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BEAUTY SPEAKING: BEAUTY AND LANGUAGE IN PLOTINUS AND AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

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BEAUTY SPEAKING: BEAUTY AND LANGUAGE IN PLOTINUS AND
AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By

Anthony John Thomas IV

Lexington, Kentucky

Co-Directors: Dr. Terence Tunberg

and Dr. David Bradshaw

Lexington, Kentucky

2015

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

BEAUTY SPEAKING: BEAUTY AND LANGUAGE IN PLOTINUS AND AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Much has been said about the influence of Plotinus, the Platonist philosopher, on the ideas of Augustine of Hippo, the Western Church Father whose writings had the largest impact on Western Europe in the Middle Ages. This thesis considers both writers' ideas concerning matter, evil, and language. It then considers the way in which these writers' ideas influenced their style of writing in the *Enneads* and the *Confessions*. Plotinus' more straightforward negative attitude towards the material word and its relationship to the One ultimately makes his writing more academic and less emotionally powerful. Augustine's more complicated understanding of the material world and its relationship to God results in a more mystical and more emotionally powerful style, which derives its effectiveness especially from its use of antithesis and the first and second person.

KEYWORDS: Plotinus, Augustine of Hippo, *Enneads*, *Confessions*, Platonism

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04/10/2015

BEAUTY SPEAKING: BEAUTY AND LANGUAGE IN PLOTINUS AND
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Mi Carissima, talis es, qualis numquam fuit.

Acknowledgments

In writing my thesis, the guidance and support of Dr. Terence Tunberg and Dr. David Bradshaw, my thesis directors were of particular assistance. I further appreciate the review of my thesis by Dr. Terence Tunberg, Dr. David Bradshaw, and Dr. David Hunter. Their comments and questions during my thesis defense have been of particular assistance in sharpening my ideas. I would also like to express my appreciation for Dr. Bradshaw allowing me to audit his course on Neo-Platonism in the fall. This course was especially helpful in developing my understanding of Plotinus' thought.

I would further more like to express my deep appreciation to my wife, Rebekah Thomas, whose emotional support and willingness to discuss my thesis have helped to sustain me through the at times stressful process of writing a thesis. I would also like to express my appreciation for my parents' support for my interest in Augustine and classical literature.

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Section One: Introduction

A great deal has been written in the past century or so about the extent of the influence of Plotinus on Augustine of Hippo's ideas.¹ Less, however, has been written about the similarities or differences of style between the two authors. This is certainly understandable given that Augustine would have read Plotinus in Latin translation, which would dilute something of the character of his style. Still, it is worth considering what influence the differences in their ideas might have on the style of these two great intellectuals. In an attempt to address this lack in some small way, in this paper I will first consider each man's understanding of the material world, evil, and words, and then consider their styles. Ultimately, I hope to show, through close analyses of *Enneads* I.6.7 and *Confessions* X.27.38, that Augustine's more emotional, more dramatic style arises from his belief in a transcendent God, Who, though transcendent, nevertheless creates the material world as good, while Plotinus' simpler, more negative attitude towards the material world leads to a less emotionally powerful style.

¹ For a review of some of the main currents of thought concerning Augustine and Platonism, see John O'Meara's article "The Neoplatonism of Saint Augustine," in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1982), 34-41.

Section Two: Plotinus on the Material World

This paper will restrict itself to matter in the sensory world and will not discuss matter in the intelligible world. Plotinus begins *Enneads* II.4 “On Matter” with what he takes to be the definition of matter generally accepted by philosophers, Τὴν λεγομένην ὕλην ὑποκείμενον τι καὶ ὑποδοχὴν εἰδῶν, “What is called ‘matter’ is said to be some sort of ‘substrate’ and ‘receptacle’ of forms.”² Matter, then, according to Plotinus, is something in need of a form. Matter is somehow influenced by the forms, underlying the material world and thus necessary for the forms to be in the material world. Plotinus expands on this idea of matter as ἡ τῶν σωμάτων ὑποδοχή, “the receptacle of bodies.”³ Assuming the veracity of the ancient elemental theory and the possibility of bodies changing from one element to another, Plotinus asserts that matter is what stays constant and underlies the body. This is necessary because otherwise changes happening to material bodies would mean that one thing was entirely destroyed and another created entirely anew.⁴ In order for matter to be able to survive the changes that occur between the elements and be what underlies the change without being itself changed, matter must be ἀόριστον,⁵ “without boundaries” or “indeterminate.”⁶ This is because change occurs when the εἶδος, the form, which is what imparts determination and boundary to a thing, changes. Matter, then, is “not form,” μὴ εἶδος.⁷ Since the Forms are what make up the

² Plotinus, *Enneads* II.4: “On Matter,” in *Plotinus: Enneads II*, ed. and trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1.1-2.106-7.

³ *Enneads* II.4.6.1.116-7.

⁴ *Enneads* II.4.6.2-9.116-9.

⁵ *Enneads* II.4.6.20.118.

⁶ *LSJ* s.v. ἀόριστος, A.

⁷ *Enneads* II.4.6.20.118-9.

Intellect, it seems that matter, lacking form, is the opposite of or at least opposed to the intelligible world, towards which Neoplatonism strives.

The weakness of matter and of the sensory world can even be seen in *Enneads* I.6. In this treatise, Plotinus makes a distinction between things in the higher world, which are κάλλη αὐτά, beauties in themselves, and bodies, which are οὐ παρ' αὐτῶν τῶν ὑποκειμένων καλά...ἀλλὰ μεθέξει, “not beautiful from their own substrate...but by participation.”⁸ It should be noted that, while A.H. Armstrong, editing the Loeb edition of Plotinus’ *Enneads*, here translates ὑποκειμένων as “from the nature of the objects themselves,”⁹ this same word in *Enneads* II.4 means and is translated by Armstrong as “substrate.”¹⁰ There is in this part of the text, moreover, a similar context to *Enneads* II.4 since here too, Plotinus is talking about matter. It is also worth noting that Plotinus emphasizes that not only the source of beauty in the sensory world is different, but also the quality of the beauty. He does so by referring to the higher beauties using the noun for beauty, whereas he refers to sensory beauties using the adjective for beautiful. Thus, intelligible beauties are more properly beauty than sensory beauties, which only have beauty as a quality, something that can be lost. This potential for sensory beauty to be lost is explicitly stated when Plotinus writes Ἐώματα μὲν γὰρ τὰ αὐτὰ ὅτε μὲν καλά, ὅτε δὲ οὐ καλὰ φαίνεται, ὡς ἄλλου ὄντος τοῦ σώματα εἶναι, ἄλλου δὲ τοῦ καλά, “The same bodies appear sometimes beautiful, sometimes not beautiful, so that their being bodies is one thing, their being beautiful another.”¹¹ Sensory things can be

⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads* I.6 “On Beauty,” in *Plotinus Porphyry on Plotinus and Ennead I*, ed. and trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1.13-4.232.

⁹ *Enneads* I.6.1.233.

¹⁰ *Enneads* II.4.1.107.

¹¹ *Enneads* I.6, 1.14-7.232-3.

beautiful at one time and not at another since being beautiful is not proper to being a body. Thus, sensory objects are capable of being ugly; indeed, they are ugly to the extent that they do not participate in form. More than that, sensory matter without form, that is to say, pure matter, is described as τὸ πάντα ἀίσχρὸν,¹² utter ugliness. In between this utter ugliness and sheer beauty is the partial beauty of most or all of the sensory world, which is τὸ μὴ κρατηθὲν ὑπὸ μορφῆς καὶ λόγου, “not completely dominated by shape and formative power.”¹³ The reason for this is that matter cannot or does not entirely receive the form, thus preventing the sensory world from entirely participating in and imaging the intelligible world.¹⁴ Thus, for Plotinus, since matter is formless and even contrary to form, it gets in the way of the form impressed upon it, so that the material world fails to sufficiently convey the truth and the beauty of the higher world.

¹² *Enneads* I.6, 2.16-7.238.

¹³ *Enneads* I.6, 2.17-8.238-9.

¹⁴ *Enneads* I.6, 2.18-9.238.

Section Three: Plotinus on Evil

Plotinus' negativity toward the sensory world can also be seen in *Enneads* I.8 "On What Are Evils." In trying to determine what evil is, Plotinus writes,

Λείπεται τοίνυν, εἴπερ ἔστιν, ἐν τοῖς μὴ οὖσιν εἶναι οἶον εἶδος τι τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ὃν καὶ περί τι τῶν μεμιγμένων τῶ μὴ ὄντι ἢ ὁπωσοῦν κοινωνούντων τῶ μὴ ὄντι,

"So it remains that if evil exists, it must be among non-existent things, as a sort of form of non-existence, and pertain to one of the things that are mingled with non-being or somehow share in non-being."¹⁵

For something to be an evil thing, then, it must have a share in non-being. As Dominic O'Meara, speaking about this passage, remarks in *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads*, "The notion of evil as defined by Plotinus as the 'privation' or absence of good is found in Christian thinkers influenced by Plotinus such as Gregory of Nyssa or Augustine. But by 'privation of the good' the Christian theologians mean, not an existing reality, but a willful turning away of the soul from god. However, evil exists for Plotinus, it is matter, even though he also finds, as we shall see, a turning away of soul from the good."¹⁶ O'Meara, moreover, defines matter as "metaphysical evil," writing, "As an existing reality which is part of the universe and is the principle of other evils (including moral evil), we might call matter 'metaphysical evil.'"¹⁷ Plotinus goes on to further specify that non-being here means something that is ὡς εἰκῶν τοῦ ὄντος ἢ καὶ ἔτι μᾶλλον μὴ ὄν, "like an image of being or something still more non-existent."¹⁸ For Plotinus, the sensory world is just such an image of Being:

¹⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* I.8 "On What Are Evils," in *Plotinus Porphyry on Plotinus and Ennead I*, ed. and trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 3.4-7.282-3.

¹⁶ Dominic O'Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 82.

¹⁷ O'Meara, 82.

¹⁸ *Enneads* I.8.3.8-9.282-3.

Τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ τὸ αἰσθητὸν πᾶν καὶ ὅσα περὶ τὸ αἰσθητὸν πάθη ἢ ὕστερον
τι τούτων καὶ ὡς συμβεβηκὸς τούτις ἢ ἀρχὴ τούτων ἢ ἐν τι τῶν
συμπληρούντων τοῦτο τοιοῦτον ὄν,

“The whole world of sense is non-existent in this way, and also all sense-
experience and whatever is posterior or incidental to this, or its principle, or one
of the elements which go to make up the whole which is of this non-existent
kind.”¹⁹

The sensory world, then, since it is non-existent, is evil to Plotinus. It fails to participate much in Being, which is the Intellect and Beauty, but rather participates in matter. As Benjamin Fuller in *The Problem of Evil in Plotinus* notes of material bodies, “Evil inheres in them as a result of their participation in Matter. Hence their nature is such that it has no true form, is bereft of life, full of internal strife, disordered in its own motion, a hindrance to the soul and soul’s activities, and in constant Heracleitean flux.”²⁰ The sensory world, then cannot fully or clearly convey the Intellect because it does not fully participate in Being and is consequently disordered. Moreover, matter and the material world lead, as O’Meara writes, to moral evil, about which more will be said shortly.

Nor does the sensory world participate fully in Beauty and consequently it cannot draw the minds or hearts of those who encounter it up to the intelligible world and even less to the One, Who is beyond even Being. This can be seen more clearly when Plotinus writes,

ἔχει μὲν γὰρ εἶδος τι οὐκ ἀληθινὸν ἐστέρηται τε ζωῆς φθείρει τε ἄλληλα
φορὰ τε παρ’ αὐτῶν ἄτακτος ἐμπόδια τε ψυχῆς πρὸς τὴν αὐτῆς
ἐνέργειαν φεύγει τε οὐσίαν ἀεὶ ῥέοντα, δεύτερον κακόν,

“For bodies have a sort of form which is not true form, and they are deprived of life, and in their disorderly motion they destroy each other, and they hinder the

¹⁹ *Enneads* I.8.3.9-13.282-3.

²⁰ B.A.G. Fuller, *The Problem of Evil in Plotinus* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 229.

soul in its proper activity, and they evade reality in their continual flow, being secondary evil.”²¹

Bodies do not fully participate in the Forms, but rather have false forms, making them especially deceptive to souls. It is because of this that bodies get in the way of the soul, preventing it from fully actualizing its proper activity, which is the pursuit of and contemplation of the intelligible world and what is beyond the intelligible, the One.

Bodies get in the soul’s way when the soul partakes in the unmeasuredness of bodies.²²

This happens because the soul shifts its focus away from οὐσία, Being, which is the Intellect or the intelligible world, and towards γένεσις, becoming, the sensible world.²³

Thus, the soul’s contemplative power is shifted away from its proper object, which gives it form and order, to an improper object, which gives it formlessness. Speaking of matter, Plotinus says, ἐξομοιοῖ ἑαυτῇ πᾶν ὅ τι ἂν αὐτῆς προσάψηται ὁπωσοῦν, “it makes everything which comes into contact with it in any way like itself.”²⁴ Plotinus writes something similar in *Enneads* II.4 of matter, which is τὸ ἄπειρον, “On Matter,” Καὶ τὸ ἄπειρον δὲ προσελθὸν τῷ πεπερασμένῳ ἀπολεῖ αὐτοῦ τὴν φύσιν, “And the unlimited when it comes to that which is limited will destroy its nature.”²⁵ Thus, matter, and consequently the material world, is capable of greatly harming the soul in its ascent to the Intellect and the One.

