
Hope in Cynical Times

Hope and Happiness at the Juncture of Past and Future

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Every human being [. . .] wishes to be happy. [. . .]There is nobody, whatever mode of life has been chosen who does not long for a happy life. So one man says, "Happy are those who join the army." Another denies this and says, "Happy, yes but those who have a plot of land to cultivate" (Augustine, Sermon 306 c.3, n.3)

The goal of this paper is to examine the nature and necessity of hope as an element of happiness. Where does hope come from? Is it simply a predisposition of some personalities or is it as a result of learning to accept and balance the conflicting experiences of one's own life and of humans universally? Is hope an exclusively religious construct and if so what is its equivalent in secular terms? My thesis is that hope is a necessary element of happiness. It can be found in the living of religious and secular individuals and it is created by the way we interpret past events, both negative and positive, in such a way as to give them a meaning that transcends our individual or ego self. For the religious individual the ultimate transcendent reality is understood as God, for the secular individual it may be any of a number of causes that connect them to something larger. Our interaction with others and our ability to engage complexity, not to reduce experience to the purely negative or positive is vital for the adoption of a perspective of hope.

Should hope be thought of as a choice, it is one made in the present though it may interpret the past and have expectations of the future. It is hope, the stance that incorporates so many apparent dualities, that allows us to access a present Augustine described as having no space, and extend it. Hope may be a choice made over and over in countless present moments until perhaps it becomes habitual, but it is in the present that it occurs and makes its claims. Living in hope is a creative act and creativity is transcendent.

Hope can best be identified as a stance or perhaps a virtue, in the sense that virtue is a life force or purveyor of vitality. One should not associate virtue in this context with something that makes one better than someone else, although it may allow one to live a life that is more integrated and whole. There are many for whom life has made hope virtually impossible through no fault of their own. One of the questions this paper will consider is how context, and I speak particularly of individuals and social systems, can provide for some people immersed in negative experience a way to tell their story that provides them with the possibility of taking the stance of hope.

Happiness in the Present Context of the Western World

As I considered the multivocality of happiness and the complexity it shares with life I was struck by the power of personal narrative to make of life experience something both cohesive and flexible. Initially my attention in this area was fixed by a reference in conversation to children whose past experiences have been so negative and traumatic that their ability to live in the world in a way society can accept is severely hampered. To cope with the reality of these children's behaviour they are removed from the world of 'normal' social interaction and placed in the mini-society of the institution. They are maintained in a physical sense but they are not liberated from their past. Certainly in some cases caring psychiatrists or social workers will attempt to unravel, through interaction with the children, perhaps through pictures or play, their past experience, but often the resources are not available. Whether this is because society finds what it allows to happen to these young ones too painful to consider, or because

the process for unlocking their past and restoring them is not a fast one, they are not helped. They are not given the tools for resilience, tools to create a coherent, cohesive past, a narrative that will make of their experience something that will enable them to live from a stance of hope.

The situation of these children seemed to bring into focus many questions about happiness as it relates to time and narrativity. The questions of why resources are not available for these children, or for adults as well, who have suffered terribly, connects with Kingwell's exposition of present cultural norms. Kingwell, in *Better Living: From Plato to Prozac*, describes a society in which hedonistic rather than eudemonistic happiness is too often sought after. This is not the choice Kingwell advocates. In his introduction and throughout the book he illustrates the complexity of the happiness question he poses. "It would have been deceptive, indeed irresponsible to offer definitive answers about happiness when what I mostly felt was the power of the question" (Kingwell 1998, xi). For Kingwell "True happiness, if it means anything, means having the strength of character to meet them [the challenges] when they come" (Kingwell 1998, xi). Strength of character is not achieved in an instant; yet, as Kingwell describes in his blend of personal narrative and cultural critique, instantaneous is what many expect happiness to be. Instantaneity eliminates reflection and relationship that require engagement and energy over a long period, thus eliminates the possibility of engaging those negative experiences of the self and of others such as the experiences of the abused children. In this society one must be happy and conceal one's sadness. Patience is not often understood as an element of happiness in our society. Programs that offer happiness claim it is attainable in months or weeks or even minutes and if the books fail the consumption of Prozac or St. John's Wort for despondency or dissatisfaction rather than clinical depression is the order of the day. None of these solutions is about meaning. If we can agree that happiness is complex, as life is, surely it follows that once the complexity is reduced to allow only the positive or the empirical or any other reduced vision, happiness vanishes. In a later description of hope by Gabriel Marcel it is said that hope "can have no meaning except in a world which admits of real injuries, one in which despair is also possible" (Nowotny 1978, 54, 55).

