face everything. Each man has a right and a duty to learn that it is always possible to compare every proposal with this elementary experience. It must also become a habit.”⁵⁰⁸ Experience, being contrary to what can be understood from a naturalistic or empiricist perspective, is always a meaningful relationship between subject and object. Therefore, experience always includes an evaluation; but the criterion is immanent, it is elementary experience. This discernment, this comparison of what I encounter in reality and the core that characterizes me originally, the nucleus of evidences and needs, includes a recognition that can be trained with vigilance, acquired in the maturing of one’s own experience. Elementary experience is then an operating principle, the criterion for judgement, the motionless engine of human movement that shapes the motives of acting, a direction that is found implicitly or explicitly (from the point of view of the conscience) in all human experience.

Thirdly, according to Di Martino, Giussani sheds light on the experiential aspect of the structure of human experience as awakened, initiated and activated by what comes to us, especially by another human subject, or by things. Through elementary experience, Giussani re-proposes an old-fashioned category, the original structure of humanity, but does it through experience and what it entails. This structure, the subject's demanding nature, is not an anonymous or unconscious configuration that takes humanity backwards, as a drive for self-preservation. The demanding structure is alive, from the beginning to the end, not as an abstraction, but through a down-to-earth experiential encounter. Because this original elemental structure would never be activated without the encounter with the other, its condition of emergence is relationality. Since the criterion of evaluation of meaning is always

508. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 7.

internal to the experience itself and includes an awareness of the original structure itself, the accent is placed in the recognition of the constitutive needs already present in experience when encountering reality. This constant comparison of the inner criteria of elementary experience in relation to everything, allows experience in the truest human sense.

Fourthly, Di Martino picks up from Giussani two characteristics of the human “exigencial” (needs) structure, namely, inextricability and inexhaustibility. Since these needs are the law and the mover of human kinetics, of one’s movement, the first characteristic is the inextricability of the exigencial structure. The needs are unavoidable and inescapable, for they constitute the fabric of the self. The second characteristic is that the needs are inexhaustible structurally, that is, they express a relationship with the totality (one’s center connected to the whole) and have the character of infinity: the quest for meaning is a need for exuberant meaning, for completeness. The consequence is that the infinite desire in us is not a projection of one’s imagination, as if dreams or imagination produced it. Modernity has the idea of the infinite, or the perception of it, as the result of an idealized operation of finite beings. For moderns, it is a projection of the finite due to the anguish of finitude. For Giussani, however, the desire of infinity is inscribed in humanity’s own constitutive needs, as the texture of the human fabric: there could not have been the consciousness of finitude if not in relation to an already present tendency towards infinity. In that regard, Giussani is not far at all from Augustine’s *Confessions*.

Although the idea of elementary experience is present with relevant prominence in the final version of *The Religious Sense*, nevertheless, the conceptual axis remains, as the title suggests, the religious sense. The consequence is that the rich concept of elementary experience is originally expressed, but not justified, expanded, enlarged in its existential and psychological implications. Giussani was a theologian and not a psychologist, and possibly did not have enough tools to open the box of the psychological repercussions of his own theological anthropology. The idea of elementary experience was pointed out by Giussani, but not elaborated in its implications to a theological psychology: it was as if waiting for an apt listener to pick it up and to develop it, to enlarge and expand it. As Ecléa Bosi poetically puts it, “A person’s proposal transcends the physical range of his existence: he never dies having

made explicit all his possibilities. One dies as if in the day before: and someone must fulfill the possibilities that have remained dormant, so that the drawing of his life is completed.”⁵⁰⁹

Miguel Mahfoud, a former student of Ecléa Bosi, surely heard her acute proposition that one must continue the drawing of another’s life. He possibly had that in mind (while not explicitly) when headed to Italy in 1986, to study with Giussani. Coincidentally, that was the exact moment Giussani formulated the last version of *The Religious Sense* which expressed the definition of elementary experience. During that year, Mahfoud looked attentively to Giussani in order to “paint the first drafts” of what would become a relevant appropriation his his thought and legacy. For almost twenty years, he struggled with the phenomenological and psychological implications of the concepts of religious sense and elementary experience. After these twenty years, in 2005, Giussani passes away. But as Mahfoud recalls it, after attending Giussani’s funeral, “In 2005, the force of that whole process was right before my eyes. My personal connection to Giussani would not end with his death.”⁵¹⁰

3.2.2 Miguel Mahfoud’s biographical and academic journey

As it is with rivers and spring waters, human life can be compared to a journey with encounters and confluences moving towards a direction. Every human being has a trajectory, a history of development and maturation as life unfolds. In the academic world, after centuries of academic production, an intellectual biography also undergoes maturation. This growth however, is not self-directed. Even though academics value working independently, it never happens as a solo career, but as a trajectory that is influenced by encounters with old and present authors, as streams meet in the formation of a river. One is entering into an ongoing conversation and expressing one’s own particular voice in response. This voice, as contextual theology, social criticism and postmodern thought have helped us realize, is bound by place and time, and its reasoning is inserted and interpreted within a located culture and its experiences.

509. Ecléa Bosi, *Memória e Sociedade: lembrança de velhos* (São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz, 1983), 32. The original citation in Portuguese stands for “os projetos do indivíduo transcendem o intervalo físico de sua existência: ele nunca morre tendo explicitado todas as suas possibilidades. Antes, morre na véspera: e alguém deve realizar suas possibilidades que ficaram latentes, para que se complete o desenho de sua vida.”

510. Miguel Mahfoud, interview by Davi C. Ribeiro Lin, October 5, 2018.

In order to understand how Miguel Mahfoud came to formulate Elementary Experience in Psychology, one is called to retrieve the larger picture of his biographical and academic journey and the context in which it emerged. This section will discuss the intersection of his personal and academic biography. It will follow the logic of three streams influencing Elementary Experience in Psychology, namely, theological anthropology, phenomenology and psychology. Firstly, the stream of theological anthropology: having returned to faith during university years as an undergraduate student, Mahfoud started questioning the prevalent psychological reductionist view approaching religious experience; this resistance eventually led him to pursue his own thought, one that sought a fuller appropriation of human experience and found in Luigi Giussani a personal and intellectual reference. The second stream is phenomenology; Mahfoud embraced it as an adequate method to respect and access subjective personal elaboration. Within the vast movement of phenomenology, the names of Gerard Van Der Leeuw, Edmund Husserl, Edith Stein are to be highlighted. Thirdly, Mahfoud is also influenced by and actively responding to authors within psychology, both in social psychology and psychotherapeutic approaches. As a consequence of theological anthropology, phenomenology and psychology in conversation, Elementary Experience in Psychology emerges as the outcome of a personal and academic journey rather than a ready-made, intentionally planned theoretical approach. It grew organically, almost spontaneously, at the encounter between Mahfoud's academic maturation and the impact felt and recognized by those who understood EEP's implications for psychological practice. Its main contribution, therefore, relies on realizing the reductionisms of psychology, and by drawing conceptual formulations from theological anthropology and phenomenology, offers a critical revision of the field in order to include missing or underrated aspects.

Miguel Mahfoud graduated in psychology in 1980, obtained his master in 1990 and a PhD in Social Psychology in 1996, all degrees conferred by the Psychology Institute of the University of São Paulo (USP). If his academic roots are traced to USP, the blossoming which comes with academic maturity occurred during the 20 years (1996-2016) when Mahfoud was professor of psychology at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG). Among other academic involvements, it is worth mentioning his connections with Italy, the time he spent studying with Luigi Giussani (1985-1986), as well as when he was a post-doctoral researcher at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome under the philosopher Angela Ales Bello (2004). Miguel Mahfoud and Marina Massimi have been the editors of the

academic journal *Memorandum: Memory and History in Psychology*, which has been in the last decades the major publication forum in the intersection of phenomenology and psychology in Brazil. Mahfoud is also founding member of the Process Analysis Laboratory in Subjectivity (LAPS UFMG) and member of the Advisory Board of the Society for Qualitative Studies and Research (SE & PQ). His research emphases in Social Psychology were mainly the following subjects: phenomenology, religious experience and psychology and culture. Since the 80s, Mahfoud has been interested in the implications of Luigi Giussani's *The Religious Sense* to psychology. From 2005 onwards, at the request of his students, his synthesis became a course and then evolved into an approach called Elementary Experience in Psychology.

3.2.2.1 Origins, roots and turning points in an academic biography

The origin and roots of Miguel Mahfoud's academic biography include the longer story of the influences received during childhood and teenage years, as well as the wealth of meaning that comes from these first experiences. Miguel Mahfoud grew up in the state of São Paulo, in the context of a Catholic upbringing. In his childhood years he comprehended that faith was not only an individual religious devotion, but impacted daily life and the whole of society. His father was a lay person involved in the local Catholic parish, proposing that Christians were meant to serve the world and favor social relations for all, not only for Catholics. His father's parish was part of a movement of Catholic social service which included an intense social life with a religious ideal connected to daily existence. Miguel's father used to visit the prisoners, raise clothing for the poor, and help organize a picnic with the whole city on the holiday of May 1st, which included a Mass in the field and Italian songs. As Mahfoud recalls it, he grew up among community experience in the fundamental sense, in which religious experience was not detached from societal life, but linked to the world in a significant communal experience. Through this passionate and meaningful environment, he recalls his first years as an intense religious formation, as the faith passed on to him by his family found resonance in his heart.

Even though Miguel Mahfoud had a religious background in childhood and teenage years, when reaching university, the young adult had a significant faith crisis. Throughout his university years as a psychology student at Universidade de São Paulo (USP), during the military dictatorship in the 70s, a time of social conflict, polarization and the lack

of ability of Christians to navigate these troubling waters, Mahfoud realized how he had not been aware of the complex social conflicts of his times. He was then confronted with political complexities, the drama the country was facing and the incapacity of his faith to make sense of it all. His religious experience collapsed; Mahfoud started regarding Christianity as *naïveté*, childish innocence. As he recalls it, “when they used to invite me for church activities, I would decline it and say: I do not care, it does not interest me. I already know what it is all about. For me, faith was innocence and the world was truly something else.”⁵¹¹

The university environment at his time regarded religious experience as alienation; but during his third year in university, Mahfoud experienced a return to faith, one that would deepen the human and existential implications of believing in Christ. Through randomly passing by a group of Catholic students discussing a book from theologian Luigi Giussani, Mahfoud overhears the conversation. It suggested that the disciples followed Jesus not because of a set of rules or doctrines, but because Christ had become the center of their affective life. Their journey was from amazement to belief at the impact of the human life of Jesus. Through the influence of Giussani’s texts, Mahfoud realized that his skeptic position was not true, as Christianity did interest him highly.

Giussani’s proposal which impacted Mahfoud suggests that Christianity is to be understood primarily from the point of view of an existential encounter in human experience. Christianity is not simply a system of thought, set of rules, and doctrines that are assumed by abstract rationality. It is a living experience, a love story revealed through an amazing presence, the human life of Jesus. Therefore, there is a shift from ideas and concepts to down-to-earth human experience in Christian life. God reveals himself to humanity in history in such a way that the disciples were amazed at that exceptional presence. The disciples’ hearts found the presence that unexpectedly and clearly corresponded to their desire for beauty, truth and justice that constituted their existential needs (Giussani, 1998). At the heart of Giussani’s theology is a commitment to understanding experience in the whole of life, for “every earthly experience lived in the Spirit of Jesus, risen from the dead, blossoms in eternity.”⁵¹²

511. Mahfoud, interview.

512. Luigi Giussani, “In the simplicity of my heart I have gladly given you everything” in *Communion and Liberation: a movement in the Church*, ed. Davide Rondoni, trans. P. Stevenson and S. Scott. (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press), 173.

I would like to highlight two implications of Mahfoud's return to faith, namely, an existential understanding of faith and the posture of realism. The first is that Christian life is comprehended existentially as an authentic human position towards reality. Christianity is not a moralism, or merely a naïve belief in the afterlife, but an authentic human search for meaning that was met by a relational revelation from above, which requires taking a stand with consequences in earthly human life. The second is the posture of "realism." Reality itself evokes the encounter that activates authentic human dynamism. Since it is through an encounter with his people that God reveals himself, reality reminds and arouses what elicits not only the fundamental questions but also its authentic existential response. In addition, Mahfoud's conversion through reading Giussani also changed his methodological posture as a student. If human experience is central to that first encounter with Christ and the disciples, experience is not to be disregarded: it has value for dialoguing with the world, for taking a stand. He acquired a keen sense of recognizing prejudices and preconceptions that were not the product of a personal reflection in fine-tuning with experience.

With that methodological revolution on the way, an event in class became an intellectual turning point, one that would contain in a kernel his later academic interests and his main research questions in psychology. In a seminar class on social psychology, still as an undergraduate student, Miguel Mahfoud and his classmate Eduardo Coelho were to present the ideas of Erving Goffman's book *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*.⁵¹³ Goffman described these as closed social systems separated from the outside world organized by strict rules enforced by authority. Its "closure" or its total character is symbolized by the barrier to social relations with the outside world and by prohibitions that often include physical distance, such as high walls and barbed wire.⁵¹⁴ Since Goffman aims to question the institutional ideology of psychiatric hospitals, asylums are the main institution discussed. However, the first part of the book describes five kinds of "total institutions", of which psychiatric hospitals are only one. Goffman includes, among total institutions, prisons and monasteries. The book's Portuguese translation however, the one Mahfoud had access to, changed the book's title: it referred not only to asylums, as in English, but to prisons and convents as well.⁵¹⁵ The translation is indeed biased, adding a

513. Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (London: Penguin Books, 1987).

514. Goffman, *Manicômios, prisões e conventos*, 16.

515. *Ibid.*

different emphasis; but does not betray Erving Goffman's argument. He suggested that prisons have the same logic for depersonalization and domination as asylums; and throughout his research transferred this logic to religious consecrated lives of nuns and monks, centering his argument in quotations taken from the Rule of Benedict. In total institutions, there is a basic division between a large controlled group, which is the group of internees, and a small supervisory team. Goffman takes an element of truth (that monasteries indeed resemble a prison in the sense of distancing from worldly entanglements) but reinforces what is not present, namely, monasteries as oppressive places where personal needs are devalued. He interprets the Rule of Benedict's principle that monks are to give their possessions and private properties as a submission to a controlling abbot ruling over a total institution.⁵¹⁶

Goffman's argument was strongly rejected by Miguel Mahfoud, who in his recent return to faith had visited a monastery. Mahfoud was impressed with the communitarian vision of the nuns of the cloister monastery of *Nossa Senhora da Paz*.⁵¹⁷ His interaction with the convent gave him personal knowledge to reject the logic he was reading: Goffman's book was not appropriate to evaluate what he had just seen and experienced. The giving of possessions in a monastery was not an act of oppression from a controlling group, but a free response from the monks and nuns in their desire for a deeper communitarian life that overcomes individualism. But to question an acclaimed author would not only mean to reject a classic in social psychology, but also be going against the mainstream of the whole institution he was in. Most of his professors at USP regarded religious experience as alienation and a controlling power mechanism. Miguel Mahfoud would then start questioning if his environment did really understand authentic religious experience.

How did I dialogue with this book from the point of view of my experience? As my experience dialogued with what I was studying, we prepared a polemical paper that generated arguing in class, because religious experience was something we did not talk about, it was taboo, no one could speak positively of it in our context. And we said: we know a cloister monastery - and it has nothing to do with the depersonalization process for domination. We showed how Goffman takes a principle, transfers it to another institution and concludes about convents and monasteries without truly knowing them. He took excerpts from the rule of Benedict to make an argument, but without knowing the monks' experience; and concluded with his previous assumptions. But we had a situation, for the book was from an acclaimed

516. Goffman, *Manicômios, prisões e conventos*, 28-29.

517. Nossa Senhora da Paz monastery, or *Mosteiro Nossa Senhora da Paz* was founded in 1974, under the order of Saint Benedict, in Itapeverica da Serra in the state of São Paulo. The spirit of rule of Saint Benedict, which is summarized in the motto *pax*, peace, is captured by the monastery's name, "paz."

author and an undergraduate boy was arguing this book had a faulty argument.⁵¹⁸

The well-prepared paper with the suggestive title “Manicômios, Prisões ...mas não conventos!” (“Asylums, prisons,... but not convents!”) received an A grade. The academic work became known beyond the university itself and reached the monks. Miguel and Eduardo’s second paper, focused not on refuting Goffman but emphasizing the communitarian sense of monks, was published in Spanish in *Cuadernos Monásticos*, an Argentinian publication, having as main theme Saint Benedict and the development and integration of personality.⁵¹⁹ As their conclusion points out, “life in community, in which man is called to live and recognize the presence of another, overcoming individualist limitations, offers to the monk, who has the intimate desire to search for God, the possibility of a fully human fulfillment.”⁵²⁰ For Mahfoud, this experience was not merely affirming religious experience of monks as an authentic human community, but it became a methodological intellectual turning point. As Mahfoud recalls it, “a naïve audacity, but it was an intellectual turn that struck me for the rest of my life.”⁵²¹

I would like to suggest this “intellectual turn” has brought implications in different directions, which became golden threads to be explored further in his academic career. Firstly, it affirmed the value of personal experience for taking a stand. What he lived had elements to dialogue with the world: Goffman was to be questioned, not for bringing about a discussion on total institutions or questioning ideologies, but for a generalization that showed a detachment from reality. There was an absence of personal knowledge and of actual engagement with life that generated faulty argumentation. Mahfoud’s own experience had criteria for evaluating the symbolic life of nuns and carried relevant resources for dialogue. A lived experience, being in contact with real life, created the condition of possibility of hearing well the personal elaboration of another. In order to respect the subjectivity of an alterity, an attentive ear would need incarnation, or a lived experience with the other.

Secondly, religious experience was considered an authentic human experience, not necessarily a controlling alienation, but an existential choice with an affective dimension towards relationality. The nuns he had just gotten to know seemed free in their choice and

518. Mahfoud, interview.

519. Eduardo Rodrigues Coelho and Miguel Mahfoud, “San Benito y el desarrollo y la integración de la personalidad,” in *Cuadernos Monásticos* 53 (April-June 1980): 185-200.

520. Ibid., 199.

521. Mahfoud, interview.

lived in genuine communities; monasteries were neither like prisons nor asylums, but expressed an authentic choice of consecrated life. Religious life was not to be regarded as alienation and could not be reduced *a priori* into psychopathological categories.

Thirdly, as early as an undergraduate student, Mahfoud sensed Giussani's impact not only in his personal life of faith but in his academic production. Giussani is already quoted in this text, becoming not only a personal reference for Mahfoud's affirmative interpretation of religious experience, but also a point of reference for his academic work. The premises in *The Religious Sense*, realism, reasonableness and morality became compasses against the reductionisms of psychology. This event reinforced a journey on which Giussani becomes continuously more influential in his thinking. If we were to return to the river metaphor, Giussani's theological anthropology is the first stream in Mahfoud's thought.

Fourthly, the manner and mode of elaboration of one's experience becomes highly relevant. An institution, be it a totalitarian one or not, could not ultimately determine all the aspects of one's subjective life. There could have been controlling abbots throughout history; however, and primarily, there was a human, personal response: the monasteries were the place of subjects who had a rich interior life. Therefore researchers had to go beyond their own prejudices and capture the personal elaboration, to hear the intentions, the meanings in order to understand such a choice. With such emphasis, Mahfoud comprehended psychological work not as interpretation through psychopathological categories, but accompanying what emerges from the elaboration, to being available for the other as a facilitator to meaning coming from the elaboration of experience. This posture led him to phenomenology as an adequate method to respect subjective personal elaboration in psychological work.

3.2.2.2 Phenomenological affinities

The second stream in Mahfoud's thought, therefore, one that cannot be underestimated, is the influence of phenomenology. If one were to seek a location within the broad field of psychology, Miguel Mahfoud and EEP would be placed within the phenomenological psychology tradition. Phenomenology has been a movement concerned with the study of subjective experience, with roots in the work of Franz Brentano (1838-1917) and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), later becoming a diverse philosophical movement. In phenomenology, Mahfoud's influencers have been Gerard Van Der Leeuw's in his qualitative

methodological research, Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein. After some further preliminary material we will give a more detailed account of these three major influencers.

Phenomenology met Mahfoud's intentions to avoid biased outlooks in psychology as it seeks a descriptive study of whatever appears to consciousness, specifically in the manner in which it so appears. Phenomenology can be described as a way of seeing rather than a theoretical doctrine: for the observer, it involves the practice of taking a fresh, unprejudiced look, uncorrupted by scientific, religious or cultural presuppositions.⁵²² When applied in psychology, the method avoids being an interpretative outlook, and primarily strives for a descriptive perspective. It specifically focuses on the manner objects are constituted in and for subjects, focusing on the configuration and qualities of objects as they are experienced by the subject.⁵²³ The phenomenological approach pays particular attention to the living experience of meaning to the subject as it seeks to bring out the quintessence of experience.

Even for current times, phenomenology still offers an alternative to contemporary naturalistic accounts of consciousness and meaning.⁵²⁴ Phenomenology describes in its complexity the manifold layers of the experience of objectivity as it emerges at the heart of subjectivity.⁵²⁵ In doing so, it is critical of objectivism, in that it directs itself towards what appears but not to the relation of the appearing to the subject. The main dichotomy in modern philosophy phenomenologists seek to overcome is the subject-object distinction of epistemology, with its explanation of knowledge as representation of the object in the subject.⁵²⁶ Phenomenology attempts to think through the essential correlation between mind and world, focusing on the things as they show themselves to be, an uninterrupted intuition of the essence of the object.

As it enlarged and amplified its influence as a philosophical movement, Husserl reacted to misapprehensions of his own project. Heidegger, whom Husserl initially thought to be an accurate successor to his thinking, followed a different path. Heidegger had a different vision of phenomenology, and after having published his *Being and Time* of 1927, led many

522. Dermot Moran, introduction to *The Phenomenology Reader*, eds. Dermot Moran and Timothy Mooney (London: Routledge, 2002), 1.

523. *Ibid.*, 2.

524. *Ibid.*, 1.

525. *Ibid.*, 2.

526. *Ibid.*

to abandon Husserl for existential analysis of *Dasein*.⁵²⁷ Husserl used to highlight the importance of consciousness of the intentional connection between subject and object; but Heidegger's non-Husserlian version of phenomenology dropped reference to consciousness and intentionality and introduced the being in the world, *Dasein*, a venture in hermeneutics and fundamental ontology.⁵²⁸ Others, such as Edith Stein, were able not to break up with Husserl but still find a singular path and philosophical formulation. She organized her own work and developed it in the directions she herself was interested in, such as the work on empathy and dialoguing Thomism and phenomenology; but she also developed Husserl's realist phenomenology in original directions. Stein's phenomenology (and not Heidegger's) is Mahfoud's phenomenological preference.

Gerardus Van der Leeuw (1890-1950), a Dutch phenomenologist of religion, has been to Mahfoud a methodological inspiration for qualitative phenomenological research in social psychology. For Van der Leeuw, the work of phenomenology is to place in evidence and communicate how the lived experience of a phenomenon is constituted. It is an organization of reality by signification, which belongs partly to reality but also to someone who understands it personally, interweaving the objectivity of a phenomenon manifestation and the subjective elaboration. Through meaning, objectivity and subjectivity are joined. By reading Van der Leeuw, Mahfoud comes up with a method of empirical phenomenological research applied to the context of social psychology.⁵²⁹ Since the task of phenomenological method is taken as being in contact with another's experience and one's own, a mutual resounding, as musical instruments in fine tuning, phenomenological qualitative research psychology is then systematized under 7 stages.⁵³⁰ Van der Leeuw's phenomenology of

527. *Ibid.*, 4.

528. *Ibid.*, 17.

529. For an apt description of this methodology in applied qualitative psychological research under Mahfoud's perspective, see Roberta Vasconcelos Leite, *Pesquisa Fenomenológica de um Encontro Intercultural*, (Curitiba: Appris, 2016).

