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## ***Disciplina et Veritas: Augustine on Truth and the Liberal Arts***

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In the *Soliloquia*, one of his earliest dialogues, Augustine identifies the liberal arts, or disciplines (*disciplinae*), with truth (*veritas*), and employs this somewhat puzzling identification as a premise in his infamous proof of the immortality of the soul.<sup>1</sup> For Augustine and for much of the subsequent medieval tradition, the liberal arts consist of the seven disciplines that make up the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*: dialectic, grammar, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. In order to show that the liberal arts are truth, Augustine (1) argues that the constituent propositions of the liberal arts are true insofar as they are learned, and (2) maintains that dialectic—the discipline of disciplines (*disciplina disciplinarum*)—makes every liberal art (including itself) true. He claims that dialectic is the “truth through which all disciplines are true”<sup>2</sup> I will refer to this claim as “the truth of the liberal arts.” While commentators have scrutinized the various aspects of Augustine’s proof of the immortality of the soul, they have not paid much attention to Augustine’s identification of the liberal arts with truth in the proof, or to how dialectic makes the liberal arts true.

In this paper, I examine Augustine’s arguments for his *prima facie* peculiar identifications of the liberal arts with truth and of dialectic with the truth of the liberal arts.<sup>3</sup> First, I show that

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<sup>1</sup> I treat Augustine’s early corpus as those works written before his ordination to the priesthood in 391 CE. The *Soliloquia* was likely written in the winter of 386–7. Also included in this *oeuvre* of early texts are the following important philosophical works which I will be citing in this paper: *Contra academicos* (*Acad.*), *De beata vita* (*Beat. V.*), *De ordine* (*Ord.*), *De immortalitate animae* (*Imm. An.*), *De quantitate animae* (*Quant. An.*), *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* (*Mor.*), *De dialectica* (*Dial.*), *De magistro* (*Mag.*), *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* (*Div. Qu.*), the letters to Nebridius (*Ep.* 3–14), and *De libero arbitrio* (*Lib. Arb.*). I also cite the *Confessiones* (*Conf.*), *De doctrina christiana* (*Doctr. Chr.*), and the *Retractationes* (*Retr.*), all of which Augustine wrote after 391 but include discussions of the liberal arts, though in these later works he is more skeptical of the eudaimonist value of the liberal arts.

<sup>2</sup> *Sol.* 2.21. In my citations of Augustine’s works, I have chosen to omit the somewhat otiose chapter numbers and provide only book and section numbers. Translations of Augustine are my own, though for the *Soliloquia* I have benefited from consulting Foley and MacDonald’s excellent translations. Translations of the *Soliloquia* are based on the text in Augustine, *Soliloquiorum libri duo; De immortalitate animae; De quantitate animae*, ed. W. Hörmann (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> For various analyses and diagnoses of Augustine’s proof, see the following: Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, tr. L. E. M. Lynch (New York: Random House, 1960); Phillip Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Lenka Karfíková, “Das Verhältnis von Seele und *ratio* in Augustins Abhandlung *De immortalitate animae*,” in F. Karfík and E. Song (eds.), *Plato Revived: Essays on Ancient Platonism in Honour of Dominic J. O’Meara* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 117–37; Giovanni Catapano, “Augustine’s Treatise *De immortalitate animae* and the Proof of the Soul’s Immortality in his *Soliloquia*,” *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 25 (2014), 67–84; Christian Tornau, “*Ratio in subiecto?* The Sources of Augustine’s Proof of the Immortality of the Soul in the *Soliloquia* and its Defense in *De immortalitate animae*,” *Phronesis* 62 (2017), 319–54; Erik Kenyon, *Augustine and the Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Emmanuel Bermon, “Augustins Argumentation für die Unsterblichkeit der Seele in den *Soliloquia*, in der *Epistula* 3 und in *De immortalitate animae* 5–6,” in Augustine, *De immortalitate animae*, ed. and tr. C. Tornau, Augustinus Opera-Verke 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 376–407; Sebastian Gerz, “Truth and Immortality in Augustine’s *Soliloquies* and *De immortalitate animae*,” in A. G. Long (ed.),

Augustine identifies the liberal arts with truth because the constituent propositions of the liberal arts are all *learned* and *known*. Next, I argue that he identifies dialectic with the truth of the liberal arts because its structure is *essential* to the liberal arts. That is, dialectic furnishes each of the liberal arts with the following three structuring properties: (1) definitions (*definitiones*), (2) divisions and collections (*divisiones et collectiones*), and (3) syllogistic arguments (*ratiocinationes*). I claim that dialectic's three structuring properties render the liberal arts structured sets of necessary true propositions. To explain the necessity of the constituent propositions of the liberal arts, I suggest that each of the liberal arts reflects a distinct segment of intelligible reality, that is, the realm of the intelligible Forms. In other words, I posit that the intelligibles are the subject matter of each of the liberal arts.

I proceed as follows. In section 1, to provide context for Augustine's identification of the liberal arts with truth, I outline his proof of the immortality of the soul. Next, in section 2, I turn to Augustine's discussion of the relationship between dialectic and the other liberal arts from earlier in the dialogue, and draw an important distinction between dialectic *qua* discipline and dialectic *qua* structure; this distinction is crucial insofar as Augustine argues that it is not the former, but the latter that makes the liberal arts true. Then, in section 3, I reconstruct what I call the Epistemic Argument, wherein Augustine demonstrates that the constituent propositions of the liberal arts are true because they are learned. Next, in section 4, I explain how the three structuring properties of dialectic—definitions, divisions and collections, and syllogistic arguments—make the liberal arts structured sets of necessary, true propositions. I also formalize what I refer to as the Metaphysical Argument, in which Augustine shows that dialectic is the truth of the liberal arts insofar as its three structuring properties are essential to the liberal arts. Finally, in section 5, I return to the proof of the immortality of the soul to assess how Augustine's arguments from earlier in the dialogue can help us better appreciate his rationale for employing the identification of the liberal arts with truth as a premise in his proof. I conclude by tentatively offering another, less explicit rationale Augustine might have had for identifying the liberal arts with truth. This rationale stems from his underlying belief that the intelligible Forms (*rationes/divina/universa*)—the subject matter of the liberal arts—are constitutive of intelligible reality. At the outset of the second book of the *Soliloquia*, Augustine identifies truth with God. This identification is crucial to his early philosophical project: by learning the liberal arts we come to know truth, and thereby also come to know God.

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*Immortality in Ancient Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 196–214; Scott MacDonald, “Augustine's Early, Abandoned Proof for the Immortality of the Soul” (unpublished manuscript). The only studies that treat Augustine's identification of dialectic with truth at all are Cary, *Augustine's Invention*, 95–100; Markus Enders, “‘Wahrheit’ von Augustinus bis zum frühen Mittelalter: Stationen einer Begriffsgeschichte,” in M. Enders and J. Szaif (eds.), *Die Geschichte des philosophischen Begriffs der Wahrheit* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 71–6; Tobias Uhle, *Augustin und die Dialektik: Eine Untersuchung der Argumentationsstruktur in den Cassiciacum-Dialogen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 203–7; and Bermon, “Augustins Argumentation,” 388–90.