²¹ *Enneads* I.8.4.2-6.286-7.

²² *Enneads* I.8.4.7-18.286.

²³ *Enneads* I.8.4.17-21.286.

²⁴ *Enneads* I.8.4.24-5.288-9.

²⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads* II.4 “On Matter,” in Plotinus II (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 15.16-7.144-5.

Matter, then, is not only metaphysical evil, primary evil, but it leads to evil in the soul, or moral evil. Plotinus discusses this moral evil in *Enneads* IV.8 “The Descent of the Soul into Bodies”:

ὅταν δὴ τοῦτο διὰ χρόνων ποιῆ φεύγουσα τὸ πᾶν καὶ τῆ διακρίσει
ἀποστᾶσα καὶ μὴ πρὸς τὸ νοητὸν βλέπει, μέρος γενομένη μονούται τε καὶ
ἀσθενεῖ καὶ πολυπραγμονεῖ καὶ πρὸς μέρος βλέπει καὶ τῷ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὅλου
χωρισμῷ ἐνός τινος ἐπιβάσα καὶ τὸ ἄλλο πᾶν φυγούσα,

“Now when a soul does this for a long time, flying from the All and standing apart in distinctness, and does not look towards the intelligible, it has become a part and is isolated and weak and fusses and looks towards a part and in its separation from the whole it embarks on one single thing and flies from everything else.”²⁶

Thus, when the soul spends too long with matter and the material world, it is made weak and gets distracted from the higher world of spiritual realities, τὸ πᾶν, “The All,” by its love and fascination with the sensory world. A little further on, he writes,

ἔνθα καὶ συμβαίνει αὐτῇ τὸ λεγόμενον πτερορρυῆσαι καὶ ἐν δεσμοῖς τοῖς
τοῦ σώματος γενέσθαι ἀμαρτούση τοῦ ἀβλαβοῦς τοῦ ἐν τῇ διοικήσει τοῦ
κρείττονος, ὃ ἦν παρὰ τῆ ψυχῇ τῆ ὅλη,

“Here the ‘moulting’, as it is called, happens to it, and the being in the fetters of the body, since it has missed the immunity which it had when it was with the universal soul directing the better part [of the universe].”²⁷

Thus, this distraction from the higher realities leads to the soul being chained to a particular body, rather than directing all of the universe. Moreover, this being chained to the body means that the soul is πρὸς τῷ δεσμῷ οὔσα καὶ τῆ αἰσθήσει ἐνεργούσα διὰ τὸ κωλύεσθαι τῷ νῶ ἐνεργεῖν καταρχάς, “is engaged with its fether, and acts by sense because its new beginning prevents it from acting by intellect.”²⁸ Thus, the soul,

²⁶ Plotinus, *Enneads* IV.8 “On The Descent of the Soul into Bodies,” in Plotinus IV, ed. and trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 4.13-8.408-9.

²⁷ *Enneads* IV.8.4.22-5.408-11.

²⁸ *Enneads* IV.8.4.27-8.410-1.

becoming fascinated by material things, can only operate in terms of the sensory world, the world composed by material objects, because this fascination with material things hinders it from perceiving the spiritual realities, where lies true Beauty, as opposed to the false allure of mere sensory beauty. The material world, then, is not merely a positive evil for Plotinus, but it is even the cause of moral evil in the soul.

It may be objected that there are points at which Plotinus presents a more positive view of the material universe, as, for example, when he is arguing against the Gnostics; his overall attitude, however, towards matter is entirely negative, as has been shown. In the case of *Enneads* II.9 “Against the Gnostics,” the treatise is, as its title suggests, part of a polemical tract aimed against the Gnostics, which A.H. Armstrong refers to as an “un-Hellenic heresy (as it was from the Platonist as well as the orthodox Christian point of view).”²⁹ Plotinus is more concerned with combatting an opposing philosophy than with presenting his precise ideas about evil and the material world. As Armstrong notes when discussing the Platonists’ objection to the Gnostics, “Worst of all, they despise and hate the material universe and deny its goodness and the goodness of its maker. This for a Platonist is utter blasphemy, and all the worse because it obviously derives to some extent from the sharply other-worldly side of Plato’s own teaching (e.g. in the *Phaedo*).”³⁰ Thus, this tendency to a negative attitude towards the material world is clearly a feature of Platonism, albeit one that Plotinus does not want to fully admit, since it would, at least according to the Gnostic formulation, require that the One and Intellect be less than entirely good.

²⁹ A. H. Armstrong, Introduction to *Enneads* II.9 “Against the Gnostics,” by Plotinus, in *Ennead II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 220.

³⁰ Introduction to *Enneads* II.9, 221.

Moreover, Armstrong acknowledges that the positive attitude displayed in this treatise is more often a feature of Christianity than Platonism when he writes, “At this point in his attack Plotinus comes very close in some ways to the orthodox Christian opponents of Gnosticism, who also insist that this world is the good work of God in his goodness.”³¹ Even the passage in *Enneads* I.8 “On What are Evils” to which O’Meara refers when he writes, “The same very positive attitude to the world is found a little later in the last words of the treatise where Plotinus explores the idea of matter as absolute evil,”³² seems more to serve to illustrate the opposition of the good of the spiritual world to the evil of the material world than that the material world is good in itself. The passage to which he refers is I.8.15.23-9, the very end of *Enneads* I.8:

Τὸ δὲ κακὸν οὐ μόνον ἐστὶ κακὸν διὰ δύναμιν ἀγαθοῦ καὶ φύσιν· ἐπεὶ περ ἐφάνη ἐξ ἀνάγκης, περιληφθὲν δεσμοῖς τισι καλοῖς, οἷα δεσμῶταί τινες χρυσῶ, κρύπτεται τούτοις, ἵν’ ἄμουσα μὴ ὀρώτο τοῖς θεοῖς, καὶ ἄνθρωποι ἔχοιεν μὴ αἰεὶ τὸ κακὸν βλέπειν, ἀλλ’ ὅταν καὶ βλέπωσιν, εἰδῶλοισι τοῦ καλοῦ εἰς ἀνάμνησιν συνῶσιν,

“But because of the power and nature of good, evil is not only evil; since it must necessarily appear, it is bound in a sort of beautiful fetters, as some prisoners are in chains of gold, and hidden by them, so that it may not appear in its charmlessness to the gods, and men may be able not always to look at evil, but even when they do look at it, may be in company with images of beauty to remind them.”³³

Thus, Plotinus uses the metaphor of fetters of gold to describe the beauty found in the material world. Ultimately, however, even fetters of gold are fetters and the man held by them is still a prisoner, as the slaves in Thomas More’s *Utopia* would discover in the Renaissance. Even if there is some beauty in material things, this beauty is something

³¹ Introduction to *Enneads* II.9, 221.

³² O’Meara, 87.

³³ *Enneads* I.8.15.23-9.316-7.

added to the evil that is matter by the Good to help draw the soul away from the material world and back up to the spiritual world. The material beauty is meant to do this by reminding the soul of its former glory apart from the material world. Thus, even in those places where Plotinus presents a more positive attitude towards the material world, his overall attitude towards it is a negative one. This being the case, it seems natural that Plotinus has a less than positive attitude towards words and writing, since they are sensory things partaking of the evil inherent in all material things, as will be seen in the following.

Section Four: Plotinus on Words

Evidence for Plotinus' tendency to look down on the sensory world can be found in Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*. Indeed, the first sentence of the *Life* expresses this very clearly: Πλωτῖνος ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς γεγωνῶς φιλόσοφος ἔώκει μὲν ἀισχυνομένῳ ὅτι ἐν σώματι εἶη, "Plotinus, the philosopher of our times, seemed ashamed of being in the body."³⁴ In the same section of the *Life*, Porphyry relates Plotinus' aversion to having a painting or sculpture made of himself. Indeed, Porphyry relates that on this subject Plotinus said,

οὐ γὰρ ἀρκεῖ φέρειν ὃ ἡ φύσις εἶδωλον ἡμῖν περιτέθεικεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἶδωλου εἶδωλον συγχωρεῖν αὐτόν ἀξιούν πολυχρονιώτερον καταλιπεῖν ὡς δὴ τι τῶν ἀξιοθεάτων ἔργον,

"Why really, is it not enough to have to carry the image in which nature has encased us, without your requesting me to agree to leave behind me a longer-lasting image of the image, as if it was something genuinely worth looking at."³⁵

Thus, Plotinus' contempt for the material world seems, at least on Porphyry's account, to extend to man-made images of the sensory world. Indeed, Plotinus seems especially opposed to man-made images since they are images of images and thus even less capable of conveying intelligible reality than the original sensory objects. Spoken words, however, being signs, are images of other things and sometimes images of images, when they are signs of material things. Written words, like the words of the *Enneads*, are even further removed from intelligible reality since they are images of spoken words. Words, spoken or written, are even more imperfect in their expression of other things since they are signs invented by human beings and thus do not have even a natural correspondence

³⁴ Porphyry, "On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Books," in *Plotinus Porphyry on Plotinus and Ennead I*, ed. and trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1.1-2.2-3.

³⁵ Porphyry, 1.7-10.2-3.

to the things they signify, whereas a painting or sculpture would at least be capable of showing Plotinus in the way he appears. Moreover, Plotinus seems in Porphyry's account to be somewhat hesitant to write his ideas down. He wrote twenty four of his treatises while Porphyry was with him and at Porphyry's instigation.³⁶ Porphyry also asserts that the best treatises were those written while he was with Plotinus.³⁷ Thus, Plotinus' disdain for the material world extends to writing and results, unless influenced by someone like Porphyry with greater interest in writing, in less well-written pieces. Indeed, he does not seem entirely confident about the power of words to convey truth, at least truth about the One.

Plotinus' hesitancy about the power of words to convey the truth about the One can be seen in Plotinus' last treatise in Book Six of the *Enneads* when he writes about speaking about the One, ἡ οὐδὲμ θαυμαστὸν μὴ ῥάδιον εἰπεῖν εἶναι, ὅπου μηδὲ τὸ ὄν ῥάδιον μηδὲ τὸ εἶδος· ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἡμῖν γνῶσις εἶδεσιν ἐπερειδομένη, "There is nothing surprising in its being difficult to say, when it is not even easy to say what Being or Form is; but we do have a knowledge based upon the Forms."³⁸ For Plotinus, then, not only is it difficult, if not impossible to speak of the One, but it is even difficult to speak of the Intellect, the Forms. Of form at least, it is possible to have knowledge, since things in the material world can have some participation, albeit weak, in them. Since, however, as he proceeds to discuss, the One is beyond any form, it is difficult for the soul to even know for certain that the One is anything, and so the soul, tired out from attempting to

³⁶ Porphyry, 5.16 and 6.24.

³⁷ Porphyry, 6.24.

³⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.9: "On the Good or the One," in *Plotinus: Ennead VI.6-9*, ed. and trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 3.1-4.310-11.

touch the One, goes away from it, uncertain whether the One even exists.³⁹ Since, then, the One is without form, in order to attain the One, the soul must do so, οὐ προστιθέντα αἴθησιν οὐδεμίαν οὐδέ τι παρ' αὐτῆς εἰς ἐκεῖνον δεχόμενον, ἀλλὰ καθαρῶ τῶ νῶ τὸ καθαρῶτατον θεᾶσθαι καὶ τοῦ νοῦ τῶ πρώτῳ, “without adding any sense-perception or receiving anything from sense-perception into that Intellect, but beholding the most pure with the pure Intellect, and the primary part of Intellect.”⁴⁰ Thus, the man seeking the One must remove his attention from sense perception. As such, Plotinus advises the use of negation in approaching the One with the Intellect, since the One is none of the things it causes.⁴¹ One of the clearest expressions of his thought about speech and the One that Plotinus gives is ἀλλ' ἡμᾶς οἶον ἔξωθεν περιθέοντας τὰ αὐτῶν ἑρμηνεύειν ἐθέλειν πάθη ὅτε μὲν ἐγγύς, ὅτε δὲ ἀποπιπτοντας ταῖς περὶ αὐτὸ ἀπορίας, “but we run round it outside, in a way, and want to explain our own experiences of it, sometimes near it and sometimes falling away in our perplexities about it.”⁴² Thus, people can never really describe the One. The closest people can come is to talk about their experience of the One, which is what Plotinus does to some extent in *Enneads* I.6 “On Beauty,” except that he does not talk in particular terms of his own experience of the One, which might have been more powerful and expressive, but only in general terms of the experience of the soul seeking to ascend to the One. Moreover, not even material beauty can be used to help one ascend to the One, ἀλλ' ἀποστηναὶ δεῖ καὶ ἐπιστήμης καὶ ἐπιστητῶν καὶ παντὸς ἄλλου καὶ καλοῦ θεάματος, “but one must

³⁹ *Enneads* VI.9.3.4-10.310.

⁴⁰ *Enneads* VI.9.3.24-7.312-3.

⁴¹ *Enneads* VI.9.3.40-2.312.

⁴² *Enneads* VI.9.3.3-5.314-5.

depart from knowledge and things known, and from every other, even beautiful, object of vision.”⁴³ Thus, not only material things cannot be used to ascend to the One, but even knowledge, which would seem to belong primarily to the Intellect, cannot be used. Beauty, at least in material things, and perhaps even in the realm of the Forms, cannot help one to ascend to the One. Rather, the soul must proceed by negation, removing its attention from beautiful things.

⁴³ *Enneads* VI.9.4.9-10.314-5.

