

“*Quam videndo intus dicimus*”:
Seeing and Saying in *De Trinitate* XV

MARY SIRRIDGE

Summary: I argue that Augustine’s theory of thought in *De Trinitate* XV is a theory of mental language and a theory of mental vision. Augustine is aware to some extent of the difficulty of maintaining both models, but has philosophically compelling reasons for doing so.

Verbum autem nostrum, illud quod non habet sonum neque cogitationem soni, sed eius rei quam uidendo intus dicimus, et ideo nullius linguae est atque inde utcumque simile est in hoc aenigmate illi uerbo dei quod etiam deus est quoniam sic et hoc de nostra nascitur quemadmodum et illud de scientia patris natum est. (*De Trinitate* XV.xiv.24.32-34)

I want to argue that there is in *De Trinitate* XV a theory about the nature of thought which is a theory of inner, or mental language, not just some much vaguer theory about an “inner word,” and not just a theory about some proto-vocal *sermo entheticus* which lies between thinking and the action of speaking. The supposition that Augustine does not put forward such a theory rests, I think, at least in part on the fact that he so resolutely continues to present his account of thought in visual terms. But, as I shall argue, in *De Trinitate* XV Augustine is self-consciously arguing that thinking is both essentially linguistic and essentially visual. This is obvious both from the terminology and sequence of the discussion of Book XV and from parallels with Book XI, where the visual theory is developed.

What does Augustine mean when he says that thought is both inner vision and inner speaking? He is obviously not saying that thought has all the same literal features as the physical activity of seeing or the physical activity of speaking; he frequently emphasizes that thought is not *in* any particular language, and is not stretched out in time in the way that spoken language is (*De Trin.* IX.x.15.7). Nor, however, is he just saying that thinking is *somewhat like* speaking and seeing or that these activities generate apt metaphors for thinking. What is being asserted is that thought *has*

the same form as seeing or speaking respectively, i.e., that it *works* essentially like seeing or speaking, that thought is a formal and functional isomorph of seeing or speaking.¹

But what is it for thought to be a functional isomorph of speaking?² Surely, if Augustine held that thought has a compositional structure such that mental expressions with specific semantic assignments combine in specified mental syntactic patterns to make up mental propositions,³ the nature of the proposed isomorphism would be clear. But there are other considerations which will point to a linguistic theory of thought as well. Most importantly, if thought is linguistic in some way, then computational models can be used as an explanation or “map” of the process of reasoning, which will be understood as a process of connecting propositions by inferential rules or building propositions by applying proposition-forming operators to propositions. In addition, one hallmark of verbal systems is that the “expressions” of the system need not, and characteristically do not, resemble the perceived and understood realities they symbolize; thus, on the verbal model, there is no reason why we should not have thoughts of three green suns and the like, and have general concepts, or carry out and be able to think about abstract mathematical operations, even ones which are unimaginable because they are repeated infinitely. On the verbal approach, meaning will be explained as the connection be-

1 We can say, then, that seeing, or speaking, is being proposed *as a model* of thought, so long as we remember that this sort of model is intended as a formal and functional description with real commitments, and is not merely heuristic. I thus want to see Augustine as verging towards what Fodor (1987) calls “The Language of Thought hypothesis”—with the reservation that Augustine does not, as we will see, explicate for propositions “a constituent structure appropriate to the content they have.”

2 This question can be answered in terms of the characteristics of the representative elements: visual symbols have an analog relationship to their referents, and verbal symbols satisfy instead some set of digitalizing rules (cf. Goodman 1976: 127-173). A system can even be both visual and verbal, as Paivio (1986: 53-83) claims, that is, if the visual image process is used to form vocabulary items, while operations proceed linguistically. These sensible solutions do not seem to be what Augustine has in mind.

