

Art for God's Sake:

An Augustinian Defense of Theatre

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Abstract

In *City of God* Augustine refers to the theatre as a “pestilence” on the morals of the Roman people. Further, he devotes a large portion of the third book of the *Confessions* to outlining his own sinful experiences with the theatre and a Platonic attack on the poetical arts. From these passages in his two most famous works it would be reasonable to see theatre as incompatible with an Augustinian worldview. However, by expanding upon O’Connell’s *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine*, Smith’s “Staging the Incarnation: Revisioning Augustine’s Critique of Theatre”, and Drever’s “Entertaining Violence: Augustine on the Cross of Christ and the Commercialization of Suffering”, this study shows that a complete condemnation of the theatre cannot be sustained in light of the wider Christian framework within which Augustine operates. This thesis begins by examining the similarities between Plato and Augustine’s critiques of theatre on both ethical and ontological grounds. Having established that the basis of their attack lies in three elements: imitation, the emotions, and material images, an exploration of Augustine’s views on material creation, the Incarnation, Resurrection, and human *persona* shows that neither the emotions nor material images can be condemned on the Platonic assumption that their natures are inherently corrupting; in fact, both of these are shown to be moral goods that, while liable to corruption because of the Fall, are innately good. Given that they are moral goods, it becomes possible to make room in Augustine for the possibility of a ‘redeemed theatre’ where the mimetic imitation inherent to the theatrical arts is not a moral hindrance but a devotional aid. Indeed, Augustine’s use of theatrical elements in his own writing points to the efficacy of this method of evangelization.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

“I came to Carthage and all around me hissed a cauldron of illicit loves. ... My soul was in rotten health. In an ulcerous condition it thrust itself to outward things, miserably avid to be scratched by contact with the world of the senses.”¹ Thus begins Book 3 of Augustine’s *Confessions* and a description of a man haunted by his youthful actions and desires. Though not nearly as famous as the story of the pear theft, Augustine’s narrative regarding his past experiences with the theatre and poetic arts similarly reveals Augustine as deeply determined to help others avoid this pitfall. In this way, the first portion of Book 3 is dominated by an interweaving of confession of past sin and criticisms of the theatre which led him into said sin. Augustine’s shame is so acute that in *City of God* he commends Plato for having banished the poets entirely from his ideal republic.² That Augustine explicitly references Plato has led to an examination of the ways in which Augustine’s attack on theatre mirrors Plato’s on both ethical and ontological grounds. In such studies many scholars have come to the same conclusion as Donalee Dox in her book on the theatre and Latin Christianity: that the pagan institution of theatre is entirely irreconcilable to Augustine’s Christian philosophy.³

However, as negative as Augustine’s attitudes toward the theatre are in *City of God* and *Confessions*, a wholesale condemnation of theatre is not consistent with the larger theological framework he puts forth throughout the *Confessions*. Theatre may be broken down into its constituent parts according to Augustine’s criticisms of it – the imitation of the content of the spectacle and the emotions which theatre evokes (ethical criticism), and the material images it is

¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), iii.i.1.

² Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.14.

³ Donalee Dox, *The Idea of the Theatre in Latin Christian Thought: Augustine to the Fourteenth Century*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 16.

made up of (ontological criticisms). Beginning with an examination of Augustine’s critique and followed by a refutation drawn from Augustine himself, I intend to show that his attack is overly reliant on his anti-Manichaean bias and the Platonic and Stoic schools of thought which influenced him. In progressing toward a full acceptance of the Christian doctrines in the *Confessions*, Augustine is obligated to acknowledge that neither materiality nor the emotions are inherently corrupting and at times he explicitly affirms their goodness. In accepting this, Augustine must also accept that the theatre itself is not inherently corrupting. Indeed, in his discussions of imagination, the imitative aspect of theatre emerges as something to be used for moral ends. Finally, Augustine’s own use of theatrical elements in his writing supports the possibility of this holy *telos* and as such, the idea of a “redeemed theatre” remains open for Augustine.⁴

Scope and Limitations

As this study aims primarily to show that Augustine’s attack on theatre is not tenable within the very work which he presents it, my primary source is his *Confessions* (where the bulk of his criticism lies) and to a lesser extent, *City of God*. I will draw on other works when relevant, particularly *On the Trinity* and the Anti-Manichaean treatises, but in a study of this size it is neither feasible nor practical to attempt to address the entire Augustinian corpus. Moreover, this study will focus on redeeming specifically the theatre and poetic arts within Augustine. While much of what is discussed may be applicable to other art forms – such as music, visual arts, or the liberal arts – I will not specifically be addressing them. Finally, this study aims to not only show that there is a space for theatre in Augustine’s framework, but that it indeed has a

⁴ I have borrowed the term “redeemed theatre” to refer to a holy theatre possible within an Augustinian framework from Smith; James K.A. Smith. “Staging the Incarnation: Revisioning Augustine’s Critique of Theatre,” *Literary & Theology* 15, no. 2 (2001): 123-139. <https://doi-org.proxy.queensu.ca/10.1093/litthe/15.2.123>

utilitarian function with regards to spiritual growth. Because I am focusing on this specifically religious *telos* of theatre, I will not be discussing Aristotelean “uses” of art such as catharsis, nor the idea of art for art’s sake.⁵

Previous Scholarship

A handful of scholars of the past 50 years have tried to cast Augustine’s aesthetic theory in a less negative light and it is upon these studies I have built my argument. Gene Fendt in “The Moral Problem in reading confessions: Augustine’s double argument against drama,” lays out much of Augustine’s issue with the theatre in the *Confessions* but also points out a common thread in these studies – that the *Confessions* themselves are a deeply theatrical work meant to affect the reader just as theatre affects the spectator.⁶ Fendt ultimately does not provide an attempt to redeem theatre for Augustine, opting instead to argue that the *Confessions* must be read as a prayer rather than a work of literature, as this is the only way to rescue it from the same ontological pitfalls which theatre is subjected to.⁷

Of the scholars who have actively tried to redeem arts for Augustine, Robert O’Connell’s *Art and the Christian Intelligence* is easily the most thorough study; however, he does not treat the theatre specifically, but Augustine’s aesthetic theory in general, with a particular focus on *De Musica*. O’Connell traces the chronology of Augustine’s aesthetic theory throughout his corpus arguing for a more harmonious vision of aesthetics rather than an Augustine who becomes increasingly hostile to the arts as time progresses.⁸ The scope of his study is broad, incorporating

⁵ See Chapter 5 for a discussion of “use” vs. “enjoyment” within Augustine and its implications for the theatre.

⁶ Gene Fendt. “The Moral Problem in reading confessions: Augustine’s double argument against drama,” in *Texts and their Interpretation: American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly Annual Supplement 72*, ed, Michael Baur (Bronx: National Office of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 1999), 171-184.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Robert J. O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

both visual and liberal arts and attempting to address most, if not all, of the Augustinian corpus. For our purposes, most significant is his discussion of art in the *Confessions* and the artistry of the *Confessions* where he argues that Augustine's aesthetic in the *Confessions* is largely ascensional – moving from the material to the immaterial – but that the artistry of the work itself speaks to the need for an Incarnational aesthetic – an aesthetic grounded in the material reality of human existence.⁹

In contrast to O'Connell, Herdt's "The Theatre of the Virtues" has an extremely narrow scope. She focuses entirely on the ethical critique present in *City of God* and does not address the *Confessions* at all. Herdt argues that for Augustine pagan theatre is bad because it glorifies pagan "manly virtues" which rest on pride and self-reliance.¹⁰ Theatre can thus only be redeemed if we see these virtues through spiritual eyes, rather than carnal ones, which allows us to reframe these stories not as grand human victories but successes (or failures) owing to humble reliance on the grace of God.¹¹ Consequently, pride is the true sin of theatre.

James Smith has provided the most direct attempt to redeem specifically the theatre for Augustine in his article "Staging the Incarnation: Revisioning Augustine's Critique of Theatre." In it, Smith lays out both the ethical and ontological critiques in both the *Confessions* and *City of God* arguing that they cannot stand given Augustine's affirmations elsewhere of the goodness of creation. Moreover, Smith differentiates between a participatory and incarnational ontology – one where God participates in the world while remaining external to it vs. one where He becomes part of it – arguing that the reality of the Incarnation opens the door to alternative

⁹ Ibid, chapters 5-6.

¹⁰ Jennifer Herdt, "The theatre of the virtues: Augustine's critique of pagan mimesis," in *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide*, ed. James Wetzel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 111.

¹¹ Ibid., 122.

methods of knowing, significantly *aisthesis* instead of *noesis*. Knowing materially, instead of intellectually, allows for the possibility of an Augustinian theatre that could be good, or at least morally neutral.¹² However, Smith does not address what this “redeemed theatre” would look like, nor how it would function, he simply leaves open the potential for its existence.

This gap is where Drever’s article on the commercialization of suffering in Augustine becomes significant. While not addressing theatre specifically but spectacle more broadly, is crucial to this study as he makes an argument for directing the affective capacity of material objects to a moral end.¹³ Drever engages in a discussion of material images in general and their corruptive capacity with a particular focus on those which are violent or include suffering. He cites various examples from Augustine’s corpus showing how these, in tandem with the innate human curiosity, can lead the soul into sin. However, in *On the Trinity* Augustine engages in a discussion of the devotional potential of images like those of Christ suffering and in light of these meditations Drever concludes that these images can be used to accustom the soul to prioritizing spiritual, not material, death.¹⁴

¹² Smith, “Staging the Incarnation.”

¹³ Directing the material images and affections of theatre is the primary subject of Chapter 5.

¹⁴ Matthew Drever. “Entertaining Violence: Augustine on the Cross of Christ and the Commercialization of Suffering,” *The Journal of Religion* 92, no. 3 (2012): 331-361. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/665040>

Chapter 2 – Establishing Augustine’s Attack on Theatre

Before I can attempt to “redeem” theatre for Augustine, I must first establish what his critique of the theatre consisted of. Smith divided this into two parts: an ethical and an ontological.¹⁵ For ease of organization I will use a modified version of his same structure in my exposition of Augustine’s criticisms. Much of Augustine’s attack draws from Plato’s *Republic* either explicitly or implicitly; for example, Augustine, in a hyperbolic rhetorical flourish in *City of God*, goes as far as to state that Plato “should be set not only above the heroes, but even above the gods themselves” for his attack on the poets.¹⁶ Thus, where it is applicable, I will first summarize Plato’s criticism and then discuss how Augustine builds upon it.

Ethical Criticisms

A Problem of Imitation

The first, and likely most obvious, critique that both Plato and Augustine bring against the theatre is that it is unvirtuous. In book three of the *Republic* Plato voices his concerns regarding the morality of the dramatic arts, particularly with respect to their representations of the gods and heroes, claiming that the poets falsely attribute to them adulterous, effeminate, and otherwise undesirable behaviors. For example, Plato draws attention to Achilles’ cruelty towards Hector’s body and the captive Trojans, the extramarital affair of Ares and Aphrodite, and Zeus’ ‘womanly’ weeping over the death of Sarpedon.¹⁷ Plato also accuses the poets of celebrating tyranny.¹⁸ Likewise, Augustine claims that the theatre provides examples of bad behavior for

¹⁵ Smith, “Staging the Incarnation.”

¹⁶ Augustine, *City of God* 2.14.

¹⁷ Plato, *Republic*, in *Republic* 1-5, trans. Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Freddy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 3.388-391.

¹⁸ Plato, *Republic*, in *Republic* 6-10, trans. Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Freddy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 8.568b.

spectators as it holds up “to wretched men the worst possible examples in their stories of the gods,” while in his own experience in Carthage with this “cauldron of illicit loves” only “fueled [his] fire.”¹⁹ Moreover, in *City of God*, Augustine treats theatrical spectacles as vehicles “by which disgraceful acts and licentious vanity are exhibited.”²⁰

Augustine also draws attention to the sexually immoral nature of poetical works; while Plato may have attacked these under the general umbrella of “lacking virtue”, Augustine very specifically and deliberately targets the sexual nature of many theatrical performances. He discusses his own addiction to sexually immoral shows in his youth at Carthage; he describes how he “liked to tickle my ears with false stories which further titillated my desires. The same curiosity mountingly increased my appetite for public shows.”²¹ At these shows he was made accessory to the onstage sins when he “shared in the joy of lovers when they wickedly found delight in each other.”²² From his own experience Augustine affirms in *City of God* that, through the theatre, “the most shameful lust was inflamed among human beings.”²³ This sexual element appears to be more important for Augustine than for Plato, not only for the detrimental effect it had on Augustine in his youth, but for the titillating effects it has on the general public; while a lack of sexual temperance would probably not be considered part of Plato’s ideal virtuous man, for Augustine it went beyond ideals since sexual incontinence is a mortal sin which threatens the salvation of souls.

The unvirtuous nature of theatre is so problematic for Augustine because he is extremely concerned with the (im)moral effect that theatre has on the spectator. Aristotle’s idea of

¹⁹ Augustine, *City of God* 2.14; *Confessions* iii.i.1-ii.2.

²⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, 1.32.

²¹ Augustine, *Confessions* i.x.16.

²² *Ibid.*, iii.ii.3.

²³ Augustine, *City of God* 2.14.

responsive mimesis is valuable here: the belief that theatre invites the audience to imitate the actors because of its ability “to engage the feelings of man and to move them in sympathy with the characters that they represented.”²⁴ Similarly for Augustine, being a spectator was ultimately being in a receptive role; viewing a spectacle left one susceptible to significant changes to one’s moral character.²⁵ We may see this with Alypius, who leaves the gladiatorial games “not now the person who had come in” because he mirrors the attitudes and actions of the audience and performers around him.²⁶ We may also see the effect of mimetic imitation with Augustine’s own experiences with the theatre where he “shared” the passion and tragedy of the lovers on stage.²⁷

Augustine further addresses the problem with theatrical imitation in *City of God* where he refers to stage plays as a “pestilence” upon the morals of the Roman people.²⁸ Attributing to the theatre partial blame for Rome’s moral decay, he tells us that plays “blinded the minds of their miserable victims with darkness, and sullied them with depravity.”²⁹ He tells us a story of a young man looking at a titillating picture of the myth of Danae and the golden shower and he argues that “he finds, in so great an authority [i.e. the gods], a patron for his own wickedness; and so he boasts that, in what he does, he is imitating a god.”³⁰ Though this example is from the visual arts, it is drawn from a myth, which like many others, would have also been the subject of stage plays and poems. By portraying unvirtuous and explicitly sexual things and inviting the

²⁴ Karl F. Morrison, *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform in the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 17; we will return to the role of emotions in Augustine’s ethical criticisms shortly, but for present it is important to recognize the negative role imitation plays for Augustine.

²⁵ Herdt, “Theatre of the virtues,” 120-1.

²⁶ Augustine, *Confessions* vi.viii.13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, iii.iii.3.

²⁸ Augustine, *City of God* 1.32.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.32.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.7.

spectators to imitative them via mimesis, theatre becomes a negative phenomenon for Augustine because the spectator is fundamentally changed for the worse.

