

St. Augustine's Cosmological Arguments on Transcendent Beauty

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Abstract: Based on the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, Augustine argues that God created all forms from nothing, and the physical-temporal world simultaneously sprang into existence when corporeal forms were created and motions occurred; thus, time and space are creatures. In order to argue for the intelligent design of the world, Augustine investigates the attributes of formless matter, corporeal form, and intelligent form in the order of creation, which is logical order rather than temporal order. All forms, which are good and beautiful in different degrees, contain the triad (beauty, measurement, and order) as the common good and constitute universal harmony, manifesting the transcendent beauty of God. The human form is superior to all other corporeal forms because it is a combination of the corporeal and intelligent forms; thus, not only can it reason the unchangeable principles (metaphysical forms) underlying physical phenomena, but it also can receive the ethical beauty existing in the commandments of the Creator.

Key words: transcendent beauty, order, form, *creatio ex nihilo*, gradation, universal harmony

1. Transcendent Beauty is not an Aesthetical Object

Augustine's concept of beauty investigates how universal harmony manifests transcendent beauty in the order of creation. For Augustine, transcendent beauty is an attribute of God rather than an aesthetical object. Modern philosophers generally relate the study of beauty to the concept of aesthetics, a new philosophical field pioneered by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-1762), who envisioned a philosophical study of sensual feeling, which relates to art theory. Immanuel Kant is considered one of the founders of this modern aesthetic system, laid out in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and his aesthetics deals with sensibility, feeling, and gratification of human beings in the activities of the aesthetically subjective judgment of an object, which does not require logical reasoning.¹ Contrastingly, in the ancient philosophical and theological tradition, the topic of beauty is about the investigation of the attribute of God, which is based on logical reasoning. Without discriminating between different concepts of beauty in varying contexts, the

1 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 89.

notions of the essence of God on one hand and art theory on the other can be mixed up, causing confusion and misunderstanding. In response to the confusion surrounding the concept of beauty in contemporary work on aesthetics, E. R. Curtius outlines the ancient philosophical understanding of beauty:

When Scholasticism speaks of beauty, the word is used to indicate an attribute of God. The metaphysics of beauty (e.g., in Plotinus) and theories of art have nothing whatever to do with each other. "Modern" man immeasurably overvalues art because he has lost the sense of intelligible beauty that Neo-Platonism and the Middle Ages possessed. "*Sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi,*" says Augustine to God (Conf., X.27.38). Here, beauty is meant of which [modern] aesthetics knows nothing.²

Other scholars also recognize the difference between beauty and aesthetics in the ancient world. Umberto Eco points out a significant characteristic of the theory of beauty prior to and during the Middle Ages: "The medievals did, in fact, conceive of a beauty that was purely intelligible, the beauty of moral harmony and metaphysical splendor."³ Frank Hentschel, in his "The Sensuous Music Aesthetics of the Middle Ages," also notices the obvious contrast between aesthetics and beauty, stating that "[i]n the Middle Ages, most discussions about beauty (*pulchritude*) were placed in metaphysical contexts that cannot be interpreted with regard to art, either in the modern sense or in the medieval sense of *ars*."⁴ Matthias Smalbrugge distinguishes between Augustinian beauty and aesthetics, drawing a concise and profoundly convincing conclusion about the relationship between the two:

Augustinian beauty is not an element of what will become Western aesthetics or Western art, although Western art is unthinkable without the subjectivism of which Augustine traced the first contours. His beauty is essentially pre-modern, a classical element that can be used at best as an aspect of a traditional theodicy.⁵

Reading the topic of beauty in the context of ancient philosophical and theological tradition from a metaphysical perspective gives an accurate account of Augustinian beauty. This present article argues that according to Augustine's cosmology, the creation order manifests transcendent beauty, which can only be perceived by human reason.

2 E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 224, no. 20.

3 Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 1.

4 Frank Hentschel, "The Sensuous Music Aesthetics of the Middle Ages: The Cases of Augustine, Jacques de Liège and Guido of Arezzo," *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 20, no.1 (2011): 1.

5 Matthias Smalbrugge, "Beauty and Grace in Augustine," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 49, ed. J. Baun, A. Cameron, M. Edwards and M. Vinzent (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 11.