Section Five: *Enneads* I.6.7 “On Beauty” Analysis

In *Enneads* I.6.7, Plotinus describes the ascent to the Good, which is also Beauty, and the experience of the Good for the one who has attained it. The Good is an object of desire for those who are ascending to it. In order to attain the Good, it is necessary to do the opposite of what was done in the descent to the sensory world; the one ascending must free himself from attachment to worldly things. When he attains the Good, he experiences himself alone with the Good. Plotinus then describes the ecstatic experience of the Good.

Plotinus writes very impersonally in this passage. In the very first line of the passage, Ἀναβατέον οὖν πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν, οὐ ὀρέγεται πᾶσα ψυχή,⁴⁴ “So there must again be an ascending to the good, of which every soul is desirous.”⁴⁵ There is no personal pronoun present in Plotinus’ introductory sentence; instead, Plotinus uses the impersonal verbal adjective Ἀναβατέον with an understood ἔστιν for the main verb. Plotinus is not speaking in terms of his own experience or desire in this sentence, but impersonally and abstractly. Even when an actual verb is used in the subordinate relative clause, it is a third person verb. The reason for this impersonality is suggested by the subject of the verb, πᾶσα ψυχή. Plotinus is speaking impersonally in order to generalize to the experience of every soul. His own experience is not very important, except insofar as it is a starting point for understanding what every soul experiences and does in its ascent to the One. It is also worth noting that in this passage, he has separated the soul from its body. It is not the person, with its body, who seeks the Good, but just the soul.

⁴⁴ *Enneads* I.6.7.1-2.252.

⁴⁵ My translation is employed here because it Armstrong’s translation fails to catch the impersonal sense of Ἀναβατέον, which is necessary for my argument.

Indeed, the body is only a hindrance, as can be seen later in this passage. In the next sentence Plotinus writes, Εἴ τις οὖν εἶδεν αὐτό, οἶδεν ὃ λέγω, ὅπως καλόν, “Anyone who has seen it knows what I mean when I say that it is beautiful.”⁴⁶ Plotinus does use a verb with a first person subject, but this is only in the relative clause, not in the main clause. Furthermore, it is said almost as an interjection and the sentence still has essentially the same meaning without it. The first person of the verb is not used because Plotinus is discussing his own experience, but only with reference to Plotinus’ words or ideas. Moreover, in the following sentence, Plotinus here uses an adjective with a passive sense, Ἐφετὸν, with an understood εστιν, “It is desired.”⁴⁷ Although at the end of the sentence there is a first person verb, ἡμφιεσμεθα, “we put on,”⁴⁸ this verb is plural because it is referring generally to all people. It does not refer specifically to Plotinus’ experience. It is not even referring just to those who have experienced the upward ascent to the One, but rather to the metaphorical action of clothing themselves with flesh and fleshly desires as all men did in the process of descending to the sensory world. When referring to the actions involved in the ascent, Plotinus uses the nouns ἔφεις and τεύξεις, “desire” and “attainment,”⁴⁹ or uses plural active (or middle with an active meaning) participles without any noun attached to make them specify an individual: ἀναβαίνουσι, ἐπιστραφεῖσι, and ἀποδυόμενοις, “for those who go up,” “[for those who] are converted,” and “[for those who] strip off.”⁵⁰ These nouns and participles help contribute to the generality and unspecificity of the passage.

⁴⁶ *Enneads* I.6.7.2-3.252-3.

⁴⁷ *Enneads* I.6.7.3.252-3.

⁴⁸ *Enneads* I.6.7.6.252-3.

⁴⁹ *Enneads* I.6.7.4.252-3.

⁵⁰ *Enneads* I.6.7.4-6.252-3.

The metaphor of clothing, furthermore, points to the fact that Plotinus does not conceive of the material body as something essential to a human being, but rather as something extra added on after the human soul had already been created. This is very different from the Christian idea, wherein the material is an essential part of the human being.

Plotinus proceeds to use a simile to describe the ascent of the soul. Before describing the simile, however, it should be noted that this simile does not describe the Good itself but rather the soul ascending to the One. Plotinus here avoids describing the Good by using physical language that refers to or suggests physical or sensory objects. The simile compares the soul ascending to the vision of the One to someone being initiated into mystical rites. Indeed, the similarity between the two is so close that it almost seems as though Plotinus is really suggesting that the deeper meaning of the rites is what the soul does in its ascent; or that the two actions are aiming at attaining a similar goal, attainment of the divine, by a similar means, the removal of material things. This removal may be a physical removal of the actual physical objects or removal from the soul of the attachment to these material things. The simile is introduced before it properly begins with the word οἷον, “just as,”⁵¹ when Plotinus uses words for clothing, ἡμφιεσμεθα, and unclothing the soul, ἀποδυομένοις, to refer to the process by which the soul ascends to the One. The simile uses words of ascent, different forms of ἀνειμι,⁵² for the entrance into τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἱερῶν, “the celebrations of sacred rites.”⁵³ Necessary for these rites are ceremonial cleansings and the removal of garments, so that the initiate can

⁵¹ *Enneads* I.6.7.6.252-3.

⁵² *Enneads* I.6.7.7 and 8.252.

⁵³ *Enneads* I.6.7.7.252-3.

enter into the rites clean and naked, being himself alone without anything else.⁵⁴

Similarly, the soul ascending to the One must remove from itself all attachment to things in the sensory world since these things drag the soul down by distracting it from the higher things, the intellectual and the hyperintellectual world. Things of the sensory world are described as ἄλλότριον τοῦ θεοῦ, other than God.⁵⁵ Sensory things, then, are a great danger to the one ascending to the One. Thus, in the ascent to the One, the soul itself must separate itself from all that is not the One and become one like the One, independent of all attachment. Ultimately, the soul ascending to the One even needs to become one in the sense that it has put off discursive thought in favor of the higher hyperintellectual vision of the One. This likeness to the One is suggested especially strongly when Plotinus writes, αὐτῶ μόνῳ αὐτὸ μόνον ἴδη, “one sees with one’s self alone that alone.”⁵⁶ This likeness to the One is what allows it to see the One. The sense organs could never allow the soul to perceive the One, who is beyond the senses, since sensation and knowledge occur through similarity. That the stripping off of the world is a becoming like the One is further suggested by the adjectives used to describe the One: εἰλικρινές, ἀπλοῦν, καθαρόν, “simple, single, and pure.”⁵⁷ The One has nothing at all mixed in it, neither intellectual things nor sensory things, as someone who has removed garments of attachment to the sensory world is himself not mixed with passions for material things. The last of the three adjectives, καθαρόν, especially points to the fact that the cleansing of the soul is a means of becoming like the One. This is especially clear

⁵⁴ *Enneads* I.6.7.7-9.252.

⁵⁵ *Enneads* I.6.7.9.252.

⁵⁶ *Enneads* I.6.7.9-10.252-3.

⁵⁷ *Enneads* I.6.7.10.252-3.

because the word seems more properly applied to the soul than to the One. The One has no need to be cleansed because it has never been soiled by anything. The One is, if anything, beyond being described as clean; it has never been cleaned because it has never been in need of being cleaned. It is rather the human soul that must be cleansed because it has soiled itself with things of the sensory world.

Similarly, even when Plotinus comes to speak of the One itself, he speaks of it in terms that actually point more to everything other than the One. Plotinus writes, ἀφ' οὗ πάντα ἐξήρτηται καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπει καὶ ἔστι καὶ ζῆ καὶ νοεῖ, “from which all depends and to which all look and are and live and think.”⁵⁸ The subject here is πάντα, “all,” not the One. Even as everything focuses on the One, the sentence focuses on everything but the One. Everything depends on the One and looks toward it, but the One itself, as the adjectives discussed above suggest, is completely free of dependency or concern with anything other than itself. It is the source of being, life, and thought in all things that have being, life, and thought, but it is itself other than being, thought, or life. In order to be the source and cause of all these things, it has to be none of them. When Plotinus comes to speak of it as cause, the One is finally the subject, but the focus is still on everything other than the One: ζωῆς γὰρ αἴτιος καὶ νοῦ καὶ τοῦ εἶναι, “for it is the cause of life and mind and being.”⁵⁹ The One is not presented as in any way acting or choosing to act in order to be the cause of all things. Describing the One as a cause does not so much affirm something of the One itself but only shows the relationship of other things to it. Indeed, this relationship seems at times to be largely one-sided: things are

⁵⁸ *Enneads* I.6.7.10-2.252-3.

⁵⁹ *Enneads* I.6.7.12.252-3.

related to and caused by the One, as suggested by the fact that the subject of most of the verbs here is everything but the One, but the One is not really related to things.

Otherwise, it would depend on lower, contingent things; it would be in their power, which, for Plotinus, can never be true of the relationship of something ontologically higher to something ontologically lower.

In the following lines, which constitute what is arguably the most rhetorically powerful passage in *Enneads* I.6, it is not the One who is described, but the lover of the One and his experience of the One. Plotinus heightens the emotion in this passage with the repetition of ποίους, “what”: Τοῦτο οὖν εἴ τις ἴδοι, ποίους ἂν ἴσχοι ἔρωτας, ποίους δὲ πόθους, βουλόμενος αὐτῷ συγκερασθῆναι, πῶς δ’ ἂν <οὐκ> ἐκπλαγείη μεθ’ ἡδονῆς; “If anyone sees it, what passion will he feel, what longing in his desire to be united with it, what a shock of delight.”⁶⁰ The strength of ποίους comes from its indefinite character. It does not specify, giving certainty, but rather shows the indescribability of the things referred to by the indefiniteness of the adjective. The plural is also used skillfully here to further the indefiniteness by implying a multiplicity of passions experienced by the lover. Moreover, ποίους introduces an indirect question, which does not so much expect an answer, as lend a sense of wonder to the passage, as *quam* or *qualis* does at times in Latin. As far back as Homer, ποίους is seen used to express surprise.⁶¹

The same sentence has verbs suggesting sensory experience, ἴδοι, “see,” and ἴσχοι, “feel.” The sentence, and the action indicated in it, begins with sight. The human

⁶⁰ *Enneads* I.6.7.13-4.252-3.

⁶¹ LSJ, s.v. “ποιός.”

must first perceive the One before he can be consciously, if that is the right word, affected by it. Plotinus is thus using a word indicative of sensory experience to describe interaction with the One; however, it is the human who is doing the perceiving in this passage. Moreover, sight is used metaphorically since the One cannot be seen with physical, human eyes. Sight as a metaphor for intellectual or supra-intellectual perception is found in most languages. Thus, the sensory nature ἴδοι of is not greatly felt. The verb ἴσχοι, for its part, is a very emotionally powerful word, indicating reception of and susceptibility to something.⁶² It can even have a sexual connotation.⁶³ A similar emphasis on love, even desiring love similar to sexual love, can be seen with the objects of ἴσχοι, ἔρωτας and πόθους. This use of erotic language is similar to Augustine's use of erotic language throughout *Confessions* X.27.38. Thus, when the soul perceives the one, it experiences something akin to the passion of a lover for his beloved. The intensity of πόθους is especially strong; it refers to a "longing" or "yearning...for something absent or lost."⁶⁴ Thus, the one who sees the One still does not fully possess it and thus he longs to have it. That this word is not merely signifying love apart from longing is suggested both by its inclusion when another word had already been used for love and by the words that follow: βουλόμενος αὐτῷ συγκερασθῆναι,⁶⁵ "desiring to be combined with it."⁶⁶ Desire to be combined with the One is associated with the sight of the One. It is worth noting that συγκερασθῆναι, while meaning primarily to be mixed, can also have a transferred sense in which it denotes both the combining of mind and heart in friendship

⁶² LSJ, s.v. "ἴσχω."

⁶³ LSJ, s.v. "ἴσχω."

⁶⁴ LSJ, s.v. "πόθος."

⁶⁵ *Enneads* I.6.7.13.252.

⁶⁶ My translation.

and the union that occurs between spouses.⁶⁷ Thus, not only is erotic imagery being used with reference to the soul's side of the relationship with the One, but with it is coming an emphasis on the person's need for an intimate, even personal relationship with the One. The One, on the other hand, does not care whether or not it has the human being and, not being a person, cannot fulfill, let alone desire the soul, in any personal sense. It should also be noted that neither verb has the One as its agent. In the case of the second verb, the object of the verb is not the One either, but rather the love directed towards the One. Thus, if anything, the human is being acted upon by love, not by the One. The human being is the lover; the One is the beloved. The One is not described as actively experiencing love the way the human lover does. It only has this love directed towards itself; moreover, it is not even affected by this love.

In a similar fashion, passionate language is used further on in the sentence to describe the pleasure of perceiving the one when Plotinus writes, πῶς δ' ἂν <οὐκ> ἐκπλαγείη μεθ' ἡδονῆς;⁶⁸ “how greatly would he be struck with pleasure?”⁶⁹ ἐκπλαγείη can be used when speaking “of any sudden, overwhelming passion.”⁷⁰ The lover is intensely struck with love of the One. As above, where ἴσχοι carried a sense of passivity, here, where the verb is actually passive, it is still not the One who is the agent, but rather the pleasure. The One is detached from the human experience of it. Thus, the most powerful passage in *Enneads* I.6 shows both a focus on the human instead of on the One and an abundance of sensory, even erotic language, something that seems contrary to

⁶⁷ LSJ, s.v. “συγκεράννυμι.”

⁶⁸ *Enneads* I.6.7.14.

⁶⁹ My translation.

⁷⁰ LSJ, s.v. “ἐκπλήσσω.”

Plotinus' usual negative attitude toward the sensory world and more in line with Augustine's positive understanding of and attitude toward the sensory world. Plotinus, however, while using erotic language in *Enneads* I.6, uses less of it and less strongly than Augustine, whose entire passage, as will be seen, overflows with such language. Augustine will, moreover, use erotic language to refer to both God and the human being, making the relationship between them more intimate.

