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13. In Memoriam

Memory and Imitation in Augustine and Athanasius

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Abstract

Compositions moved Augustine, and nowhere is that more evident than in his *Confessions*. I argue that in this late-fourth-century biography-cum-protreptic, Augustine tries to replace earlier philosophical (Cicero’s *Hortensius*) and Christian (Athanasius’s *Vita Antonii*) protreptics with an updated version – his *Confessions*, which, in part, seeks to move the reader to embrace the Christian ascetic life. Augustine accomplishes his goal by modeling *Confessions* partly on the memory-imitation-text triad found in the *Vita Antonii*. The memory of stories and texts serves as a major focus of the account of his conversion experience in the garden in Milan, and he chooses to imitate those stories as the response to the call to embrace the Christian life. Imitation, in turn, leads him to asceticism through reading Scripture and remembering to imitate others who imitated Antony.

Keywords: Athanasius, memory, imitation, asceticism, *Confessions*, protreptic

Remembering Bill Harmless

My first introduction to Bill Harmless came through his research on Egyptian monks – his article “Remembering Poemen Remembering” helped frame some of the questions for my master’s thesis. We met at the 2011 Oxford Patristics conference, and over the next few years talked at the annual meetings of the North American Patristics Society. He discussed what he was working on, and I asked him questions that pertained to my dissertation research. Bill always pressed me on my reasoning and forced me to ask next-level questions; he guided me toward texts and connections that I had yet to make. He even gave me his in-progress article on Christology in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, published for the first time in this volume, to help me think through questions about Egyptian monasticism and the purpose of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*’s production. Unlike other authors in this volume, I did not know Bill for many years. I knew him, though, as a mentor who, from afar through his writing and close-at-hand through his incisive questions, guided and continues to guide my own research.

Introduction

In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes, “A man can be praised and loved even though far distant from us” (*Conf.* 4.14.21.; all translations are my own). This saying is sparked by Augustine’s rumination on dedicating his work on beauty to someone he had never met. Perhaps Augustine had the reader of *Confessions* in mind when he wrote this. Though Augustine may be far distant in space or time from the individual who reads his autobiography, the text may still move the person to love and identify with Augustine. Augustine is unflaggingly conscious of readers of his *Confessions*, and at several points explicitly describes the effect that he hopes his work will have on them.¹ In short, Augustine wants to engage his audience emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. I argue that this consciousness toward the reader reflects Augustine’s intention to produce a protreptic² that, in part, moves an educated Christian reader toward the ascetic life, and that he wants this protreptic to replace the non-Christian Cicero’s *Hortensius* and the uneducated protagonist of the *Vita Antonii* by Athanasius. I do not mean that this was Augustine’s sole aim in writing the *Confessions*; other scholars (explored below) have demonstrated that Augustine was partially concerned with combating Manichean teachings. However, it appears that the confluence of memory and imitation in Augustine’s literary production strongly resembles

¹ E.g., *Conf.* 2.3.5; 10.3.3-4.6; 11.1.1. In *Retractationes* 2.6.1, Augustine writes about the pleasing effect that reading *Confessions* had on others. Commenting on Augustine’s statement of intent in composing in *Conf.* 2.3.5., Donovan Johnson writes, “Augustine would persuade his readers to take up this stance, this life of faith, by the radical rhetorical strategy of presenting himself as a model of this life in both its negative and positive aspects” (40). Augustine is intentionally composing the *Confessions* to move his reader with his own life.

² Protreptic literature generally advocates conversion, frequently toward the life of a philosopher or toward another path in life. While the term lacked clear technical definition in antiquity, and while exhortative or conversion literature could take different terms, protreptic is a convenient modern categorization.

the protreptic of Athanasius, and he resolves his dissatisfaction with Cicero by producing his own protreptic.³

Texts that moved people were popular genres in classical and late antiquity – protreptics, paraenetics, apologies, and various written speeches such as invective, all functioned to persuade readers toward a particular viewpoint. As generally viewed in modern scholarship, the function of protreptic was to convert the hearer toward a particular, usually philosophical, way of life. Authors like Aristotle, Cicero, Iamblichus, and Galen wrote to convert others to the philosophical life; Christian authors (including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, and Gregory of Nyssa) appropriated the style and wrote conversion literature of their own, arguing either for conversion to the Christian life or to a particular kind of Christianity. Some literature, while not overtly protreptic, demonstrated protreptic elements. One example is the *Vita Antonii* (*Life of Antony*), written by the fourth-century Alexandrian bishop Athanasius about a famous monk of the Egyptian desert. Athanasius composed his biography with a protreptic aim: to create monks who would obey the words of the bishop. Texts of this kind that altered their readers were intentional constructions intended to produce specific results, and *Confessions* is no different.

