

Identity and the Trinitarian *Imago*

ANGELA FRANKS

Saint John's Seminary

Brighton, MA

Identity is in many ways the object of the most convulsive crises of our day. A seemingly infinite variety of self-generated narratives of consciousness (Locke) demand to be recognized (Hegel) based on their authenticity (Rousseau) and autonomy (Kant). Beyond identity politics, philosophers have chimed in (Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Paul Ricœur, among others), arguing for the importance of narrative for the self, and neurological and psychological research confirms this instinct. But neither neuroscience nor philosophy has come up with satisfying explanations of identity. I will here make a counter-intuitive claim: that the way forward beyond these impasses is to recognize the properly theological nature of identity. This does not mean that the theological obliterates the natural structures that it presupposes; quite the contrary. But it does mean that the natural structures, on their own, will not add up to a satisfying answer. To put it bluntly, non-theological accounts of identity are seriously defective.

This recourse to theology seems strange. Why would theologians do any better than scientists and philosophers? Briefly put: We have Augustine. The late-antique master reveals that the mysteries of memory and identity can be plumbed only by grasping the creaturely status of man and his Trinitarian imaging. These two properly *theological* realities show us the way forward beyond identity aporias.

Augustine will help us see the necessarily Trinitarian nature of identity-formation through memory as a structural reality of man as Trinitarian *imago*. I will supplement his thought with Hans Urs von Balthasar's account of the perfection of that structure by means of graced participation in the Trinitarian processions and missions. In this graced

life, the filial reception and paternal generation of identity in love produce a narrative of identity that is a confession of mission.

Like the coupling of identity and theology, the linking of Augustine and Balthasar might seem to be an unlikely pairing. Did Balthasar not reject the Augustinian spiritual analogy of the Trinity in favor of an inter-personal analogy? The matter is more complicated, however, than that simple scholarly trope would suggest. While Balthasar found the spiritual analogy uncongenial to his theological style, he recognized its necessity. His late work argues, in fact, that both the Augustinian psychological analogy and analogies of inter-personal relations are needed, because each addresses a different aspect of the Trinity. In *Theo-Logic II*, he holds that the spiritual and the inter-personal analogy each accomplish something and also miss something.¹ And, from *Theo-Drama III*: “The creaturely image must be content to look in the direction of the mystery of God from its two starting points at the same time; the lines of perspective meet at an invisible point, in eternity.”² Here I will attempt to perform such a bi-directional viewing of the Trinity.

One last introductory point: the lack of consensus concerning the nature of identity means that the word is often used equivocally. Here I will use the word with three different meanings, all of which correspond to dimensions of identity contemplated throughout the history of philosophical anthropology, even when the word “identity” is not used to indicate them. Identity1 is the metaphysical baseline of identity, what enables something to endure through time; its function was usually taken to be fulfilled by substance or sometimes by the subsisting soul. Identity2 is what the Platonic schools called the “true self.” This is the answer to the Delphic Oracle’s command: *Gnothi seauton*, “know thyself.”³ Identity3 is our knowledge and/or affective experience of Identity2.

¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic*, vol. 2, *Truth of God* [TL II], trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 37–43; on his proposed route, fruitfulness, which pertains to both the intra- and inter-subjective analogies, see 59–62.

² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 3, *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ* [TD III], trans. Graham Ward (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 527.

³ For Plato, reason is the province of the immortal soul, or at least its immortal parts (see *Republic* 10.589a6–b6). Thus, where a person is “himself [*heauton*] most of all” (*First Alcibiades* 133c6) or “that which is each of us truly” (*Laws* 959b3) must be found in the rational soul. The *First Alcibiades* was the first reading within the neo-Platonic course of studies, foregrounding the question of the Delphic Oracle (Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights About Individuality, Life, and Death* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], 201).

Narrative Identity

Let us turn, then, to how narrative might function for identity. The centrality of narrative has been explored by philosophers such as Ricœur, Taylor, and MacIntyre.⁴ For Ricœur, the key questions concern the *same* (or *idem*-identity—roughly, Identity1) and the *self* (or *ipse*-identity—as narrative Identity3), and only narrative allows for the temporality of *ipseity* to be expressed in a way that safeguards sameness and also entails engagement with the other.⁵ For Taylor, we are “self-constituting animals”—at least “in part”—through our self-understandings narratively generated in community.⁶ For MacIntyre, human adults (in contrast with infants) make decisions within a temporal context set by where we come from and where we are going.⁷ We are both ontological and historical: ontological, as possessed of a certain nature ordered to some goods, and historical, as living in particular circumstances and communities.⁸ As he explains: “Reflective

⁴ The literature on the question is vast and is only selectively sampled here.

⁵ On *idem* and *ipse*, see Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2–3 and throughout, esp. 116: “Self-hood, I have repeatedly affirmed, is not sameness.” *Ipse*- or self-constancy is “irreducible to any empirical persistence” (195) or to any substantial persistence (118). I see more metaphysical dependence upon Identity1 in the other forms of identity than does Ricœur, although his proposal is complex, and I cannot do justice to it here. For secondary work, see Alain de Libera, “Subject (Re-/Decentred),” *Radical Philosophy* 167 (May/June 2011): 15–22, at 16; Alexandre Dessingué, “Paul Ricœur,” in *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Memory*, ed. Sven Bernecker and Kourken Michaelian (London: Routledge, 2017), 563–71. At *Oneself as Another*, 114n1, Ricœur distinguishes his project on narrative identity here from his earlier one centering around temporality in *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁶ See the presentation in Charles Taylor, “Introduction” and “Self-Interpreting Animals,” in *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1–2, 45–76; the qualification of “in part” is given on 3. See also the summaries and defenses in Kenneth Baynes, “Self, Narrative and Self-Constitution: Revisiting Taylor’s ‘Self-Interpreting Animals,’” *Philosophical Forum* 41, no. 4 (2010): 441–57; Beatriz Zegers Prado, “La Cuestión del Bein y la Identidad Narrativa de Charles Taylor,” *Pensamiento* 69, no. 258 (2013): 53–70.

⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 3.

⁸ MacIntyre thus offers a metaphysical foundation for narrative lacking in the other two philosophers and develops his own thought from *After Virtue*. As he put it in the preface to the third edition of that work, “In *After Virtue* I had tried to present the case for a broadly Aristotelian account of the virtues without making use of or appeal to what I called Aristotle’s metaphysical biology. And I was of course right in rejecting most

agents thus increasingly understand themselves and others in terms of a certain kind of narrative, a story in which they as agents direct themselves or fail to direct themselves toward a final end, the nature of which they initially apprehend in and through their activities as rational agents.”⁹

I am sympathetic to these accounts, most of all to MacIntyre’s metaphysically rich account, which captures something very true about the human condition. I will develop them further by looking at contemporary neuroscience to unfold the importance of narrative to the formation of a sense of self. But I will argue that, while necessary, narrative is not sufficient for personal identity; we cannot simply be what our stories about ourselves claim, even with the necessary qualifications concerning human nature.¹⁰ By what standards ought we to measure the *particularities* of our narratives, which transcend answers derived from the teleology of our common nature and the ensuing morality? Who *ought* we be as individuals (identity2)? And what happens if a person loses her life’s narrative thread?¹¹

More on that shortly, but first let us not forget that John Locke was

of that biology. But I had now learned from Aquinas that my attempt to provide an account of the human good purely in social terms, in terms of practices, traditions, and the narrative unity of human lives, was bound to be inadequate until I had provided it with a metaphysical grounding. It is only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do” (*After Virtue*, 3rd ed. [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007], xi; quoted and analyzed by Robert A. Gahl Jr., “MacIntyre on Teleology, Narrative, and Human Flourishing: Towards a Thomistic Narrative Anthropology,” *Acta Philosophica* 28, no. 2 [2019]: 279–96, at 284).

⁹ MacIntyre, *Ethics*, 54; see also the criteria at 57 and the framing of life as a quest in his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 197.

¹⁰ For other reasons, Galen Strawson opposed the narrative turn in “Against Narrativity,” *Ratio* 17, no. 4 (2004): 428–52, summarized in Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, “Virtuous Selves in Vicious Times: Alasdair MacIntyre on Narrative Identity,” *Narrative inquiry* 21, no. 2 (2011): 367–73. Strawson argues, among other points, that experiencing one’s life as a narrative is optional, given that one could experience it episodically as well, as he argues he himself does (430–34). I am not convinced; there may be an “episodic” tendency for a person not to identify with the “I” of the past or future, but neuroscience indicates (as we will see) that all people must fill in memorial gaps with some kind of narrative to have any sense at all of past or future and to avoid the kind of disorientation that happens in dementia.