3 Panaccio (1995) requires for a true theory of mental language “the presence of a semantics articulated in terms of a syntax.” See also Panaccio 1992 for an account of William of Ockham’s theory of mental language. Note, however, that the internal speaking in the scriptural examples of *De Trinitate* XV.17 is propositional.

tween symbols and descriptions and definitions.⁴ The action-producing and action-guiding function of thought can be understood in terms of attitudes towards propositional content and a calculus of means and ends. And if thought is essentially some kind of speech, it is natural to think of it as running through its elements in temporal sequence. Error will be a matter of incorrectly combining the items of some basic “vocabulary” into statements or of incorrect inferential operations among these statements.

By contrast, explaining cognition as a sort of inward seeing seems to require that cognitive processes be understood as similar in structure to perception.⁵ Thus the *visiones* of the visual model need to be in some sense likenesses of their referents. The visual cannot really be said to have a syntax, though it has a certain order which we suppose to be imposed by a combination of the way the objects of apprehension are, and the parameters of our apprehensive abilities. Augustine’s theory of vision, borrowed from the Stoics, describes vision as an activity originating in the soul, which uses the senses to gather information, so that vision for Augustine includes such phenomena as attention and selection and interpretation; still, though the mind’s eye may rove around and shift focus, the elements of a given *visio* should, it seems, be present simultaneously to the mind. On the visual account, the model for error is misperception.

The respective advantages of the linguistic and visual models are fairly obvious, but the thesis that thinking is both inner seeing and inner speaking is not very promising on the face of it. At a minimum, it is plausible to suppose that thought is both inner seeing and inner speaking only if: (i) each model is plausible and the combination of both models is more plausible than either alone (If Augustine has no reason for his manoeuvre other than his enthusiasm both for the visual model dear to the hearts of Platonists and for a philosophically informed understanding of the “verbalism” of the Gospel of John, then philosophers of mind can safely ignore his efforts); (ii) only if certain differences between these

⁴ See Cummins 1989: 6 for a brief summary of the working and advantages of a theory which treats mental representation in terms of symbols.

⁵ Cummins (1989: 6 ff.) treats image theories of mental representation as a variant of a more general kind of theory, the “mind-stuff inFORMed” theory, which is exactly the sort of theory we find in *De Trinitate* XI and XV.

activities as we normally think of them disappear in the “inner realm” (if inner speech and inner vision are not different by virtue of the fact that speech is syntactically structured and vision not; if it is not true “within” that speaking is temporally sequential whereas vision is simultaneous; if internal verbal symbols do not lack resemblance to what they signify, whereas *visiones* have it; and if *visiones* can somehow be connected with intended meaning, and not just with the context of information); and (iii) only if the differences which disappear can be shown to be accidental to the external, material context, and thus to be inessential (so that, for example, inner speaking and inner speech still have exactly those characteristics which are required for a system to be essentially linguistic.)

I want to argue first that in chapters x-xiv of *De Trinitate* XV, Augustine is working *inter alia* to make his theory of thinking meet these requirements.⁶ He first adduces scriptural passages to show that “inward speaking” is done by, or amounts to, thinking. In the Gospel, we hear that “certain scribes said within themselves ‘This man blasphemes’”; “*Quid est enim, Dixerunt intra se*”, Augustine asks, “*nisi cogitando?*” (*De Trin.* XV.x.17.20-23). And, he adds, Jesus refers to this silent speaking of theirs as thought: “*Denique sequitur: Et cum vidisset Iesus cogitationes eorum dixit: ‘Ut quid cogitatis mala in cordibus vestris?’*” (*De Trin.* XV.x.17.23-25). Augustine then argues the other way around that thinking must sometimes be understood as inner speech; Luke reports the same incident, he says, as follows: “*Coeperunt cogitare scribae et pharisaei dicentes: ‘Quis est hic qui loquitur blasphemias?’*” to which again Jesus is described as having responded, “*Quid cogitatis in cordibus uestris?*” (*De Trin.* XV.X.17.25-30). To speak within oneself and in one’s heart, Augustine concludes, is “*cogitando dicere*” (*De Trin.* XV.x.17. 33-34). Finally, he argues that it does not follow from the aptness of the verbal account that our *cogitationes* are not also *visiones*: “*Foris enim cum per corpus haec fiunt aliud est locutio, aliud uisio; intus autem cum cogitamus utrumque unum est*” (*De Trin.* XV.x.18.52-

