

Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 28 | Issue 1

Article 3

1-1-2011

Tears and Weeping: An Augustinian View

Paul J. Griffiths

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

Recommended Citation

Griffiths, Paul J. (2011) "Tears and Weeping: An Augustinian View," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 28 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

DOI: 10.5840/faithphil201128113

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol28/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

TEARS AND WEEPING: AN AUGUSTINIAN VIEW

Paul J. Griffiths

This essay describes and commends the treatment of tears and weeping in Augustine's *Confessions*. It shows that Augustine depicts these acts as communicative of a particular judgment about the way things are; and that he understands these acts as a species of confession appropriate to the human condition. To become, or attempt to become, the kind of person who does not weep is to distance oneself from God; Augustine therefore commends weeping to Christians as a mode of establishing intimacy with God.

How should the relations among faith, rationality, and the passions be construed? That was the broad question informing the symposium for which these remarks were written. I here address Augustine on one aspect of this complex question: that of how tears (*lacrimae*) and weeping (*fletus*) are depicted and understood. I limit myself mostly to the *Confessiones*, a work of Augustine's maturity composed in his early forties, in which these topics have considerable prominence. Sadness (*tristitia*), sorrow (*dolor*), and anguish (*luctus*)—all words much used by Augustine—are, for us, typically understood as emotions or affects, with tears and weeping as their public signs. This pattern of thought is not altogether alien to Augustine, but his depictions of tears and weeping suggest that he understood these not principally as outer witnesses to an inner condition, but rather as communicative judgments offered to an interlocutor or interlocutors. Approaching them in this way has implications for a broadly Augustinian understanding of the relations between reason and the passions (*passiones*, *affectiones*)—and, since Augustine's thought is intimate with Christian orthodoxy, indeed to a considerable extent definitive of it, also for a broadly Christian understanding of this matter.

The first extended treatment of tears and weeping in the *Confessiones* occurs in the third book,¹ where Augustine reports his mother Monnica's

This essay is a revised version of remarks delivered at a symposium on faith, rationality, and the passions, held at Wolfson College, Cambridge, in January 2010. I was instructed by the discussion it received then, and grateful to Sarah Coakley for her invitation; I have profited also from comments made by a reviewer for this journal.

¹(3.11.19–3.12.21). I refer to the *Confessiones* according to the standard tripartite sectional division. I have used the text given by J. J. O'Donnell in the first volume of his three-volume edition and commentary: *Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). I also draw heavily upon the commentary given in volumes two and three, which is extraordinarily valuable.



laments over his adherence to the Manichees and his concomitant rejection of Catholic Christianity. She cries for her son the Manichee more copiously than do most mothers for their dead (*amplius quam flent matres corporea funera*), and her tears are a mode of address to the Lord, who hears and responds to them by giving her a dream-vision in which she sees Augustine converted, baptized, standing where she stands. In weeping, she communicates to the Lord a judgment or understanding of what is the case: that her son is confused, and that his confusion has separated him from the Lord's love. Her tears are a form of prayer, which is to say of direct address to the Lord. It is a prayer answered proleptically by the dream-vision,² and then later in reality when Augustine is baptized by Ambrose. Augustine depicts Monnica's tears in this episode not principally as an outer manifestation of an inner feeling, but rather as an understanding of a state of affairs intentionally communicated to another—in this case to the Lord. Her tears are, as well, a communication answered: she speaks to the Lord in and by them, and he responds to her.

In Book Four (4.4.9–4.7.12), Augustine describes his tear-figured response to the death of an unnamed friend. The friendship, even though not *vera amicitia* (true friendship) because it is not between Christians (neither Augustine nor his friend is at this point baptized), is intense. The two are perhaps twenty or twenty-one, and Augustine writes that their friendship was sweet to him beyond all the sweetness of his life to date (*super omnes suavitates illius vitae meae*). The friend becomes seriously ill and is baptized without his knowledge. This matter, Augustine writes, was of no *cura*, no care or concern to him; and when his friend began to get well he tried to joke with him about what had been done, only, to his puzzlement, to be rebuked by his friend, who takes the matter more seriously than Augustine had thought he would. Augustine decides that he will conceal his *motus*, the movements of his soul, from his friend until he is completely well; but the friend relapses and dies. Augustine echoes Lamentations: *dolor*, sorrow, casts shadows over his heart,³ and he becomes to himself a great question (*factus eram mihi magna quaestio*). The only thing that comforts him is weeping: "Only weeping was delicious to me: it replaced my friend in my soul's delights" (*solus fletus erat dulcis mihi et successerat amico meo in deliciis animi*).