A Problem of Emotion

I have already hinted at the second aspect of Augustine's ethical criticism in discussing Aristotle's responsive mimesis wherein it is the strong emotional response which the theatre evokes that is responsible for inviting the spectators into imitation. Before looking at how the emotions do this, however, let us first examine Plato and Augustine's views on the emotions. As a school valuing reason above all else, it is not unreasonable to assume that the Platonists would have a quite negative attitude toward the emotions; indeed, this is the case in the *Republic* when Plato engages in a discussion of the proper place for grief in a virtuous man. He writes:

the law says, surely, that it's best to face misfortunes calmly as far as possible and not get agitated ... grief gets in the way of what must come to our aid as soon as possible in those circumstances ... the ability to ponder over what has happened and as in the fall of a dice arranging one's affairs according as things have fallen out, in the way that reason determines what would be best.³¹

Here we see clearly the Platonic superiority of *logos*; in fact in the same passage he states that it is more appropriate for a "decent" man upon losing his son to keep his grief under control, or not to feel it all, than to publicly express it.³² Indeed, emotions are so bad that not even honorable women are allowed them, for "we would be right to remove the lamentations of men of good standing and allocate them to women, although not even then if they are virtuous."³³ Clearly, Plato gives a wholesale condemnation of close association with the emotions for any person who aims to be virtuous.

³¹ Plato, *Republic* 10.604.

³² *Ibid.*, 10.603e.

³³ *Ibid.*, 5.388.

But why are the emotions to be avoided for Plato? He tells us that it is because emotions, which cause one to remember and engage with their suffering, are “irrational, idle, and a friend to cowardice.”³⁴ The emotions, as the opposite of the rational intellect, engage with the baser parts of the soul; in fact, Plato creates an explicit connection between the emotions, the worse parts of the soul, and theatre in book 10 of the *Republic*. He tells us “The art of painting and imitation as a whole accomplish what is their function far from the truth, while as companion and friend it associates itself with that part in us which is far from the intellect and has no healthy nor even true purpose.”³⁵ In their translation of the *Republic*, Emlyn-Jones and Freddy point out that Plato creates this link between irrational emotions and the masses at the theatre also in *Laws*.³⁶ Consequently, the emotions facilitate an intimate connection between three “base” things: the imitation of theatre, the emotions themselves, and the lower parts of the soul.

This base association has detrimental effects on a person’s moral character as, according to Plato, “being inferior and rubbing shoulders with the inferior, imitation produces the inferior.”³⁷ On an obvious level the emotions, by engaging the lesser rather than the superior part of the soul, inhibit the calm detachment which allows one to rationally contemplate their circumstances and to thus determine the most virtuous path of action. Plato is aware of this when he writes, “poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind is ever to increase in happiness and virtue.”³⁸

Even more than this, the emotions habituate the soul toward feeling non-rational emotions and thereby create mental weakness. When we are habituated to feeling these emotions

³⁴ Ibid., 10.603.

³⁵ Ibid., 10.603b; see also 10.605a.

³⁶ Editors’ note to Plato, *Republic* 10.603.

³⁷ Plato, *Republic* 10.603b.

³⁸ Ibid., 10.606.

and thinking with our baser natures our ability to make virtuous choices is also diminished. It is a sign of a good poet when they make us sad and suffer along with the characters; we would be unsatisfied if we did not feel sadness during a tragedy or laugh during a comedy. However, Plato has already established that when we ourselves are suffering a virtuous person ought to desire to remain calm and resolute. It would be shameful to weep at our own suffering, so why should we desire to do so at the theatre, especially when these are fictional scenarios with no bearing on our reality?³⁹ It is this folly – William Mann’s anomalous psychological response – that is the true effect of the base association between theatre, the emotions, and the lower nature; as the will is habituated to lesser things, we more frequently seek these things out, oftentimes irrationally, since our ability to make rational decisions is reduced.⁴⁰ I will return to Mann’s other “paradoxes of tragedy” throughout.

Augustine holds similar beliefs to Plato regarding the emotions and their association with mental weakness. Like Plato, Augustine is averse to expressing intense emotion and instead thinks it proper to repress and control them as much as possible. This can most clearly be seen in the passage where he describes the death of Monica where he admonishes Adeodatus for weeping and keeps his own grief in check remaining calm and neutral throughout the funeral proceedings.⁴¹ Compare this to the “sweetness” of his tears and grief he experienced at the death of his friend from Tagaste prior to his conversion and the proper ordering of his emotions.⁴² For

³⁹ Ibid., 10.606.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* iii.ii.4; William E. Mann, “The Life of the Mind in Dramas and Dreams” in *Augustine’s Confessions: Philosophy in Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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⁴¹ Augustine, *Confessions* ix.xii.29.

⁴² Ibid., iv.iv.9-iv.v.10.

the immature Augustine, emotions were to be enjoyed; for the Christian Augustine, they were to be suppressed. We will return to a more complete examination of this in a later chapter.

The Effect on the Will

Imitation and the emotions together also distort a person's will, fueling an addiction to the theatre and reducing their ability to know and choose the good. By repeatedly engaging in an experience which invites the viewer to feel strong emotions, one becomes accustomed to experiencing these non-rational emotions and thus more likely to reproduce them in the future even when not actually in the theatre. Based on his own experiences Augustine proposes a mechanism for this in the *Confessions*:

I was bound not by an iron imposed by anyone else but by the iron of my own choice. The enemy had a grip on my will and so made a chain for me to hold me a prisoner. The consequence of a distorted will is passion. By servitude to passion, habit is formed, and habit to which there is no resistance becomes necessity. By these links (hence my term a chain), a harsh bondage held me under restraint. The new will, which was beginning to be within me, a will to serve You freely and enjoy You, God, the only sure source of pleasure, was not yet strong enough to conquer my older will, which had the strength of old habit.⁴³

Like Plato, Augustine also claims that the emotions indulge the weaker part of the soul and in doing so habituate the soul toward feeling non-rational emotions. Augustine's own servitude to and imitation of passionate actions – his addiction to the theatre, his relationship with an unmarried woman – created a habit with negative force on his soul. The misdirected will then forms a self-feeding cycle wherein the soul becomes further and further trapped by a “chain” within the bondage of sin.

⁴³ Ibid., viii.v.10.

The distorted will increases the desire to have repeat experiences of the passions which the poets evoke, no matter how illogical this desire may be. Augustine again uses his own experience to illustrate:

I was captivated by theatrical shows. They were full of representations of my own miseries and fueled my fire. Why is it that a person should wish to experience suffering by watching grievous and tragic events which he himself would not wish to endure? Nevertheless he wants to suffer the pain given by being a spectator of these sufferings, and the pain itself is his pleasure. What is this but amazing folly? For the more anyone is moved by these scenes, the less free he is from similar passions. ... The greater his pain, the greater his approval of the actor in these representations. If the human calamities, whether in ancient histories or fictitious myths, are so presented that the theatregoer is not caused pain, he walks out of the theatre disgusted and highly critical. But if he feels pain, he stays riveted in his seat enjoying himself.⁴⁴

Like Plato, Augustine draws attention to the fact that we praise poets for their ability to cause us emotional distress, if they do not, they would not be considered good poets. More than that, Augustine observes that we actually *want* to feel this pain, he “loved to suffer and sought occasions for such suffering”; this is Mann’s “anomalous psychological response”.⁴⁵ What could cause this “amazing folly” except for a distortion of the rational will? It is also interesting to note the language Augustine uses here – emphatic words and phrases like *rapiebant* and *quo minus a talibus affectibus sanus est* in a discussion of freedom. This is the same strong language he employs in viii.v.10, the passage we have just discussed in relation to the general distortion of the will; he creates a clear linguistic connection between the negative effects of the theatre and the corruption of the will.

⁴⁴ Ibid., iii.ii.2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., iii.ii.4; Mann, “The Life of the Mind.”

This chain of bondage Augustine describes is aptly named, for it becomes increasingly difficult to break. As the will is distorted by the emotions and habituated by imitation it reduces the will's ability to choose or even recognize the good. Sometimes, when the soul finds itself in this situation, it has no desires except those of the bondage of sin. Other times, however, as with Augustine himself in this passage, the will is split; Augustine's problem of the divided will is laid out more fully a few pages later:

The mind commands the body and is instantly obeyed. The mind commands itself and meets resistance. The mind commands the hand to move, and it is so easy that one hardly distinguishes the order from its execution. Yet mind is mind, and hand is body. The mind orders the mind to will. The recipient of the order is itself, yet it does not perform it. What causes this monstrosity and why does this happen? ... The strength of the command lies in the strength of will, and the degree to which the command is not performed lies in the degree to which the will is not engaged. For it is the will that commands the will to exist, and so it commands not another but itself. So the will that commands is incomplete, and therefore what it commands does not happen. ... We are dealing with a morbid condition of the mind which, when it is lifted up by the truth, does not unreservedly rise to it, but is weighed down by habit. So there are two wills. Neither of them is complete, and what is present in the one is lacking in the other.⁴⁶

It is significant that for Augustine even when a person desires and wills themselves to choose Good, they may not always be able to if the will is sufficiently habituated (by imitation) towards evil. In these cases, two wills emerge in a person's soul, one that desires evil and the other good, and without the Grace of God the former is inevitably victorious because it is strengthened by the "violence of habit."⁴⁷ So not only does the theatre, via emotions and imitation, prevent us from desiring good, it also hinders us in choosing that good, should we receive the Grace to desire it.

⁴⁶ Augustine, *Confessions* viii.ix.21.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, viii.v.12.

I have discussed how theatre divides the will with respect to its internal decision-making, but when we are less able to recognize or choose good, our thoughts and actions towards others are also naturally impacted. Plato does not say much about the actual actions that the corrupted will produces as he focuses mainly on how this misleads people into unvirtuous desires (we can, of course, extrapolate unvirtuous actions resulting from these desires). Augustine, as we have seen, specifically addresses how imitation of what is presented on stage can lead to immoral action, as it did with the young man and the myth of the golden shower. However, the external effects of the theatre do not end here; we must also look to Augustine's distinctions between misery and mercy. He tells us, "when he himself suffers it is called misery; when he feels compassion for others, it is called mercy."⁴⁸ Thus when we experience loss, like Augustine at the death of Monica, we ought to suppress our emotions because we are the ones suffering; however, if a companion of ours is suffering, it is good to have compassion for them. The problem arises for Augustine when we feel mercy at fictitious dramatic spectacles; because the audience is not invited to help, but only to suffer alongside the characters, this is not true compassion, but rather a false, impotent mercy. Central to Augustine's ethics is the commandment to "love thy neighbour" and so, this "mercy" leads to sinful behaviour because it leads to inaction, a sin of omission.⁴⁹ Theatre invites us to feel passionate emotions (which we have established are detrimental to the will) and it invites us to feel these emotions with no 'utilitarian' pay-off, we are not even acting with compassion or mercy for the benefit of others, we simply are invited to feel for the sake of our own pleasure.

⁴⁸ Ibid., iii.ii.2.

⁴⁹ Bonnie Kent, "Augustine's Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Elenore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 215.

Furthermore, the emotions do not just cause passive sins, but Augustine claims they also cause us to wish evil on others, what he terms “malicious goodwill.”⁵⁰ Correctly ordered love plays a large role in Augustine’s discussion of ethics; the emotions that the theatre produce subvert this order and cause people to prioritize their own pleasure over the wellbeing of others. Since theatre creates an addiction to feeling the false-mercy, and since, by Augustine’s definition, “mercy cannot exist apart from suffering,” this addiction leads us to wish that others might suffer in reality outside of the theatre, so that we might experience the pleasure of feeling “mercy” towards them.⁵¹ Hence, the paradoxical “malicious goodwill”; it cannot truly be goodwill if we are wishing ill of another, and so Augustine denies the existence of this “goodwill.” Instead this warped “mercy” is a sin, and not a passive one, but actively willing the misery of another for selfish reasons – the agonies of others become objects of love valued above the love of the others themselves. Augustine sums this up when he writes, “I have more pity for a person who rejoices in wickedness than for a person who has the feeling of having suffered hard knocks by being deprived of a pernicious pleasure or having lost a source of miserable felicity. This is surely a more authentic compassion; for the sorrow contains no element of pleasure.”⁵²

Augustine’s final ethical criticism of theatre is completely absent from Plato’s attack because it is a uniquely Christian problem with theatre; though brief, it still must be addressed. For Augustine, not only is the theatre a source of immoral spectacles, but it is intricately tied to pagan worship and ritual. This in and of itself is cause for serious moral concern. In book two of *City of God* he outlines the religious origins of the theatre in Rome, recounting the story where stage shows were established at the urging of the priests in order to dispel a growing plague upon

⁵⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* iii.ii.3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, iii.ii.3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, iii.ii.3.

the city.⁵³ For Augustine, this blurs the distinction between explicit worship of the gods and the religiously motivated spectacles performed on their behalf; the theatre becomes fundamentally associated with the Greco-Roman pantheon. Given the polemical nature of *City of God* any association with the pagan gods is obviously unacceptable for Augustine. He uses this link between immoral theatre and the gods as further evidence of the depravity of pagan religion when he claims that, “These gods, indeed, were actually at pains to sow and foster wicked acts, by desiring that their deeds - or deeds thought to be theirs - should be made known to the people through theatrical celebrations.”⁵⁴ This connection proves insurmountable for several Augustinian scholars such as Dox.⁵⁵

Ontological Criticisms

Theatre and its Images: A Problem of Materiality

Plato and Augustine’s attacks on the poets are not restricted to ethical grounds alone; both also criticize theatre on structural grounds because in their eyes the works of the poets and theatre are imitative material images. Because of their imitative nature these images lack substance, and this falsity leads the soul into an unhealthy attachment to material images – the materialist error – which prevents the soul from being able to know the highest good.

The bulk of Plato’s critique can be found in books 3 and 10 of the *Republic* where he establishes that material images are inherently imitative and thus false.⁵⁶ For Plato, the highest good is the immaterial Form of a thing; a carpenter who makes a bed based on the preexisting Form, because his replication is material, is considered to be at the second level of separation

⁵³ Augustine, *City of God* 2.8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.14.

⁵⁵ Dox, *The Idea of the Theatre in Latin Christian Thought*, 16.

⁵⁶ Plato, *Republic* 3.939c.

from the Form. However, an imitator (which for Plato, includes the poet and the actor), imitates what is apparent about a thing, i.e. how things appear to be, not “as they actually are.”⁵⁷ For example, when a painter creates an image of a bed, his image “isn’t the real thing...he makes something that is an appearance of a bed.”⁵⁸ Plato describes this imitation as one who carries a mirror around with them – one would be able to replicate everything anytime one wished with this mirror but logic tells us that these images are not “things that are real in the true sense.”⁵⁹ For this reason, because he creates an image of an image of the Form, the poet “is three stages away from the king and the truth.”⁶⁰ This separation from the Forms puts poets and other imitators at the bottom of Plato’s hierarchy. He writes that “for each and everything there are three skills: how to use them, how to make them, how to imitate them” – the poet therefore is the last and least of these.⁶¹

As if the separation from the Forms were not bad enough, these imitations are inherently material, and this also poses a problem for Plato. Plato held two positions on the matter: 1) that of the *Phaedrus* and *Phaedo* which claimed that the soul has fallen to earth and become trapped in a material body which limits its ability to have pure knowledge, and 2) that of the *Timaeus*, slightly more positive in that the soul has been sent to earth with a specific mission.⁶² Common to both branches of thought, however, is the pre-existence and transmigration of immaterial souls

⁵⁷ Ibid., 10.598a-b.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 10.596e.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.596.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 10.597.

⁶¹ Ibid., 10.601.