530. The research method by Van der Leeuw, appropriated by Mahfoud is the following: 1) Naming: delimits the phenomenon and gives the shape of one's approach; naming is part of defining of the research object; 2) Insertion: the interpretation of meaning happens when the lived becomes understood by the researcher. Meaning becomes clearer as the observer stands in unison with the perspective of the other. 3) Insert in brackets: to a deeper understanding of the meaning that is being attributed, the researcher temporarily suspends one's own pre-judgments, that would prevent to deepen the experience of knowing the object as it manifests itself. 4) Elucidation: seizing the connections of meaning, categories are defined that are grouped and incorporated, according to their similarities and differences. 5) Understanding: there is something of the object being communicated; and we lean over the object with a sympathetic look. 6) Continuous Rectification: concern to always confront with data the interpretation performed about the experience lived. 7) Reconstruction: the reconstruction of the lived experience happens so that the phenomenologist then acts to witness what is being shown.

religion dealt with features such as comparative history; Mahfoud, a psychologist, uses Van der Leeuw's inspiration in interviews for social psychology research. Through detailed interview analysis, the researcher could relate to another's experience by signaling "*o acontecer da pessoa*": by taking attentively that singular individual human experience, one captures what is essentially human. With attention and wonder, it signals a unique personal movement taking place.

Another influence in phenomenology is Edmund Husserl. One of the characteristics of Husserlian phenomenology is that, in response to Hume and Kant, experience is not the product of contingent associations, but it possesses necessary intrinsic characteristics. As Romano pointed out, Husserl advocated that these essential features are not subjective *per se* but express an objective subjectivity: they depend on the nature of the phenomena, and therefore have a general application to all of human experience, and are not due to the contingent singularities of the human psyche.⁵³¹

Husserl sought a philosophical path that was neither empiricist nor Kantian. He believed empiricism understood experience as a mosaic of sensations, which left the links formed in experience as fictions. The result of this approach would be phenomenalism, a dead end creating a vicious circle around sense data, with an uncertainty about the object and labelling experience as illusion.⁵³² Consequently, phenomenology raises the interrogation whether experience draws its meaning from language, and the answer is negative, that there are pre-linguistic features. The laws that direct the phenomena are not derived of higher functions of thought or linguistic games, but immanent to the domain of experience.⁵³³

In Husserlian perspective, firstly, experience is not structured only by contingent synthetic connections; experience itself possesses necessary characteristics. Secondly, these features are not subjective but objective, and they are directed by the very nature of the phenomena that possess them; they apply to all experience, and are not tributary to the contingent particularities of the human psyche.⁵³⁴ Experience presented itself with universal laws, grounded in the nature of its essential aspects:

the contents of experience, material things, sounds and colours, for example, also have their quid, their essence, and for every essence we can also find

531. Claude Romano, *At the Heart of Reason*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2015), 22.

532. *Ibid.*, 18

533. *Ibid.*, 15-16.

534. *Ibid.*, 22.

laws of essence that are true a priori, that possess an absolute universal validity. These essences and these laws of essence belong to what Husserl calls “a material a priori,” that is to say, an a priori that is grounded in the very nature of the contents of experience which exemplify it, in the very nature of space, sound and color, for example...it is an a posteriori truth that a given sound has resounded; but it is an a priori truth that a sound must have a timbre, pitch, and intensity, and that given three sounds of different pitch, one of them is always between the other two.⁵³⁵

What follows is that there is no conflict in the laws of essence suggested by phenomenology being at the same time *about* experience and *prior* to experience.⁵³⁶ As this *a priori* relies on the nature of the contents of experience, independent of the subject, carrying an irreducible objectivity, for “the *a priori* laws that are true of colors define what color is for any consciousness capable of experiencing it.”⁵³⁷

As described in his article *The person as subject of experience: contributions of phenomenology*, Miguel Mahfoud found in Edmund Husserl a non-reductive approach to experience that could fertilize psychology. According to Mahfoud, phenomenology found a way out of the frequent reductions in contemporary psychology. On the one hand, it can overcome the naturalistic reduction that takes into account only mechanical processes, neurophysiological, behavioral or psychological, which results in abolishing the subject of experience; and on the other hand, phenomenology criticizes the reduction of experience to symbolic concepts and language. Paradoxically, if the human subject is figured as the source of meaning, he is incapable of apprehending himself and the world as existing beyond himself.⁵³⁸ Husserl’s understanding of experience paved the way for Mahfoud’s EEP, which suggests that the criteria to understand these objective laws of experience are immanent and already present in human subjectivity, even though in a yet to be discovered and still blurred form of existential quest.

Throughout the later years, particularly under the guidance of Italian phenomenologist Angela Ales Bello, Edith Stein’s works have been of great interest to Mahfoud’s research. Her contributions have also brought insights to deepen the ideas of Elementary Experience in Psychology. I would like to highlight three main notions that have made Stein relevant to Mahfoud and EEP: a phenomenological reference against a

535. Ibid., 20-21.

536. Romano, 23

537. Ibid., 21.

538. Miguel Mahfoud and Marina Massimi, “A pessoa como sujeito da experiência: contribuições da fenomenologia,” *Memorandum* 14 (2008): 59.

reductionist view of the human person in psychology; the idea of a “personal centre”, and human openness to transcendence as an inherent part of human dynamism.

Firstly, Stein is a phenomenologist resisting reductionisms when approaching the human person in psychology. Stein lived in times when the psychology born in the nineteenth century was being established, heir of a naturalist and positivist perspective, which resulted in a dualistic body-mind, matter-spirit split approach. It did not emphasize the unity of the person in a holistic perspective, and was unable to hold the whole while at the same time integrating different parts. In her autobiography, Edith Stein narrates her disappointment with the psychological science when she had attended classes during her university education in Breslau. This discontent seems to have been a major factor in her move to the University of Gottingen to attend Edmund Husserl’s classes seeking an alternative psychology. If Stein experienced disenchantment with the emerging scientific psychology, she also sought deeper ways to ground the knowledge of the human being.⁵³⁹

Once Stein embraced phenomenology, she understood the constitution of the human person using an investigation without prejudices for the manner things appear to us, or not excluding anything *a priori*.⁵⁴⁰ Phenomenological method does not want theory about things, but it seeks an immediate intuition, a reflexive revelation (*aufweis*) of the essences. It is a simple cognitive attitude, in a sense submissive to the object that can reach the essential structure of things.⁵⁴¹ As Stein compared phenomenology with the idealist, psychoanalyst and the existential Heidegger’s perspective of her days, she found these perspectives wanting and cherished phenomenology as more attuned to an analysis of experience.⁵⁴² Stein compares the results obtained by her research with the conceptions proper to theories of scientific psychology, questioning the epistemologies and worldviews underlying them. Stein questioned the body-mind dualism, and the lack of a holistic view of the person; and since these views were built in opposition to scholasticism, under a scientific idea of positivism, Stein also sought to bring the philosophical anthropology of Thomism to dialogue with phenomenology.

539. Marina Massimi, “Compreender a Estrutura da Pessoa: diálogo entre fenomenologia e filosofia aristotélico-tomista, por Edith Stein,” in *Edith Stein e a psicologia: teoria e pesquisa*, ed. Miguel Mahfoud and Marina Massimi, (Belo Horizonte: Artesã Editora, 2013), 101-102.

540. Éric de Rus, *A visão educativa de Edith Stein: aproximação a um gesto antropológico integral*, trans. Isabelle Sanchis (Belo Horizonte: Artesã Editora, 2015), 28.

541. *Ibid.*, 28-30.

542. Massimi, “Compreender a Estrutura da Pessoa,” 102.

As Mahfoud and Massimi suggest, classic phenomenology, and more specifically Stein's phenomenology, proposes a method that allows the apprehension of psychological phenomena without reducing them to dimensions (such as bodily or spiritual) while at the same time considering the interaction between them. Its consequence is that phenomenology is able to avoid reductionist tendencies and at the same time open up psychology to interdisciplinary work.⁵⁴³ In a lecture to the American Psychological Association, Gordon Allport (1897-1967) argued that psychology has to seek the human person in its entirety as its study object, rather than reducing the person to its processes, such as memory, perception or cognitive aspects. In Allport's perspective, a psychology of the person would have to be constructed in dialogue, among others elements, with Aquinas' idea of *intentio* and phenomenology.⁵⁴⁴ Even though Allport did not use Stein as his reference, this is a sign that Stein can be placed as a privileged thinker to contribute to bring missing elements to the discussions in the field.

Secondly, Mahfoud and EEP draw from Stein the idea of a "personal centre". Stein affirms both the unity of the person in its body-soul character and a personal centre from which truth emanates from within, an interior midpoint to be heard, known, a source of authenticity. So this *nucleus* is not being shaped or produced by the subject himself, but rather it is formative force that points to a direction, forming humanity according to the image already present in the soul.⁵⁴⁵ Consequently, since there is a teleological dimension, the human task is subjectivity formation, an education that is connected to this personal centre. Stein suggests a holistic formation of the person based on one's interiority, and at the same time education in Stein is verticalization of the human being towards transcendence.⁵⁴⁶

Thirdly, Stein, Ales Bello and Mahfoud favour a phenomenology that privileges the human openness to transcendence as an intrinsic part of human dynamism. The objective characteristics of experience are imprinted and expressed in the human quest for the most significant realities of existence. In that regard, they echo a critique on Heidegger: Ales Bello suggests that Stein can give to psychology an anthropological foundation in a way Heidegger

543. Miguel Mahfoud and Marina Massimi, "Edith Stein e a psicologia: a fenomenologia de Edith Stein fertiliza o campo da psicologia no Brasil," introduction to *Edith Stein e a psicologia: teoria e pesquisa*, ed. Miguel Mahfoud and Marina Massimi (Belo Horizonte: Artesã Editora, 2013), 16.

544. Paulo C. Castelo Branco and Miguel Mahfoud, "Revisitando as relações entre tomismo e fenomenologia conforme o pensamento de Edith Stein," in *Edith Stein e a psicologia: teoria e pesquisa* (Belo Horizonte: Artesã Editora, 2013), 144-145.

545. Miguel Mahfoud, *Memorandum*, 162.

546. Éric De Rus, *A visão educativa de Edith Stein*, 28-30.

cannot, for he did not take into account an anthropology of the human being in its entirety.⁵⁴⁷ To sum up, by receiving influences of phenomenologists such as Stein and applying its insights to psychological work, Miguel Mahfoud found an ontological tradition of phenomenology that contemplates the human person and rejects reductionisms in psychology, fosters a phenomenological approach with an emphasis on an objective subjectivity directed towards the authentic centre of the human person and privileges the dynamism as openness to transcendence.

3.2.2.3 Relevant contributors to Mahfoud's academic formation in psychology

As both Giussani's theological anthropology and the authors in the phenomenology movement have been major contributions to Mahfoud's thought, it is worth mentioning a third stream, the influence of some academics in psychology. This impact is brought firstly by the interaction with professors at Universidade de São Paulo (USP), which brought implications to how EEP would be organized in the future. Some of these intellectuals at the prestigious Brazilian university of USP conveyed singular contributions to the formation of his early academic life and brought implications to his later journey. Among them are to be highlighted the names of Rachel Léa Rosenberg, Geraldo Paiva and Ecléa Bosi.

Throughout his academic journey, Mahfoud's main interest in psychology has not been the psychopathological elements of mental health, but how, even amidst suffering, one is able to elaborate inner life in order to live meaningfully in ordinary, common existence. One of his central research questions has been how a human person "*elabora a experiência*" (elaborates experience), an inner work (labour) by which meaning and significance are expanded and particularized. The professor that first helped him on his quest was the Belgian-born Rachel Léa Rosenberg (1931-1987). Rosenberg was one of the main promoters of humanistic approach or client-centered therapy in Brazil. Rosenberg worked on advancing the thought of the North-American psychologist Carl Rogers as well as organizing his personal visits to the country. Rosenberg brought to Counselling Psychology a mode of psychological help called "plantão psicológico" which influenced Miguel Mahfoud's clinical stance. Rather than the formal process of going through a waiting time for psychotherapy taking sometimes

⁵⁴⁷. Angela Ales Bello, preface to *Edith Stein e a psicologia: teoria e pesquisa* (Belo Horizonte: Artesã Editora, 2013), 13.

days or weeks, it focused on giving instant psychological care in a way that allowed a privileged timing for elaboration of experience, which is the time one decides to seek help. Modeled after emergency medicine in hospitals, which receives patients in need of immediate care, Rosenberg (and later Mahfoud) learned to work within institutions to create a system of psychological care in which psychologists would be available to welcome people at the moment of their need. *Plantão Psicológico* was also a proposal of a prevention resource in mental health, as a way of providing psychological help to people who would not necessarily go to psychotherapy. The counselling sessions were not so much based on what the psychologist interpreted, but centered on the client, on what emerges from the person who is not only a passive receiver, but the subject of the elaboration of experience. Even though Mahfoud himself did not embrace Rosenberg's humanist psychology as his own approach, this mode of counselling psychology through "plantão psicológico" which privileged the elaboration of experience would be later reproduced by Mahfoud in different contexts, such as schools and universities. Later, as a professor of psychology at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), Mahfoud became the supervisor of a similar service to the university community; it received public recognition of its positive impact in the university environment, particularly in the prevention of mental health disorders among university students. As this service started in 2006 at UFMG, after Mahfoud had already proposed Elementary Experience in Psychology, the approach became the theoretical grid underlying *Plantão Psicológico* at the university. At the same time, it became a superb place to verify the applicability of EEP in counselling psychology.

Another important contributor has been Geraldo José de Paiva, a researcher in the fields of social psychology and psychology of religion, who became Mahfoud's supervisor during his graduate years. During Mahfoud's master's degree, Paiva suggested that Miguel already possessed a promising phenomenological approach and reflection that could be developed and nurtured. He also paved the way for Mahfoud's PhD thesis, a phenomenological study about religious experience in the feast of "*Folia de Reis*", in times when religion was not a welcomed research topic among social psychology researchers at the University of São Paulo.⁵⁴⁸ Mahfoud's academic journey had marks of an explorer and

548. Miguel Mahfoud, *Folia de Reis: festa raiz: psicologia e experiência religiosa na Estação Ecológica Juréia-Itatins* (São Paulo: Companhia Ilimitada, 2003).

pathfinder in the intersection between the study of religious experience and academic research in psychology, but it was Paiva who fostered and encouraged Mahfoud to pursue his path.

Among these influencers the name of Ecléa Bosi is to be highlighted. She was one of the most significant thinkers in the contemporary Brazilian social psychology, author of the classic work *Memória e Sociedade: lembrança de velhos*.⁵⁴⁹ This classic work in Brazilian social psychology was the product of her interview with eight elders in the city of São Paulo on the topic of their memories and narratives. Her interviews were marked by an empathic posture and her writing combined poetic writing while maintaining methodologically consistent work. Bosi was a dialogical, integrative thinker; but also an evocative presence, able to inspire her students through a teaching style that combined demanding conceptual work, poetic inspiration and a peculiar low voice. Her influence marked Mahfoud's academic attitude, which embraced diverse sources and placed them in conversation. Furthermore, his teaching style seemed to have resembled hers, as students considered his presence in class captivating, one that provoked students through arts and poetry intertwined with conceptual work, pointing central aspects of human experience in a dialogical manner.

From Ecléa Bosi, Mahfoud inherited an academic posture that was not only focused on the transmission of content, but on bringing about a relational and personal response. In that framework, teaching becomes more than informing, as words provoke and change. As in Augustine's treatment of language in *Confessions*, explaining that words do perform and not only inform, Mahfoud has become a "presença que mobiliza" or a presence that mobilizes and evokes the human dynamism of his hearers. The result of this academic attitude was quite unexpected. In his classes about psychology and the religious sense in an undergraduate course in psychology in 2005, the students asked Mahfoud to deepen their participation in class, not only for receiving a better grade, but also for giving a personal response to the content. Student response included both academic interest in continuing studying those contents, but also unexpected artistic expressions such as poetry and singing. Considering the positive response and the request of those students to continue deepening the reflection, Mahfoud offered in the following term the first class in the topic of Elementary Experience in Psychology. Consequently, rather than a ready-made theory, EEP was born in

549. Ecléa Bosi, *Memória e sociedade: lembranças de velhos* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1999).

the interaction and provocation it brought to the students around, who demanded from Mahfoud a continuation of his first inspiring classes on psychology and the religious sense.

Throughout the years, Mahfoud continuously realized that the anthropological elements contained in the book *The Religious Sense* and the way his classes presented its psychological consequences had a significant impact on his audience. While still in São Paulo in the early 90s he started a group which sought to discuss the three premises of *The Religious Sense* and bring its implications for psychology. This group grew in the realization that in it there was a foundation for a common anthropology that could be acknowledged by all and not only for those who had faith or certain values. It could also facilitate an opening to religious experience without guiding it towards a certain doctrine. Starting from a common humanity in search for love, truth, beauty, justice, it did not restrain religious experience into the reductionisms and prejudices of psychologism. In this new approach, religious experience was not to be considered as naïve assimilation into a system of belief. Religiosity, present in all cultures as a human universal phenomenon, made sense as searching humanity elaborated its quest for transcendence.

While Giussani's perspective emphasizes the human being as in major need to affirm its connectedness with revelation, Mahfoud's adaptation of elementary experience to psychology places the accent in a different locus. As the approach is not theological but psychological, Mahfoud intentionally avoids responding Christologically to anthropology as Giussani does. Mahfoud focuses on the dynamism of elementary experience as a relational center within, which at the same time includes the original impetus of the evidences and exigencies, a personal center that in the encounter with reality needs to be respected and cannot be silenced. These hints to humanity's original dynamism can be accessed in self-observation and therapeutic work. Therefore, fundamental is attention to one's discerning criterion, elementary experience. As a psychologist within the phenomenological approach, Mahfoud is more interested in connecting and accessing elementary experience, which is also described as the heart, and through it draw consequences for psychological work. The focus does not to rely on a final answer that is given from above as in Giussani, but on how the heart's restlessness is a condition of possibility to process and elaborate one's inner life as a person in the world. While Giussani proposes personal investigation and awareness tending to highlight the disproportion between "the end of investigation and the depth of the

question”,⁵⁵⁰ Mahfoud’s rendering is that the disproportion is an invitation to acknowledge and respond to experience with a criterion that is given to me, the core evidences and exigencies, which are a gift to a relational subjectivity that raises the possibility to connect oneself to the core of life.

One last author to be regarded as relevant to Mahfoud’s academic journey is the Austrian psychiatrist Victor Frankl (1905-1997), founder of logotherapy. As a survivor of concentration camps and later originator of a psychotherapeutic approach, Frankl realized the importance of meaning to build up resilience in order to structure life after trauma. Frankl regarded the spiritual dimension as intrinsic to the human psychological condition and linked it to the never-ending quest for meaning. The book completed in 1946, after surviving four different concentration camps, was translated into English as *Man’s Search for Meaning*,⁵⁵¹ even though the literal title is actually *Trotzdem Ja Zum Leben Sagen: Ein Psychologe Erlebt das Konzentrationslager (Saying Yes to Life in Spite of Everything: A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp)*. Frankl’s work calls for the importance of a sense of meaning in the face of extreme and painful situations as it gives reason to continue living.

Frankl’s logotherapy focuses on the meaning of human existence, as well as the personal search towards it. Through Frankl, Mahfoud realized that psychological work is called to help activate a structural force that comes from meaning and which is already at work in the subject as one elaborates about difficult experiences. Frankl dislocates the emphasis from an objective fact to how one particularizes and responds meaningfully and personally about what has happened, a major interest of Mahfoud’s phenomenological standpoint. Reading Frankl in dialogue with Giussani, Mahfoud highlights that the need for meaning constitutes the fabric of inner life and is never additional or peripheral, but can install an authentic response to life if accompanied by a significant elaboration. Mahfoud, who has been teaching Frankl throughout the years, has found in logotherapy an inspiration to EEP, as search for meaning highlights an activating force that is already moving the dynamism of the person.

By way of conclusion, we can affirm that Mahfoud’s interest has been in the human person as the subject of the elaboration of experience and what is derivative from it; the result of personal elaboration is a position in the world as authenticity, as originality. With

550. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 50.

551. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, trans. Ilse Lasch (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989).

that main research question, Mahfoud sought to comprehend psychological work not as professional interpretation based in previous psychopathological categories, nor as a detached interpreter placing the patient's experience in a theoretical previous grid; but the emphasis is shifted to accompanying what emerges from that elaboration, to being present as a catalyst to the wealth of meaning in the elaboration of experience. Through *Elementary Experience in Psychology*, Mahfoud found a relational and existential approach that was able to adapt the phenomenological method including Giussani's notion of elementary experience into psychological research and clinical intervention. *Elementary Experience in Psychology* is not to be regarded as a reproduction of a previous author nor a planned theoretical new approach, but the culmination of a personal engagement that sought a revision of the reductionisms of psychology. In that process, it embraced an interdisciplinary approach, a psychology in dialogue with theological anthropology and phenomenological psychology. The emerging picture resembles a narrow river being led towards confluent streams, and by that encounter, arrives at its confluence with the sea.

Elementary Experience in Psychology, as an heir of phenomenological psychology in the interface with a concept of theological anthropology, carries the descriptive rather than the interpretative emphasis: it involves the practice of taking a fresh, unprejudiced look, seeking the fundamental and essential features of human experience in and of the world.⁵⁵² In the context of counselling psychology and psychotherapy, rather than fitting a client in a previous theory, the methodological posture of the therapist is changed: it reduces one's own point of view in order to cultivate a sense of mystery towards the dynamism of another person. Rather than explaining, the therapist in EEP starts from the phenomenological attitude – not an absorbed outlook, but an orientation of open-mindedness in order to enter someone else's world and empathize with it.

When EEP combines a phenomenological attitude with the purpose of attuning to the dynamic essential features of experience, the importance of contemplative listening, one that is responsive to mystery, is reinforced. The therapist first asks, "who is this person I am staring at, who I still do not know and do not comprehend, but is offering me a window into her interior life, by which I am called to recognize its elementary experience dynamism? In such a posture, one is more likely to cultivate attentive listening, for recognizing elementary

552. Dermot Moran, 1.

experience is like responsively learning a song that we roughly know and attuning to its melodic dynamic.

3.3 The heart in *Confessions*

It is not words the Lord wants of you, but your hearts.

(*Sermo*. 91.3)

In the vast land of Augustinian writings, the bishop of Hippo is known to have left over five million words to be read. Amidst such massive writing production, one of these compasses for “sea navigation” is the anthropological term describing the center of the human person, the heart. The term is perhaps undervalued compared to other central concepts such as grace or sin, as these gave rise to polemics and theological debates throughout the centuries. Some of Augustine’s ideas have been “akin to theological dynamite”⁵⁵³ and received much attention due to the debates they have raised. Nevertheless, the less controversial but highly significant Latin word *cor*, the equivalent of heart in English, is counted in more than 8000 uses, which demonstrates the crucial position of the concept in the whole of his *corpus*. The frequency of the idea increases as his thought moves from Platonic influences to an ever-increasing Semitic and biblical understanding of the person. In the writings prior to his baptism, heart is mentioned once; and between baptism and ordination, a total of 45 times.⁵⁵⁴ The use of *cor* is reasonably enlarged and improved from ordination onwards, as his work as a pastor-theologian required from him a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. Heart is arguably the most important anthropological term in the Old Testament and the notion was ripe to be picked up by Augustine, who finds in the Scriptures and in the psalms an appropriate notion to describe how God was touching and transforming his interior life.

Confessions, as a personal response to experienced grace in form of biblical psalmed language, has as one of its golden threads the *cor* and its dramatic pilgrimage. The heart is set on a journey from restlessness to stillness, from being darkened to being lightened up by its Creator. If God is the goal of life, the human heart as such is not the destination; nonetheless, one cannot attain the goal or arrive at the end point except by returning to one’s own heart. *Cor*, therefore, exerts a relevant position in Augustinian anthropology as the

553. James Wetzel, “Snares of Truth: Augustine on Free Will and Predestination,” in *Augustine and his Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, ed. Robert Dodaro and George P. Lawless, (London: Routledge, 2000), 124.

554. Edgardo de la Peza, “El Significado de ‘cor’ en San Agustín,” *Revue D’Etudes Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 7, no. 4 (1961): 343.

personal center of cognition and affection, the meeting point between immanence and transcendence, the teleological driving force and the dynamism that energizes immanence towards that transcendent end. In *Confessions*, as nowhere else in his works, the personal God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Augustine is “the God of my heart” (*Conf.* 4.2.3, 6.1.1).

By writing a confession to God in the presence of others, Augustine found a manner of putting truth into practice, “truth it is that I want to do, in my heart by confession in your presence, and with my pen before many witnesses” (*Conf.* 10.1.1). *Confessio/confiteri*, which comprises the corresponding association of confession of sin and praise, is the loving responsive language to the God who pierced his heart with his word (*Conf.* 10.6.8). At the start of book ten, Augustine announces that he will reflect on the act and purposes of confessing, particularly as he is aware of his audience, “To You, before witnesses” (*Conf.* 10.1.1). The bishop of Hippo is pastorally interested in the hearts of his audience, particularly to those who will pay a friendly ear to him. The three main actors in the confession are, therefore, God, Augustine and his listeners. The Augustinian confession seeks to arouse the hearer’s heart, stirring hope and forbidding it to fall into despair (*Conf.* 10.3.4).