## 1. The Proof of the Immortality of the Soul

For Augustine, the liberal arts consist of seven disciplines, which in the Middle Ages came to be known as the *trivium*, consisting of grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric, and the *quadrivium*, consisting of arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music (though Augustine himself does not use either of these terms). In *Soliloquia* 2.24, Augustine's explicit contention that the liberal arts *are* truth serves as a crucial premise in his proof of the immortality of the soul.<sup>4</sup> In the proof, Augustine argues that the eternity and immutability of truth ground the immortality of the rational soul (*animus*):

### [T1]

It is necessary that for anything which is in a subject [*in subiecto*], if it always remains [*semper manet*], the subject itself also always remains. And every discipline is in the rational soul as in a subject [*omnis in subiecto est animo disciplina*]. Therefore, it is necessary that the rational soul always remains if discipline always remains. However, discipline is truth, and truth always remains, as reason persuaded [us] at the beginning of this book. Therefore, the rational soul always remains, and a rational soul is not said [to be] dead. Therefore, only the person who proves that something above was not conceded correctly may deny without absurdity that the rational soul is immortal.<sup>5</sup>

The key pieces of Augustine's proof are the following: (1) the notion of being-in-a-subject inseparably, (2) the identification of truth with the liberal arts/disciplines, and (3) the eternity of truth. Augustine establishes the eternity of truth at the end of Book 1 of the *Soliloquia*,<sup>6</sup> and relies on Aristotle's *Categories* to explain the notion of being-in-a-subject inseparably.<sup>7</sup> Although Augustine does not explicitly mention the inseparability condition in T1, he stresses its importance in *Soliloquia* 2 and in his unfinished dialogue *De immortalitate animae*, which was originally intended to be the third book of the *Soliloquia*.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, when Augustine says in T1 that *x* is in a subject, we should take him to mean that *x* is in a subject *inseparably*. What is in a subject inseparably cannot exist without the existence of the subject in which it inheres, that is, it is existentially dependent on the subject in which it inheres.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on Augustine's approach to and Christianization of the liberal arts curriculum, see Ilsetraut Hadot, *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1984); J. J. O'Donnell (ed.), *Augustine: Confessions*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Erik Kenyon, "Augustine and the Liberal Arts," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 12 (2013), 105–13. Augustine had originally planned to write treatises on each of the liberal arts, a project which he eventually abandoned. He did, however, manage to write a treatise on music (*De musica*), consisting of six books. We also have an incomplete text of Augustine's treatment of dialectic (*De dialectica*), which Augustine himself reports as lost. Finally, Augustine wrote a treatise on grammar (*De grammatica*), but, unfortunately, this text was also lost to both Augustine and posterity (*Retr.* 1.6). Augustine's most extensive account of the contents of the liberal arts can be found in *Ord.*, written a few weeks before *Sol.* in 386 (*Ord.* 2.35–44).

<sup>5</sup> *Sol.* 2.24.

<sup>6</sup> See *Sol.* 1.28.

<sup>7</sup> See Aristotle *Cat.* 2, 1a23–29.

<sup>8</sup> See *Sol.* 2.22; *Imm. An.* 1; *Retr.* 1.5.

Returning to the proof, Augustine argues that since truth is eternal and is in the soul as in a subject inseparably, the soul too must be eternal. A more formal reconstruction of Augustine's argument is as follows:

*Proof of the Immortality of the Soul*

P1. For all  $x$ , if  $x$  (1) is in a subject inseparably and (2) always remains, then the subject itself always remains. [*Sol.* 2.24]

P2. Every liberal art is in the soul as in a subject inseparably. [*Sol.* 2.24]

P3. Therefore, if the liberal arts always remain, then the soul always remains. [P1, P2]

P4. The liberal arts are truth. [*Sol.* 2.19–21]

P5. Truth always remains. [*Sol.* 1.28]

P6. Therefore, the liberal arts always remain. [P4, P5]

P7. Therefore, the soul always remains. [P3, P6]<sup>9</sup>

Augustine's proof of the immortality of the soul is beleaguered by certain troubling implications, many of which have been discussed at length in the secondary literature. Scholars have worried about (1) whether Augustine's argument entails the pre-existence of the soul, (2) whether the liberal arts are either cognitively or ontologically "in" the rational soul, and (3) whether the liberal arts inhere either essentially or accidentally in the rational soul.<sup>10</sup> In particular, studies on the *Soliloquia* have principally focused on Augustine's inference from P1 and P2 to P3, explaining various ways in which the liberal arts could inhere in the rational soul as in a subject inseparably, and how this inherence relation might explain the soul's immortality.<sup>11</sup> There is also another, particularly worrying implication of Augustine's proof. The proof requires that the liberal arts inhere inseparably in the rational soul; to be more precise, it requires that they ontologically inhere in some *particular* rational soul. In this way, nothing prevents the liberal arts from inhering in one rational soul, and then in another, and so on; consequently, a given particular rational soul would

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<sup>9</sup> Augustine presents a more detailed version of his argument from *Soliloquia* 2 at the beginning of *De immortalitate animae*, where he tries to establish the truth of P2 (i.e., that the liberal arts exist in living beings as in a subject inseparably). His argument rests on the assumption that knowledge is possible only if the objects of knowledge are in the soul, as Gerz convincingly argues ("Truth and Immortality," 206–9). The proof in *Soliloquia* 2 has been discussed at length in the secondary literature; for other reconstructions of the proof, see Uhle, *Augustin und die Dialektik*; Catapano, "Augustine's Treatise"; Tornau, "*Ratio in subiecto*"; Kenyon, *Augustine and the Dialogue*; Bermon, "Augustine's Argumentation"; Gerz, "Truth and Immortality"; MacDonald, "Augustine's Early, Abandoned Proof." While I benefited from perusing their reconstructions, the reconstruction above is my own.

<sup>10</sup> On the first question, see Robert O'Connell, "Pre-existence in Augustine's Seventh Letter," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 15 (1969), 67–73; Gerard O'Daly, "Did St. Augustine Ever Believe in the Soul's Pre-existence?," *Augustinian Studies* 5 (1974), 227–35; and Robert O'Connell, "Pre-existence in the Early Augustine," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 26 (1980), 176–88. On the second question, see Phillip Cary, *Augustine's Invention*; MacDonald, "Augustine's Early, Abandoned Proof"; and Scott MacDonald, "Augustine on the Ontology of Cognition: From *Soliloquia* to *De Trinitate*" (unpublished manuscript). On the third question, see Tornau, "*Ratio in subiecto*"; and Gerz, "Truth and Immortality."