⁶ I will not discuss in this paper Augustine’s larger theological agenda in *De Trinitate* XV. See John Cavadini 1992: 103-124, who argues, correctly, I believe, that *De Trinitate* is not designed to produce rational illumination with respect to the Trinity, but rather to show the insolvency of such an approach. For an extended treatment of Augustine’s use of the expression “*in aenigmate*” see Van Fleteren 1992: 86-90.

54). I will not examine these arguments in detail. They are important here because they show that Augustine is aware that he needs to argue explicitly both for the linguistic theory of thought and for its compatibility with the visual theory.

I want to turn instead first to an examination of the way in which inner speech, the language of thought, is introduced in *De Trinitate* XV. The thought which is formed (*cogitatio quippe formata*) from the thing we know, says Augustine, is a “*verbum quod in corde dicimus*,” which belongs neither to Latin nor to Greek nor to any other language (*De Trin.* XV.x.19.76-78). The choice of “*formata*” is significant for two reasons. First, because Augustine thereby chooses the terminology which he has consistently used in presenting the visual theory in *De Trinitate* XI (*De Trin.* XI.ii.2.10-35; XV.ii.5.124-131). Secondly, because ‘*formata*’ contrasts sharply with ‘*articulata*’, which is a technical term sometimes designating vocal sounds that have a phonetic structure and can be analyzed alphabetically, and sometimes describing a vocal sound that is regularly attached to a meaning, and sometimes carrying both meanings, i.e., designating the fact that words are analyzable into discriminate smaller elements so as to be regularly attached to meanings.⁷ It is, then, the *vox articulata* which enters into the vocabulary of some actual language and is thereby assigned to some part of speech with its characteristic syntactic potentials. The significance of Augustine’s choice of “*formata*” thus seems to be that “inner words” are presented as having structure and “syntactic definition” in the way in which *visiones* do; they reflect another structure, in this case, the structure of the *nota*, which are consistently understood by Augustine as *visiones*. For Augustine, then, our *nota* constitute a sort of vision or structural representation of the intrinsic structure and order of reality. And in its turn the *cogitatio*, the “inner word,” inherits this same order and structure;⁸ the in-

7 ‘*articulata*’ can have two distinct meanings. For grammarians like Priscian, articulation is a matter of being connected with a meaning. For dialecticians, articulation is a matter of being analyzable into written or sound components, i.e., into *litterae*. But for many theorists being “lettered” is held to be the key to belonging to a system of linguistic items which are regularly correlated with meanings. Augustine seems to be using ‘*articulata*’ in this combined sense. Cf. Tabarroni 1989; Eco et al. 1989.

8 Thought reflects the structure of the *nota*, selectively, since we are not always thinking about everything we know.

ner word, Augustine says, “eiusmodi sit omnino cuiusmodi est illa scientia de qua nascitur” (*De Trin.* XV.x.19.75-76). Again, “What is in the knowledge is also in the word, and what is not in the knowledge is also not in the word” (XV.xi.20.49-52).⁹

Inner speech is thus in some sort of ideal language. In *De Trinitate* XV we learn very little that is positive about how this ideal language compares to and gives rise to external languages. This, I think, is partly because Augustine is so concerned to safeguard the non-conventional and non-material character of the ideal language of thought – which, after all is crucial to his theological enterprise – that he is unwilling to speak about it using syntactic terminology from grammatical theory. In addition, Augustine is enormously impressed by the metaphysical anomaly which is effected in speaking when thought becomes embodied in external language. As in the *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Augustine here stresses the parallel between the exteriorization of internal speech into external speech with the Incarnation (*De Trin.* XV.xi.20.1-12). In consequence, I think, he is disinclined to think constructively either about the structural character of the language of thought or about the mechanics of the process of externalization.