That tears can comfort puzzles Augustine, and he meditates on the question of why they do. Is it that our tears are a means of communicating our unhappiness to the Lord, and that they comfort because of the hope that we are heard (*quod speramus exaudire te*)? This could be true if, as we have already seen in Monnica's case, tears are a form of prayer. But for the youthful Augustine, unbaptized and without faith, tears are not

²Augustine also depicts his mother's tears at his deceitful abandonment of her at Carthage as a form of prayer to the Lord—only this time as one ignored (5.8.15).

³*propterea maestum factum est cor nostrum; ideo contenebrati sunt oculi nostri*, Lamentations 5:17 (Vulgate).

prayer; rather, they are for him simple misery, a bitter thing (*res amara*), comfortable only because they distract from awareness of the friend's absence, which would be even bitterer. Tears, as the middle-aged Augustine sees it, show the youthful Augustine his true condition, which is one of unrelieved misery; but because he could not at that time understand this, he becomes attached to that very life of misery and dwells on and in it instead of upon his dead friend.⁴ He becomes more unwilling to lose his tear-soaked misery than he had been to lose his dead friend: "Although I wanted it to be different, I was more unwilling to lose it [my misery] than to lose him" (*nam quamvis eam mutare vellem, nollem tamen amittere magis quam illum*). Tears are the only things that provide a temporary escape from the agony of the dead friend's absence, but when, Augustine writes, he stops crying, his soul is "weighed down with a vast weight of misery" (*onerabat me grandis sarcina miseriae*).⁵

Augustine's youthful tears for his dead friend are in part different from Monnica's for him, and in part the same. In both cases, they are knowledge-bearing judgments about the state of things. For Augustine, it is a judgment of desolation: a world with death in it but without the Lord is a place of unrelenting and unremittable grief, a hopeless place in which tears communicate desolation with no one to hear. For Monnica, it is a judgment that things are out of joint, but a judgment communicated to one who hears it and responds to it with a word of hope. Monnica's tears are transparent: they can be looked through to the one they speak to. Augustine's youthful tears are opaque: their flood shows only themselves, and that is why Augustine comes to prefer them to the memory of his dead friend. Their bitterness can become, if savored for long enough, half-sweet, a tangy flavor to be rolled around the tongue, puckering the tissues of the palate.

The next major episode of crying in the *Confessiones* is in the account of the conversion in the garden (8.12.28–8.12.30). The young Augustine has, by the time this episode occurs, understood Christianity, and assented, intellectually, to its truth. But he is not yet ready to give himself to the Lord. He is held back by his old loves (*antiquae amicae meae*), especially his love for the bodily delights of sex, and he cannot yet imagine letting these old friends go and permitting their transfiguration by the love of the Lord, even

⁴The form of Augustine's understanding of unregenerate tears is formally the same as his understanding of sin in Book Two (2.3.5–2.10.18). Just as sin, an absence masquerading as a presence, is there depicted as becoming a matter of interest in its own right, so also for tears here in Book Four.

⁵It is interesting that these sections of Book Four are the only parts of the *Confessiones* that Augustine saw fit to comment on negatively in his *Retractationes*. There (2.6.2) he writes that his earlier statement that the only reason he wanted to continue living was that if he died the last remnant of his friend would also have died should be understood as *declamatio levis*, superficial rhetoric, rather than *gravis confessio*, serious confession. Well, yes; but this is already evident in the *Confessiones*, where it is clear that this opinion belongs to the Augustine of 376 (or so) and is not endorsed by the Augustine of 397 (or so). The Augustine of 427 (or so) is insufficiently sensitive to the temporally-layered rhetoric of his own work of thirty years before. Here, as is usually the case for authors, the author is not the best reader or interpreter of his own text.

though he deeply and intensely desires this. He sees clearly the weight of his misery, and this prompts an *ingentem imbrem lacrimarum*, a great tear-storm. He is with his friend Alypius, but at this point moves away from him because, it seems to him, solitude is more appropriate than company for the business of weeping (*ad negotium flendi*). He goes away, lies down under a fig-tree,⁶ and abandons himself to tears. Rivers flow from his eyes, and he takes these to be an acceptable sacrificial offering to the Lord. As he weeps, he hears the voice of a child from a nearby house saying *tolle, lege* (take and read). In response, he gets up after having checked the tear-flood (*repressoque impetu lacrimarum*), goes back to where his friend Alypius is sitting, which is where he has left the codex containing Paul's letters which he had earlier been reading, and opens it at random. What he reads (Romans 13:13–14) infuses his heart with a light of assurance and removes every shadow of doubt (*omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt*). He is able to proceed from this point toward baptism, and all his tears are gone.