<sup>11</sup> P2 in the proof is potentially problematic as well, for though it establishes that the liberal arts exist in living souls, it does not establish that they exist *only* in human souls. Thus, Augustine leaves open the possibility that the liberal arts inhere in the souls of angels and other higher beings.

be immortal only as long as the liberal arts inhere in it. Thus, Augustine's proof requires only that the liberal arts inhere in *some* rational soul, but not necessarily in a perduring rational soul.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, given its many troubling implications, it comes as little surprise that Augustine appears to have later abandoned the proof entirely.<sup>13</sup>

Compared to other premises in the proof, P4 and P5 have received limited scholarly attention. In his groundbreaking study on Augustine's early Platonism, Phillip Cary claims that Augustine's identification of the liberal arts and dialectic with truth is "bizarre," given that Augustine frequently identifies truth with the second person of the Trinity, that is, the Son of God.<sup>14</sup> According to Cary, neither the liberal arts nor dialectic appears to be at all identical to God or the divine essence, much less related to them. *Contra* Cary, I argue that dialectic is *not* truth in the sense that the second person of the Trinity is truth. Instead, I shall argue (in section 4.1) that dialectic should be identified with the following three structuring properties: definitions, divisions and collections, and syllogistic arguments. I contend that these structuring properties are essential to the liberal arts and render them true or genuine liberal arts. Augustine's identification of dialectic with the truth of the liberal arts proves crucial to his early philosophical project as a whole. In *De ordine*, written shortly before the *Soliloquia*, Augustine argues that knowledge of the liberal arts is a necessary condition for knowledge of God.<sup>15</sup> In this way, understanding the close conceptual connections between truth, dialectic, and the liberal arts may help us better appreciate how Augustine conceives of our knowledge of God.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Dialectic *qua* Structure

Before turning to Augustine's arguments concerning the conceptual connections between truth, dialectic, and the liberal arts, we must first examine a useful distinction Augustine draws between dialectic *qua* discipline and dialectic *qua* structure. He contends that dialectic *qua* structure furnishes the liberal arts with a specific organizational framework: a given set of necessary, true propositions is a liberal art in virtue of being structured by definitions, divisions and collections, and syllogistic arguments.

However, this conception of dialectic as a structure presents an apparent problem for Augustine. He raises a puzzle for his interlocutor, Reason, about whether dialectic makes itself a true liberal art:

[T2]

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<sup>12</sup> I thank the anonymous reviewer for OSMP for bringing to my attention this substantial worry about Augustine's proof.

<sup>13</sup> See *Retr.* 1.4–5.

<sup>14</sup> See *Sol.* 2.1; see also Cary, "Augustine's Invention," 95–100.

<sup>15</sup> See *Ord.* 2.47–50.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Bermon, "Augustine's Argumentation," 383–4. Bermon does not explicitly identify dialectic as essential to the liberal arts, but nonetheless emphasizes that Augustine's arguments demonstrate that dialectic is the only the truth *of the liberal arts* and not truth in the sense that God is truth.

**Augustine (A):** I am close to assenting completely: but it troubles me that we also count among the disciplines the science of disputation [i.e., dialectic]. For this reason, I judge that the latter is rather the truth in virtue of which this same science [i.e., dialectic] is also true.

**Reason (R):** Excellent and most carefully [done]! But you do not deny, as I believe, that it [sc. dialectic] is true in virtue of that by which it is a discipline [*eo veram esse, quo disciplina est*]?

**A:** On the contrary, that is the exact thing that bothers me. For I noticed that it is itself also a discipline and, on account of this, is said to be a true discipline.

**R:** What then? Do you think that it could have otherwise been a discipline unless everything in it were defined and distributed?

**A:** I have nothing else that I can say.

**R:** But if this function [*officium*] belongs to it [sc. dialectic], then it is a true discipline [*disciplina vera*] through itself. Therefore, will anyone think that it is surprising if that [discipline], in virtue of which all disciplines are true through themselves and in themselves, is truth?<sup>17</sup>

Augustine the interlocutor poses the following question: If dialectic *qua* structure is the truth or essential to the liberal arts, and if dialectic is itself a liberal art, then does this fact entail that dialectic is a liberal art in virtue of being dialectic? In other words, Augustine wonders whether dialectic makes itself a true, or genuine, liberal art.

Reason appears to answer his interlocutor's question affirmatively. Distinguishing between dialectic *qua* structure and dialectic *qua* discipline, Reason claims that dialectic *qua* structure can in fact make the discipline of dialectic a true (genuine) discipline. In other words, Reason claims that the structure that dialectic (i.e., dialectic *qua* structure) exhibits is essential to making it a true or genuine liberal art. In this way, dialectic makes itself a genuine liberal art. Having addressed this ambiguity about the nature of dialectic, I now turn to Augustine's conception of truth.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. The Epistemic Argument

In this section of the paper, I will outline the Epistemic Argument, through which Augustine shows that the contents of the liberal arts are true insofar as they are learned. In this way, he demonstrates that the contents of the liberal arts are *predicatively* true. But in addition to a predicative conception

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<sup>17</sup> *Sol.* 2.21.

<sup>18</sup> Kenyon, "Augustine and the Dialogue," 108–11, has argued that dialectic is the "ruling liberal art" insofar as it reflects the way in which human beings think and eventually arrive at self-knowledge. While it might be true that dialectic reflects how human beings reason, Kenyon's analysis still fails to explain how dialectic structures the liberal arts as sciences. In other words, Kenyon does not distinguish between dialectic as a process of reasoning and dialectic *qua* structure (i.e., definition, the method of division and collection, and syllogistic argument). It is dialectic *qua* structure that *makes* every liberal art true.

of truth, Augustine also has an *attributive* conception of truth. Accordingly, before reconstructing the Epistemic Argument, we must first better understand the two ways in which Augustine uses the term ‘true’ in the *Soliloquia*.

Throughout the *Soliloquia*, Augustine employs the adjective ‘true’ (*verum*) in both a predicative sense and an attributive sense. For Augustine, predicative truth seems to consist in a relation of correspondence between proposition and fact (i.e.,  $p$  is true iff  $p$  corresponds to some fact), whereas attributive truth seems to denote genuine class or set membership (i.e.,  $x$  is a true  $F$ ).<sup>19</sup> For instance, the proposition ‘It is true that Caesar crossed the Rubicon’ showcases the predicative sense of ‘true,’ whereas the proposition ‘Caesar is a true human being’ showcases its attributive sense.

The predicative-attributive distinction is crucial to Augustine’s treatment of the nature of truth in *Soliloquia* 2. When Augustine the interlocutor asks Reason whether it is possible to learn false things, Reason indicates that one ought to differentiate the predicative and attributive senses of ‘true.’ She notes that while the fable of Daedalus and Icarus is false in a predicative sense, it is nonetheless a *true fable*, or true in an attributive sense: “It could not be a true fable [*veram fabulam*] about the flight of Daedalus, unless it were false that Daedalus had flown.”<sup>20</sup> Reason affirms that the proposition ‘Daedalus flew’ is false, while still maintaining that the fable of Daedalus and Icarus is a true or genuine *fable*. On the one hand, the proposition ‘Daedalus flew’ is false because it fails to correspond to a fact or an obtaining state of affairs; on the other hand, the fable of Daedalus is a true fable because it genuinely belongs to the class of fables. Presumably, Augustine the author believes that the fable of Daedalus and Icarus is a true fable insofar as it instantiates the essential or necessary properties of *being a fable*. Consequently, the fable of Daedalus and Icarus can be said to be attributively true, although it is predicatively false.<sup>21</sup>

Having established this distinction, Augustine’s first step in pursuit of his identification of the truth with the liberal arts is to show that the propositional contents of the liberal arts are all predicatively true. Reason contends that the contents of the liberal arts are true insofar as they are *learned*. And if something is learned, then it is true, or so Reason argues:

[T3]

**R:** What about grammar itself? Surely, if it is true, then it is true because it is a discipline [*eo vera est, quo disciplina est*]? For ‘discipline’ is said

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<sup>19</sup> For the semantic distinction between predicative and attributive adjectives, I am drawing on Peter Geach, “Good and Evil,” *Analysis* 17 (1956), 33–42. Geach details how the term ‘good’ can be used both predicatively and attributively. For a brief overview of the predicative and attributive uses of ‘true,’ see Walter Cavini, “Truth as a Logical Property and the Laws of Being True,” in L. Castagnoli and P. Fait (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 109–10.