Narrativity and Resilience

As I consider the plight of those whose past contains extremely negative experience or most of us whose past contains some wounding, it seemed that personal narrative is an exciting and effective tool with which to develop a stance to engage creatively in life. This stance I understand as hope and it is a stance which seems essential to happiness. Since personal narrative is a tool I find most compelling I will consider hope as it can be called out of personal narrative with its requirements of weaving a variety of experiences, a variety of addressees, a molding of chronological time to enable creation of a self that is continuous and yet flexible, and finally a calling forth of creativity that is transcendent. Narrative, with its connecting of past, present and future, its use of language and its creation of self, not in isolation but in engagement with various addressees, brings to mind Augustine's *Confessions* as a work that demonstrates and explores all these elements.

Whether we engage life from a stance of hope or despair depends on our resilience, our ability to rebound from the blows of life. Boris Cyrulnik gives the following definition of resilience: "Processus qui permet de reprendre un type de développement malgré un traumatisme et dans des circonstances adverses" (Cyrulnik 2003, 239).¹ We will all encounter sorrow, or disappointment or abuse at some point in our life and the way we view the negative content of our past and weave it into our self-construction in the present determines our view of the future. Will we be forever trapped by the negative experiences we have had? Will we allow them to define our very self as negative or worthless or bad, or can we transcend the negative by making it part of a larger meaning? *Placing Oneself in Personal Time* as Benson titles a chapter of his book *The Cultural Psychology of Self* (pp. 45–58), describes a way to answer the questions who am I and has my life a meaning, while attending to the details that construct and attend on those primary questions. This narrative, we discover, is flexible and shaped both by the context in which the question is asked and answered, the contents of the life of which the question is asked, the way the individual is able to shape the contents within the context and the various addresses who are the co-creators of the personal

narrative. One tells a different story of oneself to a doctor than to a salesperson, and one reveals more to a spouse than to a casual acquaintance. This does not mean that there is not truth in all the stories, but that the truth comes in the presentation of the appropriate contents to the addressee. The decision of what piece of the narrative belongs to what addressee is itself part of the personal narrative. To reveal the most intimate details of your life to a salesperson would not confirm one as an extremely truthful individual but one with a lack of discernment.

“ . . .the shape of a life is made and remade by the stories a person tells of him or herself” (Benson 2001, 46). This making and re-making is a place for hope to enter. The fabric of personal narrative is like a tapestry that has the weft of continuity and the warp of change. Ricoeur calls continuity, self-constancy, Frankel would probably identify this as meaning or logos. For Kingwell continuity comes from “memory continuity and bodily integrity” (Kingwell 1998, 149). “What if I found one morning that the world of my memories did not coalesce in the normal manner?” (Kingwell 1998, 148). What if the memories normally familiar to me, the morning routine, the people I always meet, were no longer part of memory? Or what if all my memories remained intact but my body was so changed that no one recognized me as the person I was or am? Kingwell concludes that “Personal identity grounds our individual experience but equally it lays the foundation for social and cultural life“ (Kingwell 1998, 150). William James asks the same question: “How do I know I am the same self today as I was yesterday? (Benson 50). In some ways we remain the same but in others we change and narrative must allow space for both. Context, the place in which we recognize ourselves and others recognize us, is important.

Time is also important in personal narrative for we are creatures in history. Personal narrative however is not strictly chronological. If we are the stories we tell of ourselves, then our viewpoint or stance may rearrange or re-shape chronological order. It may slow down time at some point to enlarge the space of a particular meaningful event or leave out a memory barely present to consciousness because of its painfulness. It also begins at the end, at the point at which we begin to construct it, the point at which

we begin to answer the question; has my life a meaning? An example of this is found in the gospel narratives of the New Testament which have the death of Jesus as their starting point, even though they unfold the chronological narrative with Jesus' death is at the end.