Before his conversion, Augustine wrote a book *De pulchro et apto* (*On Beauty and Fitness*). Almost two decades later, he feels no regret for the loss of this book, which is about the corporeal forms of the physical world, as he retrospectively confesses: “At that time [before his conversion in AD 386], I knew nothing about these things [transcendent beauty], and I loved those lower beauties, and I was in a deep pit.”⁶ After conversion, corporeal beauties are neither the object of Augustine’s love nor his focus of negation; instead, he properly evaluates them so as to investigate the eternal beauty of God in the order of creation. Therefore, Augustine’s arguments for transcendent beauty also cover the topic of corporeal beauty when premises are supplied by the latter to make deductions about the former. The transcendent beauty not only surpasses the realm of the senses but also is far beyond human cognition by reasoning. However, in the realm of logic, human intelligence can taste metaphysical splendor in the creation order by reasoning about the cause and purpose of beauty.

Augustine’s investigation of transcendent beauty has never undergone a process of evolution during his career as a Christian philosopher since he constantly refers to numbers as the unchangeable truth to support his arguments for the unchangeable attributes of God. Similar to the Pythagoreans, Augustine believes that the world is harmonically arranged in numeric order and all the forms of creatures are measured by numbers.⁷ In his two early apologetical writings, *De Ordine* and *De Musica*, Augustine searches transcendent beauty in unchangeable harmonic order with the guidance of *quadrivium* (music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy), as he states in *De Ordine*: “Now in music, in geometry, in the movements of the stars and in the fixed ratios of numbers, order reigns in such a manner that if one desires to see its source and its very shrine, so to speak, he either finds it in these, or he is unerringly led to it through them.”⁸ In his later years, when reviewing *De Musica* in *Retractations*, Augustine reiterates the concept that music, as the science of numbers, is the basis for him to search for the unchangeable and invisible attributes of God.⁹ Evidently, after Augustine’s conversion, his focus turns to the life-long pursuit of the transcendent beauty by constantly referring to the unchangeable numerical principles underneath the phenomena of the corporeal world.

2. *Formosissima and creatio ex nihilo*

According to the gradations of beauty, Augustine argues that no corporeal form would exist unless God, the Creator, is the incomparable supreme Form in the degree of perfection. In *De*

6 Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.13.20. Note: In this article, quotations from Augustine’s works translated from the original texts in J.P. Migne edition to English are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

7 Augustine, *De Musica*, 6.17.57.

8 Augustine, *De Ordine*, 2.5.14.

9 Augustine, *Retractations*, 1.11.1. *quorum ipse sextus maxime innotuit, quoniam res in eo cognitione digna versatur, quomodo a corporalibus et spiritalibus, sed mutabilibus numeris, perveniatur ad immutabiles numeros, qui iam in ipsa sunt immutabili veritate, et sic invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt intellecta conspiciantur.*

Vera Religione, Augustine uses *Formosissima* (the superlative degree of *formosus*, which means fine appearance or well-formed beauty relating to order, form, measurement, numbers, and movement) synonymously together with *speciosissimus* (the superlative degree of *speciosus*, which means splendid beauty in appearance and attractive to the mind) to indicate the beauty of God, stating:

Therefore, He is the Creator of substance, from whom all peace comes, and who is uncreated and the Most Beautiful Form (*formosissima*). The corporeal object has a certain form, without which the corporeal cannot be formed. If you ask who made corporeal forms, that is to ask who is the perfect Beauty (*speciosissimus*). All forms come from the Beauty. However, besides the only God, the only Truth, the only Salvation of all, and the first and highest Essence (from which all things derive their existence, for all existence as such is good), who can be the Form?¹⁰

For Augustine, the most beautiful transcendent Form is the Essence, which caused all forms, both spiritual and physical. Based on the Christian cosmology—*creatio ex nihilo*,¹¹ Augustine draws a clear ontological distinction between the Form as Creator and created forms in both his early and later works. In *De Musica*, Augustine declares: “If you take these things from the earth, it will be nothing. Almighty God made the earth out of nothing.”¹² He reiterates this doctrine in *Confessions* XII, “Surely the formed is better than the unformed and is preceded by the eternity of the Creator, so that it was from nothing, from which something was made.”¹³ Repeatedly, in *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine states that “if God is always master, he always has creatures serving his dominion; nevertheless, not begotten of him, but made by him out of nothing, nor coeternal with him.”¹⁴ Since all corporeal forms were created from nothing, they have mutable nature subjecting to corruption. According to the law of causation, all mutable matters are effects that depend on the cause of another being and cannot have its own being by itself. Therefore, if there were no ultimate cause, which is immutable, nothing would exist. Although immutability surpasses the cognitive limitation of human beings, logical necessity compels human reason to admit that there must be a necessary, unchangeable Being to cause other changeable beings with measurement and order, as Augustine states:

He indeed is the Truth Himself because He is unchangeable. For every mutable form, which He made, has no its own being. Truth, therefore, is that which is

10 Augustine, *De Vera Religione*, 11.21.

11 This term *creatio ex nihilo* first appears in an apologetical work *To Autolytus*, written by Theophilus of Antioch, the sixth bishop of Antioch in the second century. Theophilus argues that this notion is a biblical truth, stating, “And first, they [the biblical prophets] taught us with one consent that God made all things out of nothing; for nothing was coeval with God.” (Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolytus*, 2.10)

12 Augustine, *De Musica*, 6.17.57.

13 Augustine, *Confessions*, 12.29.40.

14 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 12,15,3.

immutable. All things made by the Truth received their existence because of the *modo* (measure) of the Truth. Therefore, the Truth, which is the Supreme, cannot be contrary to existence except that which is not. Hence, as everything that is good comes from the Truth, so all that are from the Truth are nature; for all that exist in nature are good.¹⁵

The eternal necessary Being must be the unchangeable Truth, which cannot be non-existent and mutable. Since all corporeal forms were created from nothing as effects by the necessary Being, they are mutable and corruptible—coming into existence and subjecting to perishing in the sequence of time. However, they are good because corruptibility is their nature.¹⁶

In *De Civitate Dei* VIII, Augustine compares Christ with Roman religions and philosophers and states that some principles that Platonists discovered from the physical world agree with Christian truth, including that God is the incomparable first Form.

They [philosophers] conclude that the first Form is not to be found in those things whose forms are changeable. They discover that the corporeal and the soul are more or less beautiful in forms and that they could have no existence if they are deprived of forms. They understand that there is a certain Being in which the first Form is unchangeable and incomparable, and they most rightly believed that the Being is the first Principle of things which was not made and by which all things were made. ‘For what can be known about God is manifested to them; for His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived from all visible and temporal created things.’ (Romans 1:19-20) They call things that the part of theology has been discussed physics or nature.¹⁷

Regarding natural principles discovered by Platonic philosophers, he refers to Apostle Paul’s statement that the knowledge of God has been clearly revealed by the temporal-physical forms. For Augustine, natural science is essential to knowing the eternal truth of God and temporal creatures, mainly to know what God is not.

Augustine also differentiates his concept of forms from Platonic forms or worlds in his review of *De Ordine*.¹⁸ He claims that his concept is not a carbon copy of Plato or Platonic philosophers but a revelation received from God:

I proposed two worlds, the one sensible, the other intelligible—not on the authority of Plato or the Platonists, but on my own in such a way as though the Lord also meant

15 Augustine, *De Natura Boni*, 19.

16 Augustine, *De Natura Boni*, 10.

17 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 8.6.

18 See Plato, *Phaedo*, 79a-b, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *The Complete Works of Plato*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co, 1997), 69.

to indicate this, on the ground that He does not say, 'My kingdom is not of the world,' but 'My kingdom is not of this world (John 18.36).'¹⁹

Augustine understands "the kingdom of the Lord" as the spiritual realm in which human beings submit to God, while "this world" indicates the human society that is rebellious against God rather than "the world", namely, the physical world that God created. He endorses the Platonic concept of the intelligible world, namely, the metaphysical form as "the unchangeable plan according to which God made the world."²⁰ Since to create is to form and to arrange, Augustine believes that the archetypes of creatures exist in the design of God in the a-temporal realm because "God makes things new and different neither without predetermined order and plan, nor foreseeing them from upcoming time, but by eternal foreknowledge."²¹ The substance of corporeal forms is made from nothing, but the design of corporeal forms, which is metaphysical form of measured numbers, is in the eternal foreknowledge that is infinite and incomprehensible to humans but not to God.