That *Confessions* has a protreptic aim is not a new argument; a long scholarly history recognizes this (see Kotzé 2004, 2011). However, I consider here the possibility that Augustine constructed *Confessions* as a conscious protreptic intended to replace the *Vita Antonii* and Cicero's *Hortensius*. Like Athanasius, Augustine weaves together memory, composition, and asceticism to encourage readers to imitate his way of life. In so doing, Augustine writes a text that moves the reader toward ascetic philosophical practice in the Christian tradition. Augustine adds philosophy to Athanasius's protreptic and adds Christianity to Cicero's protreptic, creating a text that speaks to people like Augustine – the educated elite of the Latin-speaking world.⁴

³ Writing about an author's "intention" when composing a work is a tenuous proposition. My reading of *Confessions* as re-scripting the philosophical-ascetic protreptics of Cicero and Athanasius does not deny other "intentions" in its production. *Confessions* is certainly anti-Manichean, it is certainly praise of God, it is certainly biographical, it is certainly exegetical. All these statements are simultaneously true about the single work, and all make sense of the evidence (as discussed below). I hope to bring together three major themes in *Confessions* – memory, imitation, and composition – and to demonstrate how Augustine used these to rewrite his favorite protreptics (*Hortensius* and the *Vita Antonii*) into an argument for living as an ascetic Christian. Dennis Trout, in an engaging piece on Augustine's Cassiciacum writings, contends that in 386 CE, after the experience in the Milanese garden, Augustine was still trying to figure out how to synthesize his ascetic ideal, the classical tradition of the life of leisure, and the somewhat tepid asceticism of *Hortensius*. Perhaps Augustine composed *Confessions* partly as a way of reconciling the philosophical life of leisure (in *Hortensius*) with the life of ascetic Christianity (in the *Vita Antonii*). This is not the only argument in *Confessions*, but one of many intended to move the reader in a highly complex and multi-layered text.

⁴ Quite unintentionally my argument fills out the details of a somewhat off-handed statement by Josef Lössl: "What he seems to advocate is an alternative literary canon within a Christian literary culture. He may well have thought of the *Confessions* themselves as the kind of literature with which to replace the classical canon which in his view had him led so astray" (59). I contend that Augustine is trying to replace both the classical literature encapsulated by *Hortensius* and the Christian protreptic literature encapsulated by the *Vita Antonii*.

What is “Confession”?

Unlike some Christian or non-Christian authors (for example, Clement of Alexandria and Iamblichus, respectively), Augustine does not title his work a protreptic, but instead calls it *Confessiones* (*Retract.* 2.6.1[1-2]). It is worth exploring this title briefly here. In his *Retractationes*,⁵ Augustine writes, “The thirteen books of my *Confessions* praise God, just and good, for my evil and my good,”⁶ while also turning both his and his readers’ minds and hearts to God (*Retr.* 2.6.1[2-5]).⁷ Augustine clearly envisions that his *Confessions* will serve a protreptic purpose – to turn the reader to the contemplation of God.⁸ What is unclear from the *Retractationes*, however, is when Augustine started to think of *Confessions* in this way.

According to Anthony DuPont, two of Augustine’s Pentecost sermons, which DuPont strongly wants to date to 397, may shed some light on this issue (2011). *Sermones* 29 and 29A address the framing lines of Psalm 118[117]: *Confitemini Domino quoniam bonus est, quoniam in saeculum misericordia eius*. Augustine uses the first part of this phrase to launch a discussion of the double meaning of *confiteri* and *confessio* – praising God and admitting sins (2011: 80-94). DuPont identifies two parallels between the sermons and *Confessions*: the double meaning of both *confiteri* and *confessio*; and the complex relationship between God’s goodness, human sin, and the reconciliation offered by confession and praise (2011: 83-94). If DuPont is correct that Augustine was likely working on an early draft of *Confessions* in 397, then these sermons may reveal his thinking when he titled the work (2011: 88). At the very least, *Sermones* 29 and 29A (along with *S.* 29B, which explores the same passage and has similar content; DuPont identifies it elsewhere as a related sermon [2014: 90-97]) represent Augustine’s understanding of confession at a point earlier than *Retractationes*, whether or not he delivered these sermons at the same time he was composing *Confessions*.