This heart arousal is provoked by confession, which is a voluntary act of renunciation of his will towards another, uttering a speech that gives back to God the praise as an echo of this new inner reality given to him by grace. This confessional intent is to affect the hearts of the hearers in a journey to God. Augustine will seek to arouse the hearer’s hearts in all the three parts of *Confessions*, the biographical, books 1-9, then self-examination and repentance in book 10 and finally the exegesis of Genesis in books 11-13. At first, from books one to nine, Augustine invites his audience to journey with him in the description of his past biography. As they hear about Augustine’s spiritual voyage, the listeners are able to attune their hearts with “hymns and laments”, which becomes a road of confession in them as they respond to Augustine’s life,

To such people I will disclose myself: let them sigh with relief over my good actions, but with grief over my evil deeds. The good derive from you and are your gift; the evil are my sins and your punishments. Let them sigh with relief over the one and with grief over the other, and let both hymns and laments ascend into your presence from the hearts of my brethren” (*Conf.* 10.4.5).

In the confession of repentance and self-examination in book ten, Augustine is not looking anymore at his past, but to his present and to the rest of his life in the future. He is

now living a mature life of a middle-aged man, but he does not cover his inner struggles. Deep within, the heart of a converted Christian is also set to be tempted (*Conf.* 10.39.64). Augustine knows the temptations of a divided inner life, and begs for a life of single-hearted service (*Conf.* 10.35.56). Garry Wills calls it *Confessions*' "hinge", on which he is preparing the readers in a kind of ritual cleansing for the last part, the interpretation of deep mysteries of Genesis.⁵⁵⁵ In the last three books (eleven to thirteen) Augustine carries an understanding of his conversion within the logic of the creational narrative. His goal is the study of Scripture and he discusses the opening verses of Genesis in three different books, one about God the Father, creation and time, in book eleven; then God the Son, the origin, book twelve; and the Spirit, bond of love, the protector and consummator of our union with God in book thirteen. Even though his life is only a dim shadow in the mystery of Trinitarian life, in which he is invited to participate, his narrative is part of a greater story of creation and redemption. His life secure in God's healing and the promises of God's Word,

O Lord, who are mercifully disposed toward all my sins, heal all my ailments too. And I know you will, for you will rescue my life from decay, crown me in pity and mercy, and overwhelmingly satisfy my desire with good things; and my youth will be renewed like an eagle's. We are already saved, but in hope, and in patience we look forward to the fulfillment of your promises. Let everyone who has the aptitude listen to your spoken word within; for my part I will begin with confidence from your word in scripture, and cry out, how magnificent are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have created all things. This wisdom is no other than the Beginning, and in that Beginning you have made heaven and earth. (*Conf.* 11.9.11)

Augustine is most himself at the level of his heart, but he realizes that some will not be in tune with his interior life. Not all of his audience can understand and access or even lay ears to his heart, for "people who have read my works or know me only by hearsay. None of these have laid their ears to my heart, though it is only there that I am whoever I am" (*Conf.* 10.3.4). Nevertheless, miscomprehension does not stop his endeavor, for he wants the friendly ear to embark in the same affective journey.

3.3.1 Reading *Confessions* through the heart

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage (Psalm 84:5)

555. Wills, *Augustine's Confessions*, 98-99.

The heart journey is the trademark of Augustinian spirituality.⁵⁵⁶ Augustine portrays a spiritual adventure, the dynamism that places the interior life in motion and the *cor* that is pierced by the Word of God which is addressed in love. In each book Augustine reports the state of his heart in pilgrimage, in a path with obstacles, cloudiness and transformations. In *Confessions*, Augustine does not offer a merely factual description of his life events, but conveys a narrative of rich symbolical meaning in which his life participates in the larger drama of salvation. Peter Brown suggests that the story of his *affectus*, the growth of his heart, is the fundamental topic of Augustine's *Confessions*.⁵⁵⁷ If *Confessions* is a pilgrimage that "relives the drama of sin and salvation, in the form of a journey to God",⁵⁵⁸ a theological construct with layers of meaning that surpass the factual description of events, *Confessions* can be read through the point of view of heart progression within that larger story. This section surveys Augustine's use of *cor* from book one until book thirteen trying to capture its importance according to the development of his journey. The purpose is to trace how the heart metaphor is utilized according to each book, seeking to establish a picture that is compatible to Augustine's own intents when using *cor* in *Confessions*. Its objective is not to bring an extensive study of the historical, literary and theological elements present in the work, but simply journey with Augustine paying special attention to the significant moments when *cor* is present. Reading *Confessions* "through the heart" conveys a sense of unity and coherence in an apparently disjointed work of thirteen books, helping one to make sense of the whole, for if the narrative ends in book nine, the discussion about the heart runs from the first until the final paragraph. Furthermore, reading *Confessions* through the heart brings consequences towards a realistic account of the human interior life, and its implications will be discussed at the end of this section.

3.3.1.1 *Cor* in *Confessions*

In the *Confessions*, the term *cor* occurs 175 times: from beginning to the end, in the first and last paragraphs, *cor* frames the whole of the work, being recaptured again in the invocative paragraphs that start at least 6 books, as in *cor nostrum* (*Conf.* 1.1.1), *recordari*

556. Martin, *Our Restless Heart*, 41.

557. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 163.

558. Garry Wills, *Augustine's Confessions: a Biography* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2011),

(*Conf.* 2.1.1), *cor*, (*Conf.* 5.1.1), *cordis mei* (*Conf.* 6.1.1), *cor meum* (*Conf.* 7.1.1), *cor*, *recorder* (*Conf.* 8.1.1), *cor meum* (*Conf.* 9.1.1), *corde meo* (*Conf.* 10.1.1), *cor meum* (*Conf.* 12.1.1).⁵⁵⁹

In the biographical part of *Confessions* (books 1-9), Augustine uses *cor* to describe and clarify the state of his interior life, becoming a grid through which one understands the narrative arch. Starting from the prologue, in which some important themes are already mentioned (greatness of God, wisdom, lowliness of humanity, desire) the heart is announced as the object of a dramatic restless pilgrimage towards its final goal. Its objective, however, is to return to its original beginning, “because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you” or *Fecisti nos ad te, Domine, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*” (*Conf.* 1.1.1). Heart restlessness, a continuous unquiet state of searching, drives Augustine on a quest for the happy life.

The prologue illustrates a Christian adaptation of the Platonic homelessness and wandering of the soul, adding to it the originality of a biblical understanding of heart, placing relationality at the center of the interior life. For Plato, the soul is related to a divine element, the perfect soul and body; but since it wanders in the region of dissimilarity, a material realm far from the divine, it starts again desiring the perfection. Even though Plotinus presupposes the soul’s divinity, Neo-Platonists believed the outward movement led to a loss of identity and fragmentation, as the scattered self was lost in the dispersion that drives the soul away from the One, the source of unity. As in Platonism, the restlessness that sets Augustine’s path has a negative element, an existential instability, an inner distention (*Conf.* 11.29.39) that struggles against a complete devotion to the good.⁵⁶⁰ *Inquietas* signifies unbalance and unstableness if the heart is no longer positioned towards its goal, wavering between *foris* (outside) and *intus* (inner self). But Platonic thought is not the only source for Augustine’s understanding of the heart, for in *Confessions* Augustine does not portray an archetypal or cosmic soul. It is the journey of the heart (in biblical terms) in pilgrimage, and its language of a relational quest depicts both partners seeking an encounter, the Creator and the restless human heart. Restlessness has, consequently, a positive connotation of a force driving humanity towards that encounter. On one side, the grace of God is actively seeking to draw the hearts of his created beings; on the other the *cor inquietum* restlessly seeks its origin but

559. Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 182. Jager has counted *cor* occurring 188 times, while our count suggests a different number.

560. Bright, “Book Ten,” 157.

still lacks the explicit knowledge that leads it to repose. Restlessness is a God-given resource towards remembrance which fosters homecoming, “because our souls were deeply disquieted... we remembered you” (*Conf.* 13.12.13). As Dupont and Walraet argue,

It is a God created restlessness that keeps us from abandoning the path that we need to take. This restlessness keeps us from losing sight of our Destination. It causes us to move on from our self-created rest. It is actually a positive restlessness. This restlessness is fed, according to Augustine, through the consciousness of our insignificance (a part of your creation) our mortality, and our sinfulness. The rest that we hope to find in God means two things: the abolishment of our moral shortcomings or sinfulness, and the abolishment of our mortality.⁵⁶¹

Moving towards the discussion of heart in the narrative, in book one Augustine describes his first infancy, *infantia* (*Conf.* 1.6.7.-1.8.13). This is a time of inarticulate sounds and gestures, when he was unable to make precise the thoughts of his *cor* (*Conf.* 1.8.13). Even though words are not coherent, it can already be a stage when one expresses selfishly one’s own desires, as in food cravings (*Conf.* 1.7.11). Then Augustine moves to boyhood, *pueritia* (*Conf.* 1.9.14-1.20.31) in which the first schooling years are portrayed as an ambivalent stage, for the words are precious vessels, but his teachers use them for self-centered desires, “I am blaming not the words, which are finely-wrought, precious vessels, but the wine of error mixed for us in them by teachers who are drunk themselves” (*Conf.* 1.16.26). The roots of his divided language are established, a struggle between the right use of words and communication for self-serving infatuation. Looking retrospectively, Augustine looks negatively at the state of his heart during his first school years, “if I was caught out and accused of cheating I was more apt to lose my temper than to admit it. Is this boyhood innocence? No, Lord, it is not; hear me, dear God, it is not. These same sins grow worse as we grow older” (*Conf.* 1.19.30). Book one also introduces the idea of inner senses of the heart or *interiore sensu* (*Conf.* 1.20.31), such as in *aures cordis*, or the ears of the heart (*Conf.* 1.5.5). The primary sense of a heart is hearing, for Augustine recounts the story how his heart was unresponsive and deafened to God’s truth (*Conf.* 7.1.2). The heart listens to God, for he is the one who speaks in it and promises great things.

In book two, Augustine describes his own heart using the metaphor of a field being sowed. In this heart cultivation, God is the owner of the field (*Conf.* 2.3.5) but many

561. Dupont and Walraet, “Augustine on the Heart,” 53.

kinds of seeds are planted. Augustine is being distanced from God's good seeds of love and is cultivating pride, *superbia*. His education reinforces the self-centeredness of his "intellectual cultivation" as his parents strive for the best education possible even beyond their means. Augustine's father is concentrated on his son's intellectual development, forgetting the heart, "no such efforts were made on behalf of the children of many other citizens who were far richer; yet all the while this same father of mine was unconcerned about how I would grow up for you, and cared little that I should be chaste, provided I was intellectually cultivated" (*Conf.* 2.3.5). Augustine depicts his attachment to earthly goods as sowing sterile seeds to his grief that wearied him in restlessness (*Conf.* 2.2.2). Puberty was a time of cloudy confusion, for the heart could not distinguish between the fog of lust and the light of love (*Conf.* 2.2.2). Augustine placed the pursuit of happiness in the satisfaction of his own passions, and lust revealed itself insatiable, because the desire that accompanies it is always greater than the objects that it intends, leading him to continually renew the objects of his affections.⁵⁶² Since the desire for love could not be fulfilled, Augustine is constantly directed to renew his preferences.⁵⁶³ By not being stable enough, the objects of his desire ended up in unfruitful suffering.

It is not a coincidence that, in a book in which the heart is compared to a field, the state of heart misery is expressed when stealing pears. Leo Ferrari suggests that Augustine's life of sin finds symbolically its fullest expression in the theft of pears. As it was in Eden when stealing the forbidden fruit, there is a dominance of evil in an epochal way from which other evils follow.⁵⁶⁴ The deeper theological meaning should not be missed: humanity wants to imitate God in governing the rules, to substitute the field owner, to replace the vineyard master. His story is a symbolic portrayal to demonstrate how original sin is also enacted in his life. Augustine does not accept being the field but in prideful rebellion establishes himself as the owner; but since he is not the field's rightful landlord, the fruits are wasted and the pears are thrown to the pigs. The field of his heart is haunted by the sin of Adam, re-enacting in his own small story the fall of humankind.⁵⁶⁵ William Green argues that, if the fear of the Lord is

562. Antonio Pieretti, "Doctrina Antropológica Agostiniana," in *El pensamiento de San Agustín para el hombre de hoy: la filosofía agostiniana*, ed. Jose Oroz Reta (Valencia: EDICEP, 1998) V. 1. 335.

563. Pieretti, "Doctrina Antropológica Agostiniana," 334.

564. Leo Charles Ferrari, "The Arboreal Polarisation in Augustine's Confessions," *Revue D'Etudes Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 25, no. 1-2 (1979): 39. Ferrari also points out that there are two powerful climaxes related to the arboreal image, one the domination of sin expressed in the theft of pears and the other the grace that overcomes sin in the garden conversion of book eight.

565. Wills, *Augustine's Confessions*, 32-33.

the beginning of wisdom, pride is its opposite, the beginning of sin.⁵⁶⁶ For Augustine, the outcome of pride is sin, and as it was in Genesis, catastrophic for his heart's health, "look upon this heart of mine, on which you took pity in its abysmal depths, enable my heart to tell you now what it was seeking in this action which made me bad for no reason, in which there was no motive for my malice except malice. The malice was loathsome, and I loved it. I was in love with my own ruin, in love with decay" (*Conf.* 2.4.9).

In the description of his life from book three onwards, Augustine portrays himself as blind to the highest good in a pursuit of cultivating a successful worldly career and aspiring his own honor and pleasure. He searched for happiness in transient things and did not find rest until his eyes opened to the Creator and he learned to love the God of his heart.⁵⁶⁷ As early as in book three we hear of Augustine's first movements of returning to his heart, which is also his interior self (*Conf.* 3.6.10). In the pursuit to go beyond his divided self, his encounter with Cicero's *Hortensius* in the same book three sets him in a path of love for wisdom; in the pursuit of philosophy as a road to happiness, his heart experienced a kind of proto-conversion, "all my hollow hopes suddenly seemed worthless, and with unbelievable intensity my heart burned with longing for the immortality that wisdom seemed to promise. I began to rise up, in order to return to you" (*Conf.* 3.4.7). As Brachtendorf suggests, if in the first book Augustine portrays human search for false goods as vanity (*vanitas*) and the second book exposed the sickness of pride (*superbia*), then in the third this desire for God and wisdom represents his first step to conversion,⁵⁶⁸ even though at this time he adheres to the Manicheans but not to the Catholic Church.

Biographically, book four covers Augustine's age between 19 and 28, in which he is already a rhetoric teacher. Its main discussion is about how the human heart is to relate to what is finite. Augustine's main idea is that the love for God does not exclude a love for what is transient, but reorders it towards God. The opposition, therefore, is not between loving God or loving limited beings, but in loving rightly the finite in God and for his sake.⁵⁶⁹ Augustine utters a lament to the "God of his heart" as he looks back retrospectively; at that stage he had not yet learned to love God and was attached to materiality, "O God of my heart, for I had not yet learned to love you; all I had learned was to think about brilliant material objects. Is not a

566. William M. Green, "Initium Omnis Peccati Superbia: Augustine on Pride as the First Sin," *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 13 (1949): 410.

567. Brachtendorf, *Confissões de Agostinho*, 42.

568. *Ibid.*, 87.

569. *Ibid.*

soul that sighs for such make-believe gods wantonly forsaking you, trusting in illusions and feeding the winds?” (*Conf.* 4.2.3). There is much crying and death throughout *Confessions*; but it is here in book four that we have the significant death of a dear friend from Thagaste. Augustine does not love rightly: he is attached to his friend as the good that would bring his happiness. The consequence is devastating for his heart, “black grief closed over my heart, and wherever I looked I saw only death. My native land was a torment to me and my father's house unbelievable misery. Everything I had shared with my friend turned into hideous anguish without him” (*Conf.* 4.4.9). *Confessions* is a work written *a posteriori*, when he elaborates about his life in dialogue with the Scriptures. At the time of writing, he can associate himself with an archetypal sinner of Genesis.⁵⁷⁰ Augustine flees towards Carthage, city of sin, and away from his homeland (*fugi de patria*), as Cain who flees to another land (to a city founded by himself) after the death of his brother Abel.⁵⁷¹ Once more, Augustine is recounting his life through the lenses of a larger story, stating that he is part of humanity with a foolish heart as it anguished for what was not its destiny and clung to transitory things (*Conf.* 4.7.12). As in the biblical story, Augustine is suggesting one can either return to God after a loss or distance himself even more by not facing grief and suffering in his presence. The therapy of affections, present in antiquity but adapted by Augustine for Christian use, will be narratively portrayed by how one experiences grief away from or in the presence of God, as book four would be contrasted with another death, that of his mother in book nine.⁵⁷² But as for this moment, Augustine persists outside his heart, loving wrongly; without the strength of God, the vain and empty heart is easily distressed (*Conf.* 4.15.24). In this condition of having drifted from its divine destiny, he expressed a classical call to return to one's heart,

Let us love him, for he made these things and he is not far off, for he did not make them and then go away: they are from him but also in him. You know where he is, because you know where truth tastes sweet. He is most intimately present to the human heart, but the heart has strayed from him. Return to your heart, then, you wrongdoers, and hold fast to him who made you. Stand with him and you will stand firm, rest in him and you will find peace (*Conf.* 4.12.18).

Augustine also considered the path of skeptic philosophers, called Academics, “a suspicion had arisen in my mind that another class of philosophers, known as Academics,

570. Since the Manicheans did not accept the Old Testament, Augustine could only associate himself to a character in Genesis (or cast his life in the shadow of Cain) in a later biblical reappraisal of his own life.

571. Wills, *Augustine's Confessions*, 37.

572. Brachtendorf, *Confissões de Agostinho*, 89.

were more likely to be right. These men had recommended universal doubt, announcing that no part of the truth could be understood by the human mind” (*Conf.* 5.10.19). But Augustine cannot live with omnipresent doubt. Cicero’s *Hortensius* had already awakened in him the pursuit of philosophy as love for wisdom, which sets the heart in a pursuit of happiness. Cicero’s emphasis focused on a love that continuously seeks, calling his readers to knock and search without assurance or promise of finding. The logic found in the gospel (Matthew 7:7), however, one Augustine would only comprehend later, suggests that lovers who truly seek will attain the desired truth, “seek and you shall find”, as the answer trusts in Christ’s self-revelation (*Conf.* 7.9.14).

In books five and six, Augustine intentionally compares and contrasts well-oriented to distorted hearts.⁵⁷³ He is still a proud Manichean with a sick and sacrilegious heart (*Conf.* 5.9.16), which diverges from his mother’s faithful and loving attitude. At this stage, Monica is portrayed as the model of the humble and faithful heart (*Conf.* 5.9.17). This is also the time when Faustus disappoints his expectations (*Conf.* 5.7.12) and Augustine starts to question Manichean pride. Since God resists the proud, the right heart is linked to the humble, “only to those whose hearts are crushed do you draw close” (*Conf.* 5.3.3). Augustine also evaluates the hearts of those around him and questions the interior life of young men that set their hearts on material goods and hold wealth so dearly that they do not pay their teachers, “by setting their hearts on the fleeting baubles of this passing life and the filthy lucre that sullies the hand that grasps it” (*Conf.* 5.12.22). Augustine reminds us of the tragedy of living outside one’s own heart, wandering aimlessly to what is frugal and empty. One may become a stranger to oneself, always moving but never at home.

In book six, Ambrose embodies the heart model, a pure fountain so that Augustine could return to his own heart, “I longed to know from your holy oracle, Ambrose’s heart” (*Conf.* 6.3.4). While in a journey away from God, Augustine’s inner ears were unable to hear God and his words did not sink into his heart (*Conf.* 2.3.7) but Ambrose chewed the bread of God’s word with “the mouth of his heart” (*Conf.* 6.3.3). Once more, in the portrait of Ambrose, we are reminded that Augustine is not writing an autobiography *per se*, for in *Confessions* Augustine does not fully express how he felt about Ambrose at the time.⁵⁷⁴ His

573. *En. Ps.* 32.1.2.

574. For a discussion on how the portrait of Ambrose in *Confessions* differs from the historical perception of Augustine in his first years, see the chapter “The book’s Ambrose” in Garry Wills, *Augustine’s Confessions: a biography*, 41-57.

intention is to acknowledge that God was placing Ambrose to guide his heart towards a different appreciation of the Scriptures, which had been a steppingstone towards his return to Christian faith.

In his quest for success at the age of around thirty, his inner incongruity was evident to himself. Even though questioning the heart of self-centered students and the greedy system around him, Augustine was failing to find the God of his own heart (*Conf.* 6.1.1). Heart and mouth were miles apart as words were not uttered in the pursuit of truth, but as means of winning favors from the powerful, which included lying (*Conf.* 6.6.9). His heart was panting with anxiety and corruptive thoughts (*Conf.* 6.6.9). In this pursuit of worldly status, his unnamed concubine was ripped from his side as being regarded an obstacle towards an advantageous marriage. “Deeply was she engrafted into my heart that it was left torn and wounded and trailing blood” (*Conf.* 6.15.25). Augustine’s heart is lacerated (*concisum*), the same term used at the loss of his dear friend of Thagaste (4.7.12). After her departure, his heart is left in gangrene, putrefied, and the pain becomes cold despair (*Conf.* 6.15.25). To the first tragedy of losing her is added a second, the fact that Augustine can live without his favored concubine, but cannot live without satisfying his sex drive and ends up replacing her with another woman, a temporary mistress. Augustine cannot break his sexual addiction and lives far from his own philosophical ideals (*Conf.* 6.12.21). In the journey of an increasingly broken and scattered heart, who would mend those pieces and rescue his *cor* from spiritual death? The turning point in his life is the gracious hand of God which is softly and gradually touching his *cor*, “you began little by little to work on my heart with your most gentle and merciful hand” (*Conf.* 6.5.7). As Augustine grows miserable, God was drawing him nearer, with his mighty hand ready to seize him (*Conf.* 6.16.26).

In book seven, Augustine recognizes that faith in Christ was persisting steadfastly in his heart, even though still unformed and wavering (*Conf.* 7.5.7). His thirst for faith continues to increase, and his moral conversion is preceded by an intellectual one through an influence of Neoplatonic ideas. Having left Manichaeism, Augustine finds in Neoplatonism an alternative explanation to the problem of evil. Plotinus suggests evil as the absence of being, non-being, without ontological consistency; and by disempowering evil and the Manichean fatalist cosmological non-responsibility for moral evil, Neoplatonists influenced Augustine to a return to interiority, allowing a personal response towards the conflicts of his inner life and paving the way for his moral conversion. The philosophy of Plotinus, focused

on the mysticism of the inner life, directed Augustine to develop a Christian philosophical reflection on one's own inner life as the way to God.⁵⁷⁵ His encounter with Platonism is described not only in terms of ideas, but how these initiated a positive resonance *in his heart* as he finds in philosophy an element of truth "I set my heart upon the gold which at your bidding your people had brought out of Egypt" (*Conf.* 7.9.15).