¹¹ MacIntyre notes that his account does not *require* that a person be able to narrate an autobiography (*Ethics*, 58), although it appears to be a human rational impulse. Even with this caveat, it is not clear that he has an account of the *particularized* “true self” (Identity2); he seems to limit himself to the generality of the Aristotelian excellent human being. I will return to this concern below.

the first to use the word “identity” to mean more than Identity1, or sameness through time. Arguably he proposed the first narrativial account of identity. Yet, by famously discarding substance, Locke was forced to find the continuity of Identity1 in the memory of consciousness (Identity3).¹² As a result, he fractured the person into a series of punctual moments of consciousness and was forced into the radical conviction that “*Socrates* asleep, and *Socrates* awake, is not the same person.”¹³

Picking up the Lockean ball are many contemporary neuroscientists. Recent popularizing voices on the question exist on an ideological spectrum—from materialist to, well, very materialist. To summarize their views: identity is the necessary (albeit perhaps self-delusional) narrative that we construct in order to make sense of our neurologically logged memories. Memory is simply past consciousness embedded in the tangle of neural pathways that are constantly forming and reforming. This summary already indicates that neuroscientists generally see the agent of neural activity not as the embodied person using her neurons, but rather as the neural structures themselves, a stance that is already a philosophical claim (and one with which I disagree). I will return to this critique at the end of this section; for the following, I will stick closely to the presentation in the literature.

According to the scientists, key to the process of memory-formation are the two hippocampi, which process sensory signals to create episodic or autobiographical memories, that is, memories of events.¹⁴ These hippocampal memories are also neurally shaded with emotions, due in part to the close proximity of the amygdala to the hippocampus.¹⁵ Further, these

¹² See Shaun Nichols, “Memory and Personal Identity,” in Bernecker and Michaelian, *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Memory*, 169–79, for the Lockean position and the relevant secondary scholarship informed by analytic philosophy.

¹³ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch, 2nd ed. (1694; repr. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), pt. II, chap. 1, §11.

¹⁴ These memories are neurally formed by creating new wiring between neurons. According to Veronica O’Keane, “a memory is represented in a neural code that consists of cells that have been wired together to fire as a single unit” (*A Sense of Self: Memory, the Brain, and Who We Are* [New York: Norton, 2021], 57). The term “episodic memory” was popularized by Endel Tulving, *Elements of Episodic Memory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983). For recent literature, see the overviews by D. Perrin and S. Rousset, “The Episodicity of Memory: Current Trends and Issues in Philosophy and Psychology,” *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 5, no. 3 (2014): 291–312; André Sant’Anna, “Introduction: Philosophy of Memory,” *Acta Scientiarum* 43, no. 3 (2022): e61814; André Sant’Anna, Christopher Jude McCarroll, and Kourken Michaelian, eds., *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

¹⁵ The two amygdalae activate the autonomic nervous system, which regulates many

hippocampal memories can be consolidated or dismantled, given that the hippocampus is quite plastic.¹⁶

The hippocampus codes memories not only emotionally but also spatially. The hippocampus has “place cells,” certain neurons that light up when, e.g., a rat enters a square on a grid.¹⁷ Place is coded in each neural memory more strongly, or at least differently, than time. “Space itself is the scaffold for all episodic memories, the dimension to which every other element of an experience is bound.”¹⁸ Indeed, ancient mnemonic devices emphasized the use of spatial cues, even made-up ones, arguing that memory is “established from places and images”—more concisely, *memoria ex locis*.¹⁹

Time is quite different. Neuroscience confirms that our experience of time is made up of (as Augustine saw) only the present, modulated three ways—as present, as past, and as anticipated future. Time is coded onto neuronal memories only as succession: First this happened, then that.²⁰ While the structure of a calendar might be the scaffolding of our thinking about events, that structure has no intrinsic neurological stickiness; our memories are not date-stamped like our photos.

physical aspects of emotion: blushing, tearing up, breathing, and so forth.

¹⁶ Memories that will remain longer-term are transferred to the cortex, which is less plastic.

¹⁷ See O’Keane, *Sense of Self*, 87–98, and Lauren Aguirre, *The Memory Thief and the Secrets behind How We Remember: A Medical Mystery* (New York: Pegasus, 2021), 77–86, on the experiments by John O’Keefe and others.

¹⁸ Aguirre, *Memory Thief*, 79.

¹⁹ Dave Tell, “Beyond Mnemotechnics: Confession and Memory in Augustine,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 39, no. 3 (2006): 233–53, using a translation from Frances Yates at 249n2. In these techniques, the memory itself is conceived of as a space, similar to Augustine’s conception in *Confessiones* 10.8, and memories are formed by aligning the content with different imagined “places.” Tell argues that Augustine rejects this understanding of memory, but Tell’s contrast between memory and confession is too sharp. For Augustine’s possible knowledge of ancient mnemotechnics, see 250n7. See also Owen M. Ewald, “Imperial Roman Cities as Places of Memory in Augustine’s *Confessions*,” in *Urban Dreams and Realities in Antiquity: Remains and Representations of the Ancient City*, ed. Adam Kemezis, Mnemosyne Supplements 275 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 273–93, at 279; Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 216–17, 226.

²⁰ The sharpness of memories dulls as we age, as our neurons reform in other cell tangles and our mind prunes our memories. It would be, literally, insanity to remember absolutely everything. Neural pruning is necessary, therefore, yet pruning also makes it easy to conflate memories, especially those with the same spatial markers. Two Christmases, under the same artificial tree, meld. See O’Keane, *Sense of Self*, 99–115.

The brain is used not only for acquiring and storing these memories but also for mobilizing them to gain predictive power—that is, to think about the future. The same neural pathways light up when recalling the past and when planning for the future. The removal of the hippocampi—as in the famous twentieth-century case of Henry Molaison—or their damage in aging or dementia or from opioids (especially fentanyl) leaves a person with an inability to form episodic memories rooted in place and ordered to the past or future.²¹ This is why people suffering from Alzheimer's get lost so easily: they do not remember where they were ten minutes ago, why they are here right now, or where they will be tomorrow. Musician Clive Wearing described his experience of the loss of episodic memory as having “no difference between day and night. No thoughts at all; . . . It's precisely like death.”²²

To connect this information with our larger theme: The temporal vagueness of our memories and the orientation of the mind toward the future both point to the necessity of the narrative power of our minds to fill in the gaps with a *story*, as the narrativist philosophers and the neuroscientists both emphasize. Many psychologists also testify to the importance of a personal narrative to make sense of one's life.²³ The most materialistic

²¹ Aguirre, *Memory Thief*, traces the discovery of the hippocampal damage that fentanyl can inflict.

²² Quoted in Aguirre, *Memory Thief*, 71. They have “an equally impaired ability to remember past events *and* to envision future events” (O'Keane, *Sense of Self*, 111–12). People with severe hippocampal damage are “truly stuck in the present, literally, with what's in front of their eyes” (Aguirre, *Memory Thief*, 74, quoting neuroscientist Eleanor Maguire).

²³ Psychology has also pursued the question of how we craft autobiographical narratives. Dan P. McAdams has contributed to the way psychologists view personality development by insisting that “identity is a life story,” that is, “a personal myth” that provides meaning, unity, and purpose to an individual life (*The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* [New York: Guilford, 1997], 5–6). For a psychology of the historical construction of meaning, see the contributions in Jürgen Straub, ed., *Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness* (Brooklyn: Berghahn, 2005), especially Straub, “Telling Stories, Making History: Toward a Narrative Psychology of the Historical Construction of Meaning,” 44–98. For the socio-cultural influences on the creation of identity narratives, see Robyn Fivush, Tilmann Habermas, Theodore E. A. Waters, and Widaad Zaman, “The Making of Autobiographical Memory: Intersections of Culture, Narratives, and Identity,” *International Journal of Psychology* 46, no. 5 (2011): 321–45. See also the summary of such Social Interactionist Theory in Daniel D. Hutto, “Memory and Narrativity,” in Bernecker and Michaelian, *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Memory*, 192–204, at 193–96. On the mostly sociological idea of “collective memory,” see Aleida Assmann, “Re-framing Memory: Between Individual and Collective Forms of Constructing the Past,” in *Performing the Past*:

thinkers interpret this non-optional and yet somehow free narrativel process as an evolutionary requirement for an odd meaning-seeking species. We *must* make a narrative, but we are *free* to make it however we wish; hence the relativistic injunction: just make a good one. “So, who are you [Identity2]?” inquires one neuroscientist. “The answer is: whoever you *think* you are [Identity3].” It is not surprising that his very next paragraph points to trans-identities as an illustration, and the book’s very title—*The Self Delusion*—argues for the inherent relativity of all possible narratives.²⁴

Yet the neuroscientists—unlike Augustine—are unaware that there is a qualitative difference between the activity of neurons in recording sense memories, on the one hand, and an intellectually generated narrative that imbues memories with meaning, on the other. Neuroscientists can study the brain activity around memories, yet creating narratives on the basis of these memories is a higher-order phenomenon. A gap yawns between the level of memory and the level of meaning, a gap that only human beings (and not lab rats) traverse.²⁵ Neuroscientists assume what they must prove—and cannot.²⁶

Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe, ed. Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 35–50.