In any case, Augustine’s understanding of “confession” is the same in *Sermones* 29, 29A, 29B, and in *Retractationes*: it is both an admission of guilt and a turning toward God in praise and reconciliation. Even as early as the late fourth century, Augustine recognizes his *Confessions* in light of this dual purpose of praise and admission of guilt; both praise and admission of guilt necessitate an emotional and cognitive move toward the divine.

Kotzé demonstrates that literature of exhortation may have both a “protreptic” and “paraenetic” function in a single text (for example, in *Confessions*); so also a title like

⁵ Augustine wrote his *Retractationes* at the end of his life as a catalog and review of his life’s work, adding clarification and sometime correction to his earlier texts.

⁶ *Confessionum mearum libri tredecim, et de malis et de bonis meis Deum laudant iustum et bonum.*

⁷ For Augustine, this turning toward the divine happened in the writing of *Confessions*, and it happens repeatedly in the rereading it.

⁸ I am aware of the debate concerning the terms “protreptic” and “paraenetic” (often categorized as literature of moral exhortation). But I find convincing Kotzé’s (2011) argument that these have no technical definition in late antiquity and that a single text may serve both functions, or that one term may even serve the function traditionally associated with the other term. With an eye to the dual purpose – protreptic and paraenetic – of *Confessions* for which Kotzé (2004) effectively argues, and with full understanding that there were paraenetic protreptics and protreptic paraenetics in late antiquity (2011), I will use protreptic here as shorthand for literature of exhortation or conversion.

Confessiones may serve two purposes, indicating a poetic text of praise that exhorts the reader to turn toward the divine. The title does not change the protreptic and paraenetic aim of the text to turn readers, Christian and non-Christian alike, toward the divine.

Augustine urges this turn through self-revelation that revolves around composition, memory, and imitation, reflecting a similar set of concerns in Athanasius's *Vita Antonii*. Both authors emphasized their memories and the composition of a text based on memory, suggesting that these texts should serve as blueprints for imitative practice. Augustine expanded on this thinking by composing his *Confessions* in response to the protreptics that moved him, *Hortensius* and the *Vita Antonii*.⁹ *Confessions* draws on many of the same themes found in the *Vita Antonii*.

Athanasius: Memory, Composition, Imitation

Scholars have already documented the link between memory (albeit constructed), composition, and imitation in Athanasius's *Vita Antonii* (Brakke; Rubenson).¹⁰ We need only a short overview here. In opening the *Vita*, Athanasius writes that its composition is the result of a request from monks outside of Egypt who wish to imitate Antony (*Vita* Prol.). To that end, Athanasius says that he writes the *Vita* from his memories of interacting with Antony and from what he remembers Antony telling him (*Vita* Prol.) Athanasius claims memory as the authority for composing the *Vita*, and the composition serves as a guide for imitating Antony in the ascetic life.

So who is the Antony that Athanasius “remembers” in order to write the *Vita*? This Antony hated classical learning (*Vita* 1, 72), could not read (*Vita* 72-73, 81),¹¹ found his impetus to ascetic practice through hearing the gospel reading (*Vita* 2-3), vacillated between engagement and retreat (*Vita* 12-14, 49), and debated with heretics and philosophers over the true nature of Christianity and wisdom (*Vita* 67-70, 72-80). His ascetic practice was something that he learned gradually, and it was evolutionary, changing throughout his life as his ability to practice increased (*Vita* 3-4, 7, 45, 47, 51, 55). Athanasius constructed this image of Antony from an amalgamation of earlier sources and his concept of the “ideal” monk. He then claimed that the *Vita*'s Antony was a true product of his memory, and that he had composed the *Vita* based on the constructed reality of his memory. This *vita* was a partial protreptic that urged its readers toward a particular form of the ascetic life; it was similar in form to the biographical protreptic of Plotinus composed by Porphyry to convince readers to embrace the philosophical life.