I propose, then, that the issue of whether the “inner word” is syntactically structured is resolved by Augustine with a bold equation: “inner speech” (which of course lacks phonetic structure and presumably most features of surface syntax) has a “depth grammar” that is derived from the structure of reality of which it is a likeness, because it is also inner vision. The “inner language” of thought is thus understood by Augustine as a selective, second-order isomorphic representation of reality; in this sense it does resemble what it signifies. When we speak to others, this “depth grammar” is somehow embodied forth in the external *vox articulata*, which is defined in terms of the alphabet and syntactic rules of Latin, Greek, or whatever (*De Trin.* XV.x.19.64-72).

On the issue of whether inner speech is sequential or temporally ordered, Augustine must walk a kind of tightrope. On the one hand, Augustine is acutely aware that human thought, unlike di-

⁹ Cf. also *De Trin.* XV.xi.20.40-48, “Perueniendum est ergo ad illud verbum hominis ... quod omnia quibus significatur signa praecedat et gignitur de scientia quae manet in animo quando eadem scientia intus dicitur sicuti est. Simillima est enim visio cogitationis visioni scientiae.”

vine thought (*De Trin.* XV.xiv.23.25-31), is in some sense in time, even if it is not material. Our thoughts come and go; none is eternal because we can cease to think even of our own lives (*De Trin.* XV.xv.25.43-46); the various possibilities for thought are “quidam mentis nostrae quod hac atque hac uolubili quadam motione iactamus cum a nobis nunc hoc, nunc illud sicut inuentum fuerit uel occurrerit cogitatur” (*De Trin.* XV.xv.25.61-64). On the other hand, he is convinced that “inner speech” is not stretched out in time in the way that external speech is. True inner speech is different from even the mental image we have when we silently think through verbal utterances immediately prior to speaking them or run through “the numbers of syllables” or “the tunes of songs”; such thoughts inherit, to some extent at least, the temporal sequentiality of the corresponding actions. But neither the *nota* nor thought are corporeal in any sense, and so we must “pass beyond” this kind of sequentiality when considering the nature of such things. Briefly, I think that the balance which Augustine strikes here is this: thinking occurs in time, as does seeing, with its shifts of focus and attention. But at the moment when the mind’s attention arrives at some piece of knowledge, the elements of that knowledge are simultaneously grasped, so that thought grasps it in its entirety (*eius omnimodam similitudinem capiens; De Trin.* XV.xv.25.64-68), though its elements retain their order, just as when we see simultaneously the arch *and* Carthage *around it* when we see an arch in Carthage.¹⁰

Thus far, it is the verbal character of thought which has lost the most in the equation of inner seeing and inner speaking. But if we turn to *De Trinitate* XI, where Augustine discusses the visual model of thought, it becomes clear why the ultimate model for thought has to be essentially linguistic as well as visual. In short, to do the things Augustine wants to do with the “inner word,” he has got to have something like a full-fledged language of thought, though in

¹⁰ Similarly, the *sequence* of a logical theorem is neither inherently left-right nor before-after; both are the result of particular material conditions. Augustine stresses the structural parallel between the *species quae fit in sensu* and the *species quae fit in acie cogitantis*; both are *visiones*. Cf. *De Trin.* XI.ix.16.3-14. “quattuor species reperiuntur quasi graditum natae altera ex altera ... Ab specie quippe corporis quod cernitur exoritur ea quae fit in sensu cernentis, et ab hac ea quae fit in memoria, et ab hac ea quae fit in acie cogitantis... Visiones enim duae sunt, una sentientis, altera cogitantis.”

the discussion of Book XI, he often seems less aware of this than he should be.