Augustine's Exploration of Happiness: Time and Memory

Augustine, in writing *Confessions*, is involved in personal narrative. His addressees, or co-producers, are many: God, readers (Christian and pagan) and to some extent Augustine himself. So his self-narrative is written as example, apology, inquiry, and as expression of faith. It is this last, faith, that for Augustine gives his life coherence and locates his happiness. "That is the authentic happy life, to set one's joy on you [God], grounded in you and caused by you. That is the real thing and there is no other" (*Confessions* 10, 22). Still, Augustine does not stop there. He acknowledges that all seek happiness. Though one may or may not agree with Augustine's conclusion on the definition of happiness his examination of the subject offers an instructive lens on the subject. Further to his explicit exploration of happiness, the genre in which he chooses to set the exploration and his reflections on memory and time provide a framework for considering the development of the stance of hope.

Since one constructs a personal narrative in co-authorship with various addressees and also in a particular social context it is helpful to look briefly at Augustine's context. At the time *Confessions* was written Augustine (354 – 430 CE) was Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, bishop over a minority faith community, in the midst of the majority Donatist Christian community. Though Augustine spent much time refuting both the Donatist position and that of Pelagius, he spends little time on these two controversies in his narrative. Instead in this work, written in his mid-forties, some thirteen years after his conversion from Manichaeism, he addresses those things that arise from the path he traveled to come to Christian belief. Some, such as Neo-Platonist thought he employs constructively within his narrative, others he is at pains to refute. His training in rhetoric, which some in a society noted for what Chadwick describes as elegant skepticism, would have been admired by many for

whom the eloquence of the argument took primacy over the truth of the argument. It would also have had its critics in the Christian community to which he was a convert. He chooses to use his linguistic and rhetorical skill as a gift of God, despite those who might be critical. This is a conscious choice. Augustine is well aware of his addressees and makes explicit reference to them.

While Books 10 and 11 of the *Confessions*, those considered in this paper are not primarily concerned with the recounting of past events in a narrative fashion, they are concerned with synthesizing questions that arose out of that past, both pre- and post-conversion. Neo-platonic thought is much in evidence in the consideration of the necessity for the soul to be lifted up to the simultaneity of eternity. Augustine goes beyond Neo-Platonism to examine the concept of time as autonomous from motion. He rejects notions of ever-recurring cycles, stating the creation of the world and the incarnation of Christ as unique events not repeatable in history. He examines the successiveness of time and the implications of that successiveness in minute detail and probes in both psychological and philosophical terms the content and meaning of memory. Augustine also considers multiplicity and unity but does not seem to be able to make a further step that would resolve the confrontation of these dualities or of the concepts of internal versus external or successive versus simultaneous. Though Augustine, through his engagement in the creation of personal narrative and in his occasional passionate expressions of longing for God, may have personally attained the synthesis necessary for hope, his narrative and analysis tend toward the analytic and in Books 10 and 11 the empirical. The man who wrote:

You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.' (Confessions 10,27)

does not seem to have integrated this awe-filled and intimate interaction with God into his more empirical and pessimistic writing. . Readers of Augustine might wonder why one who wrote so passionately of his yearning for, and experience of God, turned to such empirical language and procedure at others. Augustine does however acknowledge the vital desire for happiness. He understands the desire for happiness as universal, though some would describe that which they require for happiness much differently than others. Those who pursue happiness elsewhere than in union with God, deceive themselves, however; whether they acknowledge it or not they are impelled by the image of true joy and truth deep within. “The happy life is joy based on the truth . . . in you, O God who are the truth . . .” (Confessions 10,23).