⁶² Plato, *Phaedo* 66, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, Volume II, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1888); *Phaedrus* 248, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, Volume I, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1888); *Timaeus* 41-2, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, Volume III, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1888); O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence*, 23.

which, being polluted by the impurity of the body, can only return to their true destinations when liberated by death.⁶³

Thus far, Plato has banished the poets on the basis that their works are not only material, but imitative, even further from the Forms than a secondary replication like the bed. However, his criticisms do not end here, because he argues that the imitations themselves are misleading; they are not only to be reviled for being material and imitative, but also for being false imitations. The basis of this falsity is that poets and actors are ‘jacks of all trade, masters of none’. Plato says that in his state:

We don't have people with double, or even multiple interests since each man does one job...For this reason then, only in such a state as this shall we find that a shoemaker is a shoemaker and not a ship's captain in addition to his shoemaking; and that a farmer is a farmer and not a juryman in addition to his farming; and again that a trained soldier is engaged in warfare and not in commerce in addition to his fighting.⁶⁴

He establishes that each craftsman is skilled at what he does because that is his sole pursuit and interest. By contrast, poets and actors imitate many things but are not actually masters of any of them; an actor may imitate a legislator, a carpenter, or a priest, but that does not give the actor real knowledge or skill in any of these things.

Plato applies this logic directly to Homer in book 10 when he discusses how Homer, if he had any real knowledge of virtue or war or politics, would have been a great legislator, or general, or inventor. He argues that with this knowledge of virtue it would clearly be better to be a craftsman and replicate the Form to the second degree, rather than an imitator creating an image in the third degree. However, Homer was simply a poet; his contemporaries did not force

⁶³ Plato, *Phaedo* 66, 72-3, 79-81; *Timaeus* 42.

⁶⁴ Plato, *Republic* 3.397e.

him into doing good, nor did he act with his supposed superior virtue from his own volition.⁶⁵

For Plato, this is proof that he had no real knowledge and because of this ignorance the images in his works are inaccurate and false – he is merely an imitator of substance. From this, Plato then generalizes that “all composers of poetry are imitators of images of virtue and of every other subject they deal with, but they don’t grasp the truth.”⁶⁶

I have so far established, that for Plato, poetical works are 1) material images thrice removed from the Form and 2) false imitations which lack any real substance. Taken together, these two factors create a serious issue for Plato, as he argues that ultimately these imitative material images are misleading to souls and prevent them from being able to properly know the Forms. He has Socrates decry theatrical performances to Glaucon saying that “all this kind of thing seems to me to be a corruption of the minds of their audiences who don’t have the remedy of knowing exactly what it is really like.”⁶⁷ The poets’ audiences are liable to distraction; because they do not realize the mendacious nature of these performances (“what it is really like”) they are enraptured by them, they become preoccupied with imitative material images, and in turn they are distracted from the virtuous pursuit of the immaterial Forms. Just as poets cannot have knowledge of their subject matter since they are ‘jacks of all trades’, devoting time to these imitations – whether as spectators or as purveyors – takes people away from “those pursuits worth mentioning”, i.e. the pursuit of virtue and the Form.⁶⁸ Moreover, this distraction has long-term negative effects on the soul; by associating with these material images the viewer “destroys the rational part [of the soul] ... indulging the senseless element in the soul which cannot

⁶⁵ Ibid., 10.599.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 10. 600.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 10.595b.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 5.395a.

distinguish between the greater and the lesser.”⁶⁹ So the material nature of poetic images is not only distracting, but it weakens the soul preventing it from being able to recognize lesser (material) things and better (immaterial) things, namely, the Forms.

In both his *Confessions* and *City of God* Augustine builds upon this Platonic attack on theatre and makes explicit reference to Plato’s arguments. Because Augustine does not operate within the same framework as Plato with respect to the Forms, he does not take issue with their tertiary separation in his attack on theatre; he instead focuses on their nonexistent and misleading nature. Augustine agrees with Plato’s claim that poetical images are not “things that are real in the true sense,” and his issue with nonexistence is similar to what the imitative nature of theatre is to Plato.⁷⁰ Augustine laments this ‘nonexistence’ when he speaks of his own experiences in reading the Aeneid.⁷¹ Later he again tells of how he found delight in wicked lovers “even though their actions in the spectacle on the stage were imaginary.”⁷² Augustine grieves that he wept over Dido and enjoyed the lovers, neither of whom exist, while ignoring his real problems; surely this seems folly to any sane mind. Mann identifies the absurdity of grieving over fictional characters as the “phenomenon of nonexistence.”⁷³

That theatre is composed of hollow material images poses just as much of a problem to Augustine as it did to Plato, for attachment to material images is dangerous because they are misleading. Augustine explicitly builds on Plato’s claims about the hollowness of theatre when he praises Plato for banishing the poets “so that the citizens should not be deceived,” directly

⁶⁹ Ibid., 10.605a.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 10.596.

⁷¹ Augustine, *Confessions* i.xiii.20-21.

⁷² Ibid., iii.ii.3.

⁷³ Mann, “The Life of the Mind.”

drawing attention to their misleading nature.⁷⁴ In the same passage he again praises Plato because “he refused to have the souls of his citizens tainted and corrupted by falsehood [of the theatre].”⁷⁵ This concern about the mendacity of physical images also appears in the *Confessions* where, although Augustine makes no explicit reference to Plato here, he grieves his addiction to the theatre because “physical things have no soul” and are thus empty of true substance.⁷⁶

More significantly however, like Plato, Augustine discusses the effect these images have on the soul’s ability to know God, substituting God for the Forms as the highest good. Despite poetical works being imitative and empty, they are addictive – as Augustine’s own experience attests – and they have a detrimental effect on the soul by leading it into the materialist error. Augustine tells us that “by love of created things they [people] are subdued by them, and being thus made subject, become incapable of exercising judgement.”⁷⁷ An attachment to material things – including the addictive images of the theatre – affects the soul’s ability to judge correctly and this is especially concerning when it begins to affect the soul’s ability to evaluate its own existence.

In book 10 of *On the Trinity* Augustine engages in a discussion of the Delphic maxim “know thyself” and argues that this is in fact an exhortation for the soul to perceive its own immaterial existence, and in knowing itself, since it is made in the image of God, it will be more able to know the immaterial Creator.⁷⁸ A key aspect of this process is the mind’s ability to find immaterial things not discoverable “through the medium of any bodily sense.”⁷⁹ However, an

⁷⁴ Augustine, *City of God* 2.14.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.14.

⁷⁶ Augustine, *Confessions* iii.i.1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, x.vi.10.

⁷⁸ Augustine, *On the Trinity* 10.5.7-10.8.11, trans. Stephen McKenna (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.7.10.

excessive attachment to material images hinders the soul's ability to perceive said things;

Augustine writes:

Because [the mind] is in those things of which it thinks with love, and it has grown accustomed to thinking of sensible things [i.e. things discernible by the senses, namely, material images] ... it is incapable of being it itself without the images of those things. From this arises its shameful error, that it can no longer distinguish the images of sensible things from itself, so as to see itself alone ... while it endeavors to think of itself alone, it regards itself as being that without which it cannot think of itself ... because it loved another thing with itself, it has confused itself with this other thing, and has, in a certain way, grown together with it.⁸⁰

When the mind becomes attached to material images, particularly ones with a strong affective power over the emotions, it becomes so entwined with them that it begins to think of itself as a material object; when this happens it begins to think of all spiritual things as physical. Augustine himself tells us that because of materialist error and the Manichaeans (to whom I will return in the following chapter) he struggled to conceive of immaterial “spiritual matters which I knew no way of thinking about except in physical terms.”⁸¹ This materialist error is a central recurring theme in the *Confessions* and Augustine states that it was not just his own experience, but that many people are misled and struggle to properly know the immaterial God because of their “familiarity with the fleshy order of things.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid., 10.8.11.

⁸¹ Augustine, *Confessions* vi.iv.6.

⁸² Ibid., xii.xxvii.37.

Chapter 3 – An Augustinian Defense of Material Creation: Addressing Ontological Concerns

The basis of Augustine's ontological attack on theatre rests on the Platonic assumption that material images and the emotions are inherently bad; I will attempt to show that both of these assessments are ultimately untrue for Augustine before turning to a discussion of how theatre may be used fruitfully within an Augustinian framework. With respect to material images, Augustine is critical of them because he believes: 1) they lead the soul into materialist error thereby preventing it from knowing God through rational contemplation and 2) they stir up emotions that corrupt the will and cause moral weakness. However, this is not a tenable position for Augustine within the wider framework of his corpus, nor even with the *Confessions* themselves. However, before delving into an Augustinian defense of material creation, I would first like to briefly examine the biases that might have led Augustine to decry it so harshly in the first place.

Personal and Platonic Anti-Manichaean Bias

Several scholars have noted the centrality of physical imagery in the Manichaean language and pedagogical structure. Lee asserts that the Manichaean religious language itself is grounded in the physical and material realm, and as a result of this language Manichaean adherents are primed to think about their doctrines in a physical way.⁸³ BeDuhn makes the same argument regarding the blurring between material and spiritual in Manichaean rituals: “by conceptually grounding their daily behavior in the fundamental structures of the universe, Manichaeans collapsed physics into metaphysics, physiology into cosmology, and dietetics into

⁸³ Kam-Lun Edwin Lee, *Augustine, Manichaeism, and the Good* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000), 9.

sacrality.”⁸⁴ Finally, in Fuhrer’s article on Augustine’s use and subversion of Manichaeian ideals in the *Confessions*, she points out the centrality of illustrations and mental pictures in Manichaeian pedagogy.⁸⁵ She suggests that Augustine’s criticisms of the Manichaeians really come closer to a generalized criticism of myth (i.e. material images).⁸⁶ This is supported by the terminology Augustine uses to describe Manichaeian doctrine – *phantasmata*, *figmenta*, *falsa*, *mendacium*, *fabulae*, *res fabulosae* – all words associated with myth and storytelling or, for Augustine, its falsity.⁸⁷

Moreover, there is a personal element for Augustine extending beyond the doctrinal or ontological criticisms as the Manichaeians misled him for a decade keeping him from God. Chapter 2 discusses the materialist error – wherein the soul is habituated to thinking of spiritual things in excessively material terms, thus hindering its ability to know the immaterial Creator. The *Confessions* give repeated evidence for the Manichaeians leading Augustine into this error. The Manichaeians brought to Augustine a diet of “sun and moon” – physical works – to sate his hunger for God and as a result he “was imagining corporeal shapes” since he “had not realized God is a Spirit, not a figure whose limbs have length and breadth and who has a mass.”⁸⁸ Because the Manichaeians held that God was a physical being of light, thus limited in certain respects by space and time, Augustine was unable to conceive of any existence beyond the material realm.⁸⁹ For as long as Augustine was able to think only in material terms he was unable to know God, for “those fantasies [the Manichaeian teachings] had not the least resemblance to

⁸⁴ BeDuhn, "A regimen for salvation: medical models in manichaeian asceticism," *Semeia* 58, (1992): 109-134. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1292600548>

⁸⁵ Therese Fuhrer, “Augustine’s Moulding of the Manichaeian Idea of God in the *Confessions*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 67, no. 5 (2003): 531-547. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42003526>

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Augustine, *Confessions* iii.vi.10; iv.xv.26; iii.vi.12.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, v.x.19.

you [God] as you have now told me, because they were physical images, fictional bodily shapes.”⁹⁰ Indeed, even after leaving the Manichaeans their influence lingered; though he ceased thinking of God as the Manichaeans described, he was still unable to conceive of an abstract existence beyond the material as long as he was restricted by thinking in material terms.⁹¹ Their materialist influence made it so that “non-existent [was] anything not extended in space or diffused or concentrated or expanding, which does not possess, or is incapable of possessing, such qualities.”⁹²

Thus, to support and extend Fuhrer’s claim, not only does Augustine’s anti-Manichaean discussion contain elements of an anti-myth rhetoric, but his anti-theatre discussion is excessively steeped in his anti-Manichaean rhetoric. In general, I would contend that part of Augustine’s criticism of the theatre stems from the polemical nature of *City of God* and the anti-Manichaean bias of the *Confessions*, especially given the extremely personal nature of the latter. Certainly these biases do not account for the entirety of his attack, but a blurring of the lines between his anti-theatre and anti-Manichaean writings can be shown, especially because both center around the nature of materiality, and his theatrical critiques seem unduly severe for this reason.

Augustine also makes extensive use of Plato in refuting the Manichaeans. In the narrative of the *Confessions*, he places his discovery of the Platonic texts after his disillusionment with Mani and his discussion of the failure of Manichaean theodicy, setting up the Platonists as a better cosmological alternative.⁹³ Though he eventually comes to reject also the Platonists, he

⁹⁰ Ibid., iii.vi.10.

⁹¹ Ibid., vii.i.1.

⁹² Ibid., viii.i.2.

⁹³ Ibid., Book VII.

continues to make use of Platonic ideas in refuting the Manichaeans, despite the fact that the authorial Augustine had fully converted by the time of his writing the *Confessions*. Brown also notes that the ascetic circles in Italy, to which Augustine was drawn at the time of his conversion, were also ‘Platonic-flavoured’; as such, certain anti-material views of the human person, and of sexuality, were “taken for granted” in these circles.⁹⁴ Undoubtedly Augustine felt shame at his previous sexual excess and this, combined with his interest in Platonism and the culture of Italian asceticism, only fueled the severity of his views. Though, as we will come to see, Augustine eventually relaxed these views as bishop in the less ascetically-leaning Africa, it is possible that his lingering Platonic bias against material creation in the *Confessions* not only stemmed from his own engagement with Platonism, but the influence of the ascetics of his early conversion.

Thus, while elsewhere in his writing Augustine affirms an orthodox view of the goodness of creation, in using the Platonic texts to refute the Manichaean material error Augustine allows the anti-material bias to slip in and colour his attack on the Manichaeans (and in turn, the theatre). Thus, Augustine’s anti-material bias is thrice severe – once from his persona hatred of the Manichaeans, once from the influence of the Platonists and once from the influences of the Italian ascetics; these biases will reoccur as we examine what Augustine writes about material creation elsewhere in the *Confessions*.

⁹⁴ Peter Robert Lamont Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 19898.) 396. https://ocul-qu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_QU/1m1jubc/alma997292943405158

The Identity of God and the Problem of Evil

For Christians, creation is fundamentally *good*; over and over again we are told in Genesis that God makes a material part of creation and then affirms that it is good.⁹⁵ If Augustine is to be taken seriously as a Christian philosopher he cannot ignore this basic tenant of faith, and indeed, he does not in the wider context of his work. In order to understand Augustine's view of creation we must first briefly examine who the Creator is to him.⁹⁶ One of Augustine's central hurdles to conversion was the identity and nature of God as he was first drawn in by the Manichaeon materialist error and then subsequently misled by the Platonists. The mature Augustine holds that God is the supreme and highest good, if not He would not be God since something better would exist and whatever we called 'God' would in reality be a lesser good.⁹⁷ Consequently, God must be immutable and unchanging, for if He were to change He would no longer be the highest good in the universe – if something is wholly perfect it neither needs augmentation nor is it able to be augmented.⁹⁸ This also requires Him to be eternal, for if He were not always in existence, but created by Something Else, that Something would be higher and more powerful.

It is these – the omniscience, omnipotence, eternality, immutability, and supreme goodness of God – which brought Augustine into conflict with the Manichaeon and Platonic cosmologies, and it is in his refutation of these and affirmation of the Christian cosmology that we will return to his defense of material creation. Manichaeon doctrine is coloured by dualism,

⁹⁵ Genesis 1:1-31.