⁹ Though *Hortensius* is lost, it is obvious that the work moved Augustine greatly and “converted” him to the life of philosophy and seeking truth. Robert J. O'Connell writes a detailed account of how this conversion to philosophy affected Augustine, with frequent erotic themes, throughout his life (4-81; see also the shorter account of how *Hortensius* moved Augustine in Harrison 2000: 5-7). Since Augustine (*Conf.* 3.4.7-3.5.9) already explained his complex relationship with *Hortensius* – loving it, moved by it, but ultimately disappointed in it – and since the full text is lost, it does not here receive analysis comparable to that of the *Vita Antonii*.

¹⁰ James E. Goehring summarizes: “A comparison of the *Vita Antonii* with the letters of Antony and the sayings attributed to him in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* reveals the literary modeling of the Antony in the *vita*. He bears only an indirect relationship with the historical Antony” (239).

¹¹ *Vita* 81 and 86 may indicate that Antony could write, though perhaps he dictated the letters.

The *Vita's* protreptic aim was to demonstrate that the best and truest philosophy is found in Christian ascetic practice in the vein of the church-centric Antony of Athanasius's construction. This protreptic biography had a major impact on Augustine's life course and, alongside Cicero's protreptic *Hortensius*, may offer a new approach to reading the *Confessions*.

Augustine: Composition, Memory, Imitation, Asceticism

A close reading of *Confessions* reveals that Augustine intended his text to meld and develop themes of both Cicero's *Hortensius* and Athanasius's *Vita Antonii*. *Confessions* calls readers to philosophical asceticism (as in *Hortensius*) and to the quest for truth in the Christian Scriptures (as in the *Vita Antonii*). Augustine emphasizes composition and the role that stories and texts play in changing others. He wants his hearers to be converted to the ascetic philosophical life of the Christian by imitating his conversion.

To accomplish his protreptic aim, Augustine emphasized the function of compositions, both oral and written, in his conversion. Texts and stories have a major impact on him throughout *Confessions*. He wrote that in his youth he disliked learning per se, but greatly enjoyed stories (*Conf.* 1.13.20-14.23), whether in the books used to teach the rules of grammar and pronunciation or in the plays that he frequented (*Conf.* 1.15.24-16.26; 1.18.29-19.30; 3.2.4). Compositions – literary, poetic, and philosophical – moved him, and he loved to write prose (*Conf.* 1.13.20) and poetry (*Conf.* 3.7.14).¹² Such texts and stories fill the *Confessions*, from the philosophical and literary texts of his classical Latin education (see Marrou) to the “rude” prose of the Latin Bible and the Platonic texts of his later philosophical investigations. Stories of Roman heroes (*Conf.* 1.13.21; 1.14.23) and the conversion to Christianity of Victorinus, a famous rhetor in Rome (*Conf.* 8.2.3-5), populated Augustine's mind. Augustine thought that compositions, reproduced orally (as oral stories) or in writing (as texts),¹³ were intended to move the hearer. Sometimes a composition on one topic might move the hearer toward a related idea (*Conf.* 4.3.5-6).

Throughout his classical education, Augustine was drawn toward rhetorically and grammatically beautiful texts, but was repelled by texts whose prose did not meet the classical standards of someone like Cicero (*Conf.* 3.4.7-6.10). The young Augustine explored the philosophical life because of the rhetorical and topical brilliance of Cicero's *Hortensius*, and he rejected Christianity partly because of the rhetorical poverty of the Latin Bible. He was able to proclaim later in life that fine literary style makes a composition neither necessarily true nor necessarily suspect (*Conf.* 5.6.10); but in his early years Augustine liked style. Through the polished rhetoric and philosophical leanings of Ambrose, Augustine began to see Scripture in a more positive light (*Conf.* 5.13.23-14.24; 6.4.6-5.8; 7.20.26-21.27). Augustine began to read the Neoplatonists, particularly Plotinus, and then to read Scripture alongside the Neoplatonic writings (*Conf.* 7.9.13-10.16; 7.20.26-21.27), as he tried to answer his questions: Where is truth? In which books will I find it? (*Conf.* 6.11.18). The quest for

¹² In *Conf.* 4.2.3 he enters a poetry contest, and in 4.3.5 he wins it.