Plotinus now comes to the part of the passage especially reminiscent of Augustine's *Confessions* X.27.38: "Ἔστι γὰρ τῶ μὲν μήπω ἰδόντι ὀρέγεσθαι ὡς ἀγαθοῦ· τῶ δὲ ἰδόντι ὑπάρχει ἐπὶ καλῶ ἄγασθαί τε καὶ θάμβους πίμπλασθαι μεθ' ἡδονῆς, "The man who has not seen it may desire it as good, but he who has seen it glories in its beauty and is full of wonder and delight."⁷¹ Once more, Plotinus uses a bodily metaphor for the soul moving towards the One, since ὀρέγεσθαι initially has the meaning of stretching one's hand out toward something.⁷² This meaning is then transferred to signify the act of desiring or yearning, but the image of physically reaching for something cannot be separated from the word.⁷³ The person who only desires the good seeks something he does not have in any way, since he does not even see the One. Thus, he does not have something to be happy about; unlike the One, he is incomplete, missing the sight of the One that is essential to true happiness. Moreover, he can only conceive of the One as abstractly good. He can see that the One is good or even the Good, but he cannot know in the core of his being just how good and amazing it is. The one who has experienced the One, who has seen the One with the eyes of his mind, sees

⁷¹ *Enneads* I.7.15-7.252-3.

⁷² LSJ s.v., "ὀρέγω."

⁷³ LSJ s.v., "ὀρέγω."

the One as not merely the Good, but as Beauty. Beauty for Plotinus seems here to indicate something that brings about astonishment, even ravishing delight. It should be noted that even as Plotinus describes the intense experience of the One as Beauty, the focus is still on the one experiencing and not on the One experienced. This can be seen even more by considering *πίμπλασθαι μεθ' ἡδονῆς*. Plotinus describes the soul that sees the One as filled with pleasure, not as filled with the One. As will be seen later, in a similar passage of the *Confessions*, the focus is not primarily on Augustine but on God, even as Augustine discusses his own experience of God as Beauty

Plotinus then proceeds to use a pair of opposites in what may be the most powerful phrase in *Enneads* I.6.7: *ἐκπλήττεσθαι ἀβλαβῶς*, “enduring a shock which causes no hurt.”⁷⁴ *ἐκπλήττεσθαι* has as its most basic meaning being struck or driven out.⁷⁵ It is thus associated with an act of violence and yet is cause the soul no harm. Plotinus thus draws the reader’s mind away from the basic material meaning of words by negating, or at least qualifying, the first word, *ἐκπλήττεσθαι*, with the following word, *ἀβλαβῶς*. Plotinus wants the reader to realize that this is not a merely physical wounding that can only cause harm, but rather something beyond that that heals even as it pierces into the soul’s depths. The pair of contraries together presents the reader with something far more powerful than either one of the contraries on its own, because it makes the mind go into the empty space in between the two words, where mental concepts are less clearly defined, as the One is not definable by concepts in the human mind. The mind is driven from the light of the intelligible to the unknowable darkness

⁷⁴ *Enneads* I.6.7.17.252-3.

⁷⁵ LSJ s.v., “ἐκπλήσσω.”

where the One dwells and is astonished to find in that darkness a light that dazzles the eyes of his soul. It is surprising that having made such a powerful phrase with opposites Plotinus does not continue to use such a method to move the seeking soul up to the One, but only uses contraries this once in the passage. As we will see later, Augustine uses this opposition of contraries several times in the “Sero te amavi passage” and throughout the *Confessions*, which contributes a great deal to the rhetorical power of that work. Moreover, whereas Plotinus uses this pair of opposites to describe the ascending soul’s experience of the One, Augustine uses it not only to describe the soul, but perhaps even more to speak God Himself. In speaking primarily of the soul’s experience here, one has to wonder if the attention does not get shifted away from the One to the individual; that is to say, it is not clear whether the more likely effect of reading this passage would be for the soul to desire to seek the One for its own sake or for the soul to desire to seek the One in order that it might experience the ecstasy of union with the One. It should also be noted that in this passage Plotinus speaks in general of a soul’s ascent to the One. He does not speak of his own ascent to or experience of the One. This absence of Plotinus’ own experience from the text removes some of the personal drama it could have.

Vision of the One causes the one who sees the One to despise all other beautiful things. In his exultation over Beauty, the human comes to reject all of the things that seem beautiful: τῶν ἄλλων ἐρώτων καταγελάει καὶ τῶν πρόσθεν νομιζομένων καλῶν καταφρονεῖν, “he laughs at all other loves and despises what he thought beautiful before.”⁷⁶ This recognition of Beauty Itself makes the human despise other beauties. They no longer seem beautiful to him, even if they are images of Beauty. This

⁷⁶ *Enneads* I.6.7.17-9.252-3.

rejection of sensory beauty in favor of the higher beauty can also be seen further on in the passage when Plotinus writes,

Οὐ γὰρ ὁ χρωμάτων ἢ σωμάτων καλῶν μὴ τυχῶν οὐδὲ δυνάμεως οὐδὲ ἀρχῶν οὐδὲ ὁ βασιλείας μὴ τυχῶν ἀτυχῆς, ἀλλ' ὁ τούτου καὶ μόνου, ὑπὲρ οὗ τῆς τεύξεως καὶ βασιλείας καὶ ἀρχῆς γῆς ἀπάσης καὶ θαλάττης καὶ οὐρανοῦ προέσθαι χρεῶν, εἰ καταλιπὼν τις ταῦτα καὶ ὑπεριδὼν εἰς ἐκεῖνο στραφεὶς ἴδοι,

“A man has not failed if he fails to win beauty of colours or bodies, or power or office or kingship even, but if he fails to win this and only this. For this he should give up the attainment of kingship and of rule over all earth and sea and sky, if only by leaving and overlooking them he can turn to That and see.”⁷⁷

There seems, then, to be less of a relationship between beautiful things and Beauty Itself than one might otherwise expect. By contrast, Augustine’s experience of God as Beauty will lead him to recognize the other things as good and beautiful in themselves, even if they are lesser goods than God Himself. Plotinus, though, seems to have a more exclusive viewpoint; either the One is Beauty or the sensory world is beautiful; an individual must delight in either the One or in beautiful things, not both.

Plotinus uses a great deal of hypotactical organization in *Enneads* I.6.7. The first sentence starts with οὐν, a particle connecting the present sentence to the previous one. Similarly, the first sentence also uses the relative οὗ. While relatives are present in almost every writing style, Plotinus in *Enneads* I.6.7 uses a great deal more relative pronouns than Augustine in the “sero te amavi” passage, producing a much more layered, diffuse style. The next sentence uses a relative ὅ in correlation with ὅπως in a way that Augustine does not use relatives in the main passage considered in this paper. This gives Plotinus a much more cultured, abstracted style, a style distanced from his material. He is

⁷⁷ *Enneads* I.6.7.34-39.254-55.

treating his subject matter academically, or philosophically, removed from the real experience of it. The next sentence has a use of the particles μὲν with δὲ which is very characteristic of Greek prose. These words give Greek writing a very cultured, balanced style. Particles, indeed, are perhaps what distinguishes Greek from Latin prose most greatly, giving the nuance to the organized Greek style. It is not the style of someone who is in the raptures of love or Beauty, but the cool, analytical style of a philosopher.

Plotinus' use of hypotaxis can be seen especially clearly later in the sentence with its weight of participles carrying the force of a series of subordinate clauses: ἀναβαίνουσι, ἐπισταφείσι, ἀποδυόμενοις, and καταβαίνοντες. That these participles have a weight and verbal meaning more than simply adjectival can be seen especially clearly in the case of ἀναβαίνουσι and ἀποδυόμενοις. The first word has an entire prepositional phrase hanging from it and the second has a relative clause depending on it, a relative clause, moreover, containing another participle in addition to a verb. Moreover, the sentence does not actually end with ἡμφιέσμεθα, which is only at the end of one member of the sentence. Rather, an entire simile follows on this first part of the sentence. Within this simile, there are nouns that carry a verbal sense: καθάρσεις and ἀποθέσεις, “purifications” and “strippings off.”⁷⁸ ἀποθέσεις even has an objective genitive hanging from it, ἱματίων, “of the clothes,”⁷⁹ an objective genitive, moreover, that is qualified by an article attached to an adverb, τῶν πρὶν, “they wore before.”⁸⁰ The sentence does not even end with this members, but has two more members before the sentence actually ends. The next two member, moreover, demonstrate a similar abundance of

⁷⁸ *Enneads* I.6.7.7-8.252-3.

⁷⁹ *Enneads* I.6.7.8.252-3.

⁸⁰ *Enneads* I.6.7.8.252-3.

subordination, attained with participles and nouns implying entire clauses and actual relative clauses.

Section Six: Augustine on the Material World

In contrast to Plotinus's mostly negative attitude towards the material world, Augustine presents a more balanced view of the material world as both good, beautiful, and connected to the spiritual world, while still of less importance than the spiritual world. In his *Confessions*, it becomes clear that Augustine arrived at this balanced view through his interaction with and reaction to Manicheanism and its tendency, like that of the Platonism of Plotinus, to present a negative view of matter. As Henry Chadwick remarks in *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction*, "The religion of Mani, or Manicheism, expressed in poetic form a revulsion from the material world and became the rationale for an ultra-ascetic morality."⁸¹ Indeed, "Above all, the Manichees urged that they had the only satisfactory answer to the problem of evil: it was an ineradicable force inherent in the physicality of the material world."⁸² Thus, as for Plotinus, for Manicheanism matter is the cause of evil and is not to be trusted or relied upon. Chadwick says moreover that "Mani denied any authority to the Old Testament with its presupposition of the goodness of the material order of things and of its Maker. He deleted as interpolations all texts in the New Testament that assumed...the order and goodness of matter."⁸³ Thus, Mani, and consequently Manicheanism, was altogether opposed to the idea that the material world could be good. This was the intellectual atmosphere in which Augustine was living prior to his conversion to Christianity. Indeed, Augustine's acceptance of the essential goodness of matter would be a large factor in his rejection of Manicheanism and conversion to Christianity. Augustine describes his entrance into Manicheanism thus:

⁸¹ Henry Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 12.

⁸² Chadwick, 14.

⁸³ Chadwick, 13.

*Nesciebam enim aliud vere quod est, et quasi acutule movebar ut suffragarer stultis deceptoribus, cum a me quaerent unde malum, et utrum forma corporea deus finiretur et haberet capillos et ungues,*⁸⁴

“But I did not know that other reality which truly is; and through my own sharpness I let myself be taken in by fools, who deceived me with such questions as: Whence comes evil? And is God bounded by a bodily shape and has he hair and nails?”⁸⁵

He then proceeds to discuss how his failure to understand that evil is an absence of good, not a real thing, and his failure to understand that God is a spirit led him to accept these questions of the Manicheans as real objections to mainstream Christianity and thus to fall in with them.⁸⁶ Thus, while Plotinus, like the Manichees, believes that matter is a real thing, Augustine has to come to a deeper, different understanding of the material world and the nature of God in order to move beyond his Manicheanism. This, in turn, forces him to have a much more developed understanding of and respect for the material world than Plotinus, who was never so intimately involved in a Gnostic sect like the Manicheans.

Augustine speaks very clearly about the goodness of creation and even matter in a prayer addressed to God at the beginning of Book 5:

*non cessat nec tacet laudes tuas universa creatura tua, nec spiritus omnis per os conversum ad te*⁸⁷, *nec animalia nec corporalia per os considerantium ea, ut exurgat in te a lassitudine anima nostra, innitens eis quae fecisti et transiens ad te, qui fecisti haec mirabiliter. et ibi refection et vera fortitude,*⁸⁸

“Without ceasing Thy whole creation speaks Thy praise—the spirit of every man by the words that his mouth directs to Thee, animals and lifeless matter by the

⁸⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. James J. O’Donnell, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), III.7.12.27-8.

⁸⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F.J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), III.7.12.44.

⁸⁶ *Confessions*, III.7.12.28

⁸⁷ The use of the second person in this passage is also worthy of note, since it points to the fact that Augustine perceives God as a personal God, unlike the impersonal One of Plotinus.

⁸⁸ *Confessions*, V.1.1.48.

mouth of those who look upon them: that so our soul rises out of its mortal weariness unto Thee, helped upward by the things Thou hast made and passing beyond them unto Thee who hast wonderfully made them: and there refreshment is and strength unfailing.”⁸⁹

Thus, created things are capable of communicating to human beings something of God and leading the human soul above them up to God Himself. Especially worthy of note is the inclusion of material things, even soulless ones, in those things that praise God and lead the soul to Him. Whereas Plotinus is especially inclined to associate material, soulless things with evil, Augustine explicitly states that these things are a means by which God raises the soul to Himself. The passage shows balance, moreover, because the soul is clearly not supposed to stop or seek its rest in these material things, but to use them in the ascent to God. Augustine, then, does not reject material things as evil, but neither does he claim them as the soul’s primary good.

Confessions X.6.9 presents a similar picture of the material world and its relationship to God. In response to Augustine asking various things in the created world whether they are God, they respond in a way, saying as it were, ‘*non sum*’ and ‘*non sumus deus tuus; quaere super nos*,’⁹⁰ “‘I am not He’” and “‘We are not your God; seek higher.’”⁹¹ Thus, once more the material world shows itself capable of directing the human soul to ascend to God by denying its own divinity. Augustine responds to creation thus, *et dixi omnibus his quae circumstant fores carnis meae, ‘dicite mihi de deo meo, quod vos non estis, dicite mihi de illo aliquid,’*⁹² “‘And I said to all the things that throng about the gateways of the senses: ‘Tell me of my God, since you are not He. Tell me

⁸⁹ *Confessions*, V.1.1.75.