They return soon, as we shall see: baptism's waters do not finally remove the water of tears. The point to emphasize here is that the tears shed in the garden are, like the tears shed at the friend's death, a judgment. The judgment in both cases is one of despair: here, under the fig tree which bears no fruit and whose leaves were used to cover Adam's and Eve's nakedness, there is nothing but a desert of lament. But there is a difference between the tears shed for the dead friend and those shed for Augustine's own sins and habits, for his inability to abandon his old loves. Those former tears were not a message: Augustine did not then see that there was anyone he could communicate his despair to, and so his tears became recursive, a bitter substitute for the dead friend which, eventually and perversely, he came to savor and was unwilling to give up. But now, in the garden, he knows that there is a Lord to whom his tears can be offered, and he describes his tears exactly as a sacrifice acceptable to the Lord (*acceptabile sacrificium tuum*, echoing Psalm 50), and so the tears become, as Monnica's were, a prayer, an utterance directed to the Lord, and moreover a prayer answered. This was not possible in the case of the younger Augustine's tears shed for his dead friend. It is interesting that weeping (*fletus*) is described by Augustine as a bit of business, a negotiation (*negotium*) best done in solitude. Weeping is work: *negotium* is the opposite of *otium*, which is exactly doing nothing, a holiday from work. And the work of tears is one of communicative exchange between the one who weeps and the Lord to whom the tears are offered as prayer. Why in solitude? Theologically speaking, I expect, because of Matthew 5:6, where Jesus exhorts those who pray to do so in solitude. Also, perhaps, because tears are a peculiarly intimate form of communicative exchange, better given in

⁶*sub quadam fici arbore*, echoing John 1:47–48 (Jesus to Nathanael), and with Matthew 21:19 (the fig tree) and Genesis 3:1–7 (fig leaves) in the background. For Augustine, the fig tree is the place of the flesh, of the *conditio carnis* where the shadow of death falls heavy and our words bear no fruit. There, tears are better than words. See, for a useful collection of passages from Augustine on this topic, O'Donnell, *Confessions*, vol. 3, 57–58.

privacy, like a caress. And yet again, because the late-antique man would likely have found weeping—especially his own—an embarrassment.

Following his account of the tears in the garden, Augustine mentions (without describing) his baptism, and shortly thereafter describes the death of Monnica. The treatment of tears at and after his mother's funeral (9.11.27–9.13.37) is the most complex and nuanced of any in the *Confessiones*, and in thinking it through it is important to keep in mind that these are post-baptismal tears.

Monnica dies at the age of 56, when Augustine is 33; and immediately upon her death, a great grief, he writes, flows into his heart and threatens to flow out from there into his eyes in the form of tears. By a violent effort of the soul (*violento animi imperio*) he restrains the tears, drying (*usque ad siccitatem*) his eyes by an effort of will. His son, Adeodatus, does cry, and is rebuked for doing so. There is the implication of struggle: Augustine wants to cry and at the same time would prefer not to. He would prefer not to, he writes, because weeping at funerals might be taken to imply that death is miserable or that it issues in extinction, and these are judgments Christians should not make. Notice, once again, that tears are understood to be a form of judgment or understanding: they are, Augustine implies, appropriate when what they respond to is indeed lamentable; but since death, on a Christian understanding, is not, funerary tears are inappropriate. Were they to be shed, they would be a sign of Christian immaturity, like Adeodatus's weeping (Adeodatus would have been sixteen or seventeen at the time). That, at least, is how the mature Augustine first represents his youthful self's initial reluctance to weep at his mother's death. The understanding present in that reluctance is soon shown to be erroneous.

