Knowing Oneself Through God: Psychoanalyzing the Conversion of St. Augustine

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Question
Is it most important to know God or oneself?

Introduction
St. Augustine’s conversion, detailed in Confessions, includes elements similar to Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis as described in Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis. This paper explores the outcomes of Augustine’s search for truth and God and the outcomes of psychotherapy for Freud’s patients.

Summary
• Applying psychoanalysis to Augustine’s confessions
  • Emotional attachment to past
  • “Talking cure” with audience
  • Subconscious repression of strong emotions due to societal pressures
• Outcomes: sublimation and validation
• Relationship between religion and introspection

“‘They have, indeed, driven it out of consciousness... apparently saved themselves a great deal of psychic pain, but in the unconscious the suppressed wish still exists, only waiting for its chance to become active...’ Sigmund Freud

“For see, thou wast within and I was without, and I sought thee out there... Thou didst touch me, and I burned for thy peace.” St. Augustine of Hippo

Conclusions
• St. Augustine’s conversions fits Freud’s psychoanalytic model in symptoms, treatment, and resolution
• Attempts to “know God” as Augustine does are conduits for knowing oneself, accomplishing what Freud does through psychoanalysis
• Through knowing oneself, one comes to know God, and vice versa

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References