AUGUSTINE'S INCARNATIONAL HERMENEUTICS AND POSTMODERNITY

A Thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology

by

Jonathan Glenn Prince

Middlesex University

Supervised at London School of Theology

September 2018

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the hermeneutic framework of St. Augustine of Hippo. Study of this topic has been suggested by patrologists such as Frances Young, and garnered occasional glances in contemporary scholarship. Little has been done as far as a systematic treatment of Augustine's theory of hermeneutics in favor of theological/doctrinal issues.

This thesis begins with a contextualization of the hermeneutic of late antiquity, then follows Augustine's analysis of the three-fold schema of language: *res*, *verbum*, and *dicibile*. Primary texts for these topics are *On Christian Doctrine, Against the Academic Skeptics*, and *The Teacher.* Secondary literature specifically on this topic and texts is sparse, though a few scholars have addressed papers to the query.

This thesis is written in dialogue with contemporary theological hermeneutics, with the view that a pre-modern hermeneutic schema can be a valuable interlocutor in the continuing development of post-modern thought. Additionally, the human need to identify, interpret, and apply meaning is a perennial struggle, and an influential thinker/writer of late antiquity can aid in the contemporary development of a holistic interpretive/epistemological framework without falling to false dichotomies and deterministic methodologies.

Contents

Introduction

In St. Augustine's writings, it is difficult to stray very far from his conception of sign and semantics. Later authors have rarely explored his work on signification, though it is an essential foundation of his thought.

> Chief among these is Augustine's discussion of the meanings of Scripture, but the concept enters into such diverse fields of his interests as his theory of language, his discussion of miracles, of the relation of the world to God, and of Man's way of acquiring knowledge, not least knowledge of himself.[1]

Though not always explicitly stated, language itself is essential to the philosophical thought and theological development of his works. For Augustine, language is not simply a pragmatic tool for social interaction – but rather a foundational aspect of being human in the world. It is the function that enables humanity to understand themselves, the exterior world, and ultimately, for Augustine, humanity's Creator. It is not only a semantic field, but an epistemological one; the key to the ego, inter-subjectivity, and the metaphysical alike.

The field of hermeneutics has overlooked the possible contribution that pre-modern interpreters can make to the field. Thiselton writes "...the pre-history of [semiotics] throws up none of the most sensitive issues."[2] He mentions, however, that "Augustine noted the capacity of

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[1] R. A. Markus, "St. Augustine on Signs," *Phronesis* 2, no. 1 (1957): 1.

[2]Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 83.

signs to point beyond themselves, and like Locke, viewed linguistic signs as identifying markers of thoughts or ideas."[3]

Hermeneutics considers its birth as part of the modern era; typically, it is attributed to Schleiermacher. While that may be true of interpretation as a study guided by scientific methodology, the study and critical reflection of human interpretation and understanding of texts (or utterances in general) has been a regular occurrence long before Aristotle penned his 'Poetics'.

For the field of theological hermeneutics there are two primary concerns; the first is interpretation of scripture, and the second is *apologia* to the wider field of philosophy. Before Schleiermacher, the role of hermeneutics was "to support, secure, and clarify an already accepted understanding"[4] of traditional church interpretation and teaching. For modern philosophical hermeneutics, tradition cannot be a valid arbiter of interpretation, understanding or truth; as a result, large swaths of historical theology and hermeneutics have been necessarily marginalized. The questions of the post-modern culture, however, are different than the commitments of the modern scholar. This difference has sparked a renewed interest by scholars such as Frances Young[5] in critically examining these influential pre-modern authors.

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[3] Thiselton, 83.

[4] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 5.

[5] Frances Young, "Augustine's Hermeneutics and Postmodern Criticism," *Interpretation* 58, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 42–55, https://doi.org/10.1177/002096430405800105.

Contemporary interpreters may be skeptical or even suspicious toward possible contributions of these pre-modern writers. Of course, there is historical distance, but also an assumption that anything prior to the enlightenment (or at least pre-dating Martin Luther) subscribes to a naïve and simplistic understanding of the world. There is also a suspicion based on underlying presuppositions caused by issues arising from the church as an institution. A reader would do well to recall that Augustine was not the harbinger of institutional tradition for centuries; he was simply a contemplative individual wrestling with the issues of his time. Just as Thiselton and Vanhoozer endeavor to address perceived challenges from their S*itz im Leben*, Augustine saw gaps in his context and sought to provide counterpoints.

This thesis is not about appropriating the thoughts of St. Augustine of Hippo, or "re-contextualizing" his views according to a particular agenda—philosophical, theological, or otherwise. This is an argument that Augustine, and by extension his pre-modern cohort, have something to offer the contemporary conversation. His thought and writing have inescapably tinted the landscape of western tradition. The very shape of the Christian Church owes a debt to St. Augustine who contributed to its great Schism. Theology, Catholic and Protestant alike, has been founded, rebutted, reformed, and revived using his argumentation.

Likewise, philosophy cannot escape his influence. In an essential history of philosophy, Augustine stands alone in a nineteen-hundred-year gap between Aristotle and Descartes. Thinkers as diverse as Thomas Aquinas and Jacques Derrida lament and laud, refute and re-imagine, chafe against and co-opt the ideas of this late-antiquarian.

Yet for all of this, exploration of the *Grund* of his thought has been curiously sparse. His contemplation of the issues of time, self, the Godhead, the Church, the world, morality, sin, and

grace, have been examined *ad nauseum* since he took up his pen. In all of this, save an occasional mention and rare project has scholarship considered the thread that runs through the tapestry of his worldview, faith, contemplation and writing – language and meaning.

Though modern hermeneutics began as an ecclesial discussion in the early-nineteenth century, it evolved into the post-modern doubt that any real understanding or subsequent claims of truth are possible. By the end of the twentieth century, theologians saw hermeneutics as the current cultural battleground; Derrida's literary deconstruction was tantamount to Nietzsche's declaration "God is dead". "Deconstruction is the death of God put into writing",[6] wrote Carl Raschke in 1993.

> Hermeneutics and the human sciences appear to have reached a dead end in postmodernity only because an alternative to the Cartesian subject was not forthcoming. A viable alternative, the communicative agent, is now available, however… The crux of the matter is this: communicative agents are not disembodied minds but embodied persons who form part of a language community.[7]

Is it possible that a writer from sixteen-hundred years ago can contribute to the contemporary situation? In this thesis, I will argue that Augustine is not only a valuable interlocutor—but is already in the background of the discussion. While contemporary contributors to hermeneutics are not concerned directly with his views of language, they rely on

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[6] Carl A. Raschke as quoted in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 30.

[7] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 231.

the previous generation of philosophers, who explicitly use Augustine to develop core aspects of their response to modernity.

Not only is Augustine already in the background of contemporary debates, but in his own texts has considered issues that are currently unaddressed or unresolved. On his own terms, he has wrestled with the ramifications of both collapsing and severing the relationship between Being and language. These are perennial issues, and ones for which he has established holistic, inter-disciplinary solutions. The argument need not be whether his answers to these problems are the only or even best available; the argument is that he has anticipated the issues of post-modern debate and provided an answer for them for his own context. As such, Augustine deserves a seat at the table as an interlocutor, his works deserve honest contextual examination and due consideration for points of contemporary engagement.

With this goal in mind, an attempt was made to avoid overlaying a foreign theoretical framework on Augustine and his writings in search of confirmation or refutation. Rather, a Gadamerian approach was attempted to address "questions that arise," rather than "free-floating problems." For "…only when we understand the question to which something is the answer," can we say we understand without "remain[ing] foregrounded against our own intention."[8] The intention is to be hermeneutic in methodology as well as content. Thus, a discursive approach has been taken, following three of Augustine's texts relating to language and its relation to

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[8] Hans-Georg Gadamer, as quoted by Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 4.

Being: *On Christian Doctrine, The Teacher,* and *Against the Academic Skeptics*.[9] As primary contemporary interlocutors, Anthony C. Thiselton, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer have been chosen for two primary reasons: first, they have placed an emphasis on understanding and addressing the wider issues of general hermeneutics, and second, they have contributed to developing the field of theological hermeneutics.

This thesis will begin by developing the context in which Augustine practiced by examining the inherited hermeneutic approach(s) of late antiquity. Following, will be a consideration of how language relates to ontology and Augustine's theory of reference in response to that dynamic. Next, the issue of skepticism, its morality, and its relationship to signification will be taken up. Finally, the issue of the author as communicative agent, and the content of signs will be considered.

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[9] *De doctrina christiana*, hereafter *Doc. chr.*; *De magistro,* hereafter *Mag.*; *Contra Academicos*, hereafter *C. Acad.* All titles, translations and abbreviations for Augustine's works are from Mark Vessey and Shelly Reid, eds., *A Companion to Augustine*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

1. Augustine's Hermeneutic Context

Introductory texts on hermeneutics refer to pre-modern interpretation variously as 'mystical,' 'allegorical,' or 'pre-critical.' Often these terms are ambiguous and used interchangeably, though they were distinct interpretive traditions.[10] Jean Grondin is a rare author in the genre by even taking a few pages to sketch the Hellenic origins of the allegorical tradition and note that there was an opposing school of thought based in Antioch.[11]

In *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, Thiselton dedicates a chapter to "Pre-Modern Biblical Interpretation: Hermeneutics of Tradition" but does little to address the topic itself. He comparatively analyzes the role of tradition in pre-modern, modern, and post-modern hermeneutics.[12] He includes a paragraph summary of the Quadriga, or four-fold interpretation of scripture.[13] His primary concern is the defeat of gnosticism by Irenaeus; he approves of the use of the rule of faith, as well as the appeal to the canon for setting a horizon. Thiselton holds other

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[10] E.g. Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979).

[11] Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

[12] "On the basis of belief in God, *trust* assumes the kind of methodological role which *doubt* assumes for modernism as exemplified in Cartesian rationalism, and which *suspicion* assumes for post-modernism in socio-critical hermeneutics and in deconstructionism." Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 143 (Italics original).

[13] *litera gesta docet: quid credas allegoria. Moralis quid agis: quo tendas anagogia*: The letter teaches what has been done, the allegory what you are to believe, the moral what you must do, and the anagogy where you are heading. F. F. Bruce, "The History of New Testatment Study," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 28.

approaches under suspicion, "One weakness in Irenaeus's interpretative practice was his willingness to resort to allegorical interpretation…"[14] Despite his doubts about the practice, he does make note of a significant difference between the use of allegory between the early Christians and Greek and Jewish exegetes.[15]

The Hellenic Greeks and the Jewish scholars of antiquity, such as Philo of Alexandria, employed allegory to broaden meaning. They sought to 'demythologize', 'de-objectify', and 'de-particularize' the meaning from texts. They sought to develop *secular* meanings and applications from ancient religious texts. Conversely, early Christian allegorists sought to narrow the meaning of ancient religious texts to specifically *Christological* application.[16] Thiselton's primary exemplar of the period is Origen, with a tentative assessment that he "operates with varying degrees of hermeneutical success and failure, depending largely on his aim in particular cases."[17] He does, however, make a brief mention of a caveat to the genre of allegory, the "Antiochene Fathers" and their "greater emphasis on history and related suspicion of polyvalent meaning."[18]

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[14] Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 155.

[15] Alister McGrath discusses differences between the Alexandrians and Antiochenes, but only in reference to their Christologies, not their hermeneutic approach. Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1998).

[16] Thiselton, 158.

[17] Thiselton, 171.

[18] Thiselton, 172.

Alexandrian School

The Alexandrian school is generally associated with allegory and considered to be instituted by Philo. This school developed its interpretive schema from the Greek through the Judaic and into early Christian traditions. Even in his own time, Philo's *allegoresis* was considered excessive in its focus on looking beyond the text and into the 'spiritual' meaning; nevertheless, his style of interpretation seems to have become the archetype for the practice. In reality, this tradition had a rich critical heritage from which to draw.

Augustine's own use of allegory, as applied to scripture, can result in a bewildering array of meanings, especially to a modern interpreter influenced by Julicher. The allegorical schema that marked much of the early church teaching used biblical texts as narrative templates that could be typologically transferred to fit contemporaneous issues.

As an example, Augustine refers to the narrative of Sarah and Hagar[19] several times in different ways to further differing arguments. In *City of God*, Augustine traced the development of the Earthly and Heavenly Cities in Book XV. Here, following the Apostle Paul's allegorical lead in his Epistle to the Galatians,[20] the distinction is made between Sarah and her children of promise, and Hagar and her children of slavery. Hagar, as a slave, was connected to Mount Sinai and the Mosaic Covenant and bore children into slavery under the Law. Sarah, as the free

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[19] Genesis 16.21.

[20] Galatians 4.21-31.

woman, equated to the Heavenly Jerusalem, and bore children in Grace under the New Covenant.

Augustine's Earthly City was prefigured by Hagar; the city and its inhabitants are "by nature vitiated by sin".[21] Born of flesh and natural law, Ishmael was destined to remain under the slavery of natural law in the Earthly City. Isaac, however, was born of miraculous grace to the free woman Sarah; as such, he is free to enjoy the "divine kindness"[22] of the Heavenly City.

Sarah's barrenness and old age also figured into Augustine's allegory; under the natural law of the Earthly City, she had no reason to hope for children of her own. In the grace of the Heavenly City, she was blessed with offspring to be "vessels of mercy."[23] Thus, Augustine claims that Isaac and his children "typify the children of grace, the citizens of the free city, who dwell together in everlasting peace, in which self-love and self-will have no place, but a ministering love that rejoices in the common joy of all, of many hearts makes one, that is to say, secures a perfect concord."[24] Ishmael and his descendants in the Earthly City, are destined for discord, strife, and eventually – to be 'cast out', as was Hagar.

Elsewhere, Augustine develops the Hagar/Sarah narrative differently. In his commentary on Galatians he explains Paul's use of Hagar as representing the Old Testament, and Sarah

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[21] *City of God*; Book XV s.2. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Christian Church 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004). Hereafter, *Civ. Dei*.

[22] *Civ. Dei,* XV.2.

[23] *Civ. Dei,* XV.3

[24] *Civ. Dei,* XV.2

prefiguring the New Testament.[25] Augustine again develops the allegory beyond Paul's usage. "Augustine also recognizes here that Abraham had more than two sons, namely those born to Keturah, and he finds even in these sons some *figura* of the future, namely, a foreshadowing of heresies and schisms."[26] There is also, in the conflict between Ishmael and Isaac, a foreshadowing of persecution of Christians by the Jews.[27]

The allegorization of the Sarah/Hagar narrative is a recurring theme in many of Augustine's writings including: *On the Gospel of John 11*, *Psalm 119*, his *Epistles 93*, *185*, *196*, his *Answer to the Jews* and his refutations of the Manichean and Donatist heresies.[28] In his response to the Manicheans, he draws on the pride of Ishmael (the son of a slave) in "playing"[29] with Isaac (the true heir) as a factor for being cast out of his father's household. To the Donatists, he takes a very different approach. In response to the contentious issue of re-baptism, "Augustine applies the treatment of Hagar to the Donatists, telling them that even if they have suffered corporal punishment through the Catholic Church, they have suffered as Hagar at the hand of Sarah; she was told to return to her mistress."[30]

We can see, by Augustine's varied use of this single biblical narrative, that he used terms interchangeably with other narratives. At times he would use characters as signs for other

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[25] Wendy E Helleman, "'Abraham Had Two Sons': Augustine and the Allegory of Sarah and Hagar (Galatians 4:21-31)," *Calvin Theological Journal* 48, no. 1 (April 2013): 35–64.

[26] Helleman, 48f.

[27] Helleman, 49.

[28] Helleman, 52.

[29] Genesis 21.9.

[30] Helleman, "'Abraham Had Two Sons,'" 56.

concepts – such as Sarah and Hagar for New/Old Testaments and Covenants. In other instances, characters would be discarded for use of basic plot – as in the abuse and return of Hagar as a moral model for the Donatists. In several circumstances (such as his use in *City of God*) Augustine used Paul's allegorizing in Galatians as license to further extend the metaphor to suit various theological arguments. At times, it seems that this allegorizing was limited only by imagination and intent. Augustine, however, did not hold this hermeneutic to be without limit.

Augustine's practice of interpreting scripture was not spontaneously generated; he stood "broadly speaking, in the Alexandrian tradition of Biblical interpretation."[31] Influenced by the preaching of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, he was drawn to "the techniques and insights of Greek exegetes in the tradition of Philo and Origen."[32] This was a well-established methodology that drew on Platonic philosophy, interpretive traditions of Homeric poetry, Hebrew Scripture, and Rabbinic scholarship. Origen's interpretive program has been traditionally understood as it is laid out in *De Principiis* with the following five principles.

1. "Literal" interpretation was attributed to the Jews, Christians are to seek the spiritual meaning.
2. Based on Philo's tripartite division of the human (body, soul, spirit), there are three levels of meaning – literal, moral, and spiritual.

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[31] Richard A. Norris, "Augustine and the Close of the Ancient Period," in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 386.

[32] Norris, 382.

3. In instances where no coherent literal sense was apparent, Christians are called to look for spiritual meaning.
4. In the Jewish spirit of the importance of every "jot and tittle", Origen sought allegorical meanings in the minutest details.
5. The Holy Spirit imparted truth concealed in a narrative about the created order so that spiritual truths could be discovered.[33]

The above program for interpretation appears to set no horizon on the possible meaning of texts. It establishes the 'literal' meaning (or meaning at the level of text/fact/referent) as a remedial meaning; requiring that an interpreter go beyond the text itself to find a 'spiritual meaning'. Any meaning that could be ascribed to any of three 'levels' and attached remotely to the smallest term of the narrative, could be legitimized. This does seem more like hermeneutical anarchy than any method on which the early church could base its theology.

More recent analysis finds that there are more underlying principles in the Alexandrian school than in this understanding of Origen. Frances Young notes, that in *De Principiis*, Origen is not systematically expositing his own hermeneutic, but rather delivering an apology for broad Christian understandings of scripture. Indeed, in chapters one though seven of Book IV, Origen developed an *apologia* for Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and law, as well as the authority of those writings to bear witness to Him. Origen is also "justifying controversial aspects of Christian interpretation rather than giving an account of exegetical methodology."[34]

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[33] Adapted from, Frances Young, "Alexandrian and Antiochene Exegesis," in *A History of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 335.

[34] Young, 338.

Young's second argument is that Origen dedicated much of his life to biblical scholarship, and *De Principiis* "provides no description of what he did as a text critic, commentator, and preacher."[35] The framework given in *De Principiis* is not Origen's own working hermeneutic, but rather a broad consideration of wider Christian exegesis. In order to construct the interpretive framework of the Alexandrian school, we must look to the Hellenistic system presumed by Origen, and later, Augustine.

Exegetical work was divided in two phases, the first, *methodikon*, the second *historicon*. In this phase the 'physical' text was examined. Beginning with the handwritten material, text-critical questions were posed. Grammar and word choices were observed and critiqued, the meanings of archaic words/forms were exhumed. As part of this examination, tropes (figures of speech) were identified and explained along with idioms and other linguistic devices.

For the Greeks, the 'literal sense' of the texts encompassed a broader scope than in modern hermeneutics. The usage of tropes could mean that the whole text was metaphorical, and a "reading 'according to the letter' was wrong".[36] Etymology contributed a whole new set of possible meanings, and allegory itself was considered simply another figure of speech. All these potential meanings fell within the scope of the 'literal' sense of the text.

The second phase of Greek exegesis, *historikon*, is what could be considered commentary. Extra-textual material was applied to help develop and broaden understanding of the text. Included in this study would be relevant data such as historical information,

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[35] Young, 338.

[36] Young, 339.

geographical data, and explanations of myths, poetry, and external events referred to by the text. Texts were also evaluated based on their rhetorical aspects; if there were different ways to express the same concept, then an author's choice of word, weight and voice bring different meanings to the text. Examination of those rhetorical choices contributed to an in-depth textual interpretation.

A text must also pass moral consideration; Plato and Plutarch's assessment of the poets still held sway over interpretive practice. If a text, action, or narrative character was judged to be morally deficient or subversive, it was to be discarded. To defend these deficient texts, meaning must be found to lie somewhere other than at the literalistic level, therefore, allegory must be applied. [37]

Not simply a matter of philosophical interest, the Alexandrian school was concerned with practical applications of interpreting narratives. "It was important for the budding lawyer to be able to challenge the plausibility of narratives… Methods of *anaskeue* (refutation) and *kataskeue* (conformation) were therefore taught…through the medium of literature."[38] Part of training in textual interpretation was to evaluate narratives for cohesion, coherence, and plausibility. While this had particular interest to those intending to argue cases in the court of law, it clearly had implications for how texts should be treated. A text, whether classical poetry, epic myth, historical report, or Holy Scripture, like a narrative in court, was subject to critical evaluation. A

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[37] Young, "Alexandrian and Antiochene Exegesis," 2003.

[38] Young, 340.

text must meet certain literal level requirements to hold its own valid textual meaning. Failing these tests, meaning must lie on another level.

There were certain limits within a text itself to allegorical interpretation. "Didymus, distinguished sense and reference, first at the level of the wording… then at the level of figurative discourse… Here a series of traditional "figures" (such as Jerusalem = church) were consistently applied."[39] Allegorical interpretation could not be arbitrarily legitimized; consistent metaphors and figures must be applied to texts, and only when the text itself signaled, could another meaning be sought after.

The historicity of the passage also set a horizon, "Augustine gives a clear affirmation of historical truth; spiritual understanding (*sensum intelligentiae spiritualis*), should not undermine the reality of historical fact."[40] Augustine restricted allegorical use more than his predecessors. For example, "Origen and Jerome, as writers who allegorize on the basis of names, [however] Augustine affirms clearly that he will not himself indulge in that approach."[41] He was also reluctant to sever prophecy from its historical setting. Old Testament prophecy, properly in its own context, had a historical and literal fulfillment. This created a different meaning, slightly more grounded than allegory; these fulfilled prophecies *pre-figured* New Testament fulfillment in Christ or his new Covenant.

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[39] Young, 338.

[40] Helleman, "'Abraham Had Two Sons,'" 46.

[41] Helleman, 40.

For exegetes like Augustine, Origen and Jerome, it was assumed "that the Scriptures were full of passages or statements that are obscure or even, at first glance, difficult to make sense of…"[42] When confronted with these plentiful passages, a reader was called by the Divine Author to seek a deeper, spiritual meaning. For the Alexandrian school, the narratives of scripture were sacred and took prominence in their theology and ethics, but the texts included many signals that their meaning must be developed externally.

Greek exegesis used many tools we associate with modern methodologies. The *methodikon* approach focused on the form of the text by asking text-critical questions, finding figures of speech, idioms, tracing etymology and analyzing word choices. Allegory itself, was a type of figure of speech and was part of this process. *Historikon* was the practice of applying historical-critical techniques such as assembling pertinent geographical data, information about various cultural practices, and contemporaneous external narratives or myths that were alluded to in a text. Rhetorical studies assumed a distinction between the text and the subject matter; the interpreter sought to identify the author's purpose by analysis of the way a text/argument was structured. These interpretive traditions that have often been dismissed as ancient, 'pre-critical', or naïve spiritualization, in fact, utilize sophisticated critical analysis of texts.

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[42] Norris, "Augustine and the Close of the Ancient Period," 391.

The Alexandrians, however, were not the only exegetical school of this time. Lucian, known for critical study of scriptures and whose edition of the Septuagint was preferred by the eastern church, founded a school in Antioch.[43]

Antiochene School

In modern histories of hermeneutics, there has been a tendency to underestimate the distinctions between the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools. This can be attributed to historical misunderstandings of use of the term *theoria*. There are several reasons for this confusion, first, there are significant gaps in extant writings of this school. This contributes to the second reason, relative disinterest by scholars of theology and patrology. The third reason is that *theoria* is confused or equated with allegory, typology, or *sensus plenior.* In his *History of Hermeneutics*, Milton Terry refers to "Mystical interpretation" as "Closely allied to the allegorical interpretation..." even as he footnotes an objection to conflating the two, as there is a distinction between *theoria* and *allegoria*.[44] Terry, Thiselton, and Grondin[45] mention the Antiochenes, but offer no explanation or analysis of this school.