¹³ Reading was usually performed aloud (Harrison 2013: 1-9; see especially 5-6 n. 8, where she cites Augustine's describing in *Confessions* his surprise at finding Ambrose reading aloud).

truth in compositions – oral stories and, especially, written texts – drove Augustine to the crisis point in the garden at Milan.¹⁴

Augustine's conversion story turns on the power of compositions. Immediately preceding his experience in the garden at Milan, compositions served as catalysts to the conversion moment. Augustine exhausted himself mentally, emotionally, and physically while trying to find truth and to assent fully to Christianity. He was recovering and studying at a friend's house in Milan. He wanted to convert and to quit his post as a rhetorician, following the example of Victorinus in a story told to him by the priest Simplicianus (*Conf.* 8.2.3-5.10). But he could not quite bring himself to that point.

Augustine framed the origin of his crisis over conversion using compositions (*Conf.* 8.6.14-7.17). A friend, Ponticianus, visited the house for business, and upon arriving found a book in front of Augustine – Paul's letter to the Romans. Ponticianus told the story of Antony taken from Athanasius's *Vita Antonii*, and then the story of Ponticianus's two friends who converted to ascetic practice (along with their wives-to-be) after reading the *Vita*. Hearing these stories stirred Augustine's memory of reading Cicero's *Hortensius* and how it drove him to pursue the philosophical life (*Conf.* 8.7.17). This pericope of *Confessions* opens with a book (Paul's letter to the Romans), climaxes with the story of ascetic conversion through reading the *Vita*, and concludes with the memory of another book, Cicero's protreptic *Hortensius*, set in opposition to the epistle of Paul. Compositions, both stories and texts, brought Augustine to crisis in his own quest for wisdom and truth.

Augustine knew that a text or story sometimes moves a person immediately, as Antony was moved, and sometimes a text or story in the memory stirs a person at an opportune moment (*Conf.* 7.20.26). The compositions at Milan melded remembered texts and remembered conversions (both Augustine's and others') with stories heard that moved Augustine immediately. Composing a text, for Augustine, was an act intended to produce a result, a movement, in an individual. Stories and texts should move the hearer internally or externally, emotionally or intellectually. Compositions have a purpose.¹⁵

Confessions is based on self-knowledge and self-memory, and even on events reconstructed when memory fails (as in infancy, or in another person's observation of Augustine). So Augustine recorded the memories that he remembered, the memories that he did not remember until he needed them to move him (as in the garden), and the memories

¹⁴ I use here "compositions" to refer to texts and speeches in antiquity. Like carefully composed texts, speeches generally followed rhetorical rules and fit into genres defined by purpose and audience. Augustine was drawn to the rhetorical brilliance of compositions written and oral. Philip Burton recognizes the link between text and speech in Augustine, though he necessarily focuses on texts and their physical manifestations as books (89-108).

¹⁵ Augustine's use of texts to frame conversion stories is recognized by other scholars, for example Burrus, Jordan, and MacKendrick: 53-54; see also Burton: 95-99. Compositions are important for Augustine, and they are especially important for his understanding of "conversion." Brian Stock says that the conversion of Augustine is slightly different than earlier conversions because it relies on memories of events that Augustine did not witness himself (11-13). Stock writes, "Antony hears the gospel and abruptly changes his life, without the use of intermediaries, whereas Augustine's conversion is preceded by an interlacing of already interpreted lives" (13).

that he created based on observation or the retelling of others (as for his infancy). Memories drove the composition, though Augustine interspersed philosophical contemplations throughout the text. Augustine wanted the autobiography and confession that is the text of *Confessions* to recount these memories, to retell the story, to move the hearer.

This interplay between memory and composition helps to demonstrate some of the similarities between the *Confessions* and the *Vita Antonii*. Augustine and Athanasius both utilized memory (active, passive, and constructed) as the authority behind their compositions. They both composed biographies that portray their subjects' conversions as pivotal moments. And both of texts they produced drive the hearer toward imitation. It is this understanding of imitation that helps to position these stories in the vein of protreptic literature.