<sup>20</sup> *Sol.* 2.20.

<sup>21</sup> Since the expression ‘The attributive use of the term “true”’ is ungainly, I have opted to employ as shorthand ‘attributive truth.’ Second, I am ascribing to Augustine a deflationary conception of attributive truth; that is, an  $F$  is a true  $F$  iff that  $F$  is an  $F$ . For Augustine, the sentence tokens ‘Dialectic *qua* structure is that in virtue of which every discipline is a true discipline’ and ‘Dialectic *qua* structure is that in virtue of which every discipline is a discipline’ are semantically equivalent.

from ‘learning’ [*discendo*]; however, no one can be said not to know [those things], which he/she has learned and holds, and no one knows false things. Therefore, every discipline is true.<sup>22</sup>

Reason claims that the contents of the liberal arts (*disciplinae*) are true because they are learned, relying on the etymology of *disciplina*, which Reason suggests comes from the verb *discere*, ‘to learn.’<sup>23</sup> I reconstruct Augustine’s argument in T3 as follows:

*The Epistemic Argument*

P1. For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is learned, then  $x$  is known. [*Sol.* 2.20; Cf. *Acad.* 3.5]

P2. For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is known, then  $x$  is true. [*Sol.* 2.20; Cf. *Acad.* 3.5]

P3. Therefore, for all  $x$ , if  $x$  is learned, then  $x$  is true. [P1, P2]

P4. Every discipline is learned. [Etymology]

P5. Therefore, every discipline is true. [P3, P4]

As evinced by the Epistemic Argument, Reason believes that learning some proposition  $p$  entails coming to know that  $p$ . *A fortiori*, learning must be a factive mental state, such that if S learns that  $p$ , then  $p$  (P3). For instance, if Meno says that he learned the Pythagorean Theorem in geometry class, he means that he came to know it: the content of his learning is true, not false.<sup>24</sup>

Leaving aside cases of objectual knowledge and knowledge-how, which seem irrelevant to knowledge of the liberal arts, when we learn or come to know something, what we learn and come to know are *propositions*. Propositional knowledge is especially important to Augustine’s conception of the liberal arts. For Augustine, the liberal arts appear to be structured sets of necessary, true propositions.<sup>25</sup> Since the liberal arts are learned and everything that is learned is true, the predicate ‘true’ should apply to the propositional contents of the liberal arts. In this way, the Epistemic Argument demonstrates that the propositional contents of the liberal arts are predicatively true.

It may worry readers that the Epistemic Argument fails to explain why the propositional contents of a liberal art consists in a set of structured, *necessary* truths. In other words, the

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<sup>22</sup> *Sol.* 2.20.

<sup>23</sup> For an alternative reconstruction of the Epistemic Argument, see Uhle, *Augustine und die Dialektik*, 203–4. Uhle also helpfully points out that the etymology Augustine provides for *disciplina* is dubious. However, if we understand the dependence of the disciplines on learning as not an etymological one, but a conceptual one, the dependence relation seems more plausible. That is, it seems reasonable to assume that the concept DISCIPLINE (i.e., a structured body of knowledge) depends on the concept LEARNING.

<sup>24</sup> As it stands, the Epistemic Argument is valid, though scholars have questioned its soundness: it seems odd to maintain that we can learn something only if it is true, for surely we can learn false things? (See Cary, *Augustine’s Invention*, 96–7; Uhle, *Augustin und die Dialektik*, 203–4.) For example, in elementary school, I learned that Christopher Columbus was the first European to set foot in the Americas, but in fact it is likely that Leif Erikson had set foot in the Americas nearly five hundred years earlier; in other words, I appear to have genuinely learned something false. While Augustine can circumvent this worry by stipulating that learning is a factive mental state, P4 may seem tenuous, and not just for etymological reasons: indeed, a liberal art may have propositions that are true but not learned. But this worry can be easily dispelled if we apply the principle of charity to say that P4 should read: “Every discipline is *learnable*.” Cf. Enders, “Wahrheit,” 74.

<sup>25</sup> See *Sol.* 2.20.



Epistemic Argument seems to apply to contingent truths as well as to necessary truths. I agree that this oversight is indeed a weakness in Augustine's argument, but there are two points to make in Augustine's favor. First, he has a demanding conception of knowledge (*scientia*) in his early corpus. In another early work, *Contra Academicos*, he restricts the class of knowable propositions to necessary truths (e.g.,  $\phi \vee \neg\phi \models \top$  and  $3 \times 3 = 9$ ) and introspective, phenomenal truths (e.g., 'This olive leaf tastes bitter *to me*').<sup>26</sup> Since the propositional contents of the liberal arts cannot consist of introspective, phenomenal truths, these contents must consist of necessary truths. Second, Augustine suggests that the subject matter of the liberal arts is the intelligibles; and since the intelligibles are eternal and immutable, it stands to reason that propositions *about* relations between the intelligibles are necessary truths. (I will explain the relationship between the intelligibles and the constituent propositions of the liberal arts in section 4.1 below.)

In the Epistemic Argument, Augustine shows that the propositional contents of the liberal arts are predicatively true. However, the fact that the propositional contents of the liberal arts are predicatively true is not equivalent to Augustine's identification of the liberal arts with truth (*veritas*) as such. Augustine also argues that dialectic *qua* structure makes the liberal arts true. We must therefore address Augustine's identification of dialectic *qua* structure with the truth or essence of being a liberal art.

#### 4. Truth and Dialectic

Augustine's identification of dialectic *qua* structure with truth comes after a lengthy discussion of the nature of falsity and some preliminary, fruitless attempts at defining truth. In *Soliloquia* 2.19–21, Augustine unequivocally identifies dialectic *qua* structure with the truth of being a liberal art—that is, that which makes every liberal art true. He argues that every liberal art shares the structure that dialectic *qua* structure furnishes it with, and that every liberal art is a true or genuine liberal art in virtue of instantiating this structure. In this way, Augustine indicates that dialectic *qua* structure is essential to the liberal arts. In this section, I will first outline what the structure of the liberal arts consists in and why this structure makes the liberal arts true; I will then reconstruct Augustine's argument for his identification of dialectic *qua* structure with the truth of the liberal arts.

##### 4.1. The Subject Matter and Structure of the Liberal Arts

For Augustine, the liberal arts are sets of necessary, true propositions structured in the following three ways: they each have (1) definitions corresponding to fundamental or primitive truths, (2) a structure organized hierarchically through the method of division and collection, and (3) truth-preserving, deductive arguments.<sup>27</sup> In the *Soliloquia*, Augustine argues that dialectic *qua* structure makes the liberal arts attributively true, that is, it makes them true or genuine liberal arts:

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<sup>26</sup> See *Acad.* 3.23–6.

<sup>27</sup> Augustine does not mention collection (*colligendo/conectendo*) with reference to dialectic in *Sol.* 2.20–21, but he does so elsewhere in the *Cassiciacum Dialogues*. See, e.g., *Ord.* 2.30, 2.38, 2.48.

[T4]

**R:** Does it not seem to you that if nothing in it [sc. grammar] were defined, nothing divided and separated into genera and their parts [i.e., species], then in no way could it be a discipline?