Augustine's esteem of Platonism, however, soon gives way to a critique of their rejection of Christ's incarnation. Their refusal is not explained in terms of philosophical arguments, but on the state of their interior life: the philosophers' hearts were not humble enough to accept the incarnate mediator, for "they are too scornful to learn from him, because he is gentle and humble of heart" (*Conf.* 9.21.27). As William Green suggests, a foundational theme of *Confessions* is that God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble; the divine incarnation is set as the opposite of pride and Augustine's conversion is an adherence to Christ that manifests itself in a conscious rejection of pride. From this follows Augustine's later developments that humanity is dependent on grace.⁵⁷⁶ Evidencing a kind of progression between the pure heart and divine Word, which started with Monica in book five, continued with Ambrose in book six, Christ is the apex of the gentle and humble heart model (Matthew 11:29) who gives rest for the souls (*Conf.* 7.9.14). His is the heart to be followed: Christian revelation provided the solution for the pilgrim's restless heart through the humble path opened by Christ's incarnation. Christ is the perfectly humble and gentle heart, but men reject him because they do not accept his lowly state. As Etienne Gilson points out, the whole solution of the heart drama is set through a Christological emphasis, which liberates humans from a wandering purposeless life: "without Christ the mediator who became flesh to liberate us from flesh [...] man can only wander aimlessly at whim of concupiscence and vacillate between antagonistic systems."⁵⁷⁷

At the start of book eight, Augustine prepares the readers for a peak experience, the time for the siege of his heart: "Your words were now firmly implanted in my heart of hearts, and I was besieged by you on every side" (*Conf.* 8.1.1). In the same book, at the center of his conversion stands the weeping over his darkened heart, and the narrative climax as he encounters Scripture and the conviction that his divine cardiologist would enlighten it: "I had

575. Dupont and Walraet, "Augustine on the Heart," 50.

576. Green, "Initium Omnis Peccati Superbia," 421-431.

577. Etienne Gilson quoted in John D. Green, "Augustinianism": *Studies in the Process of Spiritual Transvaluation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 14.

no wish to read further, nor was there need. No sooner had I reached the end of the verse than the light of certainty flooded my heart and all dark shades of doubt fled away” (*Conf.* 8.12.29). As Antonio Pieretti pointed out, if the Platonists in book seven led him to believe that in order to re-enter himself it was necessary to move away from exteriority in order to concentrate on interiority, only through reading Paul’s biblical text of Romans 13:14, the return to the heart becomes a life journey led by grace. The themes of interior recollection and union with the spiritual realities are combined with the Pauline themes of the new man who is rehabilitated by God and is restored to the original condition.⁵⁷⁸

The final book of his biographical section is where the noun *cor* is most present in the whole work. At the start of book nine, Augustine is announcing the leitmotif of death and rebirth, but associates it to the heart motif “your right hand plumbed the depths of my death, draining the cesspit of corruption in my heart” (*Conf.* 9.1.1). Book nine, which includes, among other events, his baptism (representing the rebirth of his interior life), the vision at Ostia and the death of his mother, stands for the time when the healing of his heart from past wounds is most perceived (*Conf.* 9.13.34). At this stage, Augustine narrates the joy and sweetness of a new convert who has received a new heart after a long journey of wrestling and anguish. Since God implants gifts in the hearts of the faithful (*Conf.* 9.11.28), Augustine’s heart is transformed, “there you had begun to make me feel your sweetness and had given me joy in my heart” (*Conf.* 9.4.10). As he abandons his career in the market of self-serving words, it is also the time of integration between interior life and outward expression, which is experienced as heart liberation: “at last the day arrived which was to set me free in fact from the profession of rhetor, as I was free already in spirit. And so it was done; you detached my tongue from that bond whence you had already delivered my heart, and I blessed you as I joyfully set out for the villa with all my company” (*Conf.* 9.4.7). Even in the midst of his mother’s death, sorrow does not lead his inner life astray. He can find great consolation throwing himself into the Father’s arms, weeping against his breast after his difficult journey; the God of his heart easily wiped away his tears (*Conf.* 5.2.2). In placing Monica’s death in parallel to that of his friend in book four, Augustine wants to stir the hearts of his readers to weep rightly before God, and in arousing the hearer’s heart, forbidding them to slump into

578. Antonio Pieretti, “Doctrina antropológica agustiniana,” in *El pensamiento de San Agustín para el hombre de hoy: la filosofía agustiniana*, ed. José Oroz Reta and José Galindo (Valencia: EDICEP, 1998), 352.

despair (*Conf.* 10.3.4).⁵⁷⁹ Augustine announces that at the end of his biographical journey, his life was set in a path of commitment to God in the service of his brethren, with “heart, voice and pen” (*Conf.* 9.13.37). Consequently, the end of book nine anticipates the introduction of book ten, in which Augustine would discuss the very act that integrates inner life and outward expression, the therapeutic language of *confessio* (*Conf.* 10.2.2-10.5.7).

If *Confessions* ended at book nine, the narrative of ascension could give rise to an idealistic overrealized eschatology of healing. This is definitely not the case, as in book ten Augustine intentionally acknowledges his current temptations and sins. Augustine is set in the paradoxical tension of the already-not yet, a growing sense that God is to be thanked for the work done, while at the same time he still continues to beg for deliverance from present temptations, “I give thanks and praise to you, my God, my teacher, for knocking at the door of my ears and shedding your light into my heart. Pluck me free from all temptation” (*Conf.* 10.31.46). Even though the darkened state of his inner life is past, he still hungers to live truly in the intimacy of his heart. The believer is set in a paradoxical state, for he lives in between ages, both with the hope of oncoming glory and the temptations that still linger in the heart. Life is a breath anticipating the vision of glory while it remains the wounded heart, “I have seen your blazing splendor, but with a wounded heart” (*Conf.* 10.41.66).

Book eleven marks the entrance on the last third of *Confessions*, which is comprised of Augustine’s three books commentating God’s creation in the book of Genesis. The heart metaphor supports the mirror that is set between creation of the exterior world and recreation of his inner life. The same God who speaks “let there be light”, *fiat lux*, in the beginning also will light Augustine’s lamp and illumine his heart’s darkness (*Conf.* 11.25.32). God speaks, the world is created, there is light. But that is not all, for the same voice that speaks and enlightens biological existence at large communicates also in the microcosm of creation that is his enlightened pierced heart:

In this Beginning you made heaven and earth, O God. You made them in your Word, your Son, your Power, your Wisdom, your Truth, wonderfully speaking and in a wondrous way creating. Who can understand this? Who explain it? What is this light that shines through the chinks of my mind and pierces my heart, doing it no injury? (*Conf.* 11.9.11).

579. See also Brachtendorf, *Confissões de Agostinho*, 89.

If a heart does not cling to God's eternal realities, wandering between past and present, it tends to emptiness in the realm of nothingness as an "unfinished" wandering creation, "they strive to be wise about eternal realities, but their heart flutters about between the changes of past and future found in created things, and an empty heart it remains" (*Conf.* 11.11.13). The question arises about an intervention in the heart that can stand the test of time and restore it, "who shall take hold of the human heart, to make it stand still and see how eternity, which stands firm, has neither future nor past, but ordains future and past times?" (*Conf.* 11.11.13). God's creating breath sustains the very existence of the heart's life. The answer relies on God's initiative to make the timely bounded human heart the home of his endless presence, "oh, how high and glorious you are, who make the humble-hearted your home! You help the downtrodden to their feet, and they do not fall, for their high dignity is yourself" (*Conf.* 11.31.41).

Book twelve is not focused on the heart theme, but on Scriptural exegesis and interpretation, as Augustine sets the "unity and clarity of the Word side by side with the plurality and ambiguity of the words through which we approach the Word."⁵⁸⁰ Nonetheless, *cor* is mentioned twice in the first sentence, as Augustine finds himself busy concerning the interpretation of Scripture. "The words of your holy scripture have knocked at the door of my heart, O Lord, and in this poverty-stricken life of mine my heart" (*Conf.* 12.1.1). Moreover, God's truth in Scripture is the illumination of his heart (*Conf.* 12.10.10). His law is the means through which love springs from a clean heart, "because its object is to promote the charity which springs from a pure heart" (*Conf.* 12.18.27). In a passage in book twelve, Augustine encapsulates the heart as interior and private space, while at the same time assigning to it ascension and dynamism towards God. We hear Augustine's plea so that God would speak truth within, in the interiority of his heart, and as he retires to the "private room" and sings songs of love in inarticulate groans. As he moves within, his inner life also moves upwards, for walking in pilgrimage lifts his heart towards God's city:

Speak to me yourself within my heart in truth, for you alone speak so. Then I will get rid of those people who blow into the dust only to stir up earth and get it into their eyes; then let me retire to my private room and sing my songs of love to you, giving vent to my inarticulate groans as I walk my pilgrim way, remembering Jerusalem and lifting up my heart toward her (*Conf.* 12.16.23).

580. O'Donnell, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, introduction commentary to book 12.

Book thirteen expresses the dynamic union with God under the action of the Holy Spirit in the world.⁵⁸¹ When referring to *cor*, Augustine says that the human hearts are lifted up to God, *sursum cor*, by the Spirit. It is the third person of the Trinity that directs the movement of the heart towards rest in God while it struggles between two loves, the restless cares and the love for God,

One is the uncleanness of our own spirit, which like a flood-tide sweeps us down, in love with restless cares; the other is the holiness of your Spirit, which bears us upward in a love for peace beyond all care, that our hearts may be lifted up to you, to where your Spirit is poised above the waters, so that once our soul has crossed over those waters on which there is no reliance we may reach all-surpassing rest (*Conf.* 13.7.8).

The Spirit personifies love in himself (*Conf.* 13.6.7) and is referred to as the “supereminent Love” (*Conf.* 13.7.8). In Augustine’s Trinitarian model *caritas* and the Spirit are equated. He portrays the Spirit as the bond of union of love between Father and Son, while at the same time the agent of our union with God. In this progression the heart movement is ascension, as the weight of love carries us upwards, “my weight is my love, and wherever I am carried, it is this weight that carries me. Your Gift sets us afire and we are borne upward; we catch his flame and up we go. In our hearts we climb those upward paths, singing the songs of ascent” (*Conf.* 13.9.10). The *cor* becomes the essential location of creaturely rest, since the love of God is poured out by the Spirit in the hearts (Romans 5:5) *caritas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum Sanctum* (*Conf.* 13.31.46). The heart and the Spirit are also mentioned in the closure of the book in its vision of restful unity.⁵⁸² Augustine anticipates Sabbatical rest: God’s future consummation through the Spirit’s work is the warranty of the hope which sustains its continual conversion until final redemption.

If one was expecting a straightforward triumphant ending, as if one had just arrived at the destination, the conclusion might leave us disappointed. We are left in endless need to knock at his door. The condition to arrive at the destination is a pilgrim existence, “let us rather ask of you, seek in you, knock at your door. Only so will we receive, only so find, and only so will the door be opened to us” (*Conf.* 13.38.53). As we are saved in hope of being united with the *telos* of our hearts, Augustine intentionally ends the book keeping alive a desire to seek God. Our restless heart now knows where to find the door to its happiness, but

581. O’Donnell, *Confessions*, introduction commentary to book 13.

582. “*Posteaquam concepit de spiritu tuo cor nostrum*” (*Conf.* 13.38.53).

it remains continually called to knock. As the first Christians were called those of “the way” (Acts 9:2, 19:9), God’s people are pilgrims at heart moving towards God’s Sabbatical rest.

3.3.1.2 Implications of a heart pilgrimage

After journeying with Augustine focusing on the uses of heart in *Confessions*, I would like to conclude this section with six implications which are drawn from heart pilgrimage. Firstly, Augustine’s perspective on the heart is neither idealistic positive nor pessimistic, but constitutes in itself a strong form of realistic anthropology. On one hand, it is not naïve optimism, for Augustine prevents the ready-made illusion that everyone will become perfectly healed in this life, the completely restful *cor*. As a matter of fact, Augustine destroys our illusions of thorough faultless healing in this life. In this expectant exile, Augustine helps us realize that one’s commitment to God includes a never-ending aspiration to become real and vulnerable, rather than being nice, enjoyable or perfect. On the other hand, *Confessions* is not a negative, pessimistic account of the heart, as if it had no hope of redemption. If Augustine portrays his misery and his sins in a blunt, direct manner, it is an artistic painting for the sake of highlighting the work of grace. His hope of becoming a fully alive person will not be disappointed, for God is faithful and promises great things. Augustine is, after all, a man saved in hope. Augustine has been accused of a pessimistic anthropology, but reading *Confessions* “through the heart” has given us a picture of a dramatic realism, for the heart participates in the spectacle of redemption.

Secondly, even though the heart is a battlefield or a field in constant plantation, Augustine directs his readers to grow into the humble heart God desires us to have. As an antidote, Augustine proposes self-surrender to love, a continually grateful heart that is amazed by God’s abounding generosity; the consequence is that the self is accepted in its brokenness and therefore called to reject an inauthentic life of appearances and false masks. By saying yes to this grace, his heart-field has an orientation and a goal to be fruitful in love. Throughout this journey, Augustine becomes more a person in Christ, as his divine power exchanges hearts of stone for hearts of flesh. It is a heart that has experienced the inwards upwards movement, living in the freedom from the chains of success that falsely legitimizes one’s existence by external achievements. Augustine is moving away from external unstable loves towards an upwards direction to God as self-offering, and this is the heart he is calling his audience to pursue. As Esther de Wall points out “if I really hand myself over, making an

act of personal surrender, asking God to accept me just as I am now, open, vulnerable, powerless, then I shall also be able to receive whatever he has in store for me in the future.”⁵⁸³ The openness of a grateful heart is the path to delight, that learns to praise and trust in his goodness even in the midst of one’s present frailties. Augustine reminds his audience that he was fully accepted and remains deeply loved just as he is and this meek realization is the foundation of the right heart. Its consequence is that he invites his readers to also celebrate God’s goodness and grow themselves into a responsive humble heart.

Thirdly, the act of confession sustains the continual movement of the heart towards God, fostering the unity of interior relationality and exterior communication which is the heart’s health. In confessing, Augustine seeks a unity of heart and tongue, of interiority and outward expression. *Confessio*, with its double movement of acknowledging sins and celebrating God’s intervention, is the outward language that allows the continual renewal of inner life, and in confessing, Augustine is a cardiac patient always returning to receive his medicine. A relational confession is not a perfect long-awaited healing, but on the contrary, the very act of confessing is a realization that one continues to carry the wounds of present life, its anguishes and burdens while at the same time one has been touched by love. But in his past, the act of confession has not always been present: when Augustine was a child, he was unable to express the thoughts of his heart (*Conf.* 1.8.13); and as he grew into a man, instead of seeking God’s intervention, he brought to himself the obscurity of his own heart. This process was deepened by the infatuation of his successful career, as his tongue served the wickedness of his darkened heart. But now, as a renewed man in the present, confessing becomes the language of return to the heart, to the integrated self rather than the scattered one which was much of his prior life. If the pursuit of happiness drives the pilgrimage, in which the heart is tested and challenged (10.28.39, 10.37.60), confessing sustains the continuous heart conversion amidst the temptations of *concupiscentia*. As Augustine offers the sacrifice to God in the service of his heart and tongue (*Conf.* 11.2.3), *confessio* becomes an act of integrating the outward communication and inward movement that reinstates the heart in its path towards wholeness.

Fourthly, there is a counter-cultural, subversive element in reading one’s own journey by emphasizing vulnerability, infirmity and limitation. Augustine retells his personal life portraying the struggles of his inner journey, rather than a successful identity materialized

583. Esther de Wall, *Living with Contradiction: An Introduction to Benedictine Spirituality*, 48.

through exterior achievements: this is also a form of questioning the pursuit of *status quo*. The revelations of God in the heart are not for the intelligent or the strong: these realities are given to the humble, to the weak. Cognitive capacity does not determine the greatness of the heart. Platonic philosophers, the same who granted him a tradition of interiority, were the least able to understand the lowly right heart of Christ's incarnation. In keeping their prideful hearts, they were attached to worldly status and unable to live up to the inner ascension they endorsed. Augustine is intentionally showing his wounds to question those who are still attached to an individualistic self-made identity. Right hearts have their identities hidden in Christ's grace, and cannot but respond humbly to this love. A consequence of this destabilizing, subversive vulnerability is that the heart journey in Augustine could be an entrance point for dialogue with contemporary theologies that emphasize God's interest in the disabled or outcasts, such as disability theology⁵⁸⁴ or liberation theology. The disabled or the poor are not to be excluded or alienated, but they embody the vulnerability a heart needs in order to return to its original responsive surrender. By communicating primarily in *affectus* and not entering into the mentality of performance, of the cognitive ability that values productivity, the mentally disabled can have a greater ability to understand God's unconditional love that is not based on merit. They invite all to see weakness and vulnerability as an opportunity to discover God's grace existentially.

Fifthly, reading *Confessions* "through the heart" creates an interpretation framework that is less vulnerable to psychopathological lenses that do not pay attention to the deeper layers of narrative and theological meaning. Augustine's intention is to bring his sin to the forefront in order to participate in the larger story of salvation. His experience reminds us of those whose heart has gone astray, such as Adam, Cain and the prodigal son, but also those who came back home being touched by the love that pierces the heart. If *Confessions* is not a straight-forward autobiography but the recounting in a smaller way the dramatic journey of sin and salvation, psychological readings through contemporary theoretical grids may miss the highly articulated interweaving of biblical narrative and Augustine's personal story to convey theological meaning. If a dialogue with therapy and psychology respects Augustine's own understanding of heart in pilgrimage, it is likely to foster a discussion that respects Augustine's own point of view.

584. See Martin Claes and Anthony Dupont, "Augustine's Sermons and Disability," in *Disability in Antiquity*, ed. Christian Laes (New York: Routledge, 2017), 328-341.

Sixthly, Augustine suggests that we are to continue seeking the heart's constant renewal, and never believe that in this life we have arrived at the destination. Augustine guards his readers from the temptation towards a state of apathy, which includes a refusal to grow. If one believes that one is already fruitful at its utmost, there is danger, as the process of lifting up one's heart towards God remains until death. Augustine's vision is not an escapist heart healing; it is not an easy completeness. It includes the acknowledgement that we will live surrounded by the paradoxes and contradictions of present-day existence but one must keep a constant drive forward, in order never to harden the heart. The search for God must be kept: in this dynamic tension, one must sincerely desire to move forward. As T. S. Eliot puts it, brilliantly capturing the spirit of the heart journey in *Confessions*,

Love is most nearly itself
When here and now cease to matter
Old men ought to be explorers
Here and there does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and empty desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.⁵⁸⁵

3.3.2 Thoroughly Biblical, particularly Augustinian: the Meanings of *Cor*

Augustine immersed himself in biblical language and drank from its fountain to convey meaning when using *cor*. In Scripture, the heart is the center of human life, including the wide-ranging expressions of affection, reflection, conscience and decision, representing both the whole of human interior life and its center. God himself searches and looks at human hearts, transforming and inhabiting them. As James O'Donnell pointed out,

cor in Augustine is a word whose use is demonstrably influenced by contact with its scriptural employment; it is in Augustine an expression for the indivisible, authentic centre of human life, where the tensions of a sinful world are most clearly felt. The term is, as others have observed,

585. Eliot, "East Coker," V.

unphilosophical, even untheological, but it is eminently scriptural, and Augustinian.⁵⁸⁶

“Scriptural and Augustinian”: This section will argue that the use of heart in Augustine’s *Confessions* is primarily inspired by biblical language, and at the same time, shows signs of a singular appropriation of its tradition. Augustine’s *cor* is stirred by the biblical reference while at the same time showing signs of his own personal reflection. Augustine’s synthesis is thoroughly biblical, while yet particularly Augustinian. His concentration on *cor* is not an end in itself, but a path to what it represents and evokes.⁵⁸⁷ The meanings of *cor* throughout his works, with special attention to *Confessions*, could be summarized as: 1) the integrative center of the personal; 2) the realm of interiority; 3) the center of a dynamic teleological movement 4) the place of spiritual senses 5) the place of healing and therapy. By summarizing the meanings of heart in Augustine, we will find ourselves in a better position for the next stage of dialogue, to retrieve Elementary Experience Psychology in dialogue with the heart in Augustine.

3.3.2.1 Heart in Scripture

In the Bible, the heart is the center of human life and symbolizes the whole human person. In the Hebrew Scriptures, heart (*lēb*) is a very frequent term, which also demonstrates its relevance. When referring to the human heart, it is counted 814 times; the “heart of God” can be counted 26 through usages and the “heart of the sea” is used 11 times.⁵⁸⁸ The accent on the human heart highlights its significance for biblical anthropology. On one side the human heart is the place of emotions, feelings, moods, and passions; but it is also the cradle of thought and reflection, including intellectual capacities (Isa. 6:10), providing wisdom, discernment and understanding between good and evil.⁵⁸⁹ In biblical language, the functions of the mind are connected with the heart.⁵⁹⁰ Moreover, it is the center of conscience, decisions

586. O’Donnell, *Confessions*, commentary on 1.1.1.

587. Martin, *Our Restless Heart*, 41.

588. Douglas R. Edwards, “Heart,” in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 377.

589. *Ibid.*

590. Gerald P. Cowen, “Heart,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 731.

(2 Sam. 7:21), devotion, and intentionality, the place where a person meets God's word (Jer. 32:40) and where conversion takes place.⁵⁹¹

The heart could also be described as “center of the physical, mental, and spiritual life of humans.”⁵⁹² It speaks about the center of physical life, but also represents the person as a whole: it also came to be the concentration for all the vital occupations of one's body, including intellectual, affective, moral and spiritual life. In the New Testament, καρδία is the causative basis of a person's psychological life, with special emphasis upon thoughts—‘heart, inner self, mind, intention, purpose.’⁵⁹³ Since an equivalent of καρδία could also be ‘liver,’ and in a number of ancient languages it is ‘stomach’ or ‘bowels’⁵⁹⁴ in the overall the biblical emphasis is not on the biological heart but in its rich figurative meaning. The heart is crucial for spiritual life, as the apostle Paul argues that a person must believe in the heart for salvation, as with the heart one believes, resulting in righteousness (Rom. 10:10).

The heart is both an arena where crucial battles are fought and the privileged field where God does his redemptive work in the lives of men and women. Since the heart is where the strains of existence in a fallen world are mostly felt, it must be protected against corruption (Prov. 4:23) as the true nature of a person relies on the quality of one's heart. Hearts can be hardened (Mark 6:52), prompting unbelief. Hearts can be divided and scattered, as Solomon's in old life, corrupted by power, money and many wives, who “turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord” (I Kings 11:4).

The human heart is prone to error and “deceitful above all things” (Jer. 17:9-10), but God is the one who knows the heart fully: he searches and evaluates the depths of humanity. In the story of David's anointing, God's seeing the heart is related to examining the interior life of a person. Human beings judge according to exterior appearance, but God is the one who looks at the heart (interiority) and does not choose according to outward façade, overpowering human prejudices (I Sam.16:7). Humans cannot resist God's eyes, for what is hidden to the outside, the secret thoughts of the heart, will be brought into the open (1 Cor. 14:25). He searches hearts (Rev. 2:23), tests them (Ps. 26:2); he knows the hearts of all (Acts 1:24), for he is also its Creator (Ps. 33:15). He knows the state of the human race, its

591. Edwards, “Heart,” 377.

592. Cowen, “Heart,” 731.

593. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd edition., vol. 1. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 320.

594. Ibid.

depravity, sickness and deceit, which comes from a corrupted heart (Jer. 17:9). Furthermore, God is the agent of transformation converting “hearts of stone” into “hearts of flesh” (Ezek. 11:19, 36:26). Christ exhorts his disciples at his departure not to let their heart be troubled (John 14:27), for his peace that transcends all knowledge and understanding is a gift that guards minds and hearts (Phil. 4:7). The heart is vulnerable and frail, but, as the psalmist affirms, the hope for the heart is God’s continual intervention, “my flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps.73:26). This verse, as Madec suggests,⁵⁹⁵ is at the core of the frequent “*Deus cordis mei*” in *Confessions*, the “God of my heart” (*Conf.* 4.2.3, 6.1.1).

The Hebrew Scriptures also speak of an inscribed heart, or the heart as a tablet, so that the divine law and its commandments are to be written on. The tablets of the heart convey the idea of obedience to divine law (Pv.3:1), for the heart is the place God writes on, placing his law within (Jr 31:33). Sin, however, is also inscribed in the heart as in the book of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 17:1), a text that describes the collective rather than the personal sin or individual deeds.⁵⁹⁶ Paul, in continuity with the Hebrew Scriptures, denoted the heart as the central hidden core on which God writes his law. In receiving a new heart from God, the gentiles are said to have in the heart the ordinances that the law required as in (Rom. 2:15-16), written on the tablet of their hearts (2 Cor 3:7). Jager argues that the idea of inscribed heart was mediated to Augustine by Origen and Ambrose, as the first interiorized the biblical tradition and the second individualized it. Origen, from the allegorical school of Alexandria, suggested the tablet of the heart is an interior scroll, like letters or marks in wax which are secret to men, books (*libri*) to be opened and revealed in the future by the hosts of heaven.⁵⁹⁷ Origen influenced Ambrose, who sees the heart as a secret hidden place, conveying its meaning both in collective terms, *cor nostrum* but also individualizing it, at the tablet of your heart (*tabula cordis tui*), emphasizing this individuality.⁵⁹⁸

It is significant that, in the New Testament, the heart is already portrayed as the inner dwelling place of God. Two persons of the Trinity are mentioned to reside in the heart.⁵⁹⁹ Christ dwells in the heart through faith, such as in Ephesians 3:17, “dwell

595. Goulven Madec, *Le Dieu d’Augustin* (Paris: Cerf, 1998), 92.

596. Jager, *The Book of the Heart*, 11.

597. *Ibid.*, 21-22. Jager points out Origen also implies a separate interior realm for each person and a collective one, *cor nostrum*. Origen varies between heart and soul, having heart as the predominant term.