Augustine says that two kinds of people would inevitably err—people whose souls have been enslaved by the physical world and people who escape from it for the sake of the spiritual realm but are ignorant of the reality of the world, as Augustine says in his early work *De Ordine*:

If he does not know what nothing is, what is formless matter, what is formed inanimate, what a body is, what is the lifeless in body, what is in place and what is in time, what is local motion, what is non-local motion, what is steady motion, what a-temporality is, what is to be neither in a place nor nowhere, what is beyond time and forever, what it is nowhere to be and nowhere not to be, what it is never to be and never not to be, whoever does not know these matters, but chose to seek and debate about his own soul (let alone investigating about the Highest God, who is better known by knowing what He is not), will fall into every possible error.²²

In this passage, Augustine raises ontological issues in respect of the nature of nothingness, forms, substance, time, space, and motion. And he emphasizes the importance of knowing the nature of these things relating to what can be known about God. If a person does not correctly know the ontological truth of the physical world, he would not properly know his own soul, let alone God. In an argument with Faust, the Manichee, in order to refute the dualistic concept of two gods, logic compels Augustine to raise a question: "Who is the author of all things which I mentioned, if not the One by whose *modus* all things are united, in whose wisdom all beautiful things are formed, according to whose law all things are arranged?"²³ Augustine argues that when the evidence of reality compels human reason to admit that the power of order operates as the unchangeable

19 Augustine, *Retractions*, 1.3.2.

20 Augustine, *Retractions*, 1.3.2.

21 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 12.18.

22 Augustine, *De Ordine*, 2.16.44.

23 Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, 21.6.

law dominating the whole universe, there must be a Lawgiver who is consistent, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent; otherwise, there would be no order and form, and nothing would exist. The Form of God is the first Principle by which all things were created and measured, but not the substance that all things share with God. The difference between God and creatures is the ontological order of beauty, which establishes the position of creatures as presentable forms showing the beauty designed by the *Formosissima*.

3. Formless Matter and Formed Creatures

In order to investigate the reality of the physical world, Augustine analyzes the nature of formless matter, corporeal form, and intelligible form according to the order of creation, which is the order of logic rather than temporal order. He assumes that God created the formless matter from nothing, and the clue is in Genesis 1:24: “Did you not, Lord, teach me that, before you formed and distinguished this formless matter, there was nothing, no color, no shape, no body, no spirit? It was not, however, absolutely nothing: it was a kind of formlessness without any form.”²⁵ Augustine also argues that the formless matter was created in the a-temporal realm, explaining that “the formlessness, from which heaven and earth were made, were made not in time because the formed materials give rise to time, but that the formlessness was made first.”²⁶ Based on the fundamentals of physical motions, Augustine argues for an intrinsic connection between time, space, and corporeal forms “because without the change of motions, there is no time, and where there is no form, there is no change”²⁷ The nature of physical forms contains the measurement of both spatial and temporal numbers that are conditioned by space and time. Thus, physical forms, space, and time are preconditions for motions to happen, “[f]or where there is no shape, nor order, nothing comes or passes away, and where this does not take place, there are certainly no days or alternation of temporal spaces.”²⁸ The nature of formless matter is mutable, so it has potential to be formed and moved. However, it was not moved until it was shaped and measured by God according to metaphysical forms; at that point, motions and time simultaneously took place.²⁹ However, the formless matter and forms do not relate in the sequence of time in the way that flowers precede fruits, nor the formless matter likes raw materials such as wood or silver, from which things are made; instead, their simultaneous union brought time into existence. Augustine illustrates how metaphysical forms changed formlessness simultaneously with the

24 Genesis 1.1-2 *In principio fecit deus caelum et terram, terra autem erat invisibilis incomposita (informis) et tenebrae erant super abyssum et spiritus dei superferebatur super aquas.* (Vetus Latina)

25 Augustine, *Confessions*, 12.3.3.

26 Augustine, *Confessions*, 12.29.40. *materiam rerum primo factam et appellatam caelum et terram, quia inde facta sunt caelum et terra, nec tempore primo factam, quia formae rerum exserunt tempora.*

27 Augustine, *Confessions*, 12.11.14.

28 Augustine, *Confessions*, 12.9.9.

29 Augustine, *De Genesi Contra Manichaeos*, 1.2.4.

example of the relationship between a formless sound and a tune, which relate in logical order rather than in temporal sequence:

Materials [such as wood] by time also precede the forms of the things which are made from them, but in singing, this is not so. For when it is sung, its sound is heard at the same time; there is not first a formless sound, which is afterwards formed into a song, for as soon as it sounded, it passed away. You could not find any skill that can arrange tunes from a sound. However, it is first in origin. A tune is not formed in the sequence of time but in the soul.³⁰

According to the theory of physics, a musical tune is produced by the vocal body's controllable, regular vibrations, and the frequency of vibrations can be manifested by harmonic ratio; in other words, harmonic ratio is the metaphysical form of a musical tune, while noise, namely, a formless voice, is produced by irregular vibrations, and no harmonic ratio can be found in it. Noise occurs, then disappears immediately; by no means could it be a material for making a tune in the sequence of time. Thus, they have a relationship by logic rather than by time. Among all creatures, only humans, as rational animals, are able to have a harmonic ratio in their soul, and by their mouths, controllably operate a musical tune, which is formed by the union of a voice and harmonic ratio simultaneously. Again, in *De Genesis ad Litteram*, with a similar illustration of the relationship between a voice and a word, Augustine explains that God made both the formless matter and forms simultaneously.³¹ In this regard, Augustine understands God as the unmoved Mover and His creation as the first Motion, (though in which no temporal intervals can be found), giving existence to both space and time as conditions for the corporeal forms to move.³² It seems that Augustine borrowed some elements from Aristotle; however, they are fundamentally different. In *Physics*, Aristotle concludes his investigation on motion and time, stating that "the first mover causes a motion that is eternal and causes it during an infinite time."³³ Thus, according to Aristotle, the first mover, time, and motions are all eternal. Unlike Aristotle, based on *Creatio ex nihilo*, Augustine understands time and space as finite creatures in order to distinguish the ontological differences between the Creator's eternity and creatures' temporality. Thus, he interprets Genesis 1:1a 'in the beginning' (*in principio*) not as in the beginning of time but 'in wisdom/logos/principle of God' since there was no time before God created the world.³⁴ The word (*Logos*), by which God commanded the creation, must be the eternal Logos and ontologically different from vocal utterance, which is essentially conditioned by time and space.³⁵

30 Augustine, *Confessions*, 12.29.40.

31 Augustine, *De Genesis ad Litteram*, 1.15.29.

32 Augustine, *De Musica*, 6.17.58

33 Aristotle, *Physics*, Book VIII, 267b20-25, trans. R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1995), 446.

34 Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.9.11.

35 Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.6.8.

Regarding the gradation of beauty in the creation order, the human form is superior to all other corporeal forms by the rational soul, which contains individual uniqueness concerning intelligence, affection, and free will. Regarding the uniqueness of individual human form and the universality of mankind's form, Nebridius raised a question in his letter to Augustine: "Whether the highest Truth, the Wisdom and the supreme Form (or Archetype), by whom all things were made and whom our creeds confess to be the only-begotten Son of God, contains the ratio (reason) of mankind in general, or also of each individual of our race?"³⁶ In responding to this question, Augustine posits that an individual human form as a part of the created world belongs to one general ratio of humankind, namely, a ratio of many humans together, while every individual human form is created according to a specific ratio that suits that human, and the uniqueness of human form is distinguished by diversities in the circulation of time.³⁷ Further, Augustine analyzes the nature of the human form: it is similar to the form of the inert matter regarding its physical material, similar to the form of plants regarding seed-bearing, and similar to animals concerning the senses; however, only human form consists of an animal body and a rational soul, which human has in common with angels.³⁸ Thus, Augustine states that "man is a great creature, made after the image and similitude of God, not as respects the mortal body in which he is clothed, but as respects the rational soul by which he is exalted in honor above the beasts."³⁹ In order to match the rational form of the human soul, the human body was created as a harmonic instrument of the soul, as Augustine explains:

Don't you know parts connect to each other by numbers? This interrelation is called harmony, a word derived from music where we see the strings stretched upon the lyre. If all the strings were to give forth the same sound, there would be no song; it is variation in degrees of tension that produces different sounds. These different sounds, however, connected by ratios, produce sweetness of sound, which is not visible beauty. Whoever recognizes that it is the same ratio that connects the limbs of the human body will marvel and be greatly delighted to know that the same ratio intelligibly presents all visible beauty.⁴⁰

The human body has a harmonic power to present beauty from both within and outside because it was created according to harmonic principles in order to serve the reasoning function of the rational soul. Thus, the human form has a combined harmonic power that enables human to react to the outside world and to know what they should know by both bodily senses and rational reasoning. Regarding the reason of the rational soul, Laurence raised two questions in his letter to

³⁶ Augustine, *Epistola 14*, 4.