In outer vision, there is an external object, "which we have sensed by seeing" (*corpus quod videndo sensimus*), by which the sense of the body is formed (*formata*) into a *visio* (*De Trin.* XI.ii.2.10-20). For Augustine, the process of vision is both active and passive. The whole process by which sense is directed to the object whose representation (*species*) informs it is effected by an "intention of the mind" (*animi intentio*; *De Trin.* XI.ii.2.32) or "will of the mind" (*voluntas animi*; *De Trin.* XI.ii.5.127-128). It is clearly in virtue of this *intentio animi* that the mind pays attention to one thing rather than another in the visual field, causes the eyes to focus on some things, shuts out the sight of others, etc. It is thus in virtue of this "intentionality" that vision is selective and directional; meaning on the perceptual level is a matter of being an intentional object, i.e., of being something to which the gaze of the sense power is directed and upon which it is focussed. Thus perceptual meaningfulness is embodied literally in physical directionality, though the *intentio* is in essence spiritual (*De Trin.* XI.ii.2.30-35).¹¹

In inner vision, there is again a "trinity": the representation (*species*) in memory by which the gaze (*acies*)¹² of the mind is formed into an inner *visio* which resembles the representation

11 On the level of memory, it is again the intention of the will which causes some things to be remembered, and others not to be remembered; "the will turns memory aside from sense when, intent (*intenta*) upon something else, it does not allow things which are present to cling to it." (*De Trin.* XI.viii.15.86-88). Memory figures prominently in the earlier discussion as the repository of cognitions which the mind takes up into thought; this "*memoria retinens speciem illam*" plays very little role in the Book XV discussion, where Augustine tends to speak simply of "*scientia quae manet in animo*" (*De Trin.* XV.xi.20.45-47). Moreover, thought itself is described as remembering in XI.7, but not in XV, where Augustine clearly means to use memory in a much more restricted sense, as in the discussion of reciting from memory (*De Trin.* XV.vii.13.92-107).

12 I have not found '*acies*' used precisely in this sense in Quintilian; but cf. *Institutio Oratoria* XI.ii. 10: "Nec dubium est quin plurimum in hac parte valeat mentis intentio et velut acies luminum a prospectu rerum, quas intuetur, non aversa." Both '*acies mentis*' and '*acies ingeniorum*' occur in Cicero (*De Oratore* II.160; 124), but Cicero's usage most often takes '*acies*' as a battle-line metaphor. For Augustine, it seems to have become a technical term designating literally the physical ray sent out by the soul in the process of vision, then metaphorically, the "gaze" of the mind itself directed to memory and to the *nota*.

(*intus similis visio*). It is again an “intention of the will” which turns the mental gaze to the representation which is stored in memory, effecting the transition of information into meaning. When the mind’s gaze is no longer informed by a given representation lodged in the memory, then what it represents is no longer being thought of, but the mind’s gaze is turned to something else, “quo rursus conversa fuerit ut alia cogitatio fiat” (*De Trin.* XI.iii.6.35-41). Just as it is the intention of the will (*intentio voluntatis*) which literally turns the physical gaze towards and away from corporeal objects, so it is an intention of the will which turns the gaze of the mind towards representations in memory or averts it from them; “iam porro ab eo quod in memoria est animi aciem uelle auertere nihil est aliud quam non inde cogitare” (*De Trin.* XI.viii.15.105-107).

Since Augustine presents thought as visual in the sense that it is a functional isomorph of vision, it is to be expected that his account will have problems precisely with respect to those cognitive functions for which there is no visual analogue.

Because the thought which arises from a representation in memory is really distinct from the memory it arises from, says Augustine, the thought can diverge from sense experience, even if a memory cannot. My mind can will to combine a shape which I have come to have in thought by virtue of seeing it (*illam figuram quam videndo cognovimus*) with a color gotten from another experience, so as to get, for example, a thought of a black swan (*De Trin.* XI.x.17.12-17), or a square or green sun (*De Trin.* XI.viii.13.29-32). In thought we can think many suns when we have seen only one; extend any body whatsoever to the size of the earth; divide the smallest bodies infinitely – for even if imagination cannot keep pace, reason can carry on a process, e.g., dividing, without ceasing (*De Trin.* XI.x.17.25-35). In sum, though we can remember only what the mind has drawn into memory from sense, in our thoughts these representations may be “multiplied and varied innumerably and without end” (*De Trin.* XI.iii.13.14-20). Moreover, if someone tells a story about things in his experience, even though I have no representations in my memory of these particular items as they are related to each other in his story, I can, it seems, understand his story.