598. *Ibid.*, 24.

599. Cowen, “Heart,” 732.

(*katoikēsai*) refers not to the beginning of Christ's indwelling at the moment of salvation. Instead it denotes the desire that Christ may, literally, "be at home in," that is, at the very center of or deeply rooted in, believers' lives."⁶⁰⁰ In setting His seal of ownership he put the Spirit in the hearts as a deposit (2 Cor. 1:22). It is the Spirit inhabiting within that allows the believer to love, for the love of God has been poured out in the hearts by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5, a favorite verse of Augustine). Consequently, the New Testament already conveys a vision in which the human heart becomes a home, a dwelling God himself is preparing to inhabit.

The heart is destined to move towards its source: the New Testament gave Augustine the language of God inhabiting within, in the heart, leading him to call his hearers to return to the inner core and find God in there. Augustine interprets Christ's ascension as a call to find him dwelling in the heart, which is precisely where he has always been. Christ disappeared so that we would return and find the Christ already present inside the heart, "then he withdrew from our sight, so that we might return to our own hearts and find him there" (*Conf.* 4.12.19). When humanity is homecoming, God is found in the hearts of those who confess to him, "see! there you are in their hearts, in the hearts of all those who confess to you, who fling themselves into your arms and weep against your breast after their difficult journey, while you so easily will wipe away their tears" (*Conf.* 5.2.2).

3.3.2.2 Five meanings of *Cor* in Augustine

1) *Heart as the integrative center*

The bishop of Hippo, inspired by biblical language, apprehended the heart as the integrative center, the nucleus of life force, the basic fundamental reality of who we are as persons. Since humanity is most precisely itself at the level of the heart, in Augustinian language *cor* signifies the center of personality and the identity which marks every human person.⁶⁰¹ In Augustine we find the heart as the center, the root, the essential nucleus where the life of the body and the soul are mysteriously joined.⁶⁰² As an intimate center, it is the concentrated *locus* of all human powers and capabilities (both intellectual and affective) while yet retaining a relational articulation. *Cor* expresses poetically the inner source that breathes

600. Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 631.

601. Dupont and Walraet, "Augustine on the Heart," 47.

602. De la Peza, "El Significado de 'cor' en san Agustín", 339-340.

and pants for God. In searching for happiness while devoid from its original source, heart language represents the center of the person in its desire to return to the epicenter of life itself.

According to Madec, in patristic literature the word *cor* was the equivalent of the lyrical term for *anima*, which marked a transition from the philosophical style to the poetic.⁶⁰³ Since *cor* was the lyrical correspondent of the Latin idea of *anima*, heart is associated with the breath of life, the life force, the beginning of life.⁶⁰⁴ It is an artistic, poetic representation of the inner center of humanity, the original fabric that makes human essence. In *Confessions* we find exhaustively the Augustinian lyrical, psalm-based expressions for the activities and metaphors of the heart.

Since the heart is the integrative center of the person, breath of life or living force, we are driven to a deeper yet more interconnected understanding of the term than the customary contemporary use. In present-day world, heart is being substituted by the brain and neuroscience; in popular use it is still taken to be the place of emotions and sentiments but not of a living integrative center which includes the intellect as in Augustine. The reasons for this separation are historical: even though Augustine and classical antiquity considered the heart as the life-giving personal center, since scholasticism intellect and heart have been assumed as counterparts.⁶⁰⁵ Seventeenth-century thinker Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) suggested that “The heart has its reasons that reason does not know at all”⁶⁰⁶ and faith was God accessible through the heart. As Dupont and Walraet suggest, “Pascal denotes in this way that the heart and mind are two domains that have nothing to do with each other, that do not understand each other. Augustine, however, does not make this distinction. For Augustine the heart is both the seat of reason, and the seat of man’s emotional life. The heart feels, thinks, wills, loves.”⁶⁰⁷ Madec points out that, unlike Pascal’s modern opposition between reason and heart, the Augustinian understanding is an integrated one, where *cor* is both the place of thought and feelings. The heart is opposed not to reason, but to the eyes, the ears, the body, to the voice, to the exterior part of human beings.⁶⁰⁸

603. Goulven Madec, “Cor” in *Augustinus-Lexicon*, ed. Cornelius Petrus Mayer, vol. 2 (Basel: Scwabe, 2006): 1.

604. Dupont and Walraet, “Augustine on the Heart”, 49.

605. *Ibid.*, 48.

606. *Pensées* 278: ‘Le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point’.

607. Dupont and Walraet, “Augustine on the Heart,” 49. For further information on the conversation between Augustine and Pascal see James R. Peters, *The Logic of the Heart: Augustine, Pascal and the Rationality of Faith* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2009).

608. Madec, “Cor,” 1.

As the concentrated focus of all human capabilities, the intellect in Augustine is not placed in opposition to relationality, but located in the context of personal encounter, and defined in relation to love.⁶⁰⁹ Love and intellect are interweaved, suggesting an intimate bond between them. *Cor*, which is the organ of knowing, is both objective and subjective, not opposing thought and feeling. Personal affections and thought processes are all part of what one loves, and the heart, the center from which the interior life flows. This relational understanding of the intellect resounds from Trinitarian ideas: Augustine conceives the intellect not in a stagnant divine nature, but in the dynamism of intra-Trinitarian relationality.⁶¹⁰ As Anna Ngaire Williams suggests, by grounding his integrative vision in the Trinity, in which intellect and will are distinctive, yet not conflicting, Augustine asserts that humanity need not, and indeed, cannot choose between knowledge and love.⁶¹¹

2) *The Realm of Interiority*

In *Confessions*, Augustine suggests that “the interiority of the heart is an ineffable mystery, as the movements and affections of the heart are harder to count than hair” (*Conf.* 4.14.22). The heart is an “immense abyss” (*Conf.* 4.14.22), the space that is deeper than the external area. Despite being well-informed about anatomy and medicine in the context of the fourth and fifth century, Augustine hardly mentions the heart as a corporeal organ,⁶¹² as his interest is located elsewhere. Heart is the place of the inner self, where mystery remains. Sometimes, its use is linked with the soul.⁶¹³ Rather than the physical, *cor* symbolizes inner life. This interiority is on one side the enigmatic secret chamber where the unknown is hidden to himself (but not to God), and on the other, a place where encounter and relationality are genuinely sensed.

Since humanity is a mystery to itself, Augustine affirms in the *Soliloquies* that he desires nothing but to know God and man.⁶¹⁴ “Let me know myself, let me know you” or

609. Anna Ngaire Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 187-188.

610. Williams, *The Divine Sense*, 187-188.

611. *Ibid.*, 188.

612. Dupont and Walraet, “Augustine on the Heart,” 47.

613. In a passage in *Confessions*, the heart, soul and interior life are placed in parallel as describing the same realities. “O God, you are the light of my heart, bread for the inward mouth of my soul, the virtue wedded to my mind and the innermost recesses of my thought” (*Conf.* 1.13.21). The heart and the soul are once again intertwined as in the association of the pleading heart, the seeking soul. “A soul that seeks you and thirsts to enjoy you, one whose heart pleads with you, I have sought your face, O Lord, your face will I seek” (*Conf.* 1.18.28).

614. *Sol.* 1.2.7.

“*Noverim me, noverim te*”⁶¹⁵ suggests that the knowledge of God and self-knowledge jointly entail each other in the interior dimension of the heart. A human being cannot uncover who he is: the mystery that man is to himself, while showing that he ignores his own ontological state, reveals the quest that each human person is compelled to shed light on.⁶¹⁶ Human beings have not lost their desire for happiness, but the explicit knowledge of the good that fulfills that desire.⁶¹⁷ The real meaning of life, therefore, is mysteriously hidden. Humans are unfathomable mysteries to themselves and cannot fully understand the secrets of inner life and its transcendent destiny.

Even though interiority is a realm beyond whole comprehension, Augustine invokes in our common humanity an attention to interiority in contact with transcendence.⁶¹⁸ In *Confessions*, he questions those who go out to exteriority and forget to explore the mystery within and marvel at their inner lives, “people go to admire lofty mountains, and huge breakers at sea, and crashing waterfalls, and vast stretches of ocean, and the dance of the stars, but they leave themselves behind out of sight” (*Conf.* 10.8.15). The story of his own life manifested how he lived outside, in the external world (*foris*), while God was within, *intus*,⁶¹⁹ a situation that disallowed the gathering of his inner conflicts and the integrative restoration of his own self. Human restlessness makes humanity attached to different creatures in search for meaning, but if one searches outside, one remains distant to inner truth.

Return within, return to God: since God is present within, Augustine calls sinners to return to their hearts in order to find peace, for “He is most intimately present to the human heart, but the heart has strayed from him. Return to your heart, then, you wrongdoers, and hold fast to him who made you. Stand with him and you will stand firm, rest in him and you will find peace” (*Conf.* 4.12.18). Rather than an airplane rising, the Augustinian ‘return to the heart’ resembles a submarine diving towards the darker parts of the sea, an inward movement, which is followed by an upwards movement towards light. To ‘return to your heart’ is a plea to renounce an inadequate affection for the transitory, which is outside, in order to find stillness within, which is also a path upwards towards God.

615. *Sol.* 2.1.1.

616. Pieretti, “Doctrina Antropológica Agostiniana,” 334.

617. Brachtendorf, *Confissões de Agostinho*, 42.

618. For a work on the topic of interiority as openness to transcendence in dialogue with philosophical influences see the work of Sílvia Maria de Contaldo, *Cor inquietum: uma leitura de Confissões* (Porto Alegre: Letra e Vida, 2011).

619. “Et ecce intus eras et ego foris et ibi te quaerebam et in ista formosa, quae fecisti, deformis iruebam” (*Conf.* 10.27.38).

Augustine's vision of interiority does not portray a detached escapist spirituality, but conveys a vision of proximity and relationality. The heart is the place God inhabits and where we are closest to the entire human race. It is not a separation from the earthly, but a retreat to return to the authentic self, the loving person recreated in the image of God. The Augustinian heart does not portray a vision of inner life as a private self-centered space, but an inwards upwards movement towards relationality: the interior is where Christ makes his home. *Cor* is where God is more intimately present to Augustine than his own innermost being, and higher than the highest peak of his spirit (*Conf.* 3.4.11). It is here, not in exteriority, that humans find their identity hidden in Christ who lives in their innermost being.⁶²⁰ Since this authentic self is a gift from grace, its consequence is a movement towards a spiritually-filled incarnational service of love to God and neighbor, in a continual conversion that pours out one's life in service to the poor and needy. As Thomas Martin puts it,

from the heart I come to Christian faith, become a member of the church, the Body of Christ, and begin to recognize Christ in my brothers and sisters, with a particular openness of heart for the poor. Heart is that touch-point where true integration of the interior and the exterior, the spiritual and the incarnational, takes place. Heart is never the final goal, yet what does not start 'from the heart' goes nowhere. Equally true is Augustine's insistence that if something is claimed to be 'in the heart' but never manifests itself outwardly in love and community, it is nothing less than self-deception. His insistence upon the heart is thus not a self-serving escape from responsibility into interior religion and privatised faith. The return to the heart is but the first step of a conversion process that proves itself in universal and unrestricted – catholic love. Since God has placed God's own image there, it is where we must begin, but it is never the place to end. To come to the heart is simply to discover that we are God's work, that God does dwell within us, that at our deepest and truest level of self we are never alone – and certainly never unloved.⁶²¹

3) *The Center of a Dynamic Teleological Movement*

The heart's destination is written in its creation: in the teleological structure of its design, the tongue was fashioned to confess the name of his Creator (*Conf.* 5.1.1) and the heart destined to move towards its source. Ontologically, it is an upward orientation, towards God, *ad Dominum*, an orientation of interiority that points to its ultimate goal. The heart is not static, but a force in action, the orientation towards the object its desire seeks. For Augustine,

620. *Io.eu.tr.* 18.10.

621. Martin, *Our Restless Heart*, 43.

this dynamism is manifested in a begging condition and restlessness; his hunger and thirst will only be satiated when God's glory is manifested.⁶²²

In the *Confessions*, human beings are described as dependent creatures, directed towards transcendence in a voyager existence. The restless heart can be characterized as a form of “dramatic” anthropology, in which the human being is set on a quest to come to self-understanding through search for God. The Augustinian heart is also the manifestation of an *homo viator*, who is constantly asking, searching, looking for answers. Even within contingent horizons, the heart maintains infinite pursuits for its essence is a never-ending dynamism of receptivity to God's grace. As Conybeare puts it,

the self is endlessly, boundlessly receptive to God's grace, and that requires holding itself in perpetual pliant readiness. It may – metaphorically – turn toward or away from God, but it will never be static, for it is always already in a dynamic relationship with God. In narrating the self, Augustine is narrating not just the self's desire for its own story but, more importantly, its never-ending desire for God.⁶²³

The dynamism of the search for God is beautifully expressed through the prologue of *Confessions*. Three realities are stated: the greatness of God, the lowliness of man in his mortality and the restlessness of a heart. The three combined set a dramatic pilgrimage that carries the seeds of a potential encounter. In that regard, the restlessness is the positive antidote against a less than fulfilled life. Restlessness is the resource for a persistent upwards movement, *sursum cor*.

Paul Brand, a medical doctor who has worked with leprosy patients in the United States and in India, wrote with journalist Philip Yancey the book *The Gift of Pain*. In it, Brand confronts pain-free attitudes by arguing that pain is not an adversary to be crushed but the very resource against body damage. Pain is the way the body connects itself with the brain, and by that mechanism protects the body from harm. The tragedy in leprosy is that it prevents pain, and therefore, patients injure themselves more easily. A pain-free life, is therefore, an unprotected, risky life that cannot distinguish between a deep cut and a small bruise. The analogy with Augustine's restlessness is evident, for restlessness is a resource to be taken seriously by those who seek happiness: it is a hint towards what truly fulfills the heart's desire. Even though the restlessness has also a negative element (wandering, instability) as

622. *Sermo* 158.7.7.

623 . Catherine Conybeare, *The Routledge Guidebook to Augustine's Confessions* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 146.

pain does, it is primarily a positive way of protection against apathy that is satisfied with lower objects which scatter the heart dynamism and prevent its fuller realization. The irresistible longing towards God inhibits stability at a different place than God himself. As Dupont and Walraet suggest,

God, the Creator, has put an irresistible longing for Himself in the heart of every person. This longing prevents us from seeking rest, stability and a happy life elsewhere: ‘...a little piece of your creation (...) you have made us for yourself...’. Augustine confesses that God causes us to break out of our own self. God has created us faced in his direction, oriented toward him, in our inmost depths, longing for Him. There is then movement here, in the direction of God. We are on the way to God as our final future. This is how God has created us. He is our Beginning (...) toward Himself; He wants to be our Future.⁶²⁴

Augustine also uses the derivative words from *cor* in Latin to convey the idea of heart dynamism. Peza suggests that *cordatus*, *recordatio*, *verecordia* are some of the words Augustine uses to express the heart’s non-static condition.⁶²⁵ *Concordia* and *discordia*, as opposite pair, express the dynamic character of the heart towards unity or disunity.⁶²⁶ Augustine interestingly opposes *cordatus* (wise, prudent), an intelligent heart, and *mentis sopore* (sleeping), or a response of apathy.⁶²⁷ Echoing Jesus’ teaching that “where your treasure is, your heart will be also (Mat. 6:21), the quality of the treasure sought will determine the moral quality of a man. Augustine thus opposes *mente perversa* versus *simplici corde*,⁶²⁸ the simplicity of heart and a perverse mind.

The importance placed on the Scriptural influence of Augustine’s use of the heart, should not, however, disregard the platonic stimulus that undergirds the heart’s dynamism in *Confessions*. The *cor inquietum* could also be set as Augustine’s initiative of taking the gold of Platonic thinking and using it for Christian purposes. Neoplatonists provided a mature tradition focused on interiority: Augustine received from Plotinus both the notion of dynamism of the interior life and the logic that God could be found in accessing this inner world. Brown argues that Plotinus understood interiority as a continuum; the real self was

624. Dupont and Walraet, “Augustine on the Heart,” 52.

625. De la Peza, “El Significado de “cor” en San Agustin,” 351-354.

626. Ibid, 351.

627. Ibid, 352.

628. Ibid, 359.

divine, connected to the world of ideas, expecting the attainable union of the mind with latent divinity.⁶²⁹

As Augustine himself puts it in *Confessions*, the Platonic books admonished him to return into himself, but he could only do so because the God of his heart was at work: “Warned by these writings that I must return to myself, I entered under your guidance the innermost places of my being; but only because you had become my helper was I able to do so. With you as my guide I entered into my innermost citadel, and was given power to do so because you had become my helper” (*Conf.* 7.10.16). Human pride forgoes that at the center of interiority stands relationality. Although Augustine appropriated the Neoplatonic ideal to turn to interiority, he broke with Plotinus by stating that the personal self does not increasingly become the same as the divine self. Humanity can only find fulfillment in moving towards the holy other, the triune God of grace, the true divine, which is humbly inside the heart but infinitely higher.

In summary, the heart’s desire for God is an in-built compass towards its source – and that characteristic provides life with a teleological dynamism. The movement towards God is not a static once-for-all event, but a *via* that is also a progressive spiritual adventure. As Tanner suggests, the desire for God has an active dynamic quality that moves humanity forward in constant dissatisfaction when meeting a knowledge that is less than absolute truth, motivating the continual search for what only God gives.⁶³⁰

4) *The Spiritual Senses of the Heart*

In tune with Scripture, Augustine proposes an opposition between the exterior of humanity, the eyes, the body; and the heart as interiority. Although the notion of spiritual senses is already hinted in the Bible, such as in Ephesians 1:18, “pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened,” nevertheless, Augustine takes a step forward, with the idea of an interior sense. “I took good care to keep myself whole and sound and so preserve the trace in me of your profoundly mysterious unity, from which I came. By means of my inner sense (*interiore sensu*) I coordinated my sensible impressions, and in my little thoughts about little

629. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 172.

630. Kathryn E. Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 113.

things I delighted in truth” (*Conf.* 1.20.31). For Augustine, *cor* possesses spiritual senses, ears, mouth, eyes, hands. These spiritual senses mean the interior life of humanity is not a monad, but it lives through contact, an experiencing relational center.

The heart has spiritual senses, and in *Confessions* the ears of the heart seem to be of especial relevance. The confessing heart is ready to hear (*Conf.* 2.3.5) as in “my heart is listening, Lord; open the ears of my heart and say to my soul, I am your salvation. Let me run toward this voice and seize hold of you” (*Conf.* 1.5.5). Although in Augustine sight is described as an active sense (*Conf.* 10.6.9) nevertheless, as O’Donnell points out, the verb *audire* counts for 175 times in *Confessions*⁶³¹ reinforcing the hearing as the primary spiritual sense. Hearing does have a passive quality, but nevertheless includes a relevant active responsiveness.

There is a dual mode of God’s address to the heart, one that is exterior, primarily through Scripture (but also the witness of creation), and one that is interior, through the inner senses. The exterior mode, God’s Word, pierces the interior life and makes Augustine fall in love with God (*Conf.* 10.6.8). The ear of the heart becomes deafened if pride takes its wrong place, but it is invited to homecoming and quietness by listening to the Word that calls the heart back, “take care that the ear of your heart be not deafened by the din of your vanity. You too must listen to the selfsame Word who calls you back, and there find a place of imperturbable quiet, where love is never forsaken unless it chooses to forsake” (*Conf.* 4.11.16). The other mode of address, the interior, is the inner voice of *caritas* that is heard by the responsive inner ear. God is the one who speaks to the heart, and confessing is not only speaking, but also listening with the ears of the heart “bring the ear of my heart close to your mouth” (*Conf.* 4.5.10). As Rebecca Weaver suggests, there is an intrinsic link between external and internal modes of address,

As God addresses the heart externally through the preaching and liturgy, God is also immediately present to the heart, converting it and its longings through the gift of the Holy Spirit, charity. The external address, which is being internalized as one’s own prayer, thus conforms to the internal address, from which the yearning of the converted heart emerges.⁶³²

631. O’Donnell, *Confessions*, commentary on 1.11.17.

632. Rebecca H. Weaver, “Prayer,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 674.

Looking back at God's intervention, Augustine describes God's work in terms of reorienting the spiritual senses of his heart. "You called, shouted, broke through my deafness you flared, blazed, banished my blindness; you lavished your fragrance, I gasped, and now I pant for you; I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst; you touched me, and I burned for your peace."⁶³³ Augustine also praises God for knocking at the door of his ears and shedding light in the heart (*Conf.* 10.31.47). The heart consequently lives by the responsiveness of its senses, which are related to a living experience of transcendence. The inner self adheres to a voice, a fragrance, a light and embraces them in love (*Conf.* 10.6.8).

5) *The place of healing and therapy*

Time and again in *Confessions* Augustine describes God as the healer of his heart. Throughout his life, Augustine was dragged by his sins, which obscured and darkened the heart, leading to confusing loves (*Conf.* 2.2.2). His foolish heart was darkened (*Conf.* 5.3.5) but God is the light of the heart (*Conf.* 1.13.21), who knows its abysmal depths (*Conf.* 2.4.9) and can distinguish its shadows (*Conf.* 2.8.16). God is the one that comes into the heart and changes its atmosphere, inebriating it, "who will grant me this grace, that you would come into my heart and inebriate it" (*Conf.* 1.5.5).

There is wickedness in his heart, but God is its forgiver and healer (*Conf.* 1.5.6). Even though Augustine was a son of many tears (*Conf.* 3.12.21), God is also the one with the ears open to hear the cries and pleas of the heart of his mother (*Conf.* 3.11.19). As in biblical language, this was a vivid portrait that God does not disdain a broken and humbled heart (*Conf.* 4.3.4). If on one hand, Augustine laments his family's concern in cultivating his intellect, neglecting his interior life, his heart (*Conf.* 2.3.5), on the other, as a field that is slowly cultivated, the merciful and gentle hand of God little by little began a work in his heart (*Conf.* 6.5.7). Even though the hearts of men are full of schemes, God's purposes last forever unshaken (*Conf.* 6.14.23).

There is, however, a different kind of woundedness that is not related to the vain and the scattered heart. The heart is pierced by God's word resulting in a responsive love, "I love you, Lord, with no doubtful mind but with absolute certainty. You pierced my heart with

633. 'Vocasti et clamasti et rupisti surditatem meam, coruscasti, splenduisti et fugasti caecitatem meam; fragrasti, et duxi spiritum et anhelo tibi, gustavi, et esurio et sitio, tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam'. (*Conf.* 10.27.38)

your word, and I fell in love with you” (*Conf.* 10.6.8).⁶³⁴ Sometimes it is described directly as the heart pierced by love, “with the arrows of your charity you had pierced our hearts, and we bore your words within us like a sword penetrating us to the core” (*Conf.* 9.2.3). As a surgeon that opened a wound in order to heal, God pierced his heart; it is precisely this wound of love that makes the heart burn with the fire and ascends *ad Dominum* towards the peace of the heavenly city (*Conf.* 13.9.10).⁶³⁵

In book ten, Augustine portrays himself not only as the patient but also as a kind of therapist that stirs hearts (*Conf.* 10.3.4), or even more precisely, since God is the medical doctor, the cardiologist assistant that points towards the *medicamentum*. The therapeutic ideal is not only for his heart, but also for *our* restless heart (*Conf.* 1.1.1) “so that together we may declare great is the Lord and most exceedingly worthy of praise” (*Conf.* 11.1.1). Augustine is not the cardiologist himself, but a kind of relentless seeker retelling humanity to knock and strive for a return to the *Christus Medicus*, which is ultimately a return to their own hearts, where he finds his home in us. *Interroga cor tuum*,⁶³⁶ claims the bishop of Hippo, who is until the end of *Confessions* stirring the hearts of his fellow companions to open themselves to God’s intervention, “let us rather ask of you, seek in you, knock at your door. Only so will we receive, only so find, and only so will the door be opened to us” (*Conf.* 13.38.53). The theme of heart therapy evolved in Augustine’s thinking after *Confessions*, and its importance grows as he established himself in pastoral work.⁶³⁷

Augustine confesses to his doctor while remaining in expectation of final heart redemption. He is a healed patient yet bruised on earth our common hospital. *Confessions* is, as Peter Brown has suggested, an act of therapy, for Augustine “wrote *Confessions* in the spirit of a doctor committed only recently, and so all the more zealously, to a new form of treatment. In the first nine books, therefore, he will illustrate what happens when this

634. “*percussisti cor meum verbo tuo.*”

635. See the theme of sin as sickness and confession in humility to God as treatment under the hands of the *Christus Medicus* in the first part of this work, section 1.4, *Augustine’s Confessions and philosophical therapy: confession as soul healing and therapy by the “Doctor Humilitatis.”*

636. *en. Ps.* 98.3

637. His sermons stir hearts and build up in teachings of faith (*Sermo* 9.1), a goal that is both cognitive and touches the affections. In doing so Augustine has a therapeutic ideal, that the “God of his heart” and the Creator of his hearer’s hearts would also carry on with the cure. For sermons as therapy, see Paul R. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

treatment is not applied, how he had come to discover it, and skipping a decade, he will demonstrate, in Book Ten, its continued application in the present”⁶³⁸

To sum up, the bishop of Hippo has captured some essential aspects of the biblical language of the heart but also expresses a particular retrieval of its tradition. The five meanings, the integrative center of the personal, the realm of interiority, the center of a dynamic teleological movement, the place of spiritual senses and the place of therapy express that his appropriation is comprehensively biblical, while being singularly Augustinian. After discussing Augustine’s comprehensive understanding of the heart, as well as its particular journey laid down in *Confessions*, the next step is to place in conversation the Augustinian heart and Miguel Mahfoud’s *Elementary Experience in Psychology*.

638. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 170.

3.4 A Dialogue between Augustine and Elementary Experience in Psychology

*I depend not only by the fact that someone created me, but also that I need to be received by someone else in the human world. If my existence is to make sense, it does not depend only on myself: a meaning that is valid only for myself is not enough; the meaning of my existence refers to my presence for another person, in the world, in a story. Comprehending meaning depends on whether it makes a difference in a certain context, that I am able to imprint a mark. Without being received into a human world, I would not be able to exercise my own dynamism, I would not become myself. (Miguel Mahfoud, *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*).*

Mahfoud suggests that human nature is intrinsically dependent as it is thrown into the world begging for relationality. In affirming a contingent self in need of an alterity, Mahfoud bears a resemblance to the Augustinian emphasis in a vulnerable subject, a direction postmodern thought recognizes and values. Beyond postmodern thought and resembling an Augustinian perspective, Mahfoud carries the horizon of “being made” which entails an inner relational dynamism and a direction. This road encompasses that I must be welcomed by another in order to become myself, as life is manifestly a communal journey and not self-construction in isolation. As human life is dependent on another that welcomes me, Mahfoud gives voice to a conception of a personhood that entails the denial of self-sufficiency and the movement to find meaning in moving beyond oneself. If there is a “being made” there is also a maker’s intent, a teleological direction that instills in the human person a dependence on relationality. In Mahfoud’s *Elementary Experience in Psychology (EEP)*, humanity is imprinted with original needs and evidences that mark our common humanity and provide discerning criteria to position ourselves in the world. There is, therefore, a similarity between Augustine and Mahfoud’s anthropology regarding a relational transcendent horizon, which includes the fact that we are made and need to be welcomed; furthermore, the desiring transcendence moves us in a quest for happiness, beauty and love, which is part of our common humanity as conceived by Augustine and EEP.

This study turns then to a dialogue between Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* and EEP. We seek to confront concepts and methodologies as accepted in EEP with an

Augustinian theological anthropology, with a particular focus on the heart. Our goal is to evaluate how “diverse” perspectives dialogue with each other, comparing possible convergences as well as dissimilarities.

This section will suggest that Miguel Mahfoud’s Elementary Experience in Psychology is an approach attuned to Augustine’s concept of heart and its dynamism; consequently, despite being distinguishable perspectives, the convergent conceptual and experiential routes evidence that Mahfoud actualizes an Augustinian theological anthropology for a contemporary audience within the limits of psychology; this actualization is not the Augustinian therapy itself; it also includes differences, which express complementarity.

The two main arguments that support this linkage between Augustine and EEP are: firstly, a convergence in the description of the heart: both consider it the relational inner center that is drawn towards transcendence, which sets it in a dynamic movement in the form of desires or “original needs”; secondly, EEP actualizes the Augustinian therapeutic model within psychology by proposing an evaluation or verification of the heart, an attuning to the elementary experience in order to recognize the original needs and activate the human transcendent dynamism.

3.4.1 Elementary Experience and the Augustinian *cor*

3.4.1.1 Heart in Elementary Experience in Psychology

*Since childhood I’ve desired and still desire
the presence that would silence me forever.*

While the other girls danced,

I stood still, wanting,

I lived on wanting.

Pomegranade liqueur,

*Invisible blood pulsing in the presence Most Holy (Adélia Prado, *The Sacrifice*).*

While the idea of *cor* is present at the outset of *Confessions*, it is also significant as a term to be discussed in the perspective of Elementary Experience in Psychology, for both Luigi Giussani and Miguel Mahfoud associate elementary experience and the heart.⁶³⁹ The concept of elementary experience resembles the biblical and Augustinian *cor*, a link Mahfoud's main source, Luigi Giussani, advocates: even though the product of a twentieth century original articulation,⁶⁴⁰ its ancestries seem to be nowhere distant from Augustine's *cor inquietum*.

Elementary experience can also be conveyed in the framework of a personal center that lives in a desiring tension towards infinity amidst contingent realities. Mahfoud describes elementary experience as the personal center, the beating heart of life in the relational engagement with the world.⁶⁴¹ Following both Mahfoud's book *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia: Aprendendo a Reconhecer*⁶⁴² which summarizes EEP's approach, and the more specific chapter about the heart as personal center in *Polifonias do Coração*,⁶⁴³ we will seek to clarify Mahfoud's understanding of the heart in order to dialogue with the *cor* in Augustine's *Confessions*.⁶⁴⁴ There is a correspondence in the description of the heart: both consider it the relational inner center that is immanently marked by transcendence, which sets the heart in a dynamic motion in an experiential-existential quest.

In Mahfoud's perspective, drawing from the conceptual work of Giussani, elementary experience or the heart is the dynamic center that moves a person towards the transcendent, a nucleus containing original needs and evidences. Humanity is intrinsically set towards a free relationship with the infinite, and seeks to break the walls of any dwelling which wants to imprison it: needs and evidences of the heart are the existential sign of the free relationship with the infinite.⁶⁴⁵ The two basic components in EEP's idea of a desiring inner center, needs and evidences, express the dynamism towards encounter at the origin of our humanity. Firstly, the constitutive needs, *exigências* (as Mahfoud puts it), are related to the

639. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 9.

640. Scola, *Luigi Giussani, un pensamiento original*.

641. Miguel Mahfoud, "O coração como núcleo pessoal: contribuições de Luigi Giussani," in *Polifonias do Coração*, eds. Anette Hoffmann, Leda M. de Oliveira and Marina Massimi (Ribeirão Preto, Funpec Editora, 2014), 117.

642. Mahfoud, *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*.

643. Mahfoud, "O coração como núcleo pessoal," 117.

644. Since our goal is to set EEP in dialogue with Augustine, this section will not seek to elucidate broadly the different concepts in Mahfoud's perspective, but to focus on the idea of elementary experience as the heart in order to bring the resources for bridge-building.

645. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 79.

human tendency towards infinite realities expressed in a need for happiness, justice, love, freedom, meaning, beauty. Secondly, the original evidences (*evidências*) express a transcendent mark in immanence expressing the heart dynamism through the search for ultimate answers. These evidences are expressed in terms of existential ultimate questions, such as questioning the meaning of life, the reality of death, the problems of pain and injustice. In common, needs and evidences express an original impetus towards transcendence that is continuously stimulated by contact with reality.

Evidences and needs are the tools for encounter, the immanent desiring center that is in contact with reality ignites the human motor. Its movement contains the impetus of this human dynamism. Humanity is thrown into existence with an original force that is stimulated in our interaction with reality,

nature thrusts man into a universal comparison with himself, with others, with things, and furnishes him with a complex of original needs and “evidences” which are tools for that encounter. So original are these needs or these “evidences” that everything man does or says depends on them. These needs can be given many names. They can be summarized with different expressions (for example, the need for happiness, the need for truth, for justice, etc.). They are like a spark igniting the human motor. Prior to them, there is no movement or human dynamism.⁶⁴⁶

The constitutive needs or *exigências* as Mahfoud calls them express that the heart of each person is made of structural demands, marked by a totalizing horizon. Humanity is continually in search of something infinite.⁶⁴⁷

Giussani takes an image from electric tension or electric potential difference, in order to suggest that between our fundamental exigencies and the limited story of a life there is a distance, establishing a “potential difference” which is responsible for the spark of life that places in movement the human dynamism. Following Giussani, Mahfoud’s EEP suggests that our humanity is marked by transcendent realities shaping immanent search, and therefore the heart is set in a situation of “potential difference.” The distance between the infinite desires and its actual existence activate the heart: Mahfoud’s *coração* is the mobilization that is born in us precisely in this difference of potential.⁶⁴⁸ In EEP, reality is the place where the horizons of infinity continually provoke the “heart beating” within contingent realities. As Mahfoud suggests,

646. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 7.

647. Mahfoud, “O Coração como Núcleo Pessoal,” 128.

648. *Ibid.*, 125.

our experience of reality brings to us radical demands: we have a need for beauty, not for being fashionable; we have a need for love, not for patting things; we need justice, not just less corruption in the country. These are horizons of infinity that continually re-emerge in our relationship with reality. Between our experience of relationship with someone and the need for love, a provocation takes place, if there is an ideal tension, the heart beats. Giussani rightly calls this mobilization that is born in us precisely in this difference of potential.⁶⁴⁹

Mahfoud suggests that, although there is a structural incompleteness to fulfill what we intensely desire or what we have planned,⁶⁵⁰ reality continuously provokes humanity with an impact that draws life towards the original needs. Through the idea of heart beating, Mahfoud points out the continuous force of the unnegotiable needs. Heart beating draws in itself the idea of resilience: the heart is the personal center that insists on living, affirming the continuity of love even amidst resentment, or the quest for justice amidst hard oppression. The beating of a heart is an image of freedom even within constraints.⁶⁵¹ The heart beat announces the presence of those fundamental needs, of what is not renounceable.⁶⁵² One may lack material wealth, intelligence or educational opportunities, but the inextricable needs, manifested in a cry for beauty, for justice and happiness even the most deprived of us can experience, pointing to our common humanity. A physiological reality, the physical pulsing of the heart, remains an evidence of the continuity of life which points to the heart's quest for the infinite even when life is within its limits and constraints.

There is, however, a possibility of denying the heart quest, living in a way that the fundamental questions such as those about life, pain, meaning, do not surface. Giussani calls it an "unreasonable" posture, for it pretends to explain a phenomenon in a non-holistic way that is not appropriate to all the factors involved in it. The unreasonable attitudes do not entirely correspond to the factors that experience shows. It gives a disproportionate attention to one aspect of reality, leading to a partial appropriation. As Mahfoud suggests, it is unreasonable to break the expectation of an exhaustive, total response that completes us, that puts the heart in peace, for this attitude interrupts the dynamism that is peculiar to the heart, the dynamism that gives human tension to relate with anything that exists. It is unreasonable

649. Ibid., 124-125.

650. Ibid., 118.

651. Ibid., 120.

652. Ibid.

to prevent the horizon of wholeness for it interrupts the dynamism proper to the human person.⁶⁵³

To sum up, the heart in EEP expresses the dynamic relational center of a personal life in the encounter of the subject with his world. The heart lives between reality and infinity, and it beats expressing the tension between what its infinite needs actually desire and its contingent contexts. A person is truly oneself by affirming that he lives an existence that transcends him, accepting that reality was not given to him by himself, but gifted by another. As Mahfoud points out, “I could not have the awareness of myself without the perception of life beyond me, without a relationship. If I did not realize, in a relationship, life pulsating, I would not be able to identify life in me. In this singular perception of myself and of life, there emerges existential recognition of the value of one's own personality, of each particularity and of the whole of reality.”⁶⁵⁴

3.4.1.2 The Augustinian *Cor* and Elementary Experience

After discussing the meanings of *cor* in Augustine and the recently surveyed ideas about heart in EEP, this work seeks to compare the perspectives about the heart in Augustine and EEP, pointing out similarities and differences.

In the Augustinian perspective, the heart is the integrative personal center. The heart is the essential nucleus, an intimate center, the focal place of human capacities (including both the affective and the intellectual). It is also the realm of interiority, where an inwards upwards movement towards God finds its proper place; it is the center of dynamic teleological movement that desires to return to God, the epicenter of life, which sets *cor* in a restless journey until its homecoming.

Augustine describes theology and the human condition in a way that generates space for a dynamic relational theological anthropology. It involves two correlated characteristics: one associated with movement, the dynamism of life towards a goal directed by the Creator; and the other related to an inner center, the human heart, which serves as criterion to discern and position oneself in humility before God. It is journeying humanity in *via*, with a *telos*, created not only by God but for Him; and at the same time with an interior

653. Mahfoud, *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*, 131.

654. Mahfoud, “O Coração como Núcleo Pessoal,” 121-122.

focal point, the heart, the discerning center to which humanity is called to return in order to fulfill its human destiny before God and the world.

In EEP, as it is in Augustine, the heart is the integrative desiring center. It is the *nucleus* of the original needs and evidences that is constantly being provoked by reality and through this interaction becomes aware of the human structural incompleteness. Consequently, the heart is the place where the human drama is set, either leaning to nihilism, in a position that affirms that nothing can fulfill the heart's desire; or, oppositely, it can be an occasion of openness to the totality of the factors involved in a certain situation. It includes both an awareness of frailty and the possibility of a human response even within incompleteness, in which the heart's wound becomes an occasion for a revived human elaboration and position.⁶⁵⁵ What typifies the heart is a teleological dynamism that cannot be extinguished, but requests to be heard: the heart's vitality is constantly reopening the human quest. The human search for meaning cannot be controlled by a rule or a mechanism; but it is accessed through self-awareness at the level of our deepest needs.

There is a convergence between the concept of elementary experience and Augustine at the level of an infinite desiring restlessness. As Giussani points out, "the bee knows the secret of its beehive, and the ant knows the secret of its anthill, but man does not know its own secret – the structure of a human being is a free relationship with the infinite, and therefore, it has no limits. It bursts through the walls of any place within which one would want to restrain it".⁶⁵⁶ In *Confessions*, from its prologue onwards, Augustine highlights that there is a tendency to God that is intrinsic to the nature of humanity, but the human race in its present state is unaware of its origin and destination. The unquiet movement is not caused by any event in one's life (even though experiences could highlight the need for a transcendent being), but is universal and a priori, for every mortal human being seeks God in a fundamental form of a desiring restlessness. Since without knowledge no search is possible, God placed in memory an original tendency towards the divine. An implicit knowledge of God places humanity in movement towards happiness, even though in the form of an unknown desire for infinite realities. Likewise, Miguel Mahfoud develops an Augustinian anthropology which is implicit at Giussani's concept of elementary experience. Mahfoud suggests that human experience in its basic structure is characterized by an irresistible

655. Ibid., 118.

656. Giussani, *Religious Sense*, 79.

unquietness that moves in search of even more satisfactory answers, because human desire tends to the infinite, and therefore considers provisional and inadequate the answers found.

EEP's emphasis in the idea of heart dynamism actualizes the Augustinian tradition with an experiential realism. Giussani's own trajectory included a passage from the notion of religious sense (which resembles the idea of a restless heart in Augustine) to the concept of elementary experience: it highlights the importance of an experiential encounter with reality to activate human dynamism. Its consequence is the addition of an Augustinian realism that reinforces a concrete need for an alterity. This elaboration of an Augustinian framework integrating the importance of how the heart meets real life in experience accompanies Giussani's expansion from his first notion of religious sense in 1957 into the idea of elementary experience in the 80s (the expanded 3rd version of *The Religious Sense* in 1986).

Augustine and EEP suggest that the heart dynamism happens in the dependence of a relationship, of an alterity. One cannot access the personal center, or the heart, if not relationally, for even though the elaboration of experience comes from the subject, the recognition of the *exigências* and evidences is not self-conducted. As Giussani entitled one of his books, the self is reborn through an encounter. Mahfoud suggests that one carries in the heart "a burning wound." The need and quest for happiness is an alighted wound, an ardently radical desire for something new, open, and infinite in reality. And at the same time, the heart that is wounded can find the path, the criterion by which one judges the correspondences of each event to the needs for happiness, justice and truth which are constitutive of being.⁶⁵⁷

Augustine has the perception that reason recognizes the existence of an inner truth that serves as criterion. Likewise, for EEP, the criterion is imprinted upon humanity in the form of constitutive fundamental needs, desired by all but expressed differently in each cultural context. One could also point out that the anthropological consequences of the Augustinian understanding of love of God are the pursuit of eternal values and the delight in lovely things⁶⁵⁸ the concepts of exigencies and evidences in EEP could be set as contemporary re-appropriations of Augustinian anthropology.

For Augustine, even though one does not realize, the human being has a mark of God, created in the image and likeness of him. In the incarnation of the Word, humankind is

657. Mahfoud, "O coração como núcleo pessoal," 126.

658. Burnaby, *Amor Dei*, x.

brought to the fullness of that which was already destined for creation. Augustine and Giussani suggest humanity is gifted with marks within that are a kind of preparation to adhere to revelation. It is a similar itinerary of fundamental theology, a two-step process that involves firstly the “pointers” then the revelation of Christ, “in your unfathomable mercy you first gave the humble certain pointers to the true Mediator, and then sent him, that by his example they might learn even a humility like his” (*Conf.* 10.43.68). Elementary Experience in Psychology, Mahfoud’s perspective, remains in the indicators, in the heart’s provocative call. The needs are marks in humanity’s heart that directs to seek for love, truth and justice. One is called to return to the inner centre, to the original needs and evidences.

Considering the perspective of EEP, we are to suggest that the similarities with an Augustinian restless heart are significant. Of particular importance is the idea of a restless teleological movement towards transcendence. As Giancarlo Petrini points out, in EEP the heart is characterized by an irresistible restlessness that moves in search of increasingly satisfactory answers, because human desire tends to the infinite, considering therefore each answer provisional and only momentarily adequate.⁶⁵⁹

By drawing both from Giussani and phenomenology, EEP established an opening in psychology to dialogue with spirituality. Nevertheless, its major limitation in updating Augustine’s therapy is precisely being in an academic psychological framework rather than a theological one, which prevents EEP from taking the step of adhering to a special revelation. In Mahfoud’s synthesis of Giussani’s work into psychology lies the limitation of not proposing a return to Christianity, whereas one could point out that it may bring someone closer to a spiritual quest. Mahfoud’s originality includes more clearly an interdisciplinary framework of theological anthropology, phenomenology and psychology. Contrarily to Augustine’s reception in modernity and postmodernity that have ruptured Augustine’s philosophy and theology, EEP does not break the connection; it simply suggests that adhering to the Christian revelation is not the objective of its psychological proposal, but recognizes that the pointers to revelation are inherently in the human heart.

Furthermore, Augustine and Mahfoud have in common a biographical journey: both had a Christian upbringing but when reaching adulthood, they came across intellectual difficulties which made them depart from the faith received. Through encounters, they were

659. Giancarlo Petrini, foreword to *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia: aprendendo a reconhecer*, by Miguel Mahfoud (Brasília, Universa, 2012), 17-18.

reopened on a quest for truth that eventually became a return to Catholicism. They recovered the faith which was already part of their search, but in a more mature reappraisal. Having gone through a further process of questioning, their biographies have fomented deeper existential enquiries which informed their academic interests and pursuits. Augustine reaffirmed the priority of grace, and Mahfoud that reality provokes the heart in a limitless search for beauty, truth, love and happiness. One is called to re-elaborate experience in contact with these central and defining marks of elementary experience. In common, Augustine and Mahfoud affirm that a quest for transcendence is intrinsically part of their lives. This pursuit does not belong solely to their spiritual quests, but are immanent in our common humanity and can only be satisfied relationally.

Miguel Mahfoud's perspective draws us towards a comparable Augustinian call to return to one's heart, adding to it experiential sensitivity and contemporary relevance. *Elementary Experience in Psychology* brings to psychological practice elements of the wide-ranging Augustinian theological anthropology in the framework of nurturing and paying attention to the central elements of human experience, not separating theology from philosophy or psychology while yet retaining the boundaries between disciplines.

3.4.2 The recognition of an experiential relational dynamism: conceptual convergence and differentiated complementarity

Modern and contemporary society knows how to deal with the needs of housing, health, education, work, among others. The market offers answers to those needs. But the original needs develop the desire for goods that are not available in the market, so the tendency is to ignore them, as if they were baseless fantasies. But it is arbitrary to conclude that the goods that the market does not have are non-existent. Relational goods, for example, motherhood and paternity, are not on the market, but no one who uses reason could deny their existence. (Giancarlo Petrini)

3.4.2.1 The Recognition of an Experiential Dynamism

Mahfoud recalls an exposition of baroque images, in which someone invited him not only to look at the statues, but to capture its implicit artistic dynamism: “note that the

image has a movement: it asks you to stir, it suggests your gaze to move, not because it is dispersed, but because it has its own dynamics.”⁶⁶⁰ Mahfoud’s response was to accept that invitation as he learned to recognize the baroque essential pattern,

Nothing to chance, the lines are asking you to look at some essential point of that image. There is a multiplicity of elements and directions, but all that will not disperse or lead to emptiness: some trace makes you return, your gaze is led to something fundamental of that figure. Some statues forged in the baroque style do not have this dynamism: the image is scattered, the look is lost outside the figure or in any detail... but it is not a proper baroque statue, it does not present the dynamics of its own. It is as in the case of someone who organizes a beautiful thing, but does not know its peculiar dynamics.⁶⁶¹

In art as it is in human experience: if in a baroque statue there is a peculiar dynamic that includes a recognizable unity, for Mahfoud it could also be the case of personal experience. Aristotle suggested that art imitates nature, as it replicates nature’s way of acting. If the seemingly chaotic and loose elements of baroque art are to be comprehended in an expressed but veiled dynamic congruence, even more personal experience should seek to find its heart’s concealed but identifiable elementary features. As Mahfoud puts it, “baroque has a unity that we often do not recognize [...] there is an expressed unity, apprehensible to intelligence, a characteristic aspect of that figure. When we are before a person something similar happens. For this reason it is necessary to learn to recognize the essential elements of experience in its characteristic dynamism.”⁶⁶² Since the heart is gifted with an essential center, one is called to recognize, to pay attention to the dynamism that is directed towards this experiential unity.

Mahfoud comprehends that elaboration of experience is the consequence of a verification that judges and discerns the needs within when it meets reality; an encounter between a personal nucleus and reality stimulates a criterion that, if discerned, moves the person towards the experiential recognizable unity. Elementary experience constitutes the deepest core of personal identity, and for this very reason it becomes the critical sieve with which each person approaches reality to evaluate it.⁶⁶³ An objective nucleus in subjectivity opens space for a deeper attuning: the path is the verification of the heart, an attention to the criterion of elementary experience. The recognition of the original needs fosters discernment

660. Mahfoud, *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*, 29.

661. *Ibid.*

662. *Ibid.*, 30.

663. Petrini, foreword to *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*, 17.

as it emerges in the encounter with reality. The consequence of elaboration is an adjusting to the dynamism, the response to this original impetus. Elementary experience identifies the meeting point between the subjectivity element and the criterion that points to an essential dynamism, and in recognizing the dynamism of original needs present in this personal center, draws consequences for psychological work.

EEP seeks to evaluate and consult the heart, in attentiveness to the criterion placed within that emerges in the encounter of the original needs and an impact coming from the outside.⁶⁶⁴ We could also point out that a comparable verification of experience is suggested in *Confessions*,

Surely this beauty is apparent to all whose faculties are sound? Why, then, does it not speak the same message to all? Animals, both small and large, see the beauty, but they are not able to question it, for in them reason does not hold sway as judge over the reports of the senses. Human beings have the power to question, so that by understanding the things he has made they may glimpse the unseen things of God; but by base love they subject themselves to these creatures, and once subject can no longer judge. Creatures do not respond to those who question unless the questioners are also judges: not that they change their voice that is, their beauty if one person merely sees it, while another sees and inquires, as though they would appear in one guise to the former, and differently to the latter; no, the beauty appears in the same way to both beholders, but to one it is dumb, and to the other it speaks. Or rather, it speaks to all, but only they understand who test the voice heard outwardly against the truth within. (*Conf.* 10.6.10).