⁹⁰ *Confessions*, X.6.9.122.

⁹¹ *Confessions*, X.6.9.193.

⁹² *Confessions*, X.6.9.122.

something of Him.”⁹³ To this the sensory things respond loudly, *ipse fecit nos*,⁹⁴ “He made us.”⁹⁵ Thus, sensory things direct Augustine’s attention to the God, Who is above sensory things by telling him that they were created by Him. If, as in a Plotinian worldview, the material things only existed by derivation and had evil matter mixed in with them, they would not be so helpful in the soul’s search for God, but would only present a distraction in the search; in an Augustinian worldview, however, the personal God intentionally creates the material world as a sign to communicate himself to human beings and so He has a closer connection to both the material world and the human beings than in Platonic thought. Creation is thus directed towards God; it does not merely exist because of Him.

In Book 7, when Augustine is discussing his conversion from false Manichaeism and other false doctrines, Augustine once more shows the good of the material and created world. As with Plotinus’s considerations of the material world, so too Augustine in his considerations of the created world considers the extent to which created things exist:

*Et inspexi cetera infra te et vidi nec omnino esse nec omnino non esse: esse quidem, quoniam abs te sunt, non esse autem, quoniam id quod es non sunt. id enim vere est quod incommutabiliter manet,*⁹⁶

“Then I thought upon those other things that are less than You, and I saw that they neither absolutely are nor yet totally are not: they are, in as much as they are from You: they are not, in as much as they are not what You are. For that truly is, which abides unchangeably.”⁹⁷

⁹³ *Confessions*, X.6.9.193.

⁹⁴ *Confessions*, X.6.9.122.

⁹⁵ *Confessions*, X.6.9.194.

⁹⁶ *Confessions*.VII.11.17.82.

⁹⁷ *Confessions*, VII.11.17.129.

Thus, God truly exists while all other things, spiritual or material, have existence, but not full existence to the same extent as God, who cannot be changed or destroyed, has. It should be noted that whereas Plotinus allows full existence to the Intellect and the Soul and denies true existence to the material world, Augustine recognizes that the spiritual realities, while higher than the material realities, lack full existence just like the material realities. Thus, the ontological lowness of the material world cannot make it any more inherently evil than the spiritual world. Indeed, the spiritual world seems for Augustine to be capable of worse evil than the material world.

It is also helpful to consider just what Augustine says in the *Confessions* about the similarities and differences between his and Plotinus' understanding of God and the material world. Augustine first presents his own encounter with the books of the Platonists as an act of God for Augustine's salvation.⁹⁸ Augustine summarizes what he learned from those books with a quotation from the Gospel of John:

*in principio erat verbum et verbum erat apud deum et deus erat verbum. hoc erat in principio apud deum. omnia per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil. quod factum est in eo vita est, et vita erat lux hominum; et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae eum non comprehenderunt,*⁹⁹

“in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God: the same was in the beginning with God; all things were made by Him and without Him was made nothing that was made; in Him was life and the life was the light of men, and the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it.”¹⁰⁰

Thus, Augustine finds an idea of the divine *Verbum* in the books of the Platonists.

Presumably, Augustine is here equating Plotinus' $\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$, the second hypostasis in

⁹⁸ *Confessions*, VII.9.13.80.

⁹⁹ *Confessions*, VII.9.13.80.

¹⁰⁰ *Confessions*, VII.9.13.126.

Plotinian metaphysics, with the *Verbum*, the second person in the Christian Trinity. He moreover finds the idea that this *Verbum* is the source of all created things. He also finds the idea that the *Verbum* is beyond the power of evil, here represented by *tenebrae*, darkness.

After quoting further from the Prologue to the Gospel of John where it talks about the role of the *Verbum* in the world's creation, Augustine then quotes the Gospel of John to show the things that do not appear in the books of the Platonists, namely the incarnation of the *Verbum* and the role of the incarnation in salvation history: *in sua propria venit et sui eum non receperunt, quotquot autem receperunt eum, dedit eis potestatem filios dei fieri credentibus in nomine eius*,¹⁰¹ "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not, but to as many as received Him He gave power to be made the sons of God, to them that believed in His name."¹⁰² To make this difference even more clear, Augustine says, *Item legi ibi quia verbum, deus, non ex carne, non ex sanguine, non ex voluntate viri neque ex voluntate carnis, sed ex deo natus est; sed quia verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis, non ibi legi*,¹⁰³ "Again I found in them that the Word, God, was *born not of flesh nor of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God*; but I did not find that *the Word became flesh*."¹⁰⁴ Thus, Augustine reads in the books of the Platonists that the *Verbum*, being God, has its origin in God, not in human beings or human birth. What he does not find in the books is that the *Verbum* was made a human being with real human flesh, living among men. This is, of course, something that

¹⁰¹ *Confessions*, VII.9.13.80.

¹⁰² *Confessions*, VII.9.13.126-7.

¹⁰³ *Confessions*, VII.9.14.80.

¹⁰⁴ *Confessions*, VII.9.14.127

Plotinus could never say. Even when Plotinus presents a more positive image of the material world, the idea that the Intellect would or even could in any way take on a material form is beyond the realm of Plotinian metaphysics. Moreover, in Plotinian thought, where the material world is rarely anything but a distraction from the pursuit of the Intellect and the One, if the Intellect were to become a human being, it does not seem as though this incarnation of Intellect would bring about a positive result because to Plotinus' mind it would be a lowering and defiling of the Intellect. The incarnation of the *Verbum* suggests that there is something good or at least capable of being saved about the material world.

Because of their failure to understand the incarnation, Augustine, citing Paul's Letter to the Romans, speaks contemptuously of the Neoplatonists:

*etsi cognoscunt deum, non sicut deum glorificant aut gratias agunt, sed evanescent in cogitationibus suis et obscuratur insipiens cor eorum; dicentes se esse sapientes stulti facti sunt.*¹⁰⁵

“and if *they know God, they have not glorified him as God or given thanks: but become vain in their thoughts; and their foolish heart is darkened. Professing themselves to be wise they become fools.*¹⁰⁶

Augustine himself is initially made overly proud by the wisdom that he finds in the books of the Platonists:

*iam enim coeperam velle videri sapiens plenus poena mea et non flebam, insuper et inflabar scientia. ubi enim erat illa aedificans caritas a fundamento humilitatis, quod est Christus Iesus?,*¹⁰⁷

“For I had begun to wish to appear wise, and this indeed was the fullness of my punishment; and I did not weep for my state, but was badly puffed up with my

¹⁰⁵ *Confessions*, VII.9.14.81.

¹⁰⁶ *Confessions*, VII.9.14.127.

¹⁰⁷ *Confessions*, VII.20.26.86.

knowledge. Where was that charity which builds us up upon the foundation of humility, which is Christ Jesus?"¹⁰⁸

Thus, for Augustine, understanding of Platonism was as much a danger as it was an aid. Augustine fell into pride over his wisdom. The only cure was the one thing not found in the books of the Platonists, Christ Jesus, that is to say, the *Verbum* incarnate. Only belief in Christ, who humbled himself to become like men, could save Augustine by teaching him humility.

At the very end of Book VII, Augustine goes into further detail about just what the books of the Platonists lacked, which he found in the Christian Scriptures, especially the writings of St. Paul:

quoniam iustus es, domine, nos autem peccavimus, inique fecimus, impie gessimus, et gravata est super nos manus tua, et iuste traditi sumus antiquo peccatori....quid faciet miser homo?,¹⁰⁹

“For Thou art just, O Lord, but we have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and Thy hand has grown heavy upon us and we are justly delivered over to that first sinner....But what shall unhappy man do?”¹¹⁰

Thus, the first thing Augustine mentions having found in the Scriptures is the whole of human history, full as it is of human sin. Sin makes the life of man and the entire sensory world in need of a savior. The Plotinian idea of ascending beyond the material world does not take into account the need for something more than intellectual enlightenment to save humankind from sin. Augustine, intimately familiar as he was with sin, knew that more was needed by sinners than mere intellectual enlightenment. As noted above, even understanding of the higher realities is capable of leading a human being astray into pride

¹⁰⁸ *Confessions*, VII.20.26.135.

¹⁰⁹ *Confessions*, VII.21.27.87.

¹¹⁰ *Confessions*, VII.21.27.136.

apart from Christ. Augustine then cites Christ's action in human history as what he learned from the Christian Scriptures:

in quo princeps huius mundi non invenit quicquam morte dignum, et occidit eum? Et evacuatum est chirographum quod erat contrarium nobis...non habent illae paginae vultum pietatis huius, lacrimas confessionis, sacrificium tuum, spiritum contribulatum, cor contritum et humiliatum, populi salutem, sponsam civitatem, arram spiritus sancti, poculum pretii nostri,¹¹¹

“in whom the prince of this world found nothing worthy of death yet killed Him; and the handwriting was blotted out of the decree which was contrary to us....Their pages show nothing of the face of love, the tears of confession, Your sacrifice, an afflicted spirit, a contrite and humbled heart, the salvation of Your people, the espoused city, the promise of the Holy Spirit, the chalice of our redemption.”¹¹²

The solution for humanity's sinful actions within history is for God, through the *Verbum's* incarnation, to become directly active in human history. That this is so is pointed to especially strongly when Augustine references Pontius Pilate not finding Christ guilty, a particular historical event. For Augustine, salvation must lie in something more than knowledge of spiritual realities; it must be joined to the material reality by the actions of God in history, as well as the actions of God and the individual in the individual's own life. The particular example of God acting in history that is of concern to Augustine in the *Confessions*, as suggested by the words *lacrimas confessionis*, “the tears of confession,” is his own confession of his life. The *Confessions* are a narration of God's action in his life and a means for Augustine and others to receive or at least perceive the grace of God. This is what gives the *Confessions* such great power, both spiritually and rhetorically; this is why the use of first person and second person pronouns to refer to the intimate relationship of God and Augustine are so essential to Augustine's

¹¹¹ *Confessions*, VII.21.27.87.

¹¹² *Confessions*, VII.21.27.137.

writing throughout the *Confessions*. Augustine, having developed his identity in the context of the Judaeo-Christian culture, knows that the actions of God in history, even the individual's personal history, are essential to the salvation of all men. Plotinus, however, has no such background, so he does not focus on his own personal experience of the One, but rather seeks to give an impersonal discussion and description of his philosophy. To discuss personal details would seem to Plotinus to distract from the higher realities with the mundane details of the material reality.

Section Seven: Augustine on Evil

Augustine's positive attitude towards the material world can be seen in his understanding of evil as not matter, but as a lack of goodness and a failure of the soul to seek God as its greatest good. In Book 7 of the *Confessions*, Augustine discusses the inherent goodness of *quae corrumpuntur*, "corruptible things":

*Et manifestum est mihi quoniam bona sunt quae corrumpuntur, quae neque si summa bona essent neque nisi bona essent corrumpi possent; quia si summa bona essent, incorruptibilia essent, si autem nulla bona essent, quid in eis corrumperetur non esset. nocet enim corruptio et, nisi bonum minueret, non noceret,*¹¹³

"And it became clear to me that corruptible things are good: if they were supremely good they could not be corrupted, but also if they were not good at all they could not be corrupted: if they were supremely good they would be incorruptible, if they were in no way good there would be nothing in them that might corrupt. For corruption damages; and unless it diminished goodness, it would not damage."¹¹⁴

Thus, while created things are lower beings than the supreme being, God himself, they are still good. This is clear because things that are not good at all cannot be made worse, but created things, material and spiritual, are capable of becoming worse. In mentioning this *corruptio*, Augustine points towards what he will present as the true evil, not material things, but the movement of good things away from God; when referring to spiritual evil, Augustine refers to this movement as *iniquitas*, "iniquity":

*et quaesivi quid esset iniquitas et non inveni substantiam, sed a summa substantia, te deo, detortae in infima voluntatis perversitatem, proicientis intima sua et tumescentis foras,*¹¹⁵

"So that when I now asked what is iniquity, I realized that it was not a substance but a swerving of the will which is turned towards lower things and away from

¹¹³ *Confessions*, VII.12.18.82.

¹¹⁴ *Confessions*, VII.12.18.130.

¹¹⁵ *Confessions*, VII.16.22.84.

You, O God, who are the supreme substance: so that it casts away what is most inward to it and swells greedily for outward things.”¹¹⁶

Thus, iniquity for Augustine is losing what is most inward to oneself by going away from God, Who is most inward to the human person, in the pursuit of lesser goods, which are nevertheless goods. Not even the fact that the soul can be distracted by these things makes them fundamentally evil. Moreover, Augustine asserts the importance of having lower things even if they are sometimes the object of a sinful will because *non iam desiderabam meliora, quia omnia cogitabam, et meliora quidem superiora quam inferiora, sed meliora omnia quam sola superior iudicio saniore pendebam*,¹¹⁷ “I no longer desired better, because I had thought upon them all and with clearer judgment I realised that while certain higher things are better than lower things, yet all things together are better than the higher alone.”¹¹⁸ Thus, while the spiritual goods are better than the material goods, the world is better because it has both the spiritual and material goods. Men, then, cannot reject what is material and treat it as evil, but should rather pursue all goods, material and spiritual, in their proper order and way.¹¹⁹

Augustine further shows the possibility of evil arising from the pursuit of perceived spiritual goods as well as material goods when describing his adolescent theft of the pears in Book 2. About the cause of this theft, Augustine writes,

*et ego furtum facere volui et feci, nulla compulsus egestate nisi penuria et fastidio iustitiae et sagina iniquitatis. nam id furatus sum quod mihi abundabat et multo melius, nec ea re volebam frui quam furto appetebam, sed ipso furto et peccato,*¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ *Confessions*, VII.16.22.132.