³⁷ Augustine, *Epistola 14*, 4.

³⁸ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 5.11.

³⁹ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 1.22.20.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *Sermon 243* "De Resurrectione Domini Secundum Ioannem," 4.4.

Augustine: "How far does reason contend for religion? What should not come into reason when faith is required alone?"⁴¹ Augustine replies:

Things that either originate from the sensory experience of the body or that are discovered by the intelligence of the mind may be demonstrated by human reason. However, regarding things that we are neither able to experience with the bodily senses nor achieve with the mind, we shall unhesitatingly believe the witnesses of those divine people who accomplished the Scripture and saw and even foresaw the things about which they testified with divine aids in their senses and minds.

For Augustine, human reason and the bodily senses are taking charge of knowing the world at different levels, respectively. Reason takes the dominant role because it is not only responsible for investigating things that cannot be perceived by the senses but also judges the data collected by sense perception. Still, it has limitations in knowing the infinite knowledge of God. Thus, miracles or prophecies from God, which are not contrary to reason and facts but divinely surpass the dominion of human senses and reason, should be believed with faith.

Because of the harmonious combination of bodily form and rational soul, human form is also superior to other creatures by free will and affection. All corporeal forms contain measurement of both temporal and spatial numbers; animal forms additionally have memory, senses, and appetite, which human beings have in common with other animals, except for having the form of the mind with free will for the endorsement of ethical beauty, which is about happy life.⁴² Augustine holds that having a good will is essential to happy life, stating:

Definitely, not evils, but good things, make people happy when they do them: of which there is already something of the good that should not be esteemed lightly, that is, the good will itself, which desires to rejoice in the good things of which human nature is capable, not in the perpetration or acquisition of any evil.⁴³

Human's free will is led by the force of love. Beauty has the power to delight the soul; thus, it is the object of love and enjoyment. Therefore, Augustine is apt to use *pulchritude*, which means the inner quality of being pleasing, beautiful, and attractive, to indicate that in the ethical order, God is the object of love and satisfaction for humans, who cannot be beautiful unless they wholeheartedly love God, the highest Beauty. In the passage below, Augustine uses *pulchritudo* synonymously together with *formosus* to indicate human beauty:

'Confession and beauty (*pulchritudo*) are before Him.'⁴⁴ Do you love beauty (*pulchritudinem*)? Do you wish to be beautiful (*pulchre*)? Confess! He did not say

41 Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 1.4.

42 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 5.11. *rationali autem insuper mentem, intelligentiam, voluntatem.*

43 Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 13.6.9.

44 *Confessio et pulchritudo in conspectu ejus.* (Psalm 95.6 in Vulgata Latina)

beauty and confession, but confession and beauty. If you are ugly, confess that you may be fair (*pulcher*). If you are a sinner, confess that you may become righteous. You can deform yourself, but you cannot make yourself beautiful (*formosum*)... We love beauty (*pulchritudinem*); however, let us first choose confession so that beauty (*pulchritudo*) might follow.⁴⁵

In this passage, Augustine relates sin to ugliness and righteousness to beauty; thus, there is an ethical beauty of the inward related to love and choice. Man can deform his inward beauty by the choice of free will “for he who loves iniquity hates his own soul.”⁴⁶ However, he cannot reverse the consequence of deforming unless he confesses his disorder or sin and loves God, the Designer, who would restore him to the right order or righteousness because ethical beauty ontologically exists in the commandment/righteousness of God. The beauty of righteousness and wisdom has no shape, size, weight, or color; however, it has incomprehensible measure, number, order, and quality in the will of God, “whose unity is the standard of all measure, whose wisdom is the mode of all beauty, and whose law is the rule of all orders.”⁴⁷ By the free will of the rational soul, the human form is able to receive righteousness from God because “righteousness is the beauty of the soul, by which men are beautiful,”⁴⁸ Augustine states. Thus, humans, as rational forms, not only have a rational function to understand the unchangeable principles but also have free will to make choices based on the knowledge and affection of the rational soul.