Augustine points out that the truth within is to be tested against the voice heard outwardly. The heart possessing inner senses and in human interiority it is possible to identify the presence of an innermost truth. According to Charles Taylor, Augustine suggests that reason acknowledges a point of truth that serves as criterion; this is given to nature and shapes it rather than is constructed by the subject, and therefore, it is present in all of humanity: “he tries to show his interlocutor that there is something higher than our reason, which thus deserves to be called God. The proof turns on the insight that reason recognizes that there is a truth which is criterial for it, i.e., a standard on which it regulates itself, which is not its own making, but beyond it and is common to all.”⁶⁶⁵

664. Mahfoud, “O coração como núcleo pessoal,” 128.

665. Taylor, *Sources of Self*, 132.

3.4.2.2 A Relational Dynamism

For EEP, a genuine dynamism in the personal center of elementary experience is stimulated by another human's company. This inspiring presence is not necessarily embodied as it could also be prompted by drawing inspiration from the past (through a personal engagement with the author or characters of a book, for example). Remaining in contact with one's dynamism depends on someone else that provokes me to recognize this dynamism in myself, for it is at the same time common to all humanity but translated differently in each personal reality. This dynamism is manifested as openness to transcendent realities, such as in the need for love, justice and beauty, which is also an expression of a quest for relationality with the infinite.

Since one of Mahfoud's main interests has been in the person as subject of elaboration of experience, there is the need for a criterion, a point of reference to avoid subjectivism or being bound by current ideologies. For Mahfoud, experience is not just the self-directed subject who has his elaboration as an autonomous flow of thought. An independent self-explanation could lead to understanding the world as a projection of self-construction. The dominant culture renounces the search for answers to the questions and the anxieties that spring from the elementary experience; on the other hand, considers these needs as aspects of individual subjectivity.⁶⁶⁶ This human dynamism, however, cannot be activated by one's own force or willing. It happens only through an encounter with a human authentic position in reality.

A comparable relational dynamism is also present in the Augustinian tradition, for love is the essential relationality of being, anchored in a creational ontology, on which humanity is never the source, but nevertheless, free gifted by the other. According to Marie-Anne Vannier, the cornerstone of Augustine's ontology is the affirmation of being a creature in relation to the Creator. This relationality is defined in oppositional terms, delineating God as the infinite, eternal, not bound by time, without future or past (*Conf.* 9.10.24) and humanity as finite and dependent; this antagonism proposes a certain apophatic atmosphere as he places humans at the impossibility of circumscribing God, as if everything said about him verges on

666. Petrini, foreword to *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*, 18.

inadequacy.⁶⁶⁷ But Augustine does not affirm a complete apophatic theology, for God is present and is understood through his creation, the works of the Creator. There is an implicit and incomplete knowledge about God in creation, both interior (the mark left in the heart) and exterior, through order of the world: “Then indeed did I perceive your invisible reality through created things, but to keep my gaze there was beyond my strength” (*Conf.* 7.17.23). In *Confessions* Augustine underlines the possibility of perceiving the transcendent through immanent realities but stresses the dependence of humanity upon the Creator to keep the search for the fountain alive. If on one hand God is revealed through the voice of creation crying out that it was made, on the other, humanity is kept in need of a force beyond its capabilities to sustain its gaze, “for if anyone listens, all these things will tell him, ‘We did not make ourselves; he made us who abides forever’” (*Conf.* 9.10.25), *non ipsa nos fecimus sed fecit nos qui manet in aeternum*.

Although creation shouts out for a mysteriously hidden yet present Creator, nevertheless, Augustine also conveys the argument that one is not able to sustain that vision or uphold that search by oneself. God imprinted in creation the aptitude to listen and connect to this vision, but one is not independent from the very source of life to fully grasp it. There is an intrinsic reliance of creature towards the Creator, as the finite is sustained by the eternal. Humanity acknowledges or at least glimpses the path, but is not able to keep the eyes straight on the way. Humanity is kept *in via*, thirsting for what it seeks, desiring. The limits of creation are highlighted, but one that also establishes a positive *telos*, one that sets humanity in motion. By this dramatic anthropology, on which “hints are followed by guesses” (T. S. Eliot) the *inquietum cor* struggles to hear the voice of God.

Even though humanity carries an aspiration to return to the roots of its true self, it cannot attain its goal by itself. Happiness, the ultimate desire of the will, consists in having God, or participating in him, for it consists in a condition whose ultimate foundation is God himself; consequently, the return to one’s being, the attainment of its end, is dependent upon another.⁶⁶⁸ Augustine proposes an itinerary of progressive deepening in the ontological status of man, capable of implying the totality of existence within an original horizon of salvation.⁶⁶⁹ The consequence is that no human can fulfill its own desire for happiness by himself. From

667. Marie-Anne Vannier, *Creatio, conversio, formatio chez S. Augustin* (Fribourg: Ed. Universitaires, 1991), 38.

668. Pieretti, “Doctrina Antropológica Agostiniana,” 334.

669. *Ibid.*, 332-333.

the aspiration that originally moves humankind until the final resolution a human being is submerged in a restless existence. However, the search that strives for God also relies upon a free initiative of the Creator, which has placed transcendence at the core of immanent searching and revealed himself through the Incarnation of Christ. In other words, humanity would not explore a path towards God if the divine did not allow himself to be found or placed upon humanity the very desire to seek him. Furthermore, obeying and realizing the commands are only possible as a gift, that is, a mature love is only attained if God is offering such love.

Mahfoud suggests that it is possible to embrace an authentic human response which is already at work in the heart. EEP, however, confronts human independence by affirming that the heart or the personal center can only be accessed relationally. In doing so, EEP brings back Augustine's anthropological emphasis to the contemporary scene: it affirms that truth, love, beauty are both within the self and beyond my reach. It reinforces the dependent and relational nature of experience. One can only find true recognition of a personal position towards this immanent criterion, elementary experience, through an empathic presence, or drawing inspiration and strength from another being. It reminds one of Augustine's prayer in the first book of *Confessions*, in which the soul is compared to the small house in ruins, which needs to be enlarged by a presence beyond itself: "The house of my soul is too small for you to enter: make it more spacious by your coming. It lies in ruins: rebuild it. Some things are to be found there which will offend your gaze; I confess this to be so and know it well" (*Conf.* 1.5.6).

3.4.2.3 Psychological work is not managing another's subjectivity but an attuning to the mystery of the other

Mahfoud proposes an attention to a central, dynamic human movement towards its center, by identifying "the essential elements of our being, learning to recognize that we are made with an inner demand for happiness, for fulfillment."⁶⁷⁰ If psychological work disregards the essential dynamism of the personal unity by focusing on preconceived theories that do not take into account the aspects that do not fit the previous theoretical scheme, psychologists could miss the experiential dynamism as a pointer to a deeper reality. As Mahfoud suggests,

670. Mahfoud, *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*, 30.

psychologists do something similar: we manage, we try to set things right; but by not recognizing the dynamics of being a person, some aspects end up being left unconnected, dispersing ... because the unity of experience is not given by us, it is not constituted by us. It's at the origin. Experience has a unity in itself. By recognizing this peculiar dynamic, we can deal more carefully with experience, with its development, with its unity.⁶⁷¹

What follows is a critique of the manner in which psychologists try to manage their patient's subjectivity by fitting them in psychological models, while unable to recognize the implicit dynamic unity their broken lives already point to. Mahfoud's proposal highlights that psychological professional practice can foster a posture of recognizing and pointing to the client's authentic human dynamic that is immanent to one's original heart needs and quests, and by doing so, help someone to position oneself better towards life situations,

Giussani's contribution and Mahfoud's reflection assure us that there are other possibilities of facing the challenges of existence, more positive, more dignified, richer in meaning and beauty. They depend on the attentive and passionate gaze directed at the human experience that we can learn to awaken from the numbing impoverishment of the self, to bring forth the heart that was immersed in drowsiness and inconsistency, to walk the path of life as an exciting adventure, the provocations of reality, without censoring anything and never giving up waiting to be unveiled from that horizon that the heart stubbornly awaits.⁶⁷²

Elementary Experience in Psychology highlights an objective subjectivity that is not defined by the patient's choice, but by a human movement common to all. Even though it reinforces our common humanity, EEP also creates room for singularity, for the *exigências*, such as expressed in the desire for beauty, love, happiness, manifested in varied forms, depending on cultures and life circumstances. The essence of the human heart remains the same, even though the manner one seeks the fulfillment of the deeper realities of life changes constantly. Consequently, EEP rejects easy and ready-made answers of self-sufficient subjects, fostering both to patient and therapist a respectful sense of mystery to what elementary experience is pointing at even amidst the contradictions of existence. Mahfoud seeks to elaborate a therapeutic methodology capable of valuing in a thought-provoking fashion the freedom of the patient and the capacity to face his existential drama.⁶⁷³

671. Ibid., 29.

672. Petrini, foreword to *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*, 27.

673. Petrini, foreword to *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*, 15.

A more concrete example would be the challenge of considering the dynamism present in sadness. Sorrow in EEP is not taken as a problem in itself, but a resource to connect to the original needs. Giussani considers sadness the fundamental element of an aware life.⁶⁷⁴ He quotes St. Thomas Aquinas' definition of sadness as "the desire for an absent good."⁶⁷⁵ It arises out of the human incapacity to conquer the final goal to human destiny; but it is also a positive force when one is able to realize that sadness points to the "greatness of life and to intuit life's destiny."⁶⁷⁶ Giussani calls sadness a spark that is activated by a potential difference between the desired destination and its historical fulfillment.⁶⁷⁷ Despair, on the other hand, would be the opposite to sadness,⁶⁷⁸ a deprivation of an infinitely great horizon, a denial of a dynamic search for what is constitutively human. Giussani's idea of sadness is picked up by Mahfoud's psychological approach, for sadness carries the hope to continue searching for adequate answers. Despair is against the human dynamism as it prevents a continual search for answers in a way sadness does not. Sadness respects the inner dynamic of a desire for an absent good, even though in a concealed fashion, "when an energy is highly strung, if it runs across an obstacle, it still tends to go beyond it. It does not give up."⁶⁷⁹

Mahfoud points out that if psychotherapeutic work were based on the intention to overcome sadness and not capture its dynamism, it would be equivalent to arranging some component of a baroque statue, in the best way we could, to modify the person's posture. But the fundamental question is to locate the very human, personal dynamism that constitutes the subject even if depressed, although confused. Even in the experience of some psychologically complex situation, in that experience, there is something else: an original need, an *exigência*. We are called to learn to recognize it.⁶⁸⁰

The task of the one who listens to another is to remain as an emphatic presence amidst pain, rather than an easy-made "oh, see the good side of life." When one recognizes a nuclear element that points to a deeper level of experience, there is the possibility of a different positioning and outlook. If we tried to show contradictions in what the person is

674. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 51.

675. St. Thomas Aquinas, quoted in Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 51.

676. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 52.

677. *Ibid.*

678. *Ibid.*

679. *Ibid.*, 55.

680. Mahfoud, *Experiencia Elementar em Psicologia*, 54.

saying, or suggest more positive horizons; we would not be attuning to the dynamism of elementary experience. As Mahfoud suggests,

Psychological work helps one discern the original needs and activate a teleological dynamic in order to re-elaborate experience. Even a child comes to talk about it if we make room for it. And there is a surprising aspect: if he can say that the pain is to be alone, it can develop care in relationships, which would remain impossible as long as he just reaffirms “I’m worth nothing.” Without reaching the fundamental need, the dynamics of care do not arise, and it would be revolving around buzzwords and rules.⁶⁸¹

Augustine’s response to EEP’s psychological work would include a critique that therapy requires a medicine beyond immanence, for in loving God humanity finds the original dynamism of surrendering responsiveness. The contradictory life without God has a tendency to idolatry but will always call sinful humanity to humility, for no earthly being can fulfill the desires for infinity that God has placed in the human heart in creation. The author of Ecclesiastes talks about how God “set eternity in the hearts of men”, however they “cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (3:14). The longings for eternity, beauty, love, justice and happiness are hints of a lost world, but the desires for power and vainglory have come from the twisted relationship with God and its implications for the human heart. The sick nature can abort the God-given desires and substitute them for idols. Idolatry is an expression of human contradiction, because counterfeit gods express some of the glory that humanity seeks. As Lamberigts puts it, in the Augustinian perspective the ethical life is intrinsically related to God’s love and its prerequisite is a willingness to love him,

The essence of grace is love, a love which is identical with the desire for the good, and this good is present in its perfect form in the Good one, God: the one who takes the initiative with regard to love is finally also the purpose of our love. Augustine clearly has a Trinitarian view in mind: God’s love is revealed through the incarnated Christ and results in the gift of the Holy Spirit which is given to us. God’s love directs us towards the good. It is a prerequisite for human beings’ willingness to love God. Because of God’s gratuitous love, our mind is illuminated and we are enabled to overcome our sinful desires. In a sense, thanks to this love, we will act because of God himself. A theologically good ethical life is related to God’s love and the qualification good can only be attributed to a life in which everything is done because of God, which means that He is loved gratuitously. However, human beings can only reach such a level if God is offering such love.”⁶⁸²

681. Mahfoud, *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia*, 56.

682. Mathijs Lamberigts, “Augustine’s View on Love as Grace in the Controversy with Julian of Aclanum,” *Augustiniana* 64, no. 1-4 (2014): 82.

In conclusion, considering the differences between the two approaches, Mahfoud's goal is psychological and not theological: he seeks a human position in the world with authenticity, a relational self in a living humanity that responds as a human being to the criteria of transcendence within. For Augustine, despite the common emphasis on the relational self, the path towards a full relationally responsive life is intrinsically theological. The Augustinian *noverim me, noverim te* aims at a self-knowledge as double knowledge of God and self. By turning within, an upwards movement directed towards the God who is present in his heart, Augustine points out that our hearts remain restless until they find the original Creator who has also placed in the heart the quests for beauty, truth and happiness. His goal is to diminish himself in order to rediscover himself in a relationship with his Creator in order to love him. Nevertheless, even though the fields are marked by differences, the search for recognition of dynamism towards transcendence is part of both approaches, suggesting a differentiated complementarity.

Further questions of interdisciplinary reappraisal and the boundaries between theology and psychology arise. EEP does not make the Augustinian claim that God in the Christian tradition is the fulfilment of the heart's desire for happiness, but its perspective has an implicit faith-based component, since it is influenced by theological anthropology. Both the Augustinian *confessio* and the movement towards elementary experience and its personal centre highlight the need to follow a transcendent imprint that stimulates life from within.

3.5 Conclusion

Mahfoud proposes a therapy that is a re-elaboration of experience “for this life” while Augustine fundamentally believes ultimate healing relies on loving the God revealed in Christ through the Spirit, a telos that will be consummated in the afterlife. That, however, does not mean that Augustine is not concerned in “earthly healing”, or that he is prone to “escapism.” Augustine is realistic, and indeed concerned about earthly health-giving. Nevertheless, he places a limit on the therapeutic effects when disconnected from revelation. Therapy through confession, placing the wounds and praising the *Christus Medicus* is essentially oriented to transcendent life. Mahfoud evidently includes this transcendent aspect through an attuning to the original needs within, but is in the end more “immanently” oriented than Augustine’s therapeutic proposal. This important difference in objective, however, does not mean that Augustine’s position excludes Mahfoud’s as if they were in contradiction. In fact, EEP might be as Augustinian as a psychological perspective within the limits of academic psychology can reach. Giussani and Mahfoud also agree that true life includes loving the infinite realities, the mystery that is the foundation of life. As Augustine in his sermons, who is interested in moving his audience (*movere*) and not merely pleasing (*delectare*) or convincing (*docere*)⁶⁸³ EEP seeks to move the heart towards its authentic dynamism.

Mauro AmatuZZi, writing about Mahfoud’s work, pointed out that Elementary Experience in Psychology has both a phenomenological methodology that values the intentionality of subjectivity and a privileged framework to dialogue with spirituality and theology. Firstly, it captures not only the feelings or emotions but the dynamism, the intention, the movement. It is an invitation to be attentive to what is already present in one’s experience, but so often missed and overlooked. Everyday living becomes the arena for a passionate gaze towards reality, as emotions are seen not as an end in themselves, but as relevant pointers to that elementary experience. Secondly, AmatuZZi also points out that, since Mahfoud takes his main concept from a book that discusses the religious sense,⁶⁸⁴ EEP can also dialogue with theology. This interaction between psychology and theology can shed new

683. Claes and Dupont, “Augustine’s Sermons and Disability,” 338.

684. Giussani, *Religious Sense*.

light into what it means to be human in real life experience through an interdisciplinary approach.⁶⁸⁵

As a concluding remark, I would like to suggest a comparison between how Augustine and EEP see the transcendent teleological direction of the heart and what is central in unveiling its fulfillment. For St. Augustine, the impulse to transcendence is related to the natural desire to be united with God, to see the beauty of his face, to rest in his love. The search for happiness expresses immanently the direction towards an ontological relation that constitutes life and impels the heart towards infinite desires. Consequently, loving God, being relationally responsive to his voice, giving him the praise in *confessio* carries the heart to the place that corresponds to its origin and destination. God's love is the goal, the dynamism (desire to drive us to the goal) and the essence of the heart's interior life.

For Mahfoud's Elementary Experience in Psychology, this structural incompleteness of our personal experience could be the drama that leads us to nothingness, to nihilism; but the position "let us admit that nothing realizes our thirst" is less than sufficient. Rather than failing the quest, the infinite desires for beauty, happiness, love, justice, meaning and truth in a contingent and limited world are the resource for embracing a position of openness to the totality of the factors involved in reality (reasonableness in Giussani's terms), recognizing that there is still place for awe, for the unexpected, for the gift. By recognizing the elementary, the nuclear essential center of the heart in action, the experiential dynamism may become a reference, as a light in a dark place, a criterion that becomes an occasion for a revived human position in the world.

Augustine and Mahfoud stem from the same essential horizon of dependent human origin, for we did not make ourselves. Creationality places dependence in the essence of our human experience. Being human is, therefore, to be relationally responsive to the other. The answer of who that other is, and how that relational fulfillment is achieved, express a difference between the two approaches. The answers fit the framework of their contexts, as one is eminently psychological and this-worldly oriented, and the other is theological other-worldly directed, pointing to a revelation from above. Augustine, however, does not advocate a ready-made departure from the earth but a struggle not to be bound by worldly entanglements; the difference of Augustine and EEP's approach, consequently, does not mean

685. Mauro Amatzuzi, preface to *Experiência Elementar em Psicologia: aprendendo a reconhecer*, by Miguel Mahfoud (Brasília, Universa, 2012), 11-13.

absence of convergent perspectives, but points to a kind of reciprocal and supportive dialogue.

4 CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A THERAPEUTIC RESPONSIVE RELATIONALITY

“The Augustinian outlook alone allows not only the Catholic philosophy, but also the fully human one. If this has not yet been fully realized, the reason is that the future reserves for the doctrine of St. Augustine a fruitful activity far surpassing all the influence it has exercised in the past.” (Maurice Blondel)

This work’s main objective has been to understand Augustine’s *Confessions* and its therapeutic relationality in order to discuss its implications for a contemporary audience through interdisciplinary dialogue, particularly with the approach of the Elementary Experience in Psychology (EEP). Augustine conveys a relational rather than a self-sufficient anthropological outlook; this relationally-oriented perspective may well express a vision of self-giving in love amidst self-centered societies. In our contemporary pluralistic twenty-first century, the need for theological anthropology is highlighted as technology and globalization have produced information but have not conveyed a vision of communicative language based on relational personhood. The hyper-connected digital age may establish the possibility for friendly encounters, but it does not necessarily foster open dialogue. Recognizing Augustine as an apt companion to convey a more dialogical human outlook, this work has sought to understand *Confessions* and its therapeutic approach as a relational proposal that carries implications to contemporary societies, particularly given the context of present-day individualism. An increased focus on self-sufficiency and independence in the increasingly technical societies has generated an absence of those meaningful relational experiences that give life a deeper sense of purpose. The fragility and transience of affective bonds in a consumer-oriented society on one hand,⁶⁸⁶ and the inattention to one’s own personal subjective experience on the other (interiority in Augustinian terms), stimulates dis-functional relationships. The combination of relational fragility and the lack of attention to the inner life in a fast-paced society can forge an individualistic mentality that is also poor in meaning. Given this scenario, theological anthropology is called to promote an understanding of personhood in which the self is open to and enriched by the other, both God and neighbor. In

686. For an interesting dialogue between Augustine’s theological rhetoric and the contemporary consumer oriented society, see Mark Clavier, *On Consumer Culture, Identity, the Church and the Rhetorics of Delight*, Reading Augustine (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

the Christian tradition, knowing oneself happens in the light of knowing an alterity, with intrinsic dialogical implications. Recovering a relational perspective of what it means to be and become human could promote an outlook beyond individualism and egocentrism towards a deeper relational life.

In Augustine's lifetime, the narrative of a triumphant Roman Empire was in decline; its instability and imminent collapse increased the awareness of societal and personal brokenness. In a time of unstable transition, Augustine's *Confessions* provided a narrative of dislocation towards a loving other with a singular kind of honesty and humility that conveyed a vision of transformation of the inner life, a heart therapy. His conversion weaved subjectivity and open relationality towards an alterity, with therapeutic effects. Augustine's consciousness of human vulnerability, articulated in his relational confession, is of great interest to the contemporary state of mind, as demonstrated by postmodern authors such as Derrida and Lyotard. Augustine's work is read as an ally to question human pretenses to power, as a reaction to the collapse of the modern pursuit for progress and human autonomy. Considering the historical similarities but also the great contextual differences, how relevant can Augustine's *Confessions* be to contemporary discussions on vulnerability, relationality and therapy?

Our investigative quest, therefore, contained two different poles, one in Augustine's world and the other in ours, which entailed being aware of the possibilities of interacting different historical times but also the recognition of limits and boundaries. This journey of bridging two worlds led to three interconnected parts. The first was linked to Augustine's vision of therapeutic relationality within his historical world; Augustine's vision of relationality in *Confessions* was structured under the axis of theography, dialogical language and therapy. Secondly, this dissertation sought to understand how Augustine's therapeutic vision is retrieved by contemporary approaches, with a focus firstly on psychology and secondly on postmodern thought. Psychotherapeutic, psychoanalytic and postmodern perspectives have interpreted the *Confessions* through partial appropriations that often do not proper justice to Augustine's therapeutic relational perspective. Given the need for a friendlier, or even unbiased, exchange, one that hears Augustine's own therapeutic voice and yet respects the limits of contemporary psychology, the third part sought an interdisciplinary dialogue with Miguel Mahfoud's *Elementary Experience in Psychology* (EEP), an approach forged in a dialogue with phenomenological psychology and theological

anthropology. Conceptually, the term heart, *cor*, was chosen as it captures a main therapeutic motif in *Confessions* and is used in EEP in a comparable way as Augustine did.

4.1 The Augustinian Therapeutic *Confessio*

This pursuit to understand the Augustinian relevance for today has led to a journey that started in the fourth and fifth centuries of Augustine's world. Amidst multiple interpretations, and sometimes even misinterpretations, we have sought to give Augustine a voice of his own, particularly in the topics of *confessio*, therapy and the heart. At the same time, we have found out that his voice, his language, his love is intended to point beyond himself. It is a spiritual biography, weaving his life in the light of the greater narrative of the Scriptures, casting his small story as an example of God's redeeming work, his own quest as a mirror of all our life journeys. After all, Augustine does not only steal pears (*Conf.* 2.6.12) or surreptitiously escapes towards Carthage (*Conf.* 4.7.12): he is a fallen man inheriting and exemplifying the Adamic fall in the garden, or the prodigal son fleeing towards empty loves and away from his true homeland. His life is not merely an auto-bio-graphy, but a theography, an other-centered pilgrimage of a heart affected by grace that can only make sense of existence in the light of being touched by God; or perhaps even an auto-hagio-graphy, explaining how each sinner can become one and whole ('holy') again, can find salvation to accepting the grace of the Other/others. In a way, to illustrate it with a contemporary metaphor, we can consider his *Confessions* as a love song in which he sings about how to find true love.

Augustine believed human existence originally consisted in depending upon divine love, an intrinsic responsiveness to God. By being created through God's breath, humanity could not preserve life in itself. By choosing to live independently and rebelling against its Creator, human life faded and death emerged: the present fallen state of human nature is a denial of its basic needy creation. The anthropological condition of this mismatch is that human beings restlessly search for happiness which is, ultimately, a desire for the highest good. Augustine identifies this delighting desire for eternity with the love which has its origin in God. Humanity lives, however, in a fading and fleeting world characterized by

chaos, of disorder in the relations between God and humankind, unaware of its true vocation to love and be loved in God.