Augustine is still puzzled at the intensity of his grief. If it is not grief at his mother's extinction, or at the unhappiness of her post-mortem condition, what is he grieving? It is, he writes, the loss of the sweet pleasure (more affect-language) of the habit (*consuetudo*) of living with her and talking to her. That habit was powerful, and to have it suddenly broken is painful. In an attempt to cover up his grief, to make firmer and more reliable his mind's restraint of it, he discourses to his friends upon the meaning of death. Offering these discourses—and it is not hard to imagine what their Polonius-like character might have been—soothes him, offers balm to his anguish. His friends listen to him with no sense that he is suffering (*sine sense doloris me*)—and indeed, for a while, as he discourses, he does not suffer. But then, in typically Augustinian fashion, he begins to reproach himself for the mildness of his feeling, his *affectus*. His grief has bowed to his will, and even that fact grieves him; and as it does, his first grief returns in flood, even in paroxysm. At that, he becomes unhappy that he is so moved with grief for his mother's death: he now sorrows for his sorrow, just as he had earlier grieved for his lack of grief. The disturbance or turbulence of sorrow has become multi-layered. Still, he does not cry, even though he wants to; and although he asks the Lord to take his sorrow away, this does not happen. Augustine comments that his sorrow provides

a lesson in the power of habit, and that the Lord does not remove it exactly in order to drive that lesson home. The habit in question is, again, that of living happily with his mother.

Monnica's body is taken out for burial, and Augustine and his companions accompany it tearless (*imus redimus sine lacrimis*), even when the interment is done. Throughout the day, however, he finds himself oppressed with a hidden (*occultus*, here meaning not made outwardly manifest) suffering and disturbance of mind. Still hoping that his sorrow might be taken from him, he decides to take a bath, with the thought that this might expel the grief from his soul (*anxietatem pellat ex animo*). He offers etymological speculation on the meaning of the Greek word for 'bath' (*balanion*) in order to explain this, a typical instance of the imbrication of his metaphysics with his understanding of language. The bath does not wash away his grief; but now he is alone, and he permits memories of his mother to return to him and press upon him. In doing so, he writes, he finally sets free or liberates the tears he had kept bottled up (*dimisi lacrimas quas continebam*), and their flow becomes a pillow for his heart. Once again, he cries in solitude, as a mode of address to the Lord: his tears, or at least his depiction of them, are a mode of address directly to the Lord. The tears heal his wound, his *vulnus*—that is, the wound of his separation from his mother, the shattering of that habit. The wound in question is a *humanum*, a human thing, part of the human condition; and tears, he now sees, are an element in the appropriate response to that wound, its salve or balm.

In shedding tears, Augustine cries for all flesh and all fleshly wounds, and in giving an account of his solitary weeping for his mother's death, he provides an account of what tears mean for Christians. This is worth quoting in full:

I wept freely before you [that is, before the Lord] for her and about her, for myself and about myself. I let out the tears I had held in so that they might flow as much as they wanted, supporting my heart. It rested on them because your ears were there, not those of some man offering an arrogant interpretation of my weeping. And now, O Lord, I confess to you in written words which anyone who wishes may read and interpret as he wishes; if he discovers any sin in the fact that I wept for my mother for a small part of an hour, that mother who had died before my eyes and had for many years wept for me that I might live before yours, he should not deride me but should rather, if he has any love, himself weep before you, the father of all the brothers of your Christ, for my sins.⁷

Tears have an audience: they are communicative, and in thinking about what they communicate it is important to think about their audience. Augustine here distinguishes a critical human audience, Stoic or Platonist in tendency,⁸ whose members might interpret his tears arrogantly, as a sign of

⁷I translate from the Latin of 9.13.33, given in O'Donnell, *Confessions*, vol. 1, 117.

⁸Plotinus claims that the rational person does not grieve: "Even if the death of friends and relations causes grief, it does not grieve him but only that in him which has no intelligence,

weakness or childishness. This is a tendency he is himself subject to, as his conflict about whether he should cry for his mother shows. But such hearers are not the real audience for Christian tears. That, rather, is the Lord: as Augustine strikingly puts it, his ears are in our tears (*ibi erant aures tuas*), and that is why tears provide a support for our hearts, our *cordes*. The play with eyes and ears in the passage is remarkable: our eyes weep; Monnica has died before Augustine's eyes; she has spent a good portion of her life weeping with her eyes for him so that he might live before (in the sight of) the Lord's eyes. And ears hear: the Lord's ears are present in the tears the eyes weep, and that fact both provides comfort and shows the tears to be appropriate as understandings of the way things are; the ears of the arrogant, by contrast, mishear and take tears to be sin or childishness.