In Book XI, Augustine seems to think that the visual-mnemonic theory can explain some of these phenomena. When faced with

the story about things with which I am unfamiliar, he says, I would indeed not be able to understand the story, were it not that I “remember singular things generally” (*De Trin.* XI.viii.14.51-54). About other problems he seems less optimistic; he seems to abandon the attempt to use the visual model to explain reason’s grasp of infinity or its operation of infinitely dividing the smallest quantities (*De Trin.* XI.x.17.30-35). Still, I think that Augustine may underestimate the seriousness of the problem presented by reason’s operations like dividing, extending, or multiplying. In the case of extending or dividing to infinity he seems to run together conceiving of infinitely divided reality and reason’s operation of dividing infinitely. He thus fails to see, I think, that it is precisely the synthetic operation of reason as such, and not just an operation which is infinitely iterated, which poses a problem for the visual-mnemonic theory.

Similarly, in *De Trinitate* XI, Augustine does not seem to appreciate the seriousness of the problem posed by thoughts about black swans and square suns; he seems to think that it suffices to show where the mind could come up with the components. But it is in the end not clear that there is a perceptual analogue to the arbitrary process of recombination. Granted, just as perception is an active process, thoroughly conditioned by will and intention, inner vision will have a similar admixture of will; it is will which “applies the gaze of thought to memory” and pulls it away, just as it is will which directs us to avert our eyes and hold our noses to shut out unwanted corporeal sensations. Suppose that’s so. Still, the mind’s synthesizing action of “staining” the swan’s shape with black color seems to be different in kind from the function of directing attention toward and away from visual objects and causing some of them – and not others – to be stored in memory.

As an aside, let us note that Augustine does understand the seriousness of the problem posed by the action-guiding and action-generating character of thought; he has already introduced the verbal model in Book IX to deal with it. Thus the visual-mnemonic model presented in Book XI has clear deficiencies; and at least in the case of infinitely repeated operations, and the action-guiding character of thought, Augustine is explicitly aware of these shortcomings.

In *De Trinitate* XV Augustine does not return to precisely the problems he poses for the visual model in Book XI. Still, it is sig-

nificant, I think, that in *De Trinitate* XV, Augustine uses the verbal theory to deal with the same sorts of deficiencies. In the course of explaining the gap between man's mind and the divine nature, Augustine gives a brief account of three human phenomena which have no counterpart in the divine nature: error, doubt, and lying. In each case he is concerned to explain what it is to which the mind gives assent, i.e., what "word" it can be that is in the mind in such cases, if the inner word arises "de sola scientia nostra" (*De Trin.* XV.xv.24.1-7). The phenomena of doubt and lying are particularly interesting for our purposes. In the case of doubt, he says, our "word" is not "about what we doubt", but "de ipsa dubitatione" (*De Trin.* XV.xv.24.7-12) Thus, even if p is false, I have a true "word" within, so long as what I believe is 'I am uncertain about p ', which is precisely what the cautious believer would assert, if asked whether p is true. The liar, who knowingly and willingly says something false, presents a different sort of problem. According to Augustine, the liar does have something true in mind; the "word" that the liar has in mind is the truth 'I am lying about p ', although what the liar intends to say to a hearer and does say, i.e., ' p ', is false (*De Trin.* XV.xv.24.12-17). I think that there is something very wrong with this brief treatment of doubt and lying, and that the problem has to do with the tacit persistence of the visual model. What I want to stress, though, is that Augustine's treatment of cases in which there is a mismatch between reality and thought or between thought and language is here couched in terms of propositions and propositional operators; in the case of doubt or lying, the "inner word" is not a simple expression, but a proposition *cum* epistemic or alethic operator. It is easy to see why Augustine forsakes the visual-mnemonic model when he sets out to deal with such cases.