⁹⁶ Clearly the identity of God is a much more complex and lengthy discussion than can be examined in the present study, so I will be giving merely a surface level overview as is commonly agreed upon by Augustinian scholars and contemporary orthodox Christianity.

⁹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions* vii.iii.5-vii.iv.6; x.vii.11.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, i.vi.10; vii.iii.4.

positing the existence of two eternally opposing forces – the God of Light and the Prince of Darkness – both of whom had physical substance.⁹⁹ Though the good element is stronger than the evil, the latter cannot be wholly eradicated and both fight for dominance throughout the universe and more importantly, on the ‘battlefield’ of the human person.¹⁰⁰ The human person is home to both light and darkness; darkness because “the alienation of all physical matter from God is central to Mani’s belief” and light because its particles are “trapped” in the body and need to be freed.¹⁰¹ These forces struggle within the soul and when the darkness is victorious, a person sins, though not necessarily of their own accord.¹⁰²

It is this comingling of light and dark within the human person that poses several major problems for Augustine. Firstly, that Light particles – which to the Manichaeans *are* God’s substance – can be mixed with Darkness indicate that these particles cannot be God, for to be comingled is to undergo change and we have established that God must be immutable.¹⁰³ The same argument can be made regarding the Light particles’ ability to be hurt by the Darkness, for God must also be incorruptible. Moreover, the Light’s inability to eradicate the Darkness is proof that the Light is not omnipotent, again, it cannot thus be the Christian God. Finally, defining God in solely material terms limits Him in space and time, the same way material things are limited. This casts doubt on His eternal nature, and moreover, Drever claims it is sinful, since by replacing an immaterial divine creator with a physical image they are usurping God’s power –

⁹⁹ Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: a Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 13; Geo Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism*, (London: Weidenfel and Nicolson, 1965), 45.

¹⁰⁰ Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism*, 44.

¹⁰¹ Chadwick note 31 to *Confessions* ivxv.26; Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee*, 13-15.

¹⁰² Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of Good, Against the Manichaeans* 43 .” in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* vol. 4, trans. Newman, ed, Philip Schaff (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1887); This is different from Augustine’s “two wills” as in Augustine the wills are not made of two separate matters, light and dark, but rather one perfect will made depraved by the fall. I will discuss this more when we come to Augustine’s privation theory of evil.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*.

replacing the immaterial (over which we have no control) with the material (which we have some control, such as in the Manichaean practice of freeing Light particles from food by digesting them).¹⁰⁴

It is the Manichaean theodicy, however, that poses the biggest problem to Augustine and as a result provides us with his strongest affirmation of material creation. If God is omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent, as Augustine argues He must be, how can evil have material existence? If God is all good, He would not create evil matter; if He is all powerful, He would not make creation out of a pre-existing imperfect matter, but rather, through His infinite power, He would make creation *ex nihilo* with the best possible matter. The resulting creation would be Good because He is Good. Augustine affirms this in the *Confessions*, that God is not simply a craftsman, but the creator, and that creation was born from the fullness of God's Goodness.¹⁰⁵ Creation is thus made from the Goodness of God, and as it is made of separate matter from the immaterial substance of God, we are *from* God, not *of* Him – a distinction which will become important shortly.

Being *from* God, however, is still Good, for He is Good, and this is where we find Augustine's first necessary affirmation of the goodness of creation. In discussing creation *ex nihilo* in contrast to the Manichaean (and Platonic) cosmologies he states, "You made heaven and earth out of nothing, a great thing and a little thing, since you, both omnipotent and good, make all things good."¹⁰⁶ Again, he tells us that creation is Good because its Creator is "You, Lord, who are beautiful, made them for they are beautiful. You are good, for they are good. You

¹⁰⁴ Drever, "The Commercialization of Suffering."

¹⁰⁵ Augustine, *Confessions* xi.v.7; xiii.iv.5.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.vii.7.

are, for they are.”¹⁰⁷ In short, because it was created by a wholly Good and omnipotent God, Augustine explicitly states that “all nature, that is, every spirit and every body is naturally good.”¹⁰⁸

However, this does not solve the problem of the Manichaean explanation of evil; it is not enough to say ‘creation is Good because God is Good’ for this does not account for evil, the reality of which we would be folly to deny. Augustine must again necessarily defend material creation if he is to explain evil while still holding that God is both omnipotent and the supreme Good. We have established that the universe exists via creation, not emanation – we are *from* God, not *of* Him – and this distinction becomes important in Augustine’s explanation of evil. We know that God is incorruptible and immutable and so if our universe was *of* Him evil could not exist, for if matter that was *of* God was liable to corruption that would mean that He Himself would also be. We also know that evil cannot have physical substance as all created things are from God, who is all Good, and therefore all created things must also be Good.¹⁰⁹ However, material from God, while still inherently good, may be liable to corruption without threatening his immutability. Thus, Augustine must suggest a solution somewhere in between in order to explain evil – one that necessarily affirms the Goodness of God (and of creation) as well as His immutability; this is his privation theory.

Augustine struggles with the paradox which I have just laid out and instead suggests that evil does not have a true “existence” – i.e. material substance – but is rather the absence of good.¹¹⁰ Augustine tells us in *De Natura Boni* that “if He alone is unchangeable, all things that

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., xi.vi.6.

¹⁰⁸ Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of Good* 2.

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, *Confessions* vii.xii.18.

¹¹⁰ Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of Good* 18.

He has made, because He has made them out of nothing, are changeable.”¹¹¹ In the *Confessions* he describes this as a different “sense” of Good as created things cannot be equal to their Creator, implying that good things *from* God can be changeable while still inherently being good.¹¹²

Augustine asserts “evil is nothing else than corruption, either of the measure, or the form, or the order, that belong to nature. Nature therefore which has been corrupted, is called evil, for assuredly when incorrupt is good; but even when corrupt, so far as it is nature it is good, so far as it is corrupted it is evil.”¹¹³ Because creation is changeable it is liable to corruption, and this corruption, when it breaches God’s law, is evil; it is important to note Augustine’s affirmation that even when corrupted, the nature itself, in as much as it is a creation of God, remains good.

In his discussions of privation theory, both in the *Confessions* and in *De Natura Boni*, Augustine is forced to acknowledge the goodness of material creation as something cannot be corrupted if there was no goodness in the first place to be corrupted. He writes that, “every nature that can be corrupted is also itself some good; for corruption cannot injure it, except by taking away from or diminishing that which is good.”¹¹⁴ He lays this out most explicitly in the following passage:

it was obvious to me that things which are liable to corruption are good. If they were the supreme goods, or if they were not good at all, they could not be corrupted. For if they were supreme goods, they would be incorruptible. If there were no good in them, there would be nothing capable of being corrupted. ... If they were to be deprived of all good, they would not exist at all. If they were to exist and to be immune from corruptions, they would be superior because they would be permanently incorruptible ... Therefore, as long as they exist, they are good.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Ibid., 1.

¹¹² Augustine, *Confessions* xi.vi.6.

¹¹³ Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of Good* 4.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁵ Augustine, *Confessions* vii.xii.18.

Thus, though material creation is certainly liable to corruption (the mechanism of which we will return to in Chapter 5, material creation is inherently Good.

The Incarnation and Promise of Resurrection

Augustine's affirmations of the goodness of material creation do not lie solely in his discussion of cosmology and theodicy, but also in the centrality of the Incarnation and Resurrection for Christians. In discussing the doctrine of the Incarnation we must again briefly diverge to examine the development of Augustine's thought on the soul-body synthesis as here too he had been influenced by the Manichaean materialist error, and again in correcting this error he emphatically affirms the goodness of creation. Even for the young Augustine it is clear, due to Neoplatonic influence, that the soul could not be a material substance, for it can conceive of immaterial things – such as abstract numbers – and thus it must not be limited by space; the immortality of the soul too, points to its immateriality.¹¹⁶ What is unclear then, to this young Augustine, is how the immaterial soul is connected to the clearly material body. It is certain that there is a connection, for anyone can see that when a person dies their body remains, but some immaterial animating force is lost.

In seeking to answer this question Augustine is influenced by the Platonists' anti-material bias. We have already seen in chapter 2 the various opinions of the Platonic school regarding material creation, the emphasis being the pre-existence and transmigration of immaterial souls which, being polluted by the impurity of the body, can only return to their true destinations when liberated by death.¹¹⁷ This leads Porphyry, quoted by Augustine himself, to state that “the soul

¹¹⁶ John M. Rist, *Ancient Thought Baptized*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 95; Augustine, *Confessions* vi.xvi.26.

¹¹⁷ Plato, *Phaedo* 66, 72-3, 79-81; *Timaeus* 42.

must leave behind all union with a body in order that the soul may dwell in blessedness with God.¹¹⁸ In Augustine's early dialogues we see these opinions reflected; in *Against the Skeptics* and *Soliloquies* the body is a "dark prison", and the latter Reason tells Augustine that "these things of sense must be forsaken entirely".¹¹⁹ This posed a problem to Augustine in his acceptance of the Incarnation as he tells us:

Our Saviour himself, your only Son, I imagined emerging from the mass of your dazzling body of light for our salvation. I could believe of him only what my vain imagination could picture. I thought a nature such as his could not be born of the Virgin Mary without being mingled with flesh. That he could be mixed with us and not polluted I did not see, because my mental picture was what it was. I was afraid to believe him incarnate lest I had to believe him to be defiled by the flesh.¹²⁰

Thus, in turning to the Platonists to correct the Manichaeian materialist error, the young Augustine swung too far in the opposite direction developing a severe anti-material bias that prevented him from accepting the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation.

However, we know that "the Word became flesh and lived among us," so how was Augustine to understand the soul-body synthesis, especially as it applied to the Incarnation?¹²¹ Just as against the Manichaeans in the previous section, here too Augustine is called to affirm the goodness of material creation against the Platonists. Christ could not have taken on human form if such a form were to blemish or corrupt His Perfect Goodness, and thus, material creation must not be inherently evil or corrupting. This affirmation can best be seen in the development of Augustine's beliefs on the soul-body synthesis. What started out as a very Platonic view

¹¹⁸ Augustine, *City of God* 10.29.

¹¹⁹ Augustine, *Answer to Skeptics* 1.3.9, in *The Fathers of the Church* vol. 5, trans. Denis J. Kavanagh, ed. Ludwig Schopp (New York: Cima Publishing Co. Inc., 1948); Augustine, *Soliloquies* 1.14.24, in *The Fathers of the Church* vol. 5, trans. Thomas F. Gilligan, ed. Ludwig Schopp (New York: Cima Publishing Co. Inc., 1948); Rist, *Ancient Thought Baptized*, 98.

¹²⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* v.x.20.

¹²¹ John 1:14.

becomes a more holistic approach to the human person; Augustine introduces his concept of *persona* in letter 137.¹²² The *persona* is the blending of soul and body; it indicates a union of substances.¹²³ It is notable that he applies this new term not just to regular human beings, but to Christ Incarnate, affirming that material creation exists in harmony with the soul, rather than corrupting it.

He further supports the goodness of creation in his later and “more severe” works: *City of God* and *Retractationes*. In *City of God* Augustine asserts that man is “composed of both body and soul” and he affirms their equal importance when he says “it is when both are joined together that they receive the name of man. Neither part, however, loses the name of man even when each is spoken of singly.”¹²⁴ Instead of the soul being considered the essence of the man, both soul and (importantly for us) body are considered the “true” man. In *Retractationes* he clarifies the anti-material bias of his youth: “With regard to that statement I made there: ‘These things of sense must be entirely fled from,’ I should have been on my guard lest I be thought to hold the opinion of the false philosopher, Porphyry, according to which every body must be fled from.”¹²⁵ Thus, though many scholars have interpreted the mature Augustine as becoming more ascetic and harsh, we see that in the development of his thought on the soul and Incarnation, he actually increasingly affirms the inherent goodness of the material world in contrast to his younger self.¹²⁶

¹²² Rist, *Ancient Thought Baptized*, 100.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Augustine, *City of God* 13.24.

¹²⁵ Augustine, *The Retractations* 1.4.3, in *The Fathers of the Church* vol. 60, trans. Sr. Mary Inex Bogan, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1968.)

¹²⁶ O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence*, 130.

The final element of Augustine's assertion of creation's goodness appears in his discussion of the Resurrection, which is intimately tied to his treatment of the Incarnation and integrated human *persona*. Here too Augustine's early beliefs are coloured by a Platonic and Italian ascetic anti-material bias. In the *Cassiciacum* dialogues Augustine speculates that Adam's original body was not of flesh, or at least not flesh as we know it, but that these only emerged after the Fall. As a result, at the Resurrection, it would not be our current bodies that would ascend to Heaven, but bodies of "spiritual" flesh, more similar to the Platonic *ochema* of the soul.¹²⁷ This aligns with the ascetic exegesis of Genesis common in the circles within which Augustine made his conversion.¹²⁸ Augustine is eventually obligated to change his beliefs in order to fully accept the reality of the Incarnation as told by the Gospels; Christ's Resurrection and Ascension were of the flesh so the soul *and* body must both be acknowledged to be Good for this belief to be tenable. This leads Augustine to affirm that Adam and Eve had physical bodies and were sexual creatures even in Eden – flesh and sexuality were not merely a result of the Fall since the first humans were specifically told to 'increase and multiply'.¹²⁹ This also leads to his support of the necessity of the material flesh in the Resurrection, not just Christ's, but the ultimate Resurrection at the end of time.¹³⁰ Yet again, despite the seeming asceticism of the mature Augustine, his emphasis on bodily Resurrection only increases in his later works, especially once he is forced to abandon the Platonic idea of the disincarnate pre-existence of souls, thus removing the idea of the soul needing to "escape" the body in the final Resurrection and instead stressing its teleological importance.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Rist, *Ancient Thought Baptized*, 98-9.

¹²⁸ Brown, *Body and Society*, 400.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Rist, *Ancient Thought Baptized*, 99.

¹³¹ O'Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence*, 136.

Augustine's privation theory and orthodox acceptance of the doctrines of Incarnation and Resurrection thus do not only have implications for the perfect *persona* of Christ, but also for every human being, and thus, for material creation more generally. Though initially opposed to material creation because of his Platonic Anti-Manichaeism bias, Augustine in explaining the origins of evil must affirm the goodness of material creation. Not to do so would be to limit the supreme Goodness or omnipotence of God, both of which would pose major theological problems with identifying God as 'God'. Moreover, that Christ was both soul and body without corrupting Him indicates that the flesh – material creation – is not inherently evil; it is not as the Platonists held and the soul is not "trapped" or made lesser by the body.

In discussing the Incarnation and Resurrection, Augustine affirms that the body, though material, is good and moreover, that its material nature is a necessary component of the final Resurrection. If, as we have established, material creation is not a wholesale evil that the Platonists make them out to be, some of Augustine's attack on theatre loses its severity – though material images can still be corrupting (we will return to how this is later), we cannot condemn theatre on the basis that it is a material image alone. The inherent goodness of material images contained within Augustine's larger framework has led Drever to conclude that the physical world is "harmonious with God's invisible, spiritual purpose. The created world has an integrity – truth, beauty, and goodness – grounded in the creative act of God and guaranteed in the saving act of Christ."¹³² Within a Christian framework, material images are not necessarily distracting from the immaterial God because He took on material form, in the process "meeting us where we are."¹³³

¹³² Drever, "Entertaining Violence."