**A:** Now I understand what you are saying; no kind of discipline whatsoever occurs to me, of the sort in which definitions and divisions and syllogistic arguments have not constituted the very whole in virtue of which it is said to be a discipline [*in qua non definitiones ac divisiones et ratiocinationes ... totum hoc ipsum, quo disciplina dicitur, egerint*]<sup>28</sup>—as long as it is made clear what each thing is [*quid quidque sit*], as long as each part is assigned what belongs to it without confusion, as long as no characteristic feature [*proprium*] is left out, [and] as long as nothing extraneous is included.

**R:** Therefore, that very whole too is that in virtue of which it [sc. a discipline] is said to be true.<sup>28</sup>

In T4, Augustine details three essential, structuring properties of the liberal arts: (1) definitions (*definitiones*), (2) divisions (*divisiones*; here Augustine omits *collectiones*), and (3) syllogistic arguments (*ratiocinationes*).<sup>29</sup> By employing the liberal art of grammar (*grammatica*) as a test case, he extracts essential features or properties of the liberal arts *qua* liberal arts. Definitions, divisions and collections, and syllogistic arguments are essential to and constitutive of being a liberal art—in effect, they make a given set of necessary, true propositions a genuine liberal art. Before explaining why these three structuring properties—identified with dialectic *qua* structure—are essential to the liberal arts, I will briefly (1) sketch what the subject matter of the liberal arts is and (2) outline what definition, the method of division and collection, and syllogistic argument each contributes to the structure of the liberal arts.<sup>30</sup>

In the Cassiciacum Dialogues and beyond, Augustine suggests that each liberal art is a structured set of necessary, true propositions whose subject matter is a distinct segment of

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<sup>28</sup> *Sol.* 2.20. Cf. *Ord.* 2.38 and *Imm. An.* 1.

<sup>29</sup> Pace Jean Pépin, *Saint Augustin et la dialectique* (Villanova, PA: Augustinian Institute, 1976), 167–8. Somewhat bizarrely, Pépin omits syllogistic argument as an essential structuring property of the liberal arts. This is especially odd given his otherwise careful treatment of the structure and objects of dialectic. My hypothesis is that Pépin omits syllogistic argument from his list because it does not feature in *De ordine*; however, in both *Soliloquia* and *De immortalitate animae* Augustine makes it clear that syllogistic arguments are a *sine qua non* of the structure of the liberal arts.

<sup>30</sup> Augustine's most thorough treatments of definition can be found in *Ord.* 2.31 and *Quant. An.* 47. In the former, Augustine claims that a definition consists in a genus and two specific differentiae (e.g., 'Human being is a rational mortal animal'), whereas in the latter he argues that the *definiens* and *definiendum* of a given definition are necessarily coextensive. The tension can be put as follows: while in *De ordine* definition is hyperintensional, in *De quantitate animae* it is mere necessary coextension. Augustine's first construal of definition seems to be more Aristotelian (perhaps via Porphyry: see *Isag.* 3.10.9–15), whereas the latter appears to be more Stoic (see Cicero, *Ac.* 2.21).

intelligible reality.<sup>31</sup> In other words, the subject matter of each liberal art consists of a distinct and determinate set of intelligible Forms (*rationes/divina/universa*), which are eternal (*aeterna*), unchangeable (*incommutabilia/immutabilia*), and accessible to reason.<sup>32</sup> For instance, numbers and operations are the subject matter of arithmetic, points, lines, and planar figures of geometry, and the motions of the fixed stars of astronomy.<sup>33</sup> Presumably, the truths of a given liberal art will be necessary in virtue of the eternity and immutability of the objects that constitute that liberal art's subject matter.<sup>34</sup> For instance, '5 + 2 = 7' will be a necessary truth of arithmetic in virtue of the eternity and immutability of numbers.<sup>35</sup> Based on the evidence adduced in T4, definition and the method of division (and collection) appear to be constitutive of being a liberal art. To generalize, in a given liberal art *L*, definition and the method of division and collection will (1) denote the essential or necessary properties of the entities in *L* (*quid quidque sit declaratur*),<sup>36</sup> (2) hierarchically organize the entities in *L* in accordance with their essential or necessary properties (*sine confusione parti sua cuique redduntur*),<sup>37</sup> and (3) ensure that all and only the essential or necessary properties of the entities in *L* are defined and appropriately categorized (*nihil praetermittitur proprium, nihil adnumeratur alienum*). While Augustine does not explicitly mention in T4 the essential structural role that syllogistic argument plays in the liberal arts, he treats it as essential to the liberal arts, and elsewhere in his early corpus he emphasizes its importance to the production of inferential knowledge.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, syllogistic argument plays a crucial structuring role in the liberal arts insofar as it is truth-preserving and deductive.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See *Sol.* 1.9–11, 2.32; *Imm. An.* 2, 5–6; *Quant. An.* 10–21; *Conf.* 10.16–19. Augustine's most explicit mention of the necessity of the propositions of the liberal arts is in his discussion of number in *De libero arbitrio* 2. In that dialogue, Augustine asserts that arithmetical propositions are necessarily true in virtue of the eternity and immutability of numbers: "7 and 3 are 10 not only now, but also always, and at no other time were 7 and 3 not 10, and at no other time will 7 and 3 not be 10. Therefore, I have that this incorruptible truth of number [*incorruptibilem numeri veritatem*] is common to me and to anyone else who reasons [*cuilibet ratiocinanti*]" (*Lib. Arb.* 2.21). The implication of Augustine's assertion seems to be that the eternal and immutable truth of arithmetical propositions is explained by the eternity and immutability of numbers, which are intelligibles. Augustine's conception of metaphysical modality thus is not strictly a possible-worlds conception.

<sup>32</sup> See *Imm. An.* 2, 10; *Lib. Arb.* 2.14, 2.24.

<sup>33</sup> *Ord.* 2.39–43; *Sol.* 1.9–11.

<sup>34</sup> *Imm. An.* 2; *Lib. Arb.* 2.21.

<sup>35</sup> *Acad.* 3.25; *Imm. An.* 2; *Lib. Arb.* 2.21.

<sup>36</sup> By 'the entities in *L*,' I mean the objects that serve as *L*'s subject matter; these entities will be intelligibles.

<sup>37</sup> The method of division and collection goes hand in hand with definition: it is through the method of division and collection that we arrive at definitions, by hierarchically organizing phenomena in order to discover genuine unities, as in the so-called Porphyrian Tree; see *Ord.* 2.31 and 2.48, and cf. Porphyry, *Isag.* 2.6.13–23. The goal of the method of division and collection is to isolate and distinguish various genuine kinds or classes of objects in virtue of their essential or necessary properties.

<sup>38</sup> See *Imm. An.* 1; *Quant. An.* 53.

<sup>39</sup> By arguing that syllogistic arguments are essential to the liberal arts, I do not mean to say that the only arguments one uses in the *process* of acquiring a given liberal art are syllogistic ones: presumably, one would employ inductive and abductive arguments as well. Nonetheless, the only arguments that will structure a *fully articulated* liberal art are syllogistic arguments.