Augustine consciously intended his *Confessions* to move readers toward a particular end (*Conf.* 10.3.3-6; 11.1.1). This understanding of *Confessions* is not new. Either in whole or in part, *Confessions* was supposed to convert the hearer – that is, conversion toward Christianity, or conversion away from Manichaeism (Cook; Kotzé 2004, 2006, 2008, 2011). I contend, however, that Augustine's purpose in *Confessions* was more complex than merely to offer a pro-Nicaean, anti-Manichaean polemical protreptic. He also intended to convert educated, literate Christians to a life of asceticism by imitation of his life. In so doing he both called on the *Vita Antonii* (conversion to asceticism) and modified it (conversion of the educated elite to asceticism).

Augustine's own experience in the garden models what he intends his literate audience to experience. He had been reading Romans, heard the story of Ponticianus's friends converting to ascetic living, and remembered his own conversion by *Hortensius* to the philosophical life and the quest for wisdom and truth. This conversion, for Augustine, was a positive experience, though he found the intellectual conversion incomplete. He then turned to his friend Alypius, distressed specifically because the unlettered (such as Antony and the other monks) were reaching heaven before the lettered (such as himself). Athanasius presented Antony in the *Vita* as an education-hating, unlettered, illiterate monk. He could not read and may not have been able to write. Augustine did not necessarily enjoy his education, but he received it. He was neither unlettered nor illiterate, yet all of his learning could move him only part of the way toward accepting Christianity. Ultimately, Augustine had to give assent to his conversion, just like Antony, despite all of his superior education.

Augustine completed the final part of the journey toward conversion through a perception of divine intervention (the voice in the garden) and through imitation of Antony, of Ponticianus's friends (who themselves had imitated Antony), and of Victorinus. Memory reminded him to imitate, and he enacted this imitation when the conditions were right. But what was this conversion? Like Antony hearing the gospel call to renunciation, Augustine heard a similar Pauline call: "Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and

make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Romans 13:13-14). Augustine converted not to Christianity writ large, but to a Christianity of renunciation.¹⁶

Immediately, Augustine understood his conversion “experience” in light of asceticism: “You converted me to you. So I did not seek a wife, nor did I seek any of the things I desired” (*Conf.* 8.12.30).¹⁷ He rejected sexual relations and rejected his earthly career – a conversion that followed the stories of Ponticianus’s friends and Victorinus. From here, the tone of *Confessions* turns decidedly philosophical and ascetical.¹⁸ Everything after Book 8 hinges on the questions that opens Book 9 (9.1.1: *Quis ego et qualis ego?*): “Who am I? What am I?” Augustine’s answer is that he is an ascetic Christian philosopher, combining Antony and *Hortensius*, with the key point being his ascetic conversion. The owner of the Milan estate, Verecundus, also desired to follow in Augustine’s conversion, but was held back by his marriage (*Conf.* 9.3.5), demonstrating that Augustine’s experience in the garden was a conversion not only to Christianity but to specifically ascetic Christianity.

Augustine answered Book 9’s existential questions in Book 10, which opens with the prayer: “Let me know you, you who knows me” (*Cognoscam te, cognitor meus*; 10.1.1). Augustine found himself through finding and knowing God. Augustine approached the divine when he recognized that true happiness lies in God (*Conf.* 10.22.32), and in loving truth, found in God, above all else (*Conf.* 10.23.33-24.35). God had always been in Augustine’s memory, waiting to be found. Augustine found God through ascetic practice, and spent many pages of *Confessions* (10.29.40.-39.64) telling his readers specifically how he practiced this ascetic impulse: no sex, no excess in food and drink, no perfumes, no non-religious songs, no distracting objects of physical beauty and no excessive physical trappings (such as clothes, pictures, furniture), no excessiveness in physical sensations, no pride, and no love of praise.