A small collection of scholars since the late-nineteenth century have explored the lacuna in work about the distinctive practices of the Antiochene School. The Antiochenes, (whose adherents included Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and John Chrysostom) referred to their hermeneutic approach as *theoria.* Against the Alexandrian School, they held that textual

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[43] Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 645.

[44] Terry, 164.

[45] See, Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 172.; Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 32.

meaning was located within the literal/historical context; the text was more than just a vehicle for the hidden spiritual meaning. The Antiochenes were staunchly anti-allegory. Diodorus of Tarsus cites a significant difference between the Apostle Paul's use of the *term* 'allegory' (in Galatians 4.24) and the Greek-Alexandrian *method* of allegory, which he asserts is a foreign import to scriptural interpretation.[46] For the Antiochenes, meaning is found *primarily* in the historical referent of the text. There were, however, many significant distinctions for the Antiochene school's hermeneutic methodology.

When commenting on Galatians 4.24,[47] Theodore of Mopsuestia accused the Alexandrians of "abusing" this "saying of Paul, taking it as authority for destroying all meaning from Scripture" and that, "The apostle did not do away with history, nor did he strip away actions which had occurred long ago." [48] Theodore's understanding of Paul's use of allegory was contrary to the interpretive license the Alexandrians adopted. "Rather, Paul used the account of past events to elucidate his own words."[49]

John Chrysostom's commentary on Galatians shows a commitment to interpreting Paul's intention when he uses the Genesis narrative of Hagar and Sarah. Chrysostom interprets Paul as equating the Judaisers (sons of Abraham 'in the flesh') as sons of Hagar. They, as sons of the

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[46] Frances Young, "Alexandrian and Antiochene Exegesis," 341.

[47] "These things are an allegory, for these are the two covenants. The one is from Mount Sinai, which gives birth to bondage; she is Hagar." Galatians, 4.24, Modern English Version.

[48] Theodore of Mopsuestia, as quoted by Robert J Kepple, "Analysis of Antiochene Exegesis of Galatians 4:24-26," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 39, no. 2 (1977), 241.

[49] Kepple, 241.

bondwoman, are bound to the Law given at Mt. Sinai—Hagar's namesake.[50] Theodoret of Cyrrhus does not cite this linguistic link, and explains; "alongside that mountain [Sinai] the race of Hagar has been dwelling."[51] The sons of Sarah are born of spirit, "for the womb was dead both through age and barrenness, but the Word of God fashioned Him."[52] The juxtaposition drawn between the two is this: "The being born after the flesh renders one not more honorable, but less so, for a birth not after the flesh is more marvelous and more spiritual."[53] The Old Testament narrative also prefigures the oppression of the sons of Sarah/promise suffered at the hand of the sons of Hagar/flesh as typifying the oppression of the early church at the hand of the Jews (Galatians 4.29). Like the bondservant in Genesis, the slaves to the Law will be cast out and not share in the inheritance with those born of promise, which Chrysostom explicitly identifies as the Gentile church.

"Observe how the type is preserved in every particular, as the former...so the latter, when the fullness of time is come, brings forth."[54] Chrysostom clearly saw Paul's usage of this narrative as more typological than allegorical. As such, his exegesis sought to join two horizons: first, the original event in the context of the Genesis narrative, and second, the theme of Paul's message to the Galatians. Chrysostom interprets this 'allegory' as a further restatement of the

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[50] Here Chrysostom writes "'Hagar' is the word for Mount Sinai in the language of that country." It is noted that this claim has not been substantiated. John Chrysostom, "Commentary on Galatians," in *Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Etc*, ed. Philip Schaff, 4th ed., vol. 13, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004), 34.

[51] Theodoret of Cyrrhus as quoted by Kepple, "Analysis of Antiochene Exegesis of Galatians 4," 247.

[52] Chrysostom, "Commentary on Galatians," 34.

[53] Chrysostom, 34.

[54] Chrysostom, 34.

shocking theme of overturning Jewish assumptions about Law and inheritance, for the superiority of the freedom under adoption through promise in Christ.

For those that subscribed to Antiochene interpretive methods, *theoria* was "the divine revelation or mystical illumination of spiritual realities which attended the processes of inscripturation, interpretation, or homiletical discourse."[55] *Theoria* encompassed the entire process of textual content from transcription to reception. Italian patrologist Alberto Vaccari, in the early-twentieth century, identified four facets of *theoria* that have been referenced since:

1. *Theoria* presupposed the historical reality of the events described by the biblical author; those events functioned like a mirror imaging a different reality.
2. In addition to the historical reference, *theoria* simultaneously embraced a second future reality, which was ontologically linked to the first.
3. The first or near historical event stood in relation to the second, as the mediocre to the perfect, the small to the large, or a sketch to the finished work of art.
4. Both the present and future events together were described as direct objects of *theoria* but in different ways. The present functioned as the

[55] As noted in, Bradley Nassif, "The 'Spiritual Exegesis' of Scripture: The School of Antioch Revisited," *Anglican Theological Review* 75, no. 4 (September 1993): 457.

> less significant vehicle through which the prophet knowingly described a greater future event in human history through the use of hyperbolic language. [56]

This hermeneutic places the textual author as a witness to a spatio-temporal event. While witnessing the immediate event, the author is (or becomes) aware that a second, distant event, will share significant attributes. Thus, as the author transcribes the text, he/she records the event(s) in such a way that recipients will (first) understand the significance of the immediate event to the author, and (second) leave the text open to being understood in light of the distant event, which details the reader is privy to, though the author is not.[57]

The recipient of the text is to set both events as horizons of meaning. The text must be understood within the bounds of the historical account and of the significance to the witness/author. The immediate event is simultaneously an inferior type for a latter, superior event that distant recipients will presumably recognize. The meaning and significance of the two events will be closely tied, one influencing the understanding of the other. This framework has possible contributions to understanding the use of the Old Testament by New Testament authors.

> Vaccari maintained that *theoria* operated as a creative and highly imaginative way of resolving the dilemma which the Antiochene authors faced when confronted with the *historìa* of a biblical text and its later Christological meaning which at times could not easily be reconciled with its original historical context.[58]

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[56] Nassif, 443.

[57] This bears striking resemblance to Paul Ricoeur's conception of how the author-text-reader relationship functions.

[58] Nassif, "The 'Spiritual Exegesis' of Scripture," 442.

As we can see, theories of interpretation and of language have never been simplistic. The dreaded post-modern specter of 'immediacy' or naiveté never really existed. Hermeneutics has always been a discipline that requires balancing a general theory of communication, contemporary theories of history, critical examination of texts, linguistic differences, cultural values, and technological issues. Pre-modern interpreters employed critical methodologies, however, their priorities, were not the same as those of modern hermeneutics. Historical-critical questions were not the end of the process but the beginning of a project of determining textual meaning in the horizon of salvation history. This holistic approach to interpretation is what Augustine hopes to impart in *On Christian Doctrine*.[59] His theoretical approach to the topic ranges across the body of his work.

Two contemporary authors are influential in developing the area of theological hermeneutics, Anthony C. Thiselton and Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Both Thiselton and Vanhoozer began their work in hermeneutics in response to issues affecting their primary fields of study. Thiselton pursued a response to Bultmannian influences on New Testament studies, specifically the "one-sidedness"[60] of the New Hermeneutic. Vanhoozer sought to establish the legitimacy of meaning in the skeptical culture of post-modern deconstruction.[61]

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[59] Augustine of Hippo, *Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Christian Church, First Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2004). Hereafter, *Doc. chr.*

[60] Anthony Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 324–28.

[61] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998).

As will be seen, Augustine develops a holistic view of language and signification and then focuses that schema toward an andragogy of scripture. In contrast, both Thiselton and Vanhoozer typically work from the priority of biblical hermeneutics and have set their concern as the "philosophical description"[62] of the hermeneutical problem. By this, they intend to explore philosophy for the best explanation of humanity's process of interpretation.

In effect, theological hermeneutics, while never losing sight of its teleology, seeks to first describe how it is that humans approach the production, interpretation, and comprehension of texts in general. "The biblical scholar therefore needs the help of someone who has made it his life's work to wrestle with the problem of how these two sides of the situation [historicality of author and interpreter] can be held together, without either being lost to view."[63] With this in mind, theological hermeneutics interacts with a vast spectrum of thinkers; all proposals should be critically evaluated—and when appropriate—integrated into a comprehensive schema establishing the validity of proper interpretation of biblical text and human existence in general.

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[62] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980). Thiselton recognizes the impact of Augustine on Christian thought and church doctrine but does not address his theoretical framework. In Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007)., he mentions Augustine thirty-three times: thirty-one times as a mention of doctrinal development, nine of those are simply listed with other contributors, once *Confessions* is mentioned as a speech-act of doctrinal importance, once *Doc. chr. II* is cited for developing a theory of signification and its importance for a doctrine of the sacraments, Augustine is quoted once in his influential discusion of time. Augustine is never mentioned in *Two Horizons*, and once in Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2009).

[63] Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, 1980, 27.

2. Relationship Between Ontology and Language

The first hermeneutic issue that will be addressed is one that Anthony Thiselton found particularly troubling – that of the relationship between Being and language. If the relationship between the two are conflated, meaning becomes relative, any speech/text can be interpreted according to the reader's projection of reality behind it. If the relationship between Being and language is severed altogether (as in deconstruction), meaning becomes lost in an endless series of signs.

To resolve this issue, Thiselton first turns to Martin Heidegger to establish the possibility of examining Being. Second, he follows Hans-Georg Gadamer's development of hermeneutics as an experiential epistemology, his connection of ontology to textual hermeneutics, as well as his horizons of understanding. What Thiselton omits, and will be shown, is that for Heidegger and Gadamer, Augustine is a vital contributor to their philosophical projects. While developing the horizons of meaning, Thiselton never really addresses *how* language and Being relate. He dismisses a theory of reference citing Wittgenstein's objections, and turns instead to speech-act theory to address the pragmatic question of *why* language is used. Augustine, however, offers a robust conception of language as reference that will be examined through his dialogue *The Teacher.*

Establishing Boundaries Between Language and World

As Thiselton's counterpoint, the New Hermeneutic represents a major development incorporating the demythologizing of Rudolf Bultmann, and the linguistic focus brought about

by structuralism and the existentialist thought of the mid-twentieth century. This framework is an illustration of what happens when the distinction between language and reality is blurred. Thiselton observes, "There is some force in the criticism that the new hermeneutic lets 'what is *true for me*' become the criterion of 'what is true'."[64] Without a distinction between language and object, interpretation falls to relativism. The New Hermeneutic movement helped to shift hermeneutical focus to the reader which, under deconstructionist's influence, would become the reader-response movement.

The fundamental problem for Rudolf Bultmann was the distinction between reality and language. Two students of Bultmann, Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling, were the primary developers and ambassadors for this schema, which intended to set demythologization on hermeneutical principle. Their program developed the idea that the mythological language of the New Testament obscures, rather than illuminates, the reality behind the text.

In an effort to establish the relationship between reality and language, Fuchs arrived at the conclusion that "The truth of reality appears only in language".[65] While this 'New Hermeneutic' affirms that there is a reality, it is only accessible through linguistics, "an eternal silence would be the abolition of reality".[66] As such, language has primacy over reality. Reality cannot simply be "what is," it must be present in expression and in the presence of the

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[64] Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," 355.

[65] Paul J Achtemeier, "How Adequate Is the New Hermeneutic," *Theology Today* 23, no. 1 (April 1, 1966): 108.

[66] Achtemeier, 107.

'concerned' subject. "Language which actually conveys reality constitutes a "language-event" (Sprachereignis) [for Fuchs], whilst Ebeling uses the term "word-event" (Wortgeschehen) in much the same way."[67]

Ebeling writes of the "profound crisis of language,"[68] found in the later Heidegger. He attributes the inability for humankind to explore the meaning of *Sein* to the dualism in western thought that goes all the way back to Plato. By splitting existence in two, separating the spiritual and material worlds, our language has become bifurcated as well. Heidegger's search for the ground of the Being of *Dasein* is defeated by the linguistics of 'being' becoming lost. "Being as the object of thought is merely being-ness (Seiendheit)."[69] In essence, western society's language has been so degraded that it simply can no longer function as an expression of actuality. "Language is not a mere tool... Rather it is that event which disposes of the supreme possibility of human existence."[70]

For Heidegger and the New Hermeneutic, western thought must recover its ability to speak (and think) meaningfully about *Sein* in order to grasp reality. There are three primary obstacles for the New Hermeneutic to overcome: an understanding of *logos* that divides Being, the limitations of western linguistics to express reality as anything other than dualisms, and the

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[67] Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," 1977, 312.

[68] Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, 1980, 335.

[69] Thiselton, 336.

[70] Thiselton, 334.

pervasive reduction of language to subject-object designations. This approach to the hermeneutical problem was an attempt to penetrate past problematic language to recover Being.

Augustine did not have these same issues with which to contend. There is much extant discussion of Augustine as a 'Neo-Platonist' that infected the discipline of theology with 'dualism'. As we will see in *Contra Academicos*, Augustine is unapologetically a Platonist – the question becomes one of what that actually means. Scholarship in the late-twentieth century has renewed an effort to map the philosophical landscape of late antiquity. This allows a much more detailed account of different schools of thought and reduces the ability "to make generic doctrinal comparisons between Christianity and Platonism … since separate Platonist schools—while sharing a basic family resemblance in their views—held significantly different positions."[71] The net effect for the hermeneutic discussion is "the matter of locating Platonism with our interpretive categories. In recent years, religious studies scholarship has helped to promote salutary circumspection regarding notions like 'religion,' 'philosophy,' and 'theology,' terms that had been previously used as natural categories with clear edges."[72] These categorical distinctions need to be reconsidered as interpretive frames; for there were no such distinctive disciplines for Platonists, Christians, or any other school in antiquity. As part of this more nuanced view, the label "Neoplatonism" and its attending attributes may need to be re-evaluated for its implication in interpreting authors from late antiquity, Augustine in particular.

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[71] John Kenney and John Peter Kenney, "'None Come Closer to Us than These:' Augustine and the Platonists," *Religions* 7, no. 9 (September 1, 2016): 2, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel7090114.

[72] Kenney and Kenney, 2.

Considering these recent studies, Augustine's relationship with Plato, Plotinus, and Neoplatonism, and their particular dualisms needs to be critically examined. Even *City of God*, the quintessential text for Augustinian dualism, has been re-examined through a more narrative hermeneutic approach with dramatically different results.[73] Perhaps some of the assumptions of Augustinian dualism are well founded within his own text, but only when systematically categorized and generically stereotyped. Under a more holistic approach, even Plato is less 'Platonic' than has been traditionally exegeted.

Kenney and Kenney cite *Confessions VII* as an essential text for understanding Augustine's view of Platonism.[74] First, it shows a clear rejection of his former commitment to the materialistic dualism of the Manichaeans; and identifies it not simply as cognitive shortfall, but as a moral failing, causing his continuous relapse into anthropomorphizing and materializing God. Platonism offered Augustine a framework to escape materialism and grasp the fullness of the teaching of the church about God. In Book VII he lists Platonic doctrines and church doctrines and critically examines convergences and discontinuities. Here and elsewhere in his writings, Augustine shows a *critical engagement* with values of Plato that aid in Christian

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[73] Gregory W. Lee, "Republics and Their Loves: Rereading *City of God* 19.(Report)," *Modern Theology* 27, no. 4 (2011): 553–81, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2011.01703.x.

[74] John Kenney and John Peter Kenney, "'None Come Closer to Us than These:' Augustine and the Platonists," *Religions* 7, no. 9 (September 1, 2016): 114, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel7090114.

development and theology.[75] Even within Platonism, there is a holistic view of philosophy, religion, ethics, and polity; this is a value that Augustine does claim regularly.

As part of the renewed interest and approach to studying late antiquity, among patrologists and philologists alike, this topic will continue to evolve. As it evolves, scholars may find that some of the theological and philosophical developments that have been traditionally attributed (and lamented) to Augustine will need to be redressed. Rants, such as Soren Kierkegaard's accusation that Augustine introduced Platonic intellectualism into the Christian faith,[76] among countless others, may be rendered obsolete in light of rhetorical and narrative examinations of Augustine's works. The problem of dualisms that the New Hermeneutic finds troubling may find a more solid foundation in Cartesian dualism than late antiquity.

Thiselton, for his part, affirms that these linguistic concerns of the New Hermeneutic are essential issues. Theological hermeneutics embraces some ideas the New Hermeneutic developed, such as overcoming certain linguistic dualisms, bringing out the gathering implications of *logos* as discourse, and presenting a case for genuine interaction with the New Testament text. Other proposals of the New Hermeneutic are met with less enthusiasm.

Thiselton's concern centers around the observation that it is extremely one-sided in its focus, "Whilst the new hermeneutic rightly faces the problem of how the interpreter may

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[75] cf *C. Acad.* II.5. Augustine of Hippo, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, trans. Peter King (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., Inc., 1995).

[76] As cited by, Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 277.

understand the text of the New Testament more *deeply* and more *creatively*, Fuchs and Ebeling are *less concerned about how he may understand it correctly*".[77] While appreciating the New Hermeneutic's insistence on placing the text as a subject, it is one-sided to eliminate critical examination as part of the hermeneutic circle.

For both Thiselton and his New Hermeneutic interlocutors, the reader stands peering through language, seeking to grasp the world beyond the text. Thiselton finds the solution to the hermeneutic issue in developing the proper role of historical-critical endeavors. In his earlier works he commonly asks the question, "What is the role of historical-criticism?" Fuchs and Ebeling, while affirming the value of historical research, consider it *prior to* beginning the hermeneutical task. For Thiselton, critical (including historical) thinking should be part of the inter-subjective dialogue with the New Testament as a check against wrong understanding.

Thiselton views the Bultmannian focus on demythologizing as problematic. Specifically, because some New Testament discourse is directed to a community that already believes. This would mean that it was written by, and addressed to, an audience within a faith tradition. For Fuchs, tradition obscures, rather than clarifies, the original proclamation of Jesus. He understood this teaching to address unbelievers; therefore, the tradition, even within the New Testament itself, is problematic. Just as Heidegger wishes to step back "behind" the conceptualizing tradition of western philosophy, so Fuchs wishes to step back "behind" the tradition of the

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[77] Anthony Thiselton, "*The New Hermeneutic*," 1977, 323 (Italics original).

primitive church.[78] From this position, the language of the text itself is held in suspicion, requiring the world behind the text to be re-constructed by the reader.

For Thiselton and other critics of the New Hermeneutic, this divorce of the text from its original situatedness leads to a host of hermeneutical and theological errors. As Paul Achtemeier notes, "The inadequacy of this hermeneutical method in its attempt to get at the true intention of the text is shown just as clearly in its attempt to come to terms with the death of Christ".[79] Without the tradition and historicality of the text, the Cross of Jesus simply becomes the affirmation of the existential value of "abandonment of self-assertion",[80] and the resurrection of Christ becomes marginalized.

For Thiselton, the New Hermeneutic is also shown as one-sided in its adopted stance toward language itself. By directly linking language with reality, Fuchs and Ebeling lose sight of the fact that language is convention, described by structuralists as the 'arbitrariness of sign.'[81] While humanity is essentially linguistic, Being is not *determined* but is *described* by the signs agreed upon by participants in a given 'language game'. Detractors of the New Hermeneutic equate the 'word-event' with 'word-magic'; they compare Fuchs and Ebeling's fusion of

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[78] Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," 324.

[79] Achtemeier, "How Adequate Is the New Hermeneutic," 115.

[80] Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," 325.

[81] As developed by Ferdinand de Saussure

language and reality with that of some primitive cultures, where it is believed that by saying something it will become real.

This linguistic dilemma is also troubling for critics in the way that the Word of God becomes bound to the word of humanity. "Does Ebeling's notion of word-event allow for an integration of divine and human action in such a way as to maintain the integrity of both?"[82] The concern becomes an issue of the 'otherness' of God; if His speech to humanity, (the language of reality or Being), is determined by humanity's own utterance, how can this language be properly *kerygmatic*?

The second linguistic issue of the New Hermeneutic is the way it prioritizes language that elicits active response over descriptive language. Thiselton quotes Ebeling, "We do not get at the nature of words by asking what they contain, but by asking what they effect, what they set going."[83] As a proponent of speech-act theory, he does not want his critique to be understood as against Ebeling's "concern with function, with communication, with self-involvement".[84] He wants to caution against predetermining that "description undermines other functions of language",[85] the single focus on eliciting a word-event minimizes the informative and descriptive content of language. Thiselton points out the danger of this in quoting Amos Wilder:

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[82] William R. Barr, "Word of God and Word of Man in Word-Event," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (October 1, 1969): 132.

[83] Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," 326.

[84] Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," 326.

[85] Thiselton, 326.

> Fuchs refuses to define the content of faith . . . He is afraid of the word as convention or as a means of conveying information . . . Fuchs carries this so far that revelation, as it were, reveals nothing ... Jesus calls, indeed, for decision . . . But surely his words, deeds, presence, person, and message rested . . . upon dogma, eschatological and theocratic.[86]

Thiselton leads us to the question, "How can the interpreter, in the absence of information about the 'world' of the original proclamation establish anything more than the linguistic existence of a 'call'?"[87] With no external description of the content of that call, the interpreter is forced to supply a framework for faith from within him/herself. In effect, the text of the New Testament simply becomes a hermeneutical mirror, in which the reader can only see his/her own reflection.

Heidegger's Ontology of *Dasein*

To rescue the possibility of meaning in language, Thiselton combines the ontology of *Dasein* of early Heidegger, the language-games of (later) Wittgenstein, and the hermeneutic circle of Gadamer. As a starting point, Thiselton works to overcome the subject/object dualism through the analysis of *Dasein* of Martin Heidegger. He carefully navigates through four different interpretations of Heidegger's work.[88] First, he rejects the view that Heidegger, with Karl Jaspers, founded German existentialism, instead "By his own account Heidegger is first and last and always not an existentialist at all, but an ontologist: one who would restore Being to its

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[86] Wilder, as quoted by Thiselton, 326.

[87] Thiselton, 326.

[88] Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, 1980, Chapter VI.

rightful place in our thought."[89] Second, Heidegger cannot be understood as simply approaching the problem from a Greek viewpoint, as has been suggested by some after placing priority on his commentaries on pre-Socratic philosophy. He, by his own statement, uses the Greek philosophers to criticize his own contemporary situation,[90] namely Cartesian conceptions of ontology. "…We must show explicitly that Descartes not only goes amiss ontologically in his definition of the world, but that his interpretation and its foundations led him to *pass over* the phenomenon of world, as well as the being of innerworldly being initially at hand."[91]

Third, Heidegger cannot be understood simply in terms of Husserl's phenomenology. Heidegger did use phenomenological methods of analysis; however, it is important to note that "Husserl repudiated Heidegger's use of his phenomenological method."[92] Thiselton lists three distinctions, but the underlying disjunction between them is that Husserl firmly retained a subject/object dichotomy and Heidegger was attempting to overturn it.

Thiselton adopts Magda King's four point understanding of Heidegger. First, the question of Being is meaningful, even in the universality of the concept. Second, defining Being is not going to function the same as other definitions because Being is not an entity. Third, we must

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[89] Marjorie Grene, as quoted by Thiselton, 144.

[90] Thiselton, 144.

[91] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 93.

[92] Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, 1980, 145.

have some sense of the meaning of Being because we know enough to further seek after its definition.[93]

King's fourth point is that Heidegger makes a crucial distinction between ontological and ontic questions. "Ontological inquiry concerns Being (*Sein*); ontic inquiries concern 'entities' or 'existents' (*das Seiende*)."[94] In the discussion of this distinction, in the first introduction to *Being and Time,* Heidegger introduces his concept of *Dasein*. *Dasein* is unique in the category of Being in that *Dasein* can question and examine its own Being. This examination does not take place in a subject/object dualism but is prior to any such distinctions; *Dasein* must view itself as a subject in and amongst other subjects. Analysis of Being cannot take place from an abstracted point of view or by using categorical terms applied to objects.