Let us now turn to a concrete example of the subject matter and structure of a liberal art in Augustine's early philosophical oeuvre.<sup>40</sup> In a lengthy aside about geometry in *De quantitate animae*, Augustine claims that the discipline of geometry will (1) define points, lines, and planes, (2) indicate how points are related to lines and lines to planes, and (3) include all and only truths about geometrical objects, that is, all and only those objects that can be constructed out of points, lines, and planes.<sup>41</sup> He also suggests that one can infer that the angles of an equilateral triangle are congruent from the definition of an equilateral triangle as a three-sided polygon with sides of equal length. This inference relies on some basic definitions of or postulates about corresponding angles and parallel lines.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, these definitions or postulates explain why equilateral triangles have congruent angles, namely, because of the nature of parallel lines, corresponding angles, and above all the equal length of an equilateral triangle's sides. The conclusion of this geometrical inference also preserves the truth and necessity of its premises: just as it is a necessary truth that the sides of any given equilateral triangle are of equal length, so it is a necessary truth that its angles are congruent. In sum, Augustine's testimony indicates that a given liberal art *L* will be attributively true if and only if the constituent propositions of *L* are hierarchically structured in such a way as to reflect the grounding or explanatory relations between entities that serve as the subject matter of *L*.<sup>43</sup>

In the Epistemic Argument, Augustine shows that the liberal arts are predicatively true insofar as they are learned and known. However, for Augustine, learning a given liberal art—that is, a structured set of necessary, true propositions  $\Gamma$ —consists not only in coming to know the constituent propositions of  $\Gamma$  piecemeal, but also in coming to know the explanatory structure of  $\Gamma$ .<sup>44</sup> For instance, if my physics teacher tells me that it is impossible to travel faster than the speed of light, I might come to know this fact on the basis of her testimony. Nevertheless, this piece of knowledge would not be an instance of genuine learning for Augustine because I have yet to grasp *why* it is impossible travel faster than the speed of light. That is, I fail to have any *explanatory understanding* of what grounds the fact that it is impossible to travel faster than the speed of light, and therefore also lack such an understanding of physics as a whole.

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<sup>40</sup> There is a serious worry about the liberal arts of grammar and rhetoric: while Augustine claims that they are liberal arts and therefore true, it seems difficult to maintain that the definitions of grammar and rhetoric are necessary truths, given that language is conventional. Nevertheless, Augustine may still maintain that there are some features of natural language that are perhaps *necessary* in some way. For instance, all natural languages have a syntax and a semantics, and something similar can probably be said about rhetoric as well—after all, Cicero has a formal presentation of argumentation theory in his *Topica*, in which definitions and divisions play a crucial role (see Cicero, *Top.* 26–29.). So, we need not take the subject matter of rhetoric to be entirely contingent either. Be that as it may, Augustine seems to treat geometry as paradigmatic insofar as it is clearly a structured set of necessary, true propositions.

<sup>41</sup> See *Quant. An.* 10–21.

<sup>42</sup> *Quant. An.* 13.

<sup>43</sup> Enders, “Wahrheit,” 71–4. Enders correctly identifies dialectic as that which makes a given set of propositions a true liberal art; however, he also appears to conflate predicative and attribute truth. That is, he claims that dialectic makes a given set of propositions a true liberal art but suggests that this explanatory relation is grounded in the fact that the liberal arts are learnable or knowable.

<sup>44</sup> See *Mag.* 39–40, 45.

In the context of Augustine’s *De magistro*, Burnyeat and Nawar have both discussed the question of whether Augustine clearly differentiates between knowledge (*scientia*) and understanding (*intellegentia*).<sup>45</sup> Burnyeat argues that Augustine uses *scire* and *intellegere* interchangeably, whereas Nawar has argued that while understanding that *p* entails knowing that *p*, the converse is not true. I am inclined to agree with Nawar on this point: Augustine seems perfectly content to say that we can know things piecemeal, even if our knowledge falls short of explanatory understanding, as long as we have justification, as in the case of knowing that one cannot travel faster than the speed of light based on the testimony of one’s physics teacher.<sup>46</sup> However, when we learn the liberal arts, we seem to acquire a kind of explanatory understanding: learning a liberal art does not consist in merely learning propositions piecemeal, but in learning how these propositions hang together *as a science*. For example, if Meno were to learn the discipline of geometry, he would not only know the Pythagorean Theorem, but would also know, *inter alia*, which definitions and postulates prove the Pythagorean Theorem. In other words, Meno would have explanatory understanding of geometry.

As we have seen, Augustine intimates in *Soliloquia* 2 that an attributively true liberal art will clearly indicate the explanatory relations between its constituent propositions. Thus, when one learns a given liberal art, one not only knows (*scire*) the constituent propositions of the liberal art in question, but also understands (*intellegere*) the explanatory relations between its constituent propositions. One will thereby recognize that these explanatory relations reflect the grounding relations between the entities—the intelligibles—that are the subject matter of that liberal art. Accordingly, when one has learned a liberal art *L*, one thereby has explanatory understanding of *L*’s constituent propositions. I turn now to Augustine’s identification of dialectic *qua* structure with the truth of the liberal arts.

#### 4.2. *The Metaphysical Argument*

Towards the end of *Soliloquia* 2.19–21, Augustine argues for the following two claims: (1) dialectic *qua* structure is the structure that every liberal art instantiates; and (2) since dialectic *qua* structure is that in virtue of which every liberal art is a true or genuine liberal art, it should be identified with the truth of being a liberal art. In other words, dialectic *qua* structure *makes* every liberal art attributively true and is essential to the property of being a liberal art:

[T5]

R: Now tell me which discipline contains the rules of definitions and divisions.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Myles Burnyeat, “Wittgenstein and Augustine *De magistro*,” *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 61 (1987), 7–8, 20; Tamer Nawar, “Augustine on the Varieties of Understanding and Why There Is No Learning from Words,” *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 3 (2015), 2–5.

<sup>46</sup> See *Mag.* 10.32–11.37.

<sup>47</sup> Hörmann’s edition here reads “*definitionum, divisionum partitionumque rationes*,” but since *divisio* and *partitio* are virtually synonymous terms, I follow the B manuscript in omitting *partitionumque* and reading *divisionumque* for *divisionum*. Pépin (*Augustin et la dialectique*, 172–3), drawing on Cicero, *Topica* 28, 33, suggests that Augustine

**A:** It was already said above that these things are contained in the principles of disputation [i.e., dialectic].

**R:** Therefore, grammar was created by this same art, with the result that it is a discipline and with the result that it is true [*ut disciplina et ut vera esset*], which was defended by you above from falsity. And it is permitted for me to conclude this [fact] not about grammar alone, but about every discipline. For you said and you said truly that no discipline occurred to you in which the power of defining and distributing did not bring about the very fact such that it is a discipline. But if they [sc. the disciplines] are true in virtue of that by which they are disciplines [*si eo verae sunt, quo sunt disciplinae*], will anyone deny that it [sc. dialectic] is the truth itself through which all disciplines are true [*veritatem ipsam esse, per quam omnes verae sunt disciplinae*]?<sup>48</sup>

In T5, Reason argues that dialectic *qua* structure makes each liberal art a true liberal art, which thereby renders dialectic *qua* structure the truth of being a liberal art; that is, the property of *being a liberal art* is explained by dialectic *qua* structure. I reconstruct the argument in T5 below:

*The Metaphysical Argument*

P1. For all *F* and *G*, an *F* is a (true) *F* in virtue of instantiating *G* iff *G* is essential to being an *F*. [Definition of essence]

P2. Every discipline is a (true) discipline in virtue of instantiating dialectic *qua* structure. [Sol. 2.21]

P3. Dialectic *qua* structure is essential to being a discipline. [P1, P2]

P4. For all *F* and *G*, *G* is essential to being an *F* iff *G* is the truth of being an *F*. [Sol. 1.27, 2.29, 2.31]

P5. Therefore, dialectic *qua* structure is the truth of being a discipline. [P3, P4]