¹³³ The usefulness of material images in leading us to God – both the immaterial Father and the Incarnate Son – will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 – Pagan Virtue and the Emotions: Addressing Ethical Concerns

I hope that by this point I have shown that theatre does not deserve wholesale condemnation from Augustine on ontological grounds. Having done this, we may now finally return to his ethical criticisms. If we remember, Augustine attacked theatre because: 1) it invites the viewer to imitate its immoral, often sexual, content, 2) it evokes strong emotions, and 3) its seemingly inseparable ties to pagan religion. Issues 1 and 3 may be addressed simultaneously.

Pagan Virtue

With regards to the immorality of stage plays not much can be said except that in the redeemed theatre more care would need to be taken to ensure the content of such spectacles would not lead the soul to ruin – this would outright ban sexually explicit works which border on pornography, but less of a clear delineation exists for non-sexual content. Of course, this is still a topic of debate for modern Christians regarding the consumption of secular media, and if a complete solution is possible, it is far beyond the scope of this study.

Though I will not attempt to provide a full resolution to his ethical criticisms, the first step for both pagan ties and lack of Christian virtue in theatre may be found in Augustine's writings. In *Christian Instruction* Augustine discusses the sack of Egypt by the Israelites in Exodus; he argues that the Israelites' repurposing of the Egyptian treasures for better use is what Christians ought to do with pagans in his own time. He writes:

In the same way, all the teachings of the pagans have counterfeit and superstitious notions and oppressive burdens of useless labor, which anyone of us, leaving the association of pagans with Christ as our leader, ought to abominate and shun. However, they also contain liberal instruction more adapted to the service of truth

and also very useful principles about morals; even some truths about the service of the one God Himself are discovered among them.¹³⁴

For the Christian, not only is it permissible to ‘cherry-pick’ the good parts from pagan society, but, according to Augustine, she “ought to take these from them for the lawful service of preaching the Gospel. It is also right for us to receive and possess, in order to convert to Christian use ... those human institutions suited to intercourse with men which we cannot do without in this life.”¹³⁵ Admittedly, Augustine does not apply this specifically to the theatre, likely because his own negative experiences biased him against it, but this passage provides a legitimate framework within which it would be acceptable for Christians to engage with the originally pagan institution of the theatre.

This notion of repurposing may also be applied to pagan notions of virtue.¹³⁶ Though Augustine spends much of *City of God* refuting pagan notions of virtue for their pride, arguing that they are really vices, Rist argues that Augustine does not in fact condemn them outright, instead they are “not good, but not explicitly bad either.”¹³⁷ To see how Augustine may repurpose elements of pagan virtue we must look to Herdt and her comments on his treatment of Regulus in Book 1 of *City of God*.¹³⁸ Regulus dies ignobly, tortured to death by the Carthaginians; Augustine, however, treats this as praiseworthy because Regulus willingly submitted to his fate for the sake of an oath he had sworn to the gods.¹³⁹ Though having sworn this oath to pagan gods, Augustine still praises Regulus – inasmuch as a pagan hero may be

¹³⁴ Augustine, *Christian Instruction* 1.40.60, in *The Fathers of the Church* vol. 2, trans. John J. Gavigan, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.40.60.

¹³⁶ Herdt, “Theatre of the virtues,” 123-125.

¹³⁷ Rist, *Ancient Thought Baptized* 172.

¹³⁸ Herdt, “Theatre of the virtues,” 124.

¹³⁹ Augustine, *City of God* 1.15.

praised – for his “noble instance of the willing endurance of captivity for the sake of religion.”¹⁴⁰ Clearly Augustine is not encouraging us to swear oaths to pagan gods, but his praise of Regulus shows that “these splendid vices can nevertheless offer a positive example for Christians” and Herdt affirms that because of this pagan examples “become a legitimate object of speculation and emulation even if not a perfect exemplar.”¹⁴¹

Thus, Augustine himself gives us an example where, with certain caveats, it is acceptable for Christians to take what is exemplary of pagan virtue and imitate it in service of the Christian God. Could we not take this example of a historical pagan hero and apply it to those on stage? I suggest the *Antigone*, for example, which emphasizes the importance of familial and religious duty over duty to a secular state. Though Antigone’s duties are pagan, the example of Regulus shows us that Augustine calls Christians to separate out the ‘good’ bits of pagan virtue for imitation; surely Antigone’s devotion to the point of death is something that Augustine would encourage among his own congregation in the face of religious persecution. While certainly some shows, especially sexually explicit ones, cannot be part of the redeemed theatre, not all secular shows deserve condemnation for lacking explicitly Christian virtues, not even for someone as severe as Augustine, for he himself repurposes pagan examples and institutions for Christian purposes.

The Emotions

With regards to his criticism of the emotions, much as with material images, a wholesale condemnation of the emotions is not cohesive within Augustine’s larger framework because of the affirmation of creation and the integrated human *persona* discussed in the previous chapter.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 1.15.

¹⁴¹ Herdt, “Theatre of the virtues,” 123.

However, before discussing this, it is once again important to examine what influences may have led Augustine to such a severe anti-emotion stance in the first place; for material images I argued that this was a Platonic, anti-Manichaean bias, for the emotions, once again the Platonists, and now the Stoics, are responsible.

Stoic Bias Against the Emotions

I have already discussed the Platonic view of the emotions in Chapter 2, but in summary, Plato is hostile to the emotions because they are associated with the baser parts of the soul and this association causes moral weakness in the person habituated to experiencing these emotions. The Stoics, largely via Cicero, are another of the central intellectual influences on the young Augustine and their position on the emotions is even more severe than that of the Platonists. The emotions are extremely problematic to the Stoics because they not only create mental weakness – a “sickness of the soul” – but they warp the value judgements central to Stoic teaching.¹⁴² For the Stoics nothing is to be valued or considered good except for virtue and acting virtuously, conversely nothing is bad except for vice, all other things beyond the sphere of our control are morally neutral. Certainly, some things such as health, safety, etc., can be considered *preferable* to their lack; however, they are not to be valued as goods having intrinsic worth since virtue is the only thing needed for a eudaimonistic life.¹⁴³

Anything that causes a person to value something else above or equal to virtue is therefore problematic to the Stoics. Nussbaum argues that the emotions are such an issue to the Stoics for this reason. The existence of strong emotion – positive or negative – in a person

¹⁴² Martha Nussbaum, “The Stoics on the Extirpation of the Passions,” *Aperion* 20, no. 2 (1987): 129-177. https://oculqu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01OCUL_QU/s1tcf8/proquest1300369763

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

implies that we ascribe some sort of import to an object outside of virtue since we would not feel intensely about them if we did not value them: “Fear requires the thought that important damages can happen to us through no fault of our own; anger, again, requires the thought that the item slighted by another is of serious value.”¹⁴⁴ Thus these incorrect value judgements – the belief that X is important, X being anything other than virtue – leaves one prone to emotions. Just as in the Platonic framework, these cause psychological weakness and open us up to more emotions and more false value judgements – worry about X being lost, desire to gain more of X, envy if someone has X and we do not.¹⁴⁵

Since the Stoics believed that the emotions stemmed from falsely held beliefs, rather than being part of an innate non-rational part of the human soul, they believed that they could be eradicated from the human person by correcting these value judgements. Indeed, in response to this problem, the Stoics did not merely call for the moderation of emotions, but the complete removal of them. Cicero exhorts us to “be bold enough not only to prune away the branches of unhappiness [caused by the emotions], but to yank out its very roots, down to the last fiber.”¹⁴⁶ Sorabji argues that this influence is clear in Augustine’s early works where he relies heavily on the Stoics; in *On the Catholic and Manichaeon Ways of Life* he writes “who does not allow that the wise man should be free from all such *miseria*?”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 3.13, trans. Margaret Graver (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁷ Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 397.

Emotions, the Persona, and the Incarnation

Once again, however, this belief creates tension with Augustine's acceptance of the doctrine of the Incarnation until he is forced to abandon the Stoic bias for Christian obedience to doctrine. I established in the previous chapter that the mature Augustine could not prioritize the soul over the material body, rather, because of the reality of the Incarnation, he was led to support an ineffable integration between the two where neither can be considered independent. This integration of the *persona* also has wider reaching implications for the place of emotions in human life. Smith argues that since the human person is inherently good (albeit led to concupiscence by the Fall), then the emotions – which are natural and inherent in every person – are part of a good creation. They cannot be condemned entirely any more than material creation can be; Smith asks, “as part of a good creation, is there not space for the affirmation of passions and emotional embodiment as structural elements of the human person which can be employed for different ends?”¹⁴⁸ I will return to how the emotions can (and cannot) be morally employed, but for now it is sufficient to state that an acceptance of the emotions must be implicitly contained within Augustine due to his affirmation of the goodness of creation.

Moreover, *explicit* support for the emotions also exists within Augustine's discussions of Christ Incarnate in both the *Confessions* and *City of God*. In Book 7 of the *Confessions* Augustine writes about his struggle to conversion because of his difficulty in accepting the Incarnation; he says that through scripture he learned that Christ “ate and drank, slept, walked, was filled with joy, was sad, conversed.”¹⁴⁹ He read in Scripture that Christ was deeply moved and wept at the death of Lazarus, that He “eagerly desired” to eat the Passover with the disciples,

¹⁴⁸ Smith, “Staging the Incarnation.”

¹⁴⁹ Augustine, *Confessions* vii.xix.25.

and He drove the moneylenders out of the Temple in anger.¹⁵⁰ Augustine struggled to accept Christ as both human and divine because he was told that He had emotions and surely God could not experience such a human frailty, just as Augustine had believed that God could not be commingled with material flesh and remain perfect. Eventually he comes to accept “the whole man to be in Christ, not only the body of a man or soul and body without a mind, but a fully human person.”¹⁵¹ With this acceptance comes the acknowledgement that the emotions are not inherently corrupting since Christ was able to experience them. Indeed, in *City of God* Augustine emphasizes Christ’s emotions as part of His human nature against heretics who did not acknowledge the full humanity of Christ.¹⁵² Augustine goes as far as to claim that the emotions are necessary to living a moral life. He writes, “if we felt no such emotions at all while subject to the infirmity of this life, we should then certainly not be living righteously” for if we did not experience grief, we would not be able to mourn our sins and make an effort to live more virtuously.¹⁵³

Christ weeping at the death of Lazarus also raises an important question regarding Augustine’s weeping at the death of Monica as this passage is often held up by scholars as one of Augustine’s strongest condemnations of emotions, and indeed I quoted it as such in Chapter 2. However, Christ’s weeping demands a re-examination of the passage and, following Helm, I argue that it is not so much an attack on grief itself as it is an attack on certain beliefs surrounding death. Augustine tells us that he suffered grief at Monica’s death because of “the break of habit formed by our living together, a very affectionate and precious bond suddenly torn

¹⁵⁰ John 11:33-35; Luke 22:15; Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-16.

¹⁵¹ Augustine, *Confessions* vii.xix.25.

¹⁵² Sorabji, *Emotions and Peace of Mind*, 398, Origen, Basil, and Jerome also wrote against these heretics; Augustine, *City of God* 14.9.

¹⁵³ Augustine, *City of God* 14.9.

apart.”¹⁵⁴ Augustine grieves because he was attached to his mother and just as with theatre, repeated association with something forms bonds of habit, in turn causing a “dangerous” attachment to the physical world. Indeed, Wolterstorff argues that Augustine derides the emotions he felt at the death of his friend in Tagaste and of Monica because these emotions are symptoms of his attachment to the fleeting physical world rather than his attachment to the unchanging God.¹⁵⁵ If he were unattached to Monica, he would not suffer grief at her absence. However, we know that Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus without sinning; if not an attack on worldly companionship or the emotions, why is Augustine so harsh at the death of Monica? I suggest we look to Helm’s response to Wolterstorff’s article.

Helm disagrees with Wolterstorff’s assessment and makes the distinction between types of grief. Helm claims that there are two types of grief for Augustine in the *Confessions* – grief at the loss of companionship and grief at the belief that the deceased is no more.¹⁵⁶ For a Christian, the former is acceptable, but the latter is problematic because it indicates that the bereaved does not hold an orthodox belief in the soul’s continued existence after death. At the time of the death of his friend from Tagaste, Augustine tells us that “I had felt that my soul and his soul were ‘one soul in two bodies.’ So my life was to me a horror. I did not wish to live with only one half of myself, and perhaps the reason why I so feared death was that then the whole of my much loved friend would have died.”¹⁵⁷ Augustine’s grief lacks the hope of Heaven for he “had no hope that he would come back to life.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, the grief Augustine felt at this time was not limited to the

¹⁵⁴ Augustine, *Confessions* ix.xii.30.

¹⁵⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Suffering Love,” in *Augustine’s Confessions: Critical Essays*, ed. William E. Mann, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2006), 110.

¹⁵⁶ Paul Helm, “Augustine’s Grievs,” in *Augustine’s Confessions: Critical Essays*, ed. William E. Mann, (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2006), 152-3.

¹⁵⁷ Augustine, *Confessions* iv.vi.11.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, iv.v.10.

loss of companionship, but was worsened by the belief that the separation from his friend was eternal.

Helm argues, however, that for the Christian Augustine, his grief is limited to the loss of companionship since he has come to believe in Heaven and hopes that Monica's soul resides there.¹⁵⁹ He writes about Monica's funeral:

We did not think it right to celebrate the funeral with tearful dirges and lamentations, since in most cases it is customary to use such mourning to imply sorrow for the miserable state of those who die, or even their complete extinction. But my mother's dying meant neither that her state was miserable nor that she was suffering extinction. We were confident of this because of the evidence of her virtuous life, her 'faith unchanged', and reasons of which we felt certain.¹⁶⁰

Let us look also at the passage where Augustine finally weeps at the death of Monica:

I was glad to weep before you about her and for her, about myself and for myself. Now I let flow the tears which I had held back so that they ran as freely as they wished. My heart rested upon them, and it reclined upon them because it was your ears that were there, not those of some human critic who would put a proud interpretation on my weeping.¹⁶¹

Not only is Augustine "glad" to weep at her death, but this passage hints at the real reason Augustine shushed Adeodatus and restrained his own tears, namely, the fear of (mis)judgement from others. Augustine fears his tears will be taken as an indication of inappropriate beliefs about death – the same inappropriate beliefs which led to his 'excessive' grief at the death of his friend – that the soul has gone to Hades or ceased to exist entirely – rather than the Christian hope of Heaven. It is morally permissible to grieve the loss of companionship – Jesus did so at the death of Lazarus – provided we do not believe that we are eternally separated from them, or that their

¹⁵⁹ Helm, "Augustine's Grievs," 152-3.

¹⁶⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* ix.xii.29.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, ix.xii.33.

very soul has ceased to exist. Consequently, Augustine's severity at the death of Monica is not an attack on emotions at all, nor is it, as Wolterstorff claims, a criticism of worldly attachment – for Christ had both in moderation – in reality it is a (perhaps excessive) reaction to Augustine's fear of being perceived as unorthodox.