4. Common Good and Universal Harmony

Augustine claims that “the triad: measure, beauty, and order are the common good in all things created by God, either in the spiritual or in the corporeal.”⁴⁹ As to create is to form/beautify, to measure, and to order, the triad—measure, beauty, and order must be simultaneously accomplished as the common good in both the physical and metaphysical realms. This concept differentiates Augustine from other ancient philosophers, particularly Plato and Aristotle—one focuses on the metaphysical realm, and the other focuses on the physical realm. Raphael’s famous painting “School of Athens” captures the major difference between these two philosophers’ interests—Plato, holding his *Timaeus*, vertically points to heaven with his right hand, while Aristotle horizontally stretches his right hand to indicate the temporal, physical world, and his left hand holds *Ethics*, in which he disagrees with the Platonic doctrine of Idea and holds that in ethics, the term ‘good’ should be applied to the categories of substance, quality, quantity, relation, or time and

45 Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, “Psalm 96” (Lat. 95), 7.

46 Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 8.6.9.

47 Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* 21.6.

48 Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 8.6.9. *Est enim quaedam pulchritudo animi iustitia, qua pulchri sunt homines.*

49 Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 3.10.

space; however, the Platonic Idea does not include all numbers existing in these categories.⁵⁰ Thus, Aristotle prefers to seek goodness in the physical world, which is attainable for humans.⁵¹ Unlike these two philosophers, the major concern of Augustine is to investigate the transcendent beauty in the harmonic order of both physical and metaphysical realms.

In his *De Natura Boni*, Augustine states that “from God, all things have a measurement (*modus*), all things are beautiful, and all things are in the order.”⁵² The triad (beauty, measurement, and order) intrinsically unites every form to contribute to the tout ensemble of the universal harmony, which is better than any individual beauty, as Augustine states: “Particularly, all things united together are very good because their ensemble constitutes the wonderful order and beauty of the universe.”⁵³ All creatures have been measured and arranged in different degrees of beauty: the celestial is superior to the terrestrial, the incorporeal to the corporeal, the rational to the irrational, the unchangeable to the changeable, and the eternal to the temporal—the lowest and the highest are harmonically connected in the creation order, as Augustine writes, “It is as though the divine power were more closely present in the transcendent beauty while having arrayed the lesser beauty at the greatest distance and the lowest level.”⁵⁴

However, the lesser beauty of the lowest level has nothing to do with the ontological evil assumed by Manichaeism. In order to refute Manichaeism's error, at the beginning of *De Natura Boni*, Augustine declares: “God is supremely good and unchangeable; all things made by God, both the spiritual and corporeal are good.”⁵⁵ If God is transcendentally true, good, and beautiful, the elements of goodness, truth and beauty are identical in God's creation and the nature of all creatures. Therefore, Augustine further states, “If we say that He is the supreme *Modus*, we should understand that the supreme *Modus* is the supreme Good. Everything exists because of the *Modus*.”⁵⁶ *Modus* is the measurement standard. All creatures are measured and ordered as good works to demonstrate the degrees of beauty and goodness designed by God, the *formosissima*.

The common good, namely, the triad (beauty, measurement, and order) is manifested by the universal harmony in the vicissitude of time. The mutability of the corporeal forms in the cycles of time does not disrupt the beauty of the divine order; instead, it contributes to the consummation of the universal harmony in the same way that every musical note first appears then instantly

50 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096b 25-30, trans. W. D. Ross in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1995), 1733.

51 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a.

52 Augustine, *De Natura Boni* 3. *a quo omnis modus, omnis species, omnis ordo*.

53 Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 3.10. *simul vero universa valde bona, quia ex omnibus consistit universitatis admirabilis pulchritudo*.

54 Augustine, *Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount*, 1.17.53, trans. Denis J. Kavanagh, in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 11 (Washington D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1968), PDF edition.