Augustine locates happiness in the individual’s relationship with God. In establishing an understanding of this relationship he develops a lengthy discourse on memory. He begins the discourse by acknowledging that although God knows everything, still it is beneficial to confess to God both in words and in silence. Augustine is quite aware that God is not the only addressee in this narrative; there will be human readers as well. “I also, Lord, so make my confession to you that I may be heard by people to whom I cannot prove that my confession is true” (Confessions 10,4). He trusts that those who listen in love will believe. Augustine is confessing not only what he was, his past, but what he is in the present. He feels that God has commanded him to serve others, and to them he “will reveal not who I was but what I have now come to be and what I continue to be” (Confessions 10,4). So God is clearly here co-author of Augustine’s personal narrative of self, as are the readers. Book 10, *Memory* and Book 11 *Time and Eternity* set out a change in the character of *Confessions*. The first nine books for the most part looked back on the past in a descriptive narrative of events leading to the present. Books 10 to 13 give a synthesis of Augustine’s position in the present. Though the stance is always the present, the first nine books contain more personal events such as the experience of conversion in the garden and the death of Augustine’s mother Monica, than intensive examination of the individual soul or psyche.

Augustine identifies his love for God as a ‘conscious certainty’

(Confessions 10,6) and tries to identify what exactly he loves when he loves God. Though God is Creator of all that is natural, including human beings, not physical but spiritual sense provides experience of God. “My soul is floodlit by light which space cannot contain, and where there is sound that time cannot seize . . .” (Confessions 10,6) If God cannot be seized or contained by space or time, in what way does one hold God in consciousness? This question leads to the discourse on memory that is summarized as follows.

Man comprises body that is external and a soul that is internal. It is the soul that must be questioned about God for it is that which judges sense perceptions. “The inner man knows this – I, I the mind through the sense perception of my body” (Confessions 10,6). God is not evident to all because some fail to compare the outward truth of sense perception with the inner truth. This inner truth knows that God is beyond the physical nature and that the soul is what animates the body and allows the individual to ascend to God. It seems that in beginning the ascent Augustine arrives at memory. His conception of memory contains the Platonic idea of memory, which consists of the maieutic, i.e. “bringing to consciousness what from an early experience the soul already knows” (Confessions 10,8). He expands the Platonic idea by including the unconscious, self-awareness and the human yearning for happiness. Satisfied Augustine asserts, by knowing God. God is the source of memory or soul and individuals can be satisfied only by returning to that source.

Augustine describes the way narrative is unfolded from memory, some events being difficult to recall and others perhaps difficult to restrain. His development of the way perceptions are received and recollected provides a framework for our consideration of the way a narrative of self can be constructed to provide a self-understanding that tends to hope or despair. “There also [in memory] I meet myself and recall what I am, what I have done, and when and where and how I was affected when I did it” (Confessions 10,8). From the memory one pulls things experienced directly, other people’s descriptions or opinions of things one has not directly experienced. “Out of the same abundance in store, I combine with past events images of the various things whether experienced directly or

believed on the basis of what I have experienced; and on this basis I reason about future actions and events and hopes and again think of all these things in the present” (Confessions 10,8). As Augustine refers to these images from his memory he does not only synthesize them in the present. Retrieved from memory of past, they occupy not only present time but also space, at least space in the mind.

Augustine then speaks of the power of memory which is of the mind. Memory is a natural gift but even with this power one cannot grasp the whole of one’s self. “Is the mind too restricted to compass itself, so that we have to ask what is the element of itself which it fails to grasp? Surely that cannot be external to itself; it must be within the mind. How then can it fail to grasp it?” (Confessions 10,8). This fills Augustine with astonishment and he wonders that it does not have the same effect on others. Perhaps then, as now, astonishment was a sadly rare state of mind.

Skills are also carried along with the images in the mind. Once again we are faced with the paradox to which we will return both further on in Augustine and in our own reflections. Augustine describes “some interior place – which is not a place” (Confessions 10,9), something not acquired through what someone told him or through sense perception he recognized within himself, discerned inwardly and knew to be true. Notions pertaining to this interior space that is not a space do not enter through the senses but before they are learnt, they are in such a remote recess they would not have been discerned if someone had not brought the possibility of their existence to attention. Here in the recollection of the initiation of things inwardly discerned by others’ initiation, we anticipate the interaction with others necessary for our self-construction. Augustine does not follow up on this notion of interaction explicitly.