Thus, just as material creation has intrinsic goodness and cannot be condemned wholesale within an Augustinian framework, neither can the emotions. In affirming the goodness and integrity of the human *persona* Augustine implicitly acknowledges the goodness of the emotions – a phenomenon innate to humans. In discussing the doctrine of the Incarnation Augustine gives explicit support for the emotions since Christ experienced them without sinning. This acceptance of Christ as both fully human and divine forces us to re-examine Augustine's reaction to his mother's death where we can see that this too is not a condemnation of the emotions but a fear of un-orthodoxy, perhaps coloured by lingering Stoic bias. Moreover, theatre cannot be wholly condemned by the content of its spectacles either. While it may be granted that some content – the sexually explicit – is completely irreconcilable with an Augustinian theatre, Augustine's praise of Regulus shows us that even "pagan virtues" may be re-appropriated for Christian purposes if viewed through the correct lens. So, Augustine's ethical criticism of the theatre cannot be wholesale for neither the emotions nor pagan virtue are wholly irredeemable.

Chapter 5 – Directing Theatre to a Holy Telos

Uti/Frui and the *Ordo Amoris*: How Not to Use Theatre

I have thus far established that a wholesale condemnation of the theatre is not possible within Augustine’s wider framework because, as he himself affirms, neither material images nor the emotions are inherently evil. Before we turn to how these can be licitly directed toward holy ends, it is beneficial to look at how theatre should not be used; for this, let us turn to Augustine’s ethical framework. Like the rest of creation, the images and emotions of the theatre are still susceptible to corruption via the Fall and human concupiscence, and once corrupted these in turn become corrupting to the soul via the mechanisms outlined in chapter 2. But how, aside from general concupiscence, are they liable to corruption in the first place? Moreover, does this corruption affect all of creation, or just theatre? Here Kent’s reminder that for Augustine, virtue is nothing more than “rightly ordered love” is useful for it is when this order of love becomes disrupted that inherently good parts of creation can become corrupting.¹⁶²

In *Christian Instruction* Augustine famously lays out his *uti/frui* ethical framework wherein he distinguishes between things that are for enjoyment (*frui*) and things that are for use (*uti*): “To enjoy anything means to cling to it with affection for its own sake. To use a thing is to employ what we have received for our use to obtain what we want, provided that it is right for us to want it.”¹⁶³ O’Donovan draws attention to Augustine’s distinction between love *propter aliud* and love *propter se* in order to explain this division: loving something *propter aliud* is to love it for the sake of another, in this case, it is for the sake of loving God (*uti*), while loving *propter se*

¹⁶² Kent, “Augustine’s ethics,” 215.

¹⁶³ Augustine, *Christian Instruction* 1.4.4.

is to love for God alone (*frui*).¹⁶⁴ For Augustine, God alone is to be enjoyed since He alone is eternal and unchangeable; “the other things are to be used that we may be able to arrive at a complete enjoyment of the former.”¹⁶⁵

Both O’Donovan and Kent assert that this is not like the Kantian means/end dichotomy since Augustine’s *uti* does not have the same exploitative slant as our own connotations of ‘to use.’¹⁶⁶ For Augustine everything in existence is on a scale of worth descending from God from whom all worth derives. From God we have beings with rational thought (humans), beings without rational thought (animals), and finally, inanimate objects. Of this O’Donovan writes:

The subordination of the world to God is not primarily a decision of the subject; it is an ontological reality which confronts the subject and demands that he conform his love to it. Because God, for Augustine, is both *beata vita* and *lex aeterna*, participation in the joy of the divine being is at the same time an embrace of the created order and an obedience to the divine law. To love one's neighbor 'for God's sake' is nothing other than to love him realistically, understanding the given fact that he is a creature ontologically ordered to the uncreated supreme being.¹⁶⁷

That is to say, while people certainly have their intrinsic worth, “we should enjoy them as related to God,” rather than for their own sake.¹⁶⁸ Kent affirms that “while we ought to appreciate the value that all people have in their own right, we must never forget that none of us has value independent of God” and so we are to ‘use’ them in order to enjoy within them the image of the divine Creator.¹⁶⁹ In fact, enjoying people for the sake of God, rather than for their own sake, forces us to recognize that they are made in His image and thus steers us away from exploiting

¹⁶⁴ Oliver O’Donovan, “Usus and Fruitio in Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana I,” in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 33, no. 2 (1982), 36.

¹⁶⁵ Augustine, *Christian Instruction* 1.5.5; 1.22.20.

¹⁶⁶ O’Donovan, “Usus and Fruitio,” 361; Kent, “Augustine’s ethics,” 214.

¹⁶⁷ O’Donovan, “Usus and Fruitio,” 362.

¹⁶⁸ Kent, “Augustine’s ethics,” 214.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 214-5.

them as a Kantian ‘means’. Thus, Augustine’s *uti/frui* ethical structure is centered on correctly ordering one’s love to align with the ontological realities of creation.

It is this point that has significant bearing on our topic since the theatre, while not inherently evil, can be brought to evil means when as part of material creation it is moved out of its place in the *ordo amoris*. Though the *uti/frui* framework is not made explicit in the *Confessions* the way it is in *Christian Instruction*, Augustine acknowledges it in the *Confessions* when he writes, “The good which you love is from him. But it is only as it is related to him that it is good and sweet. Otherwise it will justly become bitter, for all that comes from him is unjustly loved if he has been abandoned.”¹⁷⁰ Moreover, the abuse of the *ordo amoris* appears throughout the *Confessions*. For example, in debating good and evil with Alypius and Nebridius Augustine tells us:

I was so submerged and blinded that I could not think of the light of moral goodness and of a beauty to be embraced for its own sake - beauty seen not by the eye of the flesh, but only by inward discernment. In my somber state I did not consider from what fountain came the flow of delightful conversation with friends (though on such sordid subjects), nor the fact that without friends I could not be happy even when my mind was at the time a flood of indulgence in physical pleasures. My friends I loved indeed for their own sake; and I felt that in return they loved me for my sake.¹⁷¹

Though it was of course not wrong to enjoy time with his friends, Augustine prioritizes them excessively to the point of ignoring the Creator from whom his friends, and his enjoyment of them flows. Elsewhere he speaks of those who acknowledge creation to be good but are displeased with God in it because “they wish to find their enjoyment in creation rather than in you.”¹⁷² So, for Augustine, in a proper ethical framework God must always be the ultimate object

¹⁷⁰ Augustine *Confessions* iv.xii.18.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, vi.xvi.26.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, xiii.xxxi.46.

of love, solely He may be enjoyed for His own sake, and while we may love worldly things in the sense that we may ‘use’ them, we must always value them less than Him.

Fendt applies this ethical framework directly to the theatre and argues that when we misuse theatre we disrupt the proper teleological ends of the images and emotions which constitute theatre; instead of directing them toward God, we direct them inwards, treating theatre as the ultimate good of creation, thus “transforming *uti* into *frui*”.¹⁷³ Smith makes a similar argument about the emotions which theatre evokes saying that “the arousal of passion for its own sake constitutes a fundamental usurpation of the role that desire for God ought to play in the formation of the self.”¹⁷⁴ This is the ‘malicious goodwill’ which we discussed in chapter 2, where feeling mercy becomes an object of enjoyment rather than an object of use, we value feeling pleasure at having mercy more than we value the act of mercy itself.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, within Augustine’s ethical framework theatre becomes an evil only when it is ‘enjoyed’ for its own ends. For example, Augustine’s youthful addiction to the theatre where he was so engrossed that he lost sight of God and the state of his soul.¹⁷⁶ However, this warping of the *ordo amoris* can be applied to any aspect of creation – it is not solely a liability of the theatre – and indeed as we have seen, Augustine uses examples outside of the theatre to illustrate this framework and so we cannot single out theatre alone for criticism. Thus, although theatre may be misdirected to an unholy end if it is ‘enjoyed’ in such a way that it disrupts the *ordo amoris*, its very existence does not necessitate said corruption any more than any other aspect of creation.

¹⁷³ Fendt, “The Moral Problem.”

¹⁷⁴ Smith, “Staging the Incarnation.”

¹⁷⁵ Augustine, *Confessions* iii.ii.3.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, iii.ii.2-3.

The Holy Telos: The Correct Use of Theatre

We have thus far addressed several elements of Augustine's attack on theatre. First, that material images are inherently bad, and second, that the emotions are inherently bad. I have shown that within the wider Augustinian framework neither of these beliefs are tenable. Moreover, I have outlined the framework within which theatre may be corruption and pointed out that it is no more liable than any other aspect of good creation. If theatre may be corrupted to the point of being 'enjoyed' for its ends, may we not conceive of a theatre whose enjoyment may be 'used' in order to enjoy God more fully? It is to this – what Smith calls the “redeemed theatre” – that I now devote the remainder of this study to.¹⁷⁷

The Ascensional Aesthetic

The most common Christian defense of the arts situates itself with a Platonic-flavoured ascensional aesthetic. In Plato's *Symposium* there is a discussion of the famous 'ladder of love' by which the philosopher may move from contemplation of a beautiful body through several intermediary steps to the contemplation of the immaterial Form of Beauty itself.¹⁷⁸ Despite the Platonic disdain for the material body discussed in previous chapters, there is room for materiality to be used as a stepping stone by which the soul may come to contemplate the (superior) immaterial realm. Likely due to Plotinian influence, Augustine describes a similar ascent of the soul several times in the *Confessions*:

And what is the object of my love? I asked the earth and it said: 'It is not I.' I asked all that is in it; they made the same confession. I asked the sea, the deeps, the living creatures that creep, and they responded: 'We are not your God, look beyond us.' I asked the breezes which blow and the entire air with its inhabitants said: 'Anaximenes was mistaken; I am not God.' I asked heaven,

¹⁷⁷ Smith, "Staging the Incarnation."

¹⁷⁸ Plato, *Symposium* 210a-212b.

sun, moon and stars; they said: ‘Nor are we the God whom you seek.’ And I said to all these things in my external environment: ‘Tell me of my God who you are not, tell me something about him.’ And with a great voice they cried out: ‘He made us’ ... What then do I love when I love my God? Who is he who is higher than the highest element in my soul? Through my soul I will ascend to him.¹⁷⁹

In Augustine’s ascent he repeatedly consults parts of material creation in his search for God; each of these parts in turn tells him that they are not God, and instead by their very existence point Augustine towards the immaterial soul, and from there, to the immaterial God. Augustine lays out this ascent of the soul even more clearly in book 7:

I asked myself why I approved of the beauty of bodies, whether celestial or terrestrial, and what justification I had for giving an unqualified judgement on mutable things, saying ‘This ought to be thus, and that ought not to be thus’. In the course of this inquiry why I made such value judgements as I was making, I found the unchangeable and authentic eternity of truth to transcend my mutable mind. And so step by step I ascended from bodies to the soul which perceives through the body, and from there to its inward force, to which bodily senses report external sensations, this being as high as the beasts go. From there again I ascended to the power of reasoning to which is to be attributed the power of judging the deliverances of the bodily senses. This power, which in myself I found to be mutable, raised itself to the level of its own intelligence, and led my thinking out of the ruts of habit. It withdrew itself from the contradictory swarms of imaginative fantasies, so as to discover the light by which it was flooded. ... So in the flash of a trembling glance it attained to that which is. At that moment I saw your ‘invisible nature understood through the things which are made’ (Rom. 1:20).¹⁸⁰

However, this vision did not last since Augustine “did not possess the strength to keep my vision fixed”; I will attempt to provide a solution to this problem shortly.¹⁸¹ In quoting Romans 1:20 Augustine lends support to the idea that material goods can be a stepping-off point from which to seek God. Thus, scholars often attempt to rehabilitate the theatre in Augustine by pointing out

¹⁷⁹ Augustine, *Confessions* x.vi.9-vii.11.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, vii.xvii.23.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

how these lesser and material goods can be used as signposts to direct us from the sensible to the intelligible.¹⁸² In the ascensional aesthetic material beauty becomes the foundation from which the soul can find God.

The Incarnational Aesthetic

Following O’Connell, Smith, and Drever, however, I would also like to suggest a secondary, and more important, Augustinian defense of theatre – that of the incarnational aesthetic. O’Connell claims that the ascensional aesthetic “would tend to relativize, even devalue sense-beauty; it would incite the soul to flee that world as essentially a ‘mendacious’ image, would present it with a ladder for mounting to a higher world where alone ‘true’ beauty dwells.”¹⁸³ While there is nothing wrong with utilizing theatre as a stepping stone to knowing the immaterial God, the reality of the Incarnation has shown that creation has value beyond that. The incarnational aesthetic proposes that theatre can be useful in its own right – that its material and affective nature is the very thing which allows the soul to know God, rather than being a jumping-off point.

To illuminate the incarnational aesthetic we must once again contrast Augustine’s Christian framework with that of the Stoics and Platonists. These schools limit themselves to one way of knowing – that of the intellectual or rational; – Smith argues that the Christian approach must incorporate other methods of knowing: “Christian anthropology affirms the integrity of the embodied self (in contrast to a Platonic privileging of the soul), a Christian epistemology must resist the Western temptation to reduce knowing to only one of its mode – the cognitive – and

¹⁸² O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence*, 16; Smith, “Staging the Incarnation”; Drever, “Entertaining Violence.”

¹⁸³ O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence*, 22.

rather appreciate the multiple modes of knowing (affective, tactile, sensible, etc.).”¹⁸⁴ The most important of Smith’s suggestions is from the Greek *αἴσθησις*, from which we get our word aesthetic; *aisthesis* is an affective way of knowing that relies on our sense-perceptions and the materiality of our natures. In fact, Drever asserts that knowing through *aesthesis* is even more effective than the ascensional approach because “the power of material images to shape human identity plays off the more fundamental way human identity is formed as the image of the immaterial God.”¹⁸⁵ O’Connell points out the same phenomenon when he asks, “why is it that the incorporeal truth we seek affects us not less, but more powerfully, when alloyed with image, allegory, symbol?”¹⁸⁶ Even the modern magisterium acknowledges this role of affective art in Christian life; Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said, “The only really effective apologia for Christianity comes down to two arguments, namely the saints the Church has produced and the art which has grown in her womb.”¹⁸⁷ Thus, far from being an inferior substitute for the rational ascent of the soul, material images and their affectivity contained within an incarnational framework provide a more fundamental means of knowing since we are creatures of flesh as much as we are creatures of emotions; as such, *aesthesis* deserves its own place alongside, not subordinated to, intellectual *noesis*.

Not only is incarnational knowledge a valid alternative to ascensional, within Augustine’s framework and due to the Fall, it is a *necessary* one. Paul tells us that “now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”¹⁸⁸ For Augustine, this passage indicated that because of the Fall we do not only

¹⁸⁴ Smith, “Staging the Incarnation.”

¹⁸⁵ Drever, “Entertaining Violence.”

¹⁸⁶ O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence*, 133.

¹⁸⁷ Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 129-130.

¹⁸⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:12

have to toil in a physical sense to bring forth food from the earth, but we must also struggle in our communication – our communication between each other and our communication between the self and the Divine Truth. The Fall created a layer of opacity between these things – a divide between the inner and outer person and a divide between the complete *persona* and God.¹⁸⁹ Thus, in order to overcome this opacity and to “endeavor to express the intentions of [one’s] heart” we had to develop language.¹⁹⁰ However, language is nothing more than a series of imprecise signs and symbols, which, as O’Connell points out, are nothing more than imitative images since they are similar but “not like the Truth.”¹⁹¹ Even God’s self-revelation through the Incarnation was via a ‘sign’ as Christ does not reveal the fullness of the beatific vision to us but acts rather as symbolic intermediary.¹⁹² Augustine’s spiritual experience with Monica at Ostia is often touted as an example of moving from physical signs (the conversation between the two) to transcendental ones (the beatific vision), but given the nature of our earthly experience this ability to communicate without signs is necessarily limited – we inevitably must return to using earthly, imperfect signs for as long as we have earthly, imperfect flesh.¹⁹³ Augustine acknowledges this implicitly in his conveyance of the story by the very fact that he needs to use language to communicate it to his audience, language which inevitably fails to communicate the full reality of the beatific vision to his readers. Material images thus become a necessary aid, not a hindrance, to knowing God.