In *De Trinitate* XV.xii, Augustine also uses the verbal model to give an account of intellectual operations. In answer to the sceptic who alleges that we can know nothing, Augustine argues that I can know that I live and that I know that I live, and that I know that I know that I live, and so on to infinity. I also know, he says, that the series is infinite and that I can neither actually comprehend nor count off such a series (*De Trin.* XV.xii.21.36-44). Such a recursive iteration of epistemic operators and descriptions of infinite series seem obviously to require the verbal model, as does grasping that the operation is infinitely iterated and explicating my cognitive re-

relationship to it. Augustine's discussion is, not surprisingly, in terms of *verba*, not *visiones*.

Finally, with respect to the influence of thought on action, we find in *De Trinitate* XV a cautious return to the doctrine of Book IX, that the inner word "is knowledge with love" (*De Trin.* IX.x.15.29-30). Not all of our words end in works," says Augustine, "but there is no work of ours which is not preceded by a word" (*De Trin.* XV.xi.20.68-70). Here, as in the *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, and in Book IX, "word" is being used explicitly to include the intention to act, the plan of action, the design to be executed. As Augustine sees it, projection and implementation of schemata and the calculus of means and ends seem to lend themselves more to being thought of as verbal, than as visual, and throughout his discussion of action-generating intentions Augustine uses verbal terminology.

It is clear enough, then, that if Augustine insists on using the visual model, he must at certain crucial junctures use the verbal model as well. (And that juncture comes pretty quickly, because it is not just the infinitely iterated operation which requires the verbal model, but most synthetic operations.) There is thus a very strong motivation, philosophically speaking, for Augustine to avail himself of the advantages of the verbal model so as to account for *ficta*, intellectual operations, propositional attitudes, and the action-guiding role of thought. He is unwilling to rely on that model entirely. Even if the verbal model were as apt as the visual model for explaining phenomena like attention, focus, and recognition – which it is not – still, as Augustine stresses repeatedly, the external linguistic symbol is only arbitrarily¹³ connected with what it signifies. It is apparently Augustine's view that linguistic symbols are *as such* no more than arbitrarily connected to their referents, and this functional characteristic of the verbal model is completely unacceptable to Augustine as an account of the connection between thought and reality. What is wanted instead is a linguistic-

13 We hear little in *De Trinitate* XV of the explicitly conventionalist account of the various languages which Augustine gives in *De Doctrina Christiana*, save an occasional reference to the inner word – the true word – being given external expression either in Latin or Greek (Cf. *De Trin.* XV.x.19.76-80). This is perhaps because Augustine here focuses on the act of speaking, in which the ontological disparity between thought and vocal sound is overcome.

like set of operations which employ a “vocabulary” and basic syntax formed directly from knowledge, itself understood on the visual model, by a process which is best described as “visual” in that it preserves an isomorphism between object and representation. Such verbal symbols are in fact also *visiones*.

There are plenty of medieval philosophers who take up Augustine’s theory of the *verbum* which is also a *visio*. It will be obvious from what I have been saying that I am much in sympathy with a second way of understanding *De Trinitate*, i.e. with finding there the impetus to a full-fledged theory of mental language and trying to work out its syntax and semantics by a process of idealization or abstraction from external languages. Moreover, though Augustine’s approach is, on the face of it, fairly far from the modist conception of a triad of essentially identical modes, I am not sure *how* far; a lot depends on what is made of the Augustinian notion of “sameness of form.” Whether Augustine has a workable theory or not is, of course, another matter; a lot hangs on this business of “sameness of form” in external and internal language, on whether Augustine can make out how it is that the inner word is essentially language while lacking many of the most prominent features of external language. But, of course, a theory does not need to be philosophically sound to be extremely influential.

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