All these things, images, skills, notions, principles of numbers and dimensions are held in memory in the way they were learnt. Some of these spatial concepts, tools or symbols for the understanding of space are in the memory that is a place related to time. It is from the memory containing all the data of the past that in the present one makes the distinction between what is true and false and one remembers whether one made the same distinction in the past. In the future, the present discernment will be

remembered as part of the past.

The affections are understood to be recalled differently. The emotion recalled retrospectively may be remembered but the recollection of the emotion may evoke a totally different emotion. An experience that generated gladness at the time it happened, may in retrospect engender sadness; though the original emotion is remembered it is not felt. The question here is how can the mind be sad while the memory is glad. Mind and memory are not independent of one another, still they can hold two different emotions. Augustine's solution is to depict memory as a kind of the stomach of the mind where the emotion is like a food stored but not tasted.

Memory is also present to itself through itself. Memory can recollect memory, yet how does it recollect forgetfulness that one would expect would delete the very memory necessary to recollect it? Augustine expresses the struggle this concept demands, returning to the concept of the I as mind, the 'I' that remembers. What is this I that remembers even forgetfulness? "Yet in some way, though incomprehensible and inexplicable, I am certain that I remember forgetfulness itself, and yet forgetfulness destroys what we remember" (Confessions 10,16). The I is diverse and immeasurable, which is why some questions such as forgetfulness cannot be answered completely. Augustine proposes the individual must transcend even memory to reach God who is the true life, the source of the creature and the source of unity for those in this world of successiveness and fragmentation. Here is raised again the duality of immanence and transcendence that Augustine is somewhat unclear on. Though he writes of rising above our human multiplicity and successiveness to union with God, he still acknowledges God as the source of our memory, or soul and speaks of God as filling us, which seems to imply immanence.

The questions raised lead us to understand that though God is external, our memory retains some image of God as source. This knowledge that we recollect urges us to ascend above memory and enables us also to recognize God as the source of the soul's animation, and the soul as the source of the body's life. Remembering this source one understands that true happiness can only be attained through unity with it. All desire the happy life. "But how have they known about it so as to want it?"

(Confessions 10,20). Augustine poses the question which it seems he has already answered through his discourse on memory, as to whether this knowledge of true happiness is in the memory. It is indeed in the memory but not in the way other experiences are. It is in the memory because the memory or soul is aware of its source and yearns toward it.

Augustine returns to the question of where in consciousness or memory God is to be found. Since he learnt of God he has not forgotten God. But where did he learn. "You were not already in my memory before I learnt of you." (Confessions 10,26). Augustine found God in the fact that God transcends him, God is not contained by place, backwards or forwards, transcends place and so transcends the paradox of whether he is to be found in memory or outside. "You lift up the person whom you fill" (Confessions 10,28) So God is internal filling and yet transcends the internal in the ability to lift up the individual. Because God is transcendent, God can respond "[. . .]at one and the same time to all" (Confessions 10, 26). Because there is no one place occupied by God, God is present everywhere.

This transcendence expressed by being no place or having no space will be taken up as we consider Augustine's discourse on time. His expression of the present as having no space; "But the present occupies no space" (Confessions 11,15) will be important to our consideration of the location of hope. The discourse on Time and Eternity is found in Book 11 of the *Confessions*. Here Augustine first distinguishes between God's vision of time, that is eternal, and ours, that is temporal. As in Book 10, Augustine establishes that God knows all things making the continuation of his story a response to God's will that Augustine should confess and in so doing reach others. "But I am stirring up love for you in myself and in those who read this . . ." (Confessions 11,2). Here we see that Augustine observes himself: he is an addressee of his own narrative. He observes both the past he is writing about and also himself writing in the elusive present. To observe oneself the I must adopt some stance or standpoint. The place from which one observes is taken up by some part of the I which is observing. This may be why Augustine expresses the difficulty earlier of being unable to grasp the whole of himself. God has brought Augustine

to his present position as bishop. It is Augustine's hope that he can produce his confession in "an ordered narrative" (Confessions 11,1). He can also speak to God both of what he understands and of what he does not.