Thiselton identifies three ways in which Heidegger is fundamentally hermeneutical in his approach. The first, is his reliance on pre-understanding to begin an exposition of *Dasein*. The second, is Heidegger's use of the phrase "horizon for understanding"; "Everything, in Heidegger's view, is seen and understood from within a particular horizon. Meaning is that *from* which something is understandable as the thing it is."[95] Third, Heidegger is hermeneutic in his desire to recover a mode of thinking that has been lost to time. "Temporal distance must be

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[93] Thiselton finds here, in Being and Time, a parallel with Gadamer's hermeneutic circle and pre-understanding as a starting point for human inquiry.

[94] Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, 1980, 147.

[95] Thiselton, 149.

overcome so that these genuinely creative minds may speak anew to Heidegger's own question."[96]

The connection between Heidegger's conception of *Dasein* and its relationship to Augustine may be closer than his explicit citation. Of course, Augustine is mentioned several times in *Being and Time,* particularly in his classic exposition of time from *Confessions XI.* Heidegger also explicitly uses Augustine's reflection on the self (*Confessions X*) as a direct counterpoint for Descartes' *cogito*.[97] The blame for philosophy's loss of Being falls squarely on Descartes; "to whom one attributes the discovery of the *cogito sum* as the point of departure for all modern philosophical questioning. He investigates the *cogitare* of the *ego*—within limits. But the *sum* he leaves completely undiscussed, even though it is just as primordial as the *cogito.*"[98]

Heidegger was drawn to Augustinian ontology early in his career. "There is a limited generic similarity between Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* and Saint Augustine's *Soliloquies*," but distinctions were "not at all evident in Heidegger's 1924 lecture, "Der Begriff der Zeit", which was a precursor to *Sein und Zeit*."[99] It must be of significance that within pages of beginning his work (after two lengthy introductions) Heidegger quotes Augustine as an example of examining *Dasein* in its "everydayness".[100] In his earlier career, Heidegger was openly Augustinian in

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[96] Thiselton, 151.

[97] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 43–45.

[98] Heidegger, 45.

[99] Edward Booth, "Heidegger and Saint Augustine on Time," *New Blackfriars* 85, no. 998 (2004): 399.

[100] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 43.

personal correspondence and lectures, but by 1927 *Being and Time* had become divested of overt theological references.[101] A compelling argument has been advanced that *Dasein* shares more than surface level terminology, but is in fact, a secularized version of Augustine's theology of love.[102] Coyne quotes Heidegger, "*Dasein* is a self-interpreting, self-articulating entity. It was seven years ago, while I was investigating these structures in conjunction with my attempts to arrive at the ontological foundations of Augustinian anthropology, that I first came across the phenomenon of care."[103]

This possible reliance on Augustine aside, "The critique of Cartesian subjectivity and the retrieval of Augustinian thought were initially linked for Heidegger."[104] It is worth noting the irony here. The existentialists and deconstructionists that claim roots in various aspects of Heidegger's work, sever the connection between ontology and language on the basis of dualisms in western philosophy. They attribute these dualisms to the lineage of Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine. Heidegger himself relied on Augustine to overcome the dualism of Descartes, whose *cogito* is the entity to which existentialists and deconstructionists claim external Being cannot be justified.

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[101] See also, Ryan Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[102] Lars Östman, "Love and Grace in Heidegger's Sein Und Zeit," *Sophia* 53, no. 4 (December 2014): 535–51, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-013-0389-6.

[103] Heidegger, as quoted by Ryan Coyne, "A Difficult Proximity: The Figure of Augustine in Heidegger's Path," *Journal of Religion* 91, no. 3 (July 2011): 366.

[104] Coyne, 369.

Gadamer's Horizons and Possibilities

After establishing access to Being through Heidegger's *Dasein*, Thiselton needs to connect to a clearly hermeneutical framework. To do this, he relies on the hermeneutic epistemology of Hans-Georg Gadamer. First, because there are some points of connection between Gadamer and Heidegger, but "he is also more systematic and less elusive that the later thought of Heidegger."[105] Second, Thiselton is drawn to Gadamer's descriptive, rather than theoretical approach to the truth. Third, Gadamer is dismissive of methodological conceptions of knowledge and prefers to explore "modes of experience (*Erfahrungsweisen*) in which a truth is communicated."[106]

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer identifies the post-enlightenment (particularly following Kant and Hume) shift from 'science' meaning 'reason', to the modern view that "'science' has meant to us not so much Reason as empirical science."[107] This shift has been to the detriment of practical knowledge or wisdom. He argues that for the Greeks, practical wisdom (*phronesis*) was assumed as a prerequisite for theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), and the two together formed 'common norms.' This was the Roman concept of *Sensus Communis*, which Italian philosopher Vico[108] identified as the "sense of the right and the general good… that is acquired through living in the

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[105] Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, 1980, 293.

[106] Gadamer, as quoted by Thiselton, 293.

[107] Gadamer, as quoted by Thiselton, 294.

[108] Giambattista Vico, 1668-1744.

community and is determined by its structures and aims. … It was always known that the possibilities of rational proof and instruction did not fully exhaust the sphere of knowledge."[109]

For Gadamer and Thiselton, this expanded view of knowledge becomes a cornerstone for the hermeneutic endeavor. It relates to hermeneutics first, in that "truth is not to be reduced to a mere matter of concepts but relates to experience in broader terms."[110] Second, it brings up questions about interpretation. Gadamer introduces interpretation through examining understanding in art and music before shifting to textual interpretation; in part, to establish that hermeneutics is an art and not a mechanical process,[111] as well as to show that interpretation is performative.

> A picture, [Gadamer] claims, is an ontological event in which truth is disclosed in the present. Even in the case of reading literature, 'in its deciphering and interpretation a miracle takes place: the transformation of something strange and dead into a total simultaneity and familiarity. This is like nothing else that has come down to us from the past.' It achieves 'the sheer presence of the past.' Being, or truth, is disclosed to us, however, only when we allow ourselves to stand in the world created by the literature or other art-form.[112]

This performative nature of hermeneutics opens two fundamental aspects of Thiselton's interpretive framework; the horizons, and pre-understanding. The 'two horizons' of Thiselton

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[109] Gadamer on Vicco, as quoted by Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 295.

[110] Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, 1980, 298.

[111] This emphasis is a significant theme for Thiselton, cf *Two Horizons,* 301; and *Intro to Hermeneutics,* 2.

[112] Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, 1980, 299.

come from Husserl; and was adopted by both Heidegger and Gadamer; the metaphor of the 'two horizons' became the hallmark of Thiselton's career.

> The phenomenon of horizon is of crucial importance for Husserl's phenomenological research. This concept, we too shall have occasion to use. … A horizon is not a rigid frontier, but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further.[113]

The second dimension of the horizon is what Thiselton calls pre-understanding. Heidegger referred to this aspect of the hermeneutic circle as "fore-having", "fore-sight", and "fore-conceptions" (*Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht*, and *Vorgriff*). Gadamer, for the most part, accepts this, but emphasizes the "correction and revision of preliminary understanding."[114] Gadamer attempts to strike a balance between commitments to the impossibility of 'presuppositionless' interpretation, and allowing the text to 'speak what is new.' To achieve this, an interpreter must maintain two attitudes; first, to remain open to the meaning of the text, and second, to continuously expose the pre-understandings one has when approaching the text.

Gadamer, and Thiselton, must develop a conception of pre-understanding that navigates between the "naïve objectivism" of post-enlightenment empiricism, and the negative view of 'prejudice' held by later literary criticism and deconstruction. Of significant influence on pre-understanding is tradition and authority, but this must be brought out from under the dogmatic shadow of modern rejection. "The acceptance of authority, [Gadamer] argues, is not necessarily

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[113] Gadamer, as quoted by Thiselton, 303 (ellipses Thiselton's).

[114] Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 304.

blind or irrational obedience. It may be based on the thoroughly rational insight that …I have my own built-in limitations,"[115] Tradition is not something that overshadows an interpreter's own subjective thought, but rather "is the horizon within which we do our thinking."[116] For Gadamer, as with Heidegger, our own locatedness, (thrownness, facticity, etc from *Being and Time*) is what *allows* and enables an interpreter to begin the process of understanding at all. This is the point of entry to the hermeneutical circle for interpreting Being (Heidegger) as well as an artwork or text (Gadamer). As such, tradition is not a negative factor at all, it is simply one that must be critically engaged.

The crucial aspect of this hermeneutical circle is that the interpreter does not remain in their own pre-understanding, but allows the text to speak, to stretch the horizons of understanding in new directions, and allows for the text to change the interpreter. This approach to text as subject has been exemplified by Augustine. In *Confessions*, Augustine makes a pointed effort to show that engagement with a text was the impetus for each significant change in his life, leading to his conversion. Cynthia Nielsen follows his literary path from Cicero's *Hortensius,* to Ambrose's rhetoric, to Platonist writings, and to St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.[117] Augustine shows that he was affected by his encounter with these texts in a way that was a catalyst for personal change and growth.

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[115] Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, 1980, 305.

[116] Thiselton, 306.

[117] Cynthia R. Nielsen, "St. Augustine on Text and Reality (and a Little Gadamerian Spice)," *Heythrop Journal* 50, no.1 (January 2009): 98–108, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2008.00422.x.

Gadamer himself states that Augustine looms large in his thinking about language, its possibilities, and its limitations. In an interview with Jean Grondin, Gadamer discussed the paradox of the infinite possibilities and limits of language and how it relates to ontology.

> Gadamer: Hermeneutics helps us to realize that there is always much that remains unsaid when one says something. There is a lot in the same direction of meaning that almost completely escapes our attention because of the abstraction contained in concepts of modern science.
>
> Grondin: If I understand you correctly, you are emphasizing with this assertion the limits of language, while one gets the impression from Truth and Method that the universe of language is boundless. [118]
>
> Gadamer: No, no! I have never thought and never ever said that everything is language. Being that can be understood, *in so far as it can be understood*, is language. This contains a limitation. What cannot be understood can pose an endless task of at least finding a word that comes a little closer to the matter [die Sache].
>
> Grondin: Why [in Truth and Method] do you invoke St Augustine's doctrine of the inner word in this connection?
>
> Gadamer: Precisely because it took Augustine no less than 15 books to get closer to the secret of the Trinity without falling into the false way out of Gnostic presumption. … [119]

Gadamer finds, in *De Trinitate*, an exploration of the incredible possibility of language to signify, explore, and understand Being. There is also a recognition that language is not the

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[118] There has been significant debate about Gadamer's concept of the universality of language and how he uses Augustine to advance his proposal, Grondin's, own understanding of this topic has been challenged. See, David Vessey, "Gadamer, Augustine, Aquinas, and Hermeneutic Universality," *Philosophy Today* 55, no. 2 (May 2011): 158–65.

[119] Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jean Grondin, "Looking Back with Gadamer Over His Writings and Their Effective History: A Dialogue with Jean Grondin (1996)," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 92, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276406063230 (Italics added).

master of Being, and as such has its limits. "It is the Augustinian doctrine with all possible emphasis, that the *trinitas* exactly means the boundary. In this case, we can only come closer to [understanding] through human analogies."[120] By use of analogies, Gadamer finds that Augustine carefully works to make his audience 'familiar' with the concept of the Trinitarian God, and at least shape it into a rough silhouette; but also, to show the limitations to the project. "Augustine presented 15 analogies to the mystery of the Trinity – precisely to show that not everything is governable by humans."[121]

This distinction between ontology and language is critical to the possibility of language to communicate. The move to collapse this difference is where the New Hermeneutic, New Criticism, and deconstruction unravel the ability of language to mean anything. In addition, because Being exists prior to and outside of language, language cannot in and of itself 'govern' or 'dominate' Being.[122]

Thiselton, through Heidegger and Gadamer, establishes a framework in which Being is separated from both the *cogito* as subject, and a deterministic conception of language. He does not, however, systematically develop a theory of language itself. Instead, he takes a pragmatic approach and identifies what language does through the speech-act theory of J.L. Austin and

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[120] Gadamer and Grondin, 92.

[121] Gadamer and Grondin, 93.

[122] This limitation on language counters Michel Foucault, language itself cannot 'dominate' being; beings, however can *use* language to dominate other beings.

John R. Searle. The importance of speech-act theory increased as Thiselton's career went on.[123] Tradition has also taken significant prominence for hermeneutics, significant enough for Thiselton that he finds that it warrants hermeneutic treatment itself.[124] He remained, however, reluctant to place much stock in the referring function of language for determining meaning.

Thiselton puts little faith in the word-referent dynamic, instead he prefers the 'openness of hermeneutics' of Ricoeur, because it takes us to "the place where language comes to itself, the place where language is *saying.*"[125] This openness, however, needs to be tempered with "distancing and critical objectivity".[126] Semantic/linguistic discipline "achieves a more rigorous 'scientific' objectivity"[127] but at the expense of limiting possible symbolic meaning in language. He needs to balance between being open to possible symbolic interpretation, but also incorporate some level of semantic horizon.

Thiselton could have explored a robust theory of reference, but he does not pursue this avenue. He adopts instead, Ludwig Wittgenstein's argument that a theory of reference cannot be a theory of meaning. He cites two reasons: first, Wittgenstein finds that reference is still tied to communication. The difficulty is that there can be many attributes referenced by one indication.

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[123] Speech-act theory is mentioned three times in *Two Horizons*, in *New Horizons* a whole chapter, plus many citations of Searle and Austin, and near ubiquitous reference in *Thiselton on Hermeneutics.*

[124] Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*.

[125] Ricoeur, as quoted by Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, 1980, 121.

[126] Thiselton, 121.

[127] Thiselton, 121.

"Point to a piece of paper- and now point to its shape- now to its color- now to its number. …How do you do it?"[128] It is on this point that Thiselton makes his only direct quote from Augustine in relation to a theory of language. From *Confessions*; "I gradually identified the objects which the words stood for … I exchanged with those about me the verbal signs by which we express our wishes…"[129] Thiselton seems to understand this direct referentiality to be the sum of Augustine's theory, and placed within the assumed allegorical tradition, concludes that "there is no effective check on the relations between the different semiotic systems."[130]

Wittgenstein's second problem with referentiality is that for certain types of words, the ostensive definition cannot be made clear simply by pointing out a referent. Most nouns can be learned simply by pointing to an object (like the pencil) and saying "pencil". For signs indicating certain actions and properties it can be more difficult to establish the ostensive meaning.

Augustine Word and Referent

Augustine, however, does take both objections into consideration in the development of his theory of word and reference. In *On the Teacher* (*De magistro)*,[131] he delves into these difficult issues of words and referentiality at length. This dialogue took place in 389 CE between Augustine and his son, Adeodatus, who at the time was sixteen; (he later died as Augustine

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[128] Wittgenstein, as quoted by Thiselton, 123.

[129] Augustine, Confessions I.8.13. as quoted by Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*, 192f.

[130] Thiselton, 193.

[131] Augustine of Hippo, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*. Hereafter, *Mag.*

writes in *Confessions*).[132] Augustine began with the question, "What do we do when we speak?" After some discussion, it is concluded that people speak in order to teach. Even in asking a question we are simply teaching another what knowledge we desire.[133] For other uses of speech, such as singing or talking to oneself, the speaker is 'reminding' him/herself, which is a form of teaching.

Next, Augustine defines 'word'. A word is an utterance that is a sign for something else; without a referent, an utterance is simply a noise. It is not, however, always obvious what that referent is. He discusses the referent of the word 'nothing', which literally cannot have a physical referent. The conclusion is that the utterance 'nothing' must have a significate because a meaning is understood when a hearer receives it; that referent must be a "state of mind rather than the very thing that is [nothing]."[134]

Other words, such as the preposition 'from' are problematic as well. They can only be indicated by other words such as 'out of' or 'separation', and not by pointing to an external object. Even physical attributes such as color, cannot simply be indicated by pointing at an object. Augustine, as we can see, acknowledges the issues that later Wittgenstein and Thiselton have with a reference theory, as well as problems they do not consider. Verbs can also be

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[132] Augustine of Hippo, 94 King's footnote 1.

[133] For Augustine, prayer is problematic for this conclusion for a person praying cannot 'teach' God. Augustine (somewhat allegorically) defines prayer as a wordless spiritual communication interior to the heart.

[134] *Mag*. 2.3.41.

difficult to indicate; for if someone were to ask, "What is 'walking'?" while walking, how can a teacher indicate what they are currently doing?

Even in the case of an object as referent, pointing to the object is a sign itself. Pointing is not the object; it is a placeholder, indicating and drawing the attention of another person to an external object. Augustine considers the fact that people who are deaf, as well as theatrical pantomimes, communicate meaning using only physical gestures, without the use of words at all. Thus, all signs rely on other signs. "I see nothing, therefore, that can be shown without signs."[135]

Augustine identifies the following categories of signs, divided by how knowledge of their significate is formed:

1. Signs that, when asked can be exhibited only by other signs.
    a. This includes physical objects that can be pointed to, (which are not discussed in this dialogue).
    b. Words that can only be indicated by other words.
2. Self-exhibiting significates, that can be shown without signs.
    a. "Things we aren't doing when we are asked and yet can do on the spot".[136]

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[135] *Mag*. 3.6.52.

[136] *Mag*. 4.7.4.

b. "Signs we happen to be doing, just as when we speak we are making signs, 'signifying' is derived from this."[137]

This categorization is both semantic/linguistic and epistemological. "On the one hand, we might ask what conditions have to be satisfied for us to have knowledge of significates that are themselves signs. This is Division 1 [above]. On the other hand, we might be concerned with knowledge of significates that are non-signs. This is Division 2."[138] For Augustine, the relationship between sign and signified is the crucial relationship in analyzing language, as will be shown. He carefully distinguishes between what is a sign, what is a referent, and how one can know one from the other.

The first task is to separate word (as sign) from the signified object. This ontological distinction is clear, a word is a sign that simply indicates the object. It is no more the object itself than a finger pointing to the object. A word is an utterance that indicates something. A name is a type of word that indicates an object (i.e. Rome, Romulus, river, virtue). The named object can be a visible thing, (river), or it can be an 'intelligible' thing (virtue). [139] Adeodatus (Augustine's son and interlocutor) notes that there are other types of words that do not directly name an object,

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[137] *Mag*. 4.7.4-7.

[138] Augustine of Hippo, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, 103 footnote 19.

[139] *Mag*. 4.8.

either physical or intelligible (i.e. the conjunction 'if'). This complication is set aside temporarily. [140]

There are two components of a word, first is the sensory aspect. This includes the sound of the utterance as that which "strikes the ear so that it can be perceived". The second, the cognitive aspect, is that which "is committed to memory so that it can be known."[141] These two aspects relate to the terms word and name previously identified. "What if words are so called because of one of these and names are so called because of the other – 'words' [*verba*] from striking [the ear (*verbarando*)] and 'names' [*nomina*] from knowing [*noscendo*].[142]

The goal for the next section of the dialogue is to show that every word has the property of a name, in that it has a referent that can be known. Augustine begins with pronouns; they obviously name things, they simply do so in a generic way, as they are used as substitutes for specific names.

Augustine next presents an argument that conjunctions also 'name' which Adeodatus finds rather unconvincing. Augustine does not respond to his criticism but oddly moves on. His next argument is based on a statement from the apostle Paul, "In Christ there was not Yea and Nay, but in Him was Yea."[143] It would not be said that the three letters *y-e-a* were in Christ, but

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[140] *Mag*. 4.9.105-109.

[141] *Mag*. 5.12.48-49.

[142] *Mag*. 5.12.54-57, also King, footnote 31, 110.

[143] II Corinthians 1.19.

that which is *called* 'Yea'. If Paul had written "in Him was virtue", we would not "think that these two syllables we enunciate when we say *'vir-tue'* were in Him rather than what is signified by these two syllables."[144] In Paul's statement, 'Yea' names something, just as any other name in its place would; and yet, Yea (Latin, *est*, or 'it is so') is a verb.

Augustine continues his argument by illustration of translation from another language. He lists examples of seven parts of speech (eight parts of speech, minus nouns) and their Greek equivalents. "What do the Greeks name what we name 'who?'..." "Yet in all these parts of speech I have just listed, it can't be that anyone who asks what they are in this way would speak correctly unless they were names."[145] Furthermore, Cicero, the "paradigm … of Latin rhetorical and philosophical prose,"[146] himself, called the preposition *coram* ('in the presence of'), a 'name'.

Augustine's final proof in this line of reasoning involves a discussion of whether the conjunction 'if' is more appropriate than 'because' in a statement. The discussion determines that "'if' is acceptable" and "'because' is unacceptable."[147] Both of these statements are appropriately propositions, and in order to construct a proposition one requires both a subject (or 'name'), and a verb. In these propositions, 'is' is the verb, 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' are adjectives. This

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[144] *Mag*. 5.14.111-14.

[145] *Mag*. 5.15.165-68.

[146] Augustine of Hippo, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, 115 see footnote 42.

[147] *Mag.* 5.16

requires that ‘if’ and ‘because’ are the subjects of these propositions.[148] If they can be a subject they must entail a property that ‘is’ something. In conclusion to these four proofs Augustine states “as we have found that all words are names and that all names are words.”[149]

Briefly discussed is the category of words that signify themselves as well as others. The word ‘name’ refers to ‘things that name’, as well as itself, because it names something. (‘Conjunction’ does not, for it names conjunctions but is not one itself.) Augustine also mentions a category of words that signify the same thing and differ only in ‘sound’. This category includes synonyms, but also, equivalents between languages are noted as an example of this group. This section ends with Adeodatus giving a review of the argumentation covering Division 1 (above).

In the next section of the dialogue, the interlocutors take up defining signs that do not refer to other signs but instead refer to other things. Again, a careful and deliberate division is made between the sign and the signified, with an emphasis on the impression that each makes on the mind. Adeodatus states after some exasperating wordplay by Augustine, “Look, now I take the whole thing only from the standpoint of what is signified. I do agree with you that we can’t carry on a conversation at all unless the words we hear direct the mind to the things of which they are the sign.”[150]

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[148] *Mag*. 5.16.

[149] *Mag*. 6.17.2.

[150] *Mag*. 8.22.71-74.

First, it is established that a word is only a word *because* it refers to something. If an utterance (or even an individual syllable of a known word) is used without a significate, it is not a word. Second, the word is not the object it signifies; when a speaker utters the sign, the signified is only 'pointed to'. As the hearer "I can't help thinking that what is signified by the syllable is relevant to the conclusion, by virtue of the law [of reason] that naturally has the most power—so that once the signs are heard the attention is directed to the things signified."[151]

At this juncture, Augustine exposits what King refers to as Augustine's Rule.[152] The significate has more value than the sign. "I want you to understand that the things signified should be valued mare than their signs. *Whatever exists on account of another must be worth less than that on account of which it exists*."[153] Value is placed on that with ontological priority, if the sign exists only because of the object it refers to, it must therefore be less valuable.

This sign/significate distinction and its ontic/epistemological dimension produce four divisions of the semantic relationship:

1. The sign
2. The thing
3. Knowledge of the sign

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[151] *Mag*. 9.24.148-51.

[152] Augustine of Hippo, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, 127 footnote 57.

[153] *Mag*. 9.25.1-4. (Emphasis by translator)

4. Knowledge of the thing[154]

In this division, because of the ontic priority of the significate, knowledge of the sign is not possible without knowledge of the thing it refers to. With this priority in mind, Augustine recalls, and then negates, the earlier conclusion that nothing can be taught without signs. For, if knowledge of the referent is essential to knowledge, it is preferable to learn via the thing itself without signs.[155] Certain actions fall into this category; walking, and bird-catching are the examples that are given. Someone could learn these tasks/things by observing another do them, without indicating language at all.