²⁴ Gregory Berns, *The Self Delusion: The New Neuroscience of How We Invent—and Reinvent—Our Identities* (New York: Basic, 2022), 3 (italics original); cf. a literary analogue in Mark Freeman, “Telling Stories: Memory and Narrative,” in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwartz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 263–77, and a philosophical one in Erica Cosentino, “Self in Time and Language,” *Consciousness and Cognition* 20, no. 3 (2011): 777–83. Thus, the program for the new materialists is not a Rousseauian journey to find an authentic self, but instead a maximally useful narrative that scratches the evolutionary itch for meaning amidst actual arbitrariness. Two theoretical trends have undermined our sense of the self: first, modern philosophy (as seen in Locke), reaching its apex in the post-structuralist dissolution of the self; and second, the ascendancy of Identity3 and, in general, the overthrow of metaphysics by epistemology. Neuroscientists unwittingly join these two trends in arguing for the delusional self (first trend) created *post hoc* through mental effort (second trend).

²⁵ I am grateful to a paper by Marie George for clarifying my thinking on these points: “Neuroscience and the Human Soul,” Thomistic Institute, February 29, 2020, soundcloud.com/thomisticinstitute/neuroscience-and-the-human-soul-prof-marie-george.

²⁶ Thus go neuroscience and much psychology. In philosophy, the results are similar. Identity3 as consciousness remains central to philosophy of mind, while *that of which* we are conscious (Identity2) is generally deemed inaccessible or else imaginary, whether one follows Kant or Hume respectively. Identity1 perdures, when at all, in the highly technical writings of some analytic philosophers and a few lonely substance-metaphysicians (for some of the former, see Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, 27–112); or else philosophers follow the neuroscientists in locating Identity1 in the purely material substrate of the

This foray into recent neuroscience has uncovered some important truths: Memory is bound up in our narrational capacity, both of which are necessary for a full human experience of identity. Further, memories are rooted in our embodied nature, in particular in its spatial and emotional facets, while its historicity manifests as various kinds of temporal presence. These features affirm Augustine's proposals concerning time and our awesome and yet strangely fallible power of memory. In fact, his presentation of memory in book 10 of the *Confessions* recognizes many features later confirmed by psychology and neuroscience. See how closely the following passage recalls the essential what–where–when structure of episodic memory shaded with emotion: in the palace of memory, he writes, "I also meet with myself, and recall myself, and when, where, and what I have done, and under what feelings."²⁷

Augustine further grasps that the generation of a *verbum* of oneself originates from the memory, but unlike the neuroscientists, he realizes that this operation in the "more hidden depths in our memory" is a properly intellectual activity, an aspect of memory that neuroscience is ill-equipped to understand.²⁸

I turn over in my mind an arch I have seen in Carthage embellished
with a beautifully intricate pattern; here a particular thing, brought

brain in which our thinking happens. A contrarian thinker might be tempted to ditch Identity3, especially its aspects of memory and narrative, as too contaminated with Lockean biases to be retrievable. Notably, however, this was not the pre-moderns' approach, although of course they were blessedly ignorant of Lockean anthropology. Both ancient and medieval thinkers had subtle understandings of Identity3, albeit lacking our modern parlance of "consciousness" or, for that matter, "identity" understood in this way. (I do not have the space to rehearse that history now. But see my *Body and Identity: A History of the Empty Self* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2025].) Despite the disproportionate emphasis on Identity3, it still is one necessary piece of the identity puzzle, as the activity of generating the narrative that the gaps in our memories demand. But it is not the only or most important piece.

²⁷ Augustine, *Conf.* 10.8.14, quoted by and explored in Jean-Christophe Cassel, Daniel Cassel, and Lilianne Manning, "From Augustine of Hippo's Memory Systems to Our Modern Taxonomy in Cognitive Psychology and Neuroscience of Memory: A 16th-Century Map of Intuition before Light of Evidence," *Behavioral Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2013):21–41, at 35. These episodic aspects of memory are confirmed in books 10–11 of Augustine's later *De Trinitate*; see commentary by Paige Hochschild in *Memory in Augustine's Theological Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 201–6.

²⁸ Augustine, *De Trin.* 15.21.40, in *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991), 427. Unless otherwise noted, future quotations will be from this translation.

to the mind's notice through the eyes and transferred to the memory, produces an observation in the imagination. But with the mind I observe *something else*, in terms of which I take pleasure in this work of art. . . . Thus it is that we make judgments about these things according to that form of *truth*, and we perceive that by insight of the *rational mind*.²⁹

At its highest reaches, the memory is always present to itself, and such self-presence is rational, indeed, itself identical with "mind" (*mens*).³⁰ This sounds very much like the discovery of Identity2 through Identity3. Let us continue to listen to Augustine to see whether we can do better than neuroscience's brain-as-narrator with no self to narrate.

Augustine on Trinitarian Memory

We have already seen the first insight of Augustine that is important for our purposes, namely, his presentation of sensible and imaginative memory as spatially and as emotionally shaded and connected to the unique qualities of time.³¹ Second, his self—Identity2—is received, not constructed. The self is, in other words, filial, generated by the inconceivable love of the creating Father. Third, Augustine realizes that our mind's work on this identity has a Trinitarian structure. In fact, the Christically healed self thinking about itself (or Identity3) is a preeminent example of the Trinitarian *imago* in human persons this side of heaven.³² Due to space

²⁹ Augustine, *De Trin.* 9.6.11 (p. 277; emphasis added).

³⁰ Augustine, *De Trin.* 14.10.13–14.11.14; 10.11.18–10.12.19; cf. *Conf.* 10.14–17.

³¹ For overviews of Augustine on memory, see Hochschild, *Memory*; John A. Mourant, *Saint Augustine on Memory*, The Saint Augustine Lecture 1979 (Philadelphia: Villanova University Press, 1980); Roland Teske, "Augustine's Philosophy of Memory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 148–58; Liliane Manning, "Augustine," in Bernecker and Michaelian, *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Memory*, 439–47; Roger R. Corrieau, A.A. (Augustinians of the Assumption), "The Once and Future Self: Memory in Saint Augustine's *Confessions*," in *Ancient and So New: St. Augustine's Confessions and Its Influences*, ed. Glenn Arbery (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2019), 29–46; Lenka Karfiková, "Memory, Eternity, and Time," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine's Confessions*, ed. Tarmo Toom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 175–90; Kevin G. Grove, *Augustine on Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

³² Ultimately, man must remember, know, and love God in order to image him (see *De Trin.* 14.12.15; Mourant, *Saint Augustine on Memory*, 47–52; Hochschild, *Memory*, 215–16).

constraints, here I will merely sketch the second and third points, relying on *The Confessions* and *On the Trinity*, to argue that Identity2 is a divine gift from the creating Trinity and that Identity3 is itself Trinitarian in structure.³³

Augustine cannot escape the realization that “I do not know what kind of man I am,” even after conversion.³⁴ Worse, in sin, I become “an enigma to myself, and herein lies my sickness.”³⁵ Disordered desire makes the mind act “as if it were absent” from itself.³⁶ Yet alongside this confusion is the plain truth that one already knows oneself, because self-knowledge for the spiritual mind is initiated in the mind’s presence to itself.³⁷ The mind

³³ In focusing on these works, I am leaving out the great body of his preaching, in which ecclesial memory is intrinsic to the formation of the identity of the individual within the communal body of Christ; see Grove, *Augustine on Memory*, who corrects the overly individualistic and interior picture presented in Phillip Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For cautions against anachronistically projecting contemporary concerns around selfhood onto Augustine, see John C. Cavadini, “The Darkest Enigma: Reconsidering the Self in Augustine’s Thought,” in *Visioning Augustine* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2019), 138–55. For a sound overview of Augustine on the self, see Terence Sweeney, “God and the Soul: Augustine on the Journey to True Selfhood,” *Heythrop Journal* 57 (2016): 678–91.