The Lord listens to our tears and knows them for what they are, which is a form of confession. In the passage just quoted, Augustine draws closely together the act of weeping with the act of writing about weeping, and subsumes them both under the rubric of confession, which also provides the title for the work in which these episodes of weeping are described. Weeping is an appropriate, perhaps the most appropriate, response to an accurate, fully Christian, discernment of what things are like for us, and Augustine takes this interpretation up in Book Ten, just a few hundred words after the passage just quoted. There (10.1.1–10.4.5) weeping is assimilated to confession: both are means by which sinners open themselves more fully to the Lord, and in that way become more intimate with him. In weeping, as in confessing, we show that we understand what we are and what the world is. Not to weep would be to show that we misconstrue both; in restraining our tears we distance ourselves from the Lord.

Augustine's depictions of tears and weeping in the *Confessiones* are complex: he judges that both the presence of suffering-grief-anguish and its absence may be problematic, and that it is possible to respond affectively to affect—to grieve the absence or presence of grief, for example. He is consistent in his view that tears involve understandings, and that judgments as to whether or not the tears are in particular cases desirable cannot be separated from judgments about the understandings they involve. He is consistent, also, in the view that tears communicate understandings to others. And, lastly, he is consistent in depicting tears as responsive to an ascetical discipline of the passions: he can undertake, with struggle, not to cry even when moved by grief, just as he can undertake to yield to tears. And habits (*consuetudines*, usually) of greater or lesser persistence can be formed by one discipline or the other. What Augustine writes about tears in the *Confessiones* is in accord with the broader picture of the intellectual and emotive (or, better, motile) aspects of human life in his work as a whole.

and he will not allow the distresses of this to move him." From *Enneads* 1.4.4, in *Plotinus: Porphyry on Plotinus, Ennead 1*, trans. A. H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 440 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 185.

The fundamental or governing metaphor in Augustine's thought about the mental life, a metaphor that ties together its rational, appetitive, and affective aspects, is that of motion. The soul, the *animus*, moves toward or away from the things it finds in its environment; and its movements are both embodied and habituated. That is, the movements of the soul typically find a bodily correlate, as in Augustine's tears at the death of his childhood friend, or those shed in response to Monnica's death. These movements therefore do not occur simply as mental events, and they are typically habitual in the sense that they do not occur in punctual form as separate and unrelated responses to stimuli. The weight (*pondus*) of an affective or appetitive or rational habit—Augustine uses this trope of weight a good deal—is accumulated over time in such a way as to move us with an often-irresistible force toward or away from this or that. The grieving movement of Augustine's soul toward the absence of his mother was weighted in this sense, as was that toward the absence of his dead friend. The difference in the two cases is that the former's tears address only the one who weeps them—which is why the tears in that case become an object of independent fascination—while the latter's tears address themselves to and find comfort in the Lord.

Tears of either sort, like any other action, can become habits. Habits accumulate weight; weight produces movement; and the movements of the soul are, collectively, what constitute the soul's life. The moving force of all these movements of the soul is most often labeled by Augustine with one of the words from his extensive and nuanced vocabulary of love: *amor* and *dilectio* are the most frequent. We are weighted by our habituated loves, and in those loves, woven together with them, is the knotted thread of desire and will: what we love is what we want, and what we want is what we love. The appetitive and the affective are so tightly linked in Augustine's thought that separating them is effectively impossible. The movements of our soul are all, to somewhat different degrees, movements of love and will and desire all at once. The love-will-desire of solipsistic tears wants, finally, nothing; that of confessional tears wants the Lord.

The movements of the soul, these habituated love-wills, generally (but not always) have a phenomenal feel. That is, they generally seem like something to their subjects, those who undergo them. But Augustine is not very interested in this: it is not possible, I think, to derive from his work a phenomenology of affect or appetite, interested though he is in giving an account of their importance. He is in this respect more interested in the categorial or grammatical than in the phenomenological. He wants to know how to think about appetite and affect, but not to provide an artist's depiction of their flavor. In his depictions of tears in the *Confessiones*, he uses strong language for the movements of the soul involved in grief, as for the bodily movements involved in crying; but his language has to do with motion and desire and end, not with the shades and particularities of feeling, finely etched. Augustine is neither Proust nor Henry James.