Knowledge of some things can be achieved before knowledge of their sign. One can know what a head is before they are aware of the sign 'head'. Since knowledge of things is possible without signs, teaching and signifying are two different things; we signify to teach, we do not teach to signify. Words call our attention to something, like pointing a finger. They do not actually display things for a hearer/reader to 'know'. Augustine now reverses the conclusion, as previously agreed, that we speak to teach. "When words are spoken we either know what they signify, or we don't; if we know, then it's reminding rather than learning; but if we don't know, it isn't even reminding, though perhaps we recollect that we should inquire."[156]

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[154] *Mag*. 9.27.

[155] There is an exception made; moral objects, such as vice, modify the preference. The name is preferable to possession of vice itself, but knowledge of the vice is still more important than knowledge of the sign 'vice'.

[156] *Mag*. 11.36.15-18.

By way of explanation, Augustine references the story of the three men thrown into the furnace (Daniel 3).

> … everything signified by those words was already known to us. I'm already familiar with what three boys are, what a furnace is, what fire is, what a king is, and finally what being unharmed by fire is, and all the other things that those words signify. Yet Ananias, Azarias, and Misahel are just as unknown to me as the *sarabarae*,[157] and these names didn't help me at all to know them, nor could they help me.[158]

In this final section (10.33-13.46) of *The Teacher*, Adeodatus does not speak at all. Augustine instead adopts the tone of a lecture, and exposits the relationship between sign, signified, semantics, and knowledge. His epistemological framework will be discussed along with *Against the Academicians*. For now, a summary of Augustine's function of signification is appropriate.

1. Words are signs, though they are not the only signs, there are non-utterance signs (i.e. pointing a finger). Any utterance that is not used as a sign, is not a word.
2. Humans use signs to teach or to remind (this is a provisional argument).
3. Every word 'names' something in that it has a referent, whether it is 'corporeal' or 'intelligible'.
4. Some words point to physical objects or attributes, these can be indicated by pointing a finger.

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[157] *Sarabarae*; Latin: loose wide trousers worn in the East; Oxford Latin Dictionary. Augustine uses this word throughout *Mag*. as an example of a word he had no knowledge as to its referent.

[158] *Mag*. 11.37.25-31.

5. Some things (i.e. some actions) themselves can be shown without a sign.
6. Some words only indicate other words.
7. Signs are not what they signify but depend on the signified for their existence.
8. A sign is only understood when the signified is known.

Thiselton correctly insists that Being and language must be distinct to avoid the relativism of demythologizing in Bultmann and the New Hermeneutic. His use of Heidegger and Gadamer show that language and Being are separate ontologically, and the subject/object dichotomy can be overcome. He does not ever directly address how language works in relation to Being. His use of speech-act theory is helpful in showing why we use language, but he never elaborates on how language works. Augustine, by developing a robust theory of reference, allows language to indicate an external object, be it concrete or cognitive. In this Augustine overcomes Wittgenstein's objections to a simplistic theory of reference. By referring to something, words have a finite potential meaning which restricts possible interpretations. This exteriority also directly counters a deconstructionist nihilism. Language is not simply a never-ending series of symbols, but a symbol whose meaning is found in something outside the conventional system.

Having established that the location of meaning is in reference, Augustine is not content to let the matter rest. He then begins an analysis of the limit of reference, specifically, that understanding of an unknown *res* cannot be achieved simply by use of a sign. The referent must be made available in some way to constitute knowledge. Here, the problem of semantics relates to the problem of epistemology. There must be some Criterion on which the relationship between sign and referent must rely. In the last section of *Mag.* Augustine abruptly finds that Christ as *logos*, is required to hold the system together.

> Regarding each of the things we understand, however, we don't consult a speaker who makes sounds outside of us, but the Truth that presides within over the mind itself, though perhaps words prompt us to consult Him. What is more, He Who is consulted, He Who is said to *dwell in the inner man*,[159] does teach: Christ.[160]

Using only signs, one person may not 'teach' another, but only 'remind' them of references of which they already possess knowledge.[161] Only the Teacher, as both Word and Creator, can make fully known: "He Who prompts us externally through men by means of signs, so that we are instructed to be inwardly turned toward Him. To know and love Him is the happy life which all proclaim they seek."[162]

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[159] Ephesians 3.16-17.

[160] *Mag.* 10.38.44-48.

[161] *Mag.* 10.34.

[162] *Mag.* 13.46.23-26, see discussions of happiness also in, *C. Acad.* I.2.5 and *De beata vita* (*On the Happy Life*).

3. Possibility of Knowledge for Hermeneutics

It has been shown that, for Augustine, words must point to something; furthermore, that 'something' must be understood for the word to mean anything. For Augustine, the practice of interpreting meaning in communication begins with things. While the stated purpose of *On Christian Teaching* is to explicate "the mode of ascertaining the proper meaning, …and making known the meaning when it is ascertained",[163] the bulk of Book I is largely devoted to 'things'. In Chapter 2, Augustine divides 'things' in two categories. First, as general term "… a thing is whatever is sensed or is understood or is hidden."[164] "In *De dialectica* a *res* …is said to be whatever is the object of understanding or sense perception or even of ignorance."[165] Any 'thing' that has Being is a *res*; the grammatical definition of 'noun' as person, place, thing, or idea may be a helpful understanding of *res*.

It may seem, at least on a practical level, to be obvious that language needs a predicate as its basis. It is, after all, generally assumed to be a system to communicate 'something about

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[163] *Doc. chr*. I.1.1.

[164] *De dialectica* V. Augustine of Hippo, *De dialectica*, trans. B. Darrell Jackson (Boston: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1975).

[165] B. Darrell Jackson, "The Theory of Signs in St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," 1967, 18.

something'. Access to the *res*, as 'something' has not, however, fared so well throughout the course of post-enlightenment thought.

Modern Skepticism

Out of the *Meditations* of Descartes, a new brand of skeptic was born. No longer was existence Platonically divided between a superior bodiless soul and an inferior material world, but between an interior mind and an unverifiable external world. The early modern philosophers placed the *cogito* as the new center of existence—all other entities must prove that they can prove themselves. There is even debate amongst scholars as to the interpretation of Descartes' delineation between objects themselves.[166] For Augustine, *intellecta* was the mind comprehending the exterior; for the moderns, the mind is the sole ontological judge of all other entities.

Whether a modern thinker believed in the 'real world' was not the issue, the challenge was to establish how an object can present itself to the mind of the thinking subject. For writers such as George Berkeley, the mind was all that mattered ontologically. There was no necessity for the *res* to persist beyond the mind. There simply was no self-evident rationale for an object existing (or at least persisting) without a mind to perceive it. The thinking "I" became, in effect, the new center of the universe.

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[166] cf Edward Slowik, "Descartes and Individual Corporeal Substance," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (March 2001): 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1080/09608780010012666.

It has been a subject of debate whether the Idealists were true Skeptics; Berkley himself denied that he was a skeptic in an often-quoted passage from *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* about a cherry.

> I see this cherry, I feel it, I taste it: and I am sure nothing cannot be seen, or felt, or tasted: it is therefore real. Take away the sensations of softness, moisture, redness, tartness, and you take away the cherry. *Since it is not a being distinct from sensation;* a cherry, I say, is nothing but a congeries of sensible impressions, or ideas perceived by different senses: which ideas are united into one thing (or have one name given them) by the mind; because they are observed to attend together.[167]

Berkeley insists that the cherry is real and appeals to the 'common sense' of it. For, "Berkeley himself maintained that his approach to an understanding of the natural world and our knowledge of it was less skeptical and closer to common sense than any prevailing philosophical theory."[168] The 'realness' of the cherry is in its "congeries of sensible impressions", the senses detect color, taste and texture; the mind collects these impressions and identifies them as consistent with the idea of a cherry. That certainly appeals to the common sense experience of an object.

Berkeley includes an important qualification in that the cherry is not distinct from its sensation. The existence of the cherry is in the *perception* of the cherry. Furthermore, as he says through Philonous, "Whatever is immediately perceived is an idea; and can any idea exist out of

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[167]Berkeley as quoted by; Margaret Atherton, "'The Books Are in the Study as before': Berkeley's Claims about Real Physical Objects," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (February 2008): 86, https://doi.org/10.1080/09608780701789301. (Italics added).

[168] Margaret Atherton, "'The Books Are in the Study as before': Berkeley's Claims about Real Physical Objects," (February 2008): 85.

the mind?"[169] By implication, the human subject as *cogito*, is the sole master, of not only its own experience, but also its own existence in a network of dependent exterior objects.

This is not simply a pedantic epistemological distinction, as Berkeley and his idealist colleagues introduce an unknown number of unverifiable obstacles into the relationship between the perceiving mind and the exterior world. Further, by placing ontics in the realm of the mental, there is little to be done in the way of refuting the conception.

An empiricist approaches the problem from a different perspective. John Locke rejects the concept of *innate ideas*; this has become the core of much of modern thought. Bertrand Russell points out that "in [Locke's] day the mind was supposed to know all sorts of things *a priori,* and the complete dependence of knowledge upon perception, which he proclaimed, was a new and revolutionary doctrine."[170] For Locke, the mind is a *tabula rasa*, all knowledge is developed through experience. A perceiving mind experiences sensory inputs which it compiles into a representation of a material object. The object directly causes these sensations, which should overcome the idealist conundrum, as the object is once again master of its own ontic properties. A new problem arises for Locke however; "Since the mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, hath no other immediate object but its own ideas, which it alone does or can contemplate, it is evident that our knowledge is only conversant about them."[171]

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[169] Berkeley, as quoted by Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Touchstone, 2007), 651.

[170] Russell, 610.

[171] Locke, as quoted by Russell, 611.

The empiricist allows that an object exists apart from a perceiving mind; but the perceiving mind only has knowledge of its own ideas as perceptions of the sensory *representation* of the object. At best, assuming the mind's ideas are an accurate understanding of the sensible properties of the object, the representation is all we can know. The object itself is still beyond our grasp. St. Augustine's *res,* as the basis for hermeneutics, does not fare too well in the epistemology of the enlightenment, though philosophical hermeneutics as a discipline have been a counterpoint to modernist epistemology.

> In brief, hermeneutic philosophy is an approach to questions of truth and knowledge that focuses on the recovery for the present of the experience of the past as expressed in various cultural forms. Moreover, it understands this focus as at least a supplement and, more commonly, an embrasive alternative to the ahistorical empirical focus of classical epistemology.[172]

As the field of hermeneutics has gained importance in the wider philosophical discussion, its influence has deeply impacted theological disciplines as well. Where systematic theologians once began their schemas with an exposition of their epistemological stance, (as doctrines of Revelation or Word of God) they must now address the hermeneutical framework from which their system is developed. As Gerhard Ebeling, a systematician from the mid-twentieth century wrote, "Hermeneutics now takes the place of the classical epistemological theory.... For theology the hermeneutic problem is therefore today becoming the place of meeting with philosophy."[173]

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[172] Randy L. Maddox, "Contemporary Hermeneutic Philosophy and Theological Studies," *Religious Studies* 21, no. 04 (December 1985): 518, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500017728. (Italics original)

[173] Gerhard Ebeling, as quoted by Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, 1980, 4.

The enlightenment, however, was not the originator of skeptical frameworks. Epistemological skeptics have been influential since before humanity began to systematically treat the subject. Arguments have been made that skeptical views were present in Homer's epics and were later treated by early Greek philosophers.[174] By late antiquity, skepticism had a firm grasp on Plato's Academy, with some adopting the more radical teachings of Pyrrho (365/60-275/70). It is in Pyrrho that we also find the clearest example of the ramifications of a skeptical doctrine on hermeneutics.

"The Sceptic is never supposed to state a decided opinion, but only to say what appears to him. Even the Sceptical formulae, such as "Nothing more," or "I decide nothing," or "All is false," include themselves with other things. The only statements that the Sceptic can make, are in regard to his own sensations."[175] When a skeptic embraces the limitation of knowledge, speechlessness (*aphasia*) will follow, for any statement other than to simply acknowledge perceived sense-data is indeterminate and meaningless. In consequence of skepticism, the referent of language becomes inaccessible, and words are indeterminate utterances in the white noise of sense-perceptions.

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[174] cf Michelle Zerba, "What Penelope Knew: Doubt and Scepticism in the Odyssey," *Classical Quarterly;*59, no. 2 (December 2009): 295–316, http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/10.1017/S0009838809990012.

[175] Mary Mills Patrick, "Sextus Empiricus and Greek Scepticism," 25, accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/17556/17556-h/17556-h.htm#CHAPTER_II.

Augustine's Skeptical Context

Before addressing Augustine's challenge to skepticism, a brief overview of the development of skepticism in antiquity is helpful. Any discussion of this topic should follow its development between the Stoics and Plato's Academy. It is important to note that for both schools, and Greek/Hellenistic philosophy in general, philosophy was not an isolated discipline. It was a holistic part of being a good person and citizen. Philosophy was an active pursuit, seeking wisdom, personal happiness, and a just *polis.* For many strains of Hellenistic thought, a key ideal was happiness in *ataraxia* – freedom from strife. To achieve *ataraxia*, one must come to right knowledge… or at minimum avoid error.

Zeno,[176] founder of the Stoic school, proposed that within the process of belief-formation there is an inherent norm for believing truths. Certain beliefs are representations of actuality, and these true beliefs impress themselves on the mind in ways that falsities do not, these are called cognitive impressions.[177] Not all impressions are cognitive, but all cognitive impressions must be true.

In response, Arcesilaus[178] led the Academy in Athens to reject the possibility of any knowledge. In this rejection of the positive doctrine of Plato, Arcesilaus began what has

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[176] Zeno of Citium (ca. 344-262 BCE).

[177] *Phantasia kataleptike.*

[178] Ca. 316-241 BCE.

variously been referred to as the "New," "Second," or "Middle" Academy.[179] He argued that some impressions will misrepresent what is actual, humans have no fail-proof method to distinguish between a false impression and a 'cognitive impression.' Without a Criterion of Truth,[180] reason requires that we suspend all judgments about beliefs.

At this time, 'skeptic' was not a term used for those who held this view; *skepsis* is Greek for 'investigation'. The members of the Academy, and others that thought along these lines, saw themselves as continually investigating the world around them. Later this term came to mean someone that rejected belief. A skeptic referred to anyone that defended belief as a 'dogmatist', regardless of how rational their argument was.[181]

The Stoics responded to Arcesilaus' critique with one of their own. They posed the question that would perennially plague skeptics, "How can one act, if one cannot assent to a belief?" For, if one believes that they can know nothing of the world around them, how is it that they can determine a proper course of action? For philosophy in this period, there can be no separation of the epistemological stance and ethical considerations, a theory of knowledge is not complete without a theory of action as it cannot fulfill the goals of philosophy—wisdom, happiness, and justice.

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[179] John O'Meara, *Contra Academicos* (Westminster, MD, 1950), 15, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1582424?origin=crossref.

[180] The idea of the Criterion of Truth was introduced by Epicurus, (341-270 BCE).

[181] Keith Lehrer, a contemporary skeptic, still uses this term to denote anyone that professes a theory of knowledge. See, Keith Lehrer, "Why Not Skepticism?," in *Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, by Pojman, Louis P. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998), 60–67.

Arcesilaus argued that both animals and plants can act without reason. A person can act with reason without assenting to a belief that initiates the action. Further, since no impression can be proved true, it is not reasonable to depend on belief for action. Arcesilaus went on to adopt the empiricist view of the Epicureans; all sense-perception is true, but belief can introduce falsity. The Academics became universally skeptical; the dictum "I am certain of nothing – not even the fact that I am certain of nothing"[182] is attributed to Arcesilaus. For these skeptics, it was better to avoid the possibility of falsehood completely by suspending judgment; therefore, perception and belief were separated. To respond to the challenge of ethics, a skeptic could act on the best perceptions, rationally evaluated, while avoiding assent to an impression.

Carneades, and the next generation of Academic skeptics, continued the debate with the Stoics. They argued that no impression can be objectively determined to be better than another, therefore cognitive impressions cannot be superior to any other impressions. With no way to identify which impressions are 'cognitive impressions', one can only suspend judgment. The Stoics, in response, added the qualification "one that has no impediment",[183] to their definition of cognitive impression. There may be factors, external to an impression, that may cause the observer to withhold the judgment that it is 'cognitive' and reliable. Carneades continued to

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[182] John Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism: *The Contra Academicos*," *The Harvard Theological Review* 65, no. 1 (1972): 101.

[183] Katja Vogt, "Ancient Skepticism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2016 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016), 3.2, i., https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/skepticism-ancient/.

define a skeptical theory of action, though he seems to have left the original framework of Arcesilaus. He developed a three-stage criterion for determining action:

1. In important issues, a skeptic must act on what is persuasive – meaning an impression that is rationally convincing, or perhaps even plausible.
2. In more important issues, a skeptic must act on what is persuasive and 'undiverted'; that is that there is no conflict between the persuasive and any neighboring arguments.
3. In matters of happiness, a skeptic must consider what is persuasive, undiverted and 'explored'. By explored, other possible impressions have been tested and the persuasive impression is not diminished.[184]

This criterion will become problematic for the skeptical argument; later, Sextus[185] would call this a criterion of truth, not of action. Modern scholars also argue that it borders on a fallibilist epistemology.[186] Carneades also develops the term 'approval' as opposed to the Stoic term 'assent', but generally balance a thin semantic line between refusing to acknowledge a proposition as truth and the Stoic declaration of truth in fact. Augustine would later exploit this narrow distinction. The next generation of the Academy followed in these footsteps, narrowly

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[184] Vogt, 3.2.ii.

[185] Sextus Empiricus, ca. 160-210 CE.

[186] Vogt, "Ancient Skepticism," 3.2.ii.

distinguishing themselves from the Stoic position if only by a rejection of any criterion that involved truth. After Pyrrho,[187] a new, radical brand of skeptic was born.

Anecdotes about Pyrrho's life galvanized the skeptic and the Stoic alike. For the skeptic, the idea that Pyrrho could be so unaffected by the world around him that he needed to be pulled from the path of a wagon, was worthy of envy. For the Stoic, that he could be so unaffected by a man drowning that he would keep walking and fail to render aid, was evidence of the horrific ethical state brought on by the skeptic's lack of moral agency. In the Stoic ideal, *ataraxia* was a discipline that reduced anxiety. Events in the external world did not cause emotional turmoil that would disrupt one's happiness–the philosopher was still wholly obligated to be a good, moral citizen. For Pyrrho and his followers, the ideal was to allow as little commitment to the appearance of things as possible to live a tranquil life. Pyrrho offered three considerations to aid in developing skeptic tranquility.

1. Consider what are things by nature: Pyrrho made the metaphysical claim that all things are indeterminate, as such the nature of them is beyond our grasp.
2. Consider how one should be disposed toward these things: Our beliefs cannot be evaluated and thus are neither true nor false.

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[187] 365/60–275/70 BCE.

3. Consider what the result of this interaction should be: We cannot say anything, or if necessary, only speak in the mode of 'no more' to capture the indeterminate nature of things.[188]

In light of this indetermination, the proper way of life is speechlessness and tranquility. This doctrine became attractive to certain members of the Athenian Academy that were beginning to find its teachings overly dogmatic. Aenesidemus[189] was one such philosopher; he worked to formalize the teachings of Pyrrho. The first principle was that the skeptic must live according to appearances. To avoid falling into belief about those appearances, one must always put them in opposition with another thought or appearance. This will generate equipollence[190] between observations, causing the perceiver to suspend judgment. Living in suspended judgment will free the skeptic from the anxiety of error and produce tranquility.

To aid in this endeavor, Aenesidemus penned his famous Ten Modes (or Tropes). These are arguments that a skeptic can use to develop an opposition to any appearance, proposition or dogmatic argument. The Ten Modes are chiefly concerned with constructing opposition to appearances by proposing possible circumstances in which the object in question would, or could, appear differently. "Sextus himself holds that the Mode from Relativity (the Eighth Mode in his account) is in some sense architectonic for all the other: relativity is the basic form of

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[188] Vogt, "Ancient Skepticism," 4.1.

[189] Aenesidemus, ca. first century BCE.

[190] Equipollence was a term used by Sextus Empiricus to indicate a position where all arguments on all sides of a question are of equal strength, causing the suspension of judgment. Robert Audi, ed., *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Second Ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

sceptical argumentation"[191] Arippa[192] formulated what Sextus Empiricus called the Five Modes. These 'modes' were to be used by the skeptic to introduce equipollence within argumentation.

> 1. Argument from disagreement. In any matter that comes to an undecided conflict, (ordinary or philosophical) and leaves the skeptic unable to choose or reject either position, judgment must be suspended.
>
> 2. Argument leading to infinite regress. An argument brought forward to make a matter credible also needs to be supported, *ad infinitum.* With no possible starting or ending to the argument, judgment must be suspended.
>
> 3. Argument from relativity. The matter only appears in certain relation to the observer and the accompanying objects. If the object cannot be determined as it is itself, judgement must be suspended.
>
> 4. *Hypothesis*: Assumption without argument. To prevent infinite regress (a dogmatist) will assume something as a starting point without proper argument. The hypothesis may be wrong or a competing hypothesis could be formulated, judgement must be suspended.

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[191] R. J. Hankinson, "Values, Objectivity, and Dialectic; The Sceptical Attack on Ethics: Its Methods, Aims, and Success," *Phronesis* 39, no. 1 (March 1994): 46, https://doi.org/10.1163/156852894321052243.

[192] Arippa, first to second century CE.

> 5. Arguments that fall into circularity. An argument in support of the matter at hand also requires the original argument to confirm itself. Unable to assume one argument in order to establish the other, judgement must be suspended.[193]

It can be seen, these modes of argumentation would impact the kerygmatic nature of the Gospel of Christ. With these modes as aids, a skeptic should have the tools to reduce any appearance, assertion, or belief to one possible option in a field of equal, possible understandings. The modes cannot be wantonly employed however, care must be taken, or one could fall to dogmatism them self. For example, a skeptic must use restraint when arguing that an issue is *undecided* (Mode 1), to extend the debate and declare it *undecidable* would be to fall into dogmatic assumption. Instead, a wise skeptic will know when to develop opposition from an alternate mode, such as forcing the dogmatist into an infinite regression of arguments. These modes are the exemplar for the skeptical mindset, the purpose was to make it difficult for any enterprising interlocutor to argue in favor of a positive viewpoint.

Survey of *Contra Academicos*

The skeptic's framework was, by the third century CE, highly developed. It was well crafted, complex, and espoused by some of the most influential and eloquent people of the time. A young rhetorician named Augustine is an example of an educated, well read, and thoughtful person enthralled by the teachings of the New Academy, and in particular, the writings of Cicero. "It

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[193] Adapted from Vogt, "Ancient Skepticism," 4.3.

will be remembered that Augustine, two or at most three years before the date of the *Contra Academicos* gave allegiance to the New Academy"[194] Throughout the dialogues that make up this work, Augustine has a complex mix of attitudes toward his former master. At one point he states "I should never even by way of joking have attempted to attack the Academics…"[195]

O'Meara, in his introduction to this translation, noted that '*Contra Academicos'* may not even be the best title, "his work can be called '*de Academicis'*"[196], or 'On the Academics'. His respect for Cicero is evident:

> There is no doubt but that Cicero's *Academica* was the primary source upon which Augustine drew both for is version of the teaching of the New Academy, and also, in part for his refutation of the same.[197]

Augustine overtly cites *Academica,* and scholars generally agree that most of *Contra Academicos* has a direct correlation to something already addressed by Cicero.[198] Within the dialogue, Augustine recommends, by title, Cicero's works and is delighted when his interlocutors are already familiar with them. The theme of respect for Cicero and the general teaching of the (New) Academy run throughout:

> "Well, then," said Licentius, "what about our own renowned Cicero? What do you think of him?

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[194] O'Meara, *Contra Academicos*, 15.

[195] O'Meara, 15.

[196] O'Meara, 17.

[197] O'Meara, 14.

[198] Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism," 101.