¹¹⁷ *Confessions*, VII.13.19.83.

¹¹⁸ *Confessions*, VII.13.19.131.

¹¹⁹ This is in sharp contrast to the monistic tendency in Plotinus’ philosophy that moves away from multiplicity and to oneness in the pursuit of the One. Augustine’s God seems far more fecund than Plotinus’ One.

¹²⁰ *Confessions*, II.4.9.19.

“Yet I chose to steal, and not because want drove me to it—unless a want of justice and contempt for it and an excess of iniquity. For I stole things which I already had in plenty and in better quality. Nor had I any desire to enjoy the things I stole, but only the stealing of them and the sin.”¹²¹

Augustine was not seeking the material good of the pear, but was rather seeking the perceived spiritual good of the stealing of the pears. The cause of his sin was not the good of the pears, but *penuria et fastidio iustitiae*, “a want of justice and contempt for it.” He was spiritually deficient and so he committed the crime for its own sake or for pride’s sake. Friendship, which is very often considered to be a great good and more spiritual than material lead him to commit this crime, *sed quoniam in illis pomis voluptas mihi non erat, ea erat in ipso facinore quam faciebat consortium simul peccantium*,¹²² “But since the pleasure I got was not in the pears, it must have been in the crime itself, and put there by the companionship of others sinning with me.”¹²³ For Augustine, then, the material world is, if anything, less a cause of evil than other spiritual beings, whether they be humans or pure spirits.¹²⁴ The material world and all that is in it is inherently good and does not cause iniquity; rather, iniquity is the turning of the will away from God to other perceived goods, whether they be material or spiritual. Thus, for Augustine, all of the created world, spiritual and material, is capable of showing the goodness of the Christian God. Unsurprisingly, then, Augustine, while seeing the potential weaknesses of words, still recognizes that they have a powerful place in the communicating the Truth of the Christian faith to others.

¹²¹ *Confessions*, II.4.9.29.

¹²² *Confessions*, II.8.16.22.

¹²³ *Confessions*, II.8.16.33.

¹²⁴ It is worth noting that this emphasis on the fact that a spiritual thing can cause evil as well as a material thing is in line with mainstream Christian thought, which, after all, suggests that the cause of the first human sin was the temptation by Satan, an angel; moreover, the cause of Satan’s sin could not be material since he is purely spiritual and thus not capable of being affected by the material world.

Section Eight: Augustine on Words

Whereas Plotinus seems not to favor words as vehicles for conveying truth, at least about the One, Augustine presents a more complex and varied attitude towards words. He is doubtful about their power to convey truth while writing his early dialogue, *De Magistro*. The *De Magistro*, written by Augustine in or around 389 AD is a dialogue between Augustine and his teenage son Adeodatus about the effect and power of speech.¹²⁵ On the other hand, later on, having becoming a Christian preacher, perhaps even a bishop, whose work is inseparable from words, perhaps in 395 AD, he writes an entire work, the *De Doctrina Christiana*, on the proper use of and interpretation of words for conveying the Christian religion.¹²⁶ More generally, the work is also about the power of signs, sensory things, to convey reality.

In the *De Magistro*, Augustine argues that words are incapable of truly teaching. Augustine writes, “Before I made that discovery the word was merely a sound to me. It became a sign when I had learned the thing of which it was the sign. And this I had learned not from signs but from seeing the actual object. So the sign is learned from knowing the thing, rather than vice versa.”¹²⁷ Words lack actual meaning until human beings impart meaning to them. Moreover, human beings are only capable of imparting this meaning as a result of learning that occurs prior to the imparting of meaning. Thus, words are incapable of actually teaching, being rather a thing to be learned. As Augustine

¹²⁵ J.H.S. Burleigh, Introduction to *The Teacher*, by Augustine, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1953), 64.

¹²⁶ R.P.H. Green, Introduction to *De Doctrina Christiana*, by Augustine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), x-xi.

¹²⁷ Augustine, *The Teacher*, ed. R.P.H. Green, in *Augustine: Earlier Writings* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1953), x. 33.93.

writes further, “In a sign there are two things, sound and meaning. We perceive the sound when it strikes our ear, while the meaning becomes clear when we look at the thing signified.”¹²⁸ Augustine states his thesis most clearly when he writes, “What I am really trying to convince you of, if I can, is this. We learn nothing by means of these signs we call words. On the contrary, as I said, we learn the force of the word, that is the meaning which lies in the sound of the word, when we come to know the object signified by the word. Then only do we perceive that the word was a sign conveying that meaning.”¹²⁹ Words cannot teach. On the other hand, Augustine allows that words are capable of drawing a person’s attention towards realities, “The utmost value I can attribute to words is this. They bid us look for things, but they do not show them to us so that we may know them.”¹³⁰ Similarly, when establishing Christ as the real Teacher, Augustine writes, “We listen to Truth which presides over our minds within us, though of course we may be bidden to listen by someone using words.”¹³¹ Augustine also grants that useful belief may result from communication occurring by means of words, “Wherefore in matters which are discerned by the mind, whoever cannot discern them for himself listens vainly to the words of him who can, except that it is useful to believe such things so long as ignorance lasts.”¹³² Moreover, Augustine, perhaps referring to what would eventually become the *De Doctrina*, writes in the last paragraph of the work, “At another time, if God permit, we shall inquire into the whole problem of the usefulness of words, for their usefulness

¹²⁸ *The Teacher*, x.34.93.

¹²⁹ *The Teacher*, x.34.94.

¹³⁰ *The Teacher*, xi.36.94.

¹³¹ *The Teacher*, xi.38.95.

¹³² *The Teacher*, xiii.41.98.

properly considered is not slight.”¹³³ Thus, even when arguing that words cannot teach, Augustine says emphatically that words are useful.

In the *De Doctrina*, Augustine writes more extensively about the usefulness of words and other signs for conveying truth and drawing people’s minds to God. Augustine begins by making a distinction in Book 1 between things which are to be enjoyed (*frui*), used (*uti*), and both used and enjoyed, *Res ergo aliae sunt quibus fruendum est, aliae quibus utendum, aliae quae fruuntur et utuntur*, “There are some things which are to be enjoyed, some which are to be used, and some whose function is both to enjoy and use.”¹³⁴ Augustine defines enjoyment and use thus, *Fruī est enim amore inhaerere alicui rei propter se ipsam; uti autem, quod in usum venerit ad id quod amas obtinendum referre, si tamen amandum est*, “To enjoy something is to hold fast to it in love for its own sake. To use something is to apply whatever it may be to the purpose of obtaining what you love—if indeed it is something that ought to be loved.”¹³⁵ Thus, the thing enjoyed is what a person loves as an end in itself and the thing used is a means to obtaining that end. After Augustine uses a metaphor to compare people in the world to travelers trying to return to their fatherland, he concludes that the world and the things in it are to be used as a means of reaching our heavenly homeland with God:

sic in huius mortalitatis vita peregrinantes a domino, si redire in patriam volumus ubi beati esse possumus, utendum est hoc mundo, non fruendum, ut invisibilia dei per ea quae facta sunt intellect conspiciantur, hoc est ut de corporalibus temporalibusque rebus aeterna et spiritalia capiamus,

“So in this mortal life we are like travelers away from our Lords: if we wish to return to the homeland where we can be happy we must use this world, not enjoy

¹³³ *The Teacher*, xiv.46.100.

¹³⁴ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R.P.H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), I.3.7.14-15.

¹³⁵ *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.4.8.14-15.

it, in order to discern ‘the invisible attributes of God, which are understood through what has been made or, in other words, to ascertain what is eternal and spiritual from corporeal and temporal things.’¹³⁶

Thus, this material and sensory world is a means of reaching heaven; men can do this by learning more about heaven from the material world. Just as Plotinus does not think that men ought to cease seeking the Intellect and the One, so too Augustine does not think that men ought to rest in this world; however, where Plotinus for the most part comes out against much engagement with the material world, Augustine sees the material world as something helpful in the pursuit of the things beyond the material world, namely, spiritual reality and especially God. A little further on, Augustine, after granting that speech can never express God who is *ineffabilis*, “unspeakable,”¹³⁷ says nevertheless that God

admisit humanae vocis obsequium et verbis nostris in laude sua gaudere nos voluit. Nam inde est et quod dicitur deus. Non enim re vera in strepitu istarum duarum syllabarum ipse cognoscitur, sed tamen omnes latinae linguae socios, cum aures eorum sonus iste tetigerit, movet ad cogitandam excellentissimam quondam immortalemque naturam,

“has sanctioned the homage of the human voice, and chosen that we should derive pleasure from our words in praise of him. Hence the fact that he is called God: he himself is not truly known by the sound of these two syllables, yet when the word strikes our ears it leads all users of the Latin language to think of a supremely excellent and immortal being.”¹³⁸

Thus, as suggested in *The Teacher*, even if words, which are material things, cannot fully express a material thing, let alone God, they can draw a person’s attention towards God because they do have an understood meaning imparted by society. Therefore Christians ought to make use of words to lead others to God.

¹³⁶ *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.4.9.16-7.

¹³⁷ *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.6.13.16-7.

¹³⁸ *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.6.14.18-9.

Book 2 has more to say about the function of words as given signs. Augustine defines given signs thus, *Data vero signa sunt quae sibi quaeque viventia invicem dant ad demonstrandos quantum possunt motus animi sui vel sense aut intellecta quaelibet*, “Given signs are those which living things give to each other, in order to show, to the best of their ability, the emotions of their minds, or anything they have felt or learnt.”¹³⁹

Augustine gives his reason for discussing given signs:

Horum igitur signorum genus, quantum ad homines attinet, considerare atque tractare statuimus, quia et signa divinitus data quae scripturis sanctis continentur per homines nobis indicate sunt qui ea conscripserunt,

“It is this category are signs—to the extent that it applies to humans—that I have decided to examine and discuss, because even the divinely given signs contained in the holy scriptures have been communicated to us by the human beings who wrote them.”¹⁴⁰

Thus, in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, God has used humans and human words to convey truth to human beings. Words are especially important, as Augustine notes, because *Verba enim prorsus inter homines obtinuerunt principatum significandi quaecumque animo concipiuntur, si ea quisque prodere velit*, “Words have gained an altogether dominant role among humans in signifying the ideas conceived by the mind that person wants to reveal.”¹⁴¹ He moreover explicitly allows for and encourages the study of languages:

Sed haec tota pars humanorum institutorum, quae ad usum vitae necessarium proficient, nequaquam est fugienda Christiano, immo etiam quantum satis est instituenda memoriaque retinenda,

¹³⁹ *De Doctrina Christiana*, II.3.56-7.

¹⁴⁰ *De Doctrina Christiana*, II.3.58-9.

¹⁴¹ *De Doctrina Christiana*, II.6.58-9.

“This whole area of human institutions which contribute to the necessities of life should in no way be avoided by the Christian; indeed, within reason, they should be studied and committed to memory,”¹⁴²

and ea vero, quae homines cum hominibus habent, assumenda, in quantum non sunt luxuriosa atque superflua, et maxime litterarum figurae, sine quibus legere non possumus, linguarumque varietas quantum satis est, de qua superius disputavimus,

“those which men practise along with their fellow-men are to be adopted, in so far as they are not self-indulgent and superfluous. This applies especially to the letters of the alphabet, without which reading would be impossible, and (up to a point) to the multiplicity of languages, which I discussed above.”¹⁴³

Thus, Christians should seek familiarity with and understanding of languages because they can be helpful both in understanding the Scriptures and in conveying the truths of Christian religion. Augustine even exalts the Christian Scriptures over pagan, even Platonist, philosophy:

mitescere opus est pietate neque contradicere divinae scripturae sive intellectae, si aliqua vitia nostra percutit, sive non intellectae, quasi nos melius sapere meliusque praecipere possimus, sed cogitare potius et credere id esse melius et verius quod ibi scriptum est, etiam si lateat, quam id quod nos per nos ipsos sapere possumus,

“it is necessary, through holiness, to become docile, and not contradict holy scripture—whether we understand it (as when it hits at some of our vices) or fail to understand it (as when we feel that we could by ourselves gain better knowledge or give better instruction)—but rather ponder and believe that what is written there, even if obscure, is better and truer than any insights that we may gain by our own efforts.”¹⁴⁴

So, rather than philosophical insights obtained through reason without the aid of the divinely inspired Scriptures, Christians should use the words of Scripture as their guide.

Moreover, Augustine even goes so far as to commend the study of eloquence:

¹⁴² *De Doctrina Christiana*, II.101.102-3.

¹⁴³ *De Doctrina Christiana*, II.102.104-5.

¹⁴⁴ *De Doctrina Christiana*, II.17.62-5.

Sunt etiam quaedam precepta uberioris disputationis quae iam eloquentia nominatur, quae nihilominus vera sunt, quamvis eis possint etiam falsa persuaderi; sed quia et vera possunt, non est facultas ipsa culpabilis, sed ea male utentium perversitas,

“There are also certain rules of the more flamboyant discipline now called eloquence, which are valid in spite of the fact that they can be used to commend falsehood. Since they can also be used to commend the truth, it is not the subject itself that is reprehensible, but the perversity of those who abuse it.”¹⁴⁵

He moreover proceeds to state that the realities which the rules of eloquence describe are not human institutions, but rather observations of the nature of things, which is ordained by God.¹⁴⁶ Thus, Augustine goes further than encouraging just a basic understanding of language; Christians, especially preachers, should develop persuasive speech in the service of the spread of Christian religion. This is permissible because they are striving to win hearts and minds over to the truth, not to deceive others with lies, and because words are not fundamentally evil.