55 Augustine, *De Natura Boni*, 1.

56 Augustine, *De Natura Boni*, 22.

vanishes in musical motion, all the while contributing to the harmonic sequence of the whole song. The appearance and decay of corporeal forms are well arranged in the entire beauty of the universe, “as a speech well composed is assuredly beautiful, although its syllables and sounds are ephemeral, fleeting as the death of something that has only just been born.”⁵⁷ The phenomena of generating and disappearing of notes in temporal sequence is the only way that music harmony shows up by temporal motions. The physical world moves as a *cosmos/universitas* in the same temporal sequence. Therefore, Augustine regards God as the Musician who conducts the harmonic symphony of all parts of the universe, stating:

Whether He bestows or adds, removes or curtails, increases or diminishes, the unchangeable Creator, as the Director of mutable things, orders all events in His providence until the beauty of the universal course of time of which individual parts are adapted to each successive time, just as a grand melody unutterably flows from the wise Composer, and passes into the vision of those who eternally contemplate on God and properly worship Him and have faith in God even though in the temporal realm.⁵⁸

This analogical narrative gives an accurate and exhaustive account of cosmic harmony from a macroscopic perspective. Audible human music illustrates harmonic ratios by melodic and rhythmic motions, while the motions of the whole universe—the motions of heavenly bodies, the rise and decline of every individual corporeal form, and the historical vicissitude of the human community, all constitute grand cosmic harmony. Human beings are created not only as rational audiences to perceive the harmony of the universal motion but also as ethical beings to receive the principles of harmony; thereby, they are able to perform both audible music and ethical harmony through their bodily forms. Accordingly, the process of human life is similar to a piece of musical motion— At the finale, when all notes pass away with time, only the human soul can perceive the effect of its whole life and judge whether it lived in harmony with the eternal harmonic order.

In summary, all forms have the common good, namely, the triad—measure, beauty, and order; nevertheless, they are good and beautiful in different degrees of the creation order, which constitutes universal harmony. The human form is superior to other physical forms due to its mind and free will equipped for understanding unchangeable truth and receiving the ethical beauty of the commandments of God. The end, therefore, of ethical beauty, which is received by the human mind and free will, is to fulfil the ultimate harmony of the universe according to the harmonic law of God.

57 Augustine, *De Natura Boni Contra Manichæos*, 8.

58 Augustine, *Epistola 138*, 1.5.

5. Conclusion

Augustine investigates creatures' measured nature to make rational scientific argumentation for the transcendent beauty manifested in the tout ensemble of all forms in the creation order. The transcendent beauty cannot be perceived by the senses, but the rational soul can metaphysically reason it by the clue of the universal harmony manifested in the physical world. Human reason is compelled by logic necessity to posit that nothing would exist unless there is a Creator who serves as the transcendent uncaused Cause, the unchangeable Truth, the most beautiful Form, and the perfect Modus to arrange all forms with the common good (beauty, measurement, and order). The human form, a combination of the corporeal body and the rational soul, is superior to other physical forms because it is not only able to reason the transcendent beauty in universal harmony but also can choose with free will to conform to harmony, in which all creatures manifest the beautiful works of the Creator either ineffably or aloud.⁵⁹

中文题目：

圣奥古斯丁关于超验美的宇宙观论证

柏峻霄，于2017年获得蒂尔堡大学（荷兰）哲学博士学位。博士论文是《数理秩序中的上帝之美：圣奥古斯丁的音乐宇宙论》。她于2012年在香港信义宗神学院获得神学硕士学位，2009年在西安音乐学院获得音乐美学硕士学位，现任信义宗神学院助理教授，研究兴趣是音乐学、教父学、奥古斯丁研究、教会历史、希腊哲学。Email: Jenny.bai@lts.edu

提要： 基于“从无创造”的基督教教义，奥古斯丁论证上帝从无中创造了所有形态，当物质形态被创造、物理运动发生时，时间-物质世界同时出现；因此，时间和空间皆受造之物。为了论证万物的存在基于智慧的设计，奥古斯丁根据创造秩序（是逻辑的而非时间的秩序）考察了无形存在、有形形态，以及智能形态的属性。一切形态在不同程度上是美善的，因它们都以美、量、序构成的三元为普遍的善，所有形态的综合构成了普遍的和谐，彰显上帝的超验之美。人类形态优于所有其他有形的形态，因其是物体形态和智能形态的结合；因此，人类形态不仅可以认知和推理物理现象背后的不变原则（形而上的形式），而且有能力领受存於造物主之诫命中的伦理之美。

关键词： 超验美，秩序，形态，从无创造，等级，普遍和谐

⁵⁹ Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, Psalm 145.9.

