

What Thought-Leaders Can Learn from St. Augustine

Public discourse is at a nadir. There is plenty of debate, especially over politics and morality. But it is generating way more heat than light.

People on all sides are frustrated with their opponents. “Why don’t they see the light?”

For any single interlocutor, one possible answer is that the person is not actually seeking enlightenment. In that case, trying to share whatever light you have with him is futile. Enlightenment cannot be imposed upon another against his will.

But another possibility is that the other person is not seeking enlightenment from *you* specifically, because they don’t see you as having much light to offer.

As Leonard E. Read wrote:

No person will knowingly seek light from one who has no light.

Read pointed out that enlightenment-seekers are drawn to teachers who manifest mastery. And mastery is an outgrowth of dedication to *self*-enlightenment. Read cited St. Augustine as an example:

St. Augustine is a case in point. Deeply contemplative and introspective, he experienced insights and understanding far surpassing those of most people. Bent on his own improvement, the expansion of his own consciousness, he became a master of exposition; that is, he learned to explain the truth which came into his possession. In numerous writings, among them his Confessions, he made available to others that which he had first made his own. Today, more than fifteen centuries

later, this is among the most widely purchased of all autobiographies! Here we observe the power of attraction extending itself remarkably in time.

The best thing you can do to aid in the enlightenment of others is to first and foremost tend to your own light. Seek improvement in your own understanding through study and reflection. And share your understanding with others primarily for the sake of further improving your understanding (by formulating and testing it), not for the sake of fixing theirs.

The more you do that, the more that genuine enlightenment-seekers will be attracted to you as a teacher because of your evident mastery and dedication to the truth. They will be drawn by your light to share in your light.

Read closed [one of his lectures](#) by saying:

If you want to bring forth the perception of others, the formula is simple: just see how much enlightenment you can acquire and share.

In this context, Read was fond of citing an old English maxim:

It is light that brings forth the eye.

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