Indeed, Augustine explicitly addresses the value of these material signs as evangelical tools several times in the *Confessions*. In book 13 he writes:

¹⁸⁹ O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence*, 122.

¹⁹⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* i.viii.13.

¹⁹¹ O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence*, 96; Augustine, *Confessions* i.viii.13.

¹⁹² O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence*, 108.

¹⁹³ Augustine, *Confessions* ix.x.23-26.

There are things of which the knowledge is fixed and determined without evolving with the generations, such as the lights of wisdom and knowledge. But while the truths of these things remain the same, their embodiments in the physical realm are both many and varied. ... You have relieved the tedium for mortal sense by the fact that what is one thing for our understanding can be symbolized and expressed in many ways by these signs.¹⁹⁴

Though Augustine is specifically addressing miracles and the Catholic sacraments as signs in this passage, he puts in place an implicit framework within which the eternal Truth of God is able to, and even should, be expressed to humanity through varied material things. Later in the same passage Augustine stresses not just the benefit, but the necessity of these signs when he says that without the fall “there would have been no need for your ministers at work ‘in many waters’ to resort to mystic actions and words in the realm of the bodily senses.”¹⁹⁵ Because we are fallen creatures of flesh we not only benefit from, but require fleshy images to communicate immaterial truths.

Although Augustine affirms this necessity of material *aisthesis* as a way of knowing God, Platonic elitism still colours his descriptions of them. He tells us that “physical things have been produced to meet the needs of peoples estranged from your eternal truth” and that miracles and “tongues are a sign not to believers but to unbelievers.”¹⁹⁶ In his commentary on this passage Chadwick remarks that to Augustine, “signs are required by sinful people, but truly spiritual Christians look higher, beyond material means.”¹⁹⁷ Perhaps ‘mature’ Christians have no need for these material stepping stones and can access God directly via the ascensional approach, but this is not true for all Christians, not even for Augustine, as we will soon see. For a Christian aesthetic to be universal and open to all, it must incorporate multiple ways of knowing, and the

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., xiii.xx.27.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., xiii.xx.28.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., xiii.xx.27; xiii.xxi.29.

¹⁹⁷ Chadwick, note 24 to *Confessions* xiii.xx.27.

Incarnational aesthetic is thus more accessible than the ascensional. The ascensional approach is solely based on intellect and is thus not available to all peoples whether due to natural capacity or lack of access to education.¹⁹⁸ Herdt also argues out that the material approach requires only faith and humility, not philosophy, thus further increasing its accessibility and making more of a true Christian aesthetic than the ascensional.¹⁹⁹

Augustine's own conversion speaks to the need of the Incarnational aesthetic in knowing God. Turning away from the Manichaeans, Augustine seeks God among the texts of the Platonists:

but that 'the word was made flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1: 13-14), I did not read there. ... that 'he took on himself the form of a servant and emptied himself, was made in the likeness of men and found to behave as a man, and humbled himself being made obedient to death, even death on the Cross so that God exalted him' from the dead ... that these books do not have.²⁰⁰

This lack in the Platonic texts prevents Augustine from fully and completely knowing God – we saw earlier that the beatific vision at Ostia and during Augustine's ascent of the soul could not be maintained because they were purely spiritual, and Augustine was subject to mortal weakness.

He was not able to overcome this until he found God in the Incarnation:

I sought a way to obtain strength enough to enjoy you; but I did not find it until embraced 'the mediator between God and man,' the man Christ Jesus, 'who is above all things, God blessed forever.' He called and said 'I am the way and the truth and the life.' The food which I was too weak to accept he mingled with flesh, in that 'the Word was made flesh' so that our infant condition might come to suck milk from your wisdom by which you created all things.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Herdt, "Theatre of the Virtues," 118-9.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁰⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* vii.ix.14.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, vii.xviii.24.

In his human frailty Augustine cannot find God through Platonic spiritual reductionism any more than he could through the Manichaean materialist reductionism. His spiritual ascent requires both the material and spiritual aspects and thus Christ Incarnate is a necessary mediator since He has “something in common with God and something in common with humanity. If the Mediator were in both aspects like humanity, he would be far distant from God. If he were in both aspects like God, he would be far distant from humanity, and so would be no mediator.”²⁰²

Phantasmata and the Imagination: Using Imitation to Habituate the Will

We must also briefly examine Augustine’s discussions surrounding memory in Book 10 as these play an important role in developing a place for imagination and imitation within his aesthetic. In this passage Augustine tells us about two kinds of memory – *phantasia* and *phantasmata* – classifying everything he can remember into things “experienced directly” or things “believed on the word of others.”²⁰³ From this passage O’Daly delineates within an Augustinian framework reproductive memory (*phantasia*) where our mental images are reproductions of things we have seen in person and creative memory (*phantasmata*) where our mental images are generated of things we have not seen.²⁰⁴ This latter thing we would call imagination, and though it is not always subject to the will (such as during dreams or hallucinations) it *can* be willed and this is significant to its use as a potential devotional tool.²⁰⁵ Despite these imagined things not being physically present when “remembering” them, with both *phantasia* and *phantasmata* Augustine tells us that “I could see inwardly with dimensions just as

²⁰² Ibid., vii.xviii.24.

²⁰³ Ibid., x.viii.14.

²⁰⁴ Gerard J.P. O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind*, (London: Duckworth, 1987), 106; O’Daly notes that Augustine’s use of these terms is different than the distinctions of the Stoics or Porphyry.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 108.

great as if I were actually looking at them outside my mind.”²⁰⁶ Thus for Augustine the mental images generated by the imagination have a significant capacity to affect the person, indeed “as great” as the real thing. We will return to this subject shortly.

The affective ability of imagination outlined in the *Confessions* is significant in giving a background with which to frame the discussion of imagination which takes place in *On the Trinity*. Augustine establishes that being material creatures we cannot help but think of things within a framework of material images, thus, when we hear stories of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, we cannot help but use our imaginations to construct material images of Him.²⁰⁷ Similarly, he discusses how we may use our imaginations to (re)create the appearances of Mary, Lazarus, and Paul as devotional aids.²⁰⁸ It matters not if our mental image is actually what these people looked like for we know they were human, and we have a conception of what a human is, or to use a Platonic framework, we know what the Form of a human is. Drever argues in support of this phenomenon when he writes the “image of the suffering Christ is not an image formed from a direct perception but an image constructed by the power of imagination out of other (analogous) phenomena ... we construct an image of the suffering Christ from experiences of suffering we perceive in other contexts.”²⁰⁹ Augustine argues, that by contemplating this material image of Christ, we become more able to understand Him, and through Him, the immaterial Creator.²¹⁰ Within my own framework, the imagination may play a role in both the ascensional and Incarnational aesthetic. One can extrapolate the *phantasmata* discussed by Augustine to include the *phantasmata* stimulated by the poets, and, provided that the theatrical content is not

²⁰⁶ Augustine, *Confessions* x.xviii.15.

²⁰⁷ Augustine, *On the Trinity* 8.4.7-8.5.7.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 8.5.7.-8.5.8; Rist, *Ancient Thought Baptized*, 86.

²⁰⁹ Drever, “Entertaining Violence.”

²¹⁰ Augustine, *On the Trinity* 8.4.7-8.5.7.

immoral, there is no reason that these imaginative images cannot also be used as devotional tools.

But how do these imagined *phantasmata* of poetry or the *phantasia* of theatre work as devotional tools? Unfortunately, Augustine does not explicitly provide us an answer, but I would like to suggest one contained implicitly within his criticism of the theatre which is applicable to both imagined *phantasmata* and those images contained within theatre and poetry. In their preoccupation with how man ought to act, the Patristic Fathers were familiar with the use of mimesis as a strategy for the formation of moral character and Augustine is no exception to this.²¹¹ As we have seen, Augustine believed that images, though not real, still had power to affect people deeply, particularly because within the Incarnational aesthetic material creatures are more moved by material images. Augustine's sermons reinforce this idea; in them, he explicitly discusses the receptive role of spectators, claiming that they are invited to imitate the examples laid out before them – for better or for worse.²¹² As a result, Morrison claims that mimesis is a valid method of learning for Augustine; for him imitation held power to affect a person's moral character.²¹³

If thus, the spectator is receptive to changes to their moral character via mimesis, can we not conceive of a situation where theatre may be directed to holy ends? I would like to suggest an implicit possibility within Augustine's framework: that the material images and emotions contained in theatre may be used to habituate the will toward good via mimetic spectacle, instead

²¹¹ Morrison, *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform in the West*, 49.

²¹² Augustine, *Sermon 301a.7* "On the Solemnity of the Holy Maccabees: Preached in Bulla Regia," in *The Works of Saint Augustine* (2nd Release). Electronic Edition. Sermons, (273-305A) on the Saints. Volume III, ed. E Rotelle. Charlottesville: InteLex Corp: 2001.
<http://crkn.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=augustine/augustine.17.xml;chunk.id=div.aug.sermons.v8.420;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.aug.sermons.v8.420;brand=default>

²¹³ Morrison, *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform in the West*, 60.

of toward evil, since neither the images nor emotions themselves are inherently corrupting. Reflecting on Christ and the saints via material images – whether *phantasmata* generated by the imagination or through the poets and theatre– engages the mind and the soul in a sort of Christian mimesis wherein we are invited to experience their joys and their sufferings and to imitate their virtue. I have previously mentioned Augustine’s mechanism outlined in *Confessions* for the habituation of the will; although he describes the process in a negative sense, moving the will further from God through repeated negative action, the implication is that the process can be done in reverse, moving the soul toward God. Instead of trapping the will and affections in Augustine’s “law of sin,” where a person “enjoys” their emotions to an unholy end and becomes addicted to repeat experiences, these material images can engage the emotions in a positive self-sustaining cycle where the will becomes more desirous of holy experiences. Here the inertia of habit is harnessed as a tool of devotion instead of a pitfall to be avoided.

As the will engages repeatedly with these positive moral spectacles it is habituated to feeling emotions like compassion and mercy and invited to imitate them. So even though we may not be invited to act out that mercy in the theatre itself, if we are used to feeling it, we will be more likely to act upon it in the future in real life situations, just as if, being spectators at an immoral play full of lust, we would become more likely to imitate negative behaviors in the future. Drever writes of this phenomenon:

The images we form about Christ are not only inevitable but also beneficial if approached in the right manner. We approach Christ correctly not in trying to imagine his physical features, but rather by hearing and imaging the stories of the gospel narratives and connecting the images we form about Christ to our experience and understanding of suffering, humility, and death. We have not seen the life and death of Christ, but we can (and will) imagine it through our more general experience of life and death. This concrete exercise of imagination meets humans

where they are, namely, within their habits of thinking (and loving) that are strongly tied to their physical context.²¹⁴

In modern terminology this Augustinian habituation toward mercy could be considered a strengthening of our neural pathways; the more we feel mercy, even “quasi”- mercy, the more likely that feeling of mercy will be “triggered” in our brain by real life situations.²¹⁵ Thus, it has no bearing that these emotions are not “real” or that the spectator is not invited to act, since, according to Augustine himself, material images and the emotions have the power to shape a person’s moral character via imitation regardless. In this way, it is possible that the imitation involved in theatre, of which Augustine was so critical, may actually be directed to moral ends within his aesthetic framework.

²¹⁴ Drever, “Entertaining Violence.”

²¹⁵ I have borrowed the term ‘quasi-emotion’ to describe the emotions evoked by the theatre from Kendall L. Walton’s *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 250-2.

Chapter 6 – Coda: The Theatricality of Augustine’s Writings

I would like to conclude with a brief discussion of Augustine’s own use of the theatre in his writings. Thus far, this study has dealt largely in hypotheticals and philosophical abstractions – showing that Augustine’s attack on theatre could be wholesale on neither ethical nor ontological grounds. However, I would be amiss to neglect to show how Augustine himself uses elements of theatre and poetry to make his writings more effective and moving, in the process undermining much of the criticism he makes against theatre in the same writings. Indeed, Augustine uses moving imagery and epic narrative structure in order to evoke strong emotions in his viewers, ultimately inviting them to imitate what they experience in his writings – the same positive Christian mimesis discussed in the previous chapter. Though this section by no means covers even a fraction of Augustine’s corpus, it is meant to give a few notable examples of his use of theatre and poetry.

As much as Augustine may attack theatre at times, a knowledge and implicit appreciation for the dramatic arts and acknowledgement of the theatricality of human life are present throughout his works. One of his earliest works is the *Soliloquies* – a neologism he coined! – which take the form of a discussion between himself and Reason, and, as Foley points out, what is a dialogue but a scripted play? The Cassiciacum dialogues all have plot, setting, characters, and put the narrative in the present tense so that it reads like a performance.²¹⁶ Indeed, Augustine ends *Answer to Skeptics* with a monologue with “stock characters borrowed from the Roman stage such as a city slicker and a country bumpkin and stage props for each of the philosophical schools being parodied.”²¹⁷ Throughout his corpus Augustine makes use of quotations and

²¹⁶ Michael P. Foley, “A Spectacle to the World: The Theatrical Meaning of St. Augustine’s Soliloquies,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 22, no. 2 (2014): 243-260. <https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2014.0024>

²¹⁷ Ibid.

images from poetry and theatre – he mentions not infrequently “thespian Achilles”, Priam, Hecuba, Hector, etc. – and these allusions to theatre are not wholly negative, in fact, his familiarity with the arts “hints at a certain appreciation for the works of the dramatists.”²¹⁸

Clearly the larger feelings toward theatre are not wholly negative in Augustine, and, as we will see, he makes deliberate use of the trappings of theatre in order to make his own writings more effective as tools of evangelization.

As has been pointed out by many scholars, the *Confessions* in particular, are a deeply moving work wherein Augustine invites us to grieve and uses material images in order to evoke emotions in his readers.²¹⁹ Indeed, Augustine explicitly asks that God “stir up the heart” of the people who read his confessions and that their hearts be “aroused” by His mercy and grace.²²⁰ Even the later, more severe Augustine of the *Retractations* stands by this earlier goal, writing that the *Confessions* continued to please him and that he hoped they continued to up the minds and affections of those who read them.²²¹ O’Connell goes as far as to argue that the language which Augustine uses in the text indicates that he meant for the *Confessions* to be read aloud (as was custom in antiquity), that Augustine intended for their “rich sonorities to swell, diminish, interweave, and echo to each other; intended his masterful play on the resources of the Latin tongue to fall upon the listening ear, fade, and return with ever-mounting vigor and suggestiveness ... finally unfurled in climax after climax of artistic orchestration.”²²² Though Augustine criticizes artistic works which evoke severe emotion, he himself affirms that that is the purpose of his work, and indeed that is what makes him such an effective writer; the

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Fendt, “The Moral Problem.”

²²⁰ Augustine, *Confessions* x.iii.4.

²²¹ Augustine, *Retractations* 2.32.1.

²²² O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence*, 91.