¹⁶ The classic studies on renunciation (giving up lesser things for higher things) and asceticism (training in renunciation) in Christianity and in classical thought are Brown; Clark; Hadot 1995, 2002. Richard Valantasis provides a good working theory of asceticism: “Asceticism may be defined as performances within a dominant social environment intended to inaugurate a new subjectivity, different social relations, and an alternative symbolic universe” (797). All of these things are true of Augustine’s conversion. O’Connell sees the beginnings of Augustine’s ascetic conversion in his reading of Cicero’s *Hortensius* (30). Absent the text of *Hortensius*, though possessing much of Cicero’s corpus, I agree with O’Connell. As demonstrated most eruditely by Hadot (1995, 2002), the philosophical and ascetic lives were intimately linked, and Cicero was one of the classical proponents of ascetic (or semi-ascetic) philosophy. O’Connell links Augustine’s conversion in Milan to philosophical-ascetic practice in the Christian tradition and agrees with the bulk of scholarship that Augustine converted from Manichaeism (250-53). However, he misses the link between the protreptics of *Hortensius* and *Vita Antonii* in the conversion experience, melded with Augustine’s production of his own protreptic. Similarly, John V. Fleming notes the importance of the *Vita Antonii* in Augustine’s constructed account of his own conversion (1096-99). Fleming further demonstrates that both *Confessions* and the *Vita Antonii* served as literary models for Petrarch’s own life-altering experience (1099-1101) – this is precisely what I argue that Augustine intended; his *Confessions* became the new *locus classicus* for moving experiences both philosophical and Christian. Theodore Ziolkowski (7-9) describes the Petrarch incident in more detail. Andrea Nightingale (2008) suggests that Thoreau may have had Augustine in the back of his mind when composing the account of his own conversion to selfhood.

¹⁷ *Convertisti enim me ad te, ut nec uxorem quaererem nec aliquam spem saeculi huius.*

¹⁸ The ultimate goal of the philosophical life was renunciation, one which Augustine should have attained if *Hortensius* had fully succeeded in moving him (Harrison 2000: 6-7).

Augustine even felt the pull of solitude, but ultimately decided that the call to serve others was higher than the call to be a hermit (*Conf.* 10.43.70).

Augustine's understanding of ascetic practice echoes Latin philosophical ascetics such as Cicero and Seneca, along with the Christian ascetic exemplar, Antony. Both Cicero and Seneca employed similar examples and exhortations when discussing the removal of life's excesses.¹⁹ Cicero and Seneca also wrote about physical excess as the soul's sickness, as Augustine does in Book 10.²⁰ Augustine referred to truth as a public possession (*Conf.* 12.25.34), echoing statements about the public possession of truth in Seneca (*Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* 8.8-10; 12.11; 14.17-18; 21.9; 33.2). Augustine understood the practice of asceticism on the terms of the Latin philosophical ascetics, ideas that he learned from his study of the Latin authors and that were reinforced by reading the Neoplatonists, and ideas that he was called to enact because of his conversion by the protreptic *Hortensius*. His idea of conversion is ascetic – to the ascetic, philosophical life that reveals truth (again echoing Cicero and Seneca). However, in searching for truth, Augustine found God, and found his heart moved by the texts of Christianity. God and God's truth anchored this quest, Augustine writes in Book 11 (*Conf.* 11.29.39-30.40). And God's truth lay in the search for truth itself and in reading the texts that move the hearer toward truth, namely the texts of Christian Scripture. As the Psalms (*Conf.* 9.4.8-11) and Paul moved Augustine, so should they and all other appropriate texts move those who hear them and are ready to receive them.

Augustine writes in his *Retractationes* (2.6.1) that his text, *Confessions*, is ten books of biography and three books on Scripture, and clearly both the biographical and exegetical protreptic serve to reveal truth fully. It is a biography of the person searching for truth, and exegesis of Scripture as the guide to finding truth. Augustine melds philosophical readings of Scripture with ascetic practice and the quest for truth. This asceticism is Augustine's conversion, and asceticism frames the entire *Confessions*. The framing of *Confessions* relies on the theme of rest: to open Book 1, Augustine's heart is restless until it finds rest in God (*Conf.* 1.1.1), and to close Book 13, we find God resting in humans and revealing to humanity the rest that is outside time (*Conf.* 13.37.52). The climactic questions of Book 9 – “Who am I? What am I?” – are framed in Book 1 and Book 13 with the goal and end result of asceticism: rest in God. And how does one find God, find rest in God? Augustine closes *Confessions* with a reference to Matthew 7 and Luke 11: ask, seek, knock. Again, like rest, this theme returns after its appearance at the beginning of Book 1, where Augustine writes that those who seek God find God, and those who find God praise God (*Conf.* 1.1.1).

Confessions is Augustine's work of protreptic praise for God. For educated people like Augustine who ask questions about who they are and what they are, who seek self-knowledge and knowledge of ultimate truth, Augustine has the answer. You are – you should be – ascetic Christians, imitating me, Augustine, in my quest for truth in God through ascetic practice that leads to finding God and, ultimately, to resting in God.