Augustine suggests that the proper *telos* of life is expressed in the complementary movements of recognizing vulnerability and praising God, of losing self-centered life to regain it anew in loving God. Through the double meaning of *confessio* (opening the wounds of sin, praising the doctor), as a patient before the *Christus Medicus*, humanity recovers the dependent yet therapeutic affirmation of human need and God's glory. *Confessio/confiteri* is not an improvised, unplanned language; it is an intentional openness to an alterity in the wounded love of a vulnerable mortal man. Weaving the doctrine of creation (I am made for you) and the language of the psalms (my words make sense if they express your words) Augustine conveys a biblically informed language of relationality that surrenders himself to love. As one recognizes weakness and fosters a confessional attitude of humility, an inwards upwards move towards the divine takes place, which is also an invitation for a broader audience to join in the communal confession of one heart.

Augustine's confessional therapy adapts ancient philosophical ideals into a theological perspective. The standpoint of classical therapy was transformation in wisdom, which Augustine had valued since his youth after reading Cicero's *Hortensius*. But the humility of Christ changed the philosophical pursuit of knowing oneself. It could not be an autonomous human endeavor as a straight path towards virtuous wisdom. It would have to involve humility, sacrifice and death of his ego. Christ's incarnation is the decisive narrative of dislocation, from glory to excruciating pain, from abundance of life to the sacrifice of the cross. In a similar movement, Augustine realizes that therapy is to abandon presumption and embrace confession, a sacrifice of his heart and tongue to receive a humbled but resurrected self. Christ was resurrected by God the Father: and in laying down his pride, Augustine would participate in this resurrection and receive his renewed self, a partaker in the salvation narrative from divine creation to human fall and finally relational recreation. True wisdom is hidden in the foolishness of God becoming man in weakness, and in order to receive healing from God, Augustine has to undergo the same incarnational *kenotic* movement. If the sin of pride is the sickness to be overcome, Augustine sets his life in confession before the utmost humble doctor. Confession embraces this counter-intuitive wisdom which in turn recovers authentic personhood, for true wisdom is the outcome of knowing oneself in the light of

knowing Christ. This is the core of what we can label Augustine's Christocentric relational personalism. Augustine, therefore, reestablishes the philosophical care of souls into a medical allegory that welcomes wholeheartedly a Christological hidden-in-weakness wisdom approach to therapy.

For Augustine, to confess is to follow the opposite way of a chaotic self-centered life, to open a way to the transformation of the heart and in surrender receive a new self, given by grace. Augustine constantly speaks of *renovatio*: in this narrative of conversion through Christological therapy, Augustine enacts and endorses a dislocation from pride to love. Since this displacement or disruption is a diminishment of the egocentric self, it ultimately does not constitute merely loss but the very recovery of his true self in God, which activates the heart's true dynamism towards the rest it is destined for. The Augustinian *confessio*, therefore, integrates biographically, literarily and existentially the words of the gospel: "whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."⁶⁸⁷

In confessing, Augustine accepts the role of a convalescent patient who always returns to obtain his medicine. *Confessio*, the dual movement of recognizing sins and rejoicing in God's healing presence, is the outward language that allows the continuous renewal of the interior life. A relational confession is not a long-awaited perfect cure, but on the contrary, confession is the recognition that the wounds of the present life and the burdens are to be endured in faith. In confessing, Augustine seeks a unity of heart and language, of interiority and external expression, prayer and action, fostering the health of the heart.

Augustine's therapeutic proposal through confession, however, can both attract and repel his readers. In the movement of recognition of sin and praise to the healer, he is admired as someone who does not hide his vulnerability, allowing himself to be humbled and needy, which resonates in our common humanity that is born dependently and lives through the gift of another, God and others. But Augustine also may repel his readers, as many would like a self-assertive, confident brave man who shows his capacities. For autonomous self-sufficient men, Augustine may be nothing but a weakling who constantly weeps. Augustine is also criticized by some for being overly teleological or pursuing a strict theological confession, but is also admired by others precisely for his life being a persistent return to the God who converts him to grace and love. His search for God is marked by an awareness of

687. Gospel of Matthew 16:24-25.

difference and the ontological distance between humanity and the divine. In the pursuit of humble self-surrender, his tears are both bitter and sweet, as they refer to his sinful condition but also to the joy of hearing the sound of his salvation.

The Augustinian confession is a therapeutic act of surrendering to another, a self-giving in love that generates a pilgrimage from a self-centered life towards a loving relational center. Augustine, as remedy against a hardened heart and being aware of his fractured will, invokes God for a continual conversion of inner life. From the beginning in the early philosophical works to the end in his anti-Pelagian treatises, Augustine does not lose the horizon of a responsive relationality. The realization of an intrinsic need to move towards God grows as the understanding of grace increases. There is a dialogical, relational thread that runs through the whole of Augustine's *oeuvre*: in an early work such as *The Soliloquies*, truth is found in the dialogue, in the conversation with Lady Wisdom; in his later works, even when he is bewildered in the controversies, Augustine emphasizes the crucial element of recognizing the need to remain responding to a loving relationship.

In order to find healing, the heart of God's creatures is called to live under the shadow of his love: created in the image of the Trinity, the right orientation of the heart is to respond freely to the call of God. This responsiveness to a higher being does not mean losing the self's identity, but the condition of its recovery and an invitation for a further union. Augustine highlights the personal relationship to the Creator, which is *interior intimo meo et superior summo meo* (*Conf.* 3.6.11): the creative activity of God within his creatures calls humans to open the heart to the dynamism of grace, a *conversio* that is passing to the light of faith.⁶⁸⁸ In book 13 of the *Confessions*, Augustine links creation and Trinity, creature and relationality: there is a Trinitarian dimension to the creational act (*Conf.* 13.5.6). Creation, the work of the Trinity, is accomplished in voluntary homecoming, in the creature's response to God.

After acknowledging his biographical path towards God in the first books (1-9), and revealing the present state of his heart in book 10, Augustine explicitly states that he confesses not only to arouse his loving devotion toward his Creator, but also that of his readers, "so that together we may declare, Great is the Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise" (*Conf.* 11.1.1). In *Confessions*, there is both personal and communitarian response, as the characters of *Confessions* are mainly three, God, Augustine and his audience. In the

688. Marie-Anne Vannier, *Creatio, conversio, formatio*, 61.

second prologue of book 11, Augustine's vision of responsiveness to the Creator is renewed; not an individual act, but an invitation to a passage from personal to community confession, from the particular to the universal, expressed in the parallel but reinterpreted prologues of books 1 and 11. As a bishop concerned with the transformation of his listeners, Augustine intentionally puts a community prologue in the beginning of book 11, as an invitation for his audience to join the same road of conversion, prayer and transformation.

The voyage to the peace of New Jerusalem is not a departure flight in "airplane mode," but a suffering communal pilgrimage of love. *Confessio*, the humbling of oneself before God in the presence of his audience, is presented as sacrifice at the start of three main books (*Conf.* 5.1.1, 8.1.1., 9.1.1). The double movement of recognizing brokenness and praising God does not only apply to Augustine, but is a kind of invitation directed to the readers, expressing the heart language to which Augustine calls them to conform. Augustine walks slowly because he carries the weight of love towards God in the company of friends (*Conf.* 13.9.10): if love is to be completed in the next life, it is already to be enacted in the best way possible in the present. Loving a neighbor in pilgrimage on earth is more than a preparation for the next life, for love is never wasted and never disappears.⁶⁸⁹ Furthermore, the understanding of himself as pilgrim makes a deeper love possible, for if in the present life the love for God and neighbor is filled with burdens, the joy and hope of pilgrimage makes it bearable.⁶⁹⁰ Those who will meet love's face in the future are called to embrace the love of God in the face of one's neighbor in friendly communal journey, "I am always compelled to love. Love is the only one to whom I am indebted, for it is given when it is paid, but it is still owed even after it has been given."⁶⁹¹

4.2 The Reception of Augustine's *Confessions* in Contemporary Psychology

Listening to Augustine's *Confessions* is, according to its author, a process of discernment for the ears opened to him by love (*Conf.* 10.3.3). When an author raises questions about the interpretation and reception of his work, he anticipates that some will not

689. Canning, *The Unity of Love for God and Neighbour*, 70.

690. *Ibid.*, 67-68.

691. *Ep.* 192.1.

comprehend his original intent. In a multilayered, complex work such as the *Confessions*, which can also be considered as a defense of his legitimate conversion in a polemic and even hostile context (the importance of Manicheans or/and Donatists in the purpose of Augustine's writing is still debated), Augustine expects to be read attentively by benevolent ears. In the discussion about the reception of Augustine's therapeutic vision by psychologists in the second part of this work, these appropriations were marked by a less than satisfactory engagement with *Confessions*. Modern psychology and psychotherapy have neglected Augustine's own ancient framework and the three characters of the dialogue, namely, God, Augustine and his audience. The result is that Augustine is fitted in foreign interpretations, theories and concepts. In the explanation of the first group, psychologists, psychoanalysts and psychotherapists, Augustine is set as a neurotic patient that has his life pathologized.

Since psychological evaluations of *Confessions* are inclined to misunderstand Augustine's theological intent, casting upon him alien theories that reinforce contemporary psychological concepts, further psychological readings are called to move away from such non-dialogical approaches. The insufficiency of psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic readings reinforces cautious interpretation and the avoidance of ready-made pathologization of ancient authors. Listening to complex texts from the past requires attentiveness to the culture in which it was produced, as well as careful exegetical and historical research, fundamentals that contemporary psychology is prone to undervalue. As I have argued before, the quest of finding the "fitting" illness has turned Augustine merely into an unresponsive patient dissected by psychopathology in which his voice is unheard. Since these interpretations tend to neglect Augustine's own perspective, a collaborative reading that draws psychology and theology as partners, with different but respectful voices, may become the friendly ear Augustine requested from his readers.

Despite its contemporary misuse, it is also relevant to read *Confessions* in a psychological perspective, as it enhances and complements the disciplines that have engaged the work throughout the centuries, such as philosophical, theological, or biblical approaches. Psychological evaluations are not to substitute already established foundations that stood the test of time, but supplement, enhance, expand and even question prior lookouts, but entering fully and respectfully in a conversation that has started centuries ago. Understanding *Confessions* alongside psychology, provided Augustine's therapeutic proposal is also heard,

sheds light on elements of Augustine's thought other disciplines have not yet looked into with adequate perceptiveness.

As *Confessions* is a work of art with an abundance of psychological themes to be discussed, we definitely do not need to start from foreign psychotherapeutic or psychoanalytical concepts to explain *Confessions*, for a psychological viewpoint is already at work in the original book and its author. Existential and psychological themes, such as addiction, grief, introspection, mortality, the affections, memory, happiness and therapy are already significantly present. Following this dialogical interdisciplinary perspective, this work has opted to retain the dialogue within Augustine's conceptual framework, particularly paying attention to confessional therapy and the restless heart, significant themes that guide Augustine's description of his own relational subjectivity.

4.3 The Interdisciplinary Pursuit: Augustine and Elementary Experience in Psychology

In the third and last part of this project, this work sought to retune Augustine's engagement with psychology from a so-called colonialist model (which happens when Augustine is read as a test-case for psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic theories) to a more positive engagement between the involved fields. As allies and rebuilders, psychology and theology can synergically place a deeper foundation to sustain a relational understanding of personhood in the context of twenty-first century western individualistic societies. In this necessary dialogical posture, there are conditions for a fruitful conversation: as Rinaldi points out, in a serious interdisciplinary dialogue it is necessary to recognize the limitation of one's own knowledge and to overcome the attitude of distrust towards the contribution of others which arises from the risk of undue invasion.⁶⁹²

In order to bring Augustinian therapy to contemporary times, Augustine's thought needed to be set in conversation with an approach within the framework of psychology. This perspective, however, could not be set against the contributions of philosophy and theology but should be open to an interdisciplinary perspective. Furthermore, it would have to consider

⁶⁹². Fabrizio Rinaldi, *Vocazione cristiana come dialogo: tra teologia e psicologia* (Bologna, EDB, 2017), 18.

Augustinian anthropology as a possible ally rather than competitor, while being aware of mutual boundaries and retaining its integrity as psychology. The approach that seemed to fit the conditions of an apt conversation partner is Miguel Mahfoud's Elementary Experience in Psychology (EEP). Between 2005 and 2012, the year when the main book summarizing Elementary Experience in Psychology was published, over 450 students and professionals had studied the preliminary courses and almost 1000 people had received psychological help based on this approach. Throughout the years, EEP continued to be used as a reference for psychological and psychotherapeutic work at the psychological walk-in clinic of Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), called "Plantão Psicológico." As Miguel Mahfoud's approach is grounded on phenomenological psychology and on Giussani's theological anthropology, which has an implicit Augustinian inspiration, Elementary Experience in Psychology is an interdisciplinary dialogical perspective that does not break with or reject the contributions of philosophy and theology. Furthermore, while making use of theological anthropology as a foundation for its vision of relationality, it has retained itself as a proper psychological approach, and therefore, an apt conversation partner to Augustine's therapeutic ideas in contemporary times.

As a conceptual entry point to foster dialogue between Augustine and EEP, this work opted for the "heart" or "heart therapy". Augustine's *cor* in *Confessions* is a central notion which has deep associations with the idea of therapy. Since the prologue, the restless heart, in its quest for the love of God and the unending hope for rest in him, is a major psychological motif that sets the inner life in motion. Augustine's teleological subjectivity, which includes the heart's flaws and inability to love accordingly, conveys a complex and advanced description of human dynamism. Heart is also a relevant idea in Mahfoud's psychological consideration, for he associates the heart metaphor with the dynamic center of elementary experience. Mahfoud discusses how the image of "heart beating" expresses the human dynamism of the "needs" and "evidences" and discusses its implications.

From Giussani's theological anthropology, Mahfoud realizes that elaboration of experience is the result of a personal appropriation through an impact with reality, as an encounter between a personal center with needs and evidences, and reality that elicits a provocation. Then he moves to the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein, which involves an *a priori*, an objective component in subjectivity. He reads phenomenology in dialogue with Giussani's concept of elementary experience, considering the needs (such as

justice, beauty and love) and evidences (existential questions) as this objective subjectivity. An objective nucleus in subjectivity opens space for psychological work: the path is the verification of the heart, an attention to the criteria of elementary experience. The recognition of the fundamental needs fosters discernment as it emerges in the encounter with reality. The end result of true personal elaboration is not that ideas come into our heads, but is the product of responsiveness to the force of an original experience already at work in this human personal center.

EEP re-contextualizes the Augustinian inspiration about the heart through an interdisciplinary approach that finds dialogue with phenomenological philosophy and theology, overcoming the split that separates Augustine's theology from philosophy; nonetheless, EEP is still a proper psychological approach that does not convey therapy pointing to the Christian revelation; it is not Augustinian theological therapy, for it reinforces the desire for transcendence, but not the answer from Christian revelation. By embracing a dialogue between Augustine's understanding of the heart and EEP, we were able to hear both theology and psychology in conversation, as disciplinary limitation does not necessarily express conflict, but reveals a differentiated complementarity.

Rather than escaping physical reality, Augustine and EEP announce that the sphere of time is the place of experience, in which a finite life finds its meaning by being directed towards infinity. Human ontological incompleteness is pierced by a need for wholeness. This condition manifests itself in a quest in time, the search of a contingent being for its transcendent destination. For EEP, the emphasis is on the discernment that attunes to the immanent dynamism towards transcendence present at the heart. The needs and evidences are a resource and criteria to recognize the essential elements of experience as one reaches out to reality. For Augustine, humanity is destined for a trans-temporal vocation that reaches the full realization of itself beyond time. But a transcendent vocation does not negate the necessity of loving God and neighbor in the present. In fact, it is quite the opposite: those who in hope are committed to an eschatological perspective are called to be even more devoted to the transformation of present life. As Augustine himself suggests in the *Confessions*, the hope of finding the beatitude in God manifests itself in a present call to "be poor in spirit, to be meek, to mourn, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, to be merciful and pure-hearted, and to be peacemakers." (*Conf.* 11.1.1, Matthew 5:3-9). As Piero Coda highlights, the Augustinian perspective reveals that the event of love discloses at the heart of human

experience in time a deeper and more authentic experience towards the infinite, “the event of love has always disclosed in the very heart of human experience the most profound and authentic experience of the Divine.”⁶⁹³

The Augustinian tradition on the heart can be recovered by reading Augustine in conversation with the perspective of Elementary Experience Psychology, or, otherwise put, by experience imprinted with transcendent realities amidst contingent, limited experiences of love and happiness. Augustine and EEP call for the recognition of a relational dynamism that is already working within us, a movement that stirs humanity towards those fundamental needs, such as love and happiness, which are marked upon human subjective life and direct the way human beings desire and position themselves in the world. C. S. Lewis’ idea of a “good infection” captures the paradoxical element of the Augustinian anthropology. Lewis used the concept “good infection” in order to explain the Christian view of God and the human dynamic of participating in it. Lewis argues that the Trinity is not static, but on the contrary, drama, movement, a dance.⁶⁹⁴ As a pattern of a three-personal relational life, it is played out in human individuals who are invited to take place in that dance. The “great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality”⁶⁹⁵ is also the source of joy, power, and eternal life to humanity. Therefore human persons, who are ill by their disunion with God, are invited to be caught up by a “good infection”, a participation in the Trinitarian life revealed by Christ’s incarnation. Even though evil and disorders are at work in the hearts of those who participate in Adam’s fallen race, there is still an element of goodness that draws humanity to be captivated in this life-giving dynamism. As Luigi Guissani insisted in his *The Religious Sense*, the book which inspired EEP, the fundamental human needs can be reduced or emptied, but never extinguished.

The recognition of elementary experience or the heart as a stimulus for action and as a criterion that submits everything to critical evaluation restores to the person an important role in the re-construction of one’s own existence as relational responsiveness. Both EEP and Augustine, or even better, the interaction between the two, provides a good antidote to two opposing temptations: the volatile individualistic liquid mentality and the fundamentalist

693. “L’evento dell’amore ha da sempre dischiuso nel cuore stesso dell’esperienza umana l’esperienza più profonda e autentica del Divino.” Piero Coda, “Donde uno es el otro: tras las huellas de la matriz del amor” VI Congreso Internacional de Literatura, Estética y Teología. “El amado en el amante : figuras, textos y estilos del amor hecho historia”, May 2016. (Buenos Aires: Universidad Católica Argentina).

694. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), 175.

695. *Ibid.*, 176.

moralist religiosity. With a relational anthropology of encounter, which finds resonance in Augustine and EEP, we are set in a Christian proposal that overcomes the temptation of a moralist-individualist position: the rule-keeping is substituted by an awareness of grace and the desire for surrendering oneself in love. Instead of an autonomous pretense of power that fancies to construct a new world by itself, Augustine and EEP prize the heart-journey, which is intrinsically vulnerable, but nevertheless, can continually keep its direction towards its source.

Since Mahfoud has placed a focus on elaboration of experience, or how one reads back one's own biography through elementary experience or the heart, there is an implication for how we could also re-read Augustine's *Confessions*. Debates since the middle of the last century have questioned the presence of the historical Augustine in his *Confessions*, discussed on how factual or fictional *Confessions* is, and if he speaks the historical truth about his early life and experiences. Augustinian therapy in dialogue with EEP helps us reframe the said debate within the horizon of elaboration of experience. *Confessions* should not be assessed as fictional because it is not entirely factual. *Confessions*, however, is first and foremost personal. Experience is subjectively appropriated and internalized by Augustine as having meaning for himself in an objective subjectivity. Augustine is not either factual or fictional because of his more or less subjective or objective retelling of his past. Connected to the dynamic interior center, he can elaborate meaning over past events through the presence of an alterity in intersubjective history that is truthful and yet deeply personal.

Augustine could not envision the shape of contemporary societies neither the impact upon human experience. Augustine could never have foreseen the effects of a twenty-first century capitalist society on how desire is conceived and love is perceived. In times of supermarket culture, tranquillity is offered at low cost. The fundamental questions about life, the existential "whys" and the restless desire of the heart tend to be forgotten. The consumer society distracts humanity from its fundamental needs, giving answers to "unasked questions" by highlighting the goods available on the market. Even the body and loving experiences become subject to market rules. This society tends to an understanding of desire within an individualistic mind set, not oriented towards an encounter with the other. Since material goods are abundant in western societies, autonomy and individualism are on the rise, and the essential heteronomy and relationality of human life and the questions about the needs beyond the material are overshadowed and seemingly can be neglected. If that is so, the Augustinian

critique towards a self-centred society (such as proposed in *The City of God*) and the relational narrative account of *Confessions* are not only relevant for his own times, but a needed reminder of humanity's need for transcendence and relationality in any self-oriented society, in any society that defines the self in an autarkic way and ignores its relational nature. Consequently, there is a particular Augustinian contribution to western capitalist societies under an individualistic context. One is called to learn both from the wisdom contained in the Bible, the Christian tradition and ecclesial thinkers from old, such as Augustine, especially in times of transition and cultural transformation, precisely because Augustine lived in times of transition. Furthermore, an Augustinian perspective alongside EEP, which call humanity again to search for the needs not met by the market, strengthens a relational perspective and challenges individualism.

4.4 Further Theological Perspectives

The topic of therapy, which has been a major thread throughout this work, has been a key subject in ancient philosophy, patristic theology and contemporary psychology, but has not been studied sufficiently in a contemporary theological perspective. This absence is highlighted by how Jesus is portrayed in the gospels, as his ministry is associated with that of the medical doctor that heals the sick, carries the diseases, and forgives the sinners. He is the agent of life in its fullness that overcomes physical, interpersonal and spiritual illnesses. Even in Christology, the theme of therapy has been largely undervalued, with few exceptions, such as Olegário González de Cardedal, who concludes his *Cristología* with a section on “Cristoterapia.” He argues that the announcement of the Kingdom of God was accompanied with healings, the restoration of the dishonored and in his mercy Jesus was compassionate before the hunger and misery of humanity; as he puts it, Christ healed then and continues to heal throughout history those who have believed in him. Healing means physical health and spiritual healing, discovery of meaning and truth, freedom and life.⁶⁹⁶

Augustine's perceptive insights on the role of the *Christus Medicus* and confession as therapy of the heart can also be questioned, enriched and complemented by findings from New Testament Studies, Christology, Soteriology and Systematic Theology as

⁶⁹⁶ Olegário González de Cardedal, *Cristología* (Madrid: BAC, 2001), 577.

a whole. Such an endeavor is beyond the scope of this project, but could very much become the topic of further theological discussions. This theological perspective on therapy, while considering Christ as the giver of authentic life, cannot restrict itself to the transmission of the contents of faith, but needs to carry the banner of a King that is also a servant of the fullness of life on earth (Mark 10:45). A theological perspective on therapy bears a deep respect for a human authentic encounter that transforms the present while in hope awaits the completion of the fullness of life (*Conf.* 11.9.11).

Theology must avoid a fundamentalist easy-made faith answer and embrace a call to dialogue with different models of therapy across the disciplines in the contemporary world. Theology must resist the temptation to position its perspective as the queen of other disciplines, or to locate itself higher or lower than other standpoints. Disciplines involved in the task of therapy, such as psychology, medicine, theology or philosophy, have their own emphasis and are called to bring their perspective to the roundtable for conversation. The time of Inquisition and the judgement on the emerging natural sciences, expressed by the trial of Galileo, must remain a chapter in the past.

The absence of a theological comprehension of therapy is the product of a concept and a task that has been largely secularized, as the modern scientific enterprise is suspicious of religious pursuits or has a distrust of the miraculous. Nevertheless, research about Augustine and therapy points to an open field for theologians and remind them not to neglect a topic that is very much present in the gospels. Theology is not to be sidelined as being less therapeutic than other disciplines, for it provides a relational anthropology much needed in times like ours, an antidote against individualism. Theology, inspired by the Augustinian vision of therapy, could encourage other faculties to a posture of relational responsiveness, which avoids the temptation of a prideful self-centered life that does not love or serve another. Due to its unique contributions, theology should not take a defensive posture when questioned about its own therapeutic proposal, but plea for a generous dialogue. The recovery of theological therapy can be an inspiring perspective of listening to the other, as the dialogue between the heart in Augustine and *Elementary Experience in Psychology* has shown us.

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