From the consideration of the inner aspects of human consciousness and the memory or soul Augustine begins to wrestle with the successiveness of time and the simultaneity of eternity. From the consideration of creation at which time began, he considers the speech of God. He distinguishes between words God accommodates to the human ear such as — "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 17:5) (Confessions 11,6) — which are made of temporal succession of God's eternal word. The eternal word does not come to an end and it is not successive with one syllable following another. The eternal word exists in simultaneity outside time and change, being in no one place or time but everywhere and always. One can also note that the eternal word spoken in silence or in event such as the Incarnation of Christ is available to those like Augustine with superior language skills, but also to those — such as the abused children referred to earlier — whose language skills may be limited. From a religious perspective, the eternal word transcends limitations and enables the transcending of human limitations.

Although Augustine makes a tremendous leap in thought with his consideration of the relationship between time and space he seems much wedded to the duality of Greek thought which pertains also to the relationship between temporality and eternity: they are not just different they are opposed. One must be surmounted to achieve the other. And yet one must remember that for the Greeks the idea of eternity also is based on the experience of time * although in contradistinction to the ephemeral and destructive character of time. Human finitude is not be merely the limitation Augustine also sees; it is that from which to explore the human condition and make sense of ourselves in relation to eternity. Human finitude is to be viewed — with reference to, and on the basis of, Gods incarnation in Jesus Christ — in a positive way, not merely as just another word for that which we perceive initially as limitation. Augustine in his discourse on time does not go that far, and he can write instead:

They attempt to taste eternity when their heart is still flitting about in the realm where things change and have a past and a future; . . . Who can lay hold on the heart and give it fixity so that for some little moment it may be stable, and for a fraction of time may grasp the splendor of a constant eternity? Then it may compare eternity with temporal successiveness which never has any constancy and will see there is no comparison possible. In the eternal nothing is transient but the whole is present. (Confessions 11,11).

In the face of God's eternal simultaneity Augustine asks what time is. His consideration of time is a huge step from the thought of the Greek philosophers who were much more concerned with spatial concepts: "Let no one tell me that time is the movements of heavenly bodies" (Confessions 11,23). For Augustine, God is the maker of time, but how can the concept of time be articulated. Time and human access to it can be perceived by humans, but time is essentially a remote process, created by God. Humans can experience time indirectly through instruments for measurement of time (Augustine found the use of sound particularly useful in measuring time because it didn't confuse time with the spatial realities as the other sense experiences might) or through words that describe the past (Szamosi 1996, 99). Augustine does not seem to consider the possibility that our idea of eternity might be derived from our experience of time. Eternity might be a description from something we perceive as superior to the stress of transient moments. Though at one point he says: "In the sublimity of an eternity which is always in the present, you [God] are before all things past and transcend all things future" (Confessions 11,14 emphasis mine) for the human individual, Augustine asserts, the present has no space.

If we can think of some bit of time which cannot be divided into even the smallest instantaneous moments, that alone is what we can call 'present'. And this time flies so quickly from future into past that it is an interval with no duration. If it has duration, it is divisible into past and future. But the present occupies no space. (Confessions 11,15).

If the present has no space it can be considered as U-topos, which does not refer to some ideal future society understood as the subject matter of what is usually called Utopia, but which means 'no place'. If the present

has no space it cannot in fact be measured, nor limited. Its lens ranges wide over past and future and if we recall certain of Augustine's statements we see that "eternity is always in the present moment" (Confessions 11,13) — that has no space.

What do we do in this eternal place of no space? Is it possible to move beyond the dualities Augustine describes? For Augustine the distention of the soul to comprehend past and future is a distraction from the soul's proper concentration on God. "You are my eternal Father but I am scattered in times whose order I do not understand. The storms of incoherent events tear to pieces my thoughts, the inmost entrails of my soul until that day when I flow together to merge into you" (Confessions 11,29). Though Augustine states the eternal is found in the present he leaves in conflict the multiplicity that he sees in temporality and the unity of eternity. He doesn't explore the positive possibilities of the meeting of the two in the present in order for the true self to be redeemed from negative past experiences, to become resilient, to be restored to assume a stance of hope.

Narrativity and Hope

The ingredients for creation of a narrative of self that allows for hope are first the recognition of the need for a dynamic between stability and freedom. This balance is developed within the framework of language, which calls for developing appropriate tools for communication. Another ingredient is the content of the past and the capacity to have access to this content: Here Augustine's words about recollections rising up unbidden which others are elusive comes to mind.