¹⁹ E.g., Cicero, *De officiis* 1.28.101-30.106; 1.5.17; 1.35.126-36.132; Seneca, *De providentia* 4.9-10; Seneca, *De ira* 2.12.4-6; Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* 5; 8.1-2; 9; 14.1-2; 20.3-5; 20.12-13; 51; 82.2.

²⁰ See *Conf.* 10.30.42, compared to, for example: Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.20.45-47; 1.30.72-73; 3.1.1-3.7; 3.4.7-9; 3.6.13-10.23; 4.1.1-38.84; *De officiis* 1.20.67-70; 1.28.101-30.106; Seneca, *De clementia* 1.17.1-3.

Augustine had a distaste for the rude texts of Scripture and was enticed by the beautiful rhetoric of Latin philosophy. And so he wrote a protreptic to encourage educated Latin-speakers to seek the Christian philosophical life. Augustine was unhappy with the uneducated, unlettered Antony of Athanasius's composition, who found truth through asceticism before he did. And so Augustine wrote *Confessions* for people who are, like him, educated.²¹ Augustine was dissatisfied with Cicero's quest for truth omitting Scripture, the composition most able to direct the hearer toward truth. And so Augustine wrote *Confessions* to urge people toward the philosophical ascetic life, guided by Scripture and the Christian faith.²²

Conclusion

Augustine intended his protreptic to replace both Athanasius's *Vita Antonii* and Cicero's *Hortensius*. Like *Hortensius*, *Confessions* is a protreptic toward enlightened philosophical asceticism for the educated public. Augustine thought Cicero alone does not take the reader far enough, however; he fails to acknowledge the source of truth in Scripture. Like the *Vita Antonii*, *Confessions* calls the hearer to imitate its subject in searching for truth in the Scriptures and ascetic practice.²³ Augustine emphasized composition and the role played by stories and texts in changing others. He intended his hearers to be called to conversion just as he was, that is, conversion to the ascetic philosophical life of the Christian who renounces all worldly things for a life of searching for truth in God.²⁴

Augustine writes *in memoriam* of his former life questing after truth with the hope that *in memoriam* his hearers will imitate his example and be converted to the ascetic life of Christian

²¹ Here I depart somewhat from Arthur Urbano, Jr.: "That Athanasius's bios contributed to the conversions of Augustine and other young educated men from the wisdom of the world to the wisdom of God attests to the capability of the *Vit. Ant.* to communicate common convertible values to different segments of the educated elite of Late Antiquity" (914). It seems that Augustine finds it remarkable that the biography of an uneducated Copt would move educated elites in the Roman world, as evidenced by his placing the *Vita Antonii* alongside the rhetorically brilliant *Hortensius* in *Confessions* 8. This is why he wants to write *Confessions* – if the *Vita Antonii* only barely moved him, and only because he heard about Antony at the right moment in his life, how much less might it move people who were less inclined to find wisdom in the biographies of the unlettered?

²² The composition of texts that urged people toward asceticism was paramount in the Christian philosophical-ascetic movement. Derek Krueger summarizes: "Texts played a crucial role in the promulgation of ascetic beliefs and practices. Oral traditions and written texts often served as road maps toward this new identity. Fittingly, the perfected self conformed to models embedded in writings" (217).

²³ Donovan Johnson writes: "Reasons for this pattern of stories are worked out in the book itself, for Augustine presents the relationship between the other stories and his own conversion in a way that models the relationship he seeks to establish between the readers of the *Confessions* and his own story. His purpose seems to be to reproduce the pattern of story and response in his readers that he himself became part of and that thus becomes his own story" (45). To this I add that Augustine is intentionally replacing the incomplete *Hortensius* and *Vita Antonii* with his own more complete protreptic *Confessions*. Cicero does not engage Christian Scripture, and Athanasius does not provide an educated model for imitation.

²⁴ Michael L. Humphries draws attention to Antony's advice to journal one's thoughts and actions in *Vita Antonii* 55 and suggests that Augustine possibly (though not necessarily) had this passage in mind when starting his *Confessions* in the final years of the fourth century (133-34). Humphries does not otherwise engage the *Vita Antonii*.

philosophy. He remembers his life, remembers God, and asks the reader to remember him. To remember him is to imitate him, to imitate him is to become an ascetic philosopher *in memoriam* Augustine.

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