Confessions would not be so enduring among both religious and secular audiences if it did not contain such a “wonderfully captivating narrative.”²²³

The stories which Augustine conveys in the *Confessions*, not just his own, but those he has heard as well, are part of the reason why it is such an affective work. In Book 8 he tells the story of how Victorinus, a famous rhetorician, made his public profession of faith, making a clear parallel between Victorinus’ previous career and the “show” he put on for the faithful via his profession:

When he mounted the steps to affirm the confession of faith, there was a murmur of delighted talk as all the people who knew him spoke his name to one another. And who there did not know him? A suppressed sound came from the lips of all as they rejoiced, ‘Victorinus, Victorinus!’ As soon as they saw him, they suddenly murmured in exaltation and equally suddenly were silent in concentration to hear him. He proclaimed his unfeigned faith with ringing assurance. All of them wanted to clasp him to their hearts, and the hands with which they embraced him were their love and their joy.²²⁴

Though Victorinus is given the chance to make his profession of faith a private affair, he does not, presumably so that his example may excite others to do the same. Augustine tells us that upon hearing this story from Simplicianus he was “ardent to follow [Victorinus’] example. He had indeed told it to me with this object in view.”²²⁵ Via Augustine’s storytelling we see here a dual use of material images and the emotions they evoke: first Simplicianus communicates this tale to Augustine so that he may be moved to convert, and then Augustine tells it to his audience in the hope that they may be moved to do the same. In the same book, Ponticianus tells Augustine the story of Antony the Egyptian monk with the intent to move Augustine and his

²²³ Clifford S. Broeniman, “The Confessions of St. Augustine and Vergil’s Aeneas: A Study in Narrative Design,” in *Proceedings of the PMR Conference 16-17*, ed. Joseph C. Schnaubelt, Frederick Van Fleteren, and Joseph Reino (Villanova: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1994): 23-38.

²²⁴ Augustine, *Confessions* viii.ii.5.

²²⁵ *Ibid.* viii.v.10.

companions to conversion for “all of us were in a state of surprise ... because of the greatness of the story ... because we had not heard it.”²²⁶ Augustine of course, goes on to relay this story to his readers, once again making use of this ‘thirdhand theatre’ to excite his audiences and hopefully invite them to imitate his example in conversion. This is clearly a far cry from the criticisms of chapter 2 where a story (a tertiary material image), let alone one which evokes strong emotions and invites imitation, is something to be suppressed, not spread.

It is not just the anecdotal and historical stories that Augustine relays to us that make use of theatrical imagery to evoke the emotions, for Augustine also uses personification of philosophical subjects in several of his works. Notably, in the *Soliloquies* and *Answer to Skeptics* Augustine uses sexual metaphors to personify philosophy as both a nurturing mother and alluring woman. Augustine goes as far as to describe the love of this *Philosophia* as the sexual love between a lover and his beloved: “that wisdom which you desire to behold and to possess with the purest gaze and embrace, with no veil between, as it were, naked.”²²⁷ While in *Answer to Skeptics*, young men are exhorted to leave their professions and flee to the bosom of *Philosophia* and to drink wisdom from her breasts.²²⁸ This poetic technique also appears in the garden at Milan, one of the most famous scenes of the Augustinian corpus. Here *Philosophia* is transformed into the “chastely alluring” Lady Contenance, who, “serene and cheerful without coquetry, entic[ed] me in an honourable manner to come and not hesitate.” Augustine has moved from the sexual allure of the early *Soliloquies* to the matronly nurturing of the *Confessions*. Regardless, it is significant that Augustine uses the image of woman to illuminate these immaterial philosophical concepts. O’Connell claims of this use of imagery:

²²⁶ Augustine, *Confessions* viii.vi.14.

²²⁷ Augustine, *Soliloquies* 1.13.22.

²²⁸ Augustine, *Answer to Skeptics* 1.3-4.

It was surely Augustine's intention to acquaint us, mind and heart, not only with the God of his own mind and heart, but with his own individual life as laying bare the most obstinate secrets of our shared human life. His imagery must embody not only the transcendent, but the humanly universal as well. To succeed in that communication, the imagery employed had to be familiar to us, be drawn from the store of common human experience.²²⁹

By using human imagery to describe inhuman ideas Augustine engages in the 'Incarnational aesthetic' of the theatre – he makes the immaterial material, the abstract tangible, the divine human, in order to more effectively communicate with his readers.

Even the narrative structure used by Augustine is theatrical in nature. In the *Soliloquies* – an early dialogue between Augustine and the personified Reason – the two discuss human life as a theatrical affair and in his sermons he goes as far as to say that “the world is a theatre and God is the audience,”; this is clearly seen throughout the *Confessions* where Augustine has staged his own life in such a way as to be narratively engaging for his audience.²³⁰ It is clear to any reader that the *Confessions* are not simply autobiography for they are interrupted frequently by episodes of hymn, lyric, theology, philosophy, psalms, oratory, and exegesis.²³¹ However, the *Confessions* are not simply an unconventional autobiography with a few quirks but a work deliberately crafted to be as engaging as possible for its readers. It has been suggested that the narrative of the *Confessions* is not an exact chronological recounting of Augustine's life, but rather a historical fiction where the facts have been 'fudged' in order to make an interesting story – the authorial Augustine is more a novelist than a historian or biographer.²³² Indeed, McMahon claims that Augustine restructures the autobiography of Books 1-9 in order to allegorically parallel the

²²⁹ O'Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence*, 121.

²³⁰ Foley, “A Spectacle to the World.”

²³¹ Broeniman, “The Confessions of St. Augustine.”

²³² Fendt, “The Moral Problem.”; Broeniman, “The Confessions of St. Augustine.”

“creation” of the young Christian Augustine with God’s creation of the universe from Genesis.²³³ As Broeniman puts it, “Augustine is only interested in facts inasmuch as those facts can be used to reveal his nascent and mature spirituality.”²³⁴

Furthermore, Augustine makes the spiritual wanderings of his own life story parallel the geographical wanderings of Aeneas.²³⁵ The *errores* of Aeneas are juxtaposed in the early books of the *Confessions* with the *errores* of the young Augustine.²³⁶ Though Augustine uses part of book 1 to decry his own love of pagan literature, it is here that he sets out an explicit parallel between his own life and the narrative of the *Aeneid*: “I was later forced to learn about the wanderings of some legendary fellow named Aeneas (forgetful of my own wanderings) and to weep over the death of a Dido who took her own life from love. In reading this, O God my life, I myself was meanwhile dying by my alienation from you.”²³⁷ Broeniman points out the clear comparison Augustine establishes in this passage: “Aeneas wandered, Augustine wandered from God; Dido mourned her lost love to the point of death, Augustine should have mourned for himself as he was dying away from God; Augustine declaimed the words of vengeful Juno, when he should have preached the Gospel.”²³⁸

Though much can be said about the parallels between Aeneas and Augustine, there are three focal points: 1) Aeneas vs. Augustine wandering, 2) Carthage, and 3) the idea of fated Italy. I have already mentioned the parallels between the *errores* of both men, but it is also interesting

²³³ Robert McMahon, *Augustine’s Prayerful Ascent: An Essay on the Literary Form of the Confessions* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 114.

²³⁴ Broeniman, “The Confessions of St. Augustine.”

²³⁵ Sabine MacCormack, *The Shadows of Poetry: Vergil in the Mind of Augustine* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 96.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Augustine, *Confessions* 1.xiii.20.

²³⁸ Broeniman, “The Confessions of St. Augustine.”

to note that the journey from Carthage to Italy serves as a major point in both narratives.²³⁹ Moreover, in Carthage both ‘literary heroes’ are waylaid from their ultimate goals by passionate love affairs – Aeneas with Queen Dido and Augustine with his long-term partner. The two men’s departures from Carthage also bear striking resemblance as Aeneas’ fleet departs leaving behind wailing Dido, while Augustine leaves behind his mother against her wishes as she desperately prays for his salvation.²⁴⁰ Finally, both narratives revolve around the idea of fate coming to pass in Italy after a lengthy series of *errores*; Aeneas in founding Alba Longa, and Augustine in the garden at Milan. By paralleling his life to the journey of Aeneas, Augustine plays upon a story that would have been familiar to his readers and sets himself up as a ‘Christian Aeneas’; in doing so he uses structure of the *Aeneid* to evoke the same pathos as Vergil does but directed to an explicitly Christian telos, namely, the evangelization of his readers. Indeed, Broeniman claims that providing a Christian alternative to Aeneas is one of the explicit purposes of the *Confessions*: “this work [the *Confessions*] should be read as an answer to the *Aeneid*: where Aeneas failed, in part owing to his false mission, Augustine finds success.”²⁴¹

Thus, though Augustine decries poetry and theatre in the *Confessions* he uses those very media in order to make his own works more moving and effective. Throughout his corpus there are numerous, oftentimes ambivalent or even appreciative, references to theatre and the poets belying an intimate knowledge of their works. Moreover, Augustine explicitly uses theatrical images through the stories he conveys and the personification of abstract philosophical virtues. Finally, he creates a deliberate narrative parallel between his own wanderings and those of Aeneas. In making use of these theatrical trappings, Augustine attempts to evoke deeper

²³⁹ Broeniman, “The *Confessions* of St. Augustine.”

²⁴⁰ MacCormack, *Shadows of Poetry*, 97.

²⁴¹ Broeniman, “The *Confessions* of St. Augustine.”

emotions in his readers with the ultimate goal being their evangelization, or in other words, that they be incited to imitate his example in following Christ – a ‘holy mimesis’.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

Augustine draws strongly from Plato's *Republic* in his own attack on theatre present in both the *Confessions* and *City of God*; this attack can be broken down into ethical and ontological criticisms. With regards to the ethical, Augustine claims theatre is full of pagan virtue and overly sexual, and because the role of the spectator is to imitate what they see, theatre propagates immoral behavior. The theatre also evokes strong emotions which have negative effects on the soul for both Plato and Augustine. Both scholars (as well as the Stoics who influenced Augustine) held strong anti-emotional stances because they believed that the emotions engaged with the base, weaker parts of the soul. Repeatedly engaging with the emotions habituates the soul to thinking irrationally and accustoms it to feeling strong emotions. This in turn has several negative effects on a person: 1) the soul becomes more desirous of these affective experiences and actively seeks them out, even if it is irrational to desire to mourn over a play; 2) the soul becomes divided upon itself; even if it is able to recognize the good, it becomes unable to choose it. These "two wills" of Augustine lead to immoral (in)action for the theatre does not call us to act in the face of another's suffering but merely to observe, or even enjoy, it.

However, the innate structure of the theatre and poetic arts itself proves problematic for Augustine. To begin, the theatre produces material images which are imitative and non-existent, they are mere material representations of true things, not true things. As a result, they are hollow and false; lacking true substance they distract the soul from God. As the soul becomes accustomed to thinking about things in material terms, it begins to think of itself in material terms as well. Because, for Augustine, knowing the self through the immaterial soul is key to knowing the immaterial God, thinking of the soul in physical terms causes a person to limit God by thinking of Him in material terms – the materialist error.

This Platonic criticism rests on the assumptions that material images are inherently misleading because their physical nature is at odds with the immaterial mind's search for Truth; the severity of his anti-material attack was likely influenced by his Platonic sources, his own personal anti-Manichaean biases, and the ascetic culture of Italy where he made his conversion. However, this attack is not consistent with his affirmation of the Christian beliefs surrounding the goodness of creation, namely, that creation is good because God is good. God would not be God if He were not immutable, eternal, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent. Because He is omnipotent, creation must be good, for surely an all-powerful, all-good being would not create something faulty; thus, Christian creation must be *ex nihilo* in contrast to the materialist dualism of the Manichaeans. This, however, does not provide an answer to the problem of evil, and in refuting Manichaean theodicy and providing his own explanation in privation theory, Augustine repeatedly affirms the innate goodness of creation. In his discussion of the Incarnation and Resurrection Augustine moves away from the Platonic spiritual reductionism. He argues that the soul is not "trapped" in the body and the flesh cannot be inherently evil because Christ took on human form without taking on sin or corruption. The promise of resurrection at the end of times further supports this goodness of the flesh because it will not be just our souls in the Heavenly Jerusalem, but also our material bodies.

With regards to his ethical criticisms, Augustine himself lays out a framework in *Christian Instruction* in which 'pagan virtue' may be appropriated for Christian ends and so the pagan content of theatre – provided it is not sexually explicit – should serve no problem. Furthermore, much as with material images, Augustine's attack on the emotions is not tenable within his Christian framework. Again, he is influenced by the Platonic and Stoic biases against the emotions, the latter of whom call for a complete eradication of them. The Incarnation here

too provides a solution for us for Jesus had emotions – He wept, He grew angry, He despaired – all without blemishing Himself with sin. Indeed, emotions are part of the integrated human *persona* and are innate to our lived experiences; they cannot be removed, nor should they. The later Augustine of *City of God* even claims that the emotions are necessary to living a moral life since his own conversion would not have taken place had he not been motivated by guilt and shame.

We may use the *uti/frui* distinction laid out in *Christian Instruction* to see how theatre ought to be used: not enjoyed for its own sake but enjoyed for God’s sake. Thus, when situated correctly in the *ordo amoris*, theatre may indeed be “used” to moral ends. This may take two forms. The first is the ascensional aesthetic wherein material images can be used as the first rung in a Platonic ladder of love to reach the immaterial truth. The second is the Incarnational aesthetic wherein immaterial truth takes on material form to meet us where we are. The Incarnational aesthetic introduces multiple ways of knowing, notably *aisthesis* to the Platonic *noesis*, making the path to truth more accessible to all. Furthermore, our fallen state obscures immaterial truths from us – even Augustine’s mystical experience at Ostia was temporary – and so in this life the Incarnational aesthetic is both a necessary and effective means of knowing God through His Incarnate Son. Augustine’s own conversion speaks to the necessity of this aesthetic theory; he was unable to truly convert until he had accepted the reality of the Incarnation and Christ as a mediator both human and divine.

In his discussion of *phantasia* and *phantasmata*, Augustine outlines the role that imagined things may play in Christian devotion. I have suggested that these *phantasmata* – whether imagined via poems or present as part of theatrical spectacle – can habituate the will towards good. Augustine acknowledges the affective capabilities of *phantasmata* and these

strong emotions make the will desirous of repeat experiences via the same mechanism Augustine outlines in a negative sense. As the will engages again and again with positive moral spectacle it becomes accustomed to feeling things like mercy and compassion, feelings which become more likely to be “triggered” in real life situations. Material images and the strong emotions they evoke thus become a force for good when they invite us to imitate moral action.

Though Augustine’s critique of pagan theatre at first appears quite compelling, a wholesale condemnation of the theatre cannot be supported by his own writings. In fact, Augustine makes significant use of theatrical elements – material images, personification, narrative structure – in his own writing in order to effect greater pathos among his readers and incite them to imitate his example. While it may be conceded that there may always be an ethical danger contained within the theatre and the arts in general via explicit sexual content, the inherently Platonic nature of his attack is inconsistent with his Christian framework and Augustine’s use of theatre undercuts the severity of his attack. By using elements of theatre as evangelical tools Augustine shows us that the imitation involved with being a spectator (or, in this case, a reader) is not necessarily a bad thing, since, when correctly ordered, it may direct the soul closer to God. Thus, though Augustine does not explicitly endorse theatre, the possibility of a ‘redeemed theatre’ remains open within his framework.

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