Augustine presents similar ideas about the nature of human language in the *Confessions* when discussing how he learned to speak and how he learned rhetoric in school. Augustine’s initial understanding of human speech came not from people attempting to teach it to him, but rather from his own observation of his elders and their communication with each other.¹⁴⁷ Augustine as an infant recognized that the things towards which others were gesturing had the name which they were speaking:

*cum ipsi appellabant rem aliquam et cum secundum eam vocem corpus ad aliquid movebant, videbam et tenebam hoc ab eis vocari rem illam quod sonabant cum eam vellent ostendere,*¹⁴⁸

“[I observed that] my elders would make some particular sound, and as they made it would point at or move towards some particular thing: and from this I came to

¹⁴⁵ *De Doctrina Christiana*, II.132.118-9.

¹⁴⁶ *De Doctrina Christiana*, II.132.118-9.

¹⁴⁷ *Confessions*, I.8.13.7.

¹⁴⁸ *Confessions*, I.8.13.7.

realise that the thing was called by the sound they made when they wished to draw my attention to it.”¹⁴⁹

Augustine affirms that his understanding of human language made him capable of expressing his mind to others, writing, *sic cum his inter quos eram voluntatum enuntiarum signa communicavi*,¹⁵⁰ “Thus I learnt to convey what I meant to those about me.”¹⁵¹ Language, then, as in his other works, is a given sign that can be learned. He also points to the fact that the language he learned was a social construction, writing, *et vitae humanae procellosam societatem altius ingressus sum*,¹⁵² “and so took another long step along the stormy way of human life in society.”¹⁵³ While Augustine wishes that he had not in his childhood studies spent so much time on empty matters, like the myths of the poets, he acknowledges that having learned to speak and write so well is useful to him now in the service of God, *didici enim in eis multa verba utilia*,¹⁵⁴ “Among those studies, I learnt many a useful word.”¹⁵⁵ He also shows the potential of words in preaching the Gospel when he prays, *ecce enim tu, domine, re meus et deus meus, tibi serviat quidquid utile puer didici, tibi serviat quod loquor et scribo et lego et numero*,¹⁵⁶ “O Lord, my King and my God: may whatever of value I learnt as a boy be used for Thy service, and what I now do in speaking and writing and reading and figuring.”¹⁵⁷ Thus, in more than just the *De Doctrina*, Augustine asserts the power of words to convey truth and the usefulness therefore of words to Christians as well as pagans. His belief in

¹⁴⁹ *Confessions*, I.8.13.10.

¹⁵⁰ *Confessions*, I.8.13.8.

¹⁵¹ *Confessions*, I.8.13.10.

¹⁵² *Confessions*, I.8.13.8.

¹⁵³ *Confessions*, I.8.13.10.

¹⁵⁴ *Confessions*, I.15.24.12.

¹⁵⁵ *Confessions*, I.15.24.16.

¹⁵⁶ *Confessions*, I.15.24.12.

¹⁵⁷ *Confessions*, I.15.24.16.

the power of words for conveying the Christian message, as well as his strong rhetorical education, enable him to write about Beauty more beautifully and in a more impactful way than Plotinus with his strong distrust of the material world and especially words; Augustine, understanding both the strength and weakness of words, is able to take advantage of both in order to make his writing especially powerful.

Section Nine: *Confessions* X.27.38 Analysis

The personal nature of Augustine's God contributes greatly to the rhetorical effectiveness of *Confessions* X.27.38. One especially clear way in which Augustine utilizes this personal nature is in his use of personal pronouns and verbs in the first and second person throughout *Confessions* X.27.38 and throughout the whole of the *Confessions*. Although Plotinus does use the second person in "On Beauty," it refers to a very different person than Augustine's second person. Thus its effect is far from Augustine's use of *te* in the *Confessions*. In "On Beauty," the "you" is not the One or even Intellect or Soul, but his reader. Plotinus' use of the pronoun "you" keeps the text entirely on a horizontal level, at the level of reading, not aiding in the experience of higher realities. If anything, it pulls the mind and heart away from the higher realities and back to oneself or the text. Thus, insofar as *Enneads* I.6 "On Beauty" is a dialogue, it is a dialogue between man and man. The *Confessions*, on the other hand, use the "you" vertically for a dialogue, rather a prayer, between Augustine and God Himself.¹⁵⁸ Thus, the reader is taken out of himself and into Augustine's heart and mind and even beyond that to the Eternal "You" that is God, Beauty Himself. Augustine brings the reader into his own inner life, making the reader enter into his prayer to God, because ultimately the *Confessions* are not a philosophical tract talking about God, but rather a prayer addressed to God, a prayer in which the reader is enabled to take part through the writing down of

¹⁵⁸ Peter Brown, citing E.R. Dodds' article "Augustine's Confessions: a study of spiritual maladjustment," in his biography *Augustine of Hippo* writes something similar: "Yet such prayers were usually regarded as part of a preliminary stage in the lifting of the philosopher's mind to God. They had never been used, as Augustine would use them throughout the *Confessions*, to strike up a lively conversation with Him: 'Plotinus never gossiped with the One as Augustine gossips in the *Confessions*.' Just as a dialogue builds up a lasting impression of the speakers, so Augustine and his God emerge vividly in the prayers of the *Confessions*," Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 166-7.

the *Confessions*. Plotinus talks around the One, Augustine talks to his personal God. Plotinus can only engage in abstract philosophizing. Augustine must engage in concrete dialogue with and prayer to God Himself. How can he do other when for him Truth is the incarnate, personal Word Himself? Direct address is ultimately the way to encounter such a God. Augustine, like Plotinus, may understand that he cannot ever truly grasp, ever truly comprehend the totality of God, but to fail to approach Him personally would be to weaken, not strengthen his pursuit of Beauty. Moreover, this attempt by a finite creature, who is very conscious of his finitude, to approach the infinite leads to a great deal of creative tension that can be seen especially clearly in *Confessions* X.27.36, but which can also be seen throughout the *Confessions*. In many ways, Plotinus has an easier problem at hand when he comes to write the *Enneads*; he can, for the most part, allow the One to be distant and beyond the realm of human experience. Augustine can never do that because the action of God in Augustine's life and the concern of God for Augustine are utterly essential to the narrative fabric of the *Confessions*. The *Confessions* are at their most basic the story of how God becomes incarnate in the realities of Augustine's own life, the story of Augustine both rejecting attachment to the material world and finding God in the material world. The *Enneads*, in so far as they have any connection to Plotinus' own life, reveal rather Plotinus' flight from the sensory toward the One, from one thing to something else.

In *Confessions* X.27.38, Augustine's praise of Divine Beauty is full of creative tension. The tension is first centered on the relationship of God to time. Augustine

describes Beauty as *tam antiqua et tam nova*,¹⁵⁹ “so ancient and so new.”¹⁶⁰ This is not a false tension in which one of the opposing qualities is the true quality and the other only seems to be. Rather, Beauty is utterly ancient and utterly new to the same degree, if unboundedness can truly be described as a degree, as indicated by the addition of the qualifier *tam* not to only *antiqua* nor only to *nova*, but to both. Nor does even the placement of *tam* suggest any difference in how the word is applied to either adjective, but rather *tam* takes the same relative place to each word, immediately preceding each. Augustine in this manner shows Beauty’s utter transcendence of all that is temporal, by affirming as true of Beauty the extremes of temporality and thus sending the mind of the reader into the space in between the two ideas. By describing God as equally ancient and new, he in fact points to the fact that God is utterly beyond time, neither truly new nor old, but something which encompasses in it what is most excellent of both newness and oldness. The repetition of *tam* is similar to the repetition of *ποῖός* noted in the section on *Enneads* I.6. There are very clear differences, however; Augustine is modifying two words with opposing meanings and is speaking of God himself. Plotinus is modifying two words with more or less the same meaning and is describing the person pursuing the One. In both instances, great rhetorical and perhaps even emotional emphasis is placed on the words modified, but, in the case of Augustine’s writing, the emphasis is far stronger and more intense precisely because it is used to heighten the contrast between a pair of opposites and is, moreover, applied to the transcendent God.

¹⁵⁹ *Confessions*, X.27.38.134.

¹⁶⁰ *Confessions*, X.27.38.210.

The use of temporal words does not, however, cease with *antiqua* and *nova*, but the description of Beauty is sandwiched between the repetition of the phrase, *sero te amavi*,¹⁶¹ “Late have I loved Thee,”¹⁶² with its temporal adverb, in this case not applied to Beauty, but rather to Augustine and his action of loving Beauty. This creates a threefold tension within the first sentence of the passage. Not only is there tension within the description of God’s temporality or lack thereof, but there is also a tension between God’s transcendence of time and Augustine’s being bounded by time and not only being bounded by time but failing to even act quickly within time. Augustine, unlike God, is not described with two equally strong opposing modifying words, but rather with one modifier, *sero*. What produces specificity in this passage is Augustine’s temporality, much more than God’s transcendence of all that is temporal. Even the use of the modifiers referring to God emphasizes the space in between those the ideas represented by those words as much as the use of those modifiers defines God in any particularly concrete way.

The tension within God’s relationship to Augustine becomes even more primary in the following sentence. Beauty is described as *intus*, “within,” in opposition to Augustine’s *foris*,¹⁶³ “outside.”¹⁶⁴ Augustine is thus making use of an antithetical pair of words to strengthen the creative tension within the passage.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, Augustine

¹⁶¹ *Confessions*, X.27.38.134.

¹⁶² *Confessions*, X.27.38.210.

¹⁶³ *Confessions*, X.27.38.134.

¹⁶⁴ *Confessions*, X.27.38.210.

¹⁶⁵ It is worth noting here an appropriate passage from Albert Blaise’s *Handbook of Christian Latin*: “More particularly, all the figures that form an antithesis will now present a certain originality because they have their point of departure in a ‘new mentality’. The opposition of the body to the spirit appears earlier in the philosophy of Seneca; but in Christian Latin there appears the practice of opposing body to soul; flesh to spirit; spirit to matter; the life of this world, of these times, to the Christian life; earth to heaven; that which

seeks God *foris* instead of *intus*, where he can be found. To further complicate things, even though Augustine is elsewhere than Beauty, Beauty is still with Augustine and yet Augustine is not with Beauty. Augustine in this way points to the complexities of spiritual presence. God is always with Augustine since God is omnipresent and since Augustine's soul can only exist by inhering in God, but Augustine, being a being less than Being Himself, can choose not to be consciously in God's presence by seeking the other things, which he sought as if they were God himself. That Augustine seeks the other things as gods is seen when he writes, *ibi te quaerebam*, "I sought you there,"¹⁶⁶ where *ibi*, "there," refers to *foris*, which is shortly further specified as *in ista formosa*,¹⁶⁷ "upon those lovely things."¹⁶⁸ Thus, to be with another in the spiritual sense used in this passage is to have one's attention directed to the other. The pairs of contraries in this sentence, like *intus* and *foris* are used by Augustine to bring out the complexity of the relationship between a time-bound, finite being and eternal, infinite Being. It makes no sense if one thinks in human terms for a person to be far away from God at the same time as God is intimately close to that person. One would more likely expect that the individual's rejection of God would remove God from the individual, but instead the distance is one-sided.

Indeed, this Creator-creature tension is shown to be the primary tension in the passage when Augustine writes, *et in ista formosa quae fecisti, deformis irruebam*,¹⁶⁹

passes to that which lives eternally." Albert Blaise, *A Handbook of Christian Latin: Style, Morphology, and Syntax*, trans. Grant C. Roti (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, Brepols, 1994), 14.32.7.

¹⁶⁶ *Confessions*, my translation, X.27.38.

¹⁶⁷ *Confessions*, X.27.38.134.

¹⁶⁸ *Confessions*, X.27.38.210.

¹⁶⁹ *Confessions*, X.27.38.134.

“and I, deformed, was rushing upon those well-formed things which you made.”¹⁷⁰

Augustine opposes the *formosa*, “well-formed,” things which God created and Augustine sought with himself, *deformis*, “deformed.” These two words can hardly be more clearly antonyms. These things are good, having their form from Beauty Himself, the source of form, while Augustine was deformed because of his failure to live up to his form, the nature given to him by God. Instead of seeing and seeking the God to Whom they pointed, he sought the things themselves as if they were God. Interestingly, a point of departure from Plotinus is that Augustine does not consider these material things altogether harmful in the pursuit of God; they are in fact images of God Himself, as suggested by *formosa*.¹⁷¹ God is Himself, for Augustine, the first Form whence all other forms and formed things come.¹⁷² This heightens the tension in the passage because all out rejection and denial of the good of these formed things is not possible; rather, Augustine and his reader must seek the middle road between the two extremes. Augustine, having intellectually worked through the problems with Manicheanism, cannot deny goodness to created things. For that to be the case, God would have had to create evil things or there would have had to have been some other principle of creation operating that is opposed to God. Neither option is tenable for the Christian Augustine. Thus, Augustine, seeking to remain in between the two extremes maintains the tension that arises when a simple solution cannot be given to an intellectual problem. Augustine may present a solution: Creation is a good, but not the highest good. That solution,

¹⁷⁰ *Confessions*, my translation, X.27.38.

¹⁷¹ It should also be noted that there is a difference between Plotinus’ understanding of the derivation of all things from the One, where the One does not really will the existence of all other things, and Augustine’s Christian understanding of the world as actively created by God by His choice, arising from His Love.

¹⁷² This is suggested by the identification in the *Confessions* of the *Verbum* with Plotinus’ Intellect.

however, leaves the practical response to the created world fraught with complication. Certainly, God must always be sought first, but how is one to seek God while at the same time appreciating the goodness and beauty in created things? Plotinus says that the one who has seen Beauty Itself spurns all lower forms of beauty, which are doubtless essentially the same as Augustine's *formosa*. His solution is thus simpler and more straightforward in many ways than Augustine's. The reader can see the sense Plotinus' writing makes and then move on. The tension Augustine creates makes the reader's attention delay on the passage, wondering how he is to respond to this not entirely resolved tension, marveling in wonder, and perhaps fear, at the work of the God Who made the world so beautifully beyond comprehension and Who is Himself even more beyond comprehension.

Still, the main tension in this clause is not between Augustine and those things but between the Creator, imparter of form to formless being, and His Creation. Whatever difference there may be arising from the actualization or not of a form, created things and Augustine still have in common that they are created things, with a form imparted to them by their Creator. Created things and God do not even have that in common; God is, for Augustine as well as for Plotinus, beyond created being, since He is Being Itself. This tension between Augustine's impermanent being and God's permanence as Being is the fundamental tension in the *Confessions*. Even here, there is an important difference between Augustine and Plotinus. For Plotinus, the One is not even Being, but rather the Intellect is Being; similarly, the One is formless, whereas Augustine's God is the first

Form.¹⁷³ God is constantly in the background, even when Augustine tries to remove Him from the foreground, ever present, ever influencing every step Augustine takes, ever the same. Augustine, for his part, while always present in the *Confessions*, and often front and center in the foreground, is never the same from one moment to the next. This is absolutely necessary because without it there would be no story to the *Confessions*. Augustine's ability to change and repent is absolutely essential to his salvation, as God's constancy and permanent sameness is utterly essential to His role as Augustine's Savior, the one who always pursues Augustine and the constancy of Whose Beauty and Goodness allows Augustine to recognize Him as he newly appears, ever the same in every moment of Augustine's search for Truth and ever startlingly new.

The passage derives its power from the personal nature of God even more than from the tension between Creator and Creation. Throughout the passage, Augustine uses personal language to refer to himself and to God. The repeated *sero te amavi* emphasizes both of their personal natures using the pronoun *te* to refer to God and the first person form of the verb to point to Augustine. That Augustine should speak of himself in personal terms is not so surprising or striking, even Plotinus occasionally, albeit incredibly rarely, does that; it is far more startling for Augustine to refer to God as a "you." This is, moreover, not solely restricted to this passage. The *Confessions* are nothing if not a dialogue with or a monologue addressed to God. God's personal nature is essential to the very character of the *Confessions*. No longer, as in the *Soliloquies*, does Augustine address only himself or Reason. Here he addresses God Himself on intimate

¹⁷³ That Augustine perceives God as the first Form is suggested by the fact that he seems to identify the divine *Verbum* with Plotinus' Intellect.

terms. He addresses God as a person capable of real action, capable of acting intimately with individual humans, especially Augustine. This can be seen most clearly when he writes, *Coruscasti, splenduisti, et fugasti caecitatem meam*,¹⁷⁴ “Thou didst send forth Thy beams and shine upon me and chase away my blindness.”¹⁷⁵ All of the verbs emphasize God’s personhood by their use of the second person singular; moreover, the sentence emphasizes Augustine’s personhood by the use of the first person possessive pronoun. The sentence, then, shows God as an active agent in Augustine’s life, someone who actively affects Augustine. It is only through personal, active agency that God could heal Augustine in the way Augustine needed to be healed. In the sentences following that, Augustine shows how intimately God’s personal action is interwoven with his own personal action by interweaving the words describing his actions with those describing God’s actions: *Fragrasti, et duxi spiritum, et anhele tibi. Gustavi, et esurio, et sitio. Tetigisti me, et exarsi in pacem tuam*,¹⁷⁶ “Thou didst breath fragrance upon me, and I drew in my breath and do now pant for Thee: I tasted Thee, and now hunger and thirst for Thee: Thou didst touch me, and I have burned for Thy peace.”¹⁷⁷

The use of physical language to describe God in this passage is striking considering that the *Confessions* have been, on the whole, a description of Augustine’s journey from his false belief in a physical God to his belief, influenced by Plotinus, in an immaterial God. The shift to physical metaphors is taken here, perhaps, because the persons with whom humans are more conscious of interacting are other humans.

¹⁷⁴ *Confessions*, X.27.38.134.

¹⁷⁵ *Confessions*, X.27.38.210.

¹⁷⁶ *Confessions*, X.27.38.134.

¹⁷⁷ *Confessions*, X.27.38.210.

Augustine, then, wants to emphasize God’s personal nature with words that suggest not just another person but a real lover, whose touch makes Augustine burn. Yet, Augustine must always preserve the distinction between physical human love and immaterial divine love, and so he adds *in pacem tuam*, “for Thy peace,” which cannot truly be said of any human love relationship. This, moreover, signals a difference between the presentation of love in *Enneads* I.6 because there the lover, ever longing, is always in a state of incomplete fulfillment of his love. For Augustine, the love for God can ultimately be fulfilled. This description of God as lover signals a real shift away from the Neoplatonism. God, for Plotinus, cannot be described as a lover.¹⁷⁸ Humans are the ones that love for Plotinus, because they are the inferior ones seeking the superior Beauty. Humans can ascend from the love of material things to the love of immaterial things to love of the One, but it is always the humans, not the One that do the loving. For the One to be a lover would seem to Plotinus to make the One dependent on inferior beings, which can never be the case since the One is prior to all beings.

Augustine does not only use paradox in *Confessions* X, but uses paradox throughout the *Confessions* to draw out the various tensions in creaturely existence and the relationship between a creature and a Creator God. At the beginning of the *Confessions*, in I.4.4. Augustine uses paradox in the form of antithetical word pairs in a

¹⁷⁸ Even in *Enneads* VI.8, about which Armstrong in his introduction in the Loeb version of the text writes, “the language of will and love and thought is used about him, and he appears as something more like a ‘personal God’ than he does elsewhere in the *Enneads*,” Plotinus qualifies his statements by saying that λαμβανέτω δὲ καὶ τὸ “οἶον” ἐφ’ ἑκάστου, “one should understand ‘as if’ with each of them” (VI.8.13.50.270-1). Moreover, the love of the One seems to be directed not outwards to others but inwards towards itself, as when Plotinus writes, Καὶ ἐράσιμον καὶ ἔρωσ ὁ αὐτὸς καὶ αὐτοῦ ἔρωσ, ἅτε οὐκ ἄλλως καλὸς ἢ παρ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ, “And he, that same self, is lovable and love and love of himself, in that he is beautiful only from himself and in himself.” Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.8 “On Free Will and the Will of the One,” in *Plotinus Enneads VI.6-9*, ed. and trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 15.1-2.276-77/

similar manner and to a similar effect to the use of word pairs in *Confessions* X. After using a series of superlatives to refer to God with the words *summe*, *optime*, *potentissime*, *omnipotentissime*,¹⁷⁹ “the greatest and the best, mightiest, almighty.”¹⁸⁰ Augustine proceeds to use two words that while not strictly opposites are often thought of as opposites with reference to God, *misericordissime et iustissime*,¹⁸¹ “most merciful and most just.”¹⁸² Similarly, *secretissime et praesentissime*,¹⁸³ “utterly hidden and utterly present,”¹⁸⁴ are a pair of antithetical words, both of which are simultaneously applied to God. Indeed, this pair of words is even more clearly opposites than the previous word pair. Some of the word pairs, like *immutabilis mutans omnia*,¹⁸⁵ “suffering no change and changing all things,”¹⁸⁶ have their contrast in God’s nature as opposed to the nature He gives to the world. In another antithetical word pair, Augustine negates both members of the pair of words in order to refer to God *qua* God, *numquam novus numquam vetus*,¹⁸⁷ “never new, never old.”¹⁸⁸ Indeed, this word pair is almost echoed in X.27.38 by *tam antiqua et tam nova*, except that *tam* is used in the latter to intensify the affirmation, whereas *numquam*, “never,” and its repetition serves to intensify the negation. In contrast to the *numquam* in that word pair, Augustine uses *semper* to intensify by affirmation, while still referring to God *qua* God, in *semper agens semper quietus*,¹⁸⁹ “ever in action,

¹⁷⁹ *Confessions*, I.4.4.4. The use of the vocative indicating, as in X.27.38, the first-person address of God is also worthy of note.

¹⁸⁰ *Confessions*, I.4.4.4.

¹⁸¹ *Confessions*, I.4.4.4.

¹⁸² *Confessions*, I.4.4.4.

¹⁸³ *Confessions*, I.4.4.4.

¹⁸⁴ *Confessions*, I.4.4.4.

¹⁸⁵ *Confessions*, I.4.4.4.

¹⁸⁶ *Confessions*, I.4.4.4-5.

¹⁸⁷ *Confessions*, I.4.4.4.

¹⁸⁸ *Confessions*, I.4.4.5.

¹⁸⁹ *Confessions*, I.4.4.5.

ever at rest.”¹⁹⁰ In a similar manner to X.27.38, Augustine in this passage uses almost entirely paratactical constructions, using *et* or *nec* or, perhaps most powerful of all, using no connective word at all and simply allowing the opposing meanings of the words and the reader’s mind to fill in the space where the connection ought to be.

Throughout the passage, Augustine uses active, second person verbs to refer to God and his action: *eras*, *fecisti*, *vocasti*, *clamasti*, *rupisti*, *coruscasti*, *splenduisti*, *fugasti*, *fragrasti*, and *tetigisti*. The first verb, being only a verb indicating being, while striking for its difference from the third person that is always used in *Enneads* I.6 to refer to the One, is less powerful than the other verbs, which derive even greater strength than the verbs in Plotinus from the fact that they make God an active agent. Whereas Plotinus may at times use a form of the verb “to be” in order to speak of the One in some manner, he rarely, if ever, uses verbs that make the One an agent as Augustine does. Augustine has no such hesitancy about making God an agent. God, as *fecisti*, “you made,” suggests, actively creates the world; the One seems disengaged in its emanation of the world. Thus, there is a more intimate, because intentional, connection between God and the created world. This more intimate connection may also allow Augustine to use more physical language when speaking of and to God.

Whereas Plotinus in *Enneads* I.6 tends toward hypotaxis, Augustine tends in *Confessions* X.27.38 toward parataxis. He does not use much subordination, even though, as a classically trained rhetor, incredibly familiar with Ciceronian prose, which is fully of complex sentences fully of hypotactically arranged clauses and phrases, Augustine was certainly capable of producing such sentences. Almost the only conjunction used in the

¹⁹⁰ *Confessions*, I.4.4.5.

passage is the neutral *et*, which does not place one part of a sentence above the another, but gives them equal weight. While he does use relative conjunctions a few times in the passage, these do not create much hypotaxis. At times, Augustine even avoids using *et* where he could have. The only other conjunction he uses is *si*, which he only uses one time and only as is necessary for what he is saying. Erich Auerbach, writing in *Mimesis* of this style in another passage of the *Confessions*, notes: “The tone has something urgently impulsive, something human and dramatic, and the form exhibits a predominance of parataxes.¹⁹¹ Auerbach also notes that this use of parataxis is characteristic of Biblical Latin.¹⁹² Further on, he notes, “In all of these instances there is, instead of the causal or at least temporal hypotaxis which we should expect in classical Latin (whether with *cum* or *postquam*, whether with an ablative absolute or a participial construction) a parataxis with *et*; and this procedure, far from weakening the interdependence of the two events, brings it out most emphatically.”¹⁹³ Thus, the use of parataxis in Augustine actually strengthens the relationship between the sets of opposites, giving the passage more dramatic and emotional force. In *Confessions* X.27.38, the use of parataxis produces a sense of rapidity and intensity. Each phrase is presented on its own, not affected or qualified by subordinate clauses, whether explicit or implicit. This is especially true of the end of the passage, where the reader is presented with a series of verbs, describing both the actions of God and of Augustine. At the end of the passage, several clauses consist solely of *et* and a single word. The longest clause in that part of

¹⁹¹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard Trask (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), 61.

¹⁹² Auerbach, 61.

¹⁹³ Auerbach, 61-2.

the passage is the last clause in the passage. Thus, while he may not strictly use a Ciceronian tricolon, Augustine here uses an ascending style where he finishes with perhaps the most powerful image, containing within itself as it does an image that derives its effectiveness from its sensory character paired with its pair of opposites. Thus, in the final clause of the sentence, Augustine presents, on the one hand, a highly charged sensory image and, on the other hand, peace and God, Who is here indicated by the word *tuam*.

Section Ten: Conclusion

While Plotinus' negative attitude towards the material world leads him to make less effective use of words in the passages considered, Augustine's more complex understanding of the relationship between God and the created world leads him to a more complex style that derives a great deal of emotional energy from the use of antitheses necessitated by Augustine's understanding of the inherent goodness of the world and the Christian God's utter transcendence of the good world He has attentively created. Augustine's understanding of God as personal, even intimate with human beings leads, moreover, to a more dramatic style. Unfortunately, this paper has only been able to consider one passage from each author. A great deal of work still needs to be done on other passages in the *Confessions* and the *Enneads*, as well as in all of the other works of Augustine.

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04/10/2015