From the Metaphysical Argument, it is plain to see why the liberal arts are attributively true or genuine liberal arts—namely, in virtue of instantiating dialectic *qua* structure. Augustine identifies the truth of being an *F* with properties essential to being an *F* (P4). In *Soliloquia* 1, Augustine the interlocutor stipulates that the truth of [being an] *F* should be identified with that which makes some *x* a true *F*: “The following is also the case: if something is true, then it is certainly true in virtue of truth.”<sup>49</sup> When we apply this principle to the liberal arts, we see that the liberal arts are true, or genuine liberal arts because they instantiate dialectic *qua* structure as an essential property,

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distinguishes between *divisio* and *partitio*: he argues that division is a process that splits genera into species whereas partition splits either the lowest level species into individuals or individuals into their constituent parts. Another way of understanding the distinction is between separating objects into genuine kinds (division) and merely separating classes of objects on some *ad hoc* basis (partition). However, there is little evidence that Augustine makes use of these distinctions in either the *Soliloquia* or *De ordine*. For further details on the topic, especially from a Roman juridical perspective, see Dieter Nörr, *Divisio et partitio: Bemerkungen zur römischen Rechtsquellenlehre und zur antiken Wissenschaftstheorie* (Schweitzer: Berlin, 1972).

<sup>48</sup> Sol. 2.21.

<sup>49</sup> Sol. 1.27.

though Augustine himself does not make use of the Latin term *essentia* in this context, at least not in the sense of *essence*.<sup>50</sup> Insofar as dialectic *qua* structure is essential to the property of being a liberal art, it makes each and every liberal art a true, or genuine liberal art, that is, it makes each and every liberal art attributively true.<sup>51</sup> In T4, Augustine the interlocutor asserts that dialectic *qua* structure constitutes the “very whole [*totum hoc ipsum*] in virtue of which it [sc. a discipline] is said to be a discipline” and “in virtue of which it is said to be true.”<sup>52</sup> There, Reason also observes that grammar is an attributively true liberal art in virtue of instantiating dialectic *qua* structure. From this reflection on the nature of grammar, Reason makes the following claim about the liberal arts as a whole: “They [sc. the disciplines] are true in virtue of that by which they are disciplines.”<sup>53</sup> The liberal arts are each attributively true because they instantiate dialectic *qua* structure as an essential property; that is, they are structured sets of necessary, true propositions that clearly exhibit the explanatory grounding relations between their constituent propositions.

In *Soliloquia* 2.19–21, Augustine appears not to be concerned with arriving at a univocal conception of truth; rather, he aims to explicate which set of properties unifies the class of liberal arts as a genuine kind. In the case of the liberal arts, it is dialectic *qua* structure that provides this unity of essence;<sup>54</sup> therefore, dialectic *qua* structure should not be identified with truth as such, but rather with the truth of *being a liberal art*.<sup>55</sup> Both the Epistemic Argument and the Metaphysical Argument are crucial to Augustine’s conception of the truth of the liberal arts. The liberal arts are true not only because they instantiate dialectic *qua* structure, but also because their constituent

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<sup>50</sup> It is hard to find a place in Augustine’s corpus in which he employs the term *essentia* to mean essence. Indeed, *essentia* seems to mean ‘being,’ especially in a Trinitarian context; see *Trin.* 5.2, 7.1, 7.4; *Civ. Dei.* 12.2. In *De moribus*, however, while discussing the problem of evil, Augustine comes close to formulating the standard Aristotelian-Platonist conception of essence, according to which something’s essence is identified with its form or species (εἶδος):

For even nature itself [*ipsa natura*] is nothing other than that which is understood to be something in its own genus [*id ... in suo genere aliquid esse*]. For just as we now call that from which something is [*ab eo quod est esse*] by that new name “being” [*essentia*]—which very often the ancients, who did not have these names, called “substance” [*substantia*]—so we call [sc. to be something in its own genus] “nature” [*natura*] instead of “being” or “substance.” (*Mor.* 2.2)

In this passage, Augustine is differentiating between something’s being (*essentia/substantia*) and its nature (*natura*); what he describes as nature seems to be closer to the standard conception of essence.

<sup>51</sup> Pace Uhle, *Augustin und die Dialektik*, 206. Uhle argues that Augustine’s identification of dialectic with truth is only analogical and not a strict identification. He suggests that dialectic is not truth itself because it is itself grounded in truth and made true by truth. However, Uhle’s interpretation faces two difficulties. First, Uhle does not recognize that Augustine’s conception of truth is not univocal: he is not attempting to arrive at a conception of truth *simpliciter*, but instead determines that dialectic *qua* structure is the truth of being a liberal art. Second, Uhle’s solution fails to address what truth consists in. If dialectic is made true by truth and dialectic is not identified with truth, then we still need to explain what truth is. In essence, Uhle does not distinguish between dialectic *qua* structure and dialectic *qua* discipline, a distinction which is crucial to understanding how dialectic can itself be both the truth of the liberal arts and a liberal art itself.

<sup>52</sup> *Sol.* 2.20.

<sup>53</sup> *Sol.* 2.21.

<sup>54</sup> See *Ord.* 2.48.

<sup>55</sup> See Bermon, “Augustine’s Argumentation,” 383–4.

propositions are true. In *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine seems to countenance the possibility of a *false* liberal art. There, he appears to classify astrology as a false liberal art because its constituent propositions are false; thus, astrology is *not* a liberal art at all.<sup>56</sup> That is, it may very well instantiate dialectic *qua* structure, but its constituent propositions will be (necessarily) false, and this precludes it being a true, or genuine liberal art.

### 5. The Immortality Proof Revisited

Having laid out Augustine's arguments for his identification of the liberal arts with truth, let us return to this identification within the context of Augustine's proof of the immortality of the soul.<sup>57</sup> One might ask how we should understand Augustine's identification of the liberal arts and truth (P4) in his proof of the immortality of the soul (see section 1 above) in light of his arguments in *Soliloquia* 2.19–21. As I have shown, in this part of the dialogue, Augustine demonstrates that the liberal arts are both predicatively and attributively true. For his proof to succeed, he needs to ensure that P3—that if the liberal arts always remain, then the soul always remains—follows. If we take the liberal arts to be true only in a predicative sense, then the constituent propositions of the liberal arts—that is, structured sets of necessary, true propositions—would somehow have to explain the soul's immortality. Moreover, these propositions would have to exist in the soul as in a subject inseparably; if they exist forever, then the soul too exists forever.

However, it is difficult to construe a coherent way in which propositions could *exist* or ontologically inhere in the soul as in a subject inseparably. In fact, in *De dialectica* Augustine seems to claim that propositions inhere in the soul in a *cognitive* sense, as opposed to an ontological sense;<sup>58</sup> in other words, while we seem to have cognitive or epistemic access to propositions, such access does not entail that these propositions depend on the soul for their very existence. To make Augustine's argument succeed, eternal, immutable objects would have to inhere *ontologically* in the soul as in a subject inseparably. And Augustine does indeed suggest that the intelligibles—the subject matter of the liberal arts—exist or ontologically inhere in the soul as in a subject inseparably.<sup>59</sup> So much for predicative truth.

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<sup>56</sup> See *Doctr. Chr.* 2.31–6.