Another ingredient is the recognition that narrative of self is, as mentioned previously, the co-creation of a number of addressees. An abused child may develop his/her story in conjunction with the abuser, the police personnel, therapists, doctors, teachers, other children and within his/her own interior self. The input or responses of the addressees in dialogue with the individual will enable the act of self-creation that may lead to hope or to despair. Their empathy, their trustworthiness, their willingness to tolerate the negative, their own stance of hope or despair will

help determine the creation by the damaged child. One can imagine the huge task of the individual if the addressees are mostly limited to the abuser alone.

Here we must consider that although the individual is the editor of his/her personal narrative, “the patterns and forces at work in shaping my experiences, and my ability to know and control them can often be more apparent to other people than they are to myself” (Benson 2001, 47). For the traumatized child, caring individuals can help elicit the memories of experiences that need to be expressed and shaped for resilience or buoyancy as Kingwell calls it, to be present.² Kingwell explores the three dimensions of narrative construction of self in his consideration of ‘narrative hypothesis’ in Chapter 8 of *Better Living*. The narrative does not only offer the potential for the healing of damage to the individual’s integrity caused by negative experiences of the past, it also includes the individual in his/her relationship to others through the ethical and political dimensions. These dimensions further develop the necessity for dynamism between stability and freedom, continuity and change, self and others; a similar dynamism to that found in the living of hope.

The relationship between self and others in the narrative process leads to a concern about the narrative in *Confessions*. The switch in character between the first nine books and those following leads to the expectation that Augustine would not merely describe the events of his life but, as he does in the final four books reflect on the ideas that arise from those events. Perhaps the expectation is unfair that Augustine might explore and express more explicitly the nature of the individual’s relationship with others in space and time. Yet, with this expectation in mind a critique of Augustine that might eventually be made by his readers or ‘editors’: Augustine doesn’t deal with the relational aspect sufficiently and still seems to be working out the duality between God and nature.

Though Augustine speaks eloquently of the desire for God — whether explicitly stated or not — the transcendence and immanence of God are in uneasy relationship as are the various other dualities such as time and eternity. The relational aspect which forms the basis of the something larger, something that transcends the present as it transcends

the self is less clearly developed in explicit terms. It is implicit in the chapters that deal with his personal relationship with his mother, but it is not taken up into the understanding of his relation to God and through God to humanity. One exception to this is Augustine's claim that God instructed him to tell his story in order to excite the hearts of others toward God. The transcendent that is not opposed to the particular but engages it, that calls forth the creative act of becoming whole is not explicitly developed. This larger time or space to be found through the spaceless present seems to be the missing link to the extension in which hope is made or found.

Hope and Despair

Augustine's consideration of memory and time, or space and time, has provided for us the womb in which hope may be born. Having considered memory in which the materials for our creation of a personal narrative self are stored and having considered it as soul which is connected to something larger we have moved forward in our understanding of what hope comes from. Having considered the successiveness of time and eternity and the present moment we have moved toward the location of hope. Finally hope will perhaps be most clearly understood by an additional perspective that may at first seem indirect – despair.

With reference to Joan Nowotny's excellent synthesis entitled *Despair and the Object of Hope*, one can sum up the ideas brought forward by Augustine and Benson. Despair is often referred to as 'going to pieces' an example of multiplicity, the very thing opposed to the unity which is what Augustine yearns for. 'Going to pieces' is raw unrelatable fragmentation, the destruction of the continuity held within the narrative construction of self. Despair is also true fixedness in the present as literally no place or no space. The present for the one in despair is only grasped as an endless repetition of past events of boredom or horror and there is no access through this present to a future that is open to possibility. The present of despair is not extended by creativity; it does not transcend context or experience. In despair the future is closed. If the future is inaccessible and the present only repeats the past "time is plugged up"

(Nowotny 1979, 47). It is “a situation without exit” (Nowotny 1979, 47).