For Augustine, tears cannot be separated from the judgments and understandings in intimacy with which they occur. He writes elsewhere that nonhuman animals cannot have passions, if these are understood as habituated love-wills.⁹ He thinks they cannot because they lack reason. Your dog is certainly, in Augustinian terms, an appetitive being: he is moved by appetites toward or away from things. But these amount neither to desires nor to passions (in Latin, they are not *desiderium* and not *passiones*) because they bear no relation to the intellect's capacity to discern and judge what is good. Such relations may be complex and conflicted, as we have seen in Augustine's account of his responses to his mother's death. But the in-principle absence of such a relation means also the absence of passions. Passions are, for Augustine, rational or irrational (most often a complex mix of both); they can never be arational. And this is why, we might say (though Augustine so far as I know does not), nonhuman animals do not cry: tears, being rational or irrational but never arational, cannot belong to them.¹⁰

A particular movement of the soul, understood as a passion, may then be separated from reason in the sense of being intimate with a false understanding of what there is, and therefore active in opposition to true understandings. It may also be in accord with reason, and when it is it involves or is concomitant with a love of the good, which is also a love of the Lord. Our ordinary condition, in Augustine's view, is, with respect to the passions, one of fluidity, malleability, instability, motility, and ductility. Our passions, when they are active in opposition to love and therefore to the Lord, are a flood that tends toward nothing—which is the only possible direction in which they can tend, given a standard Augustinian account of evil as absence and lack.¹¹ But we may also, to the extent that our passions resound to the Lord's love for us, be moved toward the solidity and eternity of union with the Lord.

A rather different way to put the same point is to say that each of us (save only Jesus and Mary, according to Catholic doctrine) is inevitably subject to *passiones contra rationem*, and that this is true whether *ratio* is taken in the universal-objective sense to mean what it is rational (and therefore good) to want, or in the phenomenological-subjective sense, to mean what it seems rational to me at the moment to want. If our passions are irrational in the first sense but not the second, then we will have misidentified

⁹For this denial, see *De civitate dei* 8.16–17. For useful discussion, see Anastasia Scrutton, "Emotion in Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas: A Way Forward for the Im/passibility Debate?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7.2 (2005): 169–177.

¹⁰Not much hinges, I think, upon whether in fact any nonhuman animals do cry. The point of importance is not the cognitive capacities of dolphins or chimpanzees; it is, rather, that tears are inseparably intimate with understandings and desires at a level of complexity which means that all crying creatures are reflexive knowers. If dolphins or chimpanzees did cry, this would be true of them too.

¹¹On the tendency *ad nihilum*, see Paul J. Griffiths, "Self-Annihilation or Damnation? A Disputable Question in Christian Eschatology," in *Liberal Faith: Essays in Honor of Philip Quinn*, ed. Paul J. Weithman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 83–117.

and misprized the good, as Augustine did when he cried for his dead friend. If in the second sense, then we will be in a condition of conflict apparent to us, as Augustine was about the death of his mother; in this condition it will seem to us that we are in disharmony with ourselves, and this is so whether or not we have rightly identified and prized what we ought to want. Our task, as Augustine sees it, a task we cannot accomplish without grace, is to order our passions so that they are in harmony with reason in both senses—that is, so that our habituated love-will draws us toward what is good for us, and at the same time so that we want what is good for us. When we are in this condition, we will often cry, and bitterly, in confessing what is lamentable about ourselves and the damaged world.

Tears do not have to be understood as Augustine, and with him most of the premodern Christian tradition, understands them. They might be understood as a purely physiological phenomenon, occurring in response to stimuli and carrying with them no claim about the way things are; those who hold such a view might think of tears as produced by or evidence of some inner condition of sadness, or they might think of them as productive of such feelings;¹² in either case it would be beside the point to ask of those who cry what their tears show about how they understand the world, or to criticize those who weep for doing so wrongly. Or, tears might be understood as indeed making a cognitive claim, but a false one that should not be taken seriously by anyone interested in the truth. Those who think this are likely to discipline their tears toward removal, as Augustine tried at first to do in his response to Monnica's death.¹³ Augustine's understanding of tears is in important respects different from these views. For him, it is common to all those who cry that they understand the world or themselves or both to be in some respects lamentable. That understanding is accurate, but by itself insufficient; tears shed on such an understanding bring false comfort and thus further damage to those who shed them. Such tears end, as did Augustine's weeping for his dead friend, by diminishing those who shed them and diverting attention from what is wrong with the world to the act of weeping itself. Those tears are opaque, but they do not need to be disciplined out of existence. They need, in order to be made transparent, to become communicative as an instrument of confession. When that happens, they contribute to the world's transfiguration. This understanding of tears, as is typical of the Christian tradition in dealing with what we might call emotions and their signs, at once embraces and redirects them by catechesis.

Duke Divinity School

¹²A summary statement of this view may be found in chapter 24 of William James's *Psychology: Briefer Course*, first published in 1892 as a condensed version of his *Principles of Psychology*.

¹³See the quotation from Plotinus in note 9 above.