<sup>57</sup> Gilson suggests the following: “Instead of considering truth as *true*, let us consider it as *being*. Truth is said to be that in virtue of which things are true insofar as they exist; that is to say, things only exist to the extent that they are true” (*Christian Philosophy*, 79). Gilson's take on Augustine's conception of truth seems to be ontological in character: the truer something is, the more it exists, because truth grounds being, and what makes something exist more is truth. That is, Gilson identifies Augustine's attributive conception of truth: the better something instantiates its essence, the more it exists.

<sup>58</sup> Augustine argues in *De dialectica* (an unfinished treatise about the discipline of dialectic) that words (*verba*) signify objects (*res*) by means of propositions, or “sayables” (*dicibilia*) (*Dial.* 5). He asserts that these “sayables” are “held” (*tenere*) and “contained” (*continere*) in the rational soul (*animus*). However, he cannot mean that propositions depend on the rational soul for their *existence*: presumably there are infinitely many propositions that have never been entertained. Instead, we should construe the metaphor of containment in a cognitive or epistemic sense; the point then will be that propositions inhere in the rational soul only insofar as they are entertained, grasped, or understood.

<sup>59</sup> See *Sol.* 2.32. See also MacDonald, “Augustine on the Ontology of Cognition.”



This leaves us with the attributive truth of the liberal arts—that is, that the liberal arts are *true* (genuine) liberal arts in virtue of instantiating dialectic *qua* structure. In *De immortalitate animae*, Augustine suggests that the human capacity for discursive reasoning (*ratiocinatio*) grounds the immortality of the soul, and furthermore that human beings could not have this capacity without the liberal arts inhering in the soul in some way, even if this inherence relation were cognitive.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, attributive truth still fails to render P3 plausible: the fact that human beings have the capacity to reason provides us with no metaphysical explanation of the immortality of the soul. Again, what Augustine would need to explain the immortality of the soul is some eternal or immutable object that *ontologically* inheres in the soul as in a subject inseparably. Perhaps this difficulty explains why, when Augustine runs his argument a second time later in *Soliloquia* 2, he does by contending that geometrical objects, which are both eternal and immutable, exist in the soul as in a subject inseparably and thereby explain the soul’s immortality. The fact that neither predicative nor attributive truth can explain the immortality of the soul may be yet another reason Augustine had for ultimately abandoning his proof.<sup>61</sup>

There is one final worry that we have hitherto only briefly touched upon. At the outset of the *Soliloquia*, Augustine positively identifies truth with God.<sup>62</sup> However, Augustine never *shows* that truth and God are identical in the dialogue. Nor does Augustine in the dialogue demonstrate that the liberal arts are truth *as such* (P4 of the immortality proof)—what he shows is that the liberal arts are attributively and predicatively true. In other words, Augustine in the *Soliloquia* fails to explicitly argue for the identity of (1) the liberal arts and truth and (2) God and truth.<sup>63</sup> To begin to see how Augustine may have addressed these explanatory lacunae, recall that he conceives of the liberal arts as structured sets of necessary, true propositions that each reflect a distinct segment of intelligible reality. It follows that the subject matter of the liberal arts as a whole will comprise the set of intelligibles. Elsewhere in his early corpus, Augustine seems to identify truth (*veritas*) with the set of intelligibles.<sup>64</sup> Thus, it is plausible that when he contends that the liberal arts are truth, he means that the subject matter of all the liberal arts taken together constitutes intelligible reality. Furthermore, if the intelligibles are eternal and immutable, and they inhere in the soul as in a subject inseparably, it then becomes clear why the soul must be immortal: the inherence of the intelligibles in the soul grounds the soul’s immortality. And indeed, Augustine suggests that

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<sup>60</sup> See *Imm. An.* 1.

<sup>61</sup> See *Retr.* 1.4–5. Tying immortality to the liberal arts raises yet another problem for Augustine. There are, of course, many people who do not acquire knowledge of the liberal arts; presumably, the souls of these individuals would perish alongside their bodies, a consequence Augustine may wish to avoid for eschatological reasons. There are also many virtuous Christians (including Augustine’s mother, Monnica) who never acquired knowledge of the liberal arts, which would preclude them from attaining eternal salvation. Augustine could try to circumvent this worry by claiming that the human capacity for discursive reasoning is what grounds the immortality of the soul, but as I point out, this solution comes with its own drawbacks. I thank the anonymous reviewer for OSMP for pushing me on this point.

<sup>62</sup> See *Sol.* 1.3.

<sup>63</sup> Bermon, “Augustine’s Argumentation,” 389.

<sup>64</sup> See *Imm. An.* 5–6; *Ep.* 3.4; *Lib. Arb.* 2.42. See also Karfíková, “Das Verhältnis,” 123–5; Tornau, “*Ratio in subiecto*,” 341–8; Bermon, “Augustine’s Argumentation,” 394–5.

geometrical objects, which are both eternal and immutable, do exist in the soul as in a subject inseparably.<sup>65</sup>

Let us now turn to the second explanatory lacuna, Augustine's identification of truth with God. In his early works, Augustine contends that the set of intelligibles is contained in the divine intellect (*divina intellegentia*) and also identifies the intelligibles with wisdom (*sapientia*) or the Son of God.<sup>66</sup> Since Augustine identifies the set of intelligibles with both God and truth, he can also maintain that God and truth are identical. In short, while Augustine does not explicitly *demonstrate* either that the liberal arts are truth or that God is truth, he nonetheless has the conceptual and theoretical tools at his disposal to do so.<sup>67</sup>

### Conclusion

In this paper, I have reconstructed and evaluated Augustine's arguments for the identification of the liberal arts with truth and offered some tentative proposals as to why Augustine contends that the liberal arts should be identified with truth. I suggest that the liberal arts should be identified with truth *simpliciter* because the intelligibles—the subject matter of the liberal arts—are constitutive of intelligible reality. Augustine's identification of the liberal arts with truth provides further insight into the significance of the liberal arts in Augustine's early philosophical project. In *De ordine*, written weeks before the *Soliloquia*, Augustine argues that knowledge of the liberal arts consists in self-knowledge or knowledge of the soul, which is itself a necessary condition for knowledge of God and happiness (*beatitudo*).<sup>68</sup> Echoing this earlier dialogue, in the *Soliloquia*, Augustine the interlocutor informs Reason that he wants to have knowledge of both God and the soul.<sup>69</sup> It thus becomes readily apparent why the liberal arts are so crucial to Augustine's early philosophical project: learning the liberal arts consists in coming to know ourselves and brings us ever closer to knowing God.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See *Sol.* 2.32.

<sup>66</sup> See *Beat. V.* 34; *Ord.* 2.26; *Imm. An.* 10; *Div. Qu.* 46.2.

<sup>67</sup> Augustine's identification of the set of intelligibles with truth and reason (*ratio*) has strong Plotinian (and Porphyrian) resonances. Augustine's conception of the intelligibles as contained in the divine intellect seems to play an analogous role for the second hypostasis—Intellect (Νοῦς)—in Plotinus's ontological hierarchy; see *Enneads* 5.1.4–7, 5.3.5, 5.5.1–2. For an overview of the Plotinian and Porphyrian influences in Augustine's arguments in the Cassiciacum Dialogues, see Robert O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Early Theory of Man, A.D. 386–391* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968); Cary, *Augustine's Invention*; Karfiková, "Das Verhältnis," 117–37; Tornau, "Ratio in subiecto."

<sup>68</sup> *Ord.* 2.47–50.

<sup>69</sup> *Sol.* 1.7.

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