Not only does despair close the present in upon itself, it isolates the individual from others, so that neither time nor space is extended. In the narrative construction of self we acknowledge that others are catalysts for and participants in our act of self-creation. In despair we close ourselves off from our co-creators. “Non-disposability is a mark of the ego-centric consciousness that closes itself off from others even while it needs others to affirm it and reflect back to it its own self-image” (Nowotny 1979, 48). For Augustine it seemed vital that he tell his story — that he share his reflections and acknowledge his addressees. His choices, such as the use of rhetoric, force him to consider also the fact of critical listeners. He acknowledges and decides what to leave out in the face of his listeners. He understands that whatever he includes or omits is all known in the mind of God. The despairing individual on the other hand shrinks into him/herself, disengaging others and limiting the space and material for creativity to his/her own egocentricity.

Once these lens on fluidity and spaciousness and creativity are dimmed, life is meaningless, an endless repetitive journey over the tiny geography of ‘me’. As Nowotny quotes from Gabriel Marcel’s writing on the theatre of the absurd. “The sense of the absurdity and meaninglessness of life is expressed in much recent art and literature especially in the ‘theatre of the absurd’, where the function of art seems to be to sharpen anxiety and isolation” (Nowotny 1979, 49). As Mark Slade comments on Beckett. “What Beckett does for instance is to play with logic until he argues his characters into a complete loss of identity. The logics are so strictly applied that everyone is hopelessly paralyzed” (Slade 1970, 169-170).

Here in the theatre of the absurd, we find “the absolutizing of objectivity, a reduction of all reality to what can be objectively explained” (Nowotny 1979, 49). There is no place for the elements in both secular and religious understanding that allow life experience to be transformed. If love is only an instinctual drive and if I am only a series of chemical impulses and reactions, where is the potential for the transcendent act of creativity – the creativity that extends the spaceless present of Augustine into eternity?

Though objectivity and analysis are essential to understanding, life must not be reduced to this. As hope cannot be allowed by pure objectivity, neither can it be reduced to the desire for a particular object or specific outcome. “Thus hope, ‘by a *nisus* which is peculiar to it, tends inevitably to transcend the particular object to which it first seems to be attached” (Nowotny 1979, 52). This transformation is not an evasion of the object or outcome, positive or negative, but an assumption of its reality and the insertion of its experience into a larger framework of meaning. An important distinction is made here between hope and optimism. “The optimist who declares that everything will turn out for the best in the best of all possible worlds speaks from the point of view of the spectator, rather than the participant in life’s tragedies” (Nowotny 1979, 54). This does not mean that an optimist cannot gain a hopeful perspective but that optimism itself is a much simpler and shallower thing than hope.

Several characteristics of hope are examined by Nowotny. The first is humility – the quality that allows one to adapt to the trial rather than stiffly resist it. The next is patience that does not compel time but allows one to grow with time in relation to one’s experiences. Patience is the allowance of time necessary for the creative act of construction of self. We also see the deepening of perspective, the transcendence that extends the present moment. Patience is not passive but creative. None of the qualities of hope are passive. Thirdly the hopeful person has a basic trust in reality. “Man’s ordering propensity implies a transcendent order, and each ordering gesture is a signal of transcendence” (Nowotny 1979, 59). So, if a mother reassures her child waking from a nightmare that ‘everything is all right’, it is not necessarily empirical reality she is referring to but transcendent order of being. From this connection to a transcendent reality, that may or may not be understood as religious, that the empirical data may be lived through and shaped. This is done not in isolation from others or in denial of the possibility of despair. The shaping of hope is active and engaged, living through the empirical but not chained to it, created in the present but extending through it to past and present and never taking for granted its freedom from despair rather acknowledging it as a real possibility in one’s own life and in the lives of

others.

So hope exists in the place of in-between, of the present that has no space. It holds together, open-eyed and with active engagement, the objective and the subjective, the desire and the disappointment, the good and the evil, time and eternity and it makes of them through an ongoing creative activity something that transcends the self and is expressive of it.

Notes

1. A process allowing for the retrieval of development despite a trauma and under infelicitous circumstances (Cyrulnik 2003, 239).
2. Kingswell's references to buoyancy are found at pp. 229, 267 and 271 in *Better Living*.

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