

Confessions - Book X - Chapter Xvii

by St. Augustine

Transcript

26. Great is the power of memory. It is a true marvel, O my God, a profound and infinite multiplicity! And this is the mind, and this I myself am. What, then, am I, O my God? Of what nature am I? A life various, and manifold, and exceedingly vast. Behold in the numberless halls and caves, in the innumerable fields and dens and caverns of my memory, full without measure of numberless kinds of things--present there either through images as all bodies are; or present in the things themselves as are our thoughts; or by some notion or observation as our emotions are, which the memory retains even though the mind feels them no longer, as long as whatever is in the memory is also in the mind--through all these I run and fly to and fro. I penetrate into them on this side and that as far as I can and yet there is nowhere any end.

So great is the power of memory, so great the power of life in man whose life is mortal! What, then, shall I do, O thou my true life, my God? I will pass even beyond this power of mine that is called memory--I will pass beyond it, that I may come to thee, O lovely Light. And what art thou saying to me? See, I soar by my mind toward thee, who remainest above me. I will also pass beyond this power of mine that is called memory, desiring to reach thee where thou canst be reached, and wishing to cleave to thee where it is possible to cleave to thee. For even beasts and birds possess memory, or else they could never find their lairs and nests again, nor display many other things they know and do by habit. Indeed, they could not even form their habits except by their memories. I will therefore pass even beyond memory that I may reach Him who has differentiated me from the four-footed beasts and the fowls of the air by making me a wiser creature. Thus I will pass beyond memory; but where shall I find thee, who art the true Good and the steadfast Sweetness? But where shall I find thee? If I find thee without memory, then I shall have no memory of thee; and how could I find thee at all, if I do not remember thee?

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