

The Role of the *regio egestatis* in Augustine's *Confessions*

In his *Confessions*, Augustine uses the phrase *regio egestatis* (region of lack, 2.10.18) not only to portray himself as empty within, but also to express that he has nothing to impart or give to others. Augustine feels empty, unfulfilled, and absent from God, so he searches for satisfying nourishment. What he does then is fill himself with the wrong substances, such as material things, the wrong spiritual faith, and his own ambitions. The *regio egestatis* changes into a *regio dissimilitudinis* (region of unlikeness, 7.10.16) and then a *regio ubertatis* (region of abundance, 9.10.24) when he feels he has obtained spiritual fulfillment. Much research has been done about Augustine's *regio dissimilitudinis* due to the phrase's connection to Plato's ἀνομοιότητος ἄπειρον (land of unlikeness, 273d) in the *Statesman*. However, the uses of *regio* before and after this "region of unlikeness" are important in Augustine's journey and serve as a similar metaphor to link various episodes to narrate his conversion.

In Book II, Augustine describes himself as a *regio egestatis* when he realizes that he stole pears from a garden for no reason. Part of his recognition was that he was continually seeking material goods, rather than spiritual ones. He uses the imagery of his own body, hunger, lust, and appetite to strengthen his *need* to steal the pears to fulfill some inner itch (2.8.16). When Augustine encounters a beggar in Book VI, he realizes that he has been pursuing the wrong fulfillments in life, seeking to become famous, rather than a closeness to God (6.6.9). Despite his conversion to become a catechumen in the Catholic Church, he has not changed internally. He begins to question his choices in life, and he realizes he has been teaching not to educate, but to be pleasing to others (ibid.).

In Books VII and VIII, Augustine's *regio egestatis* changes to a *regio dissimilitudinis* as he realizes his distance from God, and a *regio ubertatis* when he has his transcendental

experience with his mother (Book IX). In order to reach a state similar to God (*regio similitudinis*), Augustine needs to look within himself to discover the state of his soul, how it differed from God, and that he needed to change. Augustine has this moment of looking within himself in Book VIII when he relates how God forced him to look at himself after the story of the Ponticianus (8.16.14ff). What he sees is vile and base. Augustine describes this scene as almost a battle where God pits him against himself. What he sees within is not described in terms of his relationship with God (i.e. *regiones egestatis et dissimilitudinis*), but it is his pure, very real self, and it terrifies him. This experience seems to have pushed Augustine to convert to Christianity completely when he finally embraces celibacy, but he does not reach the *regio ubertatis* until Book IX. Guided by his mother, Augustine reaches the “land of abundance” and has bridged both his *regio egestatis* and *regio dissimilitudinis* to transcend to God.

The *regio egestatis* that Augustine invokes in Book II is recalled multiple times throughout the *Confessions* as a reminder of Augustine’s emptiness and his search for knowledge outside of himself rather than a preferable turning within. The beggar scene in Book VI encourages the reader to reflect back on Augustine’s ‘fall’ with the theft of the pears as a reminder that Augustine is still unfulfilled and has only descended further into his abyss. Augustine begins to emerge from this abyss throughout Books VII to IX as he transforms into a *regio dissimilitudinis* and finally obtains a *regio ubertatis* in the scene with his mother at Ostia (Book IX). Augustine uses the imagery of *regio* as a way to describe his inner state of being and his relationship with God.