³⁴ Augustine, Sermon 340A, no. 8, transl. Henry Chadwick, “Philosophical Tradition and the Self,” in *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 60–71, at 80. Cf. *Conf.* 10.8.15: “Nec ego ipse capio totum quod sum”—“Nor do I myself know all that I am” (*The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, 2nd ed. [Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002], 246; unless otherwise noted, all translations of *Conf.* come from this translation).

³⁵ *Conf.* 10..33.50; cf. 4.4.9.

³⁶ *De Trin.* 10.9.12, 295. See Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine’s De Trinitate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 216–18.

³⁷ *De Trin.* 10.9.12; cf. 14.14.18: “The human mind, then, is so constructed that it never does not remember itself, never does not understand itself, never does not love itself.” (p. 384). See the scholarship summarized in Mateusz Stróżyński, “There Is No Searching for the Self: Self-Knowledge in Book Ten of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*,” *Phronesis* 58 (2013): 280–300, at 285–86. A groundbreaking treatment of the larger question is Therese Scarpelli Cory, *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); for Augustine, see 17–22. For the Skeptical context against which both Plotinus’s and Augustine’s treatment of self-knowledge are arguing, see Stróżyński, “There Is No Searching”; Lewis Ayres, “The Discipline of Self-Knowledge in Augustine’s *De trinitate* book X,” in *The Passionate Intellect: Essays on the Transformation of the Classical Traditions Presented to Prof. I. G. Kidd*, ed. Ayres, Rutgers University Studies in Classical Humanities 7 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1995), 261–96, at 279; Wayne J. Hankey, “Self-knowledge and God as Other in Augustine:

cannot *not* be present to itself, because such self-presence derives from its very being as mind.

But the fact of the mind's presence to itself (establishing the possibility of Identity3) does not mean that one interprets the content of who one is (Identity2) correctly.³⁸ Augustine believed for years that his "true self" was a rhetor destined for political greatness, bourgeois comfort, and family life. How could he know otherwise? The answer is, of course, found in God, more interior to me than I am to myself, who "dwells within" memory.³⁹ "What is hearing about oneself [*se*] from you if not knowing oneself [*se*]?"⁴⁰ This rewriting of the *Gnothi seauton* is grounded on the truth of creation *ex nihilo*, which Augustine explores extensively in the last three books of the *Confessions*.⁴¹ The Genesis stories express on a macro-level what is true of him on the micro-level, that he is the product of the knowledge and love of God and therefore can make no sense of himself without inquiring of the Creator.⁴² "You, Lord, know everything about a human being because you have made him."⁴³

Problems for a Postmodern Retrieval," *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 44 (1999): 83–123; Hankey, "Between and Beyond Augustine and Descartes: More than a Source of the Self," *Augustinian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2001): 65–88.

³⁸ See Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 302; "What is necessarily known in that instant of self-recognition can only be the subject of appropriate and true attention when the mind has been educated towards appropriate objects of desire, and into a concomitant practice of distinguishing the intelligible from the material." Ayres points out the distinction between *se nosse* (knowing oneself habitually) and *se cogitare* (thinking about oneself), at 300–302, 305, from *De Trin.* 10.5.7 and throughout.

³⁹ *Conf.* 10.24.35 (p. 260); see also *Conf.* 3.6.11 and *De Trin.* 14.15.21.

⁴⁰ *Conf.* 10.3.3 (p. 238; trans. modified; "quid est enim a te audire de se nisi cognoscere").

⁴¹ Contrast this with Rousseau's elevation of his own "creative imagination" as that which is responsible for his identity, in Ann Hartle, "Augustine and Rousseau: Narrative and Self-Knowledge in the Two *Confessions*," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews, Philosophical Traditions 8 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 263–85, at 271: "In his imagination Rousseau is like God. He is alone and he is master of the universe. . . . Augustine is on a journey toward God. Rousseau, in his journeys, is like God" (see also 278–82).

⁴² On God as Creator, see Jared Ortiz, "*You Made us for Yourself*": *Creation in Augustine's Confessions* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2016).

⁴³ *Conf.* 10.5.7, p. 241: "In some senses the key theme in Augustine's transformation of Neoplatonism is his understanding of the necessary and intended difference between God and creation which facilitates love in a way markedly difference from all conception of difference in Plotinus" (Ayres, "Discipline," 285n68).

Thus, to know oneself truly is simultaneous with knowing God who made oneself.⁴⁴

The reality of the loving Creator means that Augustine's existence is completely derived from God, not from Augustine himself; even the human language he uses to describe himself is something received.⁴⁵ As Thomas Prufer states, "God's revelation of Himself and of His creature Augustine to Augustine is the Word in which Augustine is enabled to speak his revelation, his words freely revealing to other creatures what has been freely revealed in Scripture, in God's Word, to him about God and about himself: his *Confessions*."⁴⁶ Thus, when it comes to knowledge of Augustine's own soul, it is "the rhetoric of God" and not Augustine's own speech or ideas that matter.⁴⁷ "The Psalms are the origin of the rhetoric of the *Confessions*, a rhetoric whose form is *caritas*. . . . God is spoken to with words first spoken by God to us (prayer as quotation and appropriation of Scripture) and in the Word spoken in common with us (Christ, human and divine, Mediator)."⁴⁸ As Mary's *Magnificat* does in a compressed way, the *Confessions* enact this transposition more extensively. The *Magnificat* sings Mary's gratitude and praise to the God who has lifted up Daughter Zion, reweaving biblical imagery and quotation into its new historical setting at the moment of the Visitation. Likewise, the *Confessions* use God's words in Scripture to form the words of Augustine's confession of his lowliness and of God's creative mercy in his life. Their words to confess themselves and God must come from the personal divine Word, as expressed in the Scriptures and derived from his creative speech, which is a "[participation] in the Word" through whom all things were made.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ See, e.g., *De Trin.* 14.12.15–14.20. See Thomas Prufer, "A Reading of Augustine's *Confessions*, Book X," in *Recapitulations* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 27–31, at 31: "Book X is situated between the 'autobiographical' Books I–IX and the 'exegetical' Books XI–XIII, between Augustine's free recollection of himself out of forgottenness, out of hiddenness of himself to himself, free recollection for the sake of free self-revelation, and Augustine's interpretation of Scripture (the first chapter of the first book of the Bible), God's Word, God's free revelation of Himself as free creator, creator to whom He Himself and His creatures are exhaustively manifest, revelation of Himself and of creatures to creatures, creatures to whom God Himself and they themselves would, without that revelation, remain hidden."

⁴⁵ *Conf.* 1.14. I owe this insight and citation to Barry Bercier, A.A., "The Mind of Augustine and the Rhetoric of God," in Arbery, *So Ancient and So New*, 16–28, at 17.

⁴⁶ Prufer, "Reading," 31.

⁴⁷ The phrase comes from Bercier, "Mind of Augustine."

⁴⁸ Prufer, "Reading," 29. Cf. Bercier, "Mind of Augustine," 27, on Scripture as "the rhetoric of God as it breaks into speech in creation and across history and enters our hearts."

⁴⁹ *De Trin.* 4.1.3 (p. 154–55).

Let us turn to Identity3: The way we reflect upon and bring forth the *verbum* of our identity has a Trinitarian structure. The origin of the *logos* and of the love of oneself in the triune God images a further divine truth, that within God himself is origin and *logos* and love.⁵⁰ The originary power in us is best aligned with the act of remembering oneself, Augustine argues. The memorial act is a matter of returning one's attention to oneself, a "non-bodily turning around."⁵¹ It is not memory as a recollection of a past event, as with episodic memory, although such recollection can be incorporated into the inner word, as I will discuss in the next section. Rather, the memorial act is self-presence: "The mind which is always present to itself remembers itself."⁵² This act is paternal in character, because self-reversion brings awareness to the highest and therefore unifying aspect of oneself. It births into the awareness a sense of the truth of the person.⁵³

The divine paternal origin is perfect self-presence, but in us, this presence takes the form of a turning toward the Creator, that is, a conversion to the interior presence of God in the soul.⁵⁴ Hence the exhortatory tone in so much of Augustine's writing on this question, as he calls us to be present to ourselves and thus to God in us.⁵⁵ Unlike the God whom we image, we do not always attend to ourselves, in particular to the truth that we are creatures, and this means that we do not know God.

⁵⁰ See *De Trin.* 5.13.14–5.14.15. Gioia writes: "The 'object,' God, is known and loved through God, i.e. in Christ through the Holy Spirit, which means that he is himself the real subject who associates us to his own self-knowledge" (*Theological Epistemology*, 4).

⁵¹ *De Trin.* 14.5.8 (p. 376); also 10.8.11 and throughout. Being and memory are inter-implicated within the tradition, from Augustine (as in the early Trinitarian *imago* in *Conf.* 13.11.12, where "being" features as the paternal analogue rather than memory, or in *De civitate Dei* 11.26), through the *Liber de causis*, to Aquinas's understanding of subsistence in terms of a self-reversion. For the latter two, see Therese Scarpelli Cory, "What Is an Intellectual 'Turn'? The *Liber de Causis*, Avicenna, and Aquinas's Turn to the Phantasms," *Tópicos* 45 (2013): 129–62; see also Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 133–41, and 279.

⁵² *De Trin.* 14.11.14 (p. 382). Hochschild writes: "In joining together two things that are the same in kind [the mind as subject and as object], [memory] functions most purely as a mode of making-present. It is, in the well-integrated soul, a union of love" (*Memory*, 214).

⁵³ For Augustine's understanding of the Father as origin or *principium*, see Gioia, *Theological Epistemology*, 144–46.

⁵⁴ See *Memory*, 139: "Memory is the embodied soul's mode of approaching God." Hochschild cites *Conf.* 1.2.2 and 1.4.4 concerning the mysterious, trans-local presence of God in man (148–49).

⁵⁵ E.g., *De Trin.* 13.20.26. See Ayres, "Discipline of Self-Knowledge," his *Augustine and the Trinity*, and throughout Hochschild, *Memory*.

What proper self-presence conceives is an inner word, a *verbum mentis* as a generated act of understanding.⁵⁶ This inner word is “not part of any people’s language,”⁵⁷ but is prior to such language as meaning generated in the memory.⁵⁸ The word is “necessarily born from the *knowledge* we hold in the memory” and is “absolutely the same kind of thing as the knowledge it is born from,” as a thought is formed out of knowledge.⁵⁹ This word is dependent on its source in the memory, because the word is the generated image of the source.⁶⁰

Viewing this human phenomenon through the lens of its Trinitarian source, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger explicates the analogous reality in God through a reflection on Matt 11:27: “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son.” He writes that the act of God’s knowing himself “is God’s giving of himself as Father and God’s receiving of himself and giving back of himself as Son, the exchange of eternal love, both the eternal gift and the eternal return of the gift.”⁶¹

⁵⁶ See *De Trin.* 9.7.12: “We conceive true knowledge of things, which we have with us as a kind of word that we beget by uttering inwardly” (p. 277). In *Augustine and the Trinity*, 194–96, Ayres points out the antecedents for the interior word in the *Tractates* on 1 John and elsewhere.

⁵⁷ *De Trin.* 14.7.10 (p. 378); cf. 15.10.19.

⁵⁸ *De Trin.* 8.6.9; 13.1.4; throughout.

⁵⁹ *De Trin.* 15.10.19 (p. 409; emphasis mine). Some commentators doubt that Augustine intends any real content to his self-knowledge: “Augustine again and again comes back to a fundamental realization: self-knowledge is not the knowledge of *some thing*” (Stróżyński, “There Is No Searching,” 288). A similar instinct is in Jean-Luc Marion, *In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey Kosky (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012). But this overstates the case, although the spiritual nature of the mind does make knowledge of itself different from knowledge of material things. The certainty that we experience in our life, memory, understanding, and will means that we know ourselves as simply who we are (as according our nature), as alive, remembering, understanding, and willing. We can properly generate a true *verbum mentis* (see *De Trin.* 15.12.22: “gignitur verbum verum . . . ex . . . thesauro memoriae”). See further Bernard Lonergan’s commentary in *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 7–8. Otherwise, Augustine would not really be proposing an analogy for the Trinity, but rather for a binity, absent the “true word” (*verbum verum*) in which “we speak what we know” (*quod scimus loquimur*). Without the *verbum* of the intellect, there would be only self-presence and perhaps love. Even the existence of love in such a case would be doubtful, however, because love unites the *verbum* and the *mens*; see *De Trin.* 9.8.13.

⁶⁰ See *De Trin.* 8.3.5: “Let us copy the example of this divine image, the Son, and not draw away from God” (p. 223).

⁶¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *The God of Jesus Christ: Meditations on the Triune God*, ed. and trans.

This formulation highlights the role of the Spirit as unifying love and as gift.⁶² The Spirit is the “active agent of the divine unity,” as Lewis Ayres writes, the unity of Father and Son in person.⁶³ In us, the will joins the memorial self-reversion and thinking of a word.⁶⁴ Knowledge occurs as a “co-generation” between the knower and the thing known, whereas love—although it precedes knowledge insofar as we desire to know—is perfected as the joyful dwelling in the knowledge.⁶⁵ The generation of an inner *verbum* of oneself is received in love. Yet, further, this unifying love is received as a gift. The gift of the Spirit is nothing other than the reception of the love of the Father and the Son.⁶⁶ The gift-character of the Spirit enables us to receive all that the Father gives through the Son as a gift to be loved—as, in fact, manifestations of the Spirit who is personal Love and Gift.

This summarizes the Trinitarian structure of Identity3.⁶⁷ Is it quite correct, however, to say that Augustine holds that Identity2 as well is Trinitarian? Indisputably, Identity2 is so, insofar as it has its origin in the triune Creator. And, as I have argued, the use of God’s Word to utter the confessional word of oneself is implicitly Trinitarian, a close imaging of the Father uttering the Word that is expressed in Scripture.⁶⁸

Yet, in *De Trinitate*, especially in book 10, the content of knowledge

Brian McNeil, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2018), 100–101. Cf. *De Trin.* 15.14.23.

⁶² For the Spirit as love and gift, see *De Trin.* 15.17.31–15.19.37 and the literature and explication in Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: Love and Gift in the Trinity and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016).

⁶³ Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 256, relying on *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus* 39.5; in general, see 256–58 and Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine*, 41–44. Ayres specifies that “Augustine is not suggesting that Father and Son are somehow brought into unity by the gift of the Spirit as an act subsequent to the generation of the Son” (258).

⁶⁴ *De Trin.* 14.10.13. See also 14.8.13: “This word is born when on thinking over it we like it either for sinning or for doing good. So love, like something in the middle, joins together our word and the mind it is begotten from, and binds itself with them as a third element in a non-bodily embrace, without any confusion” (p. 278).

⁶⁵ *De Trin.* 9.12.18.

⁶⁶ See *De Trin.* 15.19.36: “Nor because they give and he is given is he, therefore, less than they, for he is so given as the Gift of God that he also gives himself as God” (trans. Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 254).

⁶⁷ I do not have space to make the appropriate caveats, evident especially in book 15, where Augustine notes the limitations of what preceded. The likeness to God that Augustine sees is ultimately mediated in the Incarnation (see Hochschild, *Memory*, 155–68, 207–19, and throughout) and is eschatological (see John C. Cavadini, “The Structure and Intention of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*,” in *Visioning Augustine*, 1–22).

⁶⁸ The *imago*-mind, which is identical to its memory, understanding, and love, is also

of oneself via the *Gnothi seauton* is primarily a knowledge of one's nature: The mind "should think about itself and live *according to its nature*," even though this definitional knowledge is complemented by the content presented historically in the *Confessions*.⁶⁹ I would like now to make explicit what is implicit in Augustine by arguing that Identity2, the "true self" or the content of identity, is properly Trinitarian when understood as Balthasar presents it, namely, as mission. Thus, not only is our thinking about ourselves (Identity3) Trinitarian in its imaging function, but so too is the content of our thought (Identity2) Trinitarian by participation.

Identity, Mission, and Narrative

First, though, let us ask: Why do we need a particular content to Identity2? Why is a deeper understanding of human nature not adequate? Closer examination of human experience reveals the limits of such knowledge of essences. Think of spousal love, which is directed toward a particular person. Surely no husband, in describing what he loves in his wife, has ever said, "I knew she was the woman for me when I learned she was an individual substance of a rational nature." While such quidditative knowledge is necessary for an understanding of oneself—and it is knowledge that many people lack—it is nevertheless insufficient to account for the content of particularity.⁷⁰ A better account is given in Dana Gioia's poem "Marriage

"nothing other than myself," and therefore the self is itself a Trinitarian image (see *Conf.* 10.17.26 [p. 254; trans. modified]).

⁶⁹ *De Trin.* 10.5.7 (p. 292; emphasis added). From this "inviolable truth," we come to, "not what any kind of thing any particular man's mind is, but what kind of thing by everlasting ideas it ought to be" (9.6.9 [p. 276]; see also 10.7.12). This "ought" might refer to what a particular man's mind should be (where the "ideas" are the template of individuals), or else to the universal ideal of perfected humanity. See also Ayres, "Discipline," 277–78. On the variety of responses to the *Gnothi seauton* in antiquity and late antiquity, see Sorabji, *Self*, and Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 299–305.

⁷⁰ Such recourse to the particular raises the question of whether, from an Aristotelian perspective, we are talking about the intellect at all, which abstracts from universals. This move to the particular would seem to abandon Augustine's insistence on the moment of the generation of an intellectual word in the mind's presence to itself. I grant that the properly intellectual moment concerns the generation of a *verbum* concerning a universal—so, in this case, regarding human nature, as Augustine himself indicates above. Yet I would argue that the self's presence to itself is not only *qua* universal nature but also *qua* particular thing—*this* self, I, who am also of the human species. The intellect's generation of a universal word is part of this self-presencing moment, but the entire rational structure of the human mind is at play: episodic memories, bodily awareness, contemplation of the divine, and the sense that one has

of Many Years”: “You are a language I have learned by heart. / This intimate patois will vanish with us, / its only native speakers.”

Surprisingly few theorists are interested in this question of what makes up Identity2’s particularizing content. *What* do we know in these intimate personal languages? To my knowledge, the only recent thinkers to explore the content of Identity2 deeply are the theologians Balthasar and Ratzinger, who both argue that the true self is located in a mission from God.

While this may seem like a purely functional definition of a person, mission is in fact rooted more in being than in doing, more in the kind of saint God wishes me to be than in completing a specific to-do list (although the latter may also be demanded of us by God). Balthasar gets this metaphysical sense of mission from the missions of the Son and Spirit, who are sent by the Father into the world. These sendings are extensions, so to speak, of their eternal divine processions from the Father (and here Balthasar relies repeatedly on Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 43).⁷¹

Missions are, in other words, about persons (hypostases) given to the world.⁷² In God, in fact, they are constitutive of divine persons, at least from the eternal “side” of their processional origin. In us, who, unlike God, have accidents distinct from our substances, our missions can never simply and ontologically constitute our persons, but they serve as the point toward which we bend asymptotically, if we let grace have its way. The more we allow God to define us through our missions into the Church and the world, we become more our “true selves.” This missional perspective aligns closely with Augustine’s vision of Identity3, in which we speak the *verbum* resulting from our self-reversion to the paternal source. Here, I am further specifying that the *verbum* that sums up a life in community is each person’s particular participation in the Word’s mission into the world.

In God eternally, the sending is based upon the generating, and in us it occurs through adoption. “Everyone who loves is begotten of God [*ek*

of one’s mission. Both Thomas Aquinas and Karol Wojtyła speak of such knowledge of particulars as “cognitive” (see Daniel De Haan, “Aquinas on Sensing, Perceiving, Thinking, Understanding, and Cognizing Individuals,” in *Medieval Perceptual Puzzles: Theories of Sense-Perception in the 13th and 14th Centuries*, ed. Elena Baltuta [Leiden: Brill, 2019], 238–68; and Angela Franks, “Thinking the Embodied Person with Karol Wojtyła,” *Nova et Vetera* [English] 16, no. 1 [2018]: 141–71).

⁷¹ See Angela Franks, “The Mission and Person of Christ and the Christian in Hans Urs von Balthasar,” in *The Center is Jesus Christ Himself: Essays on Revelation, Salvation, and Evangelization in Honor of Robert P. Imbelli*, ed. Andrew Meszaros (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 272–99.

⁷² The communal context of missions corrects any individualistic interpretation of them.

tou Theou gegennētai] and knows God. . . . God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent [*apestalken ho Theos*] his only-begotten [*monogenē*] Son into the world so that we might live through him" (I John 4:7, 9; translation modified from the NRSV-CE). This paternal origin is not empty, as in Hegel's *Logic*, in which being as "pure indeterminateness and emptiness" is the necessary starting point for the development of thought's divine content through the science of human beings.⁷³ The paternal origin does not generate out of need, in order to fulfill an empty self, but out of the rich infinitude of love that is the divine essence.

Thus, we are primarily filial and only secondarily paternal. In receiving our being, we receive our mission-identity. This generated identity, as distinct and yet communally ordered, is a *logos* that is dependent upon the divine *Logos* and his mission into the world. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). Balthasar writes: "The Son's infinite hypostatic distinctness, since it is divine and unique, is what distinguishes each person founded thereon. And the more the person, in response to the Son's call, walks toward his prototype in the Son, the more unique he becomes."⁷⁴ Although we have the power to generate because of our *imago*-nature, we do not generate identity *ex nihilo*, but out of the material we are paternally given: namely, our place in the Son. As Ratzinger says, for one to say "Father" to God is "to know that he owes his existence to God and to give himself back to God."⁷⁵

The ability to do this is rooted in the mission of the Spirit, who enables us, in love, to cross the divide between our generative power and our filial nature. Love does this at a natural level: We love the *logoi* we generate. In the life of grace, it is the unifying work of the Spirit that enables us to love what we receive and conceive. Thus, if the Father is the generative origin and the Son the generated word, the Spirit is the power by which we generate our received *logoi*. Let us compare this, analogously, to that paradigmatic Trinitarian conception in the economy, that of Christ in Mary's womb. The Son is sent by the Father, Scripture tells us repeatedly, but the

⁷³ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, ed. and trans. George di Giovanni, Cambridge Hegel Translations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 59. In contrast, for Thomas, being is complete and simple but not subsistent (*De potentia*, q. 1, a. 1); cf. Ferdinand Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus: The Drama of the Question of Being*, trans. D. C. Schindler (Washington, DC: Humanum Academic, 2018), 47–48 (on Hegel; and throughout) and 24–25 (on Thomas; and throughout).

⁷⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, vol. 2, *Dramatis Personae: Man in God* [TD II], trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 270.

⁷⁵ Ratzinger, *God of Jesus Christ*, 101.

Annunciation demonstrates the Spirit's role. The Spirit is not the Father of the incarnate Son; it is the Father alone who paternally generates the Son.⁷⁶ But, as with creation (Gen 1:2), the paternal conception of Christ occurs by the power of the Spirit (Luke 1:35). The Father sends the Son by means of the Spirit, as expressed in the passive voice of the Apostle's Creed, in which the Son is made incarnate *de Spiritu Sancto*.⁷⁷

In this way, the identity we generate as a Trinitarian *imago* should have the following Marian stamp: It should be primarily receptive, saturated with awareness of our filial reality. But what we receive must also engage our human powers, as the genuinely human and free contribution to the conception in our mind. The action should be completely God's and completely ours.⁷⁸ It is the Spirit that enables this union between our filial makeup and our ideas, and more comprehensively between the divine Father and ourselves.

This gracious stance could be seen as a kind of "Trinitarian inversion," using Balthasar's language to describe the experience of the incarnate Word guided by the Spirit during his history on earth ("He was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness" in Matt 4:1). The Spirit enables us to be receptive to the paternally generated *logos* that is God's idea of each person. He restores our natural spiritual powers to act according to their *imago*-nature.⁷⁹ Thus, human receptivity to the Father's *logos* through the Spirit is not a *passivity*, because that divine idea must now be actively transposed into our human thinking. Each person must truly generate that identity as his or her own.

On this model, "thinking means thanking," according to Ferdinand Ulrich via Heidegger (*Denken* means *Danken*)—thinking is primarily receptivity to the generating Father.⁸⁰ Freedom is not opposed to divine generativity, but rather depends upon it. Balthasar uses the example of the inspired artist who both receives and generates his art freely. "The artist is never more free than when, no longer hesitating between artistic possibilities, he is, as it were, 'possessed' by the true 'idea' that presents itself to him in finite form and follows its sovereign commands. . . . The work will

⁷⁶ Eleventh Synod of Toledo (675), Denzinger 43rd ed. [DH] (Ignatius Press, 2012) no. 533.

⁷⁷ DH nos. 10–30.

⁷⁸ Analogies to this would be the divine and human authorship of Scripture and the action of healed nature in relation to grace.

⁷⁹ See *De Trin.* 14, especially 14.12.15–14.18 and 14.16.22–14.19.26.

⁸⁰ Ulrich, *Homo Abyssus*, 114. Heidegger popularized but did not invent this phrase, which derives from Pietism.

bear the utterly personal stamp of the artist in absolute clarity.”⁸¹ Using more generative language, Balthasar concludes that this mission-identity is “slumbering within him like a child in its mother’s womb, pressing to be delivered—out of the womb of his most personal freedom.”⁸² In receiving one’s mission, one receives “that most intimate idea of his own self—which otherwise would remain undiscoverable.”⁸³

The idea in God is simple, eternal, and identical with himself, but it is not so for us, and here we can do justice to the narratival concerns of the philosophers and scientists. Our *verba* are distended through space and time, as we live corporeally and historically as rational animals.⁸⁴ “When the human mind knows itself and loves itself, it does not know and love something unchangeable.”⁸⁵ The *verbum* of a person is pre-linguistic and cannot be easily expressed in a single word of creaturely language. On God’s side, the compression of identity into a single “name” is possible (Rev 2:17). We see an intimation of such divine compression in the Annunciation. Gabriel declares who Mary is from the viewpoint of God’s gracious initiative—she is “full of grace” (Luke 1:28; one word in Greek [*kecharitōmenē*; perfect passive participle of *charitoō*]). At the same time, from the viewpoint of her subjectivity, Mary is “the handmaid of the Lord” (1:38). Nevertheless, this name had to be enacted through the course of history in which she lived her mission at the heart of the Church, from conception to nativity to Cross to Upper Room.

Augustine takes a whole book to “confess” his *verbum*, a confession that is more a confession of God’s greatness than of himself.⁸⁶ The birth of our

⁸¹ Balthasar, *TD III*, 198. He continues here: “Sublime inspiration awakens in the person inspired a deeper freedom than that involved in arbitrary choice; for that very reason, it stamps the work with the character of personal uniqueness and necessity.” Thus, freedom for excellence is not opposed to the choice found in the freedom of indifference, but rather catches it up and integrates it into a greater context.

⁸² Balthasar, *TD III*, 198. He continues, speaking of Christ (and analogously of us): “He will not be able to say that his mission existed (in some eternal time) *prior* to his having affirmed and grasped it; for it is always his. Nor is it his in the sense that it lies ready, prefabricated, so that he only needs to assemble it. No; he must fashion it out of himself in utter freedom and responsibility; indeed, in a sense, he even has to invent it.”

⁸³ Balthasar, *TD III*, 263. These points are developed in Franks, “Mission and Person.”

⁸⁴ See *De Trin.* 15.7.11. Letter 137, written in 412, reaffirms this clearly, and John Rist identifies four other passages as reiterating the embodied *persona* of Letter 137: Letter 169, no. 2.8; *In Iohan. evang. tract.* 19.15; *De Trin.* 13.5.22; *De civ.* 19.3.4 (*What is a Person? Realities, Constructs, Illusions* [New York: Cambridge University Press], 47).

⁸⁵ *De Trin.* 9.6.9 (p. 276)276; cf. 14.15.20–21.

⁸⁶ Ayres notes the confluence between the macro-temporality of creation and the micro-temporality of personal conversion: “The temporal process by which one moves

identity is a very long labor indeed, happening throughout life right up to the moment of death, a life embodied in space and moving through a near-infinity of moments in accord with or in opposition to God's idea of each person. For this reason, a human being's continual generation of his idea of himself properly takes the form of a *narrative*, a story of his embodied movement through the spatio-temporal world and within the ecclesial communion with an open ending until death.⁸⁷ MacIntyre and company, as well as the neuroscientists and psychologists, are correct, therefore, in insisting that human beings require a *narrative*—and not only an idea—to make sense of a life. This, too, is a generative act of the memory, in which the simple self-reversion of the mind to itself can also plumb memory's treasure-store of the past-as-present.⁸⁸ “Memory is the location in which the narratives of [Augustine's] reading [of Scripture] are imposed on the narratives of his experience.”⁸⁹ The result of this is a generated word expressed in many words, a narrative of a mission enacted in time and space. The *logos* of my narrative is confessional, circling around my particularity—especially my specific failings—and the glory of the triune God. This is why confession, for Augustine, is primarily ecclesial praise.⁹⁰

And yet, if our powers of memory fail us—as for those with dementia—the resulting failure of narrative is not a failure of identity, and here the limitations of narrational accounts of identity can be seen.⁹¹ Identity2

towards the Creator mirrors and plays out over time the process of conversion towards the Creator that constitutes the creation itself” (*Augustine and the Trinity*, 280). For an insightful contrast on the role of narrative in the *Confessions* of Augustine and Rousseau, see Hartle, “Augustine and Rousseau”; on the ability of the mind to unify its consciousness over time, according to Augustine and Aquinas, see Therese Scarpelli Cory, “Diachronically Unified Consciousness in Augustine and Aquinas,” *Vivarium* 50, no. 3/4 (2012): 354–81.

⁸⁷ “We by pressing on imitate him who abides motionless,” Augustine writes; “we follow him who stands still, and by walking in him we move toward him, because for us he became a road or way in time by his humility, while being for us an eternal abode by his divinity” (*De Trin.* 7.3.5 [p. 223]).

⁸⁸ Both *Conf.* 10.8.12 and *De Trin.* 15.12.22 refer to the memory as a *thesaurus*.

⁸⁹ Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 227.

⁹⁰ Hochschild writes: “The necessarily public nature of the act of confession is not only a service to the Church; as a corporate work of meditation, it is the very constitution of the Church on earth, the worldly parallel to the love and praise of the angels” (*Memory*, 171). On narration and memory in Augustine, see Karfíková, “Memory, Eternity, and Time”; on confession and memory in Augustine's preaching, see Grove, *Augustine on Memory*, 115–19. On confession, see the “Tract for the Times 13” [anonymous], *Nova et Vetera* (English) 21, no. 4 (2023): 1115–22.

⁹¹ Hartle points out the impossible tension of claiming a God's-eye view in one's own

remains, in and as the mission that one receives from the Creator God. The drama of a mission might include a final act in which the protagonist cannot recall the earlier acts but lives continually in a present that might seem, to quote Wearing again, “precisely like death.” This loss of the narrative thread of a life is a particular passion, a loss of a *sense* of identity (Identity3), and yet not the loss of identity itself (Identity2).

To summarize: Personal identity is genuinely accomplished only through grace and the action of the Holy Spirit. This theological claim arises from the fact that the ultimate truth of personal identity must be grounded in the Father’s idea of us in the *Logos*, which comes to us as a mission. We are sent in the sending-forth of the Son, and only thus can return to ourselves by returning to the Father who sends us. Of course, as scientists and philosophers have recognized, the natural structures of human cognition and memory remain functional even in the fallen state, as we perpetually generate identity narratives no matter what the state of our souls. These narratives might even glimpse much of the truth of a person’s identity, but they cannot encompass the whole truth without reference to God. This truth can be only a confession of a mission in Christ.

An Identity Pathology: Oedipal Rejection of Paternal Origins

How does this process go wrong? In many ways, but here I want to focus on the nature of fallen desire in relation to the paternally generated “true self.” I will use the Oedipal complex as one expression of this fallen desire.

While, according to psychoanalysis, Oedipal feelings toward the mother might be subterranean and ambiguous, those toward the father are straightforwardly murderous. The twinned Oedipal reactions of desire and revolt mirror the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of man (maybe especially modern man) vis-à-vis God. The inadvertent theological truth upon which psychoanalysis has stumbled is the nature of the primordial

biography and the limitations of autobiographical memory, in “Augustine and Rousseau,” 265–66. See also Hochschild, *Memory*, 166: “Memory cannot provide a way to overcome the conditions of the temporal. . . . By memory, the temporal becomes intelligible, and the foundation for a *scientia*. But it also signifies what is for Augustine the tragedy of the temporal: the sense of loss, the frustration of distance, the dramatic unlikeness of the human and divine perspectives of creation.” On questions concerning the historicity of the events of *Conf.* and the scholarly debate, see Carmen Angela Cvetkovic, “Memory, Language and the Making of Truth: Towards a Hermeneutic of Augustine’s Conversion Narrative,” *Augustinianum* 55, no. 2 (2015): 479–512.

rebellion against the divine Father, a rebellion existing as a structuring principle of post-lapsarian life.

The spiritual analogy of the processions helps us to see that this murderous rejection of the generativity that called me into being takes the form of a rebellion against divine origins. This means intellectually the denial of my filial identity encapsulated in the *verbum* generated by the Father, which I attempt to supplant by an establishment of myself in the place of the Father. We are intoxicated by our generative powers and wish to become our own unoriginate father, with all the Oedipal *self*-destruction that this implies.⁹²

The irony is that the fallen human fathers against whom we rage reveal the reverse image of the divine Father. Fatherhood is marked by the letting-be of the child, as is already clear in the father's biological shape in generating the child. While the child is closely intertwined with the mother, originating within her maternal body, the child is unambiguously *other* than the father.⁹³ Of course, this otherness creates the possibility for absence; the father can easily walk away. Any failure of love in earthly fathers is the distorted image of the infinite love of the heavenly Father, who allows the Son to be truly other than the Father, and creatures to be truly other than their divine origin. The "distance" or "space" that marks divine paternity is the distance or space of love, of letting-be and freedom.⁹⁴ Rather than a space of irresponsible neglect, it is the paternal blessing upon what is not paternal. It is the "space" that opens up the opportunity to be truly filial, which being filial means, not the Oedipal usurpation of the origin but instead the grateful imaging of it—filial receptive imaging rather than wanting to "be like gods" (Gen 3:5). It is also the space of the possibility of a creaturely rejection of filiation, which the Father allows, as he did the Prodigal Son's Oedipal usurpation of the

⁹² As one sociologist puts it, being a self-made man means "compulsive *self*-critique born of perpetual self-disaffection, . . . living daily with the risk of self-reprobation and self-contempt" (Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* [New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2008], 38).

⁹³ For this reason, according to Benedict XVI, God's creative fatherhood in Judeo-Christianity sets him apart from all other creator gods (*Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 1, *From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker [New York: Image, 2007], 139–40).

⁹⁴ For an exploration of Balthasar's language of "distance" or "space," see Christopher M. Hadley, S.J., *A Symphony of Distances: Patristic, Modern, and Gendered Dimensions of Balthasar's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022).

paternal “estate” (or *ousia*). The paternal space can be abused by us to manufacture our rejection of the Father.

The kenotic stance of the divine Son shows us the anti-Oedipal way of filiation. Just as the Father is not competitive with the Son, likewise the glory of the Logos is not in opposition to the Father, not something to be grasped at (Phil 2:6–10) as though it were *his own* and *therefore not* that of the Father. Indeed, the glory of the Logos is precisely referential; the Son is the glory *of the Father* (Heb 1:3), and only thereby glorious in himself. In this referentiality is his very identity, as Thomas puts it: “For were he from himself, he would not be the Son.”⁹⁵ Or, as Ratzinger puts it, “the Son is the release and handing back of himself—this is what sonship means.”⁹⁶ What is true of the divine Son is true in an analogous way of us: If we were from ourselves, we would not be sons, and therefore we would be nothing at all. Our choice is stark: filiative identity, or Oedipal nihilism.

Whence You Are

I will close with some passages from the Gospel of Luke, first from chapter 13.

²³ Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few be saved?” He said to them, ²⁴ “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ When once the owner of the house is arisen [*egerthē*] and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then in reply he will say to you, ‘I do not know where you come from [*ouk oida hymas, pothen este*].’ ²⁶ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷ But he will say, ‘I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!’” (Luke 13: 23–27; trans. modified from the NRSV-CE)

Let us look at verse 25. The master of the house responds, “I do not know you, whence you are” (*ouk oida hymas, pothen este*). This is a very strange reply. So strange, that the supplicants feel they must remind him: “We ate and drank with you!” How can Jesus not know that we are his creatures, in communion (we think) with him? The master repeats, “I

⁹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* IV, chap. 8, no. 350.

⁹⁶ Ratzinger, *God of Jesus Christ*, 77.

do not know you, whence you are. Depart from me!” The only originary relation to the master now allowed is one of departure from him.⁹⁷

I would submit that this language has Trinitarian resonances. The master of the house, who is clearly Christ (the one who has taught in our streets), knows whence *he* comes, namely, from the Father (Luke 2:48; see also John 8:14, 19). Further, he knows that the originary Father is also the one who triply raises him up (*egerthē*, from v. 25): first, in his Trinitarian origin; second, as a man from Mary’s virginal womb (see Luke 3:8: “God is able to raise up children [*egeirai tekna*] of Abraham from these stones”); and third, as the resurrected one (Acts 5:30—“The God of our fathers raised up [*ēgeiren*] Jesus”—and throughout Acts).

The meaning of the parable, therefore, is found in origins—origins that are left unnamed, in fact, but upon which the rejection of the seekers is based.⁹⁸ The Lord of the house knows his origin and acts accordingly, as the one sent and risen up by the originary Father. As Hebrews puts it, “He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source [*ex henos pantes*; are all from one]. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers” (2:11; ESV). But the rejected ones do not know they are brothers from the one Father; they do not and perhaps cannot answer the question of their ultimate origin, knowing only that they are moving away from the Lord at this very moment.

⁹⁷ If we back up to the beginning of v. 25, which is a description of the master (*Aph’hōu an egerthē ho oikodespotēs*), the text begins equally strangely. *Aph’hōu* is translated by most of the English translations that I consulted as “once the master of the house gets up.” But *apo* more usually indicates origin, and *hou* can function as a relative pronoun indicating place. While it probably indicates time, therefore, *aph’hōu* could also have spatial resonances: “from where.” Further, *egerthē* is an aorist subjunctive passive, possibly “is” or “shall be risen up,” giving us “once [or: from there] the master of the house is risen up.” For more on this verb as passive, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Gospel According to Luke (I–IX): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible 28 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 659n14.

⁹⁸ François Bovon points out that Matt 7:22–23 is a parallel, but in Matthew the aspect of origin is lacking: “‘On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you [but not: I do not know whence you are]; go away from me, you evildoers’” (*Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27*, trans. Donald S. Deer, ed. Helmut Koester, Series Hermeneia [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013], 308). Bovon notes the closer parallel in *Second Clement*: “For this reason, if you do these things, the Lord said, ‘If ye be gathered together with me in my bosom, and do not my commandments, I will cast you out, and will say to you, Depart from me, I know not whence ye are, ye workers of lawlessness’” (309).

To understand this better, we can return to another Lucan parable on origins, that of the afore-mentioned Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32. The younger son goes away from the father to a far country, with the father's property (the paternal *ousia*) now given as the son's own. This filial inheritance is manipulated by the son into a means of refusal of paternal origins; he is not his father's son, but his own man. Likewise, I can take my paternally given intelligence, my will, my body, my generated ideas and narratives, like so many iron filings gathered in a sack, and leave behind the identity-magnet of mission, the *logos* that orders them. Thus, I make of them *my* property or *ousia*, to be used to make myself out of myself (Locke again, and Freud). I am from nowhere; this is now my story. And without the magnet of mission, my gifts may be ordered in any way I like, because they are perfectly fluid on their own. Yet without the ordering *logos* that comes from outside me, I will (the parable tells me) in fact disperse myself. I will try, like Narcissus, to feed myself from my own image in the pool, not understanding that my *imago*-nature derives from and reflects the triune God, not myself—and I will, like Narcissus and the Prodigal Son, starve on such empty husks.

These parables remind us that the generation of a *logos* that makes sense of a life is always derivative. We are in fact always from *somewhere*, but if we choose to try to be from ourselves, we will be from nowhere. Yet, as Augustine insists, “there is absolutely no thing whatsoever”—including God—“that brings itself into existence.”⁹⁹ Attempted self-creation obscures the omnipresence of creaturely origin. If we persist in the attempt, then the master of the house will be obedient to our Oedipal will. He will say, “I do not know whence you are,” because *we* do not know whence we are. Yet we can, with the younger son, come to our senses and remember—in the full Augustinian and paternal sense of the word—our identity found in the paternal *ousia*. As Augustine writes in *The City of God*: “Contemplating his image in ourselves, therefore, let us, like that younger son of the Gospel, come to ourselves, and arise and return to him whom we had forsaken by our sin.”¹⁰⁰

I have argued that, as Augustine realized, memory is paternal, and it generates words of narrative that unify, through love, our distended lives. Yet, absent the renewal of the filial nature of creatures by redemption in the incarnate Son, a narrative *logos* generated by the memory will be incomplete at best and a sinful deception at worst. The primary stance of

⁹⁹ *De Trin.* 1.1.1, 66.

¹⁰⁰ *De civ.* 11.28, trans. Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, 279.

the human person is filial and receptive, and the healing of the generative power of memory entails the reception of identity as mission from the eternally generative Father. Christianity has this as a great task today, to remind people of the loving paternal origins of their identities. N.V.