> After a prolonged silence, the other replied: "He was a wise man."
>
> "In that case," said Licentius, "his opinion on the point at issue has some weight with you, has it not?"
>
> "It has," was the reply[199]

Augustine's deference for the New Academy and its philosophical stance, begs the question–what motivated him to shift from a pledged adherent to refutation of skepticism as the driving force of his first writing projects?[200]

Of course, within this timeframe, occurred Augustine's much discussed conversion to Christianity. This fact does explain the new vocational trajectory from young teacher and rhetorician to Christian theologian, eventual Bishop of Hippo, and consideration as one of the Early Church Fathers. These dialogues, however, are not overtly theological; there is but little evangelical fervor, and only in the material addressed directly to Romanianus, as recipient of these transcripts. A better explanation for this change in commitment is that as part of Augustine's spiritual conversion, he experienced a significant *epistemological* conversion.

Athough he underwent this transformation, Augustine still deeply held to the general Platonic philosophy of the "Old Academy". There is a large body of scholarly work that discusses the influences of Plotinus, Porphry, and Neo-Platonism on Augustine's theology.[201] To that point, Augustine openly cites the Platonists as useful, "if those who are called philosophers,

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[199] *C. Acad.* I.3.7.

[200] The three works, *Contra Academicos*, *De beata vita*, and *De ordine* are grouped together as the *Dialogues of Cassiciacum.* All are considered the earliest extant works of Augustine and all report supposed actual dialogues in November 386 C.E. (O'Meara, 3).

[201] This topic is outside the scope of this current work.

and especially the Platonists, have said aught that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it."[202] No doubt, statements like this are what justifies Kierkegaard in decrying Augustine's "incalculable harm"[203] of Christian teaching by infusing it with Platonic dualism.

This assessment may not be entirely fair. Augustine is without a doubt, committed to certain Platonic ideas. As we see in *C. Acad.* he unabashedly attempts to recover what he views as the original Platonic program of *seeking knowledge*. At the same time, even in his early days as a Christian, he finds at the close of *C. Acad.* that the Incarnate Christ is the ultimate *arbiter of knowledge*. The remaining Cassiciacum dialogues are dedicated to showing that the ultimate knowledge is God.

Though he valued Platonism, Augustine did not intend for it to be determinative over Christian teaching. Pannenberg would make a case for judicious learning "by taking up Augustine's argument that science and knowledge must serve wisdom."[204] Wisdom is grasping the *Beata Vita,*[205] of doing "good works in Christ to cling with constancy to Him … that the breast may not be swollen with that knowledge which puffeth up, nor boast of [heathen knowledge]"[206] While Augustine *ontologically classified* Being according to a dualistic

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[202] *Doc. chr.* II.40.60.

[203] Kierkegaard, as quoted by Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*, 277.

[204] Pannenberg as noted by Thiselton, 334.

[205] *De beata vita*, "The Happy Life" is Augustine's second Cassiciacum dialogue following *Contra Academicos.*

[206] *Doc. chr.* II.41.62.

framework, (i.e. corporeal/divine, profane/spiritual) –as a matter of *praxis*, he sought to hold the two in tension. Even for Plato, 'knowledge' necessitated proper political/social ethics.[207]

The Incarnation of Christ, however, was an impetus to re-address the nature of knowledge. "But now men—even in the mass—had become capable of receiving all spiritual doctrine because of the cleansing and elevation of mankind through the coming of the Savior. It was time for the Academy to cease from its negative and skeptical teaching."[208] Traditionally, two levels of knowledge had been considered: "popular knowledge for the masses and philosophical knowledge for the few was much stressed in antiquity."[209] For Augustine, it was of deep theological import that this duality was defeated, for the Gospel had to effectively engage all, the philosopher and the 'mass' alike.

This new religious conviction in no way diminished his commitment to philosophy, he simply began to enthusiastically engage in philosophy with a new vision of its perfection in the Incarnation. "Come with me, then, to philosophy. Here there is everything that is wont wonderfully to move you whenever you are anxious and hesitating,"[210] Augustine exhorts Romaninius. In his introduction to Book I, Augustine blurs the lines between a love of philosophy and accepting the Christian faith. He writes:

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[207] Cf. Plato, *The Republic.*

[208] O'Meara, *Contra Academicos*, 17.

[209] O'Meara, 170.

[210] *C. Acad.* II.2.3.

> by our prayers we may win…you back to us, and allow your mind, which for so long has yearned for respite, to emerge at length into the fresh air of true freedom. …It is this thought, proposed in declarations of doctrines most fruitful and far removed from the understanding of the uninitiated, that philosophy to which I call you promises to make clear to her true devotees.[211]

Augustine's missionary impulse to win his friend to Christian faith was not to write a doctrinal treatise or personal testimonial, but to exhort him to accept the *possibility* of true knowledge.

> Wake up! wake up! I beg you…She [philosophy] now nourishes and cherishes me in that leisure which we have so much desired. She has freed me entirely from that heresy[212] … For she teaches, and teaches truly, …[and] promises to make known clearly the true and hidden God and is on the very point of deigning to present Him to our view—as it were, through shining clouds.[213]

The second reason for this new epistemological concern was the perennial challenge to skepticism, that of ethics. Even the venerated Cicero had no real solution for the gap. He was "inclined toward skepticism, though he refused to acknowledge the skeptic's dismissal of objective morality."[214] This was a difficult dichotomy to maintain. Many contemporary scholars find "two Ciceros," "Cicero the politician" and "Cicero the great exponent of humane living."[215] He is interpreted as claiming the mantle of Plato's Academy and its skeptical doctrine, but also developing a political/ethical praxis that was Stoic in nature "…so evidently in *De Officiis, De*

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[211] *C. Acad.* I.1.3.

[212] Referring to the heresy of Manicheism, which Augustine, shortly after these dialogues in Cassiciacum, would take up his pen to refute.

[213] *C. Acad.* I.1.3.

[214] Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism," 101.

[215] Walter Nicgorski, "Cicero's Paradoxes and His Idea of Utility," *Political Theory* 12, no. 4 (November 1, 1984): 559, https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591784012004006.

Legibus and elsewhere in his work, Cicero embraces stoic positions."[216] Cicero's positive political endeavors appear too close to Stoic ethics for the comfort of modern observers. This, of course, would have been a fatal philosophical *faux pas*, given the generations-long feud between the two schools of thought. Scholarly interpretation aside, the difficulty of maintaining both a skeptical epistemology and a positive political philosophy becomes an easy target for those with other agendas.[217]

For Augustine, in the context of developing a Christian ethic, there can be little room for this dichotomy between theory and praxis. "It will be seen that it is not so much the content of skeptical discourse which disturbs Augustine, but the effects of such discourse on the minds of men."[218] If the truth of the Gospel of Grace had come in order to be known, and the 'mass' was intended to determine proper living in its light, there was no place for dogmatic skepticism to interfere with a proper Christian epistemology.

The effectiveness of Augustine's arguments refuting his former fellow Academicians is subject to debate. In his introduction, O'Meara (in 1950) was far more interested in the historical-critical issue of confirming the Plotninus/Porphry influence in Augustine's theological work. He determines that "*Contra Academicos* cannot be recommended as a valuable

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[216] Nicgorski, 560.

[217] Walter Nicgorski attempts to unite these paradoxes in Cicero on utilitarian grounds, but that is not the issue at hand.

[218] Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism," 99.

contribution to the theory of knowledge, nor even as an answer to skepticism."[219] For him the great treasure here is that it is strictly a 'personal work' confirming, at least thematically in his view, that Augustine was a Neo-Platonist; furthermore, that those philosophical commitments are an interpretive key to understanding his whole body of theological works.

To the modern commentators' point, Augustine is clearly influenced by the Platonist school and makes no attempt to extricate himself from his philosophical roots. He follows the conventions of writing philosophy in dialogue form, as well as in explicit (though selective) affirmation of views held by Cicero, particularly, as inherited from Plato. In his opening address, he clearly asks Romaninius to consider this new Christian doctrine *as the perfection* of Platonic happiness – there is no request to abandon philosophy for a newfound religious commitment.

John Heil, takes a different (and possibly singular) approach to *Contra Academicos* and its effectiveness.[220] He asserts that commentators naturally interpret Augustine's use of Licentius' argumentation (as the voice of refutation) as "direct frontal assaults on the skeptical point of view."[221] Through such a lens, indeed, there is no definitive, convincing argument; Heil proposes that this interpretation diminishes the purpose of these dialogues. Augustine knew (as a former adherent) that challenging skeptics on their own terms, and from within their own framework would never be convincing–to a skeptic or an observer alike. The skeptics had, after

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[219] O'Meara, *Contra Academicos*, 18.

[220] "To my knowledge, this interpretation has not been discussed by any of the commentators on the *Contra Academicos,*" Heil, 110.

[221] Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism," 110.

all, spent generations developing the art of equipollence. As Augustine argues in Book III, they had managed to stay above the fray in the cultural debate with both Stoic and Epicurean proponents.[222] What proposition can you produce to convince someone of anything if they deny the legitimacy of belief in all propositions?

In Heil's view, Augustine constructed a much more sophisticated argument than he has received credit for. In *Contra Academicos,* Heil finds the following argumentation:

1. Certain knowledge is possible,
    a. Knowledge is interaction between
        i. Reason (as incorrigible)
        ii. The will
        iii. Producing cognition
    b. It is equally likely 'Appearances' are reliable as not
        i. Since they typically function as they should, doubt should be reasoned, not assumed
2. Skepticism functions by disciplining the will to act without reason,
    a. Causing a focus inward, toward the will
    b. Rather than outward toward reason

[222] *C. Acad.* III.7.16.

    c. This emptying of reason equates to a reduction to "complete unconsciousness,"[223] not tranquility

3. This is a moral issue
    a. The skeptic's "perfectly tranquil mental state"[224] is "unintelligible" and "ineffectual"
    b. It must deny
        i. *Prima Facia* knowledge
        ii. Analytic knowledge
    c. At minimum, these types of knowledge are necessary for ethical/political function
4. It is not a stretch into the irrational to assume that knowledge should be sought

In Heil's interpretation, Augustine develops argumentation to achieve three goals. The first, to reveal inconsistencies inherent to the skeptical framework itself. The second, "by offering examples of what might ordinarily be called "certain knowledge" and showing that these examples are quite intelligible".[225] The third, Augustine works to establish an *ethical* basis for the epistemological quest, one that "locates virtue and happiness in the process of apprehending the truth."[226]

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[223] Heil, "Augustine's Attack on Skepticism," 108.

[224] Heil, 109.

[225] Heil, 110.

[226] Heil, 110.

The first dialogue (Book I) revolves around the definition of 'happiness'.[227] Book II expounds the doctrine of the New Academy, noting, in particular, the distinctives between the "New" and the "Old" Academies. The debate centers around the terms *probabile* and *veri simile*. In Book III, the dialogue resumes to find the meaning of 'fortune' and to parse the difference between a 'wise man' and a 'philosopher'. Augustine himself then takes up refuting the skeptical takeover of the Academy, he enters a plea for a return to Socratic methodologies for seeking truth. Nowhere in the dialogues does Augustine counter skepticism with a positivist epistemological stance, perhaps to the consternation of the above modern commentator(s). He does not attempt to propose any new methodology, nor does he adapt either the materialist position of the Stoics or the empiricism of the Epicureans.

Happiness, Error, and Wisdom in the Search of Truth

As the dialogue opens, the interlocutors are in agreement that the statement "we ought to know truth,"[228] is the ideal. Furthermore, knowledge of the truth, even if it did not increase happiness, is preferable to ignorance. Augustine clarifies a definition of happiness as one "who lives in

[227] Note: 'Happiness' in parlance of antiquity is not equivalent to the contemporary idea which is more situational, but rather implies an *inner* peace or absence of *inner* turmoil. Augustine's definition here is that the right order of human being-ness is achieved; i.e. living under discipline of reason. (cf Platonic dialogues).

[228] *C. Acad.* I.2.5.

conformity with that part of his spirit which, as is right, should govern the other parts."[229] He adds, for the benefit of the skeptical interlocutor, that the 'best' is the 'mind' or 'reason'.[230]

Licentius presents the argument against the skeptical position that avoiding the possibility of error will lead to *ataraxia*.

> Suppose that a man is not seeking anything and is asked, for example, if it is now daytime, and without due reflection at once conjectures that it is nighttime and replies to that effect, do you not think that that man is in error? Your definition, then, has not embraced even this monstrous kind of error.[231]

Simply avoiding the search for, and assent to, knowledge cannot be sufficient to avoid error. This person cannot be deemed to be free from error simply because they did not seek knowledge and withheld assent. Therefore, the definition of error must include statements that do not reflect actuality, regardless of whether the observer is intentional about them. Licentius then proffers a modified definition of 'error' as "the approbation as true of what is not true."[232]

In Chapter 5 the question "What is Wisdom?" is taken up; Augustine offers the Stoic definition as "the knowledge of things human and divine."[233] The group finds that some people

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[229] *C. Acad.* I.3.9.

[230] For Augustine 'reason' in a special sense is 'incorrigible', see Heil, 107.

[231] *C. Acad.* I.4.11.

[232] *C. Acad.* I.4.11.

[233] Note: 'divinity' here, as throughout this dialogue does not indicate specific Christian theological ideas, but the general Platonic sense of non-corporeal knowledge. *C. Acad.* I.5.16. (direct quote from Cicero in *De officiis*, a definition attributed to the Stoics).

seem to be given the gift of knowledge, and yet do not act accordingly. They cannot therefore be wise.[234] Wisdom must be found in the seeking, not only the possession of, knowledge.

The argumentation of Book I is closed with an account of wisdom as "not only the knowledge of, but the diligent search for, those things human and divine which have relation to happiness."[235] This conclusion directly challenges the Academic doctrine of *ataraxia* through avoidance of error as sufficient criterion for happiness and wisdom.

Skepticism is Inconsistent

Book II begins with a lengthy (three chapter) exhortation to Romanianus.[236] Augustine implores Romanianus not to fall into either of two impediments to those who seek knowledge. The first, is to grow tired of seeking truth, either because of laziness or because one doubts one's own capacity to obtain it. The second is to "believe yourself to have already found it".[237] Augustine urges Romanianus to continue to seek, for "in the manner in which you know that the sum of one and two and three and four is ten…knowledge is not to be despaired of, and it will be clearer than those numbers are."[238]

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[234] The interlocutors cite the example of a spiritist that seems to have the gift of knowledge of spiritual things, yet lives an amoral life—clearly he has knowledge but it not wise.

[235] *C. Acad.* I.8.23.

[236] Romanianus took Augustine in, supported him financially as well as relationally after the death of his father (*C. Acad.* II, ii, 3).

[237] *C. Acad.* II.3.9. Here Augustine may be alluding to Romanianus' adherence to Manichaeanism (King 33).

[238] *C. Acad.* II.3.9.

Augustine, in giving an overview of the philosophy of the New Academy to his interlocutors, introduces his understanding of its development. Augustine opines that the break in the Academy was not due to shortcomings of its own teaching but was a response to the Stoics' introduction of positivism. Arcesilaus strenuously objected to this teaching and feared the potential error it could cause wise people to adopt. To counter that error, he began to deny that knowledge was possible at all.

The entire Academy did not readily adopt new skeptical doctrine; Antiochus, a follower of Philo, viewed these teachings as the threat to the Academy. He held to the doctrine that a "wise man could perceive truth".[239] Antiochus "appealed to the testimonies of the physicists of old, and to other great philosophers to prove his point."[240] He declared that it was the skeptics that were breaking with accepted doctrines and began to refer to Arcesilaus and his followers as the New Academy. As Augustine argues, the skepticism of the Academy is not even wholly accepted by the Academy itself.

To counter the Stoic ethical critique, the Academy was forced to develop the doctrines of probability (*probibile)* and what-is-like-truth (*veri simile*). Augustine, through a brief parable shows that these doctrines are not sound. No one can make a claim of similarity without knowledge of the first object of comparison. "They say that in practical matters they follow

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[239] *C. Acad.* II.6.15.

[240] *C. Acad.* II.6.15.

'what-is-like-truth,' although actually they do not know what truth itself is."[241] To determine how to act rightly, the skeptics must allow that they act according to something, while also avoiding assent. For their teachings to avoid ethical nihilism, the Academy was forced to develop a truth-like proximation anyway.

Not until chapter nine does Augustine verbalize his moral objection to skepticism. "We are concerned with life, with morality, with the spirit – that spirit which hopes to overcome the antagonism of every kind of illusion…"[242] He has a teleological issue with skeptical teaching. "Somehow or other [the Academics] persuaded me of the probability…that man cannot find truth. Consequently, I became lazy and very slothful, nor did I have the courage to seek for what clever and learned men were not permitted to find."[243] The energy behind these dialogues, his exhortations and his rebukes, lies in his moral objection to raising a stumbling block to those that desire knowledge, wisdom, and happiness. For no one is going to seek that which "learned men" has convinced them they cannot attain. That unattainable object, knowledge, is precisely what Augustine is imploring his audience (both directly in the dialogue itself as well as the recipient(s) of the transcript) to seek. His exhortation is both for the sake of philosophy and his newfound Christological epistemology.

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[241] *C. Acad.* II.7.19.

[242] *C. Acad.* II.9.22.

[243] *C. Acad.* II.9.23.

The Image of Proteus as Criterion

In the third dialogue of *C. Acad.*, Augustine develops several propositional arguments. As an example, after the assembled group establishes the existence of a wise person, he proposes the following disjunctive:

> For the Academics maintained, or rather opined, at one and the same time that the wise man could exist, but that, nevertheless, man could not attain to knowledge. Therefore, they actually claimed that the wise man knows nothing. But you believe that he knows wisdom, which certainly is not identical with knowing nothing.[244]

Augustine continues to press Alypius (as interlocutor on behalf of the Academy) to make concessions, namely that wise people do exist; and that, as much as it is possible, they can posses knowledge. This is still not a defeat for sceptics however, as they can still withhold assent from all knowledge. As Alypuis challenges:

> Even though I should concede," he said, "what you are so anxiously striving for, namely, that the wise man knows wisdom, and that between us we have discovered something which the wise man can know, nevertheless, I do not at all think that the whole case of the Academics has been undermined. Indeed, I notice that they can fall back on a stronghold that is by no means weak, and that their line of retreat has not been cut off. They can still withhold assent. … They would have us notice that their behaviour is illustrated and mirrored, so to speak, by that of Proteus[245] who, it is said, could be caught only by means which invariably did not result in his capture. His pursuers were never sure that what they had was still he, unless some divinity informed them.[246]

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[244] *C. Acad.* III.4.10.

[245] *C. Acad.* III.5.11. Note: Proteus was a sea god in Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Georgic.* Proteus would reveal truth, but only when compelled. The god would change form while in the questioner's grasp in order to startle them and loosen their grip. Only by holding fast, could a seeker learn the truth they sought.

[246] *C. Acad.* III.5.11.

Alypius brings focus to the "chasm posited by the Academics between the truth and the truth-like."[247] Just as those who sought Proteus could never be sure, for the god may change again, truth was subject to appearances, which could change. "'But who will indicate truth for us?' [the Academics] ask".[248] Augustine is thrilled by this development, for the epistemological question has changed. It has now been established that a person can, at least probably, know something. The question has now become, 'How will truth be indicated?'

Augustine then turns the metaphor of Proteus upside down.

> That Proteus – so that you, boys, may see that poets are not to be entirely disregarded in philosophy – is portrayed after the image of the truth. In poems, I say, Proteus manifests and bears the person of truth, which no one can lay hold on, if he is deceived by false images, and loosens or loses his hold on the nodes of understanding. For even when the truth is being grasped and, as it were, held in our hands, those images strive in the usual manner of corporeal things – to deceive and delude us through the very senses which we use for the needs of this life[249]

Augustine's reference to Proteus, as the arbiter of truth, may be read as an early allusion to the Incarnate Christ. Gerald Boersma finds certain parallels in these images; first, they embody and reveal truth. Second, "their character of truth is not immediately perceived." [250] Third, their physical appearance 'deceives and deludes', when grasped according to "his temporal and material condition; he is, then, not perceived as and image translucent to eternal

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[247] Gerald P. Boersma, "'Proteus Rising from the Sea': A Note on Proteus in *Contra Academicos*," *Heythrop Journal* 57, no. 4 (July 2016): 693, https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.12165.

[248] *C. Acad.* III.5.12.

[249] *C. Acad.* III.6.13. Translation, Boersma.

[250] Gerald P. Boersma, "'Proteus Rising from the Sea,'" 694.

truth." "Proteus as 'image of the truth' poetically attests to the possibility of the Incarnation – that eternal truth can be temporally revealed and embodied."[251] This imagery is also referred to in *De ordine* as an image of the intersection of Divine truth as embodied in the finite order.[252]

Augustine also points out that Alypius himself included "unless some divinity informed them" as a caveat for the appearance of Proteus. "Your words were brief but full of piety. There has been nothing in our discussion which has given me more delight, nothing more profound, nothing more probable, and, provided, so I trust, that divinity be present to us, nothing more true."[253] Curiously, Augustine, makes no more of this imagery but ends the dialogue for the day on this exuberant note, "… lest I become more excited mentally than is good for my body."[254]

It is possible that this is the apex of the entire dialogue. Here the connection is made between the 'knowledge of things human and divine' as determined was required for happiness in Book I.5. The Academicians (as represented) have been forced to admit that knowledge was at least possible, though in need of a reliable Criterion. Here, Alypius introduces imagery that Augustine enthusiastically re-interprets as this potential human-divine Criterion. He then closes the discussion for the day.

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[251] Boersma, "'Proteus Rising from the Sea,'" 694.

[252] *De ordine* II.15.

[253] *C. Acad.* III.6.13.

[254] *C. Acad.* III.6.13.

Augustine does not, however, begin the next day on this line of discussion. He instead, continues to undermine the Academic position of wisdom by deferral of assent. He constructs more disjunctive propositions in which they cannot assent to either position. They would have to either concede that knowledge is at least possible, or that their doctrine amounts to wisdom through ignorance.

Augustine, thinks little of the skeptic redefining 'wisdom' as 'the study of wisdom' rather than the attainment of wisdom. He mocks them as saying, "If you devote yourself to her [wisdom] you will never indeed be wise while you live here…your spirit will enjoy wisdom unencumbered after this life, that is, when you will have ceased to be a man."[255] Or rather saying, "Come mortal men, to philosophy. Here there is much to be gained. After all, what can be dearer to man than wisdom? Come, then, so that you may become wise – and not know wisdom."[256] For Augustine, the skeptic position is distilled down to these two possible statements, which if they were to honestly admit either one, they would be shunned as madmen.

The Limitations of Skepticism

Augustine then moves to address specific arguments that the Academy had developed. He states again "Knowledge still doesn't abandon us, even if we're uncertain about it. We know that Zeno's definition is either true or false. Hence we do not know nothing."[257] He turns his attention

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[255] *C. Acad.* III.9.20

[256] *C. Acad.* III.9.20.

[257] *C. Acad.* III.9.21 trans. King.

to Carneades who at some point 'woke up' to the difficulty of his Academy's position in light of perception. Augustine relates Carneades' thinking, "Now Carneades, are you really going to claim that you do not know whether you are a man or an insect? … Let us say that the things that we do not know are those about which *philosophers* inquire." Even Carneades realized that there were areas of knowledge that are required for everyday life and are ridiculous to deny. To maintain the skeptical doctrine, he separated those disciplines from philosophy. In this realm, he pointed to disagreements between philosophers as proof that knowledge was not possible.

Augustine opposes this separation, for even on the question of how this world is ordered, he can claim to know that the world either always existed and will always do so, or the world began at some point and thereafter will always exist; or began and will cease to exist. It is enough, Augustine claims, to know that according to the way the world is, either by the nature of existence or divine structuring, that those are the options and there are no others.

To suspend judgment on which of these possibilities to assert is a legitimate function of knowledge. The skeptic cannot force an interlocutor into taking an unsupportable position, only to argue they may be wrong. For the skeptic cannot prove that any of the options is the only correct one, nor can they argue that any of them are demonstrably false. Similarly, they cannot argue that any of the choices 'appears like falsehood.'

Reliability of Sense Perception

The skeptic can reply that one cannot even be sure that the world exists, because our sense-perception is deceptive. Augustine, however rejects this, "Your arguments were never able to disown the power of our senses to the extent of clearly establishing that nothing seems to be so to

us."[258] For the Academics can only posit that things *may not* be as they appear, and they are unable to establish that perception is consistently and substantially unreliable. The skeptic cannot cast doubt on the issue based on possible dream-states or madness. For the senses cannot be "blamed for the fact that insane people have illusions, or that we see in our dreams things that are not true. If the senses give reports that are true to those who are awake and sane, then they will not be involved in what the mind of one who is asleep or insane, conjures up."[259]

'But' says the skeptic, 'we can be deceived by our senses.' Augustine takes a different approach to this common objection. "If when an oar was dipped under water it presented itself as straight, then in that case I would convict my eyes of giving a report that was not true."[260] To the observer's eyes, an oar *should* appear bent in the water, it is not a deception or failure of the senses. The same with the other classic arguments for everyday sensory 'illusions' that plagued philosophical discussions of perception. Human beings learn to expect certain factors to change the way we perceive the world around us. We expect them and adjust accordingly – we are not the victims of deceitful or unreliable senses.

In chapter twelve, Augustine determines that perception plays no part in knowledge of ethics; for if one determines that pleasure is the highest good (Epicureans) the relativity of certain sensory perceptions will not seriously affect the process. Likewise, if a wise person were

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[258] *C. Acad.* III.11.24. Translated, King.

[259] *C. Acad.* III.11.25.

[260] *C. Acad.* III.11.26.

to make a decision about the ultimate good in a dream, upon awaking he/she could always change their mind – no one would begrudge them that. As for the fear of insanity, "either a man's wisdom is lost because of his madness, … and he does not know truth; or his knowledge remains in his intellect,"[261] and he behaves as though in a dream. Either state is an exception from seeking wisdom and not a problematic issue for wisdom itself.

Augustine's final argument against the Academic Skeptics is something of a conspiracy theory. In it, he suggests that the Academy simply adopted skepticism publicly, and only to prevent the Academy and its teachings from being overwhelmed by either the Stoic or Epicurean doctrines. Secretly, the Platonists still held to the original doctrines as 'mysteries' to be preserved, "concealing completely the doctrine of the Academy and in burying it as gold to be found at some time by posterity."[262] In this state of hibernation, the "one system of really true philosophy"[263] sat for generations until the Divine intervened and redeemed humanity to knowledge. Augustine specifically notes one doctrine:

> It is enough for my purpose that Plato thought that there were two worlds, one intelligible, where truth itself resided, and this sensible world which, it is clear, we apprehend by sight and touch. The first was the true world, while the latter was made like the true world and after its image.[264]

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[261] *C. Acad.* III.12.28.

[262] *C. Acad.* III.17.38.

[263] *C. Acad.* III.19.42.

[264] *C. Acad.* III.17.37.

The value of Platonic doctrine was in the possibility of truth and of knowledge; the physical world was a sign, giving humanity access to the overlying spiritual truth. The image of Proteus as truth directed by the divine is connected to this doctrine.

> … the most subtle reasoning would never recall souls blinded by the manifold darkness of error and stained deeply by the slime of the body, had not the most high God, because of a certain compassion for the masses, bent and submitted the authority of the divine intellect even to the human body itself.[265]

The rescue of knowledge itself, and of the Platonic 'complete system of philosophy', was mounted by God Himself in the incarnational act of His Son.

Augustine ends his refutation by stating that he, at thirty-three years old, is not as yet confident that he has found wisdom; but has dedicated himself to the search. There are two forces to aid in this endeavor, authority and reason – and he has found no stronger authority than Jesus Christ to support him in this quest for knowledge.

Possibility of Knowledge and Signification

Modern commentators are rightly disappointed if they are anticipating a once-and-for-all victory over the skeptics.[266] Their requirements for such a feat, however, were not at all a priority for Augustine. He was not interested in countering skepticism by proposing another framework for knowledge. In fact, he is as eager to avoid the positivism of both Zeno and Epicurus as he is to

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[265] *C. Acad.* III.19.42.

[266] cf O'Meara, *Contra Academicos*, 18.

refute skepticism. Augustine is not interested in a methodological approach to knowledge;[267] he only wishes to establish that knowledge is at minimum possible, and that humanity must seek after it. This is far from the epistemological agenda of modern thought.

Augustine did intend to establish the following in *Contra Academicos:*

1. Skepticism may not even be the true doctrine of the Academicians.
2. Skepticism is not a coherent system of thought
    a. Skepticism requires denying (or discounting) *premia facie* knowledge
    b. Whole disciplines of knowledge and human activity must be bracketed off to sustain it (i.e. mathematics, legal disciplines)
    c. To establish possible ethical foundations, it must propose a facsimile of truth
    d. Analytical logic leads it to disjunctive propositions in which either option is self-defeating
3. Skepticism is morally reprehensible
    a. It discourages people from seeking Truth
    b. It presupposes a distinction between the 'philosopher' and the 'masses' (the epistemological proletariat)
4. Skepticism denies the divine epistemological project of the Incarnation

[267] The position that knowledge was not the product of a methodological process but was developed through modes of experience is what Gadamer would later advance in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Revised edition (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004).

In evaluating the efficacy of *C. Acad.*, it is important to note that Augustine himself felt that he accomplished the task he set for himself. In his *Retractions* he only wishes to correct minor issues of presentation only. Certain word choices, and some 'impious' statements of a new Christian philosopher are his primary objections to his young implied author. The most substantive correction was "the praise with which I extolled Plato or the Platonists or the Academic philosophers…especially those against whose great errors Christian teaching must be defended."[268] This statement should caution the commentators against assuming that Augustine remained *primarily* committed to a Platonist viewpoint. While that position was openly stated in *Contra Academicos,* the argumentation itself also shows that Augustine held his philosophical beliefs as subject to critical evaluation considering Christian faith and teaching.

The overall work of the dialogue, Augustine still affirms thirty years later. "The silences of the *Retractationes,* too, are at least as significant as the words: the remarkable fact is that Augustine believed that so much of his early work could stand uncorrected, especially given his pressing sense of responsibility to his audience."[269] He must have felt that this early dialogue (as part of the Cassiciacum trilogy) accomplished his intended goals, for he never substantively addressed the issue again in his industrious literary career. Naturally, it is debatable whether this argumentation is sufficient or effective, those are not questions for this project, as much as that

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[268] *Retractions,* I.1.4.

[269] Catherine Conybeare, *The Irrational Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2. Although it is not in the scope of this project, it should be noted that Conybeare puts together an insightful analysis of dialogue as a genre for communicating philosophical reasoning and content. This analysis would be beneficial for any study of the classic philosophical dialogues.

discussion is worthwhile. What is pertinent for this project is to show that this argument is a vital part of Augustine's hermeneutic.

It is a temptation for contemporary readers of *Christian Doctrine* to understand the term 'doctrine' in the sense of 'dogma' or 'tradition'. In this sense, Book I is interpreted as church dogma, or *catechesis*. This is not what Augustine had in mind; for him, 'doctrine' implied 'sound teaching,' and he applied 'doctrine' to sound philosophical arguments and issues of Christian theology alike.[270] The intended 'doctrine' in *Doc. chr.* is the lesson on the interpretation of scripture in Book IV; not the *res* of Book I which is the prolegomena to the intended lesson. In *Doc. chr.*, the *res* is the foundation for interpretation. Augustine's stated purpose of the text is to teach people to interpret scripture.[271] Furthermore "All instruction is either about things (*res*) or about signs (*signum*)," the first book of *Doc. chr.* is dedicated to *res* "in the strict sense…that which is never employed as a sign of anything else." [272]

There is a substantial distinction between the 'things' of scripture for the modern interpreter and the *res* for Augustine. For the modern interpreter, the 'things' are the historical critical content of the text. To find and interpret meaning, one attempts to re-create the events recorded in the text, and/or the life and mind of the author. For Augustine, these are important

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[270] *cf C. Acad.* I.

[271] *Doc. chr.* I.1.1.

[272] *Doc. chr.* I.2.2. See also, *Mag.*

questions, but not the *res* as referent of scripture – as *historikon* they are also symbols, the ultimate *res* of scripture is the Divine Creator.

It is here, that a Platonic worldview must cautiously be considered. If there is a distinction between the corporeal (inferior) and the spiritual (superior), the ultimate goal of knowledge is to grasp spiritual truth; all other knowledge must serve that purpose (see Augustine's Rule in *Mag.* above). "The living bodily form itself,… is quite a distinct thing from the life by which it is quickened and animated by it. … [seekers of wisdom] are compelled to place above it, again, that unchangeable life, which is not at one time foolish, at another time wise, but on the contrary is wisdom itself."[273] This requires that the realm of the *verbum* and the realm of the corporeal combine to elucidate the spiritual realm as 'wisdom itself'. Understanding the text and its relation to the corporeal (*historikon*) is part of the process to understanding the spiritual *res* that is the purpose of scripture.

Having access to the *res* of language in general, and the *res* of scripture in particular, is essential to human understanding in general, but even more so, for the possibility of grasping ultimate Truth in Augustine's Christian faith. To infringe on another's confidence of this possibility is a moral issue, not just a theoretical problem.

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[273] *Doc.Chr.* I.8.8

4. Reliability of Signs

Thiselton writes, "Not until Ferdinand de Saussure did thinking about signs and signifiers in language become so sophisticated as that of Augustine."[274] It is ironic that through the structuralism of Saussure, linguistics were severed from *res* as its basis. The world had been isolated from Descartes' subjective mind, and now the language that the mind used was severed from the exterior referent. In structuralism "language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others."[275] For Wittgenstein, there was something to be gained using structuralism in the analysis of the 'language game'. For other structuralists, the 'code' became abstracted from its contextual use. "But if the code is divorced from historic human life, how is it still related to language as a *human* activity?"[276] Language could no longer be relied upon to communicate 'something about something' to someone; but could only distinguish itself from other *parole* in its own closed *langue.* At best, it could indicate that "I am speaking of 'x' and not 'y' (or any other) within 'langue a'".

In an effort to systematize knowledge of language, structuralism bracketed the sign from signified; deconstructionists realized (rightly) that a sign without a referent has no interpretable meaning. Thiselton notes that Patrick Grant finds a great contrast between "Augustine's

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[274] Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2009), 116.

[275] F. de Saussure, as quoted by Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," 1977, 428.

[276] Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," 430 (Italics original).

representational view of language,[277] and insistence in current literary theory that literary language undermines stable meanings. In Paul de Man's terms, sign and meaning never coincide."[278] To recover the possibility of meaning for signs, Thiselton relies heavily on Wittgenstein's conceptions of 'language games' from *Philosophical Investigations* and the *Blue Book*.

The modern suspicion of the reliability of signs began in the Renaissance. Vanhoozer identifies it in Francis Bacon's work. "It is all too easy, Bacon claims, to mistake one's own definition of a word for knowledge of the thing to which the word refers. The problem is that people often use words in different ways, so words alone cannot reveal the nature of things."[279]

Augustine, in contrast, places signs themselves within his ontological framework, as a second classification of *res*. Augustine uses the term *res* in slightly different functions in his theory of word. In the general sense, the sign itself is also a *res*, as it is a thing that has Being and is sensible. A spoken word is heard, a gesture, letters on a page, and facial expressions are all things that an observer receives as sense data. In Augustine's technical sense, the sign (*signum)* is a subset of *res*; the *signum* is properly a *res,* but has an additional function to indicate another *res*.

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[277] In the understanding based on the preceding argumentation of this thesis, Augustine's theory of language is not representational – though Thiselton's sources seem to take this view. In the analysis of this current work, Augustine develops a referential linguistic theory.

[278] Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*, 506.

[279] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 1998, 39.

The category of sign is broken into two types. The first is a 'natural sign' (*signa naturalia*); this is a type that simply occurs, "apart from any intention or desire of using them as signs."[280] It is something in the natural world that specifically indicates something else. One of Augustine's examples of this is smoke, which indicates a fire below it. Natural signs generally have a direct causal link to the *res* they indicate. To use Augustine's example, a fire (*res*) is the direct cause of smoke (natural sign) which indicates the presence of the fire. There is no intentionality on the part of the fire to indicate to another its location or activity; smoke is caused naturally, whether another subject observes it at all.

The second category, *signa data*, deals with signs that "living beings mutually exchange for the purpose of showing, as well as they can, the feelings of their minds,[281] or their perceptions or their thoughts."[282] The category is wholly dependent on the intentionality of the utterer to indicate something to someone else. Most translators refer to these as 'conventional' signs which does make sense considering discussions of etymology such as Plato's *Cratylus*. B. Darrel Jackson, however, argues against this translation in favor of 'given' or even 'intentionally given' signs.[283]

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[280] *Doc. chr.* II.2.

[281] Latin, *motus animi*.

[282] *Doc. chr.* II.1.3.

[283] Jackson, "The Theory of Signs in St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," 14.

Jackson supports this in two ways. First, it is simply a better translation of the Latin '*data*'[284] which means 'given'. Second, in the context of semantics, 'convention' applies more to meaning than occurrence.[285] In the *Cratylus*, Plato discusses the difference between natural origin, and a conventional meaning of words. Here 'natural' refers to the Stoic idea that words are derived directly from the object indicated. 'Conventional' source of meaning indicates that words are arbitrarily assigned to indicate objects by a linguistic culture that has agreed to its common understanding, but words are not inherently derived from the objects themselves.

In *Doc. chr.* II, as well as in *De dialectica*, Augustine is not discussing the meaning of individual words or their etymology but the categorical distinctions of signifiers; primary at this juncture, is the issue of intentionality in use. For these signs, the essential characteristic is that they are intentionally used by an 'utterer' as an indication of a *res* – they are 'given' in reference to something.

'Given signs', are further divided into two categories. Augustine does not go into detail on the first, which he refers to as "visible words."[286] These are gestures, such as a nod of the head to indicate assent, or military flags to signal troop movement. This category is not where his primary interest lies, either in *De dialectica* or *Doc. chr.*

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[284] Latin *datum*.

[285] Jackson, "The Theory of Signs in St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," 14.

[286] *Doc. chr.* II.3.4.

"For among men words have obtained far and away the chief place as a means of indicating the thoughts of the mind."[287] Here we enter into the second major technical term in Augustine's schema–*verbum. Verbum* ('word') occupies the focus of much of Augustine's thought semantically, practically, and theologically. *Verbum* consists of only "articulate utterences"[288] Utterances are formed by 'letters' –or better translated as 'phonemes.' By 'letters' Augustine means "the smallest part of an articulate utterance"[289] Only spoken utterances are '*verbum'*; a written word is only a visible sign indicating a word/utterance, hence the preference for keeping the ontological priority on the spoken aspect of words, even as the practical emphasis shifts to correctly interpreting the written word.

It is important to note here, that for Augustine's context, the written word was a secondary medium. A millennium before Gutenberg's printing press, writing, reproducing and distributing written material was a laborious affair, thus expensive, and not readily accessible. In addition there was no standard for spacing between words or lines, and no punctuation. Texts were essentially written phonetic recording of vocalizations. Even for those with access to texts, their first exposure to them would have been hearing them, as they were read aloud. "The ancient reader's first acquaintance with style, genre, and subject matter occurred when he or she listened to the vocal modulations of the text as the words were pronounced."[290] There was no punctuation

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[287] *Doc. chr.* II.3.4.

[288] *De dialectica* V.7.

[289] *De dialectica* V.7.

[290] Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader; Meditiation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996), 5.

or "'grammar of legibility'"[291] for these early written formats. Memory played an important role in reading; for, as one read (whether aloud for others, aloud to oneself, or less commonly – silently), the reader would recall hearing the text being read aloud before. This memory would aid in parsing the written text into words, phrases and passages as they were read. The reader would have to sound out the words, syllable by syllable to decipher passages. Reading in late antiquity, even privately, was a still a vocal endeavor.[292]

There are several ways in which Augustine views *verbum*. The first is that of the word itself, such as when the meaning of a word is being discussed. This is the *verbum* proper–the actual phoneme/letter combination that constitutes a sign. The *verbum* itself, its constitution, its etymology, and its usage are not critically important. These issues fall into the discipline of 'grammarians'; Augustine does not entirely dismiss it but devotes little space to the issue himself.

In *De dialectica VII*, he considers briefly a somewhat mediating position between the natural and conventional source of signification. In natural signification, the sign derives directly from the *res* itself. The Stoics believed that "there is no word whose definite origin cannot be

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[291] As quoted by Stock, 5.

[292] Contemporary research confirms this understanding of the relationship between spoken and written language. Human beings are 'hardwired' for spoken language, but reading is best taught by relating the sounds of words to the written symbols. Recent publications have analyzed the results from the National Reading Panel (2000); cf The MIT Press, "Early Reading Instruction," The MIT Press, accessed September 14, 2018, https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/early-reading-instruction. "McGuinness shows that all writing systems, without exception, are based on a sound unit in the language."

explained;"[293] they propose that any word can be traced back through its individual constituents until an "impression on the senses by the sounds are, as it were, the cradle of words." [294] Augustine agrees with Cicero's mockery of this Stoic position. He does, however, suggest that onomatopoeia is the only category that possibly meets this natural criterion. The "'clang' of bronze," or "'bleating' of sheep," could be examples that seem to support the natural origination of the sign.

Other types of words, as sounds, seem to trigger a sensory response commensurate with the object itself; Augustine plays with different words and their effect on the ear. He seems, in particular, to find the 'v' sound, as well as the 'x', harsh. He lists '*crux'* (cross) as an example of phonetic un-pleasantness "because the harshness of the word itself agrees with the harshness of the pain which the cross produces."[295] In *De dialectica,* Augustine proposes that some words, in and of themselves, reflect the object they signify; however, he quickly moves on. Augustine does seem to recognize that seeking the natural basis of words falls into an infinite regression of subjective associations.

He is clear that the true force of words is rooted in our cognitive response to the signified *res* – not the sign itself.[296] He dismisses seeking the primordial roots of signs as well as sounds

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[293] *De dialectica,* V.9.

[294] *De dialectica,* V.9.

[295] *De dialectica,* V.9.

[296] In this view, Augustine pre-figures later speech-act theory. The locution itself is only a tool with which 'to do something'. "The unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, …but rather…the performance of a speech-act." Searle, as quoted by Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 291.

of words imitating the sense of the *res*. In his later *Doc. chr.*, he has clearly abandoned any natural position altogether in favor of strict signification by convention.

> For the sound of those two syllables [*Deus* (God)] in itself conveys no true knowledge of His nature; but yet all who know the Latin tongue are led, when that sound reaches their ears, to think of a nature supreme in excellence and eternal in existence.[297]

Here, the word *Deus* derives its meaning from two things; first a linguistic community that recognizes the sound as indicating something, and second, that 'something' has attributes in and of itself that can be identified and recalled upon hearing the sound. The properties of the sign itself do not influence the nature of the signified. For after all, the same sound may signify something else entirely in another language; "…certain letters and sounds mean one thing to the Latins, another to the Greeks, not because of nature but because each society has its own agreement and consent as to their significance."[298] This complex inter-language issue is mentioned briefly in *De dialectica* X, and Augustine specifically discusses many implications of interpretation across different languages in *Doc. chr.* II.

Augustine's theory of word, while comprehensive, thus far is not entirely original. It was developed in conversation with sources such as the Stoics, Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. His contribution is in his analysis, evaluation, and deliberate parsing of the issue.

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[297] *Doc. chr.* I.4.6

[298] Jackson, "The Theory of Signs in St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*," 14.

Signification and Knowledge

In *C. Acad.*, Augustine affirms tautological knowledge, but resists the Stoic reliance on perception. This position is an acceptable one for the rhetorical purposes at hand, however, this cannot stand long-term in Augustine's schema. For his philosophical-theological commitments, true knowledge must be accessible, and that access must come through signification as Augustine is unwilling to ascribe to the Stoic conception of *phantasia kataleptike*. For this to be reliable the relationship must be unbroken from the spiritual realm, as signified in the corporeal realm, as represented in *verbum,* and interpreted in the cognizing mind.

Cesalli and Germann[299] find that Augustine develops the linguistic side of this theory in *De dialectica* and the ontological side in *De musica*. The *res* is, by nature of being, necessarily true, but how does that relate to linguistic expressions? Expressions as *signa data* are one of the entities in a triadic relationship with *res* and the observer. In order to be reliable, the two dimensions must be linked "on the one hand, the linguistic-semantic sphere, including the relationship between linguistic signs, their signification and truth; and on the other hand, the ontological sphere, embracing the connection between objects."[300]

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[299] Laurent Cesalli and Nadja Germann, "Signification and Truth Epistemology at the Crossroads of Semantics and Ontology in Augustine's Early Philosophical Writings," *Vivarium* 46, no. 2 (June 2008): 123–54, https://doi.org/10.1163/156853408X297679.

[300] Cesalli and Germann, 124.

This ontological relationship must be reliable to have the epistemic value that Augustine requires. To establish this connection, he returns to his example of unassailable knowledge in *C. Acad.,* that of mathematics. The sensible world exists because it has numbers. The sky and the earth "have forms because they have numbers. Take these away, and nothing will be left."[301] Augustine discussed this numerical basis of the corporeal in several writings[302] though modern scholarship has largely overlooked its implications for hermeneutics.

> Though the philosophical relevance of this text has long been recognized and though it has formed the object of several studies – mainly from an aesthetic perspective – its implications with respect to Augustine's theory of signs and signification are generally neglected, cf., for example, Hentschel's "Einleitung" where he emphasizes the epistemological as well as the theological implications … but does not draw a connection to Augustine's concept of signification. Even in Keller's thorough study this aspect is absent.[303]

This numerical basis of the ontology of objects "is to be grasped as the means for laying bare the fixed and universal structure of the universe, beyond the characteristics of the world of appearance."[304] Music, for example, as an acoustic phenomenon, "is not subject to the limitations and particularities of arbitrary appearances as is, for instance language, but follows universally-valid laws."[305] These universal laws govern all entities, motion, and reality in general.

> Augustine famously incorporates Plato's realism into the Christian tradition by positioning mathematical object (and other Forms) as ideas in the mind of God.

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[301] Augustine, as quoted by Cesalli and Germann, 139.

[302] Cf. *De libero Arbitrio*, *De musica, De ordine.*

[303] Cesalli and Germann, "Signification and Truth Epistemology at the Crossroads of Semantics and Ontology in Augustine's Early Philosophical Writings," 139.

[304] Cesalli and Germann, 140.

[305] Cesalli and Germann, 141.

> They are included somehow in the *Logos*, … Thus mathematical objects remain eternal, necessary, and mind-independent… but they are now directly connected to God himself. …Since God creates precisely by means of the Word (John 1.3), this approach maintains what we might call the "ontological flow" … the creative energy from eternal, unchanging realities to the impermanent mundane realities of our world. [306]

Augustine distinguishes different types of numbers from the physical level (*numeri corporales*) to the level of human intellection (*numeri iudiciales*). At each level, a judgment must be made as to the agreement/disagreement with the universal laws of mathematics.[307] For example, the role of *numeri sensuales* is to judge whether a perception of motion is proportionate with mathematical laws of motion. This judgment, because of its numerical basis, is 'quasi-rational', and is the intersection of the sensible and the intelligible. The ability to make this rational, mathematical judgment is humankind's "natural gift, [his/her] *iudicium naturale*, the bridge between sensorily-perceptible things and intellectual knowledge."[308]

The basis of this mathematic structure is the divine order – thus Augustine can proclaim:

> But what is superior except that in which the highest, unshakeable, unchangeable, eternal equality exists, where there is no time, because there is no change, and from which the times are created and set in order and modified in imitation of eternity, while the celestial rotation returns to the same place and recalls the celestial bodies to the same place and through the days and months and years and

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[306] Steven D. Boyer and Walter B. Huddell, "Mathematical Knowledge and Divine Mystery: Augustine and His Contemporary Challengers," *Christian Scholar's Review;* 44, no. 3 (2015): 208.

[307] Augustine makes "unparalleled use" of the number-theories of both Pythagoras and Plato. An evaluation of this was made by Hentschel (*Einleitung)*, cited by Cesalli and Germann.

[308] Cesalli and Germann, "Signification and Truth Epistemology at the Crossroads of Semantics and Ontology in Augustine's Early Philosophical Writings," 145.

> lustra and the other orbits of the stars obeys the laws of equality and unity and order?[309]

All created objects owe their ontology to this framework, and as such can be "recognized by the likewise mathematically structured human *ratio* in its proportionality."[310] This rational perception allows for access to things as they are.[311] The numerical basis of objects allows an interpreter to develop knowledge beyond simple sense perceptions by observing the underlying rational cause, But how does this numeric perception relate to semantic reliability?

In the semantic sphere, Augustine works to provide a causal chain between the *res*, the sign and the observer – much like the causal relationship found in the *signa naturalia*. A word is perceived in two different ways; first as a word/sound it is sensible, and second as word/content (*dicibile*) it is intelligible. In *Mag.*, an object perceived by sense-data is termed '*sensibilia,*' and that perceived by the mind '*intelligibilia.*'[312] This intelligible content is the perception of the mind of the content of word and its relationship to the 'extra-mental' object it signifies. Thus, the word 'arbor' makes an intelligible impression on the mind, much the same as an actual tree makes sensible impressions on physical senses. An important distinction is made here. Whereas the impressions of the tree constitute a representation in the Stoic (as well as the modern representationalist sense); the *verbum* constitutes a signification – a different genus of knowledge

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[309] Augustine, as quoted by Cesalli and Germann, 147.

[310] Cesalli and Germann, 147.

[311] This argument is developed by Cesalli and Germann using primarily three sources: Aurelius Augustinus, *De musica liber VI*, trans. and ed. Martin Jacobsson, (Stockholm, 2002); A. Keller, *Aurelius Augustinus and die Musik. Untersuchungen zu „De musica" im Kontext seines Schrifttums* (Würzburg, 1993); and Aurelius Augustinus, *De musica. Bücher i und vi.* Ed. F. Hentschel, (Hamburg, 2002).

[311] Cesalli and Germann, 147.

for Augustine. Intelligibility constitutes knowledge, whereas sense perception is simply information. The interplay of this relationship provides a space for an intermediate domain, that of linguistic expressions which can be reliable in signification of ontic truth.

The connection between Augustine's conception of numerical ontology and the truth value of natural signification must be established in order to be reliable. As a subset of *signa naturalia,* a recurring category of *vestigia* is developed. The *vestigia* are the properties of numbers that appear readily to the senses of an observer. "Those mathematical structures which men are able to recognize in all motions – discrete and continuous, spatial and temporal – are precisely the *vestigia* inherent in things. Since these vestiges concern "physical numbers", they signify corresponding 'immaterial numbers.'"[313] These vestiges signal the mathematical structure that constitutes the *res* and adopt the function of a semantic indicator.[314] This indicator refers to the immaterial levels of the *numeri* enabling cognition of the underlying principle and structure (the *summa aequalitas,* identified with the Creator) of an object.

Cesalli and Germann propose that Augustine develops the following conception of knowledge from ontology through signification:

1. Knowledge is possible – if not probable (*C. Acad.*)
2. There is a perceptible order to the physical (extra-mental) world (*De ordine*)

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[313] Cesalli and Germann, "Signification and Truth Epistemology at the Crossroads of Semantics and Ontology in Augustine's Early Philosophical Writings," 148.

[314] Highlighting the common attributes of *signa naturalia* may be helpful here. Like smoke to fire, 'vestiges' are caused by the inherent 'numerical' patterns in the created order. An observer can see the sign and interpret the cause.

3. This ontological structure is numerically based (*numeri corporales)*, and indicates the ultimate principle – God (*De musica*)
4. Vestiges of this underlying structure are perceptible to the intentional human observer (*De musica*)
5. Vestiges correspond to the numerical levels of intellection (*numeri iudiciales*)
6. Correspondence is evaluated by the *ratio* and judged according to its adherence to mathematical structure of knowledge and reality
7. Judged correspondence is then carried by a linguistic sign carrying the semantic content [315]

"What we have here is a symmetrical model, within which epistemology is described in terms of linguistic and metaphysical component: the model involves a linguistic-semantic side and an ontological one, the accuracy of human knowledge being founded on the isomorphism existing between words as signs of things, and things as signs of their ontological truth."[316] In the center of it all is the Incarnate Christ as *Logos*; Christ is the Word, present at creation,[317] Christ is also the mathematical/rational basis of creation disclosing itself to the *ratio* of the finite human observer.

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[315] This interpretation of Augustine's theory of truth and signification (especially as it relates to *De Musica*) is unique to Cesalli and Germann. Anglophones have had a limited interest in *De Musica* except as it relates to aesthetics. An English translation of *De Musica* itself, has proven difficult to obtain. There has been much more work on this text and topic by scholars in German, Latin, and Spanish.

[316] Cesalli and Germann, "Signification and Truth Epistemology at the Crossroads of Semantics and Ontology in Augustine's Early Philosophical Writings," 153.

[317] John 1.1-5.

The Reliability of Given Signs

According to Augustine's definition,[318] a 'natural sign' has a direct causal relationship to the *res*, which is its referent. The ontology of the sign is contingent on the ontology of the signified. The vestiges of the smoke directly correlate to the vestiges of fire. An observer perceives the vestiges in smoke and understands that there is a fire. In the genus 'natural sign', this direct relationship is obvious because of the intentional design of the Creator Himself. This relationship in connection to conventional sign requires further development because of its dependency on fallible human agreement.

Even in the Augustine's category of *signa data,* he has utmost confidence in its reliability. He subscribes to the belief that language is shown to be normatively reliable and that error is the exception. This exception is not negligible, it is a real possibility, therefore, care must be taken to critically evaluate communication, both spoken and written. Identification and correction of miscommunication is his central objective in *Doc chr*.

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[318] *Doc chr*. II.1.2.

5. Ethics of Hermeneutics

After establishing the relationship between the ontology of the *res* and function of its sign, Augustine next moves to its content (*decibile*). For there is no reason for using a sign "except the desire of drawing forth and conveying into another's mind what the giver of the sign has in his own mind."[319] Moving into this next argument, Augustine drops the distinction between *res* and sign. The sign is simply a *species* of *res*, "that which bears on the senses".[320] It should be noted, that Augustine does not subscribe to what has been termed 'immediacy' by deconstructionists. He recognizes that there is a distance between speaker/writer and hearer/ reader. "But since we do not clearly see what the actual thought is which the several translators endeavor to express,"[321] it is necessary to use signs to convey the desired content, as well as an interpretive framework to understand the meaning of these signs. If there is no author, there is no mind seeking to share its contents, without these intended contents, the meaning of signs is indeterminate and relative. This is the process that Kevin Vanhoozer seeks to defend from the nihilism of deconstruction by 'reviving' the author.

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[319] *Doc chr*. II.2.3.

[320] *quam ingerit sensibus*, *Doc chr*. II.1.1.

[321] *Doc chr*. II.13.19.

Re-establishing the Author as 'Other'

Indetermination and relativity in hermeneutics are not only a philosophical problem, but a theological one for Kevin Vanhoozer (and Augustine). He began his study of hermeneutics out of a desire to "clarify the role of Scripture in theology."[322] What he found, was that the question of interpretation is far larger in scope than the biblical studies. Vanhoozer became concerned that cultural issues were the drivers for many hermeneutic struggles in theology; "Instead of a book on biblical interpretation, therefore, I have written a theology of interpretation." [323] The product of this effort was entitled *Is there a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* and is, for the most part, a conversation with deconstructionists such as Jacques Derrida. In this conversation, Vanhoozer attempts to respond to the degenerative effect that deconstruction and literary criticism have on the ability of hermeneutics in general, and specifically biblical theology, to generate meaning.

Vanhoozer begins his hermeneutics project with the position developed by E.D. Hirsch. His book, *Validity in Interpretation*, defends the role of authorial intention in determining meaning. He seeks to refute the "theory of authorial irrelevance" that had taken hold because of "academic skepticism and disarray".[324] In response to hermeneutic psychologizing and romanticism, literary critics determined that the empirical author was lost to the reader. They had

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[322] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 9.

[323] Vanhoozer, 9.

[324] E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 3.

focused on their own particular "reading" of a text and had disassociated the author from meaning altogether. "For once the author had been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of his text's meaning, it very gradually appeared that no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of an interpretation."[325]

Hirsch's approach to authorial intent is distinct from the psychological approach of Schleiermacher or Romanticism. He presents a "more technical, philosophical sense, appealing in particular to the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. Intentionality means that human consciousness is always *about*, or *directed at*, something."[326] In an act of communication the author "wills to convey something by a particular sequence of signs."[327] This sequence of signs is not simply a *subjective* mental act by author and reader, but an *object* of conscious intentionality shared between the two.

The purpose of hermeneutics is to recover the intended meaning of a text, despite differences of situatedness. "An interpreter grasps the meaning of a text when he or she experiences sameness of content (or object) despite differentness of context."[328] For Hirsch, this 'sameness' counters the possibility for two horizons of meaning.

> This theory of a changing meaning serves to support the fusion of interpretation…and the idea that present relevance forms the basis for textual

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[325] E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 3.

[326] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 1998, 75.

[327] Vanhoozer, 76.

[328] Vanhoozer, 76.

> commentary. [However] there could be no objective knowledge about texts. …even temporary validity could not be tested, since there would be no permanent norms on which validating judgments could be based.[329]

Texts cannot have a life of their own, their meaning is fixed at the time the author assembles the sequence of signs. "The author enjoys authority because conscious intention, not the range of possible dictionary definitions, is the source of stable meaning. The correct interpretation is the one that apprehends the author's intended meaning."[330] Vanhoozer does not wholly subscribe to Hirsch's schema, but does embrace his desire to rescue the author's role in creating meaning.

Vanhoozer breaks the linguistic skeptics, philosophers, critics, and theoreticians that have upended meaning, into two different categories, the *Undoers* and the *Users*. Those that seek to deconstruct assumptions, traditions, philosophies and understandings he calls the 'undoers'. The pragmatists he calls the 'users'. Vanhoozer groups both of these under the category of *unbelievers* for their resistance to anything stable, concrete or determinative. It is Vanhoozer's goal to re-establish the possibility and morality of meaning in the post-modern environment.

Vanhoozer's prime example of an 'undoer' is Jacques Derrida, he becomes the primary interlocutor for deconstructionists. "For Derrida, deconstruction draws on the word of differance

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[329] Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 212.

[330] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 1998, 77.

[sic] in constituting the meaning of a text."[331] Whereas Wittgenstein utilized structuralism as a framework for analysis, for Derrida, *différance* was the ontic nature of language. Derrida adds a second dimension to the *différance* of Saussure. The French word means both 'difference' (opposition), and to 'defer' (delay). Thus, his new term, *différance,* encompasses both aspects of his isolation of sign; the synchronic conception of structuralist *langue,* and the diachronic dependence on future use to continue to have possible meaning.

Meaning is never intrinsic to a sign, there are only signs endlessly delaying the presence of the reality beyond. "'Meaning' is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow of reading, which continually recedes as one approaches it. We never know what a sign is a sign of; when we go to the dictionary we only find other signs."[332] The original referent is obscured rather than indicated by language.

The ultimate goal for Derrida is to hold language to account, and expose the logocentric obsession of philosophy as an attempt to reduce and master Being, rather than to disclose it as it is. Derrida finds that western philosophy went wrong when Plato surmised a "realm of truth – the eternal Forms – to which reason has direct access without having to go through language."[333] Though Derrida begins with the phenomenology of Husserl,[334] he attempts to objectively

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[331] Thomas Baldwin, "Derrida," in *Philosophy of Language*, ed. Barry Lee, Key Thinkers (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 284.

[332] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 1998, 64.

[333] Vanhoozer, 53.

[334] Baldwin, "Derrida," 284, is here interacting with Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, translated G. Spivak, (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

establish self-consciousness without resorting to using signs. The ideal knowledge is based on "a subject's self-presence in a silent and intuitive consciousness".[335]

Derrida himself, questions the possibility of the 'silent subject'. He expresses that self-consciousness, ideally, could be found as a 'relation to oneself'. This 'relation' implies something of an 'other' – a dialogical partner of sorts. This interlocutor must disclose consciousness "by using concepts which belong within a language that is not exclusively our own here and now (and is therefore 'different from oneself')"[336] Derrida seems to be attempting to propose an objective epistemology and discard signification. Derrida even refutes Husserl's conception of 'reactivation'; Husserl proposes that a given sign causes the observer of the sign to recall previous experiences with the concept. "Derrida, however, does not take over this thesis; on the contrary he holds that past experiences cannot be brought back to life at all."[337] Unable to conceive of such a linguistically devoid, knowing subject, he proposes a mysterious interlocutor that does not have the same linguistic presuppositions. How he conceives that these two imaginary subjects would transfer this knowledge without participating, at least on some level, in a language-game is unclear.

Vanhoozer interprets Derrida as an expansion of the Kantian reflection on the 'death of God' and its implications on knowledge. "Yet he sees further than Kant in perceiving that the

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[335] Derrida, as quoted by Baldwin, "Derrida," 278.

[336] Baldwin, 278.

[337] Baldwin, 273.

loss of God leads to the loss of the knowing subject (the hero of modernity) as well. Derrida has correctly analyzed the modern situation, or at least an aspect of it."[338] Whatever the understanding (they are varied) of Derrida's project, he states his desire "…to make enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words 'proximity', 'immediacy', 'presence' … [this] is my final intention in this book. This deconstruction of presence accomplishes itself through the deconstruction of consciousness,"[339]

Baldwin, like Vanhoozer, also interprets Derrida in a Kantian light; the goal of deconstruction is to establish that the possibility of meaning in language is because of a 'movement of differance'. Baldwin also recognizes that some (i.e. Richard Rorty[340]) interpret *On Grammatology* "as propounding a quietest message, to the effect that there cannot be a substantial philosophy of language at all."[341] Whether Derrida simply desires to point out the flaw in *assuming* that language works, or wishes to abolish the grounds of functional language, is a topic for debate. What is clear is that he views language as a construct of a 'metaphysics of presence' which must be discarded if humanity is to confront Being again.

Refuting this 'presence' is the core of Derrida's deconstruction. "In *On Grammatology* he remarks that the 'axial proposition of this essay' is that 'there is nothing outside the text'"[342] This

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[338] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 1998, 52.

[339] Derrida, as quoted by Baldwin, "Derrida," 279.

[340] Richard Rorty, 1931-2007

[341] Baldwin, 278f.

[342] Baldwin, 284.

slogan has been interpreted two ways – much to Derrida's frustration. Some have mistaken this statement as a declaration that the text is all that exists, that language is ontology. There can be no existence beyond the word. The New Hermeneutic comes close to adopting this linguistic idealism. Derrida himself affirmed that his statement is not a statement about idealism, but about the isolation of a text from external referent; "That there is no reference or meaning 'outside the text', outside the play of difference, for example, by means of the bare presence of an object or meaning to consciousness."[343] Signs are only signs in opposition to other signs, at no point do they point outside of themselves and the linguistic system to which they belong. The only context is the text itself.

This has dramatic implications for the author of a text. If, as deconstruction insists, the text renders all context inaccessible, the author, her/his intention, and the content of the locution is lost. This issue is the focus of the first section of Vanhoozer's book *Is there a Meaning in this Text*? He objects to this removal of the author from text for two reasons; first, ontologically a text would not exist without an author to create it, and second, the fate of the author is the textual equivalent of the Creator for theology. He finds a connection between the role of an author and a creator.

> The parallel between God and the author is again instructive. … the meaning of the world has been inscribed by the hand of the Creator. It is God who originates the world, who upholds it, and who preserves the distinctions that give it meaning. God is the Author of authors…[344]

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[343] Baldwin, 284f.

[344] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 49.

Thus, the existence, function, and authority of the author take primacy of place in Vanhoozer's hermeneutic efforts. He finds that the two disciplines, theology and hermeneutics, have much in common. "The sign and divinity have the same place and time of birth. The age of the sign is essentially theological"[345] Thus the undoing of the sign, is an attempt at undoing God (or god). Deconstructionists believe that western philosophy has deluded itself (and others) into replacing Being with a linguistically mediated illusion of the transcendence. "To believe in transcendence … is to fall under the illusion of the reliability of the sign. Philosophers who perpetuate this illusion are only ventriloquists who project their own voices onto 'Being' or 'Reason.' By contrast, Derrida's analysis overthrows this first 'idol' of the sign."[346]

The author of a text cannot exist for deconstructionists, because 'there is nothing outside the text'. Furthermore, even if the author was accessible, the text hides true being. As Vanhoozer writes about his own text: Derrida "would insist, first, that my intentions and efforts are not sufficient to ground its meaning or to control its interpretation, and second, that what I have written is not my own voice so much as the voice of all the teachers and texts that have had an impact on me." Logocentrism, for Derrida, displaces and defers the Being of the author. The inability to disclose the transcendent, renders God inaccessible as well as the author. For any use of sign is only a reference to other signs in a system of "socially constructed signifieds".[347]

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[345] Brian Ingraffia, as quoted by Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 1998, 50.

[346] Vanhoozer, 62.

[347] Catherine Belsey, as quoted by Vanhoozer, 61.

Vanhoozer determines that Derrida correctly estimates the predicament of modern systematic approaches to language and meaning, "*but he has done so by bracketing out orthodox Christian beliefs.* …the death of God that informs deconstruction is the death of the God of the philosophers, not of the God disclosed in Jesus Christ."[348] He sets out to make a case for the possibility of meaning, the authority of the author, and clarify the theological issues at stake.

Vanhoozer seeks to counter "Four Intentional Fallacies" that, New Criticism[349] and deconstruction have advanced regarding authorial intent:

The "Fallacy of Relevancy" claims that the intent of the author is irrelevant to the meaning of a text. This fallacy states that author-oriented criticism confuses semantics with psychologizing. The text must stand on its own, analyzed by how language was actually used. These critics were formalists in that linguistic convention, and not intention, determined meaning – for after all the intention of the author is unknown and unknowable. Vanhoozer partly agrees; first, in that not all data about the author is relevant to interpretation. Certain facts are, however, necessary; facts such as the language and time period of the author give essential clues as to what linguistic context to use in understanding. Second, even an author's declarations of intent are not entirely relevant, because there could be failure to realize them.[350]

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[348] Vanhoozer, 52 (Italics original).

[349] The New Criticism was a movement of literary critics, primarily Angolophones, in the mid-twentieth century.

[350] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 81.

The Fallacy of Transparency is a counterpoint to Hirsch's belief that meaning is a matter of conscious intent. These critics tie the meaning of language to unconscious factors. This understanding of meaning has roots in Freudian psychology; Jacques Lacan found that the structure of language itself, is based on the unconscious. Michel Foucault identifies the 'deep structure' of language with the social context.[351] Therefore, the very language an author uses to convey a message is colored by the unconscious influences of their social situatedness, in effect any communicative act is more of a by-product of the *langue* than an original *parole*. Not all meaning in a text is the conscious intention of the author, there are "unintended messages about the history and society in which the author lived."[352] Uncovering these hidden meanings is the priority of these interpreters.

The Fallacy of Identity makes no distinction between the intention of the author and the actual language of the text. Vanhoozer identifies the Fallacy of Relevancy (above) as an epistemological error, and the Fallacy of Identity as an ontological error. The language of the text should be considered ontologically separate from the mental act that created it. Ricoeur refers to this as "semantic autonomy", at some point the event of writing becomes separated from the life of the text.[353]

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[351] Vanhoozer, 82.

[352] Vanhoozer, 83.

[353] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: TCU Press, 1976), 30.

The Fallacy of Objectivity counters the claims of objectivity by hermeneutic realists. This fallacy is authored by "non-realists" influenced by the philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn. He argues that even scientific knowledge is simply the subjective understanding of the observer constructing reality. A hermeneutic realist goes wrong from the outset by claiming that "the interpretive object has a real independence, that it stands over against the interpretive acts."[354] Hermeneutic proposals cannot suggest an objective methodological system for determining meaning, because they necessarily rely on maintaining a delineation between a stable source of meaning (an 'object'), and a changing occasion of significance by a subject.

These four critiques of authorial intent have been offered by the New Criticism and deconstructionists. Vanhoozer, to varying degrees, holds them as valid opposition to modernist theory of meaning and the role of the author in the interpretive process. In light of these fallacies, his goal is to present a valid "appeal to the author's intention [which] will henceforth have to show how it is not guilty of these errors."[355]

The first paragraph in Vanhoozer's chapter "Resurrecting the Author: Meaning As Communicative Action" is a long quote from Augustine, "Conventional signs are those which living creatures show to one another for the purpose of conveying, in so far as they are able…"[356] He briefly contrasts Augustine's approach to language to Derrida's. Augustine conceives of

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[354] Vanhoozer, 84.

[355] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 82.

[356] Augustine *Doc.chr.* II.2.3, as quoted by Vanhoozer, 201.

language as something to be used in order to achieve the highest good, the enjoyment of God. "The highest end of human beings is enjoying God. Language, when rightly used, is one of the chief means that lead to this joy."[357] Vanhoozer summarizes Derrida's position by emphasizing his idea of language as 'play'; "The advent of writing is the advent of this play."[358] Without ever pointing outside of itself, language is an object which people can rearrange in different patterns for their aesthetic pleasure. In Vanhoozer's view, these two positions could not contrast more; one is a method of communion with God and other humans across space and time, the other is a postmodern conception of subjective pleasure and play.

The resurrection of the author begins by framing language as a communicative act (meaning as action) rather than a static sign (meaning as object). Meaning is something that people *do.* In viewing language as an action, the analysis of what it is, and how it works, changes dramatically. Language as an action, requires that a network of relationships between objects, agents, causes, effects, intentions, and responses be considered fundamental to meaning. He appeals to the philosophy of 'ordinary language" as a starting point.

Ordinary Language as Action

'Ordinary language' philosophers view language in its practical, everyday use. "Their motto, in direct opposition to Derrida's, might well have been: 'There is nothing (eg no utterance, no text)

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[357] Vanhoozer, 202. Also, see Augustine's discussion of "Difference of use and enjoyment." *Doc. chr.* I.4.4–22.

[358] Derrida, *On Grammatology*, as quoted by Vanhoozer 202.

outside a context.'"[359] While opposing deconstructionists' views, ordinary language theories also contradict modernist systems of meaning. The focus of meaning had been on words (in an individual sense), for ordinary language, the emphasis was at the level of sentence. Meaning was a product of how words functioned together, in the context in which they were used.

An exemplar of this change in focus is Ludwig Wittgenstein; his thought took a dramatic 'linguistic turn' from his early agreement with Bertrand Russell's logical positivism, to the 'language games' of his later *Philosophical Investigations.*[360] The modern, scientistic approach was to bracket language from its context, and determine an objective "single logic that would relate language and reality".[361] Wittgenstein would later determine that the rules of language changed dramatically based on social context, subject matter, and purpose.

J. L. Austin was another language philosopher that found that usage was the best way to study language.[362] Syntax was a part of the *langue* but had a limited contribution to meaning. Rather than discuss the trueness or falseness of linguistic propositions, as had been the standard practice, Austin sought to analyze what speakers intended to do by making utterances. He

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[359] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 1998, 208.

[360] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, 4 edition (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K. ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

[361] Vanhoozer, 208.

[362] See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd edition (Oxford Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1975).

developed the three-fold division of linguistic use: locution, illocution, and perlocution. John Searle further classified the different types of speech-acts into five basic categories:

"We tell people how things are, we try to get them to do things, we commit ourselves to doing things, we express our feelings and attitudes and we bring about changes through our utterances. Often, we do more than one of these at once in the same utterance."[363]

Searle accuses Derrida of confusing types of utterances with "tokens". Derrida declares that a statement cannot have definite meaning because the same words can be used in entirely different contexts to mean entirely different things. Searle defines the sentence 'type' as the word/grammar combination – the actual 'text' used. The 'token' of the utterance is the particular context that the type was uttered. "He's hot" (type) could mean entirely unrelated things in different situations (tokens). It "could be a response to a forehand cross court, to someone's temperature, or to someone's angry outburst."[364] Simply because sentence types can be used in different tokens does not imply that their meaning is indeterminate, it simply indicates that the context of the utterance must be a factor in determining meaning.

Searle makes a second important distinction, between epistemology and ontology. A lack of knowledge about something (i.e. an author's intent) does not mean that such a thing does not exist. "The standard mistake is to suppose that a lack of evidence, that is, our ignorance, shows

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[363] John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, n.d.), 29. as quoted by Vanhoozer, 209.

[364] Vanhoozer, 212.

indeterminacy or undecidability in principle"[365] Deconstructionists make sweeping statements about the impossibility of meaning, but to make their case, they must apply modernist categorical limits and materialistic reductions. "We may call the poststructuralists reduction of sentences and speakers to elements in a differential sign system the 'semiotic fallacy.'"[366] By considering the tri-partite functions of language, particularly illocution, an intentional agent necessarily returns as a part of the communicative act.

Vanhoozer's next task is to make the connection between language as utterance and language as text; and while they are substantially different, the principles of ordinary language apply. To make this argument, he turns to Paul Ricoeur who, by Vanhoozer's admission, is not an advocate of authorial intention. Ricoeur's theory of discourse, nonetheless requires that it "does not alienate authors from readers but makes shared meaning possible. Indeed, it is humanity's chief resource for overcoming spatial, temporal, and cultural distance."[367] While Vanhoozer prefers to maintain authorial intent as part of the meaning, Ricoeur moves intent to the 'event' of writing. An author writing a text is an event, similar to the event of a verbal discourse that passes away in time. The written text, however, continues through time and distance taking on new meaning(s) of its own as it is re-interpreted by new audiences.

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[365] John Searle, "Literary Theory and Its Discontents," in *New Literary History*, vol. 25, 1994, 648. as quoted by Vanhoozer, 213.

[366] Vanhoozer, 213.

[367] Vanhoozer, 214.

Vanhoozer interprets, by implication, that authorial intent is core to Ricoeur's analysis of the text. Ricoeur, however, develops this relationship far more subtly. He is careful not to sever the author from the text, this would fall into what he refers to as the "fallacy of the absolute text."[368] He places limits on the control of meaning by the empirical author. The intention of the author is placed under part of the 'intention' of the text. Vanhoozer finds that by analogy this is authorial intent, "We do not ascribe agency to texts. For only persons say something to someone about something."[369]

Perhaps the difference here is primary focus. Vanhoozer, as a systematic theologian interested in hermeneutics, is first concerned with the teleology of interpretation. Behind the text must be a fixed object on which to base a methodological theology. Ricoeur is a hermeneut who is interested in theology; as a result, he is more concerned with a description of the process of interpretation; following the life of the semantic projection of the text and its interaction with a reader/recipient.

Augustine's approach differs from both Vanhoozer and Ricoeur. Like Ricoeur, an author uses language to project an image of an object of interest. Ricoeur's projection, however, stands between the author and the reader in a linear configuration. Augustine's author is using language to indicate the actual object; the semantic projection is not a barrier between author and reader, it

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[368] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, as quoted by Vanhoozer, 216.

[369] Vanhoozer, 216.

stands on its own. As with theological hermeneutics, Augustine places the importance on the indicated object.

Augustine's hermeneutic also contrasts to the theological hermeneutic proposed by Anthony Thiselton. In Thiselton's (and Ricoeur's) contemporary framework the author and text stand between the reader and the object, for Augustine, the author, reader, and object, are in triangle configuration with signs relaying on all three sides. The author and text are not an obstacle, but a guide, indicating and drawing the attention of the reader to an object that stands independently. Especially in the case of scriptural signification, the ontic priority of the signified outweighs the author, interpreter, and sign, according to Augustine's Rule (above).

Ethics of Authorship

The next issue Vanhoozer addresses, is to clarify the type of the author he wishes to re-establish. He begins with a brief discussion of Descartes' *cogito*. He identifies three problems that a Cartesian conception of humanity poses to hermeneutics. First, is that when the *cogito* is the starting point, it is difficult (if not impossible) to verify other minds. If other minds are difficult to establish ontologically, how accessible are their intentions?

Second, making the 'I' the central (or lone) figure in anthropology leaves very little room for establishing the role of social convention. The 'metaphysically independent society' promotes humans to be disengaged from one another, Cartesian dualism promotes an

anthropological 'atomism'.[370] It is impossible to develop a comprehensive social theory, or a requisite theory of understanding when the concept of 'other' needs perpetual justification.

Third, a subject/object dualism reduces the validity of social context for meaning. Language becomes a tool for a mind to name and manipulate objects and ideas. "Language, spoken or written, creates what Charles Taylor calls a public space."[371] This public space in which language really lives and works is counter to the interiority of the mind that justifies being.

In response to these problems, Vanhoozer identifies four perspectives on authorial agency. The first, is that the author is a historical agent. Contrary to the Cartesian paradigm, an author is an embodied soul. Language is an extension of corporeality, a way for the mind and will to do things in the physical world. "The postmodern textualist is in danger of worshiping the play of signs. For one who believes in meaning, however, the text is a semantic sacrament that mediates the other: the author's vision of the world, the testimony of the witness."[372] Here, Augustine would certainly agree, language is a tool "for the purpose of showing ... the feelings of their minds,"[373] to another. Language is a way for one mind to extend its contents to another mind.

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[370] Charles Taylor, as quoted by, Vanhoozer, 231.

[371] Vanhoozer, 231.

[372] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 229.

[373] *Doc. chr.* II.2.3.

In response to this type of author, a reader seeks to understand the mental content that the author intends. Vanhoozer and Augustine are in agreement again; "in reading it, men seek nothing more than to find out the thought and will of those by whom it was written",[374] and "Understanding the text involves determining what an author has done, for a text is a communicative action fixed by writing."[375]

Vanhoozer's second perspective of the author is as an Aesthetic Agent. An author assembles a text out of available signs. It is the author who determines which words to use, how to arrange them, and what structure the text should take, to illicit the desired response from the audience. These are the form critical aspects of a text; Augustine, as a trained rhetorician, knew well, the importance of these choices. He discusses both the benefits and drawbacks of teaching rhetoric to interpreters in *Doc. chr. IV.*1-3.

The third perspective is of the Author as an Ethical Agent. "By emphasizing the performative nature of language (i.e. language as action, as work, as something we do), [J.L.] Austin reminds us that we are responsible for everything we say,"[376] So to, Augustine holds the ethical ramifications of speech as a vital component of language. An act of speech has the responsibility to indicate (properly) the ontology of the object; to carelessly or maliciously misrepresent the states of things and mislead the interpreter is a great moral failure (cf the

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[374] *Doc. chr.* II.5.6.

[375] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 1998, 233.

[376] Vanhoozer, 235.

charges leveled at the skeptics in *C. Acad. II*) as well as a serious doctrinal error (cf *Doc. chr. II.*13, *IV*.4).

The fourth perspective is the Author as Religious Agent. Vanhoozer perceives an element of faith and fidelity within the communicative act. "Unless there is something in what we say, we will never be able to witness to what is other than ourselves. And unless we are faithful to what we say, our witness will be null and void."[377] He relates this position to the first and third requirement of Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action. The first, communication must be true, that is, it accurately reflects the state of things; and the third, it must be appropriate for the social context. This religious aspect takes seriously the import for a speaker/writer to be accountable for that he or she communicates, for communicative action not only makes changes in the world, it effects who the utterer is, and becomes.

To remove the author from the text, as postmodern literary theory has proposed, is to remove any sense of responsibility for the effects that a discourse would have on the world. If there is no responsible party for meaning, deconstructionists are correct; a reader will only see themselves, for they cannot trust the witness of the 'other', if indeed, there is an 'other' at all. In the case of faithful speech, the purpose is to point the way to the Wholly Other. "The rupture between the speaker and his words is the decisive break. If a person is not behind his words, it is mere noise."[378] Augustine too, affirms that the author must exercise some authority in

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[377] Vanhoozer, 237.

[378] Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word* (1985), as quoted by Vanhoozer, 237.

interpretation. “Whoever takes another meaning out of Scripture than the writer intended, goes astray, ...”[379] The author is the originator of communication, and the reader is obligated to seek out the intended meaning.

Ethics of Readership

Vanhoozer must redeem one more agent in the hermeneutic process, the reader. “Literary knowledge is not a matter of disinterested factuality. Most authors do not write simply to convey information, but to affect their readers in some other way besides.”[380] What is the obligation of a reader? Is there any? “Texts, like dead men and women, have no rights, no aims no interests. They can be used in whatever way readers or interpreters choose. If interpreters choose to respect an author’s intentions, that is because it is in their interest to do so.”[381] If literary criticism and reader response theories are correct, it would follow that a reader has no moral responsibility in interpreting a text.

There are, however, assumptions about social constructs that are implicitly made in taking this view. Language is the function of humanity that projects the contents of one mind to another. If this link is severed, the social function of a human being is severed as well. As Richard Rorty finds, human beings are “alone, merely finite, with no links to something

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[379] *Doc. chr.* I.36.41.

[380] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 368.

[381] Robert Morgan, as quoted by Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 371.

beyond."[382] In this case a reader could only find themselves in a text, for there could be nothing or no one more.

For those that accept that humans are necessarily social creatures, the moral ramifications of language and textual engagement must be considered. A text is a way to encounter an "other", a fundamental requirement of social beings. Ricoeur finds that the act of an utterance both requires, and equates, to *interlocution*. "So, there is not illocution without allocution and, by implication, without someone to whom the message is addressed. …the statement is therefore straightaway a bipolar phenomenon: it implies simultaneously an 'I'; that speaks and a "you" to whom the former addresses itself."[383]

Vanhoozer identifies three different types of reader – the user, the critic, and the follower. The 'user' views reading a text to be an amoral event, there is no good or bad reading. "There is nothing to be responsible *to* except historical communities."[384] This is, of course, highly relative to one's own situation and community purposes. A text is simply a tool to use, in a utilitarian fashion, to advance one's own goals.

The 'critic' judges a text from the vantage point of their own ideology. Vanhoozer cites a great deal of difference between the 'criticism' of early modernity and the 'critical' stance of

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[382] Richard Rorty, as quoted by Vanhoozer, 371.

[383] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 43.

[384] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 1998, 371.

post-modernity. Criticism was undertaken as "a descriptive pursuit, analyzing, explaining and codifying the questions that perceptive readers put to the text."[385] This is very different from the critical suspicion of post-modernity. Critics claim an ethical reading because they are concerned with their contemporary situation as well as the advancement of humanity. They approach the text from the perspective of an ideology and judge it based on how well it advances or counters their own ideological goals. "You must accept their implied conception of the good life if you are to accept their criticism. That is, you can admire them as critics only if you also revere them as sages."[386]

A 'follower' values the text as other, and allows a text to say what it will, as a communicative act. A follower will use critical thinking and its tools, not to dismantle or overpower a text, but to develop an understanding of the author's intended illocution. Seeking to understand a text makes one a good, ethical reader, but scriptural texts require more than understanding, they require participation. A follower appropriates the perlocution of a text; allows the text not only to speak, but to become a dialogical agent that can confront and change the reader.

This is the type of reader that Augustine seeks to develop in *Doc. chr.* The first step to wisdom is the "fear of God to seek the knowledge of His will, what He commands us to desire

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[385] John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 6, as quoted by Vanhoozer, 371f.

[386] C.S. Lewis, as quoted by Vanhoozer, 374.

and what to avoid."[387] The reader of scripture must submit themselves to the text, seeking the path to the love of God and neighbor. The second step to wisdom is "to have our hearts subdued by piety, and not to run in the face of Holy Scripture. …We must rather think and believe that whatever is there written, even though it be hidden, is better and truer than anything we could devise by our own wisdom."[388] A reader of scripture should emulate those who, recorded in them, "fear God and are of meek and pious disposition seek the will of God."[389] Augustine's reader, like Vanhoozer's and Ricoeur's 'struggles' with the text, places the text as 'wholly other' and allows it to confront and conform them.

Proper hermeneutics of scripture is only a means – not an end in itself. Scripture is not a *res* to be known but a *sign* to indicate something greater than itself. Augustine's extended discussion of "Some things are for use, some for enjoyment"[390] makes this position clear. For God alone is to be enjoyed as "eternal and unchangeable. The rest are for use that we may be able to arrive at the full enjoyment of the former."[391] This use includes scripture itself as a sign. There are qualifications for 'use' however, these qualifications are also ethical limits to the interpreted meaning of scripture itself.

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[387] *Doc. chr.* II.7.9

[388] *Doc. chr.* II.7.9-10.

[389] *Doc. chr.* II.*9.14.*

[390] *Doc. chr.* I.3.3 – 22.20.

[391] *Doc. chr.* I.22.20.

Love as Horizon of Meaning

Augustine balances knowledge with love. In *Doc. chr.*, he quotes Paul three times in this connotation; "this knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."[392] Love is the hermeneutic key for Augustine, the ultimate end of scripture is love of God and love of neighbor. These are the 'things' (*res*) of scripture, when they are mastered, the sign (scripture itself) is no longer needed. Love is the illocution of scripture, one "who is resting upon faith, hope and love, and who keeps a firm hold upon these, does not need the Scriptures except for the purpose of instructing others."[393] Love is also the perlocution of scripture, knowledge accompanies submission to the text. Knowledge cannot result in domination of the text, God, or neighbor; but only in love and care.

The most important of these limits is love. Augustine identifies four different types of things that we are to love. The first (from Matthew 22:37) is the love of 'that which is above us' – namely the Godhead. The second love is proposed to be the self but with caveats. Firstly, that the love of self cannot overcome the other loves but must facilitate them; self-love must always be secondary to love of God as 'higher,' secondly, self-love must never "lord it even over those who are by nature its equals, – that is, its fellow-men, [sic] – this is a reach of arrogance utterly intolerable."[394] Self-love, thirdly requires self-care but prioritizing 'spirit' over 'body', and

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[392] I Corinthians 8.1 (ESV) quoted II.41.62. I Corinthians 13.8, "Love never ends… knowledge will pass away" quoted, I.39.43. I Corinthians 13.13 "Faith, hope and love, abide…" quoted I.40.44.

[393] *Doc. Chr.* I.30.40.

[394] *Doc. chr.* I.23.22.

carefully weighing possible gains regarding self-sacrifice. Augustine's third 'love' is the love of that which is equal to the self, namely one's neighbor (also cited from Matthew 22:37). The fourth love is "that which is beneath us,"[395] which Augustine makes no comment on.

These four loves encompass possible meanings of the signs of scripture. "This is the sum: that we should clearly understand that the fulfillment and the end of the Law, and of all Holy Scripture, is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed, and the love of an object which can enjoy that other in fellowship with ourselves."[396] For Augustine, the meaning of scripture refers to "faith, hope and charity," and the "end of the of commandment is charity".[397]

This 'charity' has two implications: first as an ethical virtue, second as a hermeneutic one. It is this hermeneutic value that Vanhoozer wishes to restore to hermeneutics in the post-modern era. "With regard to the morality of literary understanding, Augustine advocates what is for him the prime hermeneutical virtue, namely, charity. This is a far cry from the typical modern approach that puts a premium on distrust and suspicion."[398]

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[395] *Doc. chr.* I.23.22

[396] *Doc. chr.* I.35.39

[397] 1 Timothy 1:5 quoted by Augustine, *Doc. chr.* I.

[398] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 1998, 32.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that Augustine's understanding and development of the interrelationship of ontology, epistemology, and hermeneutics is far from simplistic and naïve. His inherited hermeneutic framework was not the stereotype of 'allegorical' as arbitrary spiritual meaning. It was a rich, complex, and nuanced interpretive tradition that employed critical methodologies to texts. The teleology of these practices was different than those of modernity. Whereas the modern (and post-modern) hermeneut seeks to reconstruct the historical events behind the text, for the Alexandrians and Antiochenes the purpose of interpretation was to discover Divine Truth as disclosed through history.

Constructive post-modern philosophers have adopted significant points of development from the thought of Augustine. Heidegger's work to overcome the subject/object divide through *Dasein* explicitly references, and arguably is rooted in, Augustinian concepts. Gadamer finds in Augustine an exemplar for reaching to the very edges of the possibility of language to disclose – without becoming domineering or deterministic of Being. In his writing, the best of descriptive theories of language, understanding and meaning, are reflected. The core tenets of speech-act theory, and the contextual implications of language-games can be found already in his analysis of communication.

Not only does Augustine anticipate the challenges of postmodern theological hermeneutics, such as Anthony Thiselton's theoretical developments, he also shares Vanhoozer's moral concerns about interpretation. These premodern and postmodern authors are cognizant of

issues of 'literary knowledge' such as an approach to the text as 'other'. Both exhort readers to adopt a posture of humility; and to resist the impulse to dominate the text.

Augustine also resolves some issues that are left open in contemporary discussions. Thiselton, in his hermeneutic endeavors, never really addresses the problem of how language and Being relate. He is never able to bring Ricoeur's "place where language is *saying*"[399] to anchor within a semantic horizon. Augustine's robust theory of reference offers a 'place to say' and allows for the 'possibilities' of meaning at the level of discourse.

Augustine extends the later literary morals of Vanhoozer into social ethics and religious praxis. In the interpretation of the locution (of scripture), the call to love is both the illocution (hermeneutical aspect), and the perlocution (ethical aspect). This is a holistic approach, allowing for the theoretical complexities of language and interpretation of the 'philosopher', the 'clarity of scripture' for the 'mass', and the praxis of discipleship for all.

More importantly, Augustine addresses the *possibility* of meaning. Theological hermeneutics is primarily concerned with the *content* of meaning. Their concern with interpretation carries an implicit 'understanding according to'; i.e. the proper interpretation of the text is one that rightly defines the content of proclamation. Augustine, however, understood that

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[399] Ricoeur, as quoted by Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, 1980, 121.

skepticism, and its resultant relativism, reduced any proclamation to one more proposition in a field of equipollence.

Vanhoozer identifies this problem in terms of textual hermeneutics, and he issues a plea for the return to intersubjective morality to correct it. Augustine understood that the issue of morality was prior to that of interpretation. In a culture where all things are indeterminate, ethics are also relative – including the ethics of interpretation. It is not coincidence that his first writing project as a Christian was to establish the *possibility* of, as well as the moral imperative to seek, knowledge itself.

Augustine not only addresses theoretical and moral concerns, but also offers an anchor on which to rest hermeneutics which contemporary theologians stop short of providing. In the book *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom*, all the contributing authors place wisdom within the framework of the interpretive act. The first two essays of the compilation, by David Ford and Robert Morgan, (both entitled "Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God"), discuss the topic from a textual-critical and exegetical viewpoint. Ford concludes his essay, "I am acutely aware that I have discussed the topic of 'Jesus Christ the Wisdom of God' with no direct exploration of what wisdom in God might be."[400] He then invokes *De trinitate* XV, and agrees with Augustine, that Christian interpretation finds its "distinctive fulfilment" in the love of wisdom.[401] Morna Hooker, of all the contributing authors in this project, comes the closest to the idea of Christ as Wisdom.

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[400] Ford, David E., "Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God (I)," in *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom*, ed. David E. Ford and Graham Stanton (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 21.

[401] Ford, David E., "Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God (I)," 21.

She finds, in I Corinthians 1.24, that "Paul *identifies* Christ with the wisdom of God, … in the significance of the message of *Christ crucified*".[402] She cites this passage however, already couched within a conception of wisdom as 'the rightly determined theological understanding of Christ.' Theology is, however, already a post-hermeneutic endeavor.

Theological hermeneutics appeals to critical realism to establish the grounds of hermeneutic realism. Critical realism alone, cannot address the issue of the Criterion of Truth; it can only assert that reality exists beyond human understanding. As Alypius asked, "But who will indicate truth for us?"[403] Without an answer to that question, even the hermeneutic realist is like the Academics in saying "If you devote yourself to [hermeneutics] you will never indeed be wise while you live here…your spirit will enjoy wisdom unencumbered in the [eschaton],[404] that is, when you will have ceased to be an [interpreter]."[405]

Augustine understood that for proclamation to be both *possible* and *meaningful* it must offer a Criterion. He understood Christ's declaration "I am the Truth" to be a direct epistemological claim – not a theological claim.

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[402] Morna D. Hooker, "Where Is Wisdom to Be Found?," in *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom*, ed. David E. Ford and Graham Stanton (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 127. (Italics original).

[403] pg. 87 above.

[404] "Here I need only add that one should pursue the quest for the single correct interpretation under the aegis of hope and its reminder 'Not yet.'" Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, 1998, 465.

[405] Modified quote from *Mag.* pg. 89 above.

Augustine addresses the epistemological question: How can humans be wise, "having knowledge of the human and divine"?[406] – The Incarnate Christ, who was both (*C. Acad.*).

Augustine addresses the hermeneutical question: How can we know the 'res' of the Creator through the indication of the 'given sign'? – The Incarnate Christ, as *logos*, who was both (*Mag., Doc. chr.*).

"But of [the search for wisdom] we should have been wholly incapable, had not Wisdom condescended to adapt Himself to our weakness … And thus, though Wisdom was Himself our home, *He made Himself also the way by which we should reach our home*."[407]

This thesis has sought to build a compelling argument for the contemporary relevance of work from late antiquity. For the hermeneutic focus of this work it has been shown, at minimum, that there was nothing naïve, simplistic, or 'immediate' in the theoretical construction of Augustine's hermeneutic. Arguably, in certain areas of development, his conception may exceed the current prevailing theories. There is value in examining work from our premodern forebearers for assistance with contemporary conundrums.

If postmodernity rightly identifies the deficiencies of modern methodologies to describe and define human communication, there are two possibilities for future development. The first option is to embrace deconstruction; to accept that humanity is a perpetual closed circuit of

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[406] See pg. 83 above.

[407] Doc. chr. I.11.11.

phenomenological objectivity, unable to truly interact with any other. Without a reliable (or worse, with a continually deceitful) hermeneutic with which to reach another subject, truth and wisdom can only be declared within the framework of individual experience, emotion and cognitive development. If this is the case, we must re-evaluate the possibility, purpose, and mode of flourishing with the impossibility of the basic anthropological need for relationship and interaction.

The second option is to accept that whatever the failings of scientific and positivistic methodologies are, they are *failed descriptions* – not *determinations of failure*. As Wittgenstein realized, humanity has amazing communicative abilities, it makes no difference if we are in possession of an adequate theory to account for the phenomena. If this is the case, we must be open to evaluating theories based on their ability to describe what is always and already occurring, not based on their cohesiveness or coherence within a pre-determined methodology.

For the contemporary theologian, (either by profession, or inclination) this is a crucial issue. If God speaks, if God desires to reveal Himself to His own creation, would it not stand to reason that His creation would possess the hermeneutic capacity to interact, reciprocate, and emulate that attribute? Or, is God simply another object in a pantheon of objects - dependent on our individual wisdom and subjective interpretation?

Augustine was not content to allow the Incarnate God to be the object of any subjective interpretation. The Incarnate is not even the *object* of wisdom, the Incarnate God *is* wisdom *itself*. For Augustine, Christ is not a passive idea open to discovery by the astute subject; but is instead the author and originator of our existence and its underlying order. Christ is also the word, or sign, that indicates the underlying order of existence to those that will search for it. He

is the arbiter, the teacher and the guide to those that would seek to abide in Truth. The Incarnate is never the object, but is the subject on whom all other subjects depend for their possibility of being.

Augustine, from his premodern vantage-point gives us different perspectives, not only on individual topics, such as this project, but gives an example of being a wholistic thinker dedicated to understanding and applying the Gospel. He is never content to divide subject domains but holds any and all realms of human thought and activity to critical examination in light of the Incarnate Christ. The theoretical, theological, ethical, and practical cannot be parsed or opposed but must align within the created order. Augustine offers us unique, insightful, and challenging analysis of humanity's situation that still engages the postmodern world. He also offers an example of how to be a wholistic Christian thinker, also still needed